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The Day The Mountain Exploded

By W. C. Fields
Director, Baptist Press

A volcano in the Caribbean is threatening to blow a mountain apart and rain destruction and death on the green and fertile countryside around it.

La Soufriere, towering over the butterfly-shaped islands of Guadeloupe, has been shaking in agony from primordial fires deep within its bosom.

Molten lava, boiling mud, toxic gases, volcanic ash and projectiles have been hurled from its depths, arousing fearful memories of a catastrophe which once rocked a neighboring island.

At 7:50 on the morning of May 8, 1902, the nearby green island paradise of Martinique was shattered by massive volcanic explosions which wiped out the seaside city of St. Pierre.

In three minutes, 30,000 people died in a huge fireball of gas and volcanic dust. Only one person, a prisoner in a hillside dungeon, survived.

Photos taken a few days later remind one of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The tumbled ruins of St. Pierre's cathedral still attest to the violence in which the city died.

A modest museum there today contains fragments of the horror which fell upon the people and their proud "little Paris of the West Indies:" a blackened flute with melted keys; a trumpet twisted grotesquely; nails fused into a blob; a bunch of keys welded into a mass; the poor box from a church with the coins run together; and a headless statue of Christ with arms still outstretched.

The visitor can ponder other evidence of this frightful holocaust: a molten spiked fence; books with blackened leaves; singed checks on the Banque de France, never cashed; spaghetti, rice and coffee carbonized in the bowls from which they were about to be served.

Ships in St. Pierre's harbor, ignited by the incandescent, sulphurous cloud, burned to their waterlines and sank.

Most poignant of all the museum relics are blackened wedding rings, the body of a child charred into a pathetic cylinder, and pocket watches that stopped at the moment the world ended for these tragic people.

That eruption of Mt. Pelee ranks among the most awesome displays of nature's destructive power ever seen by man.

Mt. Vesuvius, which dominates the Bay of Naples, the most famous of killer volcanoes, broke open with apocalyptic force in August, 79 AD. It buried Pompeii, which had a population of 20,000. Mud flows likewise covered Herculaneum and Stabiae.

Krakatoa, on an island in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java, erupted catastrophically August 27, 1883. The explosion was heard 2,500 miles away. It blasted a depth of 1,000 feet in the ocean and set off a tidal wave that killed 35,000.

There have been many other lesser calamities when the molten rock cauldron inside the earth's shifting crust broke out and played havoc among scurrying, frightened people.

In Guadeloupe, Southern Baptist missionaries are among those now assisting the 72,000 people evacuated from the fissured slopes and foothills of 4,813-foot La Soufriere. Scientists at the scene are able to make only educated guesses as to whether there will be a monstrous eruption, or when the danger will pass.

The guessing game has potentially fatal consequences for the worried refugees from Basse Terre, the island's capitol which sits by the sea with the great groaning mountain hanging over it.

The homes of the well-to-do at St. Claude higher up on the slopes now can be death-traps. And humble villagers in the danger zone for miles around the smoking, spitting, splitting, tormented "sulphur mine," wait disconsolately at a distance for a safe time to return to their sugar cane patches and banana groves.

And they remember Mt. Pelee and the unfortunate victims of St. Pierre!

Martinique, like Guadeloupe, is an unlikely looking place for vast tragedies. Today, as in 1902, it is a green island paradise in many respects, blessed by nature with permanent June weather, an abundance of fruit and flowers, breath-taking mountain scenery, a jewel set in a background of cobalt blue seas.

Both island-states are provinces of France. Their social, educational and economic problems are somewhat camouflaged by sunshine, gentle trade winds and thousands of smiling tourists whose involvement with these friendly people seldom extends beyond a week or two.

The local residents, not unlike other tropical peoples, have a rather lighthearted view of many things, often including religion. Missionaries and other religious leaders work hard for victories that measure small on the world's scales.

But La Soufriere and Mt. Pelee are startling reminders of ultimate realities--and mysteries--of life. For all of us!

Smoking volcanoes, bone-jarring earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons, drouths, and other uncontrollable forces around us pose some searching questions about who we are and where we are headed.

In a time that seems to be fraught with calamities, so frequently marked by catastrophes that are almost biblical in their scope, it is rather clear that frail and fragile man is still not much more than that tiny millimeter against the sky.

Far from ruling the earth, we are still at the mercy of many forces which we can not fully comprehend nor control.

Mt. Pelee and the doomed people of St. Pierre--and La Soufriere and those who wait and watch around it--are sobering reminders that we earthlings are still perilously perched between our planet and heaven, always on the edge of eternal mysteries that point us beyond the creation to the Creator. (BP)

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist editors

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Fulbright Picks Former
Louisiana College Student

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PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--Robert Peters, a 1970 graduate of and former instructor at Louisiana College here, has become the first alumnus in the Baptist school's 70-y ar history to be awarded a scholarship from the Fulbright Commission.

Peters, now studying at the University of California for his doctorate in German, was selected by the Commission to receive the German Academic Service Scholarship.

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Morris Peters of Pollock, La., the Fulbright scholar returned to Louisiana College in 1972 as an instructor of German and French, following the completion of his master of arts degree in German at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

To be considered a candidate for the scholarship, a student must maintain a perfect 4.0 grade point average throughout all his schooling, and must be recommended by at least one of his professors in each of the areas he has studied.

W. Marvin Watson To
Chair Seminary Campaign

FORT WORTH (BP)--W. Marvin Watson, former U. S. postmaster general, has been named national chairman for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's "Eight by Eighty" campaign which seeks to raise \$8 million by 1980.

His most immediate involvement in the campaign is expected to come with the soon-to-begin fund drives in Dallas and Houston.

Serving with Watson will be evangelist Billy Graham who has agreed to serve as honorary national chairman. Graham is expected to lend his support and influence as the campaign begins to go into select target cities around the country.

Watson, who served in the cabinet during the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, most recently served as executive vice president for corporate affairs of the Occidental International Corporation. He is vice chairman of Southwestern's advisory council and a member of the board of directors of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Last March, Watson was keynote speaker for the kick off of the Fort Worth phase of the "Eight by Eighty" campaign. At that time he cited the need for trained ministers who will carry the missionary message of Christ around the world.

The "Eight by Eighty" campaign seeks to raise \$3 million for capital improvements and \$5 million for the seminary's endowment fund. The fund drive is divided into three stages. The initial Fort Worth phase, with a \$2 million goal, is expected to be concluded this year. Campaigns for selected Texas cities, including Dallas and Houston, are slated to begin in early 1977. The national phase, with a \$3 million goal, is expected to begin in 1978.

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Seminary Names Pitt
To New Development Post

Baptist Press
9/13/76

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Phillip R. Pitt, former assistant to the president of Belmont College, a Baptist school in Nashville, Tenn., has been named director of institutional support at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here, according to Wesley M. Pattillo, vice-president for development.

Pitt will be primarily responsible for cultivating support for the seminary among business corporations and charitable foundations.

He holds the bachelor of arts degree from Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to five years on the administrative staff at Belmont, Pitt was pastor of several churches in Tennessee and Kentucky. His most recent post was with Don Elliott and Associates, a development consulting firm in Nashville.

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EBPS Returns To
Original Offices

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RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--After a time of frequent office changes and provisional arrangements, the European Baptist Press Service (EBPS) will operate from its original address in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, as of October 1, 1976.

The news agency of the European Baptist Federation was first established here and carried on its functions from 1961-1972 and again during an interim period in 1974-75.

From early 1973 to the present, its offices have been located in the Paris area.

EBPS should bear the following address: European Baptist Press Service, Gheistrasse 31, CH-8803 Ruschlikon Zh, Switzerland.

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Noble Van Ness
Dies In Maine

VINALHAVEN, Me. (BP)--Noble Van Ness, former employe of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and son of the late I. J. Van Ness, third executive secretary of the board, died Sept. 13 at his home here. He was 79 years old.

A Georgia native, Van Ness worked at the Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., for 43 years before his retirement in 1965. He served in several capacities, including managing editor of Sunday School Board periodicals and Broadman Press, publication director, head of the production department, manager of the operations department and manufacturing consultant.

Van Ness was a member of the Immanuel Baptist Church, Nashville, for more than 40 years, where he served as a deacon and Sunday School teacher and held several other positions.

On Vinalhaven, an island off Maine's coast, he had been a member and chairman of the school board, secretary-treasurer of the Lion's Club and director of fund raising for the Red Cross for the state of Maine. He was instrumental in establishing and active with the local chapter of National Conservancy to preserve islands and did occasional preaching in the local church.

Before he began work at the Sunday School Board, Van Ness was an instructor at Mars Hill (N. C.) College.

He was a graduate of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, where he earned the B. S. degree. He had done graduate study at several universities.

His widow, Mrs. Bethann Van Ness, is an author and former executive director of the Nashville YWCA and manager of the Nashville Symphony.

He is survived by his wife; two daughters, Mrs. Thomas F. Bridges Jr., Port Washington, N. Y., and Mrs. William Monin, Anchorage, Ky.; a son, John Van Ness, Jacksonville, Fla.; and a brother, Dr. Edwin Van Ness of Gulf Stream, Fla.

Funeral services were held on the island of Vinalhaven.

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Missionary's Mother
Killed In Accident

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ARUSHA, Tanzania (BP)--Mrs. Eula Howell of Waco, Tex., mother of Mrs. Keith L. Oliphint, Southern Baptist missionary, was killed in a one-car accident near here September 12.

The Oliphints' daughter, Wanda, who was driving the car, was not seriously injured.

A memorial service was held at Arusha Baptist Church. Burial will be in the United States.

The accident occurred when the car overturned as Miss Oliphint swerved off the road to avoid hitting a pedestrian. They had been traveling to the Baptist Theological Seminary about 10 miles from Arusha.

Oliphint is administrative secretary for the organization of missionaries in East Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) and stewardship and evangelism secretary for the Tanzania Baptist Convention.

Mrs. Oliphint was born in Fort Worth, Tex., and grew up in Waco. Oliphint was born in Hemphill, Tex., and grew up in south Houston.

Mrs. Howell, who had been visiting in Tanzania for the summer, is survived by her daughter and three sons.

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