

specific lessons about how individuals saw themselves in relation to the electorate; how the letters reflected trends in the mass media; how people reacted to the style of the chats rather than the substance.

These methodological issues aside, Ryfe has written a provocative and interesting analysis of presidential communication strategies. It is original in its approach, and many political scientists will find it a refreshing change. The major criticism is that the empirical sections do not always meet the expectations of contemporary political science methodology. To a rhetorician this is not a flaw—indeed, it might be a virtue.

Together, these three books paint a complex portrait of presidential power and behavior. They suggest a continued vibrancy in the subfield, which remains open to a broad range of approaches.

Charitable Choice at Work: Evaluating Faith-Based Job Programs in the States.

By Sheila Seuss Kennedy and Wolfgang Bielefeld. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. 248p. \$44.95 cloth, \$26.95 paper.

Faith, Hope, and Jobs: Welfare-to-Work in Los Angeles.

By Stephen V. Monsma and J. Christopher Soper. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. 240p. \$44.95 cloth, \$26.95 paper.
DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071836

— Jo Renee Formicola, *Seton Hall University*

In 1996, the Republican-controlled Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, a law designed to reform the prevailing welfare system. Although Section 104, known as the Charitable Choice Provision, allowed religious and faith-based organizations to compete for federal funding for social services, little was done to create the specific means by which this could be implemented. No surprise, then, that one of the first actions of the new President, George W. Bush, was to sign two Executive Orders in 2001 that established such a mechanism: the Faith-Based Initiative.

The president's directives instituted the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and similar centers at the Departments of Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. The Faith-Based Initiative, then, represented a major policy shift: a way for the president to carry out "compassionate conservatism." It was intended to level the playing field for religious organizations that would now be encouraged to apply for government contracts to pay for the charitable social services that they could provide.

The Congress attempted to institutionalize the Faith-Based Initiative for the next two years through the introduction of the Community Solutions Act in the House and the CARE Act in the Senate, but both bills died on the floors of their respective chambers. Undeterred, the

president continued to establish faith-based centers by separate Executive Orders in the Department of Agriculture, the Agency for International Development, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In 2002, he established the USA Freedom Corps, a White House agency that brought together the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps, the Senior Corps, the Peace Corps, and the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Thus, as the Faith-Based Initiative expanded into an increasing number of government agencies, state offices were created as well to find the means to qualify for funds and to experiment with ways to implement the policy. Thus, a major bureaucracy emerged and billions of federal dollars were expended for the initiative without explicit congressional support and constitutional concerns.

The works of Sheila Seuss Kennedy and Wolfgang Bielefeld and of Stephen Monsma and J. Christopher Soper are critical attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of faith-based organizations (FBOs) that have been receiving federal funding over the last six years, and both books make policy recommendations about that support. Kennedy and Bielefeld look at six research questions. Are there differences in implementing the faith-based initiative in different states? What are the distinctive characteristics of FBOs? What organizational characteristics and management capacities correlate with effectiveness? What are the public management challenges of faith-based contracting? Is there a difference in performance efficacy between faith-based and secular services? How accountable are public managers and contractors?

The tasks of the Kennedy and Bielefeld study were formidable. They reported that it was difficult to find reliable data, to merge legal and social science methodologies, and to define a "faith-based organization." Additionally, they recognized the need to focus on limited aspects of the Faith-Based Initiative; thus, their investigation covered only job training and placement agencies. Finally, the authors realized that they could only study these two areas of funding in a sample of states. Therefore, they chose Massachusetts, Indiana and North Carolina on the basis of their diverse political cultures, religions, and demographics.

Their findings are mixed. Kennedy and Bielefeld's data show that implementation approaches for the Faith-Based Initiative differed from state to state due to political culture, state-level politics, and fiscal difficulties. Within that context, the authors were able to conclude that very little has changed on the ground with regard to job training and placement agencies. The expected "armies of compassion," or volunteers who would provide such social services that the president envisioned, never really materialized. What they were able to conclude, however, is that "faith based and secular providers placed clients in jobs at essentially the same rates, and that those jobs paid similar hourly

wages” (p. 139). They conclude, perhaps even more importantly though, that the policy debate should be refocused on data rather than discourse, and reframed, in part, on accountability and an investigation of capacity building rather than outcomes.

Enter Monsma and Soper, whose study attempts to gather data about the support systems that can create successful faith-based social services. Their emphasis is on the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs in Los Angeles County, a study which is designed to measure faith-based social service programs versus government and for-profit programs.

The problems in this study were basic, too, just as they were in the Kennedy and Bielefeld book. Monsma and Soper immediately ran into the quandary of how to define and operationalize “effectiveness” and how to identify the client base that they wanted to study. In order to overcome these problems, they decided to exclude the question of organizational effectiveness and deal, instead, with program outcomes. As a result, they measured program goals and objectives rather than outputs—in essence, they looked at capacity building. The systems that could enable employment success included language and education attainments, vocational skills, attitudinal and behavior changes, and the development of social capital.

The findings of this study are complex. The data show that for-profit agencies had the best record in terms of their program goals. They found more and better jobs at higher wages for their clients, and had the highest rate of clients who achieved economic self-sufficiency. They emphasized job skills, training, internship elements, and the profit motive. However, faith-based organizations, according to Monsma and Soper, were more interested in providing “holistic” services—and did better at providing hope and optimism, fostering program completion, and developing social capital. They found that FBOs outperformed their counterparts in these areas despite less financing, facilities, and staffing, even though they placed their clients in the lowest-paying jobs. Government agencies, it is interesting to note, were less successful in finding jobs for their clients than either faith-based organizations or for-profits after 12 months, when basic variables such as race, gender, education, marital status, and dependent children were held constant (p. 134).

What do both these books tell us? Clearly, they show us how little *evidence* has been gathered thus far about the Faith-Based Initiative and how much more research needs to be done. They point out how diverse and limited the existing data are and how difficult it is to gather reliable information from faith-based agencies, many of which have not been required to compile and report statistics in the past. Further, they point out how complicated the task of gathering data is for researchers when disparate agency

goals are unclear and when transparency is part of a new way of doing business.

Both sets of authors also stressed the difficulty of operationalizing basic definitions, admitting that there are also no standards against which to measure effectiveness, outcomes, or outputs. The sheer numbers of offices and social agencies represent an infinite number of variables to study in staffing, purposes, clients, and delivery systems, as well as in levels of satisfaction, social capital, and intangibles. There is a pressing need to standardize definitions and to collect further data.

The significance of these limited studies, however, rests on the policy implications of their findings. Monsma and Soper conclude that there is merit in a fluid welfare-to-work policy, maintaining that their findings lead them to oppose a “one size fits all approach” to providing social services. They recommend the continued and increased government funding of all such efforts, including the faith-based ones. They support collaborative work among organizations and propose a pilot program to establish such cooperation.

Kennedy and Bielefeld raise constitutional concerns and policy caveats. In fact, they ask if Charitable Choice (in the guise of the Faith-Based Initiative) is simply a solution in search of a problem. They argue for integrating fragmented services at the community level and for improving communications and cooperation among the providers of social services. More importantly, they contend that “there is no reason—constitutional or prudential—that government should exclude (or favor) religious social service providers” (p. 180).

Both studies, then, take a pragmatic approach to the Faith-Based Initiative. They recognize that faith-based organizations have a role to play in providing social services and that in specific, limited situations they can do as well as government or other secular, for-profit providers. Kennedy and Bielefeld remain concerned about the problem of church–state separation for the federal funding of faith-based social services, and caution both public managers and faith-based operators to clarify their objectives and understand the pros and cons of doing business with the government. Monsma and Soper tend to see this involvement as yet another example of the increased partnership of government and nongovernmental agencies in the delivery of social welfare services. In the end, neither study definitively provides enough evidence to either justify or eliminate the continued existence of government funding for the Faith-Based Initiative. Rather, their strengths lie in the fact that they force the reader to take a rational instead of political or ideological approach in assessing the value of providing government funding to religious groups for charitable and social services. What they both do so very well is to remove the Faith-Based Initiative from the culture wars and to provide instead a sound—but limited—data-driven framework for its future policy evaluation.