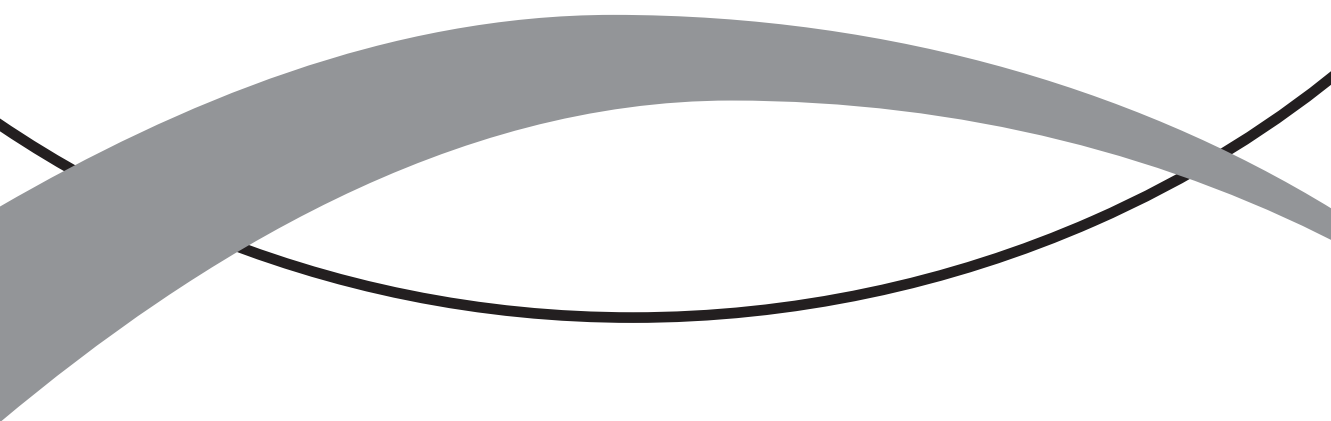


UNITING CHURCH STUDIES

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**UNITING CHURCH ENCOUNTERS
WITH THE MIDDLE EAST**

Vol. 28, No.1



Abbreviations

Documents

Hyperlinks are embedded in the full name and provide access to the full documents.

<i>AssMin</i>	Assembly Minutes
<i>BOU</i>	Basis of Union
<i>CS</i>	Covenanting Statement
<i>RP</i>	Revised Preamble
<i>UCMC</i>	The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church
<i>UCAConst</i>	Uniting Church Constitution
<i>UCAREgs2025</i>	Uniting Church Regulations 2025
<i>UIW2</i>	Uniting in Worship 2

Institutions and Organisations

<i>UCA</i>	Uniting Church in Australia
<i>UAICC</i>	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
<i>WCC</i>	World Council of Churches
<i>ASC</i>	Assembly Standing Committee

This journal

This abbreviation can be used in bibliographical references to articles published in this Journal.

<i>UCS</i>	Uniting Church Studies
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The Golden Chain of Mercy

Krikor Youmshajekian and Clive Pearson

Abstract:

This article seeks to situate the Assembly's resolutions (2015) to do with the Armenian genocide within a broader historical context than is possible in a resolution and its rationale. For that reason it notes that the 'annihilation' that took place between 1915 and 1923 was foreshadowed by the Hamidian massacres of the 1890s. The particular focus of this article is on the Australian response to the plight of the Armenians who were understood to be a Christian minority within the Islamic Ottoman empire. The arrest of leaders began on the 24th April, 1915 – that is, on the eve of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli. The churches played a significant role in the subsequent humanitarian relief. The denominations that came into the Uniting Church were most active (though their actions now seem to be lost on the memory of the contemporary church). They participated in 'the golden chain of mercy', supported the sending of a ship to assist with food, goods, medicines. The Australasian churches were responsible for running a large orphanage at Antilyas, north of Beirut. The decision of the Assembly to recognize what unfolded places it inside a contested discussion as to what constitutes a genocide. Thirty-four countries have acknowledged such, but not the Australian government which has tended to prioritize post-war reconciliation with Türkiye and the construction of Australian identity on the basis of the Anzac myth. Most western historians agree that it was a genocide, even though the term was not invented until 1943.

'Recovering Memory'

The occasion was the 14th triennial meeting of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The location was Perth: the venue was the Winthrop Hall of the University of Western Australia. The date was 12-18 July 2015. In the midst of much other business the Uniting Church unanimously adopted a resolution to do with the Armenian Genocide. The resolution had three parts. The first acknowledged that the massacres and forced deportations of 1915-1923 did indeed constitute a genocide. The second commended the state governments of New South Wales and South Australia which had already acknowledged the genocide. It sought to encourage other state governments to do the same. The third represented a commitment to commemorate the genocide as a 'day of observance' on a date on or near the anniversary of the genocide. To that end agencies of the Assembly were set the task of preparing resources 'for all congregations' in the Uniting Church. It was imagined that those resources would be educational and liturgical.¹ Following the adoption of this three-part resolution the President, Stuart McMillan, made a brief comment, the 300 members of the Assembly stood for one minute in silence in memory of the 1.5 million victims of the genocide, and the Moderator of NSW-ACT, the Revd. Myung Hwa Park offered a prayer.

¹ Uniting Church Assembly, resolution 15:23.01 (i) (ii) (iii).

In the lead-up to its adoption, one of us, the Revd. Dr. Krikor Youmshajekian, then chairperson of the Sydney North presbytery and president of Armenian Missionary Association of Australia, explained the reasons behind the resolution. The rationale described the origins of Armenia and how it became the first nation to declare itself Christian in 301 CE. That decision led to the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular language. The full Assembly was able to hear how, through its history, the Armenian nation had stood firm in its Christian faith, resisting pressures from beyond, like that of the Persians who had wanted the country to embrace Zoroastrianism. The rationale presented in an abbreviated form the rise and rule of the Ottoman empire in which the Armenians constituted a Christian minority. The massacres and deportations that were destined to come under the designation of genocide were preceded by the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1896.²

It might at first glance seem as if this reference to the massacres of the 1890s is at a remove from the subsequent response of churches in Australia to what would unfold between 1915-1923. Why it was included in the rationale needs to be unpacked. The plight of the Armenians in this earlier period on account of the repressive policies of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II were widely reported as “horrors worse than death.” The news media in Australia carried articles from the popular press in London with headlines like: “Armenian Horrors: Fearful Holocaust”, “Horrible Massacres: Children Buried Alive” and “Eight Thousand Butchered: Three Thousand Roasted Alive”. Such reports encouraged churches in Australia to hold protest meetings and, in a resolution adopted by the federal assembly of the Presbyterian Church, call upon colonial governors “to take such steps as shall effectually forbid the repetition of such outrages.” In both Australia and New Zealand, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union were “stirred by intense indignation” at the tragedy that was falling upon their fellow Christians.³

What this reporting and protesting meant was that the difficulties facing the Armenians was well known already in church circles before events took an even more sinister turn in 1915. Back then the term genocide did not yet exist: it was first coined by a Polish Jewish jurist, Raphael Lemkin, in 1943.⁴ It was adopted by the United Nations in December 1948. What came to be known as the Armenian genocide began on the 24th April 1915 – in other words, the day before the Gallipoli landing of ANZAC troops. On that day the government of the Young Turks rounded up 250 intellectuals and community leaders. In due course this gave way to the mass killing of able-bodied men, conscripted labour and the forced deportation of women, children and the elderly on death marches. Without a name to describe what was happening, Winston

² Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War and the Middle East, 1914-1920* (London: Penguin Books, 2022), 10-13. Rogan situates these massacres in the unfolding geopolitics in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war ceded to Russia. That transfer of peoples emboldened Armenian demands for greater autonomy within the empire. Pressure was brought to bear on the Ottomans by the European powers. The Ottomans discerned a threat now arising out of the Armenians, especially as activist groups espousing violence arose during the 1880s. Rogan notes that the ‘volatile situation inevitably led to bloodshed’ – the Ottoman Armenians became ‘the target of terrible massacres’. Rogan concluded that ‘the bloody events of 1894 to 1896 proved nothing short of a catastrophe.’ Some Armenians then sought to work with liberal parties seeking reform in the Ottoman empire

³ Vicken Babkenian and Peter Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2016), 30-33.

⁴ Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

Churchill declared these events to be “an unnamed crime.”⁵ The rationale ended with a list of those nations, churches and other organizations that had recognized what had transpired as a genocide.⁶

This decision was welcomed by the Armenian community both here in Australia and abroad – in both Armenia and also in the United States. It led to the Uniting Church being awarded the Freedom Award by the Armenian National Committee of Australia at its banquet on 4 November 2016. In his speech of thanks, the President at that time, Stuart McMillan, advised the attendees that he had written to the Prime Minister urging the government to recognize the genocide.⁷ The day of observance was, however, somewhat occasional and the provision of the educational and liturgical resources eventually came to depend upon the work of the voluntary network, the Friends of the Middle East. The most prominent of the annual observances was the 110th anniversary when the President of the Assembly, the Revd. Charissa Suli, hosted a commemorative service.⁸

The Golden Chain of Mercy

There is only so much that can be conveyed in a rationale for a resolution to the meeting of the full Assembly. That consideration raises the interesting question as to whether there might have been some further information which would have established a deeper understanding within the Uniting Church of the Armenian genocide – and why the Turkish state and its historians continue to object to this naming. For them a solution to the ‘Armenian problem’ was necessary, firstly due to the emergence of radical activist groups in the 1880s, and then due to the geopolitics of wartime measures. The Armenians were Christian as were the Ottoman’s European and Russian enemies. How this counter-narrative is dealt with is important insofar as the integrity of the Uniting Church’s resolution depends upon the plausibility of the claim to genocide.

In some important respects something was missed in the position adopted by the Assembly in 2015 in terms of imagination and adherence. This dilemma arises out of the recency of the Uniting Church coming into being. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches came into union, hence well after the Armenian genocide had run its tragic course. The connections between an always emerging present with those contributing denominations has progressively weakened through the passage of time. One of the consequences of that eclipse is that few members of the Uniting Church are aware of how widespread the Christian concern for the Armenian situation was at the time and, additionally, what role their own antecedents had played in the relief campaign.

⁵ In a radio broadcast on 24 August 1941 Churchill referred to the killings carried out by Nazi death squads as a ‘crime without a name’. His Armenian statement was made on 20 October 1915: Armenian National Institute, ‘Winston S. Churchill – Statement on the Armenian Genocide’, <https://www.armenian-genocide.org/churchill.html>; Also see, Richard Langworth, ‘Winston Churchill and the Armenian Genocide, 1914-1923’, *The Churchill Project*, 5 September 2020. <https://winstonchurchill.hilldale.edu/armenian-genocide/>; Johann Justus Vassel, ‘In the Beginning, There Was No Word’, *The European International Journal of Law*, 29:4 (2018), 1053-1056.

⁶ The Armenian National Institute, ‘Uniting Church in Australia’, 12 July 2015. https://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.504/current_category.189/affirmation_detail.html

⁷ National Council of Churches in Australia, *Newsletter*, December 2016. <https://www.archive.ncca.org.au/ncca-newsletter/december-2016/item/947-recent-events-the-uniting-church-in-australia-receives-armenian-freedom-award>

⁸ Uniting Church, Assembly, 27 March 2025. <https://uniting.church/110-anniversary-armenian-genocide/>

This gap in contemporary knowledge has been addressed in two ways. The first was through the launch of monograph, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, co-authored by Vicken Babkenian and Peter Stanley. This launch fittingly took place at St. Stephens Uniting Church in Macquarie Street, Sydney, on 13 September 2016. Back in 1915 the minister of St. Stephens, then a Presbyterian Church, was the Revd. John Ferguson. In response to news making its way back to Australia concerning the plight of the Armenians, Ferguson established the Armenian Relief Fund. On this occasion Babkenian delivered an address with a slideshow, while descendants of those Australians who supported the orphanage set up on Australian auspices were honoured.⁹

As the title suggests, Babkenian and Stanley's widely acclaimed history explores the Armenian genocide through the responses of Australians at the time. The primary focus is not simply on the policies pursued in the Ottoman empire towards Christian minorities, notably the Armenians but also includes the Pontian Greeks and Assyrians.¹⁰ The particular niche in the international literature to do with these 'annihilations' is how ordinary Australians responded half a world away through accounts provided by Anzac prisoners of war,¹¹ journalists such as Charles Bean¹² and American missionaries. Babkenian and Stanley accordingly describe the setting up of the Friends of Armenia, the Armenian Relief Fund, and the work of a cadre of compassionate humanitarians. Their number included a significant proportion of women activists among whom were Edith Glanville,¹³ Isobel Hutton, Cecilia John, Jessie Webb, Hilda King, Mary Bryce and Edith Searle. Of particular interest for the subsequent Uniting Church (and its 2015 resolution) was the role played by two clergy, Loyal Lincoln Wirt and James Cresswell.

Wirt was actually a Congregational minister from California but with strong Australian connections. In imitation of John Wesley his autobiography bore the title of *The World is My Parish*. It so happened that Wirt had made his way to Australia in 1901: during his time in the country, through to 1907, he served in ministry at the Congregational church in Newcastle, in mission work in Redfern, and then at Brisbane's Wharf Street Congregational church (where he established the first kindergarten in Australia).¹⁴ His return to Australia in May 1922 was in his capacity as a speaker recruited by the American Near East Relief to render its humanitarian aid international. Wirt was a noted evangelist and commanding speaker, besides which he

⁹ Krikor Youmshajekian, 'Armenia's Angels in the Uniting Church of Australia', *Armenian National Committee of America*, 7 November 2016. <https://anca.org/armenias-angels-in-the-uniting-church-of-australia/>

¹⁰ See, Themistocles Kritikakos, *Armenian, Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Century Australia*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan / Springer Nature, 2026), 1-2. Kritikakos weaves together the 'collective victimhood' arising out of the 'systematic extermination of around 2.5 million Christians – between 1914 and 1923 – across Anatolia (Asia Minor), Eastern Thrace and surrounding territories'. The Armenian genocide is better known than the other two. The experiences of the Greeks and Assyrians are 'largely unknown and overlooked'.

¹¹ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 84-101.

¹² Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, pp. 109-111, 127-128, 141-142. Charles Bean was the official Australian war correspondent. In December 1915 he forwarded the report of an interview he had conducted with an Armenian soldier in the Ottoman army. Bean informed an Australia readership that the Turks were intent on 'wip[ing] out the Armenian nation'.

¹³ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 223-234. Edith Glanville (1871-1966), welfare worker, a philanthropist, a Justice of the Peace, an activist, a feminist, lecturer and broadcaster. Edith lost her older son Leigh who was killed on the day the Australian forces landed on the beaches of Gallipoli. She never fully recovered from that loss, but rather than give into grief she concentrated her energy and considerable talents into a wide range of activities. After the First World War ended she helped set up the Armenian Relief Fund – and later a breakaway group known as the 'Friends of Armenia'. She travelled extensively through the 1920s and 1930s to Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine, seeing for herself the impact of war and violence. Edith was also instrumental in setting up orphanages for Armenian children in Lebanon and Syria. She and her husband, George, sponsored one of these orphans, by then a young man. Also, see: Vicken Babkenian, 'Edith May Glanville: Champion of the Armenian Relief Fund', *Journal of Ashfield and District Historical Society*, 2008. https://www.academia.edu/3580937/Edith_May_Glanville_Champion_of_the_Armenian_Relief_Fund

¹⁴ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 164.

had travelled through the refugee-stricken lands and possessed eyewitness accounts. By the time he arrived in Australia he had already set up relief committees in Hawaii, Japan, China, Korea and the Philippines.

From May through to September 1922 Wirt travelled the country explaining the “moral mandate” to assist the suffering Armenians. He drew large crowds and was able to work with leading churchmen, civic leaders and politicians. He was able to elicit sympathy and solidarity from a highly receptive Australian public. It was through Wirt’s initiative that the idea of sending an Australian “mercy ship” – the *Hobson’s Bay* – full of Australian food (as well as leather, condensed milk, clothing and other supplies) to Beirut and Constantinople. Passing by Gallipoli led him to coin the phrase “Anzac bread.” It was Wirt who also conceived the idea of an Australasian Orphanage at Antilyas, north of Beirut: it became a home and refuge, initially, for 1700 children. Wirt understood his mission to be one in which “a golden chain of mercy” was stretched across the Pacific “with a link in every country.”¹⁵

Cresswell was also a Congregational minister but, in this case, from Adelaide.¹⁶ Babkenian and Stanley describe him as “entirely ordinary” until he found himself immersed in the work of the Armenian Relief Committee. Prior to setting out for the Middle East he had unsuccessfully petitioned the Commonwealth government to allow entry for “young people” of Armenian stock. Cresswell set sail with Miss Gordon on the *Hobson’s Bay* in January 1923. They made their way to the Australasian Orphanage at Antilyas bearing messages of support and a large Australian flag. In his inspection of the home Cresswell noted “a vast array of Australian-branded” products: South Australian honey, blankets bearing the label of a “well-known Australian firm,” bread made out of Australian flour and “small boys, making boots out of leather from Sydney tanneries.” During his visit “eleven little boys” arrived after an arduous journey: Cresswell noticed how “they could not remember their parents and few of them even knew their own names.”¹⁷

Cresswell and Miss Gordon visited other orphanages, run by the Americans, in Syria before making their way to a Greek refugee camp where mainly women and children were living in caves: Cresswell reflected how what he saw was “beyond words ... no words seem adequate to describe the misery ... of these poor people.”¹⁸ Cresswell made his way through Palestine to Greece, while Miss Gordon remained at the orphanage of Antilyas. In Piraeus, in Greece, he presented the ambulance ordered by the committee back in Adelaide “as a gift from the people of South Australia.”¹⁹ From Greece he made his way to Istanbul, then to the republic of Armenia now within the Soviet Union, before visiting Gallipoli and returning to Australia.

Cresswell was a prominent witness to the continuing sufferings of the Armenian and Greek refugees. Through his tour he was able to report on the running of the orphanage at Antilyas as well as the distribution of goods sent from Australia “for the sake of sweet charity.” All the while, back in Australia, relief committees

¹⁵ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 195-209.

¹⁶ Cresswell was an example of what was called a ‘late vocation’. On coming into the ministry he was aged 43. ‘His first pastorate was in Keith ... From 1912 to 1919 he was minister of College Park Congregational Church and became chairman of the Congregational Union of South Australia in 1917-18. At the request of the London Mission Society, he spent a period as a missionary in the Cook Islands in 1920. He then returned to South Australia to become minister of the Highgate Congregational Church’. Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 210.

¹⁷ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 211-212.

¹⁸ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 214

¹⁹ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 218.

continued to make appeals in order to “grapple with the problem of supporting a vast number of orphans.” The South Australian committee even published its own monthly magazine, the *Armenian*.²⁰

The contemporary link between this work and the Uniting Church has subsequently been made more transparent in the documentary film, *The Golden Chain of Mercy*. It begins with the Last Post being played on Anzac Day, 25 April 2015, in Sydney: there are scenes of wreathes being laid and of elderly veterans marching through the streets. The setting then switches seamlessly to Yerevan, the day before, 24 April, which is the day set aside to observe Armenian Genocide Memorial Day. Tributes of red and white flowers. The narrator, Vernon Wells, describes the mass deportations and the loss of life occasioned by the government of the Young Turks in the Ottoman empire. The two days are “hardly mentioned in the same breath,” but they are “deeply interconnected.”

The film assumes this background. It makes use of a number of Australian-based historians and scholars of genocide studies to explore what transpired. Deborah Mayersen describes how the events of 1915-1923 were preceded by the Hamidian massacres / “terror” of 1894-1896.²¹ The death toll was around 100,000. Of particular interest is the concern for what is the best strategy to pursue. Is it to seek to reform the system from within or mount armed resistance? Mayersen describes how clergy were targeted in a bid to convert them to Islam. The task of describing the impact of the rise of the Young Turks was given to Panayiotis Diamadis whose specialist area of research is the genocide of the Pontian Greeks.²² Stanley reports on the arrest of the 250 intellectuals on the eve of the Gallipoli landing, leading into eyewitness accounts from Anzac prisoners-of-war. Andrekos Varnava is adamant that what ensues should be defined as genocide: “the intention of the death marches to nowhere” was to kill. Varnava elsewhere clarifies why it is genocide and not ethnic cleansing.²³ The difference lies between physical destruction and forced displacement. Across the Tasman, Maria Armoudian cites examples of how the news media covered the unfolding “annihilation” of the Armenians, even in outlets in small towns.²⁴ Joy Damousi concentrates attention on the humanitarian work of middle-class, well-educated, progressive women; that is set alongside a sensitivity to the news coming out of the Middle East which has been honed by the trauma of loss and grief.²⁵

The film includes several narratives surrounding individuals who played a part in the relief. In addition to Wirt, Cresswell and Glanville *The Golden Chain of Mercy* refers to the work of Isobel Hutton, an Australian Red Cross nurse who served Aleppo; Stanley Savage (at one-time a Baptist Sunday school teacher) who deployed a small force to protect thousands of fleeing Assyrian refugees from Urmia; Hilda King, John and Lydia Knudsen (from Christchurch in New Zealand) who oversaw work at the Antilyas orphanage, and Mary Bryce who drew parallels between Indigenous experience in Australia and that of the Armenians. These accounts both bear witness to the response of what happened as well as providing a plurality of perspectives.

²⁰ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 220-222.

²¹ Deborah Mayersen, ‘Armenian Resistance to the Hamidian Massacre’, *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 16:2 (2022-2023), 68-88.

²² David W.G. Treloar and Panayiotis Diamadis, *Genocide to Restoration: The Photographs of George Devine Treloar*, (Athens: Unity in Philia, 2025).

²³ Andrekos Varnava, ‘Distinguishing Between Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire, (1914-1923) and Why This Matters’, *Griffith Law Review*, 34:2 (2025), 160-177.

²⁴ Maria Armoudian and Katherine Smits, ‘How Soon We Forget: National Myth-Making and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 27:1 (2025), 91-112.

²⁵ Joy Damousi, ‘Humanitarianism in the Interwar Years’: How Australians Responded to the Child Refugees of the Armenian Genocide and the Greek-Turkish Exchange’, *History Australia* 12:1 (2015), 95-115.

The Fall of the Ottomans

The Golden Chain of Mercy is one film among three. The other two are about the relief campaigns that emerged in Europe, in particular the young female missionaries from the Scandinavian countries, and the United States, respectively. The title of the first film is *Map of Salvation* and the second is *The American Good Samaritans*. The Australasian response was novel inasmuch as this was the first time that a humanitarian venture was made in response to an American rather than an English initiative. The emergent tendency in writing on the Armenian genocide in this country is to focus on the Australian relief response and address diasporic concerns for a proper recognition of their forbears' stories and experience. The resolutions of the Uniting Church and the holding of commemorative services fall within that experience – but it is not the only way in which to frame the Armenian “tragedy.” Its original setting lay within the Ottoman empire, its deepening decline and the course of the great war and its legacy.

The outbreak of war has presented a conundrum: whose side would the Ottomans be on? If they were in alliance with the Germans, what might that then mean for those Armenians if their homelands became the theatre for war between the Russians and the Turks? There were Armenian populations on both sides of the border. Back in the late nineteenth century Armenian revolutionary movements had arisen. Their numbers may not have been large; they may not have had widespread support but this history, their existence, possessed the capacity for the Armenians – as a Christian minority – to be regarded with some suspicion. That risk was exacerbated when the primary leader of Sunni Muslims, Sheikh ul-Islam, declared the war to be a jihad, a holy war, in November 1914.

For an accessible understanding of this war-time context, the Uniting Church's apprehension of the Armenian genocide can benefit from a reading of Eugene Rogan's work on *The Fall of the Ottomans*.²⁶ Rogan is Professor of Middle East Studies in the University of Oxford. In this scenario the “annihilation” of the Armenians comes about as a consequence of the Ottomans facing invasion on three fronts – in the south, east and the Dardanelles. The governing Young Turks set about organizing their defence on the basis of “total war.” The army in the east was in disarray due to the onslaught of the Russians and disease. It was becoming evident that the soldiers in the east were deepening their hostility to the Armenians on the grounds of suspected disloyalty. The setbacks of the nineteenth century in the Balkan states had already led to the deportation of Greeks. The Armenians were perceived to be a much greater risk because it was feared they aspired after an independent homeland within the Ottoman empire brought about by the assistance of outside allies. They were deemed to be “the enemy within.” It appeared as if the Armenians were concentrated into three areas in particular where the Ottomans were most concerned for their security. It would appear that following defeat in the Caucuses at the hands of the Russians, the Young Turks began to contemplate more “extreme methods.” The ensuing deportations, the death marches, and acts of indiscriminate killing led one priest, Grigoris Balakian, to name what was happening as “the Armenian Golgotha.”²⁷

²⁶ The relevant chapter of Rogan's is ‘The Annihilation of the Armenians’, pp. 169-184.

²⁷ Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1918*, (first published in 1922: New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

Rogan is under no illusions about the intent behind the annihilation. He argues that a “two-track approach” was put into place. The passage and implementation of open deportation decrees was set alongside more secret orders to carry out an “atrocious slaughter.”²⁸ Rogan argues there was a set pattern: he writes of how

a set number of days after deportation notices were posted, Armenians were driven from their homes by gendarmes with fixed bayonets. Males aged twelve and older was separated from their female relations and killed. In smaller villages, the men were often killed within sight or hearing of their horrified womenfolk, but in larger towns they were marched away to where their murder would not be witnessed, particularly by foreigners. After the Armenian men had been separated from them, the women and children were escorted out of town under armed guard. According to survivors’ accounts, some of these caravans faced robbery and wholesale massacre; others were marched from town to town, with the sick, infirm, and the elderly killed as they fell behind. The ultimate destination for survivors were desert settlements in Syria and Iraq: Dayr-al Zur and Mosul were towns reached by perilous treks cross open desert.²⁹

Rogan illustrates the plight of numerous individuals, including Balakian. The question that arises is whether “the mass murder of Armenians between 1915 and 1918 was an unintentional consequence of war or a deliberate policy of extermination.”³⁰ Rogan believes it to have been “the first modern genocide.”³¹

Recognizing Genocide

It was a momentous decision for the Uniting Church to recognize the Armenian genocide. The last chapter of Babkenian and Stanley’s history is an epilogue dedicated to friends who tell the truth. The difficulty needing to be negotiated is the legacy of Gallipoli as well as the migration of both Turks and Armenians to Australia. The construction of the Anzac myth and the post-war reconciliation with Turkey has made it difficult for the federal Australian government to describe formally the Armenian massacres and death marches as genocide. There is little popular incentive to examine critically the authenticity and apparent sincerity of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s celebrated comment to do with “Johnnies and Mehments” lying together in “the soil of a friendly country.” His words of tribute are now to be found on many Gallipoli memorials, but it is highly doubtful that Atatürk ever said them. It is likely to come as a shock to the general Australian population that some reputable historians now believe it to be an invention which had its origins in a Brisbane suburb in 1978.³² This inability of the federal government not to publicly acknowledge the “annihilation” as a genocide would have struck church leaders, humanitarian workers and ordinary members of the Australian public of the period between 1915 and 1923 as very odd.

For the Uniting Church to declare its recognitions situates it at odds with those who deny that a genocide took place. Babkenian and Stanley concede that

²⁸ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 173-174.

²⁹ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 174.

³⁰ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 183.

³¹ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 184.

³² See Mark McKenna, ‘An Anzac Myth’, *The Monthly*, 21 April 2016; Paul Daley, ‘Ataturk’s “Johnnies and Mehments” words about the Anzacs are shrouded in doubt’, *The Guardian*, 20 April 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/20/ataturks-johnnies-and-mehments-words-about-the-anzacs-are-shrouded-in-doubt>

[i]t's true that there is no single document – the incriminating records have probably been destroyed. There are no 'Wannsee Conference minutes of the kind outlining detailed plans for the Nazi Holocaust.'³³

Rogan names "the architects."³⁴

As things stand neither the Turkish nor Australian government are prepared to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. At the time of writing there are thirty-four governments that have recognized what transpired as a genocide. Their number includes Germany, France, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and the United States. Only three countries – Turkiye, Azerbaijan and Pakistan – have explicitly denied such. Stanley relates how he was summoned by the Turkish ambassador who sought to have him not use the term. Other entities and leaders who have done so include the World Council of Churches and Pope Francis. Whether the Uniting Church seeks to follow through further on its overture to the federal government for official recognition is a moot point.

Both Babkenian and Stanley are not committed to the necessity of some legislative decision by a group of politicians. Nor are they convinced by the argument that, were the Turkish authorities to acknowledge the genocide, then that admission would lead to claims for reparations. Their base position is that it is 'important' to recognize "the truth of what happened in the Ottoman empire during the Great War than [it is] to maintain a tactful silence for fear of offending Australia's Turkish friends."³⁵

The impact of this politics of recognition (or not) on the descendants of survivors is the subject of Kritikakos' research into memory and inherited trauma (sometimes handed on in silences). How is this played out in the affected diasporic communities in Australia where the memory may not have often been registered in public? Those memories remain. They do so despite the "narrative of reconciliation and mutual respect between former enemies [that] has become central to Australia's relationship with Turkey."³⁶

What, then, is the cost of this myth of national identity? Does it mean that the memories of affected communities is banished – Kritikakos suggests, "the suffocation of remembrance?" The enduring issue that Kritikakos is seeking to address had to do with "what happens when a people's suffering is persistently silenced or overlooked?"³⁷ If that is so, then it raises the consideration of "in a multicultural society whose memories deserve to be remembered," especially if there is a "competition of memory."

Kritikakos provides a thorough description of how a form of activism has led to campaigns for recognition at state and federal level. The irony that presents itself is the sharp difference between the responses of Australians at the time and political reluctance of the present. It is as if the acts of compassion that marked the relief fund, the public meetings, the despatch of humanitarian has all been forgotten. The "national

³³ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 280.

³⁴ Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, 63.

³⁵ Babkenian and Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, 283.

³⁶ Kritikakos, *Armenian, Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Australia*, 2.

³⁷ Kritikakos, *Armenian, Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Australia*, 5

memory” has seemingly “erased those acts of compassion.”³⁸ It has opted to favour an idea of reconciliation between former enemies, but ignored the narratives of those whom Kritikakos imagines might constitute the witnesses and victims of a “Christian genocide.”³⁹

The Resolution of 2015 Revisited

The kind of research that Kritikakos has done is germane to how we understand what the Uniting Church might need to heed in the wake of recognizing genocide. Is a resolution enough, especially if it was not followed through in subsequent years until very recently? Through interviews the “generations after,” Kritikakos mapped the “cultural trauma” that comes about “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness.”⁴⁰

The resolution that the Assembly adopted in 2015 anticipated that there would be appropriate educational resources made available. Such an initiative enables a diasporic community to remember and give their account of what happened. It allows the wider church to hear that story and thus not be ignorant of why its Assembly has passed such a resolution. There is more value than this act of attentive listening, however. The educational resources that have now been developed by the Friends of the Middle East allow members of the Uniting Church to recapture an understanding of what motivated the fund raising and the compassion that lay behind the orphanage at Antilyas, the cargo of the *Hobson's Bay*, and the way in which churches held Armenia Sundays. Through the ministries of Wirth, Cresswell, Fergusson and many others, the forebears of the Uniting Church played their part in being a “link” in “the golden chain of mercy” to a far-off people.

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³⁸ Kritikakos, Armenian, *Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Australia*, 221

³⁹ Kritikakos, Armenian, *Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Australia*, 183. Kritikakos is aware of the risks of weaving the experience of the three communities – Armenian, Abyssinian and Greek into a ‘collective’ experience. It runs the risk of ignoring the particular, the distinctive.

⁴⁰ Kritikakos, Armenian, *Greek and Assyrian Genocide Recognition in Twenty-First Australia*, 10. Here Kritikakos is citing Jeffrey C. Alexander, ‘Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma’, in Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser and Piotr Sztompka, eds, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 1-3.



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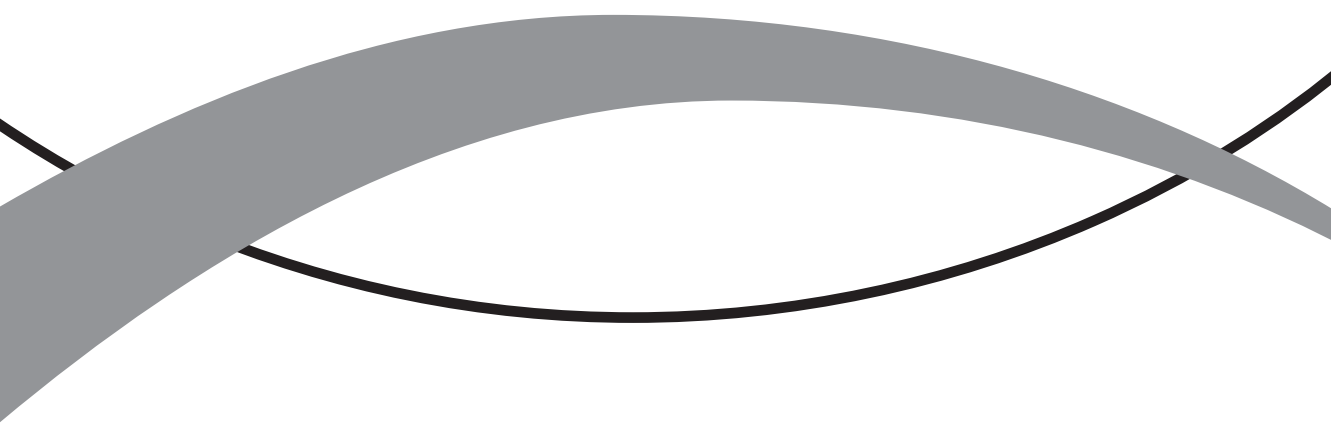
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