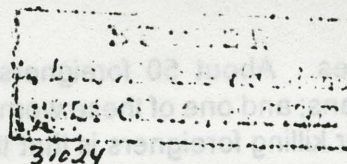


*Our home address  
is still:*

**BUTLER**  
2, Bvd. Abbane Kamdane



But we are <sup>now</sup> still writing from Kansas  
on July 28, 1994

Dear Friends:

Last Halloween we wrote you a letter that finally reached you in February/March. It included a self-made family portrait from June of 1992 when the boys carried out their incredible caper of setting themselves up in our living room while we were out and totally unaware that they had any intention at all of coming to visit us. If any of you did not get that letter for any reason, please let us know so that we can send you a photocopy.

In that letter we spoke of some of the horrors of human history in our time. What had triggered that type of reflection were the massacres in Burundi and the mounting death toll in Angola. In the latter country, which had been somewhat forgotten because of events in ex-Yugoslavia and Burundi, some reporters were saying their previous 12-18 months of fighting had caused as many deaths as the previous 15-20 years of civil war! Over the past years, a number of our parishioners in Oran have been students from these two countries.

Since then, of course, the scenes of great apocalyptic horror have shifted to Rwanda. While we have had no Protestant students from there in recent years, we do presently have two Rwanda Catholic students who are very active in our ecumenical African student group and who attend our services on occasion. The president of the ecumenical group is a Catholic from Burundi and two of our Protestants are originally from Burundi even though their families went into exile in Tanzania when they were young. Their exile was due to slightly less horrific inter-ethnic/political strife in earlier years. Those from Burundi know they have lost some members of their families though not of their immediate families. They assume many other distant relatives and friends have either been killed or forced into exile. The two from Rwanda were saying in early June that their families were temporarily spared because they were in regions not yet affected by the massacres. Since then the whole country has been devastatingly ravaged. We can only assume that their families have been traumatized in some way and that they have no way of getting any precise information about them.

These situations and many others make the politico-religious strife in Algeria seem rather tame. Nevertheless, a conservative estimate of those killed in the past two years comes to around 5,000. Most of these have been members either of some branch of the security forces or of extreme fundamentalist groups. The latter are trying to overthrow the government to establish a new order based on the old traditional Muslim law, and find help and encouragement from both Iran and the Sudan as well as at least moral support from other radical Muslim fundamentalists in various other countries. They see the present authorities and can easily portray them to the masses as the natural successors to the old one-party regime whose corruption destroyed the economy and can easily show that they have done almost nothing to end corruption and bring the guilty to justice. The security forces, of course, are trying to stamp out these violent activists. A certain number of other people get killed due to cases of mistaken identity or simply to being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mistakenly counted in the politico-religious toll are also an unknown number of victims of banditry (increasing with the crumbling of the economy) and of settling old scores but where the aggressors make it look like terrorism.

In addition, there are other victims specifically targeted by the extreme fundamentalists. These are primarily intellectuals or leaders of one kind or another: journalists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges and religious leaders who dare to oppose them. Last fall they also warned that all foreigners should leave or expect to become targets of their terrorist

*Estimates reached 50,000 by the  
end of 1995 and 60,000 in Jan. 1997*



activities. About 50 foreigners have been killed, at least two of whom were wives of Algerians; and one of these women had even converted to Islam. The rationale the terrorists give for killing foreigners is that their presence implies at least an acceptance of the present regime when it is not an active form of economic cooperation and hence a support for the government.

Some extremists have also vowed that they will purify Algerian soil of all Jews, Christians and other "wrong believers." This last category includes atheists and agnostics in the supposedly all-Muslim Algerian population and, in the final analysis, any Muslims who openly disagree with their fundamentalist interpretation of the Islamic tradition. Need we say that there are also divisions among the extremists both in terms of fundamentalist interpretations and in terms of tactics. There have been some inter-extremist killings.

Most embassies in Algiers have asked their citizens in Algeria to leave the country unless they have some more or less effective protection. Such protection is especially provided for diplomatic people and those working in the petro-chemical industries. The French have closed their cultural centers and their schools except for one small school in the capital. There are still thousands of French citizens all over the country, mostly people born in Algeria or living there for so long that they really have no other home and no significant source of income except in unconvertible Algerian currency. Many others are wives and mothers of Algerians. The number of black African students has been diminishing due to the Arabization of most university instruction. Now there will be a more rapid decrease as some are graduating and very few ones will want to come even if scholarships are offered.

NEW

As of mid-June, no Catholic priests, nuns or lay brothers had left because of this violence although two Catholic workers were killed recently in Algiers. All of us in Oran are in a much less violent context than people in Algiers, Constantine and many other cities; but the American embassy, our family and friends would like to see us leave. Our bishop in Zurich and other United Methodist leaders in both New York and Switzerland keep asking us how we in the country read the situation and feel about it. They asked us to leave for two months this summer and to attend a special meeting in Switzerland in August before returning to Oran. That surely did suit us fine for reasons that will appear obvious later in this letter.

As for our long-range prospects, we are due to retire in just one year. This will be one of the last of these letters we write. Between now and then, a number of scenarios are possible. One is a precipitous departure in the midst of a tremendous upsurge in violence. Another would be an expulsion order should the extremists seize power. The latter event would probably be a call to martyrdom for the few national Christians. Assuming we can complete our term, then the question of succession becomes a problem. Our successors were to be a family with three small children. Barring a sudden and dramatic improvement in the situation, it would be unreasonable to have them come. Other options are being studied for them. Meanwhile, the French Protestant Federation is searching for a pastor who could come without children and who would have at least a basic working knowledge of English. He (and his wife if accompanied by a spouse) would need to keep the English-language library functioning part-time as well as providing a bilingual pastoral ministry to very small numbers of people who need that ministry all the more as their numbers decrease. Just how that succession will work and just how soon we might be leaving next summer are still unknown.

Please keep us, the whole Christian presence in Algeria (Catholic as well as Protestant) and the whole country in your prayers. What happens in the next year or two could very well affect the total life of the nation for many generations to come. In any case, for those of us

*By the end of 1996, the Catholics counted 19 martyrs among priests, nuns & lay brothers, including our dear friend and brother in Christ, the bishop of Oran.*



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living in this situation, it puts a whole new perspective on "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" and "Pray without ceasing." It also reminds us that we cannot let these words echo through our hearts and minds only in relation to ourselves but also in relation to all those around us and finally to the whole human family, so many of whom live and die in situations far more dramatic than our own. It also adds a new dimension to appreciating life as a daily gift to be enjoyed in loving, caring and sharing.

As for this summer, we would normally have spent six weeks in combined vacation and extended pastoral ministry, visiting some 30 families in Europe. The plan was changed and we returned to the states because our third son, a veterinarian, was getting married July 16th, to a former classmate from the KSU vet school. We naturally stayed to visit the whole family, including a two-week stay in Harlingen, Texas with <sup>CAROL'S</sup> parents. Our two months away from Oran has given us time for all that plus a few of the most crucial visits in Europe and a week for the meeting in Switzerland.

Other highlights of the year: <sup>David's</sup> last trip to the Swiss Annual Conference as pastoral delegate from North Africa and <sup>Carol's</sup> sharing in the Cincinnati Assembly of United Methodist Women as a special guest from abroad. <sup>She</sup> is also delighted with the great increase in the number of books in the library and with the growing friendship and expressions of gratitude that come from some of the users. That provides encouragement. Of course, the intensity and depth of personal relationships within our small Christian community (again including Catholics as well as Protestants) and the assurance of your Christian love and prayers remain a primary source of inner strength, and for that we thank one and all. Such loving solidarity is truly a God-given antidote <sup>FOR THE SOLITUDE</sup> (physical or psychological) which one might otherwise experience, and is a well-spring of meaning and purpose in life...and of hope.

Fraternally yours,

The Butlers