

Rebellion, Religion, and Rational Choice Institutionalism: Towards an Integrated Framework for Analysis

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Abstract

Religious leaders and organizations can play important roles in all stages of a rebellion, from providing (1) inspiration for political mobilization to (2) justifications for or against political violence to (3) facilitation of peace talks and to (4) implementation of post-conflict reconciliation. In each stage, the well-intentioned efforts of the relevant faith-based organizations often produce surprisingly negative unintended consequences. This paper examines these multiple, inter-linked social dilemmas by outlining an informal framework for analysis based upon rational choice institutionalism (or institutional analysis). Basic strengths and weaknesses of this framework are examined, and preliminary suggestions are made towards the definition of questions for subsequent research and policy evaluation.

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Religious leaders and organizations play important roles during all stages of rebellion, from initial mobilization to post-conflict reconciliation. Leaders inspired by visions of faith help mobilize opposition to what they see as sources of injustice. Faith-based organizations are especially active in the provision of humanitarian assistance and other efforts to ameliorate the effects of violent conflict on non-combatants. Other actors motivated by religious conviction focus their attention on facilitating negotiations and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Finally, religious leaders and organizations have provided essential leadership in times of social healing and reconciliation.

In each step along the way, all parties confront daunting tasks. Even actions taken with the best of intentions may backfire, resulting in surprisingly negative consequences. In previous research I have used the tools of institutional analysis to understand the rational basis for the coordination problems and other social dilemmas occurring at each stage of the conflict process. In this paper I begin to use this same framework to understand the unique contributions that religious leaders and organizations make during extended processes of violent political conflict and its resolution. A word of caution: this paper is only a preliminary statement of a research agenda that remains in its earliest stages.

Rationality and the Analysis of Religious Institutions and Public Policy

In my previous research I have used game theory and other tools of rational choice theory to better understand processes of violent political conflict (McGinnis 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2005; McGinnis and Williams 2001). My work builds on the *institutional analysis* approach to the study of politics, governance, and public policy, as developed by Vincent Ostrom, Elinor Ostrom, and their many colleagues and collaborators at Indiana University's Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis (Ostrom 1990, 2005; McGinnis 1999a,b, 2000). In turn, institutional analysis fits within the broader tradition of *rational choice institutionalism*, a multi-disciplinary body of research on rational choice theory, game theory, public choice, social choice, transaction cost economics, constitutional political economy, and related methods developed by political scientists, policy analysts, economists, and other social scientists. (For overviews, see Mueller 1997, 2003; Shepsle and Bonchek 1997; Sabatier 1999, Scharpf 1997).

This mode of analysis builds on the presumption that all politics consists of strategic interactions occurring within particular institutional contexts. Individuals are presumed to pursue their own self-interest to the best of their abilities, but the options available to them and the ways in which they perceive their own interests are profoundly shaped by the institutions that surround them. Formal and informal organizations consist of networks of interacting strategies, norms, and rules (Crawford and Ostrom 1995), with individuals playing essential roles in the design and maintenance of each of these components. To take an important example, social capital is produced in informal networks of social connections, shared beliefs, norms of reciprocity, habitual practices, and procedures to monitor and sanction the behavior of others members of that group.

This analytical framework relates to the study of *rebellion* because individuals engaged in acts of politically inspired violence are following what they consider to be compelling norms of behavior. These norms were instilled in them by individuals fulfilling what they, in turn, saw as legitimate roles of leadership, acting according to a set of norms and rules of behavior considered as legitimate within their own cultural context. A key aspect of this norm installation process was the dissemination of shared meanings to such terms as “innocent civilians” versus “legitimate military target.” Of course, all such terms remain contested, open to diverging interpretations by parties in and observers of that conflict.

Institutional analysis is controversial because it treats *rationality* as the core component of human choice in all areas of endeavor. This theoretical perspective asserts that tensions between individual self-interest and collective goals can be ameliorated (but never eliminated) through the careful design of institutional mechanisms of social choice, rule-making, monitoring, and dispute resolution. It acknowledges that any solution to one dilemma of collective action necessarily generates additional dilemmas in its wake.

Research and practice have both made it clear that there can be no single, perfect solution to fundamental dilemmas of collective action. Still, there are better or worse responses, ones that are more or less appropriate to a given set of circumstances. By helping us diagnose the types of problems that are most likely to emerge in any given setting, institutional analysis helps unravel the complex sequences of strategic reactions to institutional innovations that emerge as groups confront ever-changing policy problems.

In my experience as an instructor, I have found that any effort to apply these same tools to the study of religious belief, behavior, and organizations easily generates a lively discussion concerning the limits of rational choice. Although I am confident that analytical concepts and models originally developed for the study of economic exchange and political decision making can be usefully applied to *some* important aspects of religious choice at the individual and collective level, I also acknowledge that other aspects of these phenomena may not be easily understood by the use of these tools alone. However, the precise location of this divide remains to be determined.

Even if fundamental determinants of personal faith remain outside of the realm of explanation in terms of rational choice, people of faith still face difficult choices concerning levels of personal commitment to act upon the principles of their faith and their leaders must select what level and type of political involvement is appropriate for that organization. Furthermore, all these choices will be shaped by the institutional context within which members and leaders live their lives. The same distinction appears in standard models of rational choice used in political science or economics, which typically presume that an individual’s preferences (or an organization’s goals) are determined by some exogenous and unexplained factors. Institutional analysis requires us to examine more closely the foundations upon which particular organizations are formed and rules promulgated and enforced. The study of religion holds out the promise of pushing this barrier farther back into the identity construction process, for religious leaders still, in most societies, play essential roles in socialization and education.

For the purposes of this paper I adapt Appleby's (2000: 9) term "religious actor" by interpreting that term more broadly as covering any individual who acts as an agent of a faith-based organization affiliated in some meaningful way with a religion. Appleby states his definition as follows: "People who have been formed by a religious community and who are acting with the intent to uphold, extend, or defend its values and precepts." Note that this assumption presumes that all religious actors are driven by a "logic of appropriateness" (March and Olsen 1984, 1989), namely, to take those actions that will advance the fundamental interests of the religious tradition within which that individual's identity was first formed. Although I agree that such concerns play an important role, as individuals all agents also face incentives to shirk from their responsibilities. Agent behavior is partially shaped by the imperatives of these collectively-defined role expectations, but we cannot neglect the all-too-human incentives to take advantage of one's position of authority or access to unique resources. Thus, for purposes of this paper a religious actor is defined as an agent of an organization related in some meaningful way to a religion or faith tradition, but whose incentives include both personal and professional components.

In short, a religious actor confronts the same fundamental trade-offs inherent in any form of agency. As a consequence, the full panoply of concepts from the study of agents and principals becomes relevant. In this sense, a religious actor is a rational actor like any other.

At this point it may be useful to also clarify my intended use of the term "religion." Much effort has been extended to try to develop a widely acceptable definition of this term, which still seems fated to remain an essentially contested concept. I have no intention of engaging the full array of debates on this topic here. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to follow Appleby's (2000: 8-9) lead in "defining" a religion as a configuration of creed, cult, code of conduct, and confessional community. For Appleby a religion consists of a group of people who share a common understanding (community) about participation in a common set of rituals (cult) and who share a common set of beliefs (creed) which imply a code of conduct in their everyday lives. Appleby repeatedly emphasizes the diversity of beliefs and behavior that all religions or faith traditions can encompass, yet insists that there remains a meaningful sense in which all four of these components are inter-related and that "religion constitutes an integral culture" (p. 9).

The term "configuration" is not used by Appleby, but I find it particularly apt. For institutional analysts, a norm, a rule, or an organization is each formed by a network of components which interact in a configural manner. As a consequence, it is often difficult to isolate the effect of any single change, because any one change may have multiple effects on different components of the overall configuration (see Ostrom 2005). In this perspective a religion constitutes a configuration of the components listed above. In addition, I add a fifth c, for corporate actor. I am solely concerned with those religions which have been manifested in the form of a formal organization with explicitly defined roles for its agents and normative expectations for their behavior. In particular, I focus on the behavior of the individual agents of a faith-based organization, which is in turn connected to a community of believers who actively participate in that faith tradition. Such formal organizations accomplish many important tasks, especially in the inter-generational transmission and prolongation of particular faiths. For example, such organizations typically establish some form of training or accreditation that

selects potential agents and socializes them into their role expectations, as well as sanctioning those whose behavior falls short of an acceptable standard.

Because my focus lies on the behavior of the agents of faith-based organizations, I do not need to take any position regarding the truth or falsity of any of the faith traditions under study. No matter what their ultimate meaning or lack thereof, the important point for me, as a political scientist, is that these configurations of beliefs-actions-codes-communities-organizations can have real and demonstrable effects on political processes and policy outcomes. Although it seems to have come as a surprise to the many social scientists who expected modern societies to follow a steady march towards a fully secularized future, it has become abundantly clear that religious beliefs, practices, and organizations have had and will continue to have important practical consequences at all levels of social aggregation.

Analytical Preliminaries: Understanding the Nature of the Goods Associated With Religion

Policy analysts have long realized the crucial importance attached to the “type” of good being investigated (see Bickers and Williams 2001; Cornes and Sandler 1996). Private goods can be enjoyed to the utmost by a single owner and can be easily bought and sold in market transactions. In contrast, public goods can only be enjoyed by a group of people all at the same time. Club goods are also enjoyed jointly by a group (typically small), but outsiders can be easily excluded from participating in that enjoyment. Common pool resources (CPRs) are ones from which excludable packets can be extracted for consumption or exchange, but whose continued availability requires attention to the common source of these resources.

Each type of good tends to be most efficiently produced and exchanged in different institutional arrangements. Competitive markets for private goods, for example, are built on voluntary exchanges between firms (or other producers) and individual or households as consumers. Although markets in private goods can be remarkably efficient, production of public goods is undermined by the common incentive to free-ride on the contributions of others. Indeed, one of the primary justifications for the existence of government is the need to collect taxes to finance the production of public goods. Since the interests of groups of different sizes are likely to vary in significant ways, formal constitutions or informal rules must establish legitimate mechanisms through which such conflicts of collective interest can be resolved. Yet governments themselves are subject to their own limitations, including the difficulty of fully satisfying the tastes for public goods expressed by a heterogeneous population. Voluntary associations arise to realize the potential gains from the coordination of individuals with comparable interests, often in the form of clubs that impose tolls or fees on their members. Finally, CPRs such as fisheries are subject to over-exploitation, unless some other mechanism is put in place to properly align the incentives of resource extractors to the need for long-term maintenance of that resource. Although many policy analysts advocate government management or privatization of CPRs, Ostrom (1990) and other researchers have demonstrated that common pool resources are often most effectively managed by community-based organizations.

In sum, there is no single best institutional arrangement for the production of all types of goods. Instead, each type of good tends to be produced most efficiently by different forms of

social organization. One of the major concerns of institutional analysis is to match the organizational forms by which goods or services are produced and distributed to the characteristics of the relevant goods and services in that particular context. In practical terms, this correspondence between type of good and the organizational format needed for efficient production is not quite so neatly demarcated.

A further complication is that goods and services are *multifunctional* when they necessarily provide an array of different types of benefits or costs to distinct or overlapping groups of people. One particular area of concern is agricultural policy, which has direct implications for rural development and for environmental conditions (Pretty et al. 2001, Knickel and Hend 2000, OECD 2001). This realization leads naturally to a consideration of hybrid organizational forms, in order to match policy problems with complex institutional mechanisms that prove the most effective in that situation. Policy analysts face the challenge of determining the optimal configuration of institutional arrangements appropriate for particular circumstances.

When it comes to religion, what is the nature of the goods or services that are produced? That depends on how one looks at it. Individual believers enjoy such private goods as the increased self-esteem that comes from gaining a sense of meaning in one's own life, which may convey additional benefits in terms of physical health (Fagan 1996). In addition, an individual believer may gain access to social services and to a network of social support providing both tangible and intangible resources. A shared faith can be an especially important source of solace in times of grief.

Joint participation in rituals can generate a beneficial feeling of belonging to some larger community. A community of believers can be said to share consumption of such club or toll goods as the satisfaction that comes from participating in emotionally moving rituals (Iannoccone 1992, 1994). This too is a form of social capital, at the level of small groups. Established churches generate more extensive networks of social connections, and especially access to various kinds of social services. To the extent that access to these resources is limited to members of that group, these benefits take the form of club or toll goods. Finally, a meaningful sense of group solidarity can emerge from a tightly knit religious community, thus enabling that group's traditions to survive for generations.

That religion can generate benefits for society as a whole has long been recognized. Max Weber (1930) posited a relationship between the content of particular religious traditions and a country's prospects for economic growth. Adam Smith (1776) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1835), in different ways, posited a positive connection between the diversity of religious organizations and the overall health of the national economy or society as a whole. By helping establish a widespread sense of morality among the population, religious institutions help secure the foundation for a stable and prosperous society, by lowering the transaction costs required to impose limits on the actions of private actors and public authorities. It has also been argued that a vibrant religious community can improve the quality of public discourse on political issues, by bringing fresh perspectives and unique resources to bear on public debates (see, for example, Coleman 2001). To use a more technical terminology, religious activities can generate positive externalities, particularly a general level of social capital upon which all members of society can

build. In other circumstances, intense religious belief may provide the fuel for deep-seated political antagonism and war. Similar pathologies can occur at the group and individual levels.

However, extensive research has failed to reveal any systematic correlation between the structure or content of a country's religious economy and its macroeconomic conditions (Gill 2001, Iannaccone 1998, Delacroix and Nielsen 2001, Barro and McCleary 2003a, b, 2004). In my opinion, such analyses have been misdirected at too high a level of aggregation. In my proposed research I will focus my attention instead on more *micro-level questions* comparing the relative effectiveness of faith-based and secular types of non-governmental organizations engaged in similar programs. Research questions of that type are much more amenable to systematic empirical testing.

My research builds on an interdisciplinary body of research in which rational choice models are applied to particular aspects of religious phenomenon (for reviews see Iannaccone 1998; Beckford 2000; Demereth et al. 1998; Legee 2003). The application of models and methods originally developed for the analysis of economic markets to questions of religious belief remain, not surprisingly, intensely controversial. The validity of this approach has been questioned on diverse grounds (Bankston 2002, 2003; Bruce 1993, 2000; Jerolmack and Porpora 2004; Johnson 2003; Sharot 2002; Young 1997). Frankly, I find the reports of these debates to be eerily reminiscent of controversies in my home discipline of political science. My own take on this issue is that these debates can be resolved only once scholars on all sides recognize rational choice models as but one component of the variegated tool kit that social scientists need to understand the complex phenomena we study.

Rational choice theory itself encompasses a still-expanding array of techniques and approaches, only a few of which have thus far been evident in the field of religious studies. Basic insights of market models (Finke and Stark 1992), public choice (Ekelund et al. 1996), and the production of club goods (Iannaccone 1992, 1994) have been investigated in some detail. However, any single religious belief, practice, or organization may have effects that resemble private, public, group, or communal goods. Using the terminology introduced above, religion is best envisioned as conveying a multifunctional configuration of private and club benefits to its members as well as public goods (or bads) to society as a whole. To my knowledge, the existing body of research applying rational choice theory to religious studies is restricted to analyses that consider only one of these aspects at any one time. For example, Stark and Finke (2000) present reports on research projects directed at different levels of aggregation, but each analysis stands alone, with little direct connection to the others (beyond their common grounding in a logical structure of definitions, assumptions, and propositions).

Because of these wide-ranging effects, certain aspects of religious choice should be taken as a proper subject for policy analysis. From the point of view of a policy analyst, the question becomes which institutional arrangements enhance the socially beneficial consequences of religious beliefs, behavior, and organizations while minimizing their potentially negative effects on society as a whole? In order to address this question we need to look more carefully at the ways in which partnerships between different types of secular and faith-based organizations can enhance the positive externalities of religious belief and behavior.

Locating Faith-Based Organization within Networks of Voluntary and Public Organizations

One of the great strengths of rational choice institutionalism, or institutional analysis, is its ability to highlight the complementarity of goals pursued by agents of different types of organizations (Costen 1998; Hansmann 1987; Salamon 1987; Weisbrod 1997). Transaction cost economics and new institutional economics provide important insights into the ways in which the incentives of agents can be structured to make them more likely to pursue the interests of the organization as a whole (see Berger 2003; Zech 1998). Game theory is a mode of analysis particularly suited to the study of the problems of coordination implied by strategic interactions between agents or organizations pursuing related but not identical goals. I am confident that this set of inter-related research tools can be effectively employed to improve our collective understanding of the policy implications of diverse forms of faith-based organizations.

In many countries, religious organizations provide welfare services or educational services to other members of their community. Of particular interest to the current project are the many ways in which secular and faith-based organizations of different types can work together in partnership. Despite the common perception of a cherished “wall of separation” between church and state in the U.S. (Davis 2001, Hecllo 2003), religious and political organizations have in fact formed partnerships of various kinds (Davis 2001; Lupu and Tuttle 2002; Salamon 1987; Weisbrod 1988, 1997). Recent research has attempted to demarcate the unique contributions, if any, that faith-based organizations provide to the overall mix of welfare services (Chaves 1998, 2004, Cnaan et al. 1999, Ebaugh et al. 2003, Glenn 2000, Kennedy 2003, Monsma 1996, Smith and Sosin 2001, Wuthnow 2004). Other researchers have sought to understand the range of relationships between religion and politics in different countries. For example, despite the general tendencies towards homogenization of public policy among all members of the EU, there remain significantly diverse forms of church-state relationships among the current and future members of the European Union (Barker 2004; Bloß 2003; Jalen and Wilcox 2002). Even a simple measurement of the degree of church-state separation can be controversial (Barro and McCleary 2004, Fox and Sandler 2004; Minkenberg 2002).

Researchers comparing the effectiveness of the delivery of welfare services at the local level by faith-based and secular organizations have had to deal with such preliminaries as making sure it is possible to systematically differentiate between faith-based and secular organizations, either in organizational form or in actual behavior. It turns out, perhaps not surprisingly, that there is as wide a variation in organizational form within the faith-based category as there is among secular organizations. (Jeavons 1998, Zech 1998)

In my view, any comparison between the effectiveness of welfare programs instituted by faith-based and secular organization must incorporate the effects of the multifunctional nature of the goods and services such programs provide to individuals, groups, and to society as a whole. As will be seen below, similar comparisons can be applied at the international level.

The Multiple Roles of Religion in Different Stages of a Conflict Process

The many effects of religion can be illustrated by considering its potential roles in all stages of a process of violent political conflict (see McGinnis 2003, 2005). For purposes of analysis, these can be considered as aspects of four separate (but sometimes overlapping) stages.

1. **Political Mobilization and War Fighting.** Injustice from any source can inspire leaders affiliated with faith traditions to mobilize opposition to their oppressors. In some circumstances their pronouncements may legitimize political violence; in other cases, individuals engaged in combat operations may recognize limits on acceptable behavior as articulated by religious leaders.
2. **Amelioration of the Effects of Fighting on Non-Combatants.** Faith-based organizations are especially active in the provision of humanitarian assistance and other efforts to ameliorate the effects of violent conflict on non-combatants (Nichols 1988; Kniss and Campbell 1997; McCleary 2004).
3. **Peace-Making and Informal Diplomacy.** Others motivated by religious conviction focus on facilitating negotiations and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Appleby 2000; Johnston and Sampson 1994; Johnston 2003).
4. **Post-Conflict Reconciliation and Peace-Building.** Parties to the conflict will continue to harbor strong animosities towards each other if religious, political, or educational institutions act to reinforce memories of past atrocities committed by the other side. As long as different segments of society see each other as potential enemies, there remains the danger that some political entrepreneur will devise a way to generate sufficient support to overcome constitutional restraints that would otherwise prevent the destruction of the still-offending party on the other side. By playing critical leadership roles in any process of reconciliation, and by limiting the scope of their political agendas in the post-conflict policy, religions can provide an effective counterweight to the forces of hate and fear (Helmick and Petersen 2001; Smock 2002; Tutu 1999).

Different types of faith-based leaders or organizations are most directly involved in each phase of the conflict process as given above. Terrorist groups who claim inspiration from religious sources are an important aspect of religion's contribution to the first phase, but so are those faith-based activists who advocate non-violent direct action or who insist that combatants obey the restrictions stipulated in the concept of just war or related traditions. As noted above, faith-based organizations have long been prominent in the delivery of emergency humanitarian relief to refugees and others displaced by violent conflict. Various faith-related non-governmental organizations engage in efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully, and especially in the practice of Track II diplomacy in which ordinary people or non-political leaders from enemy camps are brought together to learn more about each other's point of view. Finally, individual leaders and inter-faith alliances have played prominent roles in the process of reconciliation among formerly warring parties. In this way a relationship of peace can be built, which should make recurrence of that particular conflict less likely in the future.

Each of these impacts of religion on political conflict has been investigated separately by various researchers, but efforts to integrate all these effects into a comprehensive analytical framework are rare. One important exception is Appleby's (2000) analysis of diverse cases of religious-based violence, peace, or reconciliation. Even Appleby, however, treats each type of organization in a separate fashion. In this paper I lay out a research program directed towards a more systematic analysis and integration of these multiple roles and effects.

Incentives Facing Religious Actors

I have long been intrigued by the way in which religious faith can make claims that directly contradict the dictates of political authorities. The campaigns of Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi against different forms of political injustice are classic examples of such fundamental challenges to political authority (see Ackerman and Duvall 2000). Questions of religious belief, behavior, and organizations constitute arenas of interaction that are fundamentally distinct from the public sphere of political conflict. In effect, each religious tradition develops its own distinctive set of rules for decision making and judgment within its own purview. Communication is possible across different religious traditions, and between believers and members of secular society, but to be effective any such communication requires effort on all sides to understand the perspective of the other (Carter 1993; Coleman 2001).

My initial premise is that religious belief, behavior, and organizations constitute arenas of interaction that are fundamentally distinct from the public sphere of political conflict. The following quote from a modern classic aptly summarizes this basic starting point for analysis.

Religions are in effect independent centers of power, with bona fide claims on the allegiance of their members, claims that exist alongside, are not identical to, and will sometimes trump the claims to obedience that the state makes. **A religion speaks to its members in a voice different from that of the state**, and when the voice moves the faithful to action, a religion may act as a counterweight to the authority of the state....

A religion ... is not simply a means for understanding one's self, or even of contemplating the nature of the universe, or existence, or of anything else. **A religion is, at its heart, a way of denying the authority of the rest of the world**; it is a way of saying to fellow human beings and to the state those fellow humans have erected, "No, I will *not* accede to your will."
(Carter 1993, 35, 41; bolding added)

Each religious tradition develops its own distinctive set of rules for decision making and judgment within its own purview. In effect, each religion constitutes its own sector of public economy, comprised of a complex array of actors, rules, and processes. As such, a faith-based tradition is a fit subject for institutional analysis, with the full panoply of concepts of levels of choice, nature of goods, and institutional statements (see Ostrom 2005). Much of the action occurring in each faith-based sector has little direct relevance for public policy. Only certain types of actors, with access to politically relevant resources and motivated by uniquely political goals, are likely to crossover to direct participation of the kinds listed above. To understand

interactions between these arenas, we need to have a common framework equally applicable to the study of both types of activity. I argue that institutional analysis, based on rational choice theory, broadly construed, provides such a common framework.

In a practical sense, this means that the utility function for a religious actor/agent must integrate three primary components. The first component concerns the satisfaction an individual receives from fulfilling what he or she sees as the primary tasks associated with his or her role as an agent of that religion or faith-based organization. The specific nature of this criterion cannot be defined in general, but must instead be defined by that actor from within the appropriate religious frame of reference. The second component concerns practical benefits in terms of political influence or economic reward (including a general preference for having control over more resources). Different leaders will assign different weights to these two components, and we should expect to observe different strategies being implemented by leaders within the same organization who care more or less about political effectiveness or economic gain as compared to more directly religious criteria.

Leaders of faith-based organizations seeking to have an impact in the political arena face several strategic questions of interest. Should they devote their attention to efforts to convert individuals to their own faith, and hope that social improvement will follow from the gradual diffusion of their faith tradition? This goal is one that is explicitly religious in nature, and thus may lead to more immediate rewards within an existing faith-based organization. However, some religious believers may experience frustration at the slow pace of political change, and may respond to leaders encouraging them to participate more directly in the political process.

Politically-minded entrepreneurs themselves face a set of alternative options. Should they form political action organizations that can lobby political leaders but will have to accept the compromises necessary to implement public policy in a democratic setting? Or is more direct action needed, in order to force a change in policy or regime, even by violent means? A related option is to insist on direct political action, but of a self-consciously non-violent nature, in order to not tarnish noble goals by the use of violent means. All of these options have been adopted by important faith-based organizations, and institutional analysis tells us that each of these strategies will be seen as optimal in different sets of circumstances.

In other words, agents may be motivated by primarily religious or by more practical considerations. In addition, the organizational structures within which they decide and act will have some mechanisms to monitor their performance on one or both sets of criteria. Such mechanisms are necessary because religious actors, like agents of any type of organization, face incentives to shirk from their responsibilities or to use their position of authority for personal gain or for other inappropriate activities. This residual desire to satisfy more selfish considerations serves as the third major component of a religious agent's utility function.

Religious actors, as defined here, should be able to make decisions on a consistent basis, balancing these competing inclinations as each best sees fit. When it comes to individual members of a faith-based organization, however, it may not be as reasonable to expect them to follow such a fully-integrated preference schedule. That is, individual members may not be cognizant of the extent to which actions selected to be consistent with religious prescriptions

result in tangible costs. Also, most of their political or economic choices may be made on grounds that are not intimately shaped by religious belief. As a consequence, when the religious leaders they most respect encourage them to adopt a particular political position, individual members may react in an intense manner to this newly-revealed inconsistency in their behavior. This ability of moral entrepreneurs to frame issues in such a way as to mobilize intense levels of political support has long been one of the most distinctive resources available to religious actors.

Social Dilemmas Concerning Religion and Conflict

The central insight of rational choice theory is the ubiquity of unintended consequences of self-interested behavior. Even if the strategies implemented by any one individual or organization may be rational in the sense of furthering their own interests, the effects on society as a whole can be surprisingly good (as in Adam Smith's invisible hand) or surprisingly bad (as in a tragedy of the commons). Especially important are instances of **social dilemmas**, that is, situations of strategic interaction in which the self-interested motivations of each actor leads to undesirable outcomes. Although these outcomes may be unintended, the techniques of game theory and related tools enable us to uncover the underlying structure of these problems. Furthermore, once the reasons behind specific consequences are fully understood, then efforts can be undertaken to avoid those particular problems. Even so, there are no simple or complete answers to social dilemmas. Instead, each resolution of one social dilemma necessarily generates a new round of problems.

Consider interconnections among social dilemmas occurring in times of peace, rebellion, negotiations, and post-conflict reconstruction. In all phases of the conflict process, participants are assumed to be *rational* in the sense that they pursue their own goals in as effective a manner as possible. As they devise solutions for one problem, new problems subsequently arise. In this sense, dilemmas of collective action are *compounded* as the conflict process moves from one stage to the next. Some of the most important of these dilemmas can be stated briefly:

1. Political entrepreneurs seeking to overthrow the existing order can mobilize support for rebellion by tapping into the political grievances felt by oppressed or marginalized groups, but these entrepreneurs are pulled in different directions as they respond to the funding opportunities made available by group grievances, the support of external patrons, and the use of force for personal gain (McGinnis 2002).
2. International humanitarian organizations may act to ameliorate the conditions faced by refugees and internally displaced peoples, but clever combatants find ways of diverting these resources into funding their own military campaigns or otherwise serving their own political purposes (McGinnis 2000b).
3. Third party intermediaries offer assistance in helping the parties devise a peaceful agreement, but so many negotiations prove fruitless that certain parties must be actively sabotaging these efforts (McGinnis 2003).
4. Even agreements that seem successful may later prove powerless to prevent a renewed outbreak of fighting. Nor does the establishment of a new regime insure

success, for oftentimes leaders of the new regime eventually face rebellions remarkably similar to the one that they themselves had earlier led. More extensive processes of constitutional reform and inter-ethnic reconciliation are needed to exit this conflict system, and such occurrences are rare indeed.

Outcomes from games occurring in any one phase of the conflict process define the nature of the problems experienced by participants in subsequent phases. For example, service-oriented rebel organizations act as honest agents of their constituents' interests, whereas proxy forces and criminal gangs specialize in harming local populations (see Berhal and Malone 2000). Since leaders of the latter type of organizations have an incentive to pretend to be interested in resolving political grievances, they may engage in duplicitous behavior during negotiations, by acting in secret to undermine any prospects for a peace that would put them out of business. Similar dilemmas of collective actions confront participants and outside parties during each phase of the conflict process.

In the next few sections several important dilemmas that occur in each conflict stage are examined in more detail. This discussion is based on my analysis of a set of simple formal models that illustrate an array of dilemmas facing participants in conflict and third parties who have intervened in that conflict (see McGinnis 2003, 2005). Discussion here remains at an informal level, focused on outlining those dilemmas most pertinent to religious organizations participating in or reacting to an ongoing rebellion.

Faith-Based War-Fighting

Many contemporary political movements use religion, in one form or another, as a basis for mobilization. Space precludes a comprehensive review of all the ways in which religion has been used as legitimization for political violence. For present purposes, it is sufficient to consider a few ways in which religion can contribute to the initiation, escalation, and continuation of violence or to the elongation of its after-effects.

Before violence begins, activists inspired by religious convictions may "capture" state policy in a way that generates intense grievances among disadvantaged parties. Byman (2002) highlights the efforts of groups with hegemonic aspirations as a particularly potent trigger for violent rebellion. Any such effort to use the power of public authorities to impose legal or moral codes derived from a dominant religious tradition upon all members of that society can be seen as a form of rent-seeking. This term is typically restricted to rent-seeking undertaken for economic gain, especially when a special interest group seeks to "capture" control over policy in a given area of government regulation in order to limit entry into that market sector or to otherwise create an artificial scarcity. Such scarcities can generate significant "rents" for the group that benefits from government intervention, so significant that the typical arrangement involves direct or indirect benefits for the public officials who impose these artificial restrictions. Primarily religious organization sometimes engage in exactly this form of rent-seeking, as shown in analyses of the ways in which some agents of the Roman Catholic church in medieval Europe exploited their monopoly position (Ekelund et al. 1996).

Here I am concerned with what has been called “ideological rent-seeking” (see Bickers and Williams 2001). When the purpose of the imposed restrictions relate not to tangible material gain but rather implement some aspect of a religious agenda, then religious agents can be said to benefit in ways that they find meaningful. Those from other religious traditions, or even those in the same tradition with different opinions on these issues, may suffer from these exactions. As shown by Byman (2002), any effort to impose the hegemonic control of a dominant group can be a sure trigger for violent resistance. This becomes even more likely if the hegemony is based in some religion, for religion is tied to many people’s self-identity in particularly intense ways.

In general, religious symbolism can effectively evoke intense responses on the part of believers. As such, religion can be an especially effective means of political mobilization. Such emotions, once aroused, may prove especially difficult to control. Consider, for example, the great difficulties that both Gandhi and Martin Luther King faced in convincing their followers to remain non-violent. More generally, in conditions of unrest the phenomenon of “outbidding” often emerges, in which rival leaders compete by adopting more extreme positions, in hopes of attracting additional support.

Scholars of social movements stress the importance of expressive rewards in encouraging individuals to resist. Religious leaders may be especially adept at enhancing the salience of expressive rewards among their followers. Unfortunately, those who derive satisfaction from the mere act of engaging in some form of resistance may not be as concerned about monitoring the practical effectiveness of the actions undertaken by their leaders. As a consequence, this may enable ineffective leaders to continue to enjoy support even though they are not doing much to live up to their responsibilities as an agent of that aggrieved group. In addition, the longer a conflict persists the more likely it is that some leaders will learn how to benefit from the continued conflict. Such leaders are unlikely to put forth any meaningful effort towards a peaceful solution, whereas they will almost certainly cater to the expressive needs of their followers.

Finally, by encouraging attitudes of intolerance, advocates of religiously legitimated violence may serve to poison the post-conflict polity. Problems associated with the long-term effects of reinforced grievances will be discussed below, in the section on post-conflict reconciliation. In general, behavior in one stage of a conflict process can have long-lasting effects on subsequent stages and indeed on later conflicts.

Faith-Based Humanitarian Assistance

The plight of refugees and other peoples displaced by conflicts has inspired a tremendous amount of effort orchestrated by humanitarian aid organizations throughout all regions of the world. Faith-based organizations have long been an important component of the international community of humanitarian organizations providing essential assistance to refugees and other people displaced by natural disasters, famines, and wars. Unfortunately, well-intended actions of humanitarian organizations and other extra-regional actors have, to a remarkable degree, instead contributed towards the perpetuation of war and misery (MacRae et al. 1994, Maren 1997). For example, government officials may lose all incentive to provide basic services to their people, if they can be assured that humanitarian aid agencies will rush supplies to assist peoples displaced

by conflict or famine. Too often supplies are diverted by local officials (on both the government and rebel sides) and used to continue the war.

Although originally intended to be apolitical in their approach, humanitarian activists have come to realize that their efforts necessarily have political effects (Anderson, 1999). This realization has led to efforts to be more self-consciously strategic in their selection of programs that further the likelihood of peace rather than contributing to the continuation of war and suffering. In particular, codes of good conduct or best practices have been adopted by many of the major humanitarian aid organizations. However, even this may not solve the problem. Elsewhere (McGinnis 2005; see also Gibson et al. 2005) I use a simple model of the Samaritan's Dilemma game to highlight the fundamental tensions between international donors of humanitarian assistance and their local recipients. Although the donors would most prefer to give assistance to only those governments and rebel leaders who respect the human rights of their constituents, if they do not provide needed assistance many innocent civilians will die. Thus the dominant strategy of at least some potential donors is to provide assistance even when the crisis was caused by the actions of unsavory local leaders who put forth little or no effort to resolve the underlying problem.

The ability of local leaders to divert humanitarian aid to the support of continued conflict has been a prominent theme in journalistic accounts of conflicts in this region, and this simple model helps explain why this problem is so common and so difficult to overcome. This outcome is reinforced by some long-term dynamic trends in the organization of religion.

Humanitarian aid organizations originally established by leaders inspired by their faith tend to later evolve into more practically minded organizations perfectly comfortable dealing with governments on a routine basis (Kniss and Campbell 1997; Lumsdaine 1993; Nichols 1988; Smith 1990). Catholic Relief Services, to take as an example a major player in the area of international humanitarian aid and development assistance, relies heavily on financial contributions from the U.S. and other governments and inter-governmental organizations. Similar statements could be made about humanitarian relief organizations sponsored by the major mainline Protestant denominations. An intermediate case is World Vision International, which still remains true to its roots in the non-denominational evangelical movement. Volunteers of this organization are more likely to push an agenda of spreading the gospel, as they understand it, to the recipients of their aid. Still, even World Vision seems mainstream when compared to the activities of missionaries sent out by denominations pushing a more aggressive campaign of proselytizing.

This process of organizational evolution, as I understand it, goes as follows. At the initial stage, only those individuals deeply inspired by moral principles are likely to get involved in the difficult task of going halfway around the world to help desperate people from a totally different ethnic and cultural background. Such moral individuals tend to cluster in faith-based traditions, so it seems natural that faith-based organizations would play leading roles in establishing programs of this type. Over time, as that organization proves its ability to deliver needed goods and services, national governments and international organizations begin to take notice, especially those agencies most directly responsible for the distribution of developmental or humanitarian aid. Once policy decisions have been taken to increase levels of aid, the

bureaucrats responsible for distributing these funds will naturally look for organizations that have already proven their ability to implement these activities. Initially, there may be little interaction between government funding and the faith-based focus of the organization, but, as these operations continue for many years, a sense of professionalization sets in among the members of that organization. They come to see the problems as sufficiently difficult to solve, even without any recourse to proselytization. As a consequence, this branch of the faith-based organization comes to more closely resemble a secular-based non-governmental organization that might also be involved in this same type of work. By interacting with political actors on a regular basis, the agents of originally faith-based organizations develop increased sensitivity to political realities, and begin to more explicitly take account of the political consequences of their own actions.

Meanwhile, new denominations will arise, for reasons unrelated to this particular issue area. Finke and Stark (1992) argue that no one religion can satisfy the diverse tastes in faith-related activities found in a heterogeneous population, and that this diversity of tastes ensures an endless supply of new varieties of faith-based organizations. These new faith traditions are led by individuals deeply inspired by their own visions of the meaning of their faith. If their faith leads them to seek new converts, many of whom may be found among the poor and disadvantaged of the world, there is a natural tendency for these new faith-based movements to establish their own missionary activities, which tend initially to emphasize spreading their faith over the practical matters of the distribution of aid. Nonetheless, the tendencies identified above eventually become manifest, and these new organizations should become increasingly professionalized and quasi-secular in nature. As a consequence, there are always new faith-based organizations eager to provide humanitarian aid even in situations where larger, more experienced organizations would prefer to withdraw. In this way the natural dynamics of religious development ensures a steady supply of humanitarian assistance to peoples whose leaders are exploiting this situation for their own selfish ends.

Faith-Based Peace-Making

Parties engaged in conflict face an array of difficult challenges when they attempt to arrive at a peaceful resolution. Since combat generates costs on all sides, some leaders may decide to try to achieve joint gains by engaging in peace talks. Yet doing so is risky, since rebel leaders run the risk of losing support if they are seen as selling out the cause for their own personal gain. Under conditions of war-fighting, even basic forms of cooperation are very difficult to arrange. Combatants naturally develop deep-seated suspicions of each other's motives in the unfolding of their struggle.

In other words, combatants contemplating negotiations face significant transaction costs. Third parties can help in several ways. First, they can lower the basic transaction costs involved in the practical problem of establishing channels of communication between warring parties and especially in bringing representatives of these parties together in some physical location. Second, third parties can help facilitate the parties' search for a solution by suggesting a set of terms around which their expectations might start to converge. This coordination problem lies at the heart of the bargaining process, and imputes much of the costs involved in such matters. Third, external parties may go beyond merely suggesting a compromise position and suggest a more

creative or integrative solution. Creative problem-solving is a time and effort intensive problem, and external assistance can be crucial.

Fourth, external parties may provide positive inducements to parties to participate in the negotiations. Alternatively, they can impose costs or threaten the imposition of costs on those parties who refuse to participate. An important problem follows immediately from this form of assistance. By offering positive or negative inducements, third parties may inadvertently elicit what I call the duplicitous strategy. The problem begins if some rebel leaders realize that they would be unlikely to maintain a position of leadership in a post-conflict society. Their proven skills at organizing effective coercion may not be of direct relevance to opportunities in a peacetime economy. Also, many soldiers will lack skills needed for gainful employment after the war ends, especially those who have been fighting for many years. Peace will not be attractive to leaders or followers who cannot expect to enjoy a comparably satisfying life in times of peace.

Leaders who prefer continued war to peace may publicly agree to participate in peace negotiations, while at the same time acting secretly to sabotage those talks. Rebel leaders dependent on external support may be especially prone to this strategy. External donors face daunting information asymmetries when dealing with rebel leaders, who by necessity must have the capacity to act in secret. Donors can easily observe whether a faction leader is participating in public talks, but it is much more difficult to insure that leader is not acting in bad faith. This problem is a direct manifestation of standard problems of opportunism in relations between principals and their agents.

Thus, by exerting pressure for talks to begin, third parties create for themselves the additional problem of distinguishing between honest and duplicitous negotiators. After a conflict has persisted for a long time, clever strategic actors will learn how to extract advantages from the continuation of conflict. Resolving an ongoing conflict is thus not simply a matter of finding a mutually acceptable solution for the issues that initially divided the parties into warring camps. It is also necessary to counteract the incentives that incline some actors towards the continued utilization of violence.

With a few notable exceptions, religious-based organizations play a relatively minor role in peace negotiations. Certain faith-based organizations have been very effective in helping resolve particular conflicts, such as Sant'Egidio in Mozambique and several inter-faith organizations in Northern Ireland (see Appleby 2000; Johnson and Sampson 1994). Appleby recognizes Sant'Egidio and the Mennonite Conciliation Service as positive examples of the type of institutionalized religious-based peace-building that he would like to see replicated in all faith traditions. Generally, however, faith-based conflict resolution organizations lack the resources needed to convince reluctant parties to make peace. They can be especially effective at the local level, in helping ordinary people on both sides to get past their mutual misunderstandings.

Local peace conferences do not make the front pages of newspapers, but they can have long-lasting impacts. They typically take long periods of time, in order to allow the completion of local traditions and rituals. Few international diplomats have the patience for such slow and low-level discussions. Indeed, religious-based organizations have played prominent roles in sponsoring and facilitating these efforts. Not all such efforts have been successful. In northern

Uganda, the Achioli Religious Leaders Initiative has been active for several years. Conflict continues between the LRA and government forces. However, one important development appears to be that the LRA no longer attracts much local support, and this change may in the long run turn out to be a critical step towards peace.

Faith-Based Reconciliation

It is often the case that civil peace is eventually followed by a repetition of rebellion, this time led by a different segment of the population. If all that changes is the identity of the person or groups enjoying the position of centralized power, then other, still-excluded groups will eventually organize to redress their perceived grievances. Such a defective peace agreement can be said to have an implicit expiration date, in the sense that peace will evaporate after the period of time necessary for these newly aggrieved groups to organize an effective resistance. Unfortunately, this is exactly the type of peace agreement that serves as the focus for the vast majority of diplomatic efforts. Just stopping the fighting is sufficiently difficult in many cases to justify delaying any effort at more fundamental reform.

Reconstruction, reform, and reconciliation each contribute in complementary ways to the building of stable peace. Improved economic opportunities change the incentives that individual fighters face as they decide whether or not to shift their efforts towards productive employment. At the national level, constitutional reform can reduce the ability of future rent-seekers to impose excessive costs on some other segment of society. Reconciliation between warring parties can be especially effective at lowering the likelihood of an eventual resumption of hostilities, yet accomplishing this task can require a high cost in terms of time and effort. Furthermore, the parties themselves should bear the bulk of these costs, for no one can force another to forgive their enemies.

The question of reconciliation raises a whole other set of issues. To be effective, post-conflict reconciliation must have a transformative effect on the self-perceptions of people, and especially on how they perceive other members of their society. Here one has to step outside of the pure rational choice tradition, in which preferences remain fixed. Since intense emotions are aroused in rebellions, this task requires integration of psychological factors beyond simple cost-benefit calculations. Long and Brecke (2003) contrast a "signaling model" of reconciliation that is grounded in the rational choice tradition and a "forgiveness model" which more explicitly incorporates the essential roles played by emotions and cognitive processes. They conclude that the signaling model is useful in explaining the success or failure of reconciliation between warring states, but that only the forgiveness model provides an effective explanation of reconciliation after internal or civil wars.

This is not to say that concepts of collective action or transaction costs have nothing of relevance to say on this question of psychic healing and identity reconstruction. Each individual's personal engagement in transformative processes of reconciliation and forgiveness must, at some point, convey some meaningful intrinsic benefit to that individual. At this point, transactions of this type become benefits rather than costs. Ultimately, even after an extensive process of social transformation, effective political institutions must be established and sustained.

Construction of an appropriate set of institutions that reinforce the parties' newly-formed social identities is an essential step in the sustainability of any post-reconciliation political order. Parties to the conflict will continue to harbor strong animosities towards each other if religious, political, or educational institutions serve to enhance memories of past atrocities committed by the other side. As long as different segments of society see each other as potential enemies, there remains the danger that some political entrepreneur will devise a way to generate sufficient support to overcome any constitutional restraints that would otherwise prevent the destruction of the still-offending party on the other side. This is where the need for reconciliation comes in. Only if past grievances are discussed in the open, and some kind of mutual healing takes place, only then will a new sense of community have developed. In that case, it will be very, very difficult for any subsequent leader to justify the level of repression that could inspire armed rebellion. Of course, their incentive to respond favorably to the efforts of constituent groups seeking to capture a disproportionate share of government largess will never vanish. Still, without an underlying attitude of hatred, it becomes much more difficult for rebel entrepreneurs to find enough supporters to begin their rebellion. In short, religions can provide an effective counterweight to the forces of hate (Appleby 2000; Helmick and Petersen 2001; Smock 2002).

Research Agenda and Potential Policy Implications

This overview of dilemmas confronting agents of faith-based organizations from conditions of rebellion to reconciliation highlights three recurring themes. First, faith-based organizations face severe resource constraints that make it unlikely that they can instigate or resolve any significant conflict on their own. Nonetheless, religious agents have access to a unique array of resources that can prove essential at each step along the way. Depending on how they choose to deploy these resources, religious actors face a second set of concerns, namely, the danger of losing control to political activists. During times of violent conflict, moderate voices can easily be drowned out by extremists, and efforts to relieve suffering or to help the parties achieve peace or reconciliation may detract from the fundamental, underlying mission that first inspired the establishment and later propagation of that religious tradition. Finally, a third theme, only briefly touched upon here, is that any decision concerning the political strategies employed by religious actors must necessarily emerge from a political contest among advocates of alternative policies within that faith tradition. As a consequence, these strategic choices induce distributional consequences that may be resisted by other elements of that same tradition.

The political nature of this problem can be illustrated by one final consideration of the important analysis provided by Appleby (2000). After surveying the ways in which religious principles can be used to advocate violence or to work towards peace, Appleby concludes that believers in all faith traditions should act to strengthen the peace-building capacities of their own religion. He presumes that those activists who use religious arguments to support physical violence suffer from “religious illiteracy” since they must be unaware of the equally strong arguments in favor of peaceful reconciliation that can surely be found in the same sources mistakenly used to legitimate violence. By advocating a wholesale campaign of “religious education for peace-building” in all faith traditions, he hopes to ensure that religion’s potential for peace will forever outweigh any danger that it will instead increase peoples' suffering.

Inter-faith dialogue seems the ideal means to accomplish his goal, which points to an important oversight. Inter-faith dialogues typically elicit strong opposition among many religious actors, especially those whose choices are driven primarily by what they consider to be purer religious-based motives. In the final analysis, each religion is so dynamic and diverse that it is not realistic to presume that politically motivated efforts to achieve peace, no matter how desirable in terms of social welfare, can ever become hegemonic within all religious traditions. In any event, these choices must be left up to the people within each faith tradition. The outcome of such debates cannot be dictated by external observers, whether they be policy makers or institutional analysts.

This observation leads directly to a consideration of the need for an effective program of reform in the global network of national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian aid, diplomacy, development, human rights advocacy, and related activities. I use the term *international conflict policy* to encompass the consequences of choices made within this emerging if still inchoate network of interacting organizations. Although policy is usually assigned to the actions of governments or other easily identifiable organizations of public authority, policy can also be said to emerge from governance networks consisting of a broader array of public, private, and voluntary organizations.

Governance takes place whenever members of a community establish institutional rules and procedures by which the limits of acceptable behavior are determined and collective efforts undertaken in order to move that community as a whole towards more desirable outcomes. Governments establish rules within which markets in the exchange of private goods operate, as well as setting the parameters for voluntary cooperation. Yet private corporations and institutions of the broader society also shape interactions involving private, public, and other types of goods. These institutions play similarly important governance functions.

In particular, religious organizations play important roles in the governance of conflict at the local, regional, and global levels. As voluntary associations with limited resources, they rarely have the final word, but their impact can be quite significant, as I have argued throughout this paper. As such, the behavior of faith-based organizations and especially that of the agents of such organizations seems a proper subject for policy analysis. This means that the full panoply of instruments by which public officials seek to shape the incentives of private actors should be of potential relevance to the behavior of religious actors.

I conclude by admitting that this conclusion is not entirely novel. Consider the following excerpt from a classic work in political economy.

But there is no order of men, ... upon whom it is so dangerous, or rather so perfectly ruinous, to employ force and violence, as upon the respected clergy of any established church. ... But though this order of men can scarce ever be forced, **they may be managed as easily as any other**; and the security of the sovereign, as well as the public tranquility, seems to depend very much upon the means which he has of managing them; and those means seem to consist altogether in the preferment which he has to bestow upon them. (Adam Smith,

1776. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Book V, Chap. 1, Part III, Art. 3, bolding added)

As is so often the case, Adam Smith's analysis needs only to be marginally updated in order to demonstrate its continuing relevance for the issues of today. Whereas Smith limited his concern to the male clergy of a small set of acceptable candidates for official establishment drawn from the major Christian denominations, we must today think in terms of the male or female leaders of faith-based organizations emerging from an endlessly expanding array of faith traditions. Also, the policy of "preferment" Smith refers to needs to be generalized beyond a simple choice between the establishment or disestablishment of any particular church. The policy questions in play today deal with the full array of options available to public officials to impose the moral prescriptions of a dominant faith or to otherwise support organizations grounded in one or another faith tradition. With these modifications, Adam Smith's confidence that even religious leaders respond to changing incentives as set by public officials stands as a compelling point of departure for subsequent research and later elaboration of its potential policy implications.

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