Christian churches’ responses to marketization
Comparing institutional and non-denominational discourse and practice

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Introduction

Accelerating processes of marketization are having a notable impact on the religious field worldwide. On a broader macro-level, the rise of market and consumer society has coincided with a set of major transformations in the global religious field, including a sharp decline in institutional forms of religion, an increasing elevation of the subjective over the collective, and a growing emphasis on the experiential over reason across different types of religions and religious traditions (Gauthier, Woodhead et al. 2013, p. 4). On an institutional meso-level, neoliberal public-sector deregulations have given rise to a situation of ‘generalized religious-secular competition’ (Stolz and Usunier 2014, p. 5) as religious communities have increasingly become forced to compete with various non-religious actors in an expanded field of social agency and marketplace of ideas and lifestyle choices.

While the effects of market and consumer society can be explored in relation to a wide range of religious phenomena and types of religious communities, this chapter focuses on its impact on the changing discursive practices and modus operandi of various types of Protestant Christian churches around the world. As argued by Gauthier (2015, p. 79), in an increasingly marketized social and cultural environment, institutional forms of religion that have maintained dense organizational and bureaucratic structures and the ‘characteristics of the earlier state regulatory model’ have been experiencing progressive, and indeed accelerating, decline on a worldwide scale. By contrast, the types of religions that have embraced and actively sought to adapt to currently prevalent marketized, entrepreneurial, and consumer-oriented models have fared relatively well, and even continued to grow.

As will be illustrated in more detail later in relation to a few notable cases, on an international level, the independent non-denominational Protestant Christian field has increasingly become molded in accordance with market models and consumerist sensibilities. Independent Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal congregations ranging from North America and Europe to East Asia and the Global South have since long embraced
advertising, marketing, and branding as tools for proselytization and church expansion. For these types of churches, new marketized realities generally appear as the taken-for-granted, natural state of affairs. Indeed, these types of churches often view themselves as players in an extended marketplace of ideas and lifestyle choices, which is also clearly reflected in their discursive practices and the ways in which they organize and present their activities and provisions.

The situation with regards to long-established institutional Protestant mainline churches throughout Europe and North America remains notably different. Following decades of continuing decline, most of these types of churches are currently struggling to retain or regain their historical societal and cultural positions. Due to their high degrees of bureaucratization and historical embeddedness in national-statist structures, the impact of ongoing processes of marketization on these churches has mainly come in the form of mounting pressures, both external and internal, to adapt to new social organizational realities and new forms of ‘governance’-inspired church–state and church–third-sector partnerships. Following these developments, the orders of discourse of these types of churches have become increasingly permeated by market- and new public management (NPM)-associated discourse and terminology.

Focusing on the contemporary official discourse of various types of Protestant churches in different parts of the world, this chapter aims to highlight the usefulness of viewing the accelerating marketization of the Protestant religious field as a largely (although by no means exclusively) discourse-driven process. The chapter also briefly considers some of the main ways in which marketization discourse has become materialized in actual practice across various Protestant Christian church contexts.

The ideational and discursive dimensions of market society

The origins of currently prevailing understandings of the ‘market’ can be traced back to the early liberalism and classical political economy of the 18th and 19th centuries. In the liberalism of thinkers such as Smith, Mill, and Ricardo, the ‘market’ appeared as the key independent social coordination mechanism that was to facilitate individuals’ rational pursuit of their self-interest ‘without compromising the autonomy of their choices’ (Slater 1997, p. 42), thus laying the foundations for the subsequently developed notion of ‘market society.’ As explained by Slater and Tonkiss (2001, p. 8), while the notion of market exchange can be used to denote a wide range of different types of exchange, ‘thinking about modern social order in terms of “market society” implies the primacy of one mode of exchange—based on market transactions—which has come to dominate, restructure or marginalize all others.’ Such understandings of the market as a prime governing principle of the social became increasingly established during the first decades of the post–World War II era as capitalist societies were transitioning from a ‘Fordist’ economy based on the industrialized and standardized mass production of goods towards a ‘post-Fordist’ economy based on more flexible and specialized modes of production. As part of these developments, consumerism also emerged as the principal ethos, both social and cultural, of modern capitalist societies (e.g. Slater 1997, pp. 24–25), along with the consumer as ‘master category of collective and individual identity’ (Trentmann 2006, p. 2).

The notion of a ‘market society’ reached its eventual full realization following the global expansion and establishment of neoliberalism in the early 1980s. Grounded in an unwavering belief in the power, efficiency, and rationality of the free, non-regulated market and the extension of market imperatives across all societal domains and sub-systems, neoliberal
restructurings of the global political economy have greatly affected the basic structure and organization of contemporary societies across the globe (e.g. Harvey 2005). While the spread and perpetuation of neoliberal ideology has been instrumental in bringing about a wide range of actual, tangible social restructurings and transformations across the world, its ideational and discursive impact on the present-day social institutional and organizational field has been equally notable (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001; Thrift 2005; Mautner 2010). It is important to recognize, therefore, how the spread of neoliberalism has gone hand in hand with an increasing perpetuation and normalization of market-associated discourse, language, and terminology across virtually all social and cultural domains and thus served to propel a general process of marketization.

The concept of marketization is generally intended to capture the extended historical process whereby:

[a] market logic has come to provide a means of thinking about social institutions and individuals more generally, such that notions of competition, enterprise, utility and choice can be applied to various aspects of people’s working lives, access to public services and even private pursuits.

(Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p. 1)

In its ideational dimensions, marketization can be understood as a largely discourse-driven process that involves the increasing permeation of market-associated language, discourse, and terminology into new social domains, including in particular domains that have traditionally been considered ‘non-economic,’ such as education, healthcare, non-profit and ideological organizations, and religion.

In order for the study of religions to be able to adequately appreciate the impact of these developments on the present-day religious field, Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead (2013, pp. 261–262) have argued for the need to construct a new ‘alternative paradigm for understanding religion today, outside the secularization/postsecularism episteme.’ In contrast to so-called ‘economics of religion’ approaches (e.g. new paradigm approaches and rational choice theory), such a broader alternative interpretative framework would avoid reducing social realities to economic determinants and instead be aimed at drawing our attention to ‘the noneconomic [i.e. the ideological, ideational, and discursive] dimensions and effects of market economics and their correlates in globalizing societies’ (Gauthier 2015, p. 72, emphasis added). This approach to the character and fate of religion in neoliberal market society would thus be one that underlines the role of ‘market ideas’ (Carrier 1997)—in the sense of market economics-inspired ideologies and discourses—as prime vectors of contemporary social and cultural change on the whole, including religious change.

The effects of marketization on Protestant Christian churches

The new general socioeconomic environments and circumstances that have emerged following neoliberal restructurings of modern societies have brought a multifaceted set of highly significant consequences or ‘spillover effects on contemporary religion’ (Martikainen 2012, p. 180). As argued by Martikainen, as a first notable effect, we can now clearly discern ‘a growing role of economic reasoning among religions in the new political economy,’ including an increasingly ‘wide use of business-oriented practices’ such as different managerial techniques, advertising, marketing, branding, and different types of ‘organizational restructuring’ (Martikainen 2012, p. 177). Closely related to this, a second notable effect has been the degree to which religious
communities have not only adapted to ‘market rationalities’ but increasingly also started to act and reconfigure themselves as businesses and commercial enterprises (Martikainen 2012, p. 178).

In broader perspective, the effects of processes of marketization on the contemporary, both non-denominational and institutional, Protestant field can be viewed in light of Esping-Andersen’s (1990) crude and much debated, but nonetheless heuristically useful, tripartite ideal-type distinction between three main types of post-industrial ‘welfare capitalism’ regimes: the liberal (including e.g. the United States, the UK, Australia), conservative-corporatist (including e.g. Germany, France), and social-democratic (including e.g. the Nordic countries). This typology orders societies on the basis of their respective degrees of ‘decommodification’ as it relates to principles of labor-market organization, the distribution of resources, social stratification, and social security. While liberal regimes tend to be characterized by lower levels of state intervention and a higher reliance on market forces in the creation of welfare and social security, conservative-corporatist regimes instead tend to take a middle road and develop insurance contributions-based welfare regimes. Social-democratic regimes are, by contrast, characterized by much more interventionist and universalist welfare and social security principles and policies (cf. Isakjee 2017, p. 6). While many societies clearly remain representative of one of these ideal types, the typology is best understood in terms of a continuum that allows for movement. Indeed, the global spread of neoliberal political economy has served to propel a general movement of all types of societies towards the liberal end of the spectrum (cf. Koenig 2005). This is also reflective of the general ways in which, as Gauthier puts it, the increasing proliferation and implementation of neoliberal ideology and policies have come to propel a ‘complex and multifarious set of processes through which economics has dislodged politics as a structuring and embedding force’ (Gauthier 2015, pp. 71–72).

**Marketization in the non-denominational Protestant Christian field**

Primarily emerging as a response to the fundamental social and cultural changes of the 1960s, non-denominationalism has become epitomized by the spread of non- or cross-denominational neo-evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal so-called ‘seeker sensitive’ churches (Miller 1997). As a particular type of religious phenomenon, non-denominationalism has since spread throughout all corners of the world, with large and growing congregations having been established throughout Latin America, African countries such as Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria, and East-Asian countries such as South Korea. Primarily targeting the ‘unchurched,’ seeker-sensitive churches tend to emphasize the relationship between faith and personal development and success. While the teachings of these types of churches tend to lean towards the conservative side, they typically also carry the promise of fundamental life transformation and improvement through religion. Non-denominational churches have also been quick to embrace new media technologies as a central means of promotion and proselytization (e.g. Einstein 2008; Hackett 2009). Moreover, it is not uncommon nowadays for these types of churches to utilize different types of market research in order to be able to identify core publics and ‘customers,’ to gear services to niche audiences, to enhance their ‘quality’ and entertainment appeal, and to reduce the demands put on (potential) customers in terms of lifestyle, belief, and commitment (Einstein 2008; Stolz and Usunier 2014, pp. 17–18). In many notable respects, these types of churches have thus increasingly modeled and structured themselves as businesses and come to view themselves as players in an expanded marketplace of ideas and lifestyle choices. Consequently, their primary aim is to cater to the personal religious tastes and sensibilities of the individual. While the proliferation of these types of churches can be observed throughout
societies with different welfare regimes, they have in large part emanated from, and also arguably grown the most, in socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts that lean towards the liberal end of the spectrum.

Houston-based Lakewood Church, one of the largest megachurches in the liberal-regime United States, provides a case in point. Singled out by Einstein (2008) as one of the most prominent ‘faith brands’ in the United States, Lakewood Church has grown exponentially since its establishment in 1959 and developed into an international multi-media ministry with a strong emphasis on the relationship between faith and personal development. Understood as ‘spiritual products that have been given popular meaning and awareness through marketing’ (Einstein 2008, p. 92), faith brands are characterized by their close association with key people such as leading personas and various types of ancillary church/community-related products such as books, DVDs, courses, etc., all of which are marketed and advertised in highly sophisticated ways. The official discourse of Lakewood Church is heavily centered on its leading pastor, Joel Osteen, and the theme of personal achievement and success. In terms of genre and style, the official discourse of the church as found on its official website (lakewoodchurch.com) is blatantly promotional. It is aimed at making the church and its high production-value services, activities, and products as attractive as possible and to deliberately connect them to wider cultural discourses on personal development, successful living, and the ‘entrepreneurial self.’ Only very little is revealed about the actual organizational structure, strategies, or working routines of the church. This, however, is perfectly in line with Lakewood Church’s focus on providing its adherents with attractive individual provisions rather than offering any type of ‘public utility’ for which a higher degree of transparency might be required.

The Melbourne-based seeker-sensitive Pentecostal-evangelical megachurch Hillsong, known for its self-produced and heavily branded own style of popular worship music, provides another good example of the increasingly close relationship between non-denominationalism and market and consumer sensibilities. Since its establishment in liberal-regime Australia in 1983, Hillsong has evolved into a transnational multi-site and multi-media ministry with local branches in several major cities around the world. Similar to Lakewood church, the teachings of Hillsong emphasize the relationship between Christian faith and both private and professional personal growth and development. For example, the congregation offers people what it calls ‘master classes’ ‘designed to speak to the leader within us all—to stretch our thinking and help us take our churches and lives forward with new innovative ideas’ (hillsong.com a). Although Hillsong is registered as a non-profit organization, it is structured like a commercial enterprise (Wagner 2014, pp. 61–63). However, apart from a brief account of its ‘Corporate Governance’ provided on its official website (hillsong.com b), the official discourse of Hillsong reveals little about internal deliberations on strategic or other organizational issues. Rather, its official discourse is highly promotional and focused on what the church can provide for the individual member or potential member.

The close relationship between market and consumer culture values and imperatives and the non-denominational field also extends to non-Western contexts which constitute ‘emerging market’ societies with mixed economy regimes. Among countless examples, Lagos-based megachurch Christ Embassy (also known as Believers LoveWorld Incorporated) provides a clear illustration. Since its establishment by leading pastor Chris Oyakhilome in 1987, Christ Embassy has developed into an international (and controversy-ridden) conglomeration of churches with several million followers worldwide. The church has actively embraced a range of different types of media for the purposes of communicating its messages, as can be seen in its strong online presence, hugely popular television program
Atmosphere for Miracles (Hackett 2009), and large number of church–related books by its leading pastor—all of which are internationally marketed in sophisticated ways (Adeboye 2003, p. 143). Often situated in the ‘prosperity gospel’ mold, the teachings of Christ Embassy center on the relationship between faith and social mobility and emphasize material wealth as a natural outcome of their particular vision of faithful life and living (Adeboye 2003; Hackett 2009). For example, the ‘Resources’ section of the church’s official website contains an article titled ‘Just keep growing’ that provides the following closing encouragement:

If you desire to experience continual growth in every area of your life, then you must build your spirit with God’s Word. Remember that God is willing to give you much more than you could ever imagine (Ephesians 3:20). Start declaring right now, that the Word of God is growing in your finances and health the same way it’s growing in your heart.

(cristembassy.org)

As this example illustrates, the teachings of Christ Embassy emphasize the intimate connection between faith and both personal and material development and success. This example is also further illustrative of Christ Embassy’s official discourse more generally: it is highly promotional and geared towards individual members and potential members.

As the above brief discussion illustrates, many non-denominational Protestant churches around the world have adopted and fully internalized the discourses of market and consumer society. In addition, they have consciously aimed to materialize these discourses in actual practice through configuring their services, messages, and activities in ways that correspond to the consumption-oriented sensibilities of modern individuals (e.g. Einstein 2008). Their official discourse therefore closely mirrors what these churches actually do. Moreover, they all share a drive towards continuous growth and expansion in the context of what they view as a competitive environment of religious and other lifestyle choices. Unconstrained by dense bureaucratic structures, they are free to pursue their aims, which is also clearly reflected in their individual- and consumer-oriented official discourse and its actual practical materialization. In this, their general character is thus also reflective of the broader liberal regimes in which they are embedded.

**Marketization in the institutional Christian Protestant field**

Compared to the increasingly individual- and customer-oriented discourse of many non-denominational churches, as discussed earlier, the response of long-established institutional Protestant churches to ongoing processes of marketization have largely become expressed through an idiom of crisis and need for thoroughgoing organizational change. The response of these types of churches is closely connected to the ways in which neoliberal restructurings have brought about a range of significant changes in public-, third-, and private-sector relations, including those between church and state.

While the effects of processes of marketization on the contemporary institutional Protestant field have been both multiple and multifaceted, they have become particularly visible through the ways in which these types of churches have become increasingly susceptible to NPM-inspired organizational values and criteria of organizational effectiveness (cf. Martikainen 2012, p. 178; Moberg 2017). By now firmly established across liberal, conservative-corporatist, and social-democratic regimes alike, the principal objective of NPM
is to reform public-sector bureaucracies by subjecting them to a set of instrumental-rationalist private-sector measures as part of a more general effort to enhance their ‘effectivity’ and ‘performance’ (e.g. Pollitt et al. 2007). NPM has also provided the justification for, and brought about a range of, actual public-sector deregulations and new types of ‘public–private partnerships’ as part of a more general social-organizational shift from ‘government’ (in terms of state power on its own) to ‘governance’ (a broader configuration of state and other key actors, organizations, and elements in wider civil society) (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p. 143). In many cases, these developments have entailed notable expansions in the ‘opportunity structure’ of religious organizations through opening up new areas of religious/faith-based secular partnerships and modes of cooperation (Martikainen 2012, p. 180).

In the liberal regime of the United States, where state and religion have been firmly legally separated for centuries and the religious landscape has always been organized along denominational and congregational lines, the changing fortunes and discursive practices of the long-established so-called ‘mainline’ Protestant churches provide apt illustrations of an increasing adoption of market- and NPM-associated discourse and values on the part of institutional religious organizations. The US mainline churches all established dense bureaucratic structures already in the early 20th century as part of their concentrated ‘Social Gospel’ engagement in social issues and causes (Thuesen 2002). While they all continued to grow until the 1950s, the 1960s came to mark the start of a long process of perpetual mainline decline that has continued into the first two decades of the new millennium with Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study documenting a decrease in mainline membership from 18.1 percent of the adult population of the United States in 2007 to 14.7 percent in 2014. In spite of their numerical decline, however, the mainline churches nevertheless retain close relationships to the core social establishment and continue to act as central participants in various forms of church-, state/government-, and third-sector partnerships (e.g. Lantzer 2012). In the words of Wuthnow and Evans (2002, p. 19), the ‘model’ for mainline church life has increasingly become ‘that of a network, or referral system.’ As a central part of these developments, the mainline churches have also become increasingly prone to adopt market-associated discourse, values, and imperatives and to reconfigure their organizational cultures in accordance with new NPM-associated criteria of organizational effectivity. Indeed, when looking at the official discourse of US mainline churches, the perpetuation of market and NPM imperatives and values is clearly visible already at a cursory glance. Above all, we find an increasing emphasis on and preoccupation with strategic thinking and the proliferation of notions and terms such as ‘cost-effectiveness,’ ‘flexibility,’ ‘total-quality management,’ ‘marketing,’ and ‘branding.’ There are also plenty of examples of the actual materialization of such discourses, ranging from the establishment of new working units such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Mission Advancement Unit to large-scale undertakings such as the United Methodist Church’s 2001 Igniting Ministry and 2009 Rethink Church advertising and marketing campaigns (Moberg 2017). The US mainline churches therefore provide examples of churches that have remained deeply embedded in the social structures of a strongly liberal regime but nevertheless largely followed a pathway towards marketization that resembles that of public institutions.

In the liberal regime of the UK, an increasing perpetuation of market-associated discourse and imperatives is also clearly observable in the changing discursive practices of the Church of England (CoE), which still retains its formal status as state church. The CoE reached its modern-time high point during the ‘Anglican decade’ of the 1950s (Davie 2015, p. 29) after
which a period of radical change set in during the 1960s when traditional institutional religion, as represented by the CoE and the other traditional churches, became challenged on virtually all fronts. Based on a new realization that thoroughgoing changes were required in order to keep the church à jour with cultural developments and remain socially relevant, the CoE opted for an accommodating approach to modernity and ‘became part of the social fabric and the reigning moral and cultural ethos’ (Woodhead 2012, p. 15). Following its own experience of progressive decline and changing social status, the CoE has devised a number of strategic initiatives aimed at stemming the state of perpetual decline that it finds itself in. These include the broader Anglican and ecumenical so-called Fresh Expressions initiative, the principal purpose of which is to create new ways in which the church can reach beyond the parish level and ‘overcome the limitations of the “inherited model”’ (Davie 2015, p. 146). The Fresh Expressions initiative emerged out of a series of previous large-scale strategic undertakings such as the so-called Breaking New Ground initiative in 1994 and the Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context initiative in 2004, all of which were designed to aid what the CoE has come to refer to as ‘church growth.’ As part of these initiatives, official CoE discourse has also become increasingly marked by an emphasis on strategic thinking and the heavy employment of market and NPM notions and terminology (for a more detailed discussion see Moberg 2017, pp. 102–109). Here, too, the pathway that the CoE has taken towards increasing marketization closely resembles that of other public institutions.

Similar developments have also been observed on the institutional Protestant field in conservative-corporatist settings such as those of the Netherlands (Sengers 2010) and Germany (Schlamelcher 2013). In the social-democratic settings of the Nordic countries, market and NPM values and imperatives have also clearly made their way into the official discourse of the Nordic Lutheran majority churches, which all retain close structural relationships to their respective states. While the Nordic countries have all witnessed significant neoliberal public sector deregulations in recent decades and thus gradually moved towards the liberal end of the spectrum, they still retain many characteristics of the social-democratic model. Beginning already in the 19th century as part of their growing concerns to remain closely aligned with the political and social establishment and the everyday concerns of the population at large, the Nordic churches grew increasingly liberal, inclusivist, and pragmatic in general outlook (e.g. Kasselstrand and Eltanani 2013). They have all developed dense bureaucratic structures and continue to maintain a strong presence on every level of society. Lutheran uniformity culture has, however, been considerably weakened following steadily decreasing church membership figures coupled with accelerating religious diversification since the early 1970s. But although structural relationships between church and state have likewise been progressively weakening over a period of several decades, they still remain strong, especially at the level of administration and finances. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Nordic churches have all gradually transformed themselves into civil-service and public utility-oriented institutions and increasingly come to adopt third-sector organizational models. However, as they have traditionally been strong supporters of the Nordic welfare state model, their social work and welfare provision has traditionally been, and in large part remains, closely coordinated with that of the state and local secular municipalities.

In Sweden, following new legislation and the disestablishment of the Church of Sweden (CoS) in 2000, its general order of discourse has yet increasingly become marked by an emphasis on strategic thinking and NPM imperatives. The changed legal status of the CoS has also brought some identifiable changes in its self-perception as a public institution (e.g.
Petterson 2013; Moberg 2017). For example, the CoS has increased its investments in communications and ICT and adopted a range of actual marketing practices as part of its efforts to construct one single and all-encompassing ‘Church of Sweden brand.’ As Kornberger (2010, p. xiii) reminds us, branding has developed into a ‘new management framework that turns old wisdoms upside down by conceptualizing the organization from the outside in.’ The earnest adoption of banding on the part of the CoS thereby also clearly signals a general shift from a public state organization type of mindset towards that of a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization.

In Denmark, where the ties between church and state have remained the closest and strongest in wider Nordic comparison (Nielsen and Kühle 2011), the general order of discourse of the Church of Denmark (CoD) has become increasingly marked by calls for renewal and change. It is important to note, though, that as the CoD retains the status of official change church and legally remains under the authority of the Danish Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, its official discourse consequently also remains more closely aligned with that of the Danish public administration field more generally. Denmark thus constitutes a special case where the CoD remains an integral part of the social and political establishment. As explored in detail by Rasmussen (2018), this state of affairs provides part of the explanation as to why the official discourse on the CoD, beginning in the early 1990s, has become so strongly permeated by NPM-associated discourse, values, and imperatives while simultaneously remaining strongly embedded in a public utility and ‘civil service’ idiom.

One notable way in which marketization discourses have become materialized within the CoS and CoD is through the ways in which increasing investments in areas such as communication and ICT, marketing, and branding have led to the forming of new working units focusing on these types of issues as opposed to more ‘conventional’ forms of church work (Schlamelcher 2013). Another notable way is through the actual marketing and branding endeavors that have taken place and the visibility they have generated.

As the above discussion illustrates, the official discourse of institutional Protestant churches in the United States, the UK, and the Nordic countries has become increasingly permeated by market- and NPM-associated discourse and organizational values. In sharp contrast to non-denominational independent churches, the official discourse of institutional Protestant churches generally continues to reflect an establishmentarian and ‘public utility’ mindset, although this may be slowly changing. Their increasing adoption of market- and NPM-associated discourse is perhaps best explained by the fact that they have maintained organizational structures that remain geared towards public, collective social engagement rather than a focus on individual needs and sensibilities. Since their continued active civic engagements largely take place through their bureaucratic structures, this makes it more likely for them to become subjected to stronger inter-organizational ideological and discursive influence and pressures to conform to new NPM-associated values and criteria of institutional and organizational effectiveness (Moberg 2017, p. 76). But marketization discourses have also come to provide these churches with ready-made explanations and taken-for-granted ways of talking about ‘proper’ and ‘effective’ institutional and organizational culture, and it is to a large extent on the basis of such discourse and values that new church imaginaries are now being reconstructed.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to highlight the various ways and degrees to which different types of Protestant Christian churches have embraced the ideational and discursive traits of
market and consumer society. The discussion in this chapter has been based on the contention that actual, practical changes in the organizational structure, communication practices, and modus operandi of social institutions and organizations in general tend to be intimately connected to broader changes in discursive practices and changing institutional and organizational imaginaries. In this regard, Esping-Andersen’s (1990) typology of welfare regimes provides a general framework for understanding the broader social and political economic contexts in which such changes occur. However, as the above discussion shows, the pathways that institutional Protestant churches have taken towards increasing marketization have been largely similar across societies with both liberal and social-democratic welfare regimes.

Exploring the official discourse of religious communities—whether institutional and traditional or more newly established and independent—in particular social contexts at particular points in time, provides scholars with important clues as to what actual, practical developments we might expect to see in the future. A focus on the dialectical relationship between discursive and social change thus provides scholars with a particular set of tools for the identification and analysis of some of the main ways in which broader processes of discursive change relate to, and often also translate into, religious change. More specifically, a discursive approach provides scholars with valuable tools for identifying the ways in which changing discursive practices may become operationalized as part of the construction of new imaginaries for religious agency in a broader social and cultural environment marked by market imperatives and the ethos of conspicuous consumption. In addition, it also provides tools for identifying how new discursive practices may become materialized through the actual reconfiguration of religious activities, provisions, organizational structures, working routines, etc.

It remains clear, though, that a fuller understanding of the actual, practical consequences and effects of ongoing processes of marketization on the future organization, life, and practices of religious communities cannot be adequately assessed on the basis of an analysis of their official discourse alone. Future research could usefully strive to combine an analysis of the changing discursive practices of religious communities with in-depth empirical explorations of how the operationalization and materialization of market and consumer culture discourse, values, and imperatives actually play out and are negotiated in real-life situations in different types of religious contexts around the world.

References


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