

Reaching the Weekend Warriors

Thousands participate in Civil War re-enactments every year. And as they restage the battles of Gettysburg, Antietam and Olustee, Christians are there to preach the timeless message of Jesus.

In the Shadow of the Mosque

In most Muslim nations, sharing the gospel is forbidden. But observers believe that Turkey—where the New Testament church flourished—may be the key to reaching all of the Middle East.

The first time that Ali Pektas had an encounter with Jesus Christ was in Mecca, Saudi Arabia—the spiritual heart of Islam.

“I was working in Saudi Arabia and joined a hajj, a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca—without being in any way religious. It was the first time in my life that I prayed,” says Pektas, who comes from Malatya in central Turkey.

“One night [during the hajj] I had a dream. I saw Jesus, and He was very bright and reached out to embrace me. He then touched my forehead and said, ‘You belong to Me.’”

Pektas—being from a communist family who lived in a Muslim country—had heard the name of Jesus but knew nothing about Him and had never met a Christian.

The next morning, one of his friends asked him: “What happened to your forehead? It looks phosphorous!” Unconcerned, Pektas got into his car to drive back to the center of Mecca to continue the hajj.

“The car was brand-new, but it did not start,” he recalls. “The ignition was dead, and I heard a voice saying: ‘You cannot go.’” Pektas made a decision to leave Mecca instead—and immediately the car started.

Later he heard the voice again, telling him to return home to Turkey. Today at age 45, and 12 years after his Mecca experience, Pektas is a student at the two-year Istanbul Bible Training Center, preparing for full-time ministry. Larry Mills, his pastor and the school’s director, confided in Charisma that he just might turn over his church to Pektas in the near future.

Determined to Grow

The number of ethnic Turks associated with charismatic and evangelical churches is still minuscule in Muslim Turkey—about 2,000 in 50 million. The population of Turkey totals some 66 million, but about 13 million are Kurds, and 3 million are of other minorities.

The mere fact that an indigenous Turkish church has been established in the last 15 years and Turkish church leaders such as Pektas are now emerging has unnerved the government. It is under constant pressure from nationalist lobbies and popular opinion to preserve Turkey’s traditional identity as a Muslim nation.

In the most recent wave of discriminatory measures against Christians, local authorities notified 15 congregations that their buildings were not “licensed for worship” and ordered them to abandon their services. A Christian school in Ankara was closed, and seven of its foreign staff members were deported. Ankara believers have received bomb threats, and a series of national TV talk shows have stirred anti-Christian sentiments.

Turkish pastors who met with Charisma in Istanbul explained that the latest wave of harassment has not caused the

country's Christians to lose heart, but has actually revealed a determination not previously displayed by Turkey's believers during periods of government pressure.

They pointed out that not one church has bowed to the threats or complied with the close-down order. Instead the pastors hired a lawyer and appealed the ruling in a concerted legal action that is unprecedented in Turkey.

The Anadolu Protestant Church in Istanbul, pastored by Levent Kinran, wasn't among the 15 ordered to close. But in a decision that reflects the new willingness of the Turkish church leadership to face the current challenge head-on, the Anadolu congregation actually reported itself by notifying police that their church was unlicensed.

"We are determined to live in the open and to gain recognition," Kinran told Charisma. The congregation's boldness was rewarded. Although Kinran's church gathers in a building that is quite "unlicensed," the authorities assured the pastor that "everything is OK."

"What we are up against is not persecution," Kinran says. "Some time ago a pastor from Iran spoke in our church. When he returned home he was killed. That is persecution. Compared to the Iran believers, we are doing fine."

Pastor Behnan Konutgan, president of the Turkish Evangelical Alliance, also stresses the positive influence the current difficulties are having on the nation's Christians, saying that "it has brought the churches together, to protest and to pray."

In Turkey, religion traditionally is defined in political rather than spiritual terms. Christianity is viewed as the religion of Turkey's historical enemies in western Europe and the United States.

Christianity is also associated with the blatant immoralities

of the West, which in the last 15 years have invaded the Turkish mass media and youth culture, fanning opposition from faithful Muslims.

The 80-year-old Republic of Turkey is, constitutionally, a secular state granting religious liberties. Its predominant political force, however, always was and still is a ruthlessly aggressive brand of nationalism that claims the only acceptable citizen is an ethnically Turkish Muslim.

Consequently, Turkey's ethnic minorities, Christian and Muslim, have been subjected to discrimination that has ranged from harassment to genocide. During the years 1915-1916 and 1922-1923, 1.5 million (out of 2.5 million) Christian Armenians living in the eastern provinces around Mount Ararat were killed. To this day Turkey denies the genocide occurred.

The estimated 13 million Muslim Kurds in Turkey still live under martial law. Some 3,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed, and the Turkish army has displaced about 3 million Kurds since the 1980s.

The discrimination against the new churches is also nationalistically motivated. Turks turning to Christianity are suspected of political and cultural treason and are marked as "hirelings of Western powers."

This applies to evangelical and charismatic churches in particular because of their Western-style worship and close ties with (and often financial dependence on) U.S. and western European churches and missionaries. Pastor Konutgan, who is evangelical and an Assyrian—not an ethnic Turk—has been arrested 20 times or more since his conversion 24 years ago, always on spy charges.

Pastor Carlos Madrigal, a Spaniard ministering in Istanbul since 1985, is the president of the church-planting Silas Network. He says police questioned him frequently in the first years of his ministry and arrested him once. They always

insisted he must be an enemy agent hired to “divide” Turkey.

“But in fact I supported both my family and my ministry through a normal secular job in those days, so there was no way a case could be built against me,” he says.

In spite of the resistance, the charismatic and evangelical churches in Turkey are growing in number as well as Turkish identity. Madrigal says that until 1995, foreign workers were taking the spiritual initiative to spread the gospel. After that time, Turkish church leaders started developing a vision for their nation and taking the lead.

Kinran confirms that the situation has changed entirely during the last 15 years. He became a believer in 1987 and joined Istanbul’s first ethnically Turkish church, which had been planted a year earlier.

“Today there are 24 evangelical and charismatic churches in Istanbul, and many have a Turkish identity,” he says. “Three months after my conversion, the New Testament in modern Turkish was published. A revision of the Old Testament was published in 2001.

“Two Christian radio stations are on the air,” he continues. “You find Christian ads in Turkish papers. Back in 1987 there were very few Christian books in Turkish. Now we have translated and authored many titles.”

Kinran is himself a translator, as well as the author of a Christian novel and one of the editors currently working on the first Turkish Bible dictionary. <P > **Key to the Muslim World**

Kinran was born to a Muslim family in Istanbul in 1967, and his testimony illustrates how Turkey was confronted by the full gospel for the first time since the days when the apostle Paul planted churches along the Mediterranean coast.

“My father was a nonreligious alcoholic, but my mother was a practicing Muslim,” he explains. “I did not question Islam, but it was never my religion.”

The same could be said of most young Turks. Secularization is racing among the youth, with cities adopting a loose Westernized lifestyle at an incredible pace. “Most young people have grown indifferent of religion,” Kinran claims.

At 17 he studied British and American literature at Istanbul University and says he was inspired by the classics to “start asking the hard questions about the meaning of life.” Looking for answers, he turned to Islam.

“I prayed five times a day, studied Arabic and read the Quran, but I could not find God,” Kinran recalls. “Being surrounded by atheist fellow students, I also read Freud and Nietzsche. But altogether I did not seem to get anywhere.”

By age 19 “life seemed pointless,” Kinran says. He was desperate enough to seek comfort in alcohol and drugs. But one day he ran into an American Christian at a bus stop, made friends and was given an American Bible.

“What really struck me reading it was the person of Jesus,” he says. “I read the Gospel of John over and over again. Jesus’ claim to be God was so overwhelming that I ended up crying.”

There were very few Christians in Turkey in the mid-1980s, but Kinran met with one new believer who was able to help him clarify the basics of his newfound faith. Realizing why Jesus had come to die on the cross, Kinran says, became “a transforming experience, and I started feeling God’s touch.”

Kinran joined the Turkish Protestant Church, planted by Campus Crusade for Christ and later heavily influenced by the Vineyard movement. Today the group consists of three congregations in Istanbul, and Kinran says half the members became Christians through “power encounters” with the Holy

Spirit.

The reaction by Kinran's family to his conversion was traumatic. It is still common that even nonreligious families disown children who leave Islam.

"I lived with my parents, the way we do in Turkey," Kinran explains. "I chose not to mention Christianity at home, but after some time my mother started receiving bomb threats! 'Your son has joined an organization that is conspiring to divide Turkey—beware!'"

One day Kinran's photo, accompanied by slanderous text, appeared on the cover of one of the leading newspapers. His mother had contacted the reporter. Later she asked the police to arrest her son.

"The police didn't arrest me, but it was awful," Kinran says. "I felt hate for my mother and wanted to leave home. But the Lord told me no! A few years later my father died of a heart attack, and my mother said my betrayal caused his death—and threw me out."

Family relationships of Muslim Turks converting to Christianity are often tested, even severed. Today Kinran sees his mother again. "We are not close, but at least we visit," he says.

Konutgan explains to Charisma: "Our problem is not with the government as such. Turkish law does not forbid Christianity. But the government is not free. It is afraid of the people."

Konutgan came to the Lord at a time when there were "no more than 10 believers in all of Turkey," he says. His Christian roots reach back to the third century, when missionaries from Antioch (Turkish Antakya today) planted churches among Assyrians in Haran, the ancient homeland of Abraham—also located in Turkey, just north of Syria.

With conviction, Konutgan exclaims to Charisma: "As Christians we love Turkey and its government, but we hate these nationalism and fear!" If they were overcome, he says, thousands would come to know the Lord.

There are now some 50 charismatic and evangelical churches in Turkey that comprise some 4,000 believers. Ali Pektas' pastor, Larry Mills, is a graduate of Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a missionary to Turkey, Germany and Bulgaria since 1986. He agrees with pastor Konutgan that Turkey is ready for revival.

"Something has softened up the hearts of the people," Mills says. "I am convinced that the many prayer initiatives—the prayer during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month; the prayer through the 10/40 Window—have played a major role. If we find ways to spread the Word to the masses—for example, by employing mass media—we will see a major revival.

"I believe Turkey is a key to the entire Muslim world," Mills continues. "Christianity is not illegal in Turkey, and the ambition to prove itself a democracy and a worthy candidate for the European Union keeps the country from yielding fully to the nationalist lobby."

Mills emphasizes the importance of the ongoing legal infighting with the authorities for full recognition. But the main focus in the next years, he says, must be the training of Turkish leaders.

Mills reflects: "We keep asking God, 'When?' I perceive God is asking us, 'When?'"—but then adds: "As soon as we see to it that there are many more Turkish pastors like Ali Pektas, revival will come!"

The Turkish Challenge

Ministers inside Turkey say sensitivity is crucial for those who are called to share Christ there.

Old-timers in Istanbul joke that there used to be “one [foreign] missionary for each believer” in the ancient Turkish city—hearkening to a time when Turkey was hardly seen as a promising mission field. Today, instead of one missionary for every believer, the new ratio is half of that—300 foreign missionaries for the city’s 600 charismatic and evangelical believers.

There is, however, a renewed and accelerating interest in Turkey as a mission field. Mission activity is on the rise in the wake of the 10/40 Window international prayer movement, the involvement of Christian agencies with the victims of the 1999 Turkey earthquake, the long-term work of Phoenix-based International Turkish Network, as well as other initiatives. Turkish leaders and missionaries working in the country agree that international backing for the church is still vitally needed.

Yet cultural issues, as well as issues of attitude that Turkish leaders hinted at, continue to cause tensions between the national and the missionary Christian communities in Turkey.

Pastor Behnan Konutgan, president of the Turkish Evangelical Alliance, told Charisma he could tell “many, many stories” of “missionaries behaving in an insensitive [and disrespectful] way” toward the Turkish people. He counsels the international church to support Turkey through prayer, and he advises foreigners who want to live in Turkey to consult the local leadership for ways they can help.

Long-term, experienced missionaries such as pastors Carlos Madrigal of Spain and Larry Mills of the United States both stress that Turkey does not necessarily need an influx of missionaries. Short-term teams in particular tend to tie up rather than add to the resources of the national church.

Mills says he would welcome “to help train national leaders.”

Madrigal says missionaries have to “invest their lives to produce fruit” by staying long term and learning the language and culture.

Phoenix-based Beyond the Borders cooperates with national leaders such as Konutgan and seasoned missionaries such as Madrigal and Mills to inspire and facilitate cross-culturally sensitive mission work in Turkey. Twice a year the organization’s director, Joy Wright, who moved to Istanbul in January 2000, invites American charismatics to her new hometown if they have an interest in praying for Turkey or helping the church there. In that setting, she introduces the visitors to national leaders.

“You cannot love people without knowing them,” Wright stresses. “While the need in Turkey is great and the Western church has something to offer, our contribution may be more acceptable if we court the Turkish church rather than trying to dominate it.

“We should feel free to present our ideas, but trust the Turkish leaders to reshape them to fit their culture,” she adds.

A few years ago, while on a shopping tour in Istanbul, Wright says she was overcome with a longing to see the country won to Christ. Today, traveling from Istanbul several weeks out of each year, she visits charismatic prayer groups in the United States to inspire ongoing intercession for Turkey.

Notes Wright: “Independent charismatic churches are still not as aware of the importance of Turkey as they should be”.

Tomas Dixon, a journalist based in Sweden, is Charisma’s correspondent to Europe and the Middle East.

Avoiding Cholesterol Drugs

The nutritional supplement policosanol is the most impressive for lowering cholesterol.

Don't Burn This

Get Ready for the Hip-Hop Revolution

The music is loud, and the beats are strong. But Christian hip-hop artists say they're using this unorthodox sound to reach a generation for Christ.

Just One Thing

Many of us are ready to do anything but the one thing Jesus asked of us!

Don't Fall for a Cheap Imitation of the Holy Spirit

What people think is the Holy Spirit is often a cheap imitation. Don't be deceived.

Pigeons and doves are in the same family and look much the same. But the pigeon is not the symbol of peace. It was not a pigeon that came down and remained on Jesus. The turtledove—symbolizing the Holy Spirit—is different from a pigeon in interesting ways.

My friend Pete Cantrell is an expert on pigeons and turtledoves. His observations have amused and gripped me. Their relevance to a study of the Holy Spirit is almost astonishing.

“Do you see that pigeon?” he once asked me. “Watch him, he’s getting ready to bully the pigeon next to him because it is perched on the spot he wants for himself.” Seconds later, I watched it happen.

“I don’t see that happening with turtledoves,” Pete added. “Doves don’t fight.”

It seems to me that many of the claims to the presence of the Dove among us are nothing but pigeon religion—a counterfeit for the Holy Spirit. In my own haste I have presumed the presence of God in my life many times—when it was not the Dove after all. Often it has been a pigeon—not the heavenly Dove—that gave me a “religious” feeling. Here’s how you can avoid making the same mistake.

Don't Be Fooled by Appearances

When one is preconditioned for a certain manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it is easy to presume the presence of the genuine Holy Spirit when you see that particular manifestation. Take falling down and laughing as examples.

I happen to believe that the phenomena of falling down and laughing have been the authentic results of God's presence in some places. But when one attends a church where this happens a lot, it's likely that someone could easily fall to the floor after being prayed for and that there could be an entirely natural explanation for it.

Several years ago, because I was sitting on the front row, I felt compelled to come forward when the preacher asked all church leaders to line up for prayer in the front. I sincerely hoped that God would come down on me and do whatever He pleased. Seventy or 80 men and women were lined up ahead of me for prayer.

As the preacher prayed for each person, every one of them fell backward into the arms of the "catcher" waiting next in line. Then the preacher came to me. I stood there like the Statue of Liberty. Nothing happened.

He prayed again, then a third time. Had I closed my eyes and been less conscious of standing straight, I suspect I too would have fallen.

I felt sorry for the preacher and wanted to apologize for his embarrassment when I didn't fall. I wanted to go down—I promise you. But I didn't want to be pushed over by a pigeon!

I'm not saying that the Dove did not come down on some, if not all the other people in that line. But I believe that their expectancy was so high and the preconditioning so powerful that a pigeon could have done the same thing.

Pigeons may be present whenever God shows up in genuine Holy Spirit power. On one night there may be a most awesome sense

of God's presence.

You may feel it in the worship, in the preaching and in the time of prayer ministry. People may be shedding tears of joy and repentance and laughing and crying. Scores may be converted and many healed.

You can't wait for the next night. That night the same worship group leads with the same songs and hymns. The same preacher takes his text from God's Word. But God chooses not to show up.

The important issue is this: Will the minister in charge have the integrity not to manipulate the people? Or will he feel that to be successful, that night's meeting must appear to be just like the meeting on the previous night? If he thinks that, it is likely he may practice pigeon religion in order to get the same results.

The genuine Dove is like the wind that blows "'wherever it pleases'" (John 3:8, NIV). If one is truly sensitive to the Spirit, he or she must flow with the Spirit as well. And if one is equally sensitive to His absence, that person will honor God's sovereignty and will not pretend.

It takes a lot of courage to yield to the Spirit when He comes in power. It takes equal courage to be unpretentious when He is absent. Both aspects of the Dove can threaten one's comfort zone.

There is nothing like a large crowd to counterfeit the presence of the Dove. A big group can create an expectant atmosphere. Nothing preconditions a leader or a congregation like a church that's filled with people.

If there is a lack of discernment and sensitivity to the person of the Spirit, which is needed all the more at such a time, a pigeon could come down on the heads of everyone present, and no one would know the difference. I fear this has

happened many times—and to the best of people.

The initial similarity of appearance between a pigeon and the Dove can even produce a “bandwagon” effect—everyone becomes excited and wants to be “in” on what is happening. This can continue for some time. But eventually one wakes up and comes to terms with the sobering possibility that it was all hype. It hurts when you realize you were taken in and that there was a fleshly explanation for everything that happened.

This can happen at an individual level as well, whether it be through speaking in tongues or through prophetic words of knowledge. If we convince ourselves that God must manifest Himself, we will settle for almost anything.

It is almost as if one says, “Well, if I can’t have the Dove, I’ll take a pigeon.” But if we believe that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, we ought not settle for the counterfeit.

Don’t Manipulate the Spirit

A pigeon can be domesticated, trained and manipulated. A pigeon can be easily controlled and made to conform. Not so with a turtledove.

Nor can the Spirit of God be easily manipulated or controlled: “‘The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going,’” (John 3:8). You cannot make the Holy Dove do anything—except when you make it fly away.

Feeling the need to control the Holy Spirit may be one of the greatest abuses of the Spirit. When we begin to feel we can control the will of the Holy Spirit, pigeon religion has moved in. Yet often we continue trying to convince ourselves that it must be the Dove.

The issue is control. Who’s in charge? Some people play with

the Holy Spirit as if He has no will of His own.

We can fall prey to this when we are praying alone by attempting to do all the talking—thus quenching the Spirit. Or we can read the Bible and do all the thinking. In this way, the Dove does not have a chance to slip in.

The same can happen with public leadership. A powerful leader (even a worship leader or preacher) can sometimes control a crowd with his or her gift and personality. The people out there may not have a clue they are being manipulated.

The problem lies in the fact that one's gift is, in a sense, also one's anointing. God shapes each gift and personality for His glory.

However, not everything that someone with an anointed gift does is Spirit-led. We are under a solemn obligation to follow—not lead—the Holy Spirit. I may have an anointing to teach and preach, but I can get ahead of the Lord. When I do, pigeon religion takes over because I am in control.

Some years ago I talked with a worship leader about his style of leading worship. He admitted he had a gift that enabled him to control an audience.

He could make them do almost anything—clap, jump, sit or weep. When he did this, the people never knew they had been conditioned for a certain response in much the same way pigeons are trained to perform a particular behavior. It is an exceedingly rare worship leader who is utterly sensitive to the Dove and does not get ahead of the Lord.

Pigeon religion is man in control. It is manipulative, usurping the place of the Dove.

The gracious Spirit is gentle and prudent. Like the meek and lowly Jesus, the Dove is neither intrusive (coming when not invited) nor obtrusive (unpleasantly noticeable). He is self-

effacing. When He is invited and accepts the invitation, the result takes man out of the picture.

When the Spirit is present, people want to wait on the Spirit. They want to worship, and they let the Spirit do the leading. When this happens, it is an unforgettable experience—one worth waiting for.

The Spirit will not be manipulated. The Dove flutters away as soon as one tries to do this, and the pigeon comes in.

Don't Be Territorial

A pigeon thinks a certain place belongs to him. Pigeon religion is manifested when one instinctively feels he or she has a “corner” on the anointing. This happens when we take ourselves too seriously.

It also happens when we decide we own the franchise on God's enterprise in a particular theological or geographic area. As a result, we struggle against someone else “elbowing in” on our calling, area of expertise or following.

This is a party spirit, a rival or competitive spirit. Because we uphold a particular emphasis, we want to be the sole vanguard for the “party line.”

Nothing is more deadly than a rival spirit in the church of God. Take the subject of revival, for example. I think we all agree that there is a heart cry for revival today. I doubt there is any evangelical group or church that is not praying for revival—a sovereign outpouring of God's Spirit that will revive the people of God and result in many conversions.

The problem is, we all want it to come to us! We all tend to see ourselves as having “borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day” (Matt. 20:12). We resent it if God makes others “equal to us”! We want God to bless our efforts, our party line and our denomination.

Therefore we tend to dismiss any report of God's coming down powerfully on anyone but us. We honestly believe it couldn't happen to those who are of a different theological persuasion or ecclesiastical setting.

Not long ago a weekly prayer meeting on the second floor of a civic center in Nairobi, Kenya, centered on revival. A group of a dozen Western missionaries prayed earnestly that God would send revival to Nairobi.

At exactly the same time, 700 Kenyans were praying noisily and worshipping God—and growing rapidly—in the large auditorium just beneath the group of Western missionaries. The irony is, God was answering the missionaries' prayers!

But they could not bring themselves to recognize revival under their noses—for the Kenyans below them didn't represent their party line. Another example of pigeon religion!

None of us has a monopoly on the anointing. Jesus' disciples wanted to stop someone praying in Jesus' name “‘because he is not one of us'” (Luke 9:49-50). Jesus stepped in, admonishing, “‘Do not stop whoever is not against you is for you.'”

Even Joshua, when he was young and still had a lot to learn, was unhappy when certain people were prophesying without recognized credentials. “But Moses replied: ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!’” (Num. 11:29). That is the way God would have us all to reject pigeon religion and pray for the restoration of His honor in the world (rather than just in our own ministries).

The Spirit will do His work—if we don't get in the way. We must not step in where we don't belong or elbow in on the Spirit's territory. For the Spirit to be able to do His work, we must simply be the channel through which He works. If we try to do what He does best, He flutters away.

You may think you are incapable of being deceived by a pigeon. But all of us are as capable of following pigeon religion as we are of following the Holy Dove.

Simon Peter was being led by the Dove when he said to Jesus, “‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:16). Yet just a few verses later Jesus turned and said to Peter: “‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (v. 23).

Our best guarantee against following pigeon religion is an ever-increasing sensitivity to the Dove.

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Ministries Target Wall Street District

New Yorkers are more open to the gospel since 9/11, say leaders of two ministries in Manhattan

Religious broadcasters upset over satellite merger

Pentecostals Heal Old Divisions

The gathering of charismatic, Pentecostal, Word of Faith and Oneness Pentecostal leaders was called 'a first'