

RELIGIOUS MARKETING: REFLECTIONS FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF POLITICS

Ifan D H Shepherd, Middlesex University Business School

Abstract

The idea that politics and religion occupy adjoining berths in the broadened marketing camp is critically examined. Following a brief review of contemporary religious marketing, a comparison is undertaken of religion and politics to determine whether they conform to a common marketing framework for non-business environments. The idea that marketing in faith environments is validated by the 'religious economy' theory is critically examined, significant objections to the adoption of marketing principles and methods by the religious community are explored, and some limitations of the exchange concept in a faith context are identified. Some implications are considered for both political and mainstream marketing, in terms of recent attempts to broaden the scope of marketing.

Keywords: Religious marketing, political marketing, faith, religion, politics.

"This is an age in which business and work have replaced religion and politics as central forces in contemporary life." (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003)

"I think the Internet scares a lot of these (Asia-Pacific) countries. There is too much information available about religion and politics." (Bolus, 2003)

1. INTRODUCTION

Politics offers perhaps the worst consumer experience of any so-called service, and yet the marketing of the product has an entire sub-discipline devoted to it. Faith, on the other hand, provides arguably the greatest source of meaning in the lives of countless millions of people worldwide, and yet it fails to register on the radar of almost every mainline marketing textbook published in the past couple of decades [1]. This apparent paradox provides the backdrop to this paper.

The contrast between the current status of political marketing and religious marketing as academic sub-disciplines is all the more surprising in view of the fact that marketing methods have been adopted in both arenas for the best part of a century. The seeds of modern marketing in politics can be found in the early years of the twentieth century, with the conference on marketing in US government held in 1919 (Graham, 1994), and its origins in religion can be traced to the publication in 1925 of the book *The Man Nobody Knows* by Bruce Barton. In recent decades, television shows, mass leafleting, personalised letters, computer-based telephone polling and Web-based relationship marketing have all passed effortlessly from business into politics, and many have also made their way into organised religion.

A second motivation for this paper stems from the many apparent similarities between politics and religion. The dynamic preacher who holds his congregation in thrall from the pulpit or platform appears to be carved from the same block as the skilled politician whose presentation skills bewitch the listener or viewer; preachers and politicians alike appear to address the mind with ideas and prescriptions rather than with the virtues of consumer products; the TV evangelist who exhorts seekers to give their souls to God and their money to the cause appears to be at one with the politician who implores electors to cast their votes in the polling booth and to make a donation to the party; and both politics and religion are of decreasing importance in peoples' lives in many developed nations. Religion and politics often take direct action out of the hands of adherents, whether through a powerful church hierarchy or through the machinery of party, candidate and government. This can create a distance between the adherent and the object of their desire (God, social change, etc.) which consigns them to the role of observer or bit-part player that, for an increasing number, is too unsatisfying in a world that offers many more compelling participative experiences.

A third motivation for this paper arises from the extensive and continuing interaction between politics and religion in society (Madeley, 2003). Down through the centuries, each has been a locus of power in society, and the balance of power has regularly shifted from one to the other. In the modern world, religion figures in various forms of government, from the completely secular to the fiercely theocratic. Although church and state have long gone their separate ways in most western democracies, religion and politics still exert enormous influence on one another.

In the USA, for example, there is a long history of religious involvement in political affairs, reaching back to the time of de Toqueville's famous observation in 1831: "Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions". Such involvement has often focused on attempts to redress social inequities, and especially those that appeared during periods of rapid economic growth (Williams & Demerath, 1992; Guth *et al.*, 1998). (This, for example, was the role of Christian Socialism which emerged in the nineteenth century during a period of rapid economic development in the UK and the USA.) Currently, religion informs political attitudes on everything from homosexuality, euthanasia and abortion to stem-cell research, the role of women in society and foreign intervention. As this paper was being written, Biblical principles on support for the poor were being debated by Alabama politicians in order to decide the state's tax policy (Allen-Mills, 2003). Kohut *et al.* (2000) put such developments in the context of a 'diminishing divide' between politics and religion in the USA.

For their part, politicians continue to wield considerable power over religious affairs. This is demonstrated in the UK by the role of the Prime Minister in confirming senior Church appointments, and by legislation on matters that are central to religious belief, as in the case of Sunday trading (Harris *et al.*, 1999). In view of these interconnections, it might be hypothesised that marketers should consider both politics and religion when drawing up a marketing strategy for either one. The more experienced practitioners already capitalise on this relationship; Parry (1986), for example, describes how politicians in the second half of the nineteenth century became adept at managing faith and religious issues as part of mainstream politics.

This paper attempts to redress the imbalance in the status of political and religious marketing in several ways. Primarily, it will do so by using politics and political marketing as a lens through which to better understand the application of marketing in

a religious context. Conversely, marketing applications in religion will be used to cast fresh light on political marketing. By comparing marketing in the two domains, it is hoped to identify similarities and differences between them, and draw out possible implications for mainstream marketing.

In relation to the marketing literature, this paper continues the discussion initiated by Kotler and Levy (1969) on broadening the concept of marketing, by considering two key areas of non-conventional marketing frequently mentioned in the same breath. It evaluates the attempt made by Shawchuck *et al.* (1992) and others to bring mainstream marketing into the work of churches. It also represents a contribution along the lines of Lock and Harris (1996), who compared politics with business marketing. In contrast, however, the current paper considers the relevance of marketing in religion largely by comparing it to another important non-business application area. Beginning with a review of the apparent similarities between politics and religion, the paper then proceeds to determine whether these similarities are more than skin deep, and thus whether common marketing approaches are relevant to both.

Before developing the subject, a brief explanation is needed of the terminology used in this paper. First, 'faith' is often used in preference to 'religion', because the latter is usually associated with organised religion, as represented by church organisations, buildings (i.e. meeting places), congregations, etc. [2]. The use of 'faith' broadens the scope of discussion to include the spiritual needs and inclinations of individuals and groups that may not necessarily be incorporated into explicit organisational structures. Second, 'adherent' is used to refer to an individual who holds a particular set of religious beliefs or belongs to a particular faith, sect or denomination. Third, unless otherwise stated, the word 'church' is used to refer to any meeting place where adherents meet on a regular basis for purposes of worship and other faith-related activities. Finally, 'god' is used to refer to the transcendental or divine being, entity or principle that is commonly the focus of the adherent's faith.

2. RELIGIOUS MARKETING: A BRIEF SURVEY

The adoption of marketing methods from mainstream consumer marketing by both religion and politics has gradually accelerated during the second half of the twentieth century. As O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002, p.533) report at the close of the century: "everything from religion to government services is presented and segmented as various offerings from which the public is to choose". Wring (1999) has documented the emergence of 'political marketing' as an academic focus since the 1970s, and a number of textbooks on the practice of political marketing management have appeared. In religion, the explicit use of marketing methods has become far more common in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the USA, where numerous books, courses and specialist marketing organisations are available to help churches grow their congregations through the application of mainstream marketing principles and methods (Barna, 1990; Barna & Woodard, 1992; Shawchuck *et al.*, 1992).

2.1 The marketing challenge

Although there is no conventional academic textbook on religious marketing (though the handbook by Shawchuck *et al.* 1992 comes close), evidence for the various ways in which the modern church has adopted the marketing approach can be gleaned from a variety of sources, including publications by proponents and opponents of marketing, and extensive material on the Web. As an illustrative example of religious marketing in action, consider the approach recently outlined for members of the Unitarian Universalist Church in America by its Director of Electronic

Communication (Weiner, no date). According to Weiner, a key challenge for the church is how to "merge the behavior patterns of a market economy with the best practices of church membership attraction" and "provide the key ingredients which those who are church shopping seek in today's faith communities".

In adopting marketing for religious purposes, Weiner views the church or religious practice as the brand, the congregant as the customer, and the evangelist as speaker for the brand. (Others apply the marketing analogy in different ways.) Having drawn up this set of equivalents, she then suggests the adoption of several relevant marketing practices. (These include: a 7-step Customer Decision Making Path, four principles for developing loyalty to the brand, four strategies to build on growth, and 12 characteristics of 'quality congregations'.) This approach raises several important questions. For example, why do the articles of faith of the church appear to be largely left out of this statement of the marketing approach? Why is loyalty articulated mainly in relation to the church rather than to the faith? And why is the brand assumed to be the church rather than its god?

Throughout Weiner's marketing 'challenge', emphasis is placed on the church service, the quality of the worship experience, and the external social and community activities. We should not be surprised by this because, as Rushton and Carson (1989) remind us: "a product is more than just the good or service at its core ... it is the total offering made to the customer". What is surprising, however, is the considerable emphasis made on the sub-products constituting the offering rather than on the faith at its core. Perhaps this is to do with the greater intangibility of the core product which, as Rushton and Carson (1989) again suggest, may be more difficult for customers to grasp than a more tangible set of sub-products. Against this, however, must be placed the fact that, for millennia, profound faith-related messages appear to have connected readily with some deep-seated need in humans to connect with something transcendental. Faith, it would seem, finds little difficulty in being understood. There is also the question as to what is meant by 'church shopping' in Weiner's proposals. Does it refer to the competition between churches for new adherents in the local community, or does it refer to a newly defined role of the church as retailer? If it is the former, then this raises the question as to the morality of inter-church competition. If it is the latter, it raises questions about the consumer products the church believes it is retailing. Several of these questions and issues will reappear later in this paper.

2.1 The marketing debate

During the 1990s, a fierce debate developed over the use of marketing to 'sell' religion, especially in the USA. On one side of the debate are marketing proponents such as Pearson and Hisrich (1990), Barna (1990; Barna & Woodard, 1992), Stewart (1991), Anderson (1992), Shawchuck *et al.* (1992), and Warren (1995), who argue that marketing serves well the needs of churches in attracting and retaining new congregants, and in providing for their needs. They indicate how church leaders can make use of a wide range of marketing techniques (and especially target marketing) to recruit new visitors to local churches, and how the marketing ethos provides a much-needed focus on the needs of consumers. Among the most radical advocates of the religious marketing view is George Barna, who claims that: "The church is a business. It is involved in the business of ministry." (Barna, 1988, p.26). This view resonates with the attitudes of many British political managers in the last two decades of the twentieth century who increasingly sought to bring the rigours of modern management and marketing into the political process.

Against the pro-marketers are ranged numerous opponents of religious marketing, including Wells (1993, 1994), MacArthur (1993), Webster (1992), Guinness (1993), Dawn (1995), Doran (1996), Kenneson & Street (1997), Costella (1998), and Pope (2001), who variously suggest that the use of the marketing approach is scripturally unsound and operates pragmatically rather than spiritually. They criticise, in particular, the church growth and seeker church movements (Wagner, 1976, 1984; McGavran and Wagner, 1980), claiming that they emphasise the use of marketing methods to build congregations at the expense of teaching a scripture-based gospel message. Some (e.g. Doran, 1996) also criticise specific marketing techniques, and particularly target marketing (discussed in more detail below), because its use involves defining a suitable church vision, choosing a relatively homogenous consumer segment to match this vision, and then ministering to the needs of this highly selected congregation. Doran (1996) also rejects the suggestion that the reason for the failure of many churches to recruit or retain congregations is largely attributable to a lack of (marketing) skill, rather than to more deep-seated spiritual reasons. It should be noted that this opposition is by no means a knee-jerk response by die-hard traditionalists. The anti-marketers are often equally as knowledgeable about marketing methods as those they oppose, and their discussion is often highly technical in terms of the theological arguments they advance. (See especially Doran, 1996 and Kenneson & Street, 1997.)

Between these two extremes lie those who argue that religious marketing can be effective, but that there are clear limits to its use in the faith context. Shawchuck *et al.* (1992), themselves members of the pro-marketing camp, try to define a middle ground position. They argue that "marketing is not enough for an effective ministry" (Ibid, p.379), point out that "the best marketing plan in the world cannot compensate for spiritual lethargy or confusion" (Ibid, p.380), and that as far as "spirituality, vision, discernment, the leaders' integrity [are concerned] -- marketing cannot provide these" (Ibid, p.381). They also suggest that the adoption of marketing by the church is particularly useful at certain times, such as when there is a declining market for the religious product, or as a "response to the rapidly changing, turbulent environment in which religious organizations find themselves today" (Ibid, p.21). (The church growth and seeker church movements of the 1980s and 1990s were in part an attempt to halt the contemporary decline in churchgoing in the USA.) Whether this implies that marketing is less relevant in growth conditions, or in calmer and more stable environments, is not made clear.

3. RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL MARKETING

The remainder of this paper considers similarities and differences in the use of marketing in politics and religion. No attempt is made to be comprehensive or exhaustive. There is no discussion, for example, of the marketing mix [3], relationship marketing, postmodernism, the strong organisational emphasis of religious and political marketing, or the nature of political and religious competition in a local spatial framework. Issues have been selected so as to throw light on the problems of adopting marketing in the religious domain, and to provide some additional insights into the adoption of marketing in politics and, by extension, in the business environment. Particular attention is given to issues and debates that help to inform current attempts at rethinking marketing theory and practice. The focus of much of the discussion and the source of most of the examples are the largely Christian countries that flank the north Atlantic. This bias is justified partly because marketing has tended to penetrate most fully those Western countries in which some form of Christianity is

currently the main faith system, but also because the adoption of marketing in these areas has been extensively studied and documented. It is also the culture with which the author is most familiar.

3.1 Finding a marketing niche for religion and politics

Since the 'broadening' debate began in earnest among marketers in the 1960s (Levy & Kotler, 1969), various attempts have been made to bring a range of non-marketing activities into the marketing fold. Central to this effort have been the attempts made to redefine and classify the discipline. A number of definitional strategies have been adopted to enable marketing to embrace religion and politics, two of which are discussed here: naïve marketing and exchange theory. Since marketing theorists are at pains to identify what constitutes valid -- and invalid -- marketing practice, a discussion then follows of marketing activities 'at the edge'. Finally, some reflections are offered on the classifications created by marketers to accommodate the various domains in which marketing is practised. Some marketers (e.g. Kotler, 1982) have considered religion and politics as examples of nonprofit marketing, others (e.g. Lovelock, 1996) have attempted to find a home for them in services marketing, while yet others (e.g. Fine, 1981) have sought to treat them as examples of ideas marketing. Each of these perspectives has significant limitations in relation to religion and politics; space limits the current discussion to the concept of ideas marketing.

3.1.1 Naïve marketing

Advocates of marketing in non-conventional settings frequently point out that people operating in these contexts have been practising marketing all along, but were simply unaware of the fact. Early in the twentieth century, for example, Barton (1925, p.103) suggested that "as a profession, advertising is young; as a force, it is as old as the world." This sentiment is echoed more recently by Holbrook and Hulbert (2002, p.706), who suggest that "marketing has been around for a long time -- at least since Satan waged a promotional selling campaign to persuade Eve to eat the apple in the Garden of Eden". Moore (1994) in turn has suggested that the practice of 'selling' the Christian gospel is at least as old, if not older, than the selling of political candidates. In a similar vein, Shawchuck *et al.* (1992, p.19) suggest that "in many ways, the world's great religious movements arose out of the work of founders who innately utilized the concepts and methods that have today become known as marketing". This 'no essential difference' argument is sometimes used to legitimise the adoption of modern marketing methods in both religion and politics. According to this view, all religious advocacy is implicitly marketing, and all religious communicators, from St Paul down through John Wesley and on to Billy Graham, are naïve (or not-so-naïve) marketers or, to use Mercer's (1992) term, 'coarse marketers'. Much the same can be said of politicians and other societal opinion formers.

The notion underlying such views is that it is possible to recognise an untutored version of marketing in the traditional outreach practices of both politics and religion, and that everything people have done in terms of communicating or persuading is simply marketing in disguise. Barton, for example, interpreted many of Jesus Christ's activities in business terms, arguing that in deed if not by avocation He was "the founder of modern business" (Barton, 1925, p.4). More recently, Walle (1987, 1988) has provided an interesting but flawed reinterpretation of the activities of the followers of Jesus Christ and the Gospel writers in marketing terms. Cynics might interpret this approach as a facile attempt to rewrite history, or as a rather clumsy way of extending the scope of marketing as a discipline -- perhaps an indication of what

Luck (1974, p.71) refers to as the "marketing supremacy syndrome". A more rational counter-argument, which will be developed below, is that such claims are only valid if religious outreach activities adopt the modern marketing concept, and not just the techniques of modern marketing. In the context of a study of marketing practices among Australian politicians, it is worth noting O'Cass's comment (1996, p.49) that "just because the philosophy of the marketing concept [i.e. its customer-centredness] is not understood, it does not necessarily mean such a philosophy has not been adopted."

3.1.2 Exchange is no robbery

The exchange of value between two or more people is generally assumed to be at the centre of all marketing transactions (Kotler & Levy, 1969; Bagozzi, 1974, 1975, 1978). Where goods or services are involved, one partner to the exchange typically hands over money, and the other partner hands over either something tangible (e.g. a car, a newspaper, a cup of coffee) or else something intangible (e.g. a personal service, advice, kudos).

In politics, the issue is rather more complicated because not only are there multiple 'publics' involved (Kotler & Kotler, 1999), but the key exchange between voter and candidate involves two intangibles (a vote and political representation), the value returned by the candidate is usually deferred, and intermediaries (marketers, agents, etc.) are often paid to influence the exchange process (especially the voting behaviour of the voter). The exchange is also highly asymmetrical, because thousands of people on one side exchange their votes for the value provided by the single candidate on the other side, and the latter provides their value (i.e. representation in the political machine) to all voters, including those who exchanged their value with another candidate, and even those who did not enter into the exchange at all (i.e. who did not vote). Indeed, the value supposedly exchanged by the elected candidate may not materialise at all, either because they fail to be elected, or because their voice is unheard or ignored in the elected chamber. For these reasons, it is sometimes argued that the exchange analogy is inappropriate for the political process, and that some other model, such as the conceptualisation of voting as a public good (Downs, 1957), would be more appropriate.

When faith is considered, the nature of the exchange is equally complicated, not only because of the intangible nature of the value that is exchanged, but also because exchanges of different kinds are often involved, typically between diverse partners. One form of exchange involves faith itself as the item of value in the transaction, with the dyad represented by the penitent and his or her god. Although it might be argued that faith does not readily admit to a simple 'value' interpretation in an exchange context, it can be argued that the vendor (i.e. god) gets what He wants (i.e. a new convert), and the purchaser gets what he or she needs (e.g. a more meaningful life, or a promise of a better one in the hereafter), at least in the evangelical Christian tradition. Another form of exchange involves a worshipper exchanging value (e.g. money in an offering plate) in return for the services of a temporal representative (e.g. a church leader) to intercede on their behalf with the god they worship, an exchange that has affinities with the electoral process in politics. A third form of exchange involves the services provided to worshippers by their local church, again usually in return for money or time devoted to the cause.

There are considerable problems in the use of the exchange model in a religious context. The first is that the believer may be expected to give up a life of sin and reform their ways, initiate a relationship with their god and develop a different kind of

relationship with their fellow humans. This 'giving up' process can be conceptualised in the Bagozzi exchange model (1974), which incorporates exchanges involving 'negative value' or 'injury', or in the costs and benefits model of the religious exchange process developed by Shawchuck *et al.* (1992, pp.115-119). However, rather than perform conceptual gymnastics of this sort, it may be more fruitful to consider the convert's behavioural and attitudinal change not primarily as an exchange transaction, but rather as a transformational process akin to learning.

A second problem concerns the exchange that is assumed to occur during certain activities in the religious life. Prayer, for example, is often something undertaken in private by the individual, as part of a personal relationship with their god. As with the initial commitment to faith, it is possible to interpret this in exchange terms, with the adherent exchanging devotion time in return for various forms of spiritual support and assurance from their god. But it is difficult to see how this exchange relationship can be brought within a marketing process, given that in the eyes of the secular marketer at least, only a single person is ostensibly involved.

A third difficulty concerns the public act of worship, in which a number of adherents meet to offer praise to their god in a church setting. Here, again, it is possible to view this as an exchange process, with the church providing the worship opportunity for the congregation which gives up time and money in return. However, this misconceives the nature of worship in several important ways. Rather than think of worship in terms of the exchange of value between a service provider and a consumer, it may be more insightful to think in terms of the collective creation of value by the congregants. In this alternative conceptualisation, worship is not viewed simply as a service provided by the church, but as a form of co-production (Wikström, 1996). There may also be scope for considering the application in a religious context of the co-management approach used in business (Jancic & Zabkar, 2002), though its applicability to politics may be more limited.

Another way of conceptualising the act of worship is to view it in broader social terms, as a form of exchange relation that yields social solidarity. This idea is well known in social exchange theory research. As Bearman (1997, p.1413) puts it: "All exchange systems yield solidarity as their by-product, as they embed actors in chains of mutual obligation and debt." However, he goes on to say that "different systems provide different levels of solidarity" (Ibid), and demonstrates that generalized exchange (where individuals do not exchange value directly with one another) leads to greater community cohesion, solidarity and longevity in some traditional societies. Rather than consider the exchange of value between the church and its congregation as a dyadic relationship, it may be more appropriate to consider worship and other religious activities as a case of generalised exchange, in which church-going contributes to community building and solidarity. As was discussed earlier, this process was of central importance historically in creating a vibrant and pluralist religious landscape in the USA. From a relationship marketing point of view, this perspective also has close affinities with the 'Latin' social linkage model (as described by Cova & Cova, 2002), which may be far more suitable for modelling church-based worship than the 'Northern' one-to-one consumer relationship model (as described by Peppers & Rogers, 1997).

Whether or not it is conceptually sound to treat human interactions as a form of 'exchange', there still remains the ethical question as to whether such a theoretical stance justifies the application of marketing to the interactions thus characterised. Social psychologists could just as readily claim exchange as their territory. But, of course, as Bagozzi (1975) has pointed out, it is not the intention of marketing as an

academic study to make a take-over claim for an area of human study. Rather, it is claimed that anything that smacks of an exchange is fair game for the marketing approach. Critics might argue that this is little short of cultural (not to mention social and economic) appropriation. What if, for example, marketers were to compile a catalogue of all those traditional or pre-modern societies in which anthropologists and sociologists have identified and described social exchange systems, and were then to replace the intrinsic and embedded exchange mechanisms in those societies by those developed in the more technocratic framework of Western society? Would this be perfectly acceptable? In marketing, as in love and war, is it the case that everything is fair game? What is so special about marketing that gives it the uncontested right to practice its art amongst such societies? One answer, of course, is that it has just as much 'right' as those religious organisations who send their missionaries to practice their art among these peoples, regardless of the social and cultural consequences. And it has the same right as those politicians who see it as their duty to take democracy to freedom-loving peoples throughout the world.

In extending the scope of marketing, we are automatically raising ethical issues on a par with colonialism and other forms of cultural invasion. Marketing cannot be exempted from ethical appraisal simply because it has re-labelled human interactions as exchange, which are then seen as automatically open to marketing. Where marketers might see certain forms of human interaction as a marketing opportunity, leaders in a traditional society might see relationships between members of their group as serving a social bonding and community development role. Social exchange may or may not be a universal construct, but the application of marketing to every exchange situation is neither a god-given nor a politically correct right.

3.1.3 Extreme marketing: freedom and coercion

Not everyone exercises their right to vote, and not everyone has a personal faith. In most democratic countries, and for most individuals, voting and worshipping are, like shopping, an act of free will. Marketing strategies aimed at reversing decline in both might therefore be considered to be free to act in an open market. However, this is not entirely the case, because the marketplace in which both politics and religion operate is not always of the textbook variety. As a corrective to the view that a free market operates in both the political and religious marketplace (discussed in section 3.2), it is worth considering the element of compulsion and coercion that is present in both the political and religious process in some parts of the world.

There are at least 30 countries, for example, in which voting is mandatory (Gratschew, 2001), a few (including the Iraq of Saddam Hussein) in which voting for the incumbent was de facto mandatory, as it is in regimes that run a single-party democracy. In some multi-party states, such as Nigeria and Zimbabwe, there is recent evidence of considerable pressure applied to electors to vote in a particular way. Added to this is the historically widespread use of bribery to influence votes. Clearly, any political marketing strategy adopted in such environments would have to compete with, or at least accommodate, various forms of persuasion and propaganda (O'Shaughnessy, 1999).

In religion, coercion is also evident, often through the application of fear. One manifestation is the inability of Muslims to turn their back on Islam without becoming apostates and, as a result, risking the death penalty (Light of Life, 1997). (There is an interesting marketing story to be explored here in terms of the concept of brand loyalty.) In the medieval Catholic church, the Spanish Inquisition could threaten death at the stake for heretics, in New England the Witchfinder General could order the

burning of witches, while across much of the Roman Catholic world, excommunication held out the terror of exclusion from ecclesiastical society for heretics and others who turned their back on the mother church [4]. More subtle, and perhaps more contested, is the claimed 'brainwashing' of the followers of the Reverend Moon and other cult leaders. In such cases, the 'persuasion' has in some cases led to mass suicide. Elsewhere, religious leaders have held sway over their flocks through a mixture of intimidation, fear and violence. In such circumstances, religious marketing has to operate in concert with other more persuasive methods of communication and control.

In Western democracies, such practices are now relatively rare, in both politics and religion; there are few penalties for voting abstention or backsliding from one's freely chosen faith. However, terrorism as a (negative) marketing method can still be harnessed to political and religious causes, as the events of September 11 and continuing violence in the Middle East attest. Also, as O'Shaughnessy (1999) has demonstrated in the political arena, 'pure' marketing principles and practices often shade imperceptibly into non-conventional methods of persuasion such as propaganda. Moreover, both religious and political marketing frequently have to operate within cultures where unconventional forms of persuasion are commonplace, and where 'unfair' forms of opposition from governments and other faiths are rife. This implies a limit to the transfer of generic strategies from one country to another, and suggests that marketing strategies need to be tailored to what might be called the 'persuasion mix' that exists in specific areas. Missionaries in foreign fields have been combating such problems for centuries.

This leads to the question as to whether the presence of coercion in religion and politics invalidates one of the four conditions required of exchange -- i.e. that each party to the exchange is free to accept or reject the offer (Kotler, 1982, pp.39). As Shawchuk *et al.* (1992, p.106, authors' own emphasis) suggest: "*Without value and free choice, there can be no exchange.* There may be extortion, manipulation, acquiescence, or accommodation, but not exchange". Where religion and politics involve one or more of these elements, this would appear to disqualify them from being considered as examples of marketing, *sensu stricto*.

3.1.4 Not such a good idea

Politics and religion clearly involve powerful ideas, and political and religious marketing share an apparent concern with the selling of such ideas. Indeed, religion and politics are often considered as archetypal examples of ideas marketing. However, this perspective is not well served by early proponents, such as Fine (1981), who make less than rigorous distinctions between ideas, notions, concepts, beliefs, issues and causes. Although Kotler and Armstrong (2004, p.282) suggest that: "in one sense, all marketing is the marketing of an idea", it is arguable whether politics and religion involve only -- or even mainly -- the selling of ideas. The propagation of messages containing ideas may well appear to unite political and religious marketing with mainstream marketing. However, the cognitive content of both political and religious messages is typically relatively low. Most will recognise the ideas-lite products peddled by an increasing number of politicians and religious leaders. It would appear that the lower the cognitive content in the politician's message the better their chances of connecting with the electorate, while in the faith context, the more emotionally charged the preacher's message, the more receptive -- and generous -- listeners and viewers are likely to be. If politics and religion represent canonical examples of ideas marketing, then it must be said that in many cases the ideas fail to tax (and in some

cases even to engage) the cognitive abilities of the consumer. Indeed, there is often an abysmal lack of knowledge among voters and adherents of the ideas (i.e. policies and principles) they are supposedly buying into.

This is perhaps hardly surprising, since religion is not simply a set of ideas, but "a complex mixture of beliefs, values, symbols and rituals" (Bocock, 1985, p.207). Indeed, Bocock (1985, p.208) argues that it is "important to avoid an over-cognitive definition of religion", since many participants become involved in it for personal and/or social reasons rather than because of the ideas it may represent. Because religion is a powerful symbolic system, it provides important social and psychological functions that far outweigh its cognitive role as an explanatory system (Bocock & Thompson, 1985). As for politics, Parry (1986, p.446) suggests in a similar vein that "political parties are [perhaps] united by emotional sympathy rather than by reasoned adherence to a legislative programme".

In this context, it is worth commenting on Lovelock's (1996) four categories of service marketing: 'people processing', 'possession processing', 'mental stimulus processing' and 'information processing', and his inclusion of religion in the third category. (He did not explicitly assign politics to any of these categories.) It can be argued that this represents a category error on Lovelock's part. William James, the noted sociologist of religion, would have been bemused at this attempt to lump the 'religious experience' into a category involving peoples' 'minds', particularly since no attempt is made to provide a definition of this key construct. It is not at all clear, for example, whether 'mind' refers principally to cognitive activities (if so, then religion might be more appropriately placed in Lovelock's 'information processing' category), or whether it is far broader, and involves every non-tangible element of the human experience, including the emotions. If the latter is the case, then the existence of the separate 'information processing' category must be called into question, particularly since Lovelock (1996, p.31) himself suggests that "the core content [of mental stimulus processing] is information-based". Students of cognitive psychology or educational theory would have a field day identifying the serious flaws in such an arbitrary distinction, not least because research has repeatedly shown the interwoven nature of the cognitive and the affective in human information processing and behaviour (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Fine (1981) himself gave insufficient weight to the affective and experiential dimensions of political, and especially religious, ideas.

Two further points are necessary. The first is that the 'ideas' marketed by most faiths and politicians involve not just the transfer of facts, concepts or opinions from one person to another, as in reading a book or listening to a lecture. Faith-related and political ideas are certainly aimed at mental and spiritual stimulation, but they are also meant to change attitudes and behaviour. It is here that there appears to be a difference between our two domains, in that the transformational role of ideas in religion contrasts with what often happens in politics, where the ideas marketed by candidates often reinforce prejudices and behaviour, but less frequently change them. The second point relates to the way in which Fine (1981) linked ideas marketing with innovation and change, ignoring the deeply conservative and heavily ritualised nature of much religion and politics. Indeed, both represent a continuous battle between orthodoxy and iconoclasm, between the status quo and the radical, and this is crucial to an understanding of the role of marketing in each sphere. In both politics and religion, marketing may serve confirmatory or innovative agendas (in Kuhnian terms, normal versus revolutionary practices), and this practical distinction is not necessarily best served by aligning ideas exclusively with innovation.

3.2 Religious and political economies

Various studies in political marketing start from the assumption that politics can be treated as a market, and that marketing therefore has a natural role to play in that market. Baines *et al.* (2000), for example, outline an approach to political marketing, and especially the competition for voter preferences, that considers it within the context of competition and competitive markets. They suggest (Ibid, p.2) that: "parties and candidates operate in oligopolistic markets competing to deliver government services using an exclusive right of franchise bidding process". The question that arises is whether religion can be similarly described as a market or marketplace.

A number of sociologists have argued recently that the evolution of the religious landscape in the USA (and elsewhere) can best be understood in terms of a competitive 'religious economy', in which churches compete locally for congregations (Finke & Stark, 1992). Ever since the constitutional separation of church and state in 1776 (the First Amendment forbids religious establishment), a state-sponsored voluntarist (i.e. freedom of choice) principle has operated in terms of both religious and political affiliation (Moore, 1994; Warner, 1993, 1996; Noll, 1990, 2003). Lacking state support, religion was forced to market itself, and a religious market evolved hand in hand with a commercial market following Independence. Warner (1997, p.192), for example, highlights the rapidity with which an 'open market' in religion evolved in nineteenth century America: "Anybody can set up a religion. Barriers to entry are low. Potential niches are many. Awareness of alternatives is high. Choice is possible and fully compatible with commitment."

As a result of these demand-side and supply-side mechanisms (voluntarism and marketplace respectively), the US religious landscape has become increasingly vibrant and pluralist over the past two centuries, with numerous faiths and denominations putting down strong roots in local communities, and providing a major source of purpose and meaning for various minority groups who found it difficult to achieve power or self-identity through other means. (Indeed, academics such as Lechner 1997 regard religion as the 'culture of community'.) By the end of the nineteenth century, religion in the States became an integral element of what Moore (1994) calls 'commercial culture'. Indeed, as early as 1886, one magazine reported that "so far has the Church caught the spirit of the age, so far has it become a business enterprise, that the chief test of ministerial success is now the ability to 'build up' a church" (quoted in Guinness 1993, p.52).

Two implications of this process for marketing can be briefly identified. First, if the organisation of church-based religion can be interpreted through history as the result of market competition, then marketing can lay claims to being considered an integral part of modern religious activity. If, as Moore (1994, p.7) suggests for the USA, "contemporary religion operates in the marketplace of culture under the purest rules of *laissez-faire* left extant in our 'modern' state", and has done so for at least a century and a half, then there would seem to be little argument that it should continue to do so. Some pro-marketers argue that the adoption of marketing techniques such as segmentation and targeting merely represents an acknowledgement by the church of the principle of individual rational choice that is fundamental to American commercial culture (Stark & Bainbridge, 1986). Cannon (1999) goes even further, and attempts to link religion and politics with the suggestion that "the implementation of rational church marketing principles by the church legitimates the human social endeavor that we call democratic capitalism".

However, great care needs to be exercised in drawing such conclusions from the research undertaken by sociologists and historians into American church history, because the validity of both the religious economy theory and the rational choice model have been strongly contested. Bruce (1999, 2001), for example, suggests that while they may be applicable to the special circumstances that prevailed in America since 1776, secularisation theory is still appropriate as an explanation for the persistent decline in religiosity and faith in Europe during the same period. Religion in Europe evolved comparatively slowly over the past 800 years, during which time there was an inexorable erosion of the state-sanctioned, monopolistic powers of the Roman Catholic church, a gradual separation of church and state, and the emergence of (initially Protestant) alternatives to the established church. In the absence of a deeply embedded voluntarist ethic in society, a fully developed religious economy was always unlikely to emerge on the European side of the Atlantic, and the success of marketing tactics in attracting congregations to churches was likely to be far more muted. It should be noted, however, that a similar religious market has been detected in Sweden (Hamberg & Petterson, 1994).

Unlike in the New World, where Warner (1997, p.196) suggests that "American religion flourishes in situations of choice", in Europe during the past few hundred years, religion has flourished as part of a centuries-long battle against the powers of an established church which wielded enormous political, economic and spiritual power. This means that while rational choice theory is seen by Warner (1996) and others as a relevant methodology for understanding the relationship between religious consumers and religious opportunities in America, in the Old World, by contrast, explanation and prescription need to be built on a model that recognises the considerable cultural and market constraints that attend consumer choice in a less than perfect religious marketplace. It should be noted in passing that the contribution of rational choice theory to explaining voter turnout has proved to be relatively limited (Blais, 2000; Green & Shapiro, 1994), though it has been applied successfully to tactical voting (Myatt, 2000; Fisher, 2001).

A second implication of the religious economy thesis is that the functioning of local religious markets might provide practical lessons for other areas of marketing, including politics and business. Although political parties and faiths often operate at a national level, it is at the local level that competitive marketing expertise is often required. But the transfer of an effective marketing strategy from the religious to the political domain requires that due consideration be given to the significant differences in the way that religious and political competition occurs. For example, while individual churches have been able to tailor their message to small target groups and thus 'win' in a local pluralistic marketplace, it is increasingly difficult for major national parties to do so. Modern electoral success at the national level usually requires the provision of a policy package that is attractive to a broad range of electors and electors' needs. Indeed, in the USA, despite the apparent dominance of the two-party model at the national level, at the state level the party agendas are often very different, and it is only through the building of local and often temporary alliances that parties are able to mount a concerted national campaign at election time, temporarily becoming candidate focused rather than party focused (Anon 2002). As was demonstrated earlier, there are similar signs in the faith context that the messages being marketed by modern churches are converging onto a 'middle ground' which reflects the current personal and social concerns of consumers, with the result that the distinctive denominational or faith-based voice risks being lost. In view of this

convergence, religious and political marketing may have little more to learn from each other.

As a footnote to this debate, it is worth noting a paradox in the co-evolution of religion and politics. While the USA has witnessed the efflorescence of hundreds of faiths, sects and denominations over the past two centuries, as a result of an entrepreneurial process that continues into the 21st century, only two dominant political parties seem to have emerged, which have alternated in power since the 1860s. If the 'religious economy' theory is correct, at least in the USA, then one needs to ask why the same preconditions have not led to multiple parties alongside multiple faiths and denominations -- i.e. an equally pluralist political economy. An open market certainly operates in American politics as it does in religion, and new parties spring up on a regular basis. However, unlike new religions and churches, they face considerable barriers to entry and high start-up costs because of the dominance of the existing two parties. Thus, in the same commercial culture, and from the same constitutional roots, the marketing of religion and politics in the USA appears to operate in different ways, and raises the question as to whether the absence of pluralism in US party politics invalidates the religious economy thesis, or whether it suggests that additional factors -- or even different market forces -- are at work in the political domain [5].

3.3 The marketing concept

In broad terms, the marketing concept places 'consumer needs satisfaction' centre stage (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). To the extent that democracy is primarily about meeting the needs of the electorate, then the marketing concept is consistent with its mission. Indeed, the marketing concept has gradually replaced previous concepts in political campaigns: Newman (1994) sees it replacing the party concept, the product concept and the selling concept; Lees-Marshment (2001) suggests that it succeeds the product-oriented concept, and the sales-oriented concept. Although O'Shaughnessy (1990) and others have identified potential ethical and democratic dangers that attend a marketing-led political process, there appears to be little sustained dissent over the probity of adopting the principle of consumer sovereignty in political marketing. By contrast, antipathy towards the marketing concept in religion, and particularly in the Christian faith, has been altogether more vocal.

Several objections have been lodged against the adoption of the marketing concept in religion. The principal one is doctrinal (i.e. ideological), and is summed up by Wells (1994, p.82): "The premise of all marketing is that the consumer's need is sovereign, that the customer is always right, and this is precisely what the Gospel insists cannot be the case." Not only does the adoption of an overriding concern for satisfying consumer needs shift the focus away from the relationship of the adherent with their god, but it is also at odds with the fact that most faiths demand something significant from believers, whereas a consumer-based approach looks mainly to satisfy seekers' needs. This objection to a consumer focus is not aimed at churches that consider the practical needs of their members by providing easy parking, comfortable seating, or a welcome at the church door. Rather, it concerns the way in which the entire mission of the church may be changed to meet consumers on their own terms.

This conflict of interest surfaced during the 1990s in the USA, when leaders of the 'church growth' movement, the 'seeker church' movement, and the 'mega churches' adopted the marketing concept as a key strategy for presenting their faith to unbelievers (McGavran & Wagner, 1980; Barna, 1990; Pritchard, 1996). Barna (1990,

p.51) sums up the new approach in the following way: "This is what marketing the Church is all about: providing our product (relationships) as a solution to people's felt need". According to critics, this led to the traditional preaching of the ministry of salvation to sinners, and the regular worship of god, being replaced by a concern for meeting the 'felt needs' of 'seekers' in a new form of church service that stripped away many conventional faith-related activities. Table 1 (derived from Pope 2001 and other sources) summarises the distinction that critics saw between the 'traditional' and 'modern' value propositions of US churches in the evangelical Protestant tradition, as a result of this change [6].

If the religious marketing critics are to be believed, what is happening in the USA amounts to a rebranding of the entire church experience, with a switch from the old-fashioned hell-fire and brimstone, Bible thumping of the past to a thoroughly modern form of 'Entertainment Evangelism' (Sullivan, 1991; Pope, 2001). Critics identify a major cultural transition at work, and the adoption of the marketing concept is seen as a major driver of this change. Although this rebranding does not affect all US churches, but mainly those in the more progressive evangelical tradition, it informs contemporary thinking on the age-old problem of how the church should engage with the world around it. Political analysts will recognise a similar conflict in their own domain, where ideology-driven policies are seen by many as representing an outmoded product-orientation in political marketing, and the fulfilling of electors' needs a more relevant consumer-oriented approach.

Traditional	Modern
Mixed congregation	Homogenous congregation
Stringent membership requirements	Minimal membership requirements
God focus	Church and consumer focus
Salvation	Felt needs
Sin, hell, judgement, guilt	Good news, upbeat message
Sinner	Seeker
Challenge	Affirmation, user-friendliness
Spiritual identity	Self identity
Relationship to God	Relationship to others
Benefits in the afterlife	Benefits in the current life
Worship, ministry	Entertainment, performance
Spiritual messages	Practical messages
Cross, religious icons, pulpit	No cross, no icons, stage
Pastor	Worship planner
Unfocused service	Carefully targeted service
Slow-paced, formal service	Fast-paced, informal concert
Hymns, organ, choir	Pop songs, band
Tradition	Newness, 'with it'
Seminary-trained pastor	Business-trained pastor
Information from seminary	Advice from Disney
Emphasis on the Scriptures	Emphasis on personal advice
Questioning the real world	Embracing the real world
Strategy from Bible and prayer	Strategy from surveys and focus groups

Table 1. Traditional and modern value propositions of US churches

The main issue at stake is not whether individual marketing methods are admissible or not. What is being resisted is an apparent drive by pro-marketers to recruit consumers rather than converts, to focus on marketing rather than ministry, and to grow churches rather than to spread the gospel. Critics are antagonised by the marketing of a Christian 'lifestyle' message to potential adherents, as advocated by Aldrich (1981) and others. As Doran (1996, p.83) puts it: "The marketing movement's fundamental flaw [is] adopting a mode of ministry that makes man, rather than God, the center of the church's mission". It is the adaptation of the Christian message to make it consumer centred, reflecting a prioritisation of the principle of consumer sovereignty advocated by the marketing concept, that most concerns the anti-marketers. Wells (1994, p.101) puts it bluntly: "When the consumer is sovereign, the product (in this case God himself) must be subservient".

Some religious marketers take a more measured view. Shawchuck *et al.* (1992, p.314), for example, argue that church leaders "should see what they do as 'value adding'", implying that satisfying church members is secondary to their spiritual mission. But this rider is frequently missing from the manifestos of ardent pro-marketers, or else appears to be added as a sop to the critics. There is also antipathy to the cultural relativism of those who advocate the use of 'worldly' methods such as popular music as a means of reaching potential consumers (Doran 1996). Equally criticised is the use of a bottom-line (e.g. bums-on-seats) metric to judge marketing success. From a marketing theory viewpoint, it is difficult to see a way out of this impasse without rethinking the marketing concept and its current focus on consumer satisfaction. One solution for marketing theorists might be for churches to adopt marketing methods without adopting the marketing concept, and for them to forego the privilege of being able to display the marketers' seal of approval. Wrenn (1993, p.245.) suggests that although the marketing concept might be relevant to the mission of individual churches, "the marketing concept in its purest form may not apply to religion". It is a moot point, however, whether marketing methods such as segmentation, targeting and positioning can be used without also implicitly altering the religious or political message. (See section 3.4 below.)

A second objection to the adoption of the consumer concept in religious marketing holds that because the consumer-centred approach responds to 'felt needs', many of which are generated by peoples' membership of the consumer society, the church ends up reflecting the values of that society. It is therefore unable to stand outside society and provide either a critique of it, or an alternative to it. In other words, "the market-driven church is first and foremost the status quo church" (Kenneson & Street, 1997, p.22). For those who turn to a particular faith as a refuge from, or as an antidote to, the society in which they live, being confronted by a market-driven church might well lead them to question the ability of that faith to provide the 'alternative' view they were looking for. There is a clear parallel here with what appears to be happening in mainstream politics, where major parties are gradually converging in terms of their value propositions (e.g. by 'capturing the centre'), and each attempts to align itself -- at least at the hustings -- with the majority of voters' felt needs (Lees-Marshment 2001).

3.4 Marketing methods

Segmentation and targeting have been used for many years at a local level in political campaigns (Yorke & Meehan, 1986; DeRabbie, 1996; Baines, 1999; McGough, 2002). Although segmentation in consumer marketing is typically used to identify and target the most likely prospects, it is often used in political marketing to exclude those

individuals from the candidate 'selling' process who are deemed to be unlikely to change their minds. Where geodemographic classifications are used, entire areas that are considered to be 'safe' may be excluded from campaigning. There appear to be few principles inherent to the democratic political process that militate against the use of these methods, though some commentators (e.g. DeRabbie, 1996; Smith & Hirst, 2001) note the value-laden implications of their use.

Consumer segmentation and targeting are also increasingly used for religious marketing, especially in the USA, both to create congregations for new churches, and to add to existing congregations (e.g. Sweeney & Anderson 1981). Shawchuck *et al.* (1992) provide detailed guidance on how these methods can be used in the church context. The main champion of this approach is Barna (1990): "there are hot prospects and not-so-hot prospects ... we should gear our efforts toward the greatest productivity. ... Some people are ready for conversion, others are not." (These views will strike a chord with election managers who increasingly target a relatively small number of marginal constituencies at election time.) Pro-marketers support the use of these methods with a number of arguments: about resources (the church does not have the wherewithal to reach or service everyone, so "it makes sense that the congregation should target 1 (or 2) groups that, by focusing its resources, it might serve with excellence" Shawchuck *et al.*, 1992, p.105); about service delivery (it is difficult for a church to meet the needs of a diverse group); and about consumer needs (not all consumers are ready for conversion). A measure of the appeal of these methods is provided by a recent survey (Sargeant, 2002), which reveals that 86% of seeker church pastors in the USA believe that the church must target its outreach efforts rather than attempt to appeal to a broad range of consumers.

Segmentation and targeting have, of course, been used for centuries by missionaries, preachers and evangelists, in deciding 'where the need is'. Many evangelists specialise in a particular demographic segment, and there is a long history of selling the Christian gospel to the youth segment in the UK (Cliff, 1986; Smith, 1988; Ward, 1996). In the religious context, segmentation and targeting have typically been undertaken in an informal and non-technical manner. Missionaries often spent months, sometimes years, before committing themselves to a particular (usually geographically defined) segment. For them, this time was spent not with census or other data, but in prayer, seeking to determine the 'hand of God'. Secular observers of this decision making process might decry its apparent amateurism or mysticism, but as with much decision making in religious contexts, it conforms to a way of doing things that is deeply rooted in the core belief of the faith, which is that 'God's will be done'.

Anti-marketers reject the use of the technological version of consumer targeting in religion on several grounds. First, consumer segmentation and target marketing are seen to serve a highly selective church mission. Churches have traditionally practised a form of segregation based on faith, creed or denomination, as witnessed by the proliferation of church labels: from the Methodists to the Anabaptists, the Disciples of Christ to the Presbyterians, and the Pentecostals to the Latter Day Saints. In the case of target marketing, however, segregation is deemed to be unacceptable because it is not based on people's allegiance to a particular faith, but on their personal, social or geographical characteristics. Moreover, this segmentation appears in many cases to favour a particular population group, typically white-collar professionals in their thirties who are unchurched -- what the Saddleback Church in the USA refers to in typical geodemographic fashion as 'Saddleback Sam' and 'Saddleback Samantha'. (In the UK political scene, this finds an equivalent in the Conservative Party's 'Mondeo

man' in the 1980s [8].) For those who believe in the Bible's mission to reach the poor and the needy, a preoccupation with the baby-boomer generation represents unacceptable selectivity. Shawchuck *et al.* (1992) counter this criticism by claiming that although some churches use targeting to design a ministry for a particular group, other members of the congregation may also attend these special services. It should also be noted that some advocates (e.g. Engel, 1974) recommend the use of market segmentation not for selecting those who will receive the Christian message, but as a way of more effectively matching Christian communications to people of different 'spiritual status'.

Critics claim that target marketing operates an exclusionary principle; for every individual targeted, others are ignored. Thus, for example, when geodemographics is used in mainstream marketing to prioritise areas which contain individuals with the highest propensity to purchase, it at the same time draws red lines around those areas containing individuals and families considered to be poor sales leads. In political marketing, most parties restrict their canvassing efforts to a relatively small number of marginal constituencies. In faith marketing, however, such exclusion is often seen as unacceptable. Thus, for example, where the definition of a particular population segment is aimed at matching a local congregation-building ambition, it is suggested that the targeting strategy may bear little resemblance to local religious need, or to people's access to faith information in a particular area. Target marketing is thus unacceptable to those who believe that all sinners are equally worthy of salvation, and that it is wrong to single out some as being more worthy recipients of God's message than others. Sweazey (1978, pp.88-89) argues, for example, that "Every sort of exclusion is sin. ... Churches which see their ministry as restricted to some social class divide the body of Christ." In any case, claim the critics, it is only God, not the church, that knows who is ready to respond to the Christian message, and this cannot be revealed by data-based segmentation exercises.

An interesting postscript to this discussion is provided by Kendal (1999), who highlights the problems involved in defining religious consumer segments such as the 'unreached', the 'seekers', or the 'least evangelised'. It is on the basis of such segments that decisions have traditionally been made by missions and missionaries in deciding where to take the Christian gospel. Despite their use of informal segmentation and targeting approaches over many decades, world missions have been singularly unsuccessful in meeting perceived needs at the global level. Evidence for this is provided by Barrett and Johnson (1990) who assigned countries to three broad categories in terms of their level of Christian belief and degree of evangelisation. Their analysis revealed a surprising inverse relationship with the proportion of the world's foreign missionary force that work in these countries. In other words, the effects of informal missionary targeting appears to be the reverse of what might be expected from the application of a rational targeting methodology. Some will doubtless see this as a vindication of the role of (proper) marketing methods in the faith domain, and further evidence against the naïve marketing approach.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored various aspects of political and religious marketing, and has attempted to shed light on each by using the other as an exploratory device. The extent to which both politics and religion may be considered as marketplaces has been reviewed, and the theory of a religious economy has been critically examined. Several key marketing ideas have been explored, including the marketing concept, marketing methods, and the exchange concept, and their applicability to politics and religion

have been evaluated. An attempt has been made to determine whether the broadened concept of marketing can accommodate marketing as practised in these domains, particularly in view of the fact that both politics and religion exhibit features that sit uncomfortably within a generic marketing framework.

Despite the similarities and the interactions between politics and religion, it would be a mistake for marketers to view them as cut from the same cloth. Religion and politics are significantly different. "Even modern political ideologies", argue Bocoock and Thompson (1986, p.7), "have not achieved the hold over both the collective and personal lives of people in the ways in which traditional religions ... have achieved in the past and the present." It would be equally dangerous to treat all political systems and religious faiths as relatively homogeneous categories. Neither religion nor politics fit easily into the cosy schemes offered by marketing analysts, to the extent that serious doubt must be voiced over the utility of much of the classificatory activity that has taken place over the past three decades in the discipline. Even a cursory reading of studies by Wilson (1985), Casanova (1994), Eccleshall *et al.* (2003), Heywood (2003) and others reveals the immense diversity of religious, political and other ideological systems that are not readily accommodated within the 'service', 'ideas' or 'nonprofit' marketing frameworks.

One significant difference between politics and religion concerns the degree of acceptance of what Wensley (1990) calls the 'marketing analogy' in these two domains. Whereas electoral politics has more or less acquiesced to the marketing machine, albeit with qualms being expressed in some quarters as to its unintended consequences, in the religious domain there has been sustained criticism of the adoption of both the marketing concept and marketing methods. There is concern over the impact that the adoption of marketing might have on the nature of both the political process and the religious activities it is being used to expedite. Critics argue that the adoption of marketing principles and methods is changing the nature of these activities, and subverting their essential aims. Something of the flavour of this problem is suggested by O'Shaughnessy's (1990) study of the role of marketing in the US political arena: "Politics does not merely use the technologies of marketing. Office is fought for in a market-place as a marketing exercise" (Ibid, p.254). In the US, at least, it is possible to see "political culture transformed by the wholesale adoption of the marketing incubus" (Ibid, p.256). In a similar vein, Sabato (1981) has raised significant doubts as to the impact of political consultants on American democracy.

The altogether more sustained internal opposition to religious marketing is not based on simple anti-change arguments, but on major doctrinal principles to do with the core meaning of faith, and the relationship of the church to the society in which it operates. It is interesting to note how the principles embedded in a 2000-year old belief system, and expressed in its holy scriptures, are being used to decide on the adoption of a modern approach to communicating that belief. (In a similar vein, Ehrman (1987) has considered the acceptability of modern advertising practices in relation to the Talmud.) The considerable religious opposition to the adoption of the principle of consumer sovereignty appears to conflict with Trustrum's (1989) argument that the use of marketing methods without adopting the core marketing concept (i.e. customer-centredness) does not constitute true marketing. It may therefore be appropriate for some faiths simply to adopt the more useful marketing methods, leaving the marketing concept for those organisations whose role is truly to focus on customers' needs and ensure customer satisfaction. Whether politics fits into this latter category is still subject to debate.

Our discussion suggests that a common marketing model may not be entirely appropriate for political and religious marketing, and that the adoption of a generic business marketing model to include these two forms of non-conventional marketing may be misconceived. The problem lies not so much in how to broaden marketing or the exchange concept; these have proved to be almost infinitely elastic. The point at issue concerns what may be lost by over-stretching generic concepts to the point of meaninglessness, and the opportunity costs of treating diverse faith-related or political activities in terms of a single conceptual model when alternative conceptual perspectives might provide additional or better opportunities for explanation and action. In any event, a second round of broadening of the marketing concept appears long overdue. The application of and discussion of marketing in both the political and religious spheres has been too narrowly focused, in the one case being almost entirely restricted to the voting process, and in the other case highly focused on church-related activities. A truly broadened concept of marketing would embrace far more than these organisation-related aspects, and would look at the ways in which individuals engage privately and collectively to pursue their faith and political interests. It would also take in a much broader purview by including non-Western and non-democratic contexts. In attempting these forms of broadening, it might be possible to begin to tease out some of the more nuanced and adaptive ways in which marketing as a discipline can be of relevance in the still highly differentiated modern world.

In conclusion, it must be noted that it is virtually impossible to maintain a precise separation between politics and religion, or between either of these and the broad social and economic matrix in which they are embedded. Economy, religion, politics and society are all little more than convenient labels for analysts and practitioners alike. All economic behaviour is embedded in social relationships (and vice versa); political and religious principles and values have long been inter-twined; and irrational belief systems have probably been at the heart of social relationships since the birth of humankind [7]. Despite these problems, most marketers still believe that the marketing principles and practices used in one domain should be transferable to other domains. It has been demonstrated in this paper that this expectation needs to be tempered somewhat, not only because of the significant differences between the practice of religion and politics, but also because of important historical and cultural differences between nations and societies. This means that it may not be entirely possible to adopt the same generic approach to marketing in religion and politics as has been developed in mainstream business environments.

The challenge for a broadened marketing, then, remains much the same as it has been for some time: to determine the limits to the applicability of a generic model of marketing in non-business domains; to identify the scope for applying marketing practices developed in one domain to other domains; to learn how to adapt concepts and practices to meet exceptional conditions; and to identify theoretical and practical approaches that offer additional insights and expertise within specific domains. Only when these challenges have been met can it be truly claimed that the broadening project for marketing, which began some three decades ago, has been finally completed -- or has been replaced by something better.

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NOTES

1. Cutler (1991) reviews the dearth of journal papers on religious marketing before the 1990s. As for textbook coverage, the keywords 'church', 'faith', 'religion' and 'spiritual' are entirely absent from the indexes of the following standard marketing texts: Adcock *et al.* (1998); Baker (1996); Baker (1999); Brassington & Pettitt (2003); Cannon (1998); Dibb *et al.* (1997); Etzel *et al.* (1997); Evans & Berman (1994); Jobber (2001); Kotler *et al.* (2002); Kotler and Armstrong (2004); Lancaster & Massingham (1999); and Lusch & Lusch (1987). Among the rare exceptions are Schewe and Smith (1983) and Mercer (1992), both of which briefly discuss religion as part of consumer culture. (Mercer also uses the religious metaphor in a discussion of 'conviction marketing'.) Given the recent elevation of 'political marketing' to the status of a sub-discipline, it is equally curious that none of these texts discuss the use of marketing in politics. (Kotler & Armstrong 2004 come closest with a sentence on segmenting nations using political variables. Most of the others make do with a discussion of the 'political environment' of marketing.) The omission from Kotler's textbooks is doubly curious, given his seminal *Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations* (1982) and his subsequent contribution to *Marketing for Congregations* (1992). Foxall (1989, p.19) suggests that, given the inherent weakness of the extended concept of marketing, "perhaps it is no accident that standard marketing texts, though they open with definitions of marketing which portray it as a universally-pervasive activity, concentrate nevertheless upon the traditional sphere of business marketing." Little seems to have changed since he penned these words.
2. William James, author of the seminal *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, published in 1902, was similarly exercised by the word 'religion'. He eventually adopted it on largely pragmatic grounds (preferring it to alternatives such as 'divine'), but used it primarily to refer to the private faith experience.
3. Culliton (1959) provides probably the earliest application of the marketing mix to religious marketing.
4. Note also Thomas Aquinas' (in)famous declaration: "As for heretics, their sin deserves banishment, not only from the Church, by excommunication, but also from this world by death. To corrupt the faith, whereby the soul lives, is much graver than to counterfeit money." (Quoted in Ward, 2000, p.108.)
5. A complete analysis of this fascinating issue, and its marketing implications, lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth noting that the emergence of two-party politics in the USA over the past century and a half is a result of three additional factors operating in the political marketplace that are largely absent from the religious marketplace: the majority voting system, the appointment of people to public office, and the ability of the major parties to rapidly absorb fresh policies generated by minority parties (Voigts, 1979; Wasser, 1997). The well-known contrast between the perceived coherence of the two parties on the national stage, and the considerable actual variation between them at the state level, also need to be taken into account.
6. To the extent that a value proposition is a set of benefits promised to consumers to satisfy their needs, the phrase properly describes only the modern church approach. This contrast is discussed elsewhere in this paper.
7. An indication of these relationships can be gleaned from Klein (1982), Casanova (1984) and Ward (2000).

8. I am grateful to the Editor for this reminder.

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