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Rabbi recruits Catholics for new 'Marshall Plan'

Patrick O'Neill | Nov. 26, 2008

COLUMBUS, GA -- Tikkun founder, Rabbi Michael Lerner has a grand plan -- The Global Marshall Plan -- ?to end global and domestic homelessness, hunger, poverty, inadequate education, inadequate health care and repair the global environment,? and he has enlisted the help of Catholics and all people of faith.

Lerner, who is launching his plan in cooperation with the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP), was at the annual SOA Watch gathering last weekend to promote his plan to anyone who would listen. Lerner is NSP co-chair with Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister and Princeton University Prof. Cornel West

?I?m here in part to appeal to the Catholic community to ask them to play a central role in building support for The Global Marshall Plan,? Lerner told NCR.

The plan, which Lerner created, has been introduced into Congress, and it will be re-introduced next year. Written by a Jew, and co-introduced by Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), a Muslim, and co-sponsored by Rep. James P. Moran (D-VA), a Catholic, the plan has a total of 20 backers in the House.

The Global Marshall Plan would "replace our current strategy of homeland security, which is a strategy of domination and control, with a strategy of generosity and caring for others, based on our notion that you?re more likely to achieve security for the United States through generosity and caring for other people around the world than through dominating them,? Lerner said as he waited in a line to get a free bowl of soup from the group known as Food Not Bombs.

Lerner has published his plan in a 32-page booklet, which he personally handed out to hundreds of people at the gathering.

The GMP states that "the current paradigm" in the West is "security through domination."

In the booklet, Lerner writes: "The future of the world is at stake. Our survival physically. Our spiritual health. The quality of human relationships on the planet. The survival of many other species and their ecosystems.

"... Our research has taught us that the world deeply needs a framework of meaning and purpose that connects to the high est spiritual aspirations of the human race for a world of love, kindness, generosity, ethical and ecological sensitivity and awe and wonder at the grandeur and miracle of the universe."

The specific idea behind the plan is for the United States to dedicate one to two percent of its gross domestic product each year for the next 20 "to once and for all end global and domestic homelessness, hunger, poverty, inadequate education, inadequate health care and repair the global environment," Lerner said.

Lerner is working to get local and state governments to endorse his plan, and he wants them to lobby Congress to pass it.

Lerner plans to host an international conference of ?spiritual progressives, that is interfaith people who are

Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, as well as people that we call spiritual, but not religious; people who don?t necessarily adhere to any particular religion but who understand that America needs a new bottom line to replace our materialism and selfishness with a ethos of love, caring and generosity.?

Lerner said he met with President-elect Barack Obama, who is supportive of the plan, ?but says that in order for this to pass in Washington we need to build a very large national movement behind it, and we?re hoping that the progressives in the Catholic world will get behind this and help us get the local support that we need that will then convince Obama that it?s politically viable.?

Lerner said his Globa l Marshall Plan ?was very well-received" by the folks he met in Georgia. "People were very enthusiastic about it.?

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