Delahanty, J. (2023).

Making Moral Citizens: How Faith-Based Organizers Use Vocation for Public Action.

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Moral citizenship is a concept that explores the intersection of ethics and civic engagement in society. This book extends the concept by delving into its deployment in one of the largest and most effective social justice movements in the United States: faith-based progressive community organizing. Through ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, Delahanty illustrates how religion is not limited to beliefs, doctrines, and rituals within activist communities. Instead, through relational practices, progressive organizers help people see common ground across racial, religious, and class lines. To live out one's religious faith, organizers develop and deploy shared ideas of moral citizenship that emphasize common dignity, equity, and prosperity.

In the introduction, Delehanty describes ELIJAH, a faith-based community organization (FBCO) in the United States. In this section, he also highlights an event organized by ELIJAH, where people from diverse religious backgrounds came together to resist the policies and rhetoric of the Trump administration in 2017. For several decades, FBCOs like ELIJAH were at the forefront of social movements aimed at improving the lives of marginalized and working-class people (p. 14). Through community engagement and collective action, such organizations address racial and economic injustice. Additionally, Delehanty explores how ELIJAH and similar FBCOs foster social change by using personal transformation and emotional connections. Moreover, he explores the relationship between moral vocations (personal ambitions to enact a morally worthy self) and moral citizenship (collective commitment to address social issues) (p. 16). According to Delehanty, FBCOs can mobilize individuals and create a sense of unity and commitment by linking introspection to structural critique.

A brief ethnographic description of ELIJAH is also provided in the second chapter. The organization consists of geographical regions, racial/ethnic caucuses, and issue-focused teams. In addition to training lay leaders, staff organizers facilitate social change projects. ELIJAH's lay leaders serve as the public face of the organization at events and meetings with politicians rather than its staff organizers (p. 41). Through ELIJAH, community members are empowered to speak for themselves and develop leadership skills. The organization focuses on the development of long-term power and the advancement of social justice. ELIJAH's member congregations and the work

of its organizers are well described in this chapter, but other forms of diversity, such as gender, age, or socioeconomic background, could have been considered beyond Delehanty's focus on the racial and ethnic makeup of ELIJAH's congregations (p. 57).

In the fourth chapter, Delehanty presents how ELIJAH trains individuals through relational practices, conversations, and activities to see their interests broadly and collaborate in pursuit of projects that benefit all. These experiences encourage people to explore their background and embrace a different kind of faith commitment. The excerpt emphasizes the importance of personal growth, diversity understanding, and recognizing the interconnected nature of self-interest and collective action (p. 89). Although this chapter is primarily concerned with Lydia as a white woman involved in social justice work (p. 86) to illustrate that people seek religious confidence and find a diverse and inclusive community, it does not explore broader sociopolitical contexts or theoretical frameworks. Delehanty could have discussed the tension between individual motivations and collective goals, examined power dynamics within social justice movements, and explored the limitations and challenges of relying solely on personal convictions to effect social change.

The last chapter acknowledges ELIJAH's limitations and various challenges. According to Delehanty, two categories of challenges exist: those related to race and class and those related to religious identity and culture (p. 140). Delehanty examines why religious conservatives have been more successful in building and exercising power than religious progressives (p. 147). It emphasizes that progressive religious organizations face challenges not only because of conservatives but also because of cultural factors that hinder the connection between religion and progressive politics. By employing organizers of color, addressing issues relevant to non-white, poor, and working-class communities, and confronting systemic racism, ELIJAH seeks to include marginalized communities. Despite this, ELIJAH's culture still limits access and appeal to marginalized groups. In this chapter, Delehanty acknowledges that ELIJAH's work has the potential to empower people and address inequalities (p. 139), but also notes the model's complexities and limitations. Delehanty concludes by pointing out that these challenges are not specific to ELIJAH, but also apply to other FBCOs. As an example, in the case of Pastor Anthony and his ELIJAH-affiliated Black church, cultural factors play a significant role in the challenge of fully embracing ELIJAH's work. A fractured religious-political identity exists within the congregation, where some congregation members perceive the work as being too political, resulting in a divide between their religious convictions and progressive action. Additionally, ELIJAH's approach is hindered by some beliefs that resist change. The congregation's comfort and complacency, viewing the church as a comfortable club, for example, further limit its ability to engage in social justice efforts. In addition, a dichotomy between religious and secular realms may lead to skepticism, with some congregants preferring to separate religious and political matters. Thus, he suggests, further investigation into the obstacles faced by progressive social change groups is needed.

Delehanty concludes his book by emphasizing the need for religious people to move away from passively lamenting social struggles and toward active participation in collective action to improve them. In particular, he discusses the role of FBCOs in transforming people's perspectives and motivating them to address issues including inequality and racism. FBCOs emphasize the importance of relational practices, which enable individuals to recognize that their struggles are connected to those of others, he argues. Furthermore, Delehanty suggests, FBCOs foster a sense of moral citizenship by blurring the lines between personal experiences and societal problems. To achieve social change, they empower individuals to work together across differences. As this study suggests, understanding the role of religion in progressive political action requires a focus on relational practices rather than just religious beliefs, since these practices connect faith with civic engagement and meaningful action.

An important theme of this book is faith-based organizing's potential to address social injustices and promote moral citizenship. To create a more just society, relationships and collective action are emphasized and self-interest is challenged. The author emphasizes the importance of faith-based organizers who are driven by a deep sense of vocation and commitment to social change, despite the difficulties and complexity involved in their work. Among the areas for further consideration, future research, or extension of the author's main arguments would be additional comparative studies of similar movements or organizations in different countries and cultures. Across different contexts, this could provide insights into the differences in approaches, challenges, and outcomes of faith-based community organizing. Collaboration and coalition-building between faith-based community organizers and secular organizations working toward similar goals could also be explored in future work. This could shed light on the potentials and challenges in bridging religious and secular spheres in social activism.