

# RELIGIOUS CRITIQUES OF THE MARKET

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## Introduction

A few years ago, I was invited to give a talk at a doctoral colloquium aimed at enhancing students' critical thinking. For discussion, the organizers had chosen Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, which had just taken the world by storm. In my talk, I referred to the economic philosophy of Islam to draw attention to those schools of thought that have challenged capitalism but remain largely overlooked by critical marketing scholars. After the talk, two colleagues expressed concern about my approach, which, in their view, was an attempt to 'theologize' the social science and to refute the status quo (i.e., Marxism, in their view). I tried to clarify that this was not my intention and that including religious critiques of the market in discourse on capitalism can broaden our analytical lens. However, we could not reach an agreement. For these fellow scholars, theories emerging from non-secular thinking were simply unworthy of studying.

Regardless of our subjective views, religion continues to occupy a substantial place in discourses on capitalism (Anderson, 2016; Bell, 2012; Sandel, 2012; Tawney, 1920; Wallis, 2010). As I will discuss in this chapter, along with non-secular societies (e.g. in the Middle East), which are typically associated with religious dominance and governance, secular<sup>1</sup> contexts (e.g. in Western Europe and North America) are also witness to the rise of various anti-capitalist voices that are either religious in orientation (e.g. Cort, 1988; Pabst, 2011) or largely influenced by religious rhetoric (e.g. Bauman, 2000; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

Understanding the religious critiques of the market requires acknowledging the fact that there are multiple relationships between religion and the market. On the one hand, religion has allegedly paved the way for the rise of capitalism (the Weberian view) and is therefore accountable for its negative consequences (e.g. ecological calamities) (Feuerbach, 1957; Nash, 1991; White Jr., 1967). Religion itself has been significantly marketized (McAlexander, Dufault, Martin, & Schouten, 2014; Usunier & Stolz, 2014); religious enterprises broadly utilize the tools and rules of neoliberalism to grow and compete with one another and with non-religious institutions (Gauthier & Martikainen, 2013; Jafari & Sandikci, 2016). This means that religion is not, as commonly perceived, the antithesis of capitalism. Conversely, religious critiques of the market raise issues that are also reflected in the established secular traditions (e.g. Marxism). The existence of certain similarities (e.g. debate on social solidarity, poverty and social justice, and unleashed materialism) between the two camps indicates that they are not in total discord.

It is because of such complex and, at times, paradoxical interactions between religion and the market that this chapter argues for the inclusion of religious critiques of the market in debate on capitalism. At its core, this chapter argues: (1) religious and secular critiques of the market have more in common than usually thought. Analyzing each stream can help understand the other one and eventually draw a broader picture of the critiques of capitalism. (2) Religious critics of the market are not uniform in their approach toward capitalism. For example, while revolutionaries (the religious left) (e.g. Tawney, 1920) fervently argue for religious socialism as a viable alternative, reformists (e.g. Bell, 2012) call only for reconfiguring capitalism.

Given the diversity of religious orientations and their historical developments in relation to economy, policy, culture and society, this chapter does not intend to present a comprehensive review of the extant literature on religious critiques of the market. What the chapter covers, however, is a set of main issues that are expressed by religious critics of the market. These discussions can hopefully show that religious critiques of the market are not exclusively concerned with the sacred (i.e., the world hereafter); they also tap on issues that relate to the profane (i.e., life in the here and now). At the core of these agendas are poverty and social injustice, ill-being, state intervention, ecological

degradation and unsustainable growth, and loss of human dignity and solidarity, all of which recur in secular critiques of capitalism too.

The chapter is organized in three sections. First, a summary of the key perspectives on the relationship between religion and the market is presented. This overview explains that religion and the market are not necessarily in opposition. It also sets the ground for understanding the reason why religious critiques of the market adopt different approaches (e.g. revolutionary or reformist) toward capitalism. The second part focuses on the most recurrent themes in the literature that generally echo the critiques of the market from the lens of major world religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. This spectrum should not be seen as a deliberate exclusion of other faiths; rather, it should be related to the limitations of writing a book chapter and the trade-off between depth and breadth of discussion. I hope that other colleagues will embark on analyzing other faiths not covered in this chapter. The third and final section will propose areas for future research.

## Religion and the market

In a typology, Haddorff (2000) presents three theoretical perspectives on the relationship between religion and the market: opposition, absorption, and the ambiguous tradition. Religion represents the sacred and the market represents the profane. From the ‘opposition’ viewpoint, religion and the market are in conflict (Weber, 1958/1904–1905; Marx & Engels, 1967/1848). This means that “the triumph of a market society would lead to the destruction of the fabric of civil society, including the secularisation of religion, and a dystopian collapse of communal solidarity traditional values” (Haddorff, 2000, p. 487). Capitalism frames people through an economic lens that encourages more consumption. The rationale is that consumption would accelerate the wheels of commodity production (Marx & Engels, 1967/1848). Through the establishment of this rationality, people’s traditional values (including religious) and social relationships are overshadowed by market-generated values and short-term economic relationships with the market (Bauman, 2000; Bocoock, 1993).

For Weber (1993), while the rationalization of human relations represents a historical progress in terms of economic and political organization, it also leads to the disenchantment of the world by stripping human existence of its mystical but inwardly genuine elasticity (i.e., the influence of the sacred on the private lives of the

individuals). Weber argues that capitalism, which owes its triumph to the work of religion, inevitably marginalizes religion because the modern administration system gradually replaces the role of religion in organizing societies' day-to-day activities. In contrast to Weber's pessimism, for Marx the decline of religious values is a positive development because the desacralization of human relations prompts the questioning of the capitalist production relations and, therefore, would lead to a quest for the replacement of religious cohesion by secular forms of social solidarity. Marx's skeptical view of religion (as "opium of the people") drives his quest for revolutions that would replace the oppressed people's passive grieving over their miseries and instead energize them to revolt against the ruling class. For both Weber and Marx, with the progress of capitalism, religion fades away from the public sphere because they are not compatible with each other.

As regards the second perspective, Emile Durkheim's (1859/1893, 1915/1912) 'absorption theory' "attempts to reframe the triumph of market society and *homo economicus* in light of the symbolic boundaries of the 'sacred' and the 'profane'" (Haddorff, 2000, p. 490). Instead of opposition between religion and the market, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. Durkheim's religion is not transcendental. For him, religion is a socially constructed phenomenon, which uses a 'symbolic-expressive system' to assign values and meanings to people's life goals in society. The values it promotes, therefore, do not necessarily stand above the culture of society; rather, they are (re)defined by the society itself. From this perspective, a healthy society will depend on maintaining balance between the sacred and the profane. As such, the market becomes "a historically conditioned way of construing the world, a way of organizing and reorganizing our core religious beliefs and practices in a secular society" (Haddorff, 2000, p. 491). The market itself becomes a religion because it produces a series of life goals, meanings, symbols and values that usurp the values and meaning systems that were traditionally assigned by religion. Via the market system, the profane produces the sacred (Muñiz & Schau, 2005). For example, as Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) show, by blessing objects through rituals, people can sacralize profane objects and create transcendental meanings in their lives.

Finally, with reference to Polanyi's (1944, 2001) thesis of 'double movement', Haddorff (2000) explains that 'the ambiguous tradition' has both similarities and

differences with the opposition and absorption perspectives. While the development of capitalism affects society, it does not result in the alienation of religion. Polanyi also believes in the symbiotic relationship between the market and religion; yet, for him religion is a transcendental reality (i.e., a spiritual realm connected to God). With the development of capitalism and the subsequent changes that occur in human relations, society too develops decommodification strategies as a self-defense mechanism either through redistribution (e.g. almsgiving) or reciprocity (e.g. gift giving) against the commodification of human relations. While redistribution occurs within the realm of welfare politics, reciprocity occurs in the realm of culture. For example, sacralization of certain objects (e.g. souvenirs) or activities (e.g. rituals and ceremonies) can safeguard human relations against the commercialization of society imposed by capitalism. This means that people give sacred meanings to the profane.

As this analysis suggests, along with the market that pursues its own objectives (e.g. maximization of profit), as an agentic entity, society maintains its social order. As such, society deploys a variety of resources such as welfare politics, religion and culture to establish order. Polanyi argues that “since the problems of society are inherently social rather than political or economic, it is through a rediscovery of society (or community) that persons begin to engage, resist, and even transform market society” (Haddorff, 2000, p. 494). This is the reason why capitalism cannot outweigh religion. Religion persists because it supplies human society with the values that endure and respond to people’s communal and individual needs in their everyday life.

Given the self-defense mechanism of society, the market abides by the rules of society because “the market is infused with moral values, principles, and virtues, which draws from the ‘public’ role of religious and ethical discourse” (Haddorff, 2000, p. 498). This means that neither the market is completely profane, nor is religion entirely sacred. Several scholars (Wuthnow, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Marty, 1995; Schmidt, 1995) also endorse this statement by demonstrating that the material consumption rituals in Americans’ daily lives do not estrange them from their religious beliefs. Indeed, people realize moral and social values such as ‘freedom’, ‘success’, and ‘well-being’ through their consumption of the material, the profane.

The philosophy of hedonistic materialism does not drive the practice of consumption. Rather, consumption is linked with the basic life values of health,

security, being loved, beauty, knowledge, relaxation, and social solidarity. Through consumption persons embody these non-market 'values' or 'goods', which ironically assists persons in attaining the 'non-material' good life.

*Haddorff, 2000, p. 497*

To these three perspectives (opposition, absorption, and the ambiguous tradition), Jafari and Süerdem (2012) add the 'authorized selection' view. The authors critique the Weberian rigid analysis of the relationship between religion and the market and explain that Islam refutes asceticism. They show that, historically, economic activities have been part of the Muslim tradition and Islamic teachings regard economic prosperity an important and valued aspect of human life. Supporting Polanyi's analysis, the authors argue that, as interpretive agents, people selectively choose and adapt the cultural codes of religion to justify their own life conditions and preferences. As such, the same religion may be practiced differently around the world. People authorize themselves to adopt lifestyles that might seem even contradictory to the principles of a given religion. To elaborate on their thesis, the authors refer to several controversial examples, such as the unveiling of Muslim women, consumption of alcohol, and immersion in luxury consumption. "Such practices are common among those Muslims who pursue their own ways of religiosity. They may no longer feel the need for the traditional religious institutions to exclusively describe and prescribe religious practices for them" (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012, p. 72).

The presence of multiple and, at times, conflicting forms of religiosity in society is because religion plays a variety of roles in people's life. People do not have a uniform relationship with religion. With reference to Soroush (2000), the authors contend, "Some people commit themselves to religion because they fear God, others do so because they love God, and there are also those who carry the label of religiosity because it gives them a sense of identity" (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012, p. 71). In their everyday life situations, people define their customized relationship with God and, therefore, sacralize the profane and desacralize the sacred in order to actualize their own ideal self. In this self-actualization quest, the market plays an important role as it avails people with the means to organize their lives in ways that do not stand opposite to the enduring values (e.g. salvation and well-being) of religion. The authors emphasize that the market acts as a platform on which people can seek salvation by

strengthening the foundations of a healthy life. They can practice ethics, brotherhood, almsgiving, wealth creation and poverty alleviation, entrepreneurship, innovation and improving life standards, and so forth. Achieving such ends only becomes possible when balance is created between the sacred and the profane.

## Religious critiques of the market

I now proceed to examine the religious critiques of the market. Three points need to be emphasized. First, as mentioned in the introduction, religious critiques of the market converge on several points with one another and also with the non-religious critical accounts of capitalism. These similarities provide a fertile ground for gaining a more holistic view of the critiques of the market. In order to achieve this goal, I will present a thematic discussion of such similarities that overlap in several areas. Yet, this thematic categorization is not meant to homogenize these perspectives; rather, it serves only as a means to maintain the focus of the chapter. In developing the discussion, I will make several references to Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. These references can help associate the existing views with certain faiths without delving into their specificities. This is because within each faith, there are several sects and within each sect there are multiple voices that are not necessarily similar in their approach toward the market (e.g. Christian left, Christian right, and Christian libertarian).

Second, religious critiques of the market, themselves, are subject to criticism. For example, as Jafari and Sandıklı (2015, 2016) argue, religious critics of the market often fail to acknowledge that religion itself has become substantially marketized. Therefore, cosmetic surgeries of the market, in the name of religious reformism, are less likely to result in structural changes in the market system. To elaborate, the authors critique the emergence of academic and managerial practices that use religious terminology and symbolism to promote Islamic marketing and branding. Since such practices do not work outside the neoliberal economy, they cannot contribute to the creation of ‘perfect’ markets built upon religious utopias. The same view is shared by Sürdem (2013, 2016) who criticizes the commoditization of religion by those who endorse Islamic marketing as an alternative for the mainstream marketing anchored in the principles of capitalism. In the following pages, some critique of the religious critiques of the market will be discussed, but a detailed critical review of such critiques remains beyond the objective

of this chapter (for detailed analysis see Jafari, 2012; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015, 2016; Süerdem, 2013, 2016).

Third, it is important to recognize the institutional role of religion in shaping critiques of the market. As Geertz (1968) explains, religion is an abstract symbol system for people to make sense of their everyday activities. This conceptualization of religion makes it subject to multiple interpretations. Yet, religion should also be viewed as an institution in itself. That is, it is comprised of a set of actors (e.g. religious leaders, organizations, and their networks of media and politics) that give particular meanings to the abstract and promote specific ways of thinking and interpreting the symbols (see Soroush, 2000; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012). Acknowledging the institutional role of religion in society and the institutional dynamics (e.g. political and socio-economic) that (re)shape religious discourses can help us understand the reason why religious critiques of the market might highlight certain issues at the expense of others. For example, as Kruse (2015) reports, one of the main reasons for the triumph of modern capitalism in the United States is that during the 1930s, corporations such as Hilton Hotels and General Motors financed the Congregational Church in return for their support of capitalism per se. Figures such as Rev. James W. Fifield used the slogans of “The blessings of capitalism come from God” and “Freedom under God” to convince the public that socialism was bad and Christian libertarianism was good. Therefore, the religious critiques of the market are underpinned by different political orientations. Next, I will discuss some of the main themes that recur in the literature on the religious critiques of the market.

### Loss of social solidarity

Religious critics of the market regard the loss of social solidarity as one of the main vices of capitalism. They believe that by initiating the project of the ‘self’, capitalism disrupts social ties, nurtures extreme individualism, and harms the social fabric of society. Capitalism uses the slogan of freedom of choice to alienate members of society from one another; it encourages an unlimited pursuit of self-interest through property ownership, utilization of natural resources, accumulation of wealth and consumerism (Anderson, 2016; Bell, 2012; Changkhwanyuen, 2004; Kalantari, 2008; Kaplan, 2010/1934). While these concerns are shared among different faith groups, certain



aspects of them gain more importance in different scholars' thinking. For example, Changkhwanyuen (2004, p. 248) argues:

Buddhism can accept individualism only on the concept of personal inequality based on personal uniqueness, opportunity differences caused by personal intellects, social or family background, and environment. But Buddhism cannot accept personal exploitation of public resources or free competition leading to certain personal advantages and disadvantages. Persons who get better chances by differences are obliged to share them back to general society. Beneficiaries must be responsible for damages to society and nature because it is shared duty for all to preserve public resources.

For the followers of Abrahamic faiths, capitalism's primacy of the individual over the community threatens the foundations of societal integrity and family values. A key aspect of this belief is that human beings are created in the image of God. From a Christian perspective, Bell (2012) argues that through its project of consumerism, capitalism 'deforms humanity'. Neoliberalism disciplines society in such ways that human beings get agonistically involved in competition over quenching their desire for more possessions. This competition results in viewing other human beings not as creatures of God that should live in a harmonious society but as rivals in a purely economic system. Similarly, from an Islamic lens, Motahari (2000) criticizes capitalism for its commoditization of every aspect of life to an extent that human beings become products for sale in the market. Capitalism turns human beings into the slaves of its own consumerism; the more individuals bow to this ideology, the more they turn their back on the values of their society. In order for capitalism to maximize its financial gains, the values that keep members of a community together need to be eradicated so that individuals become liberated from their established traditions and follow those offered by the market. From a Jewish perspective, too, capitalism becomes problematic when individuals forget that God has bestowed wealth to human beings in order to strengthen the foundations of their social solidarity (Levi, 1993).

## Poverty and social injustice

There is a general consensus among scholars that social injustice is an outcome of capitalism because of its emphasis on the motto of 'what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours' (Anderson, 2016; Asutay, 2007; Bell, 2012; Changkhwanyuen, 2004;

Levi, 1993; Sarao, n/d; Yusuf, 1971). In a capitalist system, whose objective is economic growth, the accumulation of wealth in the hands of elite groups and certain corporations creates monopolies that use the available resources (e.g. natural or common) in order to maximize their profit. In other words, capitalist enterprises use whatever means are available to reduce their cost (e.g. cutting wages and attempting to access cheaper raw materials) and increase their profit. “Capitalism is the most centralized economic system of all by attracting capital to the center and distributing out in the least degree in order to cut cost, produce more, dump market, and profit the most” (Changkhwanyuen, 2004, p. 254). While capitalist enterprises enjoy the conditions of free market economy, the economically vulnerable strata of society feel the pressure of poverty on them. As distribution of wealth is unbalanced to the advantage of the rich, in a vicious circle, then the exploited poor become poorer and the exploiting rich become richer. Through its privatization project, capitalism leaves no room for communal ownership; neither does it recognize distribution without a financial exchange value (Anderson, 2016; Asutay, 2007; Yusuf, 1971).

To address the problem of social inequality and poverty, different faith groups agree that there should be a balanced distribution of wealth in society; yet, the solutions they offer to implement this are slightly different. For example, some scholars of Islamic economics (e.g. Afzal-ur-Rahman, 1975; Siddiqi, 1972; Yusuf, 1971) suggest a series of means such as prohibitions (e.g. of extravagance), restrictions (e.g. on income), obligations (e.g. charitable donations), and responsibilities (e.g. behaving altruistically). Such measures in Kuran’s (1989) critical analysis are problematic because they lack consistency and fail to address the principles of issues of fairness and equality in Islam:

By and large, I go on to argue, these injunctions rest on a faulty model of human civilization, and they leave far more room for interpretation than the Islamic economists acknowledge. In many contexts, moreover, the injunctions bring the principles of justice into conflict, both with one another and with other Islamic principles.

*p. 171*

The above-mentioned measures for Kuran are only cosmetic surgeries because they do not address the structural problems (e.g. politics of economic distribution) in society.

A majority of Islamic economics scholars fail to acknowledge that the state cannot and should not impose certain lifestyles on people, believing that this will bring justice to society. Similarly, Jafari (2012) argues that many such scholars overlook issues of corruption and cronyism that increasingly contribute to the failure of economic systems and the growth of injustice in Muslim contexts.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, Changkhwanyuen (2004) and Sarao (n/d) argue that measures such as simplicity, downsizing, and localization of economies are sustainable ways of preventing the gap between the poor and the rich from widening. For less-developed economies, in particular, turning away from international investment and globalization can save them from falling into debt. Economic growth, in the name of globalization, only paves the way for big organizations to access the cheap natural resources of other countries and turn them into their own consumers. It is at this point that people become enslaved by capitalism and start to witness the gap widening between the rich and poor. From Christian (Anderson, 2016; Bell, 2012; Sandel, 2012; Wallis, 2010) and Jewish (Levi, 1993) standpoints, since the problem of capitalism is its separation of economy from morality, there is an urgent need to return to the principles of religion. In their view, almsgiving can significantly contribute to the redistribution of wealth in society. Yet, figures such as Bell and Wallis specifically argue that, even if under capitalism all members of society become rich, capitalism is still problematic because it makes people greedy for more economic gains. Therefore, there is a need for the state to intervene in the economic system and establish balance in society. This will be discussed further in the next section.

## State intervention

Religious views about alternative political systems are diverse. For example, in the 20th-century United States, the Christian right movement has shifted orientation from full support for laissez-faire to support for conservative economic policies (e.g. tax cuts and child benefits). The religious left argues that capitalism is a totalizing regime that aims to govern all aspects of socio-economic life (e.g. Shariati, 1988; Tawney, 1920; Thomas, 1932; West, 1991). This system oppresses the masses in order to exploit them for its profit maximization. Under capitalism, the power of the state is minimized and restricted to the regulatory bodies that only partly control the market. As a result, the economic system actually works to the advantage of the rich as the poor become subject

to minimum benefits received from the state, depending on the social welfare of the country. This is the reason why the religious left calls for state intervention in economy and the establishment of religious socialism. What differentiates it from secular socialism, however, is the governance of the system by the spiritual principles of religion. In other words, the state abides by the religious belief that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God and the state should be responsible for a just distribution of wealth.

In contrast to the revolutionary standpoint of the religious left, reformists (e.g. Bell, 2012; Levi, 1993) call for reconfiguring capitalism. Bell takes a reformist position because he believes that capitalism is an inevitable reality that cannot be destroyed. Therefore, for practical reasons, what we can do is to find ways to re-embed it in moral values. Bell, of course, puts the 'Kingdom of God' above all the ruling systems to suggest that if the actors in the capitalism system work with faith in God and mercy toward his creatures, then society can experience salvation. For Levi, the market and religious values need to go hand in hand in order for society to run. For both Bell and Levi, the state should devise some mechanisms to support the needy without taking property rights from individuals.

From a Buddhist perspective, Changkhwanyuen (2004) suggests that the state should take part in administrating production and consumption in order to ensure that the order of the economic system is based on a balanced consumption-production. That is, real consumption should determine enough production not vice versa. Otherwise, if production creates consumption, the system will lean toward capitalism that encourages consumerism based on artificial needs. The state is also responsible for tighter controls of the production, distribution and marketing of processes:

For example, bank and financial institution[s] should be managed not to take advantage of their clients, to curb financial power with no production base, recapitalize for cooperative activities, control currency flow, and establish knowledge and development of production for community. So it can be self-reliant, and knowledgeable enough to grow in its own strength. This control should extend to product quality control, consumer protection, production volume, environment safety, waste volume, and so on. This control is possible through legal mechanism such as labor law, consumer protection law, law

protecting small and medium size enterprise, product standard law, law on service business, etc.

*Changkhwanyuen, 2004, p. 257*

Overall, religious perspectives' discontent with the state's minimal intervention in the market arises from criticizing the totalizing greed of a capitalist regime that irresponsibly takes advantage of the resources (e.g. natural) that belong to the whole society. The capitalist system also manipulates state regulations in the interest of profit maximization for the ruling class. While revolutionaries propose socialism as an alternative, reformists suggest that the free market economy needs to be reconciled with morality, and states should take the necessary steps to ensure that market rules are fair.

### Ill-being

Capitalism brings a wide variety of ills for society. Again, the common belief among religious critics is that capitalism contaminates human life by its emphasis on materialism (Anderson, 2016; Bell, 2012; Changkhwanyuen, 2004; Kalantari, 2008; Kaplan, 2010/1934; Levi, 1993; Motahari, 2000; Sandel, 2012; Sarao, n/d; Wallis, 2010). Neoliberalism makes a consumerist life plausible and even necessary in the market. In a market society, people engage in never-ending status competitions with one another in order to increase their material possessions. As competitive individualism expands, people gradually lose the meaning of life and happiness is described and prescribed in terms of the accumulation of valued assets and consumerism.

Materialism imposes several problems on human beings. As individuals agonistically race with each other, they go into debt in order to buy the things that are not really needed but are wanted because in their absence there would be a feeling of losing the competition to their rivals. Such an economic burden is exacerbated when people struggle with psychological ill-being. The anxiety and depression that arise from the desire of continuing the race can remove happiness from people's lives. Although individuals find temporary happiness in having their material possessions, under a neoliberal economic system, their relationships with people around them will also depend on their ability to maintain material equivalence. The end result is that human beings lose peace inside them and harmony with the external environment.

All faith groups reject the idea that happiness solely lies in materialism, but they also agree that the lack of sufficient financial means can result in poverty and ill-being. The key point in maintaining happiness is to create balance between the spiritual and the material. For example, in Buddhism, “an ideal society would follow the motto of happiness and welfare of maximum number of people” (Sarao, n/d, p. 7). Such an ideal situation can be embraced only when members of society consume mindfully and refrain from greed. The same notion finds support in other faith groups.

With reference to the concept of ‘sin’, Bell (2012) and Anderson (2016) argue that human beings are born with certain characteristics that make them susceptible to failure. Greed is one of them. It is claimed that people are faced with the unquenchable desire to possess, and capitalism targets this aspect of human nature, provoking them to ask for more. From this perspective, therefore, capitalism is the ‘economy of desire’ that directs happiness through materialism (Bell, 2012). Motahari (2000) and Kalantari (2008) also emphasize that the most tragic part of materialism is self-alienation. That is, by becoming materialistic, they lose their connection with their true self, created in the image of God.

## Ecological degradation and unsustainable growth

Religious critics of the market, commonly hold capitalism accountable for the rapid ecological degradation and waste of natural resources (e.g. Nasr, 1997; Sarao, n/d; Wallis, 2010). With its emphasis on rapid economic growth, capitalism utilizes natural resources much faster than they can be replaced. Economic growth also brings with it different types of demands such as water and air pollution and waste (both industrial and domestic). Economic growth is not against the principles of religion as far as it maintains a harmonious relationship with nature: “Buddhism does not mind wealth and prosperity as long as they are acquired and used in accord with the ethical norms. The real problem lies in the human tendency to have which the Buddha called craving (*tanhā*)” (Sarao, n/d, pp. 5–6). From a Buddhist perspective, “apart from taking into account the profitability of a given activity, its effect upon people and environment, including the resource base, is equally important” (Sarao, n/d, p. 6).

Some secular critics of capitalism (e.g. Feuerbach, 1957; Nash, 1991; White Jr., 1967) associate such problems with the Judeo-Christian notion of anthropocentrism, arguing that it was religion that put humanity above nature and facilitated the

exploitation of natural resources. El-Jurdi, Batat, and Jafari (2017, p. 13) summarize the response of faith groups as follows:

Bouma-Prediger (2009) in particular rejects the accusations made against Christianity for their shaky rationale [i.e. its importance as a precondition for capitalism]. Such accusations, he argues, fail to acknowledge the 2000 year gap between the advent of Christianity and today's ecological crisis. Natural degradation, in Bouma-Prediger's view, is a direct result of mankind's divorce from nature in search of economic gain. This is a similar theme in Nasr's (1997) thesis. Nasr forcefully argues that in its applications, modern science has lost touch with the divine. Ecological crisis in modern society is due to human beings' spiritual vacuum and detachment from nature and the sacred and their overreliance on materialism, scientism, and positivism. In other words, by abandoning the sacred and secularization of science man declared "war against nature". Nasr deems the reconciliation of science with the spiritual traditions of religions pivotal to combating ecological crises.

Scholars from across Judaism (Freudenstein, 1970; Tirosh-Samuelson, 2001, 2005), Christianity (Grønkvold, 2013; Sandelands & Hoffman, 2008; Wirzba, 2003) and Islam (Afrasiabi 2003; Dien 1997; Foltz, Denny, & Baharuddin, 2003; Ozdemir, 2003) all argue that anthropocentrism is misunderstood by the critics of religion. Indeed, God created mankind in his own image and made them his stewards on earth. With such stewardship came the responsibility of protecting nature and the environment. As such, it is not religion but its absence that made mankind exploit the environment. Religious critiques of the market endorse the claim that ecological crisis is rooted in human beings' pursuit of happiness through materialism and consumerism (Assadourian, 2010; Hurst, Dittmar, Bond, & Kasser, 2013; Sandel, 2012), over-reliance on science as the magic wand of well-being (Nasr, 1997), and people's market-oriented narcissism and the collapse of morality (Wallis, 2010).

### Loss of human dignity

According to faith groups, capitalism renders human beings as goods for sale in the market. Capitalism applies its monetary value system to human dignity. This is done via the relativization of morality (Wallis, 2010). In the name of economic productivity and growth, capitalism exploits human beings both as subjects and objects of

consumption. For example, Motahari (2000) argues that by viewing human beings only as the market-made consumers of a neoliberal system, capitalism dehumanizes human beings by playing with their unquenchable desires (e.g. greed, arrogance and sexuality). It detaches individuals from their position as citizen-members of human society and makes them slaves of its own realm of consumerism. Via its marketization mechanism, it also puts human beings up for sale. This is more common in the media and advertising industry which commoditize human beings as images for sale, particularly when women are packaged as sexual commodities (e.g. images of desire). This kind of aesthetic commodification restricts human beings to a physical entity (e.g. the body image) sold within the market. For example, in pornography, human beings literally become the object of consumption as a means to satisfy human lust. For capitalism, this kind of economy is accepted because it generates its producers, consumers, price mechanism, and, of course, significant revenue streams.

Bell (2012), Wallis (2010) and Sandel (2012) also aver that capitalism relativizes morality. In their view, the neoliberal market economy creates its own vices and virtues through, for example, the production of media celebrities for the masses to follow. It also defines human dignity in relation to their material achievements in the economic system, that is, it distinguishes between the haves and have-nots. In contrast to this, religion recognizes human dignity in and of itself. Under capitalism, human dignity is at risk when it comes to power relations between those who have economic power and those who do not (Wallis, 2010). In a situation where everything is for sale, those who cannot afford to meet their basic needs become vulnerable to losing their human dignity (Sandel, 2012). Bell (2012) contends that the biggest problem with capitalism is that it separates human beings from God. Instead of bowing to the Creator, human beings idolize the market and materialism.

## Conclusion and areas for future research

This chapter began with a suggestion that including religious perspectives in critical marketing can help us gain a more holistic understanding of the critiques of the market. An overview of the relationship between religion and the market was presented to demonstrate that these two are not necessarily in opposition. As the religious critiques of the market were discussed, it became apparent that despite some similarities,



religious discourses do not equally oppose the market. While some critics totally reject the free market economy, others seek to reform it (see Orwig, 2002).

The discussions under 'Religious critiques of the market' reflected some of the main themes that recur in religious discourses. These themes are also shared in secular critiques of the market. For example, the alienation of human beings and the problem of social injustice are best exemplified in Marx's works. Neoliberalism is widely criticized by many scholars including Trentmann (2004, 2006) and Gill (1995). These similarities can be seen as opportunities for a better understanding of the extant discourses shaped around the critique of capitalism. These discussions indicate that religious perspectives on the critique of the market cannot and should not be overlooked because they reflect some of the general concerns (e.g. social justice, well-being, and ecology) about how society works under capitalism. Regardless of our subjective views about, and potential skepticism toward, religion, it continues to shape the worldviews of a large number of people around the world. Therefore, scholars in general, and critical marketing thinkers in particular, need to acknowledge the importance of understanding the viewpoints of those whose critique of the market is fueled by religious discourses. Such scholars' approach to knowledge generation should not be driven by their (dis)belief in religion; rather, they should endeavor to understand how research on critiques of the market can be enriched by incorporating a diversity of critiques (i.e. secular and religious).

There are several areas for future research. It would be of particular interest to explore the changes (e.g. political and socio-economic) religious critiques of the market undergo over time. The example of the Christian libertarianism in this chapter can be specifically insightful. Closely related to this is to understand whether or not such critiques mobilize the masses against capitalism. What kind of techniques do they employ? How do they interact with non-religious critiques of the market? Are they as isolated as they are in the academic literature? If yes, why? If no, why are they less represented in the field? If religious critics of the market are powerful in religious societies, are these societies free from poverty and social injustice? Have they managed to establish an ideal economy? What are the expected outcomes of generating knowledge on the critiques of the market? How can the knowledge generated in this area be enacted to benefit society at large?

## Note

[INSERT ENDNOTE HERE]

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