

rs

religious socialism

THE JOURNAL FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH AND SOCIALISM

Now What?

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS AND YOU



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A short memory is the politician's best friend. Throw in a period of unprecedented malicious incompetence by that same politician's opponent, and it's almost like the public has no memory at all. Whatever the politician may have done in the past, his opponent was surely much worse, so it becomes possible to see his past record in a new context, as... well... the lesser of two evils.

It's safe to assume that most of the readers of this publication are deeply relieved if not outright happy about the Democrats' total reclamation of the Congress. But with two years left to go under the Bush Administration, the feeling for many of us is akin to being pleased that our house is no longer burning, only to discover that it has been burned beyond recognition.

Then later, just as with a house on fire, we recover a bit of memory, the memory of events before the fire, the fire that took every bit of our attention until it was dealt with. We recall that someone was smoking in the bedroom. But that's also when we ask ourselves why smoking was ever allowed in the house to begin with; who brought in the cigarettes? And weren't a lot of people smoking? To connect the analogy, that's when we trace the sequence of events back to their causes, which unfortunately includes the last Democratic Congress and the last Democratic president.

If it's true that power corrupts, it may or may not be true that the loss of power repairs corruption or restores the ideals of those who lost it. Al Gore sure seems to have undergone a mildly populist transformation as a result of the injustice he endured in 2000, cruelly delivered after a lifetime of doing everything according to the manual on *How To Become President*. But unlike Gore, most of the members of the new Democratic Congress, while losing control of that body, *have not lost their own seats* in the interim. Most of those members were in Congress when their party was in power, under a

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editor's notes



John C. Cort
1913 -2006

In recent years, he made a habit of telling everyone he spoke to that he was going to be gone soon. The problem was that he did it in that loud, provocative way that we all knew, which communicated to us how very much alive he still was. So when the news came that John Cort had indeed passed away, it still hit the soul suddenly if not the mind, and with that emptiness that one never really prepares for, no matter how clear the prognosis was.

At age 92, we knew that his end here was coming. It was even more apparent when he was diagnosed with lung cancer last fall. But everytime I saw him, even just a few weeks before he passed, he still could manage to prevent me from getting a word in edgewise when we spoke. He was still working on his latest book (which he finished), still planning articles for *RS* until almost his last moment.

John founded the Religion and Socialism Commission together with Gabriel Grasberg, another exceptionally wise soul. But it was John, the ex-newspaper man, who started *RS* and kept it running all these years, whether that was by doing it himself or by getting others of us to do it. It wasn't always a smooth ride. In 1998 I got a panicked call from John to attend an "emergency meeting" of the Commission to discuss laying down some political guidelines for the editorial team then in charge of the publication. I ended up editing the next issue of *RS*. That was John. He had a way of getting you to do things you had no intention of doing, had not the time to do, and simply could not do.

His life was one of deep commitment to social justice, stretching back to a time when socialism was still a fresh and fashionable idea. But John never was one to go along with the fashion. His paths crossed with legendary socialist figures like Eric Gill, Haywood Broun, and Norman Thomas, and he learned his activism in the 1930s at the feet of Dorothy Day while working at *The Catholic Worker*. Yet while John surrounded himself with socialists and leftists of one variety or another, he waited until the 1970s to decide that he himself was one. Once he did, however, he became faithfully wedded to the idea in a way that never wavered, landing on various points of opinion within the movement from its right to left wings. A man of strong principle, he often engaged in visceral arguments with those of us to his left. What many of us did not see were the greater number of arguments he had with those to his right.



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editor's notes

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He wrote in his 2003 book *Dreadful Conversions: The Making of a Catholic Socialist*: "I began to think that perhaps I had been a socialist all along, ever since I joined the CW in 1936, or better, since I got involved with the ACTU and realized that government also has a responsibility for the works of mercy and justice."

With what seemed to be an endless supply of energy, he began organizing socialists of faith within DSA. Later, after traveling throughout Europe meeting with religious socialists from the world's major socialist parties, he came across the international body that brought those national groups together (the ILRS), and was instrumental in bringing our own organization into that fold. After I became Secretary General of the ILRS in 2000, John would often contact me with his ideas about how religious socialists at the international level could do more to reach out to both our religious institutions and the faithful among our parties.

I thank God for him, and for the chance I had to tell him face to face how much he meant to me. On a handful of important issues, we completely disagreed

with each other. But when I made the enormously difficult transition from being a socialist in Britain to being one in the United States (an experience akin to finding yourself at the foot of a mountain after you started out halfway up to the peak), John Cort made that easier for me through his words and his mentoring. I shall always be grateful to him for that.

I still can't believe that there will not be another phone call, another letter from John. He had a way of making you feel that some things still mattered when you had come to the conclusion that perhaps they no longer did. His life spoke to the fact that they did. He worked for them, saw a few of them come to pass, and knew the art of the possible, even when taking on the battles within his own beloved Catholic Church.

He never gave up. That's a damned good way to live.

He is sorely missed.

John Cort is survived by his loving wife of 60 years, Helen Haye Cort, and his ten children.

—Andrew Hammer

Religious Socialists on DVD!

Enjoy the *Religious Socialism* Panel from the 2006 Global Left Forum at home or with friends. Hear Donna Schaper, Norm Faramelli, Juanita Webster, and Judy Deutsch on "What the Religious Left and Secular Left Have to Say to Each Other." DVD available for \$20 prepaid from:

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Now What?

cont'd from page 1

Democratic president who brought us NAFTA, welfare “reform,” and HMOs. Indeed, incoming Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi supported NAFTA, and in 1995 sponsored legislation allowing for the first privatization of a public park in the United States. Under Bush she voted for No Child Left Behind, and voted against funding for renewable energy in 2004. Picking out her bad votes among a majority of good ones may be unfair, but it’s important that we know who we’re dealing with in a Congress that is being presented to us as “new.”

As we breathe that sigh of relief over November’s election results, we need to take a more sobering look at what we can expect over the next two years, as we prepare to elect a Democratic presidential candidate in 2008. Getting rid of the GOP is only the first battle. Getting what we want from reluctant Democrats is the war. It could be more difficult than in previous years, as the mainstream media heralds what it sees as the return of the “moderate” voter to the Democratic party.

But some surprises could be in store as the Bush regime continues its downward spiral. Along with Bernie Sanders being the first socialist elected to the Senate, the newly-elected senator from Virginia, prodigal Reagan Democrat Jim Webb, immediately defied expectations on all sides with his op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, which he opened with the following:

“The most important—and unfortunately the least debated—issue in politics today is our society’s steady drift toward a class-based system, the likes of which we have not seen since the 19th century. America’s top tier has grown infinitely richer and more removed over the past 25 years. It is not unfair to say that they are literally living in a different country.”

Jim Webb is no socialist. When he starts talking like one, something is definitely brewing in the American collective consciousness. Whether his revived party can turn that brew into something potable for those of us on the bottom tiers is the big question for 2008 and beyond.

We’ve asked a few friends to give us their thoughts on the three things the new Congress should do right away. It will be interesting to see how quickly (if at all) their actions match up to our wish lists.

—Editor

Investigate the Misconduct of the Executive Branch



ROD RYON

[1] Congressional committees ought to look into Executive Branch conduct, hold hearings, issue subpoenas, and get testimony under oath right away. The issues are so serious—political interference in EPA regulatory decisions, pre-Iraq War use of intelligence, warrant-less surveillance, sanctions to torture, etc. I’d not rule out impeachment hearings. Democrats needn’t be risk averse, or feel a need to appease Republicans or the Democratic Right in these matters. They won because Executive misconduct got exposed, albeit too gradually and reluctantly by corporate dominated media. More exposés will rightly be understood to be responsible and in the national interest.

[2] They should press for getting out of Iraq—not just troop withdrawals but dismantling military bases and the Green zone installations. Nothing wrong with bring

Iran and Syria into the diplomatic process. We should be looking in this regard for an “Iraq Syndrome”—something akin to pressures of the 1970s (post-Vietnam) against new military interventions.

[3] Domestically, I like an economic populist approach—pressing ahead with raising the minimum wage, a new round of business regulatory legislation, rewriting Medicare prescription drug provisions. Some of these could be done right away and might jump start a dialogue on things more substantive such as universal health care.



Rod Ryon is Co-Chair of Religious Socialists.

So Much Needs To Be Done



REV. JUDY DEUTSCH

How can I or Congress focus on only three when so much needs to be done? I am reluctantly limiting myself to five, and I believe that all five should be done at once.

[1] Get the United States armed forces out of Iraq. This will be a mess whenever it happens, but the sooner it does, the fewer people will be killed and maimed. This is not to say that the United States should not give Iraqis money to rebuild the destruction we have caused. We should. *But we must not filter it through American companies that have already made or will make fortunes on our Iraqi debacle.*

**ESTABLISH
A
NATIONAL
UNIVERSAL
SINGLE
PAYER
HEALTH
CARE
SYSTEM**

[2] Revoke the law, signed on October 17, 2006, that allows the President to invoke martial law (including taking control of state-based National Guard units without the consent of governors) "to suppress public disorder."

[3] Establish a minimum wage that allows workers to live above the poverty level, and rises annually at least in proportion to the rise in the cost of living.

[4] Establish mandatory fair campaign financing

legislation that will not allow voluntary organizations or others to circumvent its intent.

[5] Establish a national universal single-payer health care system that will provide quality health care to every U.S. resident, using less money than our nation now spends.

Judy Deutsch is a Unitarian Universalist minister and member of the Executive Committee of Religious Socialists.

Do The Things You Can Agree On First



MAXINE PHILLIPS

Despite my post-election euphoria, I know that the Democrats will soon find issues to divide them. So here are three on which they can agree and three that will take a little longer:

[1] Raise the minimum wage

[2] Give the government power to negotiate drug prices

[3] Use the investigative power of Congress to root out the corruption of an incredibly corrupt administration

For the long term:

[1] A withdrawal plan for Iraq that doesn't devolve into unthinkable carnage

[2] True labor law reform and enforcement

[3] Repeal the Patriot Act

Maxine Phillips is a past National Director of DSA, and a former co-editor of RS.

Help Those Who Cannot Help Themselves

STEVE KNIGHT

One of religious socialism's central tenets is that the plenitude of God's table can be offered to everyone, but only if we have the collective spiritual will to make this happen.

It's likely that none of the successful candidates in
cont'd on page 16

ILRS Congress Addresses “Social Globalization”

The setting was ideal for a conference on globalization. Meeting at the place where Norwegian socialists and labor activists have met for generations to plan the building of their own society, the International League of Religious Socialists held its triennial congress this past June at Sørmarka, a labor-owned conference center just outside of Oslo.

Organized with the generous support of the Olof Palme International Center, the trade union movement LO, and the Norwegian Labour Party, the congress brought delegations from five continents and four faiths together for three days, to discuss the idea of making the process of globalization more socialistic and less market-driven.

The ILRS represents just over 200,000 members of socialist parties who make a connection between their politics and their various spiritual traditions.

Functioning more or less like the Socialist International of religious socialists, its member organizations are internal party groups that include members of parliaments, labor activists, and even party leaders. The Oslo congress was the culmination of three years of work to direct the organization towards a more activist agenda in addition to its role as an international network.

Two large video screens introduced the theme via a spinning red globe. After a greeting from Jan Rudy Kristensen, the president of the Norwegian member

organization Kristne Arbeidere, ILRS President Pär Axel Sahlberg opened the congress by presenting the document *Social Globalisation: Ten Ways To Make A Better World*, a condensed ten-point version of a longer working document on social globalization. The longer document addresses twelve areas of concern

from sustainable development to human rights to education, and emphasizes the need to see globalization as a development that needs to be “socialized,” in much the same way that those looking at the “new” idea of democracy over a century ago coined the term *social*

democracy to define their vision of what democracy at its best should be.

Two Hemispheres, One World

Understanding that the concept of globalization is seen differently depending on where one is in the world, the morning session on how to go about dealing with it was divided into two plenaries.

The first offered perspectives from the Global South.

Ronaldo Llamas, President of the Akbayan Party of the Philippines, began the discussion by focusing on the misconceptions held by many people in the North about the successes of the “Asian tiger” economies. The real story behind these highly export-driven economies is an all too familiar tale of exploitation of labor in societies where workers have few rights despite the militancy found in their labor movements. “A new slavery is rising,” according to Llamas, and the key in opposing that is to create both alternative



Images from the 2006 ILRS Congress (clockwise from bottom): plenary on North/South perspectives, anti-poverty activist Swami Agnivesh, ILRS Secretary General Andrew Hammer, author Irshad Manji.

cooperative economies and local governance movements, which can bring power directly to the people and work to decentralize the authoritarian political structures of most Asian countries.

The changing situation in Latin America was addressed by Sergio Moya Mena from the Socialist International Committee on Latin America and the Caribbean. Picking up on Llamas' point about governance, Moya mentioned that the increasing number of "victims" of capitalist globalization is creating a crisis of faith in democracy in the region. Disappointed with the false promises of Northern capital to repair the economies of Latin America, people are willing to turn to leaders who offer more populist proposals, even if the ability of, for example, an Hugo Chavez in Venezuela to deliver prosperity or stability is equally uncertain. Moya stressed that there is a great need for us to resist the capitalist definition of globalization, and build our own alternative model focused around the needs of people, not transnational corporations.

An African point of view was provided by Mohammed Dangor, a founding member of the Commission on Religious Affairs of the African National Congress. Dangor suggested that in the debate over how globalization proceeds, socialists should be more defined by our values than by mere interests. We need not only for national trade unions to work together globally, we also have to move beyond tolerance to genuine understanding of one another as different people and cultures.

In the next plenary, Northern perspectives came to the fore. Peter Weiderud, former international affairs director of the World Council of Churches and president of the Swedish organization Broderskap, spoke of how globalization was presenting challenges to the security of the "Nordic model," and how taking the ideas that sustained that model onto the global stage involves deepening the understanding among people in developed nations of how the material interests of North and South have been and are related. Atle Sommerfelt, director of Norwegian Christian Aid, pointed out that the Global North is exploiting itself as much as the South in the current process of globalization.

Faith and Globalization

The afternoon session moved away from the geographical and economic assessment of globalization and focused on how faith and religion was being integrated into the global society. Speakers from Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Hindu traditions

contributed to the discussion in very different ways, from criticisms of the globally destructive policies of the Bush regime to the concept of Jewish universalism.

The highlight however, was a speech by author (and former New Democratic Party speechwriter) Irshad Manji on the struggle to reform and modernize Islam. She spoke in detail of her meetings with groups of young Muslims throughout the world, who are interested in opposing fundamentalist interpretations of their faith, as well as the violent oppression of women that exists in societies where *Shari'a* law holds sway.

The following day brought a speech by Swami Agnivesh [see article on page 8], from the Bonded Labour Movement in New Delhi, and reports back from workshops on all of the congress sessions.

Expanding the Reach of the ILRS

The activity of the ILRS has been encouraging over the past three years, with a greater emphasis on both religious and geographic diversity, as well as increased interactions with the leadership of socialist parties themselves. The ILRS has been involved in Middle East peace negotiations, as well as building bridges between voters who may see socialist politics as inherently hostile to religion and socialist parties that need the support of those voters.

A new constitution of the organization was adopted, the major revision of which allows for more than one organization per nation to become a member of the ILRS. This was proposed as a means of opening up the possibility of membership to new groups from the same political party in nations where an existing religious socialist group may have a long tradition of working within one faith only.

More information on the congress can be obtained from the ILRS web site at www.ilrs.org, and the Social Globalization web site at www.socialglobalization.org.

The future welfare of working people is totally dependent on how well a country can prepare its citizens, especially the young, to claim their rights as producers and consumers when dealing with the economic challenges of a global society.

—TEN WAYS TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD

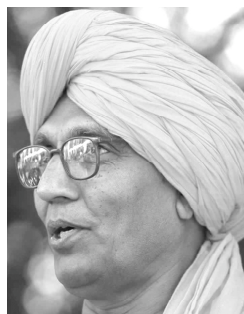
connecting the dots

RELIGION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL ETHOS

It's not often that we hear from Hindu socialists. Surely there are thousands if not millions, but finding their ideas expressed in equal parts of faith and politics has proven a bit daunting to say the least. For that reason, we are happy to publish a speech from Swami Agnivesh, an anti-poverty activist with the Bonded Labour Movement in New Delhi. The swami spoke to the 2006 ILRS Congress in Oslo, Norway, and not only captivated the delegates, but also conducted a yoga program for those interested the following morning. All in all, the story of his spiritual journey may not be that different from some of ours.

SWAMI AGNIVESH

I should like to recall my own journey. Born as I was to a very orthodox Brahman family of South India, I was steeped in rituals, superstitions, dogmas, caste—everything in the name of religion. As I grew, I practiced all these things. I was a religious young man until the age of 17 and highly superstitious.



At the age of 17, I came to Calcutta for higher education and there was an encounter with another movement which considered itself to be a religious movement. In fact, it was a revolt against orthodoxy and Brahmanism. The movement was *Arya Samaj* and the founder was Swami Dayanand. I was fascinated by this new approach. First of all, what fascinated me most was the encouragement given to questioning my own religion and all these dogmas and rituals. I questioned everything I believed to be religious authority. In the process of questioning I thought I felt that I was very much liberated from within. Most of these beliefs and dogmas and rituals disappeared. They found no place in my own life and I thought they were very superstitious, had no basis at all, and it took no time to give them up.

What I substituted them with was another worldview which was far more profound than what I used to believe in. The new worldview was based on a completely new concept of God. Earlier I thought God was like somebody, like a human being, or a super-human being, who would be pleased at times and be

angry at times, depending on my approach to God. If I am praising God he should be really happy. If I am not praising Him, the human being in Him must be getting angry. So the elements of fear and insecurity were very prevalent in my earlier religious experience.

But now my thinking was that God is certain principles. God is truth. God is love. God is justice. In order to worship God I don't have to go to any temple and I don't have to worship any particular God or Goddess or perform any ritual. I just have to be more loving, more compassionate, more just. It was a highly liberating process—so much so that my own life started looking like that of an atheist. Suddenly, there was a switch from a devout practicing Brahman to a completely non-practicing person. There was nothing outwardly to show that I was still religious. And yet deep within me I could feel that I was really being more religious. Genuinely religious. So that was the transformation.

As I grew with this experience, I now started questioning some of the postulates of the movement, the new organization with which I was associated. Questioning was now basic to my evolution. I therefore started questioning even some of the writings of the founder of the movement. I started to question Swami Dayanand's own writings. What I felt was that the more I tried to evolve and question the genuine religious practices in terms of being more loving, more kind, more just and more compassionate I found that there were two types of such religious practices. One was just being oneself and being more loving, kind and truthful. Because God is truth I have to be truthful. But it did not help. If all around me the forces of untruth are raising their ugly heads and I am not confronting them,

or challenging them, then what type of religion is this? In Calcutta, when I was studying, I could see dehumanizing inequality. There were people sleeping on the pavement while others owned palatial houses. Many children begged on the streets while others attended convents or public schools nicely dressed. These simple things which I used to encounter I had previously ignored or thought that they were something that God had ordained, something called fate or something related to a previous life, or *Karma*. In this way I was not responsible. But now I started questioning these social structures. Whatever I saw outside, I thought to myself this was not justice. I asked myself, "Can I be insensitive to all these gross injustices and yet be truthful, compassionate and kind within?" I said to myself, "No. This is not possible. This was against my personal evolution."

I derived a lot of strength or reinforcement from various individuals and various organizations. I tried deriving strength from sources such as Christianity and Islam and after some time found that I drew much strength from what is normally understood to be Marxism. When I started questioning this gross injustice all around me I found that unlike most other religious leaders, it was Karl Marx who went to the root of injustice—the relations of production, the ownership of the means of production and distribution. I found this to be very great. It was spiritually very profound. In this way I grew and was one day expelled by the same organization for which I was working—*Arya Samaj*. The national and international leaders thought that I was too much of a rebel and they expelled me from their primary membership.

For them dress was important. My being a Swami and wearing the color orange was particularly important. It was almost as if the symbol had become the religion for them. I said, "No, this cannot be my religion. I am wearing orange. Fine. But orange cloth is not my religion." My religion is to resist injustice and if for resisting injustice I have to give up these clothes and put on something else there should be no hesitation.

What I now realize and experience is that religion is trying to be as close to God, the Creator, as possible and God is seen as comprising the values of truth, love and justice. Nothing personified, nothing incarnated, nothing sitting in judgement or anything like that.

But how do these values relate to God? In order to be God-like and in order to liberate myself from within, from bondage, etcetera, I have to be truthful within and fight the forces of untruth from without. It is an activist and spiritual concept. It is not passive but activist and active and proactive.

This is how I grew into this whole struggle for human rights. Human rights of the poor. And it is not just my concern for the poor—it is also a concern for myself. I am trying to liberate myself every day and every moment. My self and my social life are inextricably



I am trying to
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My self
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two sides of
the same coin.

two sides of the same coin. It is nothing that I have given up. Apparently, I am being compassionate as if I am doing something good to another. But in fact, I am being very selfish and being good to myself all the time. So this is all I have tried to evolve.

I feel that in this task of human rights there is some element of arrogance. Human beings have come to acquire some sort of supremacy in this whole creation. We say that we are the supreme creation and, therefore, we have rights and these rights are enforced against nature and against animals. In this manner we seek to enforce our rights against the environment. It is

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Forgiving the Unforgivable

COMING TO GRIPS
WITH THE
AMISH SCHOOL SHOOTINGS



Over the past few years, Sam Hine and Johann Christoph Arnold have offered RS readers an interesting perspective on various social issues from the Bruderhof community. While different from the Amish, the similarities between the two groups on matters of forgiveness make the Bruderhof view of such a horrific incident identical to that of their Amish cousins.

SAM HINE

I'm not Amish, but my children attend a small rural school that until October seemed safely removed from the violence plaguing most of our world.

The truth is, we're not safe anywhere. The recent shooting at an Amish school here in Pennsylvania, only days after similar crimes in rural Colorado and Wisconsin, makes it clear that there is nowhere we can hide from the violence, and no one who can't be touched by it.

We need to pray for the grieving families, for the children who survived, and for the wife and children of the killer. And we certainly can and must act to make guns less available. But in the end, no amount of metal detectors or school police or other security measures will be enough to prevent another attack. No federal school violence summit will save us.

We need to look squarely at the root causes of such violence, at the evils we tolerate daily in this violent and sick culture. I could start at the top: the official justification of torture and sexual humiliation at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. The clear message from our military in Iraq ("We don't do body counts.") that the lives of people who believe and dress differently don't count as much. The congressman preying on teenage

boys on Capitol Hill, while the leaders of the "moral majority" stand by.

Then there are the obvious culprits: the glorification of violence and sexual predators in film. Violent video games simulating everything from Columbine to Fallujah. The unabashed exploitation of women and young girls as sex objects in advertising, using their bodies to sell everything from cars to beer. The news media that love nothing better than a horrible crime—the more sadistic the better. They wallow for days in the most salacious details, making criminals into instant celebrities with little thought to the copycats they might inspire.

Even more importantly, though, we each need to look in the mirror. What can I do about all this?

The media tell us the killer was angry at life and angry at God. This illustrates in a horrible way where festering resentment can lead. We can't do much to make our schools safer. But we can and must look at any grudges we have in our own lives and free ourselves from them by forgiving. We can't prevent the excesses of Hollywood or the Internet. But we can, though confession, bring to light the secret darkness in our own hearts, breaking the power of evil thoughts before they grow into evil deeds.

The Amish, in their quiet way, are showing us the most fitting response to such a horrible act. They can't find words to describe their pain, but they won't be seeking revenge. Instead they will be turning to their faith to carry them through. The rest of us Americans have a lot to learn from them. Their conscious choices to eschew television, to refuse military service, to dress modestly,

and to live simply are among the sanest, most progressive, and most hopeful responses to an insane culture that I've seen so far.

Sam Hine is Senior Pastor for Church Communities International.

JOHANN CHRISTOPH ARNOLD

In October, the attention of the whole world was focused on the Amish school in Pennsylvania where five girls were killed, five others critically wounded, and the shooter took his own life.

Charles Carl Roberts IV was angry with God, angry with himself, and haunted with guilt. Each time such violence occurs, relatives, journalists and other people ask the question—where was God? How could he let this happen?

God was and is there the whole time. As the old spiritual goes, "He's got the whole world in his hands." He is against all violence and all killings. Yet he will never impose his will on people, because he wants voluntary service. As a result, tragic events like the Amish shootings will continue to happen, as long as we all do not face the violent nature that is in each one of us.

One day after the massacre, the local Amish community started a charity not only for the victims' families, but also to raise funds for the gunman's widow and children.



God already is using the death of these five girls by turning it into something positive. They opened up to the whole world the Amish way of life, and their deep faith, which is able to overcome any tragedy. A lot has

been written about the Amish response to the shooting—to forgive. Their response, "We want to forgive...that's the way we were brought up—return good for evil." These are not just noble words. One day after the massacre, the local Amish community started a charity not only for the victims' families, but also to raise funds for the gunman's widow and children.

Roberts is dead, and some people are asking, "How can justice be done if the perpetrator is dead?" Other questions arise, such as: "Is the gunman in heaven or hell?" That is completely superfluous. He is with God. That is all that matters. No amount of human justice would have replaced and redeemed the tragic loss of these five girls. We forget that God said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." The gunman is in the hands of the best judge, who will see that true justice will be done—justice that is combined with love and with redemption, both for the victims and the shooter himself.

School shootings and other acts of violence will continue. Each time they occur, let us remember the lives of these girls, the example that they gave, such as the oldest victim, Marian Fisher, and her sister Barbie, who wanted to be shot first, to hopefully save the others.

If we truly want justice, let us ask why we cannot follow the example given us by the Amish. Why shouldn't it work for us too? In our violent society, we look too quickly for human answers to stop school violence. No amount of frisking and metal detectors and educational summits will stop it. The Amish are right in not expecting additional security such as locks on schools. If we want our children to be safe, we all have to look to God for the answer. He alone can protect us and our children.

Forgiveness is for everyone—not only for the Amish. It is the universal answer to breaking the cycle of violence that is destroying this world. Forgiveness is power, not a weakness. It can heal both the forgiver and the forgiven. It will change the world if we allow it. In short, we hold the keys of forgiveness in our hands, and we must choose whether or not to use them every day.

*Johann Christoph Arnold is the author of ten books, including *Why Forgive?*, and a founder of "Breaking the Cycle," a program aimed at reducing violence in schools by teaching forgiveness and nonviolent conflict resolution.*

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reviews



Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction

By David Kuo

Free Press, 2006 304 pp. \$25.00

MELISSA ROGERS

Some Christians are pretty ticked off at former White House official David Kuo right now for what he has written in his new book, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*. If his book causes more Christians to reevaluate the hard-wiring of faith into partisan politics, however, it will have done a great service to the Gospel.

In his book, Kuo documents the three years he worked for President George W. Bush (2001-2003) in the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

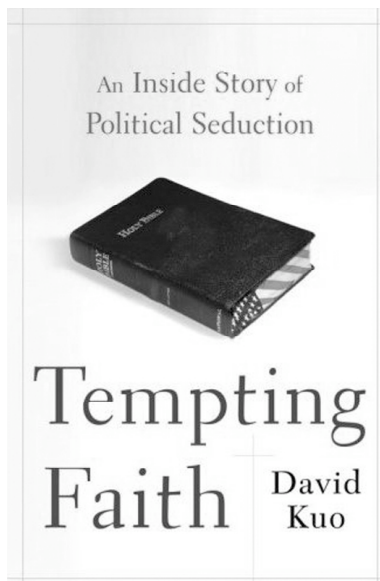
One of the book's themes is that the White House repeatedly and quite intentionally manipulated faith for partisan political gain. This certainly isn't the first time such a charge has been leveled, but the fact that an insider does so buttresses those charges and provides previously unreported details. It also may give the charges a hearing with entirely new audiences.

For example, Kuo describes how he and the White House "laid out a plan whereby we would hold 'roundtable [faith-based] events' for threatened [Republican] incumbents with faith and community leaders" during the 2002 election season. He also reports that White House senior advisor Karl Rove's office was happy to help track down about \$100,000 for each of a series of subsequent faith-based conferences in politically important states.

Meanwhile, Kuo describes a White House that was breaking promise after promise to deliver new money for social service programs. To mask that fact, Kuo says it used a host of tactics, such as borrowing from some programs to pay for others, spinning budget baselines and subdividing certain funds into smaller grants. Perhaps most significantly, Kuo says the White House sacrificed tax measures that would have benefited charitable endeavors for ones that hurt them. And, as Kuo now admits, the White House practiced an approach that was not fact-based when it said the faith-based initiative was needed to end a pattern of governmental hostility toward religion. All the while, the White House frequently "played the religion card," Kuo says, using Bush's religious credentials to encourage blind faith in the president and his administration.

The charge that the White House has cynically used religion in these ways isn't surprising. The surprise, and the deep disappointment, is when religious leaders don't push back.

This book portrays a segment of the conservative Christian community as having lost its way. "Christian conservatives seemed especially vulnerable to [the seductive power of the White House] and everyone working with them knew that," Kuo says. He describes a variety of White House perks that were regularly doled out, including phone calls and passes for Air Force One landings as well as trinkets like presidential cufflinks and pens. The White House did so "knowing the Christian leaders could give them to their congregations or donors or friends to show just how influential they were." Kuo says the



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White House realized that “making politically active Christians personally happy meant having to worry far less about the Christian political agenda.”

As Kuo points out, that agenda sometimes appears to be shaped more by ideology or partisanship than Christian principles. For example, the issue of poverty often has been missing from this agenda even though it is unquestionably at the core of Christian concern. Of course, Christians may differ over how to tackle poverty, but it’s legitimate to question a Christian’s silence on issues Jesus addressed again and again.

Some Christians also have exhibited a disturbing pattern of shutting down dissent or even questions that could damage the Republican party, Kuo says. For example, “[a] friend in a major pro-family organization said that in their regular polling they wouldn’t even ask other Christians if they were disappointed with the president,” he says. Why? “They didn’t want to know.” When Kuo left the White House and began to voice some criticisms of the faith-based initiative, he asked a friend in Christian media why she thought there was so little coverage of his commentary. “ ‘Because,’ she said, ‘the White House was going to cut off anyone who gave you coverage.’ ” Again, I’m not surprised to hear Kuo say this. I am surprised when Christian organizations let a partisan agenda dictate their activities.

What is the price of such distortion and exploitation? The most important one is that it undermines faith itself and thus the ability to reach and minister to those around us. It also harms our nation. When religion

ceases to be a fiercely independent prophetic voice, our country loses an important source of moral guidance and vision.

I should note that I disagree with Kuo’s assessment of a number of church-state matters, and I’m not vouching for all of his claims. I’m also not endorsing his idea of a “fast” for religion from political engagement. I am saying, however, that Kuo makes a persuasive case on the broad themes described here.

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Kuo’s book is cause for disappointment, not joy, among Christians who aren’t right-wing Republicans. Christians with different political perspectives should regard these matters as a cautionary tale, a pit into which any politically active religious community

may fall if it loses focus and fails to practice accountability. Political parties organize around doing what it takes to win elections. When religious communities participate in policy and politics, however, they should be guided by principle rather than partisanship.

To me, the most important question is whether more Christians will reevaluate the relationship between their faith and partisan politics. If a sufficient number of Christians do so, it may or may not be good for the fortunes of one or another political party. But it will be good for our faith and good for America.

Melissa Rogers is an attorney who currently serves as visiting professor of religion and public policy at Wake Forest University Divinity School. This review initially appeared at tompaine.com.



Swami Agnivesh

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only where we feel our collective existence is threatened when we then try to compromise and rationalize human rights in terms of them being universal or inalienable. But that basic humility is not there which acknowledges that we human beings have also been created by God. And whether it's God personified or God representing the values of truth, we have to be truthful and fight the forces of untruth; we have to be just and fight the forces of injustice. This is the aim of our life. This is how we will liberate ourselves—attain *moksha* or *mukti* or salvation, whatever you call it.

When we talk only in terms of human rights, the element of secularism dominates. We tend to become highly secular when we are talking about human rights and the role of the states, the governments, the laws, and the charters all come to play a very important role. But the type of human rights I practice does not draw its strength from these books or these charters or constitutions. I draw inspiration for the source of human rights from my commitment to my creator—to my God.

When I say that as a human being I have a right, I also try to analyze what I am and who I am. When I look at myself I feel that if I am breathing in order to be alive, I am not really breathing, breathing is happening to me. If I am seeing, I don't know how I am seeing, yet I am seeing. If I am a human being I was born, but being born was not in my hands and one day I will be dead and dying will not be my choice. Everything is beyond me. I cannot decide about myself. If I am eating something, how it is getting digested in terms of blood, bone or whatever I don't know. In the whole of nature, the whole cosmos, I am a very tiny, small part. And the process has to be evolving, evolving and becoming closer to God.

The denominational religions are the organized hierarchical, institutionalized religions which are known by different names. What I feel are the values which are behind all these religions. I also see the values which are behind Marxism because Marxism today has also become a religion. It can also be organized, and institutionalized and therefore can be very dominating and oppressive and repressive and dogmatic.

But the force and the values behind Marxism are still very basic and we have to draw sustenance from them.

It is the values that are most important. And those values represent God. Gandhi, during his South African struggle, said, "God is truth." Towards the end of his life he said, "Truth is God. Love is God. Compassion is God," That was also what Buddha said. For Buddha, truth, love and compassion were supreme spiritual manifestations. We don't have to define it and say it is God or whatever. It was out of deep compassion that he stood up against the then dominant forms of God and religion; that was spiritual activism. And Buddha was instead called an atheist. The same thing happened to many other religious leaders. The dominant religious leaders then turned against these great religious leaders and labelled them as heretics or atheists.

These people were rising up against those dominant religions of God-form because they found them to be oppressive and unjust. This occurred because of the urge for justice, the overwhelming spontaneity of compassion. That was God within them and God manifesting himself through them. And they became sources of inspiration for men and women, and therefore, a new religion was born. All these new religions protested against orthodoxy or whatever was dogmatic. But during institutionalization, meaning was lost; the form remained but the substance did not and everything was lost.

So one must define, redefine God who created this whole universe! God created us and God sustains us. We have to feel very humble before God and dedicate ourselves to prayer and through that reinforce our commitment to our human rights. But human rights should encompass animal rights, nature's rights and creation's rights. It is very difficult to have human rights as a class unto itself. Human beings have to understand this whole process of evolution. Each individual has to find the path to liberation drawing upon whatever sources exist and not discriminating between one religion and another. In fact, I would like to call it spirituality—spiritual ethos. I would rather call it *dhamma*, But if I say *dhamma*, then it becomes Buddhist. If I say *dharma*, then it becomes Hindu. These are the problems. I don't want to define it, name it anything.

That is why I have distributed one paper in Bangalore which was called "A4." We had some lay people who don't claim to have any religious authority as priests or swamis or monks. They laid down some common principles on one small sheet of paper. So just on one side of a page—the size of the paper was A4 and that is why we called it A4—this was the new religion.

This religion is different from all those scriptures and heaps and heaps of interpretations. Humanity can live by this simple one-page moral code and without Messiah, without institutions. These are simple moral principles which are already present in all these religions. And yet they are very deep, somewhere, forgotten. Only the form of the rituals remain and therefore, they are confusing. So I still feel that the dialectical process of body and soul and of matter and the spirit, have to be resolved everyday on the basis of knowledge, reasoning, etcetera. But what appears to be truth is really not truth and what appears to be permanent is really not permanent. The impermanence of things all around me should inform me, and I should inform me, and I should be very cautious not to become consumeristic. Consumerism will eat into the spiritual side of my life. To be spiritual is to be God-like. God is truth. God is compassion. Compassion and truth should be manifested not only within but outwardly in resisting tyranny and untruth. It is as simple as that.

At every stage and everywhere, wherever I am moving, I have to be very sensitive about all that is happening inside of me—the aversion and attachment constantly happening within me. This is a constant, everyday evolution, and the evil within me is the biggest hassle. This is because evil says I am and my body is and what I relate to—my family or my world. That creates all these problems and therefore, I transcend the evil and transcend myself. While it's still alive and has the body I have to transcend. Now these are the spiritual practices. The human rights debate is lacking this dimension completely. It is so superficial. We are

talking in terms of rights without much deep commitment. Why do I need to be loving and kind if I can grab your wealth and thereby try to be more happy? Why would I not do it? But I should realize what is this kind of happiness and pleasure. Real happiness is peace. If that is my goal, then I cannot grab others' rights or others' wealth. Now, that type of spiritual dimension, a deeply spiritual and profound dimension, has to be imparted into this whole debate of human rights. And this kingdom of God has to be established. By defining God, again and again, we have to be careful not to get bogged down in one of these prevailing concepts of God; all the religions have their own concepts of God and, without being disrespectful, I would still submit that they should all try to discover the real nature of God.

RS to Have Panel at 2007 Left Forum

The Religious Socialists will host another panel at the annual Left Forum at Cooper Union in New York City. The event takes place over the weekend of March 10-12; the exact time for the RS panel has not yet been announced.

Persons interested in attending a meeting of Religion and Socialism Commission members during the forum should contact Maxine Phillips at phillips@dissentmagazine.org or Juanita Webster at jbwebster@msn.com.



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New Democratic Congress

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November's election (with the notable exception of Vermont's Bernie Sanders) is a self-identified socialist. But many of this new crop of legislators possess a sharpened awareness of the growing wealth divide in our society between a favored elite and the struggling working-class majority. As one newly elected House member said recently about her constituents, "They understood when they talked about the stock market boom, that half of Americans aren't even in the stock market." Another brought a touch of religious fervor to the task of bridging the wealth divide: "I was taught at a very, very young age about faith and personal responsibility, and through that, that responsibility was about helping those who cannot help themselves."

Congress's new Democratic majority takes office in January with an ambitious agenda of economic populism: raise the federal minimum wage; fix the Medicare prescription plan; renegotiate free trade pacts to include labor and environmental protections; repeal laws that reward corporations for outsourcing jobs; gather support for legislation to create a national, single-payer health insurance. As religious socialists, we can further the mission of bringing everyone to God's table by mobilizing our communities—religious and secular—to demand that this agenda be fulfilled.

Steve Knight is a lay co-founder of the Peace & Restorative Justice ministry at Manhattan's Church of the Holy Trinity.

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