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Cuba Frees Imprisoned SBC Missionary, David Fite

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WAYNESBORO, Ga. (BP)--Southern Baptist Missionary James David Fite received an unconditional pardon from the Cuban government after 42 months imprisonment in the LA Cabana Prison near Havana.

His father, Pastor Clifton E. Fite of the Rosemont Heights Baptist Church here, announced David's release after receiving a telephone call during the night from his son in Havana.

He learned David was released from the prison Dec. 16 and allowed to go to his home in Havana.

"David said the Cuban government handed him an unconditional pardon," the father said. "It was an act of mercy. It was treated as a special case. He is now free and he and his family can come home as soon as they can get American passports."

No mention was made of the fate of Herbert Caudill, arrested in 1965 with David. Caudill, 65, was released from prison more than a year ago because of failing eyesight and has been under house arrest in Havana ever since.

David received a six-year sentence and Caudill a ten-year sentence when both were convicted of illegal currency exchange by a Cuban court. They were also charged with counter-revolutionary activities and ideological diversionism when arrested.

At the time of their arrests, Fite was a teacher and pastor in Havana and Caudill was superintendent of the Baptist work in Cuba under the sponsorship of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

On hearing of David Fite's release, Home Mission Board Executive Secretary Arthur Rutledge of Atlanta said, "We rejoice in this news and we feel it is an answer to the prayers of many people throughout the world.

"We are grateful for the assistance provided us by many people in various ways during these many months. Information we have received leads us to be very proud of our missionaries for their continued devotion and heroism during these years of stress and difficulty. We hope the Herbert Caudills and the David Fites will soon be able to return to the United States."

Mrs. Caudill, Mrs. Fite and two of the Fite's sons are also in Havana. Their oldest son was allowed to leave Cuba a few weeks ago and is with David's twin brother, Donald, a doctor in Decatur, Ga. Mrs. Fite (Margaret) is a daughter of the Herbert Caudills.

David was 36 years old on Dec. 23, the day after his release was announced by his father here.

Forty Cuban pastors and 13 laymen, including four women, were also arrested at the time the missionaries were imprisoned. A number of these have been released or paroled since that time, but officials in the United States have no definite word concerning how many remain in prison.

-30-

Hardin-Simmons Band Invited To Inaugural

(12-17-68)

ABILENE, Tex. (BP)--Hardin-Simmons University's internationally-famous Cowboy Band will represent the state of Texas at the inauguration of Richard M. Nixon in Washington Jan. 20.

State Republican Chairman Peter O'Donnell relayed the president-elect's invitation to Elwin L. Skiles, president of the Baptist school.

This will be the third inaugural performance for the Cowboy Band. The Cowboys participated in the Hoover (1929) and Eisenhower (1953) ceremonies previously.

Even though their taste in presidential inaugurations is decidedly Republican, the Cowboy musicians did perform at one major Democratic party function, the Houston-based 1928 national Convention.

Marion B. McClure has wielded the Cowboy baton since 1934.

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-30-

Racial Crisis Voted Top
Baptist Story of 1968

NASHVILLE (BP)--The racial crisis in the nation and Southern Baptist response to it was voted the top news story of the year by the editors of 30 Baptist state papers throughout the nation.

The ten most significant stories of the year concerning Southern Baptists were selected by the Baptist editors in balloting conducted by the Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention with offices here.

Adoption of the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation" by the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston and implementation of the statement by Baptist agencies, plus Baptist reaction to rioting and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., all were ingredients of the top Southern Baptist story of the year.

Other top ten Baptist news developments of 1968, as selected by the editors, were:

2. A debate within the Southern Baptist Convention over the relation between evangelism and social action;
3. The historic actions of the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, not only on the Crisis in the Nation, but on other matters.
4. The perplexing question of federal aid to Baptist higher education, and actions by several Baptist schools and state conventions to accept or reject federal aid.
5. Actions by several conventions to release Baptist schools to become private institutions, and other related developments.
6. The Crusade of the Americas, an evangelistic campaign involving Baptists in North, Central and South America, and related developments during 1968.
7. A controversy over alien immersion and/or open communion involving Baptists in several states and associations.
8. A financial crisis that faced Baptist loan organizations in Kansas and Texas;
9. Continued Baptist concern with the ecumenical movement;
10. An emphasis on ministry to the inner city and urban areas by the SBC Home Mission Board, and other SBC agencies.

The editors picked the ten top stories from a field of 23 items listed on a ballot prepared by the Baptist Press staff in Nashville, after compiling suggestions from editors attending the Southern Baptist Planning and Promotion Conference in Nashville.

In the balloting, stories were ranked one through 10, with 10 points awarded to first place picks, nine points to second place selections, and a decreasing scale of points for each of the other ranks.

The top story of the year, Baptist response to the racial crisis, earned a total of 220 points, including 16 first place votes.

In addition to adoption of the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation" by the Southern Baptist Convention and eight state Baptist Conventions, other elements in this story included such news reports throughout the year as summarized on the ballot:

"Home Mission Board takes lead in implementing (Crisis in Nation) statement; SBC agency workers meet twice to follow up statement; Baptist leaders react with shock, grief, to Martin Luther King assassination; Memphis pastors march, preach on King death; Memphis church fires deacons instead of pastor over racial dispute; Home Mission Board pledges work in ghettos, elects Negro to professional staff; Christian Life Commission seminar speeches urge churches to root out racism; survey shows 500 Baptist churches have Negro members, 3,800 have policies to accept Negroes."

The second-ranked story, a debate in the SBC over the relationship between evangelism and social action, polled a total of 156 points, 64 less than the number one story. The debate story included speeches by layman Maxey Jarman of Nashville urging Baptists to avoid social and political issues and to stick to evangelism, by SBC Evangelism leader C. E. Autrey charging Baptist papers with trying to lead the denomination towards socialism; and by SBC President W. A. Criswell urging unity within the denomination.

Ranked third, the historic session of the SBC in Houston polled 127 points and included such elements as the overwhelming vote to keep the present name of the convention in a "straw ballot;" the reaction to the assassination of Robert Kennedy; the election of W. A. Crieswell of Dallas as president, who promptly said he had changed on the race issue; the adoption of the "Crisis in the Nation" statement; and a plea from Seminary Professor Clark Pinnock for the SBC to forsake liberalism.

The fourth and fifth ranked stories were as closely related as the votes that separated them. Fourth, with 125 points, was the federal aid question for Baptist schools; and fifth, with 122 points, was action by several state conventions to release Baptist schools.

Federal aid developments during the year included a vote by the Atlanta Baptist Association to allow federal aid for its college; action by the University of Richmond to receive federal aid; adoption of a federal aid policy statement by Missouri Baptists, and action by the Georgia convention forbidding tax funds for schools, after Mercer trustees proposed taking all federal aid available.

Also during the year, Maryland Baptists voted to sell property of a Baptist school it closed in 1968, and Texas Baptists voted to sever ties with Baylor University College of Medicine to allow it to become a private school. Also in Texas, a controversial staff report recommended selling two Baptist schools and releasing another; but no final action was taken.

It related developments, Virginia Baptists voted to delay a phase-out of support for five schools, and Florida Baptists dismissed trustees for a proposed school near West Palm Beach to allow it to become an institution of the local association.

The Crusade of the Americas evangelist campaign, ranking sixth with 114 votes, included such 1968 developments as a hemisphere-wide laymen's meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that stressed lay involvement; approval of a world-wide crusade by the coordinating committee of the crusade; a project to establish 500 new churches, which was hampered by lack of funds; and a plan to match 41,000 prayer partners throughout the continent.

A controversy over baptism and the Lord's Supper in several states ranked seventh, with 108 votes. During the year, two churches in Charlotte, N. C., were ousted from a local association because of baptism practices; the Arkansas convention withdrew fellowship from four churches over alien immersion and open communion; a Baptist association in Houston rejected the application of a church over doctrine issues; and the New Mexico convention voted to leave the doctrinal questions up to local associations.

Ranked eighth, with 96 votes, was a financial crisis facing Baptist loan organizations in Kansas, and a related situation in Texas. During the year, the SBC Home Mission Board came to the aid of the Kansas loan association to prevent its bankruptcy. An investigation was conducted in Texas over a "mistake in judgment" concerning speculative land deals in California, but the loan group was cleared of any dishonesty.

Baptist concern with the ecumenical movement was ranked ninth with 61 points. Developments in 1968 included the establishment of an Ecumenical Institute at Wake Forest University; a speech urging Baptist unity by the president of the American Baptist Convention at the Nashville church where the president of the SBC was pastor; several speeches by Catholics at Baptist meetings and Baptists at Catholic meetings; and an invitation, later refused, for Texas Baptists to join a merged Texas Council of Churches and Catholic Conference.

Ranked tenth, with 34 points, was increased Baptist emphasis on ministry in urban areas with seminars urging a strategy for the inner city which the SBC Home Mission Board later devised.

Other stories on the ballot which polled more than 10 points included (in order): Vietnam war continues to concern Baptists (28 votes); Supreme Court faces major church-state cases (26 votes); new Social security law requiring clergy exemption goes into effect (23); total study of BSU program started (21); Baptist youth show increased concern and involvement (15); foreign missions advance continues (11); Georgetown College drops ban against dancing and Kentucky convention slaps trustees (11); and Congress approves bills aimed at helping people (10).

One significant Baptist story broke too late in the year to be included on the ballots: the release by Cuban officials of imprisoned SBC missionary David Fite after six years in jail on illegal currency exchange charges.

Southern Seminary Participates
In New "Metroversity" Plan

LOUISVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has joined forces with seven other higher education institutions in the Louisville area to form what is to be called the Kentuckiana Metroversity.

The Metroversity is a cooperative effort by the eight member schools to broaden the variety and lower the cost of educational programs offered to students by co-ordinating each school's courses and facilities with all the others. It calls for no surrender of autonomy by the seminary or any school involved.

Other institutions participating in the Metroversity plan are: Bellarmine College, Catherine Spalding College, Indiana University Southeast, Kentucky Southern College, Jefferson Community College (a branch of the University of Kentucky), Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and the University of Louisville. Co-ordination of the program will be furnished by the Urban Studies Center at the University of Louisville.

Principal benefits to the Baptist seminary will be joint library facilities and collections greatly expanded course offerings in areas of academic interest to seminarians but currently too costly for the seminary to provide alone, and cooperative degree programs with other institutions.

Southern Seminary already has pioneered the joint degree approach. For several years, students in the seminary have been able to earn dual degrees in social work through an agreement with the Kent School of Social Work at the University of Louisville.

Last year, a new program was begun in the field of church history to enable graduate students to earn a combination master of theology-master of arts degree simultaneously. The Metroversity will encourage this kind of development.

Each school will concentrate upon its particular strengths, pooling them with the specialties of the other schools, and all students in the eight institutions will have full access to all courses offered.

Although details of the plan are still in early stages, several definite steps have already been taken, including: use of computers to list courses offered at participating institutions; a joint orchestra involving all institutions; organization of a library council to develop a joint catalogue of books; merging of extra-curricular calendars; and proposals for joint research projects.

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Seminary Extension Head,
Ralph Herring, Retires

(12-27-68)

NASHVILLE (BP)--The executive director of the Southern Baptist Seminary Extension Department, Ralph A. Herring, has retired from his position, moving back to his native North Carolina.

Herring, 67, has been director of the seminary extension program for the six Southern Baptist seminaries for the past seven years.

For 25 years before coming to Nashville, he was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Winston-Salem, N. C.

He and Mrs. Herring will live in Charlotte, N. C., following their retirement, effective Dec. 31. Their address is 2021 Coniston Place, Charlotte, N. C., 28207.

The entire December issue of "Seminary Extension News," the monthly publication of the Seminary Extension Department, paid tribute to Herring for his service, citing his accomplishments and attributes.

More than 5,000 students per year study through both correspondence and extension courses offered through the Seminary Extension Department.

Herring has led in revising the program's curriculum materials, in moving the offices from Jackson, Miss., to Nashville in 1963, and in improving communication and cooperation with other SBC agencies.

In a farewell column, Herring wrote that much of the credit for progress in the work of the department should go to his staff, the curriculum consultant, four associate directors, and four office secretaries.

"But when our good-bye's are made with an awareness of God's continuing presence, memories have a way of becoming radiant with hope," he said. "The worth of Seminary Extension seems at times little recognized in the overall strategy of our denomination. But God is in it...."

Herring is a graduate of Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N. C.; and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, where he earned the doctor of theology degree.

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