



Alexander Vazakas portrait, circa 1940s.

From Macedonia to Missouri: The Journey of Alexander Vazakas

By Matthew A. Paugh

When Pentecostals look for inspiration from their history, they usually turn to the stories of the preachers, evangelists, and revivalists who have shaped their character. The movement has often neglected the impact of educators upon its identity, but these men and women have had a long-lasting influence. Dr. Alexander Vazakas represents one such teacher whose legacy continues to reverberate among leaders of the Assemblies of God (AG).

Vazakas's remarkable journey led him from Macedonia and, ultimately, to Springfield, Missouri, where he served as a professor at Evangel College. In his full life of ninety-one years, Vazakas served as a linguist, publisher, missionary, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) secretary, mentor, philosopher, and college professor. He spoke no less than a dozen languages and taught college courses in at least eight of them.

Vazakas's story connects with the AG on several levels. His Spirit baptism experience in the early 1890s predates the Topeka and Azusa Street revivals by at least a decade. After immigrating to the United States, Vazakas ministered and mentored among pastors in the Greek Original Apostolic Church, which the AG recognized as its Greek Branch in 1953. Finally, in his later years, he became a member of the AG and taught at Evangel where he influenced AG laity and clergy, including a young man named George O. Wood, now the former general superintendent of the AG. From prison cells to the classroom, from the Ignatian Way to the hallways of the academy, Alexander Vazakas lived a life that combined a commitment to Spirit-led living and academic rigor.

Early Life in the Ottoman Empire: Father's Conversion and Its Aftermath

Alexander Aristides Vazakas was born March 19, 1873, in Monastir, Turkey, to Aristides and Argyri Jeanellis Vazakas.¹ Located in southwestern Macedonia, Monastir existed as a city of "competing nationalisms." Its populace consisted of numerous overlapping ethnic groups, including Albanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Slavs, Turks, Vlachs, and, of course, Greeks, such as Vazakas and his family. Totaling approximately 50,000 people in the late nineteenth century, Monastir's population encompassed about 11,000 Muslims and 5,200 Jews.² The young Vazakas thus received exposure to numerous cultures and languages during his formative years.

Vazakas's ethnically diverse home city thrived in the late 1800s as part of the Ottoman Empire. Due to the construction of roads and railways, it became an economic, cultural, and administrative center in the Balkans, and European countries began to open their diplomatic offices there. Twelve consuls resided in Monastir between 1878 and 1913, and it took on the moniker "city of consuls."³

One of these consuls changed the course of the Vazakas family's life. Alexander's father Aristides practiced medicine in Monastir, and the British general consul became his patient. The elder Vazakas developed a friendship with the consul. One day, the consul, a member of the Church of Scotland, asked Aristides if he had read the New Testament. Alexander recalled that the question caused his father embarrassment because "he had studied almost everything else except that." Aristides went home and began reading the New Testament.⁴

Vazakas served as a linguist, publisher, missionary, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) secretary, mentor, philosopher, and college professor.

Reading the biblical text kindled an excitement in Vazakas's father, and he could not keep it to himself. He began talking to his patients about the insights he gleaned from Scripture. The family home that doubled as his medical office became a gathering place on Sundays for those who wanted to hear about "the wonders of the New Testament." The Sunday lectures attracted Greek-speaking individuals from various nationalities.⁵

With Aristides Vazakas's fervor for the New Testament came persecution. As the authorities gained awareness of the meetings at the Vazakas household, they became suspicious. Even owning a New Testament outside the official Orthodox Church channels could be deemed illegal. Vazakas's father found himself in and out of prison for his Christian proselytizing.⁶

On at least one occasion, Alexander became a target of mistreatment due to his father's activities. Near Alexander's schoolhouse lived two Turkish bandits who opposed Christianity. As Alexander and a friend walked home from school, one of the bandits began throwing stones and yelling insults at them. Alexander and his friend ran to a nearby Christian's home and hid themselves in a trunk until they deemed the threat had passed.⁷

Shortly after this altercation, Alexander's mother appeared at the school and made a dreadful announcement to her eight-year-old son: "We must leave at once and go to Prilep, where your father is dying." On his way to settle an estate following an uncle's death, Alexander's father encountered brigands who attacked him and left him naked and wounded in the snow. A shepherd discovered him and somehow sent word to Alexander's mother. Mother and children made the thirty-mile trek to Prilep where they found their husband and father battling pneumonia. His condition deteriorated quickly, and a recent imprisonment exacerbated his decline. Looking at his wife, Aristides cried out, "My lioness, take care of the children."

Then, he died.⁸

As a result of legal complexities, Alexander's mother proved unable to secure claims to Vazakas family estates, and the government reportedly took possession of the properties. With inheritances gone, Mrs. Vazakas attempted to take over her husband's medical practice. She saw patients in his office for four years before another appropriately licensed physician moved to the area.⁹

Now that the family lacked an income source, Alexander inherited the burden to provide for his mother and siblings. "Being left destitute," Vazakas wrote, "I started my teaching career at twelve [years old] in the Vardar Valley." Vazakas moved to an isolated area outside the town of Struminitza and became a tutor for the children of a German stationmaster named George Metzger. He sent his earnings back home to Monastir to support his mother and siblings.

Although he missed his family, Vazakas developed a friendship with his employer. Metzger had studied archeology and linguistics. Between the two of them, Metzger and Vazakas realized they knew ten different languages. Together they traveled the countryside, discussed the nuances of languages, and even dreamed of writing a dictionary with ten different columns for their ten different languages.¹⁰

During his time tutoring the Metzger children, Vazakas received word that an American family had moved to Monastir to continue the Christian work his father had started. This news provoked Vazakas's interest in the English language. He read daily from the English New Testament and found the meaning of the words in his Greek Bible. Metzger opined that reading "that book" amounted to a waste of time. He even warned Vazakas that the small print would ruin his eyesight. Later in life, Vazakas reflected on his use of the New Testament: "I have found it valuable linguistically not only for the study of English, but for every other language. It has been my basic study all these years." He added,

"And my eyes are still going strong."¹¹

"Formative Experiences": Conversion and Acts 2:4 Outpouring

Vazakas completed his contract with Metzger around the same time his sister Eugenia graduated from high school. She accepted a position as a teacher and undertook responsibility for supporting the family. This allowed Alexander to continue his own education. He moved to Thessalonica, Greece, and enrolled in high school. During these years, Vazakas had what he called the "formative experiences" of his life.¹²

In Thessalonica, Vazakas connected with the British general consul who had introduced his father to the Greek New Testament. After attending the consul's church, Vazakas remarked, "For the first time, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in a public meeting."¹³ When he went back to his room at the high school, Vazakas felt a "heavy conviction." The overwhelming realization of his sinfulness drove him to despair. He began to beat his head against the stone wall and longed to die. Then, Vazakas declared, "Christ revealed himself to me as the one who died for sinners, even the worst of sinners, and therefore for me. I saw a vision of Jesus who said to me, 'My boy I love you. I died for you.'¹⁴

This conversion experience, his first formative experience, changed Vazakas's perspective on the New Testament. Prior to his conversion, Scripture functioned as a useful tool for learning new languages, but now he felt compelled to share it with others. Vazakas recalled going "up and down" Thessalonica's portion of the Via Egnatia, the road that the Apostle Paul traveled on his second missionary journey (Acts 16-17).¹⁵ He told business owners and anyone else who would listen about his salvation experience.

Within days, Vazakas had his second formative experience. Proprietors who heard Vazakas's conversion story shared the account with a monk named

Barnabas. Barnabas lived in Giannitsa, a city about thirty miles from Thessalonica. Intrigued by the teenager's testimony, Barnabas sent for Vazakas and invited him to Giannitsa to tell about his conversion. Vazakas readily accepted the invitation.¹⁶

When he arrived, Vazakas discovered that Barnabas had assembled a large crowd of apprentices and business owners. Vazakas related his conversion story, and when he finished, he prayed the words of Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (KJV).

According to Vazakas, as soon as he spoke those words, "the power fell like bolts of lightning." Barnabas began to "shout at the top of his lungs, 'Eureka! I have found it!'" Young apprentices started "to weep and cry and ask for help to get saved." Business owners who had not spoken to each other in years offered forgiveness to their enemies and "vowed loyalty to Christ." For his part, Vazakas "found himself unable to speak except as the Spirit gave utterance."¹⁷

The commotion became so loud that townspeople gathered to see what had transpired. Vazakas went to the balcony and addressed the crowd. The "words flowed like the water of a fountain" with "no effort or thought," Vazakas recalled. For "several hours" he expounded God's word and explained the "whole plan of salvation." The next day Barnabas took to the streets. The priest read from Acts 2:4 and announced, "This is what happened to us last night!"¹⁸

In the days following the events at Giannitsa, Vazakas began to suffer ridicule. The derision arose from "that group who called themselves evangelicals." The evangelicals in Thessalonica disparaged his conversion testimony, but after his Acts 2:4 experience in Giannitsa, they became his "avowed enemies." Amid "the bitter persecution" at the hand of evangelicals, Vazakas determined to travel to the United States in order to dis-



The Vazakas family, circa 1908. Standing (l-r): George(?) Theodoroff (son of Eugenia), Eugenia Theodoroff (sister), and Alexander Vazakas. Sitting in front (l-r): Aristides (father) and Argyri (mother) Vazakas, and a sister (either Aphrodite or Chryssa).

cover if "any such thing ever happened in this country!"¹⁹

Initial Journey to America: Early Education and "Faith Adventure"

Traveling from Thessalonica through France and England, Vazakas eventually boarded a boat for North America.²⁰ He disembarked in Canada and took a train to Chicago, arriving around September 15, 1892. In Chicago, he sought out Paul Theodoroff, his future brother-in-law, who was enrolled at McCormick Theological Seminary.²¹ Theodoroff and Vazakas's sister Eugenia married and became naturalized citizens in 1893.²² At Theodoroff's urging, Vazakas decided to matriculate at Tabor College in Tabor, Iowa.

Graduates of Oberlin College founded Tabor College in 1853.²³ Vazakas spent three years at the coed school which was associated with the Congregational Church. He paid his tuition by teaching French and German classes,

and he covered his room and board expenses by sawing wood for the college furnace, pitching hay, milking cows, and gardening.²⁴ During the summers, he traveled to classmates's hometowns to preach and share experiences from his homeland.²⁵

In his third year at Tabor, Vazakas underwent "a spiritual upheaval." Vazakas originally came to the United States with the goal of ascertaining if people in America had spiritual experiences like those he had at his conversion and with Barnabas in Giannitsa. However, he realized that his ambitions had changed. He now desired to "get all the degrees possible." Then "a crushing burden" came upon him. He sensed God summoning him to abandon his ambitions and go to "some obscure place" to help people find God. In his journal, Vazakas wrote, "*Nil nisi te, Domine*" (i.e., "Nothing but you, O Lord"). Nevertheless, he had a heavy heart when he considered leaving the place he had grown to love. Many years later, Vazakas declared, "I have not for-



Alexander Vazakas (center) sitting outside with two priests from the Greek Orthodox Church during the time he worked with the YMCA in the early 1920s.

gotten the pain of that surrender to go where? I did not know. To do what? I did not know. Like Paul's call to Macedonia, I heard, 'Come over and help us!'"²⁶

So Vazakas left behind his ambitions of obtaining further degrees and his dreams of becoming a college teacher, and he departed for Greece. Before leaving, he preached in Topeka and Chicago and acquired enough funds to pay his fare to New York, where he attended a Christian and Missionary Alliance Convention conducted by A. B. Simpson. An "old lady" at the convention offered him sufficient money for his trip to Greece.²⁷

Back in Greece, Vazakas devoted himself to pastoral and evangelistic work in Athens and Piraeus for two years.²⁸ He returned to the United States for a brief period and became a naturalized citizen on June 26, 1899, in Sidney, Iowa.²⁹ Then, he departed again for Europe, where he continued his ministry as an evangelist.

A trip to minister in Constantinople almost ended tragically. When Vazakas arrived in the city, Turkish officials discovered his passport and citizenship papers. Authorities had recently uncovered an Armenian plan to revolt. Evidently, the Armenians awaited a leader from

America to help initiate their rebellion. The Turks determined that Vazakas "was the big shot," and despite his protest, they took him into custody. According to Vazakas, they pledged to release him if he would surrender his American citizenship, but Vazakas refused. As a result, Vazakas recounted, "I was sentenced to die."

While in prison, he befriended an Armenian. A boy would occasionally come to provide food for Vazakas's friend and other Armenian prisoners. The Armenian friend instructed the boy to go straightaway to the American consul and tell them that an American had mistakenly been imprisoned. "Almost immediately," Vazakas remembered, "the consul arrived," and after forcing the Turks to admit their mistake, the consul secured Vazakas's release and helped him board a boat direct to Piraeus, where he continued his "faith adventure" for two more years.³⁰

Back to America: Scholastic Endeavors and YMCA Work

Vazakas felt God calling him to go back to the United States, so in 1902, he traveled to New York City. For one year,

Vazakas ministered to Greek immigrants through A. B. Simpson's Gospel Tabernacle. He provided the immigrants with lessons in the English language and gospel messages in the Greek language. The church basement served as Vazakas's living quarters.³¹

While in New York, Vazakas applied and received acceptance to New York University (NYU). After reviewing his Tabor coursework, NYU allowed him to continue his studies exactly where he had left off before starting his "faith adventure." He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1904.³² Vazakas then continued his education and graduated from Union Theological Seminary in 1906.³³

Vazakas desired to go even further in his scholastic pursuits and enrolled in a graduate program at Columbia University. During these years, one of the more bizarre episodes in Vazakas's personal life unfolded. On March 6, 1908, Vazakas appeared before New York Supreme Court Justice Frederick E. Crane with a petition for a marriage annulment. Evidently, while ministering in Athens in 1898, Vazakas married Luise Zenia, a woman "twice his age." According to Vazakas's testimony, Zenia offered to teach him German. After a few lessons, Zenia hypnotized him, and five days later he realized he had married her. Vazakas attested that he escaped his new wife's influence by coming to the United States and that he had not seen her until she unexpectedly appeared in New York the prior year. She urged Vazakas to return to Greece with her, but when he declined, she departed alone.³⁴ In the end, the judge refused to decree an annulment due to insufficient evidence.³⁵

Although he did not realize his hopes for receiving an annulment, Vazakas continued to seek God, and during that same year, he associated with a Christian group operating a Manhattan Bible training school. Attending one of the group's prayer meetings, Vazakas felt "transported to another realm." "Suddenly," narrated Vazakas, "my vocal chords were under the impulse of the blessed

Holy Spirit and words—wonderful words—poured from my lips. They were unknown and unintelligible to me, but I knew they were words which glorified God.” Others at the meeting told Vazakas that he had experienced “the baptism with the Holy Spirit.” Vazakas now had a name for the phenomenon that he had encountered more than a decade earlier with Barnabas the monk back in Giannitsa, Greece.³⁶

Vazakas’s spiritual fervor did not detract from his academic studies, and he graduated with his Master of Arts in Philosophy from Columbia in 1911. His master’s thesis explored “the will to live.” He compared solutions offered by German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, and the Apostle Paul. He concluded that Paul offers the most helpful solution with his emphasis on “the denial of self and the embodiment of that which represents the highest type of love, the love of Christ.”³⁷

During his time in New York, Vazakas established a language school to teach English to immigrants and other languages to English speakers. At the same time, his brother Alfred instituted a similar school in Chicago. Following the completion of his thesis, the brothers switched locations. Alfred came to New York, and Alexander headed to Chicago. In addition to running the school in Chicago, Vazakas established a printing press. He published language textbooks and printed Christian tracts in Greek.³⁸ At one point, Vazakas himself wrote and published a textbook called *Greek-English Grammar and Conversational Methods*.³⁹

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Vazakas put his teaching and publishing endeavors on hold. He joined the YMCA and served as an international secretary for France. His charge included ministering to service personnel west of Paris. After the war, Vazakas became a secretary in Greece.⁴⁰

One of Vazakas’s most memorable recollections as YMCA secretary in-

involved an exchange with Greek Orthodox Archbishop Chrysostomos of Smyrna. The Archbishop sought to minister to the Greek army during the Occupation of Smyrna between 1919 and 1922. In a meeting with the Archbishop, Vazakas suggested that they distribute Greek New Testaments to the soldiers. Vazakas recalled, “That really started something! ... The Greek Orthodox Bishop and the Greek Protestant preacher were working together.”⁴¹

As he helped with reconstruction efforts in Greece following the War, Vazakas suffered an injury that resulted in a punctured lung. Because of his rebuilding work and his wound, the Greek government purportedly knighted Vazakas, and he became “Sir Alexander.”⁴² While recuperating from his injuries, Vazakas traveled to southern France, and in Nice, he met Ida Alleman. Vazakas married Alleman on March 26, 1925, in Paris before returning to the United States.⁴³ Vazakas arrived in New York on April 21, 1925.⁴⁴

Vazakas made his way to Chicago, where his first order of business involved completing his doctoral studies. He submitted his dissertation entitled “The Greek of Acts 1:1-15:25” to the New Testament Department at the University of Chicago in September 1927.⁴⁵ The project combined his passion for languages and for Scripture. The faculty approved the dissertation, and Vazakas graduated with his Doctor of Philosophy degree the following spring. He had now obtained all the degrees that had filled his ambitions at Tabor. He thought he had surrendered all those aspirations when he followed God’s call to Macedonia, but “God gave me the desires of my heart,” observed Vazakas.⁴⁶

Professor Vazakas: Teaching Around the Country

With his dissertation completed, the fifty-four-year-old Vazakas accepted a position as Professor and Chair of the Department of Modern Languages at

Willamette University, a private liberal arts college in Salem, Oregon. On his way to commence his new teaching assignment, Vazakas passed through San Francisco and met “some Greeks who regularly in a private house had religious meetings intended for a deeper spiritual life.” Vazakas wrote, “Of course, such things appeal to me so strongly.”

Thus, during his years at Willamette, Vazakas spent several vacations “near these Greeks who were seeking a deeper spiritual life.” He prayed and studied the Bible with them, but he also mentored their leaders and encouraged them to pursue education. Vazakas referred to these San Francisco Greeks as “Primitives” because they incorporated “in the early thirties” as the “so-called ‘Primitive’ plus another word ‘Apostolic’ church.”⁴⁷ In fact, this association of Greeks became known as the Hellenic Protogonos Apostolic Ecclesia, or the Greek Original Apostolic Church.⁴⁸

Once he arrived at Willamette, Vazakas began teaching in September 1927, and his wife Ida joined him in January 1928.⁴⁹ He taught an array of courses. For example, his schedule for the Fall 1941 semester included nine classes with sections in Latin, German, French, Spanish, Greek, and Comparative Literature.⁵⁰ He later added courses in Russian.⁵¹ Just as he learned to read English by comparing it to his Greek New Testament, Vazakas continued to use the New Testament as a textbook for student translation exercises.⁵²

Vazakas also focused on extracurricular and spiritual activities on campus. He sponsored the Spanish Club and the International Club, and he moderated debates. In addition, Mrs. Vazakas became active as a regular participant at social events and sponsor of the French Club. The college community sought out Vazakas for his opinion on European political developments due to his wide travels and knowledge of cultures and languages. Along with regularly speaking in chapel, Vazakas served as a faculty mentor for the Devotional Club, the Col-

lege Wesleyans, and Intervarsity Fellowship. Moreover, he preached frequently in numerous Salem, Oregon, churches, especially among the Methodists.⁵³

His reputation as a scholar and student supporter helped Vazakas become a well-respected professor at Willamette. "In Dr. Vazakas," a school newspaper article began, "the student body has a genuine friend." The writer went on to describe Vazakas as "understanding, sympathetic, gentle, and very polite with a sense of humor, subtle and philosophical." The professor walked briskly across campus wearing a Panama hat and kindly greeting passersby. The write-up ended with the conclusion that "Dr. Vazakas may rightly be considered a perfect gentleman."⁵⁴

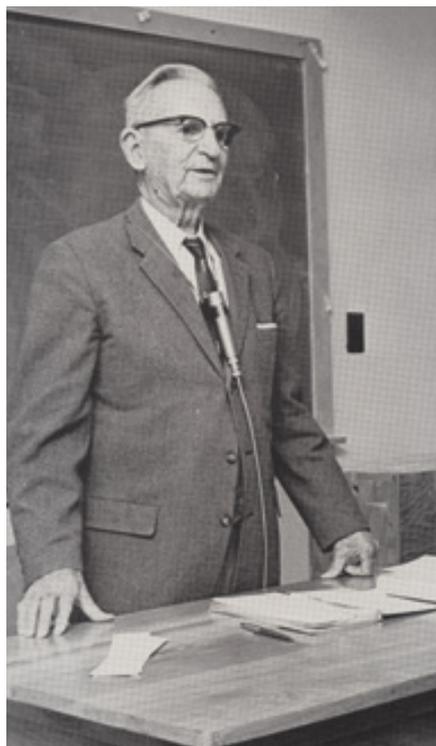
After seventeen years teaching in Oregon, Vazakas sensed God beckoning him to return to Greece. Just as he had helped after the First World War, Vazakas desired to assist the rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of World War II. Vazakas retired from Willamette at the end of the 1943-1944 academic year, and he set out for Greece. He preached there for one year, but when civil war erupted between the Greek government army and communist insurgents in 1946, Vazakas returned to the United States.⁵⁵

He could not help but go back to teaching. In 1946, at age seventy-three, Vazakas joined the faculty of Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, as a Professor of Modern Languages.⁵⁶ An affiliate of the Swedish Lutheran Church, Bethany promoted a large missions department in which Vazakas took particular pride. He called their missions program "magnificent" and "world famous." In order to prepare missionaries, Vazakas added Italian to his teaching repertoire.⁵⁷

Vazakas taught at Bethany for six years, and then, he departed Kansas to become dean of a small holiness institute in Intercession City, Florida. Opened in 1939 by the Household of Faith Mission, a Wesleyan Holiness denomination founded by Osie England, the school

went by various names including Intercession Bible Training School, Intercession City Biblical College, and Southern Wesleyan Biblical College.⁵⁸ Vazakas served the institute for one year, and during that time, his wife Ida died after an extended illness on October 26, 1953.⁵⁹

Following his wife's death and his one-year stint in Florida, Vazakas relocated to Overland Park, Kansas. Beginning the fall semester of 1954, he held a wide-ranging post as Professor of Philosophy, Philology, Theology, and Languages at Kansas City College



Dr. Alexander Vazakas addressing a philosophy class at Evangel College, Springfield, Missouri, circa 1963.

and Bible School (KCCBS), an institution associated with the Church of God (Holiness). Vazakas expressed frustration with ministry students at KCCBS who would show up late or miss class altogether. They claimed that "doing the Lord's work" or "a burden of prayer" prevented them from coming to class. The seasoned professor called such excuses "flimsy." These preachers, Vazakas asserted, thought they would "shine

as a star" simply because they "stand thundering behind a pulpit," but without proper study, they would proclaim "empty words and perform empty deeds from an empty head."⁶⁰ As always, Vazakas emphasized both the head and the heart. Spiritual fervency and academic rigor could function together.

Later Years: Interactions with the AG

While on his first Christmas break at KCCBS, Vazakas traveled to San Francisco, California, where he had spent many past vacations. Over the past year, he had regularly corresponded with Nelle Reeder, one of his former students. A 1942 graduate of Willamette, Nelle studied Spanish under Vazakas and worked as a high school teacher in Rainier, Oregon. Nelle met Vazakas in California, and they wed on December 23, 1954.

Rev. Nick A. Tounger performed the wedding ceremony at the Hellenic Protogonos Apostolic Ecclesia (the Original Greek Apostolic Church) in San Francisco. This church represented the outgrowth of the Greek home gatherings designed "to seek a deeper spiritual life" that Vazakas first encountered on his way to Willamette in the late 1920s. By this time, however, the network of churches to which Tounger's congregation belonged had received recognition as the Greek Branch of the AG by General Secretary J. Roswell Flower on August 14, 1953. Rev. Tounger held credentials with the AG, and his congregation identified as an AG church.⁶¹ Thus, his nuptials to Nelle represent Vazakas's first verifiable encounter with the AG.⁶²

After the wedding, Vazakas's bride, who was thirty-eight years younger than him, returned to Oregon to finish her teaching contract, and the groom resumed his instructional duties at KCCBS. The newlyweds reconnected in July of 1955 in Overland Park and embarked on a three-month honeymoon to Europe. Upon their return to Kansas, Vazakas served at KCCBS until May 1957.⁶³

The summer gave rise to another interaction between Vazakas and the AG. The Greek Branch of the AG invited the professor to join them for their annual convention from June 30 to July 7, 1957, in San Jose, California. Vazakas served as the evening speaker for their gathering. Gust A. Harbas, Secretary of the Greek Branch, reported, "Because of his broad education and anointing of the Holy Spirit, the convention was greatly blessed."⁶⁴

Vazakas brought his combination of scholarship and anointing to Evangel College (EC) in the fall of 1958 when, at age eighty-five, Vazakas came to the fledgling AG liberal arts school as Assistant Professor of German and Philosophy.⁶⁵ Dr. Thurman Vanzant, who served as head of the EC Department of Religion and Philosophy, remembers "excitement among the small, close-knit faculty and students that a new faculty member with a *Ph.D.* had been added."⁶⁶ At that time, EC, which opened in 1955, struggled "to attract persons with advanced degrees" to its faculty.⁶⁷

Because of his advancing age, Vazakas did not participate in faculty meetings nor attend extracurricular activities. He focused on teaching.⁶⁸ He and his wife Nelle lived on the EC campus, and she assisted him in the classroom. Nelle had obtained her bachelor's degree from Willamette and a master's degree from Drury College, and she received certification to teach French, German, and Spanish in Oregon. As a result, Vazakas joked that EC benefitted from "two for the price of one."⁶⁹

As in his prior appointments, the campus community sought Vazakas's wisdom regarding world events. In his later years, Vazakas enjoyed listening to Russian broadcasts on his shortwave radio. After hearing speeches from Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev, Vazakas used a student newspaper interview to encourage Evangelites to know other's "language, history, and anthropology" in order to "understand them." "The greatest risk in the world now is

with atomic armaments," Vazakas observed, "but what will save humanity is love, confidence, and faith."⁷⁰

In his old age, Vazakas inspired younger faculty members. As a twenty-two year old, Dr. Stanley M. Burgess was just beginning his career when he became a Professor of History at EC. He quips that Vazakas turned "aging into saging" as he invested in future generations. Burgess retains fond memories of Vazakas as a "kind and gentle man" upon whom one could "deeply sense the Spirit of God." A "high caliber teacher," Vazakas combined academia and spirituality and did not sacrifice one for the other. Because of this, Burgess declares, "Students adored him."⁷¹

Among the EC students that Vazakas impacted was Dr. George O. Wood, the former general superintendent of the AG and 1962 EC graduate. Wood took Vazakas for several philosophy courses and two years of German. Fifty-five years later, Wood still quotes Vazakas in sermons and articles. One of Wood's "take-aways" from studying under Vazakas includes the differentiation between "'informational' or cognitive knowledge and 'relational' or affective knowledge."⁷² Vazakas helped Wood to understand that "the doorway to the Kingdom is through relationship" and that "cognitive knowledge is worthless in the Christian realm without affective knowledge."⁷³

When Vazakas died in his home on the EC campus at age ninety-one on February 25, 1965, he left behind a legacy that has important lessons for Pentecostals. First, the narrative of his conversion and Spirit baptism in the early 1890s demonstrates that, although the classical Pentecostal movement is rooted in the early-twentieth-century Topeka and Los Angeles revivals, the spiritual gifts and manifestations associated with Pentecostals, including speaking in tongues, never fully "lapsed" in Christian history.⁷⁴ Second, warranted or not, Pentecostalism has developed a reputation for espousing an "anti-intellectual ethos."⁷⁵ Vazakas stands as an early example of a

Pentecostal who welded the life of the mind with the life of the Spirit and challenged others to do the same.⁷⁶ For these reasons and more, Alexander Vazakas's story in all of its complexity deserves to be heard and retold among Pentecostals today. ✠

Images provided courtesy of the Albright College Archives.



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NOTES

¹Monastir is the present-day city of Bitola, the Republic of Macedonia.

²Dimitar Bechev, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2009), 26-27; Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804-1945* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 146.

³Dalibor Jovanovski, "Redrawing State Borders: Prosperity to Poverty in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Bitola (Monastir)," in *Wealth in the Ottoman and Post Ottoman Balkans: A Socio-Economic History*, ed. Evguenia Davidova (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 202.

⁴In this article, I rely heavily upon Alexander A. Vazakas' unpublished autobiography, which is preserved at the Albright College archives in the personal papers of his nephew, Byron Vazakas, who was a nominee for the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, 1947. Alexander Aristides Vazakas, planned autobiography, folder 32, Byron Vazakas Papers, Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania. Vazakas wrote, "The introduction of this marvelous book into my father's life through this Scottish gentleman was revolutionary."

⁵Ibid. Alexander remembers that his father would often say, "Just think! Other nations who have studied the translation of this book which was written originally in Greek have become great, prosperous, and wonderful, and we to whom these treasures of heaven were originally revealed know nothing of it."

⁶"The Pentecostal Professor from Thessalonica," *Pentecostal Evangel*, September 2, 1962, 6.

⁷Vazakas, autobiography, folder 32.

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⁸Ibid.; “Pentecostal Professor,” 6; Nelle Reeder Vazakas, unpublished notes on Alexander Vazakas, folder 39, Byron Vazakas Papers, Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania.

⁹Nelle Vazakas, notes.

¹⁰Vakazas, autobiography, folder 32. Vazakas described Metzger, the stationmaster, as “a perfect gentleman and scrupulously honest”; however, “he could swear in seven different languages, mostly at his wife.”

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid. Vazakas moved to Thessalonica because his older brother lived there.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.; Nelle Vazakas, notes; “Pentecostal Professor,” 6.

¹⁵Nelle Vazakas, notes; “Pentecostal Professor,” 6. As he roved along the road, Vazakas met several English ladies who had rented a waterfront café and repurposed it to host worship services for British sailors serving at the port of Thessalonica. Worshipping at this chapel, Vazakas heard electrifying singing, and he witnessed fervent prayer and testimonies. The worship encounter intensified Vazakas’s hunger for God; see Vazakas, autobiography, folder 32.

¹⁶Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31. Besides serving as a priest, Barnabas had also established a watchmaking business

¹⁷Ibid.; Nelle Vazakas, notes; “Pentecostal Professor,” 7. Vazakas also tells of the property owner, who was known as a gambler and drunkard. When he heard the uproar, he came to mock, but then, “as if struck by lightning,” the man starting running around the room. He screamed, “What have you done to me? I see hell before me. Come and help me, or I am lost!”

¹⁸Vazakas autobiography, folder 31, folder 33. One cannot miss the echoes to the day of Pentecost and Peter’s words, “This is that” (Acts 2:16, KJV).

¹⁹Ibid., folder 33. Vazakas carefully points out that the scorn did not derive from the Greek Orthodox Church. In fact, referring to the Greek Orthodox, Vazakas wrote, “The people in that church were my friends, always eager to hear God’s word.”

²⁰As the two-week ocean passage neared its end near Newfoundland, the weather became tumultuous, and the motors began to malfunction. Passengers and crew expressed concerns about their safety, but when Vazakas’s cabin mate’s wife came to find her husband, she encountered Vazakas singing hymns. She became angry at how calm he seemed when their lives were endangered.

²¹D. C. Marquis, *General Catalogue of the McCormick Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois* (Chicago: Rogerson Press, 1900), 129.

²²National Archives and Records Administration, *Soundex Index to Naturalization Petitions for the United States District and Circuit Courts, Northern District of Illinois and Immigration and Naturalization Service District 9, 1840-1950 (M1285)*, microfilm serial M1285, microfilm roll 167; Illinois Department of Public Health, “Marriage Records, 1871–present,” Division of Vital Records,

Springfield, IL.

²³Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33; James Patrick Morgans, *John Todd and the Underground Railroad: Biography of an Iowa Abolitionist* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2006), 63. Dubbed “the daughter of Oberlin,” Tabor College, like its “mother” school, devoted itself to progressive causes, such as abolition. Tabor, Iowa, also boasted “the world’s shortest standard gauge” railroad line. It ran 8.79 miles from Malvern, Iowa, and resulted from the successful efforts of the Tabor community to prevent Tabor College from relocating; see Otha B. Wearin, “The Tabor and Northern Railroad,” *The Annals of Iowa* 38 (1966), 427–430.

²⁴His wood sawing work garnered fifteen cents per hour. The college president also allowed Vazakas to use his property to raise pigs and sell them to market. The proceeds from this venture equaled the amount needed for Vazakas to pay for his brother Alfred’s fare to the United States; see Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33. Vazakas may have become involved with the Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, a holiness denomination based in Tabor, during his years at Tabor College. Vazakas attended the Association’s 1917 convention in Elmira, NY; see “Hephzibah Association Closes Its Convention,” *Elmira Star-Gazette*, September 15, 1917, 7; T. F. Murphy, ed., *Religious Bodies, 1936: Denominations - Statistics, History, Doctrine, Organization, Work*, United States Census Bureau (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 565. Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33 notes interactions with the founder of the movement George Weavers and his son-in-law and successor Leonard Worcester. The Hephzibah Association became part of the Church of the Nazarene in 1950. See “Our Global Church,” The Church of the Nazarene, accessed May 5, 2017, <http://www.nazarene.org/sites/default/files/essentials/docs/Our-Global-Church-En1.2.pdf>.

²⁵Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33.

²⁶Ibid. Vazakas graduated from a “preparatory course” at Tabor in 1895; see H. A. Simons, “Graduates from Fremont County Schools, 1895,” *Fremont County Sun*, June 20, 1895, 6.

²⁷Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33. Along the way to Greece, Vazakas stopped in Keswick, England, and participated in a Higher Life Conference.

²⁸Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31, folder 33; *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Greek Evangelical Union (formerly “Alliance”)* (Smyrna: Greek Evangelical Union, 1898), 5.

²⁹U.S. Passport Application for Alexander A. Vazakas, February 28, 1914, in National Archives and Records Administration, *General Emergency Passport Applications, 1907-1923*, vol. 140: Rheims to Turkey; Sidney is the county seat of Fremont County, which includes Tabor.

³⁰Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33. Vazakas recalled, “I was very cheerful during my imprisonment. I was singing and the presence of Christ was with me.” See Elizabeth Geyer, “Dr. Vazakas, Oldest Faculty Member, To Teach Part-Time,” *The Lance*, April 5, 1962. Thank you to Evangel University archivist Shirley Shedd for assistance with articles from *The Lance*.

³¹Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31, folder 33.

³²Henry M. Brown, ed., *General Alumni Catalogue of New York University: College, Applied Science, and Honorary Alumni, 1833-1905* (New York: General Alumni Society, 1906), 142.

³³*Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1906-1907* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1907), 15. According to Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31, he chose Union because the American that continued his late father’s work in Monastir had attended there.

³⁴“Says Woman Hypnotized Him,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 7, 1908, 1. This marriage is further corroborated by a June 6, 1900, passport application “for a person claiming citizenship through naturalization of husband or parent.” Louise Vazakas completed the approved application in Athens. The information matches Alexander’s immigration and citizenship date. Louise was born in Germany in 1849. See Passport Application for Louise Vazakas, National Archives and Records Administration, *Emergency Passport Applications (Issued Abroad), 1877-1907*, roll 17, vol. 28: Egypt to Portugal. Vazakas does not mention Louise or this episode in his autobiography or notes.

³⁵“Vazakas Can’t Lose Hypnotic Greek Wife,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 27, 1908, 22; *The New York Supplement Containing the Decisions of the Supreme and Lower Courts of Record of New York State*, vol. 109 (New York: West Publishing, 1908), 568-570.

³⁶“Pentecostal Professor,” 6; Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31, folder 33; Nelle Vazakas, notes.

³⁷Alexander A. Vazakas, “The Solution of the Will to Live: A Comparative Study” (master’s thesis, Columbia University, 1911), 48, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. One of Vazakas’s professors at Columbia was John Dewey, the philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer.

³⁸Vazakas, autobiography, folder 33. While he was a student at Tabor, Vazakas earned enough money through his various jobs to pay for Alfred’s journey to the United States. Tragically, Alfred died in New York on December 31, 1912, as a result of pneumonia. Vazakas moved Alfred’s widow and three sons to a Chicago apartment, but a fire destroyed the apartment complex a few weeks after their arrival. Alfred’s wife and children left and moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, before settling in Reading, Pennsylvania. Alfred’s oldest son was the poet Byron A. Vazakas.

³⁹“Death Takes Scholar, 91,” *Springfield News-Leader*, February 27, 1965.

⁴⁰“Overseas Secretaries,” *Association Men*, September 1917, 565; *Columbia Alumni News*, October 4, 1918, 77; *Year Book of the Young Men’s Christian Associations of North America for the Year May 1, 1920, to April 30, 1921* (New York: Association Press, 1921), 153.

⁴¹Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35. Archbishop Chrysostomos was brutally killed by a mob following

the Turkish sacking of Smyrna in 1922. He was later declared a saint and martyr by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

⁴²Nelle Vazakas, notes; "Vazakas Entrain on First Leg of Trip to Egypt and Greece," *The Willamette Collegian*, July 14, 1944, 3; "Dr. Vazakas' Rites Slated," *Springfield News-Leader*, February 27, 1965; "Professor, Linguist, Editor: Teacher for 77 Years Dies," *The Lance*, March 11, 1965, 1.

⁴³Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35; Nelle Vazakas, notes. The disposition of his marriage to Luise Zenia at this time is unknown. I have been unable to uncover any divorce records. It is possible that she had died.

⁴⁴*Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1957*, Records of the U.S. Customs Service, National Archives, Washington, D.C., record group 36, roll 3639, line 17, page 161.

⁴⁵Alexander Aristides Vazakas, "The Greek of Acts 1:1-15:25" (doctor of philosophy dissertation, University of Chicago, 1927). Vazakas's dissertation argues against a theory, common at the time, that the Greek in the first fifteen chapters of Acts derives from a translation of an Aramaic original. Vazakas had earlier written on the same subject in an abbreviated form in A. A. Vazakas, "Is Acts I-XV.35 a Literal Translation from an Aramaic Original?," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 (1918), 105-110. Vazakas evidently began his studies prior to the beginning of World War I; see *Circular of Information: The Divinity School, 1915-1916* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), 86, which identified Vazakas as Vice President of the New Testament Club. See also *Annual Register Covering the Academic Year Ending June 30, 1916, with Announcements for the Year 1916-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1916), 599.

⁴⁶Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35. "Professor, Linguist," *The Lance*, also notes that Vazakas "studied abroad at the Universities of Mexico, Athens, Paris, Switzerland, and Madrid."

⁴⁷Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35.

⁴⁸See William J. Molenaar, "The American Mission Field: Intercultural Ministries" *Assemblies of God Heritage* 34 (2014): 42.

⁴⁹"Reporter Discovers Hobbies of Faculty: New Members of Teaching Staff Are Revealed by Means of Their Avocations," *Willamette Collegian*, September 29, 1927, 1; Mary Clanfield, "Society," *Willamette Collegian*, January 19, 1928, 3.

⁵⁰"Whew!!! Vazakas Teaches Five Different Languages," *Willamette Collegian*, November 28, 1941, 8.

⁵¹"Faculty Makes Course Changes," *Willamette Collegian*, November 13, 1942, 1.

⁵²"Linguistic Heights," *Willamette Collegian*, March 19, 1943, 3.

⁵³"Wesleyans Have Interesting Meets," *Willamette Collegian*, November 13, 1931, 3; "French Club Meets," *Willamette Collegian*, February 18, 1932, 1; "Vazakas Says Europe's 'Sore Spots' Overrated," *Willamette Collegian*, November 3, 1933, 1; "Russian Seen International Language," *Willamette Collegian*, December 3, 1943, 8; "Vazakas Tells of Russians," *Willamette Collegian*, October 9, 1942,

3; "Intervarsity Fellowship on Thursday," *Willamette Collegian*, February 18, 1944, 5. Vazakas was also a regular speaker for community groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and civic clubs; e.g., "Mysticism Talk Enjoyed by Club," *Daily Capital Journal*, March 31, 1928, 5; "Vazakas to Speak," *The Oregon Statesman*, October 2, 1942, 5; "Gospel Need of Germans," *Daily Capital Journal*, June 1, 1944, 11.

⁵⁴"Introducing Dr. Vazakas," *Willamette Collegian*, February 4, 1938, 2.

⁵⁵"Vazakas Entrain," 3; Vazakas, autobiography, folder 31.

⁵⁶"Personalalia," *The Modern Language Journal* 32 (1948), 452.

⁵⁷Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35.

⁵⁸Dick Burdette, "Intercession City . . . Last Exit to Yesterday," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 19, 1974, C-3; Jovida Fletcher, "Defunct Bible College Lives On in Minister," *Osceola Sentinel*, August 6, 1989, 3; Jovida Fletcher, "Intercession City Founded By Pioneers With Failed Dreams," *Osceola Sentinel*, July 8, 1990, 3; Jovida Fletcher, "Minister Followed Father's Steps All The Way To Intercession City," *Osceola Sentinel*, May 14, 1995, 3; Vic Reasoner, "Smith, Aaron Jacob," in *The A to Z of the Holiness Movement*, ed. William Kostlevy (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2010), 272-273; "Who was Osie England?," Historic Intercession City, accessed May 5, 2017, http://intercessioncity.webstarts.com/the_plan.html; "The Intercession City Schools," Historic Intercession City, accessed May 5, 2017, <http://intercessioncity.webstarts.com/missionaries.html>.

⁵⁹Obituary for Mrs. Ida A. Vazakas, *Orlando Sentinel*, October 28, 1953, 23.

⁶⁰Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35.

⁶¹Marriage certificate for Alexander A. Vazakas and Nelle Reeder, December 23, 1954, San Francisco, California, folder 39, Byron Vazakas Papers, Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania. Tounger is listed among the credentialed AG clergy in General Council of the Assemblies of God, *Official List of the Ministers and Missionaries of the General Council of the Assemblies of God Revised to January 15, 1955* (Springfield, MO: Executive Office of the Assemblies of God, 1955), 172. According to J. Roswell Flower's Assemblies of God minister's letter, March 18, 1954, Tounger was added to the ministerial list in 1954. For the pastor's involvement in the Greek Branch, see Gust A. Harbas, "Annual Convention," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 3, 1959, 27; Gust A. Harbas, "Annual Convention of Hellenic Protoponos Apostolic Ecclesia," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 29, 1960, 27; "29th Annual Convention of the Greek Branch," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 16, 1965, 30. The Hellenic Protoponos Apostolic Ecclesia, matching the address of the church identified on the Vazakas marriage certificate, is listed in *Assemblies of God Directory: A Complete Listing by District of Churches of Evangelical, Protestant Faith, Affiliated and Co-operative with the General Council of the Assemblies of God to July 1, 1955* (Springfield, MO: Executive Headquarters of the Assemblies of God, 1955), 206. The church name and date of Rev. Tounger's credentialing indicates that the congregation was part of the Greek Original Apostolic Church; see also Molenaar, 42.

⁶²Nelle Reeder's mother was Harriet Reeder, a credentialed AG minister who passed away in 1951. Nelle must have had something to do with connecting Vazakas more to the AG later in life.

⁶³Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35; Nelle Vazakas, notes.

⁶⁴Gust A. Harbas, "Greek Branch Holds Convention," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 10, 1957, 30.

⁶⁵Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35, indicates he was not pleased with "assistant" being in his title: "All the past years of my teaching experience I've been a full professor, but now, after thirty years I have become an assistant professor. Why? Assistant to whom?" Despite his misgivings about "assistant," Vazakas acknowledged that he was "thrilled" to be teaching at Evangel.

⁶⁶Thurman Vanzant, e-mail message to author, May 10, 2017. Emphasis original.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Vazakas, autobiography, folder 35.

⁷⁰"Language Teacher Covers Khrushchev's Recent Visit," *The Lance*, September 30, 1959, 1.

⁷¹Stanley M. Burgess, telephone conversation with author, May 10, 2017. Shirley Shedd, e-mail message to author, April 21, 2017, remarks that Vazakas "was obviously well loved by students as the 1962 yearbook was dedicated to him." After his death, the Alexander Vazakas Memorial Scholarship fund was established at Evangel; the School of Theology and Church Ministries continues to award it.

⁷²George O. Wood, e-mail message to author, April 18, 2017. Wood states, "If our relationship with God were based on us having complete informational knowledge of God before we could 'know' him, then we would be excluded from knowing God."

⁷³George O. Wood, "What Did Jesus Really Mean that We Must Become as a Child?," Dr. George O. Wood blog, accessed April 30, 2017, <http://georgeowood.com/what-did-jesus-really-mean-that-we-must-become-as-a-child/>.

⁷⁴Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 1, 4.

⁷⁵Roger R. Olson, "Pentecostalism's Dark Side," *Christian Century*, March 7, 2006, 27.

⁷⁶On welding the life of the mind and the life of the Spirit, see Rick M. Nañez, Full Gospel, Fractured Minds?: A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005); Jonathan Olson, "The Quest for Legitimacy: American Pentecostal Scholars and the Quandaries of Academic Pursuit," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 4 (2012): 94-115. For these and further lessons from Vazakas's life, see Darrin J. Rodgers, "Dr. Alexander Vazakas: Early Greek Pentecostal, Philosopher, Linguist," Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center blog, September 1, 2016, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://ifphc.wordpress.com/2016/09/01/dr-alexander-vazakas-early-greek-pentecostal-philosopher-linguist/>.