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Florida Church Gives Funds
For San Blas Radio Station

By Adon Taft
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ALIGANDI, San Blas Islands (BP)--Iguanigtipippi Perez lay in a hammock tied to two of the main poles of a huge bamboo hut with a thatched roof. He was smoking a pipe prepared for him by one of the 300 men who sat in concentric circles of assorted benches and chairs.

One of the traditional chiefs of the Cuna Indians, Iguanigtipippi was presiding from his hammock over the nightly session of the Congress of Aligandi, one of the largest islands in the San Blas chain of some 360 small islands along the Atlantic coast of Panama.

Tommy Watson, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Perrine, Fla.; Dr. Daniel Gruver, a Southern Baptist medical missionary to the San Blas islands; and I had been summoned to appear before the congress. Seated at the right hand of the chief, we were asked to speak.

Dr. Gruver, who knew most of the men personally through his work at the hospital, addressed the congress in Spanish, a language half the men speak in addition to their native tongue. A young Indian translated his words into the native language, as Dr. Gruver introduced the two visitors from Miami.

Watson arose to explain the purpose of the visit. He announced that the Perrine Baptist Church near Miami wanted to give \$16,000 for the Cunas to build their own radio station on Aligandi. The money is to be given to the San Blas Baptist Association whose Indian leaders will decide how to use it.

Watson pointed out that there now is no radio broadcast anywhere in the Cuna language. The radio station on Aligandi could be used to make public announcements from the Congress, give public health instruction, offer education, provide music, and carry news to the 40 or so inhabited islands and handful of mainland villages where the 25,000 Cunas live. He added he hoped it could be used also to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, noted Watson, the Cunas could broadcast basketball games like the one we had watched that afternoon. Although the Cunas are the smallest people in the world, except for the pygmies, they are terrific basketball players. They can leap high, and they are off their feet all the time. Their passing is phenomenal. They seem to know where every player is. And they have a good eye for the basket.

The buzz that went through the Congress indicated the Miami minister had hit on a point of pride with the Cunas. Then there was applause.

After some discussion, Iguanigtipippi sat up and said that the Cunas appreciated, and would accept, the gift of the money for the radio station. He said they viewed the money as more a gift from God than from Watson's church.

I made a few remarks about the beauty of the island where 2,200 Indians live in large, dirt floor huts huddled so close together that the size of the village is deceiving. And I expressed our gratitude at the warm reception we had received from the Cunas.

Then, with great dignity, Chief Iguanigtipippi rose and went out of the "town hall." Moments later he returned with four "molas," the colorful cloths of multiple applique out of which Cuna women make their blouses. When framed, they make beautiful art pieces to hang on a wall.

With an appropriate speech opening the village to us, the old chief presented the molas to Watson and me much as our mayor might present a key to the city to a visitor in Miami.

Evidence of another milestone of good relations was given at that meeting of the Congress when Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the elders, asked that I write about the new farm the Indians are carving out of the jungle on the nearby mainland. No crops are raised on the island where they live.

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The new 40-acre farm, of which Roosevelt is so proud, will be used to raise tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, and other vegetables recommended by Dr. Gruver. Those vegetables never have been a part of the Cuna diet, which has consisted mostly of plantain (a banana-like fruit), coconuts, corn, and seafood.

Dr. Gruver believes the lack of those vegetables in the diet has been to a large degree responsible for the fact that the Cunas are stunted in growth, most of them have tuberculosis, and at least one-tenth of the babies starve to death. To make his point, Dr. Gruver operates a child feeding center in cooperation with the public health department of the Republic of Panama.

It has been hard for the Cunas to change centuries of custom, especially when some of the custom was dictated by the native religion. They steadfastly refused to change until some of the Indians came to know Jesus Christ and be freed from the restrictions of the ancient Indian faith.

Others of the Cuna leaders, who are extremely intelligent, could see that in six years of serving the Indians, Dr. Gruver had never harmed and had helped many. So they finally agreed to try his suggestion.

When Watson asked if he could bring 40 or 50 young people from Miami to work on the farm for three weeks this summer, the Cunas welcomed the idea with excitement. They insisted that the young people stay in their "bohios," as the huts are called, with them—a rare offer to white men, whom the Indians have historical reason to distrust.

One of the Cunas rose to tell how two young men from the Perrine church had lived with them last summer. "When it was time for them to go, my wife cried as if she were losing two sons," he said through the interpreter.

When they arrive, the youth from the church will find a place of tropical beauty that is spectacular. And they will meet people who have maintained their tribal identity and personal dignity in a culture so primitive it is a case study in many sociology books. The people are gracious, friendly, and extremely intelligent.

The whole place is a paradox of primitive existence tinged with the most modern technology. As we left Aligandi, for example, we were taken by "kayuca," a rough-hewn, dugout canoe. But it was fitted with an outboard motor.

It took us to the mainland of Panama where, on the fringe of the jungle, a short, rough trail called a landing strip runs right to the water's edge.

Standing beside the light plane which would fly us out was a young Cuna Indian, wearing a T-shirt bearing a Spanish inscription that declared: "The Devil made me do it!"

The message on his shirt was the exact opposite of the motivation of the pastor and people of Perrine Baptist Church and Dr. Gruver. They are convinced that God made them do it—bring the message of Jesus Christ to the Cuna Indians of the San Blas Islands.

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Seminary Professor Warns
Occult Can Lead to Demonism

2/25/72

FORT WORTH (BP)--People who tamper with the occult should exercise caution since it could lead to involvement with the demonic, a professor of philosophy of religion warned in a series of three special lectures at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

John P. Newport, who has taught at Southwestern since 1952, delivered three lectures on "A Christian Response to the Occult" during the annual Day-Higginbotham lecture series at Southwestern Seminary.

"There is evidence that interest in the demonic and the occult is widespread," Newport said. He added that Christians should become informed about this growing trend, and noted that the January issue of Home Missions Magazine was devoted entirely to the Occult. His three lectures on the subject will constitute portions of a forthcoming book, Demons, Demons, Demons, to be published by Broadman Press in May.

"Tarot cards, witchcraft, palmistry, numerology, even devil worship are a part of our time," he said. "Zodiac jewelry, computerized horoscopes and public exorcisms (casting out demons) have been commonplace."

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People have used these fads to plummet themselves deeper into the magical occultic world of witchcraft, which includes both white magic (good) or black magic (evil).

Newport estimated that there are at least 5,000 witches in New York, and a reported 10,000 in Los Angeles. "In the United States there are perhaps as many as 100,000 witches in all--about half the number of clergymen or physicians."

Tracing the historical growth of witchcraft, Newport said that witchcraft went underground after the Salem witch trials in 1692. In 1965, however, the popularity of Rosemary's Baby kicked off what has been called "the Second Coming of witchcraft and black magic."

In 1966, the Church of Satan was organized in San Francisco by Anton LaVey. Members of that group number their calendar from that point as Year One. Newport pointed out that this is the same year that God was proclaimed dead, that the Sexual Freedom League came into prominence, and that the "hippies developed as a free sex culture."

"It is not ironic," Newport observed, "that ritual murder suggesting black magic was performed against Sharon Tate, wife of Roman Polanski, director of Rosemary's Baby. Sharon was a student of black magic, voodoo, astrology and the occult arts."

The philosophy professor gave several reasons for the fresh outbreak of the occult. One is disenchantment with science and technology. A main cause, however, is the traditional churches' lack of spiritual power "to meet the needs of people for transcendence, immortality and liberation," Newport declared.

"The occult has become almost a counter religion," he said. The churches seem to be too rational, cold, impersonal and remote."

Thus young people especially turn to witchcraft as one option in their quest for meaning and security, when the church should be providing this through Christ, Newport said.

He quoted one young man who recently stated, "The stars and cards, even Satan, are more concerned about me than either my draft board, the Pentagon or the church."

Newport quoted Sybil Leek, a famed British witch, as saying that witchcraft is a fulfilling religion without Jesus Christ or the church.

"When the magical is dabbled with as a counter-religion, it opens the way to the influence of the Powers of Darkness--to the demonic," Newport cautioned.

With the resurgence of Satanic activity through the occult, Newport suggested that this is a demonic age.

"It is a demonic age, as is every age, in the sense that there appears to be a struggle--both cosmic and historical--moving toward a crescendo between the forces of God and the forces of Satanic evil," he declared.

This struggle can be seen in the contemporary youth culture, and is heightening, pulling young people to opposite poles, Newport observed.

He contrasted the Jesus Movement with the trend of interest in the occult, saying the Jesus people are all out for Christ and the other groups are "all out for the Devil."

He concluded that it is the Christian's duty and opportunity to devise frameworks of justice, to do deeds of love in the name and power of Christ, and to provide exciting new versions of Christian life styles.

"This means also that there is to be no escapism or despair," he said. "Satan can never increase his might beyond the measure granted to him by God."

He said there is no harm in being informed on witchcraft, astrology, and related subjects, except that "persons must realize what they are and must watch out for fads opening up into something more dangerous."



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