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*The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare.* Ram A. Cnaan with Stephanie C. Boddie, Femida Handy, Gaynor Yancey and Richard Schneider.

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information. At times, the reader feels that the book loses its focus as the author digresses into numerous tangential issues. On the other hand, some of the topics the author addresses are highly pertinent to the book's central theme. Perhaps the most important of these is the issue of basic income or 'basic security', as the author calls it. One very useful chapter is devoted to the topic and its history, dimensions and implications are examined in some depth. Other related topics of importance include profit sharing, stakeholding in firms and the issue of the right to work. Other useful chapters deal with workfare, unemployment benefits and retirement pensions. The book will certainly be of interest to anyone concerned with the link between work, employment and human well-being.

Ram A. Cnaan with Stephanie C. Boddie, Femida Handy, Gaynor Yancey and Richard Schneider, *The Invisible Caring Hand: American Congregations and the Provision of Welfare*. New York: New York University Press, 2002. \$60.00 hardcover, \$19.50 papercover.

Although religious congregations have historically been engaged in social welfare, their charitable activities have now been politicized. Influenced by Christian conservatives, the Republican Party has actively promoted the greater involvement of religious charities in social service delivery arguing that they are an effective alternative to public provisions. Supporters of faith based services claim that religious charities are far more responsive to the poor and needy, and that their programs are less costly, more efficient and delivered with greater compassion than those of government bureaucracies. They urge the government to fund religious charities and permit them to use public revenues to promote their sectarian agenda.

Following the election of President George W. Bush, some of these proposals have been implemented. For the first time, an office responsible for faith based initiatives was established in the White House, and the provisions of the 1996 welfare reform legislation that permitted religious charities to provide social services, without separating their charitable and religious missions, was given greater impetus. The President made it clear that he favored the greater involvement of the churches in social welfare

and, to the delight of religious conservatives, he promised that his administration would actively promote faith based provisions.

It is in this context that Cnaan and his co-authors have sought to assess the contribution that religious congregations make to social welfare. Their book reports on a study of no less than 215 of these congregations in different parts of the United States and Canada. Each congregation was visited and detailed interviews were undertaken to determine the nature and extent of their engagement in social welfare. In addition to providing conventional charitable services such as food pantries and clothing closets, many of the congregations were involved in community based activities including recreational and educational programs, support for neighborhood associations, artistic performances and community fairs.

Cnaan and his co-authors reveal that religious congregations make a very significant contribution to social welfare not only in terms of the goods and services they deliver but in terms of their wider educational and advocacy role. In financial terms, they found that the amount of cash resources the congregations allocated to social service provision was quite small but, when volunteer time and other non-cash resources were taken into account, their contribution is more substantial. Nevertheless, the authors conclude that religious charity cannot replace government provision. Even if the government were to allocate sizable resources to religious organizations for welfare purposes, these organizations do not have the infrastructure or expertise to assume a major role. Consequently, the authors propose that a closer partnership between government and religious organizations be forged. In addition, the contribution of faith based organizations to fostering a pluralistic conception of social welfare should be emphasized.

Cnaan and his colleagues have produced a thoughtful and significant book. It is well written, fully documented and based on a prodigious amount of research. Dedicated investigators traveled around the country to interview the leaders and members of diverse congregations and a large amount of valuable information was collected. The book makes a major contribution to our understanding of how religious congregations engage in the social welfare field and how their role can be enhanced. It is an

invaluable resource for anyone interested in the issues attending faith based social welfare today.

Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins (Eds.), *The New World of Welfare*.  
Brookings Institution Press, 2001. \$22.95 papercover.

Welfare reform has dominated social policy debates in the United States over the last decade. Since the late 1980s, when the Reagan administration passed the Family Support Act, political leaders, federal officials, state governments, private think tanks, academics and journalists have devoted a great deal of time and effort to this issue. With the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which introduced the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or TANF program, welfare reform has become even more prominent particularly in view of the program's apparent success. By the end of the decade, the numbers of people receiving cash benefits through the TANF program had fallen dramatically and politicians of different political persuasions claimed that the problem of welfare dependency had finally been solved.

This book provides a compendium of valuable information about welfare reform. Based on a conference hosted at the University of Michigan in 2002, the book is compiled by Rebecca Blank and Ron Haskins—two leading experts on the subject with rather different views. Haskins was a key policy Congressional maker who assisted the Republican majority craft the 1996 legislation while Blank served as a member of the Clinton Council of Economic Advisors. While Haskins approaches the subject from an approach that some might describe as 'compassionately conservative', Blank's perspective is grounded in a more conventional, welfare statist tradition. In the book's opening chapter, the two editors summarize the key issues attending welfare reform, presenting their own views and supporting them with plausible arguments.

In addition, the book contains no less than 18 chapters dealing with a wide range of topics related to welfare reform and most of them are written by the luminaries working in the field. Charles Murray addresses the issue of family formation focusing on illegitimacy and single family life while Lawrence Mead summarizes what is described as a conservative approach to welfare.