



Motivated by our different religious traditions, we believe that attitudes, priorities, and institutions can be changed to reflect a just and democratic use of the universe's bounty; we believe in the value of work that contributes to the common good; and in the healing influence of respect for the differences as well as the commonness of human experience.

**AUTUMN 2001**

VOLUME 25, ISSUE 4

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# Religious Socialism

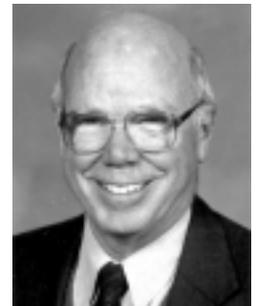
THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

## Religion and Labor: Coast to Coast

THREE PERSPECTIVES FROM ACROSS THE NATION

### RESURGENCE IN LOS ANGELES

Rev. Dick Gillett



It would have been unimaginable a decade ago in LA: a three week city-wide strike of 80,000 janitors in the spring of last year, tying up downtown streets, tramping eight miles to a rally point— and clergy of the major religious prominent throughout. Cardinal Roger Mahoney celebrated a mass for the strikers, a rabbi held a seder meal for them; and Episcopal bishop, a Roman Catholic sister and a rabbi addressed a candlelight rally of 2000 janitors and their families in LA's Pershing Square. The janitors won the strike, and new-city wide contracts

The janitors' crusade for decent wages, fair treatment and health benefits caught the imagination of the entire city, and dramatically raised public awareness of the plight of the masses of low wage workers in general in Los Angeles. Yet the groundwork for this and other religion-labor collaboration had been laid as far back as early 1996, when a small but influential group of clergy and laity drew up a theological statement and formed an interfaith group to support the campaign for a living wage ordinance in the City of Los Angeles. In the years since, that group, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), chaired by prominent civil rights leader and Martin Luther King, Jr. colleague- the Rev. James Lawson, has grown dramatically in numbers and influence. It has forged collaborative strategies with LA's forward-looking labor movement as it championed the cause of low wage workers both in and beyond Los Angeles.

**Religion still has great moral authority to command attention and respect when it enters the public arena and calls attention to injustice...**

Following the passage of L.A. 's landmark living wage ordinance in 1997 there have been rallies, religious processions, letter-writing campaigns, civil

*cont'd on page 4*

**editor's notes**

Most of this issue was prepared before the tragic events of Sept. 11, and the ensuing "war on terrorism". As editor, my first impulse was to "scrap it" and then begin anew addressing the meaning of the Sept. 11 events and its aftermath. But we are not going to do that. It is imperative that we address the critical issues facing our society, particularly because the "war" effort will be diverting much attention and resources from those issues. For example, the issues related to Religion and Labor in the quest for economic justice are even more important today as the economy sinks into recession. Similarly, the role that faith-based organizations can play addressing society's needs — utilizing government funds — is significant. Along with others, we at RS express our deep sympathies to the families and victims of the Sept. 11 events, as well as to those who are suffering in Afghanistan from the bombings. An expression of DSA concerns, and in particular, those of the Religion and Socialism Commission — written shortly afterward Sept. 11 — can be found elsewhere in this issue.

At this time we are fearful that the US bombings will be perceived as a war against the Muslims, despite our intentions. We are also concerned that the bombing will have the same unifying effects on others as the bombing of the World Trade Center Towers had on the US. There will be much said on these topics in the forthcoming issues of RS and other publications.

This issue of RS is composed primarily of two major units — one is a section on Religion and Labor — three brief articles under the title of "Religion and Labor: Coast to Coast" — which reflect different locations and different aspects of the issue. There are views from Los Angeles presented by the Rev. Richard Gillett who has been active in interfaith efforts in the LA area — from Detroit — by the Rev. Joyce Caggiano who heads a church-based social service agency — Crossroads — which spends considerable efforts on employment issues among low income people; and finally, words from Dr. Jonathan Fine, Director of the Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.

The second unit addresses the issue of Faith-based Initiatives which have been considered in previous RS issues (Spring and Fall 2000). Since the Bush Administration came into office, that initiative has created a political firestorm. On August 17, John DeLilluo resigned his position as Director of the Bush Administration's Faith-based Initiatives. The next day the Boston DSA Chapter held a Forum on Faith-based Initiatives, as part of its summer strategy meeting. The panel was moderated by the Rev. Judy Deutsch, RS Commission member, and the three panelists were: the Rev. Alexander Hurt, pastor of Kingdom Church in Brockton, MA; The Hon. Byron Rushing, State Representative in Massachusetts; and the Rev. Norm Faramelli, from RS. We are including major portions of the panel presentations in this issue along with some highlights from the discussion.

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Religious Socialism (ISSN 0278-7784) is published four times per year by the Religion and Socialism Commission of the Democratic Socialists of America, and is produced by the Democratic Socialists of America Fund. Subscriptions at the basic rate are \$10.00 per year.

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•Writers may submit manuscripts via postal mail, e-mail, or on a 3.5" computer disk formatted to text files and a hard copy. Photos are encouraged.

**UNION MADE  
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# LETTERS

## CORT IS NOT DEAD, BUT GRATEFUL

To the Editor:

When my wife, Helen, saw the Summer Issue of RS she said, "They must think you are either dead or dying. Otherwise—it's too much".

Too much or not, I am grateful to Maurice Isserman, Monsignor Higgins, and Alex Mikulich for the kind words and their defense of ACTU (Association of Catholic Trade Unionists), however, modified.

Two corrections: I graduated from Harvard in 1935, not 1936. Secondly, it is misleading to say that "religious unionists like Cort... expelled communists from the labor movement." We actually defended communists from expulsion until the CIO convention in 1949 voted overwhelmingly to expel communist controlled unions. The key actors in this move were Phil Murray, the Catholic president of the CIO, Walter Reuther of the Auto Workers and Emil Rieve of the Textile Workers. As far as I know, Reuther and Rieve were not religious.

In grateful solidarity,  
John Cort

IN THE NEXT RS:

SEPTEMBER 11  
AND BEYOND:

OUR RESPONSES TO  
TERROR AND WHAT  
TO DO ABOUT IT

Aside from the condemnation of the attacks, the left has found it hard to speak with one united voice on the matter of how to respond to the events of September 11. The Winter issue will present different opinions from our political community.

## editor's notes cont'd...

No issue of RS would be complete without a word from our dear brother and friend, John Cort. This one is no exception, as John sends a "thank you" note and offers his insightful review of Thomas Frank's, *One Market under God*, under the caption of "Say It Ain't So, Lester Thurow".

John gives an important admonition to those who are religious socialists. We should not get stuck on what is possible or feasible, but should always be ready to stretch the boundaries of the possible — and to expand the spectrum of political and economic feasibility. Thanks, John.

—Norm Faramelli



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## Religion and Labor

*cont'd from page 1*

disobedience in support of workers' organizing campaigns and intensive lobbying at Los Angeles and Santa Monica city halls-many of these actions receiving wide press coverage. A further indication of the momentum building across southern California for workers' rights and living wages is the passage this past Spring of a living wage ordinance in Ventura County (a conservative, largely rural area north of LA). Central to its success was a separate religion-labor coalition.

CLUE has three campaigns currently underway which build upon these experiences, both in religious participation and in strategies that move toward addressing the deeper causes of the powerlessness and poverty of working people. Its most ambitious campaign is focused around the "Declaration of Conscience", an initiative signed last March by almost 200 religious leaders and addressed to elected officials

**A key factor in the recent successes of organized labor... has been labor's new willingness to organize undocumented immigrant workers.**

in Los Angeles. It calls for a fundamental reordering of the city's economic development priorities and proposes six policy recommendations to be required of developers when they come to Los Angeles seeking generous subsidies for their projects. The mayor and several City Council members have either explicitly or implicitly endorsed it. But its real clout will come when CLUE, in close concert with a broad coalition of labor and community groups, begins to leverage the voice of religious leaders in the council districts at those strategic moments when large development projects come before the Council for approval.

This is a very ambitious undertaking and will require mobilization and coordination efforts that will test CLUE's organizing capabilities. But here a tremendous asset is the leadership of an organization at the center of such efforts. The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which has been decisive in building a broad coalition of groups to address these development issues. Not least among its multifaceted work is its strong research capability and its ties to key allies in and around the city. Most importantly for the religious community, LAANE has had the wisdom to include it as a strong partner. The second CLUE program, the Hotel Organizing project focuses upon supporting hotel workers in their efforts to organize unions in key

hotels on LA's wealthy West Side (including Santa Monica) and in downtown Los Angeles.

A key to this effort is a "chaplaincy in the field" program, which involves clergy in various ways from home visits with workers to listen to their stories and support their efforts in the workplace, to standing with them at a particular labor actions. One such action last Spring, directed toward Loews Hotel in Santa Monica, was a march in which over 150 clergy and laity or all the major faiths participated. This has been followed by a concerted letter-writing campaign involving not only our area but the New York area to persuade Loews, a prominent Democrat and New Yorker to recognize workers right to organize at his hotel.

The third program, now gearing up to address the plight of low-income workers in nursing homes in L.A. County, is using strategies similar to those of the Hotel Organizing project. Here the union is the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) whose organizers pair with a full time CLUE staff person, a Baptist clergyperson, on this project. This kind of collaborative strategizing, i.e., giving a real role in planning to Church folks is new to the unions. It will take patience to nourish this relationship into its full potential, but we believe that the unions will over time will see the value of clergy participation as far more effective than, say the "rent-a-collar" mentality that unions sometimes exhibit when they call upon clergy to show up at a picket line with them.

How did we come to witness a revived religious participation in labor's struggles comparable, as one prominent union leader here observe, to the involvement of the clergy and laity in the farmworkers' struggle led by Cesar Chavez?

First, is the reality of poverty in Los Angeles, which perhaps epitomizes the problem of working poverty more than any other metropolitan area in the United States. Over the 1990s, poor families rose in number from 36 to 43 percent of the total population in the L.A. County (according to the calculation of a needs-based poverty threshold of \$33,000 annually for a family of four). A sharply rising immigrant population over the same period contributed to this rise.

But a key factor in the recent successes of organized labor (it organized about 90,000 new workers in 1999 alone) has been labor's new willingness to organize undocumented immigrant workers. Just as important, the leadership of the two most active unions (the Hotel Workers' Union and the Service Employees International Union) has passed to Latinos whose union formation and experience came directly out of Chavez farmworker movement. Moreover, the head of

the county AFL-CIO federation, Miguel Contreras, was a farmworker organizer. In these unions, a bottom-up, democratic union movement is being built.

But how did religious participation in worker struggles here become so widespread? Going back to the mid-nineties, at the beginning of the new involvement, I found that a good number of people in our churches could already sense that something was terribly wrong: How could so many people be working at full-time jobs yet barely surviving, while there was so much prosperity and affluence all around them? So the request to support a living wage ordinance fell upon receptive ears.

So that initial experience of working shoulder to shoulder with ordinary working people on the living wage campaign was a quantum step up in the 'conscientization' process. It fueled the passion and the commitment of significant numbers in the religious community to expand the work in the ways described here.

The power of the religious voice and its presence in issues of worker and economic justice cannot be overstated. Religion still has great moral authority to command attention and respect when it enters the public arena and calls attention to injustice, especially among the most vulnerable and voiceless. Commenting on the religious presence in the living wage campaign, its chief legislative advocate, Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg said, "Early on, the media portrayed only the unions as the advocates of

the Ordinance. But soon the press began to acknowledge the clergy's participation. I honestly think that it were not for their joint actions and advocacy together with the unions, community groups and others, we would not have passed the ordinance." And Maria Elena Durazo, president of Local 11 of the Hotel Workers union, told a Los Angeles church conference in 1999 that the most important force in worker struggles— next to that of the workers themselves—, is the interfaith religious community, giving the workers strength and courage and signaling to the community the moral rightness of their struggle.

To whatever degree lofty pronouncements and religious processions of the past may or may not have resulted in true advancement of the dignity and respect of the workers, we should do well today to remind ourselves that Israel's great "searchings of the heart" included these stirring words of the prophet Isaiah (65:22-23)

*My chosen ones will enjoy  
the fruit of their labor,  
They will not toil to no purpose,  
or raise children for misfortune,  
Because they and their issue after them  
Are a race blessed by the Lord. ▀*

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*The Rev. Dick Gillett, minister for social justice in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, is program chair for Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, and a long-time advocate for worker justice.*

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## RELIGION AND LABOR: COAST TO COAST

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### A WORD FROM DETROIT Rev. Joyce Caggiano



I have never been in a real human stampede. But each time I open Crossroads' door I fear that it will happen that day. We will be stampeded by the brave ones of the desperately poor who demand to receive justice. The brave ones are the ones who demand their right to a decent wage and a roof over their heads and food for their bellies and shelter from the storms of life. I couldn't help but make the comparison with those who dashed down the many flights of stairs in desperate need to survive the assault on the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The two groups have one thing in common— the drive to survive.

We at Crossroads serve nearly 10,000 people in the city of Detroit each year—ninety percent African

American, and sixty-seven percent male—the population the William Julius Wilson calls "the truly disadvantaged". They come to our doors each day to get help for basic human needs. And we are there because we are committed to justice; we are committed to the ethical standards of Jesus Christ— not the standards of the Dow Jones index. And so, we feed, clothe, and love those who come to us without jobs, transportation, or even the basic necessities of a respectable human life, i.e. a home with a toilet and shower and a place to wash clothes. But this is not enough to secure safety against the persistent pressure of extreme poverty. It is not enough, because we can only help on a limited basis— because every individual has a right to a decent wage and secure employment.

Crossroads is working to assist those who have the strength and potential to survive in our capitalist nation— the ones who have the will to push to the shores of safety- to seek a living wage. Our employment office has reengineered its operation by establishing a mentoring program for the potentially

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## Religion and Labor

*cont'd from page 5*

employable. We are working to help those who can, find meaningful employment. We help everyone by helping the most severely disadvantaged to overcome barriers to full-time employment. In a one-on-one interview process, we are working to imbue the depressed and downtrodden with a spirit of success and self-worth. We kicked off our program with a meeting of all our new mentors. After hearing testimony from a former client and crack addict, one of our counselor/mentors exclaimed "Oh! I understand now. You mean that we don't need to be experts in the employment field. All we need to do is to love our fellow brothers and sisters". Too bad it is such a rare thing for so many to find. Skills alone, although necessary, will not do it.

Each of Crossroads' Employment Office Mentors has a number of clients whom they follow from week to week in an effort to help them focus on their search for a way out of poverty and homelessness. More than a hundred churches of many denomination assist in this effort through contributions of time, money, and volunteer hours. Our success is yet to be measured in terms of numbers, but the satisfaction of finding work for many, who were not previously employed, is sufficient to keep us going.

**...we help everyone by helping the most severely disadvantaged to overcome barriers to full-time employment...**

Two week ago, I met one of our clients who had found a real "place" in the work world. He works for a Condominium management company. He greeted me with smiles and blessings, proudly telling me that he now had a van, a new wardrobe, and for the first time in his life-a bank account and an ATM card! His joy lifted my spirit and gives us all hope. Yes, we can find safety and love and care in our world, with a little help from the religious community.

The rush of the crowd at Crossroads' door is still an ominous sigh of poverty's desperation in Detroit., perhaps it is desperation not unlike those who descended the dozens of flights down the World Trade Center stairwell. They ran because a group of fanatics were willing to commit suicide and mass murder.

So as the two airlines crashed into the World Trade Center towers, I thought about the rush of the people to leave the building that had sheltered them. The people had to run to get to a place- away from the center of world trade. Crossroads is perhaps another shelter from that center—one in which love, hope, faith, courage and self-assurance fight the tide of fear and oppression that will lift the cloud of doom and destruction from over the disadvantaged. ▀

*The Rev. Joyce Caggiano is an Episcopal priest and Executive Director of Crossroads.*

### RELIGION AND LABOR: COAST TO COAST

#### A VIEW FROM MASSACHUSETTS

##### Dr. Jonathan Fine

The Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (MICWJ) is one of more than 30 local Committees in the US organized primarily to bring the moral force and teachings of diverse faith communities to the cause of labor. Founded in 1997, and based in Boston, the Committee to date has concentrated its efforts primarily in the Greater Boston, the home and workplace of two-thirds of Massachusetts' residents. Consistent with its statement of purpose, the Committee's work focuses on strategies and campaigns to aid low-wage workers and, among these, especially the unorganized.



Four principal program elements have emerged:

(1) *Enlisting religious congregations in Massachusetts in the struggle for worker justice.*

The committee seeks to identify activists (clergy and laity), and work with them for mobilization of additional support within faith communities. This effort is now enhanced by the August 2001 appointment to the MICWJ of a full-time organizer.

(2) *Solidarity with organized labor in support of organizing and contract campaigns, especially in the support of low wage workers.*

While in solidarity with all unions, the Committee has worked especially with the Service Employee International Union (SEIU) locals in Massachusetts and those of the building trades, e.g., the Painters Regional Council, which have to a greater extent than many others concentrated sources on organizing low-wage workers.

### (3) *Campaigning against sweatshop conditions*

Anti-sweatshop campaigning by MICWJ has evolved in the period of 1997-2001 parallel to that elsewhere in the nation- from participation in protests directed against large, name-brand retailers, strategies designed to bring aggregate purchasing power of municipalities and other public bodies to pressure sweatshop production facilities to conform to domestic and international labor standards.— Two campaigns by MICWJ and its labor partners are bearing fruit. The *first*: a municipal ordinance drafted by UNITE the international garment workers union -and now law (2001) in the City of Boston- is designed to prevent the purchase of sweatshop-produced uniforms and other garments with public funds. The *second*: a proposed state statute that would set up a mechanism for monitoring of state contracts for goods and services for sweatshop conditions. The first of its kind in the nation, this state bill was proposed by the Commission on Law and Social Action of the American Jewish Congress but has been actively supported by MICWJ and the Greater Boston Labor Council since its inception. In mid-2001, the bill is still making its way through the Massachusetts Legislature.

### (4) *Empowerment of immigrant workers*

With assistance from foundations and the National Committee for Worker Justice, MICWJ played a strategic role in the development of the Ana da Hora Workers Center in East Boston. The Center serves Brazilian and other immigrants from the working class communities north of Boston. The Center seeks to empower the immigrant community. It is governed by an elected, all-Brazilian working class board of directors. In addition to providing ESL classes and a free legal clinic staffed by the Greater Boston Legal Services, the Center focuses on mobilization in support of immigrant rights.

Uniting all of these elements is a newly forged alliance between MICWJ and the Greater Boston Labor Council (GBLC). The history of this alliance is instructive. From its inception, the Committee responded to appeals from the national AFL-CIO and local unions for religious presence in organizing and contract actions. Consequently, MICWJ has participated in scores of labor struggles. A few of these campaigns have been of historic proportions: the national UPS contract campaign (1998), and the St. Vincent's Nurses Strike in Worcester, MA and the East Coast Bell Atlantic /Verizon campaigns (2000). Recognizing the importance of

active support from communities of faith to labor struggles, the GBLC Mobilization committee and the Organizers Roundtable, a monthly gathering of labor organizers in Eastern Massachusetts, both invited MICWJ to participate in their regular meetings. These arrangements not only gave clergy and active laity a place at the table of Labor, but it helped the Committee gain insight and acquaintance with the thinking of front-line organizers and state and national AFL-CIO leadership.

One clergyman in Massachusetts, in particular, has responded to the calls from Labor and has served the cause of Labor, the Rev. Edward Boyle, S. J., Executive Secretary of the Labor Guild of the Archdiocese of Boston. With more than thirty years of service to labor through the Guild, he has brought his vast credibility, experience, and sense of justice to the development of MICWJ and has served as its President since its inception. Father Boyle joined in founding MICWJ foreseeing the need for an activist, interfaith entity to take up the cause of labor.

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At the same time, responding to an appeal from Father Boyle, the President of the State AFL-CIO Robert Haynes and Tony Romano, the Secretary-Treasure of the GBLC, urged their organizations and the local unions of Massachusetts to provide financial support for MICWJ. In the Year 2000-2001, this initiative has resulted in \$12,000 to help build MICWJ.

As this alliance strengthened locally, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, under Kim Bobo's leadership, gained new ground in its partnership with the AFL-CIO. Beginning in 2000, the AFL-CIO

urged its representatives in each state to strengthen local interfaith-labor alliances. As a result, Sandy Felder, the AFL-CIO's director in Massachusetts, offer assistance of her staff to MICWJ to bolster its administrative and organizing capacity. Frequent consultations between both entities and Tony Romano of the GBLC, led to an unprecedented April 2001 breakfast meeting of 50 leaders of faith communities and local unions. All present were called upon to speak to the challenges that they felt the two communities should address together.

In June 2001, the newly formed alliance met again choosing five function areas for joint planning and action (a) education, organizing and mobilizing within faith communities, (b) the Justice for Janitors campaign (and others), (c) sweatshop initiatives, (d) living wage campaigns, and (e) empowerment of immigrant workers.

# DSA FORUM ON FAITH BASED INITIATIVES

On August 18, the Boston Chapter of DSA held a forum on the Bush Administration's Faith-based Initiatives. The forum, moderated by Judy Deutsch (member of the RS Commission), included The Rev. Alexander Hurt, pastor of Kingdom Church in Brockton, MA ; the Honorable Byron Rushing, Massachusetts Legislature; and the Rev. Norm Faramelli of RS. Excerpts edited from the proceedings follow:

## REV. ALEXANDER HURT KINGDOM CHURCH, BROCKTON, MA

Pentecostal preachers do not often receive invitations from DSA, so I am anxious about today's session, anxious because there is confusion in the Left-of-Center coalition around this particular policy initiative.— I want to focus on an emerging trend in US politics and consider some suspicions and challenges to the coalition, using Faith-based initiatives as a conversation partner.

A new progressive movement is emerging that looks very much the one that began in the early 20th century. The Left-of-Center and Center-Left needs to understand that there will be people who populate this coalition that will be moderates. That is, there will be occasions when these people will be in coalition with others who are part of a Center-Right coalition. This is important, because Faith-based initiatives started out as a brilliant idea on the Right in order to frustrate the successful coalition of Women, African-Americans, and Labor Unions.

In a general philosophic and ideological way, the reform movement makes for an interesting point of departure. On the left, Ralph Nader and on the Right, John McCain both arguing that the political system needs to be fixed. In the same way, there is a very large religious revival movement— the charismatic movement. All of these are about to coalesce around the Faith-based Initiatives.

The Black Church position has been very interesting, and illustrative of how opposition and a knee-jerk reaction to this initiative can create problems. The leadership of the Black churches has been saying— "It's (the initiative) from Bush and since Bush is from hell, we cannot accept it". But of the 8 large black churches where 80 % of the blacks reside, there are only 8 leaders, and there are 32 million followers. And, on this issue, the 32 million black Christians are with

Bush, and the 8 black leaders are with the opposition!

### *Three Levels*

Reform is happening on three levels- the first is a policy change; second, there is a political change; and third, there is a theological and ministerial change. Faith-based initiatives represents a significant departure away from the way that things are done. That is, there is a shift away from direct grants and purchase of services to a voucher-based system. What is interesting is that the Left has not picked up on what the real argument is all about. So to DSA I say-start reading all the magazines on the Right, like *World*. These magazines are very good at telegraphing what the Right is trying to do. On the Right, nobody cares about supporting urban ministry. This fight is not about churches. Faith-based initiatives is a small piece of giving out social services through vouchers. It makes the intellectual and policy argument for the appropriateness of a voucher-based social service delivery.. And we can guess, the second iteration will be extended to public schools and so forth.

This real game is not what the Left is fighting about. So what I always step back and say to my friend Jim Wallis (editor of *Sojourners*), and to DSA : "You have missed the boat"— just as the Left missed it on welfare reform. If we focus our attention on the things that were really detrimental to the least, the lost and the left out, we

**The real fight is the attempt by  
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mechanism to deliver services  
from government.**

could have been more successful. The real fight is the attempt by the Right to legitimize vouchers, as an appropriate public policy mechanism to deliver the services from government to those who are in need. So that is how it represents a policy change.

This represents a political change in that the Center-Left coalition is crumbling under the real differences internal to this coalition. The reality is—brothers and sisters—that the black community is a socially conservative community. Because of that, if your agenda is exclusively wrapped around non-economic issues—and not the economic issues which we share in common (where there is some convergence in terms of interest), you will lose that community.

Finally, there is a significant religious movement afoot in the charismatic movement, and these people are natural coalition partners to the progressive movement. I don't think that the progressive movement is going to reach out to them, because they are theological conservatives, but they are often social progressives. And as long as there is a near genetic opposition on the Left to all things religious, you will not be able to tap into members of a community that is growing by leaps and bounds. The next 50 years will be dominated by this community. T. D. Jakes has 30,000 congregants every Sunday, Chuck Singleton, in Calif., 32,000 congregants every single week and many looking to do some progressive stuff. Yet such people are afraid that DSA will not welcome them because of their religious commitments, even if they share the economic and political vision of DSA. They fear they will be forced to check what they think about "ultimacy" at the door. That has been a major mistake of the Left historically, and Faith-based initiatives provide a major opportunity to correct that.

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### THE HONORABLE BYRON RUSHING STATE REPRESENTATIVE, MASSACHUSETTS



I will talk about Faith-based initiatives historically, and also in current politics. I am assuming there is a controversy about this because of a long tradition in the US that began in the 18th century about how we should treat religion, politics and government. We would not be having this discussion in the United Kingdom or in other democracies. We are having it in our democracy because we have worked over most of our history to test out this consensus of the majority view.— And the majority view is found in these words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". Those are the words. Even in a

society where slavery was legal, where diversity meant only differences in nationalities, there might be some problems if we established one religion—so we said government will establish no religion.

#### *The Background*

On the other hand, we knew that if you are going to allow diversity to flourish then everybody's religion should be allowed. We should not be banishing, burning or hanging people with different religions, as we did in the first years of the colony of Massachusetts. That is the general consensus of the people today. There are definitely, however, minorities who have wanted to establish a religion and at times they have been able to do so—de facto—such as the Mormons did in Utah. Generally, that is not the majority view. The majority view is against the establishment of and for freedom of religion. Yes I know we have a hard time with that when the religions are really kooky. And we have to fight it out and we do. I won't get into that more, but those of you who know my position in the Massachusetts Legislature know that I am a "radical :freedom of religion" person. That is where I split with a good number of people on the Left, especially with regard to the welfare of children. If you are going take a radical position in a state that is the Vatican of Christian Science, you will run into conflicts with people who are concerned about children's welfare. That happens and those conflicts get worked out in our society.

#### *The Politics in Historical Context*

Every once in a while we have a proposal that seems to speak against that consensus and that causes controversy. I am assuming that if we take the Faith-based initiatives people at their word, that is the controversy we have right now.

But I agree with Alex, you can't take the Faith-based initiative people at their word. It is not about that.

Think about this for a moment. We are a society that has always felt that government can support religious institutions when they are doing certain things. And we have believed that for a long period of time, even before we thought that the Bill of Rights had to apply to states. In Mass, we funded the descendants of the Puritans until the 1820. That is, we paid for the salaries of ministers in Churches. We were able to do it because it was state money, and state government had that ability. For political reasons, that support ended in many states, but constitutionally, it ended with the passage of the 14th amendment. More importantly, governments in the US have always looked to religious organizations to do several kinds of work. And what we would call social work has always seemed like an appropriate kind of work to ask religious organizations to do.

*cont'd on next page*

## Faith Based Initiatives

*cont'd from page 9*

Sometimes religious organizations did that work well; some times they did not. When we ended the Indian wars in the US in the 1880s, the US government decided that they should do social work in the reservations. There was a tremendous amount of controversy about the government bureaucrats who were sent out to do that work, so US government stopped that by urging Churches to do the work. They had a meeting in New York City and brought together the heads of all the denominations. They literally put a map of the reservations on the table, and they asked the churches to pick the reservations they wanted. The Episcopal Church picked the Dakotas. You can go to North and South Dakota today and most native American Christians are Episcopalians. Note there was no Supreme Court case about that. It was seen as something appropriate to do.

And we know that US government and most state governments have used religious institutions as an appropriate way to do certain tasks that the government felt were important in the community. With urban renewal, the US government urged Churches to build housing for low and moderate income people, and we developed a program during the Johnson Administration to do exactly that. If you go to most cities in the US that have had urban renewal programs, you will find housing that was not only built by the churches, but was probably named after the churches. St Mark's Church, Boston built Marksdale. Union Methodist build Met Union. So why the controversy today?

Two things came together with the Republican attempt to regain the White House. One idea was that conservative churches are not getting enough of this money. There seemed to be built into the system a process by which large denominations (but also denominations that seemed to be Left of center), were getting all the money. How do we get the money to the Churches that theologically are on the Right?

The other reason why this was done, is the old tactic that Alex alluded to.

Create an enemy that never existed, insist that it exists, and then go after it. The enemy is the fact that religious organizations are discriminated against because of something that they do, or because of something that is taught in those religious organizations. So you tell people that is what is happening. And you say it over

and over again and soon people begin to believe that is a reality. And soon people sound surprised when they find out that religious organizations have been getting money for years and years. For example, at Catholic Charities in Mass., almost 70 % of its budget comes from the taxpayers of Mass. via state government. Most of the refugee work that is done in the US is done by religious organizations. Where does the money come from? The State Department— Yet lots of people think it is not so.

*Is It New?*

Consider that wonderful test that the Right wing invented a few years ago- political correctness. They told the Left that the Left was "politically correct". Then they went around telling people about how terrible political correctness was, while nobody that I knew was "politically correct". And they said it so frequently that we started to defend ourselves and now we have people defending themselves about their position regarding receiving aid from the federal government.

Yesterday I watched a TV reporter talking as if aid to religious institutions is something brand new. It is not new. What will it be if the Republicans are successful in accomplishing what they desire? There will be ways that money will go to the Churches they like. So that is

**We are a society  
that has always  
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support religious  
institutions...**

what this whole argument is all about. We on the Left have to sit back and decide on how we respond to that. In responding, we need to remember that we are not in an argument about whether religious organizations should get government money. The argument is: do we need to change the ways in which religious organizations get this money? That argument you do not have with bureaucrats. You have that argument with other

churches. Its the conservative churches - that want the money. So let's get the churches together—let those churches that do not get the money meet with those that do, and let them figure out ways and reforms that need to be made so every religious group has access to the funds. Now part of that means there will be disagreements among religious organizations. Let's have those disagreements among the churches. Let's not make this some great argument between the Right and the Left. It is being made that kind of argument, because it is in the Right's interest to have arguments with the Left. If the Right cannot have arguments with the Left there would be no Right.

## NORMAN FARAMELLI RELIGIOUS SOCIALISM

I appreciate the remarks of both. I agree with Byron that government financial support to religious institutions is not new, but I also agree with Alex that the context is now different.

In my remarks I will not address the thorny Church-State issues, or the intentions of government for these initiatives. But I am concerned about what government thinks of its role is in addressing social needs, and also what effects Faith-based initiatives will have on religious institutions.

I would like to focus on the WHY—the WHO, and the WHAT:

*The WHY...*

Some progressives like Michael Walzer think that Faith-based initiatives can be consistent with our communitarian principles and values. And I would agree, but I would concur only if these Faith-based programs were being pursued as a positive complement to the role of government. I clearly see the positive role that mediating structures or voluntary associations can play in American society, as was first pointed out by deTocqueville. But that is not what I see today. I see a federal government (particularly the White House) backing away from the responsibilities of government, so these programs are seen less as a *complement* and more as a *substitute*. Furthermore, although I see the value of religious institutions functioning as a complement to government, I have some doubts about the capacity and competence of many religious organizations to deliver the types of services that are needed.

*The WHO...*

The issue immediately surfaces: which religious institutions? Will a Muslim or a Buddhist group be eligible for government funding? Or will funding be limited only to those groups that are in the Judeo-Christian tradition? To have the government decide which religious groups are worthy and which are not is a very dangerous business.

*The WHAT...*

There are three elements to be considered.

1) Why do some Churches desire this money? My own experience is that some religious institutions see this as a way to procure funding that is needed for their continuation. If that is the case, they will be very surprised. I encountered this attitude in a congregation that was considering taking advantage of the a

Charitable Choice funds that were made possible through the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. The Church was asked to provide the social services that were the result of a badly flawed welfare reform program.

2) Take another situation—Some Churches might use government funding to religious institutions and circumvent government regulations. For example, will a religious organization (like the Salvation Army) be exempt from federal fair employment practices if it refuses to hire a person who will deliver the services, simply because that person is gay or lesbian?

**I see the federal government  
..backing away from the  
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as a *substitute***

3) There is still another aspect of accepting government funds that troubles me. Will those funds skew the mission of the religious institution, in a way that will further dampen the prophetic role of the religious institution? Now I have always been skeptical of the billing given to religious institutions in the 60's for their work in civil rights and in the anti-war movement. Some groups were very active and highly visible, while others did little. There is a chronic tendency in religious institutions to shy away from advocacy or prophetic roles. What will happen if many Churches are receiving government funds? I fear that those funds will be a further damper on their ability to critique federal policies.

*A Balance That Works*

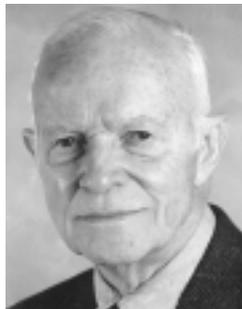
Now there are current arrangements where there seems to be a proper balance between federal funding and funding from religious constituencies. For example, the national refugee/immigration ministries of both the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans are 85-90 percent funded by the federal government. The money comes from the US State Dept and Health and Human Services Dept. and it is designated primarily for refugee resettlement. These organizations have built a sophisticated professional capacity to deliver social services.— But the advocacy work of these organizations is not funded by the government. For example, these groups know that you cannot critique the federal government's policy -such as the curtailing of benefits to legal immigrants— by using the

*cont'd on page 14*

## Say It Ain't So, Lester Thurow!

by John C. Cort

***One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy,* Thomas Frank Doubleday, 2000, 414pp.**



This is a review of an excellent book by Thomas Frank and we will get around to that excellence in due time, but first we must deal with what he says about our old friend, Lester Thurow, which also happens to be relevant to the message of the book.

Back in the seventies DSA members in New England gathered for a weekend retreat on a beach in Saco, Maine. (We were DSOOC then, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.) The key speaker was a brilliant young economist at MIT, Lester Thurow. I don't remember what he said, but he would not have been invited if it was not agreeable doctrine. I do remember that at one point he was stretched out on the floor in the middle of an admiring group of DSOOCers and seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

Years later I was indulging my incurable habit of writing about the need for a federal job guarantee and I seized on a great passage from Thurow's most popular book, *The Zero-Sum Society*:

We need to face the fact that our economy and our institutions will not provide jobs for everyone who wants to work. They have never done so, and as currently structured, they never will. Since we regard the United States as a work ethic society, this restructuring should be a moral as well as an economic goal. We consistently preach that work is the only "ethical" way to receive income. We cast aspersions on the "welfare society". Therefore we have a moral responsibility to guarantee full employment. *Not to do so is like locking the church door and then saying that people are not virtuous if they do not go to church* [emphasis added].

I especially liked that religious reference at the end.

Over the years I followed Thurow's writing and began to fear that he was drifting rightward. So I wrote and asked him if he still believed what he wrote in 1980. He replied: "I think that a real right to work is the central issue and that government should guarantee that right. But on this issue I am so far off the feasible political spectrum that I have given up

talking about it."

Now comes the really bad news. In 1999 Thurow wrote another book, *Building Wealth*. In this he wrote:

Wealth has become increasingly the only dimension by which personal worth is measured. It is the only game to play if you want to prove your mettle. It is the big leagues. If you do not play there, by definition you are second rate.

Thomas Frank quotes this passage in *One Market Under God* and in a note comments:

As astonished to encounter this passage as you are, I searched Thurow's text for evidence that he was kidding, or that he was citing these attitudes in order to shock readers. I am sorry to report that he was not. Although these are clearly attitudes that Thurow believes are common to our time rather than eternal truths, he makes no effort to distance himself from them.

With all due respect to one of America's foremost economists, I am compelled to say: It is time to distance yourself, Professor. To hell with "the feasible political spectrum!" In 1980 you spoke of "moral responsibility." What about your own moral responsibility to do what you can, and say what you can, to make an unfeasible political spectrum more feasible? We mentally disadvantaged folks depend on smarter folks like yourself. When you fail us, Milton's bitter reproach applies, "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

Thomas Frank is certainly not worrying about feasible political spectrums. With erudition, wit and sarcasm he has riddled both the political and economic spectrums that bedevil us and—especially significant for us religious types—demonstrated that popular pundits like George Gilder and Thomas Friedman are trying to sell the world that God has, in fact, finally come to the conclusion that greed is good, after all.

Incredible? Judge for yourself from quotes that Frank supplies. George Gilder in his 1984 book, *The Spirit of*

## RELIGION AND SOCIALISM COMMISSION STATEMENT ON THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS

The Religion and Socialism Commission of the Democratic Socialists of America condemns with the utmost severity the horrible acts of murder committed in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001.

This was a crime not merely against Americans, but the entire world. The victims of this tragedy were people of many faiths, including Islam. They were working people as well as stockbrokers, people of all races from many nations. The idea that such violence against innocent people can ever be warranted is deeply appalling. Equally appalling is the notion, put forth by the perpetrators of these acts, that religious belief can ever be a justifiable motive for the massacre of humanity.

The complex political background to these events is not to be ignored, but for now, our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of the victims. We join with our comrades in the International League of Religious Socialists and the Socialist International in calling for a time of remembrance, and for solidarity among all those who support the ideal of a democratic society.

September 15, 2001

*Enterprise*: "It is the entrepreneurs who know the rules of the world and the laws of God."

Frank tells us that Friedman in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) speaks of how "a visionary geo-architect", who could be no one else but God, in designing the perfect society, would be sure to let employers "hire and fire workers with relative ease." Frank concludes:

Today American opinion leaders seem generally convinced that democracy and the free market are simply identical...that there is something natural, something divine, something inherently democratic about markets.

And of course they try to make you feel guilty if you say a single critical word about globalization and the opportunities it presents for poor children in Pakistan to earn a few honest pennies to keep their parents from starving.

This reminds me of a conference at Harvard about globalization and the sweatshops from which we now buy 85 percent of our clothing. A handsome blonde in a tight red dress emphasized the Nike angle in her speech: "Isn't it better that these children should be making a few dollars rather than fending off starvation by selling their bodies in prostitution?"

A man in the audience rose in the question period and said, "You make a persuasive case. But let's apply that same reasoning to our situation here in the U.S.: There are plenty of families living in extreme poverty who would be better off if we repealed our child labor laws and our minimum wage laws and allowed their children to work for peanuts so that the family could at least eat peanuts. Is that what you want?"

No, that wasn't exactly what she wanted. She only wanted, like the pundits whom Frank riddles so well, to make us think that globalization is not all bad, and in any case unstoppable, and therefore by definition good.

Even liberal religious magazines like *Commonweal* have fallen for this line.

And so we sit back, paralyzed by self-doubt, oblivious to the fact that it isn't all or nothing. There are middle ways. There are choices. Nothing is inevitable or unstoppable. We can devise ways to help those poor children abroad just as we devised ways, still imperfect though they be, to help our children here at home. We have the clout to bring pressure on the greedy employers and politicians who are responsible for the misery of those children so that the children and their parents are better off, and at the same time the poor employers and workers who are competing with them here, are also better off.

Frank's excellent book deserves more space, but we must close with some scary statistics that he supplies out of *Business Week*. In 1990 the ratio of American CEO's income was 85 times greater than that of their average blue collar employees. This was up from 29 to 1 in 1979. By 1999 it had ballooned to 475 times greater. Jack Welch, the whizbang CEO at GE, has to get by on 1400 times the earnings of his average blue collar employee in the US and 9,571 times that of the average Mexican worker, many of whom are now GE employees.

This contrasts with a ratio in Japan, the second largest economy in the world, of 11 to 1. In Great Britain, under a socialist government which our lefties here like to ridicule as a bunch of phonies, the ratio is 24 to 1.

In any case, read *One Market Under God*. Our only criticism would be of the sub-title, "The End of Economic Democracy." As long as one decent trade union remains alive, economic democracy has not come to an end. And we still have plenty of decent trade unions. Cheer up, Frank. ▀

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*John C. Cort is the founding editor of Religious Socialism.*

## Religion and Labor

*cont'd from page 7*

Barely six months old, it is premature to predict how dynamic and functional the new Coalition will prove. Early indication is that there is heightened interest by both parties who have come to view each other as indispensable partners in the struggle for labor justice.

The potential of this alliance is considerable. With an adverse, thirty year trend in the proportion of the workforce organized, labor has come to view community support as indispensable to gain new supporters. Labor and a variety of community organizations have long collaborated to advance the nation's social agenda; social security, minimums and living wages, unemployment insurance, paid family leave, health coverage for all union families and much more. But the alliance to strengthen organizing has never been so solid. While many community organizers at the local level in Massachusetts and throughout the nation, have provided support for organizing, by and large arrangements with religious and notably, interfaith bodies have been spotty and intermittent until NICWJ, spearheaded by Kim Bobo, came on the scene in 1995.

While a few local communities preceded the National Committee, most, like that of Massachusetts, followed by example, adopting a charter based on that of the national organization. With the arrival of John Sweeney at the national AFL-CIO, labor organizing

came to be the primary challenge before the interfaith committees and organized labor.

Due to the vast networks of faith communities in the US and the almost universal support of denominational teachings in support of the right to organize, labor increasingly views alliances with faith communities as an indispensable, strategic element in the struggle to increase the proportion of organized households in the nation. Concomitantly, in an era of increasing corporate domination and declining loyalty of corporate America to its workers, public opinion polls have shown rising support for unions among the American public.

In summary, we see a convergence of factors fostering the formation of this new alliance— labor's reawakening to the need for community support and partnership, increasing attention by religious bodies to economic and worker justice, and growing public support for unions. The exhortation of all the great religions to give preferential treatment to the poor is being translated into a strategic movement in support of labor organizing. In a remarkably few years, the MICWJ and the newly forged Labor and Religion Coalition of Greater Boston have demonstrated that faith communities, labor and immigrants in alliance can achieve significant victories. ▀

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*Dr. Jonathan Fine is the Director of the Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice.*

## Faith Based Initiatives

*cont'd from page 11*

government's nickel. All of the public policy and advocacy work relating to immigration policies, work with asylum seekers-detention centers, is funded by the churches, not by government. Also, both the Lutherans and Roman Catholics are making great strides in getting their congregations involved in immigration issues. This work is also not funded by government. So there are models that have been around for some time.

I give these illustrations to say that these are existing programs— being funded over a long period of time. They reflect the balance that is needed, and very often you will not get that balance in local congregations. So we must remember that this issue is not new.

### *Discussion*

In response to the presentations, Hurt said:— Since I am the person here today representing the proponent wing of this issue—maybe I could do a better job of explaining it. Rep Rushing and I have a disagreement. Being a theologically conservative pastor, I can tell you it is simply not that case that conservative churches throughout the US are breaking down the doors to get money from government. Many conservative pastors

from around the country are opposed. I am talking about pastors who opposition is only matched by their conservatism. This is part of a much larger project, and part of what I am concerned about is that very soon in the Black community there will not be a Black Left left. Because the Left has not spent enough time trying to get the issues right. This is not about Churches providing social services.

I can tell about my denomination — 6.5 million — 18,000 churches in 454 countries — WE DON'T LIKE GOVERNMENT INVOLVED IN THE WORK THAT WE DO. And the Left needs to understand that there is a fundamental difference between social ministry and evangelism.

This goes to Norm's point — about government funding of social ministries. The church is not going to abdicate its role for evangelism. With regard to social ministries, the church not only seeks out public dollars but private dollars as well. But that does not preclude the Church from being aggressive in evangelism. And that evangelism will be funded by the church.

One of the reasons I am a proponent, and in counterdistinction to Norm, I have seen what churches

*cont'd on next page*

## Faith Based Initiatives

*cont'd from page 14*

can do in incredible ways, because we can get to people that you guys can't. We can talk to the people that the government cannot. Moreover, we can talk to them in ways that the government cannot. For instance, I can show up in a case of truancy and say to the parents – 'Take your kid to school'. There is certain level of legitimacy that I have that a bureaucrat won't have. You can send a truant officer there, but it will not work. Consistent with the progressive movement, we need to form non-traditional partnerships across the ideological spectrum today. Let's not look at where we disagree, but let's look at where we agree in order to solve problems of common concern.

Byron responded:

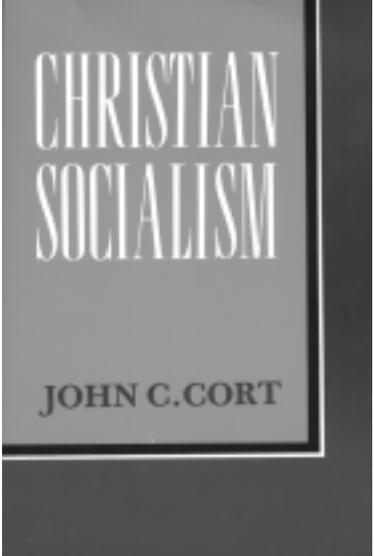
I think the factual error is that churches do some of social services better than others; in some areas, they do not do as well as others; and at some of the social services, they are simply awful. Historically, Churches have seen significant social problems in communities and set up social institutions to solve them. But at some point most churches realized that they were not able to provide those new services to everybody so those churches said that the Commonwealth— i.e., the government— should be the place where this happens. The churches realized that they could not do enough by themselves. So they had to change the structure of social services. Why is it so important to pretend that this is new?"

During the discussion several questions were raised: "Will there be a gag rule on churches that accept government money, just like you have in other countries, where if you do some things like abortion , it precludes you from receiving any funds for family planning?"

*cont'd on page 16*

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## Faith Based Initiatives

*cont'd from page 11*

Byron responded:

"That's going to happen any way if you allow the Right to take over the government — they will change the rules. There is too much support for hospitals in the US, so the government cannot say to hospitals in the USA- if you perform abortions, you will lose federal funding. They can and do say that abroad".

A debate ensued about whether the current recipients of government money have to be 501 c-3 organizations. The faith-based initiative would give direct grants to churches, it does not necessitate that the recipient to be a 501-c-3 organization. It was clear that some religious groups receiving federal funding today are independent 501-c-3 organizations, but others are not. Direct grants to religious institutions (that are not 501-c-3s) to perform social services is not a new thing.

There was discussion on the communitarian possibilities of Faith-based initiatives. It was noted that if religious institutions are seen as substitutes for government, then we can forget about communitarian ideals. Reference was made to the federal government's backing away from social services as well as housing programs.

Another point was raised about proselytizing — For example, consider a homeless shelter where one of the conditions of being taken in overnight is that the person must attend worship services and take part of the religious instruction that the group offers. "If people are forced to participate in worship before they can accept the services — paid for by government money — is not the government then establishing a religion?"

Near the end of the sessions one participant observed: "Rarely do we talk about what Faith-based initiatives really mean. Little of the debate is about the details. During the presidential campaign last year, the Right never uttered a negative word about Faith-based initiatives. The first opposition came the first day after the President hired the wrong guy to head it. The conservatives thought it would be their bureaucracy".

That was an interesting observation since the seminar was held on the day that the resignation of John Dilullio was announced. So this debate will continue, even if the events of Sept.11 have temporarily pushed it off the center stage. ▀



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