

Protestant Doubt about Climate Change

Written by Rodger A Payne

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RODGER A PAYNE, MAY 6 2011

Last week, in his regular religion column for the *Louisville Courier Journal*, journalist Peter Smith discussed the results of a recent survey about climate change. As per usual in the U.S. context, the survey asked whether particular people believed in global warming — as if the science on this question was not largely settled. “Believe” is an important word in that sentence because the LifeWay Research polling agency is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church and surveyed 1,000 Protestant pastors of various denominations in October 2010:

Sixty percent of Protestant pastors disagree that global warming is real and man-made, and 41 percent of them “strongly” disagree, a new survey says.

The skepticism is up from an already high 48 percent of pastors in 2008 who somewhat or strongly disagreed with the strong scientific consensus on man-made global warming.

The latest results were released in late April by LifeWay Research, a Southern Baptist-affiliated polling agency. It was based on a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors of various denominations in October 2010.

I’ve blogged about American faith and science previously, but this new survey seemed especially disappointing.

As Smith points out, the survey really wasn’t identifying an anti-science view among religious leaders. Rather, the survey found that political differences (and some socio-economic variables) largely explained the results. A PRWeb summary on Yahoo provides the details:

Pastors who are Democrats are most likely to strongly agree that global warming is real and manmade. Republicans are most likely to strongly disagree and Independents are in the middle.

A full 65 percent of Democrats strongly agree, along with 24 percent of Independents and 6 percent of Republicans that global warming is real and manmade. But 57 percent of Republicans strongly disagree, along with 36 percent of Independents and 6 percent of Democrats.

Republicans (21 percent) and Independents (22 percent) are more likely to somewhat disagree than Democrats (12 percent).

Among pastors who describe their political ideology as progressive or liberal, 78 percent strongly agree that global warming is real and manmade. Yet only 7 percent of conservative pastors and 6 percent of very conservative pastors strongly agree.

Sixty-nine percent of those labeling themselves very conservative strongly disagree. Forty-seven percent of conservatives and 3 percent of progressives and liberals strongly disagree.

The survey also found significant difference among pastors depending upon their level of education and geographic location (South vs. Northeast).

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Apparently, what this survey really finds is that most protestant pastors are conservative.

About the author:

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