



May 27, 1975

75-83

**Underground Baptist Church
Seen for South Vietnam**

By Jim Newton

The war is over in South Vietnam, but the killing in all likelihood has not stopped.

Already, the organized Southern Baptist foreign mission effort in South Vietnam is dead, ended after 16 years.

Now Laos has at least temporarily joined the family of closed mission efforts of Southern Baptists, as the missionaries have been pulled out of that country in recent weeks.

Not since China fell to communism in 1948 has so extensive a Southern Baptist foreign missions program (Vietnam) been snuffed out by communist aggression.

Many of the 39 Southern Baptist foreign missionaries serving in South Vietnam see a strong parallel between the fall of China and the collapse of South Vietnam.

And like the Christian churches in China, if the Baptist churches in Vietnam are to survive, they will probably have to go underground.

Some Baptist leaders' names are most likely on the extermination lists as "enemies of the state" who will be executed, several of the missionaries said.

At least four missionaries interviewed for this report, plus the secretary of Southeast Asia for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said they believed such a list exists.

Keith Parks, secretary for Southeast Asia for the board, said that although he had no evidence such a list does exist, it is his personal feeling that such a list is likely in the light of discovery of such lists in Indonesia and Chile, and reports of what has happened in China.

"I'm rather pessimistic about this," Parks said in a telephone interview just after his return from a trip to Southeast Asia for conferences with each of the Vietnam missionaries who evacuated out of the country just two weeks before the surrender.

Parks cited reports he had read in the Orient of mass executions and killings, some of which gave names, dates and places of Catholic bishops and priests who had been killed already in South Vietnam.

Southern Baptist missionary William Roberson, in a telegram to friends in the USA, said he was "confident Christian leaders have been identified by the Viet Cong for extermination... Many of these people are leaders in our Baptist work."

In Washington, a Vietnamese social worker for American Red Cross, Kim Cook, told a Baptist group she had received reports that the Viet Cong in the Danang area had issued four types of identification cards to all Vietnamese.

The red cards meant the holder was marked for execution; the pink cards, that the person would be investigated; the yellow cards, that the person was likely acceptable to the VC; and the white cards meant the person was loyal to the VC, she said.

Parks verified that he, too, had read reports indicating a similar identification system, but that the red card meant a person could not travel at all, and a white card meant they could travel on an unlimited basis.

An official of the U.S. State Department who asked not to be named said there is no question that there is an extermination list; the question rather is who and how many.

He predicted that initially the Viet Cong will take things easy and say in essence, "See, all you've heard about is not true." But they will quietly and very thoroughly conduct investigations of every person suspected of any anti-communist leanings, including Christians.

The mass executions will take place only after they are in firm control of the country and the news media, and we probably will never hear about it, the State Department spokesman said.

Lewis Myers, missionary to Vietnam currently on furlough in Boyle, Miss., agreed with this assessment but added confidently:

"I have full faith that the church, whether it goes underground or whatever, will grow strong through all of this.

"I believe the same kind of thing will happen that the early New Testament church experienced--it dispersed and grew under persecution."

Myers said the trend in Vietnam missions during the last few years had been toward development of strong, indigenous, lay-led groups that met in Vietnamese homes for prayer and Bible study.

The house church approach, he said, is probably the kind of church that is most likely to survive under the Communist regime.

"It does not depend on a high gear organizational structure, open meetings, or pastoral leadership, and it probably will be the most lasting under pressure," Myers said.

Jim Gayle, missionary to Camranh on the Vietnam coast on furlough in Bryan, Tex., agreed, adding that the house churches were not recognized by the South Vietnam government, did not receive outlays of American money and did not meet in "strange looking buildings.

"There was enough strong lay leadership in some of these house churches that they will continue," Gayle added.

"Under persecution, the Spirit of God is going to refine some real strong Christian folks," Gayle said.

Missionaries praised the attitude and spirit of some of the Vietnamese Baptist leaders who stayed.

Roberson commended the Christian maturity of an ARVN army officer. "I am the Lord's," the officer said. "I am convinced I must do my duty to my country as long as it stands... If the Communists take over and I am permitted to live... or if I am killed, I shall be happy to be with the Lord."

Several leaders of churches in Danang chose to stay, including one man who had an air ticket to flee with his family. He had been associated with Americans for many years and had been employed by the American military.

"I know that man will not make it very long," one of the missionaries said.

Whether organized Baptist work in Vietnam will "make it very long" is also in doubt.

Parks expressed grave doubts about the future of open Baptist work in South Vietnam, and predicted most of it would "go underground" or maintain a very low profile.

As for Baptist mission property and church buildings, Parks said most of it probably will be taken over by the government and used for other purposes.

Parks said there were 16 church buildings, five missionary residences owned by the mission and 22 cars left in Vietnam.

The mission also owned a remodeled residence in Saigon where the seminary and a temporary radio-TV studio were located, plus a headquarters building for Christian social ministries in Saigon, and a halfway house for Vietnamese children.

The mission's multi-purpose office building included a book store, business office, publications department, conference room and guest quarters.

Parks estimated there were about 60 Baptist congregations in Vietnam with about 3,000 baptized believers. He would not estimate how many Vietnamese might have attended services but had not been baptized.

Parks confessed that he did not see any possibilities of the missionaries going back to Vietnam.

But as missionary Jim Kellum, on furlough in Clarksdale, Miss., said, "Yes, the door's closed now, but we're still praying and hoping."

**Viet Refugee Sponsors
Include Western Star**

ATLANTA (BP)-- Some 40 offers to sponsor Vietnamese refugee families, including one from western motion picture and television star, Dale Robertson, have been received by the office of immigration and refugee service at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here.

Additional sponsorship offers have been received by many state convention offices, where state coordinators of refugee resettlement have been appointed. No total on the number offering sponsorship is available, however, said Irvin Dawson, who heads the Home Mission Board's refugee office.

Dawson, also associate director of the department of language missions, said the offers of sponsorship received at his office have come from 14 states.

Some, he said, have been rejected, including one from a couple who wanted a Vietnamese person to care for their invalid relative. Another, also rejected, was from a person wanting to adopt a baby.

Sponsors are asked to assume a moral obligation to help resettle families by providing, friendship, counsel, housing, shelter, food and assistance in finding employment.

Robertson, known to television viewers through the series "Tales of Wells Fargo," called the Home Mission Board to offer to sponsor two refugee families. He offered them housing on his ranches in California and Oklahoma.

As they did in previous refugee resettlement efforts involving Hungarians, Cubans and Ugandans, Southern Baptists are working with Church World Service in sponsoring refugees. Church World Service is one of eight organizations through which the government operates in refugee resettlement.

Church World Service has agreed to attempt to resettle some 10,000 of the more than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees and Southern Baptists have been asked to provide sponsors for some 400 family units or about 2,500 persons.

Persons inquiring through the Home Mission Board office about sponsoring refugees are sent a packet of materials that includes sponsorship guidelines, information about the Vietnamese, tips on treatment of Vietnamese children, and a commitment card to be returned indicating a church or an association has agreed to be a sponsor.

Dawson said that when the commitment card is returned the sponsor's name is sent to Church World Service, which contacts the sponsor to write a letter to the Vietnamese family. Arrangements are then made to bring the sponsor and family together.

The family's travel expense from the resettlement camp to the sponsor's home city will be at government expense if the family or sponsor cannot pay it, Dawson said.

Al Oliver, pastor of Hillendale Baptist Church, Adelphi, Md., and co-chairman, Baptist Committee of Metropolitan Washington for Refugee Relief, said a toll-free number has been set up to answer questions for individuals and groups who want to volunteer their services in refugee relief.

The number is (800) 368-1180.