

UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS

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Historical Background of the NAE

Ever since *The Readers' Digest* published two exposés of the World Council of Churches in the '70s and '80s, people in the pews of member WCC denominations have begrudged their denominations' financial support of the WCC. Others have seen the light and have forsaken their liberal churches.

The National Council of Churches is the U.S. affiliate of the WCC. The NCC has its roots in the Federal Council of Churches which was so discredited for its liberalism and its social gospel that it reorganized in 1950 under the new identity of the National Council of Churches of Christ.

In 1942 another organization was born. Refusing the call of the conservative American Council of Christian Churches to join in the stand against mainline liberalism, while avoiding direct involvement with the Federal Council of Churches, "new evangelical" leaders organized the National Association of Evangelicals with two main objectives—to promote cooperative evangelism and to encourage the American church to address social concerns.

Recent Developments in the NAE

In direct opposition to the commands of Scripture, the NAE has often followed a course of compromise in pursuing these two stated objectives. Now the current leadership is intent on broadening its bases of support and appeal. Consider the following developments from 1996:

- The latest NAE president, Donald Argue, is a charismatic from the Assembly of God;
- A majority of members on the NAE leadership council are from charismatic or Pentecostal churches;
- The NAE uses women pastors on its platform for religious functions;
- Member denominations and congregations in the NAE have always been able to hold dual membership in the modernistic NCC. Now the new NAE president is actively dialoguing with the NCC General Secretary, Joan Brown Campbell. Both have made courtesy visits to the other's headquarters, and Dr. Argue of the NAE has affirmed their "mutual respect" and has preached for the NCC staff;
- Finally, the new NAE president found a way with several other new evangelical leaders to meet with the pope when he visited the U.S. This was followed by the NAE's hosting an official Roman Catholic observer at its 1996 Convention.

Analysis

These developments confirm the drift of the National Association of Evangelicals. When it comes to questions of ecclesiastical cooperation, the NAE operates as if in an historical vacuum. It is more in tune with ephemeral cultural concerns than with biblical principle and the ongoing struggles in the Church to preserve those principles. There appears to be no appreciation for boundaries of purity and claims of truth laid down in the Bible.

Charismatic Drift

Especially in the latter half of this century the Charismatic movement has been a leading force in breaking down church barriers. Truth generally is sacrificed when differing religious bodies line up together and their only common ground is a subjective charismatic experience.

Now a precedent has been set. In its fifty-five year history the NAE generally has had an orthodox identity, at least on paper. In 1996, however, not only did the Association elect a president from a Charismatic denomination, but it also chose a majority of the leadership council from among Charismatic or Pentecostal denominations. This development is not surprising in view of the NAE's original objective of "cooperative evangelism."

Reaching out to Apostates

Equally disturbing is the NAE leadership's open rapprochement with the National Council of Churches. This late development, as well as the hosting of a Roman Catholic observer, is the natural outcome of sacrificing truth for the sake of religious unity.

The Charismatic worldview generally tends to exalt present experience over the tested truths of time. Without too much exaggeration we may safely say that a charismatic's "experience" is often "felt" as valid in meaning as a first century apostle's message from God. Therefore, often ignorant of the Scripture and steeped in an existential approach to life, charismatic decisions and lifestyles often will contradict biblical Christianity.

For the same reason, charismatic denominations downplay the importance of teaching church history to their ministerial candidates. Accordingly, if God the Spirit today is giving instant revelations, then why bother with the painstaking work of studying and learning from the church of the past? Why even bother with studying apostolic history?

Those who assert the importance of experience over reality live in an historical vacuum. Hence there is little wonder that the present NAE leadership operates as if oblivious to the great fundamentalist-modernist dispute of the 1920s and '30s in America. To know this history is to know the identity of the NCC and of its member denominations. It is a sad account of departure from historic Christianity and of open apostasy.

So what do "evangelicals" in the NAE have to do with apostate Protestants and Roman

Catholics? Are these groups no longer part of the Christian mission field? Has the “neo-evangelical” movement come to the place where it not only doubts the Bible in areas of scientific and historical statement, but now also in areas of faith and obedience? Apparently, Christ’s demands for holiness and unity in the truth are not as important to NAE leadership as building bridges to false churches.

Conclusion

Intent on expanding an already broad image, the NAE in 1996 promoted Charismatic and female leadership, accredited the National Council of Churches, and extended a palm branch to the Roman Catholic Church. Some NAE members are nervous about these sweeping developments.

To those who have a conscience enlightened by Scripture and are concerned about the diluting of Christian orthodoxy, we say (1) God demands instant obedience, and (2) there are other avenues of evangelizing and addressing social issues without being entangled in the snare of the NAE.

Even as God calls us to personal holiness, He also demands our best efforts toward ecclesiastical purity. Especially, Reformed groups in the NAE should recognize this. The Reformed heritage of “reformed and always reforming,” dictates that church bodies ever be examining themselves in the light of God’s Word. The National Association of Evangelicals is overdue for reformation. 