



## BAPTIST PRESS

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Missionaries Leave Lebanon,  
But Their Hearts Remain

N-FMB  
By Art Toalston

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--Militiamen with machine guns watched as seven Southern Baptist missionaries and several dozen Lebanese carefully stepped off a shuttle bus.

The travelers scurried through the evening rain, stepped around mud puddles and walked up an unsteady plank into the boat in East Beirut's port.

Passports in hand, the missionaries waited for their cabins, resolved to a night on stormy seas March 5. Before long, two would become seasick.

Seasickness, however, would be minor compared to what was troubling them. They were moving from one world to another.

Behind them was a war-torn land where a stray artillery shell or bullet could have ended any of their lives. It also was a land where U.S. citizens, by government order, could no longer live.

Ahead of the missionaries was the pleasant seaside city of Larnaca on the island of Cyprus, the place where relatives and friends in the United States could count on reliable telephone service to ask, "Are you all right?"

Given the chance, the missionaries would have chosen Lebanon.

In that world, they made deep friendships by weathering the war. "It's been overwhelming to see the love the Lebanese have expressed for us" since the U.S. order was announced in late January, said Leola Ragland, an Oklahoman who has worked 33 years as a missionary in Lebanon.

As of March 7, all 24 missionaries and eight children formerly in Lebanon were in Cyprus, the last couple having come out by boat the night of March 6. They wondered what relatives and friends in the United States thought of their pleas to remain in Lebanon.

"I don't know what people in the U.S. are seeing on television or reading in the newspapers," commented Pete Dunn, an Alabamian who has been a missionary in Lebanon since 1968. He has received letters asking, "Why are you still there?"

"The perspective of people outside the country is so different from our perspective. We live among the people. We eat Lebanese food. We cry with them when they hurt. We go to the hospital and visit their sick. We go to the weddings. And they come to us.

"I respect my government," Dunn added. "Maybe they are looking at other factors I'm not exposed to. But right now, I believe the order was unwarranted."

"I can't imagine not coming back to Lebanon" to continue working side by side with the country's Baptists, said Dunn's wife, Pat, also from Alabama.

"We were right on the threshold" of launching Baptist TV programs in Arabic," said Dunn, who directs the Baptist Center for Mass Communications, "and here we are on a boat going to Cyprus."

Frances Fuller of Arkansas, who has spent 16 years of her 23-year missionary career as a missionary in Lebanon, cited the relative security of East Beirut and neighboring towns. "We feel like we could say, 'Mr. Reagan, come and visit us. Meet our neighbors. And then think about (the order).'"

"It's not that there isn't danger," she acknowledged. "We thought at times we might die for being in Lebanon."

However, for Fuller, who directs the Arab Baptist Publication Center, the risk is worth taking to be obedient to God, to do the job God chose her to do and to be with the people for whom he has given her a great love.

"Never in any period of my life have I ever been happier" than in recent years in Lebanon, she said. "I feel like my roots are here. I want to come back as quickly as possible."

Fuller said she struggled with the principle of obeying God rather than men. "I went through a time of thinking, 'If we obey this (order), it's because we don't want to pay the price of making God the highest authority over our lives.' I felt I was going to get on this boat feeling that I had done something wrong."

She finally decided to obey the order, not wanting her protest to make it difficult for other missionaries later to return to Lebanon.

"We're leaving Lebanon as half-people," said Jim Ragland, also from Oklahoma, who directed Beirut Baptist School in West Beirut. "We feel we have left our hearts behind in the places where we have lived and worked."

"This is home for us," Mrs. Ragland said. "We know Lebanon probably better than we know America." Their four children are sad also, she said, because Lebanon is the only home they have ever known. All of them are married now, and they had hoped to bring their spouses to Lebanon some day.

When news of the order came, Ragland said, he and his wife sat across the table from each other and had their devotional together. They realized that something very tragic was about to take place in their lives, he said. "We just sat there and wept together."

Later, after they had left the school, Mrs. Ragland recounted, "Jim looked back toward West Beirut. It was raining and he said, 'I always dread rainy days like this, because it's so difficult to take care of the children.' Then, all of a sudden, we realized we weren't over there to do it.

"It has been a month of not really knowing where we are," she said.

For more than three weeks they said goodbyes to Lebanese friends and co-workers, both Christians and Muslims. It was an emotional challenge, Ragland said. "How do you walk away from somebody you've known for 30 years?" he asked, weeping.

With school employees, "we've seen sad days and happy days," he said. "They've been so wonderful all these years to overlook our mistakes, to come in when the going was tough, to stand up for us when it would have been easy just to fade into the background. They were right there beside us."

Like the other missionaries, the Raglands do not understand why the State Department has banned Americans from Lebanon. "If it's to protect us, we don't want it," Ragland said. "We didn't expect it when we came out. We never sought their help during these years.

"Lebanon is really up against the ropes (now)," Ragland said. "The country needs us. The Lebanese need our school, our radio ministries, the books that we're writing."

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

Retired Missionary Is Last  
To Leave West Beirut School

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)—When Beirut Baptist School opened its doors more than 30 years ago, Mabel Summers was there.

And when the U.S. State Department ordered Americans out of Lebanon, she was the last Southern Baptist missionary to leave the West Beirut school.

"I've left behind many friends," people who have become "family," said Summers, 72, who retired in 1985 but remained in Lebanon.

She said she hasn't gotten too emotionally upset over leaving Lebanon but probably will feel the impact more as she has time to reflect. Getting away, telling people goodbye and winding up things occupied all her time until she boarded a boat to Cyprus March 5.

"I don't know where I'm going from here," she added. Except, "I'm going to write and pray and do all I can, and get people in the States to pray."

A lot of people do not understand the situation, she said, explaining the majority of Lebanese people don't want civil war. "It's only a few. But the rest can't stop it. It's gotten beyond them," she laments.

Since retiring, Summers has been assisting in the school office and playing piano for chapel services. She also has been organizing services and playing the piano at the English-language University Baptist Church in West Beirut for nearly two years. About 50 worshippers from 13 countries were attending.

"I had planned to stay another school year, and that would make 40 years" in Lebanon, she said.

She had hoped the U.S. government would make an exception so she could stay to help in the absence of three other missionaries who were leaving the school. But none was granted.

Friends in the United States speculated her love for Lebanon might prompt her to refuse to obey the order. And several students at the school offered to cover whatever fines might be levied against her. But Summers said, "As a Christian citizen I didn't want to break the law."

Her experiences in the midst of Lebanon's 12-year civil war have taught her to trust God more, she said. "I go back to Isaiah: '... in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'

"I feel, as was written on a birthday card of mine one time, God never leads you where his grace cannot keep you. All through the war, even when we've had rockets around us, I had peace and trust in my heart."

Another source of peace has been the prayers of Baptists in the United States, Summers said. "I don't think we could have stayed unless they had prayed for us a lot."

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Liberian Convicted  
In Missionary Murder

N-FMB

Baptist Press  
3/10/87

SANNIQUELLIE, Liberia (BP)—A 15-member jury convicted Liberian Benjamin M. Morris March 6 of murdering Southern Baptist missionary Libby Senter and her 10-year-old daughter, Rachel.

The jury took about 30 minutes to return a verdict in the Nimba County courthouse after hearing five days of testimony from nine prosecution witnesses and from Morris. Circuit Court Judge Timothy Swope said he would pronounce a sentence sometime the next week.

Morris, 32, was arrested Nov. 27 near the Liberian border with Ivory Coast one day after Mrs. Senter, 47, and her daughter were found dead in their Yekepa, Liberia, home. He later confessed orally and in writing that he killed the two after Mrs. Senter intervened to prevent him from molesting Rachel. Mrs. Senter was from Shelby, N.C.

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Southern Baptist missionaries, including the Senter family, had befriended Morris, a Liberian Baptist seminary graduate. They knew Morris was suspected of committing sex offenses in the past, but they had dismissed the accusations after coming to know him, said Bradley Brown, chairman for the group of 67 Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to work in Liberia.

In his own defense, Morris admitted in court to the murders. But departing from his earlier testimony, he said Senter hired him to commit them. Under questioning by the prosecuting attorney and the judge, Morris contradicted himself on the dates involved in the alleged hiring, Brown reported.

"Obviously the judge and the jury did not believe (Morris), because the jury came back in less than a half hour with a unanimous guilty verdict," said John Mills, who directs Southern Baptist mission work in western Africa. Under Liberian law, Morris could be hanged for the killings.

Brown, who attended the first two days of the trial, said the proceedings had "engendered widespread interest." Some of that interest grew out of the much-publicized forgiveness husband and father George Senter expressed to Morris just before his initial confession.

People attending the trial included Antoinette Marwitb, U.S. consul from the embassy in Monrovia.

Senter, who grew up in North Garden, Va., and worked in Evansville, Ind., before his appointment as a missionary, is a field evangelist and has been working to start and strengthen churches in about 20 villages in Nimba County. Mrs. Senter actively participated in her husband's work. The Senters had lived in Yekepa since they became foreign missionaries in 1980.

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is the second of a three-part series exploring the relationship between terrorism and religion.)

Terrorism Cuts Across  
Religious Affiliation

By Marv Knox

F-10  
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3/10/87

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Terrorists pray to Jesus, Mary, Jehovah, Allah, the True Name.

They are Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and devout believers in other religious faiths. As news accounts repeat time and again, terrorism and religion mix. Violently.

During recent years, much of the world's religious violence has been associated with Islam. Followers of Allah have been blamed or have taken responsibility for shootings, bombings and highjackings throughout the Middle East and much of Europe.

"In Islam, a 'jihad' or holy war is a concept that has developed historically," notes Glenn Igleheart, Southern Baptists' former interfaith witness leader and now state director of missions for Baptists in New York.

According to the concept of jihad, a true follower of Allah must "be defensive of Allah or any attack on Allah's people," Igleheart explains. "It's then only a step from defense to offense. The Islamic fundamentalists have carried it further out."

That has been possible because Islam is one of the world's faiths that legitimates violence, says George Braswell, professor of world religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary: "Islam divides the world into two parts, the world of submission to God and the world of non-submission. The Koran (Islamic scripture) says Muslims should missionize the world or jihad it — command that all people bow before God."

Such a doctrine helps explain why Muslims might practice violence against people of other faiths. But terrorism is not so simple; Muslims fight Muslims.

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"Islam is highly monolithic and unified, yet Muslims fight among themselves," Braswell notes. For example, violent tension exists between the the Sunni and Shi'ite strains: "They have leaders with different goals in mind to bring authority to bear on the world. The Sunnis tend to be a little more flexible in terms of accommodation. The Shi'ites, under Khomeini, have probably the most radicalized ideology in the world under a theocracy.

"So you've got these groups fighting. They believe the same basic things, but their agendas are different -- accommodation to the Western world, politics, power and so forth. What happens is that religion, in this case Islam, relates to certain ingredients, such as economics or politics, which become more important than religious unity."

Although Islamic terrorists have received more attention than their counterparts from other religions, they are not representative adherents of the Islamic faith, stresses George Sheridan, regional interfaith witness coordinator for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

"It would be hard to say there is a Muslim who is not a fundamentalist," he says, noting the term "Islamic fundamentalist" often is applied to terrorist groups. "Religious fundamentalism implies you go back to the basics, essential principles," he explains, noting the Koran is believed to be "an eternal, divine volume."

A Muslim is by definition a fundamentalist, "because he has to go by the root or the fundamentals of scripture," Sheridan says. "However, it usually is the case that the terrorists are an embarrassment to Muslims. Terrorists are a fraction of a percentage point of Islam."

Furthermore, terrorism is not confined to Islam. Lebanon, probably the country most in the news because of terrorism, is an example.

"Tiny Lebanon has been a country that has high educational standards, a good economy. So what's going on?" Braswell asks. "Lebanon has been factionalized by an old tribal element. You've had families that own valleys and land. They may be Christian patriarchs or Islamic. They have wedded together their religion, government, politics, militias, so it's like tribalism.

"A leader has a little nation within a nation. That's true for both Christianity and Islam in Lebanon; they want the same thing. These militias go out and fight each other, or urban terrorists fight each other."

The Palestinian refugee issue -- which actually involves Muslims, Christians and Jews -- increases the problem of terrorism, notes Braidfoot, who adds, "We'll have Middle Eastern terrorism until the Palestine refugee question is settled."

Unfortunately, Christian terrorism is not isolated in Lebanon. Sheridan points to Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics fight for power, as one of the most glaring examples of Christian terrorism.

Terrorism in that country revolves around "the same issues -- war and peace" as terrorism elsewhere, Braswell adds. "Also, outside influences are present there -- the government of Great Britain, the Roman Catholic Church -- which provide different players on the scene."

And although terrorism and violence in Northern Ireland is divided along Protestant-Catholic lines, the issue of participation in government must be settled before peace can be achieved, Braidfoot says.

Closer to home, Americans are not strangers to terrorism and religious violence, either.

Christians who fire-bomb abortion clinics tragically demonstrate "means-end inversion," Igleheart notes. He adds such radical action is not new for the ultra-right fringe element of Christianity, recalling, "crosses were burned in the yards of pastors, white and black, who were active in the civil rights movement."

Braidfoot points out frustrations of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war led to violence on the part of the ultra-left fringe "whose actions followed the failure of non-violence to attain their goals."

Even today in America, Sheridan says, "there has been a growing vandalism of Islamic buildings, even some bombing of mosques" and murder of Muslims by people bearing the name Christian.

He also points out violence, if not outright terrorism, has been utilized by Christians in South Africa, as whites seek to maintain control over other races.

Sheridan notes terrorism also can be linked with the Sikh religion, which he relates "essentially was an attempt to make a peace between Islam and Hinduism."

Braswell adds Sikh-related terrorism also is as much a "territory issue" as it is religious. "Remember it was British colonialists who came in a couple hundred years ago and used the Sikhs as their helpers, the arm of the British empire in India," he explains. "The Sikhs felt they would get the spoils when the British pulled out, but they were disappointed."

In the post-colonial period, the Sikhs "have wanted their own state or nation in the Punjab area of India," he says. "But they are divided on that even. Some want accommodation with the Hindus; some don't trust them."

Worldwide, "there's been an increase in terrorism in the last 15 years," Sheridan observes. Although many of the terrorists have flown the banners of their religious faiths, some have not. He explains this phenomena is a matter of expediency.

"Some terrorism is and some is not predominantly religious" in orientation, he says. "Where it isn't, it's in Europe, where religion is not a useful lever for getting support." Western European terrorist groups are "not served by religion, so they don't bother with it. But in other countries -- Northern Ireland, Lebanon, India -- where they are served by religion, they do use it."

Consequently, religion continues to be useful in the hands of terrorists, observers agree. And unfortunately, arbiters of hate will continue to use religion to fuel the fires of terrorism.