

Eulogy of 'Ted' Ailanjian

November 22, 1925 – March 6, 2009

His given name was Toros David Ailanjian and he was born November 22, 1925 on a little eleven acre farm just outside Dinuba, California. He was born to a humble Armenian, immigrant couple, David and Peprone Ailanjian. Their journey escaping the Armenian massacre in Turkey had led them to the safety and freedom of the United States of America. Toros (of course everyone knew him as Ted), had only one sister Alice, who was three years older, and born blind.



Since Armenian was the only language spoken in his home, when it was time for Ted to begin school at the age of six, he didn't know a word of English. After running out of class the first day of school, he convinced his mother to let him wait to attend school with his cousin Johnny the following year. Instead he stayed home and continued learning how to help his father on their now twenty-two acre farm, growing Thompson seedless grapes.

At the age of nine, tragedy struck the Ailanjian household. Ted's father suddenly passed away following an appendectomy leaving Ted, Alice and their mother alone on the farm. Following the death of Ted's father an uncle moved in with them. He helped run the farm until Ted was fifteen and thought old enough to manage the farm on his own.

When Ted was 14 years old his mother had led him to the Lord, praying with him beside his bed. He said the Lord filled his life with joy and peace and His unconditional love. Shortly after receiving Christ someone gave Ted a book. It was the biography of Dr. David Livingstone, the pioneer missionary to the continent of Africa. Reading that book planted a seed of desire in his heart to one day go to Africa, as a career missionary. It was a desire that never diminished, but before his calling could be fulfilled, Ted had a farm to manage.

High school was a difficult time for Ted – juggling classes and keeping the farm running. He would often wake up at 4 am and work for several hours irrigating, or sulfuring the vines, milking the cow, feeding the chickens – then having breakfast and rushing off to catch the bus for school. After school he'd rush home again to work on the farm many times well past dark, when his mother would have to coax him in to finally get some rest. All of the back breaking work and responsibility of the farm cultivated in Ted a will of iron, and character of steel that would carry him through the rest of his life – from his twenty plus years of work in Africa, to the many years of ministry that would follow.

In college Ted began to thrive. As a farm boy the cultural and academic education of Bob Jones University opened up a whole new world for him. He attended his first Shakespeare plays, attended classical music concerts, played basketball, soccer, ran track, and made numerous dear friends, some of which would last a lifetime – like Doc & Lois Beshore. Ted loved his professors and studying the word of God. With the dream of Africa still alive in his heart, he began taking Greek and Hebrew to prepare himself for seminary.

During the summer of 1948, before beginning at Fuller Seminary, Ted took a youth pastor position at the small Armenian Brethren Church in Pasadena. It was surely a divine appointment that would change his life — because it was there that Ted met a young, Armenian girl by the name of Melodie Anne Terzian. The minute she entered the room he said to himself, “Now that’s the girl I am going to marry.” He was smitten by her beauty and she was taken by his charm and passion for the Lord. Her heart too had been pricked at a young age for full-time missionary work. During his third year at seminary, Ted proposed and they were married soon after graduation on June 23, 1951. Ted always called this day the happiest day of his life, and they would remain happily married for fifty-two years.

Soon after their wedding they were appointed as missionaries by Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society. The board initially wanted to send them to India but Ted explained that Africa had been on his heart for ten years, ever since he read that biography of Dr. David Livingstone. So accepting his plea, the board appointed them to the Ivory Coast, West Africa in September 1951.

Immediately, Ted and Melodie started preparing for the mission field and went to work raising support during which time their first son Mark David was born in August of 1952. By September 1953, this family of three headed to Paris, France for one year, to study French, the official national language of the Ivory Coast. They began their first term in the Africa in October 1954. They would spend the next twenty years there having three more children, Heidi, Marianne and Tim, raising their family, and having incredible adventures serving the Lord with their gifts and talents.

Ted also had several brushes with death. For example, one evening he was filling the generator with gasoline and the gas caught fire exploding in his face, and singeing all the hair off his face and arms. There was also the time he was siphoning gas from a barrel sucking so hard he swallowed a mouthful of gas that required having his stomach pumped. Ted also contracted a severe case of hepatitis and was laid up for a whole month quarantined in a small store room with temperatures consistently over 100 degrees.

But Ted loved Africa. He loved the rugged country, the big game hunting, tramping through jungles and villages and working beside the other missionaries. Adjusting to life in Africa was a bit more challenging for Melodie, however. Their first house didn't even have a sink. Ted had to request a sink to be installed in the house with a barrel outside under the eaves to pipe water into the kitchen. This made life a bit easier for her, as did the kerosene cooking stove Ted shipped in so she could cook on something other than wood in a wood burning stove. He was always trying to make life a little better for her and the kids. He made furniture out of packing crates and he built a play house for the kids along with a slide, teeter totter and swing so they all could play. Although life was hard and sometimes quite dangerous, Ted trusted God to protect him and his family and God proved faithful. Melodie did adjust well, and once even used Ted's shotgun to shoot a large snake that was eating one of her pet parrots.

Ted had a gift. A gift for learning languages and in addition to Armenian, English and French, he began learning Senari – the language of the Senufo people. Within six months he learned enough to go out into the villages and speak to the people about the Lord.

One morning he went to the village of Kafiukaha and spoke to the men of the village from John 10 about the Good Shepherd who gave his life for his

sheep. When he finished an old gray haired man named Lunyingi Coulibaly said, “Mister, I have been looking for that Shepherd all my life. I want to be one of His sheep.” Coulibaly became one of the first to give his heart to Christ in Ted’s ministry to the Senufo people — one of many who would follow.

Although Ted was involved in many building projects on the mission field, his true passion was for teaching and evangelism. Ted went on to learn several other African languages and was involved in translation work of much of the New Testament. Helping establish the Dyula Bible School was one of his dreams – desiring to train the nationals to continue to teach the Bible in their own language and evangelize their people.

Even though Ted loved the mission field, after twenty years he believed his calling in Africa was complete. This is a quote from Ted’s memoir, *“To say good-bye is never easy. Words cannot express the heaviness of the heart when loved ones are to separate. After working with our brothers and sisters for so many years in Africa,... the time came when we had to say “Au Revoir”. I’m glad we had to say it in French, for it means so much more than a simple good-bye. It means “good-bye for the present” or “until we see each other again” This is the Christian hope, for good-byes here are only for the present, and we shall see each other again.”*

In the years following the mission field, Ted went on to be an associate Pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Fresno for four years, and then at Arcade Baptist Church for thirteen years pastoring with his old classmate and friend Pastor Lee Toms. Ted served at Arcade from 1977 to 1990 when he retired and moved to Huntington Beach, California. During the last nineteen years of his life Ted traveled all over the world – to Turkey, throughout Europe, Greece, Israel, Armenia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Indonesia – including islands of Papua, Bali and others, always preaching and teaching the word of God in his signature, tender, loving way. Touching people with the Gospel of Jesus and spreading Christ’s love to everyone he met remained his singular passion and purpose.

Ted and Melodie became the proud grandparents to nine grandchildren. But sadly, in 2001 Ted’s beloved wife was diagnosed with meta-static breast cancer. For the next two years, Ted tirelessly and tenderly took care of her as she slowly became totally paralyzed and bedridden. Melodie passed away on

July 15, 2003 and Ted grievously mourned her loss — stating that all flavor had gone from his life. However, even in his grief, he continued to be a blessing and encouragement to his children, grandchildren, and friends — and traveled the world working with missions organizations.

Last month I attended a conference with Dr. Wess Stafford, President & CEO of an organization we all know, Compassion International. I am so grateful to see Dr. Wess Stafford, who lives in Colorado Springs, CO, here with us today. Wess grew up an MK (a missionary's kid) on the same mission field in Ivory Coast with Ted and Melodie. Wess spoke to me with great affection about Ted. "Ted taught me how to preach." Wess said. "As a seven-year old boy I would preach to Ted and he would encourage me. To this day I still preach a sermon from Proverbs 3:5-6 'Uncle Ted' help me write. He was so kind to me. Ted Ailanjian had a big impact on me."

For the past four years Ted attended the Bible Study in my home each Wednesday night. His wisdom, his humor, his love, his example and his friendship were indeed very special. The impact Ted had on every member our group was tremendous. On Wednesday's evenings there is now a void. He will be so missed.

Ted served on the missions board of ROCK of Africa Mission and several years ago he joined Lois Beshore and me on an outreach to Zimbabwe and Zambia. On our return trip we traveled through London and we made it a point to visit Westminster Abbey, where Dr. David Livingstone's body is buried. Beside his grave, I knelt with Ted as he quietly prayed, thanking God for this great man who so inspired him to dedicate his life to serve the Lord on the continent of Africa. Today, I thank God for Ted who inspired me, who inspired Wess Stafford, who inspired his family, and who inspired so many of us to live a life of Christian service.

Toward the end of Ted's journey on this earth, he maintained that steadfast desire to glorify God. He believed this was the reason he was created — the reason we are all created. Even in those last days in the hospital Ted never stopped witnessing, in his loving, gentle way, to everyone with whom he made contact — the doctors, nurses, aides and visitors. He kept his irresistible sense of humor, always telling funny jokes, making everyone laugh, and encouraging us all that he was at complete peace with God's destiny for him.

Those last days were painful ones, with so many things failing in his body —diabetes, congestive heart failure, failing kidneys, a painful blood clot in his arm, a hole in his intestines, a raging infection, pneumonia — and a rapidly growing, malignant tumor in his brain. Perhaps that is what it takes to kill a man with an iron will and character of steel. Always thinking of the needs of others, never once did he complain or feel sorry for himself. His grace and courage were inspiring and astounding.

Ephesians 2: 10 says,
For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ted embodied this verse during his entire life. The word "workmanship" in this verse is the Greek word "poiema," the same Greek word for "poem."

Toros David Ailanjian, you were truly some of the finest workmanship — the finest poetry ever created by God. Words cannot express the heaviness of our hearts as we say to you Ted, beloved Father, Grandfather, and friend: Au Revoir. Until we see each other again.

*In lieu of flowers the family requested that donations
be made to the following organizations:*

ROCK of Africa Mission
a ministry of the World Bible Society
PO Box 5000
Costa Mesa, CA 92628

Armenian Gospel Mission
2650 E. Foothill Blvd. Suite 205
Pasadena, CA 91107

World Venture (C.B.F.M.S.)
1501 W. Mineral Ave.
Littleton, CO 80120