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produced by Baptist Press

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October 29, 1976

76-183

Baptists Aid Cambodian
Refugees In Thailand

By Leland Webb

BANGKOK (BP)--Missionaries Daniel R. and Fannie Cobb say their assigned station area in Thailand is "between the devil and the deep blue sea."

The "devil" is Thailand's border with the Khmer Republic, formerly Cambodia, which fell to Khmer Rouge forces in April, 1975. The "Sea" is the Gulf of Siam.

Here, in some 21 refugee centers are men, women and children who fled communist governments in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The estimate of Indochina refugees in Thailand in early June was 71,000.

Camp population has decreased in recent months, but refugees still come into the country.

Baptists began working with refugees at Klong Yai, Ban Chaman and Pang Nam Ron camps in April 1975, as Cambodians and others streamed into Thailand. First available money came from the English-language Calvary Baptist Church in Bangkok. Other Baptist churches in Thailand quickly contributed. In the first report on aid given refugees, 10 percent of funds came from Thai Baptists.

Baptists were able to act at once, said Missionary William R. Smith Jr., in Bangkok, because relief funds were readily available from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"We didn't ask anything in return. We didn't distinguish between Christians and non-Christians in the distribution of materials," added Hill, who is now administrator for the Baptist Mission here.

During the first month Hill took rice, some meat, and vegetables to the camps with which he worked, while the government was cranking up to provide aid.

At first refugees lived in the open, and the Thailand Baptist Mission (organization of Southern Baptist Missionaries) provided sheet plastic for shelter. Thatch-roofed quarters followed. For efficiency and to avoid duplication of effort, Baptists and other concerned groups agreed on which camps each would serve. Baptists deal mainly with the three locations in the Chanthaburi area.

Before the crisis, Baptists had formed the Baptist Church Foundation as their official arm in dealing with the government. The foundation includes equal representation of Thais and missionaries.

Baptists not only have distributed materials they have supplied but also have served as a channel for items from other religious groups, the United Nations, and other agencies. But help from the U.N. did not begin reaching the camps until about October, 1975.

When refugees first poured across the border, "They had everything, and they had nothing," Hill recalled. Among them were doctors, teachers, and other professional people, once well-to-do businessmen, soldiers, and laborers.

Cobb was then Mission administrator and authorized Hill to look after the refugee relief. Hill bought sheet metal for shelter and took medicine to the camps. Physicians among refugees set up a medical committee; Hill worked through them. Hill and Cobb exchanged jobs about September 1975.

Atrocities in Cambodia have been well documented, Cobb said. The Khmer Rouge have shot to death men, women and children. Even Khmer Rouge soldiers have defected because of conditions.

One refugee, who had been a university student, was advised to pray for his enemies. "They shot my uncle because he had a New Testament in his pocket," came the bitter response. "You want me to pray for them? I can't."

"You can't," Cobb agreed, "but Christ in you can."

The book that prompted the shooting could have been any book, Cobb explained later, as Cambodians are forbidden to have any literature.

On his visits Cobb distributes supplies--including Bibles, as available. He has advised refugees about corresponding with contacts abroad and has counseled on personal problems. He has provided transportation to hospitals or clinics and helped to locate relatives. In addition to duties at the camps, the missionaries continue their other mission responsibilities.

"What I do now is more for evangelism than for relief," Cobb said. Among the materials are cassette tapes on Bible study and prayer.

Mrs. Cobb (Dan calls her Fan) works with families at the camps. She told of a woman who had heard of the Christian faith while still in Cambodia. After reaching Thailand, the Cambodian received a letter from her sister, who had escaped by another route.

At one point, wrote the sister, she felt too weak to continue and prayed, "Jesus, if you are real, help me now." Sensing a new surge of strength, she resumed paddling down river. Just then, people in another boat came by and helped.

The sister eventually escaped through Saigon. And because of the experience, she wrote, she was accepting Christ.

About the time the refugee in Thailand received the letter, Mrs. Cobb was witnessing to her. "All of our lives my family had been devoted Buddhists," the woman told Mrs. Cobb. "But you came here," she said to the missionary. "You had no reason to help us, but you care. When I saw the way you cared, I wanted to be a Christian."

The first refugees baptized by Baptists were 77 in Ban Chaman, September, 1975. In less than 11 months, through July 7, 1976, baptisms totaled 885. The refugees are baptized into membership of Rayong Baptist Church.

People of Cambodia were responsive to the gospel before their country fell, Hill said. When Baptists first went to one camp, they found about 20 Cambodian Christians, and a pastor who had been affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance but had become a Pentecostal.

He and young persons had been witnessing in the camp and soon had a group of 70 believers. One elderly Chinese Christian began to witness; it was not long until he also had some 70 persons ready for baptism.

After some weeks the pastor and most of the believers moved on, and Baptists alone were left to witness. Later, some of the refugees asked Cobb to teach them about the gospel. Still later a group requested baptism.

A constant turnover in Christian leadership occurs as refugees move on to other lands. "We're sending out missionaries," Cobb said. "We get letters from other places about the fervent work of these Cambodian Christians."

Baptist workers try to relay to churches in the refugees' new homelands the names and addresses of believers, hoping local churches will make contact. Hill and Cobb agreed the best follow-up has been in Australia. One pastor there even wrote to express thanks for the Cambodian Christians coming his way, Cobb said.

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 29, 1976

76-183

Baptists in Philippines
Are 'People Who Care'

By Karen L. Hopper

MINDANAO, Philippines (BP)--More than 1,200 Moslems and 1,800 other Filipinos who were victims of the August earthquake and tidal wave here are wearing T-shirts proclaiming that Baptists are "People Who Care."

Traveling by truck, commercial launch and by jeep, Southern Baptist missionaries James B. Slack, Fred C. Ladd, H. Randall Bradley and Wayne E. Maness distributed the T-shirts and rubber slippers to the victims.

The earthquake destroyed three artesian wells in Lebak, a town in the province of Sultan Kudurat. Ladd, a civil engineer with a masters degree in sanitation and public health who is assigned to Mati Baptist Hospital, helped the town's officials locate places for new wells. The Philippine Baptist Mission (missionaries' organization) and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board provided the relief funds to pay for digging them.

Materials were also purchased for a large three-room shelter for those whose homes were destroyed. The building will become the property of the public elementary school on whose lot it is to be built, after it is no longer needed for housing relief.

Southern Baptist missionaries are working now with an architect and plan to provide materials and supervise the rebuilding of several churches destroyed by the earthquake and tidal wave.

At this point the number of casualties stands at more than 7,000. Thousands of people remain homeless. Gifts of Southern Baptists to the northern city of Pagadian and to Lebak were second only to the Philippine government itself in total number of pesos. A total of \$50,000 was authorized by the Foreign Mission Board for disaster relief.

Relief is progressing slowly through most agencies. The Philippine government and army officials have been helpful to Baptists in the process of investigation and follow-up, but thousands of people continue to experience great need.

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Miss Karen L. Hopper is a Southern Baptist missionary serving in the Philippines.

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Evangelism, Freedom Clash
Claims Baptist Educator

Baptist Press
10/29/76

WASHINGTON (BP)--Religious freedom and toleration in the United States are in "philosophical conflict" with Southern Baptist evangelism, according to a prominent Baptist educator.

Abner V. McCall, president of Baylor University, a Baptist school in Waco, Tex., for 15 years, told Washington Star staff writer John Mathews in an interview here, "There's a certain conflict between evangelism and religious freedom."

He continued, "It's one thing to say 'I'll recognize, and I'll protect and I'll fight for my religious liberty and your religious liberty, ' and then turn around and in the next breath say, 'But you're wrong in your religion, you're wrong for having no religion, ' and start arguing with you and telling you about it and trying to persuade you to come over and become a Baptist."

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McCall's comments came in response to a question about media reaction to Jimmy Carter's candidacy. He expressed the view that the national media have failed to understand the evangelical nature of Southern Baptists.

The Baylor president also noted that Jewish reaction to Carter has been "nervous." "They've raised questions because the Baptists are seen to say, 'All the Jews are on the wrong track, you're doomed to perdition. And I recognize your religious liberty to believe or not believe as you see fit, but I'm telling you you're going to hell.' Well, that's a challenge to my religious integrity," he said.

This "philosophical conflict" between religious liberty and evangelism is a problem for such groups as Quakers and Disciples of Christ as well as Baptists, because they emphasize religious liberty in addition to their evangelical mission, he further stated.

McCall also criticized federal aid to education for church schools. He noted traditional Baptist opposition to such aid and questioned its value.

"Out of about \$130 billion spent on education last year only about, say, \$12 billion came from the federal government. So they're furnishing the button for the vest and trying to tell you how to design the whole coat," McCall said.

The Baptist educator said he sees a resurgence of interest in church-related higher education since Watergate. "There is a substantial minority of students, parents of students, who are interested in an education in a Christian context and a certain emphasis on moral or value education," he said.

When asked if there is any proof that Baylor turns out more moral, honest people than the University of Texas, McCall said that proof would be hard to find. He observed that the students who attend Baylor come with "Christian principles of personal morality, personal responsibility and personal compassion for other people" because of home background.

"We just continue, encourage the same thing for four more years . . . and so they become the kind of people that have a certain degree of personal morality, . . . people who believe in the Puritan work ethic, and who believe in rendering service to their fellow man," he said. "They come with the attitude, we encourage the attitude, they leave with the attitude."

The Washington Star is an afternoon daily newspaper in the nation's capital. Joe L. Albritton, a Baylor graduate, is chairman of the board of the Evening Star Newspaper Company.