

Religious Characteristics of Government-Funded Faith-Related Social Service Organizations

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Government funding of religious organizations to provide public social services is becoming increasingly legitimate in American social welfare. A possible unintended consequence of government funding is the erosion of religiousness in these organizations. However, lack of clarity about the nature of religious characteristics limits accurate assessment of the threat of government funding to organizational religiousness. This paper uses findings from a comparative case study of two government-funded faith-related social service organizations in the Midwest as an initial test of the utility of Sider and Unruh's (2004) recently proposed typology of religious characteristics of social service and educational organizations. The two studied organizations maintained high commitments to their religious convictions even while securing the majority of their revenues from government sources. Based on this finding, this study posits a two-dimensional conceptualization of organizational religiousness that helps to explain how faith-based organizations with substantial government funding can successfully resist secularization.

SOCIAL POLICY HAS FOCUSED INCREASINGLY SINCE THE MID 1990S ON the potential of community and faith-based groups to supplement or replace government in addressing social problems (De Vita, 1999; Marwell, 2004; Smith & Sosin, 2001). In particular, "Charitable Choice" legislation included in the 1996 welfare reform, and the establishment in January 2001 of the White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, have sought to increase religious groups' access to public funds while decreasing the constraints on these organizations' religiousness

(Carlson-Thies, 1999; Davis & Hankins, 1999; Donaldson & Carlson-Thies, 2003; Sherwood, 2000). While there has been debate about and opposition to these developments, it appears that increasing partnerships between government and religious groups in addressing social problems will form a substantial part of the social welfare state in the 21st century (Bane, Coffin, & Thiemann, 2000; Cnaan, 2002; Wuthnow, 2004).

Although government funding of religious organizations providing social services is not new (Cnaan, 1999; Marty, 1980; Netting, Thibault, & Ellor, 1990), the current movement to increase these partnerships draws attention to the unintended consequences of these efforts on religious organizations. Scholars of nonprofit organizations revealed in their analyses of the growth of the nonprofit sector in the 1960s and 1970s that many nonprofits became “quasi-public” organizations (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). The concern was expressed that these nonprofit organizations, apparently representing and arising out of local community interests, were being co-opted and subverted to wider public policy aims, thus losing some of their independence and distinctive characteristics. Further, the very qualities that led governments to financially support nonprofits in the first place—being locally based, community-driven, responsive, flexible, personal, and entrepreneurial—were often undermined as these organizations increasingly became agents of government.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess the influence of government funding on an organization’s distinctive religious characteristics in the absence of clear conceptual criteria about what constitutes the religious characteristics of an organization. This paper, therefore, uses findings from a comparative case study of two government-funded faith-related social service organizations in the Midwest as an initial test of the utility of Sider and Unruh’s (2004) recently proposed typology of religious characteristics of social service and educational organizations. Sider and Unruh (2004) suggest that their proposed typology is intended to be a tool for further refinement and understanding of the faith characteristics of religious social service organizations. Since data collected in this case study closely match the suggested organizational areas targeted in the indicators included in their typology, the opportunity is available both to attempt a more precise assessment of the religiousness of the two studied organizations (and, via theoretical replication, other organizations with similar characteristics), and to provide an empirical test of the typology for these types of organizations.

Literature Review

Available theory and evidence suggest that multiple factors influence the religious characteristics of an organization (Vanderwoerd, 2004). According to institutional theory (Scott, 2001), faith-related social service organizations receiving government funding operate within an institutional environment in which these factors exert conflicting pressures. Further, the institutional isomorphism hypothesis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) would suggest that when religious organizations operate in institutional conflicts characterized by high levels of professionalization and bureaucratization, they will inevitably become secularized. While this suggests that the religious characteristics will be strongly influenced by institutional environments, more recent developments in institutional theory allow for a "...more flexible approach that posits that the cultures of faith can be chosen strategically as agencies determine the outside organizations with which they interact" (Smith & Sosin, 2001, p. 655). Thus, a key area to pursue is understanding how faith-related organizations respond to competing—and perhaps conflicting—institutional environments: one characterized by professionalization, bureaucratization, and secularization, and the other characterized by religious traditions, beliefs, and practices.

Any investigation of the impacts of government funding on religious organizations raises questions about the meaning of organizational religiousness. According to one observer (Cnaan, 1999), "the uniqueness of religious-based social services as opposed to secular services is not always clear" (p. 26). Indeed, scholars in many disciplines have struggled to define organizational religiousness (Demerath III et al., 1998; Hall, 1998; Jeavons, 2004; Wuthnow, 2004). Many observers argue for an understanding that goes beyond a dichotomous grouping of nonprofits as simply "religious" or "secular" (Smith & Sosin, 2001).

Jeavons (1998) offers one of the best-developed analyses. He argues that "What distinguishes some nonprofits, then, and all organizations that are more than nominally religious, is their values-expressive character, their concern to 'give witness' to certain truths or tenets of faith" (Jeavons, 1993, pp. 56-57). Jeavons (1993, 1994, 1998) goes on to suggest that it is too simplistic to deem an organization as either religious or not. Rather, an organization's religiousness can express itself across multiple facets of organizational life, and therefore reli-

giousness is conceived of as a continuum from thoroughly religious to thoroughly irreligious in all of its organizational aspects. Jeavons (1998) proposes seven key areas of organizations to assess the extent of an organization's religiousness:

1. **Self-identity:** The extent to which an organization identifies itself explicitly as religious, and the advantages and disadvantages that this brings.
2. **Participants:** The extent to which board members, staff, volunteers, clients, constituents and others adhere to and share religious convictions.
3. **Resources:** The sources of the organization's resources and the extent to which religion explicitly assists or hinders resource acquisition.
4. **Goals, products, and services:** The extent to which religion shapes the organization's purposes, and how these purposes are implemented.
5. **Decision-making procedures:** The extent to which religion determines the processes of decision-making.
6. **Power and authority:** The extent to which religious values determine who has power and authority and how they are exercised.
7. **Inter-organizational relationships:** The extent to which religion determines with whom the organization interacts in its environment.

This framework is helpful for examining in detail the ways in which religion is manifest in these seven organizational areas. However, Jeavons' (1998) framework does not provide a means with which to translate these seven areas into a specific assessment of how religious a particular organization might be compared to others, nor suggest any points between thoroughly religious and thoroughly secular.

Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology specifies structural and service indicators with which to place religious social service organizations on a continuum ranging from "faith-saturated" to "secular":

- **Faith-saturated:** Religious faith is explicit throughout the organization, shared by virtually all staff; programs and services are thoroughly and explicitly religious and religious content is mandatory for all clients; majority of financial support from private, often religious, sources, and often an explicit policy of refusing secular funds.

- **Faith-centered:** Religious faith is explicit throughout the organization, shared by virtually all staff; religious content is explicit in some or all programs, but not mandatory, and secular content also available; most funding comes from private, religious sources, and there often an explicit policy of refusing secular funds.
- **Faith-related:** Religious faith is explicit in origins and history, but may or may not be currently explicit; staff are not expected or required to affirm faith, but senior staff often do; programs and services are not explicitly religious but may be available if specifically desired; there is a mix of private and secular funding.
- **Faith-background:** Historical tie to faith tradition is present but no longer explicit; religious beliefs are irrelevant to staff selection; services and programs contain no religious content; the majority of funding comes from secular sources.
- **Secular:** There is no historical tie to faith tradition; religious beliefs are irrelevant to staff selection; services and programs contain no religious content; the majority of funding from secular sources.

For each of these organizational types, specific dimensions and indicators are proposed as tools for determining where to situate specific faith-based organizations. In addition, more detailed indicators are provided assessing the religious content and nature of the services provided.

Method

This study used a comparative case study design (Yin, 1994) to explore the religious characteristics of two selected organizations situated within both secular and religious contexts. A comparative case study approach is particularly warranted because of its utility in understanding 1) the complex contexts within which the studied processes occur; 2) the inclusion of perceptions of multiple organizational stakeholders; and 3) the lack of clear conceptualization of important concepts relevant to this study such as “organizational religiousness” and “secularization” (Gilgun, 1994). This design is intended to facilitate new theoretical and practical insights about the influences of multiple institutional influences on organizational religiousness.

The theoretical interest of this analysis is specifically with local/regional religious organizations providing public social services. Following Smith & Sosin (2001), an organization is defined broadly as religious or “faith-related” if it has a formal, administrative, or historical arrangement with a religious authority, or a specific mission that arises out of explicit religious values. While this definition includes a wide range of charitable and nonprofit organizations, for the purposes of this study it excludes many other types of religious organizations of various sizes engaged in a wide variety of other activities. For example, it does not include locally based congregations, churches, mosques, synagogues, or other religious organizations that are explicitly focused on religious worship and practices for members. It also excludes denominational organizations or overarching ecumenical associations, councils, or collaborations of religious organizations at the national or international level.

Two organizations in the Midwest were selected using a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) intended to yield theoretical rather than statistical generalizations (Glaser & Straus, 1967). As detailed in Table 1, both organizations possessed the following characteristics: an explicit religious mission and identity; a strong and current affiliation or connection with one or more Protestant denominations; a longstanding reputation for successful social service delivery; and a minimum of 50% of annual revenues from federal, state and/or local government sources. These selection criteria were used to maximize the extent to which the two organizations would have experience managing dual accountability to both religious and government authority structures. Both organizations had several decades of experience (since the 1970s) with multiple sources of government funding to provide services to a wide population on the basis of client need rather than religious beliefs. At the same time, both organizations identified themselves as religious, clearly articulated a religious mission statement, and had an organizational structure that tied them closely to specific religious denominations.

Table 1: Selection Criteria for Two Organizations¹

Selection Criteria	Port of Promise	Lutheran Family Services
% government funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 60% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 60%
Organizational structure, development, history, expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 280 FTE; 500 total staff • Since 1964 • Accredited by both “secular” and “religious” bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 200 FTE, 350 total staff • Founded in early 1900s • Accredited by several “secular” bodies
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult rehabilitation • Children’s services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and family • Immigration/refugee
Religious affiliation	Calvinist, Reformed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent but largely supported by 4 Reformed denominations 	Lutheran <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent but formal connection with 2 Lutheran denominations

Data were collected in the spring of 2002 from several sources, including documents and archives, interviews and focus groups with multiple stakeholders (using the nominal group technique (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971), and field observations. Specifically, individual interviews were conducted with 12–15 leaders and other key informants in each organization. Leaders included top staff persons in each organization (including the director or chief executive officer, directors or vice-presidents of finance, human resources, development, and programs) as well as board members; in addition, focus groups were held with groups of mid-level and direct service staff persons. An interview guide based on Jeavons’ (1998) framework was used; (see Appendix) interviews generally lasted about an hour to an hour and a half, and were audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Annual reports, board and staff meeting minutes, budget documents, strategic plans, and other related documents covering primarily the past five years were reviewed, as well as other documents dating further back. Several events were included for field observations, including staff development and training workshops, informal lunches, and staff meetings. A case study protocol was used to link the study questions to data sources. The analysis strategy, adapted from grounded theory, was to develop case summaries for each organization, followed by a constant comparative method to develop more

precise categories and concepts, and to pose theoretical concepts and/or propositions for further study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Despite this design's suitability to address the posed research questions, it nevertheless has a number of limitations. First, this study cannot yield statistical inferences to a larger universe of religious organizations. Second, it is unknown whether the study's conclusions reflect idiosyncrasies related to local/regional contexts. Third, the study cannot trace developments as they occur over time, and therefore may only reflect a snapshot of these phenomena.

Selected Findings

This section summarizes the results of this study by presenting brief descriptions of each of the two organizations, followed by descriptions of the similarities and differences between the organizations on each of the seven characteristics from the Jeavons (1998) framework described above.

Case Summary: Port of Promise

Port of Promise is an independent nonprofit organization with 501(c)3 status. Although it is an independent organization, it has a historic connection and affiliation with Protestant churches in the Reformed tradition in the Midwest. Currently its board membership must be constituted of persons who are members in good standing of four Reformed denominations. The board has recently gone through a reorganization in which it was reduced from 21 to 15 members. Port of Promise employs approximately 280 fulltime equivalent staff and has an annual budget of nearly \$15 million.

Port of Promise began in 1964 with an educational program for 11 children with hearing impairments. The initial focus was on providing education for children with various disabilities who were not being served by the public school system. In particular, the focus was on providing education within a distinctive Christian context. As the organization gained a reputation for being respectful and competent in providing services to children with disabilities and their families, increasing requests were made to provide additional services to adults with disabilities as well. In response to these demands, Port of Promise began adding independent living skills programs for adults, work training opportunities, and residential services. At the same time, public

funding for the children's education program came under scrutiny because of the explicit religious content and context provided by Port of Promise (and other religious schools). By the mid 1970s, it became clear that government funding for religiously based educational services to children with disabilities would soon end. Faced with the prospect of stripping the religious content away in order to continue receiving funding, the organization closed down the school for children amidst tremendous controversy and shifted to services primarily for adults.

Despite staunch opposition from some community members to the closing of the school, Port of Promise continued to expand to meet the demand for services for adults. In addition to expanding residential and employment services for adults with disabilities, in the 1980s programs were established for persons with chronic mental illness, and a residential home was opened for adolescents. The 1990s saw expansion into adjacent states, and the establishment and rapid growth of international services to persons needing wheelchairs. Recently the agency has increased services to children and their families, and is currently in the midst of a campaign to build an endowment.

Case Summary: Lutheran Family Services

The phrase "Building and strengthening families for over 100 years" appears on all Lutheran Family Service (LFS) material and captures in only a few words its history as an organization devoted to the well-being of families. The origins of the agency are in two orphanages established by church pastors in the late 19th century. One grew out of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the other grew out of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), which became the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Through the first half of the 20th century, the orphanages operated independently, adding and expanding services to address a variety of problems facing families.

The 1960s and 1970s brought dramatic changes. In 1966 the two agencies began to share office space, and in 1971 merged to form one united Lutheran social ministry organization. This merger was significant because it enabled the agency to communicate a common and shared commitment to persons unfamiliar with Lutheranism and its denominational differences. LFS took advantage of increased government funding opportunities, as did many other religious and non-religious social service organizations, and consequently was able to expand its services and programs. Expansion brought new challenges, particularly

decline in the proportion of revenue from supporting churches as the agency increasingly partnered with government as a service provider. In 1986 the agency changed its name to Lutheran Family Services of the Midwest, envisioning what the organization has become today: a distinctly Lutheran agency with approximately 200 fulltime equivalent staff (over 280 total staff persons) and an annual budget over \$9 million. Today, LFS provides a range of services for families from multiple locations across a specific region of the Midwest.

While the Lutheran label has always existed as an important part of this agency's identity, there has been increased emphasis since the mid-1990s among Lutheran social ministry organizations on recapturing distinctive Lutheran beliefs and history. This emphasis was precipitated in part when Lutheran leaders across the country established Lutheran Services in America in 1997 as a national umbrella organization for Lutheran social ministry organizations. One priority of Lutheran Services in America is to lead and equip social ministry organizations to "reassert the character and vitality of our Lutheran heritage" (Childs, 2000, p. 2). LFS's structure as an independent non-profit organization with formal connections to the ELCA and LCMS clearly links the organization to its Lutheran history and identity.

Religiousness in Seven Organizational Areas

Organizational Identity. Both organizations strongly identify themselves as religious, despite the fact that Port of Promise's name is not explicitly religious. When respondents were asked about this, there was wide consensus that this was not a problem, and certainly did not represent any motivation to disguise or downplay the agency's religiousness. One commented:

I'm not saying that we hide [our identity] either....
I don't see it as deceptive or anything. People know who we are. We are not real shy about it either. We are pretty proud that we are a Christian organization.

Jeavons argues that the organization is more religious if the organizational identity is perceived by leaders as an asset and, further, that the specific religious identification is useful in accomplishing the organization's purposes. This was certainly the case in both organizations. In Port of Promise, leaders spoke about the strong religious reputation of

the agency as an asset, while at Lutheran Family Services respondents noted that the Lutheran name was crucial to their mission. As one leader said:

When we chose our name—we actually shortened our name in 1985, and each word was very strategically deliberated and selected. Obviously, we are *Lutheran* Family Services. That has to do with our theological roots and our connections to the Lutheran church and its value base. And all of it comes from that.

Further, respondents in both organizations noted that their name had become associated with a reputation for several characteristics—honesty, integrity, quality, caring—that were seen to emerge from their religious traditions and beliefs, and thus differentiated them from other similar non-religious organizations.

Participants. The patterns of membership in board and staff are similar as well: the closer to the top of the organization, the more explicit and extensive are the requirements for adherence to religious values. Port of Promise has been more intentional, and thus more successful, about procedures for recruiting staff persons who share the religious mission while staying within Equal Employment Opportunity parameters. For example, the agency has recently developed a set of core questions that are used across the agency in hiring. These include:

1. Have you read a copy of the Port of Promise vision, mission, and values?
2. What would you do daily to show people they are valued?
3. Describe how you see yourself in assisting people to reach their potential?

Lutheran Family Services shows evidence of increasing attention to this area as well, and includes the statement “personal convictions that are compatible with the philosophy and goals of the Agency” in its list of qualifications for most positions.

Both organizations, while seeking staff persons who share the vision, also show high levels of acceptance for diversity. This commitment to diversity is consistent with the Lutheran understanding of the church’s role in social ministry and its relationship with those who are not Lutherans or Christians. For example, McCurley (2000) points out that the Lutheran values of seeking to respect the dignity of all people

and to serve all may “...imply that social ministry organizations intentionally employ at various levels of the staff, people who reflect the diverse religious and cultural traditions of those who are served” (p. 78). As much as their religious values prompt them to seek staff who share the religious vision, their values also provide strong motivation for being inclusive.

Resources. Both organizations reflect resource patterns mirroring those of other large, complex, successful nonprofit organizations (Edwards, Yankey & Altpeter, 1998; Kettner, 2002). But while the pattern is similar to other organizations, it was clear that strategies for acquiring resources were informed both by religious values and principles, and pragmatic assessments of needs and opportunities. In other words, utilizing accepted “secular” methods for resource acquisition was more intentional than inadvertent. Interestingly, informants in both organizations identified that though the contributions from supporting churches and denominations were among the smallest in terms of the proportion of overall revenue, these sources were highly influential and critical to the organizations’ mission and vision. In the words of one respondent:

The most important dollars we have in our budget are Lutheran dollars—the smallest dollars, but the most important dollars because they define who we are and why we do what we do.... They’re Lutheran. We are Lutheran. They define who we are. Those dollars may be small but in a sense control the board. They’re very important.

Thus, it is the source rather than the amount of funding that operates to influence these organizations’ religiousness. Put another way, organizational leaders exercised a choice about which funding sources would drive their mission and which would be utilized as means to accomplishing that mission. While respondents in both organizations expressed levels of frustration and dissatisfaction with various regulations and requirements attached to government funding sources, these were generally seen as manageable challenges rather than substantial threats to their religiousness. Even more, the widespread consensus in both organizations was that their religious identity, and the values and reputation associated with that identity, were sufficiently advantageous to more than offset the tedious requirements attached to funding.

Goals, Products, and Services. The heart of these organizations' religiousness is in their explicitly religious statements of organizational mission, vision, and values. Both organizations showed evidence that board and senior staff were well-acquainted with these statements, that the statements were current, and that they were widely communicated and articulated throughout the organization. Further, respondents in both organizations articulated their commitment to and understanding of these purpose statements in ways that demonstrated familiarity and knowledge of the denominational and theological traditions undergirding each organization.

For each of these two organizations, the theological foundations of their motivation for providing social services made it difficult for respondents to classify their services as either "religious" or "secular." In general, both organizations utilized service technologies that are widely used and accepted by "secular" providers within their respective fields of service. For example, Port of Promise utilizes a person-centered approach that is widely used among agencies providing services to persons with developmental disabilities. Similarly, Lutheran Family Services employs accepted models in child and family welfare such as family preservation services. This utilization was not inadvertent; rather, evidence from respondents and from documents shows that these organizations are quite deliberate in making use of the best available techniques for providing services, regardless of whether or not they were "secular." The key criterion for selecting service approaches was the fit with mission and values rather than whether a particular approach had a religious or secular source or label. This approach reflected underlying theological understandings: the Lutherans said, "God rains on us all," while the Calvinists at Port of Promise said, "God created it all, so we embrace it all."

Decision-making. As with resource acquisition, both organizations utilized pragmatic problem-solving approaches to decision-making, typically reflecting participatory and teamwork approaches. The religious aspect of these common practices was the use of prayer, explicitly included in Port of Promise's value statements, and articulated by respondents in both organizations as widely practiced throughout their organizations. In neither case, however, was prayer ever described as being mandatory or forced. Rather, respondents in both organizations described various contexts in which staff members were invited to participate in prayer and devotions. These activities were described

as occurring in a variety of contexts: as regularly scheduled events, at the beginning or ending of meetings, and as spontaneous invitations. It was clearly evident in both organizations that prayer is an important component of organizational decision-making, and that it was practiced in a way that attempted to be sensitive to those for whom prayer might be unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

Power and Authority. Power and authority were viewed in both organizations as means for accomplishing their organizational purposes, and thus subject to their religious principles. In particular, this resulted in a cautious stance toward power: power was necessary, but could be used wrongly. Respondents at Port of Promise articulated more clearly than in Lutheran Family Services that authority came from God. However, in both organizations power and authority were viewed as tools for serving others. Neither organization translated this understanding of authority into a requirement or practice in which religious qualifications were more necessary for acquiring power or authority. Indeed, there was no evidence in either organization that clergy, or otherwise religiously trained or qualified persons, possessed more authority than others, or that religious qualifications were more important than other qualifications for senior staff positions. At the board level, the practice was somewhat different between the organizations: Lutheran Family Services explicitly requires religious qualifications via its standing positions for the regional representatives of the two supporting denominations, whereas Port of Promise does not specifically require religious (or, more specifically, clerical) qualifications for board membership.

Interorganizational Relationships. Finally, in the area of interorganizational relationships, the practices in both organizations were also similar. Each organization had partnerships with many organizations, both religious and secular. Neither organization demonstrated a propensity to explicitly prioritize religious criteria over others in selecting suitable partners. Rather, the primary guide in partnerships was the extent to which a proposed partnership could advance the organizational mission, regardless of whether that partner was identified as religious.

Explicitness of Religious Expression

Examining religiousness in each of these seven areas in terms of how explicitly religious values are expressed or evident reveals three dimensions of religious expression, ranging from explicit expression to more moderate expression to least explicitly expressed (see Table 2). Overall, this case study reveals both organizations as thoroughly shaped and driven by their religious beliefs and heritage. Leaders express consensus and commitment to these values and communicate these values widely. Although religious values and commitment are high, in both organizations these values also prompt them to a stance of openness and inclusiveness. This stance enables them to accommodate and seek diversity in a variety of areas: with others who do not necessarily share their religious values, either within or outside their organization; with other organizations; with funders; and with other sources of knowledge and technology.

Table 2: Organizational Characteristics by Explicitness of Religious Expression

Level of Explicitness	Organizational Characteristics
<p>Most explicit: Religious values and identity are clearly in evidence in written documents and in respondents' articulations</p>	<p>1. Organizational self-identity 2a. Participants: Board and top staff persons 4a. Purpose and Services: Mission, values, and vision</p>
<p>Moderately explicit: Religious values and identity are in evidence sporadically, or show up in some but not all aspects</p>	<p>2b. Participants: Staff 3. Resources 5. Information and decision-making 6. Power and authority</p>
<p>Least explicit: Religious values and identity are not obviously in evidence</p>	<p>4b. Purpose and Services: Programs 7. Interorganizational relationships</p>

Note. Numbers for each of the organizational characteristics refer to the seven aspects identified by Jeavons (1998).

Discussion

Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology is a useful contribution to understanding the complex distinctions among different kinds of faith-based social service organizations. However, it appears unable to capture the nuances of either organization in this study. As shown in Table 3, neither Port of Promise nor Lutheran Family Services can be clearly classified on this typology using the indicators as given.

A limitation of the typology is its implication that the religiousness of an organization is a linear concept. Findings from this study suggest, rather, that two dimensions of an organization's religiousness can be proposed: 1) the organization's commitment to its religious mission and the efforts to realize that mission; 2) the way in which religion influences organizational boundaries.

Table 3: Organizational Aspects by Religious Characteristics in Two Organizations

Organizational Aspects	Faith-saturated	Faith-centered	Faith-related	Faith background	Secular
Mission & values	Explicitly religious	Explicitly religious	Explicit or implicit	Implicit	No religious content
Founding/ history	By religious group	By religious group	By religious group	Some religious origins	No religious origins
Board	Religious requirement for all or most members	Religious requirement for all or most members	Religious requirement for some members	Waning religious requirement	No religious requirement
Leadership/ Staff	Religious commitment required	Religious commitment understood	Religious commitment may be an asset	Religious commitment irrelevant	Consideration of religious commitment improper

Service staff	Religious commitment required or very important in hiring	Religious commitment important only in some areas (usually in more leadership)	Religious commitment motivates some staff, but not relevant in hiring	Religious commitment irrelevant to hiring—sensitivity to faith background an asset	Religious commitment irrelevant—explicit religious commitment may be a disadvantage
Partnerships	Restricted to those who share faith	Favor those who share faith	Religious commitment may be an asset	Religious commitments irrelevant	May avoid those with religious commitment
Resources	Majority of funding from religious sources	Wary of funding from non-religious sources	Mix of funding from secular and religious sources	Majority of funding from secular sources	Virtually all funding from secular sources
Programs & Services	Explicitly religious	Favor religious approaches	Religious programs optional	No religious programs	Religious programs prohibited

NOTE: Adapted from Sider and Unruh (2004). Shaded areas indicate where the two studied organizations most closely match the religious characteristics criteria along the “faith-saturated”—“secular” continuum.

Using Jeavons’ (1998) framework, an organization’s self-identity, selection of leaders, stated purposes, and use of authority are all areas in which the extent of the commitment to faith can vary. These characteristics are similar to Sider & Unruh’s (2004) indicators of mission statement, founding, controlling board, and senior management.

At issue on this first dimension is the extent to which an organization’s commitment to faith is made explicit, and further, how much effort is expended in seeking to cultivate that commitment. In the two organizations in this study, it is readily evident that such commitment is high: each organization has explicit statements about their religiously-based mission and each organization demonstrates extensive efforts to ensure that organizational leaders affirm and communicate the religious mission. Further, religious values clearly shape organizational processes such as decision-making, and provide guidelines and standards for the

exercise of authority and responsibility.

The second dimension of organizational religiousness is the way in which the organization's view of the sacred and the secular influences organizational boundaries. At one end of this dimension is a more restricted view that divides the world into "us" and "them," insiders and outsiders, "saints" and "sinners." From a religious point of view, persons who do not share the religious orientation are viewed as outsiders; in the evangelical tradition, such persons are also targets for proselytizing and conversion. This dimension applies not only to persons but to artifacts as well. At this end of the dimension, artifacts are conceived of as being "religious" or "secular," "godly" or "godless" (Marty, 1980), "heavenly" or "worldly," "holy" or "unholy." From this vantage point, a religious organization would hesitate to utilize artifacts labeled as "worldly" or "secular" because of their assumed incompatibility with the religious characteristics of the organization.

At the other end of this dimension is a view that blurs these sacred/secular distinctions. From this viewpoint, persons or objects do not possess inherent qualities that allow one to group them into mutually exclusive categories of the divine and the worldly. Rather, all persons and all artifacts are seen as potentially serviceable to either divine or secular ends, depending not on their inherent characteristics, but on how and why they are used. This dimension, which distinguishes between the religious "us" and the secular "them," can be translated into the organizational conceptualization of open and closed organizations (Scott, 1998). As shown in Table 4, the openness or closedness of an organization's boundaries, whether understood theologically or organizationally, leads to variations in how an organization deals with such things as programs, intended targets, staff, resources, partners and so on.

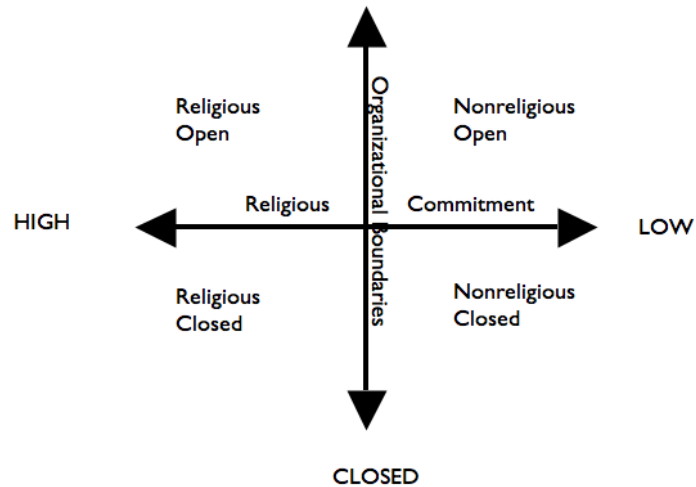
Table 4: Selected Characteristics of Open and Closed Organizations

Characteristics	Open	Closed
Program & service approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willing to consider all available "best practices" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrow criteria (either religious or ideological) for selecting approaches

Intended targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinction between “client” and “provider” is situational and open • Reciprocal relationships and benefits between providers and clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear boundaries between “providers” and “clients” • One-way relationships and benefits between providers and clients • Seek to make “clients” more like “us”
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad interpretation of staff persons’ commitment to organizational mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff persons screened on the basis of explicit religious or ideological criteria
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners chosen on basis of fit with organizational mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners chosen on basis of explicit religious or ideological criteria
Worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious values seen as shaping and touching all of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View world as divisible into “sacred” and “secular”

The addition of this second dimension expands Sider & Unruh’s (2004) typology beyond a linear conceptualization. This two-dimensional scheme accounts more completely for the way in which the religious characteristics of the two organizations in this study are practiced. On the first dimension, it is clear that both organizations are highly committed to a religiously-motivated mission, and that organizational leaders are expected to affirm and communicate that mission, and that they are given the responsibility to ensure that the mission is preserved and enhanced.

However, in neither organization is the use of secular resources, services, nor partners viewed as an abandonment or retreat from this mission. Both organizations articulated strong faith motivations for seeking and utilizing other persons or artifacts in service to their religiously understood mission. Not to use these because they are “secular” would be viewed in these organizations as unfaithful. At the other end of this dimension, however, viewing the “other” as secular makes it possible to interpret the incorporation of the secular other—whether resources, staff persons, partners, or service technologies—as an indication of decreased religiousness.

Figure 1. Two Dimensions of Organizational Religiousness

As shown in Figure 1, adding this second dimension allows one to distinguish between organizations with similarly high religious commitments but with more open or closed organizational boundaries. According to these two dimensions, both organizations in this study would be characterized as highly religiously committed and open towards others. This conceptualization is more useful and accurate than attempting to place them along a linear continuum between religious and secular because it separates these organizations' commitments to faith from the way in which they live out those commitments. Other organizations may be equally committed to their faith, but choose strategies which are identified as more closed because they reject other persons, organizations, or resources as inappropriate based on their perceived incompatibility with their religious beliefs. This does not make these organizations more religious, but simply indicates a different approach to realizing their faith commitments.

Implications

This study posits that organizational religiousness is not linear, but exists along two dimensions: the level of commitment to explicitly religious values, and the openness of organizational boundaries. The two organizations in this study were highly committed to their faith

values, and have open organizational boundaries that allow them to make wide use of nonreligious resources.

This insight has specific implications for current efforts in the United States to remove or minimize the regulative barriers that faith-based organizations allegedly encounter when they want to develop funding relationships with government. Charitable Choice legislation, first introduced as section 101 of the Personal Responsibility and Welfare Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and commonly known as the Welfare Reform bill, is, in the words of a key proponent, "...designed to erect a legal shield to protect the religious identity and character of faith-based organizations that choose to accept government funds in order to provide welfare services to needy families" (Carlson-Thies, 1999, p. 31). This statement suggests that a major hurdle preventing faith-based organizations from competing for and accepting government funding is legal and regulative.

However, evidence from the two organizations in this study corroborates Campbell's (2002) findings with faith-based organizations in California that these organizations do not identify legal and regulative expectations as substantial threats to their identity. Charitable Choice legislation and other initiatives to facilitate greater participation by faith-based organizations in public social service delivery are based on the assumption that faith-based organizations experience legal and regulative expectations as potentially incompatible with their faith identities and character. This is only the case, however, if an organization's utilization of or compliance with nonreligious legal and regulatory frameworks is interpreted to be a challenge to an organization's faith identity.

In this study, commitment to faith identity was independent of the organizations' compliance with so-called secular requirements because these organizations chose an open stance with respect to these secular requirements. The implication for policy and legislation is that Charitable Choice provisions end up only targeting those faith-based organizations that are more closed to nonreligious resources. Public managers need to be careful to distinguish between the types of religious organizations they partner with, and what types of policies and legislation are best suited to facilitate these organizations' participation and also enable appropriate measures for public accountability.

The findings from this study provide useful insights for those who lead and manage faith-based organizations as well. First, attention to organizational identity is a central and critical task for leaders (Young,

2001). Leaders in both organizations strengthened organizational identity through high commitment to religious beliefs communicated throughout the organization.

High commitment to organizational identity was not the only key, however, to these organizations being able to resist secularizing influences of government funding. These organizations also reframed their contexts so that secular/religious distinctions became irrelevant. They did not define those who do not share their faith as “out of bounds” or “untouchable,” and thus were able to seek and utilize resources, persons, and partnerships based on the more pragmatic concern for implementing their mission. This strategy can only be useful to other organizations that have similarly open boundaries toward so-called outsiders, and are able and willing to minimize distinctions between “us” and “them.” For religious organizations for which such distinctions matter, these experiences are evidence of secularization, and it is likely such approaches would be rejected as untenable.

Thus, one implication for leaders of religious organizations is the importance of understanding the characteristics of their organization’s religiousness. In particular, it appears important to distinguish between the faith commitments made in the organization and the organization’s stance (which includes both the underlying theological positions and the permeability of the organization’s boundaries) towards those labeled as “outsiders.” Assessing one’s organization based on both faith commitments and their religion’s stance toward others could provide a useful tool for determining where to focus one’s leadership efforts.

For example, in highly committed religious organizations who are more closed toward the other, it would be important for leaders to carefully negotiate with organizational stakeholders which external resources would be deemed appropriate or not. On the other hand, the task would be different for a leader whose organization demonstrated much openness to others, but appeared to have weak faith commitments.

This study raises several additional questions for further research. Additional investigations that attempt to address some of this study’s limitations could include selection of other organizations based on other theoretical criteria. For example, in addition to selecting government-funded organizations on the basis of similar faith commitments, it would be useful to include organizations with similarly high faith commitments that have intentionally chosen not to seek or accept government funding. This would enable a comparison of how these organizations interpret

and implement their faith commitments similarly and differently. This approach would allow greater understanding of whether highly faith-committed organizations with and without government funding take similar approaches in the way they encounter the secular “other.” One might hypothesize that high faith-committed organizations that do not take government funding may do so because of their stance towards others; however, further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

Further research could also be directed towards comparisons between faith-based organizations and nonreligious nonprofits, and between Christian and other religious organizations providing similar services to investigate whether there are important similarities and differences in the ways in which they understand and communicate their organizational identity, mission, vision, and values (Chaves, 2002). For example, are there nonreligious nonprofit equivalents to the phenomena uncovered in this study of faith-based organizations experiencing their identity as given rather than chosen? Does faith commitment make organizational identities stronger, more coherent, and more resilient compared to nonreligious nonprofits?

Conclusion

This study confirms that much more research is needed before concepts can be translated into measurable and quantifiable constructs. Researchers have tended to view organizational religiousness as a bimodal concept at its most simplistic. This study suggests the value of increased attention to the need for a complex conceptualization that takes into account degrees between the presumed opposite poles of secular and religious. One direction would be for further inquiry into the utility of the two-dimensional concept suggested in this research. Specifically, further research is needed to explore and refine the concept of boundaries between “us” and “them,” “secular” and “religious,” and insiders/outsideers.

Both organizations in this study had extensive experience in making use of so-called secular resources, yet both had clearly articulated and widely shared commitments to their faith and its corresponding values. Existing in secular contexts and making use of resources available from these contexts were not threats to organizational religiousness, but instead were marshaled in support of their faith, thus strengthening organizational religiousness. Although much is yet unanswered, this

study sheds additional light on the complexity of faith-based organizations operating in public contexts seeking the public good. ❖

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ENDNOTE

1. Organizational names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Organizational names are pseudonyms that are roughly equivalent in meaning to both organizations' actual names.

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Appendix

Interview Guides

Nominal Group Interview Guide

1. What *specific* experience / event / situation / activity in this organization is the best example of when your religious beliefs have clashed with your professional knowledge and expertise?
2. How do you resolve these conflicts? What resolutions are most effective? Why?
3. Which of these challenges has been particularly difficult or the most insurmountable? In what ways? Why?

Interview Guide

Dimension 1: Organizational Self-Identity

1. What does your organization's name communicate? Why is this important?
2. How important is your organization's name in accomplishing its mission?
3. What image does your organization attempt to communicate? Why?

Dimension 2: Character and Beliefs of Organizational Participants

4. What quality or characteristic in your staff is most important to the success of your organization?
5. What is the most important priority in orienting new persons to your organization?
6. What challenges does your organization face in integrating new personnel into the "culture" of your organization?
7. How do personnel articulate differing perspectives? How does your organization respond?

Dimension 3: Nature and Sources of Material Resources

8. What is the most important resource your organization needs to enable it to carry out its mission?
9. What is the most important thing you look for when pursuing new or additional resources?
10. What line won't you cross when pursuing resources? Why not?
11. What characteristic of your organization is its best strength in allowing it to acquire resources?

Dimension 4: Organizational Purposes and Services

12. What is your organization's most important reason for being (or "*raison d'être*")? Why is this the most important?
13. How does your organization put its purpose into action? What is the most challenging part of implementing your vision? Why?
14. Does your organization make a distinction between "secular" and "religious" goals and services? Why or why not? If it does, how?

Dimension 5: Information Processing and Decision-Making

15. When faced with difficult decisions and dilemmas, what kind of information, argument or rationale is most persuasive? Why?
16. How does your organization weigh the contributions of professional expertise and qualifications with religious beliefs and convictions?
17. What principles does your organization use in resolving differences or in making difficult decisions?
18. How does your organization distinguish between secular and religious truth and knowledge?

Dimension 6: Allocation and Exercise of Power / Authority

19. What is the most important characteristic you look for in organizational leaders?
20. From where do people in your organization get their authority? What is different about the authority between leaders and others in your organization? What is different between your organization's leaders and other organization's leaders?
21. What would be the ideal model of authority for your organization?
22. How and in what ways does "secular" authority conflict with "religious" authority in your organization?

Dimension 7: Interorganizational Relationships

23. Who outside your organization are your most important allies? Why?
24. What conflicts have you experienced with other groups outside your organization?
25. What is the most important characteristic you look for when deciding whether to work with other organizations or groups?
26. How does your organization respond when partner groups or organizations do things you disagree with?

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