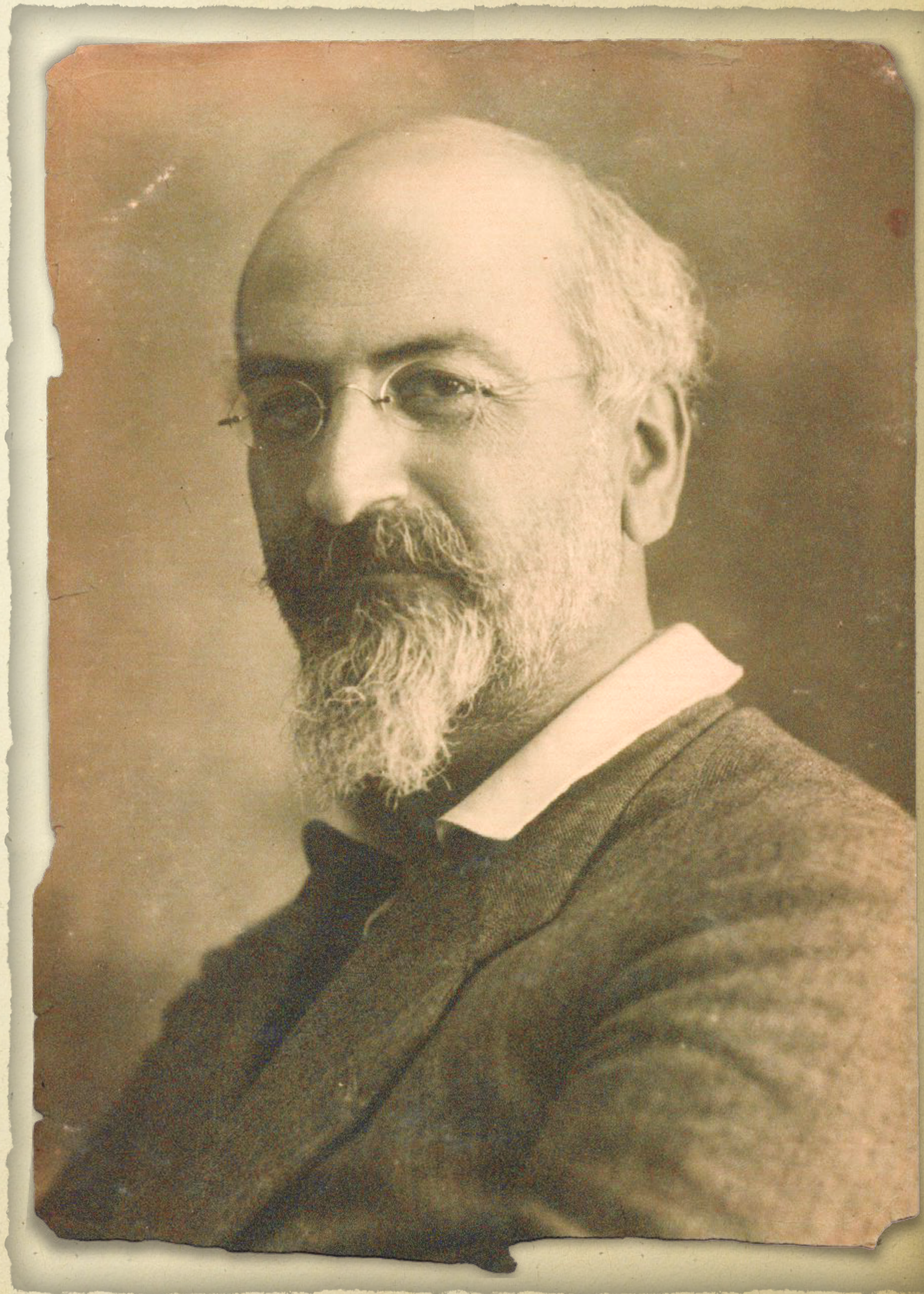


Diran
Tcherakian

Died 1921





Diran Tcherakian

University Professor, Poet, Master of the Armenian Language

The annihilation of the Armenian Adventist congregations is one of the saddest chapters in Adventist mission history. In 1914, there were about 350 Adventist church members, most of them ethnic Armenians, scattered all over Turkey. Of those, more than 250 lost their lives in the years to come, among them about 50 children or youth. Very few seem to have converted to Islam to save their lives. One of the first martyrs was the untiring Dzadour G. Baharian, who has become known as the Adventist “father” and “apostle” of the Armenians. Kurdish soldiers murdered him in 1914 close to Sivas while he was on a missionary journey. Baharian was ordered to renounce Christ and accept Islam on the spot. When he resisted and folded his hands for prayer, he was shot in cold blood. (Daniel Heinz, “The Legacy of Adventist Martyrs in Europe,” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*)

The murderers then sold his clothes and belongings in the marketplace. Other Adventists preachers followed Baharian into death in the following months and years, some with their families: E. Ayvazian, B. Touzjdjian, M. Ashikian, H. Apovian, H. Shadarevian, O. Pirenian, and finally Diran Tcherakian. Those who were not killed immediately perished during the so-called "death marches," which were organized by the Turkish army. The prisoners, sometimes whole families with their children, were led through rough mountain and desert areas for hundreds of miles without regular food and water until they perished in the blazing heat. (Ibid.)

Diran Tcherakian was a famous Armenian poet and college teacher who decided in 1921 to travel through Anatolia as an itinerant preacher to comfort the threatened, frightened, and isolated Adventist church members on his way. He was among those who later perished in one of these numerous death marches. We are relatively well informed about the martyrdom of Tcherakian because he was already famous during his lifetime, so the entire Armenian people mourned his death. (Ibid.)

Tcherakian also managed to leave behind written notes during the march that found their way back to the Adventist members in Constantinople, where the mission office was located. In addition, there were also some eyewitnesses who reported his death in oral and written form later on. Even the *Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia*, published in Yerevan from 1974 to 1986, honored Tcherakian with an entry that acknowledged his literary accomplishments for the Armenian nation. (Ibid.)

Tcherakian, the restless and searching poet, had become a fervent Adventist believer in 1915 and, according to his own testimony, saw in the return of Christ the fulfillment of his deep spiritual longing. After the death of Baharian, the 40-year-old took over the pastoral care of the small Armenian flock that had survived the genocide. This Tcherakian did until 1921, when he was arrested in Konya and convicted because he refused to renounce his faith in court. He had preached about his favorite topic, the soon-coming “kingdom of God.” (Ibid.)

The Turkish authorities, however, accused him of “rebellion.” Two sturdy brothers from the local Adventist group were convicted with him and shot dead within a few days after the trial. Tcherakian’s ordeal began on April 14, 1921. For several months, he was forced to walk in chains, beaten and tortured by mounted militiamen, traversing the barren mountainous area of Anatolia. Gradually all his belongings were taken from him. With a small Bible in his hands, he preached to his fellow prisoners while walking. (Ibid.)

After having traveled about a thousand kilometers (about 620 miles), the convict colony reached the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir on the banks of the river Tigris in June. They now faced the deadly Syrian desert beyond the river. Along the way, women and children from Armenian villages, taking pity on the prisoners, had given them food or washed them and their clothes. Any prisoner who could not walk farther was now left behind to die. Tcherakian was struck by fever, and finally, his feet could not carry him any longer.

(Ibid.)

His fellow prisoners, who had listened to his short sermons on the march, being themselves in deepest misery and totally exhausted, did not want to leave the preacher behind and decided to carry him on their backs until strength forsook them too. Yet, they did not give up and convinced some officers, in exchange for Tcherakian's coat, to lift him onto a horse and tie him to the saddle. A few hours later, Tcherakian passed away. In one of his final words, he exhorted his companions to keep together and not to allow their faith and love to cease. (Ibid.)

Tcharakian “had only become an Adventist in 1913. After the death of Baharian, this charismatic intellectual took over the spiritual care of the persecuted members.

Tcharakian described the horrific death march of more than 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) he had to endure. To the end, he wrote letters and secret messages on small pieces of paper, sending them to the Adventist Mission staff in Constantinople by paying someone. On one of these notes he wrote in 1921 with a trembling hand, shortly before his death on the banks of the river Tigris at Diyarbakir: “And when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you, my God, are with me” (see Ps. 23:4). In the “valley of the shadow of death” they lost their earthly lives as a price for their faithfulness, but nobody can take from them their heavenly “crown of life” (see Rev. 3:11). (Daniel Heinz, “While Justice Lingers,” *Adventist Review*, December 9, 2015)