

## PRECISION HARVESTING YIELDS NEW CHURCHES

Since the first group of today's missionaries came to Turkey 25 years ago, one of the greatest problems they have faced is the seeming inability to reach those who were truly interested in the gospel. Many missionaries reported having established 1 or 2 year long friendships with Turks and Kurds, only to have it become painfully clear that those people were not really open to receiving Christ.

Mary, a tentmaker who taught English in one of the universities in Eastern Turkey, described this problem. After two years of teaching English at a university and making local friends, no one had converted to Christianity, nor were there many who expressed much interest in learning more about the God of the Christians. "To tell you the truth, I came here because God told me to come, but I have lost my motivation for coming back," Mary said candidly.

During the last decade foreign workers like Mary had begun to realize that the traditional incarnational approach to evangelism could result in little or no contact with those who are truly interested in Christianity. What was needed was a tool to sift through the masses of people, to highlight those who were interested in converting to Christianity.

Istanbul's Bible Correspondence Course was begun for that reason, and since its inception 15 years ago it has been performing this task with calculated efficiency. Today there's hardly a missionary in Turkey who doesn't use the course for new contacts.

"It's unbelievable how much the course contacts have helped us," says Loren, a Baptist worker in Ismir. "I used to try to meet all my neighbors and visit with the various vendors on my street in hopes that I would discover someone who wanted to learn about my faith. But now I spend all my time visiting the 20 people who have written the course staff from my area. They all indicated that they desire a visit from someone to help them learn the Christian faith. We already have a Bible study started here!"

Once the course staff received permission in 1988 to advertise in Turkey's major newspapers, the number of first-time respondents to the Bible course shot up to over 10,000 respondents per year.

Using the list of course contacts in one of Turkey's western provinces (a population of over a million), for example, Sean was literally able to found a church there. Having begun with 650 "first time respondents," he made contact with 50 of them who were "strongly interested," and 5 of those 50 began to meet in his home. The handful of disciples in that city still meet regularly.

How Mehmet found his new faith is particularly interesting. Mehmet was studying at the university in Diyarbakir and was attracted to Marxism as an answer to Turkey's fascist right. Being Kurdish, some of his friends and relatives had been mistreated by Turkish local authorities.

One day while giving out some Marxist literature he was arrested by the local police and put into jail. While there he was tortured several times and given very little to eat, not an uncommon practice for prisoners held for political crimes. Some inmates encouraged him to read the Quran. But when he did, he became disillusioned by Mohammed's revelations. "Many of the revelations directly benefited him, and I knew the book was a farce," Mehmet explained.

After he was released from jail he saw an advertisement for a free New Testament in a daily newspaper (from the Bible Correspondence Course in Istanbul). He wrote a letter and requested a copy. Several months went by, but no New Testament. Once again he wrote. Again no response. Finally he made contact with them by phone only to find out that they had sent him a New Testament three times but it was always intercepted by postal staff.

A few months later, while visiting his brother in Ismir, he heard of an American Christian living nearby. He went to his house, receive his first New Testament, and when he returned to Diyarbakir he made contact with a missionary who brought him a Bible study. Now he is committed to sharing the gospel with everyone in Diyarbakir, especially young Marxist students.

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