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Bethlehem, Once Again a
Symbol of Hopes and Fears

By Wilmer C. Fields
Director, Baptist Press

Manger Square in Bethlehem is jammed this holiday season. Buses disgorge throngs of visitors from all over the world. This is THE place for the traveler to be during the great festival of the Christian year, Christmas.

Some of the thousands are pilgrims. Their trip is an act of religious devotion. Others are just tourists. Above them all, three stars converge.

The first is "the star of Bethlehem." The extraordinary display in the sky on the night Jesus was born still captures the imagination in AD 1978. "Joy to the world! The Lord is come."

The second star over Bethlehem these days is the Star of David, the Israeli flag snapping in the cold winds which whip across the Judean hills. It is clearly visible against the sky in this town of 30,000 people, mostly Arabs. Jews also venerate this special place because David was born here.

The third star over this holy place is on the Muslim flag, the Star and Crescent. It, too, must be remembered in the midst of the Christmas carols and the year-end discussions of a Middle East future.

Three men embody and symbolize these three great streams of influence which converge on Bethlehem at this Christmas time: Carter, Begin, and Sadat. Believers everywhere can pray that they may turn out to be three very wise men.

President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, whose initiative a year ago took him on a momentous journey to Jerusalem, is a devout Muslim.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin, one of the founders of the State of Israel, is a consummate Jew with the mystic spirit of Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, in his bones.

President Jimmy Carter, whose skillful mediation and motivation at Camp David helped to brighten the hopes for peace in the Middle East, has, as much as any president in U.S. history, thrust into affairs of state the principles of his Christian faith and heritage.

With the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks on-again, off-again, and with the memories of four bloody wars between Arabs and Israelis (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973) looming in the background, Bethlehem becomes once again a symbol of mankind's "hopes and fears of all the years."

The world Jesus was born into two thousand years ago was in some ways quite like ours, a divided, fractious, trigger-happy place. Roman legions under Pompey conquered the land and occupied Jerusalem in 63 BC. The fiercely theocratic Jews never really accepted Caesar's authority. As the Christian era dawned, sedition and sabotage smoldered on every hill, revolutionaries and mercurial messiahs raised their banners and were brutally crushed by the Roman army.

Guerillas and cut-throats infested the hills of Galilee. Zealots assassinated Romans and those who collaborated with them. Tax collectors squeezed the impoverished peasants mercilessly. Roman-appointed rulers--Herod the Great and his son Herod Antipas--lived in some splendor but with a paranoid siege mentality. Religious groups, like the Essenes, fled to the desert, convinced that a final showdown was approaching: "the war between the children of light and the children of darkness."

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Herod the Great, who died about two years after Jesus' birth and who is buried near Bethlehem, was pathologically suspicious of everyone, fearing for his throne and his life. He even put to death Mariamne, the favorite of his ten wives, and her two sons, suspecting them of plotting against him. Herod's friend and sponsor, Caesar Augustus, was prompted to remark, "I would rather be Herod's pig than Herod's son."

In view of these conditions, the announcement to the shepherds on nightwatch near Bethlehem was good news indeed. "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Other Christmases have come and gone. The great anniversary celebrations in Bethlehem have been watched carefully by many nervous military forces: Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Turks, Britons, the Arabs again, and now the Israelis. "Yet," Bethlehem, "In thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light!"

In this 30th year of the new State of Israel, King David's people find themselves at another historic juncture, measuring present realities and alternatives against the founders' dreams for their new-yet-ancient nation.

Modern Israel is a volcano in action. It is still evolving from tribalism to nationhood. Ironically, the three decades of conflict with the surrounding Arab world have helped to establish, strengthen, integrate and solidify a diverse population into a community/state.

Following the phenomenal Six-Day War of 1967 the Arab states began their campaign to get Israel to withdraw once more into the 1949 armistice lines, a ten-mile-wide deathtrap. The Sadat peace initiative of a year ago has placed the issue squarely before the Israelis: trade off conquered territory for peace with Egypt and eventually with other Arab states. Their dilemma is on exactly how much of their security they are willing to gamble in order to gain, at long last, peace with their neighbors.

Great things are therefore afoot at this Christmastide. The songs and prayers which arise from the streets of Bethlehem, from the Church of the Nativity, and the Shepherds Fields, indeed from the yearnings of people of good will everywhere, have great portent for the future.

"O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth, and praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth!"

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Sidewinder Has Two Field
Goals: Africa and Football

By Robert O'Brien

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KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"The Swahili Sidewinder" moves quietly in the violent world of football.

Except when a football explodes with authority off his instep and propels the name of Alan Duncan into the record books of the prestigious Southeastern Conference (SEC) and the University of Tennessee Volunteers.

That kind of authority impresses observers of the SEC, including at least two of the University of Tennessee's legendary performers now coaching at UT--Johnny Majors and George Cafego, who marvel at the accuracy and power in the right leg of the 5-11, 175 lb. son of Southern Baptist missionaries to Kenya.

When he started the 1978 season, his first opportunity to kick as a Vol regular after walking on his freshman year and sitting out his sophomore season as a red-shirt, Duncan had neither a football scholarship nor a listing in the UT football program.

He finished the season with a scholarship, the UT season field goal record (13 in 17 attempts), the 1978 Vol scoring title (65 points), a tie for two SEC records--single game field goals (5) and single game record for points kicking (17), and a grade-point ratio of 3.2 out of a possible 4.0.

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With two years eligibility left, Vol coaches believe he will break the school and SEC marks of 33 field goals set in 1972-74 by UT's Ricky Townsend, whose soccer-style kicking inspired Duncan to want to kick for UT. Duncan saw Townsend kick in 1972 when he came home, as a ninth-grader, on a year's furlough from Kenya with his parents.

But Duncan, despite the glitter of his achievements, remains an enigma to those who view his quiet humility, strong Christian convictions and lack of pre-occupation with his own exploits as a paradox in the high-profile, super-ego environment of college football.

Many appear as intrigued by his ability to speak fluent Swahili as they seem enthused over the sidwinding, soccer-style kicks he learned as the leading scorer for the soccer team at Rift Valley Academy, Nairobi, Kenya, where he also played rugby and basketball.

That combination inspired a sports broadcaster to christen the 20-year-old kicker as "The Swahili Sidwinder," a nickname that may or may not stick in a sport which abounds with colorful handles for colorful characters.

Duncan came by his Swahili honestly. A native of Tennessee, he grew up in Limuru, Kenya, where his parents, Marshall and Margie Duncan, also Tennessee natives, serve as Southern Baptist missionaries. He now spends his summers with them helping in their work--which has first priority in his life.

He's set his sights on a major goal--completion of his agricultural degree at UT, graduation from a Southern Baptist seminary, and return to Africa as an agricultural missionary, if, "It's the Lord's will," says Duncan, who regularly gives his testimony before youth and church groups with his roommate, Dale Schneitman, UT's first team punter and also a Southern Baptist.

The Lord's will, Duncan says, has a lot to do with his life decisions; in fact, everything. He's become more determined than ever not to let his own desires take over as his place kicking prowess creates talk of a pro career--and not idly.

Coach Cafego, who has tutored at least three UT place kickers into the pro ranks, says, "Alan has all the equipment to go as far as he wants to in football. Right now, Alan is the best kicker in Tennessee history," adds Cafego, a Tennessee All-American in the late 1930's, who has coached UT kickers for the past 21 years under five head coaches, including Majors.

"Alan puts the ball into the end zone, without many returns, which puts him ahead in overall kicking," says Cafego, who notes that opponents fail to run back at least half of his kickoffs. When they do, they seldom get beyond the 20-yard line, averaging only 18.3 yards per return.

Adds Majors, who returned to his alma mater two years ago after coaching the University of Pittsburg to the national championship: "I never had a field goal kicker or kick off man to do what Alan did against Kentucky." In that game, Alan broke the UT record and tied the SEC record for field goals (5) and points scored kicking (17) in a 29-14 victory over the Wildcats. His kicks ranged from 48 to 36 yards. Earlier, he booted a 53-yarder against Duke University.

Duncan listens quietly to all the praise and says, "I'm working to be a pro kicker if God wants me to, just like I worked to be Tennessee's kicker. But if God says, 'No,' I'll forget it. I'll do my best to be a pro kicker, but other things have priority in my life--one is Africa and one is the foreign mission field.

"I enjoy kicking," Duncan adds, "but it's just a tool. All the gifts God has given me are tools to use in my testimony for Jesus Christ."

Spain Constitution Good
But Some Problems Remain

MADRID, Spain (BP)--The nationwide referendum on the new constitution for Spain has been called a dramatic high point in Spain's "renaissance" by Southern Baptist missionaries, but some issues remain to be settled.

Indy (Mrs. Charles W.) Whitten, Southern Baptist missionary press representative, said the constitution provides for a parliamentary monarchy which gives freedom of religion, the press, enterprise and collective bargaining, and abolishes torture and the death penalty.

But the matter of "religious tax" is yet to be resolved. "There seems to be a leaning toward the system used in Germany," Mrs. Whitten said. Under this plan each citizen would declare what his religious beliefs are and be assessed a certain amount of ecclesiastical tax, to be collected by the government. The amount to be collected would be suggested by each church.

These taxes instead of voluntary gifts would support the churches.

The Evangelical Defense Committee has gone on record opposing this system, which would "cut the nerve of Christian stewardship," according to Maximo Garcia Ruiz, president of the Spanish Baptist Union. Spanish Baptists are actively involved in this committee.

Eduardo Zulueta, director of ecclesiastical affairs in the Ministry of Justice, said the ideal is for each church to finance itself.

Most of the religious groups in Spain find no grounds to reject the constitution for moral or spiritual reasons, Mrs. Whitten said. For 38 years, Spain was considered a Catholic nation under the regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

During the last years of his regime and during the reign of King Juan Carlos, religious liberty has grown to allow non-Catholic churches to advertise meetings, meet in public places and build new buildings.

A number of Christian leaders in Spain have expressed their satisfaction over the new constitution, but say emphatically, "We will not be satisfied with less than complete separation of church and state," Mrs. Whitten reported.

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Annuity Board Adds
Department, New Staff

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DALLAS (BP)--Creation of a new department and the addition of a key staff member highlighted personnel changes at the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, according to Darold H. Morgan, president.

B. J. Chenault, senior vice president and treasurer and director of finance and accounting, will become senior vice president and director of endowment, Feb. 1. Chenault, a senior vice president for six years and Annuity Board staffer for 16, will direct a newly-created endowment department.

Harold Richardson, senior assistant treasurer of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, succeeds Chenault on Feb. 1. Richardson's title will be vice president and treasurer and director of finance and accounting.

The new department, approved by trustees in October, will acquire endowment resources from across the Southern Baptist Convention to undergird financially the protection programs offered by the Annuity Board. "We'll pursue wills, gift annuities, trusts, estates and other endowment sources," Chenault said. Contributions will undergird the payment of benefits reflecting extra earnings to annuitants, supplement relief programs and help defray medical costs of Southern Baptist retirees.

Richardson will join the Annuity Board after two years as senior assistant treasurer of the Foreign Mission Board. A graduate of North Texas State University in Denton, Texas, Richardson went to the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., from the Baptist General Convention of Texas in Dallas, where he served as comptroller.

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