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# Understanding Religious-Organizational Marketization: The Case of the United States Mainline

Marcus Moberg<sup>\*</sup> 

## ABSTRACT

Past decades have witnessed an accelerating proliferation of managerial and market-associated discourses and imperatives across the traditional religious-organizational field. Based on theoretical perspectives on marketization, this article outlines a general analytical framework by which to approach, empirically investigate, and understand processes of organizational marketization as they unfold in contemporary religious-organizational settings. As illustrated by more recent developments among the Protestant mainline denominations in the United States, the article (1) provides a general sociological explanation for the primary reasons why processes of organizational marketization have been set in motion within the US mainline; (2) outlines the main ways and means by which such processes have tended to unfold; and (3) accounts for their main practical effects on current mainline organizational cultures and working routines.

THERE is wide agreement among sociologists of religion that the character, self-understanding, organizational cultures, and modus operandi of traditional and long-established Western religious organizations (i.e., mostly Christian churches) have been undergoing significant changes and transformations in the late modern era (e.g., [McLeod 2007](#)). Previous scholarship in the area has in large part centered on the extent to which modern religious organizations become subject to the same kinds of broader societal, cultural, and institutional pressures as other types of public, private, and third-sector organizations (e.g., [Hinings and Raynard 2014](#)). The pressures brought by the constant expansion and extension of the modern capitalist market economy certainly count among the most extensively studied developments in this regard.

Beginning already with the foundational work of Max Weber and continuing up until the 1980s, we saw a considerable body of scholarship on the effects of accelerating general processes of *bureaucratization* (along with its corollary process of professionalization) on the

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Western religious-organizational field (for an overview, see, e.g., Beckford 1985; Hinings and Raynard 2014, 163–70). Since the early 1990s, the main focus of this scholarship has increasingly shifted toward the proliferation of nondenominational “seeker-sensitive” and “growth-oriented” megachurches and other types of more recently established religious organizations that have consciously striven to align their outlooks and practices with contemporary consumerist sensibilities and wholeheartedly adopted practices such as marketing, advertising, and branding (e.g., Roof 1999; Ellingson 2007; Einstein 2008; Maddox 2012). Comparatively much less attention has been devoted to the continuous impact of the contemporary neoliberal market and consumer society on the present-day self-understandings and practices of traditional religious organizations with longstanding historical and structural ties to states or national social establishments, who typically retain extensive nationwide bureaucratic organizational structures and often remain deeply enmeshed in various types of public-nonprofit sector inter-organizational partnership networks (e.g., Ammerman 2002; Chaves et al. 2002; Schlamelcher 2013; Moberg 2017). The qualifier “traditional” should therefore not be taken to refer to any particular type of religion as such, but rather to a particular type of religious organization with longstanding historical roots in Western societies. Examples of religious organizations in this category include “mainline” Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, and to some extent other long-established organizations such as the LDS Church and the Salvation Army.

To provide a crucial complement to previous research in the area, this article focuses on some of the most notable ways in which traditional and long-established religious organizations have more recently begun to internalize managerial and market-associated discourses and imperatives as central components of their organizational imaginaries and varyingly striven to implement these in actual practice. These developments are viewed through the theoretical lens of *marketization*, which has been identified as one among the most significant societal “megatrends” of the past three to four decades (e.g., Mautner 2010; Belk 2020). As such, the article also aligns with more recently established theoretical perspectives on the “marketization of religion” (e.g., Gauthier et al. 2013a; 2013b; Gauthier 2015; 2020; Moberg 2017), which approach currently ongoing transformations in the religious field “against the backdrop of wider socio-economic changes, catalyzed by the spread of consumerism and the neo-liberal economy” (Gauthier et al. 2013b, 24).

As a basic premise, it is important to point out at the outset that *religion* (however that concept or category is understood) does not, by and of itself, become “marketized.” Rather, as will be discussed in more detail below, marketization is most adequately understood as a process that unfolds on the macro-level of society as a whole and the meso-level of social organizations and institutions (cf. Gauthier 2020, 216). This article will thus argue that ongoing processes of what will be termed *religious-organizational marketization* within the traditional religious organizational field as defined above are most adequately approached in terms of an internal set of processes whereby traditional religious organizations gradually reconfigure their own discursive practices, organizational cultures, and *modus operandi* in accordance with currently prevailing market-associated values and imperatives of organizational “effectivity” and “performance.” It follows from this that processes of religious-organizational marketization also need to be approached and understood as the result of a combination of mounting external pressures (both actual and perceived) and a series of active and conscious efforts on the part of traditional religious organizations themselves. Building on my previous work in the area (Moberg 2017), the argument that follows highlights the importance of paying close attention to discourse and changing discursive practice for reaching an adequate understanding of currently ongoing processes of organizational marketization within traditional religious-organizational settings. In this the argument closely aligns with previous discourse theoretical perspectives on the largely “discourse-driven” nature of contemporary processes of social and socioeconomic

change, which have highlighted the ways in which actual tangible changes in the practices of all types of organizations tend to be both preceded by as well as dialectically related to changes in their discursive practices (e.g., Fairclough 1992; Chiapello and Fairclough 2002).

To bring this dynamic into clearer focus, this article outlines a general analytical framework of religious-organizational marketization in traditional religious-organizational contexts. It does so through, first, presenting a general sociological heuristic frame for understanding the main reasons why processes of organizational marketization have been unfolding at an accelerating pace within traditional religious-organizational settings during past decades. Second, it outlines the principal means by which such processes are set in motion as well as the main trajectories along which they tend to unfold. Third, drawing on and re-contextualizing theoretical perspectives on organizational mediatization as developed by Thomas Schillemans (2012) and Magnus Fredriksson et al. (2015), the article highlights some of the main practical effects of these processes on the current organizational cultures, practices, and *modus operandi* of traditional religious organizations.

To illustrate the principal dynamics of such currently ongoing processes of religious-organizational marketization in a way that remains sufficiently sensitive to denominational and broader socioeconomic context, the article will focus solely on examples from the traditional so-called “Seven Sisters” of mainline Protestantism in the United States: the United Methodist Church (UMC), the American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA), the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Episcopal Church (TEC), the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Disciples of Christ (DOC). The article should not, however, primarily be viewed as a study of US mainline churches *per se*. Rather, more recent developments within the US mainline are explored to empirically illustrate the principal means by which processes of organizational marketization are set in motion and unfold within a particular *type* of broader religious-organizational context. Hence, although openly acknowledging denomination-specific peculiarities and variations, the article therefore aims to present a general analytical framework that can be tested, adjusted, and modified (or indeed refuted) on the basis of future empirical research on the changing self-understandings and organizational cultures of a broader range of traditional religious organizations.

As should be clear from the above, the analytical framework outlined in this article does not purport to be equally applicable to all and any types of modern-day religious organizations. With more specific reference to the US context, the framework does not, for example, purport to be readily applicable to the megachurch phenomenon, which represents an altogether different organizational context from the one focused on here. Rather, the framework presented is primarily intended to apply to long-established religious organizations that maintain dense bureaucratic structures, that are subjected to larger degrees of inter-discursive influence due to their deep involvements in various types of public-nonprofit cooperative networks, and that are currently struggling to maintain their societal positions following decades of perpetual decline.

The effects of processes of marketization can be observed across the religious-organizational spectrum. The particular form that they take, however, will vary from one type of broader religious organizational context to another. Whereas many more recently established, comparatively less civically engaged, and less bureaucratically structured religious organizations have, often from their very inception, consciously framed both their discourse and practices within a broader “market” and consumerist idiom, other types of long-established, bureaucratically structured, and deeply civically engaged religious organizations instead still find themselves in the process of adapting their established discursive practices and *modus operandi* to the demands of an increasingly marketized broader social-organizational environment. In the North American context nondenominational megachurches can be viewed as paradigmatic cases of the former, whereas the US mainline churches can be viewed as paradigmatic cases of the latter.

Hence, whereas many religious organizations in the megachurch mold can be described as having already become “marketized” to a notable extent, mainline churches are more adequately described as still being in the process of *becoming* “marketized.”

As a preliminary illustration, this can, for instance, be seen in how the past couple of decades have witnessed the establishment of entirely new “marketing” and “mission advancement” offices and “task forces” across all of the mainline churches. Among countless similar and more particular examples, it can be seen in the PCUSA’s Mission Agency Board’s production of a 2017–2018 Mission Work Plan that highlights the importance of “directional goals” to “serve as strategic beacons for the work of the agency” (PCUSA 2016, 3). It can also be seen in the DOC’s New Church Ministry coaching program that promises to provide “solutions to complex strategic missional challenges in your choice geographical location for ministry” (Hope Partnership Services 2018). And it can be seen in the UCCs Strategic Visioning Task Force’s and Vision Implementation Task Force of the UCC Board of Directors’ decision to adopt and implement the organizational principle of “Inclusive Excellence” for the purposes of bringing about “a fundamental transformation of the institution” of the church as a whole (UCC 2017b, 4).

The article consists of two main parts. The first part outlines a discourse-focused understanding of the concept of marketization and provides a general sociological explanation as to why processes of marketization have been unfolding across US mainline church contexts during approximately the past two to three decades. A brief discussion of the main ways in which the approach adopted in this article relates to previous dominant approaches in the scholarship on religion, markets, and consumer culture is also provided. The second part aims to account for how processes of organizational marketization have been set in motion and unfolded within the context of the US mainline churches and with what principal practical effects for church organization and practice. In what is intended to provide a general guide for analysis, the second part thus accounts for each of the main aspects and phases of religious-organizational marketization in light of a set of concrete examples from mainline church contexts during roughly the past fifteen years. The article closes with some concluding remarks and further reflections on the explanatory value, analytic utility, and limitations of the analytical framework presented.

## THE CONCEPT OF MARKETIZATION AND THE MARKETIZATION OF RELIGION: WHY RELIGIOUS-ORGANIZATIONAL MARKETIZATION OCCURS

In the Western world, a series of fundamental socioeconomic changes that would eventually lead up to an increasingly marketized society and culture was set in motion already in the immediate post-World War II era as industrialized Western economies started transitioning from a manufacturing industry-based “Fordist” economy toward a more flexible “post-Fordist” service-centered economy (e.g., Slater and Tonkiss 2001, 136–37). As a central part of these developments, the societal institution of the economy also gradually attained the status of principal social “structuring and embedding force” (Gauthier 2015, 71–72) throughout the increasingly functionally differentiated capitalist liberal democracies of the West (e.g., Schimank and Volkmann 2012, 41–42). Following the emergence and subsequent global spread of neoliberal political economy from the early 1980s onward, the primacy of the free, non-regulated market evolved into a powerful political imperative (e.g., Blyth 2002; Harvey 2007), resulting in a previously unseen extension of managerial and late capitalism-associated discourses and values across social institutional and organizational domains that had up until then been viewed as being mainly situated “outside” the economic sphere proper, such as the education, healthcare, nonprofit, and charitable organizational sectors (e.g., Birch and Siemiatycki 2015). The

extension of neoliberal imperatives and precepts was also further aided by the development of auxiliary phenomena such as so-called new public management (NPM) in the late 1980s. Although appearing in many different guises and more specific articulations, the main objective of NPM is essentially to “reform” and enhance the effectivity of public agency bureaucracies by subjecting them to a range of private sector measures (e.g., [McLaughlin et al. 2002](#)). This provides the broader backdrop against which the concept of marketization needs to be understood.

Notwithstanding the development of several slightly different understandings, in light of the above, the concept of marketization can be taken to refer to the “permeation of market exchange as a social principle” ([Slater and Tonkiss 2001](#), 25) and the extended processes whereby social and cultural domains and sub-systems that have traditionally been viewed as non-economic become gradually but increasingly visibly “subjected to a deliberate policy of economizing” ([Schimank and Volkmann 2012](#), 37; cf. [Moberg 2017](#); [Gauthier 2020](#), 183; [Firat 2020](#)). Processes of marketization are thus viewed as always being underpinned by particular and deliberate ideological efforts to construct particular versions of the “market” and “enacting particular versions of what it is to be economic” ([Muniesa et al., 2007](#), 3; cf. [Slater and Tonkiss 2001](#), 3).

The theoretical framework of religious-organizational marketization presented here is also further grounded in the (by now firmly empirically substantiated) observation that, once the logics and dynamics of marketization have taken hold in new institutional and organizational locations, they typically start to perpetuate themselves. Indeed, as Gerlinde Mautner points out, the more widespread and engrained marketization becomes within the institutional and organizational structures of society on the whole, “the stronger the incentive (or indeed pressure) for the individual organisation to follow suit, to allow more marketised practises and discourses to enter its system, and to allow them to penetrate ever deeper into its organisational structure” ([Mautner 2010](#), 18). Marketization should therefore not least, or arguably even primarily, be understood as the process whereby particular sets of late capitalist, managerial, and market-associated discourses make their way into and become increasingly established and, most importantly, normalized across previously non-economic (in the sense of not-for-profit, non-business) organizational domains, including the religious-organizational domain. To be clear, since all organizations include an economic element, religious organizations will inevitably partly constitute economic entities as well (for a broader perspective on this theme, see [McLaughlin et al. 2020](#)). But since the vast majority of them are not engaged in for-profit activities, here, they will be situated as part of the nonprofit domain.

### The Changing Fortunes of the US Mainline and the Marketization of the US Nonprofit Organizational Field

The mainline churches developed increasingly extensive and dense bureaucratic organizational structures already during the first decades of the twentieth century as part of their growing involvement in various types of social and civic causes, a movement commonly known as the Social Gospel. As Peter Thuesen points out, as part of their increasing Social Gospel efforts, the mainline churches “partook deeply of the bureaucratic ethos of big business and the scientific ethos of the university” ([Thuesen 2002](#), 42). This constituted a continuation (and indeed extension) of a particular type of intermingling between church and market modalities and practices with deep historical roots in the United States Protestant milieu (e.g., [Noll 2001](#); [Valeri 2010](#)) that had become increasingly widespread already towards the end of the nineteenth century (for detailed historical explorations, see e.g., [Moore 2001](#); [Giggie and Winston 2002](#); [Kirk 2018](#); [Dochuk 2019](#)). As an example, the publication of [Frederick Taylor’s \*Principles of Scientific Management\* \(2016\)](#) in 1911 (which inspired the mode of production management known as Taylorism) was almost immediately followed by the publication of [Shailer Mathews’ \(1912\)](#)

widely influential *Scientific Management in the Churches* in 1912. Another notable example is found in [Bruce Barton's \(1925\)](#) bestselling *The Man Nobody Knows*, published in 1925, which played an instrumental role in the wider popularization of market and business vocabularies throughout mainline contexts through its rendering of Christ as a great business executive and advertising man. Although a more detailed account of the history of the “church-market” relationship in the United States would fall beyond the scope of this article, it is nevertheless important to note that the mainline churches, in many respects, were forerunners when it came to the adoption and application of market and business modalities in church settings. But as will be further argued below, there are qualitative differences to be observed with regard to the mainline churches’ relationship to market modalities and practices before and after the onset of mainline decline in the mid-1960s and especially following the wide perpetuation of neoliberalism and NPM from the early 1980s onward.

The Great Depression of 1929 caused a thorough reassessment of the initially overtly optimistic aims of the Social Gospel. But as the movement nevertheless continued to develop and expand, the mainline churches increasingly came to adapt an “*institutional model*” of social activism and advocacy based on an “all-embracing conception of the church’s public role” ([Thuesen 2002](#), 27, emphasis added). By the 1950s, however, the intensifying civic engagements of the mainline had helped produce “denominational bureaucracies that were more interested in maintaining the status quo” than they were in trying to attract new members ([Lantzer 2012](#), 89). This particular development, in its turn, provides an important part of the explanation for the perpetual state of decline that the mainline churches have found themselves in ever since the mid-1960s. They have long since lost their “mainline” status as far as membership figures are concerned, and neo-evangelical and non-denominational congregations and “seeker-sensitive” megachurches have surpassed them (e.g., [Pew Research Center 2014](#); [Ellingson 2007](#); [Lantzer 2012](#)). In response to these challenges, the mainline churches have, as Jason Lantzer puts it, increasingly geared their bureaucracies toward “institutional survival” ([Lantzer 2012](#), 89). But in spite of their numerical decline and gradual loss of social influence, the mainline churches still retain central positions throughout various types of both local and national public-nonprofit cooperative networks (e.g., [Ammerman 2002](#), 132–36).

The progressive marketization of the US nonprofit organizational sector since the early 1980s has had a notable impact on the self-understandings and organizational cultures of the US mainline churches. The policies of Roosevelt’s New Deal in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, followed by Johnson’s Great Society in the mid-1960s, both resulted in considerable expansions in nearly all government bureaucracies charged with the distribution of various types of social services ([Salamon 1993](#)). US government social welfare spending throughout the 1960s and 1970s also largely followed the longstanding liberal regime principle of “third-party government,” whereby federal and state authorities typically enlisted nonprofit organizations (as well as private firms) to carry out social welfare operations in actual practice ([Salamon 1993](#), 18–20). These developments therefore also resulted in a considerable expansion in the operations and general economic significance of the nonprofit organizational sector, including the mainline churches, during these decades ([Salamon 1993](#), 18–20). These structures would, however, undergo a range of sweeping changes and transformations from the early 1980s onward. Underpinned by the rise of neoliberal political economy as actively promoted by the Reagan administration, the 1980s witnessed a “decisive turn toward the market, a fundamental ‘marketization’ of the nonprofit sector” ([Salamon 1993](#), 26). Following these developments, the adoption of market-related values and imperatives on the part of nonprofit organizations ceased to be, so to speak, “optional.”

The nonprofit sector thus became swept up in a much broader and more fundamental neoliberalism and NPM-driven “deconstruction and reconstruction of institutions, often in the

name of or in the image of ‘markets’” (Tickell and Peck 2003, 167–8). As expressed by Matthew Sanders, one particularly notable result has been the “the unquestioning and widespread adoption of market discourse and practice in nonbusiness organizations” and their establishment and normalization as the “primary logic of popular organizational narratives... and organizational decision making” (Sanders 2012, 180). Past decades have thus seen the entry and increasing normalization of a whole host of new market-associated discourses and imperatives into the nonprofit organizational domain in the form of, for example, “marketing,” “branding,” “promotion,” “customer orientation,” “total quality management,” “management by objectives,” “cost-effectiveness,” “flexibility,” and more recently “social entrepreneurship” (Dempsey and Sanders 2010; Sanders 2012). It is also worth noting that, apart from more obviously market-associated practices such as marketing and branding, these developments also introduced an entirely new type of emphasis on strategic thinking and organizational effectivity.

Although this very brief account of 1980s and subsequent transformations of the US nonprofit organizational sphere remains far from complete in many important respects, it nevertheless serves to illustrate on a more general level the changing structures and discursive practices of a broader social organizational field in which the mainline churches remain deeply enmeshed (e.g., Ammerman 2002; Chaves et al. 2002). The progressive marketization of the nonprofit organizational domain during past decades therefore provides a central part of the broader backdrop against which currently ongoing internal processes of organizational marketization within the US mainline churches need to be approached and understood. As I have previously argued, this is because the mainline churches’ continued engagements within this domain clearly have made them increasingly susceptible to various types of inter-organizational discursive influence as they have, often rather unreservedly, adopted the types of managerial and market-associated discourses and organizational values that have more and more come to permeate and govern the broader nonprofit organizational domain as a whole (Moberg 2017).

### The Study of Religion, Markets, and Consumer Culture

Scholarship on religion, markets, and consumer culture has developed and diversified considerably in the past couple of decades (for an overview and general categorization of key approaches, see, e.g., Moberg and Martikainen 2018, 422–24). Although the intention here is not to attempt to provide yet another overview, it is nevertheless worthwhile to briefly clarify how the approach adopted in this article relates to previous approaches in the field. In broad perspective, it could be argued that the bulk of all previous scholarship in the area has been grounded in either one of three main approaches, which could respectively be labeled the religious marketplace, commodification of religion, and marketization of religion approach.<sup>1</sup>

Scholarship in the religious marketplace approach has its roots in the broader economics of religion tradition that rose to prominence as part of the increasingly wide establishment of the so-called New Paradigm of sociology of religion in the United States in the early 1990s (Warner 1993; Roof 1999, 78; Einstein 2008). A central characteristic of scholarship in this approach has been its strong preoccupation with “economic imagery” (Warner 1993), coupled with the (far from uncontested) idea that the (primarily North American) religious field as such is best conceived of, analyzed, and understood in market economic terms.

Previous scholarship in the commodification of religion approach has been both extensive and diverse and in large part focused on the ways in which an ever wider array of religious ideas, practices, and provisions (and especially those conventionally subsumed under the heading of “new age” or “alternative spiritualities”) have been co-opted by the corporate lifestyle industries

<sup>1</sup> In addition to these, the recent work of McLaughlin et al. 2020 on religion and the “corporate form” represents a novel approach to the field.



and become reconfigured into products (e.g., in the form of books, magazines, courses, etc.) for individualized consumption on a broader contemporary marketplace of ideas and lifestyle choices (e.g., Lau 2000; Carrette and King 2005; Heelas 2008; Martin 2014).

Grounded in theoretical perspectives on marketization as outlined above and often expressly distinguished from the economics of religion tradition, the comparatively fewer studies (as of this writing) in the marketization of religion approach have instead concentrated on the wider ideational effects of post-1980s neoliberal social restructurings on the contemporary religious field in the form of, for example, the establishment of new modes of “pluricentric” network governance of religion (Martikainen 2013) and the emergence of new types of religious-state-nonprofit partnerships in the areas of social work and welfare provision (e.g., Gauthier et al. 2013a; 2013b; Gauthier 2020; Martikainen 2013; Schlamelcher 2013; Moberg 2017). Hence, it is also within this approach that we find a more sustained engagement with the ideational effects of the neoliberal capitalist market economy on long-established traditional religious organizations. Although the marketization approach is not inherently incompatible with either of the two previously discussed main approaches, it nevertheless differs from both of them in its insistence on the importance that scholarly explorations of the impact of the neoliberal capitalist market economy on the present-day religious field are grounded in adequate and sufficiently historicized and nuanced theorizations of the “market.”

In the marketization approach, analyses of the effects of broader processes of marketization on the traditional religious field are therefore most usefully pursued at the organizational level and with particular focus on the ways and degrees to which individual religious organizations themselves actively partake in such developments by instigating their own internal processes of organizational marketization. And so, when religious organizations like the US mainline churches initiate and undergo such processes they are *not* thereby transformed into for-profit organizations. Nor do they reconfigure their messages and provisions into “products” for sale on an “actual” broader marketplace of “religious/spiritual” commodities. Rather, processes of religious-organizational marketization in these types of settings first and foremost involve the adoption and internalization of market-centered imperatives and discourses as part of religious organizations’ own efforts to reconfigure their own discursive practices and *modus operandi* in accordance with currently prevailing values and expectations of organizational effectivity and performance. As I have argued elsewhere, in the case of the US mainline churches, such new discourses and organizational values have primarily been seen as providing new means and imaginaries for tackling a whole host of issues associated with continued denominational decline (Moberg 2017, 54).

The main purpose of this first part of the article has been to provide a general sociological explanation as to why bureaucratically structured and deeply civically involved traditional religious organizations like the US mainline churches have become increasingly affected by broader processes of marketization as these have unfolded at an accelerating pace across ever more social organizational domains during past decades. The following second main part of the article delves deeper into this aspect in a more systematic fashion by outlining the principal means whereby processes of internal organizational marketization are set in motion and with what principal practical effects and outcomes.

### ORGANIZATIONAL MARKETIZATION WITHIN THE US MAINLINE: PRINCIPAL MEANS, TRAJECTORIES, AND PRACTICAL EFFECTS

As noted above, processes of organizational marketization within mainline church contexts have closely mirrored similar processes occurring within other types of nonprofit organizations during past decades. Although such processes tend to unfold according to a certain

general pattern, traditional religious organizations nevertheless “marketize” to different degrees and extents. At certain points in time, particular organizations also find themselves at different stages of such processes. But whatever the case, any process of religious-organizational marketization will inevitably have to be both initiated and directed by organizational subjects themselves. Therefore, to recontextualize and paraphrase Schilleman’s observations on organizational mediatization, some religious organizations can be described as “becoming marketized” in that they have increasingly visibly started to align their official discourse with the types of market-associated discourses that currently govern the broader public and nonprofit organizational spheres (Schilleman 2012, 148). In such cases we see what could be termed “weak” marketization effects. Other religious organizations, however, are more adequately described as actively marketizing in that they have not only accommodated and firmly integrated managerial and market-associated discourses into their own orders of discourse but also actively worked towards operationalizing these new discourses in actual practice. In these cases we instead see what could be termed “strong” marketization effects. As we shall explore in several examples below, for a while now weak marketization effects have become increasingly discernible among all seven denominations that comprise the traditional US mainline. It is only more recently that some of them have also started to display signs of strong marketization effects.

A systematic focus on discourse and changing discursive practices provides a highly useful avenue for the concrete empirical exploration of processes of organizational marketization as they unfold within the context of the US mainline churches. As I have pointed out elsewhere, this is because bureaucratically structured religious organizations of this type constantly produce a wealth of official discourse of various kinds (i.e., discourse that presents and articulates the official strategy, stance, position, etc., of a particular church on any given topic or field of activity) (Moberg 2017, 14). Because official organizational discourse aims to (or purports to) articulate the shared perceptions, concerns, and aspirations of organizations on the whole (including those who work in that organization), it plays a central role in modeling and governing actual organizational practices and operations (cf. Fredriksson et al. 2015, 1056). Official discourse therefore functions as a “powerful ordering force” whereby organizations “write themselves into being” (Grant and Hardy 2003, 6). This is why actual tangible changes in the practices of all types of organizations tend to be both preceded by and driven by changes in their discursive practices (e.g., Fairclough 2005). As such, official discourse also plays a particularly central role in the positioning of organizational subjects, providing them with certain “frame[s] for action” (Fairclough 2010, 37). But we must never lose sight of the fact that official organizational discourse is always produced, maintained, and reproduced by people. To engage in discursive practice in a particular organizational setting—whether this takes the form of discourse production, implementation, or both—is to *act* in that organizational setting. Indeed, processes of religious-organizational marketization tend to become set in motion by particular types of practices and actions on the part of organizational subjects themselves. Most typically it occurs through the gradual introduction of market-associated discourse into new official strategies, steering documents, whitepapers, guidelines, etc. as a result of an accelerating and usually self-perpetuating technologization of discourse.

### The Technologization of Discourse

Originally developed by Norman Fairclough (1992), the concept of technologization of discourse aims to outline the more concrete ways and trajectories whereby new types of managerial and market-associated discourses make their ways into conventionally non-economic social organizational domains. The technologization of discourse is closely connected to the emergence and increasingly wide establishment of what Fairclough refers to as late capitalist “discourse technologies” such as promotion, auditing, customer orientation, etc., which have become “designed and

projected as ‘context-free’” and applicable across any and all organizational contexts (Fairclough 2010, 88). The technologization of discourse therefore denotes the rationalized and systematic effort whereby such discourse technologies are introduced, disseminated, established, and eventually normalized in particular organizational settings with the ultimate objective of “constructing a new hegemony in the order of discourse of the institution or organization concerned” (Fairclough 1993, 137). Investigating the technologization of discourse therefore principally involves tracking the entry and spread of new managerial and market-associated discourses within particular organizational settings. However, as with processes of organizational marketization generally, no technologization of discourse happens by itself; it always needs to be both initiated and directed by organizational actors themselves (usually by people or units in the upper echelons of organizational leaderships and administrations) (Fairclough 1992, 215–16; 2010, 138). It is also worth noting that extensive technologization of discourse efforts require considerable resources. Such efforts by and of themselves signal a greater degree of commitment on the part of organizations to alter their existing discursive practices.

Deliberate and systematic efforts toward the technologization of discourse tend to bring about a set of more particular alterations in the discursive practices of organizations. It starts with a critical evaluation and redesign of existing organizational discursive practices in light of new criteria of organizational “effectivity,” “performance,” “flexibility,” etc. (Fairclough 2010, 126; 1993, 141). This stage also typically involves enlisting the help of what Fairclough refers to as external “specialist technologists” such as management and branding consultants or coaches who assume functions as conduits for the introduction of new managerial and market-associated discourses and also assist in the education and training of organizational personnel in these new discourses and discursive practices (e.g., in the form of courses directed to employees on management, marketing, branding, customer orientation, etc.) (Fairclough 2010, 126). These efforts tend to result in three further empirically identifiable types of changes in the discursive practices of organizations.

First, we see an increasing re-contextualization of discourses (e.g., on marketing, advertising, branding) that originate from outside the organization coupled with mounting efforts to integrate these into the order of discourse of the organization in question. But importantly, as Fairclough points out, a “discourse decontextualised from its dialectical relationship with other elements of a field or network of social practices becomes an *imaginary*, very often working in a *metaphorical* way in the re-imagining of aspects of the field or practices it is recontextualised within” (Fairclough 2010, 79, emphases added). We therefore see an increasing intermingling of new market-associated discourses with already established organizational discourses. This results in the formation of new types of *hybrid* discourses that constitute (sometimes highly creative) mixtures between for-profit, nonprofit, and religious discourse genres.

For some time now there have been clear signs of intensifying technologization of discourse efforts within the US mainline churches. It is therefore principally through the technologization of discourse, the re-contextualization of market-associated discourse, and the forming of new types of hybrid discourses that the ethos and self-understandings of the mainline churches become articulated through the idiom of the market. Indeed, concepts such as marketing, advertising, and branding have become extensively re-contextualized and integrated as taken-for-granted components of official mainline discourse in the form of such new hybrid discourses.

The elaborate marketing plans of the UMC and TEC provide illustrative examples of this in that they both construct understandings of marketing that reduce it to, as well as effectively equate it with, effective communication as part of conscious efforts to *disassociate* it (i.e., to re-contextualize it) from its foundations in the for-profit domain of business and commerce. In both of these cases, we are therefore dealing with a new type of hybrid discourse where the concept of marketing not only figures in a largely metaphorical sense but also functions to provide a new imaginary for church practice. For example, the UMCs Marketing Plan Tool is introduced

thusly: “MARKETING ISN’T A DIRTY WORD. Marketing isn’t about sales. Marketing is about understanding your community and using the tools available to speak most effectively to them” (UMC 2016).

This short excerpt is generally illustrative of the ways in which the re-contextualization of marketing discourse into official church discourse typically functions as a way to re-imagine already established church practice through a new marketing idiom. The primary task that this text performs, however, is to distance the practices of the church from the world of marketing as that is commonly understood by explicitly re-defining marketing as something that “isn’t about sales” (which, in its standard definition and conventional understanding, it is).

Similarly, in what provides a particularly clear example of the intermingling of market and religious discourse genres, the TEC’s 2013 official eight-page guideline document *Marketing Your Parish: Advertising Best Practices for Effective Evangelism* starts out with an “Executive Summary” that, among other things, states the following:

Suggest churches should market to targeted segments of the population, and you’re starting to tread on forbidden turf. However—be it a congregation, diocese, denomination, or the universal Body—the church cannot afford to consider “advertising” a dirty word.... Effective commercial advertising sells products, whereas effective church advertising gets confirmed communicants in the pews. In this sense we are all advertisers; the church simply deals in spiritual rather than tangible goods. (TEC 2013, 1)

A few lines later, under the heading “Advertising As Evangelism: It’s Nothing New,” the text then goes on to proclaim,

The church has utilized effective marketing and advertising for a long time now. The Introduction to the Gospel of Luke (1, 1–4) has all the hallmarks of an effective product pitch: It casts doubt on the competition, appeals to eyewitness testimony, and offers a “satisfaction guarantee.” (TEC 2013, 2)

Apart from being highly illustrative of the practice of re-contextualization, these excerpts also provide apt examples of the creation of new hybrid discourses that constitute creative mixtures of religious and marketing discourse genres. As in the previous example, the text explicitly strives to disassociate (i.e., to re-contextualize) the practices of advertising and marketing from their roots in the world of business by re-defining them as practices that have always been fully compatible with the practices of the church. Indeed, significant parts of the entire document from which the above excerpts are taken are devoted to justifying the employment of the practice of marketing in church settings. To illustrate what something approximating an actual discourse analysis would look like in this particular case, we can begin by noting how words/terms such as “targeted segment,” “product,” “competition,” “goods,” “satisfaction guarantee” (itself put inside quotation marks), and of course “marketing” and “advertising” are made to figure rather effortlessly alongside words/terms such as “church,” “the universal Body,” “communicants in the pews,” and “the Gospel of Luke.” It is also worth noting that the language of the text is decidedly more colloquial than formal in style. In terms of its modality, the text conveys a high degree of certainty and commitment about what is being said. And so, although the document on the whole is certainly mainly designed to persuade its intended primary audience (i.e., church employees), it is simultaneously also geared toward de-sensitizing them to the employment of marketing- and advertising-related language and terminology in church settings.

Apart from the issue of marketing, a very similar development can also be discerned with regard to the adoption of the concept and practice of branding. For example, the branding guidelines of the

DOC, ELCA, TEC, and UMC all employ the concept of branding in ways that reduce it to little more than the creation of an attractive visual profile and logo. Even though the understandings of branding that emerge through such re-contextualizing hybrid discourse end up being quite far removed from the standard definition of branding, they nevertheless construct understandings of branding that provide new imaginaries for church practice while simultaneously not conflicting too much with established church discourse. The practice of re-contextualization and the emergence of hybrid discourses of this type should be regarded as constituting clear signs of weak marketization effects.

Closely related to the practice of re-contextualization, the technologization of discourse also typically brings about increasing pressures toward the homogenization and standardization of discursive practices across religious-organizational orders of discourse (Fairclough 2010, 552). This can most clearly be seen in an increasing extension of instrumental-rationalist strategic discourse. Strategic discourse is generally characterized by certain lexical and grammatical features. In particular, it tends to be focused on outlining future desired developments, typically by ways of discursive nominalization: a “shift from verbs... to a particular class of nouns in the representation of actions and processes” (Fairclough 2005, 926). Current official US mainline discourse provides an abundance of examples of these kinds of strategic, future- and effectivity-emphasizing discourse (cf. Moberg 2022).

In what provides a very general example, in 2016 the ELCA published a twelve-page document titled *Called Forward Together in Christ: ELCA Future Directions 2025* that outlines “the strategic framework that will serve shared leadership across the ELCA to realize common aspirations and better face the challenges this church faces” (ELCA 2016, 3). Although this initiative certainly signals an increasing preoccupation with strategic thinking, it is worth noting that the prevalence of strategic discourse within the ELCA so far largely has remained confined to more specific areas (such as, e.g., increasing investments in communication and digital technologies, as previously explored by Einstein 2014; Moberg 2017).

Another type of example can be found in a 2012 document outlining the new Governance Tasks of the ABCUSA, some of which are lifted verbatim from the “technologist” popular management book *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Chait et al. 2004). Among other things, the document recommends establishing new “task forces” on “leadership development, community image, peer organizations, team building, board assessment, etc.” (ABCUSA 2012, 1). Overall, the text is strongly marked by managerial language and the use of terms such as “performance,” “pathways,” and “strategic thinking” (ABCUSA 2012, 1). Most notably it emphasizes the importance of nurturing a culture of “strategic thinking” (ABCUSA 2012, 1, emphasis added) rather than “merely strategic planning” (ABCUSA 2012, 1), thereby urging the ABCUSA as a whole to adopt an entirely new approach to its organizational culture.

To take a third example, in 2012 the PCUSA’s Presbyterian Mission Agency developed a Mission Work Plan for 2013 to 2016 that emphasized the need for the church to maintain its “Organizational Integrity” (PCUSA 2012, 4). For this purpose, the plan outlined the following main “directional goals:”

Build confidence, trust and engagement in all that we do by being Collaborative, Accountable, Responsive and Excellent (C.A.R.E.).

If anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things. Philippians 4:8a (CEB) (PCUSA 2012, 4)

The main thing to note about the discourse in this short excerpt is the way in which it represents the principal values of PCUSA organizational practice in the form of an acronym, which conveniently reads as “care.” This is revealing of the influence of marketized discourse, as is also the

use of the word “excellence.” In what provides an example of inter-textuality, inter-discursivity, and the hybridization of discourse alike, the excerpt also includes a Bible reference. Indeed, the explanations for all of the “directional goals” set out in the document from which the excerpt is taken are accompanied by Bible references, the primary function of which is to provide Scriptural justification for the types of actions encouraged by the text. In 2016 the above-quoted document was followed by a new 2017–2018 Mission Work Plan, the core purpose of which is described as follows:

At the heart of the Mission Work Plan are directional goals, which serve as strategic beacons for the work of the agency. In the 2013-2016 plan, effort was given to ensure that all areas of Mission Agency work were reflected somewhere in the strategic plan. Thus, General Assembly Engagement was a directional goal in the former plan, along with Organizational Integrity (incorporating the infrastructure provided by many of our support areas). (PCUSA 2016, 3)

The most conspicuous feature of this text is its strong and repeated emphasis on strategic thinking and its permeation throughout the organization as a whole. Indeed, the text in this excerpt is also self-referential in this regard, pointing out important connections between both past and future strategic endeavors. Overall the text thus serves to work up a picture of strategic thinking as completely central to the aspirations of the PCUSA as a whole. As such, it also provides an example of a broader development within the mainline churches, whereby the focus of official strategic discourse has increasingly shifted toward strategy itself in the form of what could be called “strategizing about strategy.”

A final example is provided by a 2017 report by the UCCs Strategic Visioning Task Force and Vision Implementation Task Force of the UCC Board of Directors titled *A Vision: The Transformative United Church of Christ in Ten Years*. The document announces the introduction of a new overarching organizational guiding principle called “Inclusive Excellence,” which is described as follows:

Inclusive Excellence (IE) is the recognition that a community or institution’s success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of its constituents. More than a short-term project or single office initiative, this comprehensive approach requires a fundamental transformation of the institution by embedding and practicing IE in every effort, aspect, and level of functioning. The goal is to make IE a habit that is implemented and practiced consistently throughout an organization. (UCC 2017b, 4)

“Inclusive Excellence” is an organizational leadership strategy mainly associated with higher education institutions. In this particular case, the text explicitly encourages its wholesale adoption and integration into all UCC activities and practices. Indeed, as is stated in the text, its adoption will require a “fundamental transformation” of the entire UCC organization. The language of the text is formal but not overtly technical. In terms of modality, it expresses a high degree of commitment to what is being proposed (e.g., “requires a fundamental transformation”). This, then, provides another clear example of an increasing emphasis on strategic thinking as a key component in the construction of new mainline church imaginaries and recipes for “success.”

The above examples may suffice to illustrate the increasing penetration of managerial and market-associated discourse into the official strategic discourse of the US mainline churches. As seen in the above examples, a typical feature of such discourse is the increasing prevalence of terms such as “strategic” itself, along with terms such as “challenges,” “leadership development,” “assessment,” and “directional goals.” A thorough screening of large amounts of official mainline documents produced during the past couple of decades reveals that such discourse

and terminology has increasingly come to permeate official church discourse on a wide range of different topics (Moberg 2017). The key point to note is that the repeated employment, circulation, and, most importantly, normalization of such discourse not only serves to further a homogenization and standardization of discourse but also to foster a more general sense of constant “strategic awareness” among organizational actors and subjects themselves.

As an effect of homogenization and standardization, the technologization of discourse frequently also works to bring about changes in the “policing” of organizational discursive practices. Although there are often considerable variations to be observed between different types of organizations in this regard, their respective discursive practices nevertheless tend to be continuously “subjected to checks, corrections and sanctions” (Fairclough 2010, 138). The discursive practices of traditional religious organizations provide apt examples of this in that they tend to be governed by very particular sets of, sometimes time-honored, discursive “rules” and conventions that play a central role in determining not only what can and cannot be said within those organizations but also how they can be said and by whom. But the technologization of discourse can work to bring about a shift “in the location of policing agents,” including a “shift in their legitimacy” (Fairclough 2010, 139; cf. Chaves 1993). One example of this is when people who occupy leading positions within particular religious organizational contexts, and who previously held the authority to oversee and police their discursive practices, increasingly have to adhere to new discursive repertoires and standards (some of which may have been introduced by outside “technologists,” or become directly encouraged by new strategic initiatives such as those discussed above) (Fairclough 2010, 138). New discursive practices and standards may also become introduced and perpetuated through the hiring of new categories of staff with backgrounds in management, marketing, branding, etc., to oversee religious organizations’ public relations or communication offices. This particular effect of the technologization of discourse should not, however, be overstated. Although it is beyond question that US mainline churches have engaged in the technologization of discourse to a notable extent, these efforts might not always have been equally well received among all categories of church personnel and might also have served to inspire some discursive resistance. This, however, does not change the fact that market-associated discourse has for some time already started to become concretely materialized in organizational structures, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

### Materialization and Amalgamation: The Practical Dimensions of Religious-Organizational Marketization

Apart from its “purely” discursive effects, the technologization of discourse also works to inspire changes in the actual structures, practices, and activities of organizations. This is because changes in the discursive practices of organizations sooner or later will result in the actual operationalization and *materialization* of these new discursive practices. This may occur in a large variety of different ways, some of the most notable being the creation of actual new (either temporal or permanent) administrative units, offices, or working groups; the introduction of new auditing and performance monitoring mechanisms; the establishment of new educational or training programs; or the re-fashioning of tangible services or provisions. This is also the stage at which the constitutive power of discourse truly reveals itself. Once new discourses (e.g., on marketing, branding, or strategic thinking) become materialized in actual, tangible form in the creation of new administrative offices, units, or working groups charged with the operationalization of these discourses in practice, the mere existence of these will, in turn, work to significantly further legitimize and normalize the discourses that brought them into being in the first place. Put another way, the more firmly materialized and tangibly cemented new market-associated discourses and discursive practices become as part of the “hardware” (Fairclough 2010, 283) of religious organizations, the more difficult it also

becomes to undo or reverse their effects. This is why all instances of the concrete materialization of new market-associated discourses should be viewed as clear signs of strong marketization effects.

Examples of (relatively recently) established US mainline church offices and units directly charged with improving organizational effectivity or overseeing organizational marketing, advertising, and branding include the ELCA's Mission Advancement Unit (ELCA, n.d.), the UCCs Vision Implementation Task Force of the UCC Board of Directors 2016–2017 (UCC 2017a), the UMCs Marketing and Public Relations division (UMC, nd, a), the TECs office of "Communication, Advertising, and Marketing" (TEC 2011), and the DOC's Office of Marketing and Communications (DOC 2009). Further examples include the execution of actual advertising and marketing campaigns such as, most notably, the UMCs major 2001 *Igniting Ministry* and 2009 *Rethink Church* campaigns. As these examples illustrate, marketing, advertising, and branding have clearly developed into integral parts of the hardware of the US mainline churches, including the recruitment of new categories of personnel with professional backgrounds in these fields (cf. Einstein 2014). Whether these units, offices, and categories of personnel actually engage in marketing, advertising, or branding as these practices are commonly understood in the for-profit sector is, however, an altogether different matter. Once established, nonetheless, they tend to assume particularly central roles in the further promulgation and dissemination of new market-centered hybrid discourses and imaginaries for church practice.

The technologization of discourse and the actual operationalization and materialization of new market-associated discourses may also spur a further and final process of *amalgamation*, whereby market-associated strategic and effectivity-related concerns increasingly start to become fused (i.e., amalgamated) with organizational tasks not previously governed by such concerns (cf. Fredriksson et al. 2015, 1052–53). In these cases new hybrid discourses thus serve to bring about a "hybridization" of practice. Amalgamation is therefore closely associated with the growing discursive influence of new strategic or "marketing" offices or units across organizational structures and hierarchies on the whole. As an example, the increasingly strategically central notion of "church growth," along with the market-associated discourses that underpin it and the organizational offices that work to realize it, may increasingly take on the function of a practical imperative so that ever more aspects and areas of church activities become fashioned and carried out with this imperative in mind. Indeed, amalgamation is sometimes directly, although perhaps inadvertently, encouraged by official mainline church discourse. One example is provided by the description of Section 4: Planning for Success in the UMC's previously mentioned Marketing Plan Tool. Commenting on how to assess the results of previously carried out extensive demographic and community research, the text provides the following recommendation:

**Your measurements for success will come directly from the results of work toward your goals.** That's the simplest way to rate your progress. Perhaps those measurements will include growth in attendance or giving, a new focus on ministries or small groups... progress toward attendance goals may be simple to assess. Numbers will tell the tale. New and returning attenders will provide that metric... Rating improvements in spiritual growth may be the most difficult. How does one put numbers to faith? Thus, choosing your metrics and how to compile them is key. Perhaps this work requires more than one way to find answers. Are your small groups maintaining and/or growing their attendance? Do your members feel that their prayer habits have led them to a closer relationship with God? A mixture of numbers-based and opinion-based questions may yield your best data regarding spiritual growth. (UMC 2020, nd, b.)

Although much could be said about the text in this excerpt, its strongly instrumental approach to "church marketing" and its desired results are particularly noteworthy. Although the



administrative units of various types of churches have, as noted, long been utilizing demographic data and the like for purposes of church expansion, this excerpt is taken from a package of educational materials intended to foster the establishment of effective “church marketing teams” at every local congregational level. Church marketing, in short, is presented as something that every organizational subject should get involved with. The language of the text tries to strike a balance between the formal/technical and the colloquial, employing words like “metrics” and “measurements” alongside “spiritual growth” and “relationship with God.” In terms of modality, however, the text is more ambiguous, highlighting both potential challenges and difficulties (e.g., through phrasing some sentences as questions and using words like “perhaps”).

Another similar example is provided by the DOC’s New Church Ministry coaching program, which offers training in a demographic analytical software called MissionInsite. This software is described as providing new “church planters” with essential tools to

explore solutions to complex strategic missional challenges in your choice geographical location for ministry. Connect socio-economic, behavioral, life-style and psychographic intelligence about your members, visitors and local community at large. ([Hope Partnership Services 2018](#))

The language in this excerpt advertises a particular type of technical tool. More generally, it further illustrates how proselytizing and outreach activities have become increasingly cloaked in managerial and technical vocabulary such as “complex strategic missional challenges.” Through making inter-discursive connections to broader managerial discourses on project- and research-based work, evangelism is transformed into a rationalized and calculable activity carried out by new teams of tech-savvy “church planters.”

As the above examples illustrate, processes of amalgamation tend to further contribute to fostering an organizational culture of constant strategic awareness. Underpinned by an intensifying technologization of discourse and an increasing operationalization and materialization of new market-associated discourses and imperatives in actual practice, the processes of amalgamation may then ultimately also serve to bring about a situation where market-associated values and imperatives are allowed to subjugate prior established organizational logics, routines, and practices (cf. [Schillemans 2012](#), 87).

Although these perspectives on amalgamation originate in research on organizational media-tization (e.g., [Schillemans 2012](#); [Fredriksson et al. 2015](#)), they can usefully be re-contextualized and applied to processes of organizational marketization and can be viewed as particular types of possible outcomes of deliberate technologization of discourse efforts and the operationalization and materialization of new market-associated discourses in actual practice. As such, to the extent that processes of amalgamation become clearly empirically observable within particular religious-organizational settings, they constitute indisputable signs of strong marketization effects. This is because, when this point has been reached, new imaginaries as constructed through new hybrid discourses have transformed into palpable realities that are likely to have a long-lasting impact on the future practices and *modus operandi* of the organizations concerned.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has outlined a general theoretical framework of religious-organizational marketization, illustrated by an exploration of why and how such processes have been set in motion and unfolded within the context of the long-established US mainline. As such, this article has aimed to shed light on a highly notable, but thus far largely overlooked, broader aspect of contemporary religious-organizational change that extends beyond already widely studied processes

of bureaucratization. Above all else, this article has striven to highlight how processes of religious-organizational marketization will always be contingent upon religious organizations' own active participation in any such processes.

Drawing together the observations made at different points above, the main sociological explanation for why US mainline churches have become increasingly susceptible to processes of marketization in the particular way they have is to be found in a combination of three main factors: (1) their dense bureaucratic structures and longstanding ethos of civic engagement, (2) the larger degrees of inter-organizational discursive influence they are subjected to due to their deep involvements in various types of public-nonprofit cooperative networks, and (3) their own calls for thoroughgoing reform following their experiences of decades of sharp and continuous numerical decline. Although some of these factors may play a more central role in the organizational marketization of some mainline denominations compared to others, they have doubtlessly all been decisive for the particular types of ways in which they have adopted and internalized market-associated discourses and imperatives and varyingly aimed to operationalize and materialize these in actual practice.

Equally centrally, as illustrated by the mainline churches, this article has also aimed to highlight the main ways in which processes of organizational marketization have been set in motion and become perpetuated largely as a result of an intensifying technologization of discourse on the part of these churches themselves. This was done to highlight the significant impact that particular types of changing discursive practices play in the construction of new mainline church imaginaries as well as the particular types of (perhaps unintentional) practical outcomes that these tend to result in. In this, the article has more generally underscored the importance of paying close attention to the dialectical relationship between official discourse and actual organizational practice, a relationship that has only rarely been explored in previous scholarship on the changing character of modern religious organizations. The "reality on the ground" will, however, inevitably always be messier than the visions of official discourse might suggest. Even so, the types of managerial and market-associated discourses that we have explored in this article typically encourage their own operationalization and "putting into practice." When employed as central components of concentrated technologization of discourse efforts, they often take on the character of imperatives as to what needs (or indeed *has*) to be done in terms of the concrete materialization of these discourses.

The above discussion has provided some examples of the more recent materialization of new market-associated discourses in mainline church settings. The framework outlined in this article does not, however, offer any means for studying these types of materializations beyond the level of discourse, although it is indeed intended to provide a firm foundation for further explorations in that regard. A fuller exploration of the materialization of new market-associated discourses in traditional religious-organizational settings would nevertheless need to move beyond the level of official discourse. Further data might, for example, be gathered by means of interviews with different categories of organizational personnel and especially among those categories of personnel charged with the practical operationalization of new discursive practices and hybrid discourses. Interviews also provide a crucial means for reaching behind the veil of official discourse and finding out what actually goes on within the walls of various organizational units, offices, and working groups (cf. Schillemans 2012, 87). Engaging people who are directly involved in such work can therefore also be of great help in gaining a more precise understanding of exactly why and how technologization of discourse efforts become initiated and carried out within particular religious-organizational settings. In addition, interviews also invite further inquiries into the extent to which new discursive practices and their various degrees of materialization also might influence the perceptions and professional ethos and identities of organizational employees, and to what extent of acceptance or resistance.

As also discussed above, a firmer materialization of new discourses may also lead to further processes of amalgamation, whereby previous organizational routines and practices become increasingly intermingled with, or even subjugated by, new strategic and effectivity-related concerns. As with processes of materialization, processes of amalgamation would also need to be investigated beyond the level of discourse, using a broader set of methods and data such as, for example, empirical observations of actual organizational practices and routines. These kinds of inquiries would surely provide highly valuable new insights about the actual effects of processes of organizational marketization within traditional religious settings, however, such research largely remains to be done. Processes of materialization and amalgamation therefore constitute pertinent areas for future research. This article has outlined a framework and particular set of analytical tools on the basis of which such future empirically grounded research could usefully be pursued. Depending on the aims of a study, the particular religious organization under consideration, and the broader socioeconomic and sociocultural context in which it is embedded, it might, for instance, prove useful to put particular emphasis on one of the main components of the framework (i.e., broader determinative social/societal factors, changing discursive practices, and practical effects in the form of materialization or amalgamation). In the end, however, it is only by considering the *combined* effects of these components that we arrive at a better and more comprehensive understanding of the principal driving forces and impact of ongoing processes of marketization across traditional religious-organizational contexts.

The broader analytic utility of the framework outlined in this article will ultimately have to be determined on the basis of its capacity to aid future research on the changing discourses and practices of traditional religious organizations in a broader set of socioeconomic contexts (Moberg 2017). For even though the socioeconomic makeup of many Western European countries remains less market-oriented than that of the United States, the continuing spread and normalization of neoliberal political economy has served to propel a general movement of all Western societies toward the liberal, market-oriented end of the spectrum (cf. Koenig 2005). Processes of organizational marketization are therefore likely to become increasingly empirically observable across traditional religious-organizational settings on a trans-national scale.

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