



# FRIDAYFAX 2.0

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Kingdom-focussed E-Mail news-bulletin with inspiring reports of God at work around the world, with special emphasis on the current global reformation of Church and Missions. **Editor:** Wolfgang Simson. Subscription: €30/US-\$ 40 per year. Freitagfax 2.0, PO Box 1248, D-79397 Kandern, Germany. Email [info@ffax2.com](mailto:info@ffax2.com); website: [www.ffmpeg2.com](http://www.ffmpeg2.com). © Dawn Europa e.V.; 22 issues per year, available in English and German.

## Tilman dies – Jesus lives. And why Turkey will never be the same again

He was rather one of the more silent ones. He did not speak much, or laugh, and when he said something, he said it with conviction. Tilman Geske (†, 46) studied theology at the Free Evangelical Theological Academy in Basel (now STH), Switzerland. Both he and I graduated from the seminary in the same year, 1987. Now, 20 years later, was his ultimate graduation. He died as one more modern-day martyr for his King, Jesus, who has been the original kernel of wheat falling into the ground. Christians from Izmir, Turkey, drafted part of the following material after three followers of Christ were murdered on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007 (reported by Darlene N. Bocek on 24 April 2007; other sources are Prof. Thomas Schirmacher, Titus Vogt, Dean of German seminary “Martin Bucer Seminary”, Bonn, of which Necati Aydin was a student, as well as Turkish Pastors and friends that will remain unnamed):



## A letter to the Global Church from The Protestant Church of Smyrna

Dear friends, this past week has been filled with much sorrow. Many of you have heard by now of our devastating loss here in an event that took place in Malatya, a Turkish province 300 miles northeast of Antioch, the city where believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). On Wednesday morning, April 18, 2007, 46 year old German missionary and father of three, Tilman Geske prepared to go to his office, kissing his wife goodbye taking a moment to hug his son and give him the priceless memory, “Goodbye, son. I love you.” Tilman rented an office space from Zirve Publishing House – an extension of a Protestant Publisher based in Istanbul - where he was preparing notes for the new Turkish Study Bible. Zirve was also the location of the Malatya Evangelist Church office. A ministry of the church, Zirve prints and distributes Christian literature to Malatya and nearby cities in Eastern Turkey. In another area of town, 35-year-old Pastor Necati Aydin, father of two, said goodbye to his wife, leaving for the office as well. They had a morning Bible Study and prayer meeting that some other believers in town would also be attending. Ugur Yuksel likewise made his way to the Bible study. None of these three men knew that what awaited them at the Bible study was the ultimate testing and application of their faith, which would conclude with their entrance into glory to receive their crown of righteousness from Christ and honor from all the saints awaiting them in the Lord’s presence.

On the other side of town, ten young men all under 20 years old put into place final arrangements for their ultimate act of faith, living out their love for Allah and hatred of infidels who they felt undermined Islam. On Resurrection Sunday, five of these men attended a by-invitation-only evangelistic service that Pastor Necati and his men had arranged at a hotel conference room in the city. The men were known to the believers as “seekers” (since they had told they are interested in the Bible and its content). No one knows what happened in the hearts of those men as they listened to the gospel. Were they touched by the Holy Spirit? Were they convicted of sin? Did they hear the gospel in their heart of hearts? Today we only have the beginning of their story.

These young men, one of whom is the son of a mayor in the Province of Malatya, are part of a *tarik*, or a group of “faithful believers” in Islam. *Tarikat* membership is highly respected here; it’s like a fraternity membership. In fact, it is said that no one can get into public office without membership in a *tarik*. These young men all lived in the same dorm, all preparing for university entrance exams. The young men got guns, bread knives, ropes and towels ready for their final act of service to Allah. They arrived in time for the Bible Study, around 10 O’clock. They arrived, and apparently the Bible Study began. Reportedly, after Necati read a chapter from the Bible the assault began. The boys tied Ugur, Necati, and Tilman’s hands and feet to chairs and as they videoed their work on their cell phones, they tortured our brothers for a long time. (Some observers point to the fact that

the young attackers literally followed a portion of the Koran that reads 'I will cast terror into the hearts of those who have disbelieved, so strike them over their necks, and smite over all their fingers and toes'; Sura 8:12)'. Tilman was stabbed several times, as well as Necati and Ugur. When another believer – Gokhan - alarmed the police, the nearest officer arrived in about five minutes. He pounded on the door, "Police, open up!" Initially the officer thought it was a domestic disturbance. At that point they heard a gurgling moan. The police understood that sound as human suffering, prepared the clip in his gun and tried over and over again to burst through the door. One of the frightened assailants unlocked the door for the policeman, who entered to find a grisly scene. Tilman and Necati had been killed, Ugur was barely alive; he died later in hospital around 5:30 PM. Three assailants in front of the policeman dropped their weapons. Outside they heard a sound of yelling in the street. Someone had fallen from their third story office. They found a man on the ground, later recognized as Emre Gunaydin. He had massive head trauma. He had tried to climb down the drainpipe to escape, and losing his balance had plummeted to the ground. It seems that he was the main leader of the attackers. Another assailant was found hiding on a lower balcony.

## Political background and Anti-Christian media campaign

To untangle the web we need to back up six years. In April 2001, the National Security Council of Turkey (Milli Guvenlik Kurulu) began to consider evangelical Christians as a threat to national security, on equal footing as Al Quaida and PKK terrorism. Statements made in the press by political leaders, columnists and commentators have fuelled a hatred against missionaries who they claim bribe young people to change their religion. After that decision in 2001, attacks and threats on churches, pastors and Christians began. Bombings, physical attacks, verbal and written abuse are only some of the ways Christians are being targeted. Most significant is the use of media propaganda. From December 2005, after having a long meeting regarding the Christian threat, the wife of Former Prime Minister Ecevit, historian Ilber Ortayli, Professor Hasan Unsal, Politician Ahmet Tan and writer/propogandist Aytunc Altindal, each in their own profession began a campaign to bring the public's attention to the looming threat of Christians who sought to "buy their children's souls". Hidden cameras in churches have taken church service footage and used it sensationally to promote fear and antagonism toward Christianity. In an official televised response from Ankara, the Interior Minister of Turkey smirked as he spoke of the attacks on our brothers. Amid public outrage and protests against the event and in favor of freedom of religion and freedom of thought, media and official comments ring with the same message, "We hope you have learned your lesson. We do not want Christians here." It appears that this was an organized attack initiated by an unknown adult *tarikat* leader.

As in the Hrant Dink murder in January 2007, and a Catholic priest, Andrea Santoro, in February 2006, minors are being used to commit religious murders because public sympathy for youth is strong and they face lower penalties than an adult convicted of the same crime. Even the parents of these children are in favor of the acts. The mother of the 16-year-old boy who killed the Catholic priest Andrea Santoro looked at the cameras as her son was going to prison and said, "he will serve time for Allah".

## "Blessed are you when they persecute you"

Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel are the first martyrs for Christ out of the Turkish Church. The Church in Turkey responded in a way that honored God as hundreds of believers and dozens of pastors flew in as fast as they could to stand by the small church of Malatya and encourage the believers, take care of legal issues, and represent Christians to the media. When Susanne Tilman expressed her wish to bury her husband in Malatya, the Governor tried to stop it, and when he realized he could not stop it, a rumor was spread that "it is a sin to dig a grave for a Christian". In the end, in an

undertaking that should be remembered in Christian history forever, the men from the church in Adana (near Tarsus), grabbed shovels and dug a grave for their slain brother in an un-tended hundred year old Armenian graveyard. Ugur was buried by his family in an Alevi Muslim ceremony in his hometown of Elazig, his believing fiancé watching from the shadows as his family and friends, in the presence of death, refused to accept the faith Ugur had so long professed and died for (his family vehemently denies his Christian faith). Necati's funeral took place in his hometown of Izmir, the city where he came to faith. Before the coffin was loaded onto the plane from Malatya, it went through two separate X-Ray screenings to make sure it was not loaded with explosives. This is not a usual procedure for Muslim coffins, and a statement of how much suspicion reigns against Christians. Necati's funeral was a beautiful event. Like a glimpse of heaven, thousands of Turkish Christians and missionaries came to show their love for Christ, and their honor for this man chosen to die for Christ. Necati's wife Shemsa told the world, "His death was full of meaning, because he died for Christ and he lived for Christ. Necati was a gift from God. I feel honored that he was in my life, I feel crowned with honor. I want to be worthy of that honor." Boldly the believers took their stand at Necati's funeral, facing the risks of being seen publicly and likewise becoming targets. As expected, the anti-terror police attended and videotaped



everyone attending the funeral for their future use. The service took place outside at Buca Baptist church, and he was buried in a small Christian graveyard in the outskirts of Izmir. Two assistant Governors of Izmir were there solemnly watching the event from the front row. Dozens of news agencies were there documenting the events with live news and photographs. Who knows the impact the funeral had on those watching? This is the beginning of their story as well. Pray for them.



## Widow forgives murderers of her husband

In an act that hit front pages in the largest newspapers in Turkey, Susanne Tilman in a television interview expressed her forgiveness. She did not want revenge, she told reporters. “Oh God, forgive them for they know not what they do,” she said, wholeheartedly agreeing with the words of Christ on Calvary (Luke 23:34). In a country where blood-for-blood revenge is as normal as breathing, many reports have come to the attention of the church of how this comment of Susanne Tilman has changed lives. One columnist wrote of her comment, “She said in one sentence what 1000 missionaries in 1000 years could never do.”

The missionaries in Malatya will most likely move out, as their families and children have become publicly identified as targets to the hostile city.

The remaining 10 believers are in hiding. What will happen to this church, this light in the darkness? Most likely it will go underground. Pray for wisdom, that Turkish brothers from other cities will go to lead the leaderless church. Should we not be concerned for that great city of Malatya, a city that does not know what it is doing? (Jonah 4:11) Please pray for the Church in Turkey. ‘Don’t pray against persecution, pray for perseverance,’ urges Pastor Fikret Bocek. The Church is better having lost our brothers; the fruit in our lives, the renewed faith, the burning desire to spread the gospel to quench more darkness in Malatya, all these are not to be regretted. Pray that we stand strong against external opposition and especially pray that we stand strong against internal struggles with sin, our true debilitating weakness. This we know. Christ Jesus was there when our brothers were giving their lives for Him. He was there, like He was when Stephen was being stoned in the sight of Saul of Tarsus. Someday the video of the deaths of our brothers may reveal more to us about the strength that we know Christ gave them to endure their last cross, about the peace the Spirit of God endowed them with to suffer for their Beloved Saviour. But we know He did not leave their side. We know their minds were full of Scripture strengthening them to endure, as darkness tried to subdue the unsubduable Light of the Gospel. We know, in whatever way they were able, with a look or a word; they encouraged one another to stand strong. We know they knew they would soon be with Christ. We don’t know the details. We don’t know the kind of justice that will or will not be served on this earth. But we pray-- and urge you to pray-- that someday at least one of those five boys will come to faith because of the testimony in death of Tilman Geske, who gave his life as a missionary to his beloved Turks, and the testimonies in death of Necati Aydin and Ugur Yuksel” - the first martyrs for Christ since 1923, the founding of the Turkish republic. The event caused a media storm. Many Turks sent letters to the newspapers to express their deep disgust. Many said that now they really want to read the New Testament, some even discribing themselves as Christians, since they no longer want to have anything to do with Islam.

## New Chapter of Church History

One of my colleagues, a Turk himself, commented like this: “This could have happened to any one of us. It is true that the media carries a great deal of guilt in this. But: Necati’s funeral was televised, a lot of media has been present and have witnessed how Christians mourn and celebrate. All of this will leave a mark on the Turkish soul. **I believe this is the beginning of a new chapter of church history in Turkey.** As so many times before, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. How many times did I ponder what would be needed for the largest unreached nation in the world to experience a breakthrough for God. Countless mission agencies have tried, and, if it is allowed to say so politely, all with quite meagre fruits, if at all. Should the current trend continue, the number of missionaries – the ratio is around one missionary per believer - will grow faster than the number of Turkish believers. However, I did not believe that God in his wisdom might use another route. **Two years ago, during a seminar on planting housechurches in Turkey, Hakan spoke up, a Turkish believer who publicly carried the coffin of Necati and has been tried before judges many times before. He said: ‘Some of us in this room will have to give their lives for this vision!’ He said it in such earnest, that I shuddered. How quickly I had forgotten his words. But they came back very strongly when I heard that one of the victims was Necati. He also had sat in that room...** I believe the victory for Christ will be very great, because the fight has been tremendous. The coming revival in Turkey will influence Europe far more than all of the half-hearted evangelistic initiatives in recent years. It will give birth to a Christianity like the one in the first century that again knows the price of discipleship, that knows that the treasure in the field is more valuable than anything else. Therefore, let us go joyfully and sell everything that we own, including our own life!”