
WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING: FINDING THE PROPER BALANCE BETWEEN FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

President Bush's new Faith-Based Initiative has created a great deal of interest throughout the United States. Many see the need for partnering with faith-based organizations as a natural use of existing stable organizations to provide much-needed social programs throughout the country. Others see this initiative as a dangerous precedent that crosses a distinct line between church and state.

At the core of the debate for the Faith-Based Initiative are several questions. How can a faith-based organization provide services and ignore its very basis for being? If an organization – a church or group based on values and faith – provides social services under any circumstances, is it possible, or even desirable for that organization to be “neutral” in terms of values and faith? Can a strong basis in faith be compatible with government service – either by an organization or by an individual?

To gain some insight into these issues, vignettes in the life of Daniel in Babylon provide insight into how faith-based organizations (and faith-based individuals in public service) can draw on the strength of their values to provide for the public good -- while respecting the rights of others to weigh and determine their own beliefs. The danger today exists that this fine line may be crossed in two ways: 1) when government chooses one faith-based organization over another purely because of its faith rather than its capacity and ability to deliver services (in violation of the establishment clause of the United States

Constitution); and 2) when the faith-based organization engages in proselytization as a quid pro quo for the services it provides.

Introduction

Growing up in Kentucky, it was always interesting to see the occasional votes that took place for legalizing alcohol for sale within each of the counties. Most of the counties in Kentucky are “dry,” which means they cannot sell alcohol within the county boundaries. In fact, this is true in many of the counties where Kentucky bourbon is produced. When there are enough signatures on a petition to bring the issue to a ballot to change a county to “wet,” the politicking begins. Sides are quickly taken to support or defend the initiative, and most times, the issue is defeated – and counties remain “dry.”

A common understanding is the issue is defeated by a coalition of two groups, who make the strangest “bedfellows” in Kentucky politics. The two groups of the bootleggers and the fundamental preachers push hard to get the issue defeated. Bootleggers have no desire to lose their clientele – they have a good thing going, and they do not want to lose their business to legal liquor outlets. Fundamental preachers decry the erosion of morals in the community that the evils of alcohol bring. Both groups have their own reasons for defeating the issue, but they share a desire for the same end-state – protecting their turf and retaining a status quo of no legalized alcohol. Caught in the middle are the legal, moderate drinkers who simply drive to the next county to get their six-pack – and the small retail business owners who lose profits to the big city retailers.

President Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative appears to have some of the same characteristics of a “wet-dry” ballot issue. It appears the fundamentalists are in the middle of this issue as well. Any government intrusion or control is perceived in terms of an erosion of autonomy for the institution of the church. Worse yet, “undesirable” denominations or faith-groups may receive government monies and legitimacy, enabling these groups to further their beliefs and gain converts. For the fundamentalist groups, it is best to have the government stay completely out of the business of the church – a clean and total separation of church and state is the only answer. On the other side of the issue are those who believe religion has no place in society. The concept of using organizations based on faith conjures up

images of proselytizing and evangelizing innocent people in need of social services. Although it is a broad characterization to say this, the opposition to the Faith-Based Initiative has the strange bedfellows of the “radical right” and the “radical left.” There appears to be some truth in this concept.

At the core of the debate for the Faith-Based Initiative are several questions. How can a faith-based organization provide services and ignore its very basis for being? If an organization – a church or group based on values and faith – provides social services under any circumstances, is it possible, or even desirable, for that organization to be “neutral” in terms of values and faith? The concept of “there ain’t no free lunch” for soup kitchens meant that you got fed, but you had to stay to listen to the preaching... so how can the government ensure that “staying for the preaching” is voluntary? Can a strong basis in faith be compatible with government service – either by an organization or by an individual? To gain insight into these issues, it is useful to turn to a case study to see how a strong basis in faith is compatible with government service.

Daniel—A Man of Faith in a Faithless Society

The prophet Daniel provides an interesting case study of a man who served with distinction within a society that did not share his faith. Daniel in Babylon was a man of faith who never denied his strongly held faith, yet was a trusted senior advisor under three different kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius) who did not share his faith in God. Daniel's faith in his God was not a stumbling block, but rather a source of the very virtues necessary in public servants -- honesty, integrity, and loyalty. Although Daniel never hid his faith, he worshiped in a private, respectful manner -- and did not try to convert the Babylonian world. He clearly demonstrated the principle of "rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

Daniel's First Stand

Daniel did not choose to go to Babylon – he was taken there as a slave after Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. The best slaves – those who demonstrated the greatest potential – were selected for service to the king. Daniel was apparently easily identified as one suited for service to Nebuchadnezzar:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility -- young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. (Daniel 1:1-4, NIV)

Daniel and the other men identified as having great potential were then given an intensive three-year training program to prepare them for service. Daniel, however, was a man of great faith, deeply rooted in his religion. The training program no doubt included the best of education in Babylonian society, but it also included the best of everything else in that society. This included the food that they ate, causing the first major conflict for Daniel. The royal food and wine was not acceptable for a devout man of God, so Daniel decided to make a stand for what he felt was a higher calling. It is interesting to see how Daniel resolved this in a way faithful to his God as well as to service to his new king.

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to

this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. (Daniel 1:8-16, NIV)

Daniel's first stand was resolved in a way that was acceptable to both his strong faith in God and to service to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel demonstrated that by adhering to his faith – by not consuming the royal food and wine – he would be even more useful to the king. The purpose for providing the royal food and wine was to produce healthy men ready for service. Daniel demonstrated that he could still meet and exceed this purpose by adhering to his own beliefs.

Note the language of the previous passage – even though Daniel was “resolved to not eat the royal food and wine, he asked for “permission” to do otherwise. Daniel did not make demands, but rather worked within the system in his discussion with the chief official. Daniel made a reasonable proposal to the chief official and provided a method to measure the success of his plan. If Daniel and the others did not demonstrate they were able to be as healthy as the others on a modified diet, they were willing to go back to the diet originally provided. Even though there was an element of risk for the chief official to agree to Daniel's plan, there were no hidden agendas by Daniel or any evasion. Everything, so to speak, was “on the table.” Daniel remained true to his faith, and this faithfulness made his service even more valuable to the king. At the end of Daniel's training, he and the others who followed their diet were found to be “ten times better” than all the rest in the kingdom (Daniel 1:20, NIV).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel continued to have great success in his new service to King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar depended on his “wise men” to explain the meaning of many things that happened, including the dreams that he had. One dream particularly bothered Nebuchadnezzar and he wanted some answers – and to test the authenticity of his “wise men,” he wanted them to explain the meaning of his dream. Since they were supposedly wise, their task was not only to interpret the dream, but also to describe the dream. This was a difficult task, and none of

the wise men were able to come up with both the content and meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The solution for Nebuchadnezzar was to have all of the wise men killed – they were obviously fakes. Daniel entered the scene and met the challenge. Of course, Daniel had a vested interest in resolving this issue – he was also a “wise man,” one of the diviners of knowledge, so he and his friends were also to be killed under the king's decree. Daniel prayed to God for understanding, and the dream was revealed to him. Daniel then went to King Nebuchadnezzar to describe the dream and the interpretation of the dream.

The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these. (Daniel 2:26-28, NIV)

Daniel proceeded to tell the king the content of his dream and the meaning of the dream. The king was thrilled; Daniel accurately described the dream and explained the dream to the king's satisfaction. Note that Daniel did not take credit for his ability to understand and interpret the dream, but gave credit to God for his abilities. This was not lost on Nebuchadnezzar – he also understood that the “gift” of divining the dream came from Daniel's God.

"The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy." Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at

Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court. (Daniel 2:45b-49, NIV)

Daniel was promoted to greater responsibility within the kingdom. Daniel also remembered the other three exiles who had been faithful during his training – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (these are the new given names for Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah). We now turn to the adventures of these three men and their faith.

The Fiery Furnace

Nebuchadnezzar may have acknowledged the power of Daniel's God, but that did not make him a believer. He created an image of gold having enormous dimensions – ninety feet high and nine feet wide – for all the people to worship. For those who decided to not worship this idol, the penalty was death. With great fanfare, this image was shown to the people.

"This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (Daniel 3:4b-7, NIV)

This was, of course, disturbing to the three faithful exiles, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. According to their faith, they were only to worship their God – not an image of gold. Their refusal to worship this image was not lost on the others in power who were already jealous of the status of these three men. They immediately reported this problem to Nebuchadnezzar, who demanded an explanation.

...There are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon -- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (Daniel 3:12-15, NIV)

The three men now were presented with limited options – they could deny their faith and worship the image, or they would be thrown into the fire. Nebuchadnezzar gave them a way out; they had already violated his decree and could have been thrown into the furnace for their refusal to worship the image. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood firm in their faith – they refused to worship the image.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men,

firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. (Daniel 3:16-23, NIV)

The three men took a stand, and accepted the consequences. They did not hide their faith, nor did they deny that faith. They were willing to give up their lives for what they felt was a higher calling – serving their God. The result was that they were not killed; in fact, they came out of the fire completely unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar again acknowledged the power of their God (much as he had done when Daniel was able to interpret his dream) and promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God..." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. (Daniel 3:28,30, NIV)

The Writing on the Wall

Nebuchadnezzar died and was succeeded by his son, Belshazzar. One night, King Belshazzar decided to throw a big party for all of his nobles. To celebrate, he used the gold and silver goblets that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem by his father, Nebuchadnezzar. Suddenly, a hand appears out of nowhere and begins to write on the wall. This frightened Belshazzar so much that he was willing to give great power to anyone who could explain the message.

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way. The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." (Daniel 5:5-7, NIV)

As in the past, none of the advisors and diviners could explain the meaning of the writing on the wall. The queen remembered Daniel and his ability, so Daniel was quickly summoned to explain this strange event. King Belshazzar explained to Daniel his grave concerns and the rewards for explaining the mystery. Daniel was not motivated by greed and reward, but agreed to the king's request.

Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. (Daniel 5:17, NIV)

Daniel's explanation of the writing on the wall was very blunt. Not only did Daniel provide the meaning of the writing on the wall, he also stated clearly the reason for the message. Belshazzar had not learned from his father Nebuchadnezzar, but instead had ignored his father's hard lessons. Daniel made it very clear that the writing on the wall was a message from God – and one that would be fulfilled.

"But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. "This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

"This is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. (Daniel 5:22-29, NIV)

Even though the message was a tough message to deliver by Daniel, it was, no doubt, an even tougher message for Belshazzar to receive. Nonetheless, Daniel received the rewards promised by Belshazzar and was promoted once again. Daniel did not seek these rewards – but they were indicative of the competence of Daniel. Even though his message was a difficult message to receive, it was unquestionably a message delivered by a man of faith, competence, and integrity. Daniel was promoted and made the third highest ruler in Babylon; Belshazzar's fate was also determined that night in accordance with the writing on the wall. Belshazzar's days were indeed numbered and brought to an end; he had been “weighed and found wanting.”

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two. (Daniel 5:30-31, NIV)

The Den of Lions

Daniel had served faithfully under Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, and continued to be an important administrator for both kings. King Darius set up his new government with three administrators over Babylon – and Daniel remained one of the key administrators. In fact, King Darius was so impressed with Daniel that he planned to set Daniel up as the administrator over the entire kingdom. This, of course, did not sit well with those who wanted the position. The problem for these men was that Daniel was truly a man of integrity and principle.

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They

could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." (Daniel 6:3-5, NIV)

King Nebuchadnezzar had made an image of gold and decreed that all would worship the image or be thrown into a fiery furnace – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to go along with the decree to worship the image. The satraps and administrators convinced King Darius to make a similar decree that they knew would force Daniel to make a similar stand. The penalty for refusal was sure death – being thrown into the lions' den.

The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered-in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." So King Darius put the decree in writing. (Daniel 6:6-9, NIV)

Daniel had never hidden his faith, and this new decree did not change his faith or his exercise of that faith. His exercise of faith was conducted in a quiet, humble manner – but one that was well known by others, particularly those who were jealous of the position that Daniel had been placed in by the king.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. (Daniel 6:10-11, NIV)

The jealous administrators now had Daniel where they wanted him; they knew that the king would not be able to change his decree. The king would be forced to throw Daniel into the lion's den. The men

went directly to King Darius and reported that Daniel had violated the decree, and reminded the king that he was bound by his own laws to follow through with the penalty. Although the king was distressed at the situation and the assured loss of his most capable administrator, he had no choice but to follow through with the sentence.

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. (Daniel 6:16-18, NIV)

Daniel, in the same manner as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, made a stand when he was forced to decide between worshiping his God or denying his faith. He was willing to freely accept the consequences of his decision – and made his choice openly. It is apparent that King Darius was well aware of Daniel's faith by his reference to Daniel's god and how Daniel served his god continually. It is also apparent that although Daniel served his god continually, King Darius was pleased with Daniel's faithful service to him, as well. After a sleepless night, the king went to the lion's den to see if a miracle had happened.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. (Daniel 6:19-23, NIV)

The lions did not go without a meal – the men who had accused Daniel, along with their families, were thrown into the lion’s den and were devoured. King Darius sent out a decree to the all the people concerning Daniel’s God.

"I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end.

He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Daniel 6:26-28, NIV)

Lessons from Daniel

There are several enduring lessons from the case study of Daniel. First of all, Daniel and his fellow exiles, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were selected for their positions based upon competence. Daniel continued in the service of the kings of Babylon based upon continued competence and demonstrated ability. Daniel’s service under all three kings -- Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius – and his continued promotions to the highest levels clearly indicate he was recognized for his abilities.

True to his values, Daniel never hid his faith and loyalty to his God. His faith provided him a foundation for the very qualities the kings found desirable – honesty, integrity, and loyalty. Daniel’s faithfulness was so well known that it was the only way the jealous administrators could attack him. Daniel was unquestionably loyal to the kings, as well. How else could a man declare ‘O king, live forever’ to the one who had just thrown him the lion’s den? Daniel understood the king’s situation, and was loyal to the king even under those circumstances. Daniel’s honesty enabled him to deliver the tough news to King Belshazzar that his days were numbered – and Belshazzar

promoted him! Obviously, even King Belshazzar in his last hours understood Daniel was a man of integrity.

Secondly, when the values of faith in God and service to the kings clashed, Daniel and his fellow exiles were willing to make a choice between the two and accept the consequences. When forced to a test of loyalty, even when the test was unfairly presented, they openly chose to serve their God. Being faithful and true to God was compatible with faithful service to their government most of the time – but when presented with conflicting situations Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not compromise. Some areas did require a clean separation of church and state – and choices to be made between the two.

Daniel and the other exiles did not use their positions to attempt to convert the kings or any others to their religion. Their faith was lived out in their lives and the values they gained from a strong belief in God. As such, their influence as men of God was in their lives and faithful service, rather than from overt proselytizing. Of the three kings, it appears that only Nebuchadnezzar worshiped the god of Daniel – and only at the very end of his life and not due to any efforts by Daniel to convert him (Daniel 4:28-36). There is no record in the book of Daniel of any attempts by Daniel, or the other exiles, to create converts to their religion.

The Faith-Based Initiative Today

A recently released survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2001) indicated that 75% of Americans favor government funding for faith-based organizations. There are, however, concerns about providing government funds for those services. Seventy-eight percent of Americans think churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship contribute to solving important social problems.

The reasons for favoring religious organizations to provide social services with government funding include a belief religious groups could do a better job because the power of religion can change people's lives (62% agreed), the people who provide the services would be more caring and compassionate (72% agreed), and religious groups could provide services more efficiently than government programs (60% agreed). There was, however, a large majority (77%) who agreed there

should be a variety of options to choose from for social services (Pew, 2001).

The reasons for opposing religious organizations to provide social services with government funding included concerns over the separation of church and state (52% agreed), people who receive these services might be forced to take part in religious practices (60% agreed), and government might get too involved in what religious organizations do (68% agreed). Respondents in the survey were split over whether the programs would not have the same standards as government-based programs (47% felt this was an important concern; 48% felt this was not an important concern). Respondents were also evenly split over the issue of whether government funding of faith-based organizations might increase religious divisions within the country, with 48% agreeing this was an important concern and 48% agreeing this was not an important concern (Pew, 2001).

Based upon the Pew research, Americans agree that faith-based organizations today (and faith-based individuals in public service) can draw on the strength of their values to provide for the public good. Americans generally support providing government funds to faith-based organizations – but those organizations must respect the rights of those receiving services to weigh and determine their own beliefs. Organizations that receive funding should be selected on the basis of their competence and ability to deliver services, rather than on their particular faith. To do otherwise has the potential to cross the fine line of government support of a particular faith in violation of the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, as well as invite government interference into matters of the church. Service recipients must also be given a choice between faith-based organizations and secular organizations for services received – the fear that organizations having a basis in strong faith would engage in passive or active efforts to “preach the Word” is a concern. Faith-based organizations must make a tough choice if they accept government monies for providing services – they must clearly allow their recipients to “get the free lunch” and “leave before the preaching.” Faith-based organizations that are unable to refrain from proselytization as a quid pro quo for the services they provide will have to accept the consequences – to either opt out of competing for federal funds or lose funding.

Competence and Values

Supporters of the Faith-Based Initiative in Congress are well aware of need to base government support for faith-based organizations on competence, rather than on specific beliefs. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) recently stated, “This program will evaluate these faith-based institutions on whether they can accomplish what the program is set up to accomplish. If the Buddhists can run a good drug and alcohol center to change people’s lives, great” (Boyer, 2001). Representative Tony Hall (D-OH) also stated “If these religious groups have a proven record, they can enter into the competition. If they’re doing the job, they ought to be allowed to compete” for federal funds (Boyer, 2001).

The Assistant to the President for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, John J. Dilulio, Jr., stated “...all government funded-nonprofit organizations, religious or secular, ought to be judged according to whether they follow all relevant laws and achieve measurable, positive civic results” (Dilulio, 2001). Competence and measurable results will determine federal funding for faith-based organizations.

The hope is that faith-based organizations will be able to deliver social services with greater effectiveness and efficacy because of the foundation of values for these organizations. Those whose “religious values inspire them to do the Lord’s work” will hopefully have more compassion and dedication to their labors (Fields, 2001). Many of the workers in faith-based organizations are volunteers – dedicated to touching lives and making a difference. Faith-based organizations can uphold a common core value of “...concern for human needs, particularly those of the economically and socially disadvantaged, and for the social health of the nation” (Feinstein, 2001: p. 4). Even without federal funding, many inner-city minority churches are already providing more in terms of social services on a daily basis than wealthy suburban churches – or even secular relief organizations (Dionne, 2001). The Faith-Based Initiative is designed to give a boost to this effort, drawing on the strong values of faith-based organizations and an emphasis on measurable, demonstrated results.

The line between “drawing on the strong values” of faith-based organizations and “preaching those values” will be difficult to discern, however. Reverend Jerry Falwell recently expressed his excitement

with the new Faith-Based Initiative and stated that the initiative was designed to serve those in need and not “disseminate religious messages.” Reverend Falwell further stated that faith-based organizations that receive funding should not “water down their faithful message which make them distinct” (Witham, 2001). How does an organization not “water down their message” when the religious message is at the core? Dr. Dilulio addresses those who do not feel they can accomplish this – if a church feels it is going down the slippery slope of losing the “faith” in their “faith-based” organization, they should not participate in the program. He states, “Not all groups should participate. Faith leaders, organizations, and communities that perceive the slope as secularizing and slippery ought simply to opt out” (Dilulio, 2001).

Separation of Church and State

In a 1971 Supreme Court Case (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*), the Supreme Court established a three-pronged test for determining the legality of federal funding for parochial schools. The tests were in regard to vouchers, and stated “the enabling law must have a secular purpose; its primary effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion and it must not foster an excessive entanglement with religion” (Hentoff, 2001). Although this provides some guidance into how to approach government funding for faith-based organizations, it is open to great interpretation. As E.J. Dionne, Jr. states, “It’s a least possible ... for government and religious institutions to work together in achieving common public purposes without unduly compromising a partner in the bargain. But on this matter, God will truly be in the details—and, probably, in the litigation.”

There are two major concerns relating to separation of church and state for the Faith-Based Initiative. The first concern is the government will become entangled in matters of the church—and may favor one faith group over another. The second is the faith-based organizations will be unable to refrain from proselytizing. These two areas will unquestionably be the matter of litigation in the future to chart the course for federal funding of faith-based organizations.

Secular alternatives to services provided by faith-based organizations should be to eliminate the first concern of government entanglement. Avoiding monopolies on social service funding by faith-

based organizations through either the use of a voucher system or in-place alternatives are seen as the best solutions to this problem. Key to this concept is the responsibility for providing a social safety net within the government (Feinstein, 2001: p. 4). This may, however, be problematic in those areas (such as some of the inner cities) where needs are not being currently met by secular alternatives.

Proselytizing, or actively recruiting “converts” is perhaps one of the biggest concerns for the Faith-Based Initiative. Faith-based groups will receive federal funding to provide social services and caring for the poor, to not proselytize and mistake their mission as ministering to souls rather than bodies (Fields, 2001). Beneficiaries of social services should be able to freely opt out of religious activities; any program that has a religious component or dimension must allow beneficiaries to decline either active, or passive, participation (Feinstein, 2001: p. 8). The Feinstein Center provides further elaboration on this concept:

Teaching values or beliefs as religious tenets constitutes religious instruction or proselytizing. An example would be urging a beneficiary to accept Jesus Christ or some other religious faith as the only way to move from welfare into employment. Discussing with a beneficiary commonly held values such as abiding by the law and being honest does not automatically represent religious instruction or proselytizing, although most, if not all, religions also teach these values. Worship includes such acts as offering prayers and reading scripture, but observing a neutral moment of silence does not constitute worship.” (Feinstein, 2001: p. 8)

Dr. Dilulio, as a self-professed “born-again Catholic,” supports this view. He states he would “never support tax-funded worship or evangelizing. The President’s ambitious agenda is rooted in pluralism and voluntariness and measurable outcomes, and he welcomes good work from people of faith – whether Methodist, Muslim or Mormon – or good people of no faith at all” (Dilulio, 2001). Proselytizing, or “expected” participation in religious activities, is not acceptable for the Faith-Based Initiative.

The full details on how to maintain the separation are yet to be worked out. The Executive Order that created the White House Office

of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives declared that the primary purpose of the Faith-Based Initiative was to achieve “valid public purposes” based upon “pluralism, nondiscrimination, evenhandedness, and neutrality” (EO13199, 2001).

Faith-based and other community organizations are indispensable in meeting the needs of poor Americans and distressed neighborhoods. Government cannot be replaced by such organizations, but it can and should welcome them as partners. The paramount goal is compassionate results, and private and charitable community groups, including religious ones, should have the fullest opportunity permitted by law to compete on a level playing field, so long as they achieve valid public purposes, such as curbing crime, conquering addiction, strengthening families and neighborhoods, and overcoming poverty. This delivery of social services must be results oriented and should value the bedrock principles of pluralism, nondiscrimination, evenhandedness, and neutrality. (EO13199, 2001)

In 2001 the House of Representatives passes H.R. 7, The Community Solutions Act. H.R. 7 provides specific language to ensure faith-based organizations that receive federal funds do not use those funds for religious purposes, such as proselytizing or worship:

No funds provided through a grant or cooperative agreement to a religious organization to provide assistance under any program described in subsection (c)(4) shall be expended for sectarian instruction, worship, or proselytization. If the religious organization offers such an activity, it shall be voluntary for the individuals receiving services and offered separate from the program funded under sub-section (c)(4). (H.R. 7, 2001)

It should be noted that although this bill has passed in the House of Representatives, it has not passed the Senate.

Federal agencies, however, do have implementing rules for faith-based organizations that prohibit the use of federal funds for religious purposes. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Compassion Capital Fund provides funds for faith-based organizations. The priority for the awards for these funds are for “organizations that

focus on homelessness, hunger, at-risk children, transition from welfare to work, and those in need of intensive rehabilitation such as addicts or prisoners.” The rules for these funds state clearly that “CCF funds may not be used to support religious practices such as religious instruction, worship or prayer” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Conclusion

The life of Daniel provides a case study of how a man of strong faith can be true to his faith and provide competent, capable service to his nation. At no time did Daniel have to “hide his faith” or compromise his values of honesty, integrity and loyalty. When there was a conflict between serving his God or serving his king, Daniel “opted” out of service to his king, served his God, and accepted the consequences. Finally, Daniel respected the rights of others to make their own choices of faith—he did not proselytize or attempt to convert those he served.

Daniel provides a case study from the Bible – but there are no doubt other case studies that could be drawn from other faiths that demonstrate a careful balance between serving the state and being true to their faith. In the Bible there are other examples, such as Joseph – an amazingly parallel story of a man who was able to “work within the system” and remain true to his faith, even when he was falsely accused of crimes against Pharaoh. Even Jesus outlined the concept of the separation of church and state when he said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Matthew 2:21, NIV).

Faith-based organizations today must adopt the same standards for the Faith-Based Initiative to succeed. Organizations receiving government funding must be selected on the basis of their competence and their ability to deliver services. Faith-based organizations should draw upon their values as a foundation for their services, and allow their “faith” to remain the motivation for reaching out to those in need. Those who are not able to do this successfully should opt out – and unlike Daniel, they serve as voluntary “contractors” for services for the state rather than slaves or even employees of the state. Those organizations that receive government funding should understand they are funded to minister to needs, not to souls; religious liberty and the individual choices of beneficiaries to adopt or reject a certain faith must

be honored and respected. If faith-based organizations are not able to meet these tests, they will also be “weighed and found wanting.”

Notes

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2. The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires permission of International Bible Society.

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