

# Martyrs in Malatya Turkey

April 18, 2007 – terror in the land of apricots

**Tilmann Geske** (46) was a German missionary serving Jesus Christ in Malatya, a city of 400,000, located in northeastern Turkey. On the morning of April 18, he kissed his wife **Susanne**, hugged his son, told them he loved them and set off through the narrow dusty streets to the Agaba Ismerkezi building and the small third-floor office they rented from Zirve Publishing House – an extension of a Protestant publisher in Istanbul.

At the same time, **Necati Aydin** (35), Pastor of the local Protestant church in Malatya, himself an adult convert from Islam and former Bible student at the Martin Bucer Seminary in Bonn, Germany, said goodbye to his wife, **Shemsa** and two children and left for the same office.

**Ugur Yuksel** (32), also an adult convert – single, but engaged to a Christian girl, made his way a little later to meet the other Brothers at the printing office on Ismetiye Mahallesi street.

A morning Bible study and prayer meeting had been scheduled. Some others, who had previously expressed interest in Christianity and were referred to as “seekers,” had also been invited. There were high expectations of introducing these men to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile across town, ten young men (all under 20) prepared to go to the same meeting, but with a dark and foreboding purpose. They were members of a *tarikats* or fraternity of ‘faithful believers’ in Islam. For months they had been preparing for this hour. Five of them had attended a ‘by invitation only’ service on Easter Sunday in a conference room at the Golden Apricot Hotel in downtown Malatya. By deliberate deceit they had meticulously gained the trust of their intended victims by posing as “seekers” interested in Christianity and wanting to know more about the Bible. What deception could be more powerful to Bible publishers?

On the morning of April 18, two of these men turned up for the Bible study which began around 10 a.m. Later the rest of the assassin arrived. Together they overpowered the three Christians, tied them to chairs and began their sadistic tortures. The killers demanded that they repeat the prayer to Allah, which they had printed out, but each man refused and declared, “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.” So the long knives began to plunge. These martyred men are more than victorious conquerors because they lived the great principle of the Gospel, and did not consider life more important than loyalty to Christ.

The ritualistic and torturous manner of the murder (particularly the slicing of fingers) is straight out of the Qur’an: Sure 8:12 “I will strike terror into the hearts of Unbelievers. Flay their necks (with a sword) and strike every finger.” Some translations are more specific: The Rassoul and Zaidan translation says, “Chop off every

finger” while the Azhar translation says, “Chop off every finger tip.”

Later following an autopsy, Dr. Murat Ugras, a spokesman for the Turgut Ozal Medical Center, reported on Ugur’s death: “He had innumerable scores of knife stab wounds. It is obvious that these wounds had been inflicted to torture him. His fingers were repeatedly sliced to the bone lengthwise. His buttocks, his testicles, his rectum, his lower and middle back had dozens of cuts. There was a very long and open cut on his neck from ear to ear. His esophagus and trachea were cut with the knife-stab wounds.”

In April 2001, the MGK (National Security Council) began to consider Christians as a threat to national security, putting them in a category with al-Qaeda and the PKK (Kurdish) terrorists. Following the massacre, when Pastor Fikret Bocek went to the Security Directorate to give a statement he was ushered into the anti-Terrorist Department. There on the wall was a huge chart naming the local terrorist organizations. One prominent column listed all 8 evangelical Churches in Izmir!

As Pastor Bocek noted, “[If] the intention was to frighten the Christians, those ‘people’ did not know the opposite reaction would happen. They did not know that the Church would be mobilized to call on God. They did not know that we would not back down, but would be fueled beyond explanation to preach the Gospel more boldly.” These Brothers did not die in vain. Their blood nurtures the “seed of the Church” and advances the Gospel just as Tertullian observed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

Tilmann’s widow, Susanne Geske, earned much admiration for her words on a TV interview the day after the massacre. She forgave the murderers of her husband, the way Christ forgave His murderers, by quoting His prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” One journalist wrote, “She said in one sentence what 1000 missionaries in 1000 years could never do.”

Ironically this tragic event may have a secular side-effect by preventing (or at least delaying) the spread of Islam in Europe. The EU will need to reconsider whether or not it wants to add an additional 70 million Turkish Muslims to its regional hodge-podge.

This gruesome atrocity, deliberately performed in the name of a ‘religion,’ will long be remembered. It is in the same savage and uncivilized category as the murder of five American missionaries by Auca Indians in Ecuador in January 1956, about which many books have been written. The sterling testimony of the Martyr’s wives has set the standard to which all Christians must aspire. We must not only match with forgiveness, but exceed with Christian love the level of hatred expressed in the brutal murders of our Brothers in Christ. Truly, “...love covers a multitude of sin.” **1 Peter 4:8**

Bill Bathman – Cape Town

**“Christian love must exceed the level of hatred expressed in the brutal murders.”**