

April 16, 1965

**Montgomery Church Turns  
Down Open Door Policy**

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--The First Baptist Church here on Palm Sunday turned away a group of people from its worship services who the pastor said were among racial demonstrators picketing the church for over a week.

"They were told that the church did not seat demonstrators," V. L. Mason, chairman of the deacons of the church, said. "The church voted Friday at a congregational meeting that we could not admit demonstrators," he continued.

"The group left peaceably after a brief discussion with the deacons," Mason said concerning their effort to participate in the service.

Pastor J. R. White pointed out the group seeking entrance to the morning worship service included both whites and Negroes from among the group he called "paid agitators" in a lengthy statement from the pulpit.

He made his statement before he preached his sermon from which the group had been turned away. White also said the demonstrators did not come from Montgomery.

In the same statement, White pleaded for an end to racial prejudice and said many Negro churches had become "a platform for social and political action."

He explained to Baptist Press news service that before 1954 Negroes had worshipped in the church. That was the year of the historic U. S. Supreme Court decision on public school integration. After 1954, no Negroes have sought to worship, according to White, until the Palm Sunday effort.

According to the Montgomery daily newspaper, the Advertiser, Negroes were denied access on Palm Sunday to worship at three other churches--St. James Methodist Church, Frazier Memorial Methodist Church and St. Mark's Methodist Church. They were permitted to enter St. John's Episcopal Church, First Methodist Church, Dexter Avenue Methodist Church and Memorial Presbyterian Church.

At the unusual, over two-hour long Friday night business meeting of the 3100-member church, the deacons presented a motion which said:

"It is the recommendation of the deacons that the First Baptist Church of Montgomery reaffirm its open door policy and admit to its services anyone who wishes to attend." The recommendation was rejected but the vote not announced. White said he was for the recommendation personally.

The auditorium was filled for the discussion of the recommendation. White said he asked only members to attend the special meeting. The racial open door policy of the church apparently was the only business.

The church service is broadcast over radio, so White's statement about the demonstration was heard throughout the Montgomery area. In it, he advised members not to fear the pickets nor to disturb them. He said both uniformed and plainclothes police were in the vicinity, and no incident has occurred.

White also said he hoped he would be invited to speak in Negro churches again. Invitations no longer came after 1954, until the week after Palm Sunday, when he accepted an invitation. To a Baptist Press reporter's question, "Do you think your church would invite a Negro preacher on a reciprocal basis?", White expressed both hope and uncertainty.

The following is excerpts of White's statement on Palm Sunday to his congregation, delivered two days after the special Friday night business meeting, and on the day the deacons turned the group away from entering the church.

"I must say to you that the gospel of Christ is for all men without distinction. God loves all men, black or white, red or yellow, with the same kind of love. God is no respecter of persons. . . .

"Sorrow of sorrows, the church has become the arena for political debate. Dr. Martin Luther King and his associates have used the Negro church as a platform for social and political action. . . .

"The marchers and demonstrators in an attempt to change the social structure are waging a psychological warfare against the church. . . .

"The church must find an answer to this problem or there is no hope for our world in our time. The spiritual springs will dry up and our society will revert to the level of the jungle. . . .

"If I sound like a prophet of doom or weeping Jeremiah, I am. Sleep has fled from me and my heart is as heavy as lead. All night long, I have cried to the Lord, until the coming of the dawn on some word to speak to you to whom it is my responsibility to preach the gospel. . . .

"There have been sharp differences of opinion but this must not be a test of fellowship in th church. . . .

"The church must cease to be a forum for political discussion. . . .

"We must remove from our hearts every vestige of racial prejudice and every feeling of superiority and all of us have some of both. I must confess to you that this has been a problem for me. . . .

"We must do everything that we can in positive action to seek racial harmony and good will.

"I personally will seek opportunities to preach to the Negro people of Montgomery or any place else in the world, at churches, in their schools, or any place they will listen to me. . . ."

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After Visit, Wives Say  
Caudill, Fite Well

4-16-65

ATLANTA (BP)--The wives of two arrested Southern Baptist missionaries, Herbert Caudill and David Fite, following a visit April 13, reported the men were well.

The three Fite sons, ages 8, 6 and one month, accompanied the women to the Havana prison.

Mrs. Caudill and Mrs. Fite said the missionaries reported they were "well treated, the food normal, the bedding comfortable, and they were looking to the future with serenity."

The U. S. State Department relayed the information to the language missions department of the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board here.

Emil Stadelhofer, Swiss ambassador in Cuba who handles U. S. affairs, had informed the State Department of these facts.

Stadelhofer said he had not yet received authorization to see the missionaries, as he was having difficulty contacting those in authority who could give him permission. He expected to see the men later.

The missionaries, together with 51 others, were arrested April 8 and charged with subversive activities against the Cuban government.

Glendon McCullough, Atlanta, personnel secretary of the Home Mission Board, received a letter from Herbert Caudill written March 29 in which he reported the "possibility that we may be able to finish our missionary career with joy."

The letter, which arrived April 12, dealt with personnel matters, but contained this paragraph:

"We have been quite busy since our return to Cuba. It seems now that we have a good possibility that we may be able to finish our missionary career with joy. Our health evidently is quite good. The brethren everywhere say that they have been praying for us. There is a very fine spirit in our churches."

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Harold Seever Loses  
Sight In Both Eyes

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Harold W. Seever, pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church here and chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, has suffered an almost total loss of sight in both eyes.

The loss of sight resulted from slight hemorrhages which began in November 1963 and climaxed April 2 of this year.

At the present time, Seever has minimum vision so as to tell light and darkness. Medical advisors whom he has consulted conclude nothing further can be done about the loss of vision.

He reported his health "is otherwise excellent." When he informed the congregation of his sight loss, Seever quoted the statement of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army when Booth was informed he had lost his sight:

"I have served God all of life with my sight. I will now serve God the rest of my life without my sight." Seever said he intends to make the necessary adjustments to continue his activities.

The church, after consultation with the deacons and other of its leaders, adopted a resolution as follows:

"We express our deepest and sincere regret in the learning of our dear pastor's loss of sight. We love him and we together express our love to the Lord. May He guide our plans and activities in this regard and in the future of our church. May His kingdom come, His will be done. We acknowledge the great leadership and power from the Lord in our pastor, Dr. Harold W. Seever. We feel the Lord will continue to bless him and our church. We are hopeful and prayerful of even greater inspiration and spiritual power being bestowed upon our pastor due to his having time for more concentration of thoughts and study of God's word. We love him, his dear wife and family, and we pray the Lord's blessings on them and our church as we continue to serve together."

Seever, 53, has been pastor at Dauphin Way since July 15, 1949. He was president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 1956-57. He formerly served churches in Williams-town, Ky.; Richmond, Va., and Florence, S. C.

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Later material on Cuban situation...

A C A L L T O P R A Y E R

4-14-65

We call Southern Baptists on Sunday, April 25, to a day of prayer for our missionaries, pastors, and laymen in prison in Cuba and for their loved ones in these days of anxiety.

On April 8 Cuban authorities arrested 53 Baptists, including missionaries Herbert Caudill and David Fite and 40 pastors of Baptist churches. They were imprisoned and charged with subversive activity. Seven other pastors had been arrested in the weeks previous to April 8.

The arrests climax a series of restrictions against Christians in Cuba. It began with a closing of schools, a limitation of activities outside the churches, and strict control of membership and denominational meetings.

Southern Baptists have complete trust in the integrity and commitment of their missionaries and are confident the missionaries have limited their activities to the preaching of the gospel and the strengthening of the Christian witness in Cuba.

Since the beginning of Christianity, when the church at Jerusalem prayed for an imprisoned Peter, Christians have expressed their confidence in the power of prayer. Therefore, we ask Southern Baptists and other Christians in their churches on Sunday, April 25, to pray for the release of our Baptist brethren in prison, for comfort to Mrs. Caudill, Mrs. Fite, and other relatives of the prisoners, for the strengthening of our Christian brothers and sisters throughout Cuba in this time of crisis and for the softening of the hearts of those in power in Cuba.

Wayne Dehoney, president, Southern Baptist Convention; Arthur B. Rutledge, executive secretary-treasurer, Home Mission Board, SBC.

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Explaining the call to prayer, Rutledge said it was set for April 25 to allow time to inform all churches.

"We are grateful for the thousands who are now praying and will continue to pray for these in prison and others in Cuba, but we know united prayer accomplishes miracles," he said.

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