

1 **Harnessing the Power of Religion: Broadening Sustainability Research and Practice in the**
2 **Advancement of Ecology**

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7 **Abstract**

8 Sustainability research in the macromarketing literature has been largely limited to exploring
9 sociocultural values and norms, business practices, public policies, and economic conditions.
10 Although the concept of ‘values’ constantly recurs in the literature, religious perspectives have
11 received little attention. By presenting an alternative interpretation of what have traditionally
12 been construed as anthropocentric religions, this study highlights the underutilized potential of
13 religions as effective vehicles for initiating cultural transformation towards sustainability. The
14 article calls for contextualized approaches to ecological sustainability that take into account the
15 values and worldviews of target communities, which are often shaped by religious systems. The
16 article concludes that including religions in the sustainability discourse can benefit
17 macromarketing theory and practice in a variety of ways.

18 **Key words:** *religion, sustainability, values, ecology, worldviews*

19

1 **Introduction**

2 Does religion have a role to play in the sustainability discourse? A review of the extant
3 literatures on religion and ecology indicates an affirmative answer. Yet, there is a wide chasm
4 between two opposing views: on the one hand, religion is held accountable for fuelling
5 unsustainable modes of production and consumption (e.g., Feuerbach 1957; Nash 1991; White
6 Jr. 1967); and on the other hand, religion is defended for combating such undesirable practices
7 (e.g., Bouma-Prediger 2009; Gardner 2006; Johnston 2014; Motahari 1985, 1990; Nasr 1997;
8 Tucker 2008; Tucker and Grim 2001; Wallis 2010). A root cause of conflict between these two
9 camps is the notion of anthropocentrism. The former associates human beings' unsustainable life
10 practices and their negative consequences (e.g., ecological degradation and the depletion of
11 natural resources) with theological teachings (e.g., The Chain of Being) that have allegedly
12 legitimized man's exploitation of nature. Contrary to this view, advocates of religion argue that
13 unsustainable behaviors are only the immediate outcome of a narrow interpretation of the divine
14 teachings that regard mankind as the custodian of nature.

15 Scholarship on the positive and multiple relationships between religious principles and
16 environmental ethics is abundant within the social sciences (for a review, see Tucker and Grim
17 2001). This extensive scholarship testifies to the fact that religions have an established trajectory
18 of propagating pro-environmental behaviors anchored in the fundamental 'values of being and
19 living' (Motahari 1985, 1990). Religions' grassroots value-based approach to sustainability
20 provides an enduring and holistic ethics framework within which socioeconomic growth
21 strategies can be devised and implemented in such ways that their subsequent social, economic,
22 and ecological harms can be minimized if not eliminated (Nasr1997; Wallis 2010). Juxtaposed
23 with the general sustainability discourse, which commonly encompasses the 3E's (economy,

1 environment/ecology, and equity), the present article specifically focuses on the
2 ecological/environmental aspects of sustainability in relation to religions.
3 Ecological/environmental sustainability refers to the preservation of three functional categories
4 that represent the direct or partial use of natural resources essential for human survival: 1)
5 resource provision, 2) absorption of wastes generated by human activities, and 3) provision of
6 environmental services related or unrelated to human activity (Visconti, Minowa and Maclaran
7 2014).

8 A cross-disciplinary ~~theoretical~~ analysis of the extant literatures on religious studies,
9 social sciences, ecology, environmental studies, ecofeminism studies, marketing, and
10 macromarketing reveals four ~~based on fours religious~~ perspectives on ~~to~~-sustainability: 1)
11 religions' harmful contribution to ecological sustainability, 2) religions' beneficial contribution
12 to ecological sustainability, 3) secular/non-religious approach to ecological sustainability, and 4)
13 other mixed approaches to ecological sustainability ~~drawn from religious studies, social sciences,~~
14 ~~ecology, environmental studies, ecofeminism studies, marketing, and macromarketing is~~
15 ~~conducted to identify the intersection between religion, ecological sustainability, and~~
16 ~~macromarketing~~-(see Table 1).

17 [Insert Table 1 about here]

18 Table 1 shows that the macromarketing literature has traditionally focused on a
19 secular/non-religious approach to ecological sustainability and the works we identified mostly
20 focus on the intersection between ecological sustainability and macromarketing implications and
21 overlook religious perspectives, except the foundational work of Hunt and Vitell (2006) which
22 incorporates the intersection between religion, ecological sustainability, and macromarketing in
23 general and without specifically exploring the potential role religion can play in promoting

1 ecological sustainability. Yet, reviewing the macromarketing literature shows that multiple
2 papers recently published in Journal of Macormarketing **recently** have focused on religion and
3 macromarketing, but not in relation to ecological sustainability. For example, Drenten and
4 Mcmanus, (2015) provided a review of articles in macromarketing that have dealt with religion
5 and religious issues; Kale (2004) provided a discussion of issues of spirituality and religion in
6 the globalized context; Yardakul and Atik (2015) explored the role of religion in coping with
7 poverty; Sandıkcı et al. (2015) examined the impact of globalization, religion, and economic
8 growth on individual well-being; and Kamarulzaman et al. (2015) studied the role of religion in
9 searching Halal food in digital media. While religion is not a new research topic in **the**
10 macromarketing literature, Drenten and McManus (2015) argue that there is not much research
11 that combines religion and ecological sustainability or environmental issues, except for the work
12 of 1) Friedman and Hershey (2001) who explored the impact of Jewish values on marketing and
13 business practices, 2) Leary, Minton, and Mittelstaedt (2016), who explored the macro-level
14 influences of religion on the marketplace by showing how religion influences beliefs of
15 dominion and stewardship, and 3) Minton et al. (2015), who proposed a cross-cultural
16 comparison of religious motivations for sustainable behaviors.

17 Our review of the extant literature at the intersection of marketing, religion and
18 ecological sustainability (see table 1) indicates that macromarketing lags behind other disciplines
19 (e.g., ecology and environmental studies) in which the positive relationship between religions
20 and ecological/environmental sustainability is well trodden (see, for example, Batchelor 1993;
21 Chuvieco 2012; Dellios 2001; Dien 1997; Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin 2003; Hessel and
22 Ruether 2000; Mohamad et al. 2012; Tucker and Williams 1997). This oversight may be
23 associated with: 1) macromarketing's overreliance on secular ideologies at the expense of

1 religions' as multifaceted 'resources' (Jafari 2012; Kadirov 2014), and 2) researchers' narrow
2 focus on the impact of religiosity on consumers' ethical behaviors. For example, Hunt and Vitell
3 (2006, 1986) propose a general theory of marketing ethics incorporating religion as a macro and
4 micro level force that influences consumer behavior. Wenell (2009) explored how positive moral
5 impulses during Christmas consumptive practices could be sustained in everyday life. While
6 ethics constitutes an important link between religions and markets, it does not wholly explain the
7 impact of religion on markets (Mittelstaedt, 2002). Addressing such oversights, the present
8 article aims to enhance our understanding of: (1) how religions can enrich the
9 ecological/environmental sustainability discourse at a macro level; (2) what can be learned from
10 faith-based sustainability initiatives, and (3) how such learning can effectively inform policy and
11 help efficiently improve our existing sustainability practices which may not necessarily be
12 associated with religions.

13 The contributions of ~~the~~this article are twofold. Firstly, scholars (e.g., Helleiner 2000;
14 Johnston 2008; Varey 2010, 2011) have begun to ponder if sustainability movements can be
15 truly sustainable. For example, Catlin and Wang (2013) showed that recycling can lead to over-
16 consumption. Such skepticism is basically concerned with the dominant value systems in which
17 sustainability movements are nurtured. Here, the essence of argument is that so long as
18 sustainability operates within the dominant framework of the neoliberal political and economic
19 ideology, it is doomed to subordinate the mainstream unsustainable modes of living (Varey
20 2011). For example, since green consumerism is generally predicated on and enacted by
21 neoliberalism's 'citizen-consumer' motto, it is less likely to create grassroots behavioral change
22 as greening may paradoxically lead to the overproduction and overconsumption of green
23 products (Catlin and Wang 2013; Johnston 2008; Varey 2010). Hence, while only the form of

1 unsustainability changes, its nature remains intact (Cunningham 2002). Others (e.g., Assadourian
2 2010; Scott, Martin and Schouten 2014) warn that given the rapid global expansion of
3 consumerism and its subsequent ecological harms, sustainability is far from gaining widespread
4 global recognition as a megatrend. This article subscribes to these perspectives, yet, it stresses
5 that parallel to the ongoing theorizations, the urgency of tackling unsustainability necessitates
6 immediate action, be it ‘radical’ (seeking grassroots change) or ‘reformist’ (corrective)
7 (Mittelstaedt et al. 2014). This requires that we broaden our understanding of multiple actors
8 whose varying, and sometimes conflictual, practices and value systems influence
9 (un)sustainability. Among many of such actors and practices, religious value-based initiatives
10 offer a fertile ground on which to further investigate and operationalize sustainability.

11 The second contribution arises from the diversity of views religions can offer. Nowadays,
12 there is an increasing recognition for the importance of contextualized approaches to
13 sustainability (DesJardins 2007; Eaton and Lorentzen 2003; Mascarenhas et al. 2010; Polonsky,
14 Kilboure and Vocino 2014; Reed, Fraser and Dougill 2006). This stream of research argues that
15 sustainability’s modern definitions, conceptual frameworks and solutions have emerged and been
16 implemented in the context of western industrialized societies. Hence, sustainability discourses
17 are largely entrenched in western institutions (i.e., sociocultural values and norms, business
18 practices, policies and politics, and economic conditions), which implies that recommendations
19 resulting from west-centric projects may not be readily generalized to other societies that have
20 different sets of development trajectories and socioeconomic, political and cultural
21 characteristics, and institutions (Gifford 2011; Soron 2010). Mittelstaedt (2002) contends that
22 public policy in emerging markets is often shaped by religious political and social authority;
23 hence, our understanding of markets is greatly enhanced by understanding the role that religion

1 plays in such economies. Therefore, the inclusion of non-western theories and practices can
2 enrich our understanding of the theoretical and practical underpinnings of sustainability (see also
3 Jafari et al. 2012). By the same token, given their diversities and localities, religions can help
4 accommodate a more encompassing approach to sustainability.

5 In order to pre-empt misunderstandings, and in agreement with Tucker and Grim (2001),
6 two key points should be clarified: firstly, while “religions are necessary partners in the current
7 ecological movement”, their contribution is insufficient without the essential contributions of
8 science, social sciences and policy to the various challenges posed by contemporary ecological
9 problems (Tucker and Grim p. 3). Secondly, “no single religion is privileged over the
10 contributions of the world’s religions to the flourishing of life for future generations” (Tucker
11 and Grim 2001, p. 3).

12 The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, with a focus on ecological
13 concerns, a concise review of the key debates on sustainability is presented. This section
14 highlights two points: (1) at a macro level and as resources (Jafari 2012; Kadirov 2014) and
15 values systems (Nasr 1997; Wallis 2010), religions are largely understudied in the extant
16 macromarketing literature on sustainability; and (2) where included, they are portrayed as a
17 problem rather than a solution (see for example Leary, Minton and Mittlestaedt 2016). Then,
18 there is an overview of the debate on whether or not religions advocate anthropocentrism. This is
19 followed by a brief account of religious perspectives on sustainability through the lens of
20 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This choice is not meant to exclude other faiths and
21 spiritualities (e.g. Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Sikhism, aboriginal and so forth); these
22 Abrahamic religions are discussed because anthropocentrism is oftentimes blamed on them.
23 Next, after explaining the rise of interest in engaging religions in debates on ecological

1 conservation, there is a discussion on the way religions can broaden the existing dominant
2 conceptualizations of sustainability at a macro level and help resolve ecological problems where
3 other (secular) institutions are not (sufficiently) operant. The article concludes with a discussion
4 on how and why macromarketing research into sustainability can benefit from incorporating
5 faith-based practices in the development of theory, policy, and practice. Areas for future research
6 are also highlighted.

7 **Sustainability and the Dominant Social Paradigm**

8 Despite the rise of environmentalism and increased public awareness of the environmental
9 impact of modern modes of living, environmentalism is seriously challenged by the emergence
10 of more individualized and globalized societies, the escalating global population, and the rise of
11 consumerism (Assadourian 2010; Connolly and Prothero 2008; Merchant 2005; Scott, Martin,
12 and Schouten 2014). Merchant (2005) issued a warning to all citizens that human beings are in
13 an endangered situation. For Merchant, “the uncontrolled multinational corporations are leading
14 an undesirable globalization that is inhumane, environmentally degrading, farmer killing, and
15 undemocratic.” (p. 224). Peattie and Peattie (2009) contend that barriers to sustainability do not
16 lie in the lack of public knowledge of the dangers of unsustainable behaviors; rather, the
17 challenge is how to bridge the gap between knowledge and behavior. The implementation of
18 collective measures at the government level plays a significant role in adopting more sustainable
19 behaviors (Purushottam 2014). In this regard, Fischer et al. (2012) highlight five priority areas
20 that are necessary to evoking more sustainable behavioral change: (1) strengthening institutions
21 of civil society and improving citizen engagement; (2) controlling growth level in consumption
22 as well as population growth; (3) addressing social justice issues; (4) reforming formal
23 institutions; and (5) reflecting on value and belief systems.

1 These characteristics in the macromarketing literature are captured in the notion of the
2 Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) (Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero 1997). Defined as “a
3 society’s belief structure that organizes the way people perceive and interpret the functioning of
4 the world around them” (Milbrath 1989, 116), the DSP exposes the core ideology of a society’s
5 life philosophy and practices (Kilbourne et al. 1997). As Kilbourne et al. further elaborate; the
6 DSP in contemporary society rotates around embracing happiness through consumption and
7 materialism. This very same ideology remains a recurrent theme in more than five decades of
8 research on sustainability (see Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Ekins 1991; Fisk 1974; Foote 1963;
9 McDonagh and Prothero 2014; Packard and Payne 1957; Polonsky, Kilbourne, and Vocino 2014;
10 Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011). This stream of research argues that unsustainable modes of
11 production are closely related to the political ideology of neoliberalism that is exclusively
12 preoccupied with the notion of economic growth (Gill 1995). Neoliberalism confines life to the
13 limited boundaries of the market and employs a language that promotes the sovereignty of the
14 consumer in the marketplace (Schwarzkopf 2011), in the sense that the term consumer is used for
15 every aspect of private and social life (Schor 1999). In essence, it privileges the market over
16 society (Assadourian 2010, Fitchett, Patsiaouras, and Davies 2014; Harvey 2011). Such
17 dominant political ideology, in Varey’s (2010, 2011) view is the root cause of ecological crises
18 and no true sustainability can be accomplished within this DSP. Hence, sustainability requires an
19 alternative political system in which the basic principles of production, consumption, distribution
20 and disposition should be driven by the philosophy of ‘collective welfare’. Varey’s thesis is that
21 the market logic should be substituted by ‘eco-logic’, a mindset that describes and prescribes
22 everyday life modes of socioeconomic developments based on eco-logical considerations. This
23 eco-logical ideology also emphasizes the importance of controlling economic growth.

1 In the same vein, Kilbourne et al. (1997) and Mittelstaedt et al. (2014) argue that
2 ecological crises are directly related to the dominant ideology of socioeconomic growth and
3 nation-states' competition over the utilization of natural resources in order to gain more
4 competitive advantage in the world's political economy (see also Hunt 2011). The most common
5 solution offered to tackle this DSP is a paradigm shift towards alternative modes of production
6 and consumption. 'Societal marketing' (Lazer 1969; Kotler and Sidney 1969), 'well-fare
7 marketing' (Varey 2010, 2011), 'mindful consumption' (Sheth et al. 2011) and 'alternative
8 hedonism' (Soper 2007) represent some of the most serious discussions on such a paradigm shift.
9 Parallel to these, loss of faith in the sustainability of growth strategies has resulted in the
10 emergence of 'radical' or 'reformist' approaches to the DSP (Mittelstaedt et al. 2014). Yet, as the
11 literature alludes, options are not abundant. For example, blaming capitalism and neoliberalism,
12 researchers (Chatzidakis, Larsen, and Bishop 2014; Varey 2011) often turn to socialism as a
13 promising political framework that can help deliver collective well-being, including eco-logical
14 equity. However, as Burroughs (2010) contemplates, such solutions are much easier said than
15 done because given the complexity of sustainability, socialism's controlled growth strategy is
16 less likely to yield positive results.

17 Interestingly, although the concept of 'values' constantly recurs in the extant literature,
18 religions have remained in the periphery. This means that religions are often studied at an
19 attitudinal level without in-depth analysis of the value systems that (re)shape different societies'
20 worldviews at a macro level (see for example Leary et al. 2016; Minton and Kahle 2014; Minton,
21 Kahle and Kim 2015). As Kilbourne, Beckman, and Thelen (2002) contend, sustainability
22 research should go beyond attitudes and commitment (which are later stages of a multi-stage
23 process) to investigate value systems (at a higher level analysis) that can clearly depict the

1 position of ecologism and environmentalism in societies' mindset. Other scholars (Grunert-
2 Beckmann and Kilbourne 1997; Kilbourne et al. 1997; Stern, Dietz and Guagnano 1995) also
3 call for a grassroots approach to the study of sustainability. Such an approach, they argue, should
4 examine the drivers of sustainability, societies' underlying institutional structures, and their
5 value systems that impact environmental concerns; investigating the symptoms of environmental
6 problems (e.g., green attitudes, recycling habits, and energy consumption) cannot sufficiently
7 lead to fundamental policy change. Layton (2007) argues that consumers' core religious beliefs
8 regarding man's relationship with nature have great influence on marketing systems as well as
9 the role that marketing can play in creating a more sustainable future.

10 Religions and religious beliefs influence activities of the marketplace since religions
11 have a fundamental impact on consumers' understanding of the world and, consequently, their
12 understanding of markets and market institutions (Mittelstaedt 2002). This article argues that
13 since religions are concerned with value systems and worldviews at a macro level, sustainability
14 discourses can benefit from an understanding of contextualized religious values and faith-based
15 practices to achieve deeper social engagement in ecological sustainability and produce the
16 desired cultural transformation. Such a cultural shift can be facilitated through macromarketing,
17 since macromarketing provides the lens through which the influence of religion in the market is
18 best understood (Mittelstaedt 2002).

19 As a review of the extant literature indicates, where religions *are* discussed as value
20 systems, they are often portrayed as problems rather than solutions. For example, Leary et al
21 (2016) conclude that religious individuals exhibit more beliefs of dominion than non-religious
22 individuals and they place the responsibility for sustainability on producers. As such, religiosity,

1 in the form of anthropocentrism, is viewed as part of the DSP that has historically legitimized
2 human beings' domination over nature.

3 There is also ambiguity around the relationship between religion and ecology. For
4 example, prior work (e.g., Botero et al. 2014) highlights that each religious tradition has both
5 negative and positive consequences in terms of ecological sustainability and environmental
6 ethics. Grim and Tucker (2014) also argue that in religious discourses there is often
7 incongruence between the prophetic/transformational and conservative/constraining aspects of
8 religious views. Ecofeminist Heather Eaton (2007) further argues that every religion has
9 oppressive and liberating elements, as well as conservative and conserving values that must be
10 differentiated. These tensions create contradictory interpretations about the role of religion in
11 promoting ecology and sustainable behaviors. Resolving such contradictory views warrants the
12 re-examination of religions with a view to understanding human beings as part of ecosystems.
13 Adopting such a perspective can result in conceiving consumers' relationship to nature and
14 ecology as cosmic unity; that is, their existence will depend on the physical environment within
15 which they live (White 1967).

16

17 **Is Religion the Root of the Ecological Problem?**

18 In his controversial article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", White Jr. (1967)
19 blames the current ecological crisis on Judeo-Christianity and its western historical traditions,
20 claiming that Christianity, in its western form, is the most anthropocentric religion the world has
21 seen. According to the author, western religions have endorsed the destruction of Earth by
22 establishing the dualism of man vs. nature and the transcendence of the former over the latter.
23 Made in God's image, man is not part of nature but above it. God gave man the privilege of

1 naming animals, hence giving man dominion over nature. White Jr. takes sporadic biblical
2 excerpts such as “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28) as evidence of the
3 anthropocentrism of the Judeo-Christian tradition and its approval of human sovereignty over
4 nature. Tracing the history of Christian traditions since medieval times, he then argues that the
5 pursuit of excessive land cultivation, science, technology and exploitive capitalism in the name
6 of “progress” gave western societies power, but this power would eventually lead to the demise
7 of humanity. An interesting point in White Jr.’s thesis is that he also deems religion imperative to
8 combating the ecological crisis. White argues that religion is both the problem and the solution.
9 His rationale is that more science and technology will not solve our ecological crisis. Given the
10 power of religion in inserting change on people’s worldview – as it did by legitimizing man’s
11 superiority over nature – religion can use the same power to reverse the process.

12 Other critics pose more severe views. For example, Feuerbach (1957, p. 287) criticizes
13 Christianity for its instrumental use of nature for the sake of human salvation in the world
14 hereafter: “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only
15 of himself and the salvation of his soul.” The very same idea is reinforced in Nash’s (1991)
16 “ecological complaint against Christianity” where he argues that “Christianity legitimates
17 ecological degradation” and that “The ecological complaint is the charge that the Christian faith
18 is the culprit in the crisis. Christianity is the primary, or at least a significant, cause of ecological
19 degradation” (pp. 94-95). Eco-feminists go even further to argue that anthropocentrism is but a
20 symptom of androcentrism (patriarchy) which is inherent in all world religions (see for e.g.
21 Merchant 1998; Plumwood 2002; Sandilands 1999; Seager 1993; Soper 1995; Warren 2000),
22 hence the domination of nature is connected to the domination of women. Yet, even among
23 ecofeminists, opinions about the role of religion are mixed with some arguing that ecofeminist

1 research which does not include religious analysis misconstrues the role of religion within
2 ecofeminism resulting in a distorted, essentialist, bourgeois and white presentation of
3 ecofeminism (Page 2007).

4 These criticisms and contradictions, according to many theologians and religious
5 environmentalists, are associated with the complexity of religious texts, which are subject to
6 multiple interpretations, and people's lack of in-depth familiarity with religious teachings
7 (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005). Bouma-Prediger (2009) in particular rejects the accusations made
8 against Christianity for their shaky rationale: "In my judgment the ecological complaint against
9 Christianity is seriously flawed." Such accusations, he argues, fail to acknowledge the 2000 year
10 gap between the advent of Christianity and today's ecological crisis. Natural degradation, in
11 Bouma-Prediger's view, is a direct result of mankind's divorce from nature in search of
12 economic gain. This is a similar theme in Nasr's (1997) thesis. Nasr forcefully argues that in its
13 applications, modern science has lost touch with the divine. Ecological crisis in modern society
14 is due to human beings' spiritual vacuum and detachment from nature and the sacred and their
15 overreliance on materialism, scientism, and positivism. In other words, by abandoning the sacred
16 and secularization of science man declared "war against nature". As regards, Nasr deems the
17 reconciliation of science with the spiritual traditions of religions pivotal to combating ecological
18 crises. Heather Eaton, a theologian and eco-feminist, makes a similar argument: "it is naive to
19 assume that we in the West live in cultures which have moved beyond the dark side of the Judeo-
20 Christian tradition, or that we are isolated from such teachings due to personal religious practices
21 or abstentions. It is also false to believe that these religious traditions can be solely defined by
22 their negative or destructive aspects" (Eaton 1995, p. 29). Prominent ecofeminist Christian
23 theologians like Heather Eaton, Yvonne Gebara, Greta Gaard and Rosemary Radford Ruether

1 call for new interpretations of religious teachings where conservative and conservation values in
2 religions are differentiated and clarified.

3 The following section elaborates the core relationship between man and nature from the
4 lens of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which are construed by many as anthropocentric
5 religions. In the interest of brevity, a few excerpts from the religious geneses are presented. Here,
6 it should be emphasized that this review is not a thorough reflection of religions; rather, it only
7 demonstrates that accusations against religion are founded on incomplete interpretations of the
8 creeds. Such readings disregard the key concept of responsibility and its mandates stressed by
9 religions.

10 *The Judaic Perspective*

11 Interpretations of the Judaic texts such as the Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud base
12 environmental ethics on the doctrine of creation (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005; Tirosh-Samuelson
13 2001), which departs from the fact that only human species were created “in the image of God”
14 (Genesis 1.26-27) and that they were ‘formed out of the earth’ and to it they shall return (Genesis
15 2.15). The Psalms invites humans to contemplate the beauty, order, and wise design of nature,
16 which leads to thanksgiving and praising God like all creature do: “The heavens are telling the
17 glory of God/and the firmament proclaims his handiworks” (Psalms 19.1). Hence, being
18 privileged species and being part of the natural order place a moral responsibility on humans, as
19 stewards of God’s creation, to protect nature (Tirosh-Samuelson 2005; Tirosh-Samuelson 2001).
20 Being entrusted with nature’s well-being, Judaists are commanded by God to cultivate lands,
21 care for other creatures, “repair of the world”, be just and responsible, and to not destroy trees
22 even in times of war, as indicated in Deuteronomy 20: 19-20: “When thou besiegest a city many
23 days to bring it into thy power by making war against it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof

1 by swinging an axe against them; for from them mayest thou eat but not destroy them, for the
2 tree of the field is man's life..." (Freudenstein 1970; Tirosh-Samuelsan 2005; Tirosh-Samuelsan
3 2001).

4 The covenantal relationship between God and man supports the concept of social ecology
5 by drawing a linkage between social and ecological corruption, and therefore, an ideal Jew is
6 considered to be one that holds the virtues of humility, modesty, and moderation (Tirosh-
7 Samuelsen 2001). Humility refers to a state of awareness of the fact that humans are created by
8 God, and are thereafter subordinate to His will. As for modesty, it is the avoidance of
9 conspicuous consumption and greed, and the realization during consumption that resources of
10 the world are diminishing. The virtue of moderation is the reduction in consumption and
11 awareness of our relation to other people and living creatures.

12 'Sustainability' does not explicitly appear in Jewish texts simply because the term is a
13 modern one; yet, it is hinted at through the emphasis of its ecological, social, and economic
14 dimensions. Jewish traditions and teachings address issues of environmental protection (water,
15 soil, air, trees, and mineral resources), agriculture, urban planning, noise control, waste
16 management, intergenerational justice, warfare, budget management, animal protection and
17 ethics, diet, and consumption in general (Immergut 2008; Freudenstein 1970; Reinhardt 2014).
18 For instance, regarding pollution abatement, it is prohibited, even in war time, to discharge
19 sewage into rivers rather than its burial into the ground (Freudenstein 1970), as mentioned in
20 Deuteronomy 23: 13-15: "And thou shalt have a place outside the (military) camp, thither shalt
21 thou go out, and a spade shalt thou have with thy accoutrements, so that when thou sittest down
22 outside thou shalt dig therewith, and turn back and cover again that which cometh from thee".

23 *The Christian Perspective*

1 The available literature on the Christian perspective on sustainability points out a
2 difference in eco-theological views. This is due to the fact that there are different versions and
3 interpretations of the Bible among the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical, Lutheran, and
4 other sects (Grønvold 2013; Petersen 1999; Sandelands and Hoffman 2008). However, there is a
5 general consensus that God has created man in His image, and that He created Earth and its
6 resources for humans to use and enjoy (Grønvold 2013; Sandelands and Hoffman 2008):

7 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule
8 over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and
9 over all the creatures that move on the earth.” God created humankind in his own image, in
10 the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and
11 said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of
12 the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground. (Genesis 1:
13 26–28)

14 It is texts of this kind that are often taken as evidence of an anthropocentric view, one that
15 fosters a dualism of man and nature and thereby leading to the devaluation of the rest of creation
16 and nature (Grønvold 2013). Such interpretations have stimulated further arguments over
17 anthropocentrism versus biocentrism in Christianity, and the relationship of God-human, God-
18 nature, human-nature, and the least emphasized relation between human beings themselves
19 (Grønvold 2013; Petersen 1999). To address such allegations of anthropocentrism, Wirzba
20 (2003) argues that biblical religions have potent resources for environmentalism. More
21 pointedly, Wirzba contends that anthropocentricism is a matter of (mis)interpretation in the sense
22 that dominion does not imply privileges and a license to destroy; on the contrary, it stresses the
23 responsibility to care for Earth as God’s creation.

1 In Grønvold's (2013) view, the meanings of biocentrism, inter-human relations, and
2 human-nature relations can be understood with reference to the Bible, especially in Genesis 2:4–
3 24 which reads as “God created man...from the soil of the earth...Man is thus not above creation,
4 but made from it, shaped from the very ground he stands on”, and also in Genesis 4 about “the
5 story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, where after Cain has killed his brother, the
6 Lord hears the blood of Abel crying out to him from the earth and punishes Cain by cursing him
7 (verse 10), so that the soil of the earth will no longer be fruitful to him (verse 12)”. Likewise,
8 Genesis 2:4–7, 15 reads:

9 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created— when the Lord
10 God made the earth and heavens. Now no shrub of the field had yet grown on the earth,
11 and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the
12 earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. Springs would well up from the earth
13 and water the whole surface of the ground. The Lord God formed the man from the soil of
14 the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living
15 being. ... The Lord God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it
16 and to maintain it.

17 Such examples clearly testify to the importance of man's responsibility before nature, as a
18 basic tenet of sustainability. To further complement this defense, Sandelands and Hoffman
19 (2008) illustrate how sustainability is embedded within the doctrines of Christianity. The authors
20 associate sustainability with anthropic, relational, ethical, and divine love principles. They also
21 demonstrate how modern concepts of economic sustainability and growth are addressed in the
22 religion. For example, with reference to Catholic Church's Compendium of the Social Doctrine
23 of the Church (CSDC), they argue that religion, at a macro level, advocates a sustainable

1 economic growth in the light of eight key principles of unity and meaning, common good,
2 universal destination, subsidiarity, participation, solidarity, social values, and love.

3 *The Islamic Perspective*

4 Islam adopts a holistic approach towards developing an environmental ethical theory,
5 which is derived from the Koranic system of values and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (hadith).
6 The Koran refers to nature as God's creation, and an assembly of orderly, meaningful, and
7 purposive phenomena that manifest the power, wisdom, and mercy of its Creator (Ozdemir
8 2003). It also asserts that God created a universal balance and nature is in fact meaningful,
9 purposeful, and even Moslem (submissive to God) just like humans. Hence, it is the duty of
10 humans to preserve this universal balance in their everyday life interactions with the
11 environment and protect God's creatures (Dien 1997; Ozdemir 2003). In the Koran, nature is
12 even elevated to a personified position in which it actively praises God in ways that man cannot
13 understand: "The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is
14 not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of]
15 exalting. Indeed, He is ever forbearing and forgiving" (17:44). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad
16 says: "Some trees are as blessed as the Moslem himself, especially the palm."

17 On the subject of man-nature relationship, the concept of 'stewardship' stands out in the
18 Koran (2:30 & 6:165). Although humans are privileged creatures, they are not the masters of
19 nature to use it as their property, only God is the master (Ozdemir 2003). Humans are bestowed
20 with stewardship by the Almighty (Afrasiabi 2003), and as God's vicegerents and servants on
21 Earth, nature has been entrusted to us (Ozdemir 2003). As Afrasiabi (2003) and Dien (1997) also
22 stress, the Koran (33:72) explicitly mentions that this trusteeship comes with an ethical
23 responsibility that no other creature dared to assume: "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the

1 heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man
2 [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant”. Humans are warned that they are
3 responsible and accountable for their actions on Earth, as the hadith states: “Verily, this world is
4 sweet and appealing, and Allah placed you as vicegerents therein; He will see what you do”.

5 The Koran asserts that God created resources in limited quantities and that everything
6 exists in balance. Humans, as stewards on Earth, should act responsibly by enjoying these
7 resources, but in moderation. This restriction in the quantity of resources is said to be in favor of
8 humans who are more likely to act irresponsibly and lavishly when resources are abundant. God
9 also warns that He does not like wastefulness and overspending; such acts are punishable
10 (Chuvieco 2012; Dien 1997; Grine et al. 2013; Kula 2001). Hadiths by Prophet Muhammad also
11 touch upon the concept of sustainability, when he says: “Live in this world as if you will live in it
12 forever, and live for the next world as if you will die tomorrow”, and “When doomsday comes if
13 someone has a palm shoot in his hand, then he should plant it” (Foltz, Denny and Baharuddin
14 2003). The Koran and hadiths clearly promote the principles of and guidelines for sustainability
15 which are reflected in the ideas of justice, balance, modesty, mercy, trustworthiness and
16 custodianship, spiritual purity and physical cleanliness, truthfulness and rights, usefulness of
17 knowledge and science (Chuvieco 2012).

18 Traditional accounts of the deeds (*Sunnah*) and sayings of Prophet Muhammad also dwell
19 into various contemporary sustainability issues such as the importance of water conservation,
20 pollution and waste reduction, sustainable land use, cultivation and greening, and animal welfare
21 (Chuvieco 2012; Dien 1997; Foltz, Denny and Baharuddin 2003; Grine, et al. 2013; Kula 2001).
22 For instance, Prophet Muhammad placed great importance on the moderate use of water and
23 forbade the excessive use of it even when performing ablutions (Islamic practice of washing

1 certain body parts prior to prayer), saying that doing so was “detestable” even if there were no
2 water scarcity (Ozdemir 2003).

3 From the above discussions it becomes apparent that Abrahamic religions do indeed
4 include texts and teachings that hold man responsible for sustainable use of resources bestowed
5 upon him. The above perspectives demonstrate that religions can participate in the sustainability
6 discourse by promoting humility, modesty, moderation, moral values (e.g. charity, mercy and
7 doing no harm), as well as man’s responsibility towards nature at large. As Eaton (2007)
8 proposes, such values can be utilized in order to more effectively conserve nature and resolve the
9 world’s ecological problems that arise from human beings’ unsustainable life practices.

10 As explained earlier, the root cause of ecological crisis should primarily be searched in
11 man’s pursuit of happiness and unquenchable desires through unleashed materialism and
12 consumerism (Assadourian 2010, Sandel 2012; Hurst et al. 2013), man’s over-reliance on
13 science as the key to welfare (Dunbar 1995; Nasr 1997), society’s market-oriented narcissism
14 and the collapse of morality (Wallis 2010). The collapse of morality and ethics in society may be
15 traced to their marginalization in education (Reuben 1996), where tertiary education views only
16 scientific facts as “true knowledge”, and where “standard moral values” could not be validated as
17 scientific and hence do not constitute “true knowledge”. Using an institutional approach to trace
18 the separation of “facts” and “values” in education, Reuben (1996) relates this separation to the
19 link between morality and religion. Since religion was perceived to be dogmatic, unscientific and
20 incompatible with progress, morality was also abandoned. Ghoshal (2005) further argues that
21 morality is completely absent from most management and marketing theories, blaming many of
22 the corporate scandals in the US on business school curricula.

1 Perhaps, it is because of the rising detrimental costs of our unsustainable life modes, the
2 marginalization of morality in society, and modern institutions' imperfection that attentions have
3 been once again drawn to religion, as a resource, in establishing the required moral framework
4 needed for re-establishing sustainability (Wallis 2010). In the following section, we provide a
5 religious framework for a cultural transformation towards sustainability.

6 **A Religious Framework for the Advancement of Sustainability**

7 A thorough understanding of the macromarketing environment for the advancement of
8 sustainability can benefit from the inclusion of religions and religious institutions, as important
9 social forces that influence marketing systems (Mittelstaedt, 2002). Religions and religious
10 institutions shape activities in the market place through exerting four types of authority: political,
11 institutional, social and competitive (Mittelstaedt, 2002). Political authority refers to the exercise
12 of direct authority to regulate aspects of the market through, for example, religious sanctions.
13 Institutional authority reflects religion's power in controlling nonmarket institutions (e.g., diet,
14 marriage and family) that can have indirect effects on market related behaviors. For example,
15 when religion controls the dominant social paradigm in a society, it will influence consumption
16 patterns to an extent that sustainable consumption can become the prevailing social paradigm
17 (Mittelstaedt, 2002). Social authority enables religion to shape social behaviors and cultural
18 beliefs through religious teachings thereby defining the boundaries of acceptable market
19 behaviors. Lastly, competitive religious authority is exercised when religious organizations
20 compete in the marketplace by offering goods and services.

21 Macromarketers' engagement with scholars of religions can enhance their understanding
22 of local cultural contexts and their diverse sets of rituals, teachings, texts and symbols that are
23 largely informed by religions. Such engagement can expose them to new interpretations of

1 religious experiences and a worldview that is not solely based on socioeconomic gains or
2 hierarchal structures of domination. Acquiring such knowledge can help macromarketers to
3 collaborate with religious institutions and policymakers in order to harness the various sources of
4 religious authority to bring about the desired gradual cultural transformation to sustainability.

5 The social power of religions is a key reason for the inclusion of religious perspectives in
6 the ecological sustainability project. Religions and religious institutions possess six bases of
7 power that enable them to effect the desired change in ecological attitudes and behaviors:
8 referent, coercive, reward, informational, expert and legitimate powers (Raven 1999). Besides,
9 religious communities around the world are still powerful in terms of mobilizing the masses.
10 This can be seen as an opportunity to recruit a biocentric theology that would call upon their
11 related religious communities to adopt ecologism where and when most suitable.

12 A constructive theological framework includes the interactions between actors and
13 stakeholders such as macromarketers, religious leaders, scholars, public and governmental
14 institutions, international organizations, and consumers. More specifically, macromarketers
15 should collaborate with religious leaders and policy makers to identify conserving values and
16 make them parts of public discourses. Such a conceptual framework highlights a different
17 interpretation of religion that can help shape positive attitudes towards the environment and
18 promote a sustainable discourse. By adopting a biocentric theological approach based on a
19 contextualized perspective of how individuals define and conceive religion and its role in
20 promoting ecological sustainability, this framework goes beyond the monolithic and
21 anthropocentric approach in the present theology and ecology literatures, involving multiple
22 factors and actors from a macro perspective. A central challenge is to bring all the stakeholders

1 together through incorporating the depths of religious philosophy and discourses into a modern
2 and meaningful dialogue that focuses on the multiple aspects of environmental crises.

3 An obstacle in a framework to the advancement of religious engagement in sustainability
4 is anthropocentrism. Grønvold (2013) argues that a cultural transformation to sustainability
5 requires a shift from an anthropocentric theology towards a biocentric theology. A biocentric
6 theology is where all of God's creations are regarded as equally important and man and nature
7 are viewed as interdependent (Grønvold 2013). A more biocentric religious interpretation of
8 religious texts and teachings can help renew the definition and the role of religion in advancing
9 ecological sustainability. Therefore, macromarketers, religious scholars, and policy makers should
10 first focus on understanding the main barriers related to promoting a biocentric religious
11 discourse on sustainability to enable macromarketers to incorporate that biocentric discourse into
12 macromarketing.

13 Another obstacle is the negative role religious institutions have historically played in
14 wars and oppression of societies (e.g., opposing alternative lifestyles, gender equality, and
15 freedom of speech). Much destruction and death have been and are being committed in the name
16 of religion, from the Crusades, to the Salem witch hunts, to the more recent atrocities by the self-
17 claimed Islamic State (see Jafari and Sandıkcı 2016). While these factors may have influenced
18 people's skepticism towards religious institutions and hindered the potential role religions can
19 play in promoting sustainability, Campbell (1975) argues that society's hostility towards
20 religions' perceived "inhibitory force" is rather exaggerated. Despite their many failings,
21 religions have contributed to the development of societies through their power of social control.
22 Campbell (1975) and Raven (1999) argue that social evolution would not have been possible
23 without religion. Social evolution requires the practice of socially desirable behaviors like

1 charity, altruism and cooperation, behaviors that are at the core of all religions. A major
2 challenge for macromarketers is therefore to reposition and redefine the new role for
3 conserving/biocentric religious values in contemporary society where the prevailing logic is
4 based on existing dichotomies. Such dichotomies are reflected in the separation between intellect
5 and faith, theology and science, religious leaders and religious scholars, state and religious
6 institutions, religion as private and religion as mundane, and irrationality/emotion and
7 rationality/functionalism.

8 Such a transformation is not a remote possibility; for there is growing evidence that
9 religions are moving towards a biocentric theology. For example, the present Ecumenical
10 Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Bartholomew I, has been heavily investing in
11 promoting collaborations between religions and the scientific community for the protection of
12 the environment since his election in 1991. More recently, Pope Francis has made the
13 environment part of his agenda. The emphasis of Pope Francis's predecessors was a
14 preoccupation with the moral and structural harms of modernity. Pope Francis, on the other
15 hand, has emphasized the importance of ecological conservation and the harms of ecological
16 destruction and climate change by showing the sources of this theological emphasis. In his
17 encyclical, Pope Francis released a warning on the destruction of human environment that draws
18 on both theology and scientific research to challenge people to become better guardians of
19 creation. This is in line with Catterall's (2013) research that demonstrates how an ecologically
20 sustainable future can be shaped by a complex engagement with religious traditions along with
21 modernity and globalization. For Catterall, there is a need for researchers studying ecology to go
22 beyond religious/secular and tradition/modernity dichotomies to better understand the
23 engagement of social actors and institutions with nature and environment.

1 A profound understanding of sustainability values among the multiple stakeholders can
2 be gained by adopting a grounded theory (GT) approach following the recommendations of
3 Samuel and Peattie (2016). Samuel and Peattie (2016) argue that GT is a particularly valuable
4 method in macromarketing research topics since they involve complex stakeholder relationships
5 that require the consideration of multiple variables simultaneously. GT allows for mixed data
6 collection methods, such as data from ethnography, observation and interviewing as well as
7 diverse sets of actors to enable the researcher to understand and explain what is happening from
8 multiple perspectives (McCallin 2003). Such an approach to macromarketing research allows for
9 a deeper understanding of the relationships and interfaces among consumers, religious
10 institutions, businesses, local governments, civic institutions, policymakers, beliefs, identities
11 and patterns of behavior that socially construct marketplaces (Samuel and Peattie 2015).

12

13 **Engaging Religions in Ecological Conservation**

14 Although sustainability had never been absent from religious doctrines, it was only towards the
15 end of the twentieth century that formal initiatives were established in order to engage religions
16 more seriously in ecological debates. For example, in 1986 the World Wide Fund for Nature
17 (WWF) International invited five major faiths (i.e., Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam,
18 and Judaism) to Assisi, Italy to explore the ways they could work together on environmental
19 issues. The encounter was so successful that it led to the establishment of a new international
20 nonprofit organization in 1995, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). By 2000, six
21 more faiths had joined the Alliance: Baha'ism, Daoism, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and
22 Zoroastrianism. Now, through partnerships with local governments and NGOs, the organization
23 has projects across the world (www.arcworld.org). Parallel to this, the Islamic Foundation for

1 Ecology and Environmental Science (IFEES) was also established in the mid 1980s with the aim
2 of spreading awareness, training and ecological knowledge among Moslem communities based
3 on Islamic ethics and approaches to environmental protection.

4 Academia has also shown interest in the intersection of religion and sustainability. Some
5 universities now offer graduate programs in religion and ecology like the University of Toronto,
6 Drew University and the University of Florida and Yale. Environmental studies programs,
7 predominantly oriented as science and policy programs, are now encouraging participation of
8 religious studies or incorporating religious studies (Tucker 2008). The Forum on Religion and
9 Ecology and Harvard University co-sponsored a three year long series of conferences
10 culminating in the publishing of an encyclopedia on ecology and world religions (Gottlieb 2006).
11 The purpose of the series was to unearth the common elements of world religions that emphasize
12 human-Earth relations. Religions studied in this series included the Abrahamic religions
13 (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), the Asian religions (Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism,
14 Confucianism, Daoism and Shinto), as well as indigenous religions and resulted in 10 edited and
15 published volumes on Religion and Ecology. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and*
16 *Ecology, and Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* are academic journals that
17 are dedicated to the study of religions and ecology. Taylor's (2004) detailed review of the
18 literature on religion and ecology indicates that religions are becoming greener, a trend in which
19 nature is increasingly regarded as sacred by world religions. Such growth also lends itself to the
20 rising ecological awareness among religious groups in an era where religions are criticized for
21 their 'indifference' (Nash 1991) to ecological crisis.

22 In a time of grim environmental outlook, growing religious environmentalism should be
23 regarded as a source of optimism. Examples of how this rising religious environmentalism is

1 resulting in wide-reaching political action are abundant. The Forum on Religion and Ecology at
2 Yale University (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/>) provides a series of such examples. In the interest
3 of brevity, we outline only a few examples here: the “Redwood Rabbis”, relying on Judaic
4 teachings and traditions, took a stand against deforestation and commercial clear-cutting and
5 succeeded in protecting redwood trees in northern California. The Methodist Church in the US
6 succeeded in preventing Staples stores from selling paper that caused dioxin pollution in the way
7 it was manufactured. “Green Muslims” in Washington D.C. assists the Moslem community with
8 spiritually-inspired environmental education, reflection, and action. In all these cases, religion
9 assists scientific methods (e.g. sustainability solutions and technologies) and modern
10 administrations (e.g. NGOs) with a broader scope in which to envisage, devise and
11 operationalize sustainability more effectively and efficiently. Such success stories confirm that
12 religions can offer an alternative lens through which to frame ecological problems that have
13 traditionally been seen as social problems with ecological implications.

14 [Insert Table 2 about here]

15 **Religion as a Change Agent**

16 Religions can help macromarketers operationalize sustainability in more cost-effective ways,
17 particularly in contexts where socio-political and economic institutions are less- or under-
18 developed or are not sufficiently operant. Such a mission can be accomplished because religious
19 institutions often have five key assets: the capability to shape worldviews, community building
20 capacity, moral authority, considerable material resources, and a large number of followers
21 (Gardner and Assadourian 2004). Religious environmentalism, therefore, can make valuable
22 contributions to promoting and implementing sustainability. Prior research (e.g. Chuvieco 2012;
23 Mohamad et al. 2012; Palmer and Finlay 2003) has already documented the way communities

1 deal with changes in habits to more sustainable ways through religious values. Palmer and Finlay
2 (2003), in particular, provide a comprehensive view of western and eastern religions and present
3 several cases that empirically reveal the power of religion in enacting ecological practices:

4 *Case 1: The Fishermen of Tanzania*

5 In Tanzania, fishermen, who are part of poor religious communities, were somehow introduced
6 to using dynamite in their fishing. The use of dynamite enabled them to make large catches in a
7 short period of time, but it also resulted in detrimental destruction of marine life. The Tanzanian
8 government along with some environmental agencies, tried to deter the fishermen through
9 launching an educational program. Being part of a marginalized community, the fishermen did
10 not pay much attention to the leaflets distributed by the government and the NGOs. The
11 government then issued a ban on dynamite fishing; yet again this legislative action did not deter
12 the practice either. The small villages where the fishermen lived were almost all Moslem and
13 they lived in accordance with the teachings of Islam and the Koran, its Shari'ah laws and
14 traditions. These communities were organized under the leadership of religious *Sheikhs* (or
15 *Imams*) who are part of these communities and have widespread authority in such villages. In
16 1998, following efforts led by several NGOs (WWF, ARC and IFEES) the *Sheikhs* came
17 together to discuss Islamic teachings in relation to the appropriate use of God's creations. By
18 drawing on Koranic verses like "O children of Adam! ... eat and drink: but waste not by excess
19 for Allah loveth not the wasters" (7:31), the *Sheikhs* came to the conclusion that dynamite fishing
20 was an illegal practice according to Islam. In 2000, the Moslem *Sheikhs* banned dynamite fishing
21 and taught the fishermen that dynamite fishing risked incurring the wrath of God and damnation
22 of their soul. In 2003, in collaboration with ecologists and guided by a more profound
23 interpretation of their faith, the fishermen started implementing sustainable fishing practices. In

1 this case, based on a deeper interpretation of man's relationship with nature, religion succeeded
2 where legislation and awareness programs failed because "*it made sense within the people's*
3 *culture and worldview*" (Palmer and Finlay 2003, 5).

4 *Case 2: The Forest of Harissa – Lebanon*

5 Over the past 20 years, Lebanon has seen massive urbanization along its coastline, destroying
6 rare ecological systems. The WWF lists Mediterranean woodlands among the top 200 most
7 important ecosystems in the world to be protected. The United Nations Environmental Program,
8 along with other environmental NGOs, identified the Mediterranean coast as a priority for
9 preservation. In the late 1990s, the ancient forest of Harissa still remained and the UNEP took
10 steps to ensure its protection from urbanization. A 50 page long document detailing scientific,
11 legal and economic information demanding the protection of the forest was sent to the land
12 owners, the Maronite Church of Lebanon. Unsurprisingly, they got no response. The Church has
13 maintained ownership of the forest for over 1,000 years and the priests were not oblivious to its
14 ecological significance. However, to these priests the significance of the forest had to do with
15 much more than ecological consideration, for in its center stood the Cathedral of Our Lady, with
16 a giant outdoor statue of the Virgin Mary, Protector of Lebanon. Yet the document sent to the
17 Church contained no mention of the forest's spiritual, cultural or emotional significance. The
18 ARC and WWF ran a program called "Sacred Gifts for a Living Planet", which was designed to
19 foster commitment of communities to the environment based on people's religious views on the
20 environment. The Church was re-approached by re-framing the Harissa Forest as a Sacred Gift
21 that must be protected. Within 30 minutes the Patriarch committed the Church to protect the
22 Forest for eternity. By relating to the Church's worldview through an understanding of Maronite
23 theology and culture, the group was able to achieve the desired outcome.

1 *Case 3: Saving the Tigers in China*

2 Demand for traditional Chinese medicine is on the increase, both within and outside of China.
3 This commercialization of Chinese traditional medicine has rendered it a major industry that is
4 unconnected with its original roots as it is environmentally unfriendly. Some prescriptions in
5 traditional Chinese medicine call for rare ingredients such as rhino horn and tiger bones which
6 have a devastating effect on wildlife species. Even though the Chinese government has made
7 such ingredients illegal, the trade continues and poaching has led some species to the brink of
8 extinction. To eradicate this practice, it was important to reach illegal practitioners and their
9 clients and this was only possible through Daoists. Chinese medicine has its worldview based on
10 the belief in the Dao, the oneness of the universe and yin and yang, the two natural forces of
11 opposites. Once the Daoists were approached to help on this issue, they offered profound
12 philosophical yet practical solutions. Referring to the roots of traditional Chinese medicine, the
13 Daoists reached the conclusion that any remedy made of ingredients that endangered any species
14 or caused unjustifiable suffering to animals would not work; for it is not possible to heal one
15 species by destroying another or by afflicting suffering on another part of the universal Dao. In
16 1999 the Daoist Association of China declared that any practitioner who used medicine that
17 conflicted with the Daoist laws of balance would be ostracized. They further provided alternative
18 ingredients that, based on a study of their ancient medical scriptures, did not involve endangered
19 species or cruelty against animals.

20 Palmer and Finlay (2003)'s work is endorsed by Mohamad et al.'s (2012) study of multi-
21 faith communities in Malaysia. The study provides evidence for the role of religious
22 communities in promoting the adoption of recycling as a form of environmental practice among
23 Christian, Moslem and Buddhist communities. The authors' cross examination of several

1 religious communities' recycling practices indicates that such communities were able to conduct
2 long-term recycling programs by using their institutional structure as a conducive platform for
3 recycling activities and their collective potential to expand their programs to the broader
4 community. Such achievements were highly mediated by their commitment to religious values.
5 Mohamad et al.'s work specifically highlights the need for thinking beyond 'whether or not
6 religion can help sustainability' to contemplate how and where religion can best address
7 contextual environmental problems.

8 Other studies further support Mohamed et al.'s thesis. The work of Al-Khatib (2009) and
9 Al-Khatib et al. (2009) in Palestine indicate that moral and religious convictions positively
10 influence people's behavior in terms of avoiding littering and polluting the environment. These
11 studies reveal that compared to intrinsic religious beliefs, popular methods of traditional
12 awareness campaigns (e.g., TV and print media) are less effective. Similarly, Immergut's (2008)
13 investigation of Adamah (Earth) Fellowship (a multi-denominational Jewish, sustainable and
14 organic farming program in Northwestern Connecticut) reveals how these reflexively young
15 Jews endeavor to use religious language, text and ritual to create a meaningful relationship with
16 nature. These individuals also embark on external resources in order to enrich their existing
17 Jewish religious traditions and renew a religiously inspired relationship to the earth. Last but not
18 least, Yoreh (2010) argues that rabbinical leaders are instrumental in garnering support for
19 recycling programs in Ultra-Orthodox communities in Jerusalem. He even goes far to say: "It
20 can even be said that there is no need to convince the Haredi communities of the benefits of
21 recycling. If the rabbinical leaders are convinced then their communities will follow suit" (p.
22 338).

1 It should be stressed that these cases do not call for an institutional supremacy of
2 religions (i.e., issues of power and control in the Foucauldian sense, see Jafari and Sandıkcı,
3 2015); rather they serve to demonstrate the potent power of religious values and worldviews in
4 tackling the consequences of consumptive practices on ecological degradation. The purpose of
5 these cases is to illustrate what macromarketers can learn from faith-based sustainability
6 initiatives; the priests in Lebanon did not preserve the forest because of its ecological and
7 biodiversity value, but because the forest was sacred to them. Similarly, the fishermen of
8 Tanzania did not stop dynamite fishing because of their concern for marine life, but because they
9 were afraid of the wrath of God. Traditionally, sustainability discourses have been discussed
10 within frameworks that emphasize environmental degradation and the consequences of
11 consumptive practices for the environment. Therefore, there is a need for adopting
12 contextualized approaches and relating sustainability discourses to target consumers' value
13 systems and worldviews that may be religious in nature. Numerous case studies in Taylor's
14 (2008) *'Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature'* and Gottlieb's (2010) *'The Oxford Handbook of*
15 *Religion and Ecology'* testify to the advantages of adopting contextualized religion-oriented
16 approaches to sustainability.

17 Solving ecological problems calls for moral pluralism (Norton 1991; Wenz 1993) and
18 engaging in multiple value systems. It is therefore not enough to examine cultural ideas and
19 beliefs, what is needed is a deep analysis and a profound understanding and theorizing of
20 material realities and practices of a community with respect to the intersection of religion and
21 nature to produce new insights into the relationship between religion and nature that can
22 facilitate cultural transformation for ecological conservation. The cases cited above are examples
23 of how collaboration between religious institutions, policy makers, marketers and NGOs can

1 result in such desired cultural transformation. A thorough analysis of the cultural context, local
2 religious teachings and understanding of cultural rituals, texts and symbols is necessary for new
3 interpretations of religious experiences that will enable the transition to new lines of
4 macromarketing research and practice in the advancement of ecological sustainability.

5 **Conclusions, Contributions and Future Research**

6 In his paper “Reinventing Marketing to Manage the Environmental Imperative” Kotler (2011)
7 called for a re-examination of marketing theories and practices that have traditionally been based
8 on assumptions of unlimited resources. He concluded his paper with a call on marketing
9 researchers to investigate: 1) the factors that lead consumers to engage in sustainable behaviors,
10 2) the changes needed in marketing theories, and 3) the practices required to encourage
11 sustainability. The World Economic Forum Report (2010) stressed the importance of linking
12 faith, as the basis of enduring moral values, with regulatory mechanisms proposed as solutions to
13 global crises. Varey (2010) called for a “fundamental shift in worldview and value system”. He
14 argued that there is tension between cultural and natural systems and that sustainability can only
15 thrive in ecologically and ethically responsible behaviors which can only be made possible in a
16 different system.

17 In this article, and in response to these calls, we proposed a value-based approach
18 towards ecological sustainability. Specifically, we argued that there should be a dialogue
19 between sustainability and religious discourses given that: 1) many ethical consumer behaviors
20 are imbedded in religious moral values (Wenell 2009), and 2) religions and religious institutions
21 have social and normative influences on consumer behaviors (Raven 1999). Religions are thus
22 potent vehicles for framing ecological sustainability discourses.

1 While religions are worldviews, their contributions to ecological conservation are not
2 merely conceptual. For ecological conservation efforts to have transformative effect, approaches
3 must be connected to cultural realities and contextualized in religious and cultural values and
4 practices. However, a rights-based system of ethics, which dominates the current interpretation
5 of religions, is inadequate to foster ecological sustainability (Eaton 1995). A cultural
6 transformation through a new interpretation of religion is not a farfetched proposition. For
7 example, Pope Francis has made sustainability and ecological protection an integral part of his
8 agenda: “Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity,” he said on
9 25th September 2015 in a speech to the UN.

10 Where religions are studied in macromarketing debates on sustainability, they are treated
11 as problematic. This article provided a case towards considering religious values as potent
12 drivers of cultural change. Discussions put forward so far provided a positive response to the
13 three objectives outlined in the introduction. Firstly, it was argued that given their macro and
14 intrinsic value systems, religions can broaden the scope of sustainability research. They can
15 bring another set of macro worldviews/frameworks in which sustainability discourse can go
16 beyond dilemmas over whether socialism can or should replace capitalism. Secondly, the cases
17 discussed in the article demonstrated that there are many lessons to be learned from faith-based
18 sustainability initiatives. In particular, it became evident that the operationalization of
19 sustainability requires institutional collaborations. Such institutions are not ubiquitous around the
20 world. Especially in societies where formal modern institutions (i.e., governments and
21 environmental agencies) are not existent or sufficiently operant, contextualized cultural and
22 religious approaches can play a significant role in initiating cultural transformation towards
23 ecological sustainability. Thirdly, it was showed that interreligious dialogues can facilitate the

1 transfer of knowledge among macromarketers, different religious/faith groups, policymakers and
2 environmental activists. Given their enduring effects in spite of modernizations (Inglehart and
3 Baker 2000), established historical trajectories, and wealth of knowledge accumulated over time,
4 religions can significantly contribute to the ongoing work on sustainability.

5 Other benefits of including religions/faiths in macromarketing's sustainability research
6 follow: major religions/faiths are transnational in nature. This provides a great opportunity to
7 reach out to a diversity of local/regional communities whose sustainability practices can be
8 analyzed. The results of such studies can contribute to the theorizations of sustainability. They
9 can also inform policy in terms of understanding which communication methods should be used
10 for which type of populations. Religions/faiths, in essence, advocate holistic values systems that
11 embrace union with nature and the environment in its totality, modesty, frugality, altruism,
12 spirituality and the like. Therefore, they can help unify disparate sustainability movements that
13 are often anchored in particular political ideologies (e.g., left, radical, and reformist).

14 Macromarketing research and practice inform and are informed by our understanding of
15 the symbiotic relationship between religion and the market (i.e., religion's influence on markets
16 and markets' influence on religion) (Mittelstaedt, 2002). Future research in macromarketing
17 should, therefore, endeavor to systematically engage with religions in order to broaden the
18 conceptual scope of ecological, social as well as economic sustainability. Such a task requires an
19 interdisciplinary approach to the study of religions and sustainability. In doing so, while in-depth
20 studies of each single religion/faith is a necessity, research findings should be amalgamated in
21 larger international research centers, tracks, and forums. A useful way of achieving such ends
22 can be adopting a grounded theory approach following Samuel and Peattie (2016) in order to
23 have a fresh understanding of the sustainability mechanisms and values among such groups.

1 Additionally, action-based research should be more encouraged among doctoral researchers who
2 embark on such research topics. However, given the time-consuming nature of action research
3 and the logistic/financial requirements, more collaboration should be established between
4 academic researchers, social policy institutions and NGOs.

5 With the growing recognition of religious and spiritual values in shaping a sustainable
6 future, stakeholders such as macromarketing practitioners, policymakers, religious institutions,
7 and world organizations (e.g. UNEP, UNESCO) should define a common policy by applying a
8 multidimensional approach to sustainability within a religious framework. Further,
9 macromarketers, policy makers, and world organization should engage in a meaningful dialogue
10 with religious institutions in a manner that would lead to recognizing conservation values and
11 common responsibility in terms of ecological issues.

12 Achieving these objectives requires macromarketers to recognize the potential of
13 contextualized religious approaches to sustainability in everyday life practices and the positive
14 role they can play in this mission (Bouma-Prediger 2009; Al Khatib 2009). On the other hand,
15 mainstream scientists in the field of ecology, governmental agencies, and international
16 organizations can integrate ‘green religion’ within their ‘secular green’ policies to emphasize the
17 continuum with faith and religious values. To do so, secular institutions should remain open-
18 minded in learning from religions and abandon their unidimensional approach to resolving
19 ecological problems with the help of science alone. In Einstein’s (1941) words, “Science without
20 religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”

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