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87-170

Technology Causes Religion
To Flourish, Theologian Says

AL- CO
(SBIS)
By Pat Cole

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In contrast to predictions religion would diminish with the advance of technology, it has flourished in the modern era, theologian Langdon Gilkey told an audience of aspiring ministers.

Gilkey, who delivered the Norton Lectures on religion and science Nov. 3-6 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said technology has created anxiety that has prompted people to turn to religion. Much of that anxiety stems from the "immense possibilities of destruction" growing out of technological advances, he said.

"The secular world has not replaced religion, but it has bred it by breeding anxiety," said Gilkey, a professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School. People seek religion to calm the "new and lethal anxieties" that the scientific era has produced.

Gilkey noted, however, the results have not always been positive. In some areas, modern religion has taken on "new, powerful, unexpected and very frightening forms."

Communism, facism, Maoism and "our own brand of super-patriotic Americanism" have religious characteristics, Gilkey said. In their concepts, these may only be social, economic or political theories, but in their practice they are often similar to religion, he noted.

"Marxism discussed in a cafe in Europe is not a religion; it's an economic system," he explained. "But when it moves out into the community, it takes on a form of religion."

Political structures, Gilkey said, become like religion when they make a claim to ultimate truth, call their enemies heretics, silence the opposition and see themselves as the pure force that combats evil in the world. Noting these are not positive attributes of religion, he said they nevertheless are characteristics commonly found in the religion.

"They combine statements about reality with statements about meaning," said Gilkey. "Their claims are total, and they are fierce in their threats."

Conservative religious groups have "seized power" alongside the "pseudo religions," he added, citing as evidence the rise of Shintoism during the 1930s in Japan and the recent increase of fundamentalist Christian and Islam groups.

Protestant fundamentalists have gained influence in America both in churches and the political realm, he said. "Claims that can only be called theocratic in character are now being heard," said, noting a desire for "conservative religion to dominate the legislature and the law and the executive and the judiciary."

In the case of both the extremely conservative religions and the pseudo-religions, Gilkey said, faith becomes a danger rather than a blessing. Yet he noted that while these movements reveal the risks of faith, they also show its "necessity and its great, great value."

A totalitarian and dogmatic faith must be resisted with an ultimate commitment to a deeper faith. He contrasted a deeper faith with an idolatrous faith.

"It (the deeper faith) does not claim to rule the other, the neighbor or the state," explained Gilkey. "It sees in humility and repentance its own sin and imperial urges, and it knows that it is called to love and reconciliation."

Penn-South Jersey
Welcomes Williams

N-CO
(P-SJ)

WRIGHTSTOWN, N.J. (BP)--Almost 300 Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptists met for their 17th annual session and welcomed a new executive director Nov. 5-6 at First Baptist Church in Wrightstown, N.J.

Wallace A.C. Williams, who began Nov. 1 as executive director-treasurer, was given a standing ovation of welcome. He came to the position after 13 years as pastor in Connecticut and northern New Jersey.

The convention adopted a \$1,915,090 budget, of which its 175 churches are expected to contribute \$575,000. Other funding is expected from the Southern Baptist Home Mission and Sunday School boards.

Out of that budget, the convention will contribute \$162,438 to world mission causes through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program budget. That amount is 28.25 percent of the Penn-South Jersey churches' contribution to the budget. It reflects a 0.5 percent increase over the convention's percentage contribution to the Cooperative Program in the previous budget, and the increase is to continue annually until a 50-50 distribution ratio is reached.

Dan Crow, pastor of Pittsburg Baptist Church in Pittsburg was elected convention president. Other officers are James Nunn, pastor of Hickory Baptist Church in Sharpsville, Pa., first vice president, and Lee Bolton, pastor of Berkshire Baptist Church of Reading, Pa., second vice president.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 3-5 at Lakeside Baptist Church in McMurray, Pa.

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F-SSB

Fired Pastors
Cling To Hope

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Pain from a sharpened dagger could be no more intense than the anguish suffered by Southern Baptist pastors who have been fired or forced to resign their pulpits, according to pastors who have gone through that trauma.

A vexing mix of anger, doubt, repentance, hope and compassion lingers in these former pastors who believe God surely must have a place for them to serve again in his kingdom.

Fifteen men who live near Charlotte, N.C., recently attended the organizational meeting of Pastors Without Pulpits at First Baptist Church. They were invited to begin a support group and provide an outlet to help each other during a time that often is devastating, both personally and professionally.

Three participants agreed to share their feelings about what has happened to them, how they failed and what they needed during such a difficult time. They are not identified by name because they represent 1,000 pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention who are terminated from their pulpits each year, whose feelings are very similar to these men's.

One terminated pastor, 55 years old, resigned his pulpit more than two years ago in the midst of a church conflict: "I made blunders and I didn't listen to people enough, but I have learned a valuable lesson since then. I belong in the Lord's work. That's what God called me to. The call is so strong. ... Nobody knows how we've hurt."

A brand seems to be on ministers who are out of churches, he said, voicing an opinion expressed repeatedly by the three former pastors.

When one pastor has trouble, another should come forth with compassion," the first said. "Pastors can't identify with my problems because they have their own priorities. I was the same way."

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The second former pastor suddenly resigned his church seven years ago when a moral indiscretion came to light. The resignation ended his pastorate, his friendships and eventually his marriage.

"I hurt my church, my family, God, myself and the ministry," the 62 year-old confessed. "That still hurts very deeply."

Since he has been out of the pastorate, he has remarried and achieved financial success far beyond any salary he ever received in a church. Material success has not shadowed his dream, however.

"I'd resign tomorrow to pastor the smallest Baptist church," he said. "More than anything in the world, I'd like to be a pastor. That's my calling."

The third minister resigned his church 20 years ago because of pressures he felt on his family. His marriage broke apart, and he experienced serious health and financial problems.

He is now remarried and facing his evaluation. "I gave up the most important thing I ever wanted to do."

After his resignation, he said, he became angry: "I never thought I deserved treatment like that. God gave me a lot of talents, and I wondered, did I waste them?"

"I pray every night to go to work in God's vineyard one more time," the 60-year-old said. "The hurt is the bottom line. I believe there is a place for me back in the pulpit."

Another hurt emphasized by all three of the terminated pastors is the vacuum left by the exodus of people they thought were close friends.

"People who were good friends while I was a pastor haven't spoken to me since my resignation," the second pastor said. "That hurts. I don't ever want to forget what the Lord has done for me. I went to see a resigned pastor recently who said I was the first one to call him."

Two other common themes among the three fired pastors were the role of the denomination in caring for hurting pastors and the forgiveness and compassion that apparently often are absent from fellow pastors.

Pastors Without Pulpits, the organization started recently, is one example of how the denomination can minister to the doubts and the pain. Other agencies and conventions are developing similar programs to provide more care for terminated ministers.

More than anything outside the forgiveness of God, these men long for compassion, forgiveness and contact with friends. Sometimes, they said, they feel simultaneously invisible and branded.

Maybe some former ministers will not or should not be pastors again, but Christians believe God forgives people for their sins. Can they do any less than reach out in his name, these men asked.

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F-SSB

Terminated Ministers
Need Compassion, Care

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
11/11/87

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Failed or terminated pastors comprise a sub-stratum of Southern Baptist life that offers other ministers an opportunity to practice the compassion they preach, observers of their plight agree.

Numerous state conventions, associations and local churches are recognizing the need and offering help and consolation for ministers who have been terminated by their churches.

Pastors, however, still exhibit a strong desire to associate only with the successful, said Joe McKeever, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C.

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McKeever, the pastor-sponsor of a new organization called Pastors Without Pulpits, said: "Only the grace of God separates failures from others. Even though they mean well, our guys have chosen the pharisaical approach of not associating with the sinners, of pulling away from one of the wounded.

"In their fervor to recognize and achieve success, Southern Baptists may be ignoring Christ's direction to receive sinful men."

Southern Baptist pastors need to set an example for the denomination by looking for and receiving those ministers whose careers suddenly are suspended, McKeever explained.

During the first meeting of Pastors Without Pulpits in October, 15 former pastors, some accompanied by their wives, met to share the pain they feel and the hope they still hold.

As might be expected, emotions expressed at the meeting revealed hurt, anger, depression and disbelief. Underlying all of the pain, nearly every person still holds on to hope for a future in the ministry, McKeever said.

For terminated ministers, he said, an additional consideration exists beyond the personal and financial problems associated with unemployment, a feeling of failure in their call from God to serve local churches.

The feeling of failure is compounded when other pastors fail to reach out to them with consolation and concrete assistance. There is the feeling that they have no place to turn -- or worse yet, the perception that nobody cares.

Attention increasingly is being directed from numerous sources in the Southern Baptist Convention to helping former pastors honestly assess their part of the guilt in the failed ministry and then find avenues for service.

Norris Smith, forced-termination consultant in the church administration department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, said Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., and First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., have established temporary paid staff positions to help terminated ministers begin rebuilding their shattered careers.

State conventions -- Mississippi, Texas, Kentucky, Florida and Tennessee -- are among several that have programs to help terminated ministers. As in the efforts by local churches, the financial help is short term and the personal time is limited.

With an estimated 88 forced terminations every month in the SBC, Smith said, help must be offered on a broad scale to ease suffering.

Directors of missions are the ones who have the most frequent and direct contact with ministers who are fired by their churches, he said. The board's church administration department offers conferences for directors of missions and state leaders to help them understand their roles and give them information on how they can bring terminated pastors and denominational resources together.

Directors of missions also deal with the churches where pastors have been terminated, Smith pointed out, making their role even more crucial: "There are times when a church is justified in terminating a minister. But there are constructive and redemptive ways to achieve the termination without destroying both parties.

"Sometimes churches are grossly unjustified in terminating a pastor, when opening new lines of communication could determine causes of problems and resolve personal conflict.

"A terminated pastor needs a friend who will listen without judgment and help a minister keep his sense of worth. Friends can help the ministers drain off poison feelings and look to the future with a clarity of thought.

"Sometimes, the terminated minister becomes somewhat invisible, partly of his own choosing, because the hurt is so deep. Other pastors are busy and time passes quickly between checks on an old friend."

When pastors are terminated, their sharing of problems in support groups like Pastors Without Pulpits reaches new levels of honesty, which listeners accept with equally new levels of acceptance and grace, McKeever said.

Most pastors are not likely to share problems with their peers in the pastorate because of the judgmental silence that would prevail, he noted: "That shows a real failure of relationships with each other. To fail someone who has sinned is to deny our Lord.

"Our churches need to start practicing the theology that 'Christ receiveth sinful men.' We have a system of sinful people. To expect perfection is to deny the doctrine we teach."

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F-10

Clawson Raps Fear, Bigotry
In Gospel Music Business

By Adon Taft

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11/11/87

MIAMI (BP)--Fear and bigotry dominate the contemporary Christian music scene, says Cynthia Clawson, a popular and versatile performer on that scene.

Both artists and producers are afraid of "offending their brothers if they don't say (the Christian message) a certain way," reports Clawson, at 39 the grande dame of gospel music. Those who do stray from the straight and narrow gospel approach suffer, she adds.

Clawson cites the case of Amy Grant, the best-known of the contemporary Christian singers who crossed over into pop music. The fact Grant got "a lot of flak" demonstrates that "the Christian community is a little bigotted," Clawson suggests.

Grant sings of love without defining it in traditional religious phrases. But "since the Bible says God is love, when you speak of love you are talking about the character of God," Clawson reasons. "I'm proud of Amy Grant because she wasn't afraid to take a risk. We all should risk that way."

Coming from Clawson, the observations carry some clout. She is the winner of a Grammy and three Dove Awards as gospel music's best female performer. She is the Texas-born daughter of a Baptist evangelist. Her husband, Ragan Courtney, dropped out of a Baptist seminary in order to pursue a career as an actor and playwright. He is now on the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and together they have written a number of religious musicals.

The strictures on gospel music apply not only to lyrics but to the sources as well, says Clawson, who composed many of the songs on her nine albums.

"I wish we could get more daring and do more things with jazz and other styles," she says. "But radio promoters, concert promoters, and churches are fearful of anything that's a little beyond their grasp."

There is little beyond Clawson's grasp as a song stylist with a four-octave range. She sings classical, gospel, country and pop music. She did the soundtrack for the movie "The Trip to Bountiful." But her favorite musical style is jazz. "I guess it's in my genes," she says, noting her aunt was jazz singer Lois Ruth Lee.

But when it comes to lyrics, Clawson prefers the familiar hymns. More than any other contemporary Christian singer, she includes hymns in her concerts and albums.

"They say the things I want to say," she explains. "They sing of the pain on earth while longing for heaven. They sing of the joys of earth because of the suffering of the Father in heaven. They tell of heaven and earth coming together in the flesh of God's love."

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(Adon Taft is religion editor of the Miami Herald.)