

Methodist Missions Book Endorses Socialism, Abortion Rights

By MARK TOOLEY

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A new booklet published by the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) endorses abortion rights and praises socialist systems for providing better health care to their people.

GBGM is one of the world's largest missions agencies, with an annual budget approaching \$200 million. It is the official missions agency of the United Methodist Church, which has 8.3 million members in the United States.

Called *Abundant Living: Global Health and Christian Responsibility*, the booklet was distributed at GBGM's April directors' meeting. Its authors include two persons who work for GBGM, Sara Chand and Esther Galima Mabry; a former GBGM missionary, Dave Hilton; and a former GBGM director, Becky Jones.

The booklet admits that in much of the world infanticide and abortion target female fetuses and children because sons are preferred. "As it became possible to determine the sex of a fetus, girl fetuses were invariably aborted." The booklet even acknowledges that "Indian feminists" have opposed abortion because it disproportionately targets female children.

But the booklet goes on to note that "unhygienic" abortions often kill women. "Abortion kills more women than any other single pregnancy-related cause," the booklet observes. It then endorses the full availability of legal and ostensibly safe abortions. "Accessible legal abortion services could drastically reduce deaths from unsafe abortions, especially for the poor," it claims. "Barriers to access such as parental consent for minors, spousal consent in many countries, and other criteria limiting the ability of a woman to have a free choice need to be examined by those who would like to offer services to prevent deaths due to abortion."

The booklet comments that "many believe that children are a gift of God and that no pregnancy should be aborted, [but] it is a fact that abortion has always existed." It admits that "doctors do not like doing abortions, and pregnant women do not like having them

But rather than focus on alternatives to abortion, or explain why Christians have historically opposed abortion, the booklet chooses to minimize the moral implications of abortion. "Experience has consistently shown that where abortion is prohibited by law it continues to be performed in unsafe and clandestine settings." The booklet asserts that readily available abortion services are essential to defending women and elevating their status.

"The real issue is not abortion, but unwanted pregnancy," the booklet insists. "If we could transfer even half of the energy that goes into the abortion debate into a determined effort to assure that every pregnancy is a wanted pregnancy, it would go a long way toward resolving the conflict."

The booklet advocates that school boards insist on "responsible education-for-life classes with information about pregnancy prevention, including abstinence."

Along with unrestricted abortion, the booklet sees socialized medicine as a key ingredient to improving people's lives. "With market system health care, the goal is to make a profit," the booklet complains. Such a system provides only for healthy people, it alleges. There is no love of neighbor in such an approach." The booklet concludes that the "only solution" to remove health care from the market system" and make it a public service," i.e., government controlled.

According to the booklet, the only obstacle to health care for all is the wealth and lobbying power of large medical corporations. "The only way to remove the blockade is to organize a major grass-roots campaign pressuring Congress to establish a system of universal health care coverage."

The booklet urges readers to work through United Methodist Women to lobby Congress for socialized medicine.

One example of a health care system that works is Cuba's, according to the booklet. Cuba's health care system has advanced "remarkably" despite "U.S.-imposed trade limitations." The booklet says that Cuba's "level of health, education, and overall social welfare is superior to any country in the developing world, and is in many ways very similar to that of the developed world." Cuba has higher immunization rates for children than does the United States, the booklet maintains. Cuba also has a higher enrollment ratio of girls to boys in high school than does the United

States. Cuba "strongly supports equal rights for women," the booklet acclaims.

But Cuba's accomplishments do not get much coverage, the booklet complains, because "it has followed a different path of development, namely, 'Power to the people!'"

Seemingly, the booklet views Cuba's government-controlled health care system as a model for the United States. "Placing the needs of people before profits is also crucial in making decisions on a national level," the booklet insists.

Secular Power

The booklet repeats familiar but largely outdated left-wing explanations for Third World poverty: Western colonialism, Western banks, and population growth. It assumes the world's economy is a limited pie that can be sliced into only so many pieces. The wealth of the West can be explained only by its exploitation of the Third World. The benefits of private ownership and free markets in fostering economic growth, and stimulating more responsible health care systems, go unmentioned.

Instead, the West is faulted for its "maldevelopment," which is characterized by "militarism," "waste," "degradation of the environment," "institutionalized consumerism," "persistence of poverty," and "rising nationalism." This list of supposed Western sins is odd, as chronic poverty, militarism, pollution, and excessive nationalism are all more likely to be found under Third World dictatorships.

The booklet goes on to complain that the "rich nations" have 24% of the earth's population but consume 79% of the world's goods and services. It fails to note that the high level of consumption is powered largely by commerce within and among the developed countries, where human talents are used more productively, with less wasted through corruption and the arbitrary exercise of state power. But these facts would contravene the booklet's theme that poor nations are poor, and have inadequate health care, primarily because of the greed of wealthier nations.

The strong implication is that the West should begin making transfer payments to the Third World to compensate for its exploitation. "Without significant change, the structural distortions

will continue their toll on the human family," the booklet warns ominously. "We can be sustainers — or exploiters — of creation," it concludes.

Environmental themes are also touched on in the booklet. "The earth cannot sustain life indefinitely, given the rate at which we are using its resources and polluting the environment," it laments. Readers are told to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels, drive smaller cars, lower their thermostats, and to recycle. This advice seems salutary enough, of course, but it is doubtful that any Third World poor person will in any way benefit because an American recycles his newspapers.

The booklet admits that Communism has largely failed, but warns against capitalist triumphalism. "Is it not time to admit that capitalism as we practice it has also failed?" it asks. The booklet recommends a job guarantee to every person and an increase in the minimum wage. It also demands that the world's seven poorest nations be given equal voice in setting the course of the world's economy at meetings that typically involve only the world's seven wealthiest.

Abundant Living has some worthwhile things to say about relocating health care services out of the cities of Third World nations and into villages where they would be more accessible. (Of course, the Western colonizers are blamed for this problem, without getting any credit for introducing Western medicine to begin with.) It also contains a lot of innocuous guidance about living more frugally.

But *Abundant Living* is largely guided by radical notions of class struggle. It sees the world as a battlefield between the wealthy few and the far more numerous oppressed poor. The wealthy must renounce the means that generated their wealth, while the poor must claim what is rightfully theirs. As such, this booklet is really more about secular power than about the Gospel. There is little mention of sin, grace, or salvation. It is basically liberation theology lite, too diluted to really offend, but still too far off base to really help.