

IS KEY 73 CRUMBLING?

New York [RNS] — Seven top leaders of Key 73 admitted here that the broad-based evangelistic drive, which has the theme "Calling Our Continent to Christ," has not developed as originally planned.

But they vigorously disagreed with some assessments that have labeled the effort a "failure" eight months after formal launching.

They said both evangelism and ecumenism on the grassroots are being strengthened by Key 73 despite the fact that many high visibility programs on the

national level failed to materialize.

The Key 73 leaders conceded that their organization was a financial fiasco on the national level. But they felt that inability to produce several television specials, earlier anticipated, was a blessing in disguise because it put the burden of responsibility on local communities and churches where, they agreed, it belongs.

They challenged claims in some sources that Key 73 has met with apathy in local congregations, and they asserted

that the drive has produced a new coalition whose diverse participants will never go home to old isolation.

In an exclusive group interview, Dr. Theodore A. Raedeke, Key 73 executive director, and six of the sixteen executive committee members talked about Key 73.

They fielded questions, and each had a chance to voice pro or con responses to what has or has not taken place under the Key 73 umbrella.

The Rev. Atha Baugh, an executive of the American Baptist Churches, expressed regret — called it a "tragedy" — that all North American Churches have not seized the opportunity Key 73 offers for looking at evangelism and mission as a style of on-going Christian life.

But he was equally regretful that Key 73 has not done more to draw minority participants by putting more stress on justice as part of the Christian message.

In addition to Dr. Raedeke and Mr. Baugh, members of the executive committee taking part in the interview were the Rev. Joe Hale, United Methodist; Dr. Paul Benjamin, Christian Churches — Churches of Christ; Bishop Henry Ginder, Brethren in Christ Church; the Rev. Wesley Smedes, Christian Reformed Church, and Col. John D. Waldron, the Salvation Army.

Key 73 was opened last January with considerable fanfare. With 140 sponsoring groups — denominations of wide diversity, independent evangelical organizations and numerous Roman Catholic dioceses — Key 73 was seen as the most massive evangelistic thrust in North American history.

Sparked by a proposal made in the late 1960s by Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, then editor of the magazine Christianity Today, the endeavor lists five purposes: confronting every person in the U.S. and Canada with Christ, employing all means to communicate the Christian gospel, applying the meaning of Christ to issues shaping society, developing new resources for evangelism and helping congregations become "more effective redemptive centers."

While four months and two phases of the 1973 timetable remain, Dr. Raedeke and his colleagues were under no illusion that Key 73's original national budget will be raised.

The largest sum in the budget was \$2 million for programs such as television specials, billboards and other public promotion. Dr. Raedeke, a clergyman of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod said that at the present rate of income Key 73 will probably reach \$600,000 for both national program and operations.

"Church historians will undoubtedly cite Key 73 as the greatest thrust carried out with

the smallest budget," he commented.

In retrospect, Dr. Raedeke and the executive committee members did not seem displeased that money was not found for "spectacular" national programs. Several said that had a series of TV specials been made, persons in local communities might have assumed Key 73 was accomplished without contributing their own efforts.

Mr. Hale said that groups pulled together in a more effective way on local and regional levels because funds were not available for national programs.

Neither Mr. Hale, Dr. Raedeke or the others in the interview would accept the conclusion that Key 73 produced little more than a "yawn" in most locales — an assertion made by a United Methodist newspaper in Texas. Mr. Hale said at least half of the 40,000 United Methodist congregations were involved in some way.

The men cited unprecedented highs in the distributions of Bibles and portions of the Scripture. They attributed the increase directly to Key 73.

Mr. Smedes said his denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, has carried out a "serious study" on the nature of the Church as a result of Key 73. He said 10,000 small groups have explored the question, "Who Are the People of God in the World?"

Asked why, in a time that seemed ripe for evangelism, Key 73 could not raise the \$2 million for national purposes, the executive committee members had several responses.

Mr. Hale suggested that in some cases individuals decided to make their contributions to local and regional expressions of Key 73. Mr. Smedes added that there was something "nebulous" about a national organization that does not attract loyalty. Dr. Raedeke thought that perhaps the budget was just too small to challenge Americans.

Each person in the interview spoke of Key 73's contribution to inter-Church relations. Dr. Benjamin said that on all levels Key 73 meetings often represented the first time conservative Protestant evangelicals, persons from denominations in the National Council of Churches and Roman Catholics have collectively discussed and participated together in evangelism.

Three hundred leaders of groups that previously had little contacts, Dr. Benjamin continued, have been together for three years in Key 73 planning. "We like each other and while we don't agree on everything we respect each other and love each other," he said. "And that can't help but change the religious scene over the next decade."

An inevitable question concerned the impact of Jewish

criticism of Key 73. Overall, negative Jewish reaction was not seen as exerting much influence on the decisions of groups to take part or stay out of the drive.

Reflecting the stand, most Key 73 leaders took in response to Jewish criticism, Bishop Ginder said Christians have the mandate to bring Christ to all persons but never to be coercive or manipulative.

The bishop, among others, felt that discussion about Christian evangelism in a pluralistic nation had opened the door to more and better Christian-Jewish relations. He recalled an invitation to speak to a synagogue and answer questions about Key 73. "The climate was good throughout," he said.

Although the National Council of Churches, which has 31 Protestant and Orthodox member Churches, took no stand for or against Key 73 on its policy-making level, a Council department was listed as a sponsor. Has that listing hurt or helped Key 73? The panel was asked.

Col. Waldron of the Salvation Army responded to the question, "It is no hindrance," he said. "Catholic involvement is no handicap. Our people discovered evangelically oriented people in other Churches. It is probably not possible to get so many groups together on the basis of anything but evangelism, but for us it is an enriching experience to be a part of a total commitment. We feel at home with the personal gospel and with those in social services."

Bishop Ginder said he did not understand Key 73 as a means only to add statistics to membership rolls. He said the larger purpose was to prepare laymen for the sharing of faith.

The interview touched on a phrase, found in official materials describing Key 73 as an attempt to stretch a Christian "canopy" over North America. From the perspective of pluralism, this term is bothersome to numerous persons.

Mr. Hale said "canopy" was never intended to imply the overshadowing of all else but was meant to introduce the image of an umbrella under which many Christian priorities could cooperatively interact.

There was a consensus among Dr. Raedeke and the six executive committee members that if Key 73 has done nothing else — and they felt it has done more — it has dissolved some of the stereotypes that have long divided American Christians.

"People have discovered each other across all lines," said Bishop Ginder.

ROAST BEEF DINNER

A roast beef dinner is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 6, at the Rochester Harps Club, 115 Buffalo Rd. For reservations: 663-8679 or 254-6958, before Oct. 2.



ON THE LINE
Bob Considine

No one takes a weatherman very seriously. The Associated Press's Byron Beard had a feature about one of these unhonored prophets not long ago, a man named Vic Michael. Seems that a year ago, as a nearly exhausted hurricane named Agnes spiraled wetly into the general area of Greater Wilkes Barre, Pa., Vic took over the microphone of the radio station he manages, WMFP in Milton, Pa., and said, in effect, "Don't believe those big-time weather forecasters you've been listening to — the ones who say that nothing much is going to happen around here in the way of a flood. It's going to be awful."

He is an amateur hydrologist. He had made his own study of a number of small neighboring streams that were running over their normal banks, and the rise of the Susquehanna.

Officials called him to bawl him out for adding needlessly to the uneasiness of the people of Wyoming Valley; who was he to question the soothing reassurances of the weather experts of the networks? One threatened to have him arrested.

Came Thursday, June 22, 1972. The rains came slanting down with endless vigor, but life in the area went on just about as ever. Michael went back to his mike and told his listeners not to go to work but, instead, brace themselves for a flood the likes of which they had never seen.

They never had, as it soon turned out.

"At that time," wrote Beard, "the state-federal river forecasting service in Harrisburg, 100 miles downstream, was compiling field reports that would be the basis of a special statement issued hours later. That statement predicted a river crest of 25-26 feet at Milton, or about 6-7 feet above flood stage.

"Based on water marks, the river ultimately topped 37 feet at Milton. Depths of 10 to 12 feet were reported commonplace in the town. As for the area itself, it suffered one of the major floods in the history of the nation. The

property loss was all but incalculable; the high water marks on structures can still be seen, more than a year later. People are still disgruntled over the bureaucratic hemming and hawing that did not give them proper warning. They still listen to the better-known weathermen on TV and radio. But they now make sure to see if Vic Michael confirms those readings."

Wilkes Barre, a heavy sufferer, is fighting back, and so is the rest of the valley. Federal and state dollars which flowed into the area in the immediate agony of the floods have done their share but are now just about exhausted. The United Way must now get up \$1,650,000 or thousands of poor, aged, sick victims of the wrath of Agnes will be worse off.

It's a tremendous sum to ask of the working people, merchants, doctors, lawyers and firms. But there it is: staring good men and women in the face. The rest of the nation may forget (or never have heard) what Agnes did to that part of their country. But the residents, so many of them wiped out physically as well as financially, cannot forget.

And, apparently, will not.

"Some will not be able to give more than they did the year before," said an editorial in Harrison H. Smith's Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader, Evening News, Record, a champion of this spirited if not nationally known crusade. "Others, however, will be in a position to contribute even more than an additional 7.5 per cent. The point is, that if each of us gives his fair share, the United Way goal will be achieved. It is a simple matter of letting one's conscience be his guide when it comes to helping those who are in poorer circumstances."

The crusade won't make the front page of the New York Times, or be mentioned on the evening news (except Vic Michael's evening news.) But when the goal is achieved, as it dam well will be, it will be forever ingrained in the hearts of the unselfish people who made it come true.