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Ethiopia Missionary Finds
Prison Is Journey of Faith

By Ruth Fowler

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (BP)--Dr. Samuel R. J. Cannata Jr. spent 16 days in prison here in April, but says his jail term was "really a journey in faith."

Cannata, a Southern Baptist missionary, was arrested along with his family in their home in rural Ethiopia on April 3, 1977. The family was released after a night of house arrest here, but Cannata was imprisoned 16 days on a firearms technicality. At the conclusion of the investigation, Cannata was released with no charges filed.

The missionary said he knew the importance of "praising the Lord" in all circumstances and did keep on praising the Lord. But he admits it was praise without much enthusiasm or faith at that time.

"Especially that first night in prison," Cannata remembered, "it was such a humiliating and helpless feeling. There was nothing to do but trust the Lord, because no one else could do anything anyway."

Although he knew he was innocent of any wrongdoing against the Ethiopian government, Cannata said, during this period "the Lord made me more aware of the shortcomings and sin in my life."

God began to "show me that the victory was his," Cannata said. "I was not a prisoner of the government. He had allowed the whole thing to happen. Because it was of him, I would be blessed, his body, the church, would be strengthened, and in the end he would get the glory."

Cannata continued, "God showed me that I was always praying to be more like Jesus, but when he starts really doing something about it, I get all upset."

A few days before Cannata's arrest, he was studying the Scriptures on suffering and "admitted to the Lord that I didn't understand fully their significance."

"Now I'm understanding a little more about their significance. Our family was blessed in the experience. We all grew a lot spiritually in a short time and are closer than ever before," Cannata continued. "His body, the church, has been strengthened. We have received letters and cables from all over about people who prayed for us."

Cannata says he is convinced more than ever that prayer was the answer to his release: "Prayer alone can turn the tide against our only enemy--Satan."

During his imprisonment, Cannata said he handed out New Testaments and Bible correspondence school books to prisoners and policemen as he gave his testimony about "my Lord's love."

His wife, Ginny, also a missionary, has a story of faith too.

"Not until I heard our police driver telling people along the road that he was carrying prisoners in the car (referring to us) that day on April 3, did I really realize what freedom meant to me," Mrs. Cannata said. "Never again will I take freedom lightly."

"The children rallied around me and helped me as never before," she said. "We knew the strength and peace we had and experienced each day was from God alone, and we give him all the praise."

The nights were the hardest for Mrs. Cannata, "because I couldn't see Sam. But I experienced much peace and found many new promises in God's word to claim, as I read, prayed, and praised God when sleep was impossible."

"I read through the Psalms and wrote down all the things God says he will be for us each day if we claim these in our lives," she added.

Mrs. Cannata and their children were allowed to visit Dr. Cannata and bring him food. As she drove to the police station each morning, she sang "praise songs," so that when she arrived the "knot in my stomach was gone," and she could greet her husband happy and relaxed.

"As I waited in officials' offices and met these top officials, doing what I could to follow Sam's case, I had only peace," Mrs. Cannata said. "I experienced such a wonderful presence of the Lord each day that I will never be the same again.

"Even though it was the most frightening experience of our lives, it was also the most wonderful experience for each one of us. Thank you for your prayer support which made it possible for us to call it a most wonderful experience."

The Cannatas are one of four Southern Baptist missionary families still hoping to obtain permission from the Ethiopian government to continue work in the rural areas of the east African country.

Each of the families will travel to Nairobi, Kenya, later in June to attend an agricultural missions conference. On July 11, they will meet with Davis L. Saunders, area secretary for eastern and southern Africa, to discuss the continuation of Southern Baptist mission work in Ethiopia.

A volunteer couple, a missionary pilot and his family, and a missionary journeyman already have left Ethiopia. Two more missionary couples and a second journeyman were to leave the first week in June, according to Saunders.

In recent months, missionaries in the outlying districts have moved to Addis Araba, the nation's capital city, and are confining their work to this area, Saunders said.

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300th Seminary Extension
Center Organizes in N.C.

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ASH, N.C. (BP)--The 300th Seminary Extension Center among Southern Baptists was organized by the Dock Baptist Association here, for a record high in the program of Seminary Extension Department (SED) of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries.

The Dock Association's center met in Palmyra Baptist Church, Ash, with eight church pastors and 38 lay leaders enrolled in a study of "Great Doctrines of the Bible." Thirteen of 18 association churches had members enrolled. Dock Association churches average 105 resident members with nine of the congregations having less than 100, an associational spokesman said.

Seminary Extension Centers numbered 208 in 1972-73 and 292 in 1975-76, according to an SED spokesman.

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High Court Will Not Hear Zoning Ordinance Appeal

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a brief, unsigned order, the U. S. Supreme Court declined to review the conviction of a Virginia Roman Catholic priest who was fined \$50 for conducting the Latin Rite Mass in his home.

The priest, Father Joseph E. Gedra, was convicted in a Fairfax County Court nearly two years ago of violating a county zoning ordinance which prohibits places of worship in residential areas. Gedra's small congregation has refused to accept the New Order Mass as required by the Roman Catholic Church.

The case attracted widespread attention in religious circles and resulted in a resolution on religious liberty and freedom of assembly passed by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here in October 1975.

The Fairfax County ordinance was enforced on two other occasions besides the arrest of Father Gedra, one of these involving an Old Regular Baptist congregation.

Gedra, pastor of the Church of the Assumption in suburban Washington, D. C., first appealed to the Virginia Supreme Court, where his case was refused on technical grounds. That court said that the appeal "was not perfected in the manner required by law."

Rather than revising and resubmitting his written legal brief to the state supreme court, Gedra appealed directly to the U. S. Supreme Court. The high court gave no reason for refusing the case, indicating neither approval nor disapproval of the disputed county ordinance. Nevertheless, the effect of the decision not to hear the case is to leave standing the decisions of the lower courts.

Virginia's attorney general argued in a written brief that the high court has previously upheld similar zoning ordinances and that no "substantial federal question" was involved.

Father Gedra's attorney, on the other hand, argued that the ordinance violated the religion clauses of the First Amendment, which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Fairfax County violated Gedra's constitutional right to worship freely and "peaceably to assemble," the brief charged. In addition, Gedra's attorney argued that the state and county were guilty of favoring more popular religious groups in violation of the "no establishment" clause.

Gedra also argued that conducting the services in his home posed no threat to the health and safety of the community, did not substantially increase traffic flow, involved no on-street parking, and did not disturb the neighbors' "peace and quiet."

At the suggestion of their attorney, parishioners even stopped parking in the house's driveway and were shuttled to and from services from a nearby elementary school parking lot, the brief said.

Gedra's brief also complained that his small congregation was being persecuted by county officials, saying that Protestant prayer meetings and Bible study groups were allowed to meet in homes without harrassment.

He also argued that if showing obscene films and holding cocktail parties in private homes do not violate the law, neither should the celebration of mass.

Cooperative Program
Rallies in May

NASHVILLE (BP)--Strong giving to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) national Cooperative Program unified budget in May rallied year-to-date giving to 9.59 percent ahead of last year, after eight months of the 1976-77 fiscal year.

Worldwide mission causes of the SBC received \$4,268,543 in May--some \$538,297, or 14.43 percent, above giving in May, 1976.

Through the first eight months, the Cooperative Program has collected \$34,509,155--more than \$3 million above receipts at the same point last year.

Total gifts through May, including the \$34,509,155 in undesignated Cooperative Program funds and \$36,669,328 in designated contributions, totals \$71,178,433. That figure is 8.61 percent above last year.

Cooperative Program national receipts have rallied since they slipped to 8.94 percent ahead of last year at the seven-month mark, after registering a 10.07 percent increase at the six-month checkpoint.

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Search Underway For
BWA General Secretary

Baptist Press
6/1/77

WASHINGTON (BP)--A search for the next general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) is underway, anticipating the retirement of Robert S. Denny, following the meeting of the 14th Baptist World Congress in Toronto in July 1980.

Paul Madsen, chairman of the personnel committee named by BWA President David Y. K. Wong on authority of the BWA General Council at Stockholm in 1975, said that his committee is considering criteria to be used as guidelines in seeking names of able persons from whom a general secretary and other staff personnel may be selected.

Proposals for the criteria will be presented to the BWA General Council at its meeting in Miami Beach, July 11-15, 1977. The guidelines will be used in seeking a nominee for presentation at the Council's 1979 meeting in Brighton, England.

If the Council agrees on a nominee in 1979, he will be invited to work with the personnel committee in choosing other staff members to be elected, along with the new general secretary, by the Congress in 1980.

Denny and Associate Secretaries C. Ronald Goulding and Carl W. Tiller will have reached their 65th birthday by the end of 1980, the year of the Toronto Congress, and are subject to retirement under present personnel policy.

Any of these three may be retained on special arrangement on an annual basis, however, if the Council chooses.

Denny has been general secretary of the Alliance since the death of General Secretary Josef Nordenhaug in 1969. He was Associate Secretary from 1958 until that time.

Madsen said that his committee will welcome suggestions from Baptists in all parts of the world both as to criteria and to personnel. They may contact him at American Baptist Churches, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 19481. Other members of the committee are Floyd W. Harris, Mrs. A. Harrison Gregory, Fred B. Rhodes, Charles Roselle, and M. L. Wilson.

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