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Fall 2009

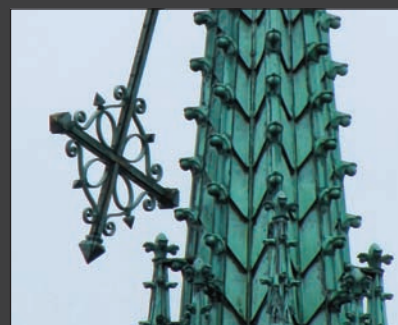
HEALTH CARE

WHAT ARE CHURCHES SAYING?



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- ▶ Evangelical Lutherans Go Over the Edge
- ▶ Anglican Action: Episcopalians Roll Down the Slope

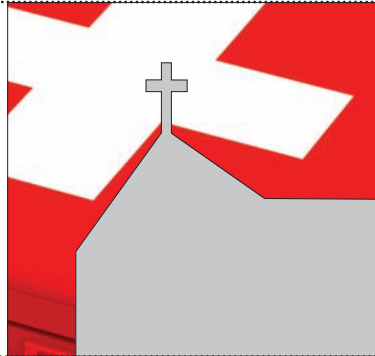


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Old Religious Left and New Evangelical Left

The IRD was founded in 1981 to combat the biases of the old religious left, primarily its uncritical stance towards the Soviet Empire and its reluctance to speak on behalf of persecuted Christians behind the Iron Curtain. The old religious left was mainly centered in the agencies of mainline/old-line Protestantism and the ecumenical groups that they established, such as the National and World Councils of Churches.

Today, thanks partly to the IRD's critique, the old religious left's influence is much diminished. Do the media pay much attention to the National Council of Churches anymore? Do the Episcopal or United Methodist lobby offices on Capitol Hill have the ear of politicians or opinion makers? Hardly.

But a new evangelical left has arisen to fill at least part of the void. These "new evangelicals" want to steer their fellow believers away from championing traditional marriage and protecting unborn children. They prefer to focus on expanding the welfare state, imposing stricter environmental regulations, and taking a nearly pacifist stance abroad. Liberal evangelicals want to disown the old religious right and, thinking there are no alternatives, are driving to the political left in a bid for increased political and cultural respectability. I call them "New York Times evangelicals," because they seem to judge their success by whether or not they win favorable publicity from the secular media.

The icon for these "new" liberal evangelicals is Richard Cizik, the longtime Washington representative for the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) who won media plaudits for his global warming alarmism. Last year, even the NAE lost patience and had to dismiss Cizik after he endorsed same-sex unions on National Public Radio. Cizik went on to work for Ted Turner's United Nations Foundation. Now he is with George Soros' Open Society Institute. This political spiral is very sad, as Cizik in past years was often a partner with IRD in speaking up for the persecuted church. We pray he recovers his roots.

IRD staff once sat on the NAE board. But now we find ourselves increasingly compelled to take issue with the evangelical association. It has been moving steadily leftward, although it was not ready to accept Cizik's stance on same-sex unions. Once the NAE was known for siding with the West against the Soviet bloc, defending religious liberty domestically and internationally, and holding to traditional moral values. In recent years it has become better known for global warming activism and condemning alleged torture by U.S. military and intelligence personnel. Most recently, it has advocated boosting legal immigration and offering eventual amnesty to illegal immigrants. Next, the NAE is considering a push for nuclear disarmament.

More and more, the NAE's stances are interchangeable with those of the National Council of Churches (NCC). The irony is that 60 years ago the NAE was founded as an alternative to the NCC's politicized, doctrinally compromised predecessor.

The founding evangelical fathers of NAE would be shocked by today's NAE. Is the NAE doomed to follow the NCC?

Of course, I hope not. I recently was pleased to encounter NAE's new Washington representative at a summit for defending traditional marriage. Let's pray NAE will not altogether lose its passion for defending the clear teachings of Scripture. But there are reasons for concern, not just about the political positions but also about the means of deciding them.

In some ways, the NAE has become less democratic than the NCC, whose annual general assembly sometimes features debates among the diverse denominational representatives. By contrast, the NAE's 100-member board functions as little more than a rubber stamp for the effectively self-replicating executive committee. That committee, dominated by left-leaning evangelicals, pushes through controversial political stances with minimal debate and little opportunity for alternative viewpoints.

When NAE President Leith Anderson testified before a Senate subcommittee, he claimed the NAE's immigration resolution had passed the board with "no dissent." An NAE press release proclaimed that, in approving the resolution, the board of directors was "representing 40 denominations, scores of evangelical organizations and millions of American evangelicals."

In fact, after a flurry of negative publicity, several NAE member denominations, including the Salvation Army, announced they had not supported the resolution. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and chair of the NAE board, acknowledged that the NAE did not speak politically for the PCA. But Taylor also made clear his own personal support for the resolution. Taylor's defense of the NAE was eerily reminiscent of mainline church officials circling the wagons around the NCC back in the 1980s when IRD first exposed the council's leftist political adventures and lack of accountability.

Of course, the NAE has not sunk to the level of the NCC, apologizing for tyrannies like the Soviet Union. But the NAE is starting to replicate the NCC's elitism and disregard for its own membership, in a seeming quest for political prominence rather than careful Christian witness. IRD was not around 80 years ago to help dissuade mainline Protestants from the tragic path that led to embarrassment and implosion. But we can today help persuade evangelicals not to repeat those same mistakes that shifted mainline Protestants to the sideline of American culture. ☒



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Mark Tooley

HEALTH CARE

WHAT ARE CHURCHES SAYING?

by Connor M. Ewing



It is a reflection on both the nature of the Church and the nature of American society that U.S. religious bodies have played a visible role in the current debate on health care reform. Christians proclaim a Savior who heals the sick. For centuries the church has demonstrated Christ's love with hospitals that have extended health care to the weak, the poor, and the hopeless. This work of effective charity gives U.S. churches a seat at the table as politicians consider overhauling U.S. health care.

But the churches have not spoken with one voice. Some have become boosters of the proposals from President Obama and the congressional Democrats. Others have been very skeptical. Still others have sketched more nuanced positions, affirming health care reform but only under certain conditions. The following paragraphs survey the recent activity of six organizations.

Sojourners

A very visible organization involved in the reform battle is Jim Wallis's Sojourners movement. On August 19, Wallis co-sponsored a conference call with President Obama and a White House policy advisor. The call served as the kick-off to "40 Days for Health Reform," a campaign intended to mobilize people of faith.

Sojourners has not endorsed a particular bill; however, it seems to identify "reform" with the Democratic proposals. The conference call allowed the President to present his vision of health care reform and the advisor to rebut criticisms. Sojourners' e-mails have blasted opponents of the Democratic proposals for spreading alleged "misinformation" and "scare tactics."

On September 10, after President Obama spoke to Congress, Wallis declared complete satisfaction: "President Barack Obama made the commitments that a broad coalition in the faith community had asked

for—reform as a moral issue, affordable coverage for all, and no federal funding of abortion."

Earlier, Wallis had expressed some unease on the last point: "There is a consensus in the faith community that federal funds should be prohibited from paying for abortions in a health care bill ... That's where we have to go ... We're not there yet."

National Council of Churches

Among those participating in the "40 Days" campaign is the National Council of Churches (NCC). The NCC has made clear its priorities: a government-controlled "public option" must be created, coverage must be expanded to cover the vulnerable and must not be denied on the basis of pre-existing conditions, and preventive care must be promoted. Acknowledging the substantial cost of meeting these goals, the NCC counseled that Christian teaching favors taxes whereby "affluent Americans are ... asked to sacrifice financially for the betterment of all."

The NCC takes no position on abortion. The council favors "wholesale health care reform" above "incremental change." It compares critics of the Democratic proposals to racist segregationists of the 1950s: "The same 'go slow' tactic that was used to string out segregation is now being applied to health care."

United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church stands to the left of President Obama, openly preferring a health care system controlled by the federal government. The United Methodist Social Principles define health care as a "basic human right" that is "best funded through the government's ability to tax each person equitably and directly fund the provider entities."

For centuries the church has demonstrated Christ's love with hospitals that have extended health care to the weak, the poor, and the hopeless. This work of effective charity gives U.S. churches a seat at the table as politicians consider overhauling U.S. health care.

Regarding abortion, the Social Principles state, "We affirm the right of men and women to have access to comprehensive reproductive health/family planning information and services which will serve as a means to prevent unplanned pregnancies, reduce abortions and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS."

Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

The most prominent religious body standing against the Democratic proposals is the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. Just before Congress's August recess, the commission produced an analysis of a leading House bill, H.R. 3200.

The Southern Baptist analysis warned that "federal money will be used to pay for abortion under H.R. 3200." It concluded: "The simple fact is that if passed, no one can say for certain how badly this will all play out in practice. However, what we can say with absolute certainty is that this legislation will lead to diminished health care for most Americans, less choice, higher taxes, and unprecedented government intrusion into every level and aspect of society, from business, to education, to marriage, to individual liberty."

National Associations of Evangelicals

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) has raised some of the same concerns as the Southern Baptists, but without delivering a verdict on particular legislation. It called on the government to "achieve the important goals of broad coverage, portability, cost containment, and maintenance." The NAE mentioned judicial and tort law reform among the es-

sential components of a reform package. It also emphasized the importance of limiting government control and facilitating private sector creativity.

In a July letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, NAE President Leith Anderson stated his organization's unequivocal opposition to abortion. He wrote that "the NAE is concerned that abortion, if not explicitly excluded from being covered and funded in the plans arranged for by this legislation, may be considered to be approved under the legislation after enactment."

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Several leaders of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have submitted letters to Congress applying the teachings of the church to the health care debate. In July, Bishop William F. Murphy, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, wrote to affirm the conference's longstanding support for "accessible, affordable and quality health care that protects and respects the life and dignity of all people from conception until natural death." Bishop Murphy advocated "a truly universal health policy" that included legal immigrants. He called for "restraining costs" and "preserving pluralism including freedom of conscience and variety of options." He did not take a position on the degree of federal control that would be required in such a system.

One month later, Cardinal Justin Rigali wrote on behalf of the

bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities. Cardinal Rigali criticized H.R. 3200 on two grounds. The first was that the proposal would empower the Secretary of Health and Human Services "to make unlimited abortion a mandated benefit in the 'public health insurance plan.'" The second deficiency concerned the possibility that monies would be channeled to circumvent the current ban on federal funding for abortions. In Rigali's words, H.R. 3200 erects "a legal fiction, a paper separation between federal funding and abortion."

An October letter from Murphy, Rigali, and Migration Committee chair John Wester judged that "[n]o current bill meets" the bishops' criteria. "If final legislation does not meet our principles," they warned, "we will have no choice but to oppose the bill."

Conclusion

All these religious bodies agree that some sort of reform is necessary. And all see the need to expand coverage and control cost. On other issues, though, there is no consensus. The respective roles of the public and private sectors, the method of funding, and coverage of abortion are all fault lines that divide these groups. In the weeks ahead, we will see which vision of health care is pursued. ☒



Connor M. Ewing is the Research Assistant at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Evangelical Lutherans Go Over the Edge

by Alan F.H. Wisdom

At its August Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopted new policies on sexuality that marked a major departure from traditional Christian teaching. The new policies allow ELCA churches to give approval to non-marital sexual relationships, both homosexual and heterosexual, and to ordain persons in such relationships. More conservative Lutherans have moved quickly to distance themselves from the denomination.

Previous ELCA policies had declared that “marriage is the appropriate place for sexual intercourse.” Single ministers were “expected to live a chaste life,” and “[o]rdrained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding [were] expected to abstain from sexual relationships.”

All of these teachings were cast aside at the latest Churchwide Assembly. By precisely the 2/3 majority that was required, it adopted a new ELCA policy statement on “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.” The new statement “opposes non-monogamous, promiscuous, or casual sexual relationships.” But it stops short of saying that all sex outside of marriage is wrong.

The new ELCA standard for Christian sexual behavior is not marriage but the vaguer concept of “social trust” manifested in relationships that are “loving,” “life-giving,” “self-giving,” “fulfilling,” “nurturing,” “truth-telling,” “faithful,” “committed,” “supportive,” “hospitable,” and “a blessing to society.”

The new policy affirms “that the greatest sexual intimacies, such as coitus, should be matched with and sheltered both by the highest level of binding commitment and by social and legal protection, such as found in marriage.” But the phrase “such as” suggests that marriage is *merely one example* of right sexual relationship. It leaves room for other, non-marital relationships that might be equally acceptable to the church.

Regarding homosexuality, the new policy states that “consensus does not exist.” It presents four “conscience-bound beliefs,” ranging from disapproval of all same-sex

relations to honoring them as marriages, as equally valid. It consults neither the Scriptures nor the Lutheran confessional tradition to determine which of these perspectives might be the more faithful interpretation. Instead it promises to “include [all] these different understandings and practices within its life.”

Pursuant to that promise, the assembly adopted a new ministry policy to “allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships.” It also authorized a process for the ordination of persons in such relationships.

In taking these actions, the ELCA assembly went against most of the denomination’s members. Responses to a 2004 survey showed 57 percent of ELCA members opposed to changing the church’s position on homosexuality and only 22 percent in favor.

The assembly also defied most of its ecumenical partners and sister Lutheran churches. Before its votes, it received clear admonitions from Archbishop Wilton Gregory of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and President Gerald Kieschnick of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Archbishop Gregory quoted Pope Benedict XVI in warning that “without this adherence to Holy Scripture, ‘our communion with the Church in every age is lost—just at the time when the world is losing its bearings and needs a persuasive common witness to the saving power of the Gospel.’”

Lutheran Bishop Nicholas Tai from Hong Kong cautioned, “If the Church accepts and practices homosexual behavior, it will be a big stumbling block for the vast majority of 1.3 billion Chinese, who need the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” After the ELCA votes, three presidents emeritus of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Jesus wrote to “inform you [the ELCA] with a heavy heart that we are deeply saddened and dismayed.” The growing Ethiopian Lutheran body, with 5.5 million members, has outstripped the declining 4.7-million-member ELCA.



BROKEN STEEPLE On the day the assembly passed a new sexuality policy, a freak tornado damaged the ELCA church across the street (Photo courtesy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

Traditionalists within the ELCA were outraged by the assembly decisions. “We just voted out the Word of God, sound reason and the good orders of creation,” exclaimed the Rev. Jaynan Clark, head of the Word-Alone Network. At an overflowing September 25-26 meeting in Indianapolis, leaders of the Lutheran Coalition for Renewal agreed to move toward becoming “a free-standing synod ... apart from the ELCA.”

IRD President Mark Tooley commented, “In embracing moral relativism, the ELCA assembly ... has left the mainstream of U.S. and global Christianity, instead following other shrinking denominations like the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ towards internal division, accelerating membership loss, and cultural irrelevance.”



Alan F. H. Wisdom is the Vice President for Research and Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

Episcopalians Roll Down the Slope

by Jeffrey H. Walton

If the Episcopal Church leaped off a precipice with the 2003 election of a partnered homosexual as bishop, the 2009 General Convention accelerated the denomination's plunge away from orthodoxy. In adopting at least two resolutions that seriously departed from biblical teaching on human sexuality, as well as a flurry of radical political resolutions, the gathered deputies and bishops left little doubt of where the 2.3-million-member church is heading.

In a lopsided vote, deputies to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church effectively repealed a moratorium on the consecration of additional gay bishops, while also opening the door to the blessing of same-sex unions.

The first of the two resolutions passed, D025, affirmed of practicing homosexuals "that God has called and may call such individuals, to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church."

The newly adopted resolution essentially counters another resolution passed three years ago, in which dioceses were urged to "exercise restraint" in the consecration of practicing homosexuals as bishops. The effect of that 2006 resolution was to keep the Episcopal Church tenuously connected to the broader Anglican Communion for the intervening three years.

The General Convention also passed resolution C056, "Liturgies for Blessings," that calls upon the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to enter into "an open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships."

The denomination also had to contend with significant budget cuts for the upcoming triennium, the result of a steep drop in revenues that denominational officials attributed to both the economic downturn and a smaller attendance in the pews.

Attendance figures released by the church reveal that its decline has accel-

erated since 2003. At the beginning of General Convention, Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori disclosed that the denomination had lost a net 19,000 members the previous year, the equivalent of the average Sunday attendance of the entire Diocese of Los Angeles.

Episcopal leaders adopted a budget for the upcoming triennium that took a heavy toll on programs. *Episcopal Life*, the church's flagship publication, will lose staff and be cut back from a monthly



newspaper to a quarterly magazine. The denomination's evangelism program was completely shuttered.

"This is a very difficult day," said finance committee chair Pan Adams-McCaslin. "For the committee and for me personally, the decisions are heart-wrenching and emotional. As a Church of mission and ministry this is even more difficult because we work for a higher calling."

Among the casualties of the budget cuts were fully one-third of staff from the Church Center, including the early retirements of Washington, D.C.-based Episcopal lobbyist Maureen Shea and New York-based Director of Advocacy Brian Grieves.

In contrast to its agonies over the budget, General Convention had no hesitation

in passing a series of resolutions endorsing liberal political positions. The resolutions ranged from an endorsement of "card check" labor organizing to support for "single payer" federally controlled health care.

Resolution D012, entitled "Support of Transgender Civil Rights," calls on the Episcopal Church to push for laws that "prohibit discrimination based on gender identity or the expression of one's gender identity" and "treat physical violence inflicted on the basis of a victim's gender identity or expression as a hate crime."

The language of the resolution echoes changes to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act advocated by transsexual activists, as well as assigning a special protected status for transsexuals under federal "hate crimes" legislation. Since inflicting physical violence upon any person is already illegal in every state, conferring a special status upon transsexual persons would expand such a crime from being a state matter and bring about the involvement of federal law enforcement.

Opposition did arise in the House of Bishops to a heavily rewritten resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israel resolution, B027, was described by Deputy Sarah Lawton of California as an "omnibus" bill that compiled the sentiments of numerous proposed resolutions relating to the Mideast. It was ultimately defeated by bishops who criticized its language for being unbalanced and anti-Israel.

Bishop Edward Little of Northern Indiana protested the singling out of Israel as aggressor and Palestinians as victims. Little was joined by Bishop Mark Sisk of New York, who stated that ascribing all the blame to Israel "is incorrect." ❏



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Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws: Christians under Attack

by Faith J.H. McDonnell

False blasphemy accusations led to open season on Christians in Pakistan's Punjab Province in July and August 2009. Korian, home to about 100 families, was destroyed on July 30 when Islamists accused a Christian family of desecrating a Koran. Two days later, the same accusation resulted in the death of Christians in nearby Gojra. Then on August 5 in Sheikhpura, an enraged mob killed a Christian factory owner and two others.

In Korian, mourners at a Muslim funeral reportedly demanded that a Christian wedding party stop playing music. The Christians refused, tossing paper currency and coins into the air for children to catch, according to custom. The next day Muslims accused the bride's younger brothers of cutting up the Koran to throw in the air along with the money. The parents, Talib and Muktar Masih, denied the accusation but apologized for any perceived offense. An eyewitness told Compass Direct News Service that the Muslims beat the Masihis until Talib was unconscious.

On July 30, clerics announced from the mosque that "infidel" Christians better "get out ... or they would be killed." A mob carrying firearms and explosives looted homes, battered down the walls with trucks, and started fires. Sixty houses and two churches were destroyed and all the livestock stolen. The mob blockaded the road, refusing entry to firefighters and police. Christians hid in the fields until relatives arrived with vehicles to take them to safety.

Two days later, extremists still upset about the Masih wedding moved to attack Gojra. Three women and a child were burned alive and ten others were killed when armed militants opened fire, shouting, "Kill the infi-

del Christians!" and "*Allahu Akbar* [God is great]!" Again, extremists barred firefighters and ambulances, ensuring agonizing death for those who had been burned.

The fact-finding team of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) determined the rioting "was not spontaneous but planned by the attackers, some of whom belong to an al-Qaeda-linked group." Asma Jahangir, a courageous Muslim attorney and the U.N. Special Rap-

When society allows Islamists to be excused from the norms observed by others, it guarantees that more Christians and other vulnerable minorities will come under attack.

porteur on Freedom of Religion, chairs the HRCP. Her statement revealed that Muslim clerics told the faithful to "make mincemeat of the Christians."

The next day, August 2, when some 1,000 people marched into Gojra's Christian enclave, local police did nothing to stop them. Witnesses told the HRCP that attackers "torched over 40 houses of Christian families in less than half an hour." Mercifully, some Muslims helped Christians to escape the violence.

Police also failed to stop the killing of Najib Zafar, the owner of the Eastern Leather Factory, on August 5 in Sheikhpura, according to the HRCP. Clerk Qasim Ali accused Zafar of desecration when a calendar of Koranic verses fell off the wall. Qasim incited fellow workers, and the local mosque called on Muslims "to attack the factory owner and kill him."

Some unarmed police arrived after Najib had been wounded. They attempted to hide him in a storeroom; however, as the crowd of violent workers swelled with reinforcements from the mosque, the police were unable to stop them from storming the storeroom. The HRCP reported that "the policemen looked the other way to save their own skin" and "the mob was free to beat the owner to death."

Now, says the HRCP, other factory owners in the region fear "that the spread of such baseless rumours by unhappy factory workers against an owner may result in a replay of similar incident." Should Christian employers eschew wall calendars in favor of desk planners? An Islamist with a grudge would still target them. No matter how far-fetched the blasphemy accusation, it will be taken seriously by clerics and judges who hold the power of life and death over the vulnerable Christian community.

Disturbingly, the western world also sometimes indulges the radical Islamists. Some media reports depicted the attacks on Korian and Gojra as "Christian-Muslim riots," as if the Islamist rampage and the Christians' feeble attempts at self-defense were morally equivalent. When society allows Islamists to be excused from the norms observed by others, it guarantees that more Christians and other vulnerable minorities will come under attack. ☒



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The Institute on Religion & Democracy

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