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# Religion-motivated Enterprises in the Marketplace: A Macromarketing Inquiry

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## **Abstract**

This exploratory essay identifies and examines a variety of religiously affiliated or inspired enterprises operating in otherwise secular marketplaces. While explicitly recognizing that some marketplace manifestations of religion can be controversial, even dysfunctional, it argues for the evident macromarketing relevance of this project. The approach for analyzing what this paper refers to as “religion-motivated enterprises” (RMEs) consists of (1) a nominal classification scheme to illustrate and categorize the diversity of RME examples; (2) some foundational principles shared among major faith traditions that provide a basis for an RME ethos; and (3) basic propositions that, with future empirical testing, may explain the contributions of these organizations to improved market performance. Our commentary includes environmental factors that prompted the establishment of many RMEs, the nature of their sustainability, and the importance of mission statements to their operations. Finally, we identify opportunities for additional research and summarize the macromarketing contributions of this article.

**Keywords:** macromarketing, religion and marketing, religion-motivated enterprises, cooperation, sharing economies, social entrepreneurship, vulnerable consumers

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## **Religion-motivated Enterprises in the Marketplace:**

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Religion and religiosity and their influences on economic behavior and social institutions are substantial. Some recent studies focusing on this phenomenon that help connect macromarketing with religion examine the influence of religion on consumption, such as food and apparel preferences (Hirshman 1982), or religious taboos (Jamal 2003). Other related studies involve the impact of religion on business conduct (van der Duijn Schouten et al. 2014; Du et al. 2014), religion and economic development (Mittelstaedt et al. 1998), organizational histories of religious enterprises such as the Salvation Army (Krisjanous 2014), and the cultural impact of religion as manifested in individual or communitarian perspectives (Schwartz and Huisman 1995). Arguably, an even more direct connection occurs when a religion-motivated enterprise (RME) enters the competitive marketplace, potentially changing its dynamics. This is the focus of the present inquiry, a subject about which academics know little. As Tracey (2012) recently stated: "...the upshot is that we know relatively little about the dynamics of religious organizational forms or the influence of these forms (and the values and practices that underpin them) on broader social processes and other kinds of organizations (p.87)." Efforts to study this relationship reveal that while spiritual values may play a role in almost any business (Brophy 2015), organizational complexity and other non-religious values are also likely to influence the operations of religious organizations (Cui, Jo, and Velasquez 2015; Peiffer 2015).

This commentary begins with views on why religion-motivated enterprises are important to macromarketing inquiry. First, macromarketing recognizes the common observation that marketing relationships are often ‘non-transactional’ and have a prior social overlay. For example, one’s hair stylist might be a cousin, life insurance agent a neighbor, or a client’s webmaster a college classmate. A *shared* religion is frequently one dimension, perhaps determinant, of such social overlays. Second, macromarketers are interested in power relationships and market arrangements that generate institutional or marketplace change. For example, new distribution structures might provide savings, while collaborative agreements among independent parties allow for greater “economies of scale” or function to offset monopoly power. Some of these developments are faith-based. Third, it is apparent that religiously affiliated relief organizations are important responders to local and global crises (e.g., famine, refugee migrations due to war, earthquakes, and floods). These organizations, some of which we will examine, are manifestations of the RME phenomenon and appear to be important economic instruments to mitigating social problems.

Enterprises with a religious relationship are especially common in specific economic sectors, notably education and health care. They also, however, dot the broader commercial universe. These organizations typically share missions that may transcend or, at minimum, complement conventional business objectives. While business objectives remain essential, they may be supplemented or even superseded by concerns for other interests (e.g., social and environmental stewardship, limiting client costs, serving the poor). Indeed, the agenda of the *World Economic Forum* suggests a

prominent role for religion and their connected RMEs in reducing inequality (Grim and Woodhead 2015).

In exploring these religious-motivated enterprises, this paper will carve a multifaceted path. Our first steps identify the macromarketing linkages for this subject. Next, the elements of a common framework for this investigation are provided: defining the RME concept; providing a nominal classification of the different sponsorship and customer bases found in the RME population; and specifying the distinctive characteristics one would expect to find among organizations with religious roots. A third major section is devoted to illustrative examples of RMEs – giving attention to their origins and social motivations, as well as their economic role and development over time. The concluding section is devoted to summarizing our observations via a macromarketing narrative and identifying opportunities for future research.

First, a brief disclaimer: The integration of religious norms into a business enterprise may result in questionable outcomes (Miller 2009). While the entire religion-motivated marketplace is not necessarily laudable, the purpose of *this* paper is to explore and highlight the unusual and helpful contributions that RMEs suggest for improving market structures and conduct. More controversial, possibly negative, effects of religious belief in organizations must await future studies.

### **Macromarketing Linkages**

Since the macromarketing domain encompasses the interaction of markets, marketing systems, and society (Hunt 1981), we argue there are lessons for marketing scholars and policy analysts, as well as for participant/practitioners, in markets influenced by religion-motivated enterprises. Indeed, while Drenten and McManus (2015) have identified a

number of examples of religion-related research published in this journal, it seems fair to observe that the more general role of religion in marketing has only been barely scratched in the macromarketing literature (See, e.g., Klein 1987, 1997; Dixon 2001; Friedman 2001; Mittelstaedt 2002; Klein and Laczniak 2009). Since the market influence of RMEs has not been directly discussed in existing marketing literature, our goal is to provide some preliminary background and insight that will allow future scholars some basis for additional investigation. Thus, this exploratory examination/commentary about RMEs and the impulses behind them is primarily descriptive.

A more specific RME-macromarketing linkage exists in the consistent interest of macromarketing scholars in social problems allegedly attributable to market failure and externalities (e.g., monopoly, inequities, environmental degradation). Such concerns are commonly associated with conduct reflecting short-term managerial objectives (Sosnick 1964). A sampling of recent issues of this journal reveals studies linking marketing and markets to poverty alleviation (Gau et al. 2014), materialism (Scott, Martin, and Schouten 2014), consumer vulnerability (Pavia and Mason 2014), environmental conservation (Viswanathan et al. 2014), and sustainability (Visconti, Minowa, and Maclaran 2014). Sometimes, RMEs enter the marketplace to help address such problems.

Considering only the issue of poverty, contemporary political discussions focus on the prevalence of economic inequality (Sanders 2016). One forum of experts recognized the significance of “financial inclusion,” (i.e., access to community-based financial institutions) as a route to poverty alleviation (Lauder Institute 2013). Such institutional arrangements are felt to be critical in advancing justice in “base of pyramid” market settings (Santos, Laczniak, and Facca-Miess 2015; McElroy 2013). To the extent

that RMEs contribute to addressing these and other social problems attributed to marketplace structures and activities, the macromarketing relevance of RMEs as market innovations seems abundantly clear.

The components we offer to the discussion include a three-step framework (i.e., categories, principles, propositions) for examining RMEs; a descriptive sampling of the many manifestations of such organizations; a macromarketing narrative about the systemic qualities of their ambit; and a list of research questions that need to be addressed in order to better understand RME emergence, pervasiveness, and attraction.

### **A Framework for Examining Religion-Motivated Enterprises**

#### ***Defining and Classifying RMEs***

For purposes of this paper, and inspired by a definition offered by LaBarbera (1991, 1992), we define RMEs as *organizations providing goods and services to the marketplace that include objectives and values directly attributable to religious doctrine in their mission and the needs of their members.*

This definition admittedly provides a generous landscape to explore. In order to illustrate the diversity of RMEs in the marketplace, in **Figure 1** we present one *possible* framework upon which to array their variety. A first, important dimension of religious motivation is *religious centrality*--the extent to which religious doctrine is vital to the mission of the RME. For instance, some enterprises reflect the direct sponsorship of a church, synagogue, or mosque as a clear extension of their core mission. An Islamic primary school that teaches the Koran, as well as other more mainstream studies, would be an example. Enterprise ownership or management by a faith-connected religious community itself would also suggest considerable religious mission centrality. For

example, religious communities founded Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant colleges and hospitals with a particular service mission (i.e., providing sectarian-inspired education or ministering to the sick owing to their religious vocation). And, ownership by an individual, family, or investor group whose religious affiliation is well known would be yet another, probably lesser, manifestation of religious centrality. *Hobby Lobby*, a firm known to espouse the importance of evangelical Christian values, exemplifies such an organization (Fuller 2014). The first two of these groupings (Church-owned or religious community affiliated) are most likely to be *non-profit* organizations. The latter category (i.e., independently owned companies proclaiming religious values) would typically be for-profit entities.

Interestingly, when classified as nonprofit, the activities of RMEs allow specific tax advantages in the market. When nonprofits compete directly against for-profit firms, the latter sometimes argue that they are forced to operate at a competitive disadvantage. For example, in the Massachusetts sports entertainment market, the *Boston College Eagles* football team, sponsored by an RME (Boston College), competes for patronage with the *New England Patriots* of the NFL. The former operates with a tax advantage. Although, to be fair, the Patriots team, by virtue of membership in the NFL, enjoys a different tax advantage of its own: exemption from federal anti-trust scrutiny. Also, nonprofits are not exempt from all taxes.

**[Insert Figure 1 about here]**

The second dimension of our classification is labeled *customer similarity* in religion. This dimension reflects the extent to which patrons of an RME are likely to be of the sponsor's religious tradition. For instance, most customers of Kosher or Halal

supermarkets are probably of the Jewish or Moslem faith respectively. While these clients would constitute each example's critical customer base, other unaffiliated shoppers might simply seek out the unique grocery items these outlets feature.

In contrast, the regular clientele of an inner city "soup kitchen" sponsored by a local church might be of many faiths or none at all. In addition, many geographic areas, where members of a particular faith are the dominant population, would also fit this second dimension. A Mormon business owner in Utah, where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is a prevailing force, is one example. Ethnic groceries in neighborhoods populated by specific groups of immigrants dominated by a single faith might also fit the classification. In such places, one would expect to find heavy users of certain RMEs simply due to the high majority of believers in local residence.

Finally, the positions of some organizations in this *customer similarity* dimension would obviously shift over time. For example, many Protestant universities (e.g. Harvard and Yale) were founded to provide divinity school training for members of particular denominations. But over the years, they morphed into non-denominational entities of higher education serving the broader market.

Thus, in Figure 1, the X-axis reflects *religious centrality* of the enterprise from low to high; the Y-axis depicts *customer similarity* (in religion) from low to high. This matrix allows for distinctions among enterprises where the religious mission is still central, but the clientele might be multi-denominational (e.g., hospitals originally founded by religious orders dedicated to caring for the sick) versus ones anchored in some religious doctrine, but where neither the activity itself nor the customers are essentially religious (e.g., a Mennonite bakery). This nominal classification of RMEs

seems a reasonable framework for illustrating and comparing the wide variety of RMEs in the business population, although we make no claim about its optimality. Future empirical justification of its utility is also required. Equally critical, or even more important, are the principles and the particulars of a given RME's mission and vision, which also contribute to the dynamics of marketplace function. To this, we now turn our attention.

### ***Religious Principles in Common for Business: The RME Difference***

Even in exploratory essays such as this, theoretical perspectives can be helpful in guiding readers and researchers to ascertain if preliminary descriptive observations are on the right track. One such approach might be to identify the commonalities of belief that major religions hold about economic activity *in general*, and to then see whether these seem to be reflected in the operations of religion-motivated enterprises. One helpful synopsis of 'harmony of beliefs' across major religious denominations was written and issued by the Caux Round Table (2010), a document we will discuss shortly, following a brief history of the organization.

The Caux Round Table (CRT) was founded in 1986 by senior business executives from Japan, Europe, and the United States (Cavanagh 2008). CRT's most famous promulgation was its *Principles for Business* (1994; 2009), which reinforced corporate social responsibility (CSR) guidelines and added two important concepts to that conversation. The first, *Kyosei*, from the eastern tradition, captures the notion of people living and working together for the common good. The second, *Dignity*, in the western, Kantian tradition, refers to the inherent sacredness and value of all humans. (Williams 2000).

In September 2010, inspired by the negative impact on society of the 2007-08 financial crises and the subsequent “Great Recession,” the CRT again convened in Caux, bringing together an interfaith group of scholars in theology and business ethics. Their purpose was (1) to explore the similarities of teaching in all the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam); and (2) to deduce the core religious thinking that should motivate enterprises in the global marketplace. Included in the “study group” were a retired Washington D.C. archbishop, a dean of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, and a rabbi from a prominent Hebrew college of Jewish studies, along with about a dozen other scholars.

The study team highlighted eight spiritual disciplines (*receiving, responding, repenting, re-envisioning, reminding, remembering, reforming, and rejuvenating*) rooted in all the religious traditions (Caux Round Table 2010). These discernments all were linked by expressions of hearing God’s call. Taken together, a case was then made for three *action-oriented* social mandates or principles, derived from disciplines that would help direct the activities of RMEs. These principles, essentially global social norms for RMEs, can be described as follows:

- (a) To serve God by serving others;
- (b) To seek justice on behalf of the poor and vulnerable;
- (c) To shape the economic system so that it provides greater person-centered fairness and stewardship over the earth.

If our exploratory description of RME features below has face validity, it should reveal the regular presence of these three social mandates in religion-motivated enterprises,

including some plausible exploratory propositions that often distinguish RMEs in terms of their relationship to clients, markets, and the marketing process.

***RME Domain: Observations, Scholarship, and Examples***

The types of RMEs previously identified in Figure 1 reflect a vast organizational domain, particularly when the range of recognized religious traditions as well as historical and international dimensions are considered. The prospects for surveying this domain in a meaningful way are forbidding. Therefore it is helpful to offer examples of RMEs that provide a flavor of the environments that prompt the establishment, development, and sometimes, decline of these religiously affiliated operations. In so doing, we hope to highlight some tentative macromarketing propositions about RMEs that will require future empirical validation. However, the connections of the propositions to the three action mandates of serving God, ministering to the poor, and co-creating a more person-centered and sustainable economy should be evident to the reader.

It might also be recognized at the outset that, while many social observers discuss the growing *secularization* of society, religious influence remains constant and pervasive (Putnam and Campbell 2010). This is the case whether it's the impact of evangelical Christians on U.S. elections (Manza and Brooks 1997), the on-going debates in Europe about the extent to which traditional (Christian-rooted) cultures can absorb the influx of Moslem refugees (Waever et. al. 1993; *Economist* 2015), or discussions in India about whether the politics and religious concerns of the BJP party (i.e., Hindu nationalists) can be effectively separated from their governance style (Corbridge and Harriss 2013). A case can also be made that “religious culture” in general has been affecting rules of marketplace conduct since the evolution of biblical time and norms. (Gordon 1994).

Finally, we should add that our discussion of RMEs in the marketplace is tentative, our observations preliminary, simply because this has been such a neglected area of study. That is, while sector profiles exist for such topics as the regional economic impact of religiously affiliated hospitals or the cost structures of some faith-inspired universities, a picture of the macro-systemic aspects of RMEs has been lacking (Iannaccone 1998).

Therefore, we are pursuing an inductive and exploratory approach in an attempt to provide researchers with a helpful framework to tease out common differences in RME operations, and also to establish specific foundational propositions upon which future analyses of this relatively unexplored area can be built. Such idiosyncratic observations about the market-related operations of RMEs must, in context with limited existing research, have a role in exploratory studies.

In the commentary that follows, examples are taken predominately from western-influenced economies. However, we also should note that our observations productively draw on our collective experience gained by working on, consulting with, and serving on the advisory councils and/or boards of directors of assorted RMEs. Thus, an underlying inspiration to our descriptive assessment of this topic was to ascertain whether the realm of RMEs is worthy of scholarly study *by macromarketers*, particularly since organizational sociologists have looked at related dimensions for some time (Miller 2002; Scheitle and Dougherty 2008; Tracey 2012). Our response to this self-posed question is “yes,” for the many reasons we will discuss later, but especially because of the rich diversity of market-facing organizations and market arrangements seemingly nurtured by religion.

We begin by describing some important and representative examples of religion-motivated enterprises that seem to have developed unique and alternative methods of operating in the competitive marketplace. The articulation and description of such alternative arrangements are central to the macromarketing enterprise (Campana et al. 2015), especially as they can spur innovation and improvements in market machinations. We conclude each example by postulating one or more descriptive propositions about the RMEs reflected in their market workings, but also demonstrating religion-based social principles.

**Credit Unions.** Credit unions are a significant force in the financial services industry. As of 2012, there were approximately 94 million credit union members in the U.S. (Estrin 2015). Faith-based credit unions arguably represented the earliest participants in the movement. In the historical context of Renaissance-era usury laws and the absence of consumer-oriented lenders, the Catholic Church in Florence – in cooperation with the Florence city-state – created the *monte commune*, the first credit union. This institution provided financing for economic ventures and bridal dowries, as well as an alternative to taxation for municipal projects (Menning 1995).

In North America, the first credit union dates to 1900 in Quebec. The first U.S. credit union was established in New Hampshire in 1908. Both were founded by local churches (Taylor 2004) and offered essential financial services to segments of the market that otherwise might have had difficulty securing such support. Additionally, some of these first credit unions were a directly sponsored business activity of a religious organization. Credit unions today are generally associated with employers or labor unions, while many of those originally established by churches have transformed

themselves to community-based organizations. Nonetheless, faith-based credit unions remain a prominent segment of the credit union movement, meeting the needs of low and moderate income families, of which many lack access to commercial savings and lending organizations and would otherwise be forced to patronize “payday loan” suppliers at high rates of interest (Robbins 2015).

From such situations, and the religious mandate to serve the poor and disadvantaged, emerges the first of seven propositions that catalyze additional questions and observations and sets the table for future discussion:

***Proposition No. 1: Religion-motivated enterprises are typically created to supply members of their communities with commercial services that are not easily available in the general market.***

**Cooperatives.** Cooperative arrangements among individuals, families, and small organizations are characteristic examples of countervailing power. They are akin to labor unions formed in response to managerial power over wages and working conditions, and to group buying among independent retailers (e.g., IGA grocery stores) as a response to chain store market power (Galbraith 1952). Retail co-ops are similarly an organized response to chain store merchandising practices. Producer (e.g., farmers or fishermen) co-ops are an organized response to concentrations of power by local processors. Such arrangements provide sufficient operating scale and, thus, bargaining strength to compete with the corporate advantage of having at least some measure of monopoly power. Cooperatives are owned by their members (e.g., producers, employees, or customers), who typically have a say in the cooperative’s operations and share in its rewards.

The cooperative movement is commonly dated to a group of weavers in Lancashire, England. (Some other early examples of cooperative enterprises, including in Europe, Asia, and North America, are described in Bunn and Falk (1936).) Experiencing poverty in the wake of the industrial revolution, they established the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844, according to principles that included member ownership, anti-discrimination, democratic governance, concern for the community, and fostering member education. Their first venture was a store that sold a few staple goods. Ten years later there were nearly 1000 cooperatives in the United Kingdom. Today worldwide cooperative membership approximates 750 million persons; employment exceeds 250 million people; and revenues total \$2.2 trillion (International Cooperative Alliance 2014).

While co-ops, which are often local or regional, may not be a prominent form of commercial enterprise when considered as a fraction of national economic activity, their significance is not trivial. Moreover, the circumstances that encouraged co-op formation a century or more ago continue to emerge and prompt the formation of new co-ops, such as in the ethanol industry (Boone and Ozcan 2014).

We can reasonably speculate that people who first established cooperative organizations were members of a faith tradition. At the least they adhered to such foundational principles because co-ops were closely aligned with prevalent religious values. It is certainly true that cultural homogeneity is typical of the communities where they were founded. That the mission statements of cooperatives are likely to include working for the “greater good” over maximizing profits, is also suggestive of faith-based

motivations (Hollenbach 2002, O'Higgins 2014). To illustrate, three prominent and direct examples of faith-based cooperatives warrant attention.

The *Antigonish Movement* is an example of social reform that grew out of adult education programs at St. Francis Xavier (FX) University in Nova Scotia. In the 1920s and 1930s, economic conditions affecting farmers, fishermen, and miners in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia inspired Moses Coady, a Catholic priest on the St. FX faculty, to lead an effort that resulted in a number of cooperative organizations. A native of Cape Breton Island, Coady's involvement in the St. FX extension program was to establish "study clubs" where experiences could be shared. Outgrowths of those study clubs included prayer meetings, the formation of the Farmer Labour Party, and, to mobilize economic power, the adoption of the principles of the British Cooperative Movement.

As the study club program continued, farming and fishing co-ops formed to compete with commercial businesses. In mining communities, consumer and housing co-ops and credit unions also started. The significance of this example is that early Catholic teachings related to social justice (see Klein and Laczniaik 2009), combined with the study club approach, led to public action and economic reforms as traditional enterprises responded to the new competition represented by these co-ops. Unfortunately this Canadian cooperative experiment ultimately failed, due in part to structural weaknesses including bureaucracy and an unwillingness to invest for growth, as well as from changes in the local economy (Alexander 1997, Dodaro and Pluta 2013).

The *Mondragon Movement* in the Basque region of Spain provides a more recent, larger, and apparently more enduring example of a cooperative system rooted in a

religious foundation. In 1941, in the wake of the Spanish Civil War, a young Catholic priest, Jose` Maria Arizmendiarieta, came to the town of Arrasate-Mondragón. Thus began a career of education and advocacy to bring Christian social values into an economic environment characterized by poverty, unemployment, hunger, and unrest. Beginning with a football (soccer) team to build social relationships, the movement's earliest establishments were an anti-tuberculosis dispensary and cooperative housing.

Arizmendiarieta went on to develop educational programs that combined literacy, technical skills, and an appreciation for worker cooperation, founding a technical college that later developed into an engineering school and, since 1997, Mondragon University. Along the way, institutional development came to include consumer cooperatives (in 1957), as well as industry and agriculture. Those educational enterprises provided the seeds for the technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial talent to operate a system of cooperatives that today employs approximately 84,000 people in 111 organizations worldwide (approximately 17 percent outside Spain) – and is arguably Spain's largest industrial group (Tremlett 2013, Fernandez 2014).

Another interesting, more contemporary example is the *Community Purchasing Alliance* (CPA). Developed by Methodist churches in Washington, D.C. to reduce operating costs for such items as trash hauling, copy services, and supplies, the CPA now has expanded to churches from a wide range of denominations. It professes three goals: saving money for its members through bulk purchases; organizing for social change; and aiding the environment. Rebates and dividends are used for investments in sustainability, worker equity, and community organizing. While it is not always possible, the cooperative tries to support only vendors engaging in business practices consistent with

the group's values and social mission. In 2012 the CPA had 110 participating congregations with potential savings approaching \$5 million (Hazen 2014).

Based on these examples, as well as the religious social principle to provide greater person-centered fairness, we see a second proposition:

***Proposition No. 2: Religion-motivated enterprises may form in response to a lack of market power among their followers, including such market deficiencies as a lack of purchasing, bargaining, product choice, or access power.***

**Social ministries.** Religious organizations commonly sponsor ministries in education, healthcare, housing, emergency relief, and social services – typically at a local level, but sometimes on a global scale. These ministries are characterized by a theological foundation, but also respond to significant community needs and provide an organized opportunity for member involvement in both church and community.

Such ministry enterprises are likely to be found on the margins of commercial markets (e.g., urban soup kitchens and mission hospitals in less developed nations). However, they might also assist in meeting basic needs, while providing employment as well as volunteer opportunities, thereby contributing to the social and economic development of the community. Thrift stores run by the *Society of St. Vincent DePaul* (SSVD) are a prime example, offering those with lower income an accessible source of affordable household products, as well as job training for some store employees. Coincidentally, in a stewardship principle connection, the “St. Vinnie’s” stores provide a recycling alternative to landfilling used clothing and household goods. The SSVD mission statement reads in part: “Inspired by Gospel values...by offering person-to-

person service to those who are needy and suffering...” Its motto urges: “End Poverty Through Systemic Change” (Society of St. Vincent DePaul, 2015).

An even richer example of the thrift shop ministry – as well as social entrepreneurship, owing especially to its rigorous jobs training programs - is *Goodwill Industries*. Operating currently with no religious affiliation, it was originally founded in 1902 by Edgar Helms. A Methodist minister in Boston, his congregation collected used clothing and goods discarded in wealthy areas of the city, then trained and hired people with limited employability (in what are today referred to as sheltered workshops) to mend and repair these items and distribute them to the needy.

Today Goodwill is a global network with 180 local chapters and 164 retail stores. Goodwill store revenue provides much of their \$3.5 billion budget for occupational assessment, training, and placement services to people with various barriers to employment. While the sheltered workshop concept has given way to social demands for community-based employment, many of these chapters continue to employ their clients in their stores and other activities and have a 21<sup>st</sup> Century goal of helping 20 million people and their families achieve economic self-sufficiency – “a hand up, not a hand out” (Keohane 2012, McCrahan 2015).

These examples of social ministry can be seen as serving marginalized populations. However, many other RME manifestations operate in more typical and traditional market settings. Religiously affiliated schools operate at all levels, while hospitals and senior living complexes compete in mainstream markets – often based on value propositions connected to religious identity as a source of differentiation. For example, *Baylor University* (Waco, TX) was founded by the Baptist General

Congregation to educate professionals in spiritual maturity and strength of character that Christian values can imbue.

Once can also find various Jewish Homes throughout the USA that provide assisted living for the elderly of all religious denominations, but cater especially to members of the Jewish faith. Their market appeal includes the observance of traditional Jewish conventions such as kosher food preparation, observation of Jewish holy days, as well as rabbinical services and consultation.

Such healthcare ministries are apparently of growing significance in the U.S. health insurance market (Armour 2016), due in part to questionable standards of care. In considering health inspection deficiencies, quality of care, and healthcare sales programs in a sample of 287 Virginia nursing homes, Ucar (2015) found faith-based non-profit and other religious nursing homes to be more effective than their secular counterparts. Ucar also cited numerous other studies indicating better performance among hospitals and homes for the aged with religious affiliations than in the healthcare sector in general.

These examples of social ministry, each presenting key RME principles, appear to support three more propositions:

***Proposition No. 3:*** *Religion-motivated enterprises are commonly established to channel the universal religious tenet of charity (via marketplace activity) by providing aid, comfort, and service to the poor and needy.*

***Proposition No. 4:*** *Religion-motivated enterprises may use their denominational identity as a source of service differentiation that also can serve as a competitive advantage in the marketplace.*

***Proposition No. 5:** Religion-motivated enterprises are often founded to be of commercial service to their faith communities, but over time, many have evolved a more general societal outreach while still reflecting elements of their core spiritual mission.*

**Commercial enterprises.** As suggested earlier in Figure 1, business establishments owned and operated by individuals, families, or groups affiliated with a particular religious tradition may have a customer base consisting largely of adherents of that same faith group. While this combination is not universal (e.g., an Italian restaurant operated by a member of the Greek Orthodox Church would not be attractive exclusively to members of that faith), it seems more likely that the ownership and customer base will have some religious commonality. As noted, a delicatessen owned by a Jewish family that expressly offers kosher food would likely attract a customer base predominantly of the Jewish tradition. This would be also true of an establishment offering a halal menu or a South Asian restaurant with vegetarian options that reflect Hindu traditions. Mortuaries operated by Catholic families are quite likely to attract significant patronage from others of that same faith because of their historical association with Catholic parishes. Such allegiances are typically further reinforced by a proprietor's nationality (e.g., Irish or Polish in communities where immigrant populations founded ethnic parishes).

Most obvious, in communities where adherents to a specific religious faith dominate the population, that social overlay is necessarily present. We have noted the Mormons in Utah as a prime example; others include rural communities originally settled by members of one or another faith. Thinking globally, these religiously homogeneous communities are quite common. Even where religious-based cultural influences over consumption are minimal (e.g., an automobile dealership), whenever ownership and a

large share of the customer base belong to the same faith, there seems likely to be some religious “sub-floor” consisting of core values associated with that belief system. From the preceding discussion, as well as the social mandate to serve others, the next proposition emerges:

***Proposition No. 6:*** *Religion-motivated enterprises carve a niche in the market by being attentive to the prescriptions of religious tradition to which a majority of their clientele belong.*

**Economy of sharing.** Sharing (or mutuality) is a virtually universal human practice that has been well examined in marketing literature (Price 1975; Belk 2010; Arnould and Rose 2016). Some commercial organizations are especially inspired by the social teachings of religious traditions with respect to meeting needs of those in their communities, particularly the poor or otherwise disadvantaged. These organizations are dedicated to *sharing* a significant portion of their profits with social service organizations, as well as with individuals in need (Gold 2003a; Gallagher and Buckeye 2014).

Such organizations are clearly “hybrids,” combining the characteristics of mainstream commerce, notably financial sustainability, with social and environmental objectives, i.e., combining for profit and non-profit characteristics (Haigh et al. 2015). In that sense, of course, most RMEs are hybrids, including cooperatives, non-profit corporations, and their for-profit subsidiaries, insofar as financial viability is an important concern, even when that depends on a voluntary workforce and financial contributions. On the other hand, it is easy to view some examples of hybridization, e.g., companies that pledge a percentage of revenue or profit to some social cause, from a more cynical

perspective, exploiting “the market for socially and environmentally conscious products and services and ... for socially responsible investments. (p.5).” In particular, the extent of social contributions by so-called “benefit corporations, such as Oakland, California’s *Give Something Back Office Supplies* (B Corporation 2014), has been challenged (Koehn 2015).

Of particular interest in this examination of RMEs is the “Economy of Communion” (EOC) project, initiated by Chiara Lubich, founder of the *Foculare* movement in Italy in 1944 that now numbers approximately 2 million supporters in 182 countries (Foculare n.d.). Lubich, a reportedly devout Catholic, was inspired by the charitable works of St. Clare of Assisi. In 1991, her followers, troubled by the disparity between the skyscrapers and the slums of San Paolo in Brazil, sought to promote a new style of economic action – a “third way between Capitalism and Marxism” (Beed and Beed 2014). As of late 2012, 861 businesses professed to adhere to the tenets of the EOC project based on communion, gratuity (i.e., profit-sharing), and reciprocity (Gold 2003b; Gallagher and Buckeye 2014; Ims and Zsolnai 2014). From the preceding discussion and all the articulated social principles of religion, our final proposition emerges:

***Proposition No. 7: Religion-motivated enterprises are more likely to be oriented toward broader societal concerns than commercial enterprises.***

### **Religion-Motivated Enterprises: A Macromarketing Narrative**

Taken in the aggregate, this wide assortment of enterprises that are connected in some way to religion can be seen as an ideal subject for macromarketing analysis. Mittelstaedt et al. (2006) makes an eloquent case for the essence of macromarketing studies being the study of the *Agora*. In studying the agora – the workings of markets and their social

networks, broadly conceived – the macromarketing domain is seen to extend beyond the usual neoclassical economic concerns of efficiency, competition, and prices. Rather, macromarketing examines the fullness of market system workings including their social outcomes, both foreseen and unexpected:

*The process of theory development in macromarketing begins with a statement of three empirical foundations that emerge from a quarter-century of macromarketing scholarship: first, markets are systems; second, markets are heterogeneous; and third, the choices and actions of market actors have consequences far beyond themselves or their firms (Mittlestaedt et al. 2006, p.133).*

In this context, several preliminary observations can be made about the multiplicity of RMEs in the broad marketplace. First, our quick topical “flyover” of the historical and global marketplace demonstrates a significant array of organizations in multiple markets with myriad services flowing from an assortment of mission-driven beliefs and ideals. As Mittelstaedt et al. (2006) might opine, ‘the agora is indeed complex.’

Another observation is that a key antecedent to the formation of RMEs is likely to be the faith and spiritual doctrines that motivate founders. However, while the religious mission of each enterprise is a unifying commonality, the ‘when, where, how, and why’ (Mittelstaedt 2002) of the product/service exchange manifestation is quite varied. In other words, casual observation of the RME population yields a substantial number of social service, retail, health, education, finance, and other organizations. Thus, one intended outcome of these RMEs is that they often provide differentiated services for

members of their faith community, as well as the opportunity for their members to live their religious mission via the work they do.

An unanticipated (and positive) social outcome for many RMEs is that the principles behind their operation and structure provide novel provisioning innovations within the market exchange system – both for members of the related faith tradition and sometimes others. For example, cooperatives make available a pathway to participation in enterprise ownership that might be denied to those of limited financial means. Preliminary observation indicates that religiously affiliated microfinance institutions in “base of pyramid” markets demonstrate stronger social performance than those with secular sponsors (Casselmann, Sama, and Stefanidis 2014). Similarly, the formation of investor consortia by those with like-minded religious beliefs allows for originalities such as the creation of Islamic bonds (*sukuk*), permitting an investment option that otherwise might be considered a violation of doctrine by Muslims (Nisar 2010).

### **Further Inquiry: Macromarketing Research Opportunities**

The above discussion, particularly in its reference to the wide range of activities provided by RMEs, suggests these enterprises have forged their own distinctive mission-inspired offerings in many market segments. Many of these arrangements seem to involve organizational enterprises with an unusual economic character (e.g., profit sharing, employee ownership, not-for-profit status), offering a compelling alternative to traditional corporate operations. Several questions need to be addressed via future macromarketing scholarship:

1. *To what extent are these RMEs found in various industry sectors?* A search of the literature fails to disclose any large-scale statistical reports that might classify

industries according to a percentage with religious affiliations. Less formal inquiries, however, reveal significant religious connections within certain sectors, (e.g., Orthodox Jews in the diamond trade, monastery-operated wineries, and Amish community kitchens). The categories detailed above also seem to indicate significant RME activity in some consumer services. This raises compelling questions, such as whether markets that include RMEs are more competitive, more innovative, or even perceived to be contributing to a higher quality of life. Layton and Grossbart (2006) make clear that the analytical examination of such alternative market systems offers a great opportunity for future academic contributions to macromarketing.

2. *How and to what degree does the religious identity of the RME make itself evident in the marketing decisions and activities of these various organizations?*

A crucial aspect of this question is to assess whether religious affiliation *is merely* a marketing strategy of many RMEs, or something more fundamental embedded in the operating character of RMEs committed to the common good. In this regard, it is also important to recognize the task of balancing mission with the financial practicalities of the organization. For example, socially responsible investment (SRI) funds, often inspired by faith-based investing principles, must, over the long term, compare favorably in profitability with their selected benchmarks (Domini 2001). *Amana Funds*, which chooses its investments based on Islamic religious values, would be one such religiously motivated firm (Amana Mutual Funds Trust 2015). Nonetheless, a combination of social and religious aspirations appears to influence the marketing decisions of RMEs in such areas as

product safety, merchandising, pricing, and information disclosure (Fitzgerald 2009). More mainstream social objectives also may present themselves as these organizations seemingly place increased emphasis on workplace and environmental ethics, as well as concern for others – community needs, children, the poor, and less-developed nations (Zinbarg 2001). But all these issues require greater investigation.

3. *What is the demonstrable impact of these organizations on their market sector settings?* To the extent that RMEs compete in markets undefined by a particular religious affiliation, do they influence the strategies of non-affiliated competitors? Is there a measurable *branding* effect on consumers? That is, do substantial numbers of customers recognize a brand preference associated with the religious affiliation? To take one example, there are 28 Jesuit universities in the United States. Collectively, these institutions seem to have cultivated a powerful, sustainable, and positive brand equity in the USA regarding the quality of the education they provide (Laczniak 1999). One-off examples aside, in the absence of empirical research that is beyond the scope of this inquiry, the answer to this “brand advantage” question seems mixed, but leans to a distinct brand loyalty (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013, Usunier and Stolz 2014). Again, more investigation is necessary.

Logically, to the extent that a business with a religious affiliation attracts customers with that same religious identity, those clients are removed from the customer base of *other* businesses. Moreover, the option of dealing with an organization known to share values associated with a particular religious tradition,

as opposed to profit alone, may also have some attraction for those outside the membership boundaries of that religion, if similar values are shared. On the other hand, one can imagine some people being put off by religious expressions of mainly commercial operations (e.g., *In-and-Out* fast food outlets putting Bible verses on their packaging, or Middle Eastern restaurants that refuse to serve alcohol).

4. *Is religious affiliation sustainable as a special characteristic of these RMEs?*

Ownership and governance arrangements change through time, as do market environments. Therefore, pressures evolve to de-emphasize or secularize the religious dimensions of mission and policies. Miller (2002) provides a strategic argument that basic resource advantage determines the ultimate success of religious organizations. This begs the question of whether most RMEs must become more secularized over time in order to grow and accrue more funding. How well do RMEs resist or forestall such changes to their original charters? Here the very limited evidence is less optimistic. When religious pluralism and secularism increase, the advantages associated with religious identity are likely to diminish as modernization and religious hybridization affect traditional consumption norms (Jafari and Suerdem 2012, Jafari et al. 2015). Further, we observe both hospitals and colleges with historical religious identities in the US and Canada abandoning the governance structures that reinforced them and, in some cases, their religious identity itself. Sometimes, offices for “mission and identity” are added to organizational management structures. Whether these offices are powerful enough to resist other business pressures is unclear

(Cavanagh 2015). Certainly, institutional histories disclose examples both of abandoning religious identification and of organizational failures. It is notable that the downfall of the Antigonish Movement (discussed above) and LaBarbera's interviews with religious enterprise leaders (1991, 1992) indicate concerns that adherence to the religious principles (e.g., member governance, compensation limits, and rigid mission commitments) may adversely affect competitiveness, and might be partially to blame for those marketing failures.

### **Concluding Comments**

The contributions of this article can be briefly reviewed. First, the mission-centeredness of RMEs offers the potential to meet societal needs in a manner that might be challenging for conventional businesses with traditional financial demands. For example, accesses to volunteer support and tax exempt status create a kind of "cost cushion" otherwise unavailable.

Second, the presence of RMEs in a market modifies its competitive complexion. RMEs provide alternative delivery systems and offerings to consumers, often leading to segmentation that might not otherwise exist. Of particular significance to macromarketing traditions, RMEs both reflect and serve social networks – that is they vividly demonstrate the societal, community-oriented dimension of markets and marketing. Finally, besides the sometimes unrecognized diversity of RMEs, many have macromarketing characteristics that may have application in the design of novel market arrangements in other sectors, and that could prove to be beneficial to market innovation.

To summarize, this inquiry has revealed the presence, character, and significance of organizations with formal or indirect (but generally recognized) relationships to

religious faith. While our observations need to be viewed as tentative because additional research is needed for verification, our scrutiny of RMEs strongly suggests the following:

- (1) Though found in many industries or lines of trade, RMEs are particularly likely to appear where social needs are most prominent (education, healthcare, and financial assistance, for example), or where religious traditions imply distinctive cultural preferences, such as in dietary or burial requirements.
- (2) RMEs tend to be characterized by *cooperative* governance and ownership structures, commitments to religion-based moral values, and particular attention to community needs (e.g., special consideration to the poor and disadvantaged, as well as environmental concerns).
- (3) Community needs have frequently provided the inspiration for establishing RMEs. When ordinary marketplace opportunities alone have been insufficient to attract investment, commitments from religious resources, both tangible and intangible, are often provided by nascent RMEs.
- (4) While RMEs appear to have a special attraction to adherents of the faith tradition of their owners, it seems reasonable to expect the social and moral values that govern their operations also can provide a significant appeal to non-adherents of that particular faith.

To be sure, these assertions need to be verified. Investigation would also be of value to determine whether the religious motivations that are actualized in organizational structure and operations (e.g., cooperative governance and commitments to serving the poor), as well as via other underlying religious principles, are a net advantage or disadvantage to economic sustainability over time.

More broadly, this descriptive, exploratory examination of RMEs helps demonstrate the relevance of religion and religious values to the marketplace. It suggests that multi-denominational religious beliefs and moral values, such as serving God by serving others, a special regard for the poor and vulnerable, and person-centered economics (Caux 2010) results in satisfied consumer patronage in many diverse sectors. RMEs would appear to have an impact on the conduct and performance of the markets where they are prominent. The innovations RMEs offer and the unique market arrangements they foster merit additional study by macromarketers. We hope these preliminary reflections help spur additional investigation.

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**FIGURE ONE: Nominal Classification of RMEs on Two Dimensions**

**X-Axis:** Religious centrality in organizational mission.

**Y-Axis:** Religious similarity of organizational customers.

