

*Review*  
**Lessons from an Organizer**

By Si Kahn

Reviewed by Hahrie Han

Stanford Social Innovation Review  
Summer 2010

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## Faith Tempered by Reality

Review by Robert Wineburg

**GOD'S ECONOMY: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State**

Lew Daly  
344 pages, University of Chicago Press, 2009

In *God's Economy*, Lew Daly has written perhaps the most complete chronicle of the legal and policy foundations of former President George W. Bush's Faith-Based Initiative. Eschewing polarizing diatribe for rigorous historical scholarship, he provides deep insights into the Catholic and Dutch Reformed philosophies that guided the initiative, and puts forth a plausible framework for future faith-based policy.

But like the Faith-Based Initiative itself, *God's Economy* is driven by a deep faith in the superior efficacy of religious transformative services—and there is simply very little evidence to justify that faith. There are no scientifically valid studies—none whatsoever—showing that faith-based social service providers are more effective than their secular counterparts. That includes the works of conservative scholar Stephen Monsma, which form the empirical foundation for *God's Economy* and have been lauded as a validation of the Faith-Based Initiative.

It is Daly's reliance on such ideologically driven research that ultimately bankrupts *God's Economy*, which lacks a realistic grasp of how social services actually operate in America's approximately 19,000 cities and 3,000 counties. It is an analysis conducted by aerial reconnaissance with little verification from facts on the ground, and as such, it is unlikely to have much of an impact on those actually delivering local faith-based services.

Daly's book will be of little help, for example, to public health directors looking to partner with congregational coalitions in order to better deliver flu vaccines in high-risk areas. The same goes for school board members hoping to attract volunteer tutors from

congregations to help struggling kids in low-performing schools.

*God's Economy* will offer scant guidance for United Way leaders who, because their partner agencies cannot afford the space they need, seek cost-effective ways to enhance their relationships with congregations in their communities. Nor will it offer answers to a local foundation that, because of bylaws forbidding funding of religious activities, is unable to financially support a faith group with a track record of helping newly released prisoners with substance abuse problems.

That is not to say, of course, that *God's Economy* lacks merit. Indeed, it was genuinely refreshing to consider Daly's analysis. His is neither the typical liberal nor conservative argument about the separation of church and state. In fact, he nicely critiques both perspectives.

And the argument Daly makes in support of his new vision of state funding of religion is certainly unique. He introduces an original and somewhat stimulating theory of change, pointing out that in Germany, the Netherlands, and other European Christian democracies there is an understanding that religious social services are for the greater good of a pluralistic society. The partnering of public funding and religious service there, Daly proposes, provides a model for what could evolve here.

His logic is compellingly simple. The architects of the Faith-Based Initiative, whose efforts shaped the federal law and policy we have today, were strongly influenced by European Dutch Reformed and Catholic principles. The good works of European Christian democracies, he therefore reasons, just might work in America as well. Religious and public service partnerships, he even suggests, could be the way forward for American social justice, a solution neither Republican nor Democrat, providing continuity amid momentous changes.

All social policy, however, ought to rest on some notion of reality—and it is here that

Daly's argument falters. Much of the legal scholarship on which he builds his argument has already proved to be contentious.

Carl Esbeck's vision for changing the way government funds sectarian social service providers, the fruits of which are seen today in the Faith-Based Initiative, was supposed to result in new, more effective ways of providing social services on the ground. That simply has not happened, a fact that Daly acknowledges only somewhat. And Stephen Monsma's assumptions about the transformative effectiveness of

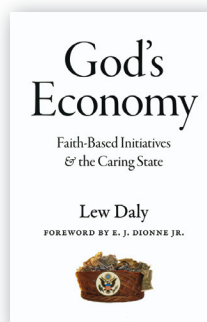
faith-based social services, which figure heavily into *God's Economy*, have been outright discredited by David Campbell's rigorous comparison of faith-based welfare-to-work providers and their public counterparts.

The best available social science scholarship, in fact, argues directly against Daly's premise. Leading congregational scholar

Mark Chaves has shown that from 1997 to 2007—the heyday of the subject of *God's Economy*—the Faith-Based Initiative had little effect on congregational and agency partnerships in communities across the country.

My own research has found much the same. Of the 76 sectarian and secular organizations I surveyed in Delaware's United Way network, only two received any government money for the development of the numerous partnerships they have with religious congregations. Seventy-five of the 76—all but one—said the Faith-Based Initiative had no impact whatsoever on their services.

I have been following government-supported faith-based services since 1982, when I first saw people lining up at our local armory for commodity foods released to community agencies by the Reagan administration. And after a career of studying partnerships between congregations and government agencies, I know at least this: Be it Lew Daly's or the Bush administration's, any faith-based initiative that fails to ground itself in the experiences of local service providers is doomed to fail. ■



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# Doing Good by Being Bad

Review by James M. Jasper

**MOVING POLITICS: Emotions and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS**

Deborah B. Gould  
524 pages, University of Chicago Press, 2009

Groups promoting social change face a dilemma. Should they play by the rules, using legal means to promote their cause?

Or should they shake things up, by disrupting traffic, production, or politics as usual? The first strategy will win them friends among authorities; the latter will get attention. But which will get them what they want? Should they be naughty or nice?

ACT UP was born in early 1987 when gay and lesbian activists in the United States decided that their efforts to portray themselves as normal, respectable, and no different from straights had simply not worked. They had been stunned the year before, when the Supreme Court had decided, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, that American states had the right to outlaw sodomy between partners of the same sex, even in the privacy of their own bedrooms. The message: Gays and lesbians were not full citizens.

The background to gays and lesbians' understandable indignation was that, for several years, they had watched accelerating numbers of their friends die of AIDS and related maladies. Energetic partygoers had turned into patient nurses, as they helped lovers, friends, and acquaintances endure the indignities of the final months and days of wretched symptoms, and then commemorated them with beautiful patches on the moving AIDS Memorial Quilt. Many of the activists were themselves HIV-positive, facing what at the time seemed certain death. They had formed an exemplary, caring community, only to be ignored or even dismissed by the Reagan administration. What did they have to lose by turning from nice to naughty tactics?

As the result of this intense fear, anger,

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and frustration, ACT UP devoted itself to disrupting business as usual through direct action. First in New York, and eventually around the world, activists shouted down scientists and public health officials, blocked streets, and held kiss-ins in jails. They interfered with rituals like opening night at the San Francisco Opera and mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

Disruption worked. ACT UP forced the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to speed up its processes for approving new drugs and to include people with HIV and AIDS in advisory bodies. It pushed corporations to lower the prices of AIDS drugs, and the U.S. government to fund more research. It promoted needle-exchange programs and condoms in schools.

It brought sympathetic attention to this new disease, and more generally to lesbians and gays, who within a few years were portrayed sympathetically on network television series.

In *Moving Politics*, Deborah Gould tells this story in a lively biography of the American ACT UP movement, following its rapid rise and then implosion around 1993 (although several tiny chapters continue today). A participant herself in ACT UP/Chicago, she has the analytic clarity to describe the movement's eventual fissioning, especially over the amount of attention to give to the different health challenges of gay white men or of women and people of color among AIDS victims.

This is not simply a chronicle. Gould pays special attention to the emotions that led ACT UP to be formed, to expand, and then to contract. She tells us what the shock of *Bowers v. Hardwick* felt like, leading activists from nice to naughty. The most stirring part of the book describes the erotic excitement of meetings and the pro-sex atmosphere of the organization, giving the reader a good sense of the pleasures of participation in protest.

Another of the book's innovations is to give equal attention to ACT UP's fission and decline. Gould traces the exhaustion and despair in the early 1990s as one drug after another failed to slow the epidemic. Bill Clinton's election as president offered hope for improvements in federal policy—which lasted just long enough to further demobilize activists.

This book engaged me so much that I felt,

as I read it, the thrill of the expanding movement and the sad anguish of its decline. I can understand why few scholars write about the decline of protest movements that they care about. It's a heartbreaking task.

Scholars who write about movements in which they participated rarely avoid the failing of trying to settle old scores. Gould (who is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz) evades this trap. She also resists the temptation to tell us what the movement should have done differently. Movements face dozens of dilemmas. If there were easy answers, or even unassailably right answers, they would hardly be dilemmas. In writing books about social change, perhaps the best we can do is to detail the costs, the benefits, and the risks of the available choices. The activists are the ones who still have to make them. ■

# Come on up to the Rising

Review by Jonathan D. Greenberg

**A PARADISE BUILT IN HELL: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster**

Rebecca Solnit  
368 pages, The Viking Press, 2009

Earthquakes, hurricanes, and other disasters are terrible—pain and suffering abounding, lives and homes destroyed.

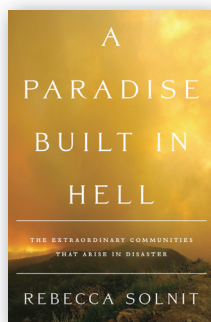
Rebecca Solnit's brilliant new book documents and explains the other side of disasters: how they often sweep away the barriers that isolate people from each other under normal times, inspiring "the better angels of our nature" that President Abraham Lincoln evoked in our nation's darkest days.

Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell* investigates the social consequences of five major disasters: the 1906 San Francisco earthquake; the gargantuan 1917 explosion in Halifax, Nova Scotia; the devastating 1985 Mexico City quake; Lower Manhattan after the 9/11 terrorist attacks; and Hurricane Katrina's 2005 deluge of New Orleans. Each case study provides a thick description of what surviving residents themselves understand to be a temporary utopian society naturally arising in the midst of casualties, dis-

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orientation, homelessness, and great loss of all kinds.

Solnit tells many poignant stories of altruism, courage, and compassionate social action. In 1906 San Francisco, for example, we meet Amelia Hoshouser, a middle-class woman who fed thousands of people in her makeshift “Mizpah Café,” while throughout the city soup kitchens, shelters, and relief projects emerged from collective human spirit as if spontaneously from the ruins. The quake led William James (then visiting at Stanford University) to realize that fierce collective action in the public interest can be “the moral equivalent of war.” Meanwhile, Brigadier General Frederick Funston, commanding officer at the Presidio Military Base, marched troops into the city with instructions to shoot the “unlicked mob” (orders that, tragically, some soldiers carried out). Dorothy Day, experiencing the quake as a child, went on to devote her life to recreating systems of social service for the hungry and poor staffed by



Catholic Worker volunteers.

Thomas Hobbes remains a political theorist to be reckoned with, but I will never read Hobbes the same way again. Breaking down Hobbes’s conception of a supposedly natural “war of all against all,” Solnit’s empiricism demonstrates that neighborhood societies of cooperation and mutual aid arise

precisely when official institutions of sovereign authority have broken down, leaving no one to help the wounded or traumatized except for other survivors, neighbors, and health providers. Solnit shows how often the greatest post-disaster threats to human security and welfare come not from “anarchy” or even “looting” but from the panicked, militarized overreaction of elites who fear a loss of power and control.

Solnit unearths a treasure trove of insightful scholarly literature in the obscure and underappreciated field of “disaster sociology.” For example, I had never before heard of Charles E. Fritz, who helped lead

the University of Chicago’s Disaster Research Project in the 1950s, prompted by the Cold War’s nuclear threat. Asked to identify methods of containing anticipated mass panic and social conflict, Fritz discovered that he had been assigned the wrong question. The conventional belief that disasters lead terrified, passive victims toward chaos and dependency was, it turns out, empirically false.

On the contrary, by analyzing evidence gathered from a large data set of catastrophic events, Fritz concluded: “The widespread sharing of danger, loss, and deprivation produces an intimate, primarily group solidarity among the survivors, which overcomes social isolation, provides a channel for intimate communication and expression, and provides a major source of physical and emotional support and reassurance.” Thus disaster survivors often share “a feeling of belonging and a sense of unity rarely achieved under normal circumstances.”

In a world of seemingly relentless disaster and catastrophe, where can we find a

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true, inspiring source of positive, sustainable social transformation? Solnit provides a stunningly paradoxical answer: *right there*, at Ground Zero, with the firefighters who sacrificed their lives to rescue so many from the World Trade Center; *right there*, in New Orleans's flooded Lower Ninth Ward, where neighbors rescued each other from drowning and provided food and sustenance for each other; and *right there*, in the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, where men and women without food for themselves or their families worked night and day to dig out strangers from the rubble of collapsed buildings, using only their hands for tools.

The cooperative, life-affirming social experiments Solnit finds so often in the ruins are fleeting. They disappear when established institutions of governance and patterns of social behavior eventually return. Perhaps we can learn ways to create profoundly beneficial social innovation in our normal lives by studying the temporary, transient communities of mutual aid that naturally arise in times of greatest need. ■

## Lessons from an Organizer

Review by *Hahrie Han*

**CREATIVE COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: A Guide for Rabble-Rousers, Activists, and Quiet Lovers of Justice**

Si Kahn  
240 pages, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010

Si Kahn's latest book, *Creative Community Organizing*, is a reflective collection of stories and songs from Kahn's long and venerable history as a community organizer. He tells riveting tales from his experi-

ences as an organizer with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Arkansas in the 1960s, with the Brookside Strike and other campaigns fighting for the rights of mine workers in Kentucky and mill workers throughout the South in the 1970s and 1980s, and, finally, with Grassroots Leadership, an organization he founded that fights for the abolition of for-profit prisons and an end to immigrant family detention.

HAHRIE HAN is the Sidney R. Knafel Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at Wellesley College and a Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy at Harvard University, where she does research and trainings on organizing and leadership development. She is the author of *Moved to Action: Motivation, Participation, and Inequality in American Politics*.

Kahn's objective in writing the book is to help interested readers answer a question he often hears: "So do you think I should become an organizer?" By writing the book, he hopes to provide an inspirational, but honest picture of what it means to be an organizer so that idealists can make their own choices about whether this is the path for them.

Like any good organizer, Kahn teaches through storytelling. His narrative voice is affable, inspirational, and humorous. The book is strongest when Kahn illustrates some of the complex ethical and strategic challenges organizers face through vivid examples from his own past.

In one of his earliest experiences as a young (Jewish) organizer with SNCC, Kahn describes learning strategizing. To force a white-owned store to hire black cashiers, SNCC leaders decide to boycott only one of four department stores in the city, to prevent the storeowners from uniting together against the black community. "Brilliant!" Kahn thinks. "So which of the department stores were we going to boycott?" When his SNCC mentors respond, "The Jew store," Kahn freezes in his tracks. "SNCC was fighting for the ultimate underdog, African-Americans. [I understood the strategy, but] to target another historic underdog, even if one more privileged than his black customers—didn't that just reinforce the injustice?"

Kahn wisely avoids moralizing in these stories and instead raises questions, describes his own experiences and reactions, and leaves us to ponder the choices we might make ourselves.

In one of these instances, Kahn tells the story of Aunt Molly Jackson, an activist who robbed a store at gunpoint to steal food for impoverished mining families. In raising some of the ethical issues in this story, Kahn asks, "Is Aunt Molly Jackson an organizer or a community leader?" This question raises an important point that unfortunately goes unanswered.

One of the book's shortcomings is that Kahn never defines what it means to be an organizer, as distinct from a community leader or other type of activist. Too often, the term is used to represent any person doing any kind of community-based advocacy

or service work. Organizing is not just any kind of community-based work, however. It is a specific approach to making change that involves, at a minimum, bringing people together to discover common resources they have to fight power structures that marginalize them or their constituents.

An organizer's emphasis on bringing those without power together to discover

and create the collective resources they need to fight those with power implies certain values that underlie organizing. For instance, change comes from within the community. Organizing is not just about solving problems, but also about creating capacity (such as motivation and skills for democratic leadership) within communities to solve problems. Service

provision, marketing, and creating policy that "nudges" individual incentives are all alternative approaches to making community-based change that are distinct from organizing because they do not involve building capacity.

Clarifying what organizing is and how it is unique could have grounded some of the 20 principles of organizing Kahn identifies. For instance, he has a forceful discussion about the importance of diversity in organizing, providing concrete strategies for organizers seeking to ensure that they maintain sensitivity to race in building organizations. Yet he falls short in arguing why respecting diversity is so important. Is it just a liberal norm that we must respect? Or is it grounded in the core philosophies of organizing, in identifying and developing leadership within the community to leave it stronger than when the organizer found it?

Organizing is a powerful tool for social change that historically has helped to change the world. We need to do more to sharpen our definitions of what it is and develop widespread understandings of what it can accomplish. Kahn's book is a valuable contribution to this effort, providing readers with an accessible set of narratives and reflections about life as an organizer. The next step for anyone trying to understand how social change works is to develop more coherent, empirically grounded theories of organizing that can shape the work of the future organizers Kahn is recruiting through his book. ■

