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PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
(another in a series)

ORDINATION
by T. B. Maston

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When I was seventeen years of age I felt "called to preach." After responding to the call I had a conviction, which I could not explain, that I was never supposed to be the pastor of a church. I struggled for years to find out what the Lord wanted me to do. This struggle led me to study the New Testament conception of the ministry and the New Testament practice regarding ordination.

I concluded that the basic call from the New Testament perspective was and is a call to minister or serve. It is a call to a particular type of life, a call to a distinctive frame of mind. This call applies to all of God's children and should be heard by all.

There apparently is an additional call that comes to some to perform certain distinctive functions for the Christian fellowship. The main purpose of the work of these uniquely called ones is to perfect or equip the saints that the latter in turn may do the work of the Lord.

Their call is basically a call to minister or to serve in a distinct way and to a unique degree rather than a call to an office that separates them from other members of the Christian group.

All of those who have been called to perform a distinctive task for the Christian fellowship may properly be ordained. Ordination, if it follows the New Testament pattern, will be a simple service of dedication or setting apart an individual to the work to which the Lord has called him.

It will include only the laying on of hands and prayer. It is possible that the laying on of hands in the New Testament days was done by all the congregation rather than being restricted to those who had been previously ordained.

The laying on of hands and prayer was and is the symbolic recognition of what had already taken place. The one being ordained or set apart has previously been separated unto the work of the Lord by the Lord himself. It is also possible that the laying on of hands is meant to symbolize the induement of the Holy Spirit for the task to which one has been called.

If we follow the New Testament conception of ordination, we will see that a church could properly ordain or set apart men or women who have felt called to an educational or music ministry, to teaching or missionary service, or to any other type of special ministry within, to, and for the Christian fellowship.

Furthermore, if the New Testament pattern were followed, it is even possible that a person might be ordained more than once. Saul and Barnabas may have been ordained previous to the occasion at Antioch when they were set apart to the work to which God had called them. In the contemporary period, if one feels led to perform a different task, he could properly be set apart for it. This has been done in the past in some churches for those going to a mission field.

I wish Baptists would return to the New Testament pattern of ordination. Being realistic, I doubt if that will ever be done.

If not, then we should not claim New Testament authority for our prevalent practice concerning those who can be ordained and for some features of the typical ordination service. Let us frankly admit that our dominant perspective regarding the ministry and ordination contains some elements that are not found in the New Testament.

July 18, 1969

Sisters Become Citizens
With Help of Baptist Group

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by Robert O'Brien

DALLAS (BP)--Two sisters from Dallas--by way of Mexico--are citizens of the United States because a Baptist lawyer went to Sunday School and decided to put into action what he learned.

Because he did, Mrs. Esperanza Soto and Mrs. Mary Lou Escobar, both baptists, learned an important lesson: It's not really so difficult to become a citizen--it just looks that way.

"It all (naturalization) looked so hard," said Mrs. Escobar, who came to the states 15 years ago from Monterrey, Mexico. "Somehow, I just never thought I could learn everything I needed to know," she said.

That was before Durward Moore's Sunday School class at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, started talking about community needs.

The class stopped talking and started acting. Volunteers went to the Ervay Baptist Center, directed by Home Missionary J. D. Holt, to help replace sheetrock. The Holts showed them around and explained the center's operation.

"We were dreaming out loud about projects we would like to start, such as a citizenship class," Mrs. Holt recalled. Moore who has an undergraduate degree in history and government, needed no prompting. "That's something I could do," he volunteered

Mrs. Soto, Mr. and Mrs. Escobar were in the first class of four which Moore faced that first night at the Ervay Center, where the Sotos and the Escobars are members.

Moore plunged right in. Fifteen minutes later he had covered 50 years of U.S. history and was just about to shift into high gear. The he looked around and saw that the group sat there in amazed confusion.

The problem was simple. The class had no inkling of what he was talking about. All those facts he'd taken for granted since childhood--Columbus, George Washington and all the rest--were North American, if not Greek, to them.

"I slowed down after that," Moore says, "and we took things gradually. I enjoyed watching them progress. They're capable people."

"Many Latin Americans and other foreign-born people would make good citizens," explained Holt. "But most of them find it hard to bridge the cultural and language gaps without help. Most of them have never had the encouragement to do what it takes."

Mrs. Soto expressed it from the heart. "Mr. Moore and the Ervay Center are doing a wonderful thing," she said. "Other churches should also help people become citizens."

"There is so much my people don't know about the United States," she continued. Some won't try to become citizens because they have heard untrue rumors. Some think they must go to court and walk on the flag of their country before the U.S. government will accept them.

"But now I can tell them differently," she beamed, "because I have been there. I pray that God will help me be a good citizen of my country."