Motivated by our different religious traditions, we believe that attitudes, priorities, and institutions can be changed to reflect a just and democratic use of the universe's bounty; we believe in the value of work that contributes to the common good; and in the healing influence of respect for the differences as well as the commonness of human experience.

Vol. 29, No. 4, 2005

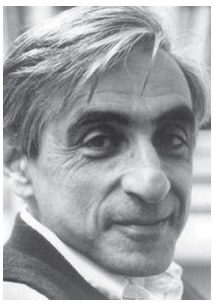
Inside . . .

Religious Socialism

THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

Politics and Religion in the United States

MICHAEL WALZER



The United States is the most religious country in the Western world, if we judge by the number of people who say they believe in God, the number who say they go to church regularly, and so on. Researchers doubt the accuracy of these self-reports, but they are all we have. Has the number of affirmative responses increased? Yes, but not by any great amount; relative to European believers and churchgoers, there is a dramatic gap, and the gap may have grown; it has certainly grown relative to our expectations about the secularizing tendencies of modernity—what we expected, after all, was a steady decline in both belief and ritual practice. The theory of secularization was for many years the common sense of liberals and leftists. Because the decline didn't happen, because the secularization process never reached its expected end, we really can't be in the post-secular age that is so much talked about in Europe. Looking at the strength of our churches in everyday American life, you would have to say that we never had a secular age.

But there has been a change in the last decades: evangelical, fundamentalist Protestants and conservative Catholics have been politically mobilized in ways that have significantly affected our politics. This sort of thing isn't entirely new: the campaign for Prohibition was a Christian social movement; the civil rights struggle was organized out of black Baptist churches and led by Baptist preachers. But the scale seems different now, and the range of issues is wider, for it includes virtually every aspect of family life: abortion, gay marriage, adoption by gay couples or by interfaith or interracial couples, the role of women in the home, the rights of parents over the education of their children—and there is probably more to come.

But in the struggle over these sorts of questions, it is hard to separate out the influence of religious fervor from a more generalized cultural conservatism—and both of these from anti-elite resentments. The cultural wars that began in the 1960s are widely viewed in the United States as an attack by the liberal vanguard on the rear guard of ordinary Americans. The vanguard thought that it was leading the country in a new direction and didn't notice how many people were not following. Still, religious preachers and evangelists have played a large part in providing an ideology of resistance to changes in social roles and practices. Perhaps another way of expressing their impor-

cont'd on page 3

co-editor's notes

An Oxymoron for our Times?

MAXINE PHILLIPS

There are many on the left (and certainly on the right) who think that the term "Religious Socialism" is as much of an oxymoron as "Scientific Socialism" or "Actually Existing Socialism." Has "socialism" as concept outlived its usefulness? Has "religion" reached a dead end despite the resurgence of so many fundamentalisms? Not surprisingly, we on the Religion and Socialism Commission of DSA still believe there is a role for religious socialists. It is, of course, much smaller than the role of a far larger group, that of progressive religious people. In what we hope is a trend, more and more of these people are finding their voice before it's completely drowned out by the religious right. As Michael Walzer makes clear in his essay on separation of church and state, it is the ability of myriad voices to contend in the public square that has led to the strength of religious belief in the United States. Jessica Van Denend writes of the way one seminary has decided to be sure that the students within its walls hear the voices of the poor, and William Droel reviews four books that look at strategies for progressive organizing, particularly among working-class and poor people. Herman Benson explores some promising ways for labor to make its voice heard, and Judith Deutsch urges the Democrats to speak up. Harvey Cox wonders whether belief is necessary, differentiating it from faith.

This was to be our special book review issue, the one in which our readers let us know what they've been reading and recommend some well-known as well as overlooked works to us. We got a good response, and if we had the money, you'd be reading all of them. Our budget doesn't allow more than 16 pages, so we'll publish the rest in the next issue. Yes, Virginia, there will be another issue of *Religious Socialism*. An extremely generous pledge from Executive Committee member Mark Finkel and an unexpected matching grant from Nancy Mottet Elbert, along with substantial gifts from other supporters, have assured our survival for the near future. Nevertheless, with postage costs rising and the pool of editorial labor shrinking, there will be some changes.

- Andrew Hammer will now be the sole editor, although John Cort and Maxine Phillips will not completely disengage.
- *RS* will publish twice a year rather than four times.
- We hope to mail *RS* first class so that it will reach you in a timely manner.
- Religion and Socialism Commission dues will go up to $10. Your dues help pay for our participation in the Global Left Dialogue, publication of *RS*, and our membership in the International League of Religious Socialists.

In addition, we hope to put *all* the back issues of *RS* online. It's an ambitious undertaking, and we need your help. We may have almost fifteen years' worth electronically, but that leaves almost fifteen years from the days of manual (and then electric) typewriters. If you have copies that go back to the late seventies and through the eighties, let us know what you have because we may need it to be scanned. If you're willing to type one issue for the archive so that it can be fully searchable, we would greatly appreciate it. Get in touch with the Archives Project by writing to Bryan Vosseler, 15 Mt. Vernon St., Salem, MA 01970, ECVBRY@aol.com

If you're in New York City on March 11, 2006, come to our panel discussion at the Global Left Dialogue and meet other people with an interest in the religious left. If you want to write for us, send manuscripts to Andrew Hammer, hammer@dsausa.org

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Politics & Religion/*continued from page 1*

tance is this: many working-class Americans who once took their political cues from their unions now take their cues from their churches.

At least with regard to the United States, the theory of secularization was simply wrong—which means that we live not in a post-secular age but in a post-secularization age. We need a new theory. Of course, it is also possible to adopt a new time frame for the old theory—as Marxist theoreticians have done again and again. And that may be the right thing to do in this case. After all, people live very comfortably with the technologies made possible by modern science, and so it seems right to ask, For how long can they sustain a pre-scientific worldview? I don't know the answer to that question, but I worry that cognitive dissonance has more staying power than we might think.

Assume that the worry is right and that there isn't going to be a demobilization of religion or a secularization of our society in the near future. How should we, on the American left, respond to a politicized fundamentalist Christianity? (That's our problem; politicized fundamentalist Islam is a problem in many parts of the world, including Europe; politicized fundamentalist Hinduism is a problem in India; politicized fundamentalist Judaism in Israel, and so on.) Separation is the standard American liberal response, first worked out in the eighteenth century by people who looked back to the politicized religions of the seventeenth century. I am a committed separationist. Is this a secular doctrine? In the United States, at least, it has been entirely compatible with a great flourishing of religion in civil society; indeed, I would argue that it is a key reason for the flourishing of religion. The United States has not experienced a fierce anti-clerical politics because we have kept our clerics focused on communion, salvation, and good works. And we have not experienced inter-religious conflict because no religion has had any hope of using political power against the others. So, for the sake of religion as well as democratic politics, we have to defend the "wall" between church and state. Here, as in other areas, left politics is defensive these days. And that's a hard politics; we need to be very clear about what we are defending.

Defending the Wall of Separation

The "wall" makes for an institutional separation, not a doctrinal one. We can insist on denying to all religions the coercive power of the state—which also means protecting all religions from the coercive power of the state. But we can't prevent citizens from drawing on their religious beliefs to shape their politics. There are liberal theorists who argue that the Rawlsian doctrine of "public reason" or its Habermasian equivalent, "ideal speech," excludes religious argument from the political arena. Neither Rawls nor Habermas believes this, but the argument is common nonetheless. On this view, no politicians or political activists should appeal to authoritative religious texts or make arguments that hang on religious dogma; they must always speak in universally accessible ways.

That strikes me as a dubious claim; indeed, I don't remember anyone on the left making it when Martin Luther King, Jr., insisted, for example, that we were all created in the image of God, or when abolitionists mobilized Protestant opinion against slavery, or when preachers of the social gospel provided support for progressive policies, or when the American Catholic bishops issued their critical statements about nuclear deterrence and economic justice. It isn't possible in a democratic society to censor political speech or to rule out citations of favorite texts. Maybe the design of the electoral system can push politicians toward more widely accessible arguments (this may be an argument against proportional representation, which encourages the mobilization of ethnic and religious communities). There is no other way, however, to narrow the range of legitimate argument. And, in any case, that's not what separation requires.

What we want to avoid is any establishment or entrenchment of a particular religion or of religion in general, in our public life. But we can't avoid the enactment of legislation inspired by particular religious doctrines, any more than we can avoid the enactment of legislation inspired by a particular ideology.

What we want to avoid is any establishment or entrenchment of a particular religion, or of religion in general, in our public life. But we can't avoid the enactment of legislation inspired by particular religious doctrines, any more than we can avoid the enactment of legislation inspired by a particular ideology. Democratic politics makes both these enactments possible. Consider the ideological analogy: a political party with, say, a socialist or laissez-faire ideology can win an election and enact its program. But it can't make its program into a public school catechism anymore than it can make the date of its founding into a state holiday. For those latter moves would represent the "establishment" of an ideology. Similarly, a Christian Democratic Party can win an election and enact its program, which may be inspired in part by religious doctrine, but it can't teach its doctrine in the public schools. It can't use its temporary hold on state power to repress or discriminate against other political parties with other doctrines. I don't mean to suggest an analogy between parties and churches, because parties are political from the beginning and churches are not. But it is useful to point out that we separate religious doctrine from state power in roughly the same way as we separate ideology from state power. We can protect ourselves against religious or ideological establishments, but we can't bar either religious or ideological speech from political debates.

No More "Village Atheists"

Instead, we have to join the debates. This is possible because even orthodox religious arguments—or scholastic philosophical arguments or sectarian ideological arguments—don't necessarily take the form of a simple *ipse dixit*: this is what God said, or Aristotle, or Marx. We will indeed be told what these notables said, but we are commonly also given some sense of why they were led to say it. And the arguments that supposedly appealed to them may, or may not, appeal to us—in any case we can engage with them. Specifically, we have to engage these days with religious arguments, and when we do that we will find that the politics of the "village atheist" is not a smart politics. Over the long span of history, it is almost certainly true that religious institutions have been a force for a cruel and reactionary politics, but religious values have as often inspired radicals and revolutionaries as conservatives.

Even when we imagine religious doctrine as a conservative force, we can recognize that some of the things it aims to conserve are indeed worth conserving. We have recently carried in *Dissent* magazine a series of articles arguing that leftists should embrace a politics of "family values"—in our own way, for our own reasons. The family is, after all, a little welfare state, where human beings first learn to make sacrifices for the sake of other people and to contribute to the common good. "Familism" can be a parochial doctrine, but it can also be the basis for an expanding solidarity—which of these two wins out will depend, in part, on how the family itself is supported by the larger society. We will have to disagree with many fundamentalist Protestants and conservative Catholics on, for example, issues of gender equality, but our disagreement is more likely to be respected, to get a hearing, if we are seen to be committed to fostering strong and coherent families. A leftist counter-culture that sets itself against the "bourgeois family" may look very radical—but it is more likely to be radical in an individualist and libertarian way than in a socialist way. The truth is that the values attached to family life by religious men and women, which include mutuality and commitment to others, overlap with our values in ways we should be ready to acknowledge—just as much as we are ready to criticize religious conceptions of patriarchal authority.

So there are agreements and disagreements here, and we have to express them openly, without the usual leftist sense of intellectual superiority and contempt for religious belief. But when we see an effort to establish religion, to use the power of the state to foster belief, then we have not only to disagree but to resist.

What Room for "Creationism"?

Here's a quick example from the American debate about teaching "creationism" and evolution in the public schools. A colleague of mine at the Institute for Advanced Study, a scientist, said that he didn't object at all to teaching the biblical story in the classroom, so long as students were also taught the story to which geologists and biologists are committed. After all, he said, scientists really don't have the faintest idea how life began. That is perhaps an exaggeration; if scientists don't know exactly what happened on the first day, they have pretty strong ideas about what didn't happen. Still, they live with a kind of uncertainty that creationists refuse: they know what they don't know. And that state of mind produces the tolerance that my colleague was displaying. I also see nothing wrong with teaching the biblical story in the public schools, but I would stress the necessary precedence of the scientific story—for a reason that might be persuasive even for religious believers. With some exceptions, all the believers that I know (or know about) drive cars, fly in airplanes, use computers, go to hospitals when they are sick, and enjoy the standard of living that modern science has made possible. So they implicitly accept the fact of science as a common good. And, therefore, it seems to me, they must accept that our children, all of them, need to understand how science works.

So, teach the book of Genesis as the creation story that most people in the Western world took to be the literal truth for many centuries—so long as you also teach, first, that the vast majority of scientists now give a different account and, second, that this account is the product of a certain method, a way of finding and using evidence, that has given us many other products of great value. It is critically important for the common good that our children be scientifically literate. And for the sake of that literacy, science has to be taught as a subject separate from religion, an approach to knowledge that has its own value and integrity. To refuse to do that—in the creationist case, to give scientific legitimacy to the biblical story—is to use the coercive power of the state to advance a religious agenda. And that is exactly what the doctrine of separation is meant to avoid.

In public institutions like schools, which exercise coercive power, religious causes cannot be advanced. But in public space more generally, in civil society, believers should be welcome and their arguments should be treated like anyone else's. There are, however, conditions on this welcome. Believers must accept the risks that all the rest of us accept in civil society: they may lose some of the arguments; they can't escape challenge and criticism; they can't drive their opponents out; they can't entrench themselves in public space (because nobody can do that). We should view these conditions as equally necessary for religion itself, which has prospered in the United States precisely because it is separated from coercive power, and for our common life as democratic citizens.

Michael Walzer is a political philosopher at the Institute for Advanced Study, author of numerous books, and co-editor of Dissent *magazine. This article was first given as a talk at a symposium in Italy sponsored by* Reset *magazine and has been published in Italian in* Reset.

The Poor with Us and in Us

JESSICA VAN DENEND

I came to Union Theological Seminary in the fall of 2003, and like a lot of my liberal Protestant cohorts, I thought that Christians could and should save the world through their social-justice programs. My application essays to Union contained phrases like "Christian responsibility toward the world," "learning how to serve the community," or "learning how to help people." I grew up in a fairly evangelical community, and it was almost as if I had replaced a more spiritual-based proselytizing with just-as-certain answers from the social gospel; those who did not dedicate themselves to "making the world better" were, not necessarily damned, but certainly not "good" Christians, either.

That mindset began to change during my first year at Union after I attended a planning session for a new program called the "Poverty Initiative." It was the brainchild of Liz Theoharis, a doctoral student at Union, who had come out of ten years of experience organizing with poor people in Philadelphia, and Paul Chapman, a long-time organizer and activist. They concluded, based on their work with the Employment Project, including a survey of seminaries across the country, that seminarians were not being adequately prepared for issues of economic injustice. The Poverty Initiative was an attempt to provide a model for a new way of learning, one that would provide the voices of the people immediately affected.

And yet, I still didn't understand the radical nature of what the Poverty Initiative would be. I didn't understand what it would mean to have the voices of the poor at the table. I still thought in terms of "doing good. It's hard to pinpoint when I finally caught on to the fact that the Poverty Initiative was not just a "nice idea" but a radical commitment to changing the way I thought about money and life.

Perhaps my changed understanding came through encounters with Willie Baptist, who arrived at Union the next fall, as the Poverty Initiative's scholar-in-residence, perhaps a first for a U.S. Protestant seminary. Willie, a self-identified formerly homeless, "poor" person, has fought for economic justice for over a quarter of a century. At age 17, he participated in the Watts Riots. In the eighties he became part of the National Union of the Homeless and today works with the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, a powerful, multi-racial organization of poor and homeless families advocating and agitating for social change. I have memories of him talking about the otherness of poverty and race in a psychology class, discussing the Panthers' organizing principles in tangent with the features of the Jesus movement for a New Testament class, and helping me with a paper on Gramsci for a social theory class.

On the other hand, perhaps the change in my outlook really occurred in the immersion class facilitated by Liz and Willie during the January intercession. We fifteen students spent two solid weeks learning more about the systematic issues behind poverty, thinking about the role of religious communities in building a social movement, and visiting with leaders of poor peoples' organizations in New York and beyond. To our conception of poverty as specifically racialized and urbanized, speakers posed the presence of poor whites, of issues connected with the growing use of immigrant day laborers. Countering our myths of the homeless as lazy, as drug-abusers, as stupid, we heard the stories of and met homeless men and women who are college educated—former lawyers and businessmen—who speak eloquently on social theory or political issues, and who are often working one or more jobs. We began to think not of how people are too lazy or ill or unfit to succeed in our society, but of how our society has wronged them.

Perhaps my internal change came when, after that class, I helped organize the Truth Commission hosted by the Poverty Initiative. The event, modeled after similar commissions in Peru and South Africa, tried to invert the traditional paradigms. We invited local preachers, teachers, academics, "experts,"—people all used to being keynote speakers—to attend, but to say nothing, to sit and listen. Leaders of grassroots and poor peoples' groups gave their "testimony" powerfully and eloquently as they shared their experiences their ideas on what the next steps might be. It has only been a couple of months since the event, but there are some signs of change – churches and religious leaders becoming more involved in advocacy movements, a flourishing of student-initiated projects at Union on a variety of related topics, and most important, an increase in relationships and conversations among people who don't always get to talk to each other—students, professors, professionals, church leaders, and leaders of poor peoples' organizations.

Perhaps conversion is something that happens again and again. Although the Poverty Initiative hopes to keep pressing for further institutional commitment, Union has already been gracious in finding ways for people to participate in classes for free, in granting office space in which meetings can occur and work can take place, and in finding space in the course schedule. There have been more classes offered, led by poor peoples' groups, such as Picture the Homeless or the Immokalee Workers, the worker organization of largely Latino, Haitian, and Mayan Indian immigrants in Florida that just won a major settlement from the owners of Taco Bell. There have been new student-led task forces focusing on such issues as prisons, immigration, arts and culture, the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last years. There have been sponsored exhibitions of art by homeless or formerly homeless artists. And there has been an increased presence at Union of people from the community, attending or leading worship, talking with students, enrolling

in classes, just being around.

And so perhaps the process is also communal. The most amazing thing about this work has been the ways in which it has rejuvenated and strengthened our own specific vocation, be it ministerial, academic, political, artistic, or focused in another way. Indeed, some of the most productive and creative processes have occurred in departments that seem unlikely to benefit from a relationship with poor people. Professor Hal Taussig, who studies the New Testament time period, is working on a book linking some of the advocacy work that Picture the Homeless is doing around the conditions of burial in Potter's Field for the indigent or unidentified dead and the funeral associations that existed during the Roman Empire.

We forget that those of us making six or more digits can be plagued by what we are lacking, can live in fear of the uncertainty of our own status, can be enslaved by the need to accumulate.

But if I had to delineate the exact moment of "conversion," when I began a new way of looking at the world, it was probably at a panel discussion the Poverty Initiative led last spring, entitled "Who is Poor?" This discussion was about the artificiality and the social construction of the gulf placed between "ourselves" and "the poor." We define the world in such a way so that we can close our eyes to the poverty already entrenched, albeit hidden, in our own churches, our own neighborhoods, our own selves. We forget that within the pews of the wealthiest, most politically connected, most ornate churches are people who are poor, homeless, without health insurance, fighting to pay their next bill. We forget that those of us making six or more digits can be plagued by what we are lacking, can live in fear of the uncertainty of our own status, can be enslaved by the need to accumulate.

An organizer from Poor People United asked listeners to raise their hands if they were on any kind of government assistance. Several did so. He then asked any students who had taken out federal loans to add their hands to the mix. Several more hands went up. That night, I saw everything in a new light.

When we listen to the stories of the poor, we realize that it is our lives that are being talked about, it is our liberation that is linked to theirs. We are bound up in this mess with each other. We *all* live, as Willie Baptist points out, in a world characterized by "increasing abandonment in the midst of increasing abundance." The divide then is not that of blue state or red state, of poor or rich, or of oppressed or oppressor in any clear-cut way. The divide is, rather, between those who recognize the problem of poverty as one that is connected to their lives and those who think they can go on operating independently, bestowing their money and solutions from above.

Jessica Van Denend is a candidate for a Master of Divinity degree in June 2006 from Union Theological Seminary, New York City, and a Poverty Initiative Student Member. *For more information about the groups mentioned in the article, visit www.nationalhomeless.org/; www.picturethehomeless.org; www.ciw-online.org; www.poorpeopleunited.org; and www.povertyinitiative.org*

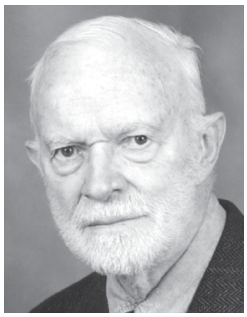
If you are missing recent issues, please be in touch with Maxine Phillips (see address on p. 2). We've had problems with stick-on labels that don't stick. Also, if you're attending a conference or meeting where you could use sample copies to enlist new subscribrs, let us know and we'll send them for the cost of postage.

When Jesus Came to Harvard and Ratzinger to the Papacy

When Jesus Came to Harvard: Making Moral Choices Today

by Harvey Cox
Houghton, Mifflin, 2004, 338 pp. $26

JOHN C. CORT



When I was doing the research for this review, I spent four years at Harvard. Granted, that was seventy-some years ago, but somehow I knew—don't ask me how—that one day I would have to review a book by Harvey Cox about Jesus coming to Harvard.

So I can testify that Harvey is wrong. Jesus came to Harvard long before Harvey started teaching a course entitled "Jesus and the Moral Love." As it says in the Gospel, he stood at the door and knocked. The trouble was, they wouldn't let him in. For example, the big introductory course in philosophy jumped all the way from Aristotle to Descartes, a 2,000-year jump, during which, Harvard told us, there is no philosophy worth mentioning. Augustine? Aquinas? Bonaventure? Bellarmine? Poor Catholic trash. Don't bother.

True, Jesus did find a little side door and sneaked in from time to time. Over in the history department, there was Charlie Taylor's course on the "Intellectual History of the middle Ages." In the government department, there was C.H. McElwain's course. I met Jesus in my tutor's study in Dunster House, and was converted on the spot.

Graduates Behaving Badly

In 1982, the Harvard faculty decided that too many Harvard graduates were behaving badly out in the world, and maybe Harvard should do something to correct that. They decreed that every undergraduate should henceforth take at least one course in moral reasoning, and Harvey's course was one option.

I attended one of the sessions. There were about 900 students present. This was partly because Harvey is an excellent lecturer. But it is also testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ, then and now, still retains enough appeal to pack them in like any rock star when he is vividly portrayed, as Harvey was able to do. Harvey breaks up the portrait into Jesus stories with catchy titles like "Picking Just the Right Woman," "Riffing on Simeon," "The Crooked CEO and the Spoiled Brat." He is respectful of the gospel text and makes no obnoxious effort to prove that the evangelists imposed their own biases retroactively onto Jesus, making him in their own image rather than what he really was; namely, a much more liberal, strictly human character.

Is this replay of Harvey's course good reading and highly recommended? Where does Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI fit in? By contrast? Not really. By similarity? Hardly. He fits in because I seemed to detect a slight movement in Harvey Cox's more traditional orthodoxy represented by Ratzinger/Benedict. Because Harvey is still one of the most popular liberal theologians of our time, this seemed to me to be a potentially significant development.

Respect for the Gospel Text

Perhaps I was wrong. On the negative side is Harvey's fixation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which appears again in this book. Bonhoeffer was a saintly martyr, a Protestant minister who was hanged in a Nazi prison for his resistance to Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer's "religion-less interpretation of Christianity" has always struck me as the most oxymoronic of contradictions.

On the positive side is the aforementioned respect for the gospel text and a willingness to let his students take a strictly religious interpretation of Christianity. For example, his chapter on "The Easter Story" has elements of ambiguity, but at least concedes that the Gospel writers are "describing something that the disciples believed was both utterly real and unique."

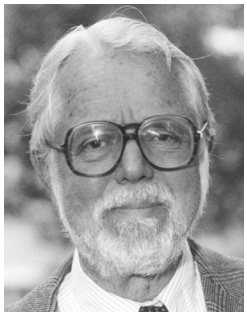
In short, I see in Harvey's new book a glimmer of the ancient debates between the Jesus of Matthew 25, what Gregory the Great called the Works of Justice rather than Mercy, and the Jesus of Mark 16 ("Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned"), between the Epistle of James ("Faith without works is dead") and Paul in Galatians ("Only by faith in Jesus Christ is a man made holy in God's sight. No observance of the law can achieve

this"), an anti-James bias that Martin Luther shared.

In modern times, on the Protestant side, we have Karl Barth vs. Reinhold Niebuhr, and even more so, Barth vs. Paul Tillich. And we have Cox vs. Billy Graham et al. On the Catholic side we have Gustavo Guttierez and Leonardo Boff vs. Ratzinger/ Benedict. None of these alleged oppositions is totally clear-cut, especially when viewed in light of the entire record, but there is some truth in them.

How much truth, we shall leave to Harvey to elucidate.

Harvey Cox Responds



John Cort's customary admixture of friendliness and feistiness always seems to evoke a reply, even at times against my better judgment. I leave it to readers to evaluate his comparison between me and Pope Benedict XVI. Instead, I would like to make one more attempt to explain to John, and to any reader who might want to tune in, why I still think Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with his "non-religious" interpretation of the gospel, remains a significant figure in Christian thought.

Is Christianity a "religion"? Of course it is, at least in our present epoch.

But I am still fascinated by those theologians, like Bonhoeffer, who ask us to imagine what form the message of Jesus might assume if , in the course of evolution, religion as we now define it did disappear.

Could there be such a thing as what Bonhoeffer called "a non-religious interpretation of the Gospel"? Is it possible that religion, as he also once wrote, might be the "outer garb" of the reality Jesus taught and demonstrated?

Bonhoeffer never had the opportunity to formulate an answer to his own questions. As a conspirator in the plot to assassinate Hitler, which misfired so tragically on July 20, 1944, he was hanged by the Gestapo just before the concentration camp in which he was being held was liberated by the advancing American army.

The Era of Peace and Plenty

Now that we live in a time of what some see as "resurgent" religions, and secularization appears to be in decline, his query appears somewhat moot. Still, I have never been able to let go of his question. I am convinced that when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, he had something far more ample and comprehensive than some alternative "religious" orientation in mind. He was referring to what Jews had called the *malkuth Yahweh*, the coming era of peace and plenty that includes the full sweep of liberated human living. He meant a utopia infinitely more far-reaching than any of the ones the "Utopian" writers like Tommaso Campanella or Thomas More tried to describe.

The Bible itself even hints at this reality-beyond-religion. There is no word for "religion" in Old Testament Hebrew. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation describes the heavenly city, which is to appear on earth, as one in which "there is no temple," presumably because, as the same text says, the Spirit of God pervades everything so that no separate "spiritual" or religious sphere is required.

I appreciate this insight for a number of reasons, but it attracts me mainly because it means that in some important sense one does not have to be "religious" in order to be a Christian or to be a follower or friend of Jesus. It also coheres well with my conviction that the words "belief" and "believer" are ultimately of limited usefulness in matters of faith.

Bishop José-Maria Martini, the now retired Roman Catholic Cardinal of Milan (once considered a credible successor to John Paul II) invited me to address an annual meeting he sponsors designed especially for what Europeans call "non-believers," of whom there are many in his highly style-conscious, sparkling, and lavishly prosperous city.

In welcoming the crowd that assembled for the occasion in a large public hall, the bishop told them he thought that the name of the event was misleading. He said he did not think the world could be divided between believers and non-believers, but that each of us is a bit of each, including himself. It was a courageous avowal for a Roman Catholic cardinal to make.

But he was exactly right. I think there must always be a place for an element of doubt and uncertainty in faith. Otherwise it is not faith. And I know many "non-believers" who have told me they often have doubts about their non-belief. Also, by not insisting so strenuously on the religious garb of the Christian message, we can more easily form alliances with "non-believers" who share our political and moral vision.

A New Stage

We may be entering a new stage in Christian history. This admixture of belief and doubt is no longer an exception. It is becoming a principal expression of faith in our time. I think of one of my favorite writers, my fellow New Englander Herman Melville, who both foresaw this stage and personally embodied it. Nathaniel Hawthorne, his close friend, once wrote about Melville in his notebook:

> It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I have known him. And probably long before—in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts. . . .He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous to try to do one or the other.

The editor of the essay from which the above quotation is taken goes on to observe,

> There can indeed be no Christian faith worthy of the name

(unless it be among the cherubim and seraphim) without this struggle between belief and unbelief, and there can be no true human sympathy without it.

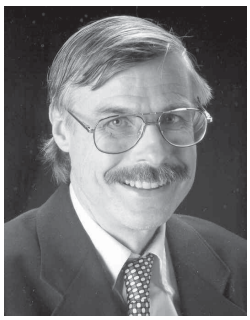
Jack Miles, the widely respected Christian scholar and writer, once described himself as a "practicing Christian, but not necessarily a believing one." His statement, which may sound odd to some, makes perfect sense to me. Belief is not the same as faith. Belief hovers near the upper, cognitive stratum of the self. It can come and go. It can be strong one day, weak the next. But faith locates itself in a deeper dimension. It is really a matter of fundamental life orientation. The early Christians spoke of their faith as the "way." But in its journey through the Greco-Roman cultural landscape, Christianity became increasingly identified with a set of beliefs that were then organized into creeds. This happened because some Christians felt the need to distinguish themselves sharply from those around them and from those among them who—they thought—were getting the message wrong. But it did not have to happen that way, and it may well be that Christianity has emphasized "belief" entirely too much, and is now transmuting itself into a stage that is "beyond belief." The biblical text for this era might turn out to be the words spoken to Jesus by the distraught father of the young man possessed by the demon: "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

It is here that the newly emerging conversation among the traditions may especially benefit mine. If historically Christianity has over-emphasized "belief," it is a genuine strength of some of the other traditions that many of them do not. But this does not mean that we as Christians should merely discard our creeds. Rather, in future years we should understand them in a more mature way. We should appreciate them not as fences to separate us from other people, but as valiant attempts on the part of some Christians at certain specific moments in history to rethink their faith in the light of radically new cultural environments. However, we too, now find ourselves in yet another new environment. We are entering an age of unprecedented religious interaction and a global world torn by hunger, injustice, and the appalling threat of nuclear catastrophe. But it is also a world bursting with fresh promise in which the gospel of Jesus has never been more relevant.

John Cort is the founder and a longtime editor of Religious Socialism *as well as author of* Christian Socialism. *Harvey Cox wrote* The Secular City *and many other books, including* The Seduction of the Spirit*, which was nominated for the National Book Award. He is a professor of theology at Harvard Divinity School and a contributing editor to* RS.

People Power

WILLIAM DROEL



About 3,500 parishes and congregations in this country pay dues to one or another of some 135 faith-based community organizations. Each organization—with a few exceptions—is affiliated with one of four national networks. The largest and oldest of these networks is the Industrial Areas Foundation, founded in 1940 by Chicagoan Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) to assist churches and other mediating institutions to deal with the forces of urban-industrial life and changing racial or ethnic patterns.

"The IAF has evolved in a variety of ways," explains Paul Osterman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in *Gathering Power*. Yet the durability of Alinsky's basic ideas about leadership training makes the IAF a nearly incomparable institution in North American politics and church life, he says. Osterman, who admits he began his research "with virtually no appreciation of religion," details the IAF process of starting and renewing a community organization. Along the way he assesses the relationship between IAF and various types of churches.

The IAF is evenly disposed to all denominations and religions. Yet, for theological, organizational and demographic reasons, Osterman finds a particularly beneficial fit between IAF-style

leadership training and Catholic parishes—at least in Texas, where Osterman did most of his research. Osterman, who over the months found himself "marveling at the impact" of religion, tells how some Catholic parishes use the IAF process among Mexican Americans to combine small-group faith sharing with an outward concern for sanitation, employment, and housing in the *colonias*. The Mexican-American leaders believe that the two prongs of this process serve the charismatic impulses of their people while grounding them in Catholic social doctrine.

Edward Chambers is the current director of the Chicago-based IAF. He took over when Alinsky died unexpectedly in 1972. Chambers came to prominence in the IAF over 40 years ago in the wake of a race riot in Rochester, New York. The riot began as a Friday evening altercation on Joseph Avenue, July 24, 1964. Over the next three days it spread to other streets and deep into the collective psyche of an otherwise peaceful and prosperous city. Four were killed in the riot, hundreds were injured, and many stores were looted or burned.

Church leaders responded to that 1964 riot in a remarkable way. They did not direct their attention to those displaced by the destroyed apartments and stores. They did not focus on getting legal aid for those arrested during the riot. They didn't get caught up in paying "reparations for injustice," as was then occurring in some Protestant denominations in response to various "black manifestos" and assorted demands from charismatic leaders. Instead, beginning at Third Presbyterian Church and expanding to other church circles, the Rochester leaders tried to discover the riot's cause.

Insight on Black Rage

After reading *Crisis in Black and White* by Charles Silberman, the church leaders concluded that black rage was a consequence of exclusion from normal participation in civic life. This insight led the church leaders to contact Alinsky, inviting him to organize the excluded citizens of Rochester. Alinsky had by that time established two community organizations in Chicago and some citizens' groups in California. One of his Chicago groups (The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council) was mostly white; the other (The Woodlawn Organization) was mostly black.

In the months following the riot, black leaders in Rochester were not overly interested in the deliberations of the church leaders, now calling themselves the Rochester Board of Urban Ministry. The local newspaper and a radio station attacked Alinsky, predicting that he would only cause more rioting. Alinsky, sensing that the attack from the establishment only helped his credibility with blacks, fired back with outrageous quips about Rochester. He said it should really be called Smug Town; that it was "a Southern plantation moved north."

In March 1965 it was time to close the deal between Alinsky's IAF and the Board of Urban Ministry, which now included several black ministers. A meeting was arranged in Syracuse, New York, where Alinsky had another business appointment. In addition to detailing financial procedures and picking a name for the proposed organization (FIGHT), the Syracuse agenda included the introduction of Alinsky's on-site organizer. The unstated assumption was that Alinsky would assign a black assistant. Instead, he introduced IAF organizer Edward Chambers—a tall, 34-year old, mercurial, cigar-smoking, Irish-American Catholic.

Chambers had a little prior experience in Lackawanna, New York. As Chambers tells Studs Terkel in *Hope Dies Last*, he got interested in the root causes of urban problems through his association with Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement. He got his basic ideas about leadership training by visiting the worker-priest movement in Belgium and France. The worker-priest model of peer ministry, sometimes called the Inquiry method, or the *observe-judge-act* model, was exported to the United States by way of the Young Christian Students, the Young Christian Workers, and the Christian Family Movement.

With meager resources, Chambers and company built a credible community organization in Rochester. Although quite controversial, FIGHT channeled black frustration into positive campaigns for job training, better housing, the delivery of social services, and more.

In *Roots for Radicals*, Chambers (with Michael Cowan) spells out what he has learned through his years with IAF, which now counts 54 community organizations in its network, including one each in Canada, Germany, and England.

Chief among the lessons is Chambers's conviction that community organizations cannot maintain their sharp edge without a skilled organizer who keeps a somewhat professional distance from the personalities, intrigues, and daily routine of the community organization and its city's ebbs and flows. Case in point: Once Chambers left FIGHT it dabbled with several laudable programs in education and housing but gradually lost its cutting-edge mission of assisting member churches to recruit and train competent leaders.

To form that pool of professional organizers, Chambers, with Richard Harmon, who organized in Buffalo, New York, changed the post-Alinsky IAF into a "seminary" for career organizers. In the Alinsky era the IAF was more like a fire station, responding to urban crises whenever the alarm sounded. In the 1960s and early 1970s the small IAF staff was always in crisis mode, which took a toll on the personal front.

Putting Aside the Bombast

Chambers was responsible for institutionalizing his mentor's ad hoc approach to community organization. Chambers had to put aside some of Alinsky's bombast (although not all of it) for the sake of long-term relationships with mayors, business executives, union officials, bishops, ministers, and hundreds of ordinary workers and citizens.

Today, all of the IAF organizations, at Chambers's insistence, are made up of different types of institutions—Catholic parishes, evangelical churches, synagogues, mosques, local labor

unions, health care agencies, and more. The "defining characteristics of IAF organizations are their plurality and inclusiveness," he writes.

Chambers's belief in inclusiveness is not a departure for the IAF, even though FIGHT was a mostly black organization. In *Roots for Radicals* Chambers describes his anger some 40 years ago when the black ministers from FIGHT played the race card—to use a contemporary phrase—in an appointment with Xerox executives. That behavior is an example of "how *not* to get a relationship," he admonished the ministers in the Xerox parking lot. FIGHT, he said, could not afford to make the same mistake in subsequent meetings with executives.

A few months later Chambers was in a similar situation, but this time with a community organization in Chicago that wanted to project a white character in a changing neighborhood. Hours before its founding convention, Chambers got a small black congregation to apply for membership. He knew the tension over admitting blacks could doom the organization. But, after some stalling, the credentials committee voted to make the new group inclusive.

Michael Gecan has been an IAF organizer for about 30 years, mostly in New York, with stints in Baltimore and Chicago. Through 12 short chapters in *Going Public* and in an interview in Studs Terkel's *Hope Dies Last*, Gecan details, for example, how the IAF teaches leaders to run a meeting and raise money. In addition to such skills training, the IAF also gives citizens a broad public philosophy that supplies sustaining fiber for involvement in their churches, unions, and civic groups. In headings, stories and comments, Gecan describes the IAF disciplines: the habit of reflection, the habit of meeting (without going to lots of meetings), the habit of withstanding tension, the habit of depolarizing tension at critical moments, and more.

Gecan explains why and how the IAF builds strategic, long-term relationships with public officials and business leaders. The IAF treats officials very respectfully, never fawning over them, but giving them credit when credit is due. In one of Gecan's best stories former New York mayor Ed Koch, despite his stubborn opposition to an IAF affordable housing initiative, is given a high place of honor (after a little private teasing) at a groundbreaking because—in the end—Koch cooperated just enough to make the project a success.

Not everyone understands the purpose of the IAF. These are not "how to" books. Opponents of IAF organizations will not learn secrets from them. The IAF is involved with all the major issues of the day: race relations, education, health care, welfare reform, housing, immigration, and much more. And yet the IAF is not, in a sense, primarily interested in any of these issues. Like a laser beam, the IAF focuses on potential leaders, revealing to them the public dimension of life that is innate to each human being. The IAF is different from hundreds of other activist groups in that the IAF principally teaches people about the joy and grandeur of citizenship and the public dimension of faith.

Of course, IAF leadership training can't be an abstraction about joy and grandeur. It has to be presented through what Chambers sometimes calls the IAF disciplines: "How to be an initiator rather than a reactor; how to listen to and affirm other people; how to distinguish between leaders and followers; ...how to develop realistic schedules; how to view and accept tension; how to live and grow with a process of dealing with issues rather than [solving] the particular issue or task...." Such social knowledge, gained through participation in an IAF organization, has many applications at work, in the family and inside a congregation.

"The personal growth and development of people is why we do what we do," Chambers sincerely says. "The first revolution is internal." Thus his *Roots for Radicals* is really a meditation in political philosophy or a text for spiritual reading.

On the other hand, an opponent of an IAF organization would be foolish to underestimate the organization's ability to influence the establishment. Because the roots of the IAF go so deep, its organizations consistently deliver on the issues.

The title of Chambers's book, *Roots for Radicals*, is meant to suggest a trilogy with two of Alinsky's books: *Reveille for Radicals* (Knopf Publishing, 1946, 1990) and *Rules for Radicals* (Knopf Publishing, 1971, 1990).

Chambers explains up front that he and today's IAF are not *radical* in the sense of *violent*. "Radical means going to the roots of the matter, and the roots of the spirit," he writes. The IAF is looking for people, especially young adults, who passionately "search for meaning and affirm community." In today's highly individualistic culture, those people are the radicals.

"The new instruments for public life," Chambers concludes, are not based "on technology or science but on communal habits of the heart." Those new instruments certainly include the 54 community organizations that Chambers and his IAF have founded.

There's plenty in these two books for those who believe their faith can make a difference in a pluralistic world. The essential ingredient to a church-based community organization, these books make clear, is the experienced organizer who can stay above the fray. The "relative scarcity" of such people, Osterman notes, is "the major constraint on the growth" of this model of public faith. Although the IAF organizers are paid better than in years past, their salaries are quite meager—even by the standards of the nonprofit sector. The whole church would be well served by attracting more young adults to the vocation of community organizer and then doing what is necessary to retain those who show an aptitude for this difficult and often delicate work.

William Droel is a pastoral associate at Sacred Heart Church in Palos Hills, Illinois. He is the author of Finding My Way in a Grace-Filled World*, Acta Publications, 2005.*

Getting Back in the Game and Staying in It

Left Out: How Liberals Helped Reelect George W. Bush

by Joshua Frank
Common Courage Press, 210 pp., $14.95

A Matter of Opinion

by Victor Navasky
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 464 pp. $27

JUDITH DEUTSCH

Joshua Frank's quick read describes a multitude of actions that have caused us to both be and to feel left out. Frank demonstrates very clearly that we can't rely on the Democratic Party to work for those things we know to be just, and that the working class knew in the last presidential election that it didn't matter who won. He says, "Progressives, leftists, libertarians, populists, and others must speak to the needs of the disenfranchised, the silent, the forgotten,"

Frank maintains that advocating a living wage and universal health care would get out the vote, and says, "The voice of the minority could one day be the voice of the majority. The key is to find a way to bring all those voices under the same tent with the same megaphone."

He shows that it is not good leaders who have historically brought about positive changes, but "progressive, grassroots movements, working together, creating and snowballing populous actions in times of conflict."

Even as Bush loses support at this time of continuing war and Katrina devastation, the odds against achieving justice in our nation often seem insurmountable. Perhaps Frank's book will give us the determination to do more than plod on.

Staying Connected

As an almost 58-year subscriber to the *Nation,* I looked forward to reading Victor S. Navasky's *A Matter of Opinion*, and I wasn't disappointed. It was delicious and often humorous reading, as Navasky told about his interactions with staff, writers, funders, and other colleagues, including the challenges and delights he faced throughout his years as editor, writer, and publisher. He acknowledges past mistakes and wonders whether his way on a number of occasions was the best.

But it was energizing to read his principles and to encounter the ways he strove to carry them out. Readers and editors of *Religous Socialism* will empathize with Navasky's belief in the importance and influence of small independent journals of opinion. And I believe that you will resonate with much of the worldview he described as his when he was being considered for the editorship of the *Nation* in 1977. Here are some excerpts:

> . . . a simplistic, absolutist view of the First Amendment . . . an unreconstructed integrationalist although I think *The Nation* is an appropriate forum for black nationalists and other views to be put forward and tested...afraid of multinationals...soft on old World Federalists...a profound presumption in favor of disarmament over armament . . . paranoid about nuclear weapons . . . worry . . . too much about automation and what the new technology has already done to our culture...all forms of electronic eavesdropping should be banned . . . many [of the programs of the Great Society] weren't really given a fair chance . . . an enduring sympathy for socialistic experiments, probably decentralized. . . .[p. 141]

Navasky also explains how he thought that a variety of views needed to be presented on some issues, but that generally he agreed with Heywood Broun that "Even an open mind needs to pull down the window at certain times or it becomes less a mind than a cave of the winds."

His pages on objectivity reminded me of how much I welcomed one of my undergraduate political science professor's stating his biases at the beginning of his courses, so we students would know where he was coming from. Navasky makes very clear that we are all biased, and that to proclaim objectivity is often to obfuscate.

However, even though I appreciate very much Navasky's clear exposition of some of Jürgen Habermas's concepts, and even though I agree with Habermas and Navasky that public discourse — reasoned argumentation — is what a democracy needs, I wonder where we are going to get it except when it emanates from publications such as the *Nation, Religious Socialism*, and *Dissent*.

Navasky provides a response to my wondering:

> The challenge is to persuade the public to come back to politics and cease to sit passively before a discussion conducted by experts and transcribed by journalists....Journals of opinion are not by themselves going to save the world, But they have been carrying on the conversation, arguing the world, for centuries. And opinion is of course not where the conversation stops. Opinions, it has been said, are to ideas as facts are to knowledge [and I, ever the optimist, might add, as knowledge is to wisdom]. Once the ideas are launched, these same journals make it possible to study, assimilate, illustrate, criticize, modify, and project them out into the culture. That's what the conversation is all about (p.416).

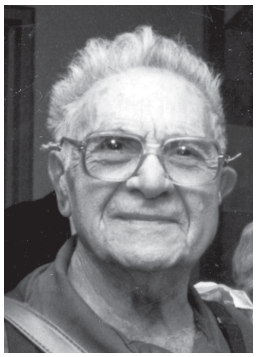
Judith Deutsch is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister who serves on the steering committee of the Religion and Socialism Commission of DSA.

Opening New Roads for Labor

The Blue Eagle at Work: Reclaiming Democratic Rights in the American Workplace
by Charles J. Morris
Cornell ILR Press, 310 pp., $35

Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below
by Vanessa Tait
South End Press, 272 pp., $20 paper

HERMAN BENSON



Two recent books suggest innovations in labor organizing, one through the courts and one through grassroots organizing.

Charles J. Morris looks to a creative interpretation of the law. The National Labor Relations Act, in section 9(a), provides that "representatives selected by a majority of employees in a bargaining unit shall be the exclusive representative for the purposes of collective bargaining of all employees in the bargaining unit." But what about those situations where no majority union has been selected, or even where a majority of the employees have voted to reject any union representation?

In 1990, law professor Clyde W. Summers wrote a short piece in the *Chicago-Kent Law Review* entitled, "Unions Without a Majority—a Black Hole." Where there is no majority representative, Summers insisted, the law clearly protects the right of unions that represent a minority to act on behalf of its own members, not to represent the majority but its own members. The "black hole," he argued, was the failure of the labor movement to demand that right and to exercise it, and the failure of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), in practice, to defend that right.

His theme was taken up briefly and unobtrusively by a few legal scholars, notably Alan Hyde, apparently without making much of an impact. But now, with a book-length treatment by law professor Charles Morris, Summers's 16-year-old law review piece commands attention.

Morris has produced a persuasive, closely reasoned work that is essentially a 230-page legal, moral, and practical brief in support of Summers, accompanied by 60 pages of bolstering citations and references in the form of notes.

Summers wrote that in 1935 "Congress proclaimed basic rights of American workers in the sweeping words of section 7 of the Wagner Act," which reads as follows:

> "Employees shall have the right to self organization, to form, join and assist labor organizations, to bargaining collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in other concerted activities, for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection."

This provision is reinforced by Section 8(1) which declares, "It shall be an unfair labor practice for an employer to interfere with or coerce employees in the exercise of their rights guaranteed by section 7."

The Law Includes Minorities

In the absence of a majority union with exclusive bargaining rights for all employees, Summers argued, the law gives a union representing a minority the right to act for its members and to seek bargaining rights to represent its members—not the majority, but only its own members. And he listed a whole series of practical measures that such a minority union could legally undertake to enforce its rights, including a strike, so long as it seeks to represent only its own members, not the majority.

What are the obligations of the employer? Summers wrote, "We have probably proceeded too long on the questionable assumption that the employer has no affirmative duty to bargaining with a non-majority union to now recognize that duty short of a statutory amendment."

In at least one respect, however, Morris exudes a conviction, even an enthusiasm, that goes beyond Summers. Morris agrees that new remedial legislation to impose upon employers the obligation of bargaining with minority unions is not likely. But he is convinced that the law's requirements are already textually so clear, and the arguments for them so persuasive, that new legislation is unnecessary. He concedes that it will not be easy to overcome employer hostility or to reverse the NLRB's presumption against minority union bargaining. But what he presents is no mere intellectual exercise. In his own words he offers what "is in effect, a procedural manual on how workers and unions can more efficiently reach the goal...."

In the early confrontations between unions and employers, Morris notes, it was common practice for unions to represent only their own members, especially when employers, resisting the union shop, sought to limit union power. In the early days of the New Deal, before the adoption of the Wagner Act, minority union bargaining was an accepted fact. Even after the adoption of the Wagner Act, the first union agreements with U.S. Steel and General Motors recognized the Auto Workers and the Steel Workers as representatives only of their members and no others. It was only later that the unions won the

exclusive right to represent all employees. Morris emphasizes that today, just as the in the thirties, wining the right to minority representation can be the first step toward wining the majority.

Piling Up the Evidence

He piles up the evidence: from the plain text of the law, from the record of congressional intent, from U.S. obligations under international law. He even takes it from the constitutional right to assembly.

Years of neglect, he argues, have caused the experiences of the past to be forgotten and left us with the prevailing assumption that only majority unions are entitled to collective bargaining rights, an assumption that is not backed, he says, by any case law. To reestablish minority rights he maps out a multipronged practical program of action.

He proposes that a union representing only a minority demand recognition by an employer as representative only for it own members. When the employer refuses, as is likely, the union files an unfair labor practice with the NLRB.

If the NLRB rejects the complaint, as is also likely, the union pickets the employer demanding recognition, always only for its own members. If the NLRB, at the behest of the employer, finds the union guilty of an unfair labor practice, the union can raise the issue in federal court by challenging the NLRB ruling.

To bring pressure on the NLRB and to help bring the whole issue to public attention, the labor movement, he suggests, can file a petition with the NLRB, backed by a public campaign, asking it to adopt a rule, substantially as follows:

> Where employees in an appropriate bargaining unit are not currently represented by a certified or recognized section 9(a) exclusive/majority labor organization, the employer, upon request, has a duty to bargain with a minority labor organization on behalf of the employees who are its members, but not on behalf of any other employees.

This book can be heavy stuff for the general reader. Much of it seems designed to persuade union leaders, labor lawyers, judges, and NLRB personnel. But it is an important book; these days, it can be a very important book. The labor movement is looking for new ways, new weapons to organize the unorganized. The SEIU has formed a Wal-Mart Workers Association to bring workers together in a hostile anti-union environment. The Communications Workers of America has organized groups of workers in non-union GE shops. Morris shows one way to break through the anti-union wall.

Another Avenue

Vanessa Tait presents another avenue for unions to follow, as she argues that poor peoples' organizations can revitalize the labor movement.

When I last saw a directory of social action groups, there must have been a thousand, maybe many more, of these local organizations all over the country. With so many groups campaigning in their communities for some measure of social justice and with some 16 million members still in the labor movement, the nagging question arises, how come this nation's politics keeps drifting to the rich and the right? Tait, a Ph.D. in sociology and a writer for Communications Workers of America Local 9119, doesn't address this question, but she does force us to recognize that these groups are out there fighting and that the cumulative effect of their activity, especially their militant activity, has powerfully affected the labor movement (or what she would call the "trade union" movement). The groups that engage her interest are those that have been led by former civil rights workers, New Leftists, and social radicals of all kinds. She demonstrates in dramatic, even inspiring, detail that they have induced the labor movement to pay attention to the needs of low-wage workers, minorities, immigrants, and working women. For those seriously involved in politics and labor, this book can supply a fuller view of what's going on in the world of social action.

But a word of caution. Out of all her impressive research and her extensive interviews with the leaders of these groups (and her contact has been with the leaders, not the mass of participants) the author constructs a confused theory, or philosophy, or mood of a "poor worker unionism" sharply distinguished from "trade unionism."

Poor worker unionism, in her view, is for the disinherited, for all who suffer. Trade unionism is for . . . but it is not clear for whom, except that it seems to be for those who don't suffer at all, or not as intensely. Poor workers unions, in her view, are part of the community, engage in demonstrations, and seek "social change," while trade unions are "business unions" that accommodate to the exploitive status quo. Sometimes she sees poor worker unionism as parallel to trade unionism, sometimes as hostile to it, and sometimes even as part of it.

A Cry from the Heart

Poor worker unionism, as she imagines it, has a universal quality, vague and shifting boundaries, and no limits. It does include super-exploited workers employed under dehumanizing conditions. As a concept, however, it also includes students demonstrating for summer jobs, women who seek payment of wages for running their household, welfare workers with grievances, community improvement campaigns, masses on a national march for immigrant rights, the 1963 March on Washington, civil rights battles, calls for black power, and so on and so on.

The author faults business-minded "trade unions" for not playing a leading role in most of these movements for justice. "Poor worker unionism" is an idea that welcomes every movement against every injustice, everywhere. As such, the concept is a cry from the heart, not a serious proposal. Tait takes these movements for the poor out of the closet and shows how widespread they are. That, in itself, is achievement enough. But we need not idealize them, as the author does, in order to appreciate their significance.

If you look at one square mile of working people's homes,

cont'd on page 15

LETTERS

Co-editor' Note: We received a larger than usual response to our last two issues as well as to John Cort's letter outlining the financial and staffing crisis at RS. Space constraints do not allow us to print them all or in full. We offer below a sampling and thank all who wrote, especially the many who urged us to continue. For more about the future of RS, read the co-editor's column on page 2.

On Same-Sex Marriage (Vol. 29, No.1)

What does the question of gay or lesbian relationships have to do with socialism? In asking this I am not objecting to the points of view expressed. . . .I subscribe to *Religious Socialism* to share with others regarding socialism, regarding democratic control and ownership of productive property, not to learn more about liberal issues like homosexuality, which I can gather from other publications on the left that I receive. . . .What we need is socialism, and this is different from pursuing the politics of inclusiveness, as much as that is needed on many fronts. Socialism itself concentrates on inclusion in the economic community (although it depends on political inclusion if its vision is to have any basis in law and its underlying theory of justice requires commitment to participation for each person in all essential aspects of community).

Stephen Charles Mott
Beverly, MA

The separation of church and state does not mean that any idea that has some religious foundation must be abandoned by the state or that we must attain all of our principles of civil organization without reference to religion. . . .

I cannot agree with a political compromise on this issue because the other side does not want a compromise. They don't just want civil unions! They want any suggestions that homosexuality is a sin to be considered hate speech. . . .Pro-homosexual speech will someday be demanded of all in the public schools. And finally, some brave preacher will be sued as they assault the last bastions of sin speech, the churches.

Harry James III
Somerville, NJ

Middle Ground on Abortion (Vol. 28, No. 4)

To the Editors:

No one should take a stand on the legality of abortion other than reluctantly. . . . . Someone committed to the values of one of the YHWH ideologies should, in giving priority to the life of the incubating fetus, also do so reluctantly. Hence my support and praise of my old religious friend John Cort's proposal of a reasonable compromise with socialists and other progressives who disagree with him on the abortion issue. By relinquishing ideological absolutism he has freed himself of the political blight of ideological certainty. More power to him in that! Bebe Anderson's "Response" makes a good point: a woman wanting an abortion should not be subjected to unreasonable delays that may jeopardize it.

Stanly Sultan
Roslindale, MA

On the Future of *Religious Socialism*

I think the time has come to celebrate the good *RS* has contributed to the struggle, recognize the impact it has made, and then let go. Here at the church, when the staff has to work very hard to keep a church program going, it is clear that the program is not meeting anyone's needs anymore. I believe in euthanasia for old church programs. Likewise, since *RS* constantly struggles to obtain articles and subscribers, I believe it is time to pull the plug on this journal in the faith that it will be resurrected when the time is right. Thank you for all the effort you have given toward its publication.

Rev. David M. Seymour
Conover, NC

Religious Socialism is not only uniquely precious to me, it is also incredibly valuable in the grand scheme of things. Thank you for your diligence and perseverance.

Nancy Mottet Elbert
Tacoma, WA

Ed. Note: *Many thanks to Nancy Mottet Elbert for her matching grant that has encouraged others to be extremely generous and has assured the near future of* Religious Socialism.

Book Reviews/*Roads for Labor continued from page 14*

poor or not, at the core of any metropolitan center, you can find more injustice, more exploitation, and more misery than can be overcome by any private organizations in a lifetime of devotion. Into this thicket of inequity come small bands of dedicated idealists inspired by visions of a more just society. They undertake the responsibility of fighting for the rights of those at the bottom, those who are ignored by other organizations that are unable or unwilling to undertake the burden, or even ignorant of the needs of those below.

These pioneers enter boldly where others will not tread; they lead a virtual guerrilla war against injustice, battling here, battling there, wherever opportunities open. They sometimes win; they often lose; even the victories often prove ephemeral. But even in defeat they can win a moral victory as society slowly is sensitized to the need. They help keep the nation's democracy alive.

Sometimes they make a major breakthrough. They demonstrate what no one realized before, that on this or that field of

cont'd on page 16

battle a long-term success is possible. The author tells the encouraging story of some of these victories. By now, organized labor (which Tait differentiates from "poor worker unionism") is learning that collaboration with experienced community organizers can be a powerful alliance in organizing low-paid workers, especially minorities and immigrants.

Oaks from ACORN

In New York, the American Federation of Teachers has joined with ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) in a drive to organize the state's 52,000 family childcare providers. ACORN is one of the oldest and largest community organizing groups, with chapters around the nation. The *New York Teacher* reports that, with the help of ACORN organizers, they "knocked on 21,656 doors in the city alone." The union paper adds, "In mounting this organizing drive, the [union] has . . . moved far beyond the bounds of traditional organizing." The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees has joined the campaign.

In an ambitious project, even more nontraditional than the childcare organizing drive, ACORN has joined with the United Food and Commercial Workers and the Service Employees in sponsoring the formation of the Wal-Mart Workers Association. The association's chief organizer, according to the account in the *New York Times*, is Wade Rathke, a top ACORN official.

When four of our major unions — the Teachers, AFSCME, SEIU, and the Food Workers — call upon ACORN for assistance, they confirm much of what Tait writes about. The community organizers have made their mark on the labor movement.

If we discount the author's heavy insistence upon erecting her facts into a kind of theory of a new "poor worker unionism," we can read her book for what it's worth: an account of how dedicated social action pioneers organize poor people in battles for justice, and how their efforts are helping to shape our labor movement. From that angle it is not only worth reading; it can even be inspiring.

Herman Benson is the founder of the Association for Union Democracy and a frequent contributor to Religious Socialism. *A version of the review of* The Blue Eagle at Work *also appeared in* Union Democracy Review.

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