

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director**REGIONAL OFFICES**ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Editor, 161 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30303, Telephone (404) 523-2593
DALLAS Editor, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) RI 1-1996
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Editor, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226**BUREAU**BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD Lynn M. Davis Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203,
Telephone (615) 254-1631

April 8, 1968

King Death Spurs Memphis
Pastors To Action, Sermons

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At least two Southern Baptist ministers joined in a march on the office of Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb on Friday, the day after King's assassination.

Brooks Ramsey, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Memphis, said that he and Bob Troutman, pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church here, were the only Southern Baptist ministers who took part in that march as far as he knew.

Troutman later said he was disturbed by the silence of the white Baptist leadership following King's assassination. "I have waited to hear from men I have respected and loved, but I have not heard a voice," Troutman said.

He added that one pastor had called him and said a group of his church members had come to him and asked him not to mention one thing about the racial situation in the city, or else to resign. "How tragic," Troutman said. "How tragic."

Not all of the Southern Baptist pulpits in Memphis, however, were silent. Several prominent Baptist ministers here had strong words concerning the King assassination.

"The death of Dr. Martin Luther King has brought shame and consternation to all of us," said Ramsey Pollard, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Memphis has long been noted as a city of good abode for men of all races," Pollard said. "In recent days that picture has been rudely shattered."

Pollard strongly condemned racism in his Sunday morning sermon, but added that both white and Negro citizens must share the blame. "Racism is a two-way street," he said. "This ugly reality is not the sole possession of either race. It is a common curse.

"Let us remember that the man who fired that fatal shot does not represent the white race any more than the colored man in Minneapolis, Minn., who killed his neighbor represents the Negro race," Pollard said.

He added that the atmosphere of rebellion and the breakdown in respect for law and order cannot be tolerated regardless of the color of the skin of those guilty of such lawlessness.

"The entire world regrets the brutal murder of Dr. King," Pollard added. "It is a dark stain upon our nation, upon Tennessee, and upon Memphis. It is a serious reflection upon our Christian civilization, that this could happen in Memphis."

Another Baptist leader pointed out that one of four persons in Memphis is a Southern Baptist, and Baptist responsibility is heavy in the city for what has happened.

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Troutman, in a Sunday sermon, agreed, saying: "We might blame the gunman, we might blame the striking sanitation workers, we might blame the mayor--but the truth is the blame is not there alone, but on a society that had to create a Martin Luther King in the first place to speak against injustice."

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"Let us ask ourselves this question: 'To what extent have I been cruel, hypocritical, unjust, and inhumane in my own personal relations with those of other races?' If we would change the character of society, then we must first change our own hearts," he said.

Following the march on the mayor's office the day after the assassination, the two Southern Baptist ministers who participated were interviewed by Larry Jerden and Bob O'Brien of the SBC Brotherhood Commission.

Asked why he participated in the march, Troutman replied: "I had just had it. I think something has got to be done. We need to decide as Southern Baptist ministers if we are going to take a stand. At least those who are willing to put their ministry on the line should say that they are willing to take a stand.

"I'm not trying to be a martyr or a crusader, this is just the hour we live in and I just wanted to do something about it. I can't hide any longer," Troutman said.

Ramsey said he felt the march "expresses the deep feeling of the ministers of this city of all denominations and of all races concerning the tremendous crisis in which we are engaged. I didn't come with all the answers, I came to express my deep concern.

He said one of the contributing factors to his participation in the march was that the issue could not be resolved unless there was a confrontation with it.

The 100 ministers participating in the march prepared a statement to present to Mayor Loeb, stating that the crisis was caused by a deterioration of human relations, by a lack of real awareness of "the desperate circumstances in which many of our fellow citizens exist," and by the lack of climate and public will to put into action the Golden Rule.

The statement also urged the mayor and City Council to find a solution to the sanitation workers' strike, including union recognition and dues check-off (automatic deduction of union dues from pay checks).

Both Ramsey and Troutman said they supported the statement, and felt that although dues check-off, the biggest issue of the strike, was not originally a moral issue, it had become one.

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Caudill, Fite Begin
4th Year As Prisoners

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ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries Herbert Caudill and David Fite quietly entered their fourth year as prisoners of the Cuban government on April 8.

Arthur B. Rutledge of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here asked that Christians in the United States continue to pray for the two missionaries, who were arrested on April 8, 1965, along with 40 Cuban Baptist pastors, and eventually convicted on illegal currency exchange charges.

At last report, Caudill, 64, remained under house arrest. He was released to the custody of his Havana home a year ago to seek medical attention for a detached retina.

An eye surgeon from the U. S. was permitted to enter the country and perform an operation on Caudill. Recovery apparently has gone well.

Fite, 35, Caudill's son-in-law, apparently is still in prison but working outdoors and remaining in good health.

Caudill, who had been a missionary in Cuba for 35 years, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Fite, who had been teaching at the Baptist Theological Institute in Havana, was sentenced to six years.

Mrs. Caudill and David's wife Margaret and their three children remain in Cuba. They are allowed regularly scheduled visits to their husbands.

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Baptist Press

President Leads Capital
In Mourning King's Death

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The President of the United States was among the 4,000 mourners crowded into the ornate Washington Cathedral here to honor slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Less than a week before his assassination in Memphis, the noted Baptist civil rights worker and winner of the Nobel peace prize had preached in the Washington Cathedral, deploring racism, poverty and violence.

With President Johnson at the noonday memorial service were Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the capital's Negro Mayor Walter E. Washington, leaders of Congress, and two members of the Supreme Court. Several civil rights leaders who had been in conference at the White House earlier in the day sat on the same pew with the President.

The rest of the congregation was largely a middle-class group of black and white persons, young and old---but especially young white teenagers and college-age youth.

The simple service consisted of music, scripture and prayers. A Baptist minister, Walter E. Fauntroy, pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church, led the prayer. Fauntroy, a close friend of King's, is vice chairman of the City Council in Washington.

At the conclusion of the service, mourners filed out of the Cathedral singing softly the song that has become the theme of the civil rights movement, "We shall overcome...black and white together...we shall overcome."

After attending the memorial service, President Johnson went on nationwide television, saying: "The heart of America is heavy; the spirit of America weeps; for tragedy denies the very meaning of our land...the life of a man who symbolized the freedom and faith of America has been taken."

The president said he believed deeply that "the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has not died with him.

"Men who are white, men who are black, must and will now join together as never in the past to let all the forces of divisiveness know that America shall not be ruled by the bullet, but only by the ballot of free and just men," he said.

He called on leaders of Congress, political leaders in the states, and leadership in churches, homes and schools to "move with urgency, with resolve and with new energy...to complete the work that has not yet been done...until we do overcome."

When Martin Luther King preached at the Washington Cathedral on Sunday morning before his death on Thursday evening, he was introduced to the congregation by Dean Francis B. Sayre as a man who "has been the conscience of our people."

King, who was trying to build support for his Poor People's campaign scheduled for the last of April in Washington, preached on the triple challenge to America of racism, poverty and violence.

The United States is spending \$50,000 to kill one Vietcong soldier in Vietnam while it is spending only \$53 for every poor person in this country, he told the congregation.

The demonstrations planned for the nation's capital are necessary, King said, "to dramatize the conditions of the poor."

"The nation doesn't move until it is confronted massively and dramatically," the Baptist apostle of non-violence said.

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Baptists In Nation's
Capital Aid Refugees

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Store windows were smashed by looters within a block, but no damage was done to the Baptist Building or to churches in the city.

Across the city where the offices of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs are located two blocks from the U. S. Capitol, smoke from the inner city engulfed Capitol Hill.

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On the Friday afternoon following the assassination as the city began to burn and as widespread looting ran rampant, most government offices as well as those of the Baptist Building and the Baptist Joint Committee closed two hours early. Traffic jammed the streets almost to a standstill.

The curfew imposed on the District of Columbia closed churches on Sunday night and caused a meeting of the Executive Board of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention to be postponed a week.

During the crisis the police and public officials appealed to people to get off the streets and stay away from the inner city. In spite of the warnings, however, the streets were jammed with sightseers, as well as by looters.

The churches of the city responded to the crisis immediately. Already plans were in the making by the churches to help care for the thousands expected later in April in Martin Luther King's "Poor People's Campaign."

Churches were opened for refugees from their burning homes and as distribution centers for food, clothing and medical supplies.

The National Baptist Memorial Church and the Calvary Baptist Church were in the heart of the riot-torn areas. National Church in cooperation with a Methodist, Presbyterian and Unitarian Church already were engaged in a project to minister to spiritual and physical needs in the inner city.

This project focused its activity at the Calvary Methodist Church, which served as a distribution center. Members of the National Baptist manned the operation, along with help from others.

The Calvary Baptist Church has a regular day center in operation for its immediate community. This church distributed food and clothing to families in connection with its center.

Although there was no separate organized Baptist effort to give relief to the distressed, most Baptist congregations and many individual members joined in community and ecumenical projects by providing food, clothing, money and manpower.

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SBC Business Officers
Elect Pegues, Praise King

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The business officers, representing Southern Baptists and state convention agencies and institutions, also elected three vice chairmen and passed a resolution on the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

Elected vice chairmen were: Frank C. Richardson, comptroller of Florida Baptist Convention, Jacksonville, Fla.; James Gregg, superintendent of Tennessee Baptist Children's Home, Inc., Nashville; and Carroll O. Weaver, administrator of North Carolina Baptist Homes, Inc., Winston-Salem. Mrs. Rose Roberts, secretary at the Annuity Board, continues serving as secretary-treasurer.

The resolution on King read:

"Be it resolved that the sixth annual Conference of Southern Baptist Business Officers meeting in Dallas, Texas, April 4-5, express our shock and dismay at the tragic and untimely death of Dr. Martin Luther King. We abhor this act of violence and pray for peace and good will and understanding, and that somehow out of this unnecessary and tragic loss those principles of freedom and justice which Dr. King espoused may prevail.

"Be it further resolved that we express to Mrs. King and their children our sincere sympathy in their personal grief and loss, and the hope that they may be comforted in the memory of their loved one and in the hope that we all together have in Jesus Christ."

The conference voted to return to Dallas in 1969, when the Annuity Board will again be host.

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DARGAN-CARVER LIBRARY
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HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC

DAVIS C. WOOLLEY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203