



# Who Will Provide?: The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare

*Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin*

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Who will provide for America's children, elderly, and working families? Not since the 1930s has our nation faced such fundamental choices over how to care for all its citizens. Now, amid economic prosperity, Americans are asking what government, business, and nonprofit organizations can and can't do—and what they should and shouldn't be asked to do. As both political parties look to faith-based organizations to meet material and spiritual needs, the center of this historic debate is the changing role of religion. These essays combine a fresh perspective and detailed analysis on these pressing issues. They emerge from a three-year Harvard Seminar sponsored by the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life that brought together scholars in public policy, government, religion, sociology, law, education, and nonprofit leadership. By putting the present moment in broad historical perspective, these essays offer rich insights into the resources of faith-based organizations, while cautioning against viewing their expanded role as an alternative to the government's responsibility. In *Who Will Provide?* community leaders, organizational managers, public officials, and scholars will find careful analysis drawing on a number of fields to aid their work of devising better partnerships of social provision locally and nationally. It was named a Choice Outstanding Academic Book of 2001.



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