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Welcome

Apologies for delaying a couple of promised articles, but I wanted to bring you the letter below; a reminder of the seriousness of the project that many are involved in the Middle East. The complete text can be found at the web site given below.

The church withdrew a section of the original letter, having found that it relied on unsubstantiated reports of details of the torture.

That alone is a reminder of the Truth that we seek to promote.

Write me at pkclark@pmbx.net & let me know what you think.

A letter from The Protestant Church of Smyrna

Dear friends,

This past week has been filled with much sorrow. Many of you have heard by now of our devastating loss here in an event that took place in Malatya, a Turkish province 300 miles northeast of Antioch, the city where believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

On Wednesday morning, April 18, 2007, 46 year old German missionary and father of three Tilman Geske prepared to go to his office, kissing his wife goodbye taking a moment to hug his son and give him the priceless memory, "Goodbye, son. I love you."

Tilman rented an office space from Zirve Publishing where he was preparing notes for the new Turkish Study Bible. Zirve was also the location of the Malatya Evangelist Church office. A ministry of the church, Zirve prints and distributes Christian literature to Malatya and nearby cities in Eastern Turkey. In another area of town, 35 year old Pastor Necati Aydin, father of two, said goodbye to his wife, leaving for the office as well. They had a morning Bible Study and prayer meeting that some other believers in town would also be attending. Ugur Yuksel likewise made his way to the Bible study.

None of these three men knew that what awaited them at the Bible study was the ultimate testing and application of their faith, which would conclude with their entrance into glory to receive their crown of righteousness from Christ and honor from all the saints awaiting them in the Lord's presence.

On the other side of town, ten young men all under 20 years old put into place final arrangements for their ultimate act of faith, living out their love for Allah and hatred of infidels who they felt undermined Islam.

On Resurrection Sunday, five of these men had been to a by-invitation-only evangelistic service that Pastor Necati and his men had arranged at a hotel conference room in the city. The men were known to the believers as "seekers." No one knows what happened in the hearts of those men as they listened to the gospel. Were they touched by the Holy Spirit? Were they convicted of sin?

Did they hear the gospel in their heart of hearts? Today we only have the beginning of their story.

The young men got guns, bread knives, ropes and towels ready for their final act of service to Allah. They arrived in time for the Bible Study, around 10 o'clock.

They arrived, and apparently the Bible Study began.

Reportedly, after Necati read a chapter from the Bible the assault began. The boys tied Ugur, Necati, and Tilman's hands and feet to chairs and as they videoed their work on their cellphones, they tortured our brothers for almost three hours.

To untangle the web we need to back up six years. In April 2001, the National Security Council of Turkey (Milli Guvenlik Kurulu) began to consider evangelical Christians as a threat to national security, on equal footing as Al Quaida and PKK terrorism. Statements made in the press by political leaders, columnists and commentators have fueled a hatred against missionaries who they claim bribe young people to change their religion.

After that decision in 2001, attacks and threats on churches, pastors and Christians began. Bombings, physical attacks, verbal and written abuse are only some of the ways Christians are being targeted. Most significant is the use of media propaganda.

In an official televised response from Ankara, the Interior Minister of Turkey smirked as he spoke of the attacks on our brothers. Amid public outrage and protests against the event and in favor of freedom of religion and freedom of thought, media and official comments ring with the same message, "We hope you have learned your lesson. We do not want Christians here."

The Church in Turkey responded in a way that honored God as hundreds of believers and dozens of pastors flew in as fast as they could to stand by the small church of Malatya and encourage the believers, take care of legal issues, and represent Christians to the media.

(Continued on page 2)

(This letter has been abridged: for a complete account see <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2007/s07040135.htm>)

Turkish Martyrs (cont.)

When Susanne Tilman expressed her wish to bury her husband in Malatya, the Governor tried to stop it, and when he realized he could not stop it, a rumor was spread that "it is a sin to dig a grave for a Christian." In the end, in an undertaking that should be remembered in Christian history forever, the men from the church in Adana (near Tarsus), grabbed shovels and dug a grave for their slain brother in an un-tended hundred year old Armenian graveyard.

Ugur was buried by his family in an Alevi Muslim ceremony in his hometown of Elazig, his believing fiancé watching from the shadows as his family and friends refused to accept in death the faith Ugur had so long professed and died for. Necati's funeral took place in his hometown of Izmir [*Ephesus*], the city where he came to faith.

Necati's funeral was a beautiful event. Like a glimpse of heaven, thousands of Turkish Christians and missionaries came to show their love for Christ, and their honor for this man chosen to die for Christ. Necati's wife Shemsa told the world, "His death was full of meaning, because he died for Christ and he lived for Christ... Necati was a gift from God. I feel honored that he was in my life, I feel crowned with honor. I want to be worthy of that honor."

In an act that hit front pages in the largest newspapers in Turkey, Susanne Tilman in a television interview expressed her forgiveness. She did not want revenge, she told reporters. "Oh God, forgive them for they know not what they do," she said, wholeheartedly agreeing with the words of Christ on Calvary (Luke 23:34).

In a country where blood-for-blood revenge is as normal as breathing, many many reports have come to the attention of the church of how this comment of Susanne Tilman has changed lives. One columnist wrote of her comment, "She said in one sentence what 1000 missionaries in 1000 years could never do."

Please pray for the Church in Turkey. "Don't pray against persecution, pray for perseverance," urges Pastor F.

The Church is better having lost our brothers; the fruit in our lives, the renewed faith, the burning desire to spread the gospel to quench more darkness in Malatya ...all these are not to be regretted. Pray that we stand strong against external opposition and especially pray that we stand strong against internal struggles with sin, our true debilitating weakness.

This we know. Christ Jesus was there when our brothers were giving their lives for Him. He was there, like He was when Stephen was being stoned in the sight of Saul of Tarsus.

But we pray-- and urge you to pray-- that someday at least one of those five boys will come to faith because of the testimony in death of Tilman Geske, who gave his life as a missionary to his beloved Turks, and the testimonies in death of Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel, the first martyrs for Christ out of the Turkish Church.

Nahmanides in Exile (Rabbinic Judaism)

Under the rule of James I Spain was embarked on the centuries long *reconquista*. The Jews were not so well treated in the nationalism of the Catholic territory as they had been under the more liberal Moors. In 1263 Nahmanides was called upon by James I to debate a converted Jew, Pablo Christian, who had become a Catholic. Nahmanides did not want to do this, since speaking disrespectfully of Catholicism was a capital offense in that climate. For the four-day debate James agreed to grant freedom of speech, with no punishment for remarks that might be against Catholic doctrine. From July 20-24 Nahmanides argued his position so well that he was clearly seen as the victor in the debate. As a sign of respect, though disagreeing with him (of course the King was not going to accept the truth of his argument!) James I granted Nahmanides 300 gold pieces. He said that he had "never encountered a man who, while yet being wrong, argued so well for his position."

Later, Nahmanides published a written record to refute some of his detractors. Within a short time, Pablo instituted a charge against him on the basis of these writings. Having promised freedom of speech, the king objected to the charges, and defended Nahmanides as much as possible, but to satisfy the Dominicans he accepted a punishment of 2 years exile for Nahmanides. (In these days it was possible for the Dominicans to persuade the Pope to excommunicate the king, and possibly even his country --thereby removing opportunity for salvation from the people.) The Dominicans later persuaded the Pope (Clement IV) to make this permanent.

Nahmanides traveled around southwest Europe, possibly in France or Castille, but by 1267 arrived in Jerusalem. There he established the first synagogue in the city since the arrival of the Crusades. (By this time the last of the Crusades were failing to achieve their goals, and the Muslim Sultan Baibars was strengthening his control of the Palestinian towns.)

Nahmanides settled at the sea port of Acre, a short distance north of Haifa, on the bay, dying there in 1270.

Nahmanides' conservatism was popular with the Karaites, who rejected the *oral Torah* of Rabbinic Judaism for a return to the original written Torah of Moses, the Pentateuch. Amongst his teachings, Nahmanides declared that resettlement in the land of Israel was expected of all Jews. He also rejects Greek philosophy as applied to the Bible, and even criticizes Maimonides' biblical interpretations (he cites Maimonides' interpretation of Gen. 18:8, asserting that it is contrary to the evident meaning of the Biblical words and that it is sinful even to hear it.)

Nahmanides also promoted the study, development and application of Kabbalah (which will require a separate article.)

For a contemporary perspective on Nahmanides I include this passage from an online sermon by a Baltimore Rabbi: "For **Nahmanides**, "Tradition" is mystical and known to the rabbis who are endowed with the ability to read the mind of God. Only rabbis endowed with this sense of "Tradition" possess the intuition to apply the Torah to everyday life. Without the secret, mystical tradition and bereft of the Divinely inspired intuition needed to please God, a person with access to the revealed religious canon of Israel is hopelessly lost" (retrieved on April 3, 2007, from http://jewishdowntown.org/rabbis_corner/2006/two-understandings.php).

Omar Khayyam

Born in Naishapur, in the Khorassan province of what is now Iran, in the late 11th Century, Hakim Omar *Khayyam* (the ‘tentmaker’) has been variously called a Sufi, and a critic of Sufism; an epicure, a sensualist and a cynic. He sought to acquire knowledge in an age when truth was disdained and religion practiced out of habit and ritual rather than devotion. He became one of the most renowned philosophers of his time, but his poetry reflects a frustration with the fruits of his studies. Throughout his life he lived in one corner of Iran, and when he died in 1519 his name remained in obscurity until another poet from another age caught the measure of his verse and published his translations for the world to see. Omar’s envoy, 350 years later, was the poet Edward Fitzgerald.

I Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has filling the Stone that put the Stars to Flight:
And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan’s Turret in a Noose of Light.

The Rubaiyat is a form of poetry familiar in Persia, a quatrain, in which the third of the four lines may be blank (ie. unrhymed). Amongst the frequent themes of the verses is a running commentary on brevity and futility of life.

27 Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

In the sequence quoted here, 20-23, he recognizes that tomorrow - *tomorrow?*- he may well be in the grave, to be quickly followed by those with whom he now enjoys life.

As Fitzgerald’s biography of Omar Khayyam says, “the burden of Omar’s Song – if not ‘Let us eat’ – is assuredly ‘Let us drink, for Tomorrow we die!’ ”

This puts Omar’s most famous verse into context, though not one of optimism:

51 The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tearws wash out a Word of it.

Quotations are from Fitzgerald’s first edition. They are taken from a 1952 publication which contains the First (75 stanzas), Third (110 stanzas) and Fifth Edition (101 stanzas) of Fitzgerald’s translation, each with a different sequence of verses, as well as differing translations of the verses. By comparing these it can be seen that he was less concerned about providing a literal translation than in giving the sense of the verses.

11 Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse – and Thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness –
And Wildrness is Paradise enow.

12 “How sweet is mortal sovereignty!” – think some;
Others – “How blet the paradise to come!”
Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest;
Oh, the brave music of a distant drum!

Omar Khayyam frequently makes mention of wine, and its ability to sooth and divert from the realities of life.

20 Ah, my Belovéd, fill the cup that clears
Today of past Regrets and future Fears –
To-morrow? – Why, Tomorrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday’s Sev’n Thousand Years

21 Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.

22 And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new Bloom,
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend, ourselves to make a Couch – for whom?

23 Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and – sans End.

This Month

Mar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30								
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M								
Far East			12 Indonesian Christians on trial for killing 2						4 Thai Muslims killed	Thai troops kill 3 Muslim teens				3 Thai Buddhists killed in attacks in South															Muslim separatists throw grenade at S. Thai mosque, cleric dies									
Sudan			5 Au peacekeepers killed in Darfur						17 Sudan army killed in clash with Chad																					Govt. planes bomb rebel conference								
N Africa			Meningitis outbreak in S, 600 die	Jinjawid kill 65 in Chad																																		
Somalia			Algeria army attacks rebels						4 Moroccan suicide bombers kill themselves to evade capture																						Libya negotiates on Bulgarian nurses							
Pakistan									120 Al Qaeda detained in Algeria	Bombs kill 33 in Algiers				Casablanca S-♣'s target US consulate																	Crush kills 7 at Sfax, Tunisia, pop concert							
Afghan.			Uganda peacekeeper killed by mortar						Clashes in Puntland					Somaliland & Puntland forces clash again																	Crowded SOS ward hit by 4 missiles							
Iran			Truce takes hold						Hijacked ships released, inc. UN supply ship																													
Arabia																																						
Iraq																																						
US Deaths: 3/30/06: 2,317 12/31: 3,000 3/31/07: 3,237 4/30: Iraq Civilians Feb: 1,645 Mar: 1,861 Apr: 1,506			19 abducted/killed at fake checkpoint						Ramadi truck ♣ kills 12					S-♣ kills 17 pol. recruits																								
Turkey																																						
Jordan																																						
Syria																																						
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