

A Sad Day in the History of the PCUSA

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One of the first contacts between the United States and the Middle East took place through the work of Presbyterian missionaries. They arrived in Lebanon in the 1800s. At the time, the entire area was under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Thanks to these missionaries, Americans became acquainted with the conditions in the Levant and the plight of the Christians that lived there.

The work of the Presbyterian missionaries was not restricted to purely ecclesiastical concerns, as it involved the building of schools and hospitals, institutions that were desperately needed. After three centuries of Ottoman imperialism, the area had sunken into poverty and the number of people who were literate was very low.

One major accomplishment of those American Presbyterians was the founding of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut . It was the first modern institution of higher education in the area, and many of the future leaders of the Middle East received their training there. The SPC began in 1866, and for several decades, all instruction was done in Arabic. Its graduates played an important role in the revival of Arab culture; and due to the oppressive nature of Ottoman rule in Lebanon , some of SPC graduates went to Egypt and established Arabic-language magazines and daily newspapers. One such visionary was Jirji Zeidan, the founder of a publishing house in Cairo that launched the daily, ***Al-Ahram***. This newspaper is now over 150 years old, and may be read globally thanks to the Internet! It must be added that nowadays, ***Al-Ahram*** (the Arabic for the Pyramids) is considered the semi-official organ of the Egyptian regime.

In the aftermath of WWI, Lebanon came under French rule, and a new era began in this history of Lebanon . In 1920, the Syrian Protestant College 's name was changed by the Board of Regents of the State University of New York, and became the American University of Beirut (AUB). Its impact not only on Lebanon , but on the entire Middle East , cannot be exaggerated. For example, in 1946, the majority of the Arab delegates to the first meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization in New York were AUB graduates! Charles Malek who taught philosophy at the AUB for many years, served as Foreign Minister of Lebanon, and once became president of the UN General Assembly.

I could go on and on, and enumerate the many by-products of the (American) Presbyterian presence in Lebanon during the 19th Century. Two important accomplishments may be mentioned: in 1867, SPC started its School of Medicine . That “gave birth” to the first modern hospital in the Middle East . Another role the Presbyterian missionaries played was their ministry to the survivors of the massacres that took place in Mount Lebanon in 1860. For those readers who happen to possess a copy of

Bat Ye'or's "The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: from Jihad to Dhimmitude," please take a look at the painting in the front cover of the book. Then read the last two lines of the back cover to appreciate the significance of the painting: **"Cover illustration: Christian refugees after the Hasbeya and Rasheya Massacres (June 1860). Courtyard of American missionary Isaac Bird. Dayr al-Qamar. Painting by Gustave Dore."**

During WWI, the Turkish authorities persecuted the Christian population in Lebanon , and as a result of their restrictive policies vis-à-vis the area, a severe famine ensued, and many people died. Here again, Presbyterian missionaries stepped into the situation and initiated a much needed relief work. Many children, whose parents died during the war due to famine and disease, were looked after in orphanages run by American Presbyterian missionaries.

I have recounted this brief history of the Presbyterian involvement in the life of Lebanon in order to contrast it with the shocking behavior of some representatives of the PCUSA who visited Lebanon , and met with men from Hezbollah. Here are quotations from the report that appeared on the web site of FrontPageMagazine on December 23, 2005:

Hezbollah official Nabil Qawuq is undoubtedly a busy man. ... Nevertheless, Qawuq recently found the time in his busy schedule to meet with -- of all things -- a church group. On October 20th, a delegation from the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA) met with Qawuq and other Hezbollah leaders for an hour in southern Lebanon as part of their three-week regional tour. Led by the head of the Chicago Presbytery Reverend Bob Reynolds, the meeting was convened for supposedly "educational" purposes, with Reverend Reynolds suggesting "I think one way people can learn from one another is to learn the way people talk about themselves and describe their own reality.

Unfortunately, the conversations which took place between the two parties were anything but realistic. Qawuq opened the conference with a lengthy harangue against the "chaos" and "fear" created by President Bush and "American policy," whose true purpose he defined roughly as enabling Ariel Sharon to "turn Lebanon into a bridge to harm Syria ." Eager to endear himself to the perturbed Hezbollah commander, PCUSA delegation spokesman Robert Worley, a retired seminary professor, assured Qawuq that all delegation members had voted for John Kerry. Furthermore, Worley promised his host to help disavow Americans of the notion -- impressed upon them by the Western media -- that Hezbollah was a terrorist group, stating:

Americans hear in the Western media that Hizbullah is a terrorist organization and they do not hear any other opinion. They know nothing about the party's concern for the people of the south.

Worley then pointed out that Hezbollah and his church share similar goals, along with comparable opponents:

We have suffered much pressure on the part of Jewish organizations in the U.S. because [of our help in] divesting corporations working with Israel . We want Jerusalem to be a united city...

The visit gained little notice until last week, when it was reported on by both The New York Times and The Chicago Tribune. Even in the glare of hostile media attention, Worley and Reynolds remained unrepentant, with Worley declaring “Hezbollah got its reputation for resisting occupation... Hezbollah is part of rebuilding Lebanon .

What a contrast between the pioneer Presbyterian missionaries’ presence and work in Lebanon , and the modern PCUSA churchmen who came to “dialogue” with Hezbollah’s men! It is indeed outrageous and beyond belief.

First, their behavior was contrary to traditional Christian principles, and was more akin to the ideology of some extreme leftist groups. Certainly, it is not the function of a Western Christian church to send its people to the Middle East , and allow them to engage in such phoney “peace” overtures.

Second, the visit of these latter-day Presbyterians constituted a dishonor to the memory of our brave men who were killed by a Hezbollah terrorist back in October, 1983. For the sake of those who may have forgotten that tragic event, let me share with you a quotation taken from the following web site: <http://www.army.mil/terrorism/1989-1980/>

On October 23, around 6:20 AM, a yellow Mercedes delivery truck drove to Beirut International Airport , where the United States Marines had their local headquarters. It turned onto an access road leading to the compound and circled a parking lot. The driver then accelerated and crashed through a barbed-wire fence in the compound parking lot, passed between two sentry posts, crashed through a gate, and barreled into the lobby of the Marine headquarters building. The Marine sentries at the gate had loaded pistols but were not equipped with M-16's, and therefore were not able to stop the driver even though they shot at him. According to one Marine, the driver was smiling as he sped past him.

The suicide bomber detonated his explosives, which were equivalent to 12,000 pounds (about 5,400kg) of TNT. The force of the explosion collapsed the four-story cinder-block building into rubble, crushing to death many inside.

Rescue efforts continued for days. While the rescuers were at times hindered by sniper fire, some lucky survivors were pulled from the rubble and airlifted to Cyprus or West Germany .

The death toll was 241 American servicemen: 220 Marines, 18 Navy personnel, and 3 Army soldiers. 60 Americans were injured. In the attack on the French barracks, 58 paratroopers were killed, and 15 injured. In addition, the elderly Lebanese custodian of the Marines' building was killed in the first blast; the wife and four children of a Lebanese janitor at the French building were also killed.

This was the deadliest single-day death toll for the United States Marine Corps since the Battle of Iwo Jima (2,500) of World War II. The attack remains the deadliest post-World War II attack on Americans overseas.

The memory of those brave American servicemen, who died on that Sunday morning while most of them were still asleep, has been desecrated by utopian ideologues who wear clergymen's clothes. They manifested no loyalty to the Christian faith, and revealed an abysmal ignorance of Islam and its designs for the world. It's a pity that so many wonderful God-fearing Presbyterians in the USA tolerate the behavior of some of their ecclesiastical representatives. Should Protestant mainline denominations continue to put up with such official or unofficial representatives, they will soon move to the sidelines, and their decline will continue rapidly as the most up-to-date studies indicate!