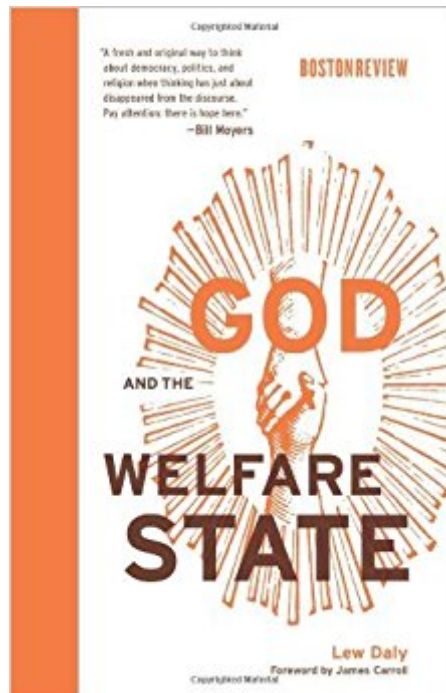


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God And The Welfare State (Boston Review Books)



Synopsis

When the Bush administration's faith-based initiative was introduced in 2001 as the next stage of the "war on poverty," it provoked a flurry of protest for violating the church-state divide. Most critics didn't ask whether it could work. *God and the Welfare State* is the first book to trace the ideas behind George W. Bush's faith-based initiative from their roots in Catholic natural law theory and Dutch Calvinism to an American think tank, the Center for Public Justice. Comparing Bush's plan with the ways the same ideas have played out in Christian Democratic welfare policies in Europe, the author is skeptical that it will be an effective new way to fight poverty. But he takes the animating ideas very seriously, as they go to the heart of the relationship among religion, government, and social welfare. In the end Daly argues that these ideas -- which are now entrenched in federal and state politics -- are a truly radical departure from American traditions of governance. Although Bush's initiative roughly overlaps with more conventional conservative efforts to strengthen private power in economic life, it promises an unprecedented shift in the balance of power between secular and religious approaches to social problems and suggests a broader template for "faith-based governance," in which the state would have a much more limited role in social policy.

Book Information

File Size: 789 KB

Print Length: 154 pages

Publisher: The MIT Press; Reprint edition (September 8, 2006)

Publication Date: September 8, 2006

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00315718A

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #42,720 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #10

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies & Reference >

Church & State #14 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences

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Customer Reviews

Okay-- Good because it makes some good points about social welfare issues, but she leaves A LOT of gaps in her arguments, and doesn't expand on areas that are relevant.

This little book of only 126 tiny pages starts and ends with very brief critiques of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI), but most of the short essay is a theological and political history of the roots of the FBCI. In the opening and closing he argues that the FBCI is a sham and serves only to fill the coffers of the religious communities that do not need a poverty program. While I would tend to agree with him, he does not provide any evidence that this is so. Because this 20 billion dollar diversion of funds from welfare and other social programs to churches has no rigorous accountability mechanisms built in, the author can not be faulted for not having hard data. However, he does not even tell any anecdotes about the misuse of funds. Nor does he explore why it took Congress 6 years to begin to investigate the FBCI programs. Perhaps it was the author's belief that FBCI philosophy is the only innovative and interesting idea in poverty policy in many decades. He may be right, but his failure to recognize that outcomes and accountability far outweigh innovativeness. To be fairer, he does argue, slightly short of calling President Bush a false prophet, that Christianity and the Bible would find the present day American trends toward vast income inequality scandalous and totally sinful. Hopefully the next book on the topic will provide good evidence for its claims, and hopefully we won't have to wait long for it.

An interesting read. I actually picked up this book from a USO rack over in the Middle East while deployed there. It was a welcome contrast to most of the other reading material generally available. For Republican and conservative readers; a note of warning. This book will most likely be offensive to you. However, I strongly recommend you read it just for the perspective. (The comment attributed to Mr Moyers on the front cover should be a good hint of the book's content.) This is a very short and concise essay that wastes no time getting to the point. Poverty is a serious issue not just of America, but for the entire world. And despite all our efforts and the so called "War on Poverty" we have made no meaningful, enduring progress on the issue. As one of the richest countries in the world, we still have a segment of our society that does not have the ability to meet their basic needs and has practically no access to a mechanism to change their situation. Daly frames faith based charities in the above context and admits that government efforts on the area have proven

ineffective; thus setting the stage for a different paradigm. His questioning of the motives behind the decision to go with the faith based approach breathes some fresh analysis into the debate: was this new direction really a search for a more effective solution set or a deliberate power-grab? A significant item he glossed over is one of the more important aspects of the religious debate on the issue of poverty in America today. A great portion of Right-Wing thought along these lines is based on scriptures such as 2 Thessalonians 3:10: "For while we were yet with you, we gave you this rule and charge: If anyone will not work, neither let him eat." (AMP) I personally think that this sort of reference is used too often as an excuse to turn a blind eye. However, discussing it would have added a dimension that is missing in the work. Daly's discussion on the origins of the modern, philosophical background of faith based initiatives was illuminating. As a side product, there was an implied but solid discussion of the First Amendment and the power of religious intuitions in America. Because of its brevity and the author's apparent genuine anguish about the subject; this book has little of the self-serving content that most works in this field have to struggle against to get their points across. The point that will most likely be buried or omitted in reviews of this book will be Daly's insistence that faith based programs should not be abandoned. His assertion that we should give them a chance to work with a renewed focus on why they were created is probably the most significant theme of this work. Unfortunately, the portion of the Left Wing that is phobic of religion will ignore this concept and concentrate on his criticism of the program. My only issue with this work is more personal in nature. To me, Daly's Clinton worship undermines the credibility of his work. The idea that Clinton's impeachment was an attempt at a religious based coup, instead of a politician abusing his office and lying about it, is disturbing and tips his hand as being a deeply entrenched Democrat. As a Green voter, I see that national disgrace as a major blow against our nation's ability to hold members of the executive branch and congress accountable for their actions. This is a very real, salient problem today. Well documented with a good narrative flow and structure. This is a good read. I have recommended it to several other people and passed on my copy. Hopefully, it will make its rounds. I am cautiously looking forward to other publications by Boston Review Books.

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