

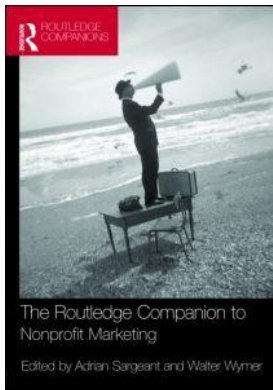
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## **The Routledge Companion to Nonprofit Marketing**

Adrian Sargeant, Walter Wymer

### **Marketing and religion**

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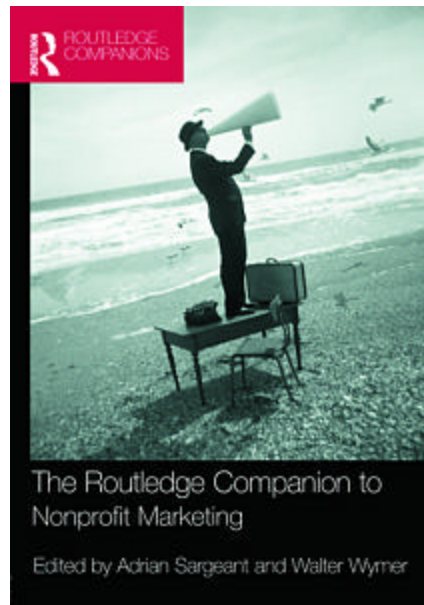
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## 6

# Marketing and religion

*Sandra Mottner*

### Introduction

Marketing as a recognized practice and subject of study is a veritable infant when compared with the practice and study of religion. Since prehistoric times, humankind has been attempting to explain the world around it through religious beliefs and practices. Even with the advent of 'organized religion', the notion of marketing being used on behalf of a religion is a very modern concept (Moore 1994). Although many religious groups have been practising marketing, they have been calling the practices 'tithing' rather than fundraising, or 'evangelism' as opposed to recruitment. In fact, the very idea of marketing and religion used in the same phrase is considered sacrilegious to many individuals (Cutler 1991; Moncreif *et al.* 1986). However, leaving these judgements aside, there is ample evidence of marketing tactics and tools being strategically used to further the goals and objectives of religious organizations (Fielding 2006). In a world where many churches have experienced declining attendance, such as in the UK and the USA, the use of marketing tactics to reverse that trend is timely. In fact, as many US churches experience declining attendance, others have increasingly adopted marketing tactics and reversed the visitation trend (Wellner 2001). This chapter examines the use of marketing to further the goals and objectives of religious organizations in a nonprofit marketing framework and brings together the major literature extant in the field and identifies specific research needs. First, however, it is important to review the world of religion and put the concept of marketing activities of religious organizations into context.

Religious beliefs vary widely, but most often are used to explain things that people cannot understand or give an individual or group of people something in which to trust other than themselves (Harrison 2006). Religions also serve to define rules for behaviour (Harrison 2006). While some people have the freedom to choose their own beliefs and practices, other groups of people have no choice. Obviously, when a group of people have freedom of choice about their religious beliefs and/or practices there is an increased ability for marketing to play a role. One of the founding principles of the USA was the strong belief in freedom of religious choice. Consequently, the USA has a greater degree of religious freedom than many countries, and therefore many of the examples used in this chapter are US based. Interestingly, the largest segment of funds raised for US nonprofits is for religious organizations (Giving USA

Foundation 2006). Even though the USA has freedom of choice with respect to religion, it does have a strong Christian tradition in which all types of Christian religions and denominations are represented. Consequently, most examples in this chapter will also be based on the Christian religion and when an organized religious body is mentioned in this chapter the word used is often 'church', when in fact a mosque, synagogue or other religious organization could be substituted in many cases.

This chapter is primarily concerned with marketing being used to influence people to change their behaviour with respect to religion in some way. The behaviours that are being changed include: (a) joining an organized religious group, either from another religion (conversion) or from having no religion; (b) maintaining or increasing 'loyalty' to a certain type of religion; (c) increasing the level of 'religiosity' and conformity to a specific religion's norms; (d) increasing one's depth of belief or faith in a religion; and (e) financial support of religious organizations. These behavioural changes are both public and social as groups of people change their behaviour. However, the changes take place on an individual basis as well. Marketing tactics being used to change a public behaviour fit the description of social marketing. However, the behavioural change has at its core a fundamental change in an individual's beliefs. Consequently, the marketing of religion will tread on some very personal space and is a matter that needs to be dealt with in a highly sensitive and ethical manner.

Besides fitting the social marketing construct (Abreu 2006), marketing practices of religious organizations also fit with the idea that marketing can be used in the nonprofit arena and for social causes and not just for products and services (Kotler and Levy 1969). Religious organizations, churches and synagogues and their hierarchies are classified as nonprofit organizations in the USA as are most religious organizations worldwide. However, while the goals and objectives of individual religious organizations vary by religion the hallmarks of nonprofits, scarcity of resources, use of volunteers, multiple stakeholders and a perceived mission to do 'good works' (Sargeant 1999) fit churches well.

The nature of marketing and religion in the USA has changed with time. For example, the last few decades have seen the growth of a number of mega-churches in the USA. Some of these churches use tactics such as Internet marketing, television campaigns and sophisticated micro-targeted efforts. Some churches, such as the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) have grown their number of believers through missionary efforts worldwide. These personal selling campaigns rely on personal testimony, 'sales' training, skilled openings and closing and other personal selling devices. Word-of-mouth campaigns also function effectively and represent organized marketing efforts in many cases. As can be seen, all of these examples can be examined in marketing terms. This chapter discusses how marketing can be related to furthering the goals and objectives of religious organizations. The topics covered in this chapter include:

- | religion and the market orientation paradigm – a discussion of the orientation models of religious organizations and the implications for marketing;
- | religion's customers and consumers – identification of the publics involved in marketing of belief systems;
- | strategy – strategic planning in religious marketing;
- | brand – how branding strategies are used by religious organizations;
- | money – fundraising and revenue generation; the service – how the services marketing framework fits the marketing of religion and
- | helps to define the marketing tools;

- | performance measurement – using marketing metrics; and
- | a research agenda – a brief recap of many of the things that we need to know.

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Overall, this chapter is reviewing much of the existing literature. Further, the chapter discusses the application of marketing theories and practices to the aforementioned topics. Faith-based parachurch organizations such as the Salvation Army will only be nominally discussed. Parachurch organizations are faith-based organizations whose primary mission is to provide social services, raise consciousness and mobilize political action (Sargeant 2005). Finally, the chapter concludes with a research agenda for scholars, religious leaders and religious and marketing practitioners.

The chapter will not be discussing the major role that religious beliefs or affiliation or the strength of those beliefs (religiosity) play in consumer behaviour and markets (Mittelstaedt 2002). Additionally, this chapter does not seek to explore the use of religion, religious metaphors and religious symbols in for-profit marketing communications. Nor do the discussions seek to promote or in any way denigrate any religious beliefs or practices. It is hoped that this very interesting and fundamentally important area of research and discourse will not remain as underresearched and underdiscussed as it has in the past (Cutler 1991) and this chapter will provide some 'food for thought' and inspiration towards further reading, writing and research.

### **Religion and the market orientation paradigm**

The paradigm in marketing today is the construct of marketing orientation, the concept that organizations are most successful when they are customer driven. However, as posited by Sargeant *et al.* (2002) this is not necessarily a good model for explaining marketing in the context of the nonprofit organization. They (Sargeant *et al.* 2002) offer a model of societal orientation in which mission, values and beliefs are antecedents of a societal orientation which produces societal benefits. Social orientation includes a focus on stakeholders, competition, collaboration, interfunctional coordination and responsiveness. This model fits religion fairly well.

Religious organizations are mission driven by definition. Their mission is determined by their beliefs. However, in order to reach the goals and objectives of a religion and thereby achieve their overall mission, they will assume different perspectives or orientations. Wymer *et al.* (2006) define four different orientations in which a nonprofit (or social) organization rationalizes what is important. Wymer *et al.* (2006) name these respectively as: (a) cause orientation; (b) offer orientation; (c) fundraising orientation; and (d) needs-centred orientation. Obviously, nonprofit organizations fit into one or more of these orientations. However, organizations that are needs centred are most likely to develop and implement successful mission-based marketing strategies. Hence, the work of Wymer *et al.* (2006) in developing indicators for the differing orientations has provided a method of evaluating the orientation of a nonprofit.

As noted in Table 6.1, the indicators developed by Wymer *et al.* (2006) have been reformulated for churches. While it is likely that churches that are primarily needs centred will be most successful in meeting their goals and objectives, all religious organizations would likely deem that their mission and beliefs must be central and paramount to all plans. When the public perceives that a church organization is moving away from its central mission, then public trust and perceptions will fall. For example, churches which are perceived as being primarily focused on fundraising might enjoy a short-term financial success, but have limited long-term success in achieving their mission and could even have their downfall celebrated by many, thus damaging the religion itself. A good example of this is the case of the televangelist Jim Bakker and his PTL





Table 6.1 Nonprofit orientations adapted for churches (based on Wymer *et al.* 2006:64)

<i>Churches with a:</i>				
	<i>Cause orientation</i>	<i>Offer orientation</i>	<i>Fundraising orientation</i>	<i>Needs-centred orientation</i>
Have an organizational focus on,	the mission and beliefs of the church	the church offerings* (salvation, programmes, services, rituals, etc.)	raising funds	needs of the population
Hire employees or seek volunteers to do marketing who,	believe in the religion and its mission	are knowledgeable about what the church offers*	are knowledgeable about fundraising and financial management	have marketing knowledge
Believe that competition comes,	from other churches or lack of deep belief	only from similar churches such as denominations who have similar offerings*	from any other church or religiously based organization	from other religions, churches, charities and a large number of other choices
Answer questions by,	looking to church teachings and beliefs	looking to what the church or religion offers*	looking at past fundraising efforts or the fundraising efforts of other churches	relying on research
Believe that when it comes to market segmentation,	their religion is for everyone and no market segmentation is needed	that their religion should recognize the correctness of their religious practices and therefore no segmentation is needed	everyone is a target for fundraising and little segmentation if any is needed	their beliefs are for everyone but targeting segments is important
Believe that when it comes to market strategies,	their religion is the 'true way' so people will be naturally drawn to it	the focus should be on what the church offers but not on the other parts of the marketing mix	the focus should be on persuading anyone who may be a target for fundraising through promotion	a well-planned marketing strategy using all parts of the marketing mix for a variety of

Believe that when marketing strategies fail,	the un-churched or believers in other religions or members of other churches just don't care, are influenced by Satan (or other dark forces!), are too lazy or have some other defect that does not allow them to see the truth	the people don't fully understand the meaning and importance of the offerings*	fundraisers aren't doing their jobs well	marketing segments is important the marketing strategy is flawed and needs to be researched and redeveloped
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\*Offering(s) in this context is used to describe such things as programmes, services and activities.

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Club (Praise the Lord Club), which built a tremendous financial base and then had the ministry disintegrate with a sex scandal, bankruptcy, mail and wire fraud convictions, and income tax issues (Knight Ridder Tribune News Service 2002).

An example of being needs centred and mission driven is the case of unchurched parents who perceive a need for moral reinforcement and learning outside of the home for their children. A needs-centred church organization will recognize this unmet need in its community and develop offerings such as Sunday school classes, pre-schools, day care and promote these offerings to parents. Churches learn of the need through feedback from church members, market research or other means and realize that it applies to one primary segment of the population (the parents) and a secondary or derived market (the children). The result of this effort is that parents' need for moral training for their children is met. The mission-driven church, however, also has the opportunity to work with both the children and the parents to change possibly their beliefs and bring them into the church community. The more thorough the church is in determining the size, scope and attributes of the need, the more effective they can be at meeting the need.

### **Religion's customers and consumers**

One of the hallmarks of a nonprofit organization is that there are numerous and varied stakeholders (Sargeant 1999) and often multiple customers and/or consumers. This is very true in the case of religious organizations. An excellent tool for defining the various stakeholders is the model used by Wymer *et al.* (2006) which identifies four major groups: (a) input publics; (b) internal publics; (c) partner or intermediary publics; and (d) consuming publics. Understanding and identifying the various stakeholders helps to understand better the multiple marketing strategies that could be employed by religious organizations.

#### ***Input publics***

Input publics are the people or organizations who provide resources and constraints to a nonprofit organization (Wymer *et al.* 2006). It could easily be argued that among all organizations, religious organizations have a most unique input public and that is a higher power, God, a supreme being, prophet(s) or a divine being. As in the Judaic Christian tradition, God has set forth laws and prophecies that have been received by prophets, apostles and others and have become written documents (Torah and Bible) that provide a guide for the beliefs of the religious organization as well as a source of regulation and constraint. The supreme power (or powers) also serves as a strong internal public as well, directing the believer/leaders of the religious organizations' actions. This unique role of a supreme being, a God or some type of higher power is unique among organizations and reinforces that the beliefs of the religion and the overriding mission perspective of religious organizations must be honoured in all actions.

The cross-public role also applies to donors of the religious organization who most often are the members of the religious organization and who carry out the mission of the organization as well. The donor-members not only donate their money, but their time and abilities and talents. Ecumenical efforts between Christian denominations also represent an input public type of role being exercised. Local, state and national governments can regulate the behaviour of religious organizations, particularly through tax regulations which constrain behaviour and also supply tax relief to churches thereby also modelling input public behaviour.



### ***Internal publics***

The internal publics (the staff and volunteers who carry out the organization's mission) of religious organizations vary depending upon the size and complexity of the church organization. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, has a long tradition of management of its church organization starting with the Pope and descending through cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and so on. Volunteer parishioners often supply additional public support to gain converts, minister to the needy, and perform outreach and other good works to their communities. Any person working directly for the religious organization either paid or volunteer is an internal public.

### ***Partner or intermediary publics***

Partner publics include marketing agencies, consultants and other professionals who are hired or volunteer their firm's services in order to help the organization to realize its objectives. There are also examples of partner publics in outreach parachurch organizations such as St Vincent DePaul, for example. There are also limited examples of for-profit and religious cooperation in a form of cause-related marketing.

### ***Consuming publics***

The consuming public is the population of believers and populations that the believers serve. The believer, the consuming public, is analogous to a customer and a consumer in the for-profit world. Understanding the nature of the greater body of consuming publics, both believers and non-believers, is key to the ability of an organization to implement a marketing strategy.

'Consumer behaviour' with respect to choosing a church or religious belief system, behaviour within the religion and other aspects of the consuming public sector is a relatively understudied area from the marketing perspective in particular. While the study of religious beliefs, religiosity and related topics has been examined in terms of consumer behaviour outside of the religion and church organization, much needs to be addressed within religions itself. While some scholarly work has been done in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and the *Journal of Religion and Society*, much is needed from a marketing perspective. One phenomenon which is of particular interest to marketing strategists is the 'church shopping' phenomenon, which is particularly of note in the last two centuries as Protestants shopped between denominations.

This also underscores the need for market research on the part of religious organizations. An interesting example of how this has been used effectively is in the mega-church phenomenon in the USA. Two mega-churches have keyed into the need on the part of many individuals and families for a feeling of community and belongingness (Fielding 2006). Both the message of the churches' advertising and the services provided for families and individuals give those who join these congregations a feeling of 'home' in the sense of a community of like-valued people.

## **Strategy**

Among other things, a marketing strategy defines target market(s), the competitive advantage, competitive positioning and the marketing-mix tools. The strategic marketing process also includes decisions about branding and fundraising. A discussion follows of target markets,



competitive strategies, branding and fundraising with respect to religious organizations followed by a discussion of the tools in the marketing mix discussed in a services marketing context.

### ***Target markets***

In beginning the planning process of a marketing strategy, the religious organization identifies all the 'publics' mentioned earlier, assesses the current external and internal situation and then keeping its mission foremost the target market is developed. These target markets could include market segments that are already being served, segments that are underserved, or segments that are not being served at all. In the USA today there is a sizeable group of 'unchurched' (Wellner 2001), a clear target market that forms part of an underserved population. Segmentation implies a thorough knowledge and understanding of the markets, including information from market research. The use of market research is inconsistent in religious organizations at the current time.

### ***Competition and competitive strategies***

It could be argued that there are several levels on which organized religions compete. On one level, there is competition for the hearts, minds and souls of any given population as opposed to other religious faiths or lack of religious faith. On another level, there is competition between differing religious denominations. Religious organizations also compete for their market's time and attention against entertainment options, time commitments, consumer distractions, peer pressure and lack of a perceived need for religion. Clearly defining the competition becomes as important as determining one's target market segments and is a key challenge for the strategic marketer. Offer-oriented organizations (see Table 6.1) can easily become disoriented here because they will tend to define the competition by their offerings rather than by what needs the competitors are serving.

There are a number of different competitive strategies and their use in the marketing of religion is particularly underresearched. Most of the competitive strategies of religious organizations are not 'head to head'. Rather, most competitive strategies are reflected in how an organization positions itself in the minds of its consuming public. Brand-positioning strategies, which are discussed in the following section of this chapter, are the primary strategies used to position differing organizations. Just as with for-profit marketing, some religious organizations will position themselves as mass marketers, while others have adopted or made small niche markets (Busenitz and McDaniel 1990).

Examples of a niche strategy being very successfully used is that of small, African-American MEA churches throughout small communities in southeastern USA. These often historic churches serve a vibrant and cohesive community with very similar needs and histories. Niche strategies on an even smaller scale are often used for newly arrived groups of people in the USA who form small churches which speak their native language and use native customs. Examples of mass-appeal strategies are those of the nondenominational mega-churches which meet the needs of very large and often very geographically extended communities (Fielding 2006). These mega-churches have successfully identified themselves as having a mass and wide appeal versus other religious choices partially through the use of very successful branding strategies.

## **Branding**

The concept of branding is an increasingly accepted practice in the nonprofit venue (Hankin-son 2001) and indications of branding being used in the religious sector are becoming more evident (Abreu 2006; Fielding 2006). The key concept to consider in branding is the image or identity of the organization. The identity of any religious organization is clearly tied to its beliefs and its mission. Merely renaming the 'brand' does not change the image or identity.

Branding is as much an internal process as an external one and in the case of nonprofits affects and involves all of the various publics described earlier. New churches, especially the new nondenominational mega-churches in the USA, have the ability to develop easily a brand identity when compared with such venerable institutions as the Church of England. For non-profits in general, and churches in particular, the core beliefs, the mission, do not change; however, some of the tools of branding can be used to meet the churches' goals and objectives. Branding language helps to identify some of the tools and strategies that may be used. These include: (a) brand name; (b) brand personality; (c) brand equity; (d) brand positioning; (e) brand image; (f) brand campaign; (g) brand identity; and (h) brand promise. The last phrase, 'brand promise', should be the first addressed as it goes to the core of not only the beliefs of a religion but also implies that religion does offer a 'promise' to its believers. The brand promise means different things to different market segments and individuals at different times. An example of a 'brand promise' is the feeling of community promoted in advertisements that appeal to a certain segment of society (Fielding 2006). However, in offering a community of like believers, the mega-church is staying true to its mission and its core beliefs which must be the overriding issue in religious marketing (Abreu 2006). The brand image, brand personality, brand identity and the brand name all serve to help to position the brand in people's minds. These are powerful and effective tools that can help a religious organization deliver its brand promise. Brand positioning is often used to not only appeal to certain market segments but as a powerful competitive tool as well (Hankinson 2001).

## **Money**

Fundraising for religious organizations is a form of nonprofit fundraising. However, in some religious organizations, fundraising is not always seen in a positive light. For example, Christians have often heard the story of Jesus driving the money-changers and merchants out of the temple (Holy Bible, John 2:14–16). This story is often used as a metaphor for not mixing matters of money and matters of belief and faith. However, the reality is that churches and religious organizations need money with which to pay their expenses, including their ministers and priests, marketing expenses, providers of music and other services, maintenance of church buildings and property and all the other products and services needed to achieve their goals and objectives. Further, major capital expenditures are needed at times and specific fundraising is undertaken for these causes. Finally, there are a number of outreach programmes sponsored by churches that need funds with which to accomplish their goals. Hence, money is often a major issue and need on the part of church organizations. Not surprisingly, Christian church leaders will often quote Bible passages to support the idea that giving to the church is a good idea as in this passage:

Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under



compulsion, for God loves a cheerful Giver. And God is able to provide you  
with every blessing in

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abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work.

(Holy Bible, 2nd Corinthians 9:7–8)

Similarities between church fundraising efforts and nonprofit fundraising abound. Major gifts in various forms from outright cash gifts to bequests and property transfers are often pursued using relationship-building similar to those used by sectarian nonprofit organizations. Understanding the motivations of the potential donor (input public) takes time and careful attention. Major capital campaigns to construct new buildings, establish other locations, send missionaries to new locations, buy organs, fund the establishment of a church school, and so on, are the types of campaigns with which nonprofits are very familiar. Numerous plans for raising funds for these projects abound and professional fundraising services provide assistance as do many religious headquarter organizations.

Annual fundraising commitments, pledge drives and similar ‘membership’ financial efforts are common in many churches. Often the ‘pledge drive’ is led by church members and/or the clergy and is intended not only as a fundraising tool but also as a means of planning a budget for the next year. Members are often encouraged to tithe during this process, although the manner of figuring the tithe can be ambiguous and open to self-serving bias (Dahl and Ransom 1999). Banks have also become involved in lending money to churches based on tithing, pledges and/or capital-fundraising campaigns (Harris 2001).

The raising of funds for the church can result in ‘positive effects for donors and nonprofits’ (Thornton 2006:204). Fundraising in the church, just as with nonprofit organizations in general, needs a good understanding of the motivations and needs of the donors. Donors will obviously donate funds to the organization that most matches their own ideology (Thornton 2006) and as such the membership base of the church is the first market segment looked to for fundraising.

Beyond fundraising efforts, whether through major gifts, campaigns for specific causes or regular membership giving, many churches also pursue revenue from other sources. These activities include church stores similar to those at museums (Ford and Mottner 2003). Fielding (2006) notes the example of churches having concession stands with some of their activity venues. The traditional rummage sales, bake sales and even silent auctions continue to raise revenues as well. Often the money brought in through revenue-raising activities is directly targeted at a specific mission or outreach project (Ford and Mottner 2003).

## **The service**

Religious organizations fit neatly into the framework of services marketing primarily due to the intangibility of what they offer (Santos and Mathews 2001). Tangible products, if any, are minimal. Consequently, in discussing the marketing tools that are used by religious organizations it is helpful to use the framework of the 7 Ps of services marketing: (a) product or service offering; (b) price; (c) promotion; (d) place; (e) physical evidence; (f) process; and (g) people (Booms and Bitner 1981). Finally, the evaluation of service quality is discussed as an essential part of the marketing tools associated with a service.

### ***Product***

The primary offerings (services) of religious organizations are layered. The foundation layer is the offering of a belief system and includes such things as salvation, spirituality, and so on. The more immediate service offering includes worship services, educational programmes and recreational activities (Coleman 2002). Different parts of the offerings have more importance for different age cohorts than others. For example, while the worship service is very important to all ages, service music associated with the service is more important to older cohorts than to younger cohorts, while the reverse is true of sports and activities (Coleman 2002). The application of product/service strategies such as market segmentation, positioning and differentiation could all conceivably play a significant role in the strategic plan of a religious organization. Anecdotal evidence indicates that strategic planning of this sort is occurring in mega-churches in particular, but academic research is lacking. New product development, however, may differ in some respects for for-profit practices and bears investigation. While Bennett and Savani (2004) have found a strong indication of parallel product/service development patterns between nonprofit and for-profit practices in civic organizations, the unique and intensely personal nature of religion may indicate differing product development practices for religious organizations.

### ***Price***

Attending a worship service is ostensibly 'free'. However, looking at what religious organizations 'offer' in terms of a 'value proposition' could yield some interesting findings both in terms of the perceived benefits received as well as the 'costs' to potential and/or current attendees. Research in this area is underdeveloped.

### ***Promotion***

An array of promotional tools is being used by religious organizations in order to communicate with their target market segments. The tools include advertising, personal selling/personal communication and public relations. Personal communication whether through word of mouth or personal visit is widely used by churches and is a form of relationship building and personal selling. Personal communication takes the form of visits by clergy, acknowledgement of visitors during services, orientation class for prospects and similar personal contacts (McDaniel 1986b).

Indeed, personal communication in the form of word of mouth is one of the most effective means of promotion by churches (Coleman 2002). An example of a word-of-mouth promotion tool in action is the Alpha International non-denominational programme which started in the UK as a means of bringing non-Christians into the Christian church. The programme specifically targets people under 34 years of age and involves local discussion courses. While Alpha International also sponsors conferences and publications, its success is generally attributed to non-threatening, non-denominational friendly communication (Anon. 2003). Word of mouth is also used by evangelical Christian mega-churches which, unlike traditional churches, 'normally exist to serve people who want to enter the door and adhere to the ways of the Bible. Seeker churches would rather figure out ways to tailor their services and sermons to the needs of attendees' (Buss 2002:42).

Advertising is increasingly being used by churches in the USA (McDaniel 1986a). Advertising is still a problematic choice for some church members, but clergy are generally more

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approving of advertising, handbills, radio, TV and newspaper use than the general public. Both generally approve of onsite signage and Yellow Pages listing (McDaniel 1986a). Advertising can be used to target specifically a particular market. For example, in an effort to reach the declining Generation X cohorts, advertising agencies were hired to produce professional advertising pieces including subway advertisements, websites and others while adjusting offerings to reflect the need for non-traditional meetings. Coffee shops, cafés, entertainment, music concerts or even a partnership with a Manhattan jazz club were part of a Generation X-targeted campaign (Wellner 2001). Moncrief *et al.* (1986) noted that advertising was used in a wide variety of denominations in a regional multidenominational sample of Christian churches. The perception was that some denominations (Baptists) advertised more than others. Advertising media choices were topped by Yellow Pages, then newspapers, direct mail, signs, radio, flyers, TV, billboards and finally magazines. In 2002 Coleman found that word of mouth led media choices followed by Yellow Pages, the Internet, TV, newspaper, and radio – although this differed somewhat by age group.

Just as evangelists found television in the later part of the twentieth century, many churches are currently using the Internet as a communication tool. Using a virtual church experience through the Church of Fools website (<http://www.churchoffools.com>), sponsored by the Methodist church, researchers found that the Internet communication tool first attracted people out of curiosity. Subsequently, the website served a significant religious need for a large number of website visitors. With the exception of the sacrament of communion which had some mixed reactions, the satisfaction with the website has been significantly positive (Ostrowski 2006).

### *Place*

While place usually refers to the distribution of goods in the marketing world, in the case of religious organizations the place issue is one of location – not unlike the retail decision about store placement. Like retail stores, the location of the church, mosque, synagogue, temple or shrine represents a major and long-term commitment on the part of a religious organization, which is difficult and costly to change. In many locations, decaying inner-city neighbourhoods with large older church buildings (even cathedrals) restrict the organizations from drawing in new members. The marketing implications become many of those faced by retailers. Proximity to attendees (core customers), distance from competition among other variables play a part in retail location decisions (Karande and Lombard 2005) just as they may play a role in religious organizations' location decision.

### *Physical evidence*

Because the offerings of religious organizations are intangible, physical cues make the offerings more 'real' to the population being served (Booms and Bitner 1981). Therefore, tangible attributes (or atmospherics) of a religious organization that are visible, audible, touchable, and even things that can be tasted and smelled are important. Religious organizations have a long and rich tradition of doing a very good job of this through such things as their structures, whether small or large. The building offers a very visible sign often of strength, tradition and identity. However, just as the traditional architecture of banks has changed from imposing stone structures (built to engender trust on the part of their customers) to ATM machines in the shopping mall to meet the changing needs of consumers, the religious organization is altering its physical image as well. Physical symbols used in and on churches are



part of the organization's identity and bear a striking resemblance to the use of logos in marketing.

Mega-churches tend to be modern, spacious, often pristine and with soaring ceilings. While some people deride these buildings for their similarities to conference centres or shopping malls the case has been made that these new buildings leave behind the image and symbolism of 'older' religious institutions. The new mega-church buildings are more functional; in fact they are multifunctional, and systematic interviews with the leaders of these churches indicate that they see their modern new buildings as one of their key tools for achieving their mission not only because of its functionality but because of the freedom from traditional design (Loveland and Wheeler 2003). Hence, while the Gothic style of many traditional Christian churches are meaningful to some segments, the new churches are meaningful to other segments. Similarly, the use of light, stained glass and modern lighting systems is also important physical evidence of a strategy that helps to bring meaning to the consuming public.

Other physical cues beyond the buildings include both music and spoken word. Again, the religious organizations have a long and rich tradition in this area – as well as with writings in many religious traditions. Physical evidence is an area in which many religions have been using marketing strategies unwittingly to help to tangibilize their message and help it to become more 'real'. Many of these practices are part of ritual and even sacrament depending upon religion. However, as a religion develops a marketing strategy it is an area that demands attention and is underresearched from a marketing perspective.

### *People*

People who provide the service offerings of a religious organization include clergy, priests, lay ministers, church elders, councils, professional musicians, cantors, volunteers of all sorts, and many more. The lesson offered by the service marketing field is that training, selection and scheduling of the right people at the right place and time is essential. Since much of the work of religion is also done by volunteers, the issues of managing often enormous volunteer staffs become critical in implementing a marketing strategy. This area is in need of research and development. While priests, clergy and other leaders have long and extensive training in theology and even the management of a church in some cases, the evidence is that their marketing training is patchy at best.

### *Process*

Process in services marketing refers to a diversity of topics. However, an example of process in religion is the use of multiple Sunday services being offered at different times to not only handle large groups of people but also to serve best the needs of different groups with different services. Since religion is both an individual and a group practice, religious organizations need to address both the process of servicing individuals as well as groups. Application of marketing practices from theatre in terms of group process would bear researching. Further, implementation of systematic fundraising processes should maximize fundraising efforts (Bennett 2005).

### *Service quality*

In considering the marketing of religion within a service framework, it is appropriate and important to evaluate the service offered using one of the service quality measurement tools available. Santos and Mathews (2001) developed a specific scale

to measure service quality in

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religious organizations. Responsiveness, credibility and commitment were found to be the most critical elements of service quality in the perception of a wide variety of church-goers. Gender was the only factor that was significantly different among a variety of demographic attributes tested (Santos and Mathews 2001). Extending this significant contribution to the literature to different religious populations and practical applications should further the effectiveness of fine-tuning service marketing strategies.

### Performance measurement

Beyond measuring the service quality as mentioned above, the last part of developing a strategic marketing plan (after planning and implementation) is devising specific means for evaluating the outcomes and making adjustments to the plan as needed. As professional marketers know, the measurement of performance is critical in evaluating the use of certain marketing tools, the allocation of assets (money and people) and future marketing plans. Most marketing outcomes are best evaluated in terms of the objectives and goals of the organization and the strategies used to achieve them. Evaluation can include attendance at worship service and other events and activities as well as the number of converts, number of members, funds received from various sources and new members. Forms of 'market share' between religious organizations also help. Busenitz and McDaniel (1990) used the following performance measurement tools: attendance, number of visitors, rate of growth, baptisms, new members, financial contributions and personal growth (including personal discipline, outreach to non-members, helping one another with personal needs and participation in church leadership). Many of these types of statistics have been historically collected by most religious organizations. However, getting more information with respect to public perceptions of offerings and marketing tools, service quality perceptions, value perceptions and more sophisticated measures of efficiencies (marketing inputs versus results) would be helpful for future marketing decisions.

One particularly interesting performance measurement system is an adaptation of Kaplan and Norton's (1992) 'balanced scorecard' which Keyt (2001) adapted for religious organizations. While traditional measures are important, the adaptation of the four measures of the balanced scorecard help to emphasize the marketing processes and multiple outcomes that occur in a developed marketing environment (Keyt 2001). An adaptation developed by Keyt (2001) is shown along with examples of how it might be used in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Balanced scorecard adapted for churches (based on Keyt 2001)

<i>Kaplan and Norton (1992)</i>		<i>Keyt (2001)</i>	
<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Indicator example</i>	<i>Perspective</i>	<i>Indicator example</i>
customer	market share	members/attenders	% of regular attendees
internal business for new	level of customer service support	internal ministry	provide support programmes
financial	stock price	ministering	number of individuals served in outreach programme

innovation/learning new product  
introductions

innovation/learning new programme  
introductions

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## A research agenda

It is obvious that there are many areas of the marketing of religion which lack academic research and that considerable discussion and thought is warranted in this intriguing and often controversial field. Throughout future discussions and research, however, one key principle is important to remember and that is that the mission of any given religion is the central cause and reason for being. Marketing, however much it aligns itself with religious practices or with for-profit practices, is merely a tool which can be used to reach more effectively and efficiently the goals and objectives of a religion. The following is a list and discussion of just some of the areas where research is warranted.

First, a better knowledge of the consuming publics and the other publics is needed. For example, do we know what the attributes of specific marketing tools are that are most important to differing market segments? One interesting book that demonstrates how a consumer culture moderates religious belief/practice and offers an interesting perspective is Miller (2003). Another research project by Coleman (2002) looks at which church practices, activities and programmes attract new visitors but this needs further development and extension.

The internal public of religious leaders, both professional and volunteer, needs examination as well. How do they view the marketing of religion? A cross-cultural analysis was made by Sherman and Devlin (2000) who looked at British and US clergy. Further, how do religious leaders get training in professional, mission-based marketing? Moncrief *et al.* (1986) found that journals and magazines were used most often to learn about marketing and that formal training in seminary or business classes was very low and that church members, other ministers and consultants provided most of the information. There are obvious signs that this has altered since that article but information is scant.

Which marketing tools are most effective in which situations? When and how should they be used? What is the state of marketing and religion in different cultures and different faiths? How do some of the specific tools of a services marketing framework work in the venue of organized religion? For example, complaint behaviour, part of the service quality literature, has been examined for one church (Hansen and Woolridge 2002) and that study could be extended. How do different marketing tools work in different cultures? A study of the use of religious advertising in Hong Kong (Au 2000) helps to illuminate the reaction from both Christians and non-Christians in a multiculturally based primarily ethnically Chinese society. There are so many other settings and cultures to review. Branding research is also limited as is the research on church fundraising and social outreach through 'parachurch' organizations such as the Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, and so on. This area was well discussed in an editorial (Sargeant 2005) which reflected on how doing something tangible – rather than the more intangible of giving money to the church – is an important act and point of difference for many donors. Now, empirical support is needed. On a very broad scale, the use of the American Marketing Academy's newer definition of marketing which emphasizes relationships versus the older definition which emphasizes exchange could help to understand and discuss the role of marketing in religion.

The preceding is just a partial list of the research that is needed but it is hoped that this chapter gives the reader a sense that marketing can be used in religion, that there is much to learn and that discussion of the topic is appropriate and helpful.

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