

# Review - Faith-Based Organizations at the United Nations

Written by Daniel Golebiewski

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DANIEL GOLEBIEWSKI, APR 16 2015

Faith-Based Organizations at the United Nations

By: Jeffrey Haynes

New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014

Precursors to secular organizations, faith-based organizations (FBOs) are certainly not new in the international arena today. Since biblical times, they have healed the sick, comforted the traumatized, and fed the hungry, and today, have expanded their focus to areas such as reconciliation, mediation, and policy-making. What is new regarding them, however, is the fact that only within the last two decades, scholars have started to gain a greater interest in FBOs' role in international affairs. One of these scholars, Jeffrey Haynes, in *Faith-Based Organizations at the United Nations*, focuses on international or transnational FBOs attempting to influence debate and decision-making at the United Nations (UN) (p. 1). He asks, "why, how, and with what results do FBOs seek to influence policy formation and dissemination at the UN?" (3).

When one attempts to answer this question, the general assumption which comes to mind is that FBOs have a hard time influencing discussions at the UN, a secular, liberal, and irreligious organization. This is partly true. On the one hand, if FBOs want to have a voice in the discussions, they must "sign up," as Haynes argues, to the UN's secular and liberal values—and they do so because this is the procedure to follow (171). On the other hand, the UN and FBOs actually share certain common goals such as peace, justice, and human rights (24), which leaves room for FBOs to use "pragmatic approaches" in achieving their goals at the UN (3). That is to say, FBOs are "*necessarily* strategic, goal-orientated" actors; they have the benefit of not only using the language of the UN but, at the same time, preaching their faith-based values, norms, and goals in discussions (3).

As a result, Haynes argues that it is not right to presume a "secular" versus "faith" division at the UN between FBOs and secular actors (40). Rather, FBOs aim to maximize their influence at the UN and will seek allies with other FBOs, secular NGOs, and governments which share their ideological, not theological, norms, values, and beliefs (51). For instance, conservative FBOs may work well with not only other conservative FBOs but also with conservative secular states and non-state actors at the UN, while liberal FBOs will also work with other liberal FBOs but also with liberal NGOs and governments (51).

To illustrate these points, Haynes provides three specific examples of FBO engagement at the UN—women's sexual and reproductive health rights (Ch. 4), human development (Ch. 5), and the defamation of religion (Ch. 6). In all three, Haynes argues that FBOs use "non-faith based norms, values, and expressions" which "actually extends to their ability to express faith-based sentiments" (101). For instance, instead of using faith-based words such as "pro-life," FBOs use UN language such as "family values" and "the rights of the unborn child" to counter against "a women's right to choose" (97-98). Furthermore, while FBOs view the issue of human development as being tied to their faith values, they place the issue in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a way to create "more robust and effective partnerships" between themselves and the UN (113). Last, but not least, FBOs argue that while "freedom of expression" certainly does exist, there are also limitations such as the right of faiths not be defamed (165).

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In short, Haynes is trying to fill in a noteworthy gap that exists in the literature regarding faith-based organizations. If we were to follow the literature, he adds to Katherine Marshall's *Global Institutions of Religion: Ancient Movers, Modern Shakers* (London: Routledge, 2013) by examining three specific case studies in one setting. However, Haynes' book would benefit more if he included additional case studies such as the discussions around peacebuilding and conflict resolution between the UN and FBOs. In addition, another worthwhile study would be examining FBOs attempting to influence debate and decision-making in the European Union (EU), or comparing their influence in both UN and EU settings.

Nevertheless, Haynes does provide an important development about the growing FBO presence at the UN and its importance to our understanding of international relations. That is to say, despite the fact that the field of international relations became secular since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 ended the decades-long religious wars, today's post-Cold War order consists arguably of a "religious resurgence" within "postsecular" international relations, as Haynes highlights (2). Certainly, we have seen this "religious resurgence" in 9/11, ISIS, and even the *Charlie Hebdo* incident. Furthermore, it seems that international "soft power" is taking precedence over traditional, material "hard power," meaning that one prescription for future violence may be FBOs encouraging conflicting parties to accept and apply religious principles, values, and ideals through the use of soft power (43). This book is certainly for those who are interested in learning about how religion and religious organizations play an increasing role in international affairs—especially at the UN stage.

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### About the author:

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