

(BP)---FEATURES

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Writer's Son, Age 7 Months,
Is "Ordained" To Ministry

by Larry R. Jorden

DALLAS (BP)--Lawrence Shelby Jorden, son of a Baptist Standard staff writer, is too young to read or write, vote or fight.

But at age seven months, he was "recommended to the saints as an ordained or licensed minister in good standing."

So reads his "Ministerial Credential" issued by the Assembly of God in Christ Jesus, Inc., which says it is legally a church.

Because it is a church, it says its ministers are entitled to numerous legal and private privileges, some of which include tax breaks, deferential treatment in hospitals and jails, and discounts on items ranging from clothes to airline tickets.

Shelby was ordained, without any questions asked, when his father responded in his name to an advertisement in a Dallas newspaper. The ad simply said anyone interested in receiving ministerial credentials and doctor of divinity degree certificates should write to: "Assembly, P. O. Box 1576, Irving, Tex."

The Ministerial License received through the mail reads, in part, "This is to certify that Lawrence Shelby Jorden of Dallas, Tex., has been ordained to the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and is commissioned to perform all the duties of an ordained minister."

Also received was a wallet-size ministerial identification card which says that the church commissions the bearer "to perform all the functions of the Christian ministry in accordance with state, provincial and international laws."

A letter accompanying the ordination certificate and card says that the "enclosed full credentials" are "for carrying out the duties of the ministry as you feel ordained of God to do.

"There is no charge for this service," the letter continues. "These credentials are issued through our church charter and you have the privilege of carrying out your own belief.

"This work is carried on by free will offerings to help defray printing, postage and newspaper advertising," adds the letter.

Another enclosure solicits \$20 for the doctor of divinity certificate.

The national headquarters of the assembly is located in a back room of a storage area built onto the three-car carport of its national chairman.

The carport shields two Cadillacs and a Pontiac from the sun and dust of a rundown section of Irving, a Dallas suburb.

W. D. Albin, chairman of the church, is a piano dealer and former Fort Worth preacher. He appears to be about 70 and says he runs the assembly as a public service--the service of giving away ministerial credentials through the mail and selling doctor of divinity degrees.

The degrees are sent complete with 10 lessons on how to set up and organize a church.

To anyone contending his church is not a full-fledged member of the religious establishment, Albin assures that it was "chartered under the laws of Texas" in 1939.

"It is a very serious thing," he says. "When that seal goes onto the ministerial credential, you are able to perform all the functions of the ministry. It's for real."

The national secretary, Shirley A. Holly, mentions some of the ministerial functions empowered by the credential and ordination certificate.

"With them you can get into hospitals and jails to visit and you can get discounts on some airlines," she said.

A check with numerous airlines operating in Dallas, however, revealed only one that offers ministerial discounts (half-fare on a space-available basis).

One woman present in the assembly's office was taking her 10-lesson doctoral course and mainly was asking about the tax benefits of running a non-profit "church."

"If I run a church and give gifts to my relatives, can I count them as tax deductions?" she asked.

She was instructed how to keep records of "offerings" and told to send a copy of the records to the church's national headquarters "so you'll have proof if Uncle Sam checks."

The "church's" theology could be summed up in the phrase, "to thine own self be true."

The national headquarters holds that each individual can believe what he wishes, but is accountable to his own conscience.

The secretary said a woman told her she would go to hell because she wore a blouse exposing her midriff. She responded that she would not, because she did not feel it was wrong.

"If my conscience said it was wrong and I wore it, I would go to hell for that," she said. "But if a person does what he thinks is right, he will go to heaven anyway."

No scripture or authority was quoted for these beliefs, but the office was decorated with a knitted cross on the wall and a large Bible on a desk.

Albin claims his church has ordained ministers from coast to coast in the United States and Canada. His secretary gave no number, but said there were "thousands."

There is no record to prove it, but Rev. L. Shelby Jerden, now age 8 months, may be the youngest such ordained minister in the nation.

Shelby may be too young (and too moral) to use the ministerial tax advantages and privileges of his "office," but he is seeking to bridge the ultimate generation gap as a "Minister to the Nursery Generation."

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Liberians Name New Baby For Church House Builder

GAYEH, Liberia (BP)--The parents of a baby born in this village wanted to name their new son after a Southern Baptist missionary, Paul Grossman, who was back in the United States on furlough.

But they could not remember the missionary's name!

The Liberians customarily called him "Pastor" or "The Builder of the Church House" rather than by his name.

When Grossman returned to Liberia he made the 18-mile drive and four-hour walk to Gayeh. There he was introduced to his tiny namesake: "Housebuilder."

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April 20, 1970

High Court Refuses to Hear Protest of Space Religion

WASHINGTON (BP)--Madalyn Murray O'Hair, noted atheist crusader, lost another round in her battle against religion when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear her plea to restrain the religious practices of astronauts in space.

Mrs. O'Hair charged that the broadcast of a prayer and of a Bible reading of the account of creation by the astronauts violated the "no establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment. She also claimed that such broadcast violated her constitutional right of freedom from religion.

The charges arose after a broadcast on Dec. 24, 1968 from the Apollo 8 flight around the moon. Mrs. O'Hair claimed that the broadcast was not a private expression of religion by the astronauts. Rather, she said that the religious broadcasts were arranged by and financed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The U.S. Supreme Court received Mrs. O'Hair's appeal from the U.S. District Court for the western district of Texas. It announced its decision not to hear (refused certiorari) without giving any reasons for its refusal. The district court had dismissed her complaint for lack of a federal question.

In addition to her objection to the religious broadcasts by astronauts, Mrs. O'Hair sought to restrain NASA from "the preparation, planning, promotion and conducting of religious activities and exercises" in excess of the limitations of the First Amendment.

She also coupled her complaint against the astronauts with the practice of justices and judges in using "so help me God" in their oaths of office. She claimed that such oaths exclude "those not professing a belief in deity from service on such courts."

The refusal of the U.S. Supreme Court to hear Mrs. O'Hair's case has the effect of letting the decision of the district court stand. Hence, her complaints against religion in the space program are at present considered to be not valid, observers here said.

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Apollo 13 Brought Science,
Religion Together, Editor Says

4/20/70

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--"The Apollo 13 mission, as perhaps nothing else in this amazing 20th Century, has brought science and religion together at their best," an editorial in the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine said here.

Editor Erwin L. McDonald wrote here that the Apollo 13 mission, far from being a failure, may turn out to be "the greatest mission of all" if somehow "Apollo 13 can point the way for a universal and prayerful concern for all people such as that we have felt for three astronauts in peril."

Noting that the world looked on with prayerful, bated breath as Astronauts James A. Lovell Jr., Fred W. Haise Jr., and John L. Swigert splashed home safe, the editorial observed that "never before had so many hearts of praying people been united in intercession for a common objective.

Space officials learned through Apollo 13 "what to do when something blows up a quarter of a million miles from home," the editor wrote.

"Some will say that the original mission was not accomplished, and that Apollo 13 was a colossal failure. But many will see a much greater achievement in the altered, emergency operation than if the flight as originally planned had come off routinely.

"And if, as now has been so forcefully brought home to us, science must be able to function on an emergency basis as well as routinely, so must religion," the editorial continued. "For prayer, if it never gets out of the day-to-day ritual, may degenerate into the mumbo jumbo of mere incantation."

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"What has happened to us, giving us a traumatic realization of man's helplessness even in the space age, has turned our hearts Godward," the editorial said. "And men and women of faith around the world see God's loving and helping hand in what has come to pass.

"The experience itself of uniting the hearts of peoples of all nations is of far greater import for the world than the placing of a few additional tracks on the surface of the moon," the editorial said.

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Mission Superintendents
Set Meeting in Denver

4/20/70

DENVER (BP)--Allen W. Graves and E. C. Watson have been named principal speakers for the annual Southern Baptist Convention Conference of Superintendents of Missions here.

The meeting will be held at Riverside Baptist Church in Denver on June 1, preceding the annual sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Paul D. Jackson, missionary for the Polk County and Haralson Baptist Association surrounding Cedartown, Ga., is president of the missionaries.

He said Graves, administrative dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. will be keynote speaker.

Watson, consultant on associational administration for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta, will bring a major address, previewing helps for superintendents of missions coming from the SBC Home Mission Board.

Another feature will be a panel of associational missionaries, discussing specific problems in their work. "Fun time" around the dinner table will feature a magic routine by Leo Jenkins, pastor of Center Point Baptist Church at Dalton, Ga., and a former associational missionary.

Jackson said wives will be invited to the dinner meeting with their missionary husbands. Baptist philanthropist Warren P. Sewell of Bremen, Ga., will host the dinner.

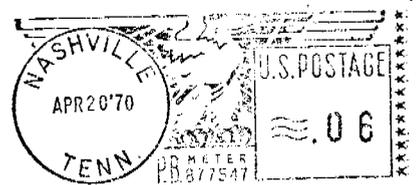
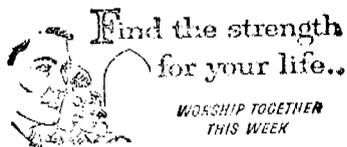
In addition to Jackson, other officers of the superintendents of missions are vice president George Gaskin of Denver; secretary James Joslin of Springfield, Mo; and treasurer D. C. Presley of Capshaw, Ala.

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