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Near East Mission  
United Church Board for  
World Ministries  
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Dear Friends:

## A CONTEXT FOR RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN TURKEY

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At this writing we are living in the second week of a new military regime in Turkey. One of the reasons for the takeover of the government, among other very pressing ones, was the misuse of power by the extremist Islamic right. Religion, not for the first time, was one of the elements threatening the stability of this republic. The goal proclaimed by this new military government is to set the country on a sound foundation following the secular, Western course of its first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

What does this mean in Turkey? Anyone wishing to become involved in religious dialogue with Turkish people must keep in mind two complicated and involved questions: (1) What exactly happened in religious terms with the miracle of Atatürk and his reforms in the 1920's?<sup>1</sup> and (2) What has been and continues to be the role of religion and religious socio-psychological manifestations in this country? The first question could and perhaps should be restated in other ways. What has been the effect of the tremendous change that was instituted by Atatürk? Why is the strength of his actions even today so much at the heart of the Turk and his nation? In answering these questions one discovers the interlocking framework necessary in any analysis of contemporary Turkey.

Kenneth Cragg in his chapter on "The Significance of Turkey" in Islamic Surveys touches on both: "The Turks have been castigated as the most outright traitors to Islam in the twentieth century with their liquidation of the Caliphate and their secular society. In the same context and for the identical measures, they have been hailed as the most realistic and creative of Muslims."<sup>2</sup>



It is not the West's responsibility to resolve this paradox but rather to recognize it. Those of the Christian world who are intent on a creative encounter or dialogue with the Muslim world cannot in the light of his statement ignore the Turks. The reality that they are Muslims gives them the right to have a strong hearing, whatever their standing in the world of Islam.

One can argue that religious dialogue should begin where there is a more orthodox expression of Islam in order to have a representative discussion. My thesis is that dialogue and understanding need to occur where there is creative thought, action and involvement. Turkey is today at the crossroads of the action. On the one hand it lives as a neighbor to Iran with its new experiment in an Islamic State. On the other hand it is faced with the dilemma of having to resolve its own economic and political problems partly in the light of its existence as a Middle Eastern and thus seemingly Arab-Islamic oriented nation. These problems are practical and urgent. They are not strictly religious but carry overtones of religion. In this area the religiously-defined issues as such are not urgent.

More than that, creative encounter and discussion cannot and should not be on a theological, theoretic, or isolated level, but in and through involvement with people in real issues which they are facing. Religion is a way of life for the Muslim and Turk, not something that can be studied in the abstract. Thus a secular setting will demonstrate the power and strength of their Islamic nature and stance.

If we indeed are intent on learning, and listening, and are willing to risk and to discard our own preconceived ideas, prejudices and arrogances, then we may take a new step in understanding Islam and sow new seeds of reconciliation among religious groups in our day. History is in part a vicious web that still holds tight the strands of hate, fear, and mistrust in our relations with the Muslim world. We cannot erase the past, but we can with a forgiving spirit build on the trust that has at the same time been woven into the web of Christian-Muslim relations in Turkey and the Middle East.

This short paper will focus on a few insights into the present-day situation in Turkey vis-a-vis the religious



climate there; or, stated another way, it will focus on the active cultural and behavioral characteristics of the Turks from a religious perspective. The acceptance and understanding of these insights can be one first step forward in our endeavour to have a creative dialogue with Islam.

Şerif Mardin in his article "Religion in Modern Turkey" starts by saying that the preoccupation with the issues of secularism and secularization has impoverished the study of religion. This is true for both the western scholar as well as the Turkish. It is as though the subject of religion has been ignored or sent to stand in the corner isolated from the currents of intellectual discussion going on in the classroom. Mardin says, "Religious studies have thereby been drawn out of their necessary context of psychological need, cultural meaning, ritual behaviour, societal values and -- partly -- institutional setting."<sup>3</sup> Our intent is to discuss this large context as a beginning.

Our primary assumption is that religious belief permeates Turkish society in spite of attempts, not only by scholars but also by the government, to isolate religion from other forms of social activities after the formation of the secular state. Turks are highly religiously oriented in spite of their secularism. As Mardin states it, "The most striking behavioural characteristic ... is the continuing intensity of religious belief among large groups of Turks."<sup>4</sup> In this very permeation it is multifarious. There are many levels of belief; there are many reasons for its intensity. In short, Islam covers a variety of meanings for Turks.

To get at these levels and reasons let us look at the phenomena which have been observed since World War II. There has been a religious resurgence. Greater lip service has been given to Islam and it has been used to justify increasing activity in many ways and for many causes. Let us mention a few. Many new mosques have been built, and old ones repaired. Mosque attendance particularly on Fridays has increased. The Islamic religion is included in the curriculum in both the primary and secondary public schools. A number of higher Islamic schools have been founded in all parts of



the country. The numbers of people desiring to go on the pilgrimage have increased yearly. The participation of Turkey in official Islamic conferences particularly in the Middle East has increased. Without doubt, some of this increased activity is because of economic as well as political considerations. And although the constitution forbids it, political parties were using religious issues to win votes until two weeks ago. 5

This resurgence has not been welcomed by everyone. As Mardin observes,

"... Turkish laic intellectuals see it as the victory of obscurantism over science, higher bureaucrats as the disintegration of the fabric of the state and the rise of anarchy, 'fundamentalist' Sunnis as a means of establishing Islamic social control over the community, clerical personnel in the higher reaches of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs as a golden opportunity to establish a solid foundation for Sunni Islam on a national scale, local sect leaders or charismatic sheikhs with their -- often inherited -- clientele as a welcome opportunity to widen their net of influence, and Shii-Alevis as a threat to their religious identity." 6

The primary orientation of each of these perspectives is a concern over authority and power. In this, religion must be understood as part of the political fabric. The growing economic and political instability (particularly in the last ten years but going back at least 40 years) has given occasion to those who are intent upon increasing their power to play upon religious sympathies. The coincidence of religious resurgence and political instability indicates not only that they are intertwined, but also that they are stimulated by each other. Between 1954 and 1960 the party in power allowed freedom to many ugly elements for the political exploitation of religious conservatism. This ended temporarily with the demise of that government. Between 1960 and 1980 we have seen the fragmentation of the body politic into small factions



each intent upon enhancing its own profit. A splintered left was offset by extremist nationalists and religious rightists, all of whom were set against an ineffective middle. The vacuum of power created with no one party able to elect a majority government encouraged the growth of anarchy and terrorism often centering on intra-Islamic religious targets. But in suspending all political party activity, the present military government has currently curtailed, among other things, the exploitation of religious fervor and identity.

Thus from this brief survey of recent years it becomes obvious that although Turkey is a secular state, religion remains a pressing concern of the government. Turkish Islam has not yet been able to secure itself from those who see it as an element in gaining and manipulating political power. They leave religion little chance to be itself. It is so much a part of the total fabric that it will remain a central political force for years to come. Although these groups may be displeased with government controls and with the use of religion for political ends, they do not feel a basic dissatisfaction with Islam itself.

On the contrary it would be unfair to label this resurgence as only the interplay of a power struggle in Turkey. There are those who are genuinely concerned and eager to express their religion more fully in their lives than the laws of the Republic have allowed. Some of their concern was behind the decision in the early 1950's to increase religious education on all levels. Some has been recognized by Turkish Radio and Television in their religious broadcasts on Fridays and during the month of Ramazan. Some also can be seen in the government's relaxation of rules related to funds belonging to mosques which allowed them to repair old buildings and build new ones. Thus in many ways this return to religion has been a positive and necessary development unrelated to anything political in the minds of many people. At the same time it would be naive of us not to recognize that this genuine interest has been exploited for political reasons. This also indicates that, as we reiterate, without a change in the socio-political structure, it is unlikely that any



new development or reformation in Islam will happen soon. Thus, on this formal level the time has not yet come for dialogue.

The persistence of the desire for religious practice by the people, no matter what kinds of control have restricted them, can be seen in Turkey. In the formation of the Republic, the califate was abolished, schools secularized, religious courts closed, and the administration of the pious foundations given to the government. Assembly for religious purpose was permitted only in mosques. Religious vestments worn in public (including the fez), dervish orders, and worship at popular saints' tombs were all outlawed. But, as the attention of the state to these matters lessened in time and the political power disintegrated, explicit expressions of religion appeared. Men wearing green caps indicating that they are Muslim religious teachers and have been on the pilgrimage to Mecca can be seen on the streets of Istanbul. Pictures of members of a worshipping dervish order were printed in a German tourist guide book to Turkey in 1976. In Poland, to cite another example, we see a similar phenomenon. Traditional strong religious belief and activity were curtailed by the Communist regime. Catholicism, which seemingly had lost its power and had been driven underground, is now taking a much more overt role in the present developments. The saying of the mass on the radio and in factories and requests for religious education are just two of its manifestations.

The conclusion we can draw from these examples is that one's identification and involvement with religious values and orientation is not easily legislated out of existence or changed by legal decree. These live and exist on a much deeper level in society.

Another insight into the political-religious blend in Turkey involves its national identity. This factor is not uniquely Turkish, for every Islamic country finds that it is almost impossible to define itself or its citizens without reference to religious terms. After more than 50 years, Turkey is still



struggling to discover, define and promote its national identity. One of the strongest criteria is that of religion. The appeal to Islamic values in varying degrees is an attempt to focus the attention of the people towards a common goal -- the country's good. The government policy makers feel the need for a spirit of unity from such an identity. With over 95% of the people in Turkey Muslims at least nominally, Islam is an obvious common denominator in such an appeal.

But what of the non-Muslim citizen in this process? Those who are aware of the history of the Ottoman period will remember that the solution to the problem of religious diversity under that Islamic regime was to establish the millet system whereby each religious group was responsible for its own conduct in the areas of law, order and justice. The residue of this system still exists within republican Turkey. In spite of the legally guaranteed freedoms, on the popular day-to-day level neither the millet system nor the constitution has been able to guarantee individual human rights. The competition, sinister hostility and intolerance displayed by the common citizen of whatever religious persuasion is a record of history. We need to keep this in mind in our analysis of developments in most of the Middle East. We of the West who do not understand or appreciate the depths of this dilemma find it hard to empathize because we have nothing analagous to it in our own experience.

Another factor which needs new insight is that of the Turkish understanding of and contact with Christians and Christianity. What do we of the West know of this? Do we know how or when or on what levels Turks have met Christians? What has been the quality of these contacts? What has caused the meeting? How often? How well publicized, and to what end? Do we know enough about the Turkish contact with Christians that we could begin a creative dialogue on the subject with either side?

As one example of Turkish understanding that occasionally embarrasses a Westerner, the general, educated Turk probably knows more about the facts and figures of Christianity than many Christians. History courses in school include a study of Christian and Western as well



as Turkish history. High school graduates often have a curiosity about Christianity which is detached from the conflict between it and Islam. Their tendency is to see that both are intent upon human salvation and that both Christians and Muslims are "people of the Book." In many cases their understanding is a sympathetic concern unrelated to theological differences.

At the same time, however, there are personal and social attitudes held by both Christians and Muslims which are not academic or sympathetic. And there is a history, which goes back to when the two groups first met before the Crusades, of conflict between "infidel" and "giaour". But Turkish antagonisms have not always been directed against the entire Christian minority within the country. Rather the attacks have sometimes been on the national groups of Armenians or Greeks. (Interestingly, the Syrian Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish minorities have generally attracted less hostility). Christian malice must also be recognized in this conflict along with the fact that Christians often have been the scapegoats for non-religious ills. The degree of acceptance or hatred has also been related to factors other than religion, and sometimes has reflected international politics as well.

What are the Christians' feelings toward Muslims and Islam in this setting? Historically and traditionally Christians within Turkey have not identified themselves as Turks. They cannot. For self-protection and identification they have often had to turn their faces toward the West. They are a minority with the accompanying feelings of insecurity or aloof superiority or other socio-psychological displacements that go with it. Yet within their social setting they show the same variety of personal feelings -- love and fear -- toward their Muslim neighbors as do the neighbors toward them. Their position is further complicated in that they must reap the repercussions of any international incident involving their particular national group. This often gives them the feeling that they are walking a tightrope. They do, however, usually have very



strong ties to the land of their birth and heritage, Turkey.

Along with the Christian-Muslim sensitivities, there is the related issue of Christian-Christian encounter. This is another dimension of dialogue. In this, to begin with we must recognize the complex relations among the Christian communities themselves. They are not one indigenous group; they are many. They live and worship separate from each other, often using languages not Turkish. They are not easily drawn together across credal and confessional boundaries, partly because of their own language differences, partly because of strong ties with their history and particular traditions. In recent years some ecumenical interest has developed as Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant people have shared religious services, particularly in Istanbul. But this newly-found compatibility may be more a reflection of an international ecumenical movement and a realization of an increased need among the reduced Christian populations to support each other than it is any widespread desire for communion.

Not only do the Christian communities in Turkey represent many of the historical divisions within the Church which have hindered dialogue among them, the Westerners' understanding of dialogue with them is also confused because of the Middle East's concepts of country and nation. We mentioned the millet system above in talking about law. Christians live in the country of Turkey, but their nation -- their millet -- is Armenian or Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox. Their loyalty is to the millet first, and they expect the foreign Protestant to display the same "national" faithfulness. This has been true historically throughout the Middle East. Westerners who have quite a different interpretation of their responsibilities to a secular nation often minimize the strength of confessional-national loyalties and are confused and frustrated when indigenous Christians appeal to them because of a presumed similarity.



Christian-Christian dialogue is in the early stages of creative encounter, but many misunderstandings, preconceptions, and much unhappy history among the Christian groups need to be swept away by both sides in order to uncover the one true Church. The need for this area of dialogue is not only because of the embarrassment of a divided Christendom. It is also in our belief that full understanding and acceptance of each other must be a concomitant of understanding between Christians and Muslims. Perhaps the real role of the Westerner in Christian-Muslim dialogue is that of helping the Middle East Christian and the Middle East Muslim together to recognize, appreciate, and pursue their common search for God.

One other point should be made in the area of Turkish-Christian (or Western) attitudes. Even in Western scholarly writings such as dictionaries and encyclopedias Turks are defined as "uncontrollable" and "terrible" and the country still is "the sick man of Europe". Such weighted words, particularly when they are used by people concerned to see justice for the downtrodden, antagonize when their professed intent is to heal. We Westerners tend to approach a subject analytically; we see ourselves as bringing an objective perspective to problems which entitles us to stand in judgment on others when we ourselves may not be objective or the others may have an understanding of the subject that has no point of reference to ours. There is little hope that dialogue can be meaningful until we stop using the very words that deny the possibility of trust and love between us or until we can each hear what the other is saying. We are convinced that those dialoguing, while recognizing the realities of history, of love, hate and difference, must indeed be humble enough to accept these and move on beyond.

So far in our discussion of the place of religion in Turkey we have mentioned the political and historical forces that affect it. We have touched on the socio-psychological realities that have contributed to the resurgence of its overt observance. And



we have mentioned how Muslim and Christians perceive each other. But there is another aspect of Turkish religious practice which we have referred to only briefly which is both gracious and profound, diverse and simple, real and transcendent, and which may be the point of creative contact between Christian and Muslim Turk. This is Turkish Islamic mysticism. As Kenneth Cragg puts it: "In the end it may be that the strength of Islam, and of its current response to its Turkish destiny, will lie, not with intellectual and academic finesse or competence -- though these it cannot ignore -- but in the deeper levels of mystical and practical piety which have always been the strength of Ottoman Islam, and whose indestructibility is one of the lessons of recent history."

This is not a new idea. Many Christian missionaries have felt an affinity with the dervish or mystical orders. One such person was J. Kingsley Birge who devoted a part of his time to the study of a specific order, the Bektashis.<sup>8</sup> Though all dervish order activities were curtailed by the reforms of Atatürk, it seems safe to say that there are still hundreds of thousands who have some kind of affiliation with the dervish traditions. A large portion of the Turkish population on all social levels still proudly speak of this tradition with warmth; references are found in contemporary literature and music and art; and many people attend anniversary celebrations and pilgrimages to various birthplaces. Well known among these, even outside of Turkey, are Hacı Bektash village and the city of Konya, the historic center of the Mevlevis.

Birge, writing in 1937, notes that in most Muslim countries the orthodox Muslim practices dissimulation -- the act of continuing one's standing in the orthodox group while also participating in these mystical fraternities -- without the least stigma. This was certainly true in Turkey. It used to be quite



common that those who were leaders in the regular Friday prayers in the mosques as imams on other days were to be found acting as Şeyhs (Shaikhs) in dervish tekkes. There are still informal gatherings of these groups. Their influence and the ideas which they stand for did not stop with the passing of a law forbidding their existence. Nor, it appears, did they completely die out.

It is in the experiential rather than the traditional formal approach to Islam that the Christian can best feel at home. The mystics' search for a direct knowledge of God in their worship and in their life is a search that can have meaning for the Christian also.

The legal, formal and cold aspects of orthodox Sunni Islam were insufficient for the Turks, and out of their need for a more personal, warmer religious expression grew the dervish orders. The diverse influences on them can be seen in the varieties of expressions of this in religious poetry, music, dance and movement, art and even in humor, all of which are expressed on the level of the common people and in a medium which speaks simply and directly to them. Often both aspects are combined.

The Havlidi Şerif, the birthsong of the Prophet Muhammad, which was written in the late 13th century by Süleyman Çelebi, is a familiar example of an expression of the combination of the orthodox with the experiential Islam. Some orthodox do not accept it because it is not from the Koran or traditions of the prophet but it does speak to a majority. The language is understandable by the common person today. The music is haunting and often interspersed with dervish hymns. The reciting and chanting of the song whether in the mosque or at home is a family affair which celebrates anniversaries of death, birth, or note-worthy accomplishments. The family on the occasion is the extended family of those who wish to share in the joy or sorrow no matter what



their creed or persuasion. It is participated in by the young and old, the most devout, the most conservative and even the confirmed and overt secularist.

We like to take it as one symbol of the strength and unity which is still part of Turkish life and which can definitely be labelled as religious. To this type of ceremony all religions and religious people can identify. It is this expression and quality of Islam in Turkey -- the indestructable mystical and practical piety -- which is truly the Islam which speaks out from a social and cultural heritage seeking for universal understanding and acceptance. Is it as we learn more about it and approach it with an open heart that we will be able to begin the creative experience of dialogue in Turkey?

Dialogue is not only talking together. It is living with people -- sharing and struggling together in the complexities of our lives. Where there is creative thought, action and involvement, understanding and dialogue can occur. The power and strength and diversity of both sides in the dialogue can enrich and ennoble our lives. Neither of us can deny our Christianity or our Islam. But we can all seek the Kingdom of God together. The point of contact is not whether we are Christian or Muslim, but whether through our words and actions in involvement individually as unique children of God what we believe draws us closer to God in day-to-day living. We as Christians can experience the same kind of dialogue Jesus had with people. The task of preparing ourselves intellectually for this encounter has only begun.



### Footnotes:

1. See Cragg, Kenneth, Islamic Surveys 3, Counsels in Contemporary Islam, pp. 141 - 44 and Mardin, Şerif, "Religion in Modern Turkey", pp. 286 - 89 for a discussion of these reforms.
2. Cragg, Kenneth, op. cit., p. 140.
3. Mardin, Şerif, op. cit., p. 279.
4. Ibid.
5. Detailed listing of evidences of this resurgence can be found in Cragg, Kenneth, op. cit. pp. 150-51, and in Smith, Wilfred C., Islam in Modern History, pp. 185 ff.
6. Mardin, Şerif, op. cit., p. 280.
7. Cragg, Kenneth, op. cit., p. 152.
8. Birge, J. Kingsley, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, Vol. VII of Luzac's Oriental Religions Series is his definitive work.

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- Chelebi, Süleyman, The Mevlidi Sherif, translated by F. Lyman MacCallum, Wisdom of the East Series, John Murray, England, 1943.
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Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1957;  
especially Chapter 4: "Turkey: Islamic Reformation?",  
pp. 140-154.

Anna G. Edmonds, editor



No. 695

Near East Mission  
United Church Board for  
World Ministries  
Post Box 142  
Istanbul, Turkey  
12 November 1980

Dear Friends:

The most important news in Turkey since the last issue of this letter is the bloodless coup on September 12 in which the minority government of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel was abolished, the parliament dissolved, and the constitution annulled. General Kenan Evren became the leader of the country. In his first address on radio and television that day he said that the civilian government's inability to govern the country, the use of religious differences to divide the country, and the increasing bloodshed from acts of terrorism were among the reasons for the coup.

The leaders of the four largest political parties were taken into custody and held for about a month. Since then Mr. Demirel and Mr. Ecevit have been released. Mr. Ecevit has stepped down from his party's leadership. Mr. Erbakan and Mr. Türkeş are presently being held in Ankara, pending their trials for various state offences.

People seem genuinely relieved that the army has taken over control of the country. The first noticeable major difference has been a dramatic decrease in the numbers of people killed every day in political violence. The army has made a serious attempt to round up terrorists, and to punish those convicted of murder. So far, four such men have been executed.

In many other areas controls have been tightened: traffic rules are being enforced and fines assessed; unlicensed peddlars have been driven off the streets, particularly on Mahmut Paşa and around the Bible House in Istanbul, and their illegally imported equipment confiscated. A provisional constitution was announced, and there have been changes in regulations about separation pay. A new tax law is expected. It is a welcome revolution, but we agree with their hope that the country can return to civilian rule eventually.



In many of his public statements, General Evren has emphasized the principles of Atatürk and called for a return to his standards. This coincides with the centennial observation of Atatürk's birth which is being celebrated not only in Turkey but also internationally. The American Historical Society had on its recent program the presentation of papers commemorating his contributions.

At the University of the Bosphorus an international Atatürk Conference was held on November 10 and 11. Speakers in the first program were President Semih Tezcan ("Atatürk ve Halkçılık"), Professor Afet İnan ("Atatürk ve Kadın Hakları"), Professor Donald Webster ("Atatürk -- Laïque Prophet"), Professor İsmet Giritli ("Kemalizm ve Modernleşme") and Professor Vlademir Danilov ("Kemal Atatürk, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve Sovyet Türkolojisi"). Other speakers included Professor Mustafa Aysan, Dr. Vedat İledim Tör, Professor Turhan Feyzioğlu, Professor Suna Kili, Professor Walter F. Weiker and Professor Sadi İrmak.

Milliyet newspaper on November 9 listed the following changes in the dollar since last December (Many of these we've already noted):

#### Dollar Value:

20 December 1979	- 47.10 TL	4 August 1980	- 80.00 TL
25 January 1980	- 70.00	12 October	- 82.70
2 April	- 73.70	26 October	- 84.70
19 April	- 73.50	9 November	- 97.75
9 June	- 78.00		

There are changes within the Near East Mission personnel also since the last issue: two new teachers have arrived at Üsküdar: Patricia Blake (English) and Shirley Libeck (chemistry). Lillian Berton (Üsküdar 1970-77) is welcomed back as a volunteer at the Üsküdar school. F. Scott Anderson (English) is teaching in Tarsus, and in Izmir Louise Fricke (French and English) and Martha Weaver (English) have joined the staff. Martha Weaver was with the Peace Corps in the Yemen before coming to Turkey. Louise Fricke's past work in developing



countries includes the years 1961 to 1963 in Tunisia and Algeria when she was with the American Friends Service Committee helping refugees, and 1977 to this year with the Methodist Board in the New Hebrides.

News of former friends brings word of the addition to Marianne and Jim Fitzgibbon's family of a 6-year old Korean boy. The Fitzgibbons were in İzmir from 1969 to 1976; for three years before that Jim was in Tarsus and Marianne in İzmir. Ian Michael was born to Marion (Cast, İzmir 1969-72) and Alan Ruge in Grand Island, Nebraska on August 20. To the Fitzgibbons and the Ruges we wish a long and happy life for both parents and children. John (Tarsus 1972-76, Üsküdar 1976-78) and Güler Hill are now both teaching at Robert Lisesi in Istanbul. Donald Webster (Üsküdar 1961-65) has been visiting in Turkey on the occasion of the Atatürk Conference at the University of the Bosphorus.

(It's interesting that on the program announcing this conference the founding date of the university is given as 1863.) Don managed to squeeze his time in here between the inauguration of the new health facility at Pilgrim Place in Claremont, California on October 12 and the Annual Pilgrim Festival beginning on November 13, for which he is treasurer. Dr. Albert Dewey (Turkey, mostly Gaziantep, 1919-1958) had been instrumental in the campaign for that new building, and was the one to cut the ribbon.

Gretchen deVries was in Turkey as she visited development projects around the world enroute to her work in Japan. Rev. and Mrs. John F. Keith were in Istanbul in early November. Mr. Keith is the associate secretary of the Canadian Baptist Overseas Mission Board. Carol Blakney is visiting Richard, Cerina and Raymond Blakney. She helped entertain Raymond on his first birthday, November 11.

October 12th was the five-yearly census day in Turkey when only the official census takers were allowed to move around and everyone else was required to observe a curfew from 8 a.m. until the count was completed. One newspaper remarked that a number of the babies born in Konya that day were given the names Sayim (Census) or



Sayil (Statistic). First reports show that the population of the country is over 45 million people.

Tercuman newspaper carried a front-page, full-color picture on November 7 of the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Shinork Kalustyan. The Patriarch was returning from an extended trip outside the country. The paper quoted him as speaking to reporters as follows:

"In no place did we make a statement contrary to the realities of the situation in our nation or against its interests. The opposite was so: wherever we went we brought the discussion around to touching upon the great religious tolerance existing in our country. On every occasion we deplored the inhuman attacks upon our nation's foreign representatives. Our regret as Armenians who are really Turks and are an inseparable part of the Turkish society is unending because of these events. We are a part of the Atatürk generation of Turks and our hearts and minds and everything we have is tied to this society; no one has any right to distress us. We as Turkish citizens, and as spiritual leaders rebuke with hatred every act against Turkey. We will send the commission we are forming to the four corners of the world to explain the comfort and tranquillity of the Armenian community in Turkey."

Anna G. Edmonds, editor



No. 696

Near East Mission  
United Church Board for  
World Ministries  
Post Box 142  
Istanbul, Turkey  
1 December 1980

Dear Friends,

### Folk Climatology

It's hard to predict the weather in Istanbul. At least it is for me, but I keep trying to learn. In the afternoon there may be a gentle Lodos wind blowing, and before I'm home from my evening shopping I might need chains to get through the snow drifts. I know this, but I always seem to come home covered with muck. And I do like yogurt.

Of course one can be sure that August will have its dog days (Eyyam-ı Bahur), that Pastırma summer (the time when beef is sun-dried and coated with red pepper paste for winter storage) will be balmy, followed by a bitter Poyraz wind blowing down the Bosphorus in January and February, and then the mild First Season (İlk Bahar) will appear with mauve and magenta blossoms freshening the hills after their winter mud bath. The seasons will come and go in order. But can I tell you what the weather will be today?

Perhaps I shouldn't try. After all, my Turkish friends say, the weather is God's business, not ours. We can't change it, so we must accept it. It's all right to comment on what's happened, but to worry about what is to come invades the realms of inşallah -- what God pleases.

The attitude that God's judgment is disclosed through the weather impressed me one chilly day when I overheard an older woman discussing the hard winter we'd just weathered. She eased herself onto a stool in the meat shop complaining about the unusual number of baskets of wood she had had to burn to keep warm.



"God really read it to our souls this year," she said. (Allah canımiza okudu.) Or maybe her comment should be translated, "He threw the book at us." As though we had tampered with the elements and He was paying us back. He well may have been!

Something else also caught my attention that morning: in the conversation the butcher had spoken about a cemre which had fallen that day so that now the land would warm up.

"Cemre," I wondered, and went home to the dictionary. With that, my Western, scientific approach to the weather was reduced to ashes. A cemre, the dictionary says, is a spark or an ember. Three of them fall from the sky each year towards the end of February. The first cemre warms the air, the second the water, and the third the land. They fall about a week apart, and until the third has fallen it's unwise to begin spring planting. Perhaps the person who named them saw them, or thought he did, but that must have been a very long time ago, because I have never found anyone who could tell me more about them. However I felt warmer knowing that the cemres had fallen; maybe they'd scorched my scorn of folk wisdom.

Those people who were first collecting knowledge in the Near East had to be keen. They weren't insulated from the weather the way we are. Their comfort, even their security, depended on the accuracy of their judgment. We enlightened moderns have begun reaccepting some of the folk remedies for illness; it's also time for us to take a new look at folk climatology. It may not help in predicting the weather in other parts of the world to know about the Near East beliefs. But then again it may. Just because no one has seen a cemre in Australia doesn't mean it doesn't fall there, too. After all, "Who has seen the wind?"

Talking about winds, I discovered in my search sparked by cemres that the two most common winds in Istanbul continue to be known by their ancient names: the south wind was Notus to the Greeks. With a slight twist it is now the Lodos, the stormy southwest wind accused of causing headaches and short tempers. Occasionally it's



blustery enough to delay even heavy shipping in the Bosphorus. Its opposite, the northeast wind, is called Poyraz and is the same sylvan spirit known in mythology as Boreas. Some people joke that Istanbul has only two seasons, Poyraz and Lodos.

But in addition to these and several other winds, the storms they bring not only have names, they appear on specific days. Fishermen and hunters know them well. There is the storm heralding the migration of swallows on April 6, the storm when the Pleiades rise at almost the same time as the sun on May 23, and the black chestnut storm that is a strong north wind blowing across the Black Sea about September 26.

Am I convinced by this folk climatology? Well, only partly. Last spring my husband and I determined to beat the local market on peas and beans by putting our seeds in the ground early. It was a warm February day, but we were blowing on our fingers before we finished. The thermometer didn't indicate that it was any warmer when our Turkish friend put hers in just after the third cemre had fallen on March 6. But whose seeds didn't sprout? You guessed it. Then the Kocakara (Old Biddy) storm on March 11 and the "March Ninth" storm the next week blew over our heads. So it was April before we got back to the spring planting.

We should have known that one must be responsive to the weather, to the falling of the cemres, to the comings and goings of storms, but obviously we needed help if we were to grow vegetables. As we pulled up our puny vines, our friend handed us a small yearly almanac showing the flurry of storms that had whirled around unknown to us. A glance showed us more in store.

There is the Zemheri storm on January 6. Zemherir means the depths of winter and comes from words for frost (zem) and for the whining of a dog when it's bitter cold (herir).

On January 29 St. Anthony's storm rages on the Black Sea. (This is the St. Anthony of Egypt who fought the hosts of evil. His feast is celebrated on January 17; it must take the dust raised by his fight twelve days to get to Turkey.) On April 21 comes Sitte-i sevir, the six days of bad weather when the sun is in Taurus.



Then the red plum storm on June 27, the black plum storm on July 30, and the ramming season storm on October 5 make their scenes. The storm of the vineyard harvest comes on October 19, the heliacal setting of the Pleiades on November 29, and the winter solstice on December 28. Which brings us back to Zemherir and the saying that "He who wants yogurt during Zemherir must carry a cow in his pocket."

Have I learned anything yet about the weather? Not much. Even if I listen to the weather forecast, read the almanac, and look at the sky in the morning, at night I will still have to clean the mud off my clothes. All winter long. Or is the problem that cow?

### Names of Winds

İmbat: the steady summer south wind, the cooling afternoon wind in the Aegean region; a west or southwest sea wind.

Lodos: the stormy south-west wind. The word comes from Notus, the same wind in Greek mythology. The local proverb is that the eyes of the lodos are always wet, meaning that one expects rain after the lodos storm. It's also said that one doesn't eat fish during a lodos because the fish tends to be too soft then.

Karayel: southwest wind, the opposite of keşişleme

Keşişleme: the southeast wind, the sirocco. Keşiş means hermit; many years ago Ulu Dağ -- near Bursa -- was known as Keşiş Dağı, the mountain of hermits. The southeast wind blowing across Istanbul got its name from the mountain it seemed to come from.

Kible: south wind. The kible is the direction of Mecca, which in Turkey is to the south.

Meltem: off-shore breeze that blows daily for a time in summer.

Poyraz: northeast wind. Boreas's children in Greek mythology helped the Argonauts when they were navigating the Bosphorus.

Samyeli: very hot, unwholesome wind, the simoom. Sam is one word for poison.



Yıldız: north wind blowing from the direction of the Pole Star. This is the wind which brings the winter snow.

Not only are the winds familiar spirits, the storms also are known by name:

approx.            name and comments  
dates

- 8 Jan.        Zemheri storm: Zemherir is intense cold, or depths of winter. Zemheride kar yağmadan kan yağması iyi: Snow during this intense cold makes it hard to work the fields, but that plowing means a good crop the next year. So it's better to sweat blood and get it done before the heavy snows come.
- 28 Jan.       Aya Andon storm: St. Anthony's storm
- 30 Jan.       Zemheri end.
- 31 Jan.       Hamsin beginning: Hamsin is a fifty-day period ending at the vernal equinox.
- 20 Feb.       First cemre: The first cemre heats the air.
- 27 Feb.       Second cemre: The second spark falls on the water.
- 28 Feb.       Leyleklerin gelmesi: the Coming of the Storks.
- 6 March.      Third cemre: the third cemre falls on the land, and then it's time to begin the spring planting.
- 11 March      Kocakara cold or Berdelacuz cold: The cold spell called the "Old Biddy" or "Old Woman".
- 12 March      Husun storm
- 15 March      Kırlangıcın gelmesi: the Coming of the Swallows or the Shearwaters
- 18 March      Kocakara ends.
- 3rd week of March      Mart Dokuzu: Vernal equinox storm at the time of the old calendar's March ninth. Mart dokuzunda çıra yak, bağ buda: If you haven't pruned your vineyard by March 9th you better get out and do it by firelight that night.



- 20 March end of Hamsin.
- 21 March Nevruz: Persian New Year.
- 23 March Koz Kavuran storm: cold that freezes the walnut buds.
- 26 March Çaylak storm: Storm of the kites (birds).
- 30 March Çaylak gelmesi: the Coming of the Kites.
- 6 April Kırlangıç storm: the Storm of the Swallows or the Shearwaters.
- 19 April Kuğu storm: strong continuous wind storm in the spring when the sun is in the constellation of the Swan.
- 20 April to 25 April Sitte-i sevir: Six days in April when the sun is in the constellation Taurus, a time of bad weather. Sit means six, sevir is Taurus.
- 4 May Çiçek storm: Flower storm.
- 6 May Hıdrellez: the beginning of summer; the day when the prophets Hızır (who became immortal by drinking the Water of Life) and Elijah meet each other. It is the fortieth day after the spring equinox. Hızır gibi yetişmek: to come as a godsend.
- 16 May Filiz Kıran storm: the storm that breaks the buds.
- 20 May Kokulya storm: the silk worm cocoon storm
- 21 May Ülker storm: Storm of the Pleiades
- 30 May Kabak meltemi: May wind
- 31 May to 8 July Bevârih rüzgârları: hot summer winds
- 3 June Filiz koparan storm: storm that breaks off the buds
- 7 June Hasat season: harvest



10 June	<u>Ülker doğumu</u> storm: storm of the heliacal rising of the Pleiades
21 June	<u>Gündönümü</u> storm: summer solstice storm
27 June	<u>Kızıl Erik</u> storm: red plum storm
30 June	<u>Yaprak</u> storm: leaf storm
3 July	<u>Samyelleri</u> begin: 'beginning of the simooms
11 July	<u>Çark dönümü</u> storm: Turn of the Wheel storm
30 July	<u>Kara erik</u> storm: black plum storm
1 Aug. to 8 Aug.	<u>Eyyam-ı Bahur</u> : favorable winds, prosperous days. Dog Days: <u>Bahur</u> means Sirius, the Dog Star.
25 Aug.	<u>Samyelleri</u> end: end of simooms
31 Aug.	<u>Mihrican</u> or <u>Mırcan</u> storm: <u>Mihrecan</u> or <u>Mihrgân</u> is the Persian day of the autumnal equinox.
4 Sept.	<u>Bıldırcın geçimi</u> storm: Storm of the Flight of the Quail, also <u>Turnaların gitmesi</u> : Departure of the Cranes.
13 Sept.	<u>Çaylak geçimi</u> storm: Storm of the Departure of the Kites
28 Sept.	<u>Kestane Karası</u> : Black chestnut storm that is a strong north wind blowing over the Black Sea about Sept. 26.
30 Sept.	<u>Turna geçimi</u> storm: Flight of the Cranes' storm.
5 Oct.	<u>Koç katımı</u> storm: Ramming storm
9 Oct.	<u>Yaprak dökümü</u> storm: storm of the falling leaves.
15 Oct.	<u>Meryem Ana</u> storm: the Virgin Mary's storm
18 Oct.	<u>Kırlangıç</u> storm: Storm of the Flight of the Swallows or the Shearwaters.
22 Oct.	<u>Bağbozumu</u> storm: storm of the vineyard harvest.
27 Oct.	<u>Balık fırtınası</u> : Fish storm
4 Nov.	<u>Lodos</u> storm



- 8 Nov. Kasım fırtınası: the beginning of winter  
which goes to May 5.
- 12 Nov. Pastırma yazı: Indian summer, unseasonal warmth
- 29 Nov. Ülker dönümü storm: storm of the heliacal  
setting of the Pleiades
- 12 Dec. Karakış fırtınası: black winter
- 19 Dec. Zemheri begins: intense cold of winter.  
Zemheri zürefası is one who wears very  
inadequate clothes in winter.
- 20 Dec. Şeb-i yelda: the longest night of the year.
- 21 Dec. Erbainin başlangıcı: beginning of the  
to period of the forty days of midwinter.
- 30 Jan.
- 28 Dec. Gündönümü storm: winter solstice storm.  
This and the St. Anthony's storm on  
the Black Sea are supposed to be  
particularly strong.

Brrrrrr!

Anna G. Edmonds, editorrrrrrr



No. 697

Near East Mission  
United Church Board for  
World Ministries  
Post Box 142  
Istanbul, Turkey  
12 December 1980

Dear Friends,

Betty Avery and Gwen Scott were honored at the United Church Board for World Ministries Annual Meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania on November 11 when they received their twenty-five-year Roll of Honor medals. At the same time Robert Avery and John Scott were honored posthumously. Betty is in the States for a year's furlough, and Gwen is on pre-retirement furlough. That night was Gwen's birthday, and, according to Frances Eddy (also on pre-retirement furlough), "the whole ballroomful sang to her at the start of the banquet -- standing." Congratulations to them for their years of service!

Thanksgiving was celebrated in Uskudar in Fay Linder's apartment with the entire Istanbul Mission family present for the traditional meal. Among the several guests were Dr. and Mrs. Avery D. Post, Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth L. Teegarden, and Dr. Dale Bishop. Dr. Post is president of the United Church of Christ and Dr. Teegarden is General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Members of the United Church and the Christian Church are exploring the possibility of a union of these two bodies by 1985, using the time until then to prepare a sound basis for it. A statement by the steering committee members for this union appeared in the September first issue of Keeping You Posted. The visit they paid to the Middle East was a part of the study by these two churches to understand better the ways of cooperation. Also present was Rev. Melvin Wittler, interrupting his furlough to be here in the Middle East for meetings of the Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut and the Turkey Development Foundation in Ankara. Although their visits to Turkey were short, the Posts and Dr. Bishop went to Tarsus Nov. 28-29 and the Teegardens went to Izmir those same days.



Margaret Blemker (formerly Near East Regional Secretary) writes as of November 24th sending special wishes to Middle East friends: "I think of you often as you continue to meet vicissitudes and victories in the ups and downs of turbulent days. Especially I want to send thanks to those 'Dear Friends' who at my retirement sent gifts for books at Bir Zeit University. Those on the West Bank need our prayers and help more than ever. Two weeks ago the school was closed as it tried to observe Palestine Week to teach students about their Palestinian culture and roots. Protesting students were injured as police shot at legs. Books for the library on the new campus are a significant gesture toward hope for the future. Thank you, dear friends, for this gift. May all the joys of Christmas and a new year be yours in abundance."

The Dutch Chapel Cantata Choir and Orchestra, directed by William Edmonds, presented their annual Christmas concert on December 5th at the Church of St. Louis and on December 7 at the German Protestant Church. The music was Vivaldi's Magnificat, Haydn's Nocturn No. 5 in C Major, and a selection of seven carols with orchestral accompaniment. There were thirty-one singers and fifteen members of the orchestra for this concert. As usual a number of the Istanbul Mission community participated: Mine Beyler, Martha Butkofsky, Anna Edmonds, Carol Geren, Fay Linder, Helene, Armin and Sylvia Meyer, Arza Nicholson, Nubar Özsimonyan, Laura Webber and Nancy Wright.

The fiftieth anniversary of Monsignor Pierre Dubois' ordination as a Catholic priest was observed on November 30 at the Cathedral of St. Esprit in Istanbul. The celebration was in the form of a performance of W.A. Mozart's Coronation Mass. The Austrian first conductor of the Istanbul Opera, Wolfgang Scheidt, conducted the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra and the ninety-four voice choir -- not only an ecumenical but also an inter-religious demonstration of harmony! William Edmonds was one of the choir directors of this group. Proceeds from the concert went to the Catholic charity organization Caritas, which helps support the Little Sisters of the Poor Old Folks' Home here. As the



performance was beginning, the conductor, Mr. Scheidt, took time to announce that he was dedicating the concert as a prayer for the release of the American hostages in Tehran.

Correction: in the last news issue of "Dear Friends" (number 695) we reported that the dollar was worth TL 97.75 on November 9. That should have been TL 87.75 as of that date. On December 11 the value was changed to TL 89.25. It is commonly expected that the lira-dollar value will become 100 to 1 by the end of the year.

Further unofficial information from the census count in October shows that the province experiencing the greatest population growth was Hakkâri. In 1975 the population of Hakkâri was 126,036; in 1980 it is 177,936 -- an increase of 68.97 percent. In the subdivision of Şemdinli in the far southeast corner bordering both Iran and Iraq the population in 1975 was 1,433; in 1980 it is 19,677. In reporting this, Tercuman newspaper remarked that this is where winter is most severe and where it's impossible to get either in or out once the snow comes. (Was this the reason or does this add to the puzzle of why there?) The population of Istanbul increased 44.22 percent in the five year period, of Ankara 42.44 percent and Bursa 37.91 percent. Gümüşhane (north of Erzincan), on the other hand, decreased from 293,673 in 1975 to 278,063 in 1980, a 10.92 percent difference.

A number of measures are being taken by the country to save energy. This is the third winter that daylight saving has been kept in effect all year long. As of the 24th of November there are regular three-hour electricity cuts between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. every day except Sundays throughout the country. (There are also irregular cuts.) Television broadcast has been shortened half an hour; it begins now at 7:30 p.m. on week days and continues until after the 23:30 news. People exceeding the 90 kilometer an hour speed limit are to be fined up to 5,000 TL, new buildings will not be approved for construction if they have large windows, and the amount of light that can be used in store windows at night has been limited. People in their private homes are being asked to cut down on the



number of lights they have on. At the same time, Professor Alpin Dağsöz, director of the Istanbul Technical University Solar Energy Institute emphasized in his opening address to the Institute the need for the development of alternative energy sources to supplement the use of petroleum in Turkey.

On December 5th the Izmir school faculty enjoyed a pot-luck dinner in honor of Ümit İçre, a long-term faculty member who retired at the end of the 1979-1980 school year. A geography teacher with boundless enthusiasm for school trips to the country's historical and geographical wonders, she also enjoyed a reputation for carrying the school's heaviest load of papers to grade while having the honor of teaching more students each year than other faculty members. Several of her former students have been her colleagues in recent years, and after the dinner they took delight in making Ümit Hanım sit for a personal "geography" quiz on her career.

According to A.J. Arberry in Religion in the Middle East (p.277), in Egypt between 1321 and 1354 the Mamluk sultans forbade the Copts to ride horses or mules, and insisted that when they rode donkeys they must ride backwards. What are Nasreddin Hoca's dates?

Repairs have begun on the roof and walls of St. Sophia in Istanbul. The Etibank has given up to thirty tons of lead to replace that which had come off the roof of the building and off the caps of the minarets. It is hoped that the repair work will be finished in February 1981.

In a thawing of the ice between Turkey and Greece, the W-15 military boundary in the Aegean Sea which has been closed since the troubles in Cyprus in 1974 is being opened to Turkish army jet traffic.

The December 9th issue of Tercuman has a front page article describing the danger to Zonguldak of the coal mines underneath it. The newspaper says that the city is threatened by collapsing into the mines. Since the coal supplies are vital to the country, it would appear that rather than stopping the mining the city should be moved.

Anna G. Edmonds,  
editor