



FEATURES

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Was Mexican 'Scratchback,'
Now Leads Growing Church

By Tim Nicholas

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Daniel Sotelo, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista del Sur here, originally came into the United States illegally.

He was a Mexican "scratchback." "Not a wetback," he asserts, "I crawled under the wires."

Having grown up in Guadeloupe, Mexico, he was already a master baker when he arrived in San Jose, Calif. at age 17.

He landed a job at a Mexican bakery next door to a Mexican restaurant when he was 18--after he had learned "how to gamble, drink, and other assorted vices," he says.

The restaurant's owners, named Gonzales, were members of the Spanish Baptist church in San Jose and "they had a nice-looking daughter," Sotelo says.

Though he had grown up in a strong Catholic influence (his aunt was mother superior at the convent in Guadeloupe) he wanted to be near that girl.

"I thought it was the devil's church, but I went anyway," he says.

"Though I wasn't a church member, they allowed me to sing in the choir. Shortly, I walked the aisle, making Jesus the Lord of my life," he recalls.

"Then later that day in November, 1951, I headed for one of my favorite gambling-spots, but just couldn't go in. And I haven't gambled since then either."

Two months later he married the girl, Elvira. He recalls the police were called in to quench a loud argument he and his wife had over whether to go to church; he's the one who wanted to go, every time the doors were open.

Sotelo worked awhile as a baker, but by 1953 he felt led to enter the ministry.

Friends talked him into moving to northern California--to a Bible college --soon after the birth of his first child, one of seven.

He had been at the Bible college only a few weeks when he met Loyd Corder, then head of Language missions for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Corder "told me I should be studying at California Baptist College," (Riverside, Calif.) says Sotelo, "I who in Mexico had been to the third grade three times and never finished it."

Nevertheless, Sotelo moved down to Riverside and began at California Baptist College in 1954 in special status.

"I hardly understood English then," he says, "and I know I passed those first three courses, speech, remedial English and U.S. history, by the grace of God."

It took him 11 years to complete the bachelor of arts degree, studying alongside serving as pastor of Spanish churches in El Monte, Pico Rivera, East Los Angeles, and Riverside.

"Now I even have California public schools teaching credentials," he says.

Also in 1954, Sotelo decided to legalize himself.

"Though the police had asked no questions, I went back to Mexico to fix up my papers and come back into the country legally," he says.

Last year, when the San Francisco sheriff's department asked Sotelo to become the chaplain for Mexican prisoners in the jail system, a little checking on his background, revealed several deportations prior to 1952.

"That was all before I became a Christian," he explained to the investigators. Since he had become a legal resident and had no record since the deportations, he got the chaplain's job.

"I remember one time especially when I was deported," he chuckles. "I had bought a car and was driving home from a party where I'm sure I had been drinking, and a tree got in my way."

"The accident knocked my front teeth out, but fortunately a doctor lived across the street from where the accident took place. He patched me up and called the police to have me deported."

"That was only a month before I started going to church," he adds, "back in San Jose again."

Sotelo's persistence is paying off in San Francisco.

"I wanted to build a large, self-sustaining, self-supporting Spanish church," he says.

And that's exactly the kind of church he is serving.

Primera Iglesia Bautista del Sur (First Southern Baptist Church), had about 35 in attendance when Sotelo became pastor in 1965; now they have 225 in morning services.

The church became self-supporting in 1967, though Sotelo remained on missionary status with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for three more years.

An average of 18 nationalities attend services--mostly from Latin American countries.

Sotelo leads in a weekly Spanish radio program using local talent. And the church holds daily English language classes with 60 adults currently enrolled.

A medical clinic at the church is not operating right now for two reasons.

First, the church is finishing a building program which will house the medical and dental clinic and child care center by the end of 1975.

Second, the clinic's former physician, W.T. Kent, is going to Panama as a medical missionary.

Sotelo preaches bi-lingually--a few minutes in Spanish, a few in English.

"I repeat the same thoughts, but not a literal translation," he says.

"I use different illustrations so the people who speak both languages won't get bored."

The church is only five blocks from downtown San Francisco in the middle of a Latin American neighborhood.

"The Home Mission Board's \$50,000 loan investment has paid off," says Sotelo, a member of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"Now our property's valued at a half million dollars."

"It's all by the grace of God," Sotelo says.

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'Yankee--Stay Here !'
Argentine Baptists Say

CORDOBA, Argentina (BP)-- "Yankee--stay here!" demanded an Argentine Baptist pastor, directing his remarks to Southern Baptist missionaries.

Over 100 national Baptists affirmed his message with a standing ovation lasting several minutes.

"While the walls of our cities may tell you, 'Yankee, go home,' we, the Argentine Baptists, say to you, 'Stay here. You are needed.'"

These words, written by pastor E. David Gilles, were read at a recent four-day Baptist conference by Roberto Turrisi, a missionary for the Argentine Baptist Convention.

Over 150 Argentine pastors, laymen, missionaries and denominational workers attended the convention, along with Southern Baptist missionaries to Argentina.

Gilles was referring to nationalists who, during recent political and economic instabilities, have spoken out against Americans, loudly proclaiming they do not want them in their country, according to Southern Baptist missionary James O. Teel Jr.

The Argentine pastor also noted that in Baptist organizations more responsibility has been turned over to the Argentines, and some missionaries have begun to doubt the continued need of their services. The missionaries' doubts were alleviated by Gilles' statement and the national pastors' response, Teel noted.

Gilles states, "You are needed for the dialogue, for the inspiration, for the challenge, for the confrontation of different points of view about important aspects of the work."

"Look for, and you will find, your new identity in this work grown adult. Stay and fill the place that God called you to occupy."

Missionary Teel related, "When he had finished, the pastors broke out into a standing ovation which lasted for several minutes."

A prayer meeting was then held which lasted another two hours.

"Nationalism is still very much alive, even among Baptists," Teel concluded, "but no one can deny that the foreign missionary still has a place in Argentina."



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