

November 6, 1973

Sees Racial Progress

White Baptist Recalls Dangers
Of Black Civil Rights Stance

By Tim Nicholas

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--William P. Davis stopped his car short of the burning timbers strewn across a narrow South Mississippi dirt road.

The midsummer night and blackness beyond the flames and automobile lights only served to increase any uneasiness Davis felt as 11 men surrounded his vehicle--their faces covered.

The men hauled Davis from the car and threw him on the ground, calling him "nigger-lover" and "do-gooder."

The past director (now retired) of the Mississippi Baptist Convention's work with National Baptists (black Baptist churches) recalled those tortured moments of an event in 1961: "I thought they were going to kill me, but one of them stopped the others.

"He lifted me to my feet and asked if I was going to report the episode.

"I said, 'Why should I report this to the police? I don't know who you are.'"

Even as they removed the timbers and Davis was allowed to drive away, he had the nagging fear his intimidators were going to kill him. Davis managed to drive to his home in Jackson, where his son, a physician, tended his father's wounds.

The incident on the lonely, Mississippi dirt road was just one of many exciting and often dangerous incidents in the life of an individual described by observers as among Southern Baptists' most courageous human-relations advocates.

A native Mississippian with 25 years in race relations for the Mississippi convention, Davis was returning from a meeting with black Baptists when the 1961 attack occurred.

While beatings weren't common, living with threats and intimidation became a way of life for him.

Many of his fellow whites have scorned, mistreated and abused Davis because of his strong, unequivocal stand on black-white relations.

Yet in his years at the very forefront of black-white cooperation, he has found a wellspring of support and help from blacks and whites.

When he spearheaded the Committee of Concern, an interracial, interdenominational group that rebuilt 54 burned-out black churches in Mississippi in 1964, Davis received help from all over the world.

Baptists, Jews, Catholics, Mennonites, Presbyterians... "and virtually every denomination in Mississippi helped," he said.

Contributions came from every state and 21 foreign countries.

"The response of people who came to help with the labor was unbelievable," Davis said.

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Davis believes hate groups attacked the black churches because, "The church is the nearest to the heart of the blacks. These people thought the burnings would frighten them away.

"It didn't work, because most of those church buildings burned were dilapidated wooden structures. They were rebuilt with cement and steel."

Davis continued by saying that too few personal friendships exist between blacks and whites.

"You've got to present your body to be involved. For instance, in black funerals--it's one thing for a white to send a note of condolence; it's another to go yourself."

With the changing of laws, Davis said he feels progress has come to Mississippi. "Blacks and whites are going to church with one another, they're eating together and they're looking at one another as people. Mississippi is just not the place it was in 1951," he said.

"But before we can really make progress, we've got to begin to look at each other man-to-man and person-to-person."

Davis was involved from the start on a person-to-person basis in race relations.

In 1950, when segregation was the law, Davis met Herbert L. Lang, (a black man) founder and first president of Mississippi Baptist Seminary, Jackson, Miss., at a train station.

"I took his luggage and we walked down the stairway where we met a reality I hardly knew how to cope with. There was 'Colored' written on one waiting room door and 'White' on the other.

"I decided it would be safer for me and for Dr. Lang if we went into the 'Colored' waiting room. Black people were sitting all around, and I stopped at the drinking fountain.

"As I stooped over, a policeman touched me on the shoulder and said, 'Don't you know you're not supposed to be in here?'

"I looked up at him and said, 'Mr. Policeman, a lot of people think I'm white.'"

"He walked off as Dr. Lang and I went to the car. Dr. Lang laughed, 'He still thinks you're white.'"

For Baptist race relations pioneers like William P. Davis, what other men think isn't important. It's what God thinks that counts.

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Baptists Aid Victims
Of Floods in Spain

11/6/73

By Baptist Press

The Spanish Baptist Union launched a special relief effort--"Operacion Manta" ("Operation Blanket")--to aid flash flood victims, and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) promised \$1,000 in support of it after swirling waters in three Southern Spanish provinces left many dead, homeless and displaced in mid-October.

Spanish Baptists initiated "Operation Blanket" after authorities in Lorca, Spain, told them the best contribution possible would be money for blankets to help the victims, European Baptist Press Service (EBPS) reported.

Baptists in Spain designated the last week of October for giving special offerings to the operation. News of the Spanish effort reached C. Ronald Goulding, secretary-treasurer of the European Baptist Federation and associate secretary of the BWA, who contacted BWA Associate Secretary Carl W. Tiller.

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The BWA sent a cable to Spanish Baptist Union President Jose Borrás of Madrid promising a check for \$1,000. The blankets were to be provided at wholesale cost by a factory in Lorca.

No Baptist families were known to have died in the floods, which hit the provinces of Murcia, Almeria and Granada. Deaths attributed to the floods have reached an estimated 275, according to EBPS.

Puerto Lumbreras (Murcia) was the hardest hit with 200 lives lost, EBPS reported.

The daughter of one Baptist family in Lorca reportedly escaped from their house just before it washed away.

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Scottish Baptists Cite
Increases, Discrimination

11/6/73

GLASGOW, Scotland (BP)--Increased membership and baptisms have reversed a downward trend for churches of the Baptist Union of Scotland in 1973, delegates to the annual assembly were told here.

The Scots also heard reports on "religious discrimination" against Scottish Baptists and learned they had exceeded their annual budget target for the first time in several years.

Ian Mundie, a Scottish Baptist pastor reporting for European Baptist Press Service (EBPS), said membership in Scottish Baptist churches reached 16,475, an increase of 56 over 1972. Baptisms for 1973 were 532, compared with 469 last year.

In an address to the assembly, Tom Houston, director of communications for the British and Foreign Bible Society, noted that Baptist Union membership figures showed an increase for the first time in 15 years.

"No one is working harder and coming nearer to halting the downward trend in statistics than Scottish Baptists," Houston said, referring to an overall national decline in membership in church life and activities.

In a business session, Baptist Union Secretary Andrew MacRae decried "religious discrimination" against Scottish Baptists.

According to EBPS, MacRae spoke of an act governing changes in education committees, affected by regional development in Scotland, and of protests to the Secretary of State for Scotland that the act discriminates against non-Church of Scotland Protestants.

The act provides statutory places (on the committees) for representatives for the Church of Scotland and of the Roman Catholic Church but doesn't provide guaranteed places for other church groups, according to EBPS.

Baptists and other denominations have been unsuccessful so far in their bid for a third statutory representative on education committees from among their church members, EBPS said.

MacRae advised assembly delegates to nominate church people to local authorities for election to the education committees, even where no guaranteed places exist. "While there is objection to social, racial and even sexual discrimination in this country, we find ourselves as victims of religious discrimination," he was quoted as saying.

John McCrudden is the new president of the Baptist Union of Scotland, succeeding Ramsey G. Small.

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CORRECTION: In Line 1 of fifth graph from end of Baptist Press story, mailed Nov. 2, 1973, headlined "Missouri Moves to Resolve Leadership, Finance Crisis," please identify Don Evans as pastor of First Baptist Church, Joplin, Mo., not superintendent of missions. In Line 1 of third graph from end, identify James Joslin as superintendent of missions, Greene County Baptist Association, Springfield, not pastor of First Baptist Church, Springfield.

Thanks.

--Baptist Press