

Letters to the Editor

Our forgotten Christian brothers

I am an old Franciscan missionary who has lived many years in the Middle East, mostly in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and the Holy Land. And I am saddened to realize that people here in the United States seem unaware of the plight of their Christian brothers in what was once the flourishing, independent, sovereign nation called Lebanon. There, beginning in 1968, civil war engulfed the land, resulting in death, untold suffering, and devastation in many regions, notably in areas heavily populated by Christians. Even now, as efforts are being made to rebuild the once lively and vibrant capital city of Beirut, local and foreign mercenaries occupy and encircle the nation, subjugating its people by violence and terror, lording it over this land where Christians, Muslims, and Druze had lived in such evident amity and prosperity that it was known worldwide as the Switzerland of the Middle East. Who was responsible for the destruction of this nation, the death and savage brutalization of large numbers of its people?

Lebanese blood flowed copiously every day for a full five years after 1968. For an additional decade and a half, sporadic fighting broke out in many parts of the country, as well as in the capital city, while, for the most part, the world conscience studiously ignored the carnage.

By the initiative of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, a peace conference was convened in Taif in 1989. Among those attending were President Hafez al-Assad of Syria and representatives of the principal groups of combatants in Lebanon. Curiously, though, Christians were denied any voice at that meeting. The accommodation agreed to was in fact an imposed *Pax Syriana*, for Assad sent a large, well-equipped Syrian Army to occupy the entire Lebanese territory, while at the same time authorizing the formation of a "puppet" Lebanese government, which rules as Syria dictates. . . .

In 1987, the total Catholic population of Lebanon was said on good authority to be 1,086,000. To this total we must add the number of non-Catholic Christians, namely, 300,000 Greek Orthodox, 170,000 Armenian Monophysites, 20,000 Syrian Jacobites, 25,000 Assyrian Nestorians.

Hence, only a short eight years ago, Lebanon was still the only country in the Middle East where Christians were a majority, politically and demographically. For in that same year—1987—the Catholic Information Center in Lebanon estimated that the Muslim population of the nation stood at 1,260,000, of whom 680,000 were Shiites and 580,000 Sunnis.

Lebanese Christians are noted for their love of learning, their cerebral capacity and intellectual activity. The Jesuits conduct the prestigious University of St. Joseph, while Lebanese monks administer the University of the Holy Spirit, both with pontifical faculty.

It is difficult to identify with certainty those who provoked civil war in Lebanon, but it is much easier to determine who really won the war. At the moment, President Assad of Syria is assuredly the master of Lebanon. It appears that this rule over Lebanon was the price Assad exacted in return for the limited help he gave the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and their allies in their efforts to force Saddam Hussein of Iraq to retreat from Kuwait. And this, despite the solemn declaration of the United Nations that all foreign troops must depart from Lebanon, a declaration that neither the U.N. nor the U.S. seems inclined to enforce. Thus has the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon been betrayed and forfeited.

Assad, being an Alawite, is well disposed to the Shiites and their cause. Before the civil war, the Shiites of Lebanon were of modest size compared to some other groups, and were not well organized. Their communities were at the outskirts, away from economic and political centers, and they considered themselves oppressed. The civil war changed the relations and equilibrium among the different religious confessions. Today, two political movements are found in the Shiite communities in Lebanon: 1) Amal, created in 1975 as a military structure "of the people who are poor and deemed to be disinherited." These strive to rehabilitate their community, culturally, economically, and politically, under the direction of Nabil Berri; 2) the second movement, Hezbollah, was formed in 1980 and is financed by Iran. It is known for its anti-American, anti-Israeli slogans, and for terrorist activities, including the taking of western—particularly American—hostages.

The Khomeini Revolution in Iran substantially increased the influence and underground activities of the Shiites in Lebanon. . . . It is estimated that more than 1 million Shiites have come from that country to settle in Lebanon, so that today they are an absolute majority, bent on ridding the land of all Christians. During the civil war, thousands of Christians were slaughtered or reported missing. Fully half a million were displaced, losing their homes, land, and other belongings. More than 300 churches, schools, and monasteries were destroyed, and several hundred thousand Christians fled in the wake of Shiite advances and brutalization. Hence, the Shiites have won the civil war.

Now it seems that the nominally Christian populations of North and South America and of Europe are indifferent to the traumatic situation of their Christian brothers and sisters in Lebanon. Here in the United States, there is need for Catholics to raise their prayers to God and their voices to the government in support of the Christians who remain in Lebanon. Justice and compassion dictate that American Catholics especially should rally around Pope John Paul II as he valiantly tries by every means at his command to press for the independence and liberation of Lebanon.

Perhaps it is still not too late for American bishops to call the unjust situation in Lebanon . . . to the attention of the Clinton administration and their senators and representatives in Congress. Even if they are rebuffed, they will have taken a stand in defense of liberty and freedom of conscience.

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The Editor replies: Who was responsible for Lebanon's suffering? *EIR's Special Report* of Oct. 13, 1995, on terrorism in South Asia, provides the basis for answering Father Basetti-Sani's question. The British, and their lackeys, such as Henry Kissinger, use religious and ethnic conflicts as their principal weapon to destroy nation-states. All of Lebanon's religious and ethnic groupings have been victims of such a British policy—not only the Christians. *EIR's* cover story of Nov. 16, 1990, titled "It Was Kissinger Who Destroyed the Nation of Lebanon," gave a detailed account by Prof. Bassam El Hashem, the unofficial spokesman for the exiled former prime minister, Gen. Michel Aoun.