

Their Aim: Agenda for Future

By JO-ANN PRICE
(NC News Service)

Hudson, Wis. — Forty-nine top ranking religious executives and scholars, assembled at a conference on the Relevancy of Religion to assess the woes of the U.S. churches and map future strategy for organized religion, emerged from a talky three-day session at the Hudson House Inn here after voting to form a "continuation committee."

The committee, headed by Dr. James P. Shannon, the former Catholic auxiliary bishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis, carries with it the mandate to develop an "agenda for the future."

Racism, the youth-age gap, investment policies of churches and synagogues, the stumblings of religious institutionalism, and "depersonal" aspects of societal and religious life, were all discussed by participants as major reasons why religion appeared to be in trouble.

The committee headed by Dr. Shannon, now vice-president of the non-denominational St. John's College, Santa Fe, N.M., will seek to put together lines of action by which the traditional U.S. religious leadership — working with racial and ethnic minorities — can make religion more "relevant" to people and to issues.

Summaries presented from the small groups brought out these possible cross-denominational projects for a future agenda:

- Greater funding of black community groups and organization of "skill banks" for oppressed minorities.
 - Creation of a paid religious lobby in Washington to press for reordering of national priorities to aid the poor.
 - "Moral audits" of church and synagogal investment portfolios and hiring practices.
 - Active programs of world justice, peace and development, reaching to the "third world."
 - Involvement of youths by having at least one-third of the membership of every national or local religious board under the age of 25.
 - More "adequate and realistic" training of the clergy for today's world, as well as radical restructuring of religious institutions.
 - Exploration of worship as an ethical exercise and of the moral dimension of an authentically religious response to needs.
- As the conference assembled, just about the only thing participants

could agree on was that in one way or another churches and synagogues seem to be making a mess of reaching modern man.

But how to go about seizing the opportunities religion has in a technical age to get through to people means many things to many churchmen. This was shown in four of the initial position papers presented for discussion by the World Council of Churches' chief executive, a noted theologian, a Catholic sociologist and a civil rights leader.

Invited to participate, comment on and challenge their ideas was an all-star ecclesiastical audience, including Presiding Bishop John E. Hines of the Episcopal church; Rabbi Jacob P. Rudin, president of the Synagogue Council of America; Dr. Robert J. Marshall, president of the Lutheran Church in America; John Cogley, of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions; Sister Mary Luke Tobin, superior general of the Sisters of Loretto, Nerinx, Ky., and others of similar stature.

Churches are weak today because they have tried to be too relevant — "always one step behind the latest fashion," a Roman Catholic priest and sociologist declared.

"They have tried to conform when they should have prophesied," Father Andrew Greeley told the conference.

To meet the challenges of the next century, churches will have to be "flexible, confident, experimental and open-minded in their structures," Father Greeley said. "They will have to engage in constant dialogue with the leading ideas of their time, yet not in such a way as to presume that such ideas at a given time are automatically superior to their own vision."

"They will have to find ways to combine openness and trust and love with efficiency, scholarship and corporate responsibility — surely one of the great challenges of the era."

"They will also have to readjust their perspectives so that playfulness, contemplation and mysticism are not viewed as an affront to good organization principles."

"The Pentecostal hysteria, 'rock' Mass, folk music, guitars, to say nothing of astrology, divination, and oriental mysticism are all a judgment on the Western Churches for their failure to respond to a man's yearning for the sacred and ecstatic," the priest declared.

"The Churches once again did not have the courage to believe in themselves or the best of their own traditions. They thought that there was

no room for the mystical in an age of science or for the sacred in an age of reason. Now, when the mystical and the sacred reappear again, and with a vengeance, the Churches are caught off guard. They had always argued that not by cold reason alone does man live, and now find themselves surprised to learn that they were right . . ."

A call by the former English Catholic priest-theologian, Dr. Charles S. Davis, for the overthrow of "corrupt" power structures in the Catholic Church elicited a sharp rebuke from Bishop Hines.

In one of five position papers at the three-day conference, Dr. Davis urged that the "laity, priests and bishops must actively rebel against the present structure, demythologize it and break its hold." He said "a key problem" for Catholicism is the authority of the Pope which "must be decisively and finally repudiated."



Mrs. Morton Phillips, better known to newspaper readers as "Dear Abby" is shown with Msgr. Vincent Yzermans of St. Cloud, Minn., and Dr. James P. Shannon of Santa Fe, who resigned recently as auxiliary bishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis. Occasion was the conference in Hudson, Wis., on The Relevancy of Organized Religion.

Pope, Canterbury Name Permanent Dialogue Group

London — (RNS) — The Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue initiated by Pope Paul and Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury in 1966 has entered a new stage with the official announcement here of the formation of a Permanent Joint Commission.

An announcement said the commission had been appointed by the Holy See and Archbishop Ramsey and will hold its first meeting at St. George's House in Windsor Castle, Jan. 9-15.

The Preparatory Commission's report revealed that the commission had made concrete proposals for continuation of its work on such subjects as a common declaration of faith between Catholics and Anglicans, liturgical problems, coordinated action on urgent human issues, moral theology and many others. The new and permanent Joint Commission has 10 Anglican members and nine Roman Catholics headed by Auxiliary Bishop Alan Clark of Northampton, Eng.

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Mrs. Phillips? You Know Her As 'Dear Abby'



Hudson, Wis. — (NC) — Her name is Mrs. Morton Phillips. She lives with her husband in St. Paul, Minn. They have two children. And she writes a lot of letters.

But to millions of newspaper readers she is known as Abigail Van Buren—or simply, "Dear Abby."

Abby was perhaps the most glamorous participant at the Conference on the Relevancy of Organized Religion at the Hudson House Inn here.

"I have a supermarket confession-al," Abby said, shifting a stack of letters—she carries them around and tries to read as many as she can. "They call me the matron saint of teenagers."

Abby, a practicing Jewess, attended a Methodist college in Iowa and once took instruction in Roman Cath-

olicism in Eau Claire, Wis. as "part of my education." And while she admits that the intricacies of theology are "away out of the ball park" for her, her replies to "Hoping," "Misled" and "Depressed" reflect a sound religious background.

During the conference she was shy about speaking up at the plenary sessions. But at the small group she was in, she did not hesitate.

When Abby gets over her head with a religious question in some letter she writes to a clergyman and prints a short reply from him. That, she says, is how she has come to know Dr. James P. Shannon, the former Catholic auxiliary bishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis and to correspond with James Francis Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen of Rochester, N.Y.

She gets between 16,000 and 20,000 letters a week. She has a staff in Los Angeles to answer and offer practical aid. Her column, carried by 1,000 newspapers, is said to be the most widely syndicated column in the world. She probably knows of more homes for unwed mothers than anyone in the country.

She and her twin sister, by nature and in the advice field, Ann Landers, of the Chicago Sun-Times Syndicate, whose column runs in more than 600 papers, have a kind of corner on the newspaper-lovelorn market.

A conference spokesman told how planners riffled through the usual list of popular religious columnists—Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale and Bishop Sheen—to come up with the name of someone who would have "a window on the real situation" of morality and youth problems. Abby won, hands down.

The chic, black-haired columnist continued: "A Catholic person can feel so good when he has confessed—even to me. It's great therapy."

Abby chose her pen name, "Abigail," from the Old Testament. "Blessed art thou, and blessed is thy advice, O Abigail." —Jo-Ann Price

Married Man Becomes Priest

Sydney — (RNS) — Australia's first married Catholic priest said here that he felt that any general release from celibacy for Catholic priests "would have a negative effect."

He said he regarded his own situation "as something of a novelty."

This observation was made by Father Peter Rushton, 42, of Sydney. A former Anglican priest with a wife and three children, he was ordained a Catholic priest by Archbishop Guilford Young of Hobart in the chapel of Mount St. Margaret's Hospital here.

Also attending were members of the Rushton family, including Father Rushton's wife, Helen, a psychiatrist, and two of their three children, Anne, 16, and James, 12, the latter serving as an altar boy during the 90-minute ceremony.

Later, Father Rushton told reporters that his ordination was "the fulfillment of a dream," and that he was grateful to the Pope who had granted the special dispensation "which made it possible for me to be ordained and continue a normal married life."

Saturday Masses Approved in Albany

Albany — (NC) — Bishop Edwin P. Broderick of Albany has approved a plan permitting Catholics to fulfill their Sunday Mass obligation on Saturday and their obligation to attend Mass on holy days on the day before the holy day.

In an announcement to pastors, Bishop Broderick cited overcrowding at Sunday and holy day Masses in resort areas of the diocese and a scarcity of priests in rural areas among the reasons for the change.

The bishop said adoption of the plan was voluntary and "whenever feasible, this decision should be made in consultation with the laity."

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