The Varieties of Faith-Related Agencies

Although some recent literature suggests religious social service agencies can help governments reach important social program goals, the true social organization and services of the agencies remain in dispute. This article interviews officials in the wide class of “faith-related” agencies in two cities to consider two aspects of this issue: the ties or “coupling” of agencies to faith, and the impact of coupling on agency structure and service programming. The results suggest that many sampled agencies are loosely tied to faith in terms of resources, more tightly coupled in terms of authority, and moderately coupled with respect to culture; that certain aspects of service-delivery technology are heavily secularized in many agencies; that faith is more influential in such matters as the agencies’ choices of services; and that the larger, potentially more secularized agencies that might be least likely to be characterized as faith-based balance differing sets of resources and thereby can more fully deliver services that arguably express faith in action. Given this finding and that most agencies profess a focus on protecting the dignity and rights of clients rather than on individual responsibility or other themes that are stressed by some recent policy proposals, governments need to be extremely selective in funding agencies to promote those proposals’ themes.

The use of religious agencies in publicly funded social service programs is advocated by politicians, contemporary public policy makers, essayists, ministers, and many lay people. The benefits of religion are touted for dealing with such vexing social problems as poverty, child welfare, juvenile justice, inner city gangs, and drug abuse (Cisneros 1996; Cnaan 1998; Cnaan, Wineburg, and Boddie 2000; DiLulio 1997; Klein 1997; Monsma 1996). The public use of religious agencies is said to maintain pluralism, reinforce the norm of personal responsibility, and limit the size of the welfare state (Berger and Neuhaus 1977; Glazer 1989; Loury and Loury 1997; Meyer 1982; Olasky 1996; Schambra 1999). Evidence of the rising support for religious agencies, Congress passed the so-called “Charitable Choice” amendment in the 1996 welfare reform legislation to allow religious charities to apply for government grants—although the charities are not permitted to discriminate on the basis of religion (Chaves 1999; Demko 1997, 38).

“Faith-based” agencies are attractive to many policy makers, scholars, and lay people because they appear to emphasize thrift, individual responsibility, less government, responsiveness, and flexibility in the provision of services. They also seem to allow clients to be personally invested in their own rehabilitation. Nevertheless, these are hypothesized benefits, and it is not simple to assess the hypotheses. Clearly, the nature of the agencies and their services cannot be understood by merely tallying the level of public funding or the number of ministers on boards of directors. Indeed, agencies interact with secular society in so many ways as to preclude a simple correspondence between any one dimension of religiosity and agency action. 

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Religion can be interpreted in many ways, and thus it can motivate many types of behavior. The joint impact of particular ties to religious and secular institutions may be complex. It is critical to carefully consider the way in which organizations are really tied to faith, and given this tie, how they function in the world.

This article conducts a detailed analysis of a diverse sample of religiously affiliated service agencies. It reveals that agencies have varying ties to religion, and these ties affect the agencies’ organization moderately to profoundly. It also suggests there is no easy or simple trade-off between the extent to which an agency expresses faith and its size, use of secular resources, or similar factors. As a result, many of the statements about “faith-based” agencies that are made in the popular press or by politicians are overly simplistic; arguments in favor of faith-based service delivery are mismatched with the true universe of religiously tied agencies and their characteristics. In other words, the vision of agencies that is stated by many contemporary policy makers and presidential candidates represents only a small percentage of the total spectrum of agencies that have an important faith component.

**Background and Theory**

Some empirical work suggests that a focus on religion is beneficial because faith-based agencies generally deliver services for the public good (Cisneros 1996; Hager, Pins, and Jorgensen 1997; Slessarev 1998; Wolpert 1997), that is, they fully express faith in the way they deliver services (Jeavons 1994, 1997). This implies that these agencies’ effectiveness is directly related to their faith connection. But because that work tends to focus on small, informal, unstable (DiLulio 1997; Hager, Pins, and Jorgensen 1997; Wolpert 1997), or otherwise specialized faith-based providers (Jeavons 1994, 1997), its apparent implication or allegation is that larger denominational agencies such as Catholic Charities or Jewish Family Services are not really faith-based, and therefore not as effective or beneficial. Indeed, this seems to confirm a more traditional stream of scholarship that suggests many large, religiously tied agencies are heavily secularized and quite like other nonprofit providers. The agencies allegedly rely on professional staff, select clients universally, and refrain from mandating participation in religious activities or otherwise expressing their faith. They are pressured to do so by government and United Way funding sources, by the general secularization of society, and by ideas emanating from the legal rights revolution (Marty 1980; Oates 1995). Under managed care and the generally more controlled funding of the newly accountable contemporary welfare state, many have little choice over such matters as the length and type of care (Smith and Lipsky 1993).

If certain religious agencies act on the basis of their faith, but many more do not, one might wonder whether there are sufficient numbers of distinctive agencies that governments might rely on. However, that dichotomy is questionable. Scholarship pointing to the way faith mobilizes resources for the poor counts the contributions of a wide group of agencies, without always documenting that each is faith based (Cnaan 1996, 1998; Wuthnow 1990). Further, there are reasons to believe that organizations with some tie to religion may share certain features, whether they are traditional or not; they are part of the same society and react to many of the same social and cultural forces, some of which are known to support religion and some of which are secularizing (Wuthnow 1980). Indeed, one major study suggests it is difficult and perhaps unusual for an agency to remain fully faith based (Jeavons 1994).

The role of faith across the wide range of religiously tied agencies is more of an empirical question than a settled issue. Research must specify how religion and faith are really expressed in agencies, to what ends, and in what agencies. This article undertakes such research. It is more analytic than argumentative, but its findings are relevant to considering the various meanings of being a religiously tied agency, the implications of the agencies’ service-delivery styles for public management and social policy, and the likely implications of government decisions to fund the larger group of agencies that have some faith connection.

**The Faith-Related Agency**

Is faith important, and how is it important? These questions are at the heart of the debate on the merits of increasing the role of religiously affiliated agencies in service delivery. Of course, examining them requires analyzing the ways in which religion affects various agencies. However, we believe this analysis should focus on the universe of what might be called faith-related agencies, which is different than the universe of the typically analyzed faith-based agencies.

Faith-related agencies may be defined as social service organizations that have any of the following: a formal funding or administrative arrangement with a religious authority or authorities; a historical tie of this kind; a specific commitment to act within the dictates of a particular established faith; or a commitment to work together that stems from a common religion. These agencies have some link to religion at the institutional level, either directly or because some individuals act on the basis of their relation to a religious institution, not simply on the basis of their personal belief system (Chaves 1994).

Use of the term faith-related is methodologically useful because it points analysis to the broader universe of...
service organizations that are of interest to policy makers. This includes large traditional providers, mission shelters that do not have formal ties to a denomination, interfaith organizations, and many others. To be more precise, the definition mirrors the set of agencies with which public policy must be concerned. If government were to focus funds on agencies that are linked to religion, most or all faith-related agencies might qualify. If governments were to choose to work with a narrower group, questions would arise concerning this choice.

The faith-related definition has two other intellectual rationales. First, it is inclusive. It reflects the variable nature of ties, recognizing that agencies most closely aligned with faith must act in the secular world, while agencies with a strongly secular orientation might be influenced to some degree by their religious ties. Second, the definition is analytically clear because it distinguishes the tie to faith from the actions that may result from this tie. For example, an agency most closely aligned with a faith may not necessarily fully attain religiously engendered goals; large agencies that are loosely bound to the authority of a given denomination might reach a broader range of clients and thus might more fully express certain service goals of that faith.

The term faith-related intentionally contrasts with faith-based organizations (DiLulio 1997), which, when taken literally, excludes all but the few agencies that fully act on faith (or at least, that come close to this illusive goal). That term also is problematic because it implicitly assumes faith can be represented by a readily identifiable set of practices, which this article disputes. Further, the term faith-based provides few layers for distinguishing the behavior of agencies that rely on faith from the definition of the agencies. Thus, it overlooks the many complex ties between agencies and their societies. Finally, it is used in some works that study an ambiguously defined group of agencies.

The term faith-related is compatible with the work of Netting (1984) and Netting, Thibaut, and Ellor (1990), which focuses on church-related or religious institutions that have a formal tie or membership in an “organized faith community.” But the new term also encompasses agencies that formerly had ties to a denomination or established faith, as long as they still rely on an organizational constitution that makes reference to faith. It also includes agencies that are oriented toward a given denomination but have no formal administrative connection. It overlaps with Chaan, Wineburg, and Boddie’s (2000) use of the term “religious-based” or even “faith-based service agency,” but that work is particularly interested in organizations “that overtly express their religious origins and affiliation” (27) and does not conceptualize them as varying in their actions in complex ways, as suggested here. Jeavons’ (1994, 1997) view also is relevant. He uses the term “religious organization” to refer to organizations that act on a particular system of faith and worship that is connected to a religion. “Religiousness” varies along seven dimensions, ranging from the mobilization of resources to goals. Jeavons’ perspective overcomes some of the problems of the term faith-based by suggesting that the tie to religion is a matter of degree as determined by a multidimensional analysis, but he calls for assessing this in behavioral terms. For example, he argues that an agency is more closely tied to religion when its resources are offered and used for moral purposes, and it is closer to religion in services when it includes “spiritual technologies.” The current definition enables us to include many more agencies and to consider the ways in which variations in institutional ties to faith act as “independent” variables that result in different actions that are not delineated by definition.

Conceptually, the current view suggests three research tasks: laying out various ways that organizations are institutionally linked to religion; relating the nature of this link to the social-service-delivery patterns, structure, and social organization of agencies; and assessing the impact of the social organization on clients. This article tackles the first two of these tasks. It is meant to unravel the issues that other perspectives tend to bunch together and to help inform policy debates about the use of the agencies.

Dimensions of the Faith Relation

As Jeavons (1997) suggests, an agency’s link to faith at the institutional level is multidimensional. We posit that the key to determining those dimensions is to consider that the agencies are heavily influenced by their institutional environment, that is, by the norms, beliefs, and cognitions apparent in other organizations. This is not to deny that service agencies exist within a “market,” where they must respond to funding agencies, religious congregations, and (to some degree) client demands. Rather, it implies that agencies do not always respond literally to pressures for narrowly defined, specific program ends. These ends tend to be socially and politically constructed, inherently controversial, and difficult to assess. Thus, services providers are frequently assessed in terms of their structures, procedures, and mission. For example, child welfare providers are partly evaluated by whether agency investigations are conducted by professionals who use agreed-upon approaches (such as family visits), and perhaps by agency compliance with a small number of placement-rate indicators.

It follows that our analysis of faith-related agencies requires considering the norms, beliefs, and cognitions stemming from the culture that define acceptable organizational structures and activities (Scott 1995). Indeed, so-called
“institutional” theory has made many advances in undertaking such analyses. For example, one version of this theory suggests there are three distinct institutional mechanisms: agencies may adopt a given set of institutional arrangements because of coercive, normative, or mimetic (that is, mimicry of common approaches) pressures (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Some analysts also suggest that agencies may have a choice of which set of cultural arrangements to pursue—for example, whether to adopt grassroots or centralized forms of democracy (Colignon 1997), both of which are viable in U.S. society.

Based on the literature on organizational theory, it is helpful to identify the sources of constraints that help dictate organizational action. We argue that three are most central: the sources of resources, such as public and private funders and donors; the use of authority, generally exercised through the hierarchical control of denominations; and the sources of what we call “culture,” which includes groups that agencies or their staff and volunteers interact with (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Katz and Kahn 1966; Oliver 1991; Scott 1987; Wamsley and Zald 1973). These roughly reflect coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures, respectively, although matters are not so simple in practice.

Resource Dependency

In the 1960s, theorists argued that organizations can be conceptualized as part of an “open system.” Organizations accept input from the outside world, produce a product or service, and export it in order to receive more resources. As it was originally formulated, this theory suggested that organizational behavior is best explained by the interaction between the demands of outsiders and the desires of organizational members, particularly with respect to the pursuit of organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Open-systems theory has more recently been viewed in broader terms, suggesting that an agency is tied to the external world in many ways (Jeavons 1994; Scott 1987). The theory forms a general framework within which scholars select more particular views of causality in analyzing such issues as how the local community affects religious congregations (Roozen, McKinney, and Carroll 1984).

The resource-dependency theory, as developed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) and Thompson (1967) and used by authors like Gronbjerg (1993), has become a readily accepted application of open-systems theory that offers more specific hypotheses. Simply put, this theory argues that organizations can act only if they have a stable flow of resources from the environment. These resources are necessary to provide organizations sufficient “certainty” about the external world to enable them to produce a product or service. It follows that a focal organization can be dominated by outsiders who provide resources that cannot be easily obtained elsewhere, if the outsiders do not need the focal organization as fully—that is, if there are “asymmetrical” dependencies.

Like open-systems theory in general, resource-dependency theory was traditionally applied to market and market-like relations. Still, it can be used institutionally because resource pressures can promote compliance to institutionalized standards (Oliver 1991). It can be taken to suggest that an agency is more fully linked to faith when it receives a higher proportion of resources from these institutions, and thus is more dependent on religious entities. It is less closely tied to faith when resources flow from secular sources. Indeed, the literature on large religious providers implies that services are fundamentally altered in a secular direction by the agencies’ funding arrangements and the resulting asymmetrical dependencies with governments, the United Way, and other secular entities (Anderson 2000; Coughlin 1965; Netting 1982; Westby 1985). Apparently, secular funding sources dispense funds to many agencies, but religious providers have few alternate sources of funds. Further, providers who refuse secular financial aid may lose ground to competing religious entities that accept secular resources. Because most secular resource providers are under pressure (stemming from their own dependencies) to fund religiously neutral services, faith-related agencies that accept their funds also are expected to respond to these pressures.

But even temporarily accepting the view that tangible resources are paramount, it is possible to open up the inquiry by suggesting that organizations that obtain many secular financial resources also can receive resources from religious institutions, and thus can maintain some ties with faith. That is, even if the dilemma raised by secular financing and control is real, dependencies can be a bit more symmetrical when religion helps supply resources that cannot be easily replaced. For example, governments often require agencies to use some of their own volunteers, facilities, skills, or even cash (Smith and Lipsky 1993), and agencies may mobilize these resources from churches or other religious sources. An even more complex perspective suggests that the role of religion varies with the way agencies utilize “strategic choice” to determine which resources to pursue (Gioia and Thomas 1996). They may choose to rely more fully on religious sources, although some also may become activists in a broader public arena where secular and religious ideas are not completely separated.

Authority

The classic view of organizations is a bureaucratic, or authority-based perspective (Weber 1947). In a broad way, this perspective considers the impact of the “rules of the game,” which are established by the administra-
tive structure. It can be argued that it involves a resource-dependency issue, in that agencies with control have the power to coerce or cajole. But authority also is a matter of legitimacy, or what we consider partly normative. For example, agencies can be under a diocese and thus may feel obliged to absorb the diocese’s standards. That is, agency workers may voluntarily agree to accept the standards, or at least may believe they are obliged to obey them in practice.

The apparent bureaucratization of society is defined as the movement toward rational-authority structures, wherein organizations are evaluated by their ability to provide goods in a systematic and logical, not a value-based, manner (Satow 1975). This definition is one of the reasons Chaves (1998a) suggests the internal “rationality” of religions is defined by the extent to which they separate their agencies—overseas ministries, educational services, and presumably social service activities—from the denominational authority structure. Chaves implies that, when agencies achieve autonomy from the denomination, they are freed from religious authority and garner a larger share of their legitimacy bureaucratically for the services they deliver (whether to the denomination or, as will frequently occur, more broadly), not the values they pursue. That perspective suggests the degree of an agency’s autonomy from religious denominations describes the extent to which it lacks an authoritative tie to religion, and thus describes the extent to which it is tied to secular society (on this dimension).

To complicate matters again, authority may be exercised in a variety of ways, many of which increase the link to faith. Agencies may not be formally part of the denominational hierarchy, but they still can be affiliated with and partly controlled by the denomination. They also may have an informal connection to a religious order or set of faiths. Religious authority may be declared or written into agency constitutions, for example, if agencies have special forms of staff participation or an organizational mission statement that reflects a specific kind of religious faith. This can become authoritative to agency staff and volunteers and can increase the tie to faith.

**Culture**

The earliest writings of the new institutional school submit that the organizational culture can be a taken-for-granted representation of the environment. Organizations draw assumptions, sometimes without thinking, and sometimes because their leaders are aware they are expected to do so (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Powell and DiMaggio 1990). Viewed in this way “culture” fits our perspective because it is derived from religious or secular institutions—institutions with which agencies are hierarchically arranged, or institutions that are important collaterals, such as other providers that have secular and religious ties, or professional associations. The analysis of culture seems to threaten the distinction between religion as an institution and religion as an individual practice, but it does not if we focus only on culture that derives from these ties. A major contribution of institutional theory is to suggest the importance of this type of cultural transmission.

While some institutional theory suggests that cultural standards are almost automatically adopted, we follow a recent, more flexible approach (Oliver 1991; Rao 1998) that posits that the cultures of faith can be chosen strategically as agencies determine the outside organizations with which they interact. Moreover, we posit that these decisions are likely to be heavily conscious; the active “discourse” of the organization, or the consciously recognized set of beliefs concerning the appropriate behavior of participants, may be critical to the extent to which faith influences staff, volunteers, and clients.

Religious culture dominates if agencies interact fully with congregations, other religious providers, and representatives of denominations. In general, this may create a niche or space for agencies to pursue their religious values. The resulting cultural discourse has a distinct role in agency organization because resource dependency, as well as rules, regulations, and authority, generally only go so far (Giddens 1984). In a sense, religious culture can establish moral standards (Chaves 1998b).

Culture also can be secular. Secular concepts obviously permeate the discourse of social service providers that interact with public bureaucracies, professional groups, and other providers that do not explicitly consider faith (Downs 1967; Lipsky 1980; Wilson 1989).

**Religious Coupling**

Formally, the degree to which an agency is linked to faith may be conceptualized as the extent of “coupling” (Weick 1976) of the agency to resources, authorities, and cultures that represent relevant faiths. An agency that is tightly coupled to faith is more closely connected to denominations or religious groups. For example, resources can be fully controlled by a Catholic diocese, leaders can be Lutheran by mandate, or internal decisions of consequence can be based on the rabbinical pronouncements. As it is used here, “coupling” is used differently than its original meaning (Weick 1976), where it concerned structural connections between components of a single organization.

Our view suggests there are three dimensions of coupling. As the top part of figure 1 shows, these dimensions should be positively related to each other, but they should not be fully coterminous. For example, while an agency that is tightly coupled with religious authority is more likely to receive religious funding, the two dimensions are somewhat independent; the lobbying arm of the Catholic church...
is coupled to religion on both these dimensions, but cer-

tain Protestant denominations provide few resources to the

child welfare agencies they sponsor.

Of course, attachments may vary within each dimen-
sion. For example, large agencies are likely to garner some

funding from their denomination and from religiously ori-

ented donors, but they also can obtain funds from donors

who have little interest in religion and from government.

Still, this notion of coupling implies something of a zero-

sum game. Agencies are more fully tied to a faith commu-

nity or to the secular society on each dimension: secular-

ization essentially is the reduction of religious authority

(Chaves 1994).

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<th>Hypothesized Relations of Coupling and Religious Behavior</th>
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Impact of Coupling

While variation may exist among individual agencies,

the impact of faith on the structure of service delivery

should generally vary with the degree of coupling on each
dimension. The tighter the coupling to religion, the more

an agency’s social organization reflects the demands of

that religion. Of course, there may be some extreme cases.

Some agencies may have completely given up their rela-
tion with religion and may look precisely like secular so-
cial service agencies. Some small religious communes may

almost fully remain within the framework of a religion.

But most agencies are most likely to be organized in ways

that reflect both religious and secular institutions.

As the bottom part of figure 1 suggests, the broad dis-
tributton of agencies should form the shape of an oval here
(as in the top half of figure 1), in that coupling will strongly
but not fully affect religious organization and behavior. To
be sure, a Lutheran social service agency that has funding
from the state child welfare authority necessarily collects
a smaller share of funding support from the denomination;
thus, it partly obeys the commands of that public author-
ity, while a mission shelter for the homeless that accepts
no revenues from secular sources has freedom to use reli-
gious paraprofessionals to deliver services. But resource
dependency can have limited effects if demands are few, if
funding-agency monitoring is lax, or if provider agencies
have powerful constituencies that help them resist outsider
constraints. Further, even if tangible resources emanate
from secular entities, organizational patterns may reflect a
compromise between secular and religious interests be-
cause of dependencies that are not fully based on tangible
resources. Religious providers may be among the few in a
community that are considered to have the legitimate right
to dispense certain types of services (Hall 1990), and they
may supply a special type of status in America’s weakly
accepted welfare state. These attributes may provide them
with some ability to determine the means of provision, even
if they are funded by government. For this reason, one so-
plicated study finds that agencies funded by government
are allowed to retain modest remnants of religious sym-
bois (Monsma 1996).

Similarly, agencies that are formally under religious
authority may be granted considerable organizational au-

onomy. Finally, the culture of religious institutions should
leave room for interpretation. For example, Baptist orga-
nizations differentially interpret potentially contradictory
dictates to be charitable and to encourage individuals to be
independent (Clydesdale 1990); chapters of Catholic Char-
ities around the country vary substantially in the way they
reconcile their connection to Catholicism with the desire
to allow staff and clients freedom of expression and belief.
Indeed, agencies can partly choose the extent and ways in
which they are coupled with faith, so that coupling and its
impact on the organization of the agency interact. The fig-
ure also implies that coupling with faith and secular soci-
ety is not necessarily completely contradictory. For ex-
ample, both religions and governments may prefer dignified
treatment of the poor. To be sure, this part of figure 1 is in
itself simplified: It does not distinguish differences in the
impact of coupling across each of the resource, authority,
and cultural dimensions, even if we consider some such
issues in the text.
Denominations

Our framework generally focuses on the impact of the dimensions of faith, rather than the impact of coupling with particular denominations. Still, denominations matter. In part, they vary in the degree of religious coupling that they demand. For example, it is well known that Protestant denominations vary in the degree of authoritative control they exercise over social services (Netting 1984). Different denominations also have different resource bases. In these instances, denominational differences are partly picked up in the degree of coupling with respect to authority and resources.

Denominations also differ in the tenets of faith. For example, there are clear differences among Protestant denominations that are more fundamentalist, mainline, or progressive (Wuthnow 1988). When discussing the impacts of faith and faith culture, it is important to determine the content of the faith. However, faiths generally interact both with each other and with the broader secular society. This is particularly the case in the United States, where denominations are losing some authority to congregations, and where individuals often switch their denomination and congregation (Warner 1993). Accordingly, the faith message presented across agencies may, paradoxically, become a bit more similar. All congregations or denominations that provide services are affected by the greater need to compete with each other to gain adherents. They also compete against or work along with secular organizations. A religious and secular discourse about services is disseminated widely and nationally (Warner 1994).

To put this in other terms, institutional theory suggests that the result of competition and interaction is some degree of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Different agencies will adopt similar arrangements because they learn from each other, accept arrangements known to be useful, or are influenced by the same institutions. If this occurs, differences between religions with respect to social services will narrow to a degree. Thus, we point to denominational differences in this article when they clearly are important, but we also look for commonalities. Future research can more specifically suggest the special nature of agencies that are coupled to each faith. One study makes quite a bit of headway on this issue (Netting 1984).

Methods

Research Sites

This article assesses the nature and implications of the degree of coupling to resources, authority, and culture, with the aid of data from agencies in two cities, Chicago and Seattle. The two cities are sufficiently disparate to capture many relevant features of northern cities in the United States. The Chicago metropolitan area includes an estimated 2.3 million Catholics, 1.3 million Protestants, 350,000 Muslims, 261,000 Jews, and 250,000 orthodox Christians (Bradley et al. 1992). It is home to the headquarters of one of the largest Catholic dioceses in the world. It also is one of the most highly segregated urban areas, both racially and economically (Massey and Denton 1993). This gives rise to relatively homogeneous competing local congregations.

Seattle is part of King County, which contains about 211,000 Catholics, 307,000 Protestants, and 13,000 Jews (Bradley et al. 1992). The Washington Association of Churches estimates that only 20 percent of the state’s residents belong to a church, and it is widely believed that Seattle and the state of Washington in general are relatively “unchurched.” Further, churches are known to be nondenominational or interdenominational. Church organization also reflects ethnic diversity, given the large numbers of Asian immigrants from a variety of nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, and others).

Sampling Criteria

Public Mission. Three sampling criteria were employed to select the agencies to study in these cities (see Appendix for a complete list). First, the agencies needed to have a public mission or a social policy goal of their own, that is, they needed to deliver services to at least some individuals who are not members of their own parishes or churches. Agencies with such a service mission confront the crucial public policy issues about employing faith in a secular society.

Service Focus. Second, the selected agencies had to provide one of three types of services: child welfare, material assistance, or advocacy. These three types are especially germane to understanding the role of faith in service delivery because they are common in faith-related agencies (Sosin 1986). At the same time, agencies delivering each type of service differ in secularizing pressures, particularly with respect to resources.

To be specific, child welfare agencies are defined as agencies that deliver foster care, adoption, counseling to families, and residential care for at-risk or emotionally disturbed children. Most of these services have been delivered by religious agencies for more than 150 years. The services are viewed as crucial to the continuance of faith across the generations, and they are legitimated by such Christian sources as the biblical hospitality rules (Garland 1994). But child welfare agencies are now heavily dependent on government funding.

Material-assistance agencies offer shelter, food, and other forms of emergency aid. Material-assistance provision is central to many faiths: under Christianity, provision reflects the dictum that it is important to feed the
hungry and clothe the poor. A moderate amount of government support is now distributed to material-assistance agencies, particularly when they serve homeless individuals. Finally, advocacy agencies are involved in community development, or they lobby for general causes or specific issues that range beyond the defense of their own resources or rights. Advocacy is legitimated by faiths that require action to improve the world. Advocacy agencies generally confront governments and do not accept funding from them.4

Bureaucracy. Third, agencies were selected by a four-fold differentiation concerning the degree of social organization, or bureaucracy. This provides diversity on a dimension that may affect coupling and its impact, given the literature suggesting that religion might reside most fully in the small agencies. Highly bureaucratic organizations include agencies that are part of a broader denominational hierarchy or that are a denomination’s major institutional representative. Medium bureaucratic organizations are relatively large, free-standing agencies with at least 30 employees. Small bureaucratic organizations exist on a continuous basis as independent entities but have fewer than 30 employees (or sometimes only a handful of employees). Organizations with no bureaucracy are indigenous, not necessarily continuous efforts that are characteristically developed by activists within a church or network of churches. They are exemplified by many food pantries. They are often informal organizations, lacking official nonprofit legal status.

Sample Composition

This study primarily selected one agency to represent each of 24 cells: four levels of bureaucracy, three types of services, and two cities. It also selected an additional 10 agencies that rounded out the sample and ensured rough denominational and ethnic balance. In general, agencies were identified in different ways across cities. The Seattle service network is relatively well-ordered, and it was possible to informally contact agencies listed in directories and to quickly learn about the universe of faith-related agencies. The Chicago service network is much larger and more diffuse. Lists were used here. A list of all child welfare contractees was provided by government. Lists of all sizeable material-assistance food providers were provided by the two coordinating agencies that supply the food. Advocacy agencies were located through United Way directories and similar sources. Informal (no bureaucracy) agencies were located from lists of technical-assistance organizations and by word of mouth.

The level of bureaucratization was estimated from telephone calls to potentially eligible agencies. The faith-related nature of organizations was determined by such data as the names of the agencies, the affiliations of the agencies, the clerical status of executives, and most important, information supplied by the agencies that provided the lists.

Interview Methods

Much of the data stem from interviews with an executive in each agency and, in the six larger agencies in each site, from interviews with an additional supervisor of service workers. These interviews relied on a focused interview schedule that encompassed the concepts that are suggested by the notions of resource dependency, authority, and culture. For example, staff members were asked about their agencies’ connections to the various religious and secular forces, their board membership, governance, staffing, and budgets. They were asked about what might be called “agency discourse:” service philosophy and the way it leads executives to deal with key issues. They were asked to describe their service-delivery system. Our focus was the general features or policies of delivery, such as which services are delivered to whom and under which conditions, or which broader advocacy policies were highlighted. The interview format was flexible enough to allow respondents to provide detailed information on specific issues not directly covered in the questionnaire. Altogether, 44 formal interviews were conducted across the two cities. Interviews frequently were accompanied by agency tours and broader staff discussions.

Interviews also were conducted with key individuals in public and nonprofit organizations in the community, including individuals in umbrella associations, representatives from the state and regional church councils, coalitions of human service providers, and specialized coalitions of emergency-assistance providers. This information helped to ensure a representative sample of agencies, pointed us toward key agency personnel, and confirmed our findings. The accuracy of our interview data was checked against various agency records, including financial statements, annual reports, and program data.

Results

The range and nature of faith-related organizations can most readily be understood by focusing sequentially on the resource, authority, and culture dimensions. For each dimension, we describe the levels of coupling and the way they co-vary with the social organization of the agencies that are clearly connected to service delivery. Across the three dimensions, we discuss this material in somewhat different orders to reflect differences in substantive findings.

Resources

Low and Moderate Coupling. As expected under the sampling plan, different degrees of coupling to faith with respect to resources are revealed in the financing and staff-
ing of each of the three types of agencies. In terms of financing, loose coupling to faith, reflecting the dominance of secular resources, is most apparent in child welfare agencies that focus on core services: foster care, adoption, and institutional care. More state revenues have been used for these services over the century, and the cost of care is now so high that few providers can fully fund services from religious sources of funds. Indeed, agencies in our sample that focus on these core services receive from 50 to 85 percent of their child welfare funds from government. Nevertheless, there is a little variation in the use of other religiously coupled funds. Some of the core child welfare agencies are large, multiservice centers that are not fully dependent on child welfare funding. These agencies may receive token funding from their denomination, and they may also solicit donations from individuals through churches. They at least have the potential for a small degree of coupling with faith with respect to resources. This contrasts with the small and medium-sized agencies, which are less likely to have even this modicum of religious resources. Indeed, one medium-sized agency that formally views itself as faith based but is not formally connected to a denomination faced a virtual identity crisis when it began to accept public child welfare funding covering all of its costs; it suddenly realized that it had very few remaining institutional ties to faith.

A mildly different pattern arises in the material-assistance agencies (that is, providers of shelter care, food, clothing, and emergency financial assistance). In general, only slightly over one-half receive some funding from government for their material-assistance or other programs (from state and federal as well as local revenues). Some of the shelters for the homeless also receive funding from local United Way chapters. But regardless of government and United Way support, many sampled agencies are loosely coupled to faith with respect to resources because they aggressively seek out much of their funding from the general secular community. (The motive for fundraising may, nonetheless, be religious—that is, to reach out to other communities as a way of spreading their religious message.) This is clear because they generally tone down their particular religious philosophy for fundraising purposes. They suggest that the agency has a historic mission of helping the poor, but they leave it up to the donor to understand this may reflect the agency’s faith orientation. At most, their advertising might mention that the poor are also God’s creatures, in a sense implying a “generic” faith message that alienates few. Material-assistance or child service agencies commonly denied they truly are “faith based.” But a few target a small amount of specific advertising at religious sources (like churches), where they make a more religious presentation, sometimes using a separate, more religiously oriented letterhead.

For both the larger child welfare agencies and most material-assistance agencies, a small to moderate degree of coupling with religious resources occurs due to other resources, that is, the religious volunteers or staff who are recruited from local congregations. This is crucial because church membership correlates positively with giving to nonprofit activities in general (Wuthnow 1990), while some faith-related organizations have special “social capital” (Coleman 1988; Greeley 1997; Wood 1997) in the form of social connections to individuals and groups who offer support (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 1997). Some material-assistance agencies are moderately coupled with faith with respect to resources because they share membership lists or lists of possible donors with other religious entities (even when they realize they are essentially helping their competitors), while others make use of shared space; Inspired Partnerships of Chicago, for instance, estimates that over 70 percent of city churches donate space for at least one community activity (usually food programs, youth programs, and other counseling programs).

**Moderate to Tight Coupling.** A few child welfare and material-assistance agencies are much more tightly coupled with faith. These agencies accept few or no government funds and rely on highly religious volunteers provided by particular churches. For example, one child welfare agency is affiliated with a Baptist church. This agency eschews government resources and relies instead on the largess of churches or individuals who have a special commitment to that denomination. Two church pantries rely almost totally on volunteers and food from a small number of churches. Mission shelters rely on funding from congregations and highly religious individuals. These are “redemptive” organizations, in which participation is meant to transform clients. They select staff on the basis of faith and encourage staff members to live by a given moral code (Wilson 1973, 47). They are often at odds with secular interests with respect to norms of equality in staff hiring and in serving clients (Lipsky and Smith 1989/90; Smith and Lipsky 1993; Sosin 1986).

Advocacy agencies have some similarities to the small child welfare and material-assistance providers, in that they are relatively closely coupled to religion with respect to resources. Governments do not normally promote or fund religious advocacy, and agency directors say they would not be free to advocate for religion if they accepted such support. Instead, resources generally emanate from the denomination and from churches, and only on occasion from secular foundations. But there is some variety here. Some advocacy agencies have mixed funding sources: a Protestant civic organization obtains funds from both local churches and secular foundations. This contrasts with advocacy agencies that are fully funded by a denomination, such as the Catholic Conference of Illinois, which...
obbies for the church. That agency receives 65 percent of its funds from the Archdiocese of Chicago and the remainder from other dioceses in the state. Similarly, a welfare rights coalition is a subsidiary of Catholic Charities and obtains most of its funds through its parent.6

Social Organization of Agencies: Typical Patterns. The impacts of coupling on the social organization of agencies in the sample varied with the agency characteristic under consideration. The most straightforward relations involve agency technology. Because resources imply dependency and control here, the core child welfare agencies that receive many secular resources have “secular” service technologies. They must follow guidelines as they monitor foster care placements, offer in-home services to avoid such placements, or deliver day care and residential placements within time and resource guidelines. Most agencies are restricted in their selection of clients by government standards and regulations. The agencies do not have sole control over discharge decisions. The agencies also use methods that are generally approved within the professional field. For example, they typically use a “systems” theory approach to family counseling. They tend to hire professional staff (universally).

Material-assistance agencies are not fully controlled by government, particularly when they are funded by the relatively new programs for homeless adults, which have few dollars for administration and deal with difficult-to-monitor emergency situations. Further, governments have few alternatives to existing religious agencies (once religious missions are bypassed) and thus do not enjoy complete resource asymmetry. Perhaps for such reasons, material-assistance agencies are less pressured to professionalize or develop professional-helping technologies. Still, except for mission shelters, these agencies do not purport to deliver services by a specific faith-based technology. That would not be consistent with the message of their fundraising campaigns (nor, as will be argued, with their culture). The vast majority of material-assistance agencies use relatively secular approaches to distributing tangible goods, in that they rely on simple distribution technologies and do not discriminate on the basis of religion or on any other behavioral criteria that might be expected to differentiate religious and secular people.

While this part of the dependency issue might suggest that traditional relations between government and religious agencies are limiting, this is partly contradicted by analyzing a second issue of social organization, the mission of serving the needy. In this instance, coupling with resources has certain nonlinear effects by which larger agencies that have low to moderate coupling to faith resources balance dependencies most successfully.7 This occurs because services are broader and because the agencies can decide how to react to problems of need—significantly, with respect to goals that are not related to conversion and inculcating specifically religious behavior. This has to do with the mobilization of resources, that is, with the strategic choice some agencies make to rely on multiple funding sources. For example, the Salvation Army in Seattle reported it is able to increase donations to food programs when government funds decline. Its faith orientation (and general reputation) mobilizes these resources because religious groups are expected to help in times of need by supplementing government funding. In contrast, agencies that fully rely on government funds and hence are loosely coupled to faith for resources do not have the revenues to adjust. This is exemplified by a Seattle emergency-assistance provider that de-emphasized its connection to faith as it increased government contracts and now has more clients than funds. Complete dependency on government also has other costs. A Chicago shelter provider is in the midst of a major retrenchment due to the loss of a government contract. It is an interdenominational agency that might attract interest and volunteers from many denominations, but it currently fully depends on the government for funds and has few ties to religious resource providers that it can mobilize.

Of course, agencies in the sample often developed from church actions. For example, a community development center in Chicago grew out of the activism of women who were trained at a Christian base community to which their Catholic church referred them. An emergency-assistance agency in Seattle began in response to local church members’ concern about malnutrition among homeless youth. But after the original period of mobilization is over, the agencies that choose and manage to combine religious with secular resources have the largest scope.

Issues of staffing complicate matters, but they do not alter the general patterns. Organizations that are able to garner more volunteers are those with a larger professional staff. They attract volunteers with a greater range of beliefs, but they also have a greater range of services. This is the case even if a few separate core volunteers, who share more of the faith, from peripheral ones. A major homeless shelter in Seattle relies on Christian volunteers for “contact” services with clients but uses volunteers from any faith for support activities such as transportation. In theory, this may enable the agency to deliver services that more fully reflect faith, but the agency does not have obviously religious programming.

Social Organization of Agencies: Extreme Patterns. While the few agencies that are most tightly coupled to faith have the most religious service technology, they do not necessarily have the largest scope of services. For example, the Baptist agency mentioned previously includes Bible studies in all service tracks. Activities like arts and crafts center around reproducing religious objects or symbols. The agency delivers family counseling, recreational
services, and other “lifestyle” services that are rarely under the purview of government (Sosin 1986) but are in keeping with the expectations of religiously motivated donors. However, because the lack of government funds limits the resource base, the agency’s services are of low intensity. It is not likely that this agency could provide services with complicated technologies (such as interventions with families at risk of abuse) or serve difficult, needy clients (such as the chronically mentally ill).

Similarly, material-assistance agencies that avoid secular resources include a soup kitchen in each city, one of which hired a coordinator based on her ties to local churches. These two small agencies frequently demand that their staff engage in religious activities, such as participating in prayer meetings in the mornings and at staff meetings. But the agencies provide food to an unusually limited numbers of clients. Neither has the revenues to adjust to demand. The Seattle soup kitchen experienced a drop in attendance despite a demonstrated need in the community. But the agency lacked sufficient resources to conduct the necessary outreach to reach people in need. (The staff also were disinclined to reach out to the broader community because they considered this to be beyond the mission of the agency.)

To put this in other terms, the finding that agencies eschewing secular funding tend to be small suggests that fully autonomous religious agencies reflect faith in many ways, but they often have modest impact on the world. That is, resources and the autonomy to deliver high-volume services are related in a curvilinear fashion (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). The major exceptions are advocacy agencies that are tied to denominations, which may be heavily funded to formally and powerfully lobby for church positions. But as we will later note, secular culture also constrains the nature of advocacy.

Authority

Degrees of Coupling. By definition, faith-related agencies are coupled to religion to some degree. Still, there are differences in formal affiliation and in the organization of their boards of directors.

Some differences in formal affiliation are apparent. Eleven agencies are directly sponsored by a denomination (such as the Salvation Army, which is a separate denomination) or an individual church. These may be considered to be most tightly coupled to faith. Five are sponsored by other religious authorities (such as St. Vincent de Paul, administered by a lay Catholic organization, or a local mission, an affiliate of the International Union of Missions, which provides shelter) and are still tightly coupled to faith. One agency is sponsored by several churches of the same faith, while four are interdenominational (like the soup kitchen mentioned above). Two are tied to a faith-based movement (like the Catholic Worker movement) and might be considered less tightly coupled to faith with respect to authority.

The other agencies or organizations have ties to specific faith communities or denominations, but are not under their auspices. They thus have a moderate coupling to faith on this dimension. Many are smaller organizations otherwise thought to be faith based, such as food pantries developed by volunteers who met at particular congregations. Similarly, Jewish agencies are rarely part of synagogues; they tend to consider themselves cultural rather than religiously oriented agencies (and thus may be borderline faith-related agencies that are part of the supplemental rather than the original sample).

With respect to the boards of directors, almost all sampled agencies appoint some members by preferential selection. But the differences between agencies that are tightly and moderately coupled to faith in this respect reflect the nature of the mandates. Mandates in the tightly coupled agencies tend to be all-encompassing. The Board of the Catholic Alliance of Illinois is totally composed of formal religious leaders. A Chicago mission requires that all board members must be lay people active in the church. Shelter missions, Catholic Worker organizations, and a few other agencies that are heavily funded by private donations or churches mandate that members of the faith control the agency as members of the board of directors. Interdenominational agencies, such as an advocacy group for the homeless in Chicago, generally have boards comprising religious leaders. In Jewish agencies, use of the board of directors strengthens what otherwise might be loose coupling on the basis of authority: The agencies tend to be committed to having predominantly Jewish boards as well as staffs and clients (and they receive a large proportion of donations through appeals to their religion).

When the mandates are mixed, coupling to faith is more moderate. One child welfare agency founded by a mainline Protestant denomination mandates that at least 51 percent of the board members represent the denomination (even though it no longer has a formal religious affiliation). In general, various sampled liberal and mainline Protestant children’s service agencies, whose coupling to religious denominations generally is somewhat loose (if varying) for subtle reasons related to the constitutions and expectations of the denominations (Netting 1984), prescribe that about half of the board members must share the given religion.

Social Organization and Denominational Authority. As Chaves (1998a) suggests, agencies that are formally part of a religious denomination, and thus are the most tightly coupled to faith on this aspect of authority, undertake activities that represent a religious view relatively fully. Religious authority seems most influential within agen-
cies where denominations have clear priorities and control much of the funding. This is clear in the example of the Catholic Conference of Illinois, which of course is funded by a denomination.

Otherwise, authority, taken literally, is only a mild tool of control. To be sure, religious authority stemming from formal denominational control can lead to prohibitions on particular aspects of the service technology. For example, Catholic Charities in one of the two cities recently took over a youth agency that distributed condoms and free needles to street children. These services will cease after the agency comes under the auspices of Catholic Charities. This and similar mandates are somewhat immune from pressures from other funding agencies, which view them as “givens” in working with religious agencies in the same way they accept the preferred client mix of secular agencies. The structure of the denomination and the way it controls service delivery also may indirectly exert mild affects on client and staff relations. In this vein, Oates (1995) is concerned about the way the Catholic hierarchy dominates service delivery and drives out lay individuals who have alternate visions of service delivery. Centralized structures both overtly and subtly affect agency operations by reducing innovation and risk taking. But these issues only affect agencies to a limited degree; for example, Catholic Charities’ general service technology is highly secularized.

For agencies that do not experience the combination of tight coupling to religion on both authority and resources and are not formally part of the hierarchy of a denomination, variance in the formal tie to religious authority or in the composition of the board does not seem to have a heavy influence on social organization. In fact, the examples mentioned above describe the greatest influence of a denomination. Most commonly, for example, denominations that sponsor child welfare agencies that receive large grants from governments tend to cede control to the staff. The director of a Methodist child welfare agency, which is affiliated with the denomination and requires that 51 percent of board members be of the Methodist faith, suggests the religion does not strongly affect service technology, and services are based on a professional model because the public child welfare agency (the funding source) demands it. The United Methodist Church is known to allow great diversity of viewpoints among the staff and volunteers of an organization, and the board realizes that secular funding dictates services. Accordingly, its board is selected almost like a cultural artifact of history (Powell and Dimaggio 1990). But things are not much different in the services of Catholic Social Services, even though the church hierarchy has recently emphasized placement of religious leaders on the board.

In general, then, resource issues generally dominate authority issues. When resources are coupled to secular society, government and the United Way impose standards on many agencies. They generally favor performance over values. Both government and the United Way are more interested than ever in measuring the outcomes of service and strive to tie funding and reimbursement to specific outcomes, such as the placement of welfare recipients in full-time employment. If anything, Jewish agencies, which are moderately coupled to religious authority, are the most likely to include several service tracts that tend to serve co-religionists, apparently because they receive resources through Jewish organizations and individual donors.

**General Implications of Coupling to Religious Authority.** Religious authority does not seem to suggest highly unique services except in denominational agencies, which are not what generally are called faith-based agencies. But authority exerts a more subtle effect on the majority of agencies in a way that does not seem to relate to the degree of religious coupling on this dimension, but which many observers might find more problematic. The nature of the agency constitution (which generally is derived from faith)—in interaction with the symbolism of religious affiliation—acts as what might be called a “screen” on individual conduct, filtering out those who do not agree with the tenets of a given denomination.

One important screen is a stated mission that reflects a formal claim of religious affiliation. This encourages personnel to self-select on the basis of religion or a general moral commitment. Thus, the American Friends Service Committee states that its mission is to be “a practical expression of the faith of the Quakers.” Few of the staff are Quakers, but most nonetheless share the commitment to principles of nonviolence and social justice. Volunteers of the Salvation Army in Seattle are screened out by the symbolic messages conveyed by the mission and by the prayers recited before eating. Many volunteers are at least partly religious Protestants. Habitat for Humanity states that its purpose is to “construct modest but adequate housing” and “to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.” The Habitat staff must be comfortable with these purposes. Consequently, it draws staff and volunteers disproportionately from Christian congregations, even though the construction of their housing tends to be a secular activity, free of obvious religious messages. Indeed, across the entire sample, the executive officers or clinical supervisors of the larger agencies frequently had religious training of some kind.

Faith can also be an important but imperfect screen for ensuring an ideologically homogeneous workforce. For instance, agencies with a faith orientation that promotes continual individual questioning of authority may experience factionalism, which reflects an interaction of religious and secular discourse. A good example is the American Friends Service Committee. In one of the cities, the local
chapter tolerated many differences in expressions of faith, but the result was severe pressure from some staff and volunteers who challenged the basic legitimacy of allying an agency with a faith. Similarly, one Chicago interdenominational agency faced schism-like separations when staff disagreed over which publicly funded services to pursue.

Faith similarly sends messages to prospective clients about the receptivity of the organization to their situation. A Catholic agency with crosses on its walls may abide by a policy of nondiscrimination, but in practice, members of the Muslim faith may feel unwelcome. In sum, there may be a trade-off between religious authority and perceived selectivity.

Culture

Culture and Coupling to Religious Institutions. Our analysis of culture remains at the required level of analysis by focusing the discussion on the way coupling to faith reflects the institutional ties between an agency and other religious and secular organizations in general, and on relations that go beyond those dictated by flows of resources and authority in particular.

The vast majority of the sampled agencies are loosely or moderately coupled to religious institutions, net of resources and authority structures. This reflects both the nature of service delivery in the two cities, and at times the choices agencies may make about interpreting their environment. Thus, the extreme instance of loose coupling involves a Chicago social development agency, which denies a religious connection and instead largely allies itself with local groups that have economic power and with secular community activists. The large child welfare agencies also interact more with other service providers (and with the local child welfare authority) than with congregations and other religious groups. These agencies hire their staff on a professional basis, and staff members tend to interact with other professionals and professional associations.

Other agencies that are at most moderately coupled to religion exercise some choice in the extent to which they are attuned to their denomination. The Protestant advocacy agency joins forces with other religious advocacy agencies and searches for volunteers through many educational activities at churches. The interdenominational agency that coordinates services to homeless adults turns to local churches for housing, making it a part of a broader religious community, even if staff members have professional ties to secular professional associations. Its board of directors provides ties to various denominations.

There are a few agencies with very tight coupling to faith with respect to culture. These agencies rely on paraprofessionals. They tend to interact largely with local churches and eschew political coalitions. Thus, they are left out of campaigns, for example, to obtain resources for homeless families. Again, mission shelters best exemplify this pattern. They are closely tied to donations and volunteers from local churches; some even conduct joint services with churches. Similarly, some conservative-based agencies that receive few government funds target staff recruitment efforts at Christian colleges or similar locales, thus allowing more coupling with faith-oriented groups.

Variation in Coupling and the Social Organization of Agencies. The demands of secular society often propel the loosely or moderately coupled agencies toward some degree of cultural secularization. The thoughtful director of a Protestant agency in Chicago noted his uncertainty about devoting his agency to education for churches or to policy advocacy for the broader society. The more the agency focuses on the latter and takes controversial, secular positions (backed up by evidence that its constituency is large), the more it is deemed “legitimate” by the media and by secular funding sources, which tend to demand proof that their funding has an impact.

In general the secularization of advocacy is common. It reflects not only the use of secular resources, but more fundamentally, the need to appear influential within a larger secular society. Accordingly, faith-related agencies take stands on secular matters by opposing welfare cuts, supporting voter registration, requesting funding for religiously funded schools, or fighting against gentrification.

Similar patterns occur with respect to material-assistance and child welfare agencies. An interdenominational shelter provider observed that grant applications required professionalized service technologies borrowed from mental health or similarly respected secular agencies. To take an extreme case, the head of one Chicago agency focused on urban development noted that the agency no longer has any tie to its founding order of priests. The agency purports to employ financial criteria to decide on loans without reference to any particular religiously based moral standard.

The most unique patterns emerge among the small number of agencies that interact most directly with churches within their denomination. These agencies fit the “faith-based” paradigm more fully, in that they are more likely to have a worker culture stressing faith. For example, agency staff might pray together, and, as mentioned earlier, agency services may stress religious themes. However, except for the redemptive shelters, we found few agencies that selected clients on the basis of religion or forced clients from other faiths to participate in religion.

Cultural Coupling and the Social Organization of Agencies: Commonalities. Culture seems to have a subtle impact that does not depend on tight coupling to religious entities; rather, it arises because the agencies are still influenced by an interpretation of the service-delivery preferences of their religion. This may reflect their contact with
the denomination through the hierarchy and through associations with local churches, as well as the previously expressed limits to resource dependence on secular funding (except certain child welfare agencies). In this case, however, culture may work against many of the patterns that are suggested by the more vocal advocates of inculcating faith in service delivery.

It is not possible to discuss this impact of culture on the social organization of agencies without presenting the content of the culture, and the most striking feature in this sample is the relative uniformity of certain underlying assumptions: Most interviewed executives share what appears to be a discourse of many modern faiths stressing the “positive” features of religion, rather than the restrictive ones (Wuthnow 1988). This discourse suggests that religion serves the individual, providing positive experiences that enhance life. This conception is interpreted in a way that suggests religiously oriented activities have special merit for those who support services and for those who receive them. It often is expressed as demanding the protection of the “dignity and rights” of clients. At the most general level, this philosophy has obvious religious precedents in sources as disparate as the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Talmud, and the writings of Paul Tillich. But it also is shared among faith-related agencies. Modern religious discourse spreads as agencies interact.

This discourse has clear implications for social organization with respect to the teaching of religious practices. The leaders of the Chicago interdenominational and Protestant advocacy groups, the Salvation Army, other organizations providing material assistance, and the child welfare agencies frequently noted in the interviews that faith calls for protection of the dignity of the individual in service delivery. Because all individuals are seen as equal in the eyes of the Creator, clients have the right to make up their own minds about religion and faith; services should respect the choice of the individual. This is reflected in the structure of services. The Salvation Army, which calls itself an “evangelical branch of the Christian Church,” opens its programs to anyone, regardless of faith or funding source. Clients are not required to participate in any religious programming because that is believed to be demeaning.

In some liberal agencies, respect for dignity also implies that agencies should not impose moral standards on clients or discriminate on this basis. Indeed, even the development agency that denies it is at all influenced by faith is engaged in a difficult task of developing the economy of an inner city area whose ethnic mix is quite different from that of the agency leadership. It might be argued that a mission of religious service clearly sustains this unusual effort, and this can filter through the agency because its leaders still are members of the religious order. More conservative Protestant agencies also clearly express dignity discourse. The Chicago Baptist agency insists on prayer, but children who are not Baptists are asked only to listen and not actively participate in prayer.

This dignity-and-rights philosophy further encourages efforts to reduce client stigma. For example, faith-related agencies often provide tangible aid in food pantries or similar organizations, where they need not ask many personal and potentially demeaning questions. To be sure, these agencies will ration benefits if necessary. A large Presbyterian church in Chicago, which is in an area where homeless adults congregate, recently responded to increasing need by requiring proof of need and limiting the number of times a single individual may request aid. A Seattle material-assistance agency does not give out motel vouchers to the homeless. Its location in Seattle’s low-cost hotel district would likely mean the organization would be inundated with voucher requests. The Salvation Army in Seattle provides food bags for homeless adults once every 90 days through their food bank program. But the rules are clear and stigmatizing needs tests are rare.

The dignity-and-rights philosophy also affects reactions to government. Child welfare agencies, even though they are funded by government, frequently criticize new government-sponsored managed care schemes for using arbitrary and allegedly religious immoral guidelines for establishing the length of stay. One Chicago child welfare agency reported it frequently keeps children longer than allowed under state guidelines, using funds obtained from income-based, sliding-scale fees and private donations. This agency believes that its faith suggests other service-delivery decisions, such as allowing dying individuals to select their own caretakers. To the Chicago interdenominational advocacy group and to members of the Catholic Workers organization, protection of dignity means a commitment to social justice as well as nondiscrimination. Jewish faith stresses social justice, and, perhaps for this reason, offices of the Jewish Federation strongly advocate social policy positions at the state and local level. The philosophy also is reflected in the range of services. For the Salvation Army, membership in the denomination obligates the agency to provide a menu of services that are consistent with its mission, including material assistance.

The protection of dignity and rights seemed to gain popularity in religious sectors during and after the civil rights movements, and it appears to be a religious response to criticisms of selective, sin-based, or other highly controlling service technologies (Garland 1994; Miller 1961; Snow et al. 1986). A complete sociological explanation might suggest this view is a compromise of secular ideas or the demands of secular funding agencies. The view is also consistent with the emphasis in the modern church on the dignity, rights, and needs of local members of the congre-
Some researchers argue this emphasis helps agencies attract and compete for parishioners (Warner 1994; Wuthnow 1990). Whatever the case, when agencies rely on the dignity-and-rights framework, they distinguish themselves from secular providers but remain consistent with many demands of secular culture, such as avoiding discrimination on the basis of religion.

While the impact of this ideology varies modestly, it partly depends on the culture of the denomination, where two views of faith dominate: (1) a personal view that implies that each employee or activist must act on their own interpretation of faith; and (2) a collective view that suggests the beliefs of the church hierarchy are binding in a collective situation. The contrast is exemplified by the Protestant advocacy agency, which calls on volunteers to act only if their own faith brings them to oppose welfare reform, and the Baptist child welfare agency, whose services are consistent with the view that personal help must encourage regeneration and must not cause dependence. The latter view tends to spur the development of service delivery systems in which moral values can be taught.

Agencies’ ability to protect dignity and rights is limited by opportunities. Resource constraints, in particular, influence service-delivery decisions. The cultural issues mentioned here do not dominate, but “round the edges” of service delivery because most agencies are otherwise coupled to secular society. Nevertheless, despite the claims of Olasky (1996), most agencies that prefer a dignity-and-rights perspective eschew the type of morality suggested by advocates of increasing the role of faith in society.

Implications for Social Policy and Public Management

Proponents of faith-based agencies are a diverse lot. Some simply hope that faith-based agencies are more effective than traditional public and nonprofit service delivery. Others hope that faith-based agencies will reduce demands on the state, promote a greater role for faith in public life, and, in the long run, shrink the state by shifting responsibility for social problems to faith-related agencies, churches, and local communities. But our research questions many of their premises and arguments, at least for the two sampled northern American cities.

If the premise is that there are many truly faith-based agencies that have very limited ties to secular society, our data do not confirm it. Even the very small agencies comprising members of a single congregation are influenced by secular culture and, for example, typically eschew efforts to convince clients to adopt their faith. If the premise is that small faith-based agencies are most effective in expressing faith, we argue this also is not supported by the data. Larger faith-related agencies can deliver more services and, in some ways, most fully carry out faith missions that express the religious mission of the provision of help. If the premise is that funding the range of existing faith-related agencies might drastically change the welfare state, this too seems unlikely; many sampled agencies differ from secular agencies in subtle ways.

To be sure, we have analyzed agencies to argue that faith does have important effects, even if these are often overlooked by other investigators. Religion mobilizes resources and enables the agencies to deliver services they otherwise could not. Larger faith-related agencies such as Catholic Charities oppose what they deem to be regressive social policies, such as managed care, welfare reform, or funding for abortion. Religion also may spur agencies to moderately supplement government funding, even if it may also attract clients and workers in selective ways, with potentially uncomfortable policy implications. Our analysis of culture suggests that greater utilization of religious providers by government will subtly alter the way services are delivered. Clients will be given “second chances” whenever possible. Extra services will be provided if the agency can afford it. Advocates will criticize specific policies. In general, then, government officials who prefer these behaviors rather than those conventionally described may have reason to work with faith-related agencies.

It might be argued that many agencies would wish to change their delivery patterns if they were provided funding that had few strings attached, but this is not clear. When viewing the faith-related agencies generally, many have no fervent desire to assume complicated government responsibilities. When we asked, we found that most fear the consequences of further entanglements with government and, more important, do not wish to take on the responsibilities of the welfare state. Many faith-related agencies—including more conservative agencies—support expanded government responsibility for the poor and reject the notion that churches and faith-related agencies can substitute for government. Few agencies in the two cities cooperated with welfare reform. Of course, based on the past experience with government funding programs, there also is a concern that if the agencies received more government support, they might become constituents for the funding programs, might lobby for continuance and expansion, and might lose the current balance between faith and secularization. Although governments might also be constrained in their ability to control faith-related agencies because of the special legitimacy that faith-related agencies enjoy.

The demands of fundraising and the general acceptance of the dignity and rights of individual clients mean that any possible devolution of responsibility to these agencies will not immediately lead to the desecularization of services. To be sure, in our sample, faith sometimes encour-
aged agencies to mandate that individuals engage in prayer, take more responsibility for their life, or engage in approved types of recreation. But this was not typical, and it mostly characterizes small agencies. Thus, in the examined cities, advocates who wish faith-related agencies to focus on very special moral standards need to carefully select agencies and support only some faiths, work toward a revolution in the way agencies interpret the dictates of faith, alter government funding priorities and authority, encourage a particular type of religious view, found agencies that might express faith in the desired way, and make sure these entities become large, multirevenue source agencies that can have a broad scope of services (but that, presumably, do not accept funds from other secular sources). Even if each change were accomplished or if agencies in other locales were somewhat more likely to have the expected religious view, it is disingenuous to argue that the basic nature of faith-related agencies in the large northern urban centers automatically gives rise to that view.

If our analysis is correct, public managers faced with funding or managing faith-related service agencies are likely to find the typical management challenges of agencies, such dealing with financial management and accounting procedures, wage and hour laws, and evaluation and assessment. Many may have special concerns about dealing with denominational positions on abortion policy, domestic partner rights, and the like, or in dealing with the way faith acts as a screen and thus is mildly selective. Therefore, contemporary administrative analyses and policy discourse concerning faith-based agencies should consider a more complex view of agencies: One that recognizes the commonalities and differences between them and other social service providers, as well as the commonalities and differences among agencies that have ties to faith.

Acknowledgments

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1. His important work tends to define service agencies with a specifically moral or spiritual vision, such as mission shelters, as most fully acting on faith. Jeavons’ research also suggests there are intermediate factors between the institutional tie and behavior for any given agency, such as how goals are set or positions are structured. Those topics are beyond the scope of this article. They are more likely to affect the behavior of an individual agency than to dictate the general way agencies operate.

2. Our description of normative pressures goes beyond their original definition, which primarily ties them to norms stemming from professional associations.

3. Resources and authority are incomplete guides to agency behavior because the beliefs, customs, and artifacts within an organization can have independent influence. Sets of meanings can dominate the way employees interpret and therefore interact with the world. They also can be a filter through which commands, regulations, and the like are translated (Martin 1992; Schein 1985; Trice and Beyer 1993). They “fill in” when formal rules fail to dictate action.

4. While some agencies offer multiple services, we focused our inquiry only on the relevant three services.

5. Some argue that individual churches are becoming increasingly inward looking (Marty 1994; Warner 1994; Wuthnow 1988) because they compete for membership of an increasingly self-conscious population by becoming attuned to individualized interests. This might seem to limit their commitment to providing volunteers for social services. But the inward search may also translate into an interest in delivering social services if parishioners feel that self-improvement dictates an orientation to serving others (Amerman 1997; Jeavons 1994; Marty 1994; Warner 1994; Wuthnow 1995). Indeed, community activities are often helpful in sustaining the solidarity of church members or other volunteers (Wilson 1973).

6. In general, advocacy agencies can be classified in the “high bureaucracy” category only when they are formally part of the social organization of the denomination itself, because all have relatively few employees of their own.

7. This principle of nonlinearity in the relationship of government resources and private donations from religious sources is consistent with recent findings by Brooks (2000) on the impact of government funding on private donations in American orchestras.

8. Even these agencies are not selective in the traditional sense of the term. They tend to dispense aid regardless of religious orientation and usually irrespective of any particular detail beyond need. Perhaps this reflects that very few are under extreme pressure to serve members of their faith—nearly all would consider that discriminatory for reasons we suggest mirror the influence of a secular culture.

9. Religious coupling on resources has severe limits. For example, while members of congregations that provide resources may frequently believe an agency primarily serves members of the faith, they rarely have sufficient resources to monitor or control the actual delivery of services.

10. Interfaith agencies primarily rely on their boards to provide broad support for humanitarian goals that do not express a specific faith. If they were more specific, each represented faith might express contradictory preferences.

11. If the protection of dignity and rights truly represents a compromise with secular trends, it also is likely that faith will again be reinterpreted if there is a broad alteration in the requirements of funding or secular ideologies. Secular and religious ideologies are constantly changing because all organizations operate within the framework of society, and because many of the agencies are attuned to secular funding sources and universal values (Loewenberg 1988).

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## Appendix Description of Agencies

### Child Welfare – Seattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Coordinates advocacy efforts related to their programs, such as foster care placement, adoption services, family support, child care, counseling for children and families, shelter and transitional housing services for homeless youth, teen mothers, and homeless families, and long-term care for elderly and disabled people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Provides counseling for children, adults, and families, emergency assistance, refugee/immigrant assistance, and assisted living for disabled Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low:</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Provides parent education and case management for teen mothers and developmentally disabled mothers; coordinates after-school programs for at-risk middle and high school youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Multidenom-inational Protestant</td>
<td>Provides meals for homeless youth and referrals to services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Material Assistance – Seattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Provides emergency shelter, emergency food, rent and utility assistance, and transitional housing for families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Lay Catholic</td>
<td>Volunteers provide assistance to people in need (housing and utility assistance, household goods, child care costs, etc.). Provides job training and jobs in affiliated businesses. Manages post-release program for ex-offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Catholic worker</td>
<td>Manages volunteer-run hot meal program for women and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-denom-intional Protestant</td>
<td>Provides meals for homeless youth and referrals to services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advocacy – Seattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Coordinates advocacy efforts related to their programs, such as foster care placement, adoption services, family support, child care, counseling for children and families, and long-term care for elderly and disabled people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Multidenom-intional Christian Quaker</td>
<td>Coordinates social justice advocacy efforts among different faiths, especially related to housing, peace, and youth. Provides housing/shelter services and food banks/meal programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low:</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Coordinates grassroots organizing and advocacy efforts related to welfare, especially for parents and women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Multidenom-intional Protestant</td>
<td>Provides business assistance and promotion, community development investment, and job training, primarily for African-Americans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Child Welfare – Chicago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
<th>Faith</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>Provides foster care, residential care, and adoption placement and counseling for children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Provides case management, counseling, and education services for Jewish children and families. Provides community education and advocacy related to the needs/interests of the Jewish community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Provides prevention, early intervention, and treatment services to at-risk children and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low:</td>
<td>Nondenom-intional evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>Provides foster care placement and treatment services for children. Provides health care and education services for low-income people in specific neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>Provides food and medical services to needy neighbors. Coordinates support groups for People with AIDS, refugees, single mothers, and recreation for youth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Material Assistance – Chicago

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
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<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Coordinates Welfare-to-Work program. Provides emergency assistance to people in need of food or shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Multidenom-intional Protestant</td>
<td>Provides outreach in homeless shelters and grassroots advocacy and community education on homelessness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low:</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Provides job training; English, health, and computer classes; food and emergency assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Provides homeless shelter, food, health care, and legal aid, primarily for Jews (including some immigrants).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Provides emergency assistance, food, health care, and child care to low-income people. Provides Bible study and religious education for the congregation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Manages soup kitchen and a weekend youth activity program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Advocacy – Chicago

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<th>Bureaucratic Levels:</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High:</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Coordinates legislative advocacy efforts for issues related to emergency food/anti-hunger, health care, child welfare, and assisted living and long-term care for elderly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium:</td>
<td>Multidenom-intional Protestant</td>
<td>Coordinates advocacy and public education efforts between churches and policy makers, especially related to social and economic justice issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low:</td>
<td>Lay Catholic</td>
<td>Develops affordable housing and provides homeowner assistance for low income seniors and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None:</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Provides services (including shelter) for homeless people and coordinates programs for youth as part of a congregation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>