

MORAL-SPIRITUAL INFRASTRUCTURE: TOUCHSTONE OF MOVEMENT-BUILDING COMMUNITY ORGANIZING¹

By Moshe ben Asher, Ph.D.²

One of my most memorable experiences in the early years of my community organizing, which turned out to be an omen, happened while doorknocking in a neighborhood organizing drive. It was before faith-based organizing came on strong. After knocking on hundreds of doors, it occurred to me that a lot of folks were responding to my pitch without regard to their immediate self-interest, which was the first axiom of neighborhood organizing, as I had learned it. But my natural inclination was also to encourage talk about “what we really believe in,” “our deepest values,” and “our hopes and dreams.” The responses were often enthusiastic and emotional, and they affected me deeply.

A few years later, in the early 1980s, while driving to a meeting with two women who were leaders in Citizens Action League, one of the women punctuated every comment with the phrase, “praise God”—which I thought was inane. But within six months I came to realize that, overwhelmingly, the lives of the people I had been organizing, all low- to moderate-income people of color and working-class ethnic whites, revolved around their religious and spiritual beliefs. Their first organizational loyalty was to their church, whether for religious, spiritual, social, cultural, educational, political or economic reasons. The inanity was that most of my fellow organizers and I were ignorant of what religion and spirituality meant to the people we were organizing. It was ludicrous that I was also ignorant of my own family’s religious tradition. How in the world, I asked myself, could I be useful to our members in making decisions that would have far-reaching consequences in their lives if I was ignorant of their most dearly held beliefs? Of course, I couldn’t—which motivated me to become a rabbi.

In the 1980s, much of community organizing shifted from neighborhoods to institutional faith communities, mainly Catholic churches. How much of that transition was driven by the need to increase the strategic assets of community organizing versus how much was due to religious and spiritual animation, I leave to

scholars and intellectuals to answer. But throughout my experience of the newer, “institutional” approach, the organizing was never centered on the heart of the faith community. While the issues taken up came out of the life experience of the members of the parish or congregation, the impulse for political action did not emerge from reflection on their faith tradition, its inspiring texts, moral lessons, and action imperatives, or on the lives of its role models. That critical step was leapfrogged by an externally imposed organizing model, one which had little or no staying power without funding from external sources, such as religious denominations, foundations, governments, and corporations.

The standard faith-based organizing model has a built-in tendency toward “slash and burn” development. Since the organizing typically proceeds with only a shallow connection to the faith-core of the congregation or parish,³ there is no inclination on the part of the general membership to approve budget appropriations for organizing staff, even for a single year, never mind on a continuous basis. This appears to be the uncontradicted experience of the member-units throughout faith-based organizing projects. Since the projects rarely have enough externally sourced funding to continuously staff campaigns and actions for all of their individual units, which they want to increase to show progress to their members and funders, they must “slash” staff support to some units to keep expanding the total number. Without that support, those units “burn out.” They require repeated redevelopment or they disappear from actions and campaigns.

Faith-based organizing has mostly failed to recognize the heart of the faith community as the essential foundation of the organizing process. In addition to dependence on external funding sources, which can be unreliable and problematic because of their tradeoff demands,⁴ the typical consequences include engaging no more than a marginal segment of the faith-community membership, often no more than a handful of activists not primarily motivated by the faith-core of

the institution but by their own idiosyncratic ideologies and interests. For the remainder of the membership, vis-à-vis campaigns and actions, the organizing tends to rely on the institution's frontispiece and the credentials of its professionals for motivation and legitimization, which leaves most members as indifferent, uninvolved spectators.

Much of the organizing of our era, including the faith-based genre, has been unmindful of the demonstrated importance of *integral* moral-spirituality in building sustained, accelerating movement. This oversight has been particularly glaring in the way faith-based organizing still approaches the relationship between (a) reflection on scripture and other sacred texts by members, and (b) their identification of issues and development of strategies and tactics. The approach in widespread use for decades has had it backwards, taking the second before the first, where the approach to the second (b) is preset by the "organizing model," and the first (a) typically is replaced with brief clergy-led prayers and benedictions. The backwards relationship between the faith tradition and the action life of the organization is a fatal flaw, making it likely that the organizing will not be led by inspiring leaders and will not be sustained for the long haul by inspired belief; but will, instead, mostly remain the marginal activity of activist-members, and require continuous energizing by the presence of professional organizing staff. Withal, there is no plausible basis to deny the conclusion, the history of our organizing demonstrates clearly that the spirituality, religiosity, and faith of the people we organize must be treated as intrinsic to their political views and commitments.⁵

This well-worn model, despite a half-century history of successful issue-campaigns by several federations of organizing projects, has not and almost certainly will not produce a sustained, accelerating national movement with the power to countervail the corruption of American democratic institutions. The justification of such a prediction is that "What America is now experiencing is a massive failure of character—a nationwide blackout of integrity—among elected Republicans," as described by a highly regarded member of that party.⁶ The solidifying authoritarian incarnation of the party is described by a former Republican strategist as "... an organized conspiracy for the purpose of maintaining power for self-interest and the self-interest of its donor class.⁷ There is no fidelity to the American ideal or American democracy."⁸ The reactionary Republicans' pivotal achievements—the current 6-to-3 conservative-leaning SCOTUS, the packing of lower courts with conservative ideologues, and the control of state legislatures—have been gained by the billionaire brotherhood's⁹ successful manipulation of a massive constituency. They have astutely targeted the tens of millions threatened by the loss of racial, cultural, and political supremacy. Their successful strategy relies on funding so-called populist organizations,¹⁰ right-wing media,

reactionary advocacy groups, conservative think tanks, and budget-starved university departments.¹¹ This strategy, unabated, will lead to an historic failure of our organizing later in this century if the profession remains committed to the model we have relied upon until now. Even if the SCOTUS is rebalanced 5-to-4 ideologically, the historical trend—we are witnessing in real time the transition from electoral democracy to oligarchic empire¹²—may only be slowed rather than reversed, thus remaining an existential threat to our democracy and an insurmountable challenge to the standard community organizing model.

Self-Interest vs. Spirit

Is integral moral-spirituality an essential touchstone of community organizing dedicated to build an inclusive, progressive national movement to ensure the continuation of the United States as a functioning democracy?

In my thinking about that question, the words of two rebels came to mind: Benjamin Franklin's "Would you persuade, speak of interest, not reason"¹³ powerfully appealed to my commonsense. And Saul Alinsky's rule, "... it is not man's 'better nature' but his self-interest that demands that he be his brother's keeper,"¹⁴ reminded me that belief in the power of appeals to self-interest has been axiomatic in most of the community organizing of our era. But Alinsky went a step further and added, "I believe that man is about to learn that the most practical life is the moral life, and that the moral life is the only road to survival," which we'll come back to momentarily.

For many decades there has been widespread recognition in community organizing that true self-interest reflects that which is shared with many others.¹⁵ Organizers and leaders have taught this concept to thousands of members of their organizations, undoubtedly to good effect. Nonetheless, that practice changes neither the recognized definition of self-interest—"one's personal profit, benefit, or advantage . . . especially to the exclusion or regard for others"¹⁶—nor the common motivation to act out of narrowly defined self-interest. The hitch with the enlightened standard of self-interest is that, while potentially integrated into organizational culture, it remains an ideal unfamiliar to the minds and hearts of millions of potential participants in social movements.

For Alinsky, belief in the eventual confluence of self-interest and morality made sense, because belief in God and membership in faith communities were at very high levels at the time. But even so, he saw straightforward self-interest as the key to winning immediate concrete changes. And Alinsky-inspired organizing ever since has been committed to building organizations that can win short-term practical benefits for their members—which Alinsky himself might rethink if he were alive today.¹⁷

Is it possible to maintain long-extended participation in movement-building based on immediate *self-*

interest—motivating commitment with expectations of regular rewarding outcomes, shared or otherwise—when, realistically, there is little or no prospect of presenting a convincing case of short-term material returns on potential participants’ investments of time, energy, and resources? It’s no mirage that successful social movements dedicated to the commonweal, although they ultimately satisfy self-interests, have the ability to survive for many decades of unrewarded sacrifice because deeply held faith supports their long struggle.¹⁸ This has been true even for movements not explicitly faith-based, such as the labor movement¹⁹ and the American Revolution.²⁰

The necessity for integral moral-spirituality in building transformative movements, implicit in Alinsky’s vision of self-interest, cannot be sidestepped. We have little prospect of building a unified national movement under the banner of immediate self-interest, even the more enlightened variety, at least not one that survives to bring about political and economic policies that reflect far-greater righteousness, truth, justice, freedom, peace, and kindness than what we have today.²¹ Self-interest works reasonably well as a relatively short-term driver, but by itself it does not provide the deep, abiding inspiration needed for continuously expanding movements that demand commitment measured not in years or even decades but in significant segments of centuries.

All of the foregoing prompts the question: How can we actualize the moral-spirituality of the people we organize, to ensure that the inspiration of their faith powers up an ever growing, strategically and tactically inclusive, unified national movement, one that reaches far into the future?

Achieving that goal requires that we transfigure organizing by embodying recognition of our society’s *moral-spiritual infrastructure* (MSI), which extends a kind of homogenized religious and spiritual influence on social life, which is not the same as institutional religion or personal religiosity. We need to become much more knowledgeable, religiously and sociologically, about the MSI itself and how it both reflects and shapes the lives of the people we organize.

Presumably, it would be useful if every genre of organizing considered the dynamics of the MSI at the outset of their initiatives; if across the board we stopped treating religiosity and spirituality as come-ons for our organizing, as if these proofs of faith are necessary but in essence little more than the irrational devotions of the gullible, mainly useful to legitimize our credentials; and if we recognized the effects of their absence in past organizing failures and the necessity of their integral role in future movement-building successes.

Perhaps a good place to begin is with a basic introduction to “infrastructure,” what we might regard as the bones or skeleton of our societal body, which provides the framework on which everything else is built.

Infrastructure Rollcall

Our familiarity with *physical* infrastructure comes from the pot-hole that jars us into mild annoyance, from the frustrating power-outages that wreck our plans, from the frightening collapse of levees that flood our cities, from the galling invasions of information networks that threaten our security and privacy, and from much, much more. Over the past several decades, we have become more aware of physical infrastructure, but only vaguely, despite the failures and lack of repair and replacement, because we rarely see the breakdowns firsthand.

Much of our *social* infrastructure similarly has an essential role but ordinarily remains out of mind. For example, most of us rarely think of the workers who run our governments and provide public services. Without that social infrastructure, we wouldn’t have vehicle codes that make driving practicable; we wouldn’t have licensing of professionals to assure us that those who serve us are competent and trustworthy; and we wouldn’t have regulatory agencies, such as the FAA and FDA, to make flying and drugs far safer than they would be otherwise. Without the social infrastructure, our lives would be much more chaotic and endangered.

Some writers use the term “*spiritual* infrastructure” to describe institutions that are mainly spiritual or religious in character. But it’s a misnomer, because they’re actually referring to physical and social infrastructure, plus all their material artifacts—their personnel and their facilities, such as sanctuaries, classrooms, and cemeteries. The subject here is entirely different.

Moral-spiritual infrastructure is a *non-material* phenomenon, although it may be associated with physical or social infrastructure. Just as we can picture the physical and social infrastructure that make our way of life possible, we can also appreciate that our cooperation, competition, and conflict—in families, classrooms, workplaces, businesses, civic organizations, government, recreation centers, etc.—remain constructive overall when we mostly adhere to shared moral and ethical values and principles, such as self-control and tolerance, which in themselves have no physicality, yet they serve as minimum requirements of behavior.

The moral-spiritual infrastructure is incorporeal; it exists only in spirit. Is it, then, nothing more than a mystical notion, without much practical impact? Is it something that must be taken on faith, because it cannot be affirmed by material evidence? It may be misunderstood in those ways, but the MSI is not the least bit mystical; because we rely on the incorporeal, which we internalize to guide our thinking and action. Consider how much we depend on one another’s love, fidelity, honesty, integrity, courage, sacrifice, honor, respect, duty, compassion, gratitude, and humility. Our belief and faith in these values and, in turn, their influence on us, make possible our aspiration to live together with “liberty and justice for all.” If we dropped just one of the values from the MSI—say, we abandon truth—the

prospects for viable social and physical life would disappear, as history has repeatedly demonstrated.

Although we have had decades of betrayals of journalistic ethics through misinformation given to the public by news media, governments, and corporations,²² before now the U.S. had no experience of leaders whose “. . . lies are already halfway around the world before the truth has laced up its shoes.”²³ Consider that, for the past four years we have been undergoing an attack on the very idea of truth. It’s not a stretch to conclude that “. . . Trump not only liberated himself from the truth, he liberated others to tell their lies and spread his”²⁴—so now the falsifiers number nearly half of the body-politic and more than a third of the citizenry. As one historian put it, “This is what rot looks like.”²⁵ The collapse of the value of truth has been characterized as “truth decay,” which is said to threaten evidence-based policymaking.²⁶ More to the point, however, the essence of so-called truth decay is the willingness of millions to lie knowingly in matters that affect the safety and security of the nation—an existential moral failing, obviously not limited in its effects to misguided policymaking. Trump “. . . has detonated a bomb under the epistemological foundations of a civilization that is increasingly unable to distinguish between facts and falsehoods, evidence and fantasy. He has instructed tens of millions of people to accept the commandment, *That which you can get away with, is true.*”²⁷ Under the circumstances, it’s clear that, even with Trump’s electoral defeat, if the MSI standard of truth is not restored, the Constitution cannot be successfully defended and our democracy cannot survive.

The critical contribution of healthy MSI to social stability, harmony, and progress is portrayed in a description of the challenges faced by South Africa after the end of Apartheid:

We may be free from the oppression of the past, but we haven’t yet been provided with a coherent, wholesome infrastructure to help direct our aspirations. So, freedom itself is only half the story. What we do with our freedom—that is the question. We need a purpose in life, and we need a moral, spiritual infrastructure to help guide us in life. Otherwise we wander aimlessly through the wilderness, and our freedom remains undeveloped potential.²⁸

Origins of Moral-Spiritual Infrastructure

How do we account for the existence of moral-spiritual infrastructure? We can easily imagine that innumerable individuals, groups, and whole societies, from the beginnings of humankind to the present day, have asked: How did this place we’re in come to be, and how does it work? How are we to know when and how we should get what we need for ourselves or, instead, join with others to get what we all need?

Of the two major arenas of knowledge in Western Civilization, science strives to discover what our mate-

rial world *is* and *how* it comes to be; while the humanities generally and religion specifically strive to identify what our individual and collective behavior *is* and what it *should be*.²⁹ The need to know how our lives can best be lived in society drives the search to fathom the *spiritual* depths and purposes of humankind and to guide its continued development by studying and teaching ethics and morality.

In the Abrahamic tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, we refer to the incorporeal infrastructure as *moral-spiritual* because it is generally understood to reflect a widely shared conception of Divine Providence—how the incorporeal Creator and Mastermind of All is believed to unfold the Creation over time.³⁰ Providence is conveyed to us through the lawfulness of nature, and through the spiritual history and the moral and ethical commandments we accept as given to us by God, communicated in sacred literature, prophecy, and revelation. Inherent in the conception of providence is that the Creator did not abandon the Creation after creating it, but continues masterminding it from moment to moment, with particular regard for humankind. That belief is at the heart of all monotheistic religions. It is understood, based on both doctrine and faith, that our actions matter to God, and that our lives are uplifted by our relationship with God. The God with whom we are in relationship is not thought to be a projection of natural forces, but the sole Creator and Mastermind of all Creation, whose domain is outside of the material world, and whose plan for future history (i.e., providence) involves us in accord with our moral and ethical behavior.

Considered sociologically, moral-spirituality, as used here, whether referring to a behavioral standard, emotional anodyne, or intellectual ideal, has two radical dimensions: that realization of the unique potential of human beings, individually and collectively, is rooted in shared morality, which is brought into effect by society’s moral-spiritual infrastructure; and that the potential for widely shared morality is most fully realized when the source of that morality is incorporeal, universal, and not itself advantaged in any way by its particular requirements.

The MSI is not the same as the specific religious and spiritual beliefs and practices of individuals and institutions; it’s more accurately understood as their common denominator. It functions as a “plausibility structure,” which we create and re-create with the meanings of the common language of our social interaction, an incorporeal edifice of definitions we project onto our institutional life, which in turn play back upon us.³¹ We have created physical icons to represent that structure, to remind us of those meanings, which we uphold insofar as they continue to reflect positive outcomes in our day-to-day lives. The most visible symbols of the plausibility structure are the Jewish Star of David, the Christian Cross, and the Muslim Star and Crescent (although the latter is not formally recognized

by Islamic religious authorities). When outcomes in the material world conform to the plausibility structure, its effects are strengthened; when outcomes no longer conform to the structure, its effects are weakened.

MSI Purposes, Potentials, and Protections

While the moral-spiritual infrastructure may be regarded as little more than imaginary cultural wallpaper that conditions our social life—it is pervasive, yet we experience it mostly without noticing it—it does far more than lend an “aesthetic” to our society, a quality of moral and ethical ambiance. It shapes our lives by helping us to recognize a transcending purpose for human existence, by providing a map to discover shared aspirations, and by showing us how to achieve individual meaning and fulfillment. The MSI points the way to uplifting lifelong goals that are morally and ethically sound, and it lays out the boundaries of acceptable behavior, such as the limits on our reactions when disappointed, insulted, or victimized. The authority of the MSI map derives from its origin, believed to be Godly, and from its historically confirmed wisdom.

The roots of the MSI are nourished by our institutional religious life, which aligns the direction of our ethical and moral consciousness and behavior with what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam generally agree accords with the will of God. The resulting MSI serves as our common *civic* religion, promulgating widely accepted standards of ethical and moral behavior, which are shared among people of all faiths and of no conventional faith.

A systematic survey³² of the world’s seven great religions and of the documents of several secular organizations, including the American Atheists, American Humanist Association, and the United Nations, describes numerous universal moral values which approximate the MSI:

Commitment to something greater than oneself

- To recognize the existence of and be committed to a Supreme Being, higher principle, transcendent purpose or meaning to one's existence
- To seek the Truth (or truths)
- To seek Justice

Self-respect, but with humility, self-discipline, and acceptance of personal responsibility

- To respect and care for oneself
- To not exalt oneself or overindulge, to show humility and avoid gluttony, greed, or other forms of selfishness or self-centeredness
- To act in accordance with one's conscience and to accept responsibility for one's behavior

Respect and caring for others (i.e., the Golden Rule)

- To recognize the connectedness between all people
- To serve humankind and be helpful to individuals
- To be caring, respectful, compassionate, tolerant, and forgiving of others
- To not hurt others (e.g., do not murder, abuse, steal from, cheat, or lie to others)

Caring for other [non-human] living things and the environment

When the MSI is internalized by individuals, it reinforces their “moral compass,” their personal moral guidelines and boundaries, additionally biasing their behavior towards non-destructive forms. Without widespread MSI-buttressing of moral compass, physical and social infrastructure begin to fragment and ultimately fail, ending the society’s ability to be materially productive and spiritually uplifting.

Not knowing or respecting the MSI, we make more moral and ethical missteps which ultimately affect both our psychic and physical well-being; because spiritual death, the loss of the values and principles that sustain goodness in its myriad forms, hastens physical death. As noted in a recent *JAMA* article, “Improving the social determinants of health will be brought at last to a boil only by the heat of the moral determinants of health.”³³ We maximize the length of our lives by living within moral-spiritual boundaries; and we shorten our lifetimes when we monopolize our lives with sensuality and materialism.³⁴

The effect is cumulative on a societal level, evidenced in the physical decline of nations, for which historians have identified moral-spiritual decay as a variable.³⁵ MSI serves to inculcate moral character and responsible citizenship, which rely on the mutual trust that accompanies expectations of reciprocal ethical and moral behavior. In other words, “. . . [such] trust is a collective moral achievement,”³⁶ without which our ability to create a commonweal disappears. As a former secretary of labor, treasury, and state put it, “Trust is the coin of the realm.”³⁷ But the MSI sets not only the boundaries of our day-to-day conduct, it also projects the moral vision that raises up our present existence and bolsters our long-term investments to refine our national character.

What does it look like when the MSI no longer conveys values that have widespread public acceptance? In the U.S., the MSI has been conflicted for decades on public policy related to abortion. Although the anti-abortion constituency, dominated by evangelical Christians, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews has lobbied successfully for conservative policy-making, a majority of Christian denominations and individuals and liberal Jews take a pro-choice position. The liberal constituency has not been well-organized since before *Roe vs. Wade*. But given the probable direction of the SCOTUS with the addition of Amy Coney Barrett, it’s expected that they will rediscover their political voice through organizations that bridge traditional religious and denominational boundaries.³⁸ The action life of the conflict affects more than abortion legislation, because when abortion is weaponized as a wedge issue by reactionary forces, it is exploited to gin up controversy as a distraction from their self-enriching policies of economic exploitation, with far-reaching negative consequences that produce more MSI fragmentation.

What does it look like when the MSI itself begins to break down? “Until four years ago, there was what you might call a Floor of Decency. This was the basic minimum standard of behavior to be an accepted member of society. . . . Because it was more or less taken for granted, a lot of us weren’t even conscious of this floor.”³⁹ Now, of course, for a significant proportion of the American public, the floor is gone—“Donald Trump [and his enablers] smashed the floor.”⁴⁰ Although his behavior should have produced “moral revulsion” among virtually the entire population, that same significant proportion of the population remained indifferent. Thus we find that “. . . our basic standards of decency are more fragile than we thought.”⁴¹ Not only have they been ignored by more than a third of the population, there is little likelihood of their recovery in the near future. The “smashing” of our MSI is painfully apparent in the moral and ethical failings of our foundational institutions, spotlighted by the open subversion of their missions by corrupt leaders and their sycophants. While it’s true that the institutions may be reclaimed by new leaders with integrity, the moral floor will undoubtedly remain smashed for huge numbers.

When the MSI fragmentation goes beyond the loss of minimum standards of behavior to destroying any possibility of national political unity, we have entered the territory that brought the downfall of democracy in post-World War I Germany. The indefensible claim from the right-wing at the time, that Germany did not actually lose the war but was betrayed by “traitors, leftists, and Jews above all,” set the stage for irreparably fragmenting German society and setting out a welcome mat for Hitler’s madness.⁴² The probability that the United States is on a similar course seems increasingly likely in the light of current events.⁴³

Nevertheless, one of the most fascinating aspects of MSI is its durability in the face of extended corruption and repression by authoritarian forces, possibly because it is seeded religiously and spiritually at the grassroots. After 70 years of repression in which “. . . Stalin destroyed or closed almost all churches, synagogues and mosques across the Soviet Union,”⁴⁴ traditional religious institutions are now thriving in Russia. There has been a revival of Jewish religious and cultural life since the collapse of the Soviet Union;⁴⁵ nearly three-quarters of all Russians now identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, although their low church attendance and infrequency of praying suggests they may prefer private spirituality to affiliation with religious organizations;⁴⁶ and Islam has been said to have “got its groove back in Russia” since the fall of communism.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most notable fact of the Soviet repression of religion is that it never succeeded in fostering “true believers” in communism as a replacement for belief in God.⁴⁸ Eventually, religious perspectives on civic morality became openly resurgent,⁴⁹ popularized even by atheist organizations.

The U.S. has experienced more than a half-century

of subliminal advertising aimed to instigate the discarding of religiously based morality for the sake of greater corporate profitability, which has significantly eroded the moral and ethical footing of the MSI. The harmful effects of the widespread decline of moral sensibility⁵⁰ have been intensified by ubiquitous commercially foisted rationalizations that celebrate unrestrained pleasure-seeking.⁵¹ Religious values have been replaced extensively by narrowly self-serving amoral autonomy, which is now widely regarded as an unassailable social good.

While a large swath of the American population has traded moral values and principles for the pleasures of boundless materialism and sensuality, it’s doubtful whether the corporate-driven anti-religious bias will permanently replace belief in God and in the value of religiously sanctifying otherwise commonplace experience. It’s as unlikely here as it was in the Soviet Union, since neither corporations nor governments can convincingly sanctify and raise up to higher meaning and purpose, the challenges and crises humans face in their experience of births, marriages, occupations, and deaths. Such sanctification is universally relied upon, even by non-believers, to psychically and emotionally meet the demanding circumstances of ordinary human existence, enabling transformation of those circumstances into meaningful and ennobling experiences.⁵²

In the meantime, until we have a widespread resurgence of moral sensibility, which may take many decades, the moral ennui has made us a convenient target for unrestrained manipulation and exploitation by powerful economic forces and their political enablers. As one of our modern sages observed, we find ourselves in a world in which “. . . everywhere depravity of morals and social tyranny and oppression go hand in hand.”⁵³ Our recent history confirms the connection between increasing disaffiliation from faith communities and jettisoning of religious values, and “. . . the erosion of the traditional norms that have sustained our democracy.”⁵⁴ This connection was highlighted early in our history by Alexis de Tocqueville, who concluded that it is religious faith that accounts for the best of American exceptionalism and that has prevented us from doing the worst that some of us scheme to do.⁵⁵ He found that in America, “The safeguard of morality is religion and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom.”⁵⁶

“Tocqueville claimed religion to be the first *political* institution of American democracy.”⁵⁷ The core of his belief was “. . . the centrality of human liberty to the entire purpose of the universe.” But he understood liberty as “. . . the opposite of license—as the triumph of practical reason . . . over animal instinct, as self-government and self-mastery over libertinism.” His view of American democracy was that it is moderated by religious morality. He saw that its success is based on the “dignity of the free person, the equality of all in the eyes of God, and the immortal value of every per-

son before God.” The essence of what de Tocqueville was describing was not individual religious beliefs or institutions per se, but the American MSI of his time.

Perhaps, then, most significantly, the moral-spiritual infrastructure strengthens our “social resilience,” our ability as a society to respond to challenges, such as threats to our democratic institutions, with unified action that brings to bear all our material and spiritual resources. Our social resilience is keyed to our ability to cooperate and act together for shared goals. That possibility becomes increasingly unlikely in direct proportion to our society’s inequality of power⁵⁸ and the disparagement of morality. As the corrupt oligarchic control of institutions advances, their purpose to serve the commonweal is increasingly sabotaged. The conditions that threaten our social resilience are closely linked to that corruption, which produces “. . . popular immiseration (declining incomes, falling life expectancies, growing social pessimism and despair), elite overproduction and intra-elite conflict, and failing state (growing state debt and collapsing trust in state institutions).”⁵⁹ Although the suffering, in turn, produces moral outrage,⁶⁰ the principal outcome is despair and disengagement,⁶¹ which undermine the MSI and reduce social resilience.

Religious institutions, faith-based communities, and the MSI itself, aligned in common purpose, can revitalize social resilience, because all of them call for social responsibility.⁶² While it’s also true that religious institutions may instead engage in triumphalism, reveling in the superiority of their particular theology and mission, MSI in the U.S. has more often promoted the egalitarian, unifying idea that, although we are each convinced of our beliefs and declare our commitment to them, politically we respect that others experience the world differently and have their own history and unique religiosity and spirituality. Our moral vision has proclaimed that the strength of the nation derives from *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one—our national motto, which emerged at our founding in 1776. Given the demographic differences from one colony to another at our founding, the vision of the new nation could not have been that it would rise up as a mono-culture. Instead, we were to become a united *socio-political* body out of many states and, of necessity, out of a diversity of cultures and states of mind and heart.

Thus we understand, sociologically, that to realize the potential of transformative social progress, it must be rooted in our MSI, more or less unified.⁶³ When that infrastructure is also strong and stable, its moral guidelines for our behavior (into which we have been socialized from childhood) sustain our physical well-being, psychic and emotional equilibrium, and moral-spirituality. Those outcomes, then, prompt and sustain our political, economic, and social initiatives to transform the larger world in the image of God—fundamentally inspiring and empowering the social movements we work to build.

The indispensable ingredient in that movement-building is moral vision. It’s not a promise of heavenly reward and it doesn’t demand a conventional belief in God. It may be understood best as a shared idea that ties together a hope for a better life in the future with a group commitment to pay the price of doing what is morally and ethically right to attain it. The essence of the idea is that “moral vision illuminates both the destination and the path by its unrelenting challenge and admonition to act on behalf of a higher good,”⁶⁴ to make sacrifices not in our immediate personal self-interest but for the “sake of heaven”—that is, prioritizing affirmation of social truth rather than acquisition of personal benefits.⁶⁵ Moral vision is thus the means of achieving unified leadership and internal cohesion—in effect, it is the glue that binds together all who count themselves in the movement. It is the *sine qua non* of all historic movement-building dedicated to the commonweal. In its justice- and democracy-seeking variation, it’s what motivates and unifies professional organizers; yet by unstated agreement, it’s not talked about and remains missing as an explicit part of our organizing model.

The MSI plays out in social movements through moral vision. As noted above, movements aimed at fundamental political, economic, and social change demand sacrifice. The sacrifices entailed in the American Revolution, Labor, and Civil Rights movements are legendary. Economic hardship and violent death were common in all three. Moral vision also comes into play in social movements when tactical and strategic decisions must be made, such as when, where, and under what circumstances violence is acceptable. In the civil rights movement it was never acceptable; in the labor movement it was acceptable at the fringes; and in the American Revolution it was institutionalized in the Revolutionary Army. And questions regarding moral vision arise when choosing allies and targeting adversaries.

What happens to a movement when, because of misguided alliances, its sustaining MSI plausibility structure collapses and its moral vision becomes blurred or disappears? For the last four years we have witnessed the weakening of the evangelical movement’s MSI. Evangelical leaders made a deal with President Trump, promising their unqualified support to him, regardless of the inhumanity of his policies, if he would nominate anti-abortion jurists to the SCOTUS.⁶⁶ While the evangelical leadership may find personal redemption, their betrayal of the movement’s basic values and principles will not be redeemed easily or quickly.⁶⁷ The plausibility structure of evangelicalism has been demoralized, literally, by the corruption of the movement’s leaders.⁶⁸ As if on cue, the business with the Trump administration was the last straw for disillusioned evangelical youth, who have been abandoning the movement in “droves.”⁶⁹ This is hardly unexpected, since we know that

. . . a potent, sustained movement must rest on more than economic and political principles. It also must draw upon the values that emanate from our deepest human emotions and desires for justice and community. The call for spiritual morality, whether advanced by organized religion or secular humanist yearnings, has played a decisive role in leading struggles throughout history. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s and the abolitionist movement of a century earlier are but two examples of struggles that were propelled forward by powerful calls for spiritual morality. Today, the embryonic movements that fuse direct action with a spiritually based call for justice offer similar promise.⁷⁰

Despite the characteristics and potentials of moral-spiritual infrastructure, it may be the least recognized underpinning of society and culture, the selfsame that community organizing aims to transform. So it's not surprising that we rarely integrate it into our professional mission, ignoring it even when its indispensability ought to be blindingly obvious to us. For our organizing to disallow all of what we know about MSI, possibly because of indefensible anti-religious bias within our profession,⁷¹ and, instead, to favor a model and a methodology that rely primarily on appeals to self-interest, immediate or long-term; or to be satisfied by religious symbols and rhetoric, even when characterized as "revolutionary," in the absence of deep reflection on the call of religious faith and sacred wisdom traditions; these promise little or nothing more than what we have achieved in the last 75 years. And rushing to praise the benefits of our historic struggles, to which many of us dedicated our lives and take pride in, may amount to a deadly diversion from the ever-deepening existential threat to our democracy. Given the potency of that threat, this may be the worst possible era to glory in past accomplishments.

Community Organizing Take-Aways

Competent organizers know the necessity of community, issue, and opposition research before starting an organizing drive or campaign. To that research list, does it make sense to add moral-spiritual infrastructure, the demographics of institutional religious affiliation, and religious positions on salient issues—regardless of whether or not the organizing is explicitly faith-based?

Probably, every kind of organizing would benefit from understanding the MSI and the faith-life of those we organize, whatever their religion, denomination, or other source of faith. Because for most of our members, regardless of whether they're religiously affiliated, their "faith," that which grounds their morality and ethics, whatever its character, tends to be at the core of their self-concept—not only what they are, but what they aspire to be—even when it's unconscious much of the time. Their revulsion at certain kinds of behavior and

what they find heartening in others, often spring from a very deep well of faith—not what is necessarily in their immediate self-interest, consciously reasoned, or scientifically provable.

The actuation of that faith is similar to the actuation of devoted commitment to citizenship; it typically requires an external trigger. In political life, issues that directly threaten material self-interest commonly act as triggers. In spiritual life, personal and social crises that threaten self-concept and that shatter expectations of fairness and compassion, may act as triggers.

It's a mistake to assume that what appears to be religious and spiritual indifference in normal times represents the full range of their potential motivational power in conditions of duress. Unexpected displays of faith by non-believers are often called out by the timeless observation, "there are no atheists in foxholes." Under the right conditions, all of us send "emergency bail-out communications to heaven." Skeptics view such prayers by self-described non-believers as nothing more than signs of emotional desperation; but the same praying—say, to save a life—may also reveal faith in the highly unlikely possibility, ordinarily beyond belief, of God's existence and concern for us. The rationality of that faith rests on its implicit acknowledgment that we are neither the authors of, nor above, the lawfulness of the Creation; and thus, forlorn as it may be at times, our best hope is to align our will with that of the Creator, as our wisdom traditions understand it. Perhaps it's believed to be our best hope because it seems to be the only hope of maintaining the moral-spiritual infrastructure for the sake of the commonweal. Can there be any doubt that, minimally, the antidote to the collapse of basic values must emphasize ". . . cultivating moral character and social duty—on honesty, reliability, vulnerability, and cooperativeness, and on shared values, rituals, and norms."⁷²

The objective in actuating faith is not to build our power, but to actualize God's power—the power of persistent goodness—through our actions in the world, which of course makes us powerful in the process. The distinction is more than religious rhetoric. Actualizing God's power, given the norms of our religious traditions, demands that we reflect on our power-building work and its foundation in faith, to ensure that our organized action is designed to be in the image of God. In this way, we build and exercise power that both nurtures our spirit and transforms poverty, oppression, and injustice.

Although clergy and lay religious leaders, as a rule, know more of faith-life than organizers, they typically do not know how to extend its effects beyond the congregation, parish, or *umma*, and they are searching for ways to do that. The vision and path to sanctify ordinary life, as described in sacred texts, make it possible. Our job as faith-based organizers includes conversations with clergy about those texts and their imperatives, and then continuing that talk with lay leaders. We

need to know enough to raise questions, but not to answer them. In effect, we have to know enough of the basic values of the relevant faith tradition(s) to ask questions that relate to contemporary injuries and injustices. For example, in relation to failing public schools: What does the tradition teach regarding our moral obligation to educate young people? The individual discussions should eventuate in the faith community *at-large* coming together to wrestle with the texts and their social action imperatives.

The extent to which the activation of faith strengthens organizing depends on organizers' attitudes and actions, which begin to be shaped professionally by preliminary research. To know the history of a population, identity group, community, geographic area, etc., ideally reveals not only their injuries and injustices and the political context, but how those experiences are defined by the MSI and the faith of the affected individuals and groups, which is rarely obvious.

In an organizing drive, first contacts may be more productive by upending the traditional approach of neighborhood and faith-based organizing, which in our experience rarely deals with faith, and then mainly for legitimization. The focus ordinarily is digging personal history of injustices and injuries as a means to identify potential issues. What might we do differently during an initial doorknocking contact, when invited into someone's home for a relatively short visit, say no more than 15 or 20 minutes? Beyond appealing to self-interest and deeper values at the beginning of the contact while still at the door, once in the home we want to begin to build a relationship by learning about personal and family history. If our questions drill down, we're not only going to learn about hopes and fears, joys and pressures, but also the moral and ethical values and principles that shape their meanings and their potential to motivate and sustain action.

How do we uncover the spiritual and religious dimensions of their lives as they share their history? We ask questions,⁷³ such as: Did you think it was fair? How did you feel about their cruelty? Do they seem to be acting morally? What did you feel about that kind of selfishness? Do you believe she had a right to medical care?—paying close attention to the content, emotion and energy revealed in the answers. Given the answers, we ask more questions, such as: How did you come to believe that? Has your belief led to conflict with other people? What did your parents teach you about that? What do you imagine Moses/Jesus/Mohammed would say about the situation? Does the Torah/Bible/Quran give you any insight into what should be done? How does your synagogue/church/mosque relate to the situation? Do you find it helpful to pray about what's happening?

Ideally, we want to bring to mind and to emotional awareness, the particulars of inspiring faith that encourage participation in non-threatening day-to-day organizing, that motivate taking carefully calculated leadership

risks on occasion, and that fortify long-term commitment in the absence of short-term rewards. The resulting consciousness has the effect of an antidote to one's debilitating history of powerlessness.

In planning for the initial meeting of a founding organizing committee (FOC), a first objective may be to help everyone understand the organizer's role. They may be inclined to think that the organizer will show them how to meet the challenges they're going to face. They need to learn that the organizer's job is to know the questions of faith, democratic process, strategy, tactics, and media that need to be answered at any point in the organizing—not to answer them, but to raise them for the leaders. Because, at the outset, nascent leaders are *not* thinking that together *they* will have the faith, intelligence and courage to answer the questions and to do what it takes to build and exercise power righteously—an obstacle they must overcome early-on. This point may be introduced in one-to-ones before the first meeting of the FOC, but it only gets driven home in the course of planning and carrying out actions.

A preliminary step to forming the FOC involves meeting one-on-one with at least two or three but no more than a half-dozen potential leaders to work out the details of the first FOC meeting. Before meeting with them, it ought to be SOP to figure out the commonplace MSI, and the religious institutional affiliations and personal faith of the potential members, including the humanistic and philosophic varieties. Doing that research makes it possible to front-load the initial meeting of the FOC with an extended reflection (planned to take about half of the total available meeting time, which will become *de rigueur* in the life of the organization), one that bridges the participants' faith, addresses their doubts and questions about their involvement in the organizing, and inspires them to move ahead with confidence. New members often have *unasked* questions about whether the organizing is a morally "legitimate" activity; they may have doubts about whether the organizer, who is a stranger to them, has the ethical integrity and intelligence to make the whole process succeed; and they're often unsure about the morality of anticipated conflict. In many ways, they may question whether their involvement can really have any effect if they do what they believe to be right.

The agenda for the first FOC meeting gets produced informally in one-to-ones with two or three of the FOC members. My method is to ask them questions relevant to the first phase of the organizing, such as: What kinds of questions do you have about attending the first meeting of the FOC? What kinds of questions do you imagine others will have about the first meeting? Do you think they'll feel free to ask them? Do you think those who come might have concerns or even fears about being involved in the organizing? Do you think some members may have doubts about whether it's appropriate for the congregation to be involved in organizing? If we spend some time in the meeting on a

teaching from your faith tradition, can you think of anything in particular that might be helpful to explore concerns? (At that point, if no suggestion is offered, I'm prepared to propose appropriate material for reflection.)

An initial FOC 45-minute faith-reflection might be along the following lines, although the questions listed below would be more than enough for the first two meetings of the FOC.

Restorer of Streets to Live In

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in sun-scorched places, and make your bones strong. You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets to live in. (Isaiah 58:11-12)

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8)

Questions for Reflection [first FOC meeting]

- Is it true that God will be with us in what we're going to do; and, if so, how does that work and what does it mean practically?
- Is it true that, although we believe in God's compassion, we still feel fear?
- What is it about the organizing that is frightening or confusing and what can we do to overcome our fears?
- How can we use God's "protection" in our organizing work to help us do what we believe must be done for justice and compassion to prevail?
- How do you feel about standing up as a member of your faith community to openly and publicly challenge the "injustice dominating public life" in the city?
- What right do we have to do this?

Questions for Reflection [second FOC meeting]

- There's so much apathy—is it really possible to get many members of our congregation/parish involved in the organizing?
- What do we need to feel more comfortable or better equipped to "go" and meet with members of our faith community in personal visits to invite their participation?
- Is it really true that every person has some skill or talent to contribute?
- How do you feel about standing up as an individual to openly and publicly challenge the "injustice dominating public life" in the city?
- Can we really be the "restorer of streets to live in" when our city has so many problems?
- What will we have to do ultimately to be the "repairer of broken walls"?

In our organizing, Khulda Bat Sarah and I have confirmed the advantages of spending more time from the outset on the faith dimensions of the process. But, understandably, to many organizers this approach may seem likely to sidetrack action in favor of endless "Bible study." The dangers of in-depth reflection on sacred texts are not inconsequential. There may be a tendency to push the organizing toward narrow sectarianism, doctrinal exclusivity, or worse, do-nothing study. Although the benefits justify the risks, there are some precautions that should be taken. The choice of texts that tie faith to action, the preparation of those who lead the reflection and discussion, the role of the organizer, and the character of the training that follows all deserve close attention and management. Done well, they can ensure that faith is translated into enthusiastic social action by the entire faith-community.

Our experience in this vein was that launching a 17-congregation organizing project, from sponsor-committee and organizing-committee development, and membership-recruiting one-to-ones, to a successful founding meeting of more than 700, was reduced from the usual several years to little more than one year. One of the byproducts of the integral-faith approach is that the decision to engage in social action is not based on an external community organizing model. Our experience was that by virtue of studying sacred texts and related materials, without prompting the members themselves began to raise the necessity of social action.⁷⁴ They wanted to know, "If this is morally wrong, shouldn't we do something about it?" Following the opportunity to explore such questions in the context of their faith tradition, they welcomed the standard community organizing model with confidence founded on energized faith and communal unity. Throughout this process, one of the advantages of the integral-faith model is that it produces multiple leaders who are inspiring and inspiring to others.

The goal in the initial concentration on faith is to lay the foundation of the new organization's moral vision and, eventually, the pathway to its realization. The culture of successful social movements includes a story that communicates their moral vision and holds onto hope for the future. If our community organizing is to foster hope of building sufficient power to materially transform the country's institutional structure of power-inequality, certainly it must be unified in a common visionary strategy. It must offer an inspiring moral vision of the commonweal we want for our children and grandchildren.

Such vision is moral because it involves the organization's very reason for being, its highest aspirations, and it concerns vision because it involves what the organization hopes to look like in the future. To lead effectively, we must see where we are trying to go. Moral vision encompasses more than just a destination, however. It also includes the means the leader

is prepared to adopt to get it there. Moral vision is reflected in the management structure of an organization, the style of personal interaction it fosters, and the incentive and reward systems it adopts. . . . Moral vision may seem a less than vital feature of leadership excellence, until we consider the alternative, a leader who is either amoral or visionless.⁷⁵

We can see in the lives of the outstanding organizers who came before us how their moral compass, rooted in the Abrahamic traditions of faith,⁷⁶ served as the substrate of the moral-spiritual infrastructure that was the touchstone of their movements.

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) was undoubtedly the “incomparable organizer” of the women’s suffrage movement,⁷⁷ although that recognition doesn’t remotely suggest her other extraordinary contributions to women’s rights. Born into a Quaker family, she was “. . . inspired by the Quaker belief that everyone was equal under God. . . ,”⁷⁸ and she remained affiliated with that movement throughout her life. The women’s suffrage movement brought together women from several different religious traditions “. . . who saw social reform as a means of testifying to their pursuit of holiness.”⁷⁹ Under the leadership of Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Faith played a key role in the fight for women’s suffrage,”⁸⁰ which began in the 1860s and continued for more than a half-century, until the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920.

For César Chávez (1927-1993), a labor organizer, Catholic spirituality played a “profound role” in his personal life and, as he instilled it, in the farmworker’s movement.⁸¹ His faith buoyed his courage and lifelong commitment to take on the daunting challenge to organize farm workers, when everyone before him had failed. “He addressed human rights, racism, labor organizing, farm workers’ conditions, environmental protection, food safety, and food access; through his moral vision and agency he challenged people around the world to do the same.”⁸²

The inspiring call for justice by Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was epitomized by his “I

Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial. The speech emphasized King’s belief that civil rights would come with the help of God: “Let freedom ring from every hill and mole hill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring, and when this happens . . . when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”⁸³

The mission of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) was to bring Jews back to Judaism, not only for the sake of strengthening Jewish institutions, but to embrace and bring to life many of the central values and principles of the faith, such as: to love one’s neighbor, to raise up leaders dedicated to creating more leaders for the sake of the community, to express conflicts with respect and graciousness, to do without delay what needs to be done to improve family, community, and national life, to promulgate the seven Noachide laws⁸⁴ in the world, and to teach others what you have learned. Schneerson organized a worldwide network of rabbinic families, in big cities and small towns, dedicated to bringing Jews back to their godly role of *tikkun olam* (repair of the world) in society and Jewish life.⁸⁵

Going beyond the Abrahamic tradition, it’s clear that the Indian national liberation from British colonial domination was powered at the most fundamental level by the Hindu moral-spirituality of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi was in politics for spiritual reasons. He explained in a speech in London (September 23, 1931) that, “. . . although to all appearances my mission is political. . . its roots are—if I may use the term—spiritual. . . I claim that at least my politics are not divorced from morality, from spirituality, from religion. . . a man who is trying to discover and follow the will of God, cannot possibly leave a single field of life untouched.”⁸⁶

¹ This article has been updated since published in *Social Policy*, 50(4) (Winter 2020).

² Many of the concepts and conclusions presented in this article are based on the study, discussion, and organizing teamwork of my wife, Khulda Bat Sarah, and myself.

³ This was called out in Moshe ben Asher, “Seeding the Vision—the Faith Link in Faith-Based Community Organizing,” *Organizing* (Summer 1993) [http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/SEEDING_VISION.pdf].

⁴ See Brian Johns and Ellen Ryan, “Leadership Is Not A Deliverable,” *Social Policy* (Winter 2013) [<http://www.socialpolicy.org/component/content/article/4-latest-issue/637-leadership-development-is-not-a-deliverable>].

⁵ For more on this theme, see Moyers & Company, “Encore: How People Power Generates Change” (August 16, 2013), broadcast interview of Marshall Ganz [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqsYsnrTTrc/>].

⁶ This was the conclusion of a chief speechwriter for President George W. Bush, who was a senior policy advisor with The Heritage Foundation and named one of “The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America.” See Michael

Gerson, “This is a massive failure of character among Republicans—with evangelicals out in front,” *Washington Post* November 12, 2020).

⁷ “The fundamental objection to corruption is moral, whether or not particular forms of corruption are also legally prohibited. . . . Corrupt actions are those that disrupt or strongly tend to disrupt moral habits of good character and/or the practices constitutive of the normative and governing purposes of institutions.” See H.G. Calloway, “What is corruption and what are its social and political sources,” ResearchGate (December 31, 2019) [https://www.researchgate.net/post/What_is_corruption_and_what_are_its_social_and_political_sources].

⁸ Remarks of Steve Schmidt, quoted by Lawrence O’Donnell on *The Last Word*, MSNBC (December 10, 2020).

⁹ The reference to a “brotherhood” is meant to convey not only that U.S. billionaires have common interests about which they communicate with one another, both formally and informally, but that they have a common purpose, plan, and operation, with roots extending back more than a century and a half, and on which they have been singularly focused for much of the latter half of the 20th century and up to the present. Based on their libertarian ideology and economic self-interest, they unalterably oppose “. . . any group or government meddling with the market,” using any available means to manipulate law and policy to insulate themselves and their wealth from government regulation, thus enjoying the benefits of an entirely unencumbered propertied class. See Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains, the Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017—Kindle edition), loc. 36; and Kurt Andersen, *Evil Geniuses—The Unmaking of America: A Recent History* (New York: Random House, 2020—Kindle edition). See also Chuck Collins and Omar Ocampo, “Trump and His Many Billionaire Enablers,” Institute for Policy Studies (January 11, 2021) [<https://ips-dc.org/trump-and-his-many-billionaire-enablers>].

¹⁰ For an example of the billionaire-brotherhood role in the formation and continuing life of the Tea Party, which is frequently described by the media and its own members as “populist” and “grassroots,” see: Amanda Fallin, Rachel Grana, and Stanton A. Glanz, “To quarterback behind the scenes, third-party efforts: the tobacco industry and the Tea Party,” *Tobacco Control*, 23:322-331 (2014) [tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/23/4/322.info]; Jess Nesbit, “The Secret Origins of the Tea Party, How Big Oil and Big Tobacco Partnered with the Koch Brothers to Take Over the GOP,” *Time* (April 5, 2016) [<http://time.com/secret-origins-of-the-tea-party/>]; and Jane Mayer, “Trump’s Money Man: The Reclusive Hedge-Fund Tycoon Behind the Trump Presidency,” *The New Yorker* (March 27, 2017), which relates the influence of billionaire Robert Mercer.

¹¹ See Jane Mayer, *Dark Money, The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016—Kindle edition).

¹² See Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3):564-81 (September 2014) (accessed at: https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/mgilens/files/gilens_and_page_2014_testing_theories_of_american_politics.doc.pdf). They note, “Our results provide substantial support for theories of Economic Elite Domination and for theories of Biased Pluralism, but not for theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy or Majoritarian Pluralism,” p. 564; C.J. Polychroniou, “The Growing Wealth Gap Marks the Return of Oligarchy,” *Global Policy Journal* (February 26, 2019) [<https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/26/02/2019/growing-wealth-gap-marks-return-oligarchy>]; and Joel Kotkin, “America’s Drift Toward Feudalism,” *American Affairs Journal*, 3(4):96-107 (Winter 2019).

¹³ See Benjamin Franklin, “Poor Richard, 1734” *Founders Online*, National Archives [<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-01-02-0107>].)

¹⁴ See Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 23.

¹⁵ For examples, see: “Community organizing,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_organizing], which describes community organizing as “. . . a process where people who live in proximity to one another come together into an organization that acts in their shared self-interest”; Ross Gittel, “Community organizing,” *Britannica* [<https://www.britannica.com/topic/community-organizing>]; and Michael Jacoby Brown, “Direct Action Community Organizing Training Sessions and Exercises Guide,” Community Learning Partnership [www.communitylearningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Direct-Action-Community-Organizing-Training-and-Exercises-Guide.pdf].

¹⁶ *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. II, Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 421.

¹⁷ See Mark Engler & Paul Engler, “Would Saul Alinsky break his own rules?” *Waging Nonviolence* (April 2, 2014) [<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2014/04/saul-alinsky-break-rules>].

¹⁸ For various perspectives on the role of religion and faith in social movements, see: Marta Cook and John Halpin, “The Role of Faith in the Progressive Movement,” Center for American Progress (October 2010) [<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2010/10/08/8490/the-role-of-faith-in-the-progressive-movement/>]; Christian Smith (Ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism* (New

York: Routledge, 1996); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion Culture and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Christopher D. Ives and Jeremy Kidwell, “Religion and social values for sustainability,” *Sustainability Science*, 14(5):1355-1362 (September 2019) [<https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1548402/religion-and-social-values-for-sustainability>].

¹⁹ For examples, see: Herbert G. Gutman, “Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age,” *American Historical Review*, 72(1):74-101 (October 1966); and Adon Taft, “Labor Day and the unions’ forgotten religious roots,” *Washington Post* (August 29, 2013).

²⁰ For examples, see: Library of Congress, “Religion and the Founding of the American Republic,” Library of Congress Exhibitions (n.d.) [<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html>]; and Christine Leigh Heyrman, “Religion and the American Revolution,” Divining America, TeacherServe, National Humanities Center (n.d.) [<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/eigheten/ekeyinfo/erelrev.htm>].

²¹ For a biblical perspective on this concept, see Nehama Leibowitz, “See, He Brought Us a Hebrew Slave” (in Aryeh Newman, Trans.), *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis)* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, n.d.), pp. 417-421.

²² See Charles Lewis, *935 Lies: The Future of Truth and the Decline of America’s Moral Integrity* (New York: Perseus Books, 2014).

²³ See Thomas L. Friedman, “Only Truth Can Save Our Democracy,” *New York Times* (November 10, 2020).

²⁴ Ad loc.

²⁵ According to Jonathan Gienapp, Stanford University professor of history. See Thomas B. Edsall, “What Is Trump Playing At?” *New York Times* (November 11, 2020).

²⁶ See Jennifer Kavanaugh and Michael D. Rich, *Truth Decay, An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2018).

²⁷ See Bret Stephens, “Donald Trump and the Damage Done,” *New York Times* (December 14, 2020).

²⁸ Yossy Goldman, “The Egg in Exodus,” mikvah.org (n.d.) [https://www.mikvah.org/article/the_egg_in_exodus]

²⁹ This is an obvious oversimplification of both intellectual and institutional history, but one which is a more or less sufficient portrayal for present purposes. For a nuanced treatment of the relationship of science and the humanities in higher education in the modern era, see Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University, Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³⁰ The spiritual DNA of these three great religions reaches back to an ancestor of Abraham, to a progenitor shared by all three: “Ever since ‘Shem’ proclaimed the name of the ‘One God’ to all the nations did it become possible to consider all mankind as one community, one family, moved by a common spirit originating from a common source, working to reach a noble goal, and developing toward a great future.” See Samson Rafael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, Vol. II (Feldheim Publishers, 1985, 1997), p. 204. An example of their common-humankind DNA is that all three religions promote social conscience through teaching their adherents to take responsibility for the impoverished by contributing to some form of *tzedakah*, charity, or *zakat*.

³¹ See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy, Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969—Kindle edition, Open Road Media, 2011), loc. 729, which describes the phenomenology of “plausibility structures.”

³² See Richard T. Kinnier, et al., “A Short List of Universal Moral Values,” *Counseling and Values*, 45:4-16 (October 2000), pp. 9-10.

³³ See Donald M. Berwick, “The Moral Determinants of Health,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 324(3):225-226 (July 21, 2020), p. 226.

³⁴ Virtually all the *pleasure*-producing activities, focused as they are on sensuality and materialism, commonly lead to addictions that are self-destructive and damaging to others in one’s marriage, family, community, commerce, and nation (the last, given the economic and national security consequences of metabolic syndrome diseases). See Robert Lustig, “The pursuit of pleasure is a modern-day addiction,” *The Guardian* (September 9, 2017) [<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/09/pursuit-of-pleasure-modern-day-addiction>]; and “A Hacking of the American Mind,” YouTube (March 15, 2018), presentation made at a meeting of the Silicon Valley Health Institute [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhh19cQukfg>].

³⁵ Classically and most notably, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) in his 12-volume *A Study of History*. Toynbee identified “spiritual, not economic forces” as shaping history, interpreting the rise and fall of civilizations as a spiritual process. See Editors, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (updated October 18, 2020) [<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arnold-Joseph-Toynbee>]. Toynbee’s perspective, which became unfashionable among academic historians soon after his opus was published, is not likely to be held in high regard again among his peers. But given the direction of worldwide events of the last few decades, historians may yet come to credit immoral values and beliefs as having a significant role in history. For indications of movement in that direction, see David Brooks, “America Is Having a Moral Convulsion,” *The Atlantic* (October 5, 2020) [<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/collapsing-levels-trust-are-devastating-america/616581/>].

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ George P. Shultz, “The 10 most important things I’ve learned about trust over my 100 years,” *Washington Post* (December 11, 2020).

³⁸ See Tina Vasquez, “Coney Barrett confirmation stirs ‘sleeping giant’ pro-choice religious community,” DAILY KOS (October 29, 2020) [<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2020/10/29/1990517/-Coney-Barrett-confirmation-stirs-sleeping-giant-pro-choice-religious-community?detail=emaildkre>].

³⁹ See David Brooks, “The Floor of Decency,” *New York Times* (October 29, 2020).

⁴⁰ Ad loc.

⁴¹ Ad loc.

⁴² See Jochen Bittner, “1918 Germany Has a Warning for America,” *New York Times* (November 30, 2020); and see also Bret Stephens, “Trump Contrives His Stab-in-the-Back Myth,” *New York Times* (November 23, 2020).

⁴³ See Timothy Snyder, “The American Abyss,” *New York Times* (January 9, 2021)—Snyder is a Professor of History at Yale University and the author of *On Tyranny*, which explores America’s tilt toward authoritarianism; and Brian Klaas, “Why Republicans won’t learn anything from their defeat in Georgia,” *Washington Post* (January 7, 2021)—Klaas is an associate professor of global politics at University College London, where he focuses on democracy, authoritarianism, and American politics and foreign policy, and he is the co-author of “How to Rig an Election” and the author of “The Despot’s Apprentice” and “The Despot’s Accomplice.”

⁴⁴ See Rabbi Marvin Hier, “‘Nights of broken glass’ from 1938-2020,” Simon Wiesenthal Center email broadcast (November 9, 2020; 2:02 p.m.).

⁴⁵ See: Steven Erlanger, “A Faith Reviving: Jews in Russia/A special report; In a Less Arid Russia, Jewish Life Flowers Again,” *New York Times* (September 19, 1993); and David Holley, “In Russia’s Far East, A Jewish Revival,” *Los Angeles Times* (August 7, 2005).

⁴⁶ See Gene Zubovich, “Russia’s Journey from Orthodoxy to Atheism, and Back Again,” *Religion & Politics Fit for Polite Company* (October 16, 2018) [<https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/16/russias-journey-from-orthodoxy-to-atheism-and-back-again/>].

⁴⁷ See Rebecca M. Miller, “Comeback: How Islam Got Its Groove Back in Russia,” *The National Interest* (April 13, 2015) [<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/comeback-how-islam-got-its-groove-back-russia-12609>].

⁴⁸ A similar campaign, the “Sinicization of religion,” is now underway in China, designed to bring about “. . . a shift from religious to political devotion,” transferring loyalty from Islam to the communist party and its leader. See Alice Su, “China’s new campaign to make Muslims devoted to the state rather than Islam,” *Los Angeles Times* (November 20, 2020).

⁴⁹ Our understanding is that “. . . people become a unified whole as a result of having passed through the proverbial crucible of suffering.” See Harav Yehuda Amital (Rav Michael Hattin, Trans.), “The Significance of Chanuka According to the Maharal,” based on a Talmudic study session, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (n.d.) [<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/significance-chanuka-according-maharal-1>].

⁵⁰ See Jim Norman, “Views of U.S. Moral Values Slip to Seven-Year Lows,” *Gallup* (May 22, 2017) [<https://news.gallup.com/poll/210917/news-moral-values-slip-seven-year-lows.aspx>].

⁵¹ See Andrew Gustafson, “Advertising’s Impact on Morality in Society: Influencing Habits and Desires of Consumers,” *Business and Society Review*, 106(3):201-223 (December 17, 2002); and John Waide, “Making of Self and World in Advertising,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 6:73-79 (February 1987).

⁵² For first-hand explanations of the motivations, see Mark Oppenheimer, “A Religious Ritual Attracts Even Nonbelievers,” *New York Times* (March 15, 2013); and Suzanne Moore, “Why non-believers need rituals too,” *The Guardian* (December 27, 2013).

⁵³ See Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (Isaac Levy, Trans.), 2d ed., *The Pentateuch*, Volume III, Leviticus (part II) (Gateshead, UK: Judaica Press, 1999), p. 476, the founder of Modern Orthodoxy.

⁵⁴ See Richard Just, “How Religion Can Help Put Our Democracy Back Together,” *Washington Post Magazine* (October 28, 2020) [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2020/10/28/religion-politics-rebuild-american-democracy/?arc404=true>].

⁵⁵ In the current crisis of American democracy, the formal structure of checks and balances to limit the powers of the president were largely circumvented and short-circuited by Trump. Given the corruption of the Republican party (see footnotes 5 through 10 above), Congressional powers were neutered; the Attorney General became Trump’s co-conspirator; and although the courts were never truly compromised by Trump, his endless appeals and judicial delaying tactics frequently enabled his end-runs around their slow, deliberate process. Arguably, what made the difference in resisting Trump’s authoritarian ambition was the moral virtue of individuals—military officials, civil servants, and prosecutors—who stood up in demonstrations of “civic virtue.” See Tim Wu, “What Really Saved the Republic From Trump?” *New York Times* (December 10, 2020).

⁵⁶ Alexis De Tocqueville in (Henry Reeve, Trans.), *Democracy in America* (Kindle edition), loc. 1420.

⁵⁷ See Michael Novak, “The first institution of democracy. Tocqueville on religion: What faith adds to reason,” *European View*, 6:87-101 (2007), pp. 93-97.

⁵⁸ Our “. . . ideological divergence is driven in part by extreme economic inequality in America today, especially in conjunction with candidates becoming increasingly reliant on ideologically extreme donors.” See Eli J. Finkel et al., “Political sectarianism in America,” *Science*, 370(6516):533-536 (October 30, 2020), p. 534.

⁵⁹ See Peter Turchin, “America in November 2020: A Structural-Demographic View from Alpha Centauri,” peter-turchin.com (November 1, 2020) [<http://peter-turchin.com/posts>].

⁶⁰ See Peter Turchin, et al., “A History of Possible Futures: Multipath Forecasting of Social Breakdown, Recovery, and Resilience,” *Cliodynamics: The Journal of Quantitative History and Cultural Evolution*, 9(2):124-139 (2018).

⁶¹ See Anne Aly, et al., “Moral Disengagement and Building Resilience to Violent Extremism: An Education Intervention,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 37(4):369-385 (March 2014).

⁶² See Guy Saperstein, “Social Resilience: The Forgotten Dimension of Disaster Risk Reduction,” *Jamba Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, 1(1):1-8 April 2006 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237614807_Social_Resilience_The_Forgotten_Dimension_of_Disaster_Risk_Reduction].

⁶³ We take it as unquestionable that, as Hirsch interprets Ecclesiastes 5:8 in *The Collected Writings*, Volume II New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1985, 1997), p. 385, “the strength and significance of a country is based on unity. . . .”

⁶⁴ Attributed to Vance Peterson (ca. 1983), but source unknown.

⁶⁵ For example, see Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, “Argument for the Sake of Heaven,” The Office of Rabbi Sacks [<https://rabbisacks.org/argument-for-the-sake-of-heaven-korach-5779/>].

⁶⁶ For a more nuanced view of the relationship, see Elizabeth Bruenig, “Why Evangelicals Aren’t What They Used to Be,” *New York Times* (November 6, 2020).

⁶⁷ For perspective on the problem, see: Nicholas Kristof, “Pastor, Can White Evangelicalism Be Saved,” *New York Times* (December 19, 2020); and David Brooks, “Trump Ignites a War Within the Church,” *New York Times* (January 14, 2021).

⁶⁸ The extent to which the values and principles of the evangelical movement have been compromised is broadcast by the conservative, evangelical radio talk-show host Eric Metaxas. He has proposed that “. . . at least two members of the Trinity favor a coup against the constitutional order, endorsed the widespread jailing of Trump’s political enemies for imaginary crimes, claimed Abraham Lincoln’s blessing for the advance of authoritarianism and urged Christians to pray to God for the effective death of American democracy.” See Michael Gerson, “Prominent Evangelicals Are Directing Trump’s Sinking Ship. That Feeds Doubts About Religion,” *Washington Post* (December 7, 2020); and Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, “How White Evangelical Christians Fused With Trump Extremism,” *New York Times* (January 11, 2021). As an evangelical law school dean put it, “We need a strategy to restore a few basic truths.” See Robert K. Vischer, “Eric Metaxas and the losing of the evangelical mind,” Religion News Service (December 1, 2020) [<https://religionnews.com/2020/12/01/eric-metaxas-and-the-losing-of-the-evangelical-mind>].

⁶⁹ See Robert Schenck, “Reverend reveals what evangelicals say privately about Trump,” YouTube (June 16, 2020) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOBhHs_1n_I].

⁷⁰ Jonathan Rosenblum, “Unions in the Trump Era,” *Tikkun* email broadcast (January 2, 2017)

[<http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/unions-facing-the-trump-era>]

⁷¹ The existence of such anti-religious bias is not surprising, since people of faith tend to believe in the accumulated religious and spiritual wisdom from the past, while progressives tend to regard those parts of the culture as mostly antiquated restrictions that hold back progress. Progressives tend to have little patience for immutable laws that are not subject to their reason, while people of faith tend to discern their abiding value. One of the most problematic aspects of the progressive mindset, especially from an organizing perspective, has been the failure to recognize the pivotal role of the family in the transmission of morals and ethics.

⁷² See Brooks, ad loc.

⁷³ This assumes that organizers are culturally competent to deal with a diversity of cultural backgrounds and faith traditions. While cultural sensitivity is essential to eliciting in-depth self-disclosure, differences in the ethnicity of the organizer and the prospective member may in fact have little influence in that regard. For example, see Nolan Zane and Helen Ku, “Effects of Ethnic Match, Gender Match, Acculturation, Cultural Identity, and Face Concern on Self-Disclosure in Counseling for Asian Americans,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 5(1), 66-74 (March 2014).

⁷⁴ This is not surprising in the light of Jewish tradition. The rabbis of the Talmud (Kiddushin 40b) debated the question, “Which is greater, study or action?” Rabbi Tarfon said, “Action is greater.” Rabbi Akiva said, “Study is greater.” The other rabbis present said, “Study is greater, for study leads to action.”

⁷⁵ Richard B. Gunderman, *Achieving Excellence in Medical Education* (London: Springer, 2006), pp. 147-48.

⁷⁶ The failure to include other significant faith traditions here is not due to their lack of followers or religious and spiritual importance, but to my own lack of experience and knowledge of them.

⁷⁷ See Leonor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, “*Century of Struggle, The Women’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959, 1975, 1996), p. 79.

⁷⁸ See Nancy Hayward, “Susan B. Anthony,” National Women’s History Museum (2018)

[<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/susan-b-anthony>].

⁷⁹ See Kristin Kobes Du Mez, “The complex role of faith in the women’s suffrage movement,” Religion News Service (June 4, 2019) [<https://religionnews.com/2019/06/04/the-complex-role-of-faith-in-the-womens-suffrage-movement/>].

⁸⁰ Ad loc.

⁸¹ See Roberto Chao Romero, “The Spiritual Praxis of César Chavez,” in (Roberto Sirvent, Ed.) *Perspectivas*, 14th issue (Spring 2017), pp. 24-39.

⁸² See “The Moral Vision of César Chávez: Agriculture, Food and the Environment in Catholic Social Teaching,” Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development [<https://www.interfaithsustain.com/the-moral-vision-of-cesar-chavez-agriculture-food-and-the-environment-in-catholic-social-teaching/>].

⁸³ For an audio recording of the August 28, 1963 speech, see Martin Luther King Jr., “I have a dream,” American Rhetoric [<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>].

⁸⁴ The children of Noah were given seven commandments: to establish a system of laws, not to curse God, not to practice idolatry, not to engage in sexual transgressions, not to murder, not to steal, and not to eat a limb torn from a live animal. See the Talmud, Sanhedrin 56a and 56b.

⁸⁵ See Joseph Telushkin, *Rebbe, The Life and Teachings of Menachem M. Schneerson, the Most Influential Rabbi in Modern History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014).

⁸⁶ See Y.P. Anand, “Mahatma Gandhi’s Leadership – Moral And Spiritual Foundations,” Comprehensive Website by Gandhian Institutions - Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal & Gandhi Research Foundation (n.d.)

[<https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/sept081.htm>]. Reference cited: P.A. Nazareth, “Gandhi’s Outstanding Leadership,” Bangalore: Sarvodaya International Trust, Gandhi Centre of Science and Human Values & Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 2006, *Anasakti Darshan* Vol. 3, No. 2, July-December 2007.

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