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-- FEATURES

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Christian Exodus In Beirut
Provides Witness Opportunity

By Irma Duke

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)—The war in Beirut has provided a witnessing opportunity for Beirut Baptist School that Jim Ragland never dreamed possible.

Ragland, Southern Baptist missionary principal of the school since 1954, always has made Bible courses and chapel a requirement, but just in recent years has the majority of the students in those classes been Muslim. Now it's not unusual to hear a hundred Muslim third and fourth graders sing "Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World"—with their parents' permission.

Until recent years, the majority of the students and all the teachers at the school were Christians. But since most of the Christians have moved to East Beirut, the Christian enrollment has declined.

In the meantime, the school has gained a reputation for its academic standards and Muslims have been sending their children to it in larger numbers, even though it's unashamedly a Baptist school. About 75 percent of the 800 students are Muslim now.

"There are neighborhoods within two blocks of us that would never tolerate a church, but their kids come to school here," says Ragland. "And they're our neighbors, our friends."

Ragland's quiet, unassuming but caring manner helped make them his friends. When the father of one of the Muslim faction leaders died, Ragland was there to comfort him. He was the only foreigner there.

"He's my neighbor back here," explains Ragland, pointing up the hill from the school. And if a neighbor from another faction were in the same situation, Ragland would pay his respects to him, also.

Muslim groups join together to fight against those known as Christians, who, for the most part, live on the east side. The Christians, primarily from Maronite and Catholic backgrounds, are fighting for a Christian-controlled government, fearing Muslim control above everything. Even though these groups have religious names, Ragland says it's basically a social and economic war, not religious.

The war has brought added pressures for the Raglands, burdens under which other people might have folded. Many days their phone starts ringing at 5 a.m. because parents want to know if overnight fighting will close school that day. Or teachers report they got stuck in East Beirut and can't get back across the Green Line. Then early in the afternoon, the phone rings again because a bus has been delayed and parents are worried about their children's safety.

Oklahoma native Ragland, 60, carries the extra burden of safety for the children while they're in class. When shelling starts near the school, it's Ragland who has to decide if the children would be safer at home. At times, he has calmly asked the pupils to move away from their classroom windows because of the danger of flying glass and other debris.

In at least one instance, Ragland has had to face armed men from one of the factions who tried to force him to accept students without proper credentials.

His own personal safety and the safety of his wife have also been a pressure during the 10 years of fighting. Last year they slept in their hallway from February to May because the shelling was close by. The Raglands do not know American Catholic missionary Lawrence Martin Jenco, who was kidnapped recently, but are close friends of Presbyterian missionary Ben Weir, who was kidnapped in May.

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When Mrs. Ragland was home for a time last year, her daughter told her she looked like she had aged 10 years in the last 12 months. "I suspect I have," Mrs. Ragland confirmed.

The war has caused the Raglands to look to Lebanese Baptists for more moral support because most of the other missionaries are across the Green Line in East Beirut and inaccessible at times.

"Our fellow missionaries are supporting us, we've never doubted that, but they're not here," said Mrs. Ragland.

Because of the bond Ragland has built with the Lebanese, that hasn't been a problem. In fact, one of his former students who is a fellow church member now says Ragland is more Lebanese than he is American.

For years, Ragland has tried to find a Lebanese he could train to take over as principal of the school when he retires and to help him with day-to-day decisions. But no one has worked out. The qualified Christians have left the country or moved to East Beirut. Three missionaries in language study in Jordan are assigned to the school, however, and one of them is expected to take Ragland's place when he retires.

The added pressure also has brought about a greater dependence upon God. Up to 1976, Ragland said he was suffering from burnout, that he was so busy doing for the Lord that he wasn't spending the time with him he needed. Then he went through a difficult, lonely period when Mrs. Ragland was back in the States.

"It was a turning point in my life." Now he gets up at 4:30 to make sure he gets his time with God. And he's acquired a new motto: "Nothing is too hard for God and me."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Kennedy-Falwell 'Debate'
Turns Into Testimonial

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
2/7/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell presented contrasting views on abortion and Reagan administration policy toward South Africa in a joint appearance at the National Religious Broadcasters convention.

But what had been billed as a debate instead turned into something of a testimonial and the ideological opposites traded warm compliments before a breakfast throng of 4,000 fundamentalist and evangelical broadcasters.

For the past 18 months Kennedy and Falwell have engaged in a political dialogue that began when a Moral Majority computer by mistake sent the Massachusetts liberal a membership card in the five-year-old conservative organization. As he came to the podium to deliver his speech, Kennedy pulled out the card and told the laughing audience, "I never leave home without it."

Kennedy recalled his highly publicized 1983 visit to Falwell's Liberty Baptist College in Lynchburg, Va., as the starting point of a "remarkable time" during which the pair has nourished a new friendship. "I have been in the home of the Reverend Jerry Falwell and his family—and he has been in mine," Kennedy said. "When my nephew died (Robert Kennedy's son, David, of a drug overdose), he was one of the first to call and offer his sympathy and prayers."

For his part, Falwell told of visiting Kennedy's suburban McLean, Va., home the evening before the debate and paid special tribute to Kennedy's teenage son, Teddy. He commended the younger Kennedy, who several years ago lost a leg to cancer, for the prayer he offered at dinner. "We love Teddy Kennedy," he declared.

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In his speech, Kennedy said that while religious values have an important place in public life, "the division is about where and how they should apply." He insisted that while "virtually no one doubts that civil rights is a public issue—or that murder is wrong," Americans "are plainly and persistently divided about whether abortion is the taking of human life." He then quoted colonial Baptist leader Roger Williams' warning "It is impossible for any man or for all men to maintain their Christianity by the sword, and maintain thereby a true Christianity."

Such a standard for interaction between religion and politics, Kennedy continued, "does not seek conformity for the sake of uniformity, but unity based on respect for our diversity; it does not enjoin religion to be silent, but holds only that at times, the proper role of religion is to persuade the individual conscience, not to harness the coercive power of the state."

Although Falwell did not address the religion-in-politics issue directly, he reiterated his longstanding conviction that abortion, which was legalized in 1973, has amounted to the "destruction" of 15,000,000 "innocent human beings" and its ongoing practice invites "the wrath of Almighty God" on America.

He also said pro-life activists "must put our money where our mouth is" by providing "loving alternatives" for unwed pregnant women such as his own "Save A Baby" campaign.

Saying he is "hopeful" President Reagan will be appointing more Supreme Court justices during his second term, Falwell added, "We can hope for a pro-life court by 1988." He said while his own preference would be for legislation to outlaw all abortions, he would settle for exceptions for rape, incest and danger to the woman's life as a means to eliminate "convenience" abortions, which he said amount to more than 99 percent of the total number of abortions in the U.S.

Both men gave over extensive portions of their speeches to U.S. policy toward South Africa and its system of apartheid, or racial separation, with Kennedy assailing and Falwell defending Reagan administration policies.

Recalling his recent visit to South Africa, Kennedy noted that "Jesus himself, who conceivably could be classified by the rules of apartheid as 'coloured' or as Asian, could not sit in the separate pews of many of the churches where he is worshiped each and every Sunday." He urged American Christians to heed the pleas of South African Christian leaders Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and Byers Naude, whose demands of their government are "as old as the ancient words of God, through Moses, to the Pharaoh of Egypt: 'Let my people go.'"

But Falwell, while acknowledging "apartheid is abominable," said South Africa has done "far better" over a much shorter period than did the United States in overcoming its system of Negro slavery. Falwell defended Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement" with the South African government and insisted that while "absolute equality" of the races is the "ultimate goal," Americans "don't need to be hypocrites" in light of U.S. treatment of blacks and American Indians.

At the conclusion of the addresses, the debate moderator asked both Kennedy and Falwell what one thing each would change about the other.

"I think Rev. Falwell works too hard," Kennedy replied. After a dramatic pause, he added, "And I suggest he take a sabbatical in 1988."

Falwell's reply: "I think the senator would make a great, great Republican Baptist."

Brotherhood Plans
Improved Materials

By Jack Childs

TALLADEGA, Ala. (BP)—During a week of intense planning at Shocco Springs Baptist Assembly, 32 state Brotherhood leaders from 18 Baptist state conventions and 19 Brotherhood Commission staff members developed a dozen new Brotherhood product proposals, outlined an enlargement campaign, made plans for a national Royal Ambassador Congress, discussed ways to improve Disaster Relief projects and reviewed Royal Ambassador Campcraft.

The meeting dealt primarily with curriculum, leadership publications, advancement and growth materials and promotional items designed to support the recommendations of a Brotherhood long-range study committee approved last October.

Known as the Missions Impact 2000 Committee, the long-range study panel of eight state Brotherhood leaders and eight Brotherhood Commission staff members recommended improved methods for helping churches involve men and boys in missions through the year 2000.

Scheduled for implementation for 1987-88 new and updated materials will support a revised Brotherhood children's and youth program which will include Royal Ambassadors for boys in grades 1-9 and High School Baptist Young Men for those in grades 10-12.

Support materials also were developed for new programs for Baptist Young Men, Collegiate Baptist Young Men and Senior Baptist Men scheduled for 1987-88 introduction. Improved approaches also will be presented at that time for Baptist Men.

All updated Brotherhood materials will focus on a study/action approach to missions learning with emphasis on practical missions involvement for both men and boys.

The Brotherhood enlargement campaign will be launched early in 1987, coordinated with the introduction of new materials supporting the program changes.

"Dare to Care" was approved as the theme for the national Royal Ambassador Congress for Pioneer Royal Ambassadors scheduled August 4-7, 1986, in Memphis, Tenn.

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Thailand Plans Limit On
Number Of Missionaries

Baptist Press
2/7/85

BANGKOK, Thailand (BP)—The government interior ministry has indicated plans to limit the number and activities of foreign missionaries in Thailand.

The plans don't seem to be leveled directly at the 79 Southern Baptist missionaries there, and it remains unclear how their work will be affected, according to Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board officials.

The government singled out missionaries of the Mormon Church, who number 200 of the some 3,000 foreign missionaries in Thailand. The Mormons often have asked to stay in the country for extended periods, but the Ministry of Interior is considering limiting their stay to no more than three months at a time, a government official said.

Some missionaries have been accused of bringing hilltribe people into Thailand from neighboring Burma and giving them money if they become Christians. Other reports indicate bothersome door-to-door witnessing tactics.

"Some of the missionaries have created problems and, in some cases, have even become a public nuisance due to their zealotry in spreading their religion's beliefs," said the official.

The Mormons have publicly denied charges against their missionaries.

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Maxine Stewart, Southern Baptist missionary press representative in Thailand, lauded the officially Buddhist nation for its stance on religious freedom. "Some Thai people have the mistaken idea that Thai Christians cannot be good Thai citizens," she said. "But Baptist missionaries encourage national Christians to be good, law-abiding, productive citizens."

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Reagan Renews Appeal
For His 'Social Agenda'

By Stan Hasteley

Baptist Press
2/7/85

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan has renewed his call on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment restoring official prayer to the nation's public school classrooms and to enact tuition tax credit and anti-abortion legislation.

Delivering his fifth State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress on his 74th birthday, Reagan told the lawmakers his "Second American Revolution" has included a renewal of traditional values. "Of all the changes that have swept America the past four years," he declared, "none brings greater promise than our rediscovery of the values of faith, freedom, family, work, and neighborhood."

He cited increased church attendance, optimism about the future and patriotism as examples and made a point of commending lawmakers for passing equal access legislation last year. The measure gives secondary school students who want to conduct religious meetings on public school property the same rights enjoyed by other extracurricular, nonacademic groups.

At the same time, Reagan asked again for a constitutional amendment to overturn the Supreme Court's historic 1962 and 1963 decisions outlawing state-sponsored prayers in public schools. He said "no citizen need tremble, nor the world shudder, if a child stands in a classroom and breathes a prayer."

Although he mentioned tuition tax credits for parents who send their children to private schools only in passing, a White House "fact sheet" distributed to reporters showed the president once more will ask Congress to pass legislation providing a \$300 credit per child by 1987. The law would be phased in over a three-year period, with a \$100 per child credit in tax year 1985, a \$200 credit in 1986 and the full \$300 benefit in 1987. No tuition tax credits would be available to families with incomes above \$60,000.

In addition, Reagan renewed a request first made of Congress two years ago to provide education vouchers to poor families who could then cash them at either public or private schools. The aid would be available only at the discretion of states and localities, however.

On the increasingly volatile abortion issue, the President reiterated his appeal for legislation "to protect the unborn," but stopped short of endorsing one approach over another. Declaring the issue "grips our nation," Reagan went on to say: "Abortion is either the taking of human life, or it isn't; and if it is--and medical technology is increasingly showing it is--it must be stopped."

He also described as "a terrible irony" the shortage of newborn babies available for adoption and added, "We have room for these children; we can fill the cradles of those who want a child to love."

On another moral issue under current scrutiny, Reagan said "in keeping with the will of the overwhelming majority of Americans," the death penalty should be used. "We do not seek to violate rights of defendants," he said. "But shouldn't we feel more compassion for victims of crime than for those who commit crime?"

Reagan also restated the broad outline of defense policies he believes are necessary to convince the Soviet Union to negotiate in good faith for the reduction of nuclear armaments. Declaring the U.S. is "poised as never before to create a safer, freer, more peaceful world," he added: "All of us have no greater dream than to see the day when nuclear weapons are banned from this Earth forever."

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