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Baptists in Lebanon struggle
to survive in post-war economy By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
5/19/93

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--A 16-year civil war ended in Lebanon in 1990 but as Lebanese Baptists celebrate their 100th anniversary this year another war rages.

"We have a new kind of war -- an economic war," said Nabih Haddad, general secretary of the Lebanese Baptist convention and pastor of Beirut's Ain Dara Baptist Church.

Runaway inflation has reduced the currency to almost nothing, and Baptists who have fled the country have reduced Lebanese Baptists' base of support.

In years past a U.S. dollar exchanged for about three Lebanese lira. Now a dollar brings about 1,800 lira. In a nation still reeling from war damages, the effect is devastating.

"Our income is in Lebanese lira but our expenses are in dollars," Haddad explained. "It's harder to support Baptist work now than during the war." Lebanon, a small country, imports many products at international prices.

"We went through 16 years of a very difficult war. It was very hard and we came out of it very tired. Thousands of homes were destroyed; thousands of houses burned. Tens of thousands of people of all ages were killed," he said.

Now more than two years after the return of peace, Baptist churches still struggle to repair shell-damaged buildings, such as Haddad's church.

Hanna E. Fahmi, pastor of Rahbe Baptist Church in Rahbe, a town in north Lebanon, tells a similar story.

Artillery shelling damaged the church building and made it totally unusable for several years. Also, Muslims from a nearby town attacked Rahbe during the war, partially burning the church and its furnishings. Fahmi was beaten during the attack and most of his theological books were burned.

The church is now repaired enough to use it but the walls and roof still need repair. "When it rains, it still comes in," said Fahmi, who estimates repairs will cost thousands of dollars.

But the church also needs to expand. Growth has meant it now overflows its second floor meeting room and many must sit in hallways during services. Church members would like to enclose the ground level of the building to provide a bigger sanctuary but, again, money is the problem.

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"Many people hold more than one job," said Samuel Kharrat, pastor of another church with financial needs. "Each person in a family has to work. There's no way to tell when things will get better."

But the war has hurt Baptists in other ways. Thousands of Lebanese, including many Baptists, fled during the war. About 1,000 Baptists in 25 churches and missions belong to the Lebanese Baptist Convention, plus six independent Baptist congregations. Haddad said the entire Baptist community, including children and steady visitors, probably numbers about 5,000.

If everyone Baptists have won to Christ over the past two decades had remained, these numbers would be two to three times as high, he estimated.

Maria Daoud, 35, a member of Mansourieh Baptist Church, said the effect of so many people leaving also has been hard on a personal level. "I've lost all my friends. They have emigrated out of the country," she said. Two members of her own family moved to France and will not return. A younger brother still at home is engaged but he and his fiance haven't set a wedding date because they can't find a place to live.

Some Christians hoped the war's end would make the Lebanese people more responsive to the gospel. But Haddad said that hasn't happened. Evangelism continues to be hard work with no signs of large revivals. "Really, Satan is the same in any situation," he said. "In the world there are many reasons to prevent people from coming to the Lord."

"Many Lebanese are depressed from the pressures of living," Haddad said. "They feel failure. How will they earn a living? They don't have a mind to listen to the gospel. They are hungry and in trouble."

Despite problems, churches continue to grow, have evangelistic campaigns and pass out Bibles, Haddad said.

Southern Baptists, who had missionaries in Lebanon for 39 years until the U.S. government banned the presence of Americans in 1987, are playing a key role in helping Lebanese Baptists rebuild and carry on.

Although no missionaries live in Lebanon, a number of personnel who evacuated live on Cyprus and continue to relate to Lebanese Baptists in such ministries as publications, media and theological education.

In 1992 the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board contributed \$135,000 in relief funds to Lebanon, said Dale Thorne, the board's director for Middle East work. That amount included \$82,100 in hunger funds and \$52,900 in general relief. All but \$2,900 of the general relief funds went to church repair.

The board also contributed \$1,200 for women's work, \$2,000 for new work, \$6,000 in church aid, \$9,000 to help the Lebanese Baptist Convention and \$12,000 in student scholarships, Thorne said. "A number of the pastors also receive salaries as employees of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and the international (Baptist) institutions that operate in Lebanon," he added.

Faouzat Shahoud, a student at the seminary, has opened new evangelistic outreach work in Qaa. When his parents, non-believers, objected to church meetings in their home he built a house with a large room to use for worship.

"The church is God's, not ours," said Haddad. "The work is his, not ours. He said go and preach the gospel and I will be with you. And according to this confidence and on this basis, we go."

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Details sketchy over pastor's
disappearance, return home By William H. Perkins Jr.

Baptist Press
5/19/93

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (BP)--Missing Yazoo City pastor Jim Everett, 41, surfaced in Montgomery, Ala., May 12, exactly two weeks after he disappeared while en route to visit his mother at a nursing home in Meridian, Miss.

Details are sketchy, and calls to the Everett home have not been returned. News media reports indicated that Everett arrived back in Yazoo City May 13.

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Yazoo City police detective Wade Woods, assigned to the Everett case, said his department is not presently involved in the investigation.

"What Mr. Everett has alleged to have happened are violations of federal law, and we have turned the investigation over to federal authorities," he said. Wood did not further elaborate on the case.

Everett, pastor of Yazoo City's Southside Baptist Church, left his home at 9 a.m. Tuesday, April 27, but never arrived at his mother's nursing home in Meridian. Authorities traced a credit card purchase that same day to Tuscaloosa, Ala., and another financial transaction was conducted in Montgomery, Ala., later that afternoon.

A security camera videotaped the Tuscaloosa purchase, and authorities who viewed the tape told his wife, Janet, that Everett appeared to be alone and under no coercion.

His wife said in an interview May 7 she suspected a physical or medical problem may have led to his disappearance.

"There are some indications of this in the past," she said.

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Unsettled convictions can yield
to apostasy, Mohler tells grads By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
5/19/93

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--R. Albert Mohler Jr., president-elect of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, told graduates from sister school Southeastern their ministries will be measured by whether they stay true to the gospel -- or move away from it in an effort to explain the difficult standards of Jesus Christ.

There is a desperate need for Christians with a strong faith who do not apologize for their beliefs, nor try to explain away the truth of the gospel, said Mohler, baccalaureate speaker at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., May 14.

"Unsettled convictions is a recipe not just for compromise and accommodation, but for apostasy, the falling away of the church," Mohler said.

One issue the church has always faced is what to do with the hard sayings of Jesus, Mohler pointed out. He used as an example John 6 in the New Testament, where Jesus said he was the bread of life. Many followers left Jesus at that point and, as the remaining disciples struggled with the difficult saying, Jesus turned to them and asked, "Will you also go away?"

"I think that is one of the most significant questions the church at the end of the 21st century is going to have to face," Mohler said. "Will we also go away?"

There is a tremendous temptation to repackage and dilute the gospel, accommodating it to the modern culture, Mohler said.

"Consider how the contemporary church would handle the rich, young ruler" of Luke 18, "this attractive, well-heeled, young yuppie, who was a type of upwardly mobile, professional, baby boomer . . . Today, those of us who want to have user-friendly churches would go after him."

This accommodation, Mohler said, is a "formula that leads to disaster," as those calling themselves disciples try to explain what Jesus truly meant.

"(When) someone's offended like that, they'll say, 'Yes, I heard what he said, but let me tell you what he meant. . . It's all a matter of interpretation. There are nuances here.'"

Since Christians now live in a society that rejects absolute truth, the church must fight the temptation towards relativism and moral revisionism, Mohler said.

Some churches are "aiding and abetting" those that are revising what the Scriptures say on issues of sexuality. Mohler also said, despite the "clear statements (of Jesus) concerning himself," there are many today tempted to reject Jesus as "the sole means of salvation."

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"It's exceedingly unpopular in this society to say that Jesus Christ is the only Savior," Mohler said. "It's not at all accepted or expected to say that human beings, each and every one of us, are eternally lost but for the salvation of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone."

Quoting E.Y. Mullins, the president of Southern Seminary at the turn of the century, Mohler said it is essential that the church hold to "certain fixed and definite teachings." Mohler pointed out that Mullins had coined the term "soul competency" and then quoted from Mullins' 1899 inaugural address:

"In an age of doctrinal unrest, it is a fortunate thing that this school is anchored to the great and eternal certainties of our doctrine. ... There is not occasion for an agnostic attitude on the question of incarnation and the atonement and other great verities of the Christian faith."

Mohler then asked the graduating seniors, "What about the church 100 years later?"

"There can be no doubt over doctrine when we hear our Lord Jesus Christ say, not just to the 12, but to us, 'Will you also go away,'" Mohler said.

Mohler pointed out, just as the disciple Peter once said, there is no other place to go.

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Pastor states views to Gephardt
on abortion, homosexual rights

Baptist Press
5/19/93

By Art Toalston & Jim Day

ARNOLD, Mo. (BP)--In a Mother's Day visit to church, Richard Gephardt, U.S. House of Representatives majority leader, received some 10 minutes of a Missouri pastor's heart against abortion and special homosexual rights and for God in government.

The comments by Gerald Davidson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Arnold, Mo., and the Missouri Baptist Convention's immediate past president, to Gephardt, a visitor in the congregation May 9 with his mother, Loreen, were replayed over Christian radio KSIV in St. Louis May 14. Davidson was a talk show guest on the station the previous day.

A transcript of Davidson's comments also has been printed in the St. Louis MetroVoice, a 20,000-circulation Christian newspaper in the metro area.

Both Gephardt and his mother are members of St. Louis' Third Baptist Church, which is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Davidson, in an interview with Baptist Press May 18, said he did not know why Gephardt chose to worship with First Baptist in Arnold that day, except perhaps that, with 3,000 members, it is the largest Baptist congregation in the congressman's district just south of St. Louis.

Davidson said Gephardt told him after the worship service he was not offended by the comments, which sparked three standing ovations from the congregation and various other interruptions of applause.

Gephardt's press secretary in Washington, Laura Nichols, told Baptist Press, "Even on Mother's Day, he doesn't have opportunity to take off his congressional hat" and is happy to hear constituents' views even when taking his mother to church.

Davidson, in his comments to Gephardt, voiced appreciation for the congressmen's various efforts to hear his constituents' views, "so I am sure you are interested in knowing what we believe, what we think and where we stand."

First turning to the abortion issue, Davidson said, "I would say to you, and I say it very kindly because you are our special guest, we at First Baptist Arnold are pro-life" The congregation responded with its first standing ovation, and Davidson resumed by describing "genocide ... against the unborn infant" as "one of the greatest blights on American society today."

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Turning to homosexual rights, Davidson said, "We stand for the human rights of all people regardless of their race, color or creed. However, we stand strongly opposed to the lesbian, gay and homosexual movement." Again the congregation responded with a standing ovation.

"These people have their human rights," Davidson continued, "but they do not deserve a special status, and neither do I think that our Congress, our president or anyone should endeavor to support them in this fashion.

"The Bible tells us that homosexuality is an abomination unto God," Davidson said. "I believe that if we study history we learn that any nation that ... protects and fosters that type of lifestyle comes under the judgment and the wrath of Almighty God."

On a third issue, Davidson stated, "I know that Baptists have long stood for separation of church and state But I do not believe that we need to separate our government from God and from godly principles." After more applause, the pastor said in a visit to Moscow last year he heard a former Soviet official say, "Our way has failed. Come and give us God. We need God in our schools, we need God in our government"

Davidson concluded: "Dear congressman, I would plead with you and I would plead with all of our political leaders who have a sense of godliness about them that they do what they can to help point our nation back to God, and we assure you that we will be praying with you and for you as you endeavor to do that." The congregation responded with another standing ovation.

Davidson told Baptist Press the church received a call from Gephardt's office the Thursday before Mother's Day stating the congressman's plans to worship at First Baptist with his mother that Sunday.

Davidson said he was mowing his lawn when the church office called to relay the news "and just immediately the Lord revealed to me the approach I ought to take" -- not to weave various comments into his sermon directed at Gephardt, but to address the congressman directly.

Davidson told Gephardt early in his comments that some members of the church are Republicans, some are Democrats, some are independents, "but I think most all of them endeavor to vote and cast their opinion for Christian principles and convictions."

"I did realize it was Mother's Day," Davidson said when asked about the appropriateness of such comments that day. "But what better day would there be than Mother's Day ... to address the matter of abortion?"

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Day is publisher and executive editor of MetroVoice.

Elder mails 6,300 copies
of proposed SBC reforms

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
5/19/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Voicing alarm that Southern Baptists' missions commitment is "breaking down rapidly," Lloyd Elder has mailed a proposal for Southern Baptist Convention reforms to 6,300 national, state and local church and missions leaders.

Elder, former president of the Sunday School Board, titled the 15-page document: "Calling the Family Back Together: A Research Report to the Southern Baptist Family."

In a media statement, Elder warns "by 2000 A.D. -- unless the trends are changed immediately -- we could be calling missionaries home from the field and closing down SBC agencies and institutions."

His paper includes various charts reflecting declining growth -- in terms of yearly percentage increases -- in SBC missions giving, membership and baptisms.

Elder, BSSB president from 1983-91 and now professor of biblical studies and preaching at Nashville's Belmont University, contends the theological-political controversy that erupted in the SBC in 1979 "holds the entire Baptist family and their mission program at great risk."

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"The controversy has a life of its own, is deepening its hold in Southern Baptist life, and continues its destructive course throughout the denominational family," Elder writes in the report.

Beyond urging both conservative and moderate factions to end the controversy and work together, he urges:

The "people faction" of the convention -- encompassing "the largest number of members" in the SBC -- should "forge a bipartisan, biblical coalition to get on with the main business of missions, education, prayer, and financial support."

"Even the nation's government forges a bipartisan foreign policy for 'national security' purposes; why should not our denomination forge a coalition of mission support for 'eternal security' purposes?" Elder implores.

Elder, in an interview with Baptist Press, said he has not received reactions from key leaders of the SBC or the moderates' 2-year-old Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

But, he said, the most important reactions will be those of church members throughout Baptist life.

He said he has no plans to formally present his proposals to the SBC's annual June meeting in Houston. If or when grass-roots Baptists "feel there is something they want to do, it needs to come from them," he said.

Elder's mailing includes a response sheet for Baptists to register their reactions to each of 20 "action plans" outlined in the proposal. Such responses can be checked as strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Among those action plans:

-- "Reaffirm and reunite ourselves around missions, our essential business," Elder writes. "Let every on-going activity contrary to that purpose be put aside from our midst." Elder cites both the purpose statement in the SBC Constitution and the Great Commission in underscoring his point.

-- Provide one messenger to the SBC annual meeting for all churches contributing any amount to the Cooperative Program channel of support for SBC home and foreign missions and ministries; a second messenger for those contributing 2 percent of their undesignated offering receipts to the Cooperative Program; and additional messengers for each additional 1 percent -- up to a maximum of 20 messengers or 20 percent of a church's membership.

-- Schedule SBC meetings every other year rather than annually.

-- Initiate SBC "regional voting conventions" at 36 to 72 sites within a four-hour drive from messengers' churches. Some 200,000 messengers could participate in a live, simultaneous network for conducting SBC business, using modern video technology.

-- Stipulate that the offices of SBC president and vice president be alternated between ordained ministers and laypersons in two-year terms. In years when an ordained minister is president, a layperson would be first vice president, with the order switched in the subsequent election. Only two laymen have been SBC president since 1946, Elder notes.

-- Reduce the appointment power of the SBC president by half. Under Elder's proposal, one of each eligible state convention's two members on the SBC Committee on Committees and Committee on Nominations would be elected by those conventions. The SBC president would select each state's other member of the Committee on Committees and that committee would select the state's other member on the Committee on Nominations.

-- Provide for each state to select its first, third and fifth representatives on the SBC Executive Committee, Foreign and Home Mission boards, Sunday School and Annuity boards, the six SBC seminaries and other commissions and boards. The Committee on Nominations would name the other state representatives.

Such changes, Elder writes, would be made via amendments to the SBC Constitution and Bylaws.

Morris Chapman, SBC Executive Committee president, told Baptist Press he has no comment on Elder's proposal at this time. Cecil Sherman, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship coordinator, was on vacation the week of May 17.

Elder told Baptist Press he has worked on his research and proposal for three months. He said he has personally paid for the report's printing and bulk mail expenses.

Information about obtaining copies of Elder's report can be obtained by contacting Lloyd Elder and Associates, Inc., 1900 Belmont Blvd., Fidelity Hall, Suite 403, Nashville, TN 37212, or (615) 386-4580.

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Templeton says giving
is sign of maturity

By K. Michele Holt

Baptist Press
5/19/93

PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--The secret of success is giving, John Marks Templeton, philanthropist and financial expert, said at Louisiana College's May 15 commencement.

"We will find we are blessed even as we are a blessing to others, for what we give comes back to us multiplied," Templeton told the Pineville, La., Baptist college's 171 graduates.

Templeton, who lives in Nassau in the Bahamas, is the originator of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, the most generous prize awarded to people involved in spiritual development. Templeton Mutual Funds is among his various business enterprises. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1987.

According to Templeton, giving is a sign of psychological and spiritual maturity. "There are few diseases so childish and so deadly as the 'gimmies,' the disease that separates us from friends and from God, and shrinks the soul."

Only the mature and wise give, he said. The immature do not. "It is wise to practice giving in every area of life," he added.

He quoted 19th century Freemasonry exponent Albert Pike as saying what we have done for ourselves alone dies with us, but what we have done for others and the world is immortal.

Voicing trust in God's wisdom and love, Templeton said, "This is the wonder and mystery of it, that when we love God we get an enormous increase in the quantity of love flowing through us to others.

"The more love we give away, the more we have left. The laws of love differ from the laws of arithmetic. Love hoarded dwindles, but love given grows.

"God's love is infinite and is directed equally to each person, but it seems to gain intensity when directed to sinners," he said.

Quoting the late Quaker philosophy professor Rufus Matthew Jones, Templeton said those who worship God are empowered by the Spirit and that religion is not a burden but rather a matter of being lifted up to new heights of joy.

"The divine Spirit moves into your life and makes it over from within so that all things are seen in a new light, and love for all becomes the spontaneous expression of a Spirit-filled soul," he stated.

Templeton also advised graduates to consult the Bible for how to become a success: "The Bible teaches us that if anyone would become first among us, let him first become the servant of all."

Thanksgiving -- the feeling, not the day -- inspires giving, he said, not only in the person who is thankful but in the one who hears the thanksgiving.

"Thanksgiving opens the door to spiritual progress," Templeton said. As evidence of that progress, he noted Americans alone are giving more than \$120 billion yearly to churches and charity -- 10 times as much as was given in the entire world in any year before this century.

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Holt is associate director of public relations at Louisiana College.

Stephen Olford to address
evangelists' June 16 session

HOUSTON (BP)--The 35th annual Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists is scheduled from 12:45-4:30 p.m. June 16 in Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center, site of the June 15-17 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Featured evangelists will be Stephen Olford of Memphis, Tenn.; Bill Stafford of Cleveland, Tenn.; and Harold Hunter of Jacksonville, Fla.

A number of music evangelists also will be featured, with Joe Atkinson of Arlington, Texas, directing the singing at the afternoon session.

The SBC evangelists' association also will sponsor "Afterglow" programs from 9:30-11:30 p.m. June 15 and 16 in the main ballroom of the Four Seasons Hotel near the convention center.

President of the evangelists' conference is Steve Hale of Woodstock, Ga.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Southern's Mohler challenges 'fundamentalism of the left,'" dated 5/17/93, please correct the introductory words to the 20th paragraph to: What is unfair, Rogers said, is not that the seminary ...

CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Orlando church tops CP giving, but SBC stats down for 6th year," dated 5/17/93, please change the 35th paragraph to read:

-- First Baptist Church in Lake Jackson, in Texas' Gulf Coast Baptist Association, 23.9 percent ...

Also, please correct the spelling in the next-to-last paragraph to Snyder Memorial Baptist Church.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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