

WEB REVIEW: *Religious Institute—Denominational Statements* <http://www.religioustheology.org/denominational-statements>

By Erica Durham

Does the Orthodox Church have an official statement on abortion? Have the Disciples of Christ ever written a position paper on homosexuality, or have Mennonites spoken out about violence against women?

Conversations about sex and sexuality dominate the airwaves amongst religious denominations and congregations. Questions about biblical interpretation, ordination standards, and ecclesiastical rules and regulations abound in seminary classrooms, weekday Bible studies, and ten o'clock Sunday morning coffee hours. Faithful people throughout the world are wrestling with issues that were simply not discussed in religious settings fifty years ago. In response to these discussions, many denominations and religious bodies have created position statements on particular issues like homosexuality, abortion, rape, etc.

The Religious Institute, a nonprofit organization committed to working “at the intersection of sexuality and religion,”¹ has created a useful database that brings together denominational statements on sexuality-related issues. The database, housed on the Religious Institute’s website, includes official statements from twenty-eight denominations on many issues, including marriage, violence against women, sexual misconduct, abortion, and homosexuality.

While the Religious Institute’s primary mission is to “change the way America understands the relationship between sexuality and religion,”² the database offers a nonjudgmental presentation of the denominational statements. Having done the laborious web searching and compiling of denominational statements, the Religious Institute simply provides an easy-to-navigate database with “cut and pasted” statements and links to the relevant denominational pages.

The denominational statements are easily accessible from the Religious Institute homepage via a link on the right navigation pane or under the “Resources” tab. The homepage is an introduction to the work of the Religious Institute with a clearly identified “Click Here to Start” button. The database is searchable by issue, denomination, or keyword. The search screen has two primary sections—keyword search and guided search—resulting in a simple site design with advanced searching capabilities.

The guided search gives the user an opportunity to browse all of the statements and policies within one denomination or choose an issue (such as contraception) and browse the statements that address that particular issue. The list of denominations has a parenthetical number that denotes the number of statements for that denomination.

Those who are interested in the statements of a particular denomination can simply click on the denomination’s name. A list is produced with statements in no particular order. To refine the search within that particular denomination, one must locate the “more options” button which is somewhat hidden on the right navigation pane. The “more options” tab brings up a list of issues that have been addressed by that denomination. A number is beside each issue, noting the number of statements about the issue. The user can then narrow the search to statements about that particular issue by that specific denomination.

¹ Religious Institute: Denominational Statements, <http://www.religioustheology.org/denominational-statements>

² Ibid.

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For example, a search of Reformed Judaism produces a list of forty-five statements. To view a list of those statements organized by issue, one must select the “more options” tab. One can then see the topics on which Reformed Judaism has issued statements and browse the statements by topic. Researchers may view statements on the database site or choose the link that points to the denomination’s website.

While the database is relatively user-friendly, users might be frustrated by the malfunctioning keyword search options. Keyword searching can be limited to “date,” “title,” and “resolution number.” However, numerous search attempts to limit by specific dates or denominational names failed. Another negative of the site is the lack of a “sort” function. In the explanation of the website, the creators boast of a “sort” function which would allow the user to sort by type of statement (e.g., position paper, official statement, church policy). If this feature exists it is extremely hard to find! A “sort by date” function would also be particularly helpful.

Overall, the Religious Institute Denominational Statements database is a well-organized, easy-to-navigate web resource for ready-reference. Though it lacks many of the popular bells and whistles (videos, images, sound), it is presented on a clean and simple platform. According to the website, religions, denominations, historical documents, and new resolutions will be added regularly. Reference librarians, polity instructors, and inquiring minds of all ranks will find this an excellent website to bookmark for future use.

