

October 29, 1968

PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
(Fifty-third in a series)

COMPROMISE AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

By T. B. Maston

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"Compromise" is considered a nasty word by some people. They contend that it reveals a lack of conviction, courage, and character.

Compromise may be a nasty word, but it is a necessary word in the operation of a democracy in church or state. Most decisions that are made through the democratic process require some compromise.

"Politics" has been defined as the art of the possible. This definition applies in particular and primarily to a democracy. Our churches, associations, and conventions are not political entities. While this is true, some of the methods and techniques that are integral to political democracy are applicable to them. Decisions, as in a political democracy, are arrived at through discussion and conference. An essential phase of such decision making is the art of compromise, and it is an art.

Many times in a democracy, political or religious, no decision can or will be reached without some compromise. An individual or a group, small or large, that is unwilling to compromise or make adjustments will frequently unnecessarily slow down the decision making process or even make it impossible to arrive at a decision.

An unwillingness to compromise may also disrupt or destroy the fellowship in a group. On the other hand, if the fellowship in the church or religious group is to be maintained on the highest level, all of the compromise or adjustment must not be made by one individual or by those representing one particular position. There must be a willingness on the part of all "to give a little in order to gain a little."

Compromise does not do any serious damage to the integrity of an individual or a group so long as the end attained is greater or more significant than the sacrifice that was made. This is particularly true when the end could not have been attained without the compromise.

For compromise to be most effective and least damaging there must be enough maturity by the individual or the group to distinguish between the essential and the nonessential. There can properly be more of a readiness to compromise on the latter than the former. There are limits to how far an individual or a group can go in compromising on essentials and still maintain his or its integrity.

There may come a time, for example, when the individual will have to take a stand even if he has to stand alone. When he reaches the limits of his accommodation, if the majority votes against him he should accept the decision graciously. He should beware of a martyr complex, of a self-righteous spirit, or of an attitude of superior enlightenment. After all, there is at least a possibility that he may be wrong. At least he should react in such a way as to strengthen rather than to weaken the fellowship of the group: church, association, or convention. He should trust the future for his vindication.



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LAW, ORDER, AND JUSTICE

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Our democratic way of life cannot be preserved without respect for law and for those who enact, interpret, and enforce the law. Just as surely, a democracy cannot permanently survive unless it provides justice for its citizens.

For a democracy to remain healthy, these two, law and order on the one hand and justice on the other, may be kept in proper balance. They must move along together.

In contemporary America there has been a breakdown to a distressing degree of law and order. This in turn has stemmed to a considerable degree from the struggle for justice by many of our citizens.

Extremists at both ends of the present struggle over civil rights have contributed to the breakdown of respect for law and for those who interpret and enforce the law. Some of those who now cry the loudest for "law and order" are the very ones who sought in every possible way, a few years ago, to evade compliance with the courts' decisions regarding desegregation.

They were and some still are particularly harsh in their criticisms of the United States Supreme Court. Some have even accused the Court of following the Communist line. Such not only contributes to a breakdown of respect for the court but also for law in general.

Both order and justice are essential for a healthy social order. Unfortunately, some who seek to attain justice use methods that tend to undermine respect for law and order. When this is done the cause of justice is ultimately hurt rather than helped.

On the other hand, some people would maintain law and order even if it meant the denial of justice to some of our citizens. Ultimately this is self-defeating. The law will not be respected by those who cannot find justice under it, and order ultimately will be undermined.

The relative importance of order and justice are determined by the situation. In a time of rapid change and revolution such as the contemporary period, justice should be given primacy. This can be done without a reckless abandonment of law and order.

Let anyone who believes he is justified in disobeying a particular law seek to do so in such a way as not to lose respect or to cause others to lose respect for law as such and for those who enforce it.

In other words, if he feels that he must disobey let him do so regretfully and with a willingness to suffer the consequences for his disobedience. His hope should be that his suffering in some way will contribute to a change of the law and will be a redemptive influence in general in society.

On the other hand, let the majority who have the power be sure that they are just as concerned about justice as they are about law and order. If they are not, the law and order that they may now have will not be on a sound basis. It will at best be uncertain and unstable.

It should not take a wise man to see the relevance of the preceding to both whites and blacks in the present racial crisis in the United States.



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**Baptist Rule Excludes Two
Churches From Association**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Myers Park Baptist Church and St. John's Baptist Church in effect were excluded from membership in the Mecklenburg Baptist Association here because of their policies on receiving new members.

Both churches, though practicing baptism by immersion themselves, will accept members from other denominations who previously have received baptism by some means other than immersion.

Last fall, the Mecklenburg Baptist Association passed an amendment to the bylaws which renders it mandatory for churches belonging to the association to require that all of their members be immersed.

The amendment took effect the day before the association met for its annual session, in effect, making the two churches ineligible for membership.

When the association convened (Oct. 23), it passed a motion seating only those messengers who represented churches abiding by the constitution.

Neither the Myers Park nor the St. John's Church, however, had sent messengers to the association.

An effort to rescind last year's ruling was tabled after Hal Shoemaker, minister of music and associate pastor at Pritchard Memorial Baptist Church here asked the association to nullify its previous action and admit the two churches.

The amendment, approved by the association last year by a vote of 214-130, states: "All churches affiliated with this association shall be churches who use the New Testament as the statement of their faith and church policy and require that all candidates, who are physically able, be immersed in water, on the basis of belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, to qualify for membership."

Both St. John's and Myers Park accept without subsequent immersion members who have been sprinkled or affused (poured) as members of other denominations.

St. John's Church insists that such candidates for membership must have been sprinkled or affused after belief in Christ as Savior. Myers Park Church makes no such distinction and has had a virtual open membership policy since 1949.

Prior to the meeting of the association, the chairman of deacons at Myers Park said the church would not send messengers to the association because the association "has left us no alternative, unless we go back on our stated position--which we don't plan to do."

Claude I. Broach, pastor of St. John's church, stressed the importance of unity among all Christians, and expressed hope that differences would be resolved among local Baptists.

Both churches are continuing to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mecklenburg Baptist Association is comprised of 74 churches with 42,350 members, and is the largest association in the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Each of the two churches involved in the controversy has about 1,700 members.

It was the second situation within a week when a Baptist association rejected a church (or churches) because of their practices on baptism. Earlier, the Union Baptist Association in Houston, rejected the application of Covenant Baptist Church for membership because it did not meet bylaw stipulations concerning re-baptism of church members who previously were baptized by churches of other denominations.

Dedication Held For Room
Where Board Was Founded

NASHVILLE (BP)--A reproduction of the room in which the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1891 was described as "a link to the glorious past" during dedication services held here.

The Founder's Room, located now in the first floor lobby of the Sunday School Board's administrative tower building, was originally the pastor's study in Nashville's historic First Baptist Church, located about four blocks away from the board at Seventh and Broadway.

Built in 1884, the study was torn down in the fall of 1967 when First Baptist Church voted to demolish the old auditorium to make way for a new building. The Sunday School Board requested, and was granted, permission to preserve the room by building a replica at the board.

Julius C. Thompson, pastor of Nashville's Dalewood Baptist Church and chairman of the executive committee of the elected Sunday School Board, was speaker at the dedication services.

In dedicating the room, Thompson said, "This Founders' Room is a constant reminder of past, present and future. There is history here and history is a living thing. There is no history without meaning. To deny that history has meaning is to deny that it exists."

Original brick, doors, door frames, windows, window frames and stained glass were used in the reconstruction. The room is furnished after the manner of the 1890 period.

W.R.L. Smith was pastor of First Baptist Church when the board was organized. He served as first president of the board.

The room has been the site of such significant Baptist historical events as: the beginning of the Tennessee Baptist Orphans' Home (1886); the organization of the Woman's Missionary Union of Nashville (1892); the planning for the first Sunday School in the area; and the planning of the founding of Union University, a Baptist college located in Jackson, Tenn.

Thompson praised board employes and elected leaders--"hundreds of skilled and dedicated men and women who have sought to build upon the work of the founders"--and challenged them "to build upon history." He added, "Our best hope of knowing where to go in the future is to know where we've been in the past."

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