

**Daly, Lew. *God and the Welfare State*. Somerville, Massachusetts: Boston Review; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006. xix +132 pages. \$14.95 hardcover.**

This book is about the Bush administration's sometimes controversial faith-based initiative (introduced in 2001). This was viewed as a next stage in the "war on poverty" but was sometimes mired in controversies about church-state relations and the vagaries of politics. The author tries to take the ideas behind faith-based initiatives seriously and discusses the development of ideas about the perceived proper relationship between church and state over time. This well-written, short book about faith-based initiatives, as the publisher's book blurb states, "gives us a new starting point in the evolving conversation about religion and American government."

The "Foreword" by James Carroll has some strong words in it, stating that religiously sponsored good works "are replacing public responsibility, and something essential to democracy is at stake" (xii). He goes on to say that we should not really be focusing on charity, *per se*, but on justice. He resembles here a thundering prophet out of ancient Israel, an Amos or a Jeremiah, inveighing against the injustice that is in the land. He seems to advocate a Scandinavian type of welfare state, with a kind of cradle-to-grave guarantee on the part of government that the citizen will not be abandoned, will be assured basic social welfare rights. It is rather curious here that the book itself does not appear to be in this same camp, arguing as it does for a greater welfare "mix," private and public (especially the private, religious-based voluntary sector).

In Chapter 1, "If You Care About Fighting Poverty," Daly clearly states that the constitutionality of federal aid to religious social service providers "is becoming increasingly plausible as the structure and purpose of the welfare state evolves" (5). He rightly avers that faith-based initiatives (he seems to prefer that term over faith-based organizations) have not proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are indeed effective. This is a question that is much debated at the present time. The faith-based initiative (I will use FBI for brevity throughout this review) is rooted in Catholicism and Calvinism, he posits. He points to "a distinctive religious theory of the limited state, the goal of which is not to privatize welfare but to shift public authority to self-governing religious groups" (8). He goes on to state that for the first time, "core theological principles of the Christian tradition have been systematically applied to federal administration and spending" (9). I certainly agree that for anyone attempting to understand why philosophy matters in politics, studying the FBI is a fine place to begin.

In chapter 2, “A Vision of Rebuilding,” he makes an interesting contrast between the addresses, over the years, of President Ronald Reagan and President George W. Bush at the University of Notre Dame. With the Bush address, there was a “determined assault” on poverty, but an assault involving “charities and community leaders” (12), not the cold and unfeeling governmental mechanisms of the welfare state. Daly spends a considerable amount of time discussing the contributions of the increasingly discussed Dutch Calvinist statesman and theologian, Abraham Kuyper. He goes on to discuss two key concepts, the Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity and the Dutch Calvinist theory of sphere sovereignty (22). He avers that it was in the 1980s that American religious conservatives with Christian Democratic roots began to “explore ways to integrate key ideas from their tradition into social policy” (25). Two think tanks played a key role here, the Acton Institute, with “social-Catholic roots” (actually, this think tank has Catholic and Protestant moorings, it would appear), and the Center for Public Justice, with Dutch Calvinist roots.

He lays out a map to the FBI landscape through subsequent chapters, Chapter 3 on charitable choice, Chapter 4 on executive action, Chapter 5 on Kuyper’s theory of the limited state, Chapter 6 on the makings of a movement, Chapter 7 on mastering Catholic governance, Chapter 8 on corrupting ourselves, Chapter 9 on the caring state, Chapter 10 on false gods, and a concluding bibliography. The author writes succinctly and well, traversing a considerable amount of ground in only 132 pages (and each page is fairly small).

The historic *Lown vs. Salvation Army* case (27) opened wider the doors to FBI activities. The important role of the Compassion Capital Fund is discussed. The author makes a pungent comment that from the beginning the FBI “has been about helping the religious groups that provide social services, not the people who depend on them. Thus, it was never a social policy of any kind: poor people and poor communities are merely its imputed beneficiaries” (43). One is reminded here to some extent of David Kuo’s book, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (2006). Despite this, Daly seems enthusiastic about the potential of the FBI.

His contrast of the principle of subsidiarity with that of sphere sovereignty (77) was not completely clear to me. He notes the comment from James Skillen that “subsidiarity resembles sphere sovereignty but embraces a more hierarchical concept of social order and the role of the state” (77). As I see it, sphere sovereignty is a component of subsidiarity, a more “micro” perspective on subsidiarity. I’m not sure if the author views it that way. One cannot help but recall the admiring

comment made by Abraham Kuyper concerning Leo XIII, that Catholicism was far ahead of Protestantism in their study of social questions. I agree that Kuyper has a lot to offer our study of the subject (and Niebuhr, Althusius, and other Protestants). But, the author bypasses the tremendous contributions of John Paul II entirely (he is not mentioned in the book), nor are contributions from Judaism mentioned at all (tzedakah, Maimonides, etc.). Lastly, Islam has well-developed social-welfare principles and practices (zakat, sadaqa, wafq, etc.) that we might learn from. There is no index to this book, and I think that a good index would help to increase reader access to the many fine ideas expressed by the author. Finally, the author's references to the interesting social-welfare policies in such countries as Germany and the Netherlands are indicative of the creative, insightful thinking the author demonstrates throughout the book.

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