

**Ram Cnaan, Professor and Associate Dean, School of Social Policy & Practice,  
University of Pennsylvania**

*(Unedited Transcript)*

This is the first panel that the people on the panel did not know Geno Baroni personally. And in the last week, I read whatever I could to find out who is this person.

And I told my wife before I left, if there's anything I want in life, is when I'm gone, my friends and students and relatives will talk about me like people here talk about Geno Baroni. So it's a dream, and I hope it will happen one day.

I'm a social science professor, a social worker teaching at the University of Pennsylvania. And a lot of the things that we do and look at are always slightly different than politicians, theologians and other people. When I look at these charts of numbers -- of course, might take it was different than the presenter. We live in the time of the highest population growth, and the beginning of the decline. Because if you look carefully you see that where it took another billion people to take a hundred years, it took 12 years, 12 years, and now we are the growth declining. Per family we have now less children, not more children. So the numbers can tell us lots of things that we look differently.

However, I was inspired by some of the presentation here, so while most of my presentation that you'll see in the PowerPoint is about social science research, I allow myself to conclude with some more general thought about our society.

Most of this organized presentation, and you can follow it on the screen, is based on a book that we are editing, which tried to have the final word -- which will never be final -- about the effectiveness of faith-based social services. And what we do with this book is try to understand what we know and where we are going.

But before that, let me tell you about the social policies in our country, and actually in every country in the world.

Social policies are not predicated upon proven scientific knowledge. That is not how it works. I mean, every proponent of them will tell you, "look at this, it always works and I know it." But there's no real scientific knowledge. They're usually based on ideological, senses (phonetic), and whatever resources we have. Those are the two major powers that motivate policies. As much as I would like to tell you that we know when we go, it never happens.

Now every social policy, if you read the "before, it was implemented," there were believers and critics. None of them persuaded each other. The party in power, the people who could influence, used their own ideology, and implemented a policy. So since President Reagan, every president proclaimed that faith-based providers are superior -- and I use the word, "superior" -- to the secular nonprofits. And given that I was allocated 15 minutes, I won't read to you some of my favorite examples -- even Clinton, because it's usually people say it's only the Republican. No, it's all the presidents, and none of them have the data to talk about it.

The pet program that most presidents say, about prison fellowship and team challenge. Look at the secular counterpart. They did 10 times over. Aren't we wasting our money to give the secular or public program (phonetic)? Now, what's the reality?

First, instead of assuming that faith-based organizations are superior, we should ask a simple question: which type of social service provider is more effective, under what circumstances, and for what groups of client? There's no sweeping answer. Anyone who believes that we can take one sector and say, "you are responsible, you'll do everything way better than the other," is not very realistic.

Now let me take a few minutes to talk 0108methodological issues. When we talk, is the faith-based services are better, we have to ask ourselves, "what are we talking about? Are we talking about the faith impact?" Meaning, are we comparing only clients that found Jesus in their lives, were proselytized? Are we talking about how much they learned religious texts and religious thought, even if they did not find new religion? Or is it the faith of the providers that we are comparing?

Or are we talking about the faith-based services, those that put the flag, "We are faith-based."?

Now, there's six typologies that explain the level of religious integration or religious level of those organizations. So are we talking about whether the providers are religious, or they do religious stuff to the client? And to what extent?

Now, in social science we try to control for all intervening variables. And as Alan aptly put, are they have equal boards? Are they have equal resources? Are they have equal expertise? Are they see over (phonetic) director of those services have the same qualification and the same qualities? So there's always the question, even if you take three, four services and compare them, that you basically measure something else totally.

Can we randomly assign clients? If we have people who are homeless, people who are drug and alcohol abusing, and we say, "You go faith-based, you go secular?" Well, it's possible but we don't do it.

Then, there's a great amount of variability within each sector, within subsectors, that is very hard to control.

So, what are we trying to compare? First, we have to know what's the other differences between faith-based and secular organizations. There are three studies that try to take one region and compare all nonprofit organizations, the secular to those that are faith-based. Elizabeth Grady did it in Los Angeles. Kevin Kearns and his team in Pittsburgh, and Julian Wolpert and his team in New York City.

If I aggregate their overall findings, they find that organizationally, they're comparable. But faith-based organizations 0110specialize in different areas than the other nonprofits. They tend to work with food, housing, shelter, civil rights issues, new immigrants, and human services. Wolpert and his team also found that faith-based organizations tend to own their facilities, as compared to the secular nonprofits organizations. This is a major difference. It's put a new dimension that is very hard to control. Which means that they may provide services at a lower cost, but not necessarily better outcomes.

So what do we know from the very limited, very small number of evaluation studies? And of the very few, it's surprising that those that pass any muster of methodological rigor -- and I put it at a very lenient threshold -- are a study by Stephen Monsma in four cities, where they took four types of services for people, and then in each one, tried to find three types of religious, nonreligious, and other organizations. Bielefeld and

Kennedy from Indiana did three states -- then they realized that you cannot compare states in this country because the regulation and 0111 systems are so different. They ended up talking only about Indiana. And there are a few others but I won't elaborate on them. But overall, there are very few and it's hard to draw conclusions.

But what are the conclusions that are coming? That faith-based and secular organizations, as Alan already told you the punch line, basically not that much difference. There's some places that actually secular organizations did slightly better, as in Monsma and Bielefeld's studies, and the other study, the religious organizations did slightly better. But so slightly that you really cannot generalize much out of it.

Interestingly, in all studies, clients prefer the faith-based organizations. Even if they were not voluntarily sent to them. They say that people are nicer to them, they treat them as a whole person. But when a measure of results, real outcome they didn't find the difference. So it's the perception, and the subjective outcome that makes a difference here.

Finally, a lot of the researchers tried -0112- the organizations themselves would collect data for them; meaning, they will administer the questionnaires to clients and collect them back. All of them failed, with the religious organizations. They don't have the infrastructure to do it. They stretch their stuff to the limits, and each and every one of them fails. If anyone plan an evaluation study, do not rely on those organizations to do the work for you. You have to have your own people.

To reject a (unintelligible) hypothesis for those of you in (unintelligible) research, meaning to conclude that one is better than the other, takes much more power than any of these studies offer us. No one -- and I mean no one -- either government or foundation are really interested in a rigorous effectiveness study. I knocked and begged on many doors and places, and the bottom line was, "We don't want to know. We don't want to know, 'cause if we are wrong we don't have legs to stand on. And we are correct, we already know it. So what do I need you to spend a few million dollars to tell us what we want to know -- or 0113 we'll spend lots of money and get the result that we don't want."

So here I move to something which I called, "Was Geno Baroni or the president correct?" Geno Baroni said secular organizations can do better. The president said secular organizations do better (sic?). The verdict is still out.

But I want to pose a question and then talk for two, three minutes on the more general issues. If Father Geno Baroni was alive today observing that in 2005, no one in America - - and I mean it -- except individuals, including the Liberals or moderate conservatives, compassionately care for the poor, except the religious community -- and I put this a major emphasis on it -- would he be an ideological proponent, or credit of the faith-based initiative as we know it now?

And those of you who know Geno would know better, but allow me to take the two minutes and add one or two thoughts:

In this country, since the Cold War, the public discourse changed dramatically. It is 0114 no longer cool to be pro-poor people. They have been pathologized: it's all their fault, they are lazy, they're a burden on us, they're immoral. And if you go public and say, "We have to help the poor" -- and as a social worker I do it more often than most people -

- I'm looked at with pity and "you don't understand it" messages. And "Thank you, you're a nice person."

It is no longer cool to think about career in government. In the sixties, people flocked to government school. Social change came through government. Now when I talk with young people and my students, and I say, "What about government?" They say, "Who wants to work there? You only follow regulations, and if you stay there for more than three, four years something is wrong with you because you work for an inefficient organization. It's a trap." And our government school is basically folding up.

It is no longer cool to be politically left of center. You can be right of center and you're accepted. Even Democrats are right of center -- I mean, Democrats, politically. 0115It is no longer politically correct or "cool" to be contemplative, to doubt something, to say that, "There may be two sides, and we need to debate it."

I was struck in the last election, in one of the debates. President Bush was asked, "Did you make any mistakes in the four years in office?"

And he said "None." And America applauded him because it's no longer cool to be -- excuse me for saying -- wishy-washy. To think that you are maybe not correct all the time, that maybe something that you did needs revision.

But we went to very short messages of 30 seconds, and they're always correct. And it's a different era than the sixties, seventies. I hope that we won't have another Watergate, that will give rise to liberal thinking, but my personal concern is that the Liberals, the Republicans of the Nixon era, are no longer concerned for those in need. They're concerned with a variety of more clean, beautiful issues. They went to the museums, they went to the opera, they left the mentally 0116ill. They left the handicapped. They left the poor.

And the only camp that I can speak with and harness is the faith-based camp. I wish I could have coalitions with other groups. But the only one that systematically stands there for the poor -- and unlike the previous panel, I'm not a person of religion, I'm not representing any faith tradition. But as a social worker, this is the only camp that I can collaborate with. And I feel sad that all my colleagues who consider themselves liberals are no longer in this camp. Thank you.