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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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FMB Volunteer Sues  
SBC For \$5 Million

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) -- A \$5 million damage suit has been filed against the Southern Baptist Convention by an Austin, Texas, man who claims he was beaten by Turkish immigrants in Augsburg, West Germany, while serving with the Foreign Mission Board.

Nassar Lotfi, identified by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram as a former colonel in the Iranian Air Force and a naturalized U.S. citizen, filed his suit in the United States District Court in Fort Worth.

Lotfi, and his wife, Marion, went to West Germany in January of 1982, for a two year volunteer term, according to the FMB. Their assignment was to minister to Turkish immigrants in the Augsburg area, working alongside Southern Baptist career missionaries and in cooperation with the German Baptist Union.

The suit says that on March 27, 1982, he was "set upon" by a group men and "beaten into unconsciousness." The beating, it says, resulted in injuries to his back and spine as well as a "traumatic neurosis...."

The lawsuit claims the defendant (the SBC) "did not disclose" that the work could be "hazardous to the plaintiff's personal safety."

FMB officials say Lotfi was selected because of his apparent Christian commitment, his Middle East background, his language skills and his intense desire to go.

According to the FMB, consultations were held in July of 1982, and a decision was made to end the agreement under which the Lotfis went to West Germany.

Southern Baptist Convention attorney James P. Guenther told Baptist Press: "We don't understand the reasoning behind Mr. Lotfi's decision to sue the SBC. The convention has never had any relationship with Mr. Lotfi.

"We (the SBC) will make an appropriate legal response."

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Missionary Family Won't Give Up  
After Three Burglaries, Injury

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2/18/83

CAMPINAS, Brazil (BP)--It wasn't all in the job description.

Kent and Donna Depee's home was burglarized three times in their first six months on the field and their son, Brent, was seriously injured on their first trip away from language school.

The Missouri couple insists they'll take the bad with the good as rookie Southern Baptist missionaries in Brazil. "I know the Lord won't test you above what you're able to stand," she said.

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The latest burglary was Feb. 5 while the Depees and their three children were shopping. A thief tore through a wooden-shuttered window and made off with the family stereo set, camera, several watches and "even Kent's cowboy boots."

She said the burglar took her brand new tennis shoes, but at least left "his old dirty ones in their place."

The stolen goods were insured, unlike the losses from two earlier robberies. A burglar stole toys and a tape recorder shortly after the Depees arrived in Campinas last August to study Portuguese. Later 15-year-old Brent's stereo was taken.

In late December Brent was thrown against a tree while riding a horse in rural Corrente, where the Depees plan to work in agricultural evangelism. His small intestine ruptured and he went through emergency surgery after a grueling 450-mile taxi ride to Brasilia.

Brent has recovered faster than expected, returned to school and is "beginning to play basketball again." His parents say the love, prayers and letters sent from Southern Baptists sped the recovery and encouraged the whole family. They have no intention of going home or of letting the setbacks frustrate their ministry.

They have, however, installed bars in their windows.

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HMB Launches Effort  
To Start 3,000 Churches

By Charlene Shucker

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ATLANTA (BP)--The church extension division of the Home Mission Board has called for a convention-wide "new-work commitment day" in response to a 1980 study indicating at least 100 million Americans lack a church home.

On "Pentecost Sunday," May 22, the Southern Baptist Convention's 36,079 churches will be challenged to start 3,000 new missions by next June.

According to the Bible, "2,000 years ago on Pentecost Sunday 3,000 souls were added to the Kingdom of God. We felt it would be appropriate for Southern Baptists to make commitments on this Sunday to add 3,000 churches to the kingdom," said Jack Redford, director of church extension.

"Our goal is for a minimum of 3,000 Southern Baptist churches to commit themselves to start a new church-type mission during the 1983-84 convention year," he said.

The latest tally indicates churches from 13 state conventions have made commitments to start 1,390 new works on Pentecost Sunday.

Jerry Graham, church extension associate director, is optimistic about commitment day. "I've been excited by the concept that a successful pastorate is no longer measured in terms of new buildings, the number of baptisms or letter transfers. A successful church is one which sponsors missions," he said.

Graham also was surprised by the interest of relatively new churches. "In some instances 'weak churches' are making surprisingly large commitments to new missions," he said.

Graham also stressed the need for commitments to start new missions from churches in mainline SBC states in the South. "Because some older rural churches are closing their doors and members are moving to the city, some southern churches feel there isn't a need for new ones. These church closings have disheartened them," he said.

Church extension planners are hopeful a significant number of new works will be ethnic and black mission churches. Emmanuel McCall, director of HMB black church relations, expects 10 percent of the present 3,000 black churches in the SBC will pledge to start new works on Pentecost Sunday. "Three hundred churches is a realistic goal," he said.

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In addition, a special intercessory prayerline (1-800-554-PRAY or 1-800-282-SEEK) will operate March 1 through May 31. "Sometimes I think Southern Baptists are willing to work hard but forget to pray hard," Graham said.

"The power of honest, fervent prayer...will be the key element to the success of Pentecost Sunday, as well as realizing the goal of 50,000 churches by the end of the century," he added.

Graham is asking for 10,000 "prayer warriors" to pray for the establishment of new work. Anyone involved in new church starts may call with specific needs in their area. The volunteer intercessors will receive these requests and pray for them, he said.

The prayerline will also benefit the "75 to 80 percent" of the mission force never prayed for in the same specific way Baptists remember career missionaries through printed prayer calendars, Graham explained.

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This Doctor Gets Paid  
In Different Currency

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press  
2/18/83

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Missionary surgeon John Tarpley shows two sets of slides when he speaks of his work in Nigeria: one for church groups and one for folks with strong stomachs.

Even third-year medical students groaned when Tarpley showed the second slide set at a Christian Medical Society fellowship last year in Virginia. Nobody expected full-color, life-size shots of goiters, tumors and gaping wounds at an after-dinner session. Tarpley chuckled and went on with the show.

"You don't have to be smart to be a good doctor," the 38-year old surgeon told the group. "You have to be compulsive. You have to pay attention." Then he dared the future physicians to try missionary medicine before giving their careers to fighting smokers' cancer and overeaters' heart attacks in the United States.

The teacher, preacher and doctor laces medical lectures with sermons and vice versa. At speaking engagements he sports polka-dot bow ties and loud pants that complement his unruly red hair and mustache but his jaunty style doesn't mask the intensity in his eyes.

Tarpley came home on furlough from Nigeria determined to challenge Southern Baptists in particular and the American Christian medical community in general to get serious about medical ministry in the third world. He is one of 54 missionary physicians Southern Baptists support overseas while requests for 32 more go unfilled. Some hospital are crippled by vacancies.

"I used to go to a church where seven orthopedic surgeons were members," said Tarpley. "In Nigeria, when my missionary surgeon partner was on furlough, I was the only general surgeon in an area of a million people." That, he added, is an "ego trip" he could do without.

Baptist Medical Centre in Ogbomosho, where he practices, has pleaded for a missionary pediatrician for two years. "We're playing at missionary medicine," Tarpley challenged Christian physicians. "We ought to get in or get out."

He carried that message all over the country last year, sandwiching speaking trips between occasional sleep and 12-hour days teaching and performing surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital and the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Baltimore. He returned to Nigeria in September.

Tarpley puts his life where his mouth is. The Tennessean finished second in his medical school class at Nashville's Vanderbilt University and went on to internship and surgical residency at prestigious Johns Hopkins, followed by several years of cancer research.

Possible fame and certain fortune awaited Tarpley in a U.S. medical career. But while teaching a teen-age Sunday School class and quizzing his students on what they really wanted out of life, he began asking himself the same question. Then he spotted a short article in the back of a medical journal.

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"The article was by an American doctor serving at a hospital in Nigeria," said Tarpley. "It went something like, 'My wife and child are sick. It looks like we're going to have to return to the U.S. These people are going to be left without medical care. How about some of you bleeding-heart liberals who go marching in the streets on Saturday and go to your country clubs on Sunday coming to Nigeria?'"

Tarpley still carries the clipping in his wallet. It was no "lightning bolt from the sky," he said, but it changed his life. In 1977 the surgeon and his wife, Maggie, were appointed missionaries to Nigeria by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

At the 150-bed hospital in Ogbomosho, Tarpley and his Nigerian and missionary colleagues battle chronic water shortages, frustrating understaffing, inadequate equipment, sheer exhaustion. He offers no complaints.

"I don't have to worry about a lot of committees," he said. "I don't have to worry about malpractice suits. I don't have to commute to three different hospitals; I live right on the hospital grounds. I walk to work every day and don't have to get in a car at all. I have good weather, good sunshine, good fruits and vegetables and lots of clean air." He also spends a lot of time with his wife and three children.

Nor does he view himself as a latter-day Albert Schweitzer bringing healing to Africa. A battalion of medical missionaries couldn't meet the staggering health care problems of the continent, he insisted. The hospital at Ogbomosho, administered by Nigerian Baptists, aims to train Nigerian doctors to solve Nigerian problems.

Tarpley's most fulfilling work comes in teaching the young Nigerian "housemen" (interns and residents) who come to the hospital to perfect their healing art. He trained 27 during his first three years at Ogbomosho.

And what of the financial rewards he will never realize? "I get paid in different currency," he replied. "I'm probably paid better than most of my compatriots in the U.S. My currency is the patients and the parents of my pediatric patients who are so grateful. My currency is seeing a houseman who at the beginning of the year doesn't know how to take care of patients learn how by the end of the year and turn around and teach the younger guys coming after him."

Tarpley remembers a spontaneous prayer service he once had with colleagues and family members after a critically ill Nigerian child recovered. "That's a year's pay right there."

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Richmond Bureau of the Baptist Press.

Possible Chinese Entry Forcing  
Hong Kong Strategy Changes

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HONG KONG (BP)--Missionaries and Baptists are facing up to the likelihood China will take over Hong Kong on or before the 1997 expiration date of British sovereignty.

The possibility of Chinese takeover is forcing Hong Kong Christians to "rethink what a church is" and make profound changes in their approach to ministry, according to George Hays, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board director for east Asia.

"I don't think there is any question the Chinese government will exercise some control" over Hong Kong churches if it moves in, Hays said. "Christians need to think about what they are going to do, not wait until it happens.

Hong Kong's high-powered financial market nose-dived last fall when China declared all of Hong Kong would be "recovered when conditions are ripe." Later Chinese assurances that business as usual would prevail have failed to calm the fears of many investors and Hong Kong citizens.

Great Britian negotiated a treaty with Imperial China in 1898 leasing about 90 percent of Hong Kong until 1997. Two earlier treaties turned the rest of the port over to the British permanently. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher maintains all three treaties are valid under international law. The Chinese foreign ministry declares them "unequal" and void. Negotiations are underway to resolve the dispute.

In the meantime Hong Kong Christians should develop new models of church growth not dependent on institutions, buildings or clergy, say some church leaders. The leaders urge a high priority on lay training and smaller congregations built around families, similiar to the "house" church inside China.

Hays believes missionaries can best help by training and encouraging leaders and testing new church models. Eighty-three Southern Baptist missionaries work with more than 30,000 Baptists in Hong Kong and nearby Macao, a Portuguese colony. Southern Baptists began work in Macao in 1910; Hong Kong was entered in 1949. He stressed missionaries will minister in Hong Kong as long as they are allowed to stay by any government in power. "Only the Lord knows what the future holds," he said.

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SBC Debate Over Linguistics,  
Not Biblical Authority: Dilday

By Gail Rothwell

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"It is my firm conviction Southern Baptists are still a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching people," according to Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. "The problem is people are confusing biblical authority with biblical interpretation."

Addressing a group of 170 pastors, church staff persons and denominational leaders attending a church training doctrine conference in Nashville, Dilday said the current theological debate in the Southern Baptist Convention is not over the authority of the Bible, but over linguistics.

He challenged leaders to adopt an unapologetic commitment to the Bible saying, "The Bible has always been the sole authority for faith and practice among Southern Baptists. It saddens me to see people who have equally high regard for Scripture divided over words of expression."

He charged Baptists are spending too much time defending beliefs to others who already believe and not enough time expressing beliefs to non-believers. "It disturbs me we are caught up in analysis and debate when we need to be putting our faith into practice," he stressed.

He believes the Bible is inerrant and infallible in its function and should therefore be judged on the basis of its purpose. "The purpose of the Bible is to lead men to Jesus Christ. We should be concerned with the results and not the process, because God did not choose to reveal his word to us in exact, scientific and technical terms," he explained.

Dilday said he has discovered the division in the SBC is not whether Southern Baptists are committed to the Bible but what interpretation they follow. "Every biblical translation is someone's interpretation," he explained. "Once we get away from the technicalities of language we find out there is not all that much difference in what we believe. Southern Baptists are unified in their commitment to the word of God."

Dilday expressed concern that over-emphasizing our differences is distracting Southern Baptists from the "great opportunities of Bold Mission Thrust."

"In the light of the fact that people all over the world are eager just to hear the word of God I am ashamed to see us divided over the way we express our beliefs," Dilday said. "Our distinctive Baptist heritage points to the diversity and individuality of Southern Baptists."

"It is my prayer we would learn to trust each other enough so when one person says the Bible is inerrant we don't classify him as a member of a certain party. On the other hand, when a person chooses not to use inerrancy language to describe the dependability of the Bible, we shouldn't think of his interpretation as inadequate," said Dilday.

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(BP) photo mailed to Baptist papers by Baptist Sunday School Board Bureau of Baptist Press.