

Bending the arc of public policy to make government a partner with communities and faith: The social power of faith, the importance of civil society, and early ideas for reform

Paper One in a Three-Part Series

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In March 2020, as an increasing number of COVID-19 cases were identified in Oregon and the state's agencies began developing public health messages, rules, and programs to slow the spread of the disease and aid its victims, human services and public health officials discovered a tragic gap: government programs and messages were not reaching some of the state's populations that most needed support during the crisis. African American, African immigrant, Hispanic, and other minority ethnic, racial, and religious communities, along with rural communities, were disconnected from the government's efforts. It wasn't until a group of Black faith leaders spoke out to highlight the disconnect between faith leaders and state officials that this began to change. Oregon, like other states, regularly contracts with religious organizations to deliver various social services, but religion was not in the foreground of the state's policy imagination. Thus, notes a state official, as the pandemic spread, "We didn't say the word 'faith' or 'congregation' or anything in any of our guidance. We treated houses of worship as nothing different than concert venues."

However, as the tragic consequences of the disconnect became evident in the spread of the disease and its outsized impact on already-disadvantaged communities, the state dramatically shifted its approach. Officials worked in partnership with faith leaders to begin opening lines of communication and to rebuild trust. Together, as partners in combating the public health crisis, they disseminated essential public health information in communities with low trust in government. Grants were awarded to faith-based and community-based organizations to support outreach and to share information about available services to help individuals protect themselves and their communities. Some organizations chose even to host vaccination clinics in their own trusted spaces.

In addition to facilitating the direct delivery of services to the public, the improved relationship between state officials and faith leaders led to a shift in acknowledging the critical role houses of worship play, particularly in minority communities and rural communities. The new program and policy direction has continued although the pandemic has waned. The state has awarded a new round of special grants, not as a crisis-response measure, but as a means of promoting community strength and resiliency by increasing the capacity of faith-based organizations, faith-based networks, and other community organizations to better serve their own members and the neighbors

*around them. A new high-level office to engage faith-based and community-based organizations has been created. As the Oregon official reflected, “[B]uilding those bridges with faith communities on topics where there is mutual interest and shared priorities has proven to be very effective in better caring for everybody who lives in Oregon.”*¹

Governments act in many ways to promote uplift, combat inequities, and support community development. As the experience of Oregon illustrates, one essential strategy is to engage with and strengthen the institutions and networks already counted on by families, individuals, and neighborhoods. Civil society organizations, locally rooted and often religious, form an important dimension of many people’s lives and are a helping and connecting presence in their communities. These organizations and their programs build personal relationships and strengthen agency; they do not simply deliver services. The vision and strategy of the faith-based or partnership initiative is to transform government policy and practice so that it partners with civil society and religious organizations rather than ignoring them, and so that it draws on their unique strengths and invests in them.

The faith-based initiative is about *no less* than ensuring that faith-based and community-based organizations are able to access government funding to provide services, and yet it is about *much more*. It also encompasses government *recognition* of the unique strengths of these organizations and the indispensable roles they play, *protection* of the freedoms they need to serve in their distinctive ways, *support* for their thriving, e.g., via tax incentives for charitable giving, and a *welcome* for them into the many networks the government supports in order to coordinate services to people and families facing particular challenges.² As US presidential candidate Barack

¹ My thanks to Maria Waters, the Oregon official who shared with me about the Oregon experience. She is the Faith Community Liaison in the Office of the Director, Oregon Department of Human Services, and serves more broadly in that capacity on request from other Oregon agencies and the Governor’s Office.

² The goal is not necessarily government funding of faith-based organizations, because faith-based and secular civil society organizations can often best flourish and best serve their communities when not entangled with government rules, however hospitable these have been made to be. And the goal is not necessarily that government regulations acknowledge and appropriately protect faith-based organizations, because faith-based and secular civil society organizations may sometimes best flourish and best serve the common good when left free of government restrictions. However, when the government does regulate and when it does offer funding to private organizations for the provision of services, then faith-based organizations should be equally eligible for the funding and their distinctive characteristics should be carefully protected as far as possible.

Obama said in 2008 in announcing that he would maintain the federal faith-based initiative started by President George W. Bush, “[T]he challenges we face today—from saving our planet to ending poverty—are simply too big for government to solve alone. We need all hands on deck.”³

“Poverty and inequality cannot be solved by traditional bureaucratic solutions, which entail generalized approaches executed by traditional command-and-control structures to address social ills with simple, linear causes. Instead, poverty and inequality are complex problems with multiple and interlocking causes and effects. . . . In order to effectively combat poverty, the government must not only bring to bear resources, but also serve as a connector and enabler. This requires linking personnel within interconnected local ecosystems, including individuals, faith-based and community organizations, community leaders, service providers on the state and local level, and public institutions, to utilize government-provided resources as seed capital for catalyzing additional social linkages and fortifying non-material assets within communities.”
— President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, *Strengthening Efforts to Increase Opportunity and End Poverty* (2016).⁴

The faith-based initiative is built on and advances twin dramatic reforms to the government’s cross-sector collaboration system of funding private organizations to provide social assistance. The first big step was the enactment in 1996 of the Charitable Choice provision as part of federal welfare reform. Charitable Choice reversed the church-state rules that had governed the collaboration system, replacing a “no aid to religion” requirement with the obligation that government allow religious organizations equal opportunity with secular providers to obtain funding. A new range of organizations with explicitly religious identities and whose activities included religious practices thus became eligible for funding. Of vital importance, this replacement of “no aid” by “no exclusion” was accomplished in a way that makes it possible for beneficiaries—the clients or service recipients—to be assisted without religious discrimination and without religious coercion, in accordance with constitutional requirements.

³ “Obama Delivers Speech on Faith in America” (speech text), *New York Times*, July 1, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/us/politics/01obama-text.html>.

⁴ President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, *Strengthening Efforts to Increase Opportunity and End Poverty: Recommendations of the President’s Advisory Council for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to Address Poverty and Inequality* (Washington, DC, 2016), 55, 58, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2017_advisory_council_report.pdf.

The second big step was the creation of new institutions in the federal executive branch—in the White House and in major federal agencies—to champion and implement this vision of a new partnership between government and civil society organizations. These “faith-based” or “partnership” offices and officials are charged with ensuring that the Charitable Choice principles are followed; proposing pilot projects that capitalize on the distinctive strengths of civil society organizations; working with grants officials to modify the size, character, and requirements of federal grants; and reaching out to welcome into partnership organizations that, despite their vital impact, were once regarded as marginal to the government’s work of uplift and development.

But there are puzzles here. Long before Charitable Choice was enacted or the faith-based initiative offices were created, the government was already providing much of its social assistance by funding private service providers—by awarding funds to nonprofit organizations, which in many instances were religious organizations. What, then, was the point of Charitable Choice and the faith-based initiative? And if the point was somehow to invite into partnership a new range of organizations because of the special qualities of their services and their connections, why, nearly three decades later, did the State of Oregon apparently have to rediscover this same vision and practice of partnership?

The vision, goals, rules, practices, and institutions that constitute the faith-based initiative produced fundamental changes to the government’s system of collaborating with private organizations to provide social services. The system’s default rules and practices were bent, foundationally modified, in order to transform the relationship from command to partnership, from government dictation to cooperation and even co-creation. But government has an inherent bias for the secular, the big, and the uniform and it does not easily change nor readily remain changed. This essay offers an overview of the genesis of the partnership vision and of its implementation by succeeding federal administrations, both Democratic and Republican. And it is an account, too, of the waning of the vision and the rebounding of old practices. I conclude with proposals for how to recover past gains and pioneer new reforms essential for enabling true partnerships in our changing society.

I write as a participant-observer. I helped to develop the initial innovation—the Charitable Choice provision in the 1996 welfare reform law—and was involved with the Clinton administration to help federal and state officials understand and implement the provision. I served on the initial staff of the Bush White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in 2001–2002, after working with others to design the Bush initiative. I served as an expert adviser to the church-state working group of President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and during his administration interacted often with officials about their implementation of the initiative. I provided confidential briefings and advice to officials of the Trump administration who carried out his version of the initiative. I have discussed aspects of the initiative with Biden administration officials, and with state and local partnership officials. For more than three decades, I have consulted with a wide range of faith-based organizations and religious leaders, including Black and Hispanic pastors. I am an advocate to Congress and the executive branch on behalf of the religious freedom that all faith-based organizations need in order to be able to offer to the public their best—their most distinctive—contributions to the common good, as they work to serve their neighbors of any or no faith.

Snapshots of the continuing presence and importance of religion and religious institutions in American society

Barack Obama (2006)

“[O]ver the long haul, I think we make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in people’s lives—in the lives of the American people—and I think it’s time that we join a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic democracy. And if we’re going to do that then we first need to understand that Americans are a religious people. 90 percent of us believe in God, 70 percent affiliate themselves with an organized religion, 38 percent call themselves committed Christians, and substantially more people in America believe in angels than they do in evolution. This religious tendency is not simply the result of successful marketing by skilled preachers or the draw of popular mega-churches. In fact, it speaks to a hunger that’s deeper than that—a hunger that goes beyond any particular issue or cause And one can

envision certain faith-based programs—targeting ex-offenders or substance abusers—that offer a uniquely powerful way of solving problems.”⁵

Eboo Patel, *Interfaith America* (2023)

“Here’s what worries me: Half the time when I’m giving a public presentation, the first question about religion is a negative question. What do you think about Islam and violence? What do you think about the Catholic Church and the pedophilia crisis? Why do so many people of faith hate gay people? Particularly in the areas of America where people have higher levels of education, those are their first questions. It is considered sophisticated and educated to know only the bad stuff about religion. Of course, that’s ironic because to only know the bad stuff is to not actually be educated. So that is discouraging.

“I’ll tell you what I find encouraging. Catholic sisters just keep on doing what Catholic sisters do, which is taking care of poor people. There are 10,000 migrants in Chicago that leadership recently welcomed into the city. But they had not adequately prepared for where those people would sleep. Well, guess who’s taking care of them? Largely, Catholic Charities and other faith-based organizations.

“Our society relies on religious communities to take care of people, to do addiction counseling, to do job training, to do hunger and homelessness work, to do refugee resettlement. We just don’t often tell the story of them doing that work. And I think that that’s a big problem.”⁶

The religious landscape

The religious landscape in 2024 is significantly different than in 1990 or 2000. Yet while the proportion of Americans who are unaffiliated with any religion has greatly increased, religion—one religion or another religion—remains very important for many people, and not least for racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants.

All Americans (PRRI, *2020 Census of American Religion*)⁷

70% of Americans identify as Christian

23% as none (religiously unaffiliated)

5% as non-Christian religious (1% Jewish, 1% Muslim)

Black Americans

63% Protestant (35% evangelical Protestant)

⁵ “Transcript: Obama’s 2006 Sojourners/Call to Renewal Address on Faith and Politics [June 26, 2006],” Sojourners, February 12, 2012, <https://sojo.net/articles/transcript-obamas-2006-sojournerscall-renewal-address-faith-and-politics>.

⁶ Eboo Patel, “Why We Shouldn’t Lose Faith in Organized Religion,” interview by Trish Harrison Warren, *New York Times*, July 9, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/09/opinion/patel-eboo-organized-religion.htm>.

⁷ For full data, see PRRI, *The 2020 Census of American Religion* (Washington, DC: PRRI, 2020), <https://www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/PRRI-Jul-2021-Religion.pdf>.

7% Catholic

Hispanic Americans

50% Catholic

24% Protestant (14% evangelical Protestant)

Native Americans

60% Christian (47% Protestant, 11% Catholic)

Immigrants⁸

68% Christian

20% none (religiously unaffiliated)

58% say religion is “very important” in their life

“Nones” and “Spiritually Involved” Americans (Pew Research Center)

Most “nones” believe in some power or factor beyond themselves.⁹ Americans are more likely to gather in a religious congregation than a spiritual meeting; most Americans who are involved in a spiritual community are also involved in a religious community.¹⁰

The turn toward civil society: Discovering the social good of religion and community

Before there was any thought of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, America’s public social assistance system already featured cross-sector collaboration.¹¹ During the long period before a significant American public welfare system was

⁸ For full data, see Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, Year), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/immigrant-status/>.

⁹ “[N]ot all ‘nones’ are nonbelievers. They are far less likely than religiously affiliated Americans to say they believe in God ‘as described in the Bible,’ but most do believe in God or some other higher power. Just 29% reject the notion that there is any higher power or spiritual force in the universe.” Pew Research Center, “Religious ‘Nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe,” January 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

¹⁰ “Americans are more likely to report gathering in religious communities than meeting in spiritual groups. Fully 39% of U.S. adults say they are involved in a religious community, such as a church or religious congregation, while 14% say they are involved in ‘a spiritual community, such as a group that helps [them] find a connection with something bigger than [themselves], nature or other people.’ Moreover, most people who are involved in a spiritual community are also involved in a religious one: 10% of U.S. adults say they are involved in both kinds of groups, while just 4% of all U.S. adults say they are involved in a spiritual community and not a religious one.” Pew Research Center, “Spirituality Among Americans,” December 7, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/12/07/spirituality-among-americans/>.

¹¹ For a theoretical overview, see John J. Forrer, James Edwin Kee, and Eric Boyer, *Governing Cross-Sector Collaboration* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014). A classic and insightful discussion of such collaboration in US social policy is Lester M. Salamon, *Partners in Public Service: Government-Nonprofit Relations in the Modern Welfare State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

created, most of the help for those in particular need had been given by the diverse religious and secular institutions of America's vigorous civil society.¹² Then, even as the federal, state, and local governments increasingly took on social responsibilities, those civil society initiatives continued, and the governments often carried out their enlarged social aims by providing funds to private organizations to deliver welfare services. With the great expansion of social welfare services via President Lyndon Johnson's mid-1960s Great Society and War on Poverty programs, the collaborative approach—government funding of private providers—became a major strategy. The vast financial resources of government were combined with the flexibility of nonprofit organizations.¹³

But by the late 1980s, criticism of American social assistance as ineffective was growing. In many other countries, officials and citizens were seeking greater involvement by nonprofits as an alternative to government-delivered services that they regarded as inadequate.¹⁴ But here, nonprofits already played a large role, yet their impact seemed lacking. Notably, just three decades after LBJ's major social assistance programs were launched, a prominent promise of Democrat Bill Clinton in his successful 1992 campaign for the presidency was to “end welfare as we know it.” The main welfare program—Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—with its laser focus on precisely determining financial need and then micro-adjusting welfare payments, actively discouraged recipients from earning income because such initiative complicated eligibility assessments.¹⁵ But how could the government's efforts be redesigned to more effectively address persistent poverty and other social problems?

¹² An account that was highly influential in the 1990s policy discussions is Marvin Olasky's *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1992).

¹³ Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, “Charitable Choice: Bringing Religion Back Into American Welfare,” in Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay, eds., *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), 269–97; Lew Daly, *God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), ch. 1; Salamon, *Partners in Public Service*; Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Lester M. Salamon and Helmut K. Anheier, *The Emerging Nonprofit Sector: An Overview* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Benjamin Gidron, Ralph M. Kramer, and Lester M. Salamon, eds., *Government and the Third Sector: Emerging Relationships in Welfare States* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992); Lester M. Salamon, “The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 4 (July/August 1994): 109–22.

¹⁵ On AFDC's negative effect, see Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, *Welfare Realities: From Rhetoric to Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 2–7. See also the noted study of the American welfare system by David

At just this same time, the contributions to the well-being of their neighbors that were being made every day by civil society organizations blasted to the attention of the public, policy scholars, and policymakers. Pressing into attention, through journalistic accounts and scholarly studies, were programs qualitatively different than the top-down, uniform, secular, and categorical ones that characterized the government system of social assistance, though it relied extensively on nonprofit organizations. These other programs, the daily work of civil society organizations, were smaller-scale, relational, often religious, and sometimes notably more effective. One striking success, unfolding over multiple years in Boston, was recounted in the cover story of the June 1, 1998, issue of *Newsweek*. The surprise newsmaker was the Reverend Eugene Rivers, pastor of a Black Pentecostal church in one of the poorest and most violent Boston neighborhoods. The surprise message was the “power of religion” to bring about a marked reduction in violent juvenile crime.¹⁶

“For decades, liberals and conservatives have argued past each other about the crisis in the inner city. The right was obsessed with crime, out-of-wedlock births and the ‘responsibility’ of the underclass; the left only wanted to talk about poverty, the need for government intervention and the ‘rights’ of the poor. Now both sides are beginning to form an unlikely alliance founded on the idea that the only way to rescue kids from the seductions of the drug and gang cultures is with another, more powerful set of values: a substitute family for young people who almost never have two parents, and may not even have one, at home. And the only institution with the spiritual message and the physical presence to offer those traditional values, these strange bedfellows have concluded, is the church.”
— John Leland, “Savior of the Streets,” *Newsweek* (June 1, 1998).¹⁷

Rev. Rivers was a key leader of Boston’s Ten Point Coalition, a network of forty Black churches supported by other churches, synagogues, and nonprofits. Asked why the pull of violence and the drug culture was so strong, a drug dealer had said to Rivers that, when teens were hanging out or

T. Ellwood, with its double-edged title: Ellwood, *Poor Support* (New York: Basic, 1988). For assessments from a Christian perspective, see Stanley W. Carlson-Thies and James W. Skillen, eds., *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), and Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, “Transforming American Welfare: An Evangelical Perspective on Welfare Reform,” in David P. Gushee, ed., *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 473–98.

¹⁶ John Leland, “Savior of the Streets,” *Newsweek*, June 1, 1998, <https://www.maryellenmark.com/bibliography/magazines/article/newsweek/savior-of-the-streets-637520286288994843/N>.

¹⁷ Leland, “Savior of the Streets.”

were on the way to school or the store, “I’m there, you’re not. I win, you lose. It’s all about being there.” The Ten Point volunteers were committed to maintaining a constant presence. The churches and community groups collaborated with each other and with the police and juvenile justice authorities, intercepting teens being drawn toward crime and involvement with the criminal justice system. The pastors and church members pursued deep relationships with the youth and offered a range of supportive services. And they also promised swift action by the police if the path of violence and crime was chosen. The clergy were a voice of “compassion, hope, and honesty” for the youth. They carried moral and communal authority as pastors of Black churches, institutions that through 150 years of brutal racism had stood central in their communities, and because of their visible commitment to the welfare of their communities and to positive outcomes for the youth.¹⁸ The Ten Point Coalition, formed in 1992, was widely credited as the main cause of the “Boston Miracle,” the dramatic decline in homicides in the city. Here, it seemed, was displayed an unexpected “power of religion” for social good, beyond its roles in the spiritual lives of its adherents. Here was a power to achieve important positive social outcomes that government programs and secular social-service nonprofits struggled to reach.

“[M]ore than a few cities, Boston among them, have come to see the churches as the most reliable institutions in poor neighborhoods, and have begun to smudge the line between church and state by quietly funding various church-run programs. ‘For the past four years, we’ve been working very closely with the churches,’ Thomas Menino, the mayor of Boston, says.” — Joe Klein, “In God They Trust” (1997).¹⁹

John J. DiIulio Jr., Ivy League scholar, Catholic, and later the first director of President George W. Bush’s White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, dubbed such accounts “faith-factor” journalism.²⁰ There were, in fact, two lines of stories and research. One inquired into what is now sometimes called the “prosocial” effects of religion—how religious beliefs and

¹⁸ Jenny Berrien, Omar McRoberts, and Christopher Winship, “Religion and the Boston Miracle: The Effect of Black Ministry on Youth Violence,” in Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin, and Ronald Thiemann, eds., *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 266–85. See also Kashea Pegram and Rod K. Brunson, “The Doors of the Church Are Now Open: Black Clergy, Collective Efficacy, and Neighborhood Violence,” *City & Community* 15, no. 3 (September 2016): 289–314.

¹⁹ Joe Klein, “In God They Trust,” *New Yorker*, June 16, 1997, 42.

²⁰ John J. DiIulio Jr., “Supporting Black Churches: Faith, Outreach, and the Inner-City Poor,” *Brookings Review* (Spring 1999): 43.

practices and involvement in a religious community appear often (though, sadly, not always) to support mental and even physical health, help people avoid or deal with addictions, guide people to engage constructively with interpersonal conflicts, and encourage adherents to generously give to and volunteer for civic and social causes, secular as well as religious.²¹

The other line of interest and inquiry focused on faith-based programs like the Ten Point Coalition and the organizations that created and supported them. What kinds of institutions were these? How was religion manifest in them? Were their programs and services especially effective, and if so, was that somehow because of the religion?²² The journalistic accounts sparked a flood of research and commentary about faith-based organizations and faith-filled services, and drew great interest from policymakers. In Washington, DC, the Brookings Institution focused on the topic with conferences and commentary; one notable outcome was a 2001 book, *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes*, which asked in its subtitle, “Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?”²³ The Heritage Foundation, from the conservative side, created a civil society center to host conferences and produce research and policy advice. In 2000, scholars mostly from Harvard University published an important collection of reflective essays, *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*.²⁴ Specialized research programs were

²¹ On the two different “faith factors,” see John J. DiIulio Jr., “Foreword: Reasons for Objective Hope in the Two Faith Factors,” in Byron R. Johnson, with Ralph Brett Tompkins and Derek Webb, *Objective Hope: Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations; A Review of the Literature* (Philadelphia: Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, University of Pennsylvania, 2002), and the entire study. Byron Johnson has published multiple additional careful studies of this “prosocial” effect. See, e.g., Byron R. Johnson, *More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How It Could Matter More* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2011). Many professional associations, including those for doctors, nurses, counselors, and palliative and hospice care, in the past few decades changed their standards to require attention to patients’ religious experience and connections. See the brief discussion in Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, “The Faith-Based Initiative: Both Cause of Contention and the Solution to an Impasse?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 70–85, at 75. On religion as a motivator of generous giving and volunteering, see Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), ch. 13.

²² DiIulio notes, in his foreword to Johnson et al., *Objective Hope*, the lack of certainty about the efficaciousness of faith-based services. There are no definitive studies proving that such services are, as a class, better—or worse—than secular social services. It is notoriously difficult to measure the effectiveness of social services and to determine the precise reasons why one program works better than another. I see no reason why either faith-based or secular programs should be as a class better than the other variety. Surely some in both categories are designed and implemented better than others; surely some varieties of a service work better for some people than another variety.

²³ E. J. Dionne Jr. and Ming Hsu Chen, eds., *Sacred Places, Civic Purposes: Should Government Help Faith-Based Charity?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001).

²⁴ Bane, Coffin, and Thiemann, *Who Will Provide?*

founded at the University of Pennsylvania (the Program for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society), University of Southern California (the Center for Religion and Civic Culture), and elsewhere. Marvin Olasky won much attention for the argument in his *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992) and related books that social assistance could only become more effective if it became less governmental and more religious, relational, and directive.²⁵

Blessing stations, hiding in plain sight

It may be difficult to imagine this now, but only a few decades ago, into the 1990s, the existence and social contributions of community-serving religious organizations were hardly recognized. Few in government or academia understood how important faith-based nonprofits and houses of worship are to society. Policy scholars and policymakers had been so focused on the expansion over the previous decades of government spending and action that they had hardly noticed that the government's social assistance system relied extensively on nonprofit organizations to deliver services.²⁶ And they had paid even less attention to the work of religious organizations, despite the extensive participation of religiously affiliated organizations in the governmental social assistance effort. The positive impact of religion had been masked, it seems, by the distorting lens of modernization theory, which taught that religion becomes privatized as society develops, retreating to family life and the worship spaces inside churches and other houses of worship, losing its social impact.²⁷

²⁵ Olasky, *Tragedy of American Compassion*; Olasky, *Renewing American Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Olasky, *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

²⁶ Hardly noticed: see, e.g., Salamon, *Partners in Public Service*, who stresses the lack of adequate theories.

²⁷ The unnoticed social impact of religion: José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ram A. Cnaan, Robert J. Wineburg, and Stephanie C. Boddie, *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Wolfgang Bielefeld and William Suhs Cleveland, "Defining Faith-Based Organizations and Understanding Them Through Research," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (June 2013): 442–67, at 443.

“Despite the magnitude of the religious nonprofit sector, until the mid-1990s research on nonprofit organizations largely ignored it. Indicative of this neglect is the fact that, of the 2,195 works listed in Layton’s *Philanthropy and Voluntarism: An Annotated Bibliography* (1987), only 2.1 percent of citations refer to religious organizations. In the past 10 years, however, religious nonprofits have begun to garner the attention of scholars and policy makers interested in the nonprofit sector, fueled substantially by the Charitable Choice legislation.” — Helen Rose Ebaugh, Janet S. Chavetz, and Paula F. Pipes, “Where’s the Faith in Faith-based Organizations?” (2006).²⁸

Yet now it was clear that religion was not only private, and now it was evident that faith-based and community-based organizations were vital in the lives of many people and neighborhoods. They had a special way of working: relational, trusted, on-the-spot, values-oriented. They offered services of various kinds, but also more—personal connections, encouragement, empowerment, hope for change. We might call them “blessing stations,” taking the term used for the small and unsung Black church-related ministries that provide essential assistance in urban neighborhoods, though often they can only be discovered by walking streets and alleys.²⁹

²⁸ Helen Rose Ebaugh, Janet S. Chafetz, and Paula F. Pipes, “Where’s the Faith in Faith-Based Organizations? Measures and Correlates of Religiosity in Faith-Based Social Service Coalitions,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (June 2006): 2259–72, at 2260.

²⁹ John J. DiIulio Jr., “The Three Faith Factors,” *Public Interest* (Fall 2002): 50–64, at 61.

How many civil society organizations are there? A 2019 study³⁰ counted nearly 1.3 million charitable nonprofits in the United States, a number that includes many houses of worship. But that total only includes organizations with IRS 501(c)(3) status and thus leaves out smaller and newer charities and congregations and those that have not registered with the IRS. A fully accurate count of houses of worship, experts say, requires identifying unregistered churches, including a considerable number of worship places that can only be found by looking along every street and into every alley.³¹

Furthermore, there is no official or consensus definition of “community-based organization” and thus no way to be sure what percentage of nonprofits (those with and without 501(c)(3) status) should be counted in that category. And there is no official or consensus definition of “faith-based organization,” either—and the usual classifications divide service providers *either* into some category of service (e.g., housing, addiction treatment) *or* into being religious or secular—and yet faith-based organizations precisely bridge these categories because they are religious social service providers!³²

To gain some sense of the universe of faith-based organizations, consider three data points:³³

- In 2019, Catholic Charities provided social services to thirteen million people, more than any entity except the federal government.
- A study of homeless shelters in eleven cities documented that faith-based organizations maintained “nearly 60% of the Emergency Shelter Beds, what many consider the ‘safety net of all safety nets’ for the homeless population.”
- The head of the National Council for Adoptions said in 2010 that if faith-based adoption agencies vanished, “the whole system would collapse on itself.”

Indeed, as the stories and research began to show, much civil society assistance is provided by *houses of worship*. Ram Cnaan, the premier researcher of their social impact, has termed congregations “our hidden safety net” and “the invisible caring hand.”³⁴ Most churches and other

³⁰ National Council of Nonprofits, *Nonprofit Impact Matters: How America’s Charitable Nonprofits Strengthen Communities and Improve Lives* (Washington, DC: National Council of Nonprofits, 2019), <https://www.nonprofitimpactmatters.org/site/assets/files/1/nonprofit-impact-matters-sept-2019-1.pdf>.

³¹ Cf. the reporting on religion in New York City by Tony Carnes and his colleagues at the website Journey Through NYC Religions, <https://nycreligion.info>.

³² The otherwise illuminating article by Ebaugh, Chafetz, and Pipes, “Where’s the Faith in Faith-based Organizations?” includes this sentence: “In terms of total revenues, religious organizations constitute the third largest sector of U.S. nonprofit organizations, behind health and education” (p. 2260)—yet many of those religious organizations deliver health or education services.

³³ These data points are noted in Thomas C. Berg, *Religious Liberty in a Polarized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2023), 166–67.

³⁴ Ram Cnaan, “Our Hidden Safety Net: Social and Community Work by Urban American Religious Congregations,” *Brookings Review* (Spring 1999): 50–53; Ram Cnaan, Stephanie C. Boddie, Femida Handy, Gaynor Yancey, and Richard Schneider, *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

houses of worship, the research showed, offer a range of helps, almost always to their neighbors and not only to members.

A range of additional assistance programs are offered by *faith-based organizations*: smaller or larger specialized service nonprofits with a clear religious identity, faith-based internal practices, and services inspired and often shaped by faith. These religious organizations are impelled to service by some particular religion, and whether or not a specific program of social service includes religious activities and teaching, somewhere in the organizations' life there are usually explicit religious practices. And yet they typically serve anyone who needs their help. World Vision USA, the evangelical organization that partners domestically with churches to offer services in addition to conducting extensive religious and development work overseas, says, "We're Christian—as in, we follow Jesus' example to show unconditional love to the poor and oppressed. Serving every child we can—of any faith or none." Catholics say the same thing: We serve people who need our help not because *they* are Catholic but because *we* are Catholic.³⁵

"Many Sikh organizations and houses of worship provide charitable services to homeless persons and others, without regard to the homeless person's religion. In exchange, Sikh organizations and houses of worship often require such persons to abide by certain religious traditions of the Sikh faith. Those requirements take several forms: Persons may be asked to remove their shoes while in a house of worship, to cover their head, and to refrain from tobacco and alcohol." — Sikh Coalition Amicus Brief (2010).³⁶

Other civil society organizations, *community-based organizations*, are secular, or at least not formally religious. Created in response to particular needs, they draw in volunteers of goodwill, whatever their faith or philosophy. They are smaller and less formal than the professionalized nonprofits in the government social assistance system. Yet, though not dedicated to embodying and being guided by a particular religion, they often have a religious aspect. Robert Woodson, a noted neighborhood social entrepreneur, says, "Many effective grassroots approaches of personal

³⁵ World Vision USA, "About Us," <https://www.worldvision.org/about-us>; Kristen Hannum, "Why Social Justice? 'Because We're Catholic,'" U.S. Catholic, July 2012, <https://uscatholic.org/articles/201206/why-social-justice-because-were-catholic/>.

³⁶ Amicus brief by the Sikh Coalition, presented in *Intermountain Fair Housing Council v. Boise Rescue Mission* (Ninth Circuit, 2010).

and community revitalization are faith-based. Even those that are not rooted in a particular religion have a spiritual component in the tireless, heartfelt commitment of grassroots leaders and their unwavering confidence in the potential of every human being.”³⁷ Moreover, given that their staff and volunteers and those they help likely belong to one or another religious community, the programs and organizational culture of community-based organizations may well include some religious activities and discussion.

In the marginalized southeastern area of Washington, DC, Apostle Angeloyd Fenrick rejected an offer of more than one million dollars for the apartment building she owned. She had used her retirement savings to purchase it years before, and it was the location for her community-based organization, Columbia Learning International Ministries (CLIM). CLIM’s mission was not yet over. CLIM used the building to assist the neighborhood’s working homeless “in their transition to permanent housing,” helping them “make and sustain changes that lead to balanced, healthy lives” and “encourag[ing] the restoration of family relationships.” Years before, seeing homeless men gather daily around a liquor store, she prayed for God to send someone to their aid. She was a school psychologist at the school across the street from the store. It turned out that *she* was the “someone” called into action.³⁸

Services, plus. These civil society organizations—faith-based and community-based organizations and houses of worship—characteristically offered not only particular social services but much more: drug treatment *plus* a support group and connections with the ministry’s staff and volunteers and their networks; a safe bed and meals for the unhoused *plus* help to reconnect with family and community life;³⁹ adoption services *plus* support for the adoptive family and the adoptee from a congregation—in the jargon, “wraparound services.”

³⁷ Robert L. Woodson Sr., *The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today’s Community Healers Are Reviving Our Streets and Neighborhoods* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 76. See also the statement on his Woodson Center website’s “About Us” page: “[O]ver the years, the Woodson Center has found that the most effective neighborhood-based organizations are faith-centered, because they are able to transform hearts and lay the groundwork for the successful application of jobs and other economic programs. Grassroots groups in the Woodson Center’s network represent a wide spectrum of religious faiths.” <https://woodsoncenter.org/about-us/faq/>.

³⁸ Ashley Fisher, “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Addressing Homelessness in D.C.” (blog post), Sacred Sector initiative of the Center for Public Justice, republished from the Center’s Shared Justice initiative, March 13, 2018, <https://cpjustice.org/the-role-of-faith-based-organizations-in-addressing-homelessness-in-d-c/>.

³⁹ The New City Initiative faith-based homeless shelter in Portland, Oregon, says that homelessness is not caused by a lack of money, at least initially; rather, people “become homeless when they run out of relationships.” Thus, a solution “necessarily involves a reestablishment of relationships and community.” Quoted in Byron R. Johnson and William H. Wubbenhorst, *Assessing the Faith-Based Response to Homelessness in America: Findings from Eleven Cities* (Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion Case Study, 2016), 21.

There was also another *plus* characteristic: a spiritual, or religious, or directional dimension. This might be accountability to “a higher power”; specific religious teachings to guide beneficiaries to good choices⁴⁰ and to emphasize the infinite value in God’s sight of even the most beaten-down person; or involvement in religious activities like prayer to connect to transformative power. However, conversion, if proposed, was unlikely to be demanded; instead, people might be encouraged to consider joining the community of faith.⁴¹

It is not simple to delineate how religion might be present within a social service. “Secular” social services themselves generally are not flatly materialistic and are not all shaped by a single philosophical understanding but may instead include appeals to a higher power, depend on positive human interactions, require changes of values, call for higher aspirations, and count on the support that a client or patient draws from religious teachings. As Stephen Monsma, a close student both of religious social service organizations and of legal and constitutional developments affecting them, notes, “Whether knowledge and theories are, in a formal sense, religiously rooted or secularly rooted, they are rooted in perspectives and presuppositions that have strong subjective elements.”⁴² Moreover, faith-based social services, though religious, have a “this-worldly” aim and effect, albeit informed by some religious tradition’s practices and its understanding of needs and resources. There might be in such faith-based services some discussion involving a religious understanding of coping, thriving, and the value of alternative

⁴⁰ Rev. Cheryl Sanders, a Washington, DC, Holiness pastor, says that Black churches, in addition to offering services and leading protests and advocacy initiatives, are able, through their teaching, example, and mentoring, to help “remoralize” members and neighbors whose agency has been undermined by the societal attractions of immediate gratification, hyper-individualism, and loosened family and marriage bonds. Cheryl J. Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People: A Path to African American Social Transformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁴¹ On the various ways that religion is present in faith-based organizations and services, see the classic analysis by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, “Typology of Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Programs,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (March 2004): 109–34. See also the important analyses of the Faith and Organizations project, discussed in a special issue titled “Faith-Based Organizations in Context” of the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, edited by Jo Anne Schneider, organizer of the project (vol. 42, no. 3 [2013]). This research stresses the significant differences among religious communities in how their respective religious beliefs and practices relate to the religious organizations and social services created by the various religions. For a careful discussion of how a religious organization can, with full respect, encourage a beneficiary to consider conversion—after all, the religious organization is convinced of the truth of its convictions—see Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community With Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

⁴² Stephen V. Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix: Religious Nonprofit Organizations and Public Money* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 119.

choices. But that kind of religious presence in a service is quite a distance from core religious activities such as worship, proselytizing, and theological teaching.⁴³

“But I ask you, who is more likely to go out onto a street to save some poor, at-risk child than someone from the community, someone who believes in the divinity of every person, who sees God at work in the lives of even the most hopeless and left-behind of our children? And that is why we need to not have a false division or debate about the role of faith-based institutions, we need to just do it and provide the support that is needed on an ongoing basis.” — Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, speaking to inner-city clergy in Boston (January 19, 2005).⁴⁴

To highlight this “plus” characteristic, social entrepreneur and researcher Amy Sherman wrote of services that are relational rather than “commodity-based,” and community development expert John McKnight described social assistance that aims to develop personal and communal strengths rather than only compensate for deficits. Similarly, Lutheran Services of America, an extensive network of church-related service organizations, speaks of its commitment to “advancing whole-person health, including offering spiritual resources,” and stresses its “asset-based and empowering approach” that embodies the “Lutheran tradition of walking alongside people in authentic partnership.”⁴⁵

Around the same time as the Ten Point Coalition was developing, John Perkins, a Black evangelical pastor and activist, was sparking the creation of the Christian Community Development Association, now more than three decades old, which is dedicated to the “three Rs”: *relocation* to the place of need; *reconciliation* across class, cultural, and racial lines, and with God; and *redistribution*: offering one’s material resources and also skills, time, and connections.⁴⁶

⁴³ I have found especially helpful, in addition to the resources listed in fn. 41 above, Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix*, and Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, “An (Ana)Baptist Theological Perspective on Church-State Cooperation: Evaluating Charitable Choice,” in Derek Davis and Barry Hankins, eds., *Welfare Reform and Faith-Based Organizations*, (Waco, TX: J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, 1999), 89–138.

⁴⁴ Quoted in John J. DiIulio Jr., *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America’s Faith-Based Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 82–83.

⁴⁵ Amy L. Sherman, *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries That Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997); John L. McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterparts* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), esp. “Do No Harm” (pp. 101–40). The Lutheran Services of America (LSA) characterizations are from an LSA background document offered to John J. DiIulio Jr. and me to help us prepare for a videoconference with LSA leaders, December 14, 2023.

⁴⁶ John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993).

Mission-driven. John J. DiIulio Jr. noted early on that civil society organizations are “not organizationally wired to go hunting for federal grants”⁴⁷; instead, when faith-based organizations are awarded government money to provide services, they are likely to add to the government money other funds that they have raised privately. We should generalize DiIulio’s point: whether these organizations are larger or smaller, they are devoted more to serving than to monitoring announcements of funding availability or refining their organizational structures. Their work and the organizations themselves are mission-oriented; they exist because particular people, attentive to local challenges and also local assets, have responded to a call to serve, which they may regard as divine. They operate not because they have heard that a legislative body or human services agency has defined a social problem, designed a standardized response, and announced funding.

“I can say from my time in Minneapolis, the programs that we had that were contracted with the government, the government would pay somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of what we needed and we had to make up the rest. So we were subsidizing the government, if you will, by hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. We were happy to do that because it furthered our mission and the mission of the common good.” — Rev. Larry Snyder, then-president of Catholic Charities USA, formerly head of Catholic Charities in Minneapolis, at a Brookings Institution symposium on the faith-based initiative (2010).⁴⁸

All nonprofit organizations are mission-driven and strive for autonomy so that they can fulfill their respective inspirational callings.⁴⁹ This determination not to be forced to dance to someone else’s tune is amplified in civil society organizations with their local roots and focus, and even more in faith-based organizations, smaller and larger, because of their conviction of a divine calling to which they are accountable.⁵⁰ Thus, it is crucial to faith-based organizations that they be able to count on institutional religious freedom—the freedom to follow the dictates of their

⁴⁷ DiIulio, *Godly Republic*, 163.

⁴⁸ Remarks made as a panelist at a symposium organized by the Brookings Institution, “Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in the Obama Era: Assessing the First Year and Looking Ahead” (uncorrected event transcript), February 18, 2010, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/faith-based-neighborhood-partnerships-in-the-obama-era-assessing-the-first-year-and-looking-ahead/>.

⁴⁹ Stuart C. Mendel and Jeffrey L. Brudney, *Partnerships the Nonprofit Way: What Matters, What Doesn’t* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Stephen V. Monsma stresses the importance of autonomy to faith-based organizations in his *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

animating religious convictions even when these conflict with legal requirements. Particularly important is their freedom, established in civil rights law and US Supreme Court decisions, to use religious criteria when selecting staff. The point is not to exclude people who simply happen to have different religious beliefs but rather to constitute a community of employees devoted to a particular faith-shaped mission of compassionate service. Also important to many faith-based organizations are the freedoms to use a religion-based curriculum, to have religious representation on the governing board or even to be sponsored by a denomination or congregation, to have an explicit religious mission, and to display religious signs and symbols.⁵¹

Religion is not generic. The policy and scholarly literature uses the generic term “faith-based organizations,” but religion, of course, is not generic.⁵² The religious convictions, moral values, and worship practices of Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, evangelical Protestant, Hindu, and other religious communities differ, sometimes sharply, from each other. Some of these differences are consequential for how particular organizations are structured and their social services are shaped. And there may be sharp differences of belief and moral values also within particular religions: Reform Jews, progressive Muslims, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) celebrate LGBTQ identities and practices; orthodox Jews, conservative Muslims, and the Presbyterian Church in America advocate respect for LGBTQ people but believe that the divine pattern for

⁵¹ On institutional religious freedom, see Stephen V. Monsma and Stanley Carlson-Thies, *Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), and Stanley Carlson-Thies, “The Common Good Requires Robust Institutional Religious Freedom,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 15, no. 3 (2019): 529–45. For an introduction to the religious staffing freedom, which is protected by the religious organization exemption of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, see Carl H. Esbeck, Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, and Ronald J. Sider, *The Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations to Staff on a Religious Basis* (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 2004). Since that book was published, federal courts have acknowledged that the Constitution itself extensively protects the right of religious organizations to choose without government interference their religious leaders and teachers. See the discussion of the “ministerial exception”—upheld by the US Supreme Court in the cases *Hosanna-Tabor* (2012) and *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (2020)—in John Witte Jr., Joel A. Nichols, and Richard W. Garnett, *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment*, fifth ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 327–32. Critics of the religious staffing freedom sometimes recommend in its place the practice of religious nonprofits that avoid formally evaluating candidates according to religious criteria by simply hiring from within their networks—but that is only a different path to the same goal of constituting a staff that is supportive of the organizations’ respective religious missions and convictions.

⁵² On this point, I found particularly insightful the remark of Charles Marsh that the civil rights movement and much of the subsequent faith-based community development movement were inspired and directed by specific religious impulses and by particular conceptions of what needed change and how that change can be accomplished. Self-giving acts of service is one way to summarize a main impulse. Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, From the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), introduction.

sexuality is profoundly different than the progressive view and they may strongly object to social and legal pressure to affirm LGBTQ sexuality. Progressive Catholics and Protestants accept elective abortion, but the official view of the Catholic Church, a view shared by many conservative Protestants, is pro-life. That official view sets a standard for organizations claiming to be Catholic and at the same time has resulted in alliances regarding some critical health care issues between Catholic organizations and evangelical Protestant organizations, notwithstanding their theological differences.

Tesserae rather than interchangeable units. Thus, the civil society programs and organizations uncovered by faith-factor journalism and research were diverse, distinctive, particular, and even sectarian, and with strong impulses to maintain these qualities. We might even say that their comparative advantage over other organizations and services is grounded in their particularity, in their personalized services, in their local focus, in their embodiment of the beliefs and practices of a particular religious tradition. But how could organizations and services that were so particularized contribute to the *common* good, to the nonsectarian and equal good that must be the way of government-sponsored assistance? Could they, and should they, adapt to the uniformity demanded by government, or would they insist on maintaining their specificity, including their religious character?⁵³ Should the government demands for uniformity be reduced? How could (diverse) beneficiaries be served by (diverse) organizations?

Certainly the religious and secular civil society programs and organizations were not the solution to every problem nor ideal for every person. Yet the journalistic accounts and the research showed that they could have powerful effects and often provided vital help otherwise unavailable. Paul Wellstone (D—Minnesota), then the most liberal member of the Senate, remarked in 1997, “Some of the best antipoverty work I’ve seen has come from faith-based agencies.”⁵⁴ William Raspberry, award-winning *Washington Post* writer on race and poverty, mused in a 1997 column

⁵³ Insisting on maintaining their specificity: see Monsma and Carlson-Thies, *Free to Serve*; Berg, *Religious Liberty in a Polarized Age*, ch. 5; Peter Greer and Chris Horst, *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2014).

⁵⁴ Klein, “In God They Trust,” 46. Klein reports that Wellstone voted against the federal welfare reform law but in favor of the Charitable Choice provision embedded in it that was intended to make possible expanded government partnerships with religious organizations.

about very positive life changes he had witnessed, though “seldom,” in his judgment, was a government program the cause. “Spiritual change,” whether or not conventionally religious, he thought, was essential. It was time, he said, to figure out “how to combine the efforts of government with those of faith-based organizations.”⁵⁵

A profile of the Orange County Rescue Mission posted by the California Board of State and Community Corrections recounts the story of Albert Mulligan, heroin-addicted, cycling in and out of jails and prison, and desperate for change as his wife was about to give birth. “In a last-ditch effort to save Mulligan from himself, his probation officer told him about the Orange County Rescue Mission, a faith-based living facility where turning one’s life over to Christ is a central part of rehabilitative programming. Orange County probation officers realize that faith-based programs aren’t for everyone, but could be effective choices for those for whom faith and religion are important.”⁵⁶

Transforming collaboration into partnership: Inviting in faith and community

The many and varied civil society programs and organizations that were now within the view of policymakers and policy scholars were mostly on the outside of the government’s system of collaborating with private organizations to provide social assistance. Inside the system were large secular nonprofits and religious organizations that were required to downplay religion. The newly visible community-based and faith-based organizations were on the outside because they were intensely focused on meeting the needs around them, not on searching for external funding; or they were excluded by the rules and practices of the government funding system; or they stayed away from the government’s system because its requirements were not congenial to the specific ways they served. If these civil society organizations with their distinctive and often particularly effective services were to become partners in the government-funded social assistance effort, the cross-sector collaboration system itself would have to be changed.

⁵⁵ William Raspberry, “Then There is Faith,” *Washington Post*, July 25, 1997. Raspberry, however, was skeptical of what became the faith-based initiative as the way to create the needed partnerships. See the transcript of the conversation hosted by Michael Cromartie with William Raspberry, John J. DiIulio Jr., and reporters, “With Ben Franklin’s Blessings: A Primer on Faith-Based Initiatives,” Faith Angle Forum, May 2005, <https://faithangle.org/session/ben-franklins-blessings-primer-faith-based-initiatives/>.

⁵⁶ “OC Rescue Mission Promotes Faith-Based Recovery,” California Board of State and Community Corrections website, <https://bscc.ca.gov/news/oc-rescue-mission-promotes-faith-based-recovery/> (viewed August 26, 2023).

A system of vendors, not partners

That system has been characterized as “nonprofits for hire.” Service providers were treated as “agents” of government rather than its “partners.”⁵⁷ Government officials defined the needs and the desired response and then awarded funding to private organizations willing to deliver the specified services. The system paid little attention to the local knowledge and connections possessed by the nongovernmental organizations. This was a top-down, government-centric system that treated private organizations more as extensions of government than as independent agents with particular capabilities, insights, and connections.⁵⁸

“Of all sectors, nonprofits most often use mission alignment as a criterion for partnership, which means that a public or business-induced partnership can be out of sync with the nonprofit actor’s intents and purposes. In public sector endeavors, the nonprofit actor is often seen as an agent to a government principal, suggesting that these arrangements are not ‘partnerships’ but something else.”

— Stuart Mendel and Jeffrey Brudney, *Partnerships the Nonprofit Way* (2018).⁵⁹

In this style of collaboration, a government agency would announce, in bureaucratic language in some official publication, the availability of funds to pay for particular services to be delivered to specified people or neighborhoods. Usually, a large sum of money would be offered to pay for a large volume of standardized services. A long list of requirements would arrive with the funds. Recipients would have to certify compliance with multiple laws and regulations often listed by their US Code or Code of Federal Regulations reference without detail or explanation. To be

⁵⁷ Smith and Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire*. See also Benjamin Gidron, Ralph M. Kramer, and Lester M. Salamon, “Government and the Third Sector in Comparative Perspective: Allies or Adversaries?” in Gidron, Kramer, and Salamon, eds., *Government and the Third Sector*, 1–30, esp. 16–20. The double meaning of the word “collaboration” is cause for sober reflection: it can mean working together to achieve a joint goal or—the opposite—a situation where one party does what is only in the interest of the other, as do “collaborators” in wartime.

⁵⁸ Nonprofits scholars note the phenomenon of organizational isomorphism, a process by which one type of organization that engages closely with another type—in this case nonprofits collaborating with government to provide social services—take on the characteristics of that other kind of organization. I suggest that key legal, policy, and practice innovations of the faith-based initiative are designed to forestall isomorphism so that civil society organizations and other private organizations can collaborate with government while retaining their nongovernmental characteristics. This aspect of the promise and pitfalls of collaboration between faith-based organizations and government is stressed in Charles L. Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ Mendel and Brudney, *Partnerships the Nonprofit Way*, 21.

sure, there might be a good reason for every requirement and procedure, but the cumulative effect was to exclude many potential partners. This kind of collaboration system favored large organizations with a staff dedicated to monitoring government publications, skilled in producing proposals attractive to the awarding agency, able to parse the details of legal and operational requirements, ready to generate extensive reports, and with the desire and ability to mass-produce some type of service. But such requirements and procedures surpassed the capacity and focus of many civil society organizations—organizations limited in staff, not lawyered up, and not devoted to compliance with procurement procedures and requirements. Their attention was concentrated on responding to the needs all around them rather than on discovering what government wanted to fund.

A system of religiously affiliated, not faith-based, organizations

Nor was the system hospitable to religion, that key characteristic and motivating force of many civil society organizations. The US Constitution prohibits the government from “establishing” religion, which according to the then-prevailing strict-separationist interpretation entailed “no aid to religion.” The government could collaborate with “religiously affiliated” organizations—organizations connected to a denomination or some other distinctly religious organization—but the religiously affiliated providers were supposed to deliver secular services in a secular setting. With such restrictions, the collaboration would not stray into the prohibited establishment of religion, and the services, required to be secular, were considered suitable for all. By contrast, religious organizations with pronounced religious features and practices, such as a policy of hiring by religion and the presence of religious ideas and activities, were tagged as “pervasively sectarian” and were ineligible for funding. Due to their religious commitments and practices, they were deemed unable to keep religion out of any funded services they might provide.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ On these constitutional and legal interpretive issues, see Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, “Faith-Based Institutions Cooperating With Public Welfare: The Promise of the Charitable Choice Provision,” in Davis and Hankins, eds., *Welfare Reform and Faith-Based Organizations*, 29–60, esp. 35–43; Carl H. Esbeck, “A Constitutional Case for Governmental Cooperation With Faith-Based Social Service Providers,” *Emory Law Journal* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 1–41; Carl H. Esbeck, “Myths, Miscues, and Misconceptions: No-Aid Separationism and the Establishment Clause,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (1999): 285–319; Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix*; and Stephen V. Monsma, *Positive Neutrality: Letting Religious Freedom Ring* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,

The exclusion of intensively religious organizations from government funding avoided religious favoritism by government, and it protected people seeking government help from possible religious discrimination and obligatory religious participation. These are important outcomes, and yet if explicitly religious civil society organizations in some instances offered the most efficient or effective services or might be uniquely helpful to many or some, then achieving these outcomes by excluding those organizations undermined the public good.

Moreover, the policy was inconsistent. Stephen Monsma surveyed a range of providers in the early 1990s, before the arrival of Charitable Choice and related church-state innovations. He discovered that many received government funding notwithstanding that they engaged in religious practices that should have placed them in the not-to-be-funded “pervasively sectarian” category. Government officials, he concluded, regarded the services these organizations provided as too valuable to be dismissed by applying precisely the strict “no aid” requirements. But being eligible for funding because of the lax enforcement of requirements or due to some kind of “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy put religious organizations in a legally precarious position.⁶¹ They had not totally erased religion as required by the secular legal box within which they were supposed to be confined. And yet were their practices actually harmful and constitutionally suspect? Asked about organizational practices, Sharon Daly, a Catholic Charities national leader, asserted that local staff would invite clients to express their spiritual concerns and interests and would offer to connect them to Catholic worship and other programs. She added that, of course, the staff would link clients to a mosque or synagogue or other faith community instead, if that was their

1993). For a current overview of these issues, with a focus on government funds and religious schools, see Nathan S. Chapman and Michael W. McConnell, *Agreeing to Disagree: How the Establishment Clause Protects Religious Diversity and Freedom of Conscience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), esp. ch. 7.

⁶¹ Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix*. Interviews with Catholic Charities and Salvation Army leaders after Charitable Choice was first adopted to provide a more solid legal foundation for government funding of faith-based organizations show how much these organizations were dependent on the loose application of the “no aid” requirement in order to partner with government. See Diane Winston, *Soup, Soap, and Salvation: The Impact of Charitable Choice on the Salvation Army* (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 2000), and Joe Loconte, *The Anxious Samaritan: Charitable Choice and the Mission of Catholic Charities* (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 2000). These are reports from the Charitable Choice Tracking Project of the Center for Public Justice, which I directed.

affiliation. Yet such religion-friendly actions were much too religious if the requirement for accessing federal funding was bare secularism.⁶²

“We try first of all to respect the religious beliefs, traditions, and affiliations of our clients. We do not assume because they are poor, that they do not have a relationship with God or a religious home—a church home. In fact, most of our clients are deeply religious, and we try to support and encourage them to find solace and support in their own religious communities. Our agencies rarely ask clients about religious affiliation, but clients often bring up their religious connections in initial interviews or counseling. Of course we reassure them that they are welcome, and that our services are available, regardless of their faith or lack of it. Catholic parishes, on the other hand, are there also—ready to provide spiritual aid, religious education, sacraments for Catholics, and instruction for seekers.”—Sharon Daly, vice president for social policy, Catholic Charities USA (1999).⁶³

Inconsistencies abounded. In silly but significant instances, the City of Los Angeles told a St. Vincent de Paul facility that it would become eligible for city funding to support its anti-poverty work if it renamed itself the Mr. Vincent de Paul Center, and a major eastern city told the Salvation Army to become a differently named army so that it could be awarded city funds.⁶⁴ Yet the United States collaborated with denominational organizations to carry out its overseas relief and development efforts; the GI Bill funded veterans’ education not only at secular universities but also at religious colleges and even seminaries; and in the 1990 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act, Congress specifically designed the new federal program to subsidize child care for low-income families such that that “sectarian”—religious—child care providers could participate although their programs included religious teaching and activities and the providers evaluated religious qualifications when deciding whom to hire.⁶⁵

⁶² Sharon Daly, “Common Sense and the Common Good: Helping the Poor and Protecting Religious Liberty,” in Davis and Hankins, *Welfare Reform and Faith-Based Organizations*, 139–51, at 143–45.

⁶³ Daly, “Common Sense,” 143–44.

⁶⁴ Carlson-Thies, “Faith-Based Institutions,” 38.

⁶⁵ On religious organizations and US overseas development efforts, see J. Bruce Nichols, *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); on the eligibility of religious higher education institutions in the GI Bill program, see Elizabeth A. Edmondson, “Without Comment or Controversy: The G.I. Bill and Catholic Colleges,” *Church History* 71, no. 4 (2002): 820–47; on the religion-accommodating design of the 1990 Child Development and Block Grant Act, see Daly, *God’s Economy*, 48–51; Allen D. Hertzke, “An Assessment of the Mainline Churches Since 1945,” in James E. Wood Jr. and Derek Davis, eds., *The Role of Religion in the Making of Public Policy* (Waco, TX: J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, 1991), 43–79, at 68–69; William Tobin, *Lessons About Vouchers From Federal Child Care Legislation*,

“Many religious nonprofits that choose to accept state funding have a relationship of convenience with government. Government provides funds and the ministry provides effective services among clientele the government has not been able to reach. Some of these nonprofits report that government officials will ‘look the other way’ when the ministries undertake activities that, technically, may be in violation of church-state separation regulations. This has allowed the ministries to maintain the distinctives of their outreach (namely, Biblical teaching and moral challenge) which make them effective. It is, however, a precarious situation: at some point, a more zealous social worker or government bureaucrat could enforce more rigorously regulations that can quell the religious expression of the ministry.” — Amy Sherman (1995).⁶⁶

Church-state scholar Carl Esbeck in the mid-1990s identified a long list of inappropriate and unconstitutional religion-limiting conditions that accompanied federal, state, and local social services funds.⁶⁷ The lines dividing eligible from ineligible organizations and fundable from nonfundable programs were hardly bright, nor were they applied consistently. Inconsistency itself made collaboration with government risky for houses of worship and for faith-based organizations committed to maintaining a robust religious identity and religion-shaped policies. Monsma pointed out that the legal uncertainty made participating religious organizations vulnerable to a “lightning strike”—an unpredictable but costly lawsuit, an adverse administrative decision, or a public outcry.⁶⁸ One careful study termed government support for faith-based social service providers and religious schools an “ambiguous embrace”—a valuable resource that would likely be accompanied by detrimental requirements.⁶⁹

Policy Papers from the Religious Social Sector Project (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 1998); and Stanley Carlson-Thies, *Utilize the Pluralist CCDBG Funding System to Ensure Faith-Based Providers’ Access to Expanded Federal Support for Child Care* (policy brief), Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, August 4, 2022, <https://cpjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/IRFA-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Sherman letter, quoted in Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix*, 149.

⁶⁷ His analysis was first printed as Carl H. Esbeck, *The Regulation of Religious Organizations as Recipients of Governmental Assistance* (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 1996). An expanded version was later published as Carl H. Esbeck, “Regulation of Religious Organizations Via Governmental Financial Assistance,” in James A. Serritella, with Thomas C. Berg, W. Cole Durham Jr., Edward McGlynn Gaffney Jr., and Craig B. Mousin, eds., *Religious Organizations in the United States: A Study of Identity, Liberty, and the Law* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 349–407.

⁶⁸ Monsma, *When Sacred & Secular Mix*, 106.

⁶⁹ Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace*. See also Joe Loconte, *Seducing the Samaritan: How Government Contracts Are Reshaping Social Services* (Boston: Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 1997), and William H. Wubbenhorst, with Alfreda Alvarez-Wubbenhorst, *The Pitfalls of Contracts for Funding Social Ministries*, Policy Papers from the Religious Social Sector Project (Washington, DC: Center for Public Justice, 1998). Constitutional law scholar Michael McConnell said that the excessive church-state restrictions turned government funds into “relentless

“The condition [in the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s regulations for the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act] requiring stripping of religious symbols from shelters, thereby creating a religion-free zone, is particularly objectionable. HUD sought removal of the religious symbols to create the impression that the aid is being delivered by a secular agency. Such an impression is not only false, but especially where adults are involved, is unnecessary if the aim is to prevent religious coercion by mere exposure to these symbols. The establishment clause should not be read as requiring desacralization of a ministry as if religious distinctives are to be handled like toxic waste.” — Carl Esbeck, *Regulation of Religious Organizations as Recipients of Governmental Assistance*, (1996).⁷⁰

Thus, despite the positive journalistic accounts and research, and notwithstanding the experiences of various elected officials and program managers that suggested that the government’s social assistance effort would be improved by more extensively utilizing faith-based and other civil society organizations, exclusion remained the rule. DiIulio writes that federal officials treated Black churches and charities “as either wholly irrelevant” to addressing social problems or, with respect to funding, as “highly radioactive.” Instead of partnering with them, “the government virtually created and lavishly funded national secular nonprofit organizations and community development corporations to deliver social services that indigenous black religious leaders and volunteers were already struggling to provide.”⁷¹

Which direction reform?

Various efforts to multiply the good works of civil society had been promoted starting already in the 1980s. When President Ronald Reagan cut federal social spending, he justified the cuts in part with the hope that the shrinking of federal programs would result in greater service by nonprofits. However, the cuts instead undermined the nonprofits’ work because so many of them

engines of secularization.” Michael W. McConnell, “Equal Treatment and Religious Discrimination,” in Stephen V. Monsma and J. Christopher Soper, eds., *Equal Treatment of Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 30-54, at 48. This is the edited version of written testimony given on Sept. 29, 1995, to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

⁷⁰ Esbeck, *Regulation of Religious Organizations as Recipients of Governmental Assistance*, 13.

⁷¹ DiIulio, *Godly Republic*, 240. Charles Glenn has written of his experiences in Boston in the 1960s when federal efforts to energize people at the grassroots level undermined community-based groups rather than connecting with and supporting them. Glenn, “Free Schools and the Revival of Urban Communities,” in Carlson-Thies and Skillen, *Welfare in America*, 393-425, at 409–11.

relied on income from collaborating with government.⁷² His successor, President George H. W. Bush, aimed directly to expand the work of nonprofits and volunteers in serving the needy by championing the private Thousand Points of Light initiative to promote volunteering. Bush also promoted legislation to encourage volunteering that led to the establishment of the Corporation for National Community Service (1993) with its federally supported AmeriCorps volunteers and later the USA Freedom Corps (2002). These volunteerism initiatives, though, did not change the detrimental features of the collaboration system itself.

“Malfunctions and defects in the Social Assistance State [the welfare state] are the result of an inadequate understanding of the tasks proper to the State. Here again *the principle of subsidiarity* must be respected: a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. . . . [I]t would appear that needs are best understood and satisfied by people who are closest to them and who act as neighbours to those in need. It should be added that certain kinds of demands often call for a response which is not simply material but which is capable of perceiving the deeper human need. One thinks of the condition of refugees, immigrants, the elderly, the sick, and all those in circumstances which call for assistance, such as drug abusers: all these people can be helped effectively only by those who offer them genuine fraternal support, in addition to the necessary care.” — Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991).⁷³

In the mid-1990s, changes closer to the collaboration system were proposed by Senator Dan Coats (R—Indiana) in what he called the “Project for American Renewal.” This was a package of more than a dozen creative legislative proposals intended to invigorate civil society by enlisting government resources and influence.⁷⁴ Ideas included a new program of federal medical malpractice insurance to indemnify doctors and nurses who volunteered to help patients unable to pay for care, and federal demonstration grants for school districts that worked with community and faith groups to develop mentoring programs for students.

⁷² Salamon, *Partners in Public Service*, 153–55, 194–97; Bob Wineburg, *A Limited Partnership: The Politics of Religion, Welfare, and Social Service* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁷³ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), para. 48.

⁷⁴ Rep. John Kasich (R-Ohio) joined Sen. Coats when the package was introduced at a press conference. Coats and Kasich, *The Project for American Renewal* (no place, publisher, or date included), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Project_for_American_Renewal.pdf.

The centerpiece of the Project was a federal charity tax credit, a dollar-for-dollar reduction in federal income taxes to match donations to charities providing assistance to the poor. The tax credit was a way for the federal government to support civil society organizations, including intensively religious organizations, without enmeshing them in red tape or violating the “no establishment” requirement. The federal government would lose some income—income that could pay for its social assistance programs—but only if taxpayers instead donated that money specifically to poverty-fighting nongovernmental organizations. This was not Reagan’s cut in federal social spending that undermined civil society by reducing the income of nonprofits that collaborated with government. And it was not Bush’s—innovative and effective—combination of the federal bully pulpit and federal expenditures to expand the capacity and the activity of private organizations, regarded as important sources of social good but distinct from the government’s own social assistance system. The Coats poverty tax credit would use the government’s tax system itself to expand the income available to civil society organizations, enabling them to expand their services.

However, for all the good such a targeted tax credit might accomplish, it was not a reform of the government’s own collaboration system. If the distinctive programs of civil society organizations were to become part of the government’s social assistance system, then the practices and rules of the government collaboration system itself needed to be radically changed. Nonprofits scholars Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier said that the challenge was “to fashion cooperation with the state in a way that protects the nonprofit sector from surrendering its basic autonomy and thus allows it to function as a true partner with the state and not simply as an ‘agent’ or ‘vendor.’”⁷⁵

That transformation, the bending of the arc—the default style of government policies and practices— required two tracks of reform. The **policies and practices of the funding system**—the grants system⁷⁶—needed to be changed. Financial awards needed to be smaller, with grantees given more responsibility for how a program would be carried out; the load of requirements and paperwork had to be lightened; funding announcements needed to be made more accessible; and

⁷⁵ Salamon and Anheier, *The Emerging Nonprofit Sector*, 121.

⁷⁶ Cf. the concept of the “contracting regime” discussed in Smith and Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire*, 43–45.

so on. And the **church-state rules** that excluded altogether organizations of pronounced religious character or that hampered their participation needed to be reversed—a fundamental but challenging reform, given constitutional requirements, including the need to protect the rights of beneficiaries.⁷⁷

In short, in order for civil society organizations, in their distinctiveness, to be able to participate in the government system of paying private organizations to provide social assistance, that system needed to be changed to become hospitable to the qualities and capacities, the modes of operating and ways of serving, of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and houses of worship.⁷⁸

For a full partnership between government and civil society, even more innovation is required than such essential changes to the funding rules and practices. Laws and regulations should be reworked, as needed, to better protect the distinctive characteristics and practices of faith-based

⁷⁷ The necessity of two different types of reform—not only changes in government policies and practices but also in the church-state rules that govern government funding of social services—is an immediate indication that the faith-based initiative was distinct from, although it shared some aspirations and reform goals with, the Clinton administration’s reinventing government initiative, which was headed by Vice President Al Gore. For a brief overview of that latter initiative, see Charles S. Clark, “Reinventing Government—Two Decades Later,” *Government Executive*, April 26, 2013, <https://www.govexec.com/management/2013/04/what-reinvention-wrought/62836/>.

⁷⁸ John J. DiIulio Jr. and Lester Salamon, among others, while urging changes in government rules and practices to enable more extensive collaboration between government and nongovernmental organizations in the provision of social assistance, have also noted the dangers of such changes. These include less accountability to the legislators and appropriators who authorized the assistance by those delivering it, and increased managerial challenges on the part of government officials. DiIulio has termed the relationship “government by proxy” and “third-party government” and has issued a call to “bring back the bureaucrats” (John J. DiIulio Jr., *Bring Back the Bureaucrats: Why More Federal Workers Will Lead to Better (and Smaller!) Government* [West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014]). Salamon notes the challenges in his *Partners in Public Service* and many other places. Problems as well as gains that occur when government direction is relaxed in order to accommodate the distinctive practices of faith-based organizations are illuminated in the accounts of social work scholar and practitioner Bob Wineburg in his *A Limited Partnership* and his *Faith-Based Inefficiency: The Follies of Bush’s Initiatives* (Wesport, CT: Praeger 2007). In Lester M. Salamon, ed., *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), Salamon and his colleagues examine in detail such challenges and propose ways that government can continue to play its rightful roles. Why go down this path despite the challenges? Only when government becomes less prescriptive and domineering in collaborating can private organizations make their unique contributions, contributions that are marked by their nongovernmental characteristics such as religion, personalization, localism, rapid innovation, and personal relationships. We can see this dynamic of less government control making it possible for the government to obtain more of what it seeks not only in the faith-based initiative but also in the school choice movement and charter schools, and in efforts in defense procurement and cybersecurity to tap cutting-edge innovations.

and community-based organizations; charitable giving should be incentivized, as Senator Coats had proposed; volunteering ought to be encouraged through initiatives such as those of the first President Bush; government resources should be used to strengthen the organizational capacity of civil society organizations; and more. Such changes were made, to varying degrees, over time. But they were no substitute for fundamentally reforming the collaboration system itself.

In their 1977 essay, *To Empower People*, social philosophers Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, noting broad popular support for government social programs combined with disdain for bureaucracy, proposed that government policy should aim to “protect and foster” civil society organizations (“mediating structures”) and, where possible, “utilize [them] for the realization of social purposes.” Revisiting the essay in the mid-1990s, Berger and Neuhaus wrote that metastasizing government regulation, which is especially heavy if government funding is involved, was turning nonprofit organizations that collaborated with government into replicas of government, no longer able to make their distinctive contributions in social assistance. Collaboration could be a positive policy, they said—but only after the implementation of statutory and regulatory reforms that would “create a protective umbrella” over the faith-based and community-based organizations.⁷⁹

Such dramatic reform to the system itself would only come later: first, with the enactment of the Charitable Choice provision in 1996, and second, in 2001, with the creation of new offices within the White House and in various federal agencies, offices charged with the mission of educating federal officials about the new church-state rules and monitoring compliance with them, proposing pilot projects, pressing reforms to grantmaking, and expanding outreach.

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⁷⁹ Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1996). The original text is reprinted on pp. 157–208; their later reflections are on pp. 145–54.