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Technology and Medicine
Raise Serious Questions

By David R. Wilkinson

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--A speaker at a conference on the Bible and Christian ethics urged Southern Baptists to lead the way in grappling with the complex moral questions created by rapid developments in technology and medicine.

In an address on biomedical ethics, Daniel B. McGee, associate professor of religion at Baylor University, warned that many Christians are retreating from the demanding ethical issues involved in "the new medicine."

"God did not create us to be observers of history," McGee claimed. "He did not put us in the bleachers to watch the action on the field. God's activity and our activity are intertwined. God calls us to be co-workers with him."

McGee, a leading Southern Baptist authority on biomedical issues, delivered 15 lectures on Christian ethics during the annual conference sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Much of the reasoning for Christians' non-involvement in bioethical decision-making, he believes, is based on a "distorted and inadequate theology" which divides the human experience into two segments--those areas of life which human beings can understand and "mystery" areas which they cannot understand.

The first area, he said, is assigned to man's control and the second to God's control. Many people, he added, place bioethics in the second category and consider involvement in those issues to be "playing God."

The question, "Are we playing God?" is legitimately raised in some instances, McGee said. "But it should never be used as an excuse for abandoning our responsibilities as stewards of the immense resources we have to heal and to make life more abundant for humankind," he declared.

Christian input is needed, McGee stressed, to give moral guidance to the mushrooming power of modern technology and institutions to control the processes of birth, death and life. Without such guidance, he said, decisions may be made which would seriously damage and limit individual freedom and human diversity. Choices related to biomedical issues, he added, should be communal decisions.

"The majority of decisions of how we, as a society, will use our new powers cannot be left to the limited perspective of any one group," McGee said. "Just as one individual cannot know it all, one profession cannot make these decisions of life control for the entire society. In recognition of our mutual dependence, we must find ways to listen to and learn from each other."

Although excited by the potential benefits from biomedical research, McGee found fault with some of its priorities. He is "deeply disturbed," he said, by "our tendency to go for the headlines, to devote all of our emotions, minds and money to discovering some new area of technology or medicine" while overlooking many basic areas of human need.

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"The greatest threat to the health of the most people today is hunger," McGee pointed out. "While we are worrying about how to increase IQs through genetic engineering, there are those who are mentally retarded for life because there was inadequate protein in the mother's diet.

"In the sight of God we will have accomplished little with all of our startling advances in medicine and life control until we have achieved a more just distribution of the blessings He has given us."

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President Challenges
Religious Leaders

By Robert O'Brien

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--As President Jimmy Carter prepared to come down from the domestic summit with plans to combat the nation's economic and energy woes, he had input from 10 national religious leaders.

Carter met with them July 10 and challenged them to call for spiritual strength for Americans to face the national crisis, said Jimmy R. Allen, pastor of the First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas, one of the participants.

"The occasion for the domestic summit that the President has been having has centered on the energy crisis," said Allen, immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, in a telephone interview with Baptist Press. "It is obvious that religion experts are not expert in energy. But we were called by the president to talk to him about the spiritual crisis and the malaise in American life, and the loss of confidence in the nation and in the leadership of institutions. We also noted the fact we're facing a new day as Americans in trying to strengthen our understanding of what's happening to us as we come into a time of scarcity we have not known since we have faced other crises like the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War II and that kind of thing."

Allen, who was called during a vacation in California to fly to Camp David, Md., said, "We talked in very concrete terms on things that are options we could see the president might have in dealing with attitudes of the American public."

Although Allen said he felt it was not proper for him to reveal those specifics before the president decides on what he will tell the nation, he said he felt that Carter "has his finger on the pulse of America" and is "committed to leadership."

"The president was challenging us as religious leaders to our task of continuing to call for spiritual awakening in our land because it has been within the best of American experience that whenever national crises are upon us that the spiritual dimension of the response is crucial," Allen said.

"It is now true even that while we are not in a fighting war, we are at a very critical time as we face the whole energy crisis and other similar kinds of adjustment," he continued.

"Usually our crises have come from external enemies. Now we are facing a crisis in the American spirit as to whether we will develop the discipline and sacrifice and the feeling of oneness necessary for us to continue to assume our role as leaders in the world community," Allen said.

Allen said the president led the group in prayer and then spent four-and-a-half hours, which included the evening meal, in a give and take exchange with them.

"It wasn't just a one-way street for the president of listening to us," Allen said. "He also participated actively and effectively. We came away with an awareness that we have a great challenge, that we have a great country."

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"America has great hope. Man's life does not consist of the amount of gasoline in his automobile tank but in the real values of why we are living. Those answers come out of spiritual resources."

Other who met with the president, Allen said, were Cardinal Terrence Cooke of New York, representing the U. S. Catholic Conference; David Preus, president of the American Lutheran Church; Claire Randall, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum, national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Congress; Greek Orthodox Archbishop Iakovos; Otis Moss, a black Baptist pastor from Cleveland; Roman Catholic Bishop Patrick Flores of El Paso, Texas; Robert Bellah, professor of sociology and comparative studies, University of California at Berkely; and William R. Cannon, United Methodist Bishop of Georgia.

"None of the 10 religious leaders came as representatives of their institutional life," Allen said. "They came as religious leaders Mr. Carter knew and in whom he had confidence."

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Crowds Watch Films While Guns Fire

KUT HIN, Thailand (BP)--With mortar shells whistling overhead, the Thailand film evangelism team set up their movie screen, hoping for an audience of 20 or 30.

But before the evening was over, more than 400 people gathered in the front yard of a house less than a mile from the Cambodian border to see Christian films and hear about Jesus.

"It was a miracle to have so many people in such a situation," said Wisate Sutiprapa, one of the team's projectionists. "They seemed to have a hunger to know God because the nation is so unsettled. They want to find peace and quiet for their hearts."

Sutiprapa said Cambodian troops were firing their big guns at the Vietnamese just across the border. Because shells sometimes fall near this village, many families have moved away to safer areas.

When the film team arrived in the village, they planned to stay only a short time and then hurry on. But at the insistence of the Christians, the crew decided to stay overnight, show the films and preach.

The next morning during a Bible study, a drunken man arrived, asking to join the service. During the following three hours the team tried to answer his many questions as he grew more sober. "When he came to know and understand about God's grace and love," Sutiprapa said, "his countenance changed. He thanked God and received Jesus Christ as his savior."

The team, jointly financed by the Thailand Baptist Mission and the Thailand Baptist Churches Association, spent six weeks in 19 villages, mostly where Christians are few and isolated, according to Maxine (Mrs. Robert R.) Stewart, Southern Baptist missionary press representative. The purpose was to encourage believers and help speed the development of house churches in these villages.

A similar team operates in Korea where more than 1,700 people made some decision for Christ in 1978 after seeing the films.

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