

REVIEWS

Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy

Warren, M. R. (2001). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE OF THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY IN America, with naysayers pointing to declining voter turnout and influential books such as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Well, Americans may vote less and may not bowl together, but, according to Mark Warren, many Americans are active in local organizations that matter. Warren's book, *Dry Bones Rattling*, adds to an enormously rapid growth in literature examining and documenting the revival of what is often called "civil society." The title is a reference to the vision in Ezekiel in which a valley of bones comes to life. As Warren explains, "in the 25 years since Ernesto Cortes, Jr. founded COPS [Communities Organized for Public Service] in San Antonio, the Texas IAF [Industrial Areas Foundation, the network of community organizers founded by Saul Alinsky in the 1940s] has been rattling bones across the state to find a way to fulfill Ezekiel's prophecy, that is, to rebuild some of our most devastated communities" (p. 4).

The unique contribution of Warren's book is his examination of how the IAF community organizing in Texas went beyond Alinsky's tactics to include and tap the resources of religious and faith groups in cities and communities across Texas. Indeed, one of Warren's main points is to demonstrate that the IAF's success was due to its ability to engage religious communities and congregations, not just through their (mostly male) leaders, but by reaching deeper into these communities and developing leaders especially from among the women congregants. In *Dry Bones Rattling*, Warren provides an engaging description and analysis of the IAF's organizing successes and challenges.

Mark Warren spent several years observing and documenting the community organizing efforts of the IAF and its associated groups in San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston. In addition, he also interviewed hundreds of community leaders and examined documents and records to tell the story of the IAF's successes in Texas from the 1970s through the 1990s. Warren identifies

several key components that he argues sets the Texas IAF apart from other community organizing.

First, he shows how the IAF was able not only to organize successfully at the local level in various cities, but was also able to build a state-wide organization that made its voice heard in state politics. For example, the IAF pioneered a job training program called QUEST which successfully acquired both local and state funding for its programs.

Second, Warren spends considerable time discussing the challenges the IAF faced in building collaborations across racial and cultural lines. Warren makes the case that the faith-based—and specifically Christian—component was the key factor in getting beyond racial and cultural barriers, both by developing common goals grounded in shared beliefs, but also by making space for cultural differences between the two main participating groups: Mexican-American Catholics, and African American Protestants. Finally, Warren shows how the involvement of congregations was critical to the ability of the IAF to develop lay leadership—especially of women—and thus foster greater participation in what he calls consensual democracy.

Although Warren's description and analysis is clearly supportive of the critical role of faith groups (mostly Christian), what he describes as a "theology of organizing" seems more sociological than theological. For readers wanting greater theological and biblical substance to buttress the arguments for the benefits of including faith in organizing, one good source would be Mark Gornik's *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (2002). Another legitimate concern is whether the emphasis on Christian congregations is unnecessarily exclusive of other faiths. Warren is very much aware of this potential critique and discusses the limitations of the Texas IAF organizing, while also showing that the IAF itself is aware of these challenges and has made recent efforts to include other congregations, most notably Jewish. Christians in social work may be tempted to conclude that *Dry Bones Rattling* demonstrates the superiority of Christian organizing over "secular" organizing; however, Warren avoids any hint of a triumphalist perspective. *Dry Bones Rattling* is a well-written, comprehensive, and hopeful contribution to the literature on faith-based community organizing, and should be consulted for anyone interested or involved in community organizing, whether Christian or not. ❖

REFERENCES

- Gornik, M. (2002). *To live in peace: Biblical faith and the changing inner city*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Putnam, R. D. (2001). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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A Heart for the City: Effective Ministries to the Urban Community

Fuder, J. (Ed.). (1999). Chicago: Moody Press.

EDITOR JOHN FUDER BEGINS THIS BOOK, A COLLECTION OF STORIES by urban ministry leaders from Chicago, by asserting his purpose to encourage and strengthen those in urban ministry. He succeeds through the inspirational accounts of various methods, organizations, and populations that urban ministries touch.

The book is divided into seven parts, each containing topical chapters followed by reflection questions. Part one begins with an overview of Chicago history and Moody Bible Institute's place in it. Most of the contributing authors are connected to Moody, as alumni or through work in various Chicago organizations and neighborhoods. Fuder claims there is an "opportunity to reach the world's nations here in Chicago" (p. 38), and he uses the stories in the book to establish a foundation for urban work in the city's rich cultural landscape.

Biblical and philosophical foundations are the theme for part two. Stowell comments on the call to compassion for "the least of these" (p. 47) which highlights the main argument for Christians' involvement—both individual and corporate—in urban ministry. This idea is taken further in the following chapters by the arguments for wholistic ministry and honest racial reconciliation in urban work. In addition, Gordon does a good job of outlining the philosophy of urban ministry including one of the book's interwoven themes—the need for relocation to the urban neighborhood as a part of effective urban ministry.

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