
I Was in Prison

by Tom Dybdahl

When I was 12 years old, I read a book titled "By God's Grace, Sam." It described how a convicted murderer, Sam W. Tannyhill, became a Seventh-day Adventist through the "Faith for Today" television program. In November 1956, about a year after his conversion, Sam was executed at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus.

I have never forgotten that little book. When I finished it, I wondered why anybody would want to kill someone who was a devout Adventist. And I wondered about all the other men and women on Death Row who might be killed before they had a chance to convert. I am still wondering about them. And that is part of the reason I dragged my family off to New Orleans for two years so I could work as a volunteer with the Louisiana Coalition on Jails and Prisons.

My job at the coalition is to work with prisoners in the state system. The organization does not provide legal aid but works to protect prisoners' civil and constitutional rights. Basically, I receive letters from prisoners describing their troubles, investigate the situation (or find someone else to), and try to resolve any problems. In addition,

the coalition actively opposes capital punishment and tries to provide special support to those people who are condemned to die.

It is hard to remember, now, just what I expected of criminal justice in Louisiana. I knew the South was not noted for genteel treatment of criminals, that our justice system had serious flaws. But knowing is one thing, and seeing is another.

Dave Bascom* called collect one day from the St. Tammany Parish Jail. He had been arrested some months earlier, accused of aggravated rape and aggravated crime against nature. He talked so much that I took an immediate dislike to him.

He had no money and no family, so he was assigned a public defender. He entered a plea of not guilty. He met with the lawyer once before the trial and gave him the name of a witness whom Dave believed would exonerate him. When the trial day came, Dave walked into court and discovered that his witness had never been contacted. His lawyer had been too busy. He asked for a postponement, but the judge denied the motion.

The lawyer then advised Dave to plead guilty and said he'd get him off with five

Tom Dybdahl, who received an M.Div. from the SDA Theological Seminary and an M.A. from the Columbia School of Journalism, works with the Louisiana Coalition on Jails and Prisons.

*Names with an asterisk have been changed to conceal the guilty.

years: with a jury trial, he could have received 100 years for those charges. In the absence of his witness, and any other advice, Dave pled guilty. The judge proceeded to sentence him to 40 years, with no reduction for good behavior. Dave didn't realize that lawyers are not authorized to offer their clients any specific deals.

By the time Dave called us, there really wasn't much we could do. An investigator found his witness with only a few phone calls, but it was a bit late, and he had no money to pay someone to take a sworn statement from the man. When I visited Dave recently, he talked about his appeal, but he didn't sound hopeful. All the judges have asked him the same question: "Why did you plead guilty if you're innocent?"

Russell Tate's* case went to trial, but his public defender didn't seem to pay much attention to the proceedings. Russell knew he was in real trouble when, on the day of final arguments, his lawyer marched into court and immediately pulled up both trouser legs. "Look at these socks," he ordered. "Notice anything different?"

"Yeah," Russell said. "You've got one of them on wrong-side-out."

"You bet," the lawyer said. "My father told me it brings good luck. You've got nothing to worry about." Russell received a life sentence without the possibility of probation or parole. Last time I saw him, he showed me the scars on his wrist from a recent suicide attempt.

A few weeks ago, a man at the state penitentiary asked for help in obtaining a pardon. He sent along a letter from the state-appointed doctor that had examined him, stating that he might well be innocent and urging that the Board of Pardons grant him clemency.

During the earlier trial, the doctor had testified about the prisoner's mental competence and had left with the sense that his court-appointed lawyer was not exceptionally adept. Among other things, this attorney periodically referred to his client by the wrong name, using instead the

surname of a crooked politician with whom the accused had the misfortune to share an unusual first name.

I'm not saying here that bad lawyers are the problem, or that these men are blameless. Prisoners, like all of us, often alter the truth in their favor, so it is risky to guess at guilt or innocence without all the facts. What I am saying is that if you're poor, the system just doesn't work very well for you. You're more likely to get a poor defense—and to end up doing time.

Inside the jails and prisons, things don't work out quite the way they are supposed to either. One day I received a call from a lawyer asking me to visit one of her clients. He seemed to be spending a lot of time in the isolation unit, and she was worried about him. But she didn't want to confront the warden.

Joseph Wells* was a big, red-headed kid, just 21. If you liked him you'd call him high-spirited. A deputy cursed him, and he cursed the deputy back. So they put a chain around his neck, arms, and legs, and beat him. Then they twisted a chain around his neck, and when he was gasping for air, they told him to apologize: "Say you're sorry."

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Say it louder."

He did, and they unchained him. It took about two weeks for the cuts and bruises to heal. When I visited him again, he was back in isolation for masturbating in view of a guard.

There were 13 cells in the isolation unit, but only four of them had lights. His didn't. It was too dark to read, but it didn't matter much because they wouldn't let him have anything to read. The roaches were what really bothered him.

"I went to see the doctor yesterday," he told me, "'cause I thought I had a rash. But he told me it was no rash, it was roach bites. I wish I could do something about those roaches." He's doing time for shoplifting while on probation.

FORUM

Newsletter of the Association of Adventist Forums

Spring 1983

New president sets goals for future of Adventist Forums

by Lyndrey Niles

The Association of Adventist Forums has recently celebrated its 15th anniversary, the last seven years of which have seen significant growth under the outstanding leadership of attorney Glenn Coe. Membership subscriptions have reached the 7,000 mark; forty chapters are active throughout the United States, Canada, and several other nations. The first national conference has been judged a success, while *SPECTRUM* and the newsletter are set for five combined issues in 1983.

The above is a good report, but it does not tell the whole story of the Association of Adventist Forums.

It does not include the formal letters of appreciative readers thanking the authors and editors for articles which have brought insight and a special blessing to them. The report excludes the testimonies of those who have grasped a clearer understanding of a difficult biblical concept discussed at a chapter meeting. The report does not cover the commitment of former Adventists to return to their churches as a result of attending the national conference in Washington.

Nor does it include the hundreds of Seventh-day Adventists who find spiritual maturity by participating in the discussions of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint and by looking objectively at different points of view in order to foster Christian intellectual and cultural growth . . . as is possible with Forum membership.

For the next two years, your AAF officers hope to provide further opportunities for what Coe recently called "the excitement of personal discovery." Already, a second national conference

has been approved to be held on the West Coast and is in the planning stages. Additional conferences in other parts of the country will be encouraged.

A goal of 10,000 members has been set, and a broader spectrum of articles will continue to appear in our journal. In addition, new proposed projects are currently being explored by the AAF Board. For example, task forces similar to the task force on lay participation will be established to explore problem areas and make recommendations to the association and the church.

We invite you to join in the excitement of the Forum experience and let us work together to discover the spiritual truths and challenging experiences to be found in genuine Adventism.

Lyndrey Niles is a professor of communications at Howard University and president of the AAF.

*The Association of Adventist Forums
announces its*

Second National Forum Conference

to be held

March 15-18, 1984

in

Loma Linda, California

Committee to plan future conferences

by Dana Lauren West

Former Association of Adventist Forums' President Glenn Coe has been appointed director of special projects by the AAF Board.

The directorship was established after the national conference, held in Washington, D.C., in September. The enthusiasm generated by that conference led the board to take steps to encourage other conferences and seminars. Coe's primary responsibility is to foster and schedule conferences.

The Executive Committee, at Coe's request, has set up a standing committee to work with him.

Spectrum, *FORUM* mailed together

by Dana Lauren West

At the Association of Adventist Forums' annual board meeting in September of 1982, several decisions were made concerning the newsletter *FORUM* and *Spectrum*.

The board approved a plan to expand the publication of *Spectrum* from four issues to five within a single calendar year. The "Update" section—printing news of the denomination in short essay form—will also be enlarged to at least five pages.

Lastly, the *FORUM* newsletter will now be included in each *Spectrum*, easily detachable so as not to spoil the journal's appearance.

The format of *FORUM* will remain the same—short news pieces dealing with the AAF, the chapters, and meetings reported in news style. The newsletter will appear five times (instead of four times a calendar year) and be stapled inside *Spectrum*, not mailed separately.

Whereas AAF news will be slightly less in total inches, the newsletter will appear more frequently than before.

The cost involved in printing five inserts of four pages each will be less than the cost of printing four 12-page newsletters. The mailing cost is also decreased because of this action. Overseas subscribers will now receive all the AAF news for no extra cost.

This Committee on Conferences, with Coe as chairman, will have the responsibilities of recommending to the Executive Committee the time, place, and content of national conferences. There will be additional input from local ad hoc committees established to help with details of national conferences slated for their area.

The Committee on Conferences will also coordinate the schedules of smaller regional conferences. Small national conferences on specific topics may also be planned. The members of the committee are: Glenn Coe, former AAF president and chief state's attorney in Hartford, Connecticut; Lyndrey Niles, present AAF president and professor of communications at Howard University in Washington, D.C.; Roy Branson, editor of *SPECTRUM* and senior fellow at Kennedy Institute of Ethics in Washington, D.C.; Lawrence Geraty, former AAF president and professor of Old Testament Studies at the SDA Theological Seminary; Susan Jacobsen, homemaker in Redlands, Calif.; William King, member of *SPECTRUM* Advisory Council and president of William King, Inc., a construction company in Flagstaff, Ariz.; and Verla Kwiram, member of *SPECTRUM* Advisory Council and businesswoman in Seattle, Washington.

Dana Lauren West is the editorial assistant for FORUM and Spectrum.

AAF chapters active in Europe,

by Molleurus Couperus

Molleurus Couperus, director of International Affairs for the Association of Adventist Forums, accompanied by his wife Dos, long active in the AAF, travelled through Austria, Holland, and Germany during October and November of 1982 visiting and leading discussions with AAF chapters.

The first of the Adventist Forum meetings they attended took place in Vienna, Austria, on October 7 at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Gerhard Svrcek-Seiler. In Collonges, France, Dr. Couperus spoke at the morning devotional to students and faculty on the providential and often miraculous leadings of God in the lives of his children.

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continued from page 2.

On October 22-24 the Couperuses joined the meetings of the German Adventist Forum group, the AWA (Adventistischer Wissenschaftlicher Arbeitskreis), and the Adventist Scholars Fellowship, at Freudenstadt in the Black Forest. The main subject was "The Biblical Understanding of the Law."

The German forum group (AWA) has for many years published two periodicals. The *AGA* (Adventist Beliefs, Past and Present) appears twice a year and publishes the papers which are presented at their two weekend conferences held each year. Dr. L. E. Trader, of the Marienhoehe Seminary, is the editor. The other periodical, *Stufen* (Steps), appears every four months and contains articles that are submitted by mem-

bers of the AWA as well as by persons who have been specifically invited to submit an article. It is edited by Kurt Bangert. Requests for subscriptions to either of these periodicals should be directed to: AWA, Im Kirchwald 3A, 6104 Seeheim 3, West Germany.

The last Forum meeting the Couperuses attended was at the Seminary Zandbergen in Holland. The morning presentation was by a member of the seminary faculty, who discussed the papers given at a ministerial conference in Germany during the summer. In the afternoon meeting Dr. Couperus spoke on "Whither Adventism?" including ways the church might handle current problems and challenges.

Molleurus Couperus is director of international affairs for the AAF.

Flood, age of world discussed at Monterey meeting

by Bonnie Wilson

The Monterey Bay Area Chapter presented "Lecture and Discussion on Creation" on January 22. The chapter heard three scientists in different fields address the issue of the age of the earth.

The topic that elicited the most discussion was the idea of the flood having taken place in a local geographic area. Lonnie Wilson, Ph.D., who moderated the question-and-answer periods, also introduced the speakers: Molleurus Couperus, formerly chairman of the department of dermatology at Loma Linda University, now doing research on creation and evolution; Jerry Snow, who works as the water quality specialist for Monterey County; and Robert Brown, a senior research scientist from the Geoscience Research Institute.

Couperus compared the SDA philosophy of the age of the earth with other Christians' ideas about this topic. Since 1905 the church has taken its present position that the earth is about 6,000 years old. Couperus felt the flood was the most crucial point in the 6,000-year concept. He presented the idea that the flood was confined to a geographic locality. This position, he said, is supported by several points: (1) The ark did not move from its own geographic locality but settled in almost the same place that it was built. (2) Food was available for the vegetarian animals that were in the ark immediately after they had disembarked. (3) Noah planted a vineyard, and

soil was needed for this. (4) There is no evidence of a universal layer of silt layed down about 4,000 years ago.

Snow spoke about the understanding of the culture of the time at the writing of Genesis. "Earth" to the men of Moses' time did not mean the "earth" as we know it but rather the portion of land that they knew and occupied only. Snow also indicated that there is no botanical evidence of a universal flood. Scientists should be finding flora from the indigenous areas of South America and in other parts of the world, and these examples of a universal flood are lacking.

There is a strategy of arriving at the truth, Brown felt, and that is by eyewitness testimony that is reliable, turning to the Bible and present day scientific research to fill in the gaps that are missing in the eyewitness testimony. There are several biblical translations that give us different chronologies of the Old Testament, and, depending upon the translation used, we can come to the age of mankind as being about $6740 \pm 8,000$ years. E. G. White tells us that "the earth is more than 6000" years old. There is also the question as to how much was created "In the beginning . . ."

Tapes are available for this session at \$9.00/set by writing to B. Wilson, 22560 Murietta Road, Salinas, CA 93908

Bonnie Wilson is president of an engineering firm in the Monterey Bay area.

Atlantic Region

The *New York Chapter* welcomed Dr. Bill Webber, president of the New York Theological Society, on February 19. Webber spoke on "Exiles and Pilgrims," which dealt with the social and political relevance of the Christian gospel.

How the gospels were compiled and transmitted was discussed on March 12 by Byron Schaeffer, professor of biblical studies at Fordham University in New York City.

The Josephine Morris Chorale gave a recital on March 26. The members of the Chorale recently returned from a tour in Europe.

Columbia Region

Philadelphia Chapter's President Jacqueline Winston reports Colin Cook's presentation on "The Gospel and the Homosexual in the SDA Church" was well received as evidenced by the approximately 200 attendants.

Cook is founder of Quest, a program that offers counselling and spiritual guidance to SDA homosexuals who wish a change in lifestyle.

North Pacific Region

The *Flagstaff Chapter* has elected new officers for 1983-84. Don Mansfield is president; Bill King, vice president; and Dollie Teske, secretary/treasurer.

New chapters include: *Pullman, Washington-Moscow, Idaho* which has been organized. The president is Byron Blomquist. *Treasure Valley* in Boise with its president James Balkins was also organized.

South Pacific Region

The *Claremont Chapter* invited Dr. James A. Sanders, Old Testament scholar and theologian, to discuss ancient biblical manuscripts with an emphasis on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Dr. Sanders serves as president of the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center for Preservation and Research.

The *San Diego Chapter* has elected new officers. Les Palinka was voted president; Don Bauers, vice president; and Adda Sheldon, secretary/treasurer. The members-at-large are Clela Waddel, Bruce Sanderson, Jan Kaatz, and Walt Fahlsing.

Because this region has so many chapters with activities scheduled, members are advised to consult their regional newsletter for additional information. The newsletter is prepared by Mike Scofield, the regional director of the Southern Pacific Region.

West Indies

A new *Barbados Chapter* in the West Indies with approximately 40 members has recently been accepted into the Forum chapters family. Officers include for president, Harold Wharton; secretary, Maccaulay Hood; assistant secretary, Dr. Norma Niles; treasurer, Cecil Cummins, and as publicity secretary, Dr. Bradley Niles.

Please send chapter information to FORUM, c/o Editorial Assistant, 7710 Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

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Nolan Washington's* mother called several weeks ago about her son's arm. He had been scheduled for surgery when he was arrested. Now he was awaiting trial, and his arm—untreated—was virtually immobile and very painful. "I was just sitting on my bed, reading the story of the Good Samaritan," she told me. "And I thought, they're doing my son just like that. Goin' right by." I called the prison, but I wasn't hopeful that it would help.

I didn't hear from her for a month or so, and then she called again. They hadn't done anything about his arm; it still hung from his shoulder, useless. But now he had ankle problems as well. He had broken it years earlier, and he had a steel pin in the joint. He had fallen recently, and it was painful and swollen.

"He asked for some treatment," she told me, "but they just looked at it and told him to come back in two days. There wasn't no place to soak his foot but in the commode. So that's what he's been doin'. Soaking his foot in the commode."

These stories are not the only ones, or even the worst ones. They are simply the ones on my mind now. Tomorrow I could write about others. There are far too many to call them exceptions—indeed, more and more it seems that the exception is when prisoners are given decent, fair, humane treatment. I think society has agreed, in some sense, that people who commit crimes should be punished and that one acceptable form of punishment is loss of freedom. But have we agreed that the men and women who are locked up should be systematically abused, degraded, denied the status of persons? Yet this goes on, daily, in most of our jails and prisons. It happens behind walls, and razor wire, and steel doors, so we do not see it. But most of us do not even want to know about it because then we would share some of the responsibility.

Just today I visited a man awaiting trial in one of the parish jails. One Sunday morning last summer, as Mike* was sleeping in his bed, he heard one of his cellmates scream.

He jumped up, and got a face-full of liquid toilet cleaner that was intended for somebody else. By the time he was taken to the hospital, one eye was almost totally destroyed and the other slightly damaged.

Last month, some prisoners at this jail sawed through the bars, and Mike was one of 12 who escaped. The law caught him the next day. While he was being taken back to the jail, some guards beat him up, trying to get information about the escape. He was handcuffed, with arms behind his back, and at one point he stumbled against one of the deputies. "Trying to steal my pistol, eh?" said the guard. "Which is your good eye?"

"My left one," Mike said.

Then the guard hit him in his left eye with the pistol butt.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, December 7, 1982, the sovereign state of Texas killed Charlie Brooks, Jr., with a lethal injection. According to the other men on Death Row, he was friendly and well-liked, and a lousy volleyball player. In December 1976, he and his childhood buddy Woody Loudres kidnapped a Ft. Worth mechanic named David Gregory and shot him to death. The judicial system toyed with Charlie Brooks for six years and then repaid him in kind.

When there was no word of a stay of execution by Friday, December 3, the coalition—all eight of us—sprang into action. Four people went off to Texas to mobilize opposition to the execution, while the rest of us did the same in New Orleans. I organized a press conference, trying to make the point that—even for those who supported capital punishment—Charlie Brooks was not a good candidate for death.

There were two reasons. It was the first time—to anyone's knowledge—that a stay had not been granted when the merits of the case were still being considered by the federal courts. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court

of Appeals, here in New Orleans, did not directly block Brooks' right to appeal through the federal court system. But by refusing to stop his execution, it made any appeal beside the point. Even a successful appeal can't help a dead man.

Second, there was a basic question of fairness. Charlie Brooks' co-defendant, Woody Loudres, had originally been sentenced to death as well. But his conviction was overturned by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals because of some fundamental errors in jury selection. Instead of prosecuting Loudres again, the District Attorney offered him a 40-year sentence in exchange for a guilty plea, and he accepted.

In the crime at issue, only one shot was fired. Since neither man testified against the other, the state of Texas did not know who had actually fired the fatal shot. So in the eyes of the law, they were equally guilty. But one was sentenced to 40 years; the other, to death.

As a result, Jack V. Strickland, the former assistant district attorney who had been the lead prosecutor in both cases, filed an affidavit in support of a stay of execution for Charlie Brooks. It read, in part: "The evidence against Brooks and the evidence against Loudres was substantially identical . . . It's my professional belief that Brooks' challenge to the disproportionality of his sentence raises a substantial question of law which deserves careful judicial review."

But as the hours passed on Monday, December 6, it became evident that no careful review was forthcoming. At about 10:30 a.m., the clerk at the 5th Circuit Court announced the decision: no stay. Papers were immediately filed in the U.S. Supreme Court. By midafternoon, the Texas Board of Pardons revealed its recommendation: a 2-to-1 vote against clemency. Shortly afterwards, lame-duck Governor William P. Clements commented that he saw no reason to intervene. At 7:30 p.m., the Supreme Court announced its 6-to-3 vote in favor of death. Charlie Brooks' last legal hope was gone.

During the noon hour, we had gone downtown and passed out leaflets with information on the Brooks case, and our reasons for opposing his execution. Some people cursed us, a few thanked us, and most glanced at our flyers politely and went on their way. One or two stopped to discuss the issue of capital punishment.

I think that opponents of the death penalty (and I am certainly one) have most of the logical arguments on their side. There is no evidence that capital punishment deters anyone else from killing; it is reserved almost exclusively for poor people; it even costs more than life in prison. But few people decide this issue logically. It is a highly emotional subject, and most people opt for revenge, though they use more polite words. If someone murders, society has a right to murder back. It's the old eye-for-eye.

I told these passers-by that I believed the death penalty is wrong, in every case and circumstance. And that I did not get to that position because of good arguments, but because I believe in mercy. If God could forgive killers, could I withhold forgiveness? Doesn't the cross proclaim that no one is beyond hope, that Jesus accepted execution to save us all from that fate? On that sunny afternoon, no one disputed my pleas; they simply saw things another way.

Our efforts did attract some media attention, however. In the previous few days, there had been almost no interest in the case. But as Monday slipped away, along with Charlie Brooks' chances, he quickly became big news. By noon, the radio was giving details of his last meal order—steak, fries, and peach cobbler. By 6 p.m., even the CBS Evening News took notice. But the big story of the day was Barney Clark's artificial heart. While doctors in Salt Lake City stretched their skills trying to save Dr. Clark's life, a doctor from the Texas Department of Corrections was examining Charlie Brooks' veins to see if they were adequate to receive a lethal injection.

At 11 p.m., 20 of us in New Orleans

gathered for a vigil. We stood in a circle, in the cold darkness of Jackson Square, in front of any empty church. Four hundred miles to the west, in the Ellis Unit of the Huntsville Prison, they were strapping Charlie Brooks to a hospital bed and preparing him for death. We talked, and sang, and prayed.

None of us in that silent square had ever seen Charlie Brooks, or known him, or spoken with him. He had no idea that we stood together because of him. But there was a bond there, simply because we had tried to help him. We had tried to say, as clearly as we could, that we did not want him to die. We did not want this man murdered in our names.

**. . . society has agreed . . .
that people who commit crimes
should be punished . . . But
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and women who are locked
up should be systematically
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status of persons?**

As the hour of his death came, we finished our prayers and joined hands, hoping for a miracle. But the only miracle was the potency of modern drugs. Afraid that there might be a hitch, prison officials had inserted the intravenous catheter well before midnight. For about half an hour, only a sterile, salt-water solution flowed into Charlie Brooks' veins. At 12:09 a.m., an unknown executioner injected a syringe of sodium thiopental into the intravenous tube. Injections of pavulon and potassium chloride followed, as a guarantee of death. At 12:16 a.m., Brooks was pronounced dead. Witnesses disagreed about whether he felt any pain.

In the days following the execution, there was a substantial clamor of protest from legal experts. Many lawyers—whatever

their views on capital punishment—were deeply disturbed by the refusal of the 5th Circuit Court to give Brooks a full hearing and by the Supreme Court's sanction of this short-cut procedure.

Meanwhile, Texas was setting up another execution. The same pattern seemed to be falling into place for Thomas Barefoot, who had been convicted in 1978 of killing a policeman. As his day of death approached, the 5th Circuit Court refused his request for a stay, and Barefoot's lawyers expected the Supreme Court to follow suit. The arguments in his case were not considered as strong as those in Brooks'.

But 11 hours before his execution, the Supreme Court surprised everyone and granted a stay. The high court also agreed to provide a full review of the procedure used by federal courts to review death penalty appeals.

No official explanation was given for this U-turn. But it was impossible not to see the decision as a tacit admission that the ruling in Charlie Brooks' case had been a mistake. And it seemed more than coincidence that Brooks was black and Barefoot was white.

A few days after Christmas, our office received a card that had been wrongly addressed and had meandered around the South for a couple weeks. It was from a former resident of Texas' Death Row, who is now serving a lengthy sentence for murder. After wishing us happy holidays, he wrote a short note.

"I was the next door neighbor to Woody Loudres (next cell) for about two years. Woody Loudres told me or admitted to me that he was the one who pulled the trigger and killed Mr. Gregory. Sincerely and Respectfully, Fred Saunders.*"

Two days after Charlie Brooks' execution, I visited Death Row at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. The penitentiary is actually an 18,000-acre farm, nestled in a sweeping curve of the

Mississippi River about an hour's drive north of Baton Rouge. The river surrounds it on three sides, and there is a high fence on the other. Inmates are housed in a number of camps spread out over the prison grounds.

Louisiana Route 66 ends at the prison. Just inside the main gate, there is a two-story cement block building shaped like a Y. Two wings are cell blocks for prisoners deemed disciplinary problems, and the other houses the men who are sentenced to die.

Visitors pass through an electrified gate in the fence under the watchful eye of a guard. There is a small sign reminding you to shut the gate again. Inside the building entrance there is a small office and some vending machines with candy and drinks. That's as far as you can go without a key.

To reach the visitor's room, you go through three sets of steel-bar doors. The guard bangs the key and yells "clear the hall," eliminating the possibility of any inadvertent human contact. The doors are opened, then closed behind you one by one, and finally you are locked into the place.

The room is painted institutional green, and despite being spotless, manages to look shabby.

The visiting area has six booths for prisoners. There are no contact visits here, and a heavy-mesh wire separates the free people from those who are bound. In a short time the wire pattern begins to drift, and the first prisoner warns me that I will soon have a headache. Family members are allowed two visits each month. Prisoners can make a monthly phone call, limited to 10 minutes.

I have visited more than half of the men on Death Row here, and the most unusual thing about them is how ordinary they seem. They look just like people I have known in other places and other times. (Except, that is, for their bad complexions and bad teeth. They don't get outside much, and dental care in most prisons is atrocious.) They talk like ordinary people, too.

I know, from reading their trial transcripts and news clippings, that some of them have done terrible things. But as I begin to associate a face, and a person, with

Information About United States Prisons

Data

Prison Population

*We now imprison people at a higher per capita rate than every industrial country except South Africa and the Soviet Union: 154 people in federal and state prisons per 100,000 citizens.

*In the decade from 1971 to 1982 the number of people in federal and state prisons increased 56 percent—from 198,061 to 353,000.

*In the decade from 1971 to 1981 the *annual* rate of increase in prison population jumped from 6 percent per year to 12 percent. The steep rise began in 1974 (7%); then in 1975 (8%); 1976 (9%); 1977-1979 (10%); 1980 (11%); and 1981 (12%).

*From 1974 to 1981 the number of prisoners in federal and local prisons increased 35 percent.

*Including federal, state and local jail inmates, the prison population in 1981 was 571,000, up from 497,000 in 1980.

Death Row

*Whites on death row: 583 (51%)

Blacks on death row: 487 (43%)

Total death row

population 1137 (as of December 20, 1982)

*Thirty-eight states now have the death penalty.

*More than half of those on death row (578) are in four states: California, Florida, Georgia, and Texas.

*455 men have been executed for rape since 1930.

*90 percent of the men executed for rape (405) were black. No white has ever been executed for the rape of a black in the United States.

Resources for Study and Action

Fellowship of Reconciliation

Box 271

Nyack, NY 10960

Provides support to prisoners and their families, and works against the death penalty.

the name on the paper, it becomes impossible to think of them only as criminals. When we talk about sports, about politics, about God, a human being takes shape.

When I describe my work with prisoners, people commonly ask: "What about the victims? What are you doing for them?" We are, in fact, working to start a ministry to victims of crime. It is an angry question, one that usually means "Why do you help killers and rapists instead of helping innocent victims?"

Victims of crime often need help, and they certainly "deserve" it. But what about Jerry Jackson*? In all the time he had been on Death Row, I was his first visitor. "I think I have a sister in Houston," he said, "but I ain't sure." He doesn't make his monthly phone call because there's nobody to call.

Or what about Arthur Hays*? He had only one request: "Could you help me find my Mamma? She has a nervous condition, and she's not very well. Just when they

moved me up here, she moved, and we lost contact. I'd like to see her one more time, so I could explain what happened."

And what about all the others? I see their faces, patterned by the heavy wire that divides us. Some of these men are open, and warm; some frighten me. Some of them are deeply sorry for their deeds; some show no remorse. Do they "deserve" help? I cannot answer, except to ask: Do I "deserve" grace?

In the short time I have been here, I have not become an expert on prisons. I do not have a plan for the perfect justice system. I am not sure what we should do with the men on Death Row, except that we should first spare their lives. And I do know that what goes on in our jails and prisons is shameful and that there are numerous options, if we were but interested.

Perhaps that is the crux of the problem. When people are convicted and locked away, we lose interest. The world labels them criminal, sub-human. So it is of small

Citizens Commission on Alternatives to Incarceration

P.O. Box 8911
Durham, NC 27707

Jesus Behind Bars

Box 7949
Orlando, Florida 32854
Seventh-day Adventist lay organization employing 17 full-time workers active in personal ministry in such prisons as the Cleveland House of Correction, San Quentin, Soledad, the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla, and five prisons in Florida. Rather than prison reform, the group trains Adventist volunteers who join professionals in conducting worship services and visiting individual prisoners.

National Council on Crime and Delinquency

Continental Plaza
411 Hackensack Avenue
Hackensack, NJ 07601
Publishes a quarterly magazine, *Crime and Delinquency*, and is an excellent source of statistics and information on crime and corrections.

National Moratorium on Prison Construction

324 C St., S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003
Publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Jericho*, does research on the problems and costs of prisons, and works against new prison construction.

PREAP

3049 E. Genesee St.
Syracuse, NY 13224
They have produced an informative book—*Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*.

Prison Fellowship

Charles Colson, Executive Director
P.O. Box 40562
Washington, D.C. 20016
Ministers to the spiritual needs of prisoners and promotes alternatives to prison. They publish a helpful volume: *Is There a Better Way? A Perspective on American Prisons*.

Southern Coalition on Jails and Prisons

P.O. Box 120044
Nashville, TN 37212
Sponsors organizations throughout the South that work to protect prisoners' civil and constitutional rights, and work against the death penalty.

concern if they are mistreated, or even killed. It serves them right.

Sadly, most Christians accept this worldly view without question. Instead of being shaped by Christ, they are shaped by the harsh counsel of those who do not know him. Instead of seeing Jesus in the least of these, they see brutes.

Here on Death Row, the line that the world draws is most clearly evident. I am free to go whenever I wish, assuming I can get the attention of a guard. After I knock on the door, they will let me out, back through the bars and gates, back to my car, back to wherever I wish to go. The men on the other side sit in gray sweatshirts, shackled hands and feet. There is only one place they may go: back to their cells, back to wait for death. The good and the bad; us and them.

Doesn't the cross proclaim that no one is beyond hope, that Jesus accepted execution to save us all from that fate?

But the gospel makes me uncomfortable with such distinctions. We are not all criminals, but we are all sinners, and St. Paul reminds us that the wages of sin is death. In God's eyes we are all on Death Row.

The good news, of course, is that God loved us anyway. He never asked whether we deserved help. Jesus poured out his life for the world, even though none of us was worthy. How can we, who live only by God's grace, presume to pass judgment on the ultimate worth of another person?

The more I see of human misery, the harder it is to take sides. There is plenty of pain to go around. Why is it so difficult—even for Christians—to see that prisoners are still human, still precious to God?

During my visits to Death Row, I am continually amazed by the strength of the men there. I think especially of Jack*, who is

probably innocent. Twice he has come near death. When his wife was dying of cancer, prison officials refused to let him visit her, and then rejected his request to attend her funeral. But he is not bitter, or angry. "If I could get a fair hearing on the new evidence, I think I could beat this thing," he says. "I'll keep trying. They can't do any more to me than what they've already done."

Daily life for those on Death Row is spartan and terribly constricted. But the physical circumstances are overshadowed by their continual proximity to death. It invades every waking moment and troubles all their dreams. Their home is named for death. Several of them have come within hours of execution, some more than once. They know that it is likely that at least one of their number will not survive this year. The pressure, even viewed by an outsider, is enormous.

Yet most of them manage to survive as human beings, often with wit, and grace, and hope. When I come away from my visits, despite the terrible grimness of things, part of me is buoyed up. It is they who give me courage.

One of the men on Death Row is a Seventh-day Adventist, or about as much of one as it is possible to be in such a place. It seems strange to sit in this stark visiting room and talk through the wire about mutual acquaintances, or theological controversies, or the nearness of Christ's return.

We have never discussed the specifics of his case, but I know them well. In a time of intense stress, he committed murder. I do not think that the circumstances leading up to his crime would recur in a million years. But his appeals are running out, and I am afraid for him.

Last time I saw him, though, he seemed in good spirits. The minutes passed quickly, and I had to leave. As the guard led him away, I called out: "Need a ride back to New Orleans?"

He laughed for just a second. "Wait till I get my things," he said, and then the door banged shut.

It is no irony that today is December 21, the winter solstice. In many ways, the last few weeks for me have been a time of darkness, of dying. Immersed in the reality of Louisiana prisons, I have wrestled often with doubt.

For the darkness is not only out there, in the jails and prisons and wardens and prisoners, but also in me. I struggle with my own will to power, to dominance, to violence. I want to take judgment into my own hands, rather than waiting on God.

And the questions do not go away. What did Jesus mean when he proclaimed the opening of the prison to them that are bound? Should a Christian think twice about dropping a wrongdoer into the abyss of our criminal justice system? Why do most churches—including my own—pay so little

attention to men and women in prison? Didn't Jesus say that a key difference between the sheep and goats was that one of them visited prisoners?

Even when people ask how they can help, I'm not sure what to say. The system is so strong, so entrenched. I tell them to go inside the bars and learn what goes on, to pray, to speak out against brutality, against death. Yet these efforts seem so small. I wonder if the months ahead will offer better answers.

But in this season of fading light, there is a star that does not flicker. It flames over the stinking barn where God became man. He, too, knew hatred, and injustice, and beatings, and finally execution. But he rose again, smashing the stone over every grave.

Because of that God, it is possible to hope. But it is not easy.