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December 17, 1981

81-194

Baptists Must 'Come to Grips' With Humanism, Philosopher Urges By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Contemporary Christians must "come to grips" with humanism if they expect to speak to today's world, Baptist philosopher Richard B. Cunningham told students and faculty members of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Humanism is among the most pervasive and influential universal ideologies of the twentieth century--at least in the Western world," said Cunningham, professor of Christian philosophy at the seminary.

He said it permeates most areas of contemporary life and culture and involves people who consciously consider the issue and call themselves humanists, as well as "vast numbers of people who live by humanist values, although they may not attach the label to themselves."

Cunningham identified two major divisions of humanistic belief, "naturalistic/secular" and "religious," each with variations.

"The heart of humanism is its emphasis upon the dignity and worth of human beings and their equal value as individuals," Cunningham explained. All forms of humanism stress the importance of human life, human responsibility and potential, the power of human reason to solve problems, good and happiness for all humans and concern for social justice, he said.

"It is evident that many Christians would share a number of these commitments and some Christians all of them, although any particular Christian might interpret them more within a theistic context," he said. "If that is true, then obviously there is some common ground between Christianity and secular humanism."

Nevertheless, the Christian faith takes issue with the naturalistic assumptions of secular humanism, Cunningham said. He claimed secular/naturalistic humanism fails to provide a "persuasive world view" which can justify its position and provide motivation for implementing it.

He called for Christians to "resist the naturalistic world view and principles of secular humanism and bring a reasoned critique to the radically secular position" while also affirming "a range of humanist values that we share in common with all humanisms, including secular humanism."

Contending that a true humanism must define human life in terms of a relation to God, Cunningham said the Christian faith provides a better framework for humanist values than does secular humanism, and it also provides a more dynamic motivating and sustaining power to act on behalf of humanity.

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Christianity surpasses secular/naturalistic humanism on several specific points, he explained. For instance, Christianity has a "defensible basis" for affirming the value and dignity of humanity, for it views humans as the "focal point of the whole created order" who "distinctively embody the image of God." Further, Christianity holds hope for life beyond, placing human life and death in a unique perspective and offering hope for an eventual balancing of good and evil.

But Cunningham cautioned that Christians must realize they live in a pluralistic society. Therefore, they must co-exist with people who hold other viewpoints while advocating the distinctive Christian understanding of human life and value.

The best basis for that is for the Christian church to develop a policy that "involves the acceptance of a broad set of humanist values as the common ground for life together," he said.

"There is a theological imperative to affirm human values within a cultural pluralism, for God has unmistakably said 'yes' to human beings and to the value of life.... Christians can do no less."

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Spacing Gifts
Prolongs Joy

Baptist Press
12/17/81

WACO, Texas (BP)--Too many toys at Christmas may confuse your child, says a Baylor University psychologist.

According to Helen Benedict, assistant professor of psychology, young children can only focus on two or three colorful toys at one time. After that, they tend to lose concentration, she says. On Christmas morning, they may open their gifts too quickly because they are mentally unable to deal with so much novelty.

It is not unusual for a child to wander excitedly about the room because of too much stimulation, she says.

Parents who want to give a lot of gifts to their children at Christmas might put some of them away after they are opened, Benedict suggests. Then the child can focus on two or three favorite toys, and the others may be brought out one by one during the coming weeks, even until spring.

By age seven or eight, a child may develop more control over outside stimulation, she says. Belief in Santa Claus seems to wane by this age, too. Robbing children of the fantasy of Christmas too soon is not a good idea, Benedict says, because young children need fantasy as part of the growing process.

Older children often experience peer pressure to get what their friends are getting for Christmas, but Benedict thinks parents should stick to their own standards of giving. "I don't know a single child who has suffered psychologically from not receiving enough designer clothes for Christmas," she says.

Parents can help their children by keeping the excitement in balance, Benedict believes. Spacing out the celebration is part of the secret.

"Whatever happened to the 12 days of Christmas?" she asks. "One gift a day was a pretty good idea, wasn't it?"

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'Old Folks' Heading
Back To Mission Field

By Erich Bridges

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--When Charles and LaVerne Tope resigned as Southern Baptist foreign missionaries in 1974 after 14 hectic years in Eastern Africa, they looked forward to a long, quiet pastoral ministry in the United States before retirement.

But the Lord, Tope says, had other plans. "So we 'old folks' are going back," he says. In December the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board reappointed the Topes for mission service in Kenya.

Tope, now 55, became pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., shortly after the couple returned from Kenya in 1974. For the previous decade and a half (except for a year when he was pastor of First Baptist Church, Biloxi, Miss.), the two Missouri natives evangelized, started churches and trained Baptist leaders in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

"At the time we came home, we definitely felt we wouldn't be going back," Tope says. "And from a human standpoint, I honestly feel that we could happily and very comfortably spend the rest of our ministry at Northwest."

The Topes enjoy close personal bonds with many at Northwest church (where membership nears 3,000), and they've led the congregation to play a leading role among Oklahoma churches in supporting home and foreign missions. They also treasure time spent with their three children and two grandchildren.

So why are they returning to Africa? "The Lord has spoken to us plainly through his word and his spirit," Tope explains. "This is what he wants us to do with the last years of our ministry. And I think we have another 10 years in us."

Two recent Africa trips helped accelerate their decision. During the summer of 1979, Tope coordinated a Foreign Mission Board relief project in war-torn Uganda, directing a team of college-age missionary kids in distributing food, medicine and agricultural supplies.

Last summer the Topes visited Kenya to establish a scholarship fund for Baptist high school and seminary students in memory of their son Howard, who was killed in a 1980 construction site accident.

Both trips reminded them of the desperate human need on the continent, and the equally critical call for preachers and trained leaders.

Another compelling factor was Tope's work as a Foreign Mission Board member representing Oklahoma. Since 1978 he has filled posts on numerous regional and administrative committees on the board, including key overseas and budget planning committee chairmanships.

"I've been thrilled at the number of specialists we've sent out--the doctors, nurses, dentists, agriculturalists, teachers," he says. "But I'm appalled at how few preachers have gone. The more I thought about it and prayed about it, the more I realized that preaching is all I ever did. That's my experience.

"We know the culture, the people, the language. Three weeks after we hit the field we can be at work."

This time Tope expects to work as a church development advisor in and around Nakuru, Kenya, about 100 miles west of Nairobi. He hopes to start new churches, strengthen existing congregations, and develop leaders, with emphasis on the latter.

"I want to spend time with small groups of men, maybe one or two, and build Christ into their daily lives," he says. "One thing we learned when we visited Uganda again was that the guys who just followed the missionaries, or looked for a handout, were the first to fall by the wayside when persecution came."

The Topes expect to leave for the field in February or March. Until then they're completing duties at church and "getting rid of a bunch of stuff." Folks at Northwest are reluctant to let them go, LaVerne reports, but unanimously supportive.

"We're not any happier about leaving all we have here than anyone else," she says. "We love the church. We love our children and our grandchildren. But neither do we feel that we're making a tremendous sacrifice by going. It's just part of a general call that we've got to respond to. God calls, and you fit into the plan."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Weber Sees Hundreds Respond;
Crusade Decisions Top 11,000

Baptist Press
12/17/81

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Former Southern Baptist Convention President Jaroy Weber saw 50 to 100 people make decisions of faith in Christ at each of 21 services he preached on a November trip to West Africa.

Reports of crusades conducted by Southern Baptist pastors and laymen from August through November in Guyana, Mexico, Ghana, Togo, Korea, Zimbabwe and Malawi were compiled and released in mid-December by the office of evangelism and church growth at the Foreign Mission Board.

The crusades resulted in more than 11,000 decisions for Christ.

After his experience, Weber, who was president of the SBC 1974-76, asserted that the continuing evangelism program which places Southern Baptist pastors and laymen on the mission field is one of the best things happening in the convention today.

"Even if they (volunteers) don't do any good on the mission field," he said, "it affects them. They go back home a lot more supportive of missions."

Weber said that every night of the trip, his fourth for the Foreign Mission Board, was a great spiritual and emotional experience. As far as he could see in the dim outdoor lights, people were standing, listening the gospel.

He was especially surprised by what he called "the unbelievable manner in which they responded to religious films." Services included religious films at both the beginning and the end because of their drawing powers.

Working with Southern Baptist missionaries, Weber and music evangelists Bob and Angeline Stone of Rome, Ga., led crusades in Accra and Tema, Ghana, and two crusades in Lome, Togo. They also led a spiritual retreat for Southern Baptist missionaries in Ghana and distributed 45,000 Bibles during their trip.

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Since returning, he has heard from James Barron, Southern Baptist missionary to Ghana who planned the crusades, that churches have shown signs of renewal in the weeks following the special services. The Bethel Baptist Church, which sponsored the crusade in Accra, was so excited about what had happened that it decided to hold monthly crusades.

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MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
A HAPPY 1982

TO ALL OF YOU FROM THE BP GANG

Pat Starkey

Robert E. Fields

Norman James

Pat Starkey

Steve Byrnes

Polly Scott