

*Will Shine  
Like the Stars  
FOREVER*

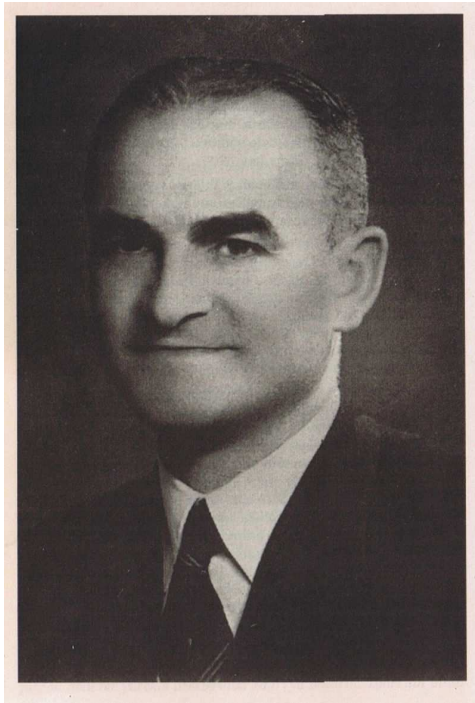
*Story of Vahram Tatikian  
Passionate Evangelist*

*Thomas Cosmades*

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## ***WILL SHINE LIKE THE STARS FOREVER***

*Story of Vahram Tatikian - Passionate Evangelist*

### **FOREWARD**

History is a fascinating study. The names of both notables and those of notoriety crowd its stage. And who can be excluded from this gallery? Everybody is there; people of all races and nations, from all ages and times, from every continent and country, achievers and devastators, the former praised, the latter maligned. Actually, many who shouldn't be there at all have somehow managed a place for themselves. The stage is expanding from day to day.

However there are countless men and women whose importance has never been recognised. If sought for in the galleries of history, they won't be found there; in fact, they won't be found anywhere. These people's service and achievement is known only in their own circles. They aren't considered successful from the standpoint of human accomplishment. But what is the criterion of success? How can we measure it?

God is certainly above history and he is the one who controls it. So there are those placed by him in this gallery. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, declares: "*Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another; the LORD heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and thought on his name*" (3:16). And the prophet Isaiah voices this beautiful song: "*And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called*

*holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem" (4:3).*

In Malachi's day there were sceptics who contended with God. But he responded with the words: *"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the good of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?'" (3:14).* Many have lived lives of devotion and zeal before the God who governs history and who will bring everything to the predetermined conclusion. These saints will pass into endless glory. Yet even their names are not known.

One of these is Vahram Tatikian (1909-1965). Vahram was a true son of Anatolia<sup>1</sup>. He was not known to a very wide circle. Nevertheless, he could be numbered among the well-known servants in God's shining gallery. As the prophet Daniel put it: *"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (12:2, 3)*

Vahram's single-minded service to God and man, first in Istanbul, then in Anatolia and finally in different countries around the world reads like a spiritual epic. Quite a few people still remember with respect and gratitude this simple man whose labors are reminiscent of the amazing ministry of the Apostle Paul and the other apostles. What is so distinctive and striking about this godly man and yet whose name is virtually unknown in our times? How was it that he, who knew neither school nor university, was able to speak to hundreds of thousands of people, change the direction of their hearts' affections and be used as an effective instrument in bringing countless people to find peace with God?

The aim of this account is not to give a full-length, detailed biography of Vahram's life and service. Such an undertaking would be impossible in the light of the fact that he left only a few letters and sermons. Our intent is to describe the most exciting features of his life, ministry and labors, and at the same time recognise the special workings of the Holy Spirit manifested in his life. He emerges as one who sought to please God supremely, laboring effectively in the power of the Holy Spirit, mighty in faith, fearless in prevailing prayer and wise in personal encounters. In our grievously lax, materialistic, hedonistic, easy-going age, Vahram's exemplary simple life has a quality about it that directs the reader to true blessedness. He depended unreservedly upon the Sovereign, Triune God and on the Holy Scriptures. He never deviated from the revelation, precepts and instruction of the Bible and never compromised its truth. His whole life was governed by the heart-warming exhortation of Scripture: *"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).*

We must not forget the striking and challenging word: *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).* The writer to the Hebrews goes on to introduce the one who strengthened, guided and influenced the leaders mentioned here: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (13:8).*

The same Jesus Christ who raised up and equipped heroes of faith like Vahram Tatikian can do the same today. The life story and labors of this man can benefit everyone.

## Chapter 1

### WAR ENDS SCHOOL LIFE

*"A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved. The strong tower of the wicked comes to ruin, but the root of the righteous stands firm. The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God" (Proverbs 12:3, 12; Psalm 92:12, 13).*

In the mid-Anatolian town of Sungurlu a lad called Vahram was working for a Muslim grocer, Hanif bey<sup>2</sup>. Clever and amiable, he was just the right kind of youngster to attract customers, and Hanif bey was well pleased with his apprentice. A few years passed and the boy's father, Apraham, sent his son

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<sup>1</sup> Anatolia, 'East' in Greek, is the geographic designation for the whole land which is Turkey in our day. In this book it will be mentioned often.

<sup>2</sup> bey: "Mr. " in Turkish

and two daughters to Istanbul. A long time later Vahram, now grown up and much changed, returned to Sungurlu. The first person he went to see was Hanif bey. "Hello, Uncle Hanif. Do you recognise me?" he asked. The aging grocer strained his failing eyes to study the visitor. "If I'm not mistaken, you're Vahram!" he exclaimed. The two joyfully embraced and kissed each other, expressing their feelings of affection after long years of separation.

Then came the surprise: "Uncle Hanif, I have an account to settle with you. Take this money! It's the money I pilfered while working for you." The startled grocer could hardly believe his ears. "Let's forget the past, son," he said. "I was always pleased with you. Let bygones be bygones. Let's put unpleasant memories behind us."

Vahram insisted: "No way, Hanif bey. I've been cleansed from sin. I've found salvation. The Lord Jesus has made me a new person. He has given me eternal life. I must admit my past sins and make amends for my dishonest dealings. This money is yours — with just a little added. For me to keep it would be a sin!"

Tears welled up in Hanif bey's eyes. Again he hugged and kissed Vahram. "May you be recompensed for this a thousand times over, my child," he cried. And with that they sat down and started talking.

Hanif bey was not the only person to be touched by Vahram's testimony. So many were to be influenced by Vahram's life and words that his name became legendary. Great joy had been brought to the home of Apraham and Siranush Tatikian when their first child was born in 1909. They belonged to a generation that was moderately religious adhering to the Armenian Gregorian tradition. Some of Vahram's uncles had even chosen to serve as priests.

Apraham was a blacksmith. His two brothers were next door neighbors and the three homes shared a courtyard. All three houses had been built by their father who had planned that his three sons should live close to each other. The trouble was that they just could not get along with each other! Everyone in the neighborhood seemed to know about the sons' unpleasant relationship. The word would go around, "The Tatikians are at it again!" Usually their wives would join in too. Happily, Vahram's mother Siranush was a peacemaker who lived up to the meaning of her name, 'Sweet Love.' As a girl she had attended an American school. She taught prayers in the Armenian language to Vahram and his four younger sisters. In accordance to the light she possessed she instructed them in the elements of the faith. Because of this some called her, 'Godly Mother.' Apraham wasn't much interested in matters of faith; he saw nothing wrong in quarrelling with his brothers. Siranush, on the other hand (being true to her name), tried to build bridges of reconciliation in the extended family.

The courtyard formed by the three houses was full of life and bustle. Camel caravans, mail-carrying Tartars and all sorts of visitors would camp for the night there. The poor, the hungry and the naked, having once experienced the bounty of 'Godly Mother' never hesitated to come again. Siranush treated each one, whether known or unknown, according to the person's needs. To some she handed out provisions; others she invited to her table. No caller ever went away empty-handed, and from the information she gleaned from them she would delight her children with wonderful tales that fed their imagination. Siranush was a true Anatolian mother. With her own hands she prepared her bulgur<sup>3</sup>, tarhana<sup>4</sup> and cheese. When the men finished their work in the evening her work would start all over again. When Apraham's two older brothers died, the care of all three families fell to him, and Siranush had even heavier demands upon her.

Vahram passed his childhood in these surroundings. He loved playing games. Best of all he liked flying his kite or playing knucklebones. He painted the knucklebones in a variety of colors which proved quite an attraction to the neighborhood children who often gathered in the Tatikians' courtyard. For a brief time he was enrolled in one of the primary schools founded by the Americans. But in adult life he would say, "I don't recall ever being promoted from one class to another." And yet he had a very sharp memory. He continually memorised passages of various writings. The whole neighborhood loved to listen to his enthusiastic recitations. Many would stop him in the street and say, "Hey, recite something for us!" And Vahram would launch into a spirited performance. When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I in 1915, Vahram's school closed. He never attended school again. Once he was struck down by a paralysis of unknown origin. Some suggested that this was the

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<sup>3</sup> bulgur - cracked wheat, cooked like rice.

<sup>4</sup> tarhana - a dried foodstuff made basically of curds and flour, used for making a delicious soup.

malicious attack of 'an evil eye.' But health returned after the application of a few folk remedies!

## Chapter 2

### THE WAR YEARS AND AFTER

When the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, Apraham Tatikian was conscripted for military service. Vahram had no alternative but to work in his father's blacksmith shop. At that stage of his life he could scarcely read or write. Feeling that ignorance was a dreadful thing, he taught himself to read from a primer that had come into his hands. He applied himself to the blacksmith work and at the same time was learning to read and write. In a short time he had mastered the primer. Under the ever-present influence of 'Godly Mother' his interest turned to spiritual books. The biography of Gregory the Illuminator was given to him. Vahram was captivated by the illustrious life of this historic Armenian who had become a Christian and was ordained bishop in Caesarea by the Greeks in the year 302. Afterward he led his people to the same faith. Those who heard Vahram's subsequent recitations were deeply stirred and concluded that he was a religious child taking after his mother.

One day he came across an interesting volume which related how Abraham was called to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God and how God retrieved Isaac from the altar, providing a ram in his place. The contents of the book so captured Vahram's imagination that he summoned all his neighbors to listen to him read the fascinating account, which he did with great sincerity and suitable emphasis.

Vahram had been keen on music from early childhood and he chanted this long account like a folk ballad. It became the talk of the whole area. Some committed 'the hymn' to memory and also repeated it. But neither Vahram nor his hearers could appreciate the profound truth of the story. There was conviction of sin in Vahram's heart but he didn't know how to get rid of it. He didn't understand the reason for his spiritual hunger. He was constantly going to church, lighting candles, giving alms, fasting and visiting the sick. All this time his passion for music was growing and he occupied himself by singing folk songs, the kind of music he was familiar with.

The burden of responsibility for the family had fallen upon his mother when his father went into the army. Income dwindled and conditions worsened. Siranush had to trek to the other end of town to grind her wheat. The family had fruit trees and gardens but there was nobody to tend them. From time to time bandits raided the villages. Surrounded by fields and orchards, Sungurlu suffered constant harassment. In those days Sungurlu was a town of two thousand households, two thirds Muslim, one third Christian. There was a Protestant church with a congregation of twenty people and a preacher by the name of Kirkor Atmajian. Vahram's uncle Haygaz, a good musician, played the violin beautifully and led the Armenian community orchestra. It was he who taught Vahram to play the violin, a skill that became very useful to him later on. From his other Uncle, Yervant – a tailor – Vahram learned this trade which was to become his occupation.

At the end of the war, poverty and destitution were widespread. Apraham returned from military service but it was well nigh impossible to collect the debts that people owed him. In these circumstances he decided to settle his family in Istanbul. In 1922 he sent 13-year-old Vahram and his two sisters to stay with their uncle who lived in Gedikpasha, the section of Istanbul where all migrants from Anatolia settled. A few years later after disbanding their Sungurlu home, Siranush came to Istanbul with the two youngest daughters. They rented a house in Kumkapi and waited for their father to join them.

It was at this time that Vahram became a master tailor. Having reached the age of sixteen, he decided to open his own shop. In partnership with another tailor he rented a place in the Covered Bazaar. From the outset, work was plentiful and they worked long hours. They hired many apprentices to help. But Vahram could not forget Sungurlu and particularly the spiritual books he had read when he was small. The story of Abraham's offering Isaac and God's providing a ram was foremost in his memory. He could not get that remarkable story out of his mind. Too bad his partner Daniel had no interest in spiritual matters. Vahram could not talk about anything other than work with him. Work, productivity and profits were thriving, but Vahram longed for something more.

## **Chapter 3**

### **LIFE IN THE FAST LANE IN ISTANBUL**

Here was a young man plucked out of a quiet and slow-moving Anatolian town and thrust into the vast metropolis of Istanbul where fast life was the accepted norm. What temptations would lure this young person, the proud owner of a profitable business? A lot of options were open before him. Vast varieties of allurements beckoned and stimulated — like the most exciting video. Many a young person found himself ensnared by catastrophic pitfalls from which he could not extricate himself. Others achieved success by choosing a wisely-studied direction. Every young person leaving Anatolia and making his way to a city like Istanbul had his own story to tell. What would Vahram do? Was there any difference between him and other young people?

One day a few fellow tailors said to him, "We've planned a great time for this evening. Do you want to join in the fun?" Without a second thought Vahram agreed. They met at a given point. He joined them not knowing where they were leading him. Soon he found himself in a section of the city known for its cheap movie houses. Excited by the explicit female pictures, he surrendered his then valuable coin of twenty-five kurush at the box office and hurried into the cinema. His friends made him feel even more excited as they shouted, "Just you wait. You're really going to see something now!" Vahram was having his first cinema experience and was musing about what cinema is, how it works, and what he was going to see. His imagination was leaping in every direction.

The instant the curtains opened he was left speechless by this twentieth century invention. Very soon, confronted by the explicit pictures, his unspoiled feelings stirred him to think, "What business do you have in such a place?" In a flash the story of Abraham and Isaac and the exemplary life of Gregory the Illuminator came to mind. He was shaken by the stark contradiction between those sacred visions and what he was seeing on the screen. He could hardly wait for the film to end. Leaving the movie house he didn't say a word to his friends. There was nothing he could say! He lacked the spiritual reality by which he might have persuaded his friends to turn their attention to the satisfaction that lasts. The next week his friends again asked him, "Vahram, do you want to join us for some great fun?" He couldn't muster any resistance. "All right," he said sheepishly. This time they went in another direction and plunged down a long passage-way lined with flashing lights, to the entrance of the exciting show. Everybody was eagerly waiting for the curtain to rise. When it did, a titter spread across the room. On the stage a woman teasingly began to take off her clothes. The sight was so electrifying that every eye and every thought were fastened on her. But instead of enjoying it Vahram felt very uncomfortable. "Come on, let's get out of here!" he said to the friend sitting beside him. "What?" guffawed his companion. "We paid good money to get in here. Whoever heard of anyone leaving a striptease?" Only then did Vahram learn that the show was called "striptease", and he vowed, "This is the last time that I fall for any dirty trick." Coming away from the night-club, while his friends kept re-living what they had seen, he trudged on with a heavily burdened heart. He learned later that this was called, 'conviction of sin.'

Next time he wanted to take them in a different direction. "Come on," he said, "Let's go to church this Sunday." They made fun of him: "That's for old fogies. Let's enjoy ourselves while we're young!" He realised that from then on he would have to take a lonely road. All alone he would go to church, light a candle, mutter a prayer and pay his respects.

Leaving the church he felt affected, but his inner burden remained. "Strange," he said to himself, "I wonder how I can get rid of this burden." So began Vahram's great search for reconciliation with God, peace in his heart and for God Himself.

## **Chapter 4**

### **INTENSIVE SEARCH, BRILLIANT DISCOVERY**

In his earnest search for God Vahram decided to attend a different church every Sunday. He strove to comply with every ritual and performance. He lit candles, burned incense, said prayers, fasted and bowed to the saints. He longed to live a pure life like theirs. And he gave alms to the poor. One



Sunday while fasting he decided to visit a church in the village of Alemdagi way out on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. He took another seeker with him. After trekking for five hours from the ferry boat stop in Uskudar, they arrived only to find that the church door was locked. Nearby they found a woman washing clothes. She was in charge of the church key so she opened the door, and she also gave them fire to burn their incense. So, all by themselves, they prayed and attended to their religious rituals.

Vahram had hoped that this performance would bring him peace and relief. But sadly, the burden still weighed like a heavy stone on his heart. "What more can I do?" he asked himself. "I've prayed earnestly to every saint I know and supplicated for my deep need. Why hasn't this brought peace to my heart? Why doesn't the Holy Spirit come to me?" The weight of his sin increased from day to day. Finally he asked himself, "If a godly life full of peace is so difficult to obtain, how can God require it of me? Is God mocking with man? Why doesn't He lift this heavy burden?"

The first glimmer of freedom shone upon him one day when he came across a Bible. He started reading it in earnest. He followed with interest the lives of the Old Testament prophets. All of them had sinned. Abraham, Moses, Job, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah — the lives of all of them served as a mirror for Vahram, reflecting his own condition. The more he read the Bible, the more clearly he saw the extent of his sin. His mind was carried back to Sungurlu. "In Anatolia," he mused, "whenever I sensed spirituality in anyone, I would immediately approach him and ask how he had arrived at such genuine peace. But to this day not a single person has been able to answer my question. As for me, in my own search for spiritual peace, I'm worn out under the weight of my burden."

Sometimes he would remember a dream in which God had appeared to him as a searing and burning fire about to consume him. He had cried out, "Have mercy! Don't swallow me up," and he had awakened from the dream in a cold sweat. But the memory of that terrible moment would not let him go. That was the time when he had come to the realisation that man is totally sinful before the holy God, who is a consuming fire. From then on the most important theological question that occupied his mind was, how can man who is essentially unrighteous attain righteousness? What could be the significance of God providing a ram the very moment Abraham was about to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice? At this juncture, let Vahram speak for himself:

"How could I, a sinner, get right with God? This question wearied me for months. I continued my religious observances, but still inside me was that old dead-weight! At length, on the basis of knowledge gleaned from the Bible, I formulated a prayer in my heart quite different from any I had prayed before, 'Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, there is just one thing I need. What it is and where it will come from I cannot tell. But you know very well what it is. Please grant me what I am looking for!' However, I soon forgot this sincere prayer.

"One day I visited one of the many churches I frequented. Before me I saw Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. Blood flowed from his brow, hands and feet. As I stood reverently before Him, I heard His voice: 'Come to me; I will save you.' I sensed my need more deeply than ever. Bowing before Him, I said, 'Oh Lord, you have promised not to turn anyone away who comes to you. Look, I have come; just as I am, sinful, unclean. I cry to you, save me!'

"Immediately I sensed the response to my cry. 'Your sins are forgiven. No one can snatch you out of my hand.' Oh, what peace, what certainty, what sweetness! Could there be a sensation on this planet as sweet as the forgiveness of a person's sin? Thinking back, I realised that Abraham's joy on seeing the sacrificial lamb had become my joy. This profound truth, graphically prefigured in the old patriarch's experience filled my soul with light and delight. God the Father had sent His only begotten Son, the Messiah, for me!

*'Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.'*

The Lord Jesus Christ's assurance of salvation was given to me once for all time. All my sins were washed away and eternity was assured for me. That happy day was Sunday, the fourteenth of October, 1928. My constant fasting, lighting of candles, burning of incense and tramping from church to another had failed to achieve what the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, accomplished through His grace in an instant. It was done!

"A few days later I seemed to hear an ugly voice saying, 'What lasting significance could just one decision possibly have? How could the sins of a lifetime be got rid of by just one promise?' Immediately the Holy Spirit revealed to me the source of this ugly voice. It belonged to Satan, the one who always resists the cleansing and saving of souls. There was only one answer, stated in the Word of God, *'He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him'* (John 3:36).

"For a while Satan stopped troubling me. But a few months later, I heard that voice again: 'Don't bother any more; Christ has abandoned you. From now on you're a lost soul.' Again, with confidence and courage drawn from the Holy Scriptures I replied, *'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand'* (John 10:28).

"I was beginning to learn Satan's tricks. He would attack again. And this is how he did it: 'You have set yourself such a difficult life-style; you will never be able to keep it up.' This time I replied to Satan, *'He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it'* (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

"Would Satan's inventions and ruses never come to an end? Now he threw a completely different provocation at me: I should observe Saturday as the Sabbath according to the practice of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. That is to say, I should not work on that day, etc. I responded to this temptation with the following word: *'He shall cover me with his pinions and under his wings I will find refuge; his faithfulness is my shield and buckler. I shall not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday'* (Psalm 91:4-6).

"Satan's games and tricks know no bounds. Next time he put into my mind the need to get married. Young, handsome, owning a business — I must be the man of many a maiden's dreams! After that, he brought before me a number of girls who did not believe in Christ, but had only biological birth. He would suggest, 'This one is just right for you. This one is the most suitable. You won't find this one's equal anywhere,' and so on. My response to this sly temptation was, *'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?'* (II Corinthians 6:14).

"God spoke to me with fatherly love and showed me His plan for my life: my desire for marriage would never be realised. Giving thanks to the Lord, I submitted to His declared will. His command must take precedence over my desires."

## **Chapter 5**

### **OASES IN THE DESERT**

After his conversion, Vahram continued to ply his trade as tailor for a while. But his whole ambition was to explain to everyone God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. In those days spiritual life in the churches of Istanbul was at a low ebb. Church people attended meetings, but a dry formalism prevailed. Preaching lacked enthusiasm, liveliness and effectiveness. Prayers were dry and deficient. Only a few spoke to others about Christ the Savior. Many believers had emigrated to other countries, and a timid, joyless, deadening apathy had settled on those left behind.

The new birth and new life in Christ which Vahram spoke about were spiritual joys scarcely heard of. For ordinary church people belief in Christ was simply a matter of going to church on Sundays, listening to a sermon, singing hymns, joining in the prayers and then going home again. At this time only a handful of church people had come to the experience of new birth. The delight of new life and the joy of eternity were absent. A few lively exceptions come to mind: Gregorios Moscho the Bible colporteur, Aleksan Batmazian, Hagopos Karakochian, Dr. Kirkor Tekian and the preacher, Garabet Derhovannesian. And there was David Giray, a Jewish Christian born and brought up in Russia. Also, as in the days of Christ's life on earth, there were a few women among them. This constitutes the short list of true believers in Istanbul at the time. The exemplary conduct, proven testimony and sincere prayers of these Christians gave a foretaste of what was to come later.

## **Chapter 6**

## FROM ARCHITECT TO BOOK-SELLER

Among those who shone brightly for the Lord was Gregorios Moscho, born in 1868 of Greek parentage. He graduated from the lyceum fluent in Turkish, Greek and French. His ambition was to become an architect and to make his own contribution to the beautiful structures of Constantinople. He successfully completed his studies at the Academy of Advanced Architecture and then threw himself into his work with great enthusiasm, drawing up plans for many buildings. His celebrated skills were much sought after throughout the city. To this day his name can be seen inscribed on one of the buildings in the district known as Yuksek Kaldirim.

Gregorios was an adherent of the Orthodox faith. At the turn of the century he started to read the Bible. With the trained eye of a master architect he made a study of the magnificent temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem. But God showed him from the same book another temple, Jesus the Savior, the Word made flesh. Moscho was captivated. From childhood he had heard much talk of Jesus Christ in the churches. But he knew nothing about Christ as God's living temple, nothing about Christ as the One who had given His life for Moscho's sins and shed His blood as a ransom — the risen Lord, the everlasting Temple.

A profound peace flooded his soul. He knelt down just where he was and pleaded with the living Christ in heaven to save his soul, to link him, the designer of attractive buildings to the Master Builder. What he pleaded for on earth was granted in heaven. After receiving Christ as his Savior, he continued as an architect for some time. But Christian witness and prayer were now more important to him than anything else.

In the end, realising that he could not do justice to such a demanding profession while pursuing a call to evangelism, he gave up his employment. From then on whenever he passed by one of his admired buildings he would stand for a moment, offer a prayer and thank the Lord who had called him from designing earthly buildings to preparing people for eternity. He would inwardly sing praises that Christ already had a beautiful eternal home ready for him. *"For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10).*

Having given up architecture with its ample income Moscho, full of faith, applied himself to the service of the Lord. At that time, the Bible Society — established in Turkey in 1821 — was looking for a colporteur who knew several languages. A colporteur is a man who carries Bibles, New Testaments and Scripture portions in a bag. He visits coffee houses, shops and offices, offering his books for sale wherever he goes. Such work is not at all easy, and naturally there are few willing to do it. No one could choose the work for himself; he had to have a special call from God. Moscho had just such a calling. In 1900, at the age of thirty-two, he became a Bible Society colporteur. People could not understand how he could abandon a promising and profitable career in architecture at such a young age to tramp the streets selling Bibles. *"The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself judged by no one" (I Corinthians 2:15).*

Brother Moscho, as he came to be known among believers, began to sell Bibles in various languages and to introduce people to the matchless salvation of Christ. Especially to Muslims did he declare God's love, grace and forgiveness, and he was constantly interceding for them. Before and after World War I many Muslims had opportunity to consider the Gospel Moscho had offered to them. He witnessed to people in their own languages. Those with an open mind took special delight in listening to him because he communicated spiritual truths as an educated person.

A few years after Moscho's death, a venerable, elderly Turk visited the Bible House Immanuel Church in Istanbul. To those who welcomed him he said, "I heard the Gospel years ago from Moscho. Is that saintly man still alive? I've come from my native city of Trabzon and have to return home by today's boat. But I was just longing to see him again." This man appeared to be a believer in Christ. Who knows how many others had heard the Good News from Moscho and trusted in Christ for eternal life? It was Moscho's conviction that a faithful witness should explain Christ's glorious redemption to everyone he met.

He never married, but he had a special interest in children. He was tenderly concerned to lead them to Christ. One of Moscho's excellent qualities was his careful avoidance of all gossip and backbiting. He could never be drawn into a conversation that was damaging to another person's good name. He loved and respected everyone. He was never known to adopt an antagonistic attitude towards anybody. It seemed to be a settled principle with him not to speak about other people but only

about Jesus Christ.

God abundantly blessed this man's ministry. Some thought it strange for him to give up a brilliant career in architecture, but when God confirmed his master-plan for Moscho, he willingly gave himself to encourage believers and to preach the Gospel to the unconverted. The fact that he was a well-read thinker was beneficial to him in the writing of many books. Other than the Bible, no spiritual literature in Turkish was available, so he wrote books to train believers in their faith. Of these, his book entitled "Emmanuel" (God with Us) is recognised as a theological book.

Moscho was known for his practice of fasting and prayer. He would eat only once a day. He lived in a very simple house in Uskudar<sup>5</sup>. In the summer months he would retreat to the woods at Kuzguncuk<sup>6</sup>, carrying his coat and would spend the whole night in prayer. The most delightful hours of his life were those spent alone with God. People could not understand it; but his Lord knew him and he knew his Lord. He lived according to the principle, *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21). He always reminded believers of the importance of God's glorious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Apart from this no union with God could be conceived of. He would say, "The believer must always live in the light of this truth, clothed in holiness, waiting for the glorious coming of Christ."

An anecdote, widely circulated among Moscho's acquaintances, illustrates well his dedication to prayer. A housewife once asked him how he, a bachelor, managed to find time to cook in the midst of all his endeavors. Coolly he said, "My God who sent ravens to feed Elijah does not leave me hungry. Yesterday," he continued, "I decided to boil some fruit. I put it on to cook, but I burnt it." The housewife in great astonishment exclaimed, "Brother Moscho! That's the first time I have ever heard of compote losing all its juice and burning on the stove. How ever did it burn?" Moscho's calm reply was, "If you had something more important to do than stewing fruit, maybe even you could burn it."

After the founding of the Turkish Republic, Ataturk brought out the 'Surname Act.' Everyone was required to choose a surname and have it entered on the national register. This law applied mainly to ethnic Turks who were generally known by their father's name. Members of the non-Muslim minorities did not need to choose a surname because they already had one, for example, Gregorios Moscho. When the law was announced, Brother Moscho, identity card in hand, hurried along to the registration office. Short in stature, hunchbacked, his round bearded face commanding respect, he stationed himself before the official. "What do you want, sir?" "Young man, I've come to take a surname." "But you already have a surname!" "That doesn't matter. I want to take a new one." "Well, let's see. What name have you chosen?" "Bekleyen" (the Turkish word for 'waiting one'). "Who are you waiting for?" "I'm waiting for Jesus Christ who is going to come from heaven." Everyone in the registration office pricked up their ears when they heard the strange request. They listened to this 'waiting' brother with curiosity to find out how this 'coming' of the awaited one would happen. From that day on, his newly registered name, Gregorios Moscho Bekleyen, proved to be an effective starting-point for a witness about Jesus Christ to people he met. In 1924, Ataturk was issuing one reform after another. At the declaration of the Republic, the week day off was Friday as in all Muslim countries. So Moscho started praying, "Oh Lord, may Friday be changed to Sunday!" A few short years passed and Moscho's faith-filled prayer materialised. Ataturk signed into law that Sunday was to be the day off.

In 1929, after twenty-nine years of service as Bible colporteur, Moscho Bekleyen resigned from the Bible Society to devote himself to prayer, visiting people in their homes and to writing. This saintly man fasted and prayed throughout the years. After the example of aged Simeon in the New Testament (Luke 2:25-35), he was waiting for the Holy Spirit to establish God's spiritual building in Istanbul. And he saw the fruit of his prayers, one of which was Vahram Tatikian. Moscho continued an active witness for Christ until the Lord called him to heaven in 1942. Writing, reading, fasting, praying, and worshipping the living God, he left as a monument a life of ministry, passing into eternity fully assured that His glorious Lord was waiting for him.

## Chapter 7

### NEW HORIZONS IN THE YOUNG BELIEVER'S LIFE

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<sup>5</sup> Section of Istanbul on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus

<sup>6</sup> As above

Having come to faith in Christ, Vahram joined the believers. The brothers and sisters, among them Moscho Bekleyen, welcomed the young man with great joy and thanksgiving to God. One day Moscho said to Vahram and another young believer, "Come, I'll take you to an uplifting gathering." He took them along the European side of the Bosphorus to Bebek where for many years a prayer meeting was held on Fridays in the historic Kavafian home. People were delighted to welcome them. Later, Vahram's youngest sister Beatrice was to come as a bride to that home, where a beautiful family was established.

Dedicated Christians were few and far between and most were elderly. As a young man, Vahram was definitely in the minority. He adopted a Scripture verse as his guiding principle: "*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to thy word*" (Psalm 119:9). So he devoted himself to reading, studying and constantly developing his knowledge of the Scriptures. His soul was continually refreshed by the deep truths and rich treasures he discovered there. He studied the Bible with such intensity that in a few years he was like a theologian. Every time he opened the Bible, he made it his aim to read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This unschooled young man, unacquainted with foreign languages and with no opportunity to study the classics reached such a level of proficiency that he was able to instruct educated people. He never failed to mention how the Holy Spirit worked in his life. The Holy Word of God had such a genuine impact on him that his experience was like that of Paul in Corinth. The Apostle, too, had been under the constraining influence of God's Word and had testified to all that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior, calling all men to faith in Him (Acts 18:5).

In 1930 there was an anniversary celebration in the Gedikpasha Protestant Church. During the meeting, Vahram stood up and prayed, "Oh Lord, I come to you with empty hands. I beseech you, give me many, many sheaves." The effect of this brief but sincere prayer was immediate. At that moment a brick and tiling manufacturer named Hovannes Jevherian stood up and cried, "Oh Lord, I plead with you, take me and let me be one of those sheaves." Jevherian was the firstfruit of Vahram's prayer. Later his family repented of their sins. The new believers were referred to as, 'people who had repented.' With time, an inseparable bond of brotherly affection developed between Vahram and Hovannes.

But there was deep grief in Vahram's heart. Daniel, his business partner in the tailor shop, refused to repent and commit his life to Jesus Christ. Didn't God's Word speak clearly that the believer cannot have fellowship with the unbeliever? (II Corinthians 6:14). Vahram had taken one way and his partner Daniel, another. He prayed constantly about this problem in order to know the clear will of God. He was facing a crisis in his life of faith.

His family was insistent that on no account should he think of leaving his business. So the wishes of his family seemed to conflict with the will of God. Which of these options should he settle on? Aware that God's command is indisputable and unchanging, Vahram realised there was only one step to take — he must abandon his business and bring the partnership to an end. After all, wasn't God calling him to His service?

One day he laid bare his position to Daniel. The partnership could not continue. This blew Daniel's mind. Where could he find another partner so successful and reliable? Reluctantly, he consented to Vahram's departure. From then on Vahram was free, free from sin and free from a partner serving another master. For a while he worked as a tailor in his home.

At that time, the Bible Society was passing through a difficult test. Moscho Bekleyen had resigned, and was replaced by a man who lacked integrity. He had taken the job simply to make money; his heart wasn't in it. He was totally dishonest in his words and actions. The Society Director, Mr. Lyman MacCallum, a Canadian brought up in Turkey, happened to go to the man's home to talk over some concerns. There he caught the good-for-nothing colporteur burning Bibles in the stove for extra heating fuel. He was going to claim that he had given them away free. The director sacked him on the spot. The Society needed someone who would sincerely apply himself to the ministry. God did not leave the task unsupplied.

News of Vahram's conversion two years before and his zeal for Christ had come to Mr. MacCallum's attention. On their very first meeting the director realised that the young man before him was pure gold. "Would you like to become a colporteur for the Bible Society?" he asked. This was just the sort of work Vahram had been looking for. How wonderful! He would be able to go everywhere selling God's Word, and at the same time would be able to explain its meaning. This was a turning point in

his life. However, Vahram was not someone who would merely sell books. He was a preacher, an evangelist. Along with selling books he would converse with people. The Bible Society's main concern was to simply sell books. Before him, Moscho Bekleyen had been confronted with the same dilemma. Should he only sell? Should he not also explain to the purchaser the contents and message of this glorious book? So on one hand, Vahram sold Scriptures, and on the other, he attended numerous meetings. In one year, book sales reached a record high. So everybody was happy.

## Chapter 8

### HOUSE MEETINGS

There were weekly meetings at the home of Dr. Kirkor Tekian in Gedikpasha. Believers in the neighborhood gathered together to study the Bible, listen to teaching, sing hymns, share testimonies and pray. Starting at around seven o'clock in the evening, these meetings usually didn't disperse until ten or eleven. People attending tremendously appreciated these gatherings. They drank deeply at the inexhaustible fountain, and the more they drank the thirstier they became. The more they feasted on the bread of life, the hungrier they became. Some outside the family of God who dropped in would be deeply convicted of sin through the Holy Spirit. They would repent with tears and believe in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Tekian's house could no longer hold the crowds. People had started coming from as far away as Topkapi, Edirnekapi, Yedikule and Beyoglu. House meetings needed to be started in other sections of the city. Many had become believers in Christ and were looking for meetings to attend. The Sunday morning services in the few churches did not meet people's needs. In any case, wasn't it the practice of the early Christians to meet in homes? (*Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2*). Hadn't God in His sovereign will first called Vahram from Sungurlu to Istanbul where he had saved him? Then hadn't he moved him from tailoring to colporteurship? Hadn't God given him the knowledge of the Word and competence to speak? Could it be that conducting house meetings was his new calling?

One of the first house gatherings was in the home of Sister Aygul. Two sisters in the faith joined Aygul and Vahram in earnest prayer that young people might come to Christ. Aygul's home became a house of prayer every morning between seven and eight. The meeting gradually expanded. God answered those prayers and many young people believed in Jesus Christ. Among the young men were Hagop, Aris, Nazar and Magaros. Up until that time there had been very few young people who had come to Christ. But after constant prayer, morning by morning, young people began to take an interest and were converted. They too joined in praying for the salvation of other young people.

The meetings begun in Dr. Tekian's home spread to every section of the entire city: Topkapi, Edirnekapi, Yedikule, Balat, Haskoy, Beyoglu and Uskudar. In those days before the now heavily-travelled Bosphorus bridges had even been thought of, there were only infrequent boats crossing from one side of the Bosphorus to the other. In traversing the large city Vahram wore out a lot of shoes. He would hurry from one place to another, dressed in seasonal wear, smart and clean, hat on head, heavy case in one hand and violin in the other — and always a pleasant expression on his face. At this time newcomers were brought to an understanding of the true nature of Jesus Christ. They repented of their sins and believed on Him as Savior. A spiritual fire kindled by the Holy Spirit was enveloping Istanbul, but only a limited number of people could see it. Men, women, young and old, were coming to the house meetings and following Christ. Christ was transforming sinners into saints.

Before long, evening meetings were not enough. Under Vahram's guidance, day-time meetings for women began in various homes. When there were too many women for one house, another meeting was started in another house. Joy and peace were becoming a reality to countless women.

Around this time Aleksan Batmazian was conducting Sunday afternoon Bible classes in the Gedikpasha church. This gentle figure who resembled an Old Testament prophet taught with deep affection and displayed fatherly love to everyone. As a young man in Aksaray in the province of Konya, he had been awakened spiritually. He became a deeply committed Christian with the gift of teaching which he used very effectively. For years he had been praying for a spiritual awakening in Istanbul and when it came he started a Bible class.

The core elements of his teaching were the Saviorhood of Christ, justification by faith, living a holy life

and the premillennial return of Christ as stated in I John 3:2, 3: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Those who had gained spiritual understanding in Vahram's house meetings were more deeply instructed as they followed the Bible studies and benefited from Aleksan's convincing grasp of eschatology. The Holy Spirit had raised up the right person for each task and the knowledge of God was being proclaimed far and wide.

## Chapter 9

### MILITARY SERVICE AND HEALING

The year was 1933. At twenty-four years of age Vahram was called up for military service. At that time it was possible to obtain a reduced length of service by paying a predetermined amount and serving the shortened term in the city of one's residence. So he paid 250.84 Turkish liras — a worthless sum today — and served six months in Istanbul. Right at the outset he was confronted with a dilemma. In those days the official day off was Friday. Sunday was an ordinary working day, whereas for Vahram and all Christians it was a day of worship. Following his conversion Vahram had dedicated Sunday wholly to the Lord. But now he had to work like everyone else. After earnest prayer he approached the commanding officer and asked if he could have Sundays off. He told the officer he would be willing to do any kind of work on Fridays, the Muslim day off. The commanding officer, a humane man, resolved the problem in a sensible way. He put him into the laundry room on Sundays, where for some reason there was no work on that day, so he was free to worship. Under this arrangement Vahram completed his military service. A short time later, Ataturk declared Sunday the official day off. This was what the believers had been praying for and anticipating.

After being discharged from the service, Vahram returned to his job at the Bible Society where he continued until 1937. Throughout this time a persistent illness caused him great discomfort. From childhood he had never been in robust health. He would sometimes have to stay in bed for three or four days. When people came to visit him he would ask them to lay their hands on him and pray. This was his method of encouraging believers in their prayer life. Like the Apostle Paul, he would say, *"to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated"* (II Corinthians 12:7).

Lyman MacCallum, director of the Bible Society, expressed concern to Vahram's close friend, Hovannes Jevherian that in spite of frequent illness Vahram had never presented any medical bills. "Why doesn't this man go to a doctor?" he asked. Hovannes related this remark to Vahram, who replied, "Shall I disappoint my Lord? Having trusted Him once, I must never stop trusting him." Mr. MacCallum was highly impressed with his faith and honesty. He took every opportunity to tell others about Vahram's reliability.

Whenever Vahram felt well enough, he would get up and dress, always putting on a freshly ironed shirt and usually a bow tie. Then he would dress in a neat suit, put on a hat suitable to the weather and run off to some useful service. Every time he would have fruit to present to his Lord. There was no lack of sheaves in his arms! He bypassed no opportunity — open air markets, shops, hospitals, lawyers' offices, poor homes of new arrivals from Anatolia... Everywhere he stopped he told people about the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ, always leading some to the Lord. There was joy among angels in heaven over what was happening in Istanbul.

Having committed his illness to the Lord, Vahram believed implicitly that healing would come. Rev. Haralambos Bostanjoglu<sup>7</sup> who years before had led many to the Lord in Anatolia, had originally taught about 'healing by faith' in these climes. His book with this title became very popular among Christians in the Middle East. Through reading it, countless people testified to having been healed. Vahram's healing was to be an added link in this long chain. As a child he had experienced a paralysis of unknown origin, and in later years he suffered from excruciating stomach pains. When they struck, the pain was so agonising that he couldn't speak. For about twenty years he struggled with these recurring pains. At first he went to doctors. One day he went to a top specialist who told him, "We've examined you thoroughly and can find nothing medically wrong with you. Your healing

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<sup>7</sup> Rev. Bostanjoglu was martyred by hanging in Marash in 1916.

must be left to Allah!" From then on he stopped going to doctors. On one occasion he prayed, "Oh Lord Christ, you have saved me from hell; now graciously grant me healing from this sickness!" After this he was constantly reading, studying and talking about the healing miracles of Christ. Often he consulted Bostanjoglu's book, "Healing by Faith". At last, the Lord granted the long-awaited healing. One night Christ, without a word, touched Vahram's hand. When he got up in the morning he was completely healed. He sensed that fresh strength had come into his body. This gave him a new song of freedom.

So another dimension was added to his testimony, the healing power of the Lord. His healing in 1934 reinvigorated his joy in the Lord. In addition to Christ's saving his soul, Vahram would always testify to Christ's healing his body: *"He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17).*

## Chapter 10

### REVIVAL TIME — HARVEST TIME

Vahram came across a book on the subject of revival, and as he read it his heart burned within him. It was as if an inextinguishable blaze enveloped him. As he read, God spoke to him from His Word: *"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession" (Psalm 2:8).* Some time after the Lord had healed him the Holy Spirit burdened him to intensify his prayers for the lost. As directed by the Lord he was moved to pray, "Oh Lord, help me to win souls as you promise in this Psalm." Eleven months passed. One day a very unpleasant voice spoke to him, "That's enough. Stop praying!" After a short time he heard another voice, "Don't despair; keep on praying!" Recognising the stark contrast between the two voices, he praised Christ.

One day as he was sitting in his room, there came a knock at the door. It was a woman to whom he had been witnessing for a long time without results. As soon as he opened the door the woman blurted out, "What must I do to be saved?" Then she said, "I'm ready now. Please tell me the way of salvation." The Holy Spirit had so prepared her heart that immediately she called upon God and believed in Christ as her Savior. The silent revival that had affected many people in the city was reaching new heights. It kept rolling in like the waves of the ocean.

Another morning Vahram opened the door to a man seemingly in a great hurry. "My wife has been distraught all night. She can't stop crying. She says she's a great sinner and needs to repent. She told me, 'Run and get Vahram.' I said to her, 'How can we trouble the man at this early hour?' and told her we should wait until evening when I would bring you with me on my way home from work. But she wouldn't hear of it. She said she couldn't wait till evening and that you must come now!" Vahram dressed immediately and accompanied the man to his home. Weeping and moaning, the woman cried, "I want to repent here and now." Vahram responded, "Christ is the Savior. If you want to put your trust in Him, come let us pray." Right there they knelt down and prayed. The woman prayed in such faith that it seemed as if the angels in heaven stooped down to listen. That morning this precious soul became one of the firstfruits of the revival in Istanbul.

Overcome with this joy, Vahram didn't feel like going back home. So he went to see an elderly sister to pray with her. The woman's son entered the room. He was on his way out to meet his girlfriend. Vahram said, "Wait a minute, let's read a little from the Scriptures." The Holy Spirit touched the young man's heart. He was so convicted of sin that he knelt right down and prayed for his salvation. He never did go to meet his girlfriend that day. Wherever Vahram went that day the young man followed him like a shadow.

The next day his girlfriend appeared at his shop to ask him why he hadn't kept his word. Upon seeing her, the young man called out, "Please don't come into my shop!" "What's the matter with you?" she cried. "Why have you become like this?" He responded, "I've left my life of sin. If you come to Christ too, then we can marry. Otherwise we'll have to forget about our relationship."

Conversions became an everyday occurrence. In homes, in shops, during the singing of hymns, reading a passage of Scripture, or someone sharing his testimony, people were suddenly affected and born again. Their sinful hearts softened and melted as they trusted in Christ. Not a day would pass without at least one sinner repenting. On some days large numbers came to Christ. Everyone was in a spirit of expectation (*Luke 3:15*). Every evening, meetings were held in various places. There would be spiritual fellowship, hymn singing, testimonies of the newly converted and prayer for the



salvation of sinners and the awakening of backsliders. Preaching at the meetings was with divine authority and had a profound effect on hearts. In every message Vahram referred to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

James K. Lyman was a Congregational missionary who had spent much of his life in Turkey and had been praying for revival for many years. Finally when this revival came to Istanbul Mr. Lyman was among the God-prepared leaders. Along with Vahram and other young men he went everywhere taking part in house meetings. With his good grasp of Turkish he would support believers in their efforts and encourage new converts. The house meetings attracted more and more people. Many who for years had taken for granted that they were Christians but had no clue about having Christ as Savior were transformed.

A special 'air' prevailed in these meetings. There was no carefully prepared program. People would gather, some sitting on couches, others on a bed in the corner, some on chairs, a few on the floor. One would start singing a hymn and the rest would join in.

Young and old, poor and better off, all felt equal in the presence of God, sharers of the same grace. Without fear or hesitancy they would sing praises to the Lamb who had been slain. Hymns would give way to prayer. Prayer after prayer was lifted by men and women. These heart-felt prayers seemed too simple to some. They were inspired by the most ordinary needs, but all emanated from firm faith. There were heart-cries for personal problems, family crises, church concerns and for the further spreading of revival. People prayed that the newly born again ones would be established in the faith, that unsaved persons whom they mentioned by name would be converted, the sick healed, the destitute provided for, the unemployed find work; and so it went on, prayer after prayer. Prayers were always offered up with adoration and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those who prayed were delighting their hearts in the Lord. Sometimes when prayers were prolonged a hymn would be suggested. Afterwards, someone else would pray.

There was always a testimony time, which was a thrilling experience for everybody. A person would stand up and tell of his previous sinful and lost condition, hardness of heart and opposition to God and how God's grace through Christ had touched him. In each of these meetings sinners came to faith in Christ through someone's talk, the reading of Scripture or perhaps through a prayer or hymn. Faith was activated and repentance followed. Testimonies centered on the former sinfulness of the person and of Christ's redemption. God would be praised and thanked for having given such a mighty salvation. Afterward, spontaneous songs of joy broke out.

Following the testimony time someone would give a message from the Bible. The sermon, lasting about forty-five minutes, set forth the love of God, the saving power of Christ and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in plain language and with a good variety of illustrations. Sinners were called to repentance and faith in Christ. The atmosphere in the meetings was always invigorating. This Scriptural truth was confirmed, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before Him is no creature hidden"* (Hebrews 4:12, 13a).

Right then and there, sinners would call on the name of Christ, repent of their sins and plead for His saving touch. Two or three hours later the meeting would end with songs of praise. Renewed and encouraged, believers would go out to courageously face the trials of daily life and to bear testimony for the Savior.

In his childhood in Sungurlu, one of Vahram's uncles had taught him to play the violin. What a tremendous asset this turned out to be for his ministry! He used the violin in all his meetings, adding a special uplift to the singing. He was dubbed by some, 'the violin-playing preacher.' Also, Brother Artaki contributed to the hymn-singing by playing his harmonica.

What an assortment of people attended those meetings! There was the businessman David Giray, a Jewish believer from Russia. Earlier he had walked across Eastern Europe as he felt that something terrible was about to happen in his homeland. He came in contact with Christians in Switzerland and was converted to Christ. Finally he reached Istanbul and joined the believers there. Now in his lively testimony and fascinating accent he told of his long anticipation of this revival. He encouraged believers to strive after holiness of life. Another person was Omer Songar, of very liberal Muslim background, who had studied in Germany as a young man and was converted there. He was rather eccentric, but there was no doubting his godly sincerity. Abruptly interrupting the meeting, he sometimes stood up and said, "Brothers and sisters, a spirit of prayer has come upon me," and he

would pray without regard to the ongoing meeting. In a meeting not regulated by any particular form or tradition strange happenings sometimes occurred.

Meetings with preaching and teaching, along with visits in homes continued unabated. One day there was a meeting in Pastor Garabet Derhovannesian's house. A poor woman obviously in great distress entered the room. Vahram was preaching but at a suitable juncture he paused, took up his violin and announced a hymn. While everyone was singing, he went over to deal with the woman's need. He exhorted her to receive the Savior by quoting II Corinthians 6:2, *"At the acceptable time I have listened to you, and helped you on the day of salvation. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* In that first meeting she had ever attended, Silvaré repented and put her faith in Christ. She was a stalwart Christian to the end. But her husband, a dentist, was a total unbeliever. When he heard of his wife's step of faith, he derogatorily remarked, "So, you've joined the 'spirituals' too, have you?" Silvaré came and poured out her sorrow to Vahram. How should she encounter her husband's behavior? Vahram pointed her to the Scripture, *"For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory"* (Colossians 3:3, 4).

Vahram would always handle the needs of the believers by referring them to the appropriate Scriptures. He believed that the Holy Spirit taught him to apply God's truth to any given problem.

## Chapter 11

### OPPOSITION AND EXHILARATION

At this time in Istanbul there were only a few traditional Protestant churches. In general they followed stereotyped patterns of worship and viewed with suspicion the necessity of the new birth, witnessing for Christ and house gatherings. They held to the position that it was sufficient for anyone to attend church, listen to a sermon and worship God. It was hard to find any warmth, liveliness or enthusiasm in these traditional churches. They looked down on Vahram and the other believers as the 'Spirituals,' because of the unstructured nature of the meetings and that the Holy Spirit alone was the guide. Vahram's response to this was, "My brother, they call us the 'Spirituals.' As long as they don't call us the 'Unspirituals' we won't object!"

Among the ministers who knew the new birth and lived in its blessing was Garabet Derhovannesian. As minister of the Gedikpasha church, this respectable person with his grey beard and upright posture influenced his hearers by his devotion to Jesus Christ. He was filled with joy at the spiritual awakening in Istanbul. His comprehensive preaching was drawing new converts to the meetings and helping them to mature in the life of faith. He was a loved and respected father to all. As a person enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he was well able to handle God's Word. He took his call very seriously. At the outset of his ministry, usually walking from house to house, he would visit as many as fifteen hundred families in a year. He would go from one family to another in those tightly-knit neighborhoods, instructing and encouraging them. Actually, God used him to pave the way for the spiritual awakening in the thirties.

Revival, or spiritual awakening, is a divine act advanced by the Holy Spirit. But believers wittingly or unwittingly prepare the way of the Lord. As Isaiah affirmed and John the Baptist reiterated, *"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken'"* (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Garabet Derhovannesian, Moscho Bekleyen, James K. Lyman, Aleksanefendi Batmazian, Hagopos Karakochian, David Giray and several other men and women knew that the prevailing traditionalism in churches was not God's supernatural order. They believed that the Holy Spirit was capable of doing something entirely different. Like Jacob wrestling with God, they fasted and prayed for God to fulfil his promises. Now they were witnessing a unique work of Christ. From every corner of Istanbul God's children were singing songs of praise and thanksgiving. In faith they were praying that the Lord would perform even mightier deeds. This was true revival. Sinners were cleansed. Lives were saved. Hearts were pricked and renewed, and believers were strengthened.

While the work induced and advanced by the Holy Spirit was bringing joy and delight to many, others

were hardening their hearts and some even resorted to resistance. Acts of obstruction have not been uncommon in times of revival. While many people were offering praise for the revival, others were looking on with distaste, mistrust and envy. The awakening had been poured out by the Holy Spirit, but instead of encouraging the much-needed work, these detractors in the churches were complaining about Vahram's ignorance, his extreme enthusiasm and the haphazard 'air' prevailing in the meetings. What they failed to see was that this was not generated by Vahram, but was activated by the Holy Spirit.

At the same time Vahram's own family were also unhappy with his peculiar line. "How could he turn his back on such a promising, successful and lucrative business?" they demanded. "And for what? For an activity with no prospect for the future! What can possibly come of it all?" His mother complained to some of Vahram's friends and begged them to persuade him to change his mind and go back to his tailoring. And she just could not fathom why he should retreat to his room and spend long hours in prayer. Praying all night and fasting could play havoc with his health, she reasoned! She became obsessed with these thoughts. She was afraid that her son was becoming a fanatic. Vahram would always respond to his family's fears with the words, "Praise the Lord!" Shortly after this mild resistance his father and mother were both converted. A few years later his mother contracted tuberculosis. On her deathbed she said with joy, "My son is Jesus Christ's nightingale."

God always met the physical needs of the believers. Among them were poor, unemployed, sick and of course, the newcomers from Anatolia. Money generously placed in the offering plate at the meetings provided for the basic sustenance of many. About this time a wealthy Greek businessman named Niko Kamileri became a Christian. He met the needs of Vahram and other believers from the proceeds of his two bustling dairy product shops on the main boulevard of Istanbul. He also gave work in his business places to some of the unemployed Christians.

## **Chapter 12**

### **WITNESSING IN CAMP AND TO PROFESSORS**

On the Asiatic side of the city in Suadiye, YMCA had a beautiful campsite. Every summer young people from the city would retreat there for a time of recreation. This was long before Istanbul's population exploded. At that time Suadiye, Erenkoy and Bostanci were just villages with lovely summer homes surrounded by gardens. The American director of the YMCA had heard of Vahram and arranged for him and his friend Aram to have a holiday free of charge at the camp. Normally this place would have been out of their reach. So before they went they prayed that God would use their witness there.

In the light-hearted atmosphere, someone had an idea, that with the help of a friend he would catch the Turkish camp director and throw him fully clothed into the Marmara Sea! It was really hilarious to everyone except to the victim. He emerged from the water sopping wet and choking. "Are you pleased with your accomplishment?" he gasped.

Now the camp had a set of rules, and the designated punishment for this kind of horseplay was that the instigator provide a new set of clothes for the victim and then that he be tied to a tree without food. The punishment was carried out to the letter and the director himself bound the culprit with rope to a tree. The prankster's friend said to Vahram, "If you believe in doing good, why don't you untie our friend and let him go and get something to eat?" "How can I set someone free who is being punished by the director?" Vahram replied. "I have no authority to do this. But..." he continued, "if the director approves, let him free this man and tie me to the tree in his place." Hearing this, the director proceeded to tie Vahram to another tree. Vahram said, "Now that you have tied me up you must set him free." So the director untied the prankster and let him go.

Vahram asked the director, "Do I have any guilt in this affair?" The director said, "No!" "Then why did you tie me up?" The director replied, "You asked to be tied up in his place." Then Vahram began to explain that the sinless and guiltless Lord Jesus was hung on the cross in our place of his own volition and there he died. "Just as the prankster here accepted my being tied in his place, so we too must accept through faith Christ's taking our place. We must repent of all our sin and ask God's forgiveness."

The illustration was apropos and its application exact. But there was a camp rule dictated by the

governmental authorities that any conversation about religion was forbidden<sup>8</sup>. The YMCA director entered in nervously, "I wanted to give you two weeks of rest in this place, but you don't seem to know the meaning of the word 'rest'. You are simply carrying on your work here." They almost sent the two friends home, but the matter was resolved amicably and they stayed. Whenever Vahram and Aram found the camp entertainment crude they would slip away to their room and pray. With discreet conversation they were able to finish out their two weeks with no further problems.

At this time Istanbul's population was only 750,000 and information of the ongoing revival spread quickly. But instead of rejoicing over what was happening, the Protestant churches for the most part were not very happy about it. There was a well-known Armenian professor named Dr. Hagopian. One day Vahram decided to take some of the young believers to visit him. Each one explained his conversion story, telling how Christ had made him a new person. The professor listened with patience to all of them and then remarked, "Is this all you're busying yourselves with?" And with that he sent them off. While many were affected by the message of salvation, others decided it was not for them.

Vahram's main concern was to relate to everyone what Christ had done in his own life. One day along with some others he went to visit Dr. Huntington, a well-known teacher at Robert College to tell him their life stories. These were simple young men having come out of an irreligious background. Their lives had been completely transformed during the revival. An intelligent hearer could appreciate the change which had taken place. After listening to the testimonies with interest, the doctor exclaimed, "Thanks be to God for His work of salvation in your lives!"

As he travelled from place to place selling Bibles, Vahram had some interesting experiences. Once in a while it happened that he approached people absorbed in amusing themselves. When he tried to sell them books, they would make fun of him. Then he would read from the Word: "*Of whom are you making sport? Against whom do you open your mouth wide and put out your tongue? Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit?*" (Isaiah 57:4). This appropriate rebuke would sober and silence them.

## Chapter 13

### ON ROADS AND TRAMS

One day when Vahram, Artaki and Aram were praying together they said, "We put great emphasis on house meetings and get much joy over the salvation of a lot of people. But many know nothing of our meetings. How will they hear the name of Christ? It's up to us to take the Good News to the highways and byways. We could at least start to preach in the streetcars." So they started on the trams, Vahram with his violin, Artaki with his harmonica and Aram also helping proclaim new life to men and women in song and speech. In the early thirties 'New Life' was the brand name of a caramel that was being pushed everywhere on the market. It had so caught the public imagination that within a short time everybody was singing the virtues of 'New Life': "It cools the mouth, refreshes the breath, gives new whiteness to the teeth, stops coughs and colds — there's nothing that 'New Life' can't do!"

On every tram, ferryboat and street corner vendors were crying, 'New Life, New Life!' One day when the three friends were on a tram spreading the news about genuine new life, one passenger shouted, "We haven't got much out of the old life; let's give the new one a try." Then and there he wanted to buy new life. But the brothers explained that real new life is without money or price, it is the free gift of God's grace.

Another day Vahram and Aram were on their way to visit some newly arrived families from Anatolia. At one of the tram stops Aram said, "Come on, let's sing a hymn!" So the two began to sing, "Hallelujah to the Lamb who washed away our sins and gave us new life!" A passenger muttered, "We can't escape these songster-beggars." Immediately another rejoined, "What songsters! These are Jesus-propagandists!"

Vahram and his friends were taken to the police station several times, but after questioning were always allowed to go free. One day, when Vahram was being held in a police station an older sister,

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<sup>8</sup> Atatürk after secularizing the state, put into law that no subject touching religion, including Islam, was to be mentioned in public places.

Rebekah, heard about it and hurried there to pray. The police were amazed to see such a close bond between these people. Vahram explained, "You see, we're brother and sister." But one of the policemen was puzzled. "How can this elderly lady be a sister to someone as young as you?"

One day, again in the tram, Vahram began singing "Lo, He is coming in the clouds, the Lamb that was slain!" Everyone listened with interest. Two young men standing nearby asked Vahram what the song was about. He replied, "It's about Jesus Christ who came down once and was offered as a sacrifice for sinners. He will come a second time to judge those who have not repented. We should be prepared for His coming." One of the passengers, an elderly man, rose angrily to his feet exclaiming, "Efendi<sup>9</sup> this is not a church; it's public transport!" One of the young men retorted, "Sir, why do you interrupt our conversation? Did we ask your opinion?" "Come to your senses," replied the man. "They are feeding you poison." "What has poison got to do with it?" replied the young man. "Can't we think for ourselves? You hear what he's saying — he's talking plain Turkish." In exasperation the man shouted "Police!" At that moment, the tram was passing a police station. The man made the tram stop and forcibly dragged Vahram into the police station. "This man has been singing a spiritual song on the tram," he announced. One of the young men had followed them into the police station. The elderly man became suspicious, requesting to see his identity card and asked him, "How is it that you side with such a person?"

As for the police, they first of all took the elderly man to a room for questioning. Waiting outside, Vahram prayed earnestly. As the elderly man was coming out, Vahram ran and kissed his hand. He said, "Please forgive me sir for arousing your anger." The man was flabbergasted, not knowing what to make of such unaccustomed behavior. Then Vahram was summoned inside for questioning by three officers, but at this juncture the door opened and the elderly man appeared. "I apologise for dragging him here by force," he said. "I withdraw my complaints. Please do not take any action."

When the police chief questioned Vahram about the incident, he explained: "Inspector Efendi, I used to live a sinful life, but one night God showed me the terrors of hell in a dream. For days I was ill and could not eat. This remarkable experience led me to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus forgave all my sin and saved me. He gave me a completely new life. Now I am always filled with joy at my deliverance from hell. No money, pleasure or entertainment could offer such delight. While men are struggling in the slavery of sin, should we keep silent? God commands that all men repent and believe in Christ."

The inspector interrupted, "Don't you know our authority? Singing of hymns and calling people to believe in Jesus is not allowed on the trams." "Sir," said Vahram, "Jesus Christ is coming again to throw Satan into the lake of fire, and Satan will drag many sinners with him. He is the most pernicious enemy of man. Is it out of place to tell men and women to be liberated from Satan's clutches?" The inspector said, "Who doesn't know that sin is wicked? You're not a hoja<sup>10</sup>, neither a priest nor a rabbi. Who are you to praise Jesus on public transport?" Vahram replied, "The motivating force is the transformation Jesus brought about in my own life. Actually, he is the one speaking." One of the policemen asked him, "Which Faculty did you graduate from?" Vahram chuckled, "What Faculty? Police bey, I don't even remember going to school." The policeman mused, "This is really strange. You didn't go to school. Then how can you teach so well?"

The inspector pressed him further: "You say that Christ has transformed your life. Tell us a bit more about that." Vahram explained, "If a vine in a vineyard yields sour, tasteless grapes, the vinedresser prunes it, digs around it and spreads fertilizer on it. Then he waters it and does anything else that needs to be done. But the vine is still the same vine.

In the end he cuts a branch from a vine that is yielding sweet fruit and grafts it onto the useless vine. Only then does the vine begin to produce good fruit. You see, I used to be that vine bearing tasteless fruit. Jesus Christ made the necessary graft into my life through the sacrifice of His blood and I became a different person. My own efforts had not helped at all. When Christ does the work of grafting in the sinner's life, the sinner becomes a saved and purified person." "So no other graft takes, then?" the inspector exclaimed. "Exactly," replied Vahram.

The conversation took on a friendly tone, "Well then, where will you go from here?" "To a prayer

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<sup>9</sup> Efendi - "Mr.", used also as "sir"

<sup>10</sup> Religious teacher. The Sunni branch of Islam, - as practiced in Turkey, is not supposed to make room for clergy, contrary to the Shia branch which is in control of the clergy.

meeting," said Vahram. "And after that, God willing, I'll go home." "I don't want to prolong this affair," said the inspector. "If I refer it to the courts, it will be a lot of involvement for you. Since the man who brought you here has decided to withdraw his complaint, you can go. Only, don't preach on the streets, boulevards and trams again." He gave Vahram's identity card back to him and they warmly parted ways.

## **Chapter 14**

### **HEALING MIRACLES**

A house meeting was in progress. The presence of the Holy Spirit was sensed by all. A believer came in, bringing a hoja with him. The recent converts were sharing their testimonies with joy and delight. The hoja was deeply affected. After the meeting he said to Vahram, "I have no doubt that there is a special power here. I have a sick daughter at home. Could you please come and lay your hand on her and pray? I have faith that she will be healed." The hoja gave his address to him. The house was right beside a mosque. Let's hear the story in Vahram's own words:

"Entering the house at the given address, I prayed aloud with deep earnestness, after which I gave my testimony explaining how Jesus had saved me. Then I left. The girl was healed. Her father spread the news all over, also relating it to other hojas. He explained how his daughter was healed after prayer in the name of Jesus. Shortly thereafter the hoja attended the meeting again and related how his daughter had been healed through prayer. Later on this girl put her trust in Christ the Savior."

Another time a brother was ill. He sent for Vahram to come and pray for him. The Holy Spirit did not permit Vahram to go immediately, but after praying for a while he went. The man said to his wife, "Get a bit of oil in a saucer and let Brother Vahram anoint me and pray." Vahram read James 5:15: *"And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."* As commanded, the man openly confessed his sins and then prayed with special thanksgiving. At that moment he was healed.

A young believing sister had contracted tuberculosis and was at the point of death. She was shivering and delirious with a high fever. When Vahram arrived, a circle of relatives were at her bedside praying. When the prayers were concluded, an inner impulse drew Vahram to the head of the girl's bed. He laid his hand on her head and prayed to the Great Physician. During the night the Lord Jesus spoke to the girl in a vision, "Araksi, I have healed you." Araksi was totally delivered from TB. She was healed. The next day the doctor came again to the house. Not recognising her, he said, "Where is the girl who is wrestling with TB?" Araksi said, "That's me!" and joyfully testified to her miraculous healing. The doctor, unable to constrain himself, burst out: "The power of Christ is truly sublime!" Araksi later married and became the mother of three sons.

A young Christian woman just home from the hospital after childbirth suddenly lost her voice. She could not speak at all; nor could she eat or drink. And, naturally, she could not breast-feed her baby. Her mother-in-law sent word to Vahram. When he arrived he read several miracles of Jesus from Matthew, chapter 8. First he prayed, then he asked her to pray. She knelt down and repeated the prayer taught by Jesus to His disciples (*Matthew 6:9-15*), after which she called out, "My beloved Savior" three times. Afterwards there was an interesting development. The young woman related how she had seen the risen Lord Jesus and how he had delivered her from the control of a dark power. This power had prevented her from eating and drinking. Now she was free. By the time Vahram was about to depart, she was healthy and full of joy.

Vahram would constantly testify to his own healing through the mercy of the Lord and he always prayed for the sick. Yet he avoided placing undue emphasis on physical healing. He held the view that although the body might be healed, in the end it must die and be buried. Conversely, he emphasized the immortality and eternal value of the soul. So he centered his attention on the person's salvation and reconciliation to God.

## **Chapter 15**

### **VAHRAM RESIGNS FROM BIBLE SOCIETY**

Vahram's wide-ranging efforts caused tension in his relationship with the Bible Society. The Society's method everywhere was strictly selling books. The colporteur was not supposed to get involved in witnessing and preaching. When the Society's director once again reminded him of this, Vahram realised that the time had come for him to make a decision. The Holy Spirit had called him to witness, preach and encourage people to commit their lives to Christ. How could he be disobedient to this charge? To make a concession just to avoid trouble was unacceptable. Seven years had come and gone; many books had been sold. He now resolved that this service must come to an end. The director accepted his resignation with deep regret. When this ministry stopped at the end of 1937, Vahram was stripped of the small salary he had been receiving. However, his trust wasn't in the Society, but in his heavenly Father who would not let him go hungry.

The Bible Society director, Lyman McCallum, was very sad to lose such a diligent worker. In fact, he continued to give Vahram a small stipend out of his own pocket. God, the source of every blessing, didn't fail in meeting all of Vahram's needs. One of his supporters was brick-maker Hovannes Jevherian. Whenever he had a suit or coat tailored, or bought a new pair of shoes, he would supply the same for Vahram. Isn't it written in the Scriptures? *"A liberal man will be enriched, and the one who waters will himself be watered"* (Proverbs 11:25).

In 1943 Hovannes Jevherian suffered with the extreme tax imposition placed on the minorities. It was called 'Varlik Vergisi' which means 'tax on wealth.' He hurried to David Giray, thinking he could help him. But to his dismay, he discovered that David was under the same imposition. So the two of them started to pray. While they were praying, Vahram dropped in and said, "Brother Hovannes, don't worry! About this time yesterday I was praying and the Lord revealed to me that your tax imposition would be paid." And by God's provision this happened.

For information's sake: This happened at the height of Hitler's conquest of Europe. Whoever failed to pay this unreasonable imposition on minority business people within two weeks' time, his business and other property, such as house or land, were impounded by the government. Even then, the proceeds of these sales did not suffice to pay the merciless tax. Then the person was shipped to Ashkale in eastern Anatolia to work on road construction for a pittance. Naturally at this ridiculous wage he could never work long enough to wipe out his debt. One can well understand that this forced labor resulted in the death of many minority business people. Finally Hitler's armies started retreating in Europe. This signalled deliverance for the survivors who then returned to Istanbul as broken men.

Vahram shared such aforementioned visions with the brothers and sisters, always bringing encouragement and uplift to their hearts. Often when a brother or sister was undergoing some ordeal, Vahram would have a word from the Lord for that person. The believers had been taught to share all their concerns with each other for prayer, so that even when they were undergoing hard testings they still had confidence in God's care.

Although Vahram severed his relationship with the Bible Society he continued selling books as before, only he bought them at a discount with his own money. He now felt at liberty to witness as he was led and he was also free to attend the house meetings. As the house gatherings expanded a larger meeting place had to be found. The believers began to pray. Overlooking the Golden Horn on the Haskoy hills was a derelict Protestant church building. All the families connected to this church had left the area. There was neither preacher nor caretaker. Vahram was able to secure the key from one of the elders of another church. With the help of all the able-bodied men, the place was put in order and opened for meetings. The provision was certainly from God. Regular meetings were started. At this time when the doors of functioning churches were closed to them Vahram's Lord unlocked an unused church for the many converts when they desperately needed one. During the years of World War II this church became one of the city's important centres for prayer. People walked long distances to attend meetings here.

Meanwhile, on Sunday mornings Vahram was conducting another meeting in Uskudar at the American Academy. They were the only meetings on the Asiatic side. His messages brought rich blessing to many. He considered the Asiatic side of the city crucial for evangelism. He would often visit homes and lead family Bible studies there. One of these places was Maltepe, way out on the Asiatic side where a much-loved Muslim family lived. Vahram would travel from the city to Haydarpasha by ship, then catch the train from there to travel to Maltepe. From the train station he would walk for half an hour to reach their home. One evening he visited until late. Darkness had fallen. The lady of the house offered him a lantern. "Don't worry, woman," said Hasan bey, her

husband. "He walks with his Lord, who will light his way. Nothing can harm him."

The meetings had spread in every direction on both sides of the Bosphorus, but the focal point was in Gedikpasha where the largest concentration of people eager for the Word of God lived. In that congested area, when the weather was hot, doors and windows of the houses would be thrown open. Some of the neighbors were unhappy with this because words of conviction emanating from inside, along with testimonies and songs were heard all around. At times, believers were even beaten as they left the meeting. The Holy Spirit was supporting Christ's witness and the testimony was permeating many areas. This was one of the distinguishing marks of the revival. It began by the Holy Spirit with a tiny spark, but spread like wildfire. On certain occasions, whole families would respond to the Savior's call and immediately start declaring their new faith in Christ.

## Chapter 16

### THE PRIEST'S IN TROUBLE AGAIN!

In 1941, the war raged on in all its fury. The government abruptly drafted men from the minorities whose ages spanned a period of twenty years. In fact, some younger ones discharged shortly before from regular service, were called up again. The task assigned to all non-Turkish draftees was road construction. They were issued brown uniforms to differentiate them from the ordinary soldiers. Vahram and Aram were sent to the same location. Here at Kuri Kemerli, between five and six hundred men were assigned to build a road. From morning to night they slaved away with pick and shovel in all kinds of weather conditions. Naturally, most of them did not know Vahram. Those who saw his devotion to God and how he was encouraging everyone soon started calling him 'the priest'. Many contracted malaria. Aram, knowing Vahram's weak constitution, asked the commanding officer if he might be given lighter work. The sympathetic officer complied and gave him a job in the kitchen.

For any given offence soldiers were put into an old Turkish bath which was being used as a prison. Vahram and Aram volunteered to join them. So the officer said, "Okay; you can stay there for three days." Shut up in an old hamam<sup>11</sup>, what were they going to do? Everyone was telling each other dirty stories, most of them centered on sexual experiences. Aram explained to them the story of Joseph. Vahram related the story of Samson with its bitter consequences. Unbeknown to them, the officer was listening outside. He opened the door and came in. "Vahram, I thought you were an intelligent fellow," he said. "But now you're talking about some imaginary man who shakes the pillars of a great hall and topples the whole building. What a crazy tale!"

Vahram said, "Sir, I didn't invent the story; it's recorded in the Holy Book." The officer was intrigued and wanted to be told every detail of the account. As a result, he gave Vahram permission to hold a meeting every Sunday. Behind such developments, Vahram could always see the intervening hand of his sovereign Lord. This so-called 'military' tenure was full of similar experiences.

Among soldiers there are always some rough characters. They dislike godliness. "Come on, let's pull a trick on Vahram," said one of them. So they planned their scheme. In an out-of-the-way place, they arranged an entertainment with *raki*<sup>12</sup> a strictly forbidden party for soldiers. They wanted to include Vahram. He joined them, but refused to drink. Instead, he opened his Bible and started reading to them. They were not disposed to favorably respond. Suddenly, four of them jumped to their feet, grabbed him and forced *raki* into his mouth — a very upsetting experience for Vahram. In leaving, he sensed the pitiless nature of Satan and felt deep grief for sinners caught in his clutches. Vahram remarked that one of the most effective weapons of Satan in fighting the truth of Christ is firmly holding sinners in his grip by all means. Some of those who saw that Vahram didn't inform the officer about the prohibited *raki* party ridiculed him and called him a coward. Mockery of the preaching of God's word has a very long history (*cf. Acts 17:32*).

One of the soldiers made up his mind to have Vahram swear. Naturally, he refused. When the instigator saw that he couldn't accomplish his aim, he hit Vahram on the head with his fist, causing his nose to bleed. Again Vahram did not run to the officer to complain, nor did he bear a grudge. Christ's life had become his. Another time from a high wall a few fellows threw dirty water on him,

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<sup>11</sup> Hamam - Turkish bath house

<sup>12</sup> *raki* - a strong anise-flavored alcoholic drink, well-known in Turkey



soaking him from head to foot. He said, "Praise the Lord!" From that time on, whenever they heard the cry, "Praise the Lord!" people around would say "The priest's in trouble again!"

At last this hard service was concluded. Much witness had been left behind. He came back to the brothers and sisters in Istanbul as a fortified person with much praise to God for his gracious sustenance. The believers had not slackened in their devotion to God, nor had they given up the meetings. In the absence of Vahram who had been regularly teaching the Word, both men and women gave themselves to prayer. They became a closely-knit family united in Christ. God did not leave their prayers unanswered. He had protected and used Vahram and returned him safely to them.

## Chapter 17

### RENEWED EVANGELISTIC VENTURES

The house meetings were picking up momentum, and again large numbers were attending. Murat Guregian was a young blind teenager. He relates his testimony: "Bored with sitting at home, I decided to walk down to the Marmara seafront. As I was walking along the shore, a middle-aged lady I had never met before approached me. After greeting me, she said there was going to be a house gathering and asked me if I would like to join in. I accepted, as I didn't have anything else to do anyway. With a cane in my hand I followed her. I got on the tram with this woman whose name I later found out was Azniv Hemshire<sup>13</sup>. She took me all the way to Ortakoy. A very gentle-sounding man was explaining about the love of Jesus, the Savior. I learned his name was Vahram. The way he played his violin and led the lively singing captured my heart. That day I repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This happened in 1947." There were many like Murat who were converted at the very first meeting they happened to attend.

New people were coming to the meetings, listening with enthusiasm to God's Word — and most of them got saved! As in the past gatherings, there was hardly room to stand. Usually Vahram preached. Sometimes he read from Charalambos Bostanjoglu's book, "The Second Coming of Christ". Men and women silently wept as they listened. Then they asked questions about the way of salvation and received the grace of God into their lives. To those who were converted, Vahram taught the necessity of holiness, studying the Bible, praying and leading sinners to the Lord.

Vahram's burden for the unsaved was so impelling that in the meetings they could barely extricate themselves from its effect. Many times the Holy Spirit laid someone on his heart and led him to fast and pray until that person got converted. When new believers fell into a static state, he would anoint them with oil and pray for them. He regularly visited the section for the elderly at the Yedikule Armenian Hospital and would tell them of the love and concern of God in very simple language. He led these people who had one foot in the grave into the reality of peace with God. When some referred to their religious accomplishments and good deeds, he would ask them a question: "In your seventy, eighty or ninety years have you managed to live a totally sinless life?" After Vahram departed for the Middle Eastern countries, many of these old people would gather and share how they had been saved through Vahram's insistence. He was a man who helped fill heaven.

How did Vahram relate to Muslims whom he encountered daily? First of all, he showed them deep love and respect. Whenever he started speaking to a Muslim, he first centred on his testimony. He would tell how he had been a sinner with a deep longing for justification, and that he finally realised that Jesus Christ had been hung on the cross for him. When he believed this, Christ redeemed him, snatched him from hell and transferred him to heaven. Afterwards, Vahram would emphasise the uniqueness of the salvation provided by Christ.

Once he had to go to Gureba, one of the city hospitals, for a general check-up. He was examined by eight doctors and their assistants. He told all of them how Christ had saved and healed him. One of the doctors asked for scientific evidence for what he was saying. Without letting Vahram reply another doctor said, "Yes, Jesus is Healer." So the door was open for an effective witness. Vahram was not a person to miss any opportunity.

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<sup>13</sup> hemshire (pronounced 'hemsheereh) -- "sister" in Turkish. Believers address each other with their given name and either 'brother' or 'sister' afterwards, as the case may be.

James K. Lyman, an old Congregational missionary who had spent his lifetime in Turkey said, "The supreme quality of Vahram's life was his unswerving loyalty to Jesus Christ. Vahram taught me many truths and gave me many insights. People would either run to him — which meant their running to Christ — or they would run away from him. In that case it meant that they were running away from Christ and the new life he offered, just as stated in the New Testament: *"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?"* (II Corinthians 2:15, 16).

## Chapter 18

### THE CHAIR, THE CHASE, THE CONSTITUTION

In Vahram's ministry there were naturally some amusing situations. One day he was speaking in a crowded house meeting. Some were enjoying his message; others were obviously disgruntled. Suddenly a husky, well-built fellow walked up to where Vahram was sitting. With amazing ease, he lifted Vahram, chair and all, and removed him bodily out onto the street where he unceremoniously dumped him. Some laughed uncontrollably; others were upset.

Vahram was at a meeting on the island of Kinali where rich Armenians spend the summer. In the meeting there was a woman who had turned to Jesus Christ. Her husband was furious. He warned her, "I strictly forbid you to attend those meetings!" But the woman had a deep hunger for spiritual truth so she determined to go, come what may. When the meeting finished, there was only a few minutes' time to get to the scheduled ferryboat. Vahram said his goodbyes quickly and ran at top speed for the quay. Unbeknown to him, the husband had been waiting outside. Seeing Vahram come out of the house, he chased him. Vahram was racing down the street and the man was at his heels, but couldn't catch him. If he could just get hold of him, he'd give Vahram the thrashing of his life! Vahram was totally unaware of the chase — he was simply running for all he was worth to catch the ferryboat. At last he just managed to jump onto the boat as it was edging away from the quay-side. The man had failed to catch Vahram, but consoled himself with the thought that he had inspired such fear in his intended victim. With great relish he declared to everyone: "I made that man run so fast that when he was cut off on all sides by the sea, he was just able to hurl himself onto the boat. If he hadn't had a stroke of luck, I'd have beaten the living daylights out of him, the poor wretch." The women who knew the real truth of the matter could not stop chuckling to themselves. When Vahram heard what had happened, he praised the Lord for his own deliverance from harm and lifted up a prayer for the salvation of his pursuer.

Boat trips to the Princess Islands, Uskudar, Kadikoy or along the Bosphorus always were looked at as opportunities to spread the Good News. Often a conversation that was started with one person would in a matter of minutes involve others around until it became a public discourse. Selling books provided the starting point for many a friendly conversation, helped spread God's Word, and provided pocket money. People's opinions of all these endeavors differed from person to person. Some bought books, others were interested, still others were hostile and a few mocked at him.

While waiting for the boat at one of the Princess Islands one day, Vahram's attention was drawn to a wealthy Greek man and his wife. After a brief prayer he approached the couple offering them a Greek New Testament. They were not interested. Five minutes later he offered them the Book of Proverbs. The woman glanced through it, was interested and bought it. Vahram withdrew from them and following a silent prayer approached them again. This time he sold them a New Testament. A friend travelling with him asked, "What was it that turned the indifference of this unconcerned couple into such interest?" "It was the power of God in answer to prayer," replied Vahram. Before approaching people, he would always approach God.

Picture Vahram with his violin and Artaki with his harmonica as they stand in an open square playing their instruments, singing hymns and declaring the Gospel of God. What a golden opportunity to spread the Good News to so many people! A policeman appears on the scene to see what is happening. After a while the crowd disperses. The policeman knows Vahram and where he lives. A short time later there is a knock at the door. This policeman summons Vahram and Artaki to the police station. Addressing his chief he says, "My inspector, these men gathered a crowd around them and were preaching about Jesus and Moses." Soberly the inspector says, "Instead of wandering around talking about Jesus and Moses, give yourselves to a worthwhile business that brings in some

cash. What do you think Moses and Jesus can do for you if you've got no money?"

Vahram answers, "Mr. Inspector, money is a good thing, but it can't take anyone to eternity. The good news we proclaim brings people who believe in Jesus to a bright eternity." These words didn't mitigate the inspector. "These men are whacky," he says. "Look, in this country we got laws, and we're going to deal with you by the book." He doesn't want to send them to the state prosecutor without a charge, so he reaches for the constitution on the shelf and sifts through it carefully. He thumbs through the whole book from cover to cover. How strange! He seems to have drawn a blank. He cannot find any mention of this kind of behavior as being unlawful. "There's no law about Moses and Jesus," he mutters. "So how can I send them to the state prosecutor without a charge?" So saying, he lets them both go free. Here was an official who understood and applied the rules of the secular state. Their being brought to him could only have been providential.

The inspector had suggested that they give themselves to some money-making proposition. True, Vahram was penniless. He lived in his sister's home and fellow-believers often invited him home for a meal. Usually he didn't even have enough money in his pocket for the tram, so he would go to meetings on foot. He was living in Topkapi by the old city walls and had to get to a meeting in Gedikpasha near the Covered Bazaar. It was summertime. He didn't even have the ten kurush for the tram, so he had to walk. Praying as he walked, he arrived at the house an hour later. Thirty people were waiting for him and soon they were taken up with worshipping the Lord and hearing Vahram's message. As people were dispersing after the lively and heart-warming meeting, an elderly sister shook his hand, pressing some small change into his palm. With this he was able to jump on a tram and get back to Topkapi.

Another day there was a very refreshing meeting in Gedikpasha. It was winter and the weather was cold. The last tram was at ten to one in the morning. The meeting went on and on, and he missed the tram. Knocking at the door of an elderly sister, he asked if she might have a place for him to spend the night. She had no spare bed. He went on to another house. The woman here said to him, "If you don't mind sharing a bed with my husband, come in; I'll sleep on the floor."

## Chapter 19

### BOTH SALVATION AND RESTORATION

A woman was seeking the Lord for eight years. She would spend whole nights in various churches, sometimes lying in dusty attics crying out and pleading in prayer until morning. Yet she couldn't find the assurance that she had obtained peace with God and the certainty of eternal life. One day on a street she saw a hamal<sup>14</sup> lugging a basket of coal on his back. He was humming the tune of a hymn as he went along. She thought that this hamal straining under the heavy load might be a true Christian. Hoping that he might be able to point her to God she called out, "When you have delivered your load, would you mind coming to my home?"

When the porter arrived at her home she asked him, "Do you know the way that leads to heaven?" The porter declared that she needed to be like the saints and that to reach such a level she had to go to church, prostrate herself on the ground, give generously to the poor, fast and pray constantly. "But for eight years I've been doing all that," said the woman, "and still I have no assurance that I shall get to heaven. Instead of these things, I'm going to perform a kindness to you in your need." So she proceeded to cut the porter's hair and trim his nails, and shaved his beard. She threw his lice-infested shirt into the fire and furnished him with a brand-new one. Pressing some money into his hand, she sent him off to the nearest hamam. After all these works of mercy she hoped that her soul might be blessed with the peace she sought. Cruel disappointment again mocked her. Instead of experiencing spiritual release, she felt only coldness inside her soul.

She started to read about the lives of the saints; all were very splendid and remarkable, but what was the relevance to her? One day she went to see her sister who had some joyful news to share. "I have met a very interesting man," she said. "He's a living saint. May I bring him to your home?" Immediately, the woman's curiosity was aroused. "Oh, yes, find him and bring him to me as soon as

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<sup>14</sup> hamal - porter. A hamal has a saddle on his back on which heavy loads are tied and carried. Being a hamal is having the lowest job in Turkey.

possible!" she earnestly begged. Finding Vahram, the sister said, "Can you come with me immediately to my older sister's home?" Vahram was always ready to act on such urgent calls.

When Vahram reached her home, his first question was, "Do you have sin in your heart?" "You've put your finger on my problem exactly," she said. And she began to unburden herself: "My sin is very great. I am crushed under its weight. I don't know how to get rid of it — I've tried everything." Vahram sweetly sang a hymn of invitation to Christ. Then he clearly explained how God is love and offers salvation to the sinner through his Son, Jesus Christ. Like one who has just stumbled upon a whole new world, the woman cried, "I understand, I understand!" Joyfully she went on, "I am now putting my trust in Christ, receiving the forgiveness and peace He offers." The blessings of salvation she had vainly sought for so many years finally became hers.

Vahram was not only seeking out sinners to lead them to the grace of God, he was also moved with compassion towards backsliders. Whenever he received news of someone who had strayed from the life of faith to love for the world, he would be consumed with pathos to lead him back to the Lord. After prayer he would go to see him. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and filled with the love of Christ, he would approach that person and re-introduce him to the reassuring love of Jesus Christ.

On one occasion, he learned of the arrival in Istanbul of someone who had come to Jesus Christ while in Anatolia but had since gone back to the pursuit of pleasure. The man was looking for a friend of his and hearing that Vahram was the only person who knew where he was, came reluctantly to Vahram's home. Vahram was on his knees praying at the time. When the door opened and the visitor caught a glimpse of his face, radiant with joy, he was deeply affected. Vahram at prayer was truly transported to heaven. The man was immediately convicted of sin and pled that the Holy Spirit would grant him the same joy and radiance. He genuinely repented and fell on his knees to pray with Vahram. The backslider was restored and promised to follow Christ. He had long before given up carrying a New Testament, so Vahram gave him a new one. He never forgot that day — and never let go of that New Testament. From then on, he too sought to restore backsliders who had made shipwreck of their lives. *"Save some, by snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23a).*

Suzan was offended by another sister. She unburdened her heavy heart to Vahram. "Sister, it's normal for offences to come. We must know how to let them go. When I became a Christian, my Lord showed me that I must not bear a grudge against anyone in my heart. He is your Lord, too. Listen to his word." The grudge that Suzan had been carrying vanished.

Vahram's ministry encompassed both men and women. Hundreds of women believed in the message of salvation they had heard from him. This man who never married extended to many women the ministry of reconciliation through Christ. In this way he demonstrated the equality for women in God's kingdom. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to apply to him this passage from Scripture: *"This continued for many years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord..." (Acts 19:10).*

## **Chapter 20**

### **NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER**

The teenager who had come from Sungurlu to Istanbul to establish himself in his trade harboured within a deep craving to discover the living God. His intensifying search in Istanbul finally led him to the God of salvation. The Holy Spirit was now using this man, once a seeker himself, to bring countless other seekers to the same joy and blessing. Eventually a genuine revival occurred, spreading from house to house and from one end of the city to the other. It was not organised by any human ingenuity or commercial interest. The Holy Spirit with His own authority and sufficiency drew many a simple person to the riches of God. Vahram was used to bring the prodigal life of many to a halt. He elevated the concept of faith to a plane above a routine religious exercise. He guided lives from uselessness to total usefulness.

The revival resulted in lively gatherings where the redeeming power of Jesus Christ was experienced in wayward lives. The sole guiding principle was God's Holy Word; the evident power was that of the Holy Spirit and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who effected the new birth. The God to whom Vahram belonged was the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory, constituting one holy being, creating, redeeming, sanctifying, revealing, teaching, strengthening and ultimately

rewarding or judging all mankind. Vahram knew how to discern God's voice and obey it. In his thinking this was the prerequisite for usefulness to bring salvation and purpose to lost people. As stated in the Scriptures: *"For the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (II Corinthians 10:4, 5).* The Word of the prophet Zechariah in the Old Testament was being fulfilled: *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice" (Zechariah 4:6, 10).*

Vahram's success in the service of God derived from his total dependence on God's Word, always referring to it for the support of his words. He used it systematically in every situation and applied it to every difficulty. He believed that the Word of God was trustworthy, speaking to man's condition. Whether selling and distributing the Scriptures, quoting them from memory or preaching, Vahram knew how effectual God's Word was. Varied experiences in his own life confirmed this stance. When he would say to anyone, "Look what is written!" this word came over as an underpinning of God's authority. Vahram's messages always were saturated with truths from the Word. He would never waste his time uttering a word insupportable by the Holy Scriptures. Without formal education or theological training, uninformed about the classics, lacking knowledge of languages, still this servant of God was able to come alongside thinkers and intellectuals in his unconventional manner. He could open up the most profound subjects because his inspiration was the Word of God and his instructor the Holy Spirit. And his heart was burning with zeal.

In this admirable dependence upon the Word he trained himself to write simple poems. Reading these, he would call his hearers to repentance and new birth. 'Spare time,' or 'killing time,' were not in his vocabulary. In an unoccupied moment, he either prayed or jotted poems on scraps of paper. He was intent on sharing every blessing and joy he experienced with others. It was his delight to relate any new spiritual insight to his fellow-Christians. Teaching God's truths to new believers was extremely important to him. Along with studying the Word, he taught the new believer to be a praying person. To those just starting in the faith he would suggest topics of prayer including the request, "Please pray for me." Through this he would lead them into effective intercession. He had no training in psychology, but he seemed intuitively to know how to address the most intricate problems and delicate situations.

Vahram had absolute faith in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to heal, but he was never known as a 'healer'. He would certainly have objected to such a designation. He believed that anyone's prayer of faith could bring healing. Suzan Hemshire was a new believer. One day, he went to her home. He was suffering with a bad earache, so he asked her to put her hand on his ear and pray in faith to the Lord. His request sprang from his own deep faith. He now wanted to impart this same faith to her. Suzan prayed. The next day he visited her again and gave her the cheerful news, "The Lord healed my ear in answer to your prayer."

In one of the house meetings a substantial sum of money had been given. It was sent to brothers and sisters in Haskoy with instructions to use it to help a needy family. A New Year's Eve service had been arranged at the Haskoy church. In spite of the snowy weather and that the church was surrounded by a vast cemetery creating an eerie atmosphere, many came. People in the neighborhood were also invited. On the way a few believers met a child looking for a house. But alas, that house had just collapsed and the family had retreated to a poor shelter. The meeting was postponed, and the believers all hurried to the market quite a distance away. They bought as much food as they could carry and then returned, presenting it to the destitute family. The poor people couldn't believe their eyes. "You are angels sent from God," they said. In this way the brothers and sisters showed that social responsibility and spiritual witness go hand in hand. "That was the happiest New Year's Eve I ever had!" Vahram remarked later.

## **Chapter 21**

### **YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN**

While Vahram was being used by God as a blessing and enrichment to many, a few people were speaking against him, sometimes even smearing him. Others couldn't stand him at all. But no one could recall a single instance where he reacted adversely to criticism. At all times towards all people he would act with the love of Christ. He would show affection toward those who derided him; he

even spoke well of them and prayed earnestly for them. He never entertained hatred, anger or retaliation in his heart. Anyone wanting to see a person in a constant mood of happiness could see it in Vahram. Whatever he was in private, he was in public. He would always point to the Lord as the spring of his joy and sufficiency. He often said, "Passing events can cause a great deal of distress, but our Lord supplies constant contentment. We must always look up to Him."

Vahram witnessed an easily understandable way to explain salvation. He used a simple illustration to everyone he talked to. He would point to one place and say, "You are here." He would then point to another place and say, "Christ was here. He took your place and transferred you to the place of His holiness. Believe it now!" The former place represented sinfulness and the latter holiness. In this way, he helped countless people to commit their lives to Christ. He would say, "If I don't bear witness there is no happiness for me." After a fruitful meeting, he would jubilate, "The Lord abundantly blessed everybody and saved souls."

He communicated at the level of his hearers and always with humility. He could speak as a child to children, as a young man to young people, as a thinking man to the educated. He would not miss any opportunity. He found it easy to open up a conversation and establish a good rapport with anyone. His unpretentiousness and ready smile inspired confidence in everyone. He came across as a believer who could be trusted. The distinctive quality of his character was his total devotion to the sinless Christ, whom he as a mortal man scrupulously emulated. He was a Christian who could say with the Apostle Paul, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (*1 Corinthians 11:1*). He could effectively combat spiritual lethargy around him through the power of the Holy Spirit. He would express his joy with exclamations of 'Hamdolsun,'<sup>15</sup> 'Hallelujah!' Whenever he said, "Christ is alive!" that indicated special joy in his heart. Sometimes in his exuberance he would call out to anyone around him, 'Brother!' or 'Sister!' To the query, "What do you want, Brother Vahram?" his response was, "Hallelujah!" Instead of engaging in chatter or gossip, he would unreservedly express himself in hearty praises.

To call him a simple man and on some occasions simplistic would not be a misnomer. As far as balance and intellect were concerned, there were times when he spoke imprudently. But his uninhibited, generously expressed out-flowing love made up for his deficiencies. The topic at hand with anyone Vahram met was the salvation of that person's soul. Conversation about anything else had to come later. He had the knack of getting to the heart of the matter in a brief time. When questioned about why he gave his whole emphasis to this subject he would say, "Some opportunities in life come only once." He was firmly convinced that the way to bring someone to repentance was through love. This can be verified by the many he literally pushed into the Kingdom of God. And they in turn pushed others.

To people who came from a traditional Christian background he would ask, "Have you experienced the new birth?" Some in a rather hesitant and embarrassed manner would say 'yes.' Knowing their real condition Vahram would say, "But your face shows no sign of the joy that salvation brings. If you truly repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be pardoned of your sin and find true happiness." In this way he led many to the forgiveness of their sins and assurance of salvation.

At a time when there were very few spiritual books or magazines in Turkish, Vahram's life was the most effective epistle being read by many. He took special pleasure in selling or distributing books where Jesus Christ was the central topic. For him the dissemination of God's Word by every possible means was a joyful involvement. He lived and worked a couple of generations before the explosion of mass communication. We each can ask ourselves, "Am I communicating the testimony of Christ with the same zeal as Vahram did? Do I speak out for my Savior and also utilize the advanced technology at my disposal?" God's Word had truly made its home in Vahram, and he conveyed the message of life and death to everyone he met.

It was unthinkable for him to indulge in trite conversation. His commitment to the testimony of Christ affected his fellow-believers in their own life and witness. Among his close prayer companions were Moscho Bekleyen, Hagopos Karakochian, James K. Lyman and a few others. He loved to pray with both young and old. *Jesus Christ said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).* The outworking of Vahram's encounter with Christ could be noted in the distinctives of his life: repentance, justification by faith, assurance of eternity in Christ's presence and an exemplary everyday life with persevering witness.

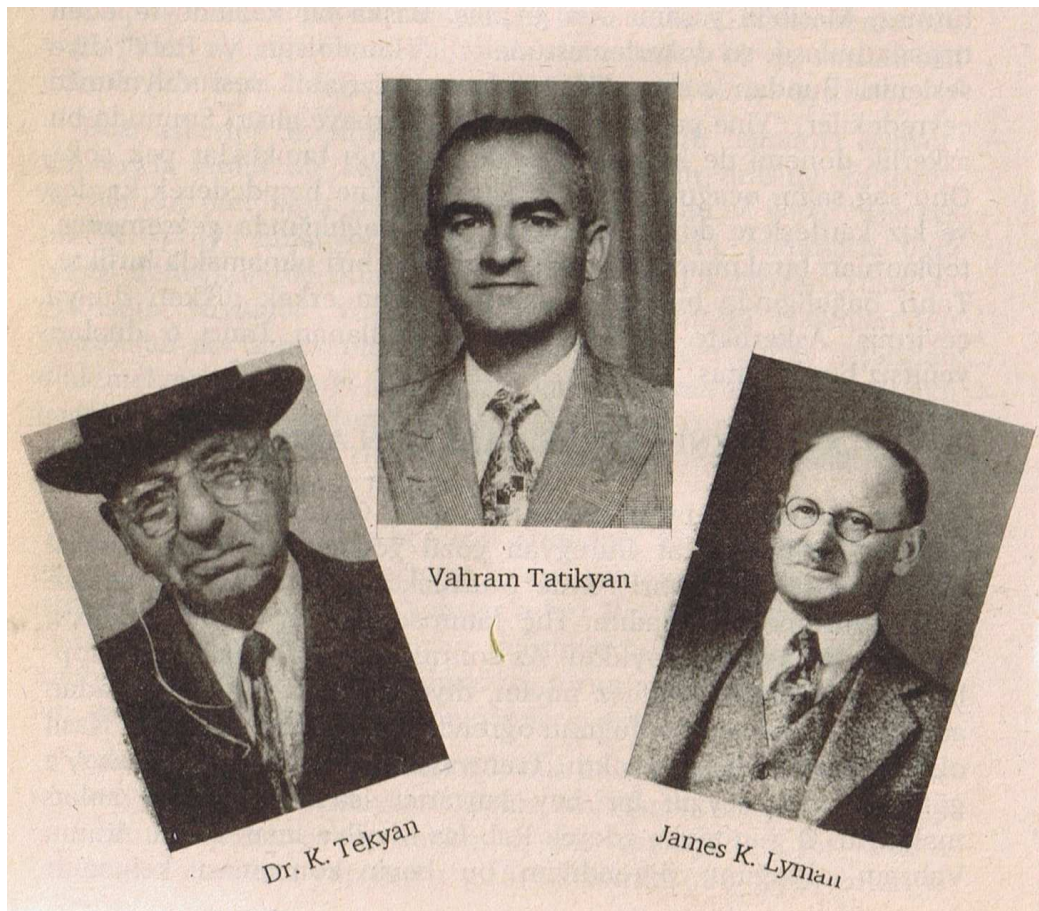
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<sup>15</sup> Hamdolsun - "May praise be given"

As an enlightened person on these basic truths, he was able to enthusiastically delve into the depth of theological subjects. His ability to grasp and expound God's Word sprung from the motivating reality of God's grace in his own life. He would always silence every sort of misguided and erroneous teaching in a loving manner. The so-called 'Jehovah's Witnesses' always avoided him. On the other hand, some people compared him to Elijah or John the Baptist. Like Amos and Ezekiel he had a definite call, and like Philip the evangelist he constantly sought to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He would share his visions with others. He always started every visit with prayer, this way setting the tone for a spiritual conversation.







*Memorial service for Haralambos Bostanjoglu, with his widow Aneta*





*With the brothers in Istanbul*

## **Chapter 22**

### **VAHRAM'S PREACHING STYLE**

We have before us a man who has never been to school, neither taken lessons in speaking, nor been instructed in the art of homiletics. Throughout church history there has been no lack of great preachers of whom Apollos is foremost. John Chrysostom, the 'Golden Mouth,' is among the notable greats. Men like him could rivet the attention of his hearers and draw them to life's most crucial decision. They are remembered with deep appreciation. Effective preachers capable of forceful communication are sought after universally. These may be well trained and prepared for the pulpit, but always the prerequisite is that they be anointed by the Holy Spirit.

When called to God's service, Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt? ...Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and of tongue." God replied, "Who has made man's mouth? ...I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." When Moses still hesitated, God mentioned his brother Aaron, saying, "He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you..." In this way the matter was settled (Exodus 3:11; 4:10-12, 16). But the outcome was striking. Not even once did Aaron speak either to Pharaoh or to the people. In spite of all Moses' fear and reticence, the LORD who called and sent him also made him a very effective speaker. Moses authoritatively defied Pharaoh and spoke to that vast congregation as a qualified leader, bringing many to the knowledge of YAWEH. When we look into the life and call of the prophet Jeremiah, we see the same development (1:4-10).

The effective preacher anointed by God is neither a born orator nor a brilliant and highly-trained communicator. God won't use those who consider themselves in this class. The called evangelist or powerful preacher is one touched by the Holy Spirit, himself affected by Him and able to affect others. We are dealing with this kind of evangelist-preacher.

When Vahram took his place behind the sacred pulpit or led a house gathering, he could carry

people along with his lively, instructive messages. This was the doing of the Holy Spirit. His mouth was anointed by his Maker. He was under the absolute control of the One who inspired the Word and made it effective. So Vahram was able to explain God's living Word with power, bringing sinners to conviction through the Word. He induced men and women who realised their sinful condition to take the step of faith to the Savior. These few features typified his ministry.

His sermons or his witness were not mere suggestions of what course to take in life. Rather, they were the application of God's inspired Word to effect visible results in lives. He never hesitated to point out his own failures and incidents of disobedience. He would display the effect of God's Word in his own life. He never put himself up as one who had attained. What had been accomplished in his own life could be realised by everybody. Stressing this with confidence, he would invite his listeners to the same commitment. To appreciate this better, read his message entitled, "A Leaking Cup at a Fountain in Damascus" at the end of this book.

Very relevant to all his activities was his prayer life. He would take every matter, personal or pastoral, in prayer to God. The important work ever before him was not his own, but the Lord's. Therefore in all things he drew near to God by faith and pled with Him in fasting to complete His own work. Before talking to men and women about God, he always felt the need to talk to God about them. This constituted a major part of his prayer life. In his view, whatever thought is to philosophy, so is prayer to an effective ministry. The promises of God given to Jeremiah come to mind in this connection: *"I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them"* (Jeremiah 5:14). *"Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"* (Jeremiah 23:29). *"If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot"* (Jeremiah 20:9). God's Word was brought to men and women by His faithful servant with visible impact.

## Chapter 23

### THE BLESSEDNESS OF A LIFE DEDICATED TO GOD

Among the believers, Fazilet Hemshire was an exemplary follower of Christ. Her life was above reproach. This suited her name which means 'virtue'. Being a Turkish woman, she was persecuted severely. Once she was even taken to the *vali*<sup>16</sup> of Marash from which city she came. The vali questioned her in exact terms about why she had abandoned Islam and followed Christianity. Her bold witness to the vali became kind of a legend among believers. She said she found no reality in Islam, and had made her commitment not to a religion but to Jesus Christ, and that no person on earth could move her away from Him. Vahram thought Fazilet would make a wonderful life partner and approached her for marriage. She showed no interest whatsoever, so for Vahram the subject of marriage was dropped and never mentioned again. The thought of marriage had occurred to him a few times before, but he had never taken any serious initiative. To live in the reality of God's call was always his first love. His heavenly Father gave him several sisters in the Lord to be helpers, such as Aygul, Sirpuhi, Altun, Rebekka, Hayguhi... These rallied to his every need, always helping and supporting him more effectively than any mother or natural sister ever could have done.

Those who followed his life and looked into his spiritual service sometimes asked the question: "Could this man be a mystic?" The pre-reformation scene of mystics in Europe is known by those acquainted with church history. As far as it can be ascertained, he knew nothing about mysticism. Probably he had never even heard of it. The only languages he could speak properly were Armenian and Turkish. Later he picked up conversational Arabic and Spanish. He had never had the opportunity to read the life and works of such well-known mystics as Thomas a Kempis, St. Bernard de Clairvaux, St. Hildegard, Master Eckhart, Madame Guyon or Francois Fenelon.

Probably he bordered on mysticism with an element of mystical devotion to God, an extraordinary sense of worship, and persistent intercessory life. He was deeply dedicated to the sinless Christ and to the infallible Word of God. He had a non-complaining attitude in all circumstances, such as when he went hungry. He had a different view of the world, of people and events than that of the ordinary person. He practiced fasting and avoided superfluous words. Some observed that they often saw his

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<sup>16</sup> vali - governor of a province

lips moving, and they wondered what it meant. Supplicating on his knees was his daily practice, and he was in continuous prayer as he went around. Bernard de Clairvaux (1091-1153) expresses it in this hymn:

*"Jesus the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills my breast;  
But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
And in Thy presence rest."*

The supreme passion of his life was to feed his soul on God's Word in order to fully know his Savior. He fervently pursued a deeper understanding of Christ's redemptive offer, for which he expressed his boundless devotion. The longing of his soul was to be so comforted by Christ's resources that he could comfort others and draw unbelievers into the riches of this fascinating life. The consequence of his search was the discovery of Christ's reality resulting in a testimony which activated enthusiasm and commitment in others to pursue the same course for their lives. His deep desire to bring sinners to Christ may be explained by this whole-hearted commitment to his Lord's commission.

He was not a prophet of noble descent like Isaiah or David, but a man with a prophetic message that drew many to the reality of justification by faith. He humbly declared God's holy Word with the skill of Apollos which attracted people away from the natural course they were following to the unseen kingdom that is above.

Vahram was just himself. There was nothing pretentious or counterfeit about him. Among God's servants having their roots in Anatolia he holds a special place. Only eternity will reveal what was achieved through him in Istanbul in the thirties and forties. His heart overflowed with love towards everyone — Muslims, Christians, Jews, irreligious folks. He reckoned himself debtor to all. It was not unusual for him to attend three or four house meetings in one day, and at each meeting he would lead men and women to Christ. It was highly unlikely for him to leave any meeting without someone being converted or being drawn closer to the Savior. Beginning in Turkey, he proclaimed the good news of God with singular devotion in the Middle East and then in South America, as far as Chile.

*"But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed?  
And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?  
And how are they to hear without a preacher?  
And how can men preach unless they are sent?  
As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'"*  
*(Romans 10:14, 15)*

## **Chapter 24**

### **ANATOLIAN VENTURE**

By this time many in Istanbul had found new life in Christ. House meetings were held daily in various parts of the city where the steadily growing number of new converts were sharing exciting testimonies. Among these were Armenians who had moved from Anatolia to Istanbul. They kept impressing upon Vahram the spiritual needs of the Armenian remnant back in Anatolia who were left without scriptures or churches. They urged him to visit their towns and villages. Before promising anything, he spent time in earnest prayer. He was determined not to make any move by the suggestions of others neither by his own will. He wanted to be sure of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For a long time he prayed, "Oh Lord, if you are guiding me to Anatolia, please open the way before me."

One day God revealed to him His will in these words, *"I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt... I will go down with you to Egypt"* (Genesis 46:3, 4). In receiving this command, Vahram thanked his Lord, accepting this promise as a God-supplied passport. It was now the mid-forties. He went down to the Galata wharf accompanied by two brothers who were assisting him to carry his bags laden with books. He bought a ticket for the ship bound for Samsun, an important port on the Black Sea. Many people were sending off their relatives and friends. Right

there he was able to sell quite a number of books. After a hearty send-off by the brothers he boarded the ship. In his cabin he knelt down and prayed. For many years he had been in the midst of believers. The nearness of brothers and sisters had always provided warm support.

Now however he was the only Christian in this vast crowd on the ship. He was a servant of Christ set apart for the advance of God's work. Satan whispered in his ear, "Don't ever attempt to sell books in the ship; you could get yourself into serious trouble." Vahram responded within, "Is not my living Lord with me? Are not the many believers left behind interceding for me that the trip will be safe and fruitful?" By bringing these questions to his mind the Holy Spirit was reminding him that he was on the ship with a commission to sell books. So he started to pray that God's program would be carried on effectively.

He mentioned to a passenger that he wanted to sell books on board. The man responded, "Splendid! All these people on the boat have plenty of time to read. What are you waiting for? Get up and start selling!" Through an unknown passenger, the Holy Spirit was prodding him into action. Again he prayed and took up his work. The response was amazing. By the time they reached Samsun, he had sold nearly a hundred pieces of Scripture, including some Bibles and New Testaments. Wanting to start low-key, he first offered Proverbs or the Psalms, as was his custom in reaching out to Muslims. Vahram later wrote, "I approached a student and offered him Proverbs and the Psalms. He immediately responded, 'No, I want the life story of Jesus,' so I sold him a New Testament." This unexpected boost cheered him greatly.

The chief cook seemed to be extremely distressed. "What's the matter, my friend?" asked Vahram. "Tell me about what's troubling you." The man explained that his son had recently been sentenced for a crime and was now in jail. "I comforted him," said Vahram, "explaining the all-surpassing love of Jesus Christ and his offer of salvation. Then I presented him with a book as my gift. He was genuinely thankful, smiling as he received it. He was truly comforted. He couldn't thank me enough. Wanting to help me in some way, he explained in detail the discount fares of the Maritime Lines." Establishing such genuine friendships was a special gift of Vahram's.

Eventually the ship docked in Samsun. Vahram's heart was full of praise. He started visiting a few Christian families, most of them Armenians. He got acquainted with a successful businessman in his shop who told him that he had many Muslim friends. This man immediately purchased thirty-three Scripture portions to offer as gifts to them. Then the businessman proceeded to pose a few irrelevant questions that he himself was often encountered with:

1. Could it be that this book has been abrogated?
2. How should we speak to folks involved in magic and fortune-telling?
3. What could the Apostle Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' have been?

Vahram answered each question appropriately from Scripture: *Isaiah 34:16; 8:19, 10; II Corinthians 12:7-10*. A Muslim man who happened to be listening in expressed his satisfaction from the answers and bought a New Testament. Soon after, Vahram became acquainted with a born-again Armenian woman named Takuhi. She took him on visits from house to house. New joy came into many homes as men and women heard the Word of the Lord with delight. A few were saved, trusting in the love and grace of the Savior.

Later he visited a drinking joint. The owner was an Armenian. Both he and the customers purchased Scriptures. Vahram explained that the Savior had power to save sinners. One of the customers said, "I dragged myself here very unwillingly. I've not been able to find help anywhere. Let's see if Jesus can help me." He immediately bought four Scripture portions. Vahram's time in Samsun was filled with new experiences which offered him opportunity to bear witness for Jesus.

After completing his mission in Samsun, he boarded the train for Amasya. True to custom, Vahram bowed his head and prayed. In the next compartment was a family with children. He struck up a friendship with them and offered to help them. Touched with the love shown by this stranger the man asked where Vahram was from, what he did and where he was going. He bought a Bible. In fact, Vahram sold many books on the train.

The train finally pulled into the dilapidated station of Amasya. There was an Armenian church here, and on this particular day the travelling priest was present for a special visit. He was so pleased that Vahram was selling Bibles. He commended him saying, "You're doing the best work possible!" After a while the priest officiated in a church liturgy, but the people couldn't understand it. Vahram asked

the priest, "May I explain in Turkish the verse to which you referred in the liturgy?" The priest was only too happy to comply. The particular text was, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).*

Taking these words of Christ Vahram expounded a lively message about the death of Jesus. "Every sinner ought to be benefited by His death and come to God as a fruit of Him who died." Before he even finished his words, one of those present asked, "Can I obtain the book where these truths are recorded?" Nobody wanted to go home. They said, "The priest comes here only once a year, but we need these truths every day." Vahram promised to pray about the possibility of making another visit, reassuring them that he would make every effort to come again. A young woman and her daughter had never seen a New Testament. Like a traveller parched with thirst who has discovered water in an oasis, they desperately clung to the book. A woman dressed in black was in deep mourning at the loss of her son. Through Vahram, the Holy Spirit lifted the woman's soul. These women entrusted their lives to Christ as their Savior. Someone who years before had obtained a Bible only to have it snatched away by a spiritually hungry friend was overjoyed to find a Bible once again. An eleven-year-old girl wanted badly to pray out loud, but could not manage it. After Vahram talked to her, she was saved and then freely lifted up words of praise to the Savior. Vahram joined the Sunday liturgy and assisted the priest in the ritual. This made a deep impression on all who attended.

Vahram went to visit a Muslim hoja. He read to him the passage of the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. "For three years I have been looking for a New Testament, but couldn't find one, and now you have brought one right to my home," said the hoja. He bought a copy and gave his address. At this juncture another hoja arrived and reprimanded Vahram, exclaiming, "This book has been abrogated!" Later on he raised the question, "How can a person know God?" Vahram answered persuasively with a Scripture verse: *"God the righteous judge is slow to show his anger, but he is a God who is always enraged by those who refuse to repent" (Psalm 7:11 – Jerusalem Bible).*

Now the hoja came with another question, this time about spiritists and mediums. Vahram answered by quoting from Deuteronomy 18:9-14. The hoja was interested in the subject of the *Paraclete*<sup>17</sup> (John 16:7-13). When Vahram had intelligently answered his question, the hoja apologised for getting angry and bought a Bible. He even suggested arranging a meeting between Vahram and other hojas, but Vahram discreetly declined.

An Armenian wedding had been arranged in Amasya. Many Muslims were among the guests. The wedding family wanted Vahram to attend and also bring a message. He read the account of the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11) and the great joy Jesus brought to the wedding banquet. They had never heard a speech like this in Turkish at a wedding. They proposed that he come to their city two or three times a year.

After visiting Merzifon where the famous American Anatolia College once offered a broad education, he headed to neighboring Gumushajikoy. On the way, the bus broke down. The driver announced that the repairs would take some hours. He advised the passengers to walk the rest of the way, a journey of about one and a half hours on foot. The passengers shouldered their bags and began walking. But Vahram had a large carton of books as well as his bag. He was going to visit many families in Gumushajikoy and he needed the books for them. The Lord granted him special strength to carry both his bag and the carton of books. He trudged on for nearly two hours, the load getting heavier as he went along. But his thoughts carried him back to the gospel messengers of earlier times in this land who had walked much longer distances to carry the Good News to needy people. He praised his Lord, saying, "They walked with heavy loads not for a mere two hours, but for many days. And if you, dear Christ, bore the weight of the cross to the hill of Golgotha for me, what is a two-hour walk for your sake?" Sustained by these touching thoughts, he pressed on, and the burden seemed as nothing.

Reaching the town at last, he gave thanks to the Lord. Starting with one person, the circle of contacts soon increased, some developing into friendships. Coincidentally, here too a wedding was about to begin. Without hesitation the family invited Vahram and within a few hours he found himself among the wedding guests. What setting could be more suitable for evangelism than a wedding! The experience of Amasya was being repeated here.

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<sup>17</sup> Paraclete - an insulting tradition among Muslims claims that the Paraclete of whom Jesus spoke was Mohammed. This they manage by deliberately altering the vowels of the word to make it read "Periclete".

When he went out to make house visits the next day, he met many people who were longing to hear God's Word, to receive Christ, or to possess the books he had carried those two hours along the road. One young man ordered ten Bibles from Istanbul, giving the money in advance. Such was the happy outcome of the visit to Gumushajikoy.

Frequent bus breakdowns were nothing unusual in those days. His bus broke down at Turhal, on the way to Tokat. It seemed as if it would never be repaired. Vahram had no plans to stop at Turhal, but here was an unexpected door of opportunity before him. He prayed that the Lord would provide contacts with Armenians who would receive him. His enquiries were leading nowhere, but the Lord directed him to persevere in his search. At last he met an Armenian who was a man of means. He invited Vahram to his home. As they were talking, the man's twelve-year old son begged, "Please, father, don't let this man leave!" So the man very cordially invited him to spend the night. "I'll stay on one condition," said Vahram, "if you arrange a meeting in your house this evening and invite everyone who would like to come." This request was gladly accepted. It was already getting dark and a porter was sent to fetch Vahram's luggage from the bus terminal. Five families gathered that evening, excitement on every face. For a long time these Armenians had not heard God's Word. They owned no Scriptures. Vahram's host was grieving over the loss of his twenty-two-year-old brother, so with love and sympathy, Vahram pointed him to comforting words from the Scriptures. What a heart-warming meeting followed that evening! People couldn't believe what was happening. They found joy in God's presence. Several repented and believed in Jesus as their Savior. Vahram sold books to all who were interested. The next day he went on to Tokat with deep thanksgiving.

Vahram arrived in Tokat in joyful expectancy. This was the place where the great missionary, Henry Martyn (1781-1812), was buried. A woman who had trusted Christ in Istanbul was now living here. She arranged an evening meeting in her home and a number of people attended. Some responded to the call of Christ for salvation. Almost everybody bought books. Young people knelt and praised God and declared their love for Jesus Christ. There was an atmosphere of spiritual uplift in the house. One family there had written several times to Istanbul asking for a Bible, but had received no response. Now everyone was full of joy for possessing their own copy of the Bible. They earnestly pled with Vahram to visit them again.

From Tokat he went on to Sivas. By God's provision, there was someone in every place who volunteered to take him around. In Sivas his guide was an eighty-year-old woman. She knew every nook and cranny of the city as well as she knew every corner of her own house. They went from section to section and from house to house. Many people were blessed. The words of Jesus Christ were fulfilled: *"And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you"* (Matthew 10:11-13).

He enlightened many people whose knowledge about Jesus Christ was practically nil. The Armenian children were totally ignorant of the fascinating life of Jesus Christ. As he and his eighty-year-old guide were entering a neighborhood, a little boy threw stones at them. Vahram approached him and asked his name. The boy said, 'Hovannes.' Hearing his name Vahram realized he was an Armenian child. Vahram began telling him stories from the Bible which told of Christ's love. The child was so excited that he ran around the neighborhood and collected ten friends to hear these stories with him. These children between six and twelve years of age hung on every word of these precious stories. They had never heard of Christ's love and that He had died for them on the cross.

The mother of one of the children noticed what was happening and called Vahram and the old sister to her house. When the same stories geared to the adult level were related to the woman, she started to weep. Vahram asked her, "Why don't you tell these beautiful Bible stories to the children yourself?" Lamenting bitterly, she replied, "How can such ignorant people as we teach anybody anything?" Right there, the woman repented and believed wholeheartedly in Christ as her Savior. In each place he visited, the Holy Spirit supported the Word for the necessary impact upon hearts. Some of the children prayed that they might be washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ. The woman took a copy of the Psalms and at Vahram's suggestion began to teach the children the Twenty-third Psalm. A lot of books were sold in that section of town. A Christian girl took her Bible to school and her Turkish teacher liked it so much that she began to read from it to the class. Whenever she couldn't understand a passage, she sent the child to her parents and asked them to explain it, thinking that because they were Armenians they would know.

There were many house meetings in Sivas. Evening after evening people gathered in God's heart-

lifting presence. Many broke down in repentance and entered into a living relationship with Christ. Until then, they had been Christian in name only. Sample books were left in book-shops on consignment and orders taken for books to be shipped from Istanbul. Only one bookseller refused his offer, and Vahram prayed for him as he left the shop. After a rewarding time in Sivas, he left the place. Many families and shopkeepers were talking about the Christ presented by this man. The love of Jesus had passed to others through him.

The last place he visited before returning to Istanbul was Ankara. He found the local Christians here indifferent and ignorant, engrossed in their daily business pursuits. Their condition oppressed him. Eventually he came across one or two believers. They prayed together and the oppression left him. Meeting some foreign believers, he immediately sensed a spiritual kinship, even though he did not know their language. Their meeting places were made available to him and, staying fourteen days in Ankara, he was able to organise several meetings. Many people repented of their sins and found God's grace in these gatherings. A note of thanksgiving at this point: The books ordered from Istanbul had already arrived! Vahram's original stock of books was finished before he arrived in Ankara. The new books sold fast. Countless doors were open to him. Families eagerly invited him to their homes and there were people being converted with tears.

Folks with various needs and especially the sick approached him offering money, with the request that he pray for them. They also wanted him to read from the Scriptures as a priest would do. But Vahram was not the kind to offer his service for money. He absolutely refused any payment. People were puzzled and asked, "What is this man driving at, running here and there, praying and cheering people up?" This questioning of the natural mind was to go unanswered.

An Armenian businessman wanting to extend a gesture of hospitality invited Vahram to a night-club. With his usual smile, Vahram said, "It's not my custom to go to such places." But the man continued to insist while Vahram was praying, "My Jesus, my Jesus, my Jesus!" Flabbergasted, the generous businessman asked, "What does Jesus have to do with going out to a club?" "I'm pleading with my Jesus to come and save you," replied Vahram. The man's mood changed. Vahram continued, "Instead of inviting me to a night-club, why don't you take me to your home?" Without the slightest objection, the man said, "Good idea, let's go!" His wife's joy was evident when she saw her husband not only coming home early but also bringing a kind gentleman with him. Normally, her husband wouldn't have come straight home from work. He would spend time at a pub and appear drunk, hours later at the door. In fact, that day he had lost a lot of money at the horse races, and in order to forget his sorrows he had intended to go to the night-club. But God intervened and changed the purposeless plan through Vahram. He explained the Good News to the man and his family; they all repented and were converted. The Lord fulfilled His plan of grace in the whole family. This man was snatched from the barroom and placed into the haven of the loving Lord.

A Jewess attended the final meeting in Ankara. Hearing the testimonies, prayers, hymns, and preaching for the first time in her life, she was deeply affected and bought the last New Testament available. A joyful late-night meeting culminated the enriching evangelistic venture in this city. Tired, but deeply gratified, Vahram planned to depart for Istanbul by bus the next morning.

However, he had not bought a ticket beforehand. In those days there was no central bus terminal. Buses started from various points in the city. He needed to go early in the morning to purchase his ticket. But he was late. There was only one bus a day, and every seat was taken! Again he prayed to his all-providing heavenly Father. At that very moment someone turned up wanting to sell his ticket because he could not travel that day. The man was standing right in front of Vahram, who immediately gave thanks to God and bought the ticket from the grateful seller. What a pity that he didn't have a single book left to sell to the man! So he set out on the twelve-hour journey to Istanbul, sitting in the very front seat. His delay in coming to the bus was because of taking time to read his Bible and pray, which practice he scrupulously followed. And his Father rewarded his faithfulness by preparing the best seat in the bus for him.

## **Chapter 25**

### **FROM THE PEN OF LYMAN MacCALLUM**

Lyman MacCallum<sup>18</sup>, son of Canadian missionaries in Turkey who for many years was director of the Bible Society in Istanbul and died there, loved Vahram greatly. Not only would he listen with interest to Vahram's experiences, but from time to time would write a piece of information about his selling Scriptures and other experiences. Two of these valuable articles which at the time were read widely are being incorporated into this book. Nothing has been altered from the original text.

### **"ANGEL ON THE TAURUS EXPRESS"<sup>19</sup>**

*The journey had begun remarkably well. Evangelist Vahram's somewhat venerable companion in the two-berth compartment of the Taurus Express had introduced himself as municipal treasurer of the holy city of Mecca, returning thither after medical treatment in Istanbul. Vahram had the lower berth and begged that they exchange as he could more easily mount the ladder to the upper. The travelling friendship thus established progressed pleasantly and the treasurer spent much time examining the Turkish and Arabic Scriptures which Vahram furnished.*

*On the second day, with the Syrian border drawing near, Vahram tried to do everything possible to distribute his Turkish Scriptures, for which there would be little demand in Arabic-speaking territories. He even went through the sleeping car offering them in each compartment. Only at one door was he rebuked somewhat excitedly by two young ladies whom he took to be school teachers. They defiantly told him that it was very wrong and presumptuous of him to offer Christian Scriptures to Turks. During the next hour or two as he waylaid passing members of the train staff he saw them watching him with growing agitation.*

*At country stations youngsters offer to replenish the water-bottles of travellers at the station pump in return for a coin. Before each of the rather frequent stops Vahram took care to empty his bottle so as to have an excuse for paying a Gospel to the lad who would fill it. But at one station the ladies called out, "Look here, boy, tear that up; it's not a good book!" The lad looked at them open-mouthed, then hurried out of sight still clutching his Gospel with its bright picture cover. But this had been a declaration of war.*

*At the next stopover Vahram had hardly paid off a boy with the Gospel when a second lad came begging for a book. Vahram seized and emptied the bottle of his Meccan friend and paid the boy for filling it, at which there were angry exclamations at the next window. Then a third poor little boy appeared, demanding a book.*

*"Your chums earned theirs by filling my bottles. You'll have to pay ten kurush for yours," said Vahram, who knew that the unfriendly teachers could involve him with the police and possibly interrupt his journey should he give the lad a free copy.*

*"I have no money and I'm very fond of books. Please, please give me a book," begged the lad, who might very well have been hoping to sell it as soon as the train left. "No. I must have money. Go and beg ten kurush and buy your book."*

*"Big brother, you know well that no one would give me money. And the train has started. Give me my book — my book!" Already he was trotting, and then running, holding up his hand to the window. Committing the outcome to God, Vahram dropped him the book, while two small, scandalised shrieks rang out from the next window. In a moment the ladies were in the corridor shouting, "Shame on you, shameless one! Where are the train police? We are witnesses that you are poisoning the innocent Turkish children of these mountains."*

*"What is it? What has he done?" Corridor doors were flying open and a tall gentleman of some importance stood before him glaring coldly into Vahram's eyes while the teachers made their excited accusations. They were obviously trying to draw a crowd whom they could then stir up against him.*

*"Sir," said Vahram, "I believe that these ladies have entirely misunderstood me, but rather than speak in my own defence I would ask you to talk with this worthy gentleman from Mecca who, you will observe, is enjoying the books which they scorn." With this Vahram got the stranger into the compartment and closed the door on the buzzing corridor. After a few moments of polite conversation with the treasurer the stranger turned to Vahram and asked for one copy of each of his books. "Police court evidence," thought Vahram in alarm, envisioning himself being handed over to*

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<sup>18</sup> He is author of a very intriguing book, "Call to Istanbul"

<sup>19</sup> From "The Bible in the World", publication of the British and Foreign Bible Society, January-February 1954



custody at the next station. Slowly he made a little pile of his Old and New Testament portions. "And now a Gospel each for the ladies," ordered the stranger. Bewilderment redoubled Vahram's foreboding. "Those two would gladly arrest me for giving them Gospels," he objected.

"You're not giving them, I am. I'm buying these books, you know." It seemed to Vahram in his relief that an angel of the Lord was a passenger that day on the Taurus Express. Vahram thought it wise not to accompany him when he presented the books to the teachers, or to appear for some time. When he did slip quietly into the corridor he heard the teachers discussing the story of Zacchaeus, at which his grateful heart overflowed.

The ladies left the train at Adana. Vahram quickly checked their empty compartment and was delighted not to find the Gospels abandoned on the seat. Courageous now, he posted himself at the window, almost challenging them if they cared to denounce him. But they were happily embracing friends on the platform. He wondered whether they would continue to ignore him, or would leave a farewell as is customary among Oriental travellers. This would show their hearts. Greetings ended, luggage and parcels were gathered up and the party began to move off. But one of the two waited until the others had gone on; then with a quick dart she turned full round to Vahram and said, "A good journey to you." "God go with you," he replied, knowing that she heard as she hurried away. He sat down to follow them with prayer.

## Chapter 26

### STRENGTHENING TIES AND STRIKING NEW TRACTS<sup>20</sup>

At the invitation of Mr. Bedros Tozluyan<sup>21</sup> of Fresno, California, who had come to Turkey in hopes of visiting the isolated Armenians of Anatolia, Vahram Tatikyan always eager for a new evangelistic adventure agreed to accompany him. To give Vahram an official status, the Bible Society took him temporarily on its payroll. The Society defrayed part of his expenses through a designated gift from the Armenian Missionary Association of Paramus, New Jersey. Other friends met the remainder of the cost of the journey, which lasted from June 24 to July 18, 1953, twenty-four days in all.

"As I set out from home," said Brother Vahram, "the words of Psalm 147, 'The Lord takes pleasure in...those that hope in his mercy,' were like a promise and benediction for the trip."

His first Bible was sold at six in the morning to the night clerk at Brother Tozluyan's hotel. The clerk suggested that if Bibles in a number of languages could be left with him he could undoubtedly make some sales, as the clientele of the hotel was of many different nationalities. Bibles in five or six languages were supplied. After taking his seat in the Ankara bus, the thought suddenly came to Vahram that he had not offered any Scriptures to the ticket-sellers in the office of the terminal. So he rushed back and in the few moments before the bus took off, he sold them several Scripture portions. When the bus rolled out on its twelve-hour journey, Vahram found himself seated next to a Turkish civil servant who appeared to be of fairly high culture. Vahram opened his bag and showed the gentleman a Bible, asking if he were acquainted with this book. "Is not your shop on the main boulevard of Beyoglu (Pera)?" the man asked. When Vahram answered affirmatively, the official continued, "Really, this is astonishing! How often I have passed your shop and wanted this book, but for some reason I never went in to buy a copy. Now you bring right it into my hands, and just at the right moment, as I am on my way for a holiday in the mountains. For next two weeks I can sit in the cool shade of a tree reading this good book."

The day was tiring and the roads bumpy and dusty. Bus journeys over Turkish roads were exhausting experiences. "They turn you inside out," as Vahram put it.

The two friends spent six days among the sixty Armenian families of Ankara who were living there at that time. They would go from house to house, and wherever they stopped, the Christian neighbors would be called in for prayer, hymns and reading, followed by the sale of Scriptures. Vahram was glad to find many of the books he had distributed six years before still in use. On Sunday morning a congregation of about fifty filled two large rooms to overflowing. A Turkish woman, the wife of a

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<sup>20</sup> By Lyman MacCallum, from the "Bible Society Record", April 1954

<sup>21</sup> Bedros Tozluyan had emigrated from Turkey to Fresno, California at a very young age. He bought land there, planted vineyards and became a wealthy man.

policeman, came to the window and watched them curiously. They invited her in and gave her a seat. She stayed through to the very end and then expressed her pleasure and bought several portions of Scripture.

Finding his supply of Scriptures dwindling rapidly, Vahram put in a long-distance call to Istanbul for replacements. When he emerged from the booth, the postal clerk, who had been listening in, asked what books he was selling and bought one of each.

Vahram visited the home of a Turk, Enver, who had studied in Germany and was a baptised believer. His wife Shukriye didn't quite know where she stood. They had supper together after which Enver started confessing to Vahram that he wasn't walking with the Lord. On many occasions during this evangelistic venture they came across lethargic Christians who greatly needed the Master's refreshing touch. To help such weak, lonely Christians was very rewarding, and Vahram said, "The trip was worth it, just to minister to these downtrodden brothers and sisters.

On the last day of June they took the bus to Sungurlu, Vahram's birthplace, which was a particularly rough ride of four hours. They asked the porter to take them to the hotel and then to the shop of the Armenian whose name they had been given. The porter refused point-blank. "I'll take you to the shop, and if they can't shelter you, you will come to my house. In this town we don't let our friends go to hotels." Vahram gave him a Scripture portion, which he was very happy to receive. In Sungurlu there were twelve Armenian families. They spent two days here. On both evenings house gatherings were held. Those attending had many questions regarding Christian worship and about the differences between Islam and Christianity. These people were completely cut off from the rest of the world. They were ignorant of the religion of their fathers; one could say that without realizing it they had been Islamized. As a result they were totally incapable of explaining half intelligently what the Christian faith was all about. In these meetings some responded to Christ's invitation and put their trust in Him.

Vahram then visited the house where he had been born. It was now in the possession of a Turk, who cordially entertained them and invited them to come whenever they wished. He flatteringly said that the house was theirs as much as his. Seeing that the man was religiously inclined, Vahram told him how he had come to the assurance of having his sins forgiven. The Turk showed some interest and gave a hearing to his testimony. He bought a Bible, making Vahram very happy.

Their next destination was Kayseri, where there were about a hundred Armenian homes. At a stop en route, Vahram got off the train for a few minutes, and there on the platform sold a number of Scriptures to an employee of the railway. The man showed great interest. Before the train started moving, this same man rushed to Vahram's compartment and said, "Quickly, give me a whole set of your books! The station chief wants them." Vahram complied and being highly encouraged he gave praises to the Holy Spirit for such an amazing occurrence. When they arrived in Kayseri, the two men went straight to the Armenian priest's residence. Father Haygazun received them with great pleasure and offered them one of the church's guest rooms for their stay. This meant that every evening Armenian folks would gather in the church courtyard for long meetings. The priest also attended and indicated his joy and approval of all that went on. He encouraged his people to attend the meetings every night. So from evening to evening the numbers increased. Some put their trust in Christ and were converted.

From Kayseri they headed on up to Talas. There among the hills they went to visit a sister in her vineyard. Vahram remarked that a four-pronged task was before them. This Armenian sister was starving spiritually because of lack of fellowship. They strengthened and encouraged her. Her husband, an unbeliever, was favourably disposed to hear the Word of God. Vahram started explaining to him what the love of God is. In hearing this, the man's attitude visibly mellowed. Vahram also told of their young daughter who had recently lost her husband. She was in need of consolation and salvation. It didn't take long for her to look beyond her sorrow and believe in the saving grace of Christ. She immediately showed the signs of being born again. There were also the neighbors' needs to consider. It was their habit to gather together in the courtyard of this home and ask the woman to explain spiritual truths to them. Vahram enlightened them on the issue of salvation and told them that this valuable information was found in the Bible, which he had available with him for them to purchase. They all appreciated this offer and bought these valuable books which had come right to their doorstep. In this way Vahram fulfilled the needs he had seen when he arrived. He said that in every town and every corner God had a window of opportunity before him.

From Talas they returned to Kayseri, directly to the bus terminal where they caught the first available bus to the next town on their itinerary, Everek. Following another arduous and dusty journey, they arrived at this town which at one time had been almost totally Armenian. There was still a church and a priest with a small parish. The priest put them in a house where they were going to stay during their visit. News of their arrival spread like wildfire, and neighbors and friends started pouring into the house. So right from the outset the spiritual ministry began unfolding. Every Armenian in town came to see them and to attend the meetings. They were fascinated with this totally unanticipated opportunity to meet with two men of their own people and to hear the Good News, about which they knew nothing. Immediately they opened their hearts, telling of all their needs and rejoicing in having met them. They were all asking for prayer – for husband, wife, parents, children, health matters and neighbors. The response for salvation was spontaneous. People were joyfully expressing their faith in Christ which until then they could not exercise due to lack of insight into God's truth. New life and joy was brought to many a home. People purchased books and expressed their desire to walk with Jesus Christ. They pled with the visitors to return. Vahram remarked that the visit in Everek was arranged by God to provide a stream in the desert for these forsaken people.

They returned to the bus terminal, as always teaming with people travelling somewhere, young boys selling sesame-seed bread rings, others hawking the newspapers they were carrying around and little children pleading with passers-by to shine their shoes. Among all these people were Vahram and his friend Tozluyan with the Good News in their hearts and hands. Buying their tickets, they boarded a bus to Sivas for another evangelistic outreach. This city known in Grecian times as 'Sevasti,' was populated with many Christians at one time. The number of Armenians was now vastly reduced. Vahram had visited the town five years before. There was one sad memory in his mind from that visit when he had approached a bookstore owner asking him if he could leave some books on consignment for sale. When the man heard that these were Christian scriptures, he sent him off rather rudely. But Vahram never gave up his faith in the Lord of the harvest. He remembered how he had left the shop praying. Once again, after prayer, he went to the same shop. "Merhaba, (hello) my friend. I wish you good sales today. Would you like to offer your customers this holy book for sale, along with the others?" There was none of the former impoliteness. Vahram was amazed by seeing how the same person had mellowed. The five years must have played a role in his change of attitude. The man immediately responded to Vahram, "Leave five Bibles and one Incil (New Testament)." He then put a Bible on display in the show window. Vahram couldn't thank the Lord enough for the change he brought about in this man's heart.

Vahram took Tozluyan to families he had visited before. Immediately house gatherings started and once again, people poured in. They insisted that the two visitors stay longer. But how could they? There was a full and busy schedule arranged for them. People were richly blessed by hearing the Word of God again and started discussing among themselves matters concerning God and Christ, which they seemed to have neglected during their hard struggle for survival. Having no church or priest the atmosphere pervading was that of oppressive Islam.

Another move – their next destination was Tokat. Vahram had an address from his previous visit. They dropped in at the shop. The owner welcomed them with great pleasure and called his little boy apprentice to take the two men to the house of an Armenian family. As they were walking along, Vahram immediately started telling this little Armenian boy about Jesus Christ. He had never heard of Jesus' love for him and was so entranced with this wonderful message that he began to tremble and he could hardly walk. He even lost his way to the house he supposed to take them to. Vahram said, "Just to see this little boy be so affected with the message of the Savior was worth visiting Tokat.

As he did in other cities, he sold Scriptures to people he met and also stopped in bookshops to offer books for sale. Suddenly word reached the police headquarters that a stranger was in town selling books. Two policemen followed him and found him in an Armenian jewelry shop. They asked him to show the books he was selling. One of them immediately glanced at the title page and when he saw that the book was published in Turkey he said, "Very good, very good. Go on and sell them." Then he remarked that he would stop at the jewelry shop at his convenience to read this book. Obviously, as a policeman, he was afraid to purchase a Bible.

Vahram still had one Bible left. He ran across a tailor shop and offered to sell it to the owner. He was a literate person, but he outright rejected the Bible. After a hard day's work Vahram was asleep in the hotel. Suddenly the clerk knocked at the door and as Vahram was rubbing his eyes, he said, "Someone wants to see you." Vahram went down to the lobby, and who should be there but the

tailor who had turned him away! He said, "I was very troubled in my heart because I refused you. Here was a holy book which came right to me and I didn't purchase it. If you haven't sold it in the meantime, I want to buy it now. Here's the money." Vahram, forgetting his abrupt awakening, once again praised the Lord, brought the Bible down and sold it with gladness of heart. The two men cordially parted.

While in Tokat Vahram and Bedros paid a moving visit to see the tombstone of the missionary giant, Henry Martyn (1781-1812). This illustrious Cambridge graduate declined to marry his fiancé Lydia because her condition for marriage was that he give up the notion of going to India. He chose the Lord's calling to missionary service. He was extraordinarily gifted and used by the Lord to translate the Scriptures into Hindustani, Arabic and Persian. While in Persia he contracted tuberculosis, and the doctors there advised him to return to England immediately. He joined a Tartar caravan on horseback and began the long trek which would take him all the way to Constantinople. But by the time the caravan arrived in Tokat he could no longer go on. His companions took him to the old Armenian priest, in whose arms he breathed his last. He was buried in the Armenian cemetery. On his tombstone, which was erected later by his friends, John 3:16 was written in several languages. Later the stone was carried to the municipality yard where it still stands. On seeing this stone, Vahram's dedication to carry out the Lord's Great Commission was renewed.

With this visit their time in Tokat was concluded. Bedros Tozluyan's joy at being partner in this fascinating outreach knew no bounds. Naturally without Vahram, he could have never made such a trip. Once again they headed to the bus terminal, this time to travel north to Samsun on the Black Sea.

After several hours, they arrived in Samsun. Immediately they went to check in at a hotel. They both were very thirsty following the long bus journey. The hotel manager refused to give them a glass of water, saying, "Can't you see I'm very busy here – and you are asking for water?" Realizing their religion he displayed an adverse attitude toward them. Vahram responded with a smile, as he always did. And of course, he offered a silent prayer to the Lord. Amazingly, the man began to be friendly. Their stay in the hotel for a few days enabled them to establish a friendship with the manager. Vahram re-visited the Armenians whom he had gotten to know previously. As was his custom, he started selling books; he didn't run into any opposition here. On the last evening of their stay the hotel manager asked Vahram to come into his small office. He led the way with Vahram following. Instead of going to his office, the manager took him into a garden restaurant. He brought him to a table where some people were eating, drinking and discussing religious matters. He abruptly addressed the party, saying, "Gentlemen, let me introduce you to a true Muslim." Everyone at the table was flabbergasted. How would Vahram react to this undesired introduction? His Lord immediately gave him the answer, "I'm very happy to meet you all. 'Muslim' means a person who has submitted himself. In that sense, I am a true Muslim. Let me tell you what my Lord Jesus Christ did in my life." At this point, the dining men were totally attentive. Then Vahram started giving his testimony, of how he had tried to be a good person by performing all sorts of religious duties in his own religion. But they didn't work. He continued seeking. At last the Lord Jesus Christ came to his help, saved him from his sins, gave him assurance of eternal life and made him a seller of Bibles. As Vahram was telling this to men whose lives were far from being submitted, they felt restless. Not one of them opposed; in fact one of them remarked, "Very true words!" After a long discussion Vahram bade them farewell and returned to the hotel. The manager asked Vahram, "Do you know who these people are?" And then he answered his own question: "They are the chief legal and administrative officials for the Vilayet (province)."

It seemed as if it were only yesterday when Vahram and Bedros had left Istanbul, and here they were finishing up their mission with abundant blessing from God. They were going to part company in Samsun. They had a time of prayer, then Bedros boarded the Istanbul-bound ship. Vahram had decided to travel back by bus. He found out that the journey would take two days. Someone said to him, "Why don't you fly?" Until then, Vahram had never flown. The suggestion seemed very attractive because he was extremely tired. He found out that the cost of the air ticket was just a little more than the bus ticket so he decided to fly. However, he still had unsold books with him, but they were not in Turkish. All the Turkish Scriptures were gone. These were books in other languages which did not find buyers. He moaned within himself. "I wish I had brought only Turkish books; they would have all been sold." The problem was that he was charged extra for the weight of the books. He boarded the plane with no money in his pocket. He didn't even have a few coins to give to the porter or money for bus fare from the airport to the city. But his Lord was not going to let him down.

Though he had no Scriptures to offer, he started talking about the Bible to his fellow passengers. He told them he was a seller of Bibles, and it was too bad that they had all been sold. One passenger became so excited that he said, 'Can you mail me a Bible? How much is it?' And right then and there, he counted out the cash. The Lord miraculously provided for Vahram's expenses for the porter and the bus fare to reach home without embarrassment. Upon arriving home, his top priority was to mail the Bible to the man. At the first opportunity he would start house meetings again. He would labor with the spirit of the Old Testament prophets who said:

*"And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:8)*

*"Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings,  
who proclaims peace! (Nahum 1:15a)*

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings,  
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,  
who publishes salvation, who says to Zion,  
'Your God reigns.' (Isaiah 52:7)*

## **Chapter 27**

### **MEDITERRANEAN VOYAGE — MIDDLE EASTERN VISITS**

Vahram's maxim for life and service can be described in the words of the Apostle Paul: "...known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (II Corinthians 6:9, 10). During his years of preaching and evangelizing he conveyed the joy and blessing of heaven to saints and sinners. This he did through fervent prayer, trusting God to train him to face all hard circumstances with faith and fortitude. He always sought to be guided by the Holy Spirit for all decisions and in all situations. Once again he was praying for new evangelistic horizons.

Invitations for visits had been coming in from neighboring countries: - Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus. News of his labors and of the spiritual awakenings had spread far and wide and people wanted to meet him and get in on the blessing. The Armenian Brotherhood which had churches in several countries carried regular news items about Vahram's activities in the widely-read periodical, 'MARANATHA', printed in Aleppo, Syria. Armenian folks in this wide region were longing to be exposed to his ministry. Vahram prayed earnestly about the possibility of reaching out to these countries. He finally felt assured that the time had come for him to embark on a tour to proclaim the Word to wider areas. So the hopes of many were about to be realized.

In 1947, about thirty believers gathered together with Vahram at the Galata wharf to commit their beloved brother to God's care and protection for his Mediterranean outreach. Earnest prayers were offered and joyful hymns were sung at the waterside. Bystanders were moved by this unusual display of affection. Many Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca were to travel on the same ship. Send-offs in those days were something special. Groups would congregate here and there chatting; they would then embrace and kiss the person leaving. The passenger would make his way to the upper deck from where he would carry a loud conversation amidst the din with those below. Handkerchiefs would be waved, tears shed and farewells called out. Vahram hummed along with the brothers and sisters who sang the well-known hymn from below:

*"God be with you till we meet again,  
By His counsels guide, uphold you,  
With His sheep securely fold you  
'Neath His wings protecting hide you...  
God be with you till we meet again."*

They were looking forward to seeing each other again in six months. However, if not on earth, they would certainly meet in the presence of Christ. All kinds of people were on the ship. The first joyful event for Vahram was leading a sorrowful lady to Jesus Christ. Among those headed for Mecca were three men with only deck tickets in their hands. He soon struck up a conversation with them. One was

a hoja. Vahram had reserved a cabin. One of the three became sea-sick; Vahram felt sorry for him and offered him his berth in the cabin. Impressed with this loving act, the hoja bought a New Testament. All three found out that true cleansing from sin could not be obtained by meritorious works or religious rituals, but only by the grace of God. One of them expressed the desire to attend a house meeting on his return to Istanbul – a hope that never materialized.

That year pilgrimage to Mecca had special significance. Called '*hajj-ul-ekber*,' the great pilgrimage, it occurs only once every thirty-six years. This is based on the lunar calendar which moves the special days of religious duties such as pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting, etc., forward ten days each year. The benefits from pilgrimage that year were considered to be of greater than usual value. The number of pilgrims headed to Mecca on the ship was about three hundred. All of them performed the ritual '*namaz*'<sup>22</sup> toward Mecca after laying down their prayer rug or some piece of cloth on the deck. Vahram knelt down with them and earnestly prayed to his God and Redeemer. They found out that he was a Christian because he stayed on his knees while praying, not going through the up and down repetitious movements of their religious ritual. And once he had stood up he didn't return to the kneeling position again. Some of them called on him to embrace Islam. "It will be sufficient for this man just to recite the '*salavat*','<sup>23</sup> they said. "Already he's a saint in his own way!"

His praying in the presence of all these *hajj* candidates opened the door for a unique opportunity to bear witness for his risen Lord. He explained to them that justification before a holy God can only be realised by believing and trusting in His infinite grace. He went on to relate how Jesus Christ had justified him. While telling them, "When I saw Him hanging on the cross I repented and received His offer," he was smiling with joy. "At that moment God the Father cleansed my sinful heart, wiped out my past, gave me new birth and assured me of heaven. For nineteen years now God has granted me peace with Himself, deliverance from all lying and swearing, from unholy desires and every kind of corruption. This is my peace. Now God is graciously using me everywhere to declare His grace." One of the many travellers to Mecca remarked, "This man's devotion to Jesus is not like devotion to religion. In my opinion, no one will be able to move him from his persuasion." Following this encounter with these eager men on their pilgrimage, Vahram continued his witness all over the ship with the same boldness, playing his violin and singing, and nobody tried to stop him. An elderly lady threw a comment into the air for all to hear: "My child, you'll get to heaven before all these folks!"

On the ship there was a newspaper photographer who went around constantly taking pictures. He took Vahram's photograph mingling with a group of pilgrims. "Please publish this with an arrow pointing to me," said Vahram, "and write underneath: 'This is one who has found grace in Jesus Christ'." The photographer promised to do so. As an interested crowd began to gather, Vahram opened his Bible and read the following verses:

*"And there is salvation in no one else,  
for there is no other name under heaven given among men  
by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)  
"For there is one God,  
and there is one mediator between God and men,  
the man Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 2:5).*

When the ship docked at Izmir, Vahram took advantage of the few hours' stay to visit the International Fair, where he sold a good number of books. In those days the Maritime liners sailing the Mediterranean called in at every port. From Izmir they sailed on to Piraeus, where Vahram had a contact address. People told him, "It's too far; you can't make it during the ship's short stay," but he persisted. Just then a woman approached him, "You're from Istanbul; you must know Mrs. Hagopian!" "I know her very well," answered Vahram. Amazed, the woman exclaimed, "I'm her sister!"

Vahram's eyes lit up and he thanked the Lord. As soon as they covered the short distance to the city the woman ran hither and thither telling everyone that she had discovered Vahram among the passengers and that there would be a house meeting during the ship's stay in port. Soon the house was packed with people. Among those who came was a priest who expressed his joy in a prayer,

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<sup>22</sup> The required prayer to be observed five times daily – in Arabic, '*biyat*'

<sup>23</sup> A prayer in which Allah is asked to bless Muhammed and his descendants.

"Oh Lord, all praise be to you for bringing this servant of yours into our midst!"

Vahram got back to the ship on time and began witnessing to the new passengers who had come aboard. The next day they reached Alexandria, Egypt, where they were going to stay for several hours. He disembarked and went to find local believers. Amazingly two different meetings were arranged in this short time. People were overjoyed to have Vahram appear before them so unexpectedly. Some were reminded of a passage in the Scriptures: *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares"* (Hebrews 13:2).

After Alexandria they made a brief trip in Port Said. There also, he made a joyful acquaintance with fellow believers he hadn't known previously. Here, too, a meeting was arranged. Then came his departure which brought tears to many eyes. Finally, after an overnight voyage, the ship dropped anchor in Larnaca, Cyprus. Larnaca was the home of the American Boys' Academy, originally founded by the Reformed Presbyterians in the U.S.A. After he met with Christians in Larnaca, they took him to the Academy where there were a number of Armenian teachers and a mixed student body, including Turks. The President, Dr. W. W. Weir, was delighted at his coming. He dismissed all classes and had Vahram speak to the approximately four hundred students. There was no time to spare; Vahram had to hurry back to the ship.

His schedule of visiting different lands and making stops in several ports had gone like clockwork. Everywhere he met fellow-believers, spoke in meetings and brought joy to many hearts. The servant of Christ finds love and hospitality everywhere. Reflecting on God's goodness, Vahram readied himself through prayer for the next stage of his trip.

## **Chapter 28**

### **BEIRUT, A COSMOPOLITAN CITY**

From the time he left Istanbul twelve days before, with stops in several port cities, the ship embarked in Beirut. For Vahram, it had been much more than a pleasant Mediterranean cruise. It had been an opportunity to contact fellow-believers in every place, minister to them and to evangelize people of various backgrounds onboard ship. In spite of linguistic barriers God enabled him to reach people through Scriptures and through using the few phrases he had memorized beforehand.

The American Board in Istanbul had offered to send Vahram to NEST, Near East School of Theology in Beirut. At this stage of his Christian life and ministry, Vahram was already established on the teaching of the Bible. However, since he wanted to spend a while in Beirut, he accepted the offer. Vahram knew that some of the teaching at NEST had liberal elements in it. He started his brief study being aware of the school's position. As he was praying earnestly about the period of his studies at NEST, the Lord appeared to him in a vision: "Don't be swayed by details." At the time he couldn't quite understand what this meant, but eventually he was to find out the essence of some of the teaching. Therefore, he couldn't throw himself wholeheartedly into the lessons. The curriculum of the school was in English, however there was a provision made for Armenian students who didn't know the language.

Vahram felt oppressed in Beirut. He discovered that this city which was fast becoming the 'Pearl of the Mediterranean' was a hedonistic centre for many who ran there for amusement. Indeed, the fast life of Beirut surpassed that of Istanbul. Every religion and creed under the sun was found in this city. This gave him a very special opportunity to spread God's message. The renowned city abounded with churches of all denominations. Every mission had its representation in this place. There was precise preaching of God's Word from many a pulpit. There was also freedom to sell Scriptures, distribute literature and witness openly. Vahram was very happy for these favorable aspects. However, the uninhibited life-style of the people was not to his liking. It only motivated him to evangelize more fervently. He established contact with the Bible Society. Because he was a former employee of the Society they offered at discount all the Scriptures he could sell. This brought encouragement to Vahram, and he took full advantage of this offer, walking the streets and selling books — mostly Arabic — in his spare time. The Bible Society people later remarked that his sale of Scriptures in Lebanon surpassed that of all the other colporteurs. During his stay in Beirut, he sold one thousand one hundred copies of Bibles, New Testaments and portions. Like anyone engaged in spiritual warfare, he experienced similar feelings to those of Paul at Corinth; *"Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city"*

(Acts 18:9,10). The Lord revealed to Vahram three ways in which he could pursue his commission:

1. *By prayer and fasting*
2. *By evangelizing, preaching and teaching*
3. *By frequent fellowship with believers.*

He took Paul's encouragement to Timothy as his own motto: "*And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*" (II Timothy 2:2).

From the very beginning he discovered the teaching and way of belief at the seminary not in full harmony with what he had been taught from early on in his Christian life. The teaching was tilted toward the naturalistic. Among the students there were several who had the new birth experience. They, too, took this kind of teaching with a grain of salt. Perceiving that these contemporary thoughts were not in full harmony with the authoritative message of the Bible, Vahram continuously went back to the Word. He gave his testimony to teachers and students alike, stressing the necessity of the new birth. He would insist, "There is both heaven and hell" and lovingly invited each one to a clear-cut commitment to Christ.

After what turned out to be nine months at the theological seminary, he sensed the Lord leading him to move on to Syria. Along with his studies, he had been fully occupied in fellowshiping with other Christians, attending both church and house meetings, and selling books. For a long time he had wanted to go to Damascus, from where many standing invitations were before him. But he had no money. There were only two and a half Lebanese pounds in his pocket. How far could such a small amount take him? As he was contemplating this, a sister who was a cleaning woman appeared at the place he was staying. With reticence and bashfulness she handed him an envelope. That same day a completely unknown person to him came up to him, also with an envelope, saying, "This money is for you," and he pressed the gift into Vahram's hand. These love-gifts were ample proof from the Lord that now was the time for him to set off on the road to Damascus.

## **Chapter 29**

### **DAMASCUS IN CRISIS**

Arriving by bus in Damascus, Vahram immediately started looking for the people whose addresses he had been given. It was a great joy for him to become acquainted with Christians he hadn't known before. But the whole city of Damascus was in fear and anguish because Syria was at war with the newly-born state of Israel. There was general anxiety; people were uncertain about what was going to happen from one day to the next. Vahram joined ranks with the believers and they all walked together to the front of a church where there was a statue of the Apostle Paul. Using the passage from Acts 9:1-25, he encouraged their hearts. The city was being bombarded incessantly, but he calmly carried on. The Christians were amazed at his courage. In a letter written to a brother he related the following: "Once again I witnessed how Jesus Christ takes away fear from his true child. In all of this, many times I bowed my head and thanked God for the peace he gives in the midst of trouble."

Witnesses were relating a sad incident which had happened the night before. A young woman had just returned home from an amusement centre when a bomb fell on her house and she was killed. Vahram was deeply affected by the story and wrote, "Many people say, 'I'll live as I please, and then repent at the last minute.' But Satan does not so easily allow that 'last-minute opportunity'." Fear was spreading. People were abandoning their homes and fleeing the city. So Vahram added these words, "Satan whispered in my ear, 'This is a very dangerous place. Get out just for the time being. Take care of yourself. The danger will soon be past, and then you can come back.' But the Lord has sent me to Damascus. Was it not He who said to me while I was still in Beirut, 'Arise, go to Damascus'? When my Lord gives a clear command He never cancels it or contradicts Himself." Vahram did not pray, "Oh Lord, shall I stay in Damascus?" He was not one to keep praying about something on which he had clear guidance.

Every morning from five to seven he gave himself to prayer, pleading that sinners might repent. Then he would hurry off to house meetings. In spite of the prevailing fear many people, both young and old, came. Those who joined in the meetings received comfort and in turn encouraged others to



attend. The meetings were usually in Turkish. It happened that a hoja from Turkey was passing through Damascus. An Armenian brother who met him informed him of the meetings in Turkish going on at that time. He gladly attended. He heard Vahram preach on heaven and hell, and responded at that very meeting by raising his hands and praying, "My God, I realize I am a sinner and that my heart is in need of the grace of Christ. Wash me in His precious blood." He found peace and joined the believers. His whole direction changed from then on.

At times meetings were held in the open air. With violin in one hand and Bible in the other, Vahram would preach and sing, inviting men and women to come to the Savior. People became curious to hear this man who was speaking in Turkish. Some days there were five or six meetings. Many responded to God's call. Occasionally there was opposition. In one of the meetings a drunk appeared and started throwing stones at everybody and swearing. On another day, again a drunk threatened him, "If you don't scram, you'll be in big trouble!" Vahram wasn't worried about these attacks. Since his Lord had brought him to Damascus, what could man do against His will? While walking down the street called Straight where Ananias was sent to the Apostle Paul he saw a man earnestly praying in front of the alleged house of Ananias. He told him that it was not sacred houses or hallowed streets that would offer a person inner peace, but that the blood of Jesus Christ which had cleansed Saul of Tarsus could do the same for him. The man was touched. He shed tears of repentance and trusted in Jesus Christ.

At the farewell in Istanbul when the believers came to send him off at the Galata wharf, their thought was that Vahram would be gone for six months. But his ministry kept expanding and now he didn't know when he would return. *The Lord spoke to him: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8).* He was continuously receiving new invitations and having encouraging encounters. The Holy Spirit was advancing God's work through him.

He was longing to visit Jerusalem, but the Arab-Israeli war prevented him from going. However, this desire was to be realised later. While the war was raging, God spoke to him: *"Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water" (Psalm 114:7, 8).* This positive affirmation relayed to him the promise of a forthcoming spiritual awakening. His heart was lifted with the promise that God was going to perform mighty works. With invigorated faith he was waiting to see what lay ahead. His experiences as God's servant throughout the years assured him of bright days to come.

## **Chapter 30**

### **PACKED MEETINGS IN ALEPPO**

The bus journey from Damascus to Aleppo took four hours. Vahram was by now accustomed to travel from city to city within Lebanon and Syria. He had a long-standing invitation to visit Aleppo; the Christians there had been praying much for his coming. The periodical 'MARANATHA' already referred to, had in the past carried some of Vahram's messages and news of his activities. It was published in Aleppo by Apraham Seferian. To visit this historic city and have fellowship with God's people had long been his ambition. Now the time had come. A large group of believers were waiting for his arrival at the bus terminal. His customary schedule started immediately. Everyone was excited to come to the meetings. Vahram's mother tongue Turkish was the second language in this city. He felt at home preaching in it, and most people understood it.

Aleppo has the highest number of churches of any city in Syria. Every day at least two meetings were held. As soon as one meeting finished in a church, everyone would head for some home where another meeting was scheduled. As in Turkey and other places in that general region meetings had no time limit. Men and women, young and old, would fill the biggest room in the house with not a square inch to spare. Everybody would listen with rapt attention to this messenger of God about whose ministry in Turkey and in the recent months in Lebanon they had heard with rejoicing. He preached in the same style everywhere he went. The simplicity of the messages brought thorough satisfaction to hearts, and many responded to the invitation.

There was an amazing interest among young people. The Christians who had been praying for revival over a long period of time were experiencing God's power. Fresh vigor was coming upon the churches. The elderly Armenians who had come from Turkey and knew only Turkish were remarking with tears in their eyes, "We have heard a wonderfully fulfilling message." The city of Aleppo, scene of

other revivals in the past, was now experiencing a new awakening.

In his free hours Vahram, as was his custom, devoted himself to selling Scriptures and witnessing in the market place. Here again book sales soared. Local Christians were motivated afresh to speak to others about Christ. The Word of God spread swiftly in all directions. His witness in schools, hospitals and homes for the elderly brought the joy of new life to many grieved hearts. This special messenger sent by God could touch the relevant cord in people's thinking, stirring them to the reality of Jesus and his presence in their lives.

The local Christians came to appreciate that Vahram was being mightily used by God. Often his exuberant heart would break forth into joyful hallelujahs and others would be caught up in praise to the Lord. Those whose hearts had grown cold to the message of Jesus Christ were now apprehended by Him. Some found salvation, others sanctification. People experienced fresh comfort. Some were physically healed and many ruined relationships were restored. Vahram's weeks in Aleppo and its outlying areas where he was preaching Jesus Christ day in and day out drew to a close. It was time to move on. The next place on the agenda was Amman, the capital of Jordan.

## **Chapter 31**

### **REVIVAL IN AMMAN<sup>24</sup>**

Many people having heard about Vahram Tatikian's evangelistic tour were praying that the Lord would also bring him to Jordan. They waited expectantly for God to open the way, and finally the day came. The brothers and sisters welcomed him as God's messenger for the hour.

The first meeting was held at the church where Pastor Kirkorian was ministering. The burden of Vahram's message was: "God says, 'One of us has to change so that we come to an agreement. Who, then, is it to be?'" Could there be any doubt about the reply to this radical question? The Holy Spirit started pricking sinners who realised that the answer was that they were the ones to change; they had to repent and trust in Jesus Christ. In one of the first meetings, Vahram's eyes were drawn to a woman who was silently weeping. With a handkerchief in her hand she was constantly wiping away her tears until the end of the meeting. Somehow, she could not compose herself to stand up and say, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, save me!" Friends explained that she always cried during the meetings without any apparent relief. Let us read Vahram's own account: "I approached the woman and asked her why she was weeping without finding relief. She replied, 'I'm a wretched sinner'. I said, 'Repent and turn to Christ. He forgives all sins.' Again she began to cry, so I earnestly entreated the Lord asking Him how I might help this woman. Christ said to me, 'Go to her house and speak with her there.'"

"The next day taking one of her Christian friends with me I visited the woman. She was very pleased for my visit and immediately began to pour out her heart's burdens. She talked without stopping for a whole hour while I listened. Then I opened the Bible and read from a few passages after which the three of us knelt down and prayed. The seeking woman finally opened her heart in prayer to the Savior. She acknowledged her sinfulness, and invited Jesus Christ into her heart. She instantaneously received assurance that she had become a child of God. She started testifying at the meetings and in every meeting she prayed twice. What a happy outcome! Hallelujah!

"This incident taught me an important lesson. Some people do not open their hearts and explain their problems at a meeting. If we don't encourage them to express their need, they may remain with a sorrowful heart for many years. Therefore, it is extremely important to ask God what people's problems are, then if possible to visit them at home. There you can openly talk with them about their sin and the issue of eternity, also listening to what they want to say. If you do this, the person can be brought to a free, unforced decision. At every place I visit, the Holy Spirit teaches me valuable lessons such as this."

Although the meetings in Amman were continuing very encouragingly, Vahram wrote: "I said to myself that the time to visit Jerusalem had come. But a man came to the place where I was staying. He told me it would be helpful if I could come to visit him before going to Jerusalem. So I went along with the pastor of the church for the visit. It was a family of eight people who were Palestinian war

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<sup>24</sup> Amman, capital of Jordan, is one of the New Testament Decapolis towns, once known as Philadelphia.

refugees. In their cramped quarters they put us up for the night. The next day was Sunday. We got up at five. I had a very useful visit with this family. God enabled me to encourage and comfort them. From there I walked to church. I preached in Turkish and my interpreter translated the message into Arabic. A young man repented and turned to Jesus, immediately giving his testimony. Some people asked me to hold a second meeting right afterward, which I did. I learned that this church had long been praying for revival. God did not leave that prayer unanswered. Night after night the meetings continued. This meant that my projected trip to Jerusalem has to be postponed again. God's plan had to take precedence."

While in Amman, one morning Vahram was praying with a family when he had a puzzling vision. Standing before him was a man dressed in Arab-style garb. Not knowing how to interpret this, Vahram asked, "My Lord, is this vision from you or is Satan trying to trick me?" A hand lifted the man's robe and underneath Vahram noticed that his body was bound tightly with a thick rope. A sweet voice spoke to him, "'Satan, who has his dominion in Amman, is bound.'"<sup>25</sup> Vahram continued: "Following this, I saw the earth open under the man and swallow him alive."<sup>26</sup>

While Vahram was still in a state of astonishment, the young daughter of the family began to pray very earnestly. He learned later that this little girl knew how to plead with God. Her mother and father had taught her from very early on to pray in faith. God had led her to pray for the city of Amman. She had prayed continuously for the binding of Satan who was causing people to commit every kind of sin, but whose dominion was already being shaken. Now God was revealing to Vahram the actualization of her prayers in a striking vision. *"How unsearchable are His judgments!" (Romans 11: 33)*

## **Chapter 32**

### **"THE YEAR OF JUBILEE"**

Having had this amazing experience with the girl Vahram stated in one of his letters: "This has proved to me once again that if mothers and fathers would teach their children how to pray earnestly while they are still small, God would raise each of these little ones to be a hero of faith and prayer." Following the vision, meetings in Amman spread rapidly and the spiritual awakening reached new heights. This revival which started in a fascinating manner continued for nine months. Old believers from those days still relate how the sweeping impact of the Holy Spirit during those nine months brought genuine fear of God and deep reverence to the throngs who heard the message. These people say that the effect of that time can never be forgotten.

Vahram always spoke through an interpreter, but actually the Holy Spirit was communicating the heart-searching message, bringing into light the inner thoughts of many. Night after night, God in his sovereign power was leading seekers to salvation and newness of life. People leaving the meeting without having made any commitment would often spend that night and the next day in spiritual agony. They would wait for that crucial hour when the Holy Spirit would finally apprehend them. As soon as the meeting ended sinners would approach Vahram and tell him they were now ready to repent and to accept Jesus Christ into their lives. People returning home on public transport were singing hymns and testifying to others without embarrassment. In a brief time, news of the spiritual awakening spread everywhere. Amman had never before experienced such joy, excitement and seasons of refreshing.

Five percent of the total population of Amman were officially 'Christian.' A good proportion of these were attending the meetings during which they became true followers of Christ. In the meantime, a growing number of Muslims started showing up in the meetings. They had heard what was going on, and came to see for themselves. Some were converted to Jesus Christ. The news of this spread fast, and a certain anxiety surfaced. Conversion of Muslims, after all, was not part of the accepted norm. A Muslim could not abandon his religion!

Radio stations referred to this development with warnings attached: If Muslims continue to frequent

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<sup>25</sup> cf. Revelation 20:1-3

<sup>26</sup> cf. Numbers 16:31-33

these meetings and become followers of Christ, churches just might have to face closure. Naturally, this signal spread fear and Muslims became hesitant to attend. But believers visited interested Muslims in their homes and explained what following Christ meant. They encouraged and comforted recent converts.

After the meeting each evening, Vahram would be invited to a home for a meal. Usually some unconverted person present would come under conviction of sin. Sometimes, the person would leave the table, kneel down and settle his relationship with God. Then he would return with new joy to partake in the meal. Pastors were visibly revived; their sermons took on fresh vitality which warmed every heart. These were amazing acts of the Holy Spirit. The effects of the revival were the talk of the town.

One evening a young man who loved the violin was passing by. Hearing the sweet strains of a violin, he was drawn into the meeting. Soon he started to tremble under conviction of sin. He was converted and went home rejoicing. A young man, who smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, was warned by his friends that the habit would kill him. To this he tried to joke about death, retorting, "Wonderful! Then you will be glad when you see my body carried into church!" He was trying to make light of his slavery to tobacco. Well, this young man came to a meeting one evening in spite of himself—probably in answer to much prayer. He sat down by the door so he could make a quick exit when the craving overpowered him. But he was so gripped by the message that he didn't go out even once to smoke! When the call to sinners was given, he jumped out of his seat and dashed forward. He repented that evening, becoming a liberated follower of Jesus Christ. He started to attend the prayer meetings. Smoking, drinking, gambling, womanizing and all other unworthy practices vanished. Vahram expressed his sentiments saying, "I feel as if I am in the Year of Jubilee described in the Old Testament<sup>27</sup>. Slaves are liberated, heavy chains shattered, prisoners freed, sinners forgiven, and men and women shedding tears of joy. Believers who had fallen away, grown weak or who had stumbled on the pilgrim way have repented and come back to the Lord. This is a real revival. Hallelujah!"

Believers were constantly praying and witnessing to sinners everywhere, urging them to repent and turn to Christ. One evening a Christian fellow stayed with a Muslim young man until midnight explaining how he could be saved. He finally received Christ and was exuberant in his new-found faith.

At one meeting Vahram's sermon was based on Daniel 6:10-23:- how the mighty God delivered his faithful servant Daniel in the den of lions, how He thwarted the schemes of evil planners and ultimately judged them. An atmosphere of holy reverence held sway over the entire congregation. After the message many repented, openly confessing their sins. One person after another called on the name of Christ. These meetings which did not follow a set pattern were climaxed with singing, testifying, conversions and prayer. Whenever Vahram preached, he depended on the authority and power of God's Word. In relation to this, he commented: "The Holy Spirit burned hearts like fire, cut them like a sword and broke them like a hammer." This was in accordance with the testimony of the Scriptures: *"Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts: 'Because they have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them' (Jeremiah 5:14). "...there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9). "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden..." (Hebrews 4:12, 13a).*

The singing of hymns reverberated all around. Certain people in their homes who were convicted by the Holy Spirit would kneel down and repent right where they were. A soldier came into one of the meetings and complained about his spiritual lethargy. "I have been a believer for a long time, but I can't say that I am enjoying my salvation fully," he said. "I read the Bible, pray and attend meetings, but I'm not a joyful believer." The young man knelt down and prayed earnestly: *"Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Psalm 51:12).* After his prayer the Holy Spirit directed him to this truth: *"And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Revelation 12:11).* "Do you bear witness to others about the cleansing effect of the blood of the Lamb that you experienced?" asked Vahram. "No," said the young man, startled. "I wonder if that is the reason for my lack of inner joy."

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<sup>27</sup> cf. Leviticus 25:10

Vahram said, "You have answered your own question," and they knelt down to pray together. "Oh my Lord, I will speak to everyone of your love, grace and salvation. Please help me," prayed the young man. He made his commitment known to the elders of the church. From then on he enjoyed his redemption to the full. He constantly told others about Jesus, repeatedly expressing the enjoyment of his salvation in his revitalised life.

Vahram gave the following counsel to new believers: "Give yourself to prayer. Tell everyone that you are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Prayer and witnessing are the keys to a joyful Christian life. If you don't put these into practice, you will become barren and lethargic in your new life. You ought to know that the moment you were redeemed you were washed in the blood of the Lamb. To affirm this, start witnessing immediately, and in order to receive inner strength from God give yourself to prayer." Vahram always was careful to put into practice the advice he gave to others.

## Chapter 33

### THE EXTENT OF THE REVIVAL

Vahram obtained permission to visit the inmates in the central prison, an unparalleled opportunity! Thanking the Lord he took his interpreter with him to visit the place. He saw the prisoners in shackles. Some were even forced to spend the night in their chains. There were Muslims, Druzes and Christians. He explained the suffering and death of Christ the Savior, his forgiveness and redeeming love for them all. He made it clear to them that Jesus Christ had come to break the eternal chains and to set men and women free. The prisoners were manifestly touched. Some repented and asked God's pardon, calling on the name of the Lord. He taught them the nature of the new life in some detail and impressed upon them the joy of living a delivered life. And eventually, when they would be freed from their prison chains, the call before them was to live the life of the delivered sinner. While his heart was gladdened on one hand for this opportunity, on the other hand the visit had upset him. For years he had been calling everyone to repentance, stressing that hell was a stark reality and not a figment of the imagination. The pitiful scene he had just witnessed reminded him that if individuals must be cast into a place of punishment to satisfy earthly justice, how much more severe will divine retribution be! He never forgot this prison experience. From then on, he felt he must emphasize more specifically the terror of the sinner's punishment.

The revival in Amman picked up momentum. Hundreds of people came under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, repented and passed from death into life. Many backsliders were restored to faith in Christ. Once again, there were those who became angry. They downgraded the believers, even intimidated them. The devil's fury against the spiritual awakening and his resorting to a variety of schemes was nothing new to Vahram. He wrote the following: "Satan is incensed to the extreme, but victory belongs to the Lord. Hallelujah!"

Every morning Vahram got up early and with fasting and prayer sought the sustaining power and protection of the Holy Spirit against all obstacles and attacks. When dealing with those who despised Christ's followers he always displayed love and forgiveness. Since he was in a strange country, some may have thought that he would be gripped by fear. Conversely, his cautious conduct was emanating from a prudent heart. The befitting words of Isaiah brought him fresh reassurance: "Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:8). And truly, what was happening was not to be concluded in one day.

In teaching and encouraging both old and new believers, he would stress the importance of humility. He would wisely counsel them never to attribute the moving of the Holy Spirit to human achievement. Rather, each person was challenged to seek the ongoing guidance of the Spirit. He would repeatedly emphasize the praise-worthiness of Christ, and against this, his own unworthiness. At times, he would relate with tears the absolute supremacy of his Lord. With this deep conviction, he sought divine counsel in the ministries before him, such as: What should the subject of his message be? Which hymns should be sung? Who should be visited? God's instruction to Jeremiah became his motto:

*"But if they had stood in my council,  
then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,*

*and they would have turned them from their evil way,  
and from the evil of their doings" (Jeremiah 23:22).*

"We do not know the needs of those present in the meetings," he would say, immediately adding, "But God knows. A consultation is what we need. In a sense, revival is a consultation with God. If we are alert to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, He is ready to direct us in every situation."<sup>28</sup> Let us be careful not to go out to face the people with whatever comes to mind on the spur of the moment. *'A friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him' (Luke 11:6).* If we bear in mind to approach our heavenly Father with such a plea, the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ in this parable will come true: *'Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you' (Luke 11:9).*"

It will be understood from these words that Vahram's preaching power did not come from his brilliant intellect, oratorical skill or theological niceties. There are many who possess all these qualities and yet cannot introduce sinners to the Savior. Vahram could speak only two languages, yet he addressed multitudes of people from a wide spectrum of nationalities and stirred them to repentance. Human know-how and proficiency were not the factors. What was written in the Scriptures about the Apostle Peter was confirmed in Vahram's ministry, as it has been with so many others: *"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).*

Whether in the New Testament period, in Vahram Tatikian's time, or in our present day, God's power and mighty works are invariably displayed through man's weakness. Vahram had his faults, just like the rest of us. But through the Holy Spirit he knew the secret of how to wrestle with his deficiencies and overcome them. In whatever situation he was, his Instructor was the Holy Spirit.

Vahram did not censure or condemn sin in an individual sinner. He would talk with the sinner in love and allow the power of God to bring conviction. His service for his Lord was a miracle of grace. His life from beginning to end reflected his faith. His humility was the putting on of Jesus. The truth that God exalts the lowly in heart and humbles the proud was proven in the life of Vahram. He lived very modestly. He could lie down on the bare ground to sleep if necessary, or go to bed hungry, but he would never fail to dress neatly. He regularly pressed his clothes and polished his shoes. He shaved every morning, a practice not generally followed in his land. He lived in harmony with Christ's well-known command: *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16).*

Following these few observations about God's tool in the ongoing revival in Amman, we return to its progress. At one of the meetings a husky man came forward to give his testimony. Everyone gasped when out from under his robe he produced a dagger. "Do you see this?" shouted the man. "I served a long prison sentence in this city. At my release I went to Baghdad. There again I was put in prison for killing someone. That sentence, too, finished at long last and I came back to Amman. I bought this dagger on my return here. My intention was to kill the person who had informed on me. One evening somebody who hardly knew me said, 'Would you like me to take you to a meeting? You'll hear a speaker who has come all the way from Turkey. And he doesn't speak Arabic either. He speaks through an interpreter'. I didn't have the slightest desire to come to such a place. It was as if my feet dragged me against my will. When I heard the preaching this evening, I realised that it was exactly for me. The incomprehensible love of Jesus Christ utterly broke my hard heart. So when I pondered the fact that Jesus had died for a wretch like me, I started to weep. Since Christ, the son of God, because of His great heart of love, gave Himself over to death so that I might be saved, I surrender this weapon of death before you all. That unfathomable love has cleansed and conquered my wicked heart. It has saved my enemy from death and delivered me from another stretch in jail."

So saying, he left the cruel weapon on the table in front of the pulpit and pleaded with Jesus Christ and the society he had grieved to forgive him. Then he offered up a very moving prayer that proved the genuineness of his repentance. He earnestly cried to God to keep him from every sin from then on. There wasn't a dry eye in the place as hymns of praise and thanksgiving ascended to heaven, welling up from the depths of every heart. Everyone felt it was an experience of unimaginable sweetness. And the man crying like a child, said, "Brothers and sisters, please pray for me that my Lord

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 5:32

who has saved me may keep me ever faithful." The elders of the church took the dagger and kept it as a reminder of that blessed evening. The angels in heaven rejoiced over the entry of a great sinner into the Kingdom of God. One soul had been kept from committing murder and another from being murdered. And God's servant in this glorious transaction was Vahram. What rejoicing there was among the young people as they gathered around the newly-converted man at the close of the meeting!

## Chapter 34

### HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS

Vahram's custom was to rise early in the morning, read the Bible and pray, and then go to the market where he would talk with people and sell books. The fact that he knew very little Arabic did not deter him. He would use every method to spread the Word of God: singing a hymn, playing the violin, using visual aids and speaking a few phrases in Arabic, such as, "Do not harden your heart, dear friend; repent and believe on Jesus Christ as Savior!" Visiting hospitals, he would talk with the patients and inspire them with joy and hope. Around Amman were nearly seventy villages — some near, some far. Every day he would make his way to one of them. The purpose of his visits was always the same -- to make the Savior known to the people.

It is said of the famous evangelist, D. L. Moody (1837-1899) that he spoke about Christ to at least one person each day. As for Vahram, it is hard to speculate the number of people he dealt with daily. His fellowship with the Lord was unbroken. He would pray, receive fresh encouragement and go on to tell people about His salvation. The Lord spoke to him again and again with the words, *"Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water" (Psalm 114:7, 8)*. This clear declaration filled his soul with assurance and courage. It was normal for him to receive such frequent encouragement from the Lord.

Visions that came from God have already been mentioned, also his being healed in answer to prayer. On certain occasions his praying for the sick and their finding health has also been touched on. But he along with the Apostle Paul would voice the testimony, *"And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated" (II Corinthians 12:7)*. Vahram laid no claims to uncommon power of healing, to a special position of receiving visions or extraordinary communication with God. He was totally unpretentious. His stance would have been desirable in our time when there is great emphasis on personal achievements and revelations in certain religious circles.

In Amman a four-year-old boy suddenly could not walk, or even stand. He was constantly crying out in pain. The doctors could not diagnose the affliction. He was brought to Vahram, who laid hands on him and prayed in faith. Giving glory to the name of Christ, he said, "Let him walk!" The Lord immediately healed him. Vahram never talked about the incident. Perhaps there were similar occurrences, but if there were, no one knew about them.

Calling sinners to repentance, Vahram often referred to Hebrews 3:7 and 8 and in this connection he often used a funny illustration: A man was once invited to an evangelistic meeting by close friends, which he finally accepted. During the message he was agitated. Not wanting to listen, he stuck his fingers in his ears. Soon a fly settled on his nose, and instinctively he took his finger out of one ear to shoo the fly away. At that very moment the speaker was repeating the Scripture, *"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness'."* At that instant, his sinful heart was pricked. He listened to the rest of the message, repented and received Christ as Savior. On another evening when Vahram was preaching, someone brought his brother along, who was known for his hard-heartedness. During the meeting the man persisted in blatant rejection. Suddenly he stood up and shouted, "This man is lying!" Pandemonium ensued. The man became more indignant. "If I'm wrong, may God strike me!" he cried. His brother wished the ground could have opened up and swallowed him, and he regretted a thousand times for ever bringing him along.

Home they went, the rebellious brother muttering to himself all the way. Arriving at home he demanded in his usual harsh way, "Start the fire under the boiler! I'm going to have a bath. Then I'll

eat." His mother complied. But time passed and he failed to come out of the bathroom. They banged on the door, and from inside they heard groaning. Breaking open the bolted door, they entered and found him dying. His believing family cried to God to spare his life. He revived. As soon as he came to, he gasped, "I want to repent; God truly did strike me. Never again will I trifle with God." That day in the bathroom his heart was opened to Christ, and he gained assurance that his sins were forgiven.

The next morning he went to the market-place and related to everyone what had happened, calling them to repentance. "Do not harden your hearts," he said. "I was stupidly resistant. I was on the brink of going down into eternity still in my sins, but God pitied me. And He will pity you, too, if you repent." That night he went to the meeting and testified to the very people he had troubled the previous evening. Now joyfully and fervently he declared, "God showed me that it's dangerous to ridicule Him, to open my mouth against Him. Listen, God had mercy on a miserable man like me and extended his grace to me. He saved me from death and from that which is worse than death, from hell itself! All thanks be to His name!"

An unsaved young man was married to a girl from a believing family. He constantly ridiculed their faith and poked fun at the people who attended the meetings. He went to a village outside Amman and found himself entering a meeting where Vahram was preaching. After the message, testimonies were given, hymns sung and then the time for prayer came. People stood up one after another and prayed. After awhile he stood up and began, "Oh Lord..." and stopped. Someone else stood to pray, but he continued standing. God granted him the spirit of repentance. Still on his feet, he repented publicly and received assurance that his sins were forgiven. He was totally changed. After this he began to pray, full of faith. In ensuing meetings he would pray two or three times. His joyful testimony was that God had first convicted him of sin, then made him stand up and finally brought him to repentance.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit the revival that started in Amman spread widely. Even today after so many years older people still remember with praise and thanksgiving that great spiritual awakening. Men and women who repented and came to Christ were afterwards baptised<sup>29</sup>. Heartfelt joy was evident at the baptisms. Those who testified and were immersed in the waters of baptism prayed and gave glory to God for their salvation. They knew that by this act they were giving witness to their passing from death to life. People came to observe this ordinance with which they were totally unaccustomed. Even some of these were convicted and turned to Jesus then and there. The chain reaction was continuing under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Strangely, the evangelist himself had not been baptised as a believer. He had undergone infant baptism at the Armenian Gregorian church. Finally the hour had arrived for Vahram to enter the waters of baptism. It was Leroy Whitman, an English missionary, who baptised him in the Jordan River. He was one of the men instrumental in promoting Vahram's ministries in the land. Vahram remembered this as one of the happy occasions of his life. And another happy occasion was the service of his ordination. Leroy Whitman was among several pastors who examined and laid their hands on him in a solemn ordination service. Those who remember that day tell how Vahram's face was shining. Naturally, Vahram had been ordained long before by his Lord while in Istanbul. He had already been blessed with an effective ministry for many years. Ordination by his Lord was what counted.

## **Chapter 35**

### **LIVING MEMORIES OF THE JORDAN REVIVAL**

Memories of the revival in Jordan, and especially in Amman in 1950-1951, still generate deep joy in the believers who lived those glorious days. Their children, now adults, were told about everything and even they like to relate stories of that revival. Many accounts emerging from those unusual days are compiled in this chapter.

It was at the end of the Arab-Israeli war. As a result of that initial conflict, a great number of war refugees moved to Jordan. The grief and despair of these homeless people prepared the ground to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ among them.

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<sup>29</sup> cf. Matthew 28:18-20 and Romans 6:4, 4.



At his arrival in Amman, Vahram naturally attached himself to the Armenians who could also speak Turkish. These believers introduced him to Leroy Whitman, who was a missionary pastor of the Free Evangelical church. Mr. Whitman was a man with a deep knowledge of the Lord and of His Word, who had served in the Middle East for many years. He sensed the spiritual gifts in this man from Turkey and invited him to preach in a church hall in the heart of Amman.

There was an air of expectancy as people filled the hall. The Lord's presence was already in the place. This was attributable in part to Vahram's earnest intercessory life, deep faith and anticipation. Something was sure to happen. People did not know who this outsider was, but they could tell that a man of God was in their midst. Rising to speak, with a smile on his face, he began with a simple but earnest prayer. God was visiting this downtown church with profound words emanating from the heart of His faithful servant. His long years of conscientious and selfless service had made him an effective preacher before God and men.

He spoke very simply in Turkish through his Armenian interpreter, Nazareth Ajemian. He exalted the Lord Jesus Christ and pointed his hearers to the Cross. Those who remember that first evening in Amman still recall the thrill and delight they experienced. At the end of the simple forty-five minute message, he invited people to pray short prayers. Those who had never realised before that they were sinners came forward, repenting in tears. Young people, especially, were responding to the call to forsake their lostness and be found by the Savior. Hearts that had been stony for years suddenly were melting. It was a very special, unforgettable evening. One of the firstfruits of that evening was Ibrahim Deir. Even after several decades of walking with God, he faithfully continues his witness for Jesus Christ, while engaged in business and serving as a local Gideon.

The meeting was so electrifying that it was agreed to invite Vahram to preach again the following evening. This he was very willing to do. The second evening, the church was even more packed. One of the fruits of that evening was Fawaz Ameish, a young man of seventeen, who had been passing through a period of spiritual uncertainty. "I could not resist the power of the Holy Spirit," he says, "as I listened to God's message and was captivated by the freshness of the truth flowing from the lips of the earnest preacher." Fawaz committed his life to the Savior that evening. Later, the Lord called him into His service. Fawaz has been serving his Savior as pastor of the Baptist church in Amman for over thirty-five years, never forgetting the evening that changed the course of his life.

It was evident to all that these meetings were too useful to be stopped. So evening after evening they continued with increasing fervor, devotion and enthusiasm. This went on for a full nine months without a break! Perhaps a trained preacher well-versed in theology would find it difficult to prepare a fresh message day after day for so long a duration. But this evangelist who hadn't had the opportunity to complete even his first class at school knew how to draw living water with joy from the wells of salvation<sup>30</sup>. Every evening with his uncomplicated messages, he brought his hearers to the necessity of salvation through Christ. Amman, named Philadelphia in Roman days and mentioned in the New Testament as one of the Decapolis (Ten Cities), was witnessing a brilliant moment in her long history.

Interest and enthusiasm increased from night to night, with new people in attendance each time. Eternity will reveal all those who received Jesus Christ as their Savior during this time. While Vahram was preaching tirelessly every single evening, the taxing work of translating the messages into Arabic took its toll on the interpreters. The three who shared in this ministry, Samuel and Nazareth Ajemian, two Armenian brothers, and Isaac Jemil, an Assyrian, took turns. All of them were effective interpreters, touched by the Holy Spirit for the hour.

Pastor Fawaz says that when Vahram came to the pulpit his face would be glowing. The radiance in his face was an expression of the fire within. His rapport with his audience was remarkable even though he couldn't speak to them in their own language. Not only did he have eye-contact, but there was also a beautiful meeting of mind and heart. He inspired confidence. It was as if people turned to the Savior because he believed they would. It happened as he anticipated.

At the conclusion of a message he would invite everyone to stand up and pray in hushed tones. Then he encouraged both men and women to pray short prayers audibly. Those under conviction started praying one after another, confessing their sins and turning to Jesus Christ in repentance. Then people separated into approximately fifteen prayer groups. Some experienced new birth; others

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<sup>30</sup> cf. Isaiah 12:3

recommitted their lives to the Savior. Every evening the winds of genuine revival were blowing in the hall. It was a true moving of the Spirit, something they had never experienced before. Later, Vahram gathered the prayer group leaders together, asking them to pray short prayers in turn.

The length of the meetings was always about three hours. Hearts were broken and many tears were shed. But the ministry was not yet over for the day. Every evening he was invited to a different home for a meal after which hymns were sung to the accompaniment of his violin, prayers were offered up and fresh testimonies heard. Believers' insatiable delight in fellowship kept them together until after midnight.

Mari Barsamian, a sister greatly influenced by the revival relates this anecdote: "We were in a home where Vahram was staying, and continued visiting until late. Vahram had already retired to his room. In the wee hours of the morning, as I passed his room on my way out, I saw his light was still on. Peeping in, I caught sight of him wrapped in his quilt sitting on the bed, deep in earnest prayer." A brother adds this recollection: "During the day we would see Vahram in the marketplace passionately selling Scripture portions. When Muslims declined to accept a Gospel portion, he would offer the book of Psalms or suggest the book of Proverbs saying, 'Won't you read the sayings of Sultan Suleyman?' This opened the way to sell a large number of Scripture portions.

One evening he came to the meeting looking downcast. Asked by a brother the reason for his sadness, he replied, "If someone curses my earthly father I feel bad, but when an irreverent person curses my heavenly Father, my heart is torn to pieces. Come, help me pray for that man." Full of the Holy Spirit, he would always be ready for the meeting. Every evening brought new hearers and gradually the number of seekers grew. Young people's interest especially was captivated more and more. The number of those who abandoned their sin and discovered the meaning of life was increasing all the time. Meanwhile, Pastor Leroy Whitman left his pulpit to Vahram in order to pursue an evangelistic tour throughout Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In this way Whitman carried the fire of revival to other regions.

The nine months were an unusual time in the life of the church in Amman. Truly it was 'evangelism explosion' long before the term was coined. Actually, this term has fallen into disuse. Throughout the full nine months, seven days a week, every evening people were converted to Jesus Christ. A great number from every stratum repented, trusted in Christ and joined the ranks of the church. Soundly converted, their faith and devotion continued throughout life. Most of these converts advanced in holiness, becoming fruitful in the service of their Master. Some emigrated to other lands and carried the flame of revival with them. During his ordination service, Vahram was also commissioned as special evangelist of the Free Evangelical Church in Amman. Now the testimony of this church through his ministry was spreading to other lands.

A new chapter was to open at Ajloun in the Gilead Mountains, following the nine months in Amman. The Baptists had just taken over a hospital. It was previously run by a British physician, Dr. McLean, who started it in the early forties. From the very outset he was plagued with numerous difficulties in operating it. Roads were unpaved and during the rainy season, they were a mass of mud. There was a cistern, but no running water or electricity. When a patient needed surgery, he would have to be carried on a horse-drawn wagon to distant Amman. The poor doctor was overworked and overwhelmed with the conditions. Not being able to deal with the mounting difficulties, he gave the hospital outright to the Baptists. They accepted it with the view of the starting a church in Ajloun. Who was better fitted for the task of moving this vision forward than Vahram?

So a two-fold responsibility became his. Every evening he preached from the pulpit preparing the ground for the start of the new church. During the day, he ministered to the personnel of the hospital. The first day he asked them to pray aloud, but some were not even saved, so naturally could not pray. Right there in the dining room they knelt by the benches, first receiving Christ as Savior and then praying. All this work he accomplished through the help of an interpreter. He also found ample time to visit villages around Ajloun, witnessing and selling Scripture portions. In the midst of this all-encompassing work God was preparing his way for a visit to Jerusalem.

## **Chapter 36**

### **JERUSALEM AT LAST**

From the time he came to the Middle East, Vahram's cherished ambition was to visit Jerusalem. Jerusalem, where the Incarnate Christ lived, taught, performed miracles, and as the prophets had foretold, was crucified between two bandits. This was the very place where He was buried and rose triumphantly on the third day, then ascended into the heavens from nearby Mount of Olives. After having proclaimed Christ to multitudes in a wide region, it was a climactic joy to be in the city where the Lord Jesus had made eternal history. At last the opportunity was here.

In those days when Jerusalem was under Jordanian rule one could travel conveniently from Amman. As everywhere else, churches here cordially welcomed Vahram and offered the pulpit to him. Again he preached with the Holy Spirit's unction emphasizing conversion and calling lapsed believers to restoration. In addition to the church ministry he loved to walk in the marketplaces and streets giving bold witness for Christ and trying to sell Scripture portions to everyone he met. He took upon himself the spreading of the testimony of Christ in this Old and New Testament city.

In his preaching from the pulpit, his theme would often centre on the various aspects of Christ's ministry in Jerusalem. His visit to the Garden of Gethsemane, to Golgotha and the Mount of Olives deeply touched his heart. He lamented that the true peace coming from Christ was neither sought nor accepted in this city over which Christ had wept. He prayed earnestly that the feet of Christ would soon touch the Mount of Olives. He recalled the words of Isaiah 66:13: *"As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."*

As he walked through the city, he reminisced over the past significance of Jerusalem and was thrilled with its glorious future. He often referred to Christ's Second Coming in his messages. A city that was dwelt in for over a thousand years before Christ and is being inhabited until the present had witnessed many wars and much destruction. He walked around the walls and observed the gates for which Jerusalem was called 'The City of Gates.' In the past there had been approximately twenty gates. Some of these were named after the kind of carriages or animals that went through them: Sheep Gate, Fish Gate, Horse Gate, Water Gate; and Damascus Gate, because it led to the road for Damascus. The city that Vahram visited had eight gates. One of them had been closed with stone and made part of the wall. According to a common tradition, when the Messiah comes, it will be opened (*Zechariah 14:4*).

Although Vahram was an experienced preacher who had read and studied the Bible for many years, this first-hand knowledge of Jerusalem brought an entirely new perspective to his thinking. After Jerusalem he visited Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born into this world in a cattle-shed<sup>31</sup>. The Eternal Word having assumed a human body in this insignificant place in poor circumstances, far removed from any pomp and show became vividly real to him. Vahram thanked God again for assigning him a simple way of life. His longing for the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom of peace and righteousness<sup>32</sup> was rekindled in these two cities close to each other.

## **Chapter 37**

### **RETURN TO ISTANBUL**

How quickly the time had flown since saying good-bye to the brothers and sisters at the Galata wharf in Istanbul! About two years had passed, packed with unforgettable revivals and other experiences. But now the day had come to return to Istanbul. At his departure he had told his praying friends that he planned to see them again after six months. But God had other plans and kept Vahram away for a period four times that long.

As he set out from Jerusalem for Beirut, he was rejoicing in what the Lord had accomplished in each place of his ministry. The many new believers were now a precious memory in his mind. En route, he stopped in Damascus to see the fellow-Christians. From there it was a journey of about three hours to Beirut. He could not spend much time there as by this time he was quite eager to return home. He boarded a ship of the Turkish Maritime Lines going to Istanbul. He was looking forward to a reunion with his faithful friends who would be waiting for him. For the past two years they had been faithfully interceding for him. Again he evangelized on board ship during the several-day voyage.

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<sup>31</sup> cf. Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1

<sup>32</sup> cf. Revelation 1:5-7; 22:7, 12, 17, 20

The friends of the scattered fellowships in Istanbul who had received word of his coming were at the seafront to welcome their beloved Vahram. He was a time-honored friend of the company of believers who followed Christ (Acts 14:26-28). Immediately the house meetings resumed, where Vahram enthusiastically related his varied experiences and ministries under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He also explained in detail about the many fellow-Christians in the lands where he had travelled. In this way, he established a relationship between those believers and the ones in Istanbul. God was again opening up a fruitful period of service in Istanbul and Anatolia.

It was Vahram's practice to refer to a scripture verse before he prayed or preached. It is a custom of the Muslims to utter the word 'Bismillah'<sup>33</sup> before they begin any kind of work. So Vahram reasoned, why shouldn't he begin his spiritual work with a verse of Scripture? An example of this can be shown from one day in Beirut when he started his message with this verse: *"To Him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever" (Psalm 136:4)*. While his heart was full of joy at the mighty deeds of God in the Middle East, the Holy Spirit seemed to be stretching his thinking to entirely new horizons. So he prayed, "Oh Lord, where do you want me to serve you in my remaining years? If I am to take up my work again in Istanbul where I left off, I am ready to joyfully accept it. But if you are going to open up new fields to me, I will accept this challenge with equal delight. I simply want to know your sovereign will."

While still engaged in ministry in the Middle East, he had received an earnest letter from his sister and brother-in-law, Dikranuhi and Misak Balian, who were living in Buenos Aires, Argentina, pleading with him, "When are you coming to visit us? There are great opportunities for preaching the Gospel in South America. Everywhere people are eager to hear the Good News." So they were pressuring him to visit Argentina.

Being greatly encouraged with the Lord's blessing on his ministry in the Middle East, Vahram wrote in a letter to his sister Beatrice in Istanbul, "Perhaps it is God's design that I should go to South America." And he asked her to pray for him to make the right decision. The Holy Spirit had for a long time been impressing the same vision for her brother upon Beatrice. So she wrote: "Yes, I believe it must be the Lord's will that you go to serve him in South America."

After he returned to Istanbul Vahram continued to pray about this matter, without telling his friends. Whenever he was seeking God's guidance he didn't consult with anyone. Once he had received the answer he would then share with others the specific leading of his heavenly Father. He persevered in prayer, full of faith and confidence. When he received a positive reply he trusted God to work out the details about his departure. In the meantime, Vahram's active ministry in Istanbul and Anatolia continued unabated.

It took a few years for intentions to be finalized. Vahram's sister in South America sent the required invitation, along with a boat ticket for the voyage starting from Beirut. But entry into Argentina was more difficult than had been foreseen. Even with an invitation in hand a person was not necessarily allowed to enter the country. But Vahram's mission was underwritten by the Lord Himself and He would accomplish it. Humanly speaking, the brothers and sisters in Istanbul were sad at the prospect of his taking off again. But at the same time they rejoiced with the new door of opportunity. God's work was not limited to his being with them. With this conviction, they committed him into the Lord's safe-keeping and sent him on his way to Beirut with prayer, hymns and their good wishes. By now, it was 1956. He travelled by train over Aleppo to Beirut and as always, sold many books and witnessed to people along the way. He felt an increasing urgency to make Jesus Christ known to everyone.

## Chapter 38

### LAST VISIT TO JORDAN

Not knowing if he would ever return to the Middle East, Vahram determined to spend some time in Jordan again. This verse came to mind: *"Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are" (Acts 15:36)*. So he journeyed from Beirut to Amman.

On his first Sunday morning, Pastor Leroy Whitman welcomed him with open arms. Vahram, his face

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<sup>33</sup> 'In the name of Allah'

shining, took his place at the pulpit with a deep sense of gratitude to his heavenly Father. When he caught sight of Ibrahim Deir, one of the firstfruits of the revival, sitting in the midst of other brothers and sisters, he was profoundly moved. Burying his face in his hands, he wept, and again the winds of revival began to blow, though in a lesser degree than during his first visit. He offered up thanks to Christ for His unfailing faithfulness.

Fawaz Ameish, who had been restored to his Savior at the previous Amman meetings, was now serving as pastor at the Ajloun Baptist church, where the memory of Vahram's preaching and assistance of its founding was still fresh. The Southern Baptist Mission, under whose auspices the hospital at Ajloun now operated, invited Vahram for a week of meetings. All the hospital staff joined hand in hand to form a circle to welcome him. Those who knew him from the 1950 meetings gave their testimonies. Called on to speak, Vahram asked in his usual manner for everyone to pray short prayers in turn, including the doctors and other staff, some of whom had never prayed in public before. For the first time in their lives they prayed aloud, and a fresh awakening broke out. From the start Vahram's preaching was marked by conversions and renewal.

One day the hospital director asked Pastor Ameish to arrange Vahram's schedule for just one day. This is how the day went, taken from Ameish's notes which he keeps to this day: "This morning we started with a special service for hospital staff. Our time was limited. At the close of his message, Vahram invited anyone who felt the Lord had been speaking to him to come to the lounge for prayer. We stayed there the greater part of the day counselling people continuously. Many of them repented of their sins with tears and received Christ into their hearts. As each person left the room, Vahram would say, 'Let us pray for him!' Then after singing a hymn together, we would move on to the next person." Pastor Ameish makes this interesting observation: "That day I understood what it meant to be moving along in the Spirit. We were truly in the Lord's presence and had no thought for anything but this great work. The Lord of the Harvest had opened up to us a gloriously fruitful field and we were laboring in it earnestly and joyfully.

"At four in the afternoon, eight of us travelling in a Chevrolet station wagon set out for a nearby town. Vahram's enthusiasm was plain for all to see, as he joyfully sang the hymn, 'Jesus Shall Come,' all the way. Suddenly, at one point, he asked the driver to stop, calling an impromptu prayer meeting. He did this three times.

"Coming into a village we stopped. A crowd gathered around the car listening to the hymns we were singing. It was a Muslim village. Vahram got out of the car and began handing out scripture portions in Arabic. Then we moved on and arrived in Jerash,<sup>34</sup> where a lively meeting awaited us in the Baptist church. Vahram certainly had a share in the founding of this church, as well as the one in Ajloun, which continues to the present day. His past influence in the places we visited was distinctly remembered. To this day when an Arab believer is asked how he is, he replies in Vahram's Turkish, 'Hamdolsun!'

"One evening an interesting incident occurred in the Ajloun meeting. A group of about forty young trouble-causers came in with the intention of upsetting the service. One of them who was politically-oriented, a Marxist, shouted, 'I've got some questions to ask you! When Ishak Jemil, the interpreter, said there would be time for questions at the end of the meeting, they all sat down to listen. Discussion with young people was nothing new to Vahram. It was something he took special pleasure in and always found to be worthwhile.

"At question-time they accused Vahram of being a foreign agent and asked why he had been sent from Turkey to the Arabs. He answered in his customary direct and convincing manner, 'I only come because I love you. I don't understand politics, neither am I involved in politics. I have not been sent here by the Turkish government but by the Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact I have been commissioned to the Lord's work by the church in Amman, and sent by that church to the whole world!'" The young men were not satisfied with the reply. One of them, an electrician, abruptly cut off the lights, plunging the hall into darkness. But the meeting itself had finished anyway, so everyone went home. It so happened that the ringleader of the group had a heart problem. Some days elapsed; he had a crisis and was taken to the Baptist hospital. In the meantime, Maurice Girges, an evangelist from Beirut, came to conduct meetings in Ajloun. During his preaching, the ringleader was genuinely converted. Afterwards he movingly confessed, 'I was the one who cut off the electricity when Vahram was answering our questions'."

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<sup>34</sup> Gerasa, one of the ten towns of Decapolis cf. *Matt. 8:28 and Luke 8:26*

Vahram was always humming hymns. Two were his favorites: 'Hisus Ismi Shirin Banal!' <sup>35</sup> and, 'Mahsher Gunu!' <sup>36</sup>. When he was witnessing to unbelievers he used to sing this second song. Along with these, many of the songs he sang were translated into Arabic, becoming part of the believers' hymnody. In fact, many believers who didn't know Turkish memorised some of Vahram's Turkish songs."

After Vahram's last visit to Ajloun, Pastor Fawaz Ameish never saw him again. But while attending the 1983 Congress for World Evangelism in Amsterdam he met some South American delegates on a bus tour of the city. Conversation eventually turned to the subject of Vahram Tatikian. They had all known him, each one testifying to the benefit he had derived from Vahram's preaching. One of the delegates from Argentina called out, 'Mejdan!' the Arabic word for 'glory'. There was no stopping the South Americans from telling one story after another concerning Vahram. Every remembrance of him was still fresh in their minds. As the Scripture says, *'The memory of the righteous is a blessing...'* (Proverbs 10:7a).

Pastor Ameish tells an unforgettable story: "My mother was very devoted to her church and was resolutely unwilling to cut her links with it. Many times we invited her to come to our meetings, but she would always refuse. 'In that case,' said Vahram, 'I will go to her church!' One day he entered her church, looking around with reverence and respect. His bright smiling face so impressed my elderly mother that she said, 'I thought one of God's angels had come to church to visit us'."

## **Chapter 39**

### **To a New Continent**

Throughout the years of his service Vahram's lips, mind and hands were a witness to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He wrote Christian articles in which he enlightened and encouraged Armenian folks throughout the world. Practically all these people had their roots in Anatolia, by and large using Turkish as their language. Those who survived the notorious genocide in 1916-1917 moved to every conceivable country seeking to find a new home for themselves. At the outset, most went to Aleppo in Syria and from there spread to other lands. Apraham Seferian was the leader of the Armenian Brotherhood, as it is called until now. This effective man hailing from Hadjin, near Adana, found himself in Aleppo. A wide and effective door was open before him among the thousands of Armenian refugees who had fled to this city. Among his many contributions, such as founding the Brotherhood Church, running the School of Life, etc., was also the publication of the *Maranatha* magazine. It was produced in Turkish with Armenian characters and for many years enjoyed a wide readership from Iran to Argentina, engulfing many countries.

Scattered Armenian evangelical leaders regularly sent their articles to this valuable periodical. Refugees who had found a new home in strange lands were greatly benefited and encouraged. Vahram sent his articles from Istanbul. Before he ever left Turkey, his name and evangelistic endeavors were known by many. The magazine also reached Argentina, since following WWII Armenians from the Middle East and Greece migrated there. Vahram's elder sister Dikranuhi and his brother-in-law, Misak Balian were settled in Buenos Aires. Armenian folks in Argentina who were benefited from his articles in *Maranatha* were begging his sister to invite Vahram to South America. For a long time he was not inclined to leave the climes in which he was being effectively used by the Lord. Finally, his heavenly Father gave him the 'go-ahead.' The invitation from his sister had to be validated by the Argentinean consulate in Beirut, where he was at the time. With growing restiveness in the Middle Eastern lands many people, especially those of Christian tradition, were eager to migrate elsewhere.

The gate to the Argentinean consulate had long queues of eager anticipants waiting to obtain the needed visa. Vahram joined them from early morning. After a long wait, his turn came and he was called in. It seemed that there was no end to the questions and formalities. He had to pursue his application on the following day. Again, it was more of the same. However, this wasn't wasted time for this man who knew how to best utilize it. God who had ordained his journey was using him at the Argentinean consulate before he left Beirut. As was his practice, he was selling Scriptures to the long lines of people and witnessing to them. He told them that it was much easier to go to heaven than to

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<sup>35</sup> 'The Name of Jesus is Sweet to Me'

<sup>36</sup> 'The Day of His coming'

Argentina or to any other country! People full of anxiety received a great uplift in the midst of the human regulations in which they were caught. Vahram was an evangelist, and knew how to bear witness for his Savior in season and out of season. The subject of going to heaven mentioned by a man from another country brought assurance to weary hearts. While waiting for his Argentinean visa to come through he devoted afternoons to house gatherings. Believers who realized they would probably not see him again on earth brought unsaved neighbors and friends to hear the message of Jesus Christ. The delay in obtaining his visa was God's opportunity for evangelism.

At last, the Argentinean consulate put the stamp on his passport and the consul signed it. His ticket to Argentina was already in his possession, provided by his sister. There was no obstacle before him. It was a cold day in Beirut, February 25, 1957, when Vahram climbed the gangplank to the ship after fervent prayers of brothers and sisters who had come to the port to see him off. At a time when travelling by air was rather a novelty, a long voyage lay ahead. To many people this would be a difficult and somewhat boring passage. But not for Vahram! He boarded the ship with a good supply of Scriptures in several languages. People immediately took their places around tables to play cards. Some made their way to the bars to drink. Still others talked incessantly, looking at their watches, anticipating the next film showing while cracking pumpkin seeds between their teeth. It was not a bad time to be selling Scripture portions in Arabic, as well as in other languages. As he walked around the lounge his steps led him to three Armenian women involved in conversation. He began explaining to them how the Lord Jesus Christ had saved him from sin and changed his life direction from tailoring to Scripture selling. They took a genuine interest in what he was explaining. He stressed to them that the matter of their souls' salvation could not be put off. One of the ladies was highly animated. She related that she was a preacher's daughter, but had lapsed in her faith. She started telling Vahram her engaging story:

"My father became very ill. He was in no condition to go to church and preach. However he was burning with the desire to declare the message of Christ to the very end of his life. He called all of us family members and some friends to his bedside. He told us that he was dying. But before he went to meet his longed-for Savior, he felt compelled to tell his story one last time. Meeting his Savior in heaven was more real to him than closing his eyes in death. His spirit was buoyant. He spoke with unusual strength, challenged the unsaved ones to trust in Christ, and then committed his spirit to him. On that day some who didn't know the Savior, were saved. They left the bedside of the dying preacher as transformed people. "

After explaining her arresting story, she listened with interest to Vahram's extraordinary experiences. "You remind me of my father," she said, and with tears in her eyes, she found her way back to the arms of the Savior. At their arrival in Alexandria, this lady assisted Vahram to get a visitor's pass so he could visit his friends while the ship was in port. He wrote the following to his sister, Beatrice, in Istanbul: "If I were not a believer, where would I have such assistance?" In the same letter he related some of his fresh experiences: "A day after we had sailed from Beirut, we arrived in Alexandria. When I got out, I went to visit the brothers and sisters whom I knew from my previous trip." This freighter stayed in Alexandria for two days. During this time Vahram made many visits and held a couple of meetings. The presence of the Holy Spirit was evident. He continued his letter, "Those converted during my previous visit to Egypt are going on with the Savior. How we all rejoiced, hallelujah! Next, we will be heading to Italy." A pleasant smooth voyage made it possible for him to talk with many Arabs who were lounging around. They generally listened to him with interest. It was so good that Beatrice kept all his letters. In 2006 she went to be with her Lord.

After departing from Alexandria, their next stop was Syracuse, Sicily. There he visited a doctor, apparently for his never-ending physical ailments. He mentioned sharing his testimony with the doctor, but made no mention of the doctor's name. Vahram needed to obtain Italian money, and the doctor offered to exchange his currency for him, but inadvertently gave him extra. Vahram immediately returned the extra money when he realized what had happened, and the doctor was very appreciative and somewhat surprised.

As they continued their voyage to Naples he contacted numerous people, selling or offering free Scriptures. Among them, he met a Jew wearing a skullcap. The man prayed three times a day. They struck up a conversation in Arabic and Vahram told him about his visit to Jerusalem, "I explained about Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha and the agonies he endured." The Jew who probably was hearing the Gospel for the first time did not object at all. Their friendship continued all the way to the end of the voyage, when they parted ways in Buenos Aires. Barriers of language and religion were

almost non-existent with Vahram. He would silently pray before talking to each new contact. Some people enjoyed being in his company so much that they didn't want to leave him. *"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6).*

He remembered the past trips to various Anatolian cities and his impressions from there. Reminiscing about them he recalled how difficult some of them had been. He often traveled in rain, snow or scorching heat. He encountered hard circumstances, in some places resistance, ridicule and distrust. He faced physical hunger at times, but he always sought to make his Savior known to his downcast people. This time bearing witness for his Savior in the comfort of a nice ship was an unusually pleasant experience. The passengers from various backgrounds on this Mediterranean voyage were favorably disposed to the message. Again he remembered those people in Anatolia whom he had evangelized and how he had prayed to God that there would be someone to follow him in watering and reaping the fruit of those labors (*I Corinthians 3:6-9*). During those difficult days of traveling in Anatolia he carried heavy packs of books on his back. He remembered how his Lord had helped him to endure all that exhaustion and how he rejoiced when the books found their proper use in remote villages. Now he was praying that the witness given here in favorable conditions would bring fruit in the days ahead. He was spreading Christ's unique message on the ship and the Holy Spirit was attending his efforts. Vahram always looked ahead in faith. His work was not a fleeting activity, but something which would bring dividends in God's time. He had seen God doing miracles in the past; likewise this outreach was going to affect lives. He was now on his way to carry the Good News to another continent. His joy was overflowing, but the greatest joy was awaiting him at Christ's throne.

*"Well done, good and faithful servant;  
you have been faithful over a little,  
I will set you over much;  
Enter into the joy of your master"  
(Matthew 25:21)*

*"Who then is the faithful and wise servant,  
whom his master has set over his household,  
to give them their food at the proper time?  
Blessed is that servant whom his master  
When he comes will find so doing.  
Truly, I say to you, he will set him over  
All his possessions"  
(Matthew 24:45-47)*

This part of the voyage over, the ship arrived in Naples. Here he was to transfer to an ocean liner. He disembarked and found a reasonable hotel. First settling in his room, he took the stock of his Italian Scriptures and other literature and walked out onto the street to evangelize any and all he met. People received his witness and the books readily. They were meeting one of the very few people spreading Christ's message in this place. Sinful practices in any port city are commonly known. He went around, talking to people who came across his way. At one point, he met three Catholic nuns and struck up a conversation with them. They could somehow understand each other since their common interest was directed to heaven. The nuns were delighted with this foreigner's earnestness and joyfulness. One of them told him that he would do very well if he turned to Roman Catholicism. Smilingly he replied, "Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end." It was nothing new for him to converse about his Savior with folks whose language he did not speak. In fact, he always found it to be an exhilarating experience. He was enthralled to be in a European country running around, pointing people to heaven. But alas! He had wandered pretty far out and lost his way back to the hotel. He felt like the lost sheep of the anxious shepherd, who after diligent search found it and rejoiced. He prayed to his Great Shepherd and experienced the Shepherd's guiding his steps back to the hotel. He realized that indeed he had strayed quite some distance.

## **Chapter 40**



## Crossing the Atlantic

His departure from Naples was at hand. The transatlantic crossing was to take seventeen days, covering many time zones. This was to be a new experience for him. But for a person in touch with heaven every occurrence is God-ordained. There was plenty of time to study the Bible, to meditate, pray and of course, fervently witness. It was winter. Finally they left Gibraltar behind and started sailing over the wide expanse of the Atlantic. Great ocean swells were constantly causing the ship to rock and roll. Most of the passengers became seasick, including him. But he composed himself and went around encouraging fellow-passengers who were also enduring the ordeal. Some were crying.

The majority of the passengers were Italian, not knowing any other language. Vahram lovingly moved from one person to another extending comfort to these distressed travelers. As much as he could, he told them that beyond this long and trying voyage there was another journey which had to be solemnly considered and carefully prepared for. Naturally, all of these people bore the name Christian. He emphasized to them that being a true believer in Christ meant enjoying personal fellowship with Jesus Christ through his sacrifice. As already mentioned, having wide experience in communicating with people of different nationalities he always learned a few basic words and phrases in a language which would be helpful in his witness: God, Jesus Christ, sin, repentance, forgiveness, atonement, blood, cross, sacrifice, salvation, resurrection, heaven, hell, assurance and a few basic verbs. This method always worked. Before long, he discovered that crossing the ocean, although a taxing journey, had a certain attraction. At one point, the ship crossed the Equator into the Southern Hemisphere. The people who had brought summer clothing along changed, and those who didn't, wished they had, because the weather was now warm. At last passengers caught sight of land and loudly raised their voices in cheers of joy.

His relatives and friends in Argentina who had eagerly awaited his arrival were thrilled at finally seeing him. Years after having become acquainted with him through his writings in *Maranatha* and hearing of his labors, the time had come to meet him face to face. It was March 20, 1957. A sizeable crowd of men and women from various fellowships had congregated at the quay. Way back from the days of the Apostle Paul whenever a believer arrived or departed from a certain place, his/her fellow-believers were always on hand to welcome the person or bid him farewell (Acts 20:37; 21:7, 17). These earnest folks had waited to welcome and embrace their courageous evangelist friend from a distant land.

The Armenian special dishes were already prepared for a big welcome feast. Immediately after his disembarking and sharing greetings all around an impromptu prayer session took place right at the port. Everyone was full of thanksgiving to the Lord. Vahram remembered that during his evangelistic visits in the spiritual desert of Anatolia there was hardly a person waiting to meet him. In fact, in some places he had to discreetly inquire where local Armenians lived or worked. Argentina was another country and a totally different situation. Believers here uninhibitedly burst into singing and prayer, asking God to use Vahram effectively throughout South America, and they were confident that He was going to answer. Some of them reminded him of how they had been blessed through a particular article of his. And now they were going hear him preach!

The churches had grown spiritually complacent. This disturbed the Christians who took their faith seriously. They prayed that Vahram would be used by the Holy Spirit in to usher in the blowing of a different wind. They were aware that God was not dependent on any person. Nevertheless, the role of the evangelist could not be minimized. What they had heard, especially about the unforgettable revival in Amman, stirred them to expect and hope for a similar spiritual awakening in Argentina. Here was a single-hearted evangelist serious in his mission, fervent in prayer, true to the Word. Vahram was going to be used in the Latin American countries as he had been in Turkey and the Middle East.

## Chapter 41

### Plowed Ground, Watered Fields

Vahram's program to preach and evangelize was already laid. On March 21, 1957, the day after his arrival, the congregation gathered in a church with high expectancy of great blessing. It was a notable occasion, commencing his ministry in South America. He couldn't yet fully adjust himself to

the new land and the climate change. Standing behind a new pulpit was nothing unusual for him. Throughout his ministry he had proclaimed Christ's Good News from many a pulpit, in coffee houses and on street corners. He was entirely new to the audience, nevertheless as a seasoned evangelist he felt at home everywhere. Vahram's thoughts were carried back to the farmer in Anatolia. He sensed that the ground had been cultivated and watered prior his arrival. For this he gave thanks to the Holy Spirit. The believers were full of joy at hearing the anointed message in their own Armenian language. Born-again Christians remarked about an air of Pentecost blowing in their midst. The effect of the Word was immediately felt as it fell upon prepared hearts. Some were converted and believers in attrition found their way back to the Lord. That evening ended with deeply felt jubilation.

Vahram was guest at his sister and brother-in-law's house. Just as had happened in other countries, house gatherings became the order of the day. He had a special interest in house meetings and strongly believed in their effectiveness. Following his conversion in Istanbul on October 14, 1928, the first meetings he participated in were house gatherings. Those experiences brought an unforgettable reward as they were the beginning of an unnoticed revival which moved onward to several little homes. Who knows how many were ushered into God's kingdom at the start of his ministry? Now in the concluding years of his service house gatherings in another corner of the world were still drawing people to Christ. From the very outset, he was also out on the streets and in the public squares selling Scriptures and witnessing. The passion of his soul to introduce Christ and gather in sheaves never abated. He felt that he was fulfilling of Christ's words: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*" (Matthew 5:9). The earnest follower of the Prince of Peace was always involved in his peace-making mission, always calling sinners to repentance and reconciliation to God.

Vahram, a messenger of peace, was used by God to induce vertical and horizontal peace. People were reconciled to God and then to each other; frictions and factions vanished. To this aftermath of the preaching of the Word he would respond with his often-heard 'Hallelujah!' There was an immediate task before him. His sister's son, Joseph Balian, in the same house where he was staying, had never made a decision for the Savior. He couldn't have imagined that a brilliant Christian life and service for Christ lay ahead. It wasn't too long before Joseph opened his prepared heart to Christ. This young man grew in the faith and led many others to the Savior (*II Timothy 2:2*). It was too bad that Joseph was not going to enjoy a long life. He died in his thirties. Nevertheless, his few years of effective witness left a lasting impact on the community.

Vahram's productive ministry in Buenos Aires continued for many months, always with fresh and rejuvenating experiences. However, he increasingly felt that God was leading him to serve elsewhere in South America. The city of Montevideo in Uruguay was the next attraction. Once again he found himself in an attractive port city. According to spoken tradition, when the Portuguese first arrived at this strikingly beautiful place and took in the magnificence of the scene, a sailor exclaimed: '*Monte vide eu!*' i.e., '*I see the mountain!*' So this important port with the mountain in the background became known as Montevideo. Moses saw the mountain of God where he was transformed and then commissioned to perform great exploits for him (*Exodus 3:1-3*). Vahram went to Montevideo with the expectation of carrying on his commission. The meetings started on November 24, 1957. Just as Moses saw the glory of God, Vahram saw the same glory hovering over this place where many lives were going to be touched and transformed.

Armenian folks who escaped the bloody massacres within the Ottoman borders migrated as far away as this city. They came here to make a new life for themselves, put down deep roots, and build a community with their businesses, schools and churches. Vahram served faithfully wherever he was invited. His messages were in Armenian or Turkish, always translated into Spanish for the benefit of the young people. Among the many who were converted was a seventy-year-old woman. God filled her with the Holy Spirit and burdened her heart for prayer. Daily she would sit out in front of her door, a custom carried from the old country, notice the passers-by and pray for their salvation. The pleading of her burdened heart received its rewards.

Numerous young people were converted at this time. During the meetings they would rush to the altar, many with tears in their eyes, to repent and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Their lives were transformed. Vahram always impressed two necessities of the Christian life upon any new convert. Besides faithfully reading the Scriptures, they were to pray in faith and witness for Christ. The young converts caught his point. They would go to public squares testifying to anyone around. They would also visit prisons, proclaiming the forgiveness of Christ and his power to transform lives.

Vahram's messages always touched the reality of the Blessed Hope. He never failed to remind his

audience of the Lord's return. He would admonish new believers to pray for Christ's Second Coming (*Revelation 22:20*). A young fellow was brought to one of his meetings. The boy had aspired to enjoy a hedonistic life. He ran away from his home in Rio de Janeiro and fell among other pleasure-seekers in Montevideo. But he soon became disillusioned with this mirage. He started looking for a way out. An Armenian woman somehow ran across him and brought him to a meeting. The lively message conveyed by a man who really knew God had its immediate impact on him. He understood that the heavenly Father was waiting for him. This wayward son came for forgiveness to the Cross and into the arms of his Savior and of his waiting parents.

In a short time the meetings were moved from Armenian to Spanish-speaking churches. Vahram's newly converted nephew Joseph was always present to interpret for him. Strange indeed, people for years had heard Christ's message in their own language without being affected. But now they were responding to a heart-stirring sermon from a man of God who had come from the other end of the earth. In fact, speaking through interpreter was not an unusual experience for Vahram. He was entirely reliant on the Holy Spirit who, since Pentecost, has been speaking to people in many languages.

On November 28, 1957, he wrote these lines to his sister in Istanbul: "Hallelujah! There is an amazing revival here. Souls are being redeemed; people not on speaking terms with each other are restored to fellowship. Rifts are healed. All churches, including the Gregorians, came together and rented a large hall. Meetings continue nightly. Also, there is an orchestra made up of young people. Men and women readily pray aloud in the meetings, and how beautifully God is answering their prayers! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! One sister approached me saying, 'Others sowed the seed and now you are reaping' (*I Corinthians 3:6, 7*). With prayer, Vahram"

Following one meeting four young ladies walked to the front of the pulpit, crying uncontrollably. Vahram was led by the Holy Spirit to read the passage: *"The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners"* (*I Timothy 1:15*). Right then and there, all four received Christ and gave clear evidence of transformed lives. The evangelist remarked, "Angels in heaven rejoice over the salvation of these dear women." After the meeting a young man came forward. "My past is very dark; I killed a man and spent a long time in prison. Finally I was released, but the evil tendency within doesn't let me go. I am constantly prone to do evil. Is there any hope for me?" As he always did, Vahram opened the Scriptures and read feelingly, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (*I John 1:9*). At hearing these reassuring words, the young man cried out, "Yes, yes, I wish to receive Christ. I need to be cleansed." Vahram prayed earnestly for this bereft fellow, then let him pray for himself. He started praying without hesitation, and another sinner's name was written in the Lamb's book of life. The penitent sinner who had been haunted by Satan, said, "Such peace and repose I have never known." This newly-born man began attending all prayer meetings, radiating his Christ-given joy. His growth in the faith was remarkable. Such experiences always brought fresh delight and thanksgiving to the heart of the evangelist.

Practically all churches in Montevideo invited Vahram for meetings. A minister had read years before a story about Vahram, printed in Damascus. At the time, he was so excited with the account that he remarked, "How I wish we could invite him here!" One day he heard that Vahram was actually in town! He was thrilled. He chanced upon him in one of the city squares where Vahram and his nephew were holding an open air meeting. The minister was delighted and immediately invited him to preach in his church. Right from the outset, the meetings were guided by the Holy Spirit. A young man was converted and gave a thrilling testimony: "I have been in this church for some years, trying to do all the right things. Probably most people thought I was a true believer, but in fact I was merely a decent and moral person. I never confessed my sins openly, nor repented of my sinfulness. I have been deceiving all of you and myself as well. I ask your forgiveness, but above all, for Christ's forgiveness." Following this candid confession, he fell on his knees and did something which he should have done years before. He was saved and became a genuine disciple of Christ. Many other such encounters in Montevideo brought joy to the Lord, to Vahram and everybody else.

## Chapter 42

### Evangelizing on Board ~~ Back in Buenos Aires

Following a valuable ministry in Montevideo Vahram felt he should return to Buenos Aires. He would travel by ship. He and four other brothers prayed for God's clear guidance. When assured that the time was right, they set sail. The ship was packed. Looking at the large crowd Vahram said to his friends, "Brothers, how beautiful it will be to hold a meeting here!" The others readily agreed. After holding an impromptu prayer session among themselves on board, Vahram gave the go-ahead: "Let's begin and if they stop us, we'll have no choice but to comply." So he started preaching Christ in Armenian with translation into Spanish. His mixed audience had never seen or been in such an extraordinary evangelistic rally. Neither had they ever heard a speaker addressing them through an interpreter. They pressed more and more around the small band while everyone listened in rapt attention. They didn't notice that the ship had started to list. The alarmed captain suddenly appeared on the scene, wanting to see the preacher. When he found out that the man did not speak Spanish, he used the interpreter's services: "You are doing a very good work, but this is not the place to do it. Come, let me take you to the lounge where you can give your message safely and more conveniently both for you and for your audience. Vahram begged the captain's pardon and thanked him for providing a suitable place for the meeting. The whole crowd followed him to the lounge where he continued to evangelize them.

Ever since he had left Buenos Aires the folks there were praying for his return. They were thrilled when their supplications were finally answered. Once again he was going strong in Buenos. In one of the meetings he ran across Armenuhi Himidian, a lady he had known from one of the Middle Eastern cities. She began explaining her condition. She and her husband had sold their home, business and everything else and moved to Argentina. In the new country their former devotion to the Lord gradually dissipated. She took Vahram home to her husband. Following a cordial talk, they both broke down in tears of confession and renewed dedication. Immediately afterward, they started attending prayer meetings with restored joy in their Savior. What had been witnessed in the past in Istanbul, Anatolia, Aleppo, Beirut and Amman was being duplicated here. The evening prayer meetings at seven were followed by preaching where there was good attendance. The devil's hostility and resistance were ongoing, but Vahram continually challenged believers to overcome the enemy's vicious attacks through earnest prayer.

Previously the believers in Buenos Aires had not enjoyed such exhilaration. Many people were kind of accustomed to the low ebb of spiritual life, but now they were experiencing showers of blessing. Sinners were being converted, lapsed believers restored, broken relationships reinstated. Those who never knew how to pray audibly were now experiencing the freedom to pray out loud. Vahram Tatikian never failed to impress on God's children the need to pray in public. The Holy Spirit was in manifest action; Christ was becoming personal and real to people. Those who found their way back to the Savior witnessed boldly. Literature distribution surpassed all previous efforts. The bond of love was evident. Many people were remarking about the change in their church circles.

Vahram's simple messages could be understood even by children. Many youngsters responded to the invitation for salvation, so a children's choir was formed made up of these new little converts. The element of love was kneaded into every message. All believers who had witnessed refreshing times in Anatolia happily remembered those joyful days. Their hearts were directed to heaven. Those who had unsaved spouses, children or relatives became burdened in a new way to intercede and draw their loved ones to Jesus Christ. Young people who were converted reflected their newly-found faith by reaching out to their friends. They wanted to share with them their new purpose-filled life. At the conclusion of the evening meetings many stayed until midnight to pray and testify. They related their experiences of how they were witnessing to people in different parts of the city.

After the meetings Vahram was led to the homes of people who couldn't come to hear the message. There he continued his admonition with the same fervency. Many a sick person found healing, but first and above all they were told of their need for assurance of salvation. There were instances of healing. However, Vahram never made much of this element in his preaching or when challenging people to come to Christ. In passing, he might refer to a healing, giving the glory to God. His prime concern was the salvation of sinners. He would say, "God did not commission me to be a dispenser of health, but a proclaimer of the Good News through his son." On one occasion, a ninety-year-old woman was saved. Shortly thereafter, she was transferred to Christ's presence. A sick person in a family was saved and also healed. The family made a commitment that the same amount of money they had been spending on the sick person's medical expenses was now going to be given to the Lord's work.

Vahram's depiction of the ugliness and menace of sin was extremely vivid. He was a preacher who could make sin an intimidating enemy. He counterbalanced this with the superlative love and grace of Jesus Christ. Behind his simple sermons there was prayer and at times, fasting. He would fit very well to the description of the Apostle:

*"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound;  
in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing  
plenty and hunger, abundance and want.  
I can do all things in him who strengthens me."  
(Philippians 4:12, 13)*

The evangelist was well trained on the doctrine of sin (*hamartology*) and God's lament over the condition of the sinner. He would earnestly urge everyone to repent and put his/her faith in Jesus Christ. *"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:18-20).* Some even went as far as calling him a modern Jeremiah (9:1). The compassion and tears of the Savior were also a part of him. Those who knew him well and followed his ministry discussed the power and authority behind the messages of this simple person who had had no education or theological training.

As many are aware, there have been glorious revivals in the past when multitudes were ushered into God's kingdom. The unnoticed revivals stirred by this faithful servant of the Almighty were somewhat reminiscent of many past awakenings. There was a clear declaration of God's message, persuasion of its verity, and application of the message to the condition of everyone who heard it. He taught believers to come together every Saturday for fasting and prayer. People earnestly and confidently made their requests known to Christ as they knelt before him. The outcome of these sessions translated many requests into divine action. The time element was not important. Sometimes the meetings would last for four or five hours without any sign of hurry. The Holy Spirit was in full cooperation with those who supplicated. Confession, repentance and returning to Christ all were part of these sessions. The apparent unity was not human-generated. A noticeable feature during the prayers was the confession of people who had been criticizing their pastors and now asking forgiveness.

When people repented they were admonished to make restitution and reparation. Old monetary debts were settled and old grievances removed. A man remembering a debt of years before who never bothered about repaying it prayed about this suppressed sin and confessed his subtlety in trying to get out of it. His settling of the old debt stirred a new attitude among other believers toward their various obligations.

One day Vahram was invited to speak to a group of young people. Both he and his interpreter were very tired from the previous night's meeting. A young man had brought along other fellows and girls to hear the evangelist. As the meeting progressed, Vahram's tiredness vanished. At the end the young people prayed freely on their knees. One of those saved that day became a fervent witness for Christ. He started proclaiming the Good News in trains, buses and in the open air. Parents could not comprehend what had happened to their children. In some cases, entire families came to the Lord. As the flames of the awakening spread, there were those seeking to extinguish it. Vahram reminded God's people about Satan's zealous preoccupation. He exhorted them to pray in the energy of the Holy Spirit to subdue the dampening attempts of opposition. In referring to Elijah's miracle on Mt. Carmel, he drew a comparison by saying that no amount of water could put out God's fire sent from heaven to destroy the idolatrous religion of Baal (*I Kings 18:32-38*).

## **Chapter 43**

### **Passing the Torch**

From his youth, Vahram was a seeker of God's truth. Also, as a young teen-ager he became a refugee in his own country due to the Armenian massacre in Anatolia. As soon as he arrived in Istanbul

he started working as a tailor, a trade he had learned in Sungurlu from one of his uncles. Due to his past experiences, many of which were unfavourable, a special interest directed to young people and children grew in his heart. From the day he set foot in Argentina he found himself in a free atmosphere where he could evangelize youngsters. He lived at the home of his sister and brother-in-law, where his nephew Joseph immediately became the target of his interest. His desire was to lead him to Christ. Joseph was born in 1936. As he grew, his passion was football – so common in Latin America. While the whole family were believers, Joseph didn't show any interest in the faith.

Before Vahram arrived, Joseph became very ill. The doctors gave up all hope for his recovery. He had been named after his grandfather. Before the old man died, he gave his grandson an Armenian and a Spanish Bible. He dedicated the Armenian Bible with the words, "To Joseph Balian, volunteer preacher." These words puzzled the family. Young Joseph said, "Such a statement doesn't suit me. I am very far from getting involved in preaching." Vahram fasted and prayed, first for his salvation, then for his healing. God rewarded this earnest supplication. Shortly afterwards Joseph was converted and healed. A couple months later, he became Vahram's main interpreter, accompanying him to meetings everywhere. The grandfather's expectation of faith was rewarded. Joseph knew Armenian and Turkish, and naturally Spanish. Having a young interpreter was a valuable asset for Vahram. Among the converted young people, Joseph was the most active.

Vahram's convincing messages had a definite impact on people who could understand only Spanish. Many people remarked about Joseph's ability to translate messages into Spanish with equal vibrancy. This opened the doors to many Spanish-speaking churches. When Joseph gave his testimony of how the Lord had redeemed and healed him, bringing him together with his uncle to peach, people saw the merciful hand of God in the whole affair.

Vahram stayed at his sister's home for five years, with that one interruption when he travelled to Montevideo. Finally, the believers decided to buy a house for him. They raised the funds from among themselves and bought a small house of two-rooms. The place became a center of prayer. The door was always open to receive visitors of all ages. He wrote to his sister in Istanbul, "I have never known a happier time than this." Until then he had not lived in a house of his own.

His relationship with young people grew ever more effective. A person lacking formal education, hailing from another culture and language, yet fully able to help young people in their search for God was clearly a work of the Holy Spirit. He was like a father to boys and girls who could not be helped in their own homes. He was a God-sent counsellor to young people. Besides preaching in churches, he included in his ministry visits to hospitals, homes for the aged, prisons—whenever permission was granted, and also open-air meetings. Again he wrote to his sister, "Sitting in church pews and listening to sermons without putting them into action does not excite young people. They are only satisfied in fervently serving the Lord who came into the world to work hard and ultimately die to save sinners. Young people need accomplishment and productivity." At a time when the restiveness and rebellion of youth everywhere had not yet come to a head (in the late fifties and early sixties), he taught a basic principle to parents and church leaders: "Show vital interest and concern in your young people. Display constructive action which they can emulate. Let them sweat it out. They should appreciate the value of their faith and gladly contribute to its promulgation. Let them consider it a privilege to work wholeheartedly for the Master. Pull them out of stagnant indifference. Let the Holy Spirit direct you in your responsibility of leadership. The outcome will be rewarding." He could offer such sound advice because this is exactly how he labored everywhere he went.

His thoughts were carried back to his youth. When he was a young believer in Christ, a faithful Swiss brother by the name of Herr Mueller was a worker in Istanbul. Herr Mueller was a worthy counsellor and father to Vahram, Artaki and Aram, effectively training them to be untiring witnesses for Jesus Christ. He successfully encouraged these young men to proclaim the Good News fearlessly and persistently. This stimulus had great effect upon them to take Christ's message to highways and byways. Herr Mueller did not only encourage them to bear bold witness, but he also taught them the basics of evangelistic outreach. The assistance of Herr Mueller had undeniable influence on the young evangelists just as the Scriptures put it:

*"Tell your children of it, and let your children  
tell their children, and their children another generation."*

*(Joel 1:3)*

*"And what you have heard from me before many witnesses  
entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*

*(II Timothy 2:2)*

The expression in Vahram's letter to his sister, "I have not had better times than these," could be well understood. The farmer who puts his hand to the plow and carries on without looking back is a vivid illustration of the Spirit-guided evangelist's work. In South America Vahram passed the lessons he had learned in Istanbul on to his nephew Joseph and other young people. Herr Mueller is gone; Vahram is gone; even Joseph is gone following a brief service to the Lord, but the truth stressed in Paul's letter to Timothy goes on proving its vitality.

For Vahram the Christian faith was a process of continuous learning. He couldn't stand to see idle Christians who did not bring some fruit for the Master. Faithful men such as Herr Mueller, J. K. Lyman and a few others who had a positive impact on his life continue to reap the rewards of their labors. New generations growing in the faith and progressing in the testimony go on offering their service to the Lord of the harvest. Young folks nurtured and trained by Vahram authenticated their clear-cut commitment by effective ministries in evangelism, radio and literature, Bible school leadership and in other areas. Vahram's conviction of the verity of Scripture has been evidenced from generation to generation. Those who have gone on before, though dead, continue to minister through the lives they trained so faithfully. The value of their legacy surpasses many other achievements.

*"A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters  
will himself be watered." (Proverbs 11:25)*

## **Chapter 44**

### **A CHURCH REVIVED IN CORDOBA**

In August 1958, Vahram moved on to Cordoba, Argentina's third largest city. Joseph was with him as his interpreter. They visited an Armenian church whose whole congregation had lost interest in anything spiritual. They were meeting simply out of habit. A meaningless and tasteless exercise was being repeated Sunday after Sunday. The church was without a pastor and people were saying that if one didn't come within two weeks, they would lock the place up. A medical doctor had been trying to carry on somehow, but his heart was not in it. He resigned because he had nothing more to say to the pathetic handful of people who were left. When Vahram met him he began to weep. "In front of me I saw a man who was in 'Babylonian captivity'", he said painfully. Vahram was so burdened for him that he prayed for him daily. He also visited him every day, giving him encouragement from God's word.

Once again the desperate man in Jesus' parable came to mind: "*For a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him*" (Luke 11:6). This tragic condition of preachers common in so many places, had reached a lamentable depth here. How was God going to use His faithful servant to deal with this plight?

Vahram suggested holding meetings in that church. A few accepted the proposal. The sparsely attended meetings picked up momentum. All who attended were touched and experienced a spiritual awakening. The Lord of the harvest abundantly answered Vahram's prayers. The doctor did not show up the first few nights, but when he heard what was going on he started attending the meetings with his wife and son. After a few evenings, he took over the work of translating Vahram's messages. He had been on the verge of disbanding the congregation and locking the church, but was now reclaimed for the ministry. Soon after, others who had previously forsaken the assembly came back. The Holy Spirit granted new life to a dying church. People discovered the substance and purpose of life (Revelation 3:2).

Vahram's ministry soon spread to other churches in the city. Many young people were saved, were attached to the church and fully followed the Lord. They went to the public squares and with loudspeakers proclaimed salvation through Jesus Christ. They widely distributed Christian literature as part of their earnest outreach. These were young people who had just been converted. The

remarkable transformation in their lives sobered people to consider the cause of their complete turnabout.

Vahram organised children's rallies at which many youngsters received the Lord. This is how he expressed his joy in a letter: "The kids feel so chirpy — they love to sing the songs they have just learned. New children are giving their hearts to Jesus in every meeting." Vahram felt a special concern for people behind bars. As he had done in other cities, he got permission to visit the prison in Cordoba. It wasn't easy, but God intervened and opened the prison doors for him. With Joseph's help he ministered to the prisoners every Sunday, and these heavily burdened people heard the message of love and joy. They were shown a whole new way of life.

In Cordoba as in other cities Vahram was keen to sell books to the public. He bought up all the Bibles, New Testaments and Christian books from the various book-shops and went out to the streets to sell them. People who had never thought of purchasing such books were activated to desire them. And many bought them readily. His old trade as colporteur which began in Istanbul never lost its zest. He sold books everywhere. During the years of his service for Christ the Scriptures which he brought to people in who-knows-how-many-languages, pointed the way to heaven to many a buyer and seeker. We shall never know how many tens of thousands of Scriptures or portions Vahram sold. This ought to encourage hesitant followers of Christ in every church.

## Chapter 45

### FROM TOWN TO TOWN, FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY

In the space of three years there was not one city where Armenians lived throughout the length and breadth of Argentina that Vahram had not visited. And it was not just a matter of being involved with a few churches in each place. There were open-air meetings, visits to prisons, homes for the aged and hospitals, and ministry in any other place where opportunity presented itself. He always carried his violin with him. He formed a youth ensemble, comprised of three violins, two accordions and two wind instruments, which he directed himself. The music would always be heralded by a cry of 'Hallelujah!' He took the ensemble with him on home visits to bring joy to sick, elderly or disabled people. He wrote that the musical group made a valuable contribution wherever they went.

All this time he could never forget his beloved Istanbul. In a letter from Cordoba dated the first of August 1958, he encouraged the believers back home: "There is a revival in Cordoba, Hallelujah! Do not forget to visit the hospitals. Stay faithful to the meetings. Keep your prayer meetings going even if there are only a few of you in attendance. News of spiritual progress in Istanbul pleases me so much that I would have not been so happy if the whole of South America were given to me! All will soon be past; only service done for Christ will last. In Cordoba a series of outdoor meetings continued for eight days. Many listened from the open windows of their homes. The church in this place has not witnessed such a revival for years. People follow the messages with deep satisfaction and are blessed. Hallelujah!" Interest in God's work was kindled everywhere he went.

Calls for him to visit various towns were increasing. It was impossible to accept them all! A great number of people wanted him to come to their homes for a meal. There was no way he could accept all their invitations. As the Lord said, *"I have food to eat of which you do not know"* (John 4:32). Again he wrote to Istanbul, "If you could only see what is happening here! It's like being in paradise. Hallelujah!"

Whenever he went to a home to eat, the meal table turned into a spiritual feast. Each time he was able to draw the company from the physical to the spiritual food. He would transfer them to the banquet table of Christ, which is promised to believers for all eternity. To share in a meal with Vahram and other Christians was to become part of a joyous fellowship in a happy atmosphere. It can honestly be said that no one ever saw him in a sour mood. His joy was the joy of the Lord.

If Vahram detected a person who was uneasy or nervous in a meeting, he would say something to put him at ease. He sensed when someone was looking for an opportunity to slip out, and he would seek ways to make that person enjoy the meeting. A lady would always make a quick exit the moment the benediction was pronounced. One day he went after her and said, "Why are you running away from the Lord?" The woman started to cry. He was able to lead her to Christ that same evening. Vahram was a workman who understood the need of every person.



On one occasion, he happened to be standing at a busy thoroughfare in Rio de Janeiro distributing tracts in Portuguese. A man and his son were passing by when the son reached out to take one. Suddenly his eyes brightened. "Oh father," he exclaimed, "This man is Vahram Tatikian!" The father could not contain himself. He ran up to Vahram and threw his arms around him. Taken by surprise, Vahram said, "Forgive me; I don't think I recognise you." "I'm a spiritual child of yours from Istanbul," the man replied. The two men embraced each other on that crowded street, shedding tears of joy and praising the Lord. The words of Psalm 126, verses 5 and 6, were again recalled.

A celebrated evangelist was going to speak in a large church in a Brazilian city. A lot of people wanted to attend in order to hear that famous preacher. At the last minute it was announced that he could not come, but had sent someone else in his place. Everybody was disappointed. When they saw a stranger standing at the pulpit, and with an interpreter, they wondered who could have been chosen to take the place of the well-known evangelist. They gave little thought to the presence of the Holy Spirit who anoints both well-known and unknown speakers and who alone can bring fruit in God's work. Vahram's message, "The Love Which Springs from God," struck fear into their hearts and was authenticated by results they could never forget.

## **Chapter 46**

### **MINISTRY IN CHILE AND RETURN TO THE EAST**

For a long time Vahram had been praying that God would open the way for him to go to Chile. This longest country of the world, about 2,650 miles from north to south and 225 miles wide from the farthest east to the ocean, was the last country on his agenda. Approximately five hundred Armenians were living in Santiago, the capital, not a high figure by any estimation, nevertheless an incredibly wealthy community. Many millionaires were among them. But spiritually they were bankrupt. He passionately wanted to reach them for Jesus Christ. Finally the door was open before him. While he was amazed at the beauty of the land his thoughts were consumed for the lost people who lived without purpose for life or consideration of eternity's values. Immediately upon reaching Chile Vahram began visiting his fellow Armenians, first in their places of business and then in their homes. They were living in the lap of luxury, but were in spiritual poverty. When Vahram started telling them about the reality of sin and the necessity of forgiveness to have peace with God and entry into heaven, some turned to Jesus Christ. Earthly riches gave way to heavenly wealth.

During his visit, Santiago was celebrating an important occasion. The various churches of the city decided to have a children's parade with the emphasis on God and eternity. They prepared an impressive float which captivated onlookers' attention. Children preceding the float were carrying placards, one of which read: "*We beseech you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, repent of your sins! Turn from the way that leads to hell!*" Vahram marched ahead playing his accordion while children in their colourful little outfits followed behind. He considered this effort a New Testament mandate. He was more ready to join such outreaches than to accept invitations to preach in churches. As in every city, he evangelized in marketplaces, hospitals, prisons, schools, homes and wherever else he could gain a foothold. He considered these places as the multi-faceted world arena where real life was being played out. All sorts of human quandaries were brought before him to deal with. This was the world to which Christ came. Such was the field of the mighty Old Testament prophets and the kind of service to which the apostles of the New Testament were sent. For Vahram, these places were the real battleground where his faith was put to the test. "Whoever reaches out to this real world always wins," Vahram said, adding with conviction, "The church must flow out to the world."

As an evangelist constantly in prayer, always on the move and daily encountering new dilemmas he sought to deal with each situation pragmatically. Vahram made the most of the latter stages of his ministry in this great land, never flagging in zeal, but making the most of every opportunity to tell yet another person of his need for Christ. His whole-hearted labours in so many lands in South America and the rewards accrued in each place verified that God had truly led him all the way. When contemplating this he would shout 'Hallelujah!' to the Holy Spirit for his flawless guidance.

On December 8, 1964, he returned to Montevideo. Satan was employing the same tactics here as he had in Istanbul years before. Because of the phenomenal success of Vahram's Spirit-filled ministry some of the leaders became jealous of him. This reaction didn't come as a surprise to Vahram, but because he was only human it did somewhat shake him. All of a sudden, the Armenian evangelical

churches closed their doors to him as had happened in Istanbul. Sensing the disgruntlement, he had been expecting a disagreeable development. He could have said with the Apostle Paul, *"We are not ignorant of Satan's designs" (II Corinthians 2:11)*. Throughout the years his ministry had stirred calculated attack from various quarters. What Satan couldn't achieve against Christ's servant by outside adversaries, he sought to effect through people within the church.

God's mature servant, Vahram, could not resort to carnal retaliation. He waited on his heavenly Father in prayer, asking for other opportunities, and truly, this is exactly what happened. God encouraged him through the words of a sister: "I don't feel at all sorry for what has happened. Human resistance cannot negate divine effectiveness. When one door is closed, He will open another door before you." So, what happened in the end? The Armenian Gregorian churches enthusiastically invited Vahram for ministry in their community! Along with this, invitations from Spanish-speaking churches began flowing in. The ministry among the young people he loved so much reached a new apex. Vahram jubilantly exalted, "Oh my Lord, hallelujah! You have never forgotten or forsaken my ministry or me. How great is your faithfulness!" Recollections from the past, both bitter and pleasant, flashed on the screen of his memory.

In a certain town he visited a church where attendance was down to a mere eight people. Following earnest prayer and determined preaching, something fabulous happened in this church. The gist of his message was, "Confess your sins openly and repent. Turn to Christ in seriousness of heart and mind. Pray in faith. Pay attention to young people. Spread the Good News with earnestness." Within two months the attendance had increased to 150. Young people now regularly attending the meetings became a vital element in the church. After one service Vahram met a young Armenian fellow who had come from Athens, Greece. He had run away from home and landed in South America. He was quickly squandering the money in his pocket on reckless living. Vahram talked to him tenderly like a loving father and invited him to repent and receive Christ as his Savior. This he did, then and there with great joy and delight! He started running everywhere, witnessing for Jesus Christ. He openly declared that he had received forgiveness from God. Vahram must have shouted many hallelujahs in celebration of that victory.

In a certain family of six, the man alone was a believer. His wife, son and three daughters had no interest in the things of God. The man was constantly fasting and praying. On a particular day while he was fasting, he managed to bring his whole family to the meeting. He was expecting in faith that God would do something. That day Vahram preached with special anointing and authority. And indeed, along with others, his whole family was converted to Christ that evening! Undoubtedly Vahram raised another 'hallelujah.' So it was, wherever God led his humble servant, some door opened which allowed him to carry on his ministry effectively. As the Apostle Paul would have confidently said, *"We are God's fellow workers" (I Corinthians 3:9)*.

A distinctive feature of those years in South America was the staging of one military coup after the other. Under the threat of being toppled, no government felt secure. Putsches had become a regular event. The evangelist would explain that the universal sovereign Lord was going to come from heaven and establish his righteous reign, which would never be toppled (*Revelation 11:15*). Vahram was a simple Christian in a complicated world. It was incomprehensible to him that God should be incapable of resolving any human problem. He emphasised the authoritative declaration of the prophet Daniel:

*And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).*

## **Chapter 47**

### **READY TO RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE**

Vahram's longing for his beloved Istanbul and for the believers and close relatives there found expression in his letters. It was becoming apparent that he wouldn't be returning to Istanbul. He was slowly reconciled to the fact that his life and ministry would be concluded in South America

Long years of ceaseless toil, constant travel, sleepless nights and general exhaustion had taken their toll. From the time he had landed in South America not once had he been to see a doctor. He was

convinced that the Savior of his soul was also the healer of his body. So in every emergency he would turn to Him with absolute confidence.

At the beginning of 1965 he began to feel unwell, but said nothing to anybody. He did not want his physical condition to interfere with his ongoing ministry. He continued to walk the pathway of faith by prayer alone. As well as going to Chile, God had helped him to take a trip to Brazil and have a rewarding ministry there. But when he returned to Argentina he was extremely exhausted and was suffering some pain. His sister and other relatives insisted that he check in at the hospital. His faith and confidence in God's care increased in proportion to the weakness he was enduring. His strong Christian character shone through his suffering. He faced the physical debility joyfully, but he was steadily losing weight. The red blood cells in his body were gradually dying. On the first of August he was taken to the *Sanatorio Evangelico* in Buenos Aires where it was recognised that his condition was critical. Before the doctors performed any treatment he would say, "Let us pray," and he would proceed to do so himself.

His kidneys were no longer functioning, and many times he was given blood. News of his condition spread to every country and city where he had worked, and believers were praying. His illness came quite unexpectedly. He had been ministering right to the end, so the news of his fast deteriorating health saddened all who loved him. When visitors came in asking how he was, he would respond with 'Hallelujah!' and confidently declare that if the Lord wished to prolong his life it would be an easy matter for Him to do it. Whenever he was able to speak with other patients or hospital staff, he would always give a lively testimony, reminding them that he was on his way to meet his Lord in heaven. This was the picture of God's man wrestling with death.

He was concerned that his written messages be translated into Spanish and that especially the young be benefited from them. His mind was sound to the end. Each day he received a fresh promise from God's word. One of the last assurances was this: *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me"* (Psalm 23:4).

At nine o'clock on Sunday morning, the twentieth of August 1965, Vahram Tatikian, God's invincible and tireless ambassador was received, at the age of fifty-six, into the presence of his beloved Christ.

*"We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord"* (II Corinthians 5:8).

*"I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better"* (Philippians 1:23).

This was the end of the earthly pilgrimage of God's faithful servant and herald of Christ's Good News. He had assisted to propel multitudes of darkened hearts into Christ's infinite grace. His labors touched four continents, some for extensive periods. The number of those converted to Jesus Christ through his ministry could only be estimated in the tens of thousands. At least twenty young men were guided into the Lord's service through his ministry. His fully productive life here below now ended and the brilliance of eternity began. The comforting words of Daniel the prophet were fulfilled:

*"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever"* (Daniel 12:3).

Vahram was more than a believer in God. He was a soldier who gave himself wholeheartedly to carry out his Master's instructions. He was deeply convinced that he must fulfil God's purpose on earth. Paul's encouraging words to Timothy found their realisation in his life:

*"Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy the one who enlisted him.*

*An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.*

*It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have first share of the crops"* (II Timothy 2:3-6).

Soldier, sportsman, farmer — all three work with a purpose. Here the Apostle Paul resembles the life and labor of God's servant to the discipline of each one of them. He emphasizes that the servant of the Lord must be equally diligent. A soldier's life is one separated from worldly work and distraction in order that he may fulfil the purpose for which he has been recruited. He recognises only his commander's instructions. So it was with Vahram. In his labors for Christ he was mindful not to step outside of His command. His whole life was a venture marked by obedience. He pleased his

supreme commander and fulfilled His purposes on earth. Furthermore, he trained himself and contested as an athlete with determined perseverance. He completed the race of life with remarkable attainment. In former times a laurel wreath was placed on the winner's head. Vahram's heavenly Master placed a resplendent crown on his head, saying,

*"Well done, good servant!" (Luke 19:17).*

How singularly did this servant of God resemble a farmer in his labors! Snow, rain, cold and heat — he disregarded them all. Whether the soil was soft or hard, cultivated or uncultivated, he toiled on. The jealousy of other farmers did not hinder him from persevering. He spared no effort as he gathered in fruit for the Lord. Finally he returned to the Lord of the Harvest, his arms laden with abundant sheaves, to receive the reward of the hard-working farmer.

What kind of a person was this worker? The Apostle Paul described him long ago:

*"For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).*

*"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith" (Romans 3:27).*

His brothers and sisters in Christ reminiscing on these noble qualities were grieved that this self-giving servant of God was no longer with them. On the other hand, they praised God for the joy that was his at being home with his heavenly Father. In Buenos Aires, everyone who knew him wanted to attend his funeral, but that was not possible. His body was brought from the hospital to the Armenian Brotherhood Church. The doctors who had treated him attended the funeral. The young pallbearers pledged that from then on they would faithfully pursue his unfinished ministry. Several young people were among those who took part in the service. One of them said, "Not only did he win us to the Savior, he also trained us to be disciples and workers like himself." While many expressed deep gratitude to him, this was especially true of the young. The service was a commemoration of thanksgiving for his life-long service for Christ. Every speaker stressed the unequivocal reminder: "Life is short and death is certain. Therefore, repent and believe in Christ." This was particularly directed to the unsaved who were present. Vahram would have wanted it this way. The Scripture that most aptly relates to his life, work and home-going is this:

*"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this:*

*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.'*

*'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"*

*(Revelation 14:13).*

Vahram, during his rather brief pilgrimage on earth, made heaven real to multitudes because he faithfully proclaimed God's grace by which he himself had discovered the road to heaven. He joined the ranks of many giants who had preceded him, but above all he was satisfied with beholding his Savior (*Psalms 17:15*).

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## **ONE OF VAHRAM'S MESSAGES**

The account of Vahram's life and ministry would not be complete without a sample of his plain and pithy preaching. Its originality, personal application and liveliness are evident. Preaching vague theories was not his way to use the trust of the pulpit. He would preach on Biblical truths that had become incarnate in him. When he spoke it was as if he were crying out: "See how the Holy Spirit has worked in my life. He wants to do the same in you. Bow to his authority." The following message was given in the colloquial Turkish of the day. The style of today's Turkish is very different.

## **A LEAKING CUP AT A FOUNTAIN IN DAMASCUS**

A hot summer day in 1955 found me sharing the good news of the Gospel in Damascus. The drinking

fountains of Damascus flow with an abundance of cold, fresh water. Attached by a chain to one of the fountains I saw a splendid tinned-copper cup that reminded me of similar cups we used to drink from when I was a child back in Turkey. "I'll have a drink," I thought. Rinsing the cup a few times before use, I held it under the water a good while to fill it. No one was with me at the fountain. But however much I tilted it to my mouth, I could not get at the water - it somehow trickled away. To find out the reason for this I examined it carefully and saw that the cup had a hole in it. I tried to snatch a drink from it as fast as it filled up, but the water was draining away too quickly. Right there God taught me a lesson.

A lot of believers are like this. They are being filled with the Holy Spirit but there are holes in them and they quickly become empty. I know this from personal experience. From time to time God has filled me with the Holy Spirit; for example when I have been studying the Bible or praying or enjoying fellowship with believers or visiting hospitals and prisons. But because there were holes in me I became empty.

What are these holes that prevent us from being permanently filled with the Spirit? There are two verses that have had a great impact upon my life. The first is: *"...no man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8)*, and the second is: *"...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23)*.

The Holy Spirit showed me that because I am not taming my tongue, I am losing the power of the Spirit. That is to say, I am finding fault with someone, or I'm judging, or I'm getting irritable and insisting on my rights. Because of this and similar causes I'm losing my joy. My spirit of prayer and witness, my zeal and my love are weakening and my appetite for reading the Bible is waning.

The prophet David had this experience. He prayed, *"Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD, keep watch over the door of my lips!" (Psalm 141:3)*. David realised that he could not tame his tongue. And none of us can. And in James 3:8, I saw that I am actually incapable of taming my tongue. I began to pray the same prayer and my life was entirely changed. Praise be to God. What we lose through our tongues is far more costly than what we lose in any other way. O LORD, have mercy upon me and tame my tongue! Amen.

Why was our Savior permanently filled with the Holy Spirit? (John 1:32). His secret was this: *'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth...'* (Isaiah 53:7). Our Savior defeated Satan by silence and was an example to us. I wrote out this verse and hung it up in my room so that on entering and leaving, I would read it. I pray always that I will not insist on my rights over other people and that God will tame my tongue. God is doing it in me.

I also hung a picture on my wall – Jesus Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. His mouth is opened not towards men but towards God, His Father (Luke 22:41). If I insist on my own rights from men and say, "Why are you acting like this?" there will be no end to my 'whys'. *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth..."* (Isaiah 53:7). Oh God, keep my mouth always shut towards others. Keep my mouth hungrily open towards you! In Jesus' name. Amen.

I had a problem with a brother and it was not possible to resolve it by meeting him and talking things over with him. God showed me that I should just pray about this matter. Every time I heard him saying bad things about me, I took it to God in prayer and carried on with my work. One day there was a knock at the door of my room. I opened the door and there was the brother who had been saying bad things about me. I let him in. Taking my hand he said, "Brother, forgive me, I was wrong. I should not have said those bad things about you." So Satan was defeated, the Holy Spirit rejoiced and we prayed together. God poured out a spirit of love upon us. Hallelujah!

Now, here is a Scripture that for many years has been a great blessing to me: *Galatians 5:22 and 23*. The Apostle Paul here lists the fruit of the Spirit. The last and greatest is self-control. It is wonderful that the greatest work of the Spirit is self-control, because nobody is able to tame his own tongue. According to James 3:8, only the Holy Spirit can, because self-control is His fruit. With a new understanding of this truth, I again committed my tongue to the Holy Spirit. Let us always pray; "Oh Holy Spirit, do control my tongue, because self-control is your fruit. In Jesus' name. Amen."

What benefits do we gain if the Holy Spirit controls our tongue?

1. We do not wound another's heart. As a Turkish proverb goes: "Swords' wounds soon heal, but tongues' wounds never heal!" (Ephesians 4:26)
2. The Spirit will not be grieved. In Ephesians 4:30 it is written, *"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit."*

3. We do not find ourselves saying, "Oh, if only I hadn't said that!" regretting something we've said.
4. We shall not be judged. *"Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). "The judge stands at the door" (James 5:9).* This door is the door of our lips. Words are often on the tip of the tongue, but the Holy Spirit controls our tongues and keeps us from the condemnation of the Judge who stands at the door. Sometimes, when it happens that we are not under control of the Holy Spirit, all of a sudden Satan trips us up and hands us over to judgment. So let us keep our tongues constantly under the rule of the Holy Spirit.
5. We are able to perform our duties with all our might. It is Satan's ploy to keep us always busy, preoccupied with one another, so that God's work is neglected. The evil one does not want souls to be won for Christ. It is written in *John 21:22, "What is that to you? Follow me."*
6. If we tame our tongues we are, by the help of the Holy Spirit, immune from certain illnesses. A lot of illnesses afflict us because we lack self-control. When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, God was angry and struck Miriam down with leprosy (*Numbers 12:1-15*).
7. If we bring our tongues under the control of the Holy Spirit, we are ready to pray, "Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!" (*Revelation 22, 20*), and our hearts are always filled with the spirit of prayer. And with full hands we shall meet our Bridegroom and be found worthy to receive our crowns from his nail-pierced hands.

Buenos Aires  
Vahram Tatikian.

## MY ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

### **A testimony**

At the beginning of 1957, the Armenian Brotherhood Church in Buenos Aires hosted an evangelist from Istanbul. He was known as Brother Vahram. He had been invited for one week and was to speak every evening. In the end, the meetings lasted seven months. Right at the start the hour-long meeting was extended to three hours and everybody was gripped by the preaching. Vahram was not a well-known preacher. He spoke very simply but effectively in the power of the Spirit. So that the young people could understand, he had a Spanish interpreter. Children and young people filled the assembly hall and all were seeking God.

I attended the meetings too in order to please my parents, and I kept one ear open just so that I could report on the subject at home afterwards. On Wednesday evening, I was sitting in the back pew as usual. Before sending everyone home, Vahram was bringing his message to a conclusion and my attention was suddenly arrested.

Many times before had I heard the invitation to come to the front. I was in the habit of going forward to please my parents – and also to ease my conscience a little. But it would have no effect on me. The evangelist would say a few words and pray, and I would go home unchanged. Everyone would think that I was saved. This put me in a dilemma.

On that evening there was another factor. A lot of people were praying for me. I had showed so many times that I wanted to be saved, but there had been no change at all in my life. I was tired of myself. Could it perhaps be that Jesus is a true and faithful friend? I had never been able to find a true friend. I did not trust anybody. A lot of people were saying I was a 'crazy mixed-up kid.' I had abandoned myself to alcohol and smoking, just to forget my distress. I had come to the end of my tether. What would I lose if I surrendered my life to the Lord?

As the meeting drew to a close, the evangelist was saying, "If you want to pray, don't hold back; come to the front and I will pray for you." This was a real call to my heart. But if I were to go to the front, they would be saying, "Just look at him! That fellow is going forward again!" So I waited until everyone had gone, and then I went forward.

When Vahram saw me he said, "Well, young man, what's your trouble?" "I'm a sinner," I said. "Sinners go to hell," he said. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin," I replied. "You know it all," he said, "I'm not going to pray for you. Kneel down right here and beg God to forgive your sins!" I was taken aback, but I did kneel down and begged Christ to forgive my every sin. At that moment I saw others

as righteous and myself as a lost sinner. Christ was there waiting to save me.

I went from that meeting a changed person. When my mother and father heard what had happened, they did not take it seriously. I couldn't blame them. How many times had I related such things to them! How could they have known that this time it was real?

However, the genuineness of that step was proved by the change in my life. At home, at school and in my whole life-style everything changed. Bad habits went. I was a new person. I was sixteen years old at the time. God called me into the ministry. After studying at a Bible school, I became a minister and preached in many churches. I spent a number of years in Beirut, Lebanon, where I ministered to Armenians and others. From Beirut, I was able to visit my father's birthplace, Turkey. In Istanbul I had fruitful meetings – people were converted and dedicated their lives to Christ. This was amazing to me. I was a fruit of Vahram Tatikian's ministry, and here I was ministering where his Christian service had begun.

I moved to various other places. Presently I am president and also teach at a Bible school in Guatemala, as well as travelling widely in Central America, speaking in many churches and to numerous groups. Praise God for the fruit he is granting. With my wife Martha (Saint), we have a full life. We have children and grandchildren. The Lord is blessing us with constant joy. I don't cease praising God for Vahram Tatikian who led me to Jesus Christ and to the ministry.

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A massive volume could be filled with testimonies such as this one. Brother Vahram has been with Christ for quite a while. People touched by God through his ministry can be found throughout the world bearing witness to Christ. If Vahram were here, he would have jubilantly shouted, 'HALLELUJAH!' for what the Lord did during his lifetime.

## EPILOGUE

Evangelism means spreading the Good News. It was instituted by the Lord himself who provided its essence, i.e., the vicarious atonement for the forgiveness of sinners. God's life-transforming, eternity-assuring offer on the Cross is set forth in uncompromising terms in his inspired word. Furthermore, it is communicated by the Holy Spirit. This has always been the cardinal message to all mankind. Starting from the prophets of the Old Testament, who prophesied about God's salvation and its proclamation, it has been the chief concern of everyone driven to declare it to all people.

The ministry of evangelism offers great pleasure to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was foretold by Isaiah (ca. 700 B.C.), the great evangelist of the Old Testament. *"He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities"* (Isaiah 53:11). At all times the evangelist is associated with bringing fruit for Christ. His aim is to bring about the reward for his master's travail. The evangelist-prophet who experienced both blessing and imprecation in his whole-hearted service sings the praises of his unflagging ministry: *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'"* (Isaiah 52:7). The renowned evangelist of the New Testament, whose experiences were similar to those of his Old Testament predecessor, joyfully adopts this axiom in regard to his epoch-making endeavor: *"As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'"* (Romans 10:15b).

The one God has an unexcelled herald to the human race. God's peerless message cannot be proclaimed by angels or any other agent, but only by those who are recipients of his salvation through faith. This is the Good News which cannot be kept to oneself. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet-evangelist, says, *"If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot"* (Jeremiah 20:9). Paul speaks with equal persuasion: *"Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"* (I Corinthians 9:16b).

Evangelists are not made, but endowed from birth with this gift (cf. Ephesians 4:11). While all Christians

are called to be evangelizing agents to those around them there are certain people apparently endowed with this spectacular gift of the Holy Spirit. The rostrum of Christians is replete with many contributors to the cause of Jesus Christ: theologians, Bible expositors, church historians, pastors, missionaries, etc. While all these draw our admiration and appreciation we may dare to say that evangelists are a special class. Beginning with Paul and the rest of the apostles these gifted people stand out as those who addressed multitudes with this particular yearning: *"So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"* (II Corinthians 5:20). In the history of evangelists and evangelism, we observe that many glorious revivals have been the outcome of fervent evangelism. The subject of this book shows this clearly.

Any listing of well-known and admired evangelists is bound to do injustice to the company of lesser luminaries. Therefore, we should avoid formulating an index of evangelists as they appear in the annals of church history. Their complete list is in the book of remembrance kept by God (cf. *Malachi 3:16,17*). There not one of them will be missing! What an illustrious company of everybody who made some contribution to Christ's kingdom! In the book of remembrance there will be household names as well as little known ones. In the latter company, there will be those without much education, any organization or wide recognition. Nevertheless, they will be right there among giants who made a lasting imprint in the annals of those who brought men and women, boys and girls, to the Savior. The saints gathering for the joyful celebration will come to know men and women recorded in God's book of remembrance. The rest of us who perhaps did not fully respond to personal or other forms of evangelism will be delighted to meet the unknown warriors shining like the stars forever.

We will receive joy from the Lord's recognition of those deserving it, while probably feeling a solemn regret for having neglected to do our share in evangelism. Among those whose names are in the book of remembrance will be many who labored in hostile environments, some even losing their lives while exalting the name of him who gives life. *"For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it"* (Mark 8:35). One of the singular distinctives of evangelism is the adversity and animosity often encountered. The learned evangelist is aware that fallen man has a built-in resistance to the message of redemption. The faithful evangelist puts forth every effort, beginning with prayer, to combat this determined resistance put into the heart and mind by the arch-enemy of the Gospel. On the day of that blessed celebration when all known resistance will have vanished, the evangelist will rejoice in his Master's presence with the realization of ultimate victory. He will praise God for many who were ushered into Christ's kingdom and alas, he will lament for the eternal destiny of those who disregarded his life-transforming message.

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