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NATIONAL OFFICESBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2356
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor**BUREAUS**ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2000
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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No Surprises Surface
At Synod of Bishops

By C. B. Hastings

VATICAN CITY (BP)--"Serendipity"--sudden surprises--is the only word for this almost-Eternal City of Rome. But no surprises came from the world Synod of Bishops in the second week of this significant four-week gathering.

During the first week, the Roman Catholic leaders raised about all the issues possible on their theme--"Catechetics (religious instruction) in Our Time with Special Attention to Children and Youth."

The 206 bishops from 101 nations, meeting here to advise Pope Paul VI, went into "small circles" during the second week for more direct dialog than is possible in the general assembly. News is so hard to come by that the 25 or so English-speaking journalists were interviewing each other.

In the weekly press conference with some of the six U. S. bishops, however, Cardinal Timothy Manning of Los Angeles sought to justify the massive effort of the hierarchy on a theme which most thought was dealt with finally by the Vatican's General Catechetical Directory of 1971. (The directory did not attempt a universal catechism, but only set guidelines for national bodies in developing their own).

Cardinal Manning said such effort "underscores the crucial role of catechetics in the Church." He reported that the work of the small language groups "has been to clarify in our own minds the nature of commitment, which is the focal point of catechesis, and how you relate such to the daily life of Catholics in the world. If community is the means by which this is done, how do you describe and create that community?"

This reference to community as the best environment in which to do the work of catechizing may perhaps show the Catholic Church moving somewhat toward the evangelical strategy of small Sunday School classes, youth groups and shared prayer meetings. There's no lack of concern for fidelity to teaching essential Christian and Catholic beliefs, but there's quite a shift away from the old-school method of catechizing by rote memorizing.

Archbishop John F. Whealon of Hartford, Conn., has long since endeared himself to evangelicals. He has given the U. S. hierarchy's stamp of approval--the Imprimatur--on Today's English Version (Good News) of the New Testament, published by the American Bible Society. As one of the outstanding Scripture scholars among the U. S. bishops he has actively pushed Catholic reading and study by the laity.

In response to the question of what steps he would take to put into practice his experience at the Synod, he noted three things: 1. attention to the "spiritual formation" of those who do the work as catechists (religious instructors); 2. encouragement of small groups such as cursillos, marriage encounters, charismatic prayer groups, which would make catechesis more effective; and 3. insistence on conversion to Christ as the preliminary to any catechesis.

Whealon defined catechesis as "a committed Christian giving instruction so as to form in Christ the one being catechized." He insisted that this is more than religious education, which deals with the mind--that it is a moral and spiritual exercise of formation of life in Christ.

This may be an era when all Christian bodies are becoming concerned about the end product of their ways of developing committed Christians for the next generation. None can afford to boast that they turn out youth and young adults who are guaranteed loyal to

to Christ and his church. Whealon referred to the 48 million Roman Catholics in the U. S. in 16,500 parishes and then observed:

"Perhaps half of our people are not leading a regular sacramental life--attending Mass every Sunday and receiving the sacraments faithfully...Standards for sexual morality are not as Biblical and Christian and Catholic as they are worldly in the lives of some."

He said this was an old picture but a new way of illustrating the parable of the sower. "Our catechetics--the way we form the Catholics of the future--are not producing the expected results, and one goal of the Synod is to make obsolete the non-practicing Catholic."

The contribution of the U. S. delegates at this Synod seems to be much more substantial than at the two previous ones in 1971 and 1974. Besides the eight-minute "interventions" each has made to the general assembly, they have together produced eight papers for the other bishops. The topics reflect a full range of interest on such as the doctrinal bases of catechisms for children, the special problems of diverse ethnic peoples in the U. S. church, the role of the family, the challenge of religious pluralism and respect for human life.

In the latter, the bishops, speaking for themselves and not necessarily for all U. S. bishops, said: "Anything which endangers human life such as wars, defense policies, neutron bombs, behavioral control through surgery, drugs, genetic engineering and certain forms of population control should be the concern of one who professes Jesus as Lord. Capital punishment is also a matter which requires special attention."

Once again the conservative Catholic press seemed nervous over lumping arms control and capital punishment with their prime taboos on birth control and abortion. No wonder youth find consistency difficult in moral and ethical standards when their elders disagree.

The role of women in catechetics is like a ghost the bishops wish they could exorcise.

Too little attention in that area--especially to the hundreds of thousands of sisters who have borne the burden of catechetics in the heat of a former day--brings down the heavy letters from such as Sister Georgianne, former superior general of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Too much attention--and that's remote at a meeting with only a handful of women as observer/consultants--would leave the impression the bishops encourage the movement toward women in the priesthood.

The status will remain in tension--Pope Paul, on the one hand, who holds the line against such a development, and the likes of Frances L. McGillicuddy, long time Catholic women's rights spokesperson, on the other. Both the Pope and Ms. McGillicuddy, a leader in the U. S. section of Geneva-based St. Joan's International Alliance (which lobbies for women's rights, including female priests), are alive and well in Rome.

As to the rumored possibility of Cardinal Giovanni Benelli, archbishop of Florence, being Pope Paul's choice as his successor, a highly-placed Vatican official declares: "At 55, he is too young."

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This is the second of several special on-the-spot reports for Baptist Press on the world Synod of Bishops in Vatican City by Dr. C. B. Hastings, assistant director (research in Catholicism), Department of Interfaith Witness, Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board, Atlanta.

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TM in Public Schools
Ruled Unconstitutional

NEWARK, N. J. (BP)--A federal court judge here ruled that the "science of creative intelligence" (Transcendental Meditation) is religious in nature and that government sponsored classes in TM at several New Jersey schools are unconstitutional.

Judge Curtis H. Meanor of the U. S. District Court declared the program, which used a \$40,000 grant from the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, "violates the establishment of religion clause of the U. S. Constitution's First Amendment." He declared that its teaching in five New Jersey high schools "must be enjoined."

Plaintiffs had charged that Transcendental Meditation contains substantial elements of Hinduism, and, as such, should not be taught in public schools. The plaintiffs included Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a group called the Coalition for Religious Integrity, the Berkely (Calif.) Christian Coalition, and 11 individual Protestant and Roman Catholic plaintiffs.

Americans United, which hailed the ruling, said it could result in removal of TM courses from public schools in several other states. The organization reported last May that more than \$300,000 in federal, state and local funds had been allocated to promote the teaching of TM.

The Southern Baptist Convention, in its June, 1976 annual meeting in Norfolk, criticized federal funding of TM, charging in a resolution it has "affinities with Hinduism." The resolution called on "government to observe a posture of strict neutrality which neither advances nor inhibits religion."

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Radio-TV Commission
To Honor Billy Graham

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FORT WORTH (BP)--Evangelist Billy Graham will receive a Distinguished Communications Medal from the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission during the commission's ninth annual Abe Lincoln Awards program at Tarrant County Convention Center, Feb. 8-9. Graham will bring the keynote address.

The Radio and Television Commission created and sponsors the Abe Lincoln Awards as an incentive to broadcasters to continue to provide their communities with quality broadcasting.

"The Distinguished Communications Medal which Dr. Graham will receive is not an annual award as are the Abe Lincoln Awards," said Paul M. Stevens, commission president. "The Distinguished Communications Medal is presented only when people of exceptional merit are found."

The Abe Lincoln Awards program traditionally brings to Fort Worth broadcasters and network leaders from around the country. Two top Abe Lincoln Awards, one for radio and one for television, are presented. The other Abe Lincoln nominees receive Abe Lincoln Merit Awards.

Stevens called Graham's position in American and world history unique. "In times of world disturbance, turmoil, and political convulsion, Billy Graham's voice has been heard persistently presenting the claims of God on the lives of many.

"He has been heard on every continent and in many nations. His message never varies. He presents the love of God, the wisdom and power of the Bible, and the need for people to love one another."

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Previous recipients of the commission's Distinguished Communications Medal include Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, the late Walt Disney, Frank Stanton, former CBS president, and the late Edward R. Murrow.

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to state Baptist papers, Oct. 31, by the Radio and Television Commission.

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Israel Bombing Not Aimed
Specifically At Baptists

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JERUSALEM, Israel (BP)--Reports indicate that the Oct. 9 bombing of the Baptist House here may have been a part of a larger campaign against Jewish Christians.

"There is reason to believe that the bombing was not directed specifically at Baptists," said J. D. Hughey, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area secretary for Europe, the Middle East and South Asia.

According to Hughey, there have been threats and other incidents of vandalism and violence directed toward groups of Jewish believers, including incidents in Rosh Pina and Nazareth.

The Baptist School in Nazareth has been broken into and vandalized twice in the last two years and the Jerusalem Baptist Book Store was also broken into.

Those responsible for the bombing and other incidents have not been positively identified, but are believed to be a minority group of religious zealots, according to Hughey.

Baptist House, the Baptist headquarters building in west Jerusalem, was slightly damaged when a bomb, which police believe was a grenade, exploded near the kitchen entrance.

Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek said the municipality, which has a fund for repairing private property damage by bombings of terrorists, will finance repairs.

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