Article

Toward A Biblical Market Orientation: Initiating a Scriptural Analysis of a Business Philosophy

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Christians, including many business students, are often uneasy about the discipline of marketing, and some characterize it as being a set of practices that are largely unethical or ungodly. In this article, our goal is to motivate Christian business practitioners and scholars to wrestle with the underlying philosophy of marketing — the market orientation — from a biblical perspective. We review the scholarly literature to highlight the history of marketing thought in this area and to identify the current consensus view of what a market orientation is. To encourage work in this area, we offer a preliminary scriptural appraisal of the market orientation philosophy and recommend directions for future research.

Introduction

During an interview at a Christian university, one of the trustees, who happened to be a pastor, asked the first author, "Don't you see the whole field of marketing as being completely contrary to the Word of God?" Without hesitation I described what a "market orientation" is from the perspective of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and emphasized how adopting this perspective involves continuously identifying existing and prospective customers' needs and responding to them. I acknowledged that some marketers employ practices that are inconsistent with biblical teaching, but I fervently asserted that a market orientation is central to *genuine marketing*, and meeting peoples' needs in this way is indeed very consistent with God's Word. I felt quite confident in my response even though I had not first analyzed every point from the vantage point of the Bible. I remember thinking at the time the interviewer's query was based on a limited understanding of what marketing really is and an overly generalized critique of the discipline, and I would evaluate the question in the same way today. In retrospect, however, I believe it is appropriate, and even necessary, to carefully scrutinize the market orientation literature on which my response and assumptions were based and determine the extent to which the commonly accepted views espoused therein are actually congruent with Scripture.

A market orientation is, after all, a business philosophy — one, in fact, that requires acceptance and adherence on the part of *each and every one* of an organization's members. As such, it is a business worldview that is continually promoted and rewarded and becomes deeply embedded in an organization's culture. The external focus of the market orientation combined with the necessity of a unified collective culture and effort sets it apart from the other common business philosophies such as the product orientation, production orientation, and selling orientation. In general, marketing academicians so universally and unquestioningly believe in the market orientation that they regularly "evangelize" or "proselytize" students and business professionals toward it with great fervor and relatively few, if any, qualifying conditions.

We introduced our subject with an anecdote not because we approach our analysis from an informal or personal perspective, but to illustrate the very real tension and discomfort some Christians feel about marketing. Given that the market orientation philosophy is secular in origin, represents a synthesis of theoretical and pragmatic perspectives, and is so widely accepted and advocated, it is important for Christian academicians, students, and practitioners to carefully analyze its constituent parts and associated practices from a biblical point of view. As with any proposed perspective, we must determine the extent to which adopting it is consistent with the teaching we have received so that we may "walk in Him" and be "built up in Him and established in [our] faith" and not be taken captive by "philosophy," "the tradition of men," or "the elementary principles of the world" (Colossians 2:6-8).

An examination of previous articles in *The JBIB* revealed there are relatively few focused directly on marketing-related issues and fewer still that have endeavored to interact substantively with the large body of scholarly marketing literature. In one sense this represents a major limitation in current biblically integrated business scholarship, but in another sense it constitutes a rich opportunity for Christian business scholars to begin actively contributing to the framing of issues that are at the forefront of marketing thought. Accordingly, our threefold objective is to 1) offer a manuscript that delves into and begins to address the thinking of prominent marketing scholars, 2) initiate a stream of biblical integration research addressing a scholarly issue at the heart of marketing — the market orientation, and thereby 3) encourage our Christian colleagues to address more directly the work of those whose original scholarship currently defines the discipline of marketing.

To accomplish this purpose, we first review the marketing literature in order to a) trace the history of the marketing concept which has since evolved into the market orientation philosophy, b) accurately characterize the current views of what it means to have a market orientation, and c) summarize what empirical research suggests the implications of following this credo are. We then offer a preliminary biblical assessment of the market orientation construct. In our assessment, we acknowledge the difficulty of the integration task given the lack of direct biblical teaching on our specific topic. We begin our assessment, therefore, by articulating what we believe to be appropriate criteria for identifying and explicating a biblical analogy with which to move Christian scholars toward the formulation of a biblical market orientation. By highlighting significant parallels between the early church and modern nonprofit marketing organizations, we examine the first six chapters of the book of Acts to demonstrate how the early church at Jerusalem was hindered due to having lost a market orientation and how its effectiveness was enhanced after it successfully implemented a market orientation. We conclude our paper by endeavoring to bridge our biblical analysis to the context of modern business organizations and then highlight avenues for future biblical integration research in this vital area of marketing philosophy.

We want to be clear at the outset that we are not under the illusion we have addressed *all* of the important issues or arrived at *any* definitive conclusions. We are merely hopeful we have employed

God's Word in a manner that will illuminate relevant and interesting issues to a level sufficient to initiate a spirited and Spirit-led debate. Our ultimate goal is to encourage Christian business thinkers and practitioners to examine their own philosophical beliefs and assumptions; grow in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding; and be equipped to practice their profession in a manner worthy of their Lord and pleasing to Him (Colossians 1:9-10).

Market Orientation — A Historical Progression of Thought

Roughly 50 years ago, marketing began to be recognized and gradually accepted as an important unifying business perspective.[1] For decades the emergence of the profession was justified and based on what was called "the marketing concept." This business philosophy was variously and loosely defined. Nevertheless, three tenets shaped the ideological core of most formulations. These were that businesses should

1) be customer-oriented (i.e., base actions on information acquired about customers' needs, wants, and behaviors),
2) endeavor to inform all departments (or functional areas) of the market's needs and integrate their efforts in order to fulfill those needs, and
3) strive for the attainment of profits rather than focus on building sales volume (Felton, 1959;[2] Bell & Emory, 1971; Barksdale & Darden, 1971;[3] McNamara, 1972; Lawton & Parasuraman, 1980[4]).

Early prescriptions for how to implement the marketing concept were hampered by the absence of a clear and precise explication of the philosophy (Lear, 1963). This produced interpretations and recommendations that were, in the opinion of the authors, largely subjective and/or anecdotal in nature (e.g., Shapiro, 1988; Houston, 1986) and assertions regarding the situations in which the concept is or is not appropriate that were not empirically supported (Houston, 1986).

Until 1990, the general precepts concerning the marketing concept were not refined into formal propositions that could be straightforwardly operationalized and tested. Consequently, it was difficult to determine the extent to which businesses had genuinely adopted the philosophy and to gauge the outcomes associated with attempts to implement it. The need for such research, however, was emphasized in the marketing literature (e.g., Houston, 1986; Deshpande & Webster, 1989). Kohli and Jaworski (1990)

> ***Their specific focus was on the implementation of the marketing concept.***

argued that the deficiencies in conceptual development were responsible for the paucity of research examining the marketing concept and its consequences. To address this situation, they conducted some developmental qualitative research. Their specific focus was on the *implementation* of the marketing concept, and the term "market orientation" was used to represent the various organizational behaviors involved in executing the philosophy. After carefully reviewing the extant literature, they completed in-depth interviews with 10 business academicians and 62 managers who were carefully selected to represent various functional areas, levels of authority, and industries. The respondents were asked a variety of open-ended questions designed to uncover their views of what a market orientation is, how an organization develops this orientation, what the consequences of having the orientation are, and the situations under which it may not be important to have a market orientation. A rich articulation of the perspective emerged which produced the following general summary of the central activities involved in exhibiting a market orientation (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990, p. 6; the following quotation was reformatted with emphasis added in order to spotlight the three general components of a market orientation).

> Market orientation is the
>
> *1) organization-wide **generation** of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs,*
> *2) **dissemination** of the intelligence across departments, and*
> *3) organization-wide **responsiveness** to it.*

The essentiality and interdependence of all three elements to a market orientation are analyzed in greater detail later in the paper. What is important to note at this point is how thoroughly engrained two of the three tenets of the marketing concept had become in the thinking of marketing professionals and academicians. The organization-wide generation of and responsiveness to market intelligence aspects are refined specifications of the essential actions involved in being "customer-oriented." Moreover, the cross-departmental dissemination of market intelligence and responsiveness facets stipulate what must be done to integrate all business functional areas in the marketing process. Equally noteworthy is the absence of the profit objective feature of the marketing concept. Respondents did not consider the pursuit of profits as unimportant or unrelated to a market orientation, but their comments made it clear they believed profitability was a performance outcome resulting from successful implementation of the marketing concept.

Later in the same year, Narver and Slater (1990) published an article in which they proposed a different but overlapping conceptualization of market orientation. They offered the following general definition.

> *Market orientation is the organization culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers and, thus, continuous superior performance for the business* (p. 21).

Based on their review of the literature, they concluded that a market orientation is comprised of three "behavioral dimensions" and two "decision criteria" (p. 21). The behavioral dimensions are

1) customer orientation — "the sufficient understanding of one's target buyers to be able to create superior value for them continuously" (p. 21).
2) competitor orientation — "a seller understands the short-term strengths and weaknesses and long-term capabilities and strategies of both the key current and the key potential competitors" (pp. 21-22).
3) interfunctional coordination — "the coordinated utilization of company resources in creating superior value for target customers" (p. 22).

The two decision criteria "long-term focus" and "profitability" (p. 21) are, they argue, highly related to market orientation but distinct such that long-term profitability should be considered an objective of the market-oriented firm. Although they characterized this conception of profitability as being different from that of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) who portrayed it as a consequence, in their empirical investigation Narver and Slater treated profitability as a performance outcome.

The designation and treatment of profitability as a consequence rather than component of the marketing concept by Kohli and Jaworski (as well as Narver and Slater), combined with the many research propositions offered by Kohli and Jaworski, triggered an explosion of studies examining a variety of performance outcomes associated with having a market orientation. Research investigations have found that having a stronger market orientation is antecedent to not only a) profitability (Narver & Slater, 1990) but also b) economic performance more broadly defined to include market share, sales growth, percentage of new product sales to total sales, return on investment, and new product advantage and success (Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998; Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000; Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001; Sin, et al., 2003; Langerak, 2003; Cano, Carrillat, & Jaramillo, 2004; Im & Workman, 2004; Narver, Slater, & MacLachlan, 2004; Singh & Ranchhod, 2004). Empirical research has also concluded that higher levels of market orientation produce other related performance outcomes such as c) satisfaction of key constituencies and positive employee work attitudes and performance levels (Lai, 2003; Jones, Busch, & Dacin, 2003; Siguaw, Brown, & Widing, 1994; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993), d) implementation of quality management standards (Lai, 2003), e) innovative strategy, innovation rate, and new product innovation (Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998; Vázquez, Santos, & Álvarez, 2002; Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001), and f) customer retention (Jones, Busch, & Dacin, 2003; Singh & Ranchhod, 2004).

In many of these research investigations, the relationship between market orientation and various performance outcomes was mediated and/or moderated by other variables. An examination of the intricacies of these relationships is well beyond the scope of the current paper. These empirical studies have also generated important suggestions for how the market orientation philosophy might be profitably refined and expanded beyond the boundaries propounded by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990). Where appropriate these latter ideas have been incorporated in the discussion throughout the remainder of the paper.

Subsequent to the seminal works of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990), other scholars have offered their own conceptualizations of market orientation (Ruekert, 1992; Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster, 1993; Day, 1994; Hurley & Hult, 1998). In fact, Slater and Narver (1995, p. 67) revised their definition as follows to reflect the evolution of thought among various scholars:

> *... the culture that 1) places the highest priority on the profitable creation and maintenance of superior customer value while considering the interests of other key stakeholders; and 2) provides norms for behavior regarding the organizational development of and responsiveness to market information.*

In actuality, the philosophical core had been relatively stable ...

After reviewing the market orientation literature, Lafferty and Hult (2001) offered a synthesized framework representing the four major areas of agreement across perspectives. According to their configuration, the heart of a market orientation is an emphasis on customers — understanding them so their needs and wants can be satisfied. The customer emphasis points to the tremendous importance of shared knowledge (information) about customers, but also information about competitors that might be seeking to satisfy the same needs. There must also be high levels of interfunctional coordination of marketing activities and relationships, including generating market intelligence, disseminating it throughout the organization, and making strategic and tactical decisions based on the information. Finally, the interfunctional coordination must result in being responsive to market activities by taking the appropriate action in a manner designed to deliver value to customers. Lafferty and Hult point out that although their framework presents what appears to be a linear process, *all* of the four behavioral components are of equal importance and are highly interactive.

Much more could be discussed about the market orientation literature and the various perspectives that have been incorporated to better understand and practice it, such as managerial vs. cultural focus, organizational learning, innovation, and effective market intelligence processing, but this would likely confound the intended focus of the present work.[5] Our concise review is intended to highlight the evolutionary trajectory of market orientation thinking. In actuality, the philosophical core has been relatively stable, yet certain parameters have been quite fluid and mutable.

Because market orientation has been linked to so many seemingly positive outcomes for business organizations, it is commonly espoused as a desirable business worldview to adopt. Scripture, however, would caution us to analyze it more carefully and to scrutinize our own motivations before adopting it (Proverbs 16:2). Accordingly, in the following section we will offer a preliminary analysis of the central facets of the market orientation view through the lens of the Bible with an eye toward initiating one or more streams of scholarly biblical analysis of this business philosophy. Given the transformation of market orientation thinking over time, there may be room for Christians to enter the general discussion of what a market orientation is, offer ideas about the modification, refinement, or even respecification of certain parameters, and contribute to the articulation of a business philosophy that is beneficial and appropriate for everyone.

Toward a Biblical Appraisal of Market Orientation Tenets

A thorough biblical appraisal of the market orientation philosophy is inherently difficult and will require the combined efforts of many different scholars. Obviously, because the philosophy is of modern origin, the Bible does not explicitly or directly address its specific tenets nor the tenets of any similar philosophical perspective. For this reason, scholars will need to find hermeneutically and exegetically sound methods of identifying connections between scriptural passages that have different primary emphases. These hermeneutical and exegetical challenges, therefore, will require careful explication of presuppositions, assumptions, and methods along the lines of what has been encouraged by Lynn and Wallace (2001) and Chewning (2001). In order to perform such research with proper care and thoroughness, each individual effort will necessarily be limited in breadth, and progress toward formulating a biblical market orientation will best be measured across many completed studies.

In this section we present a preliminary analysis of the central elements of market orientation with the foundational objective of demonstrating their general congruency with conduct and perspectives exhibited by the early church. We begin by describing what we believe to be important parameters for drawing an appropriate analogy from Scripture. Our analysis then centers on identifying such an analogy through a concise exposition of the first six chapters of the book of Acts.

Some Parameters for an Appropriate Analogy from Scripture

As noted in our introduction, the common apprehensions the church community has toward the field of marketing are the result of confusion and misappropriation of business terminology by non-business professionals. This stems primarily from the tendency of non-marketers to equate marketing with various tactics, especially the more visible forms of marketing communication such as personal selling and advertising. In the first part of this study, we have articulated a basic description of market orientation based upon the evolution of the published literature and the points of intersection across perspectives. The central elements based on Lafferty and Hult's (2001) synthesis are 1) placing an emphasis on satisfying the needs and wants of the organization's target market(s) by 2) continually acquiring market information, 3) disseminating the information throughout the organization and coordinating interfunctionally so as to 4) be responsive to the needs and wants of the market(s) by taking appropriate action. This very closely parallels Kohli and Jaworski's (1990, p. 6) articulation of a market orientation as being "the organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the information across departments, and organization-wide responsiveness to it." Because we believe Kohli and Jaworski's definition more clearly and concisely states the central elements of Lafferty and Hult's conclusions, we will employ it throughout our biblical analysis. We understand that in doing this we sacrifice subtle nuances introduced by competing definitions, but those very nuances render Lafferty and Hult's framework less straightforward for applying to our efforts. Accordingly, for our purposes we see more benefit in parsimony than in somewhat cumbersome comprehensiveness.

In order to demonstrate that this philosophy is consistent with scriptural teaching, we need to set forth the parameters of an appropriate analogy from the Bible. First, market orientation is more than the presence or application of some of its fundamental principles. Market orientation philosophy is the organization-wide emphasis on and implementation of all of these principles; so, any scriptural analogy must deal with an organization and must present the implementation of the market orientation elements as essential to the success of that organization. The biblical texts pertaining to the local New Testament church present the most fruitful possibilities for analogy. The philosophy of the organization of the local church is the subject of extensive treatment in the New Testament. More specifically, the book of Acts introduces the reader to the New Testament local church in its stages of development as it is adapting its structure to its mission. The final stage — in fact, the evidence of market orientation — is appropriate action taken by the organization to be responsive to market needs. We will suggest that the book of Acts gives evidence of the formation of a specialized structure within the local church with the purpose of making the organization more responsive to customer needs.

The desired outcome of any business philosophy is success. The question of "What is success in biblical terms?" is far too complex and comprehensive a subject to be subsumed in our study. The book of Acts, from which we are drawing our analogy, is written in narrative language rather than the prescriptive language of the Epistles. Good and bad, success and failure are judged according to the progress of the church in fulfilling its mission. Rather than devote extensive efforts to a biblical definition of "success," we will assume success if the book of Acts presents the process in a positive light and the outcome as progress in the fulfillment of the church's mission.

No single analogy can suffice for all the aspects in which a local church can be compared to a business. For purposes of this study, we will categorize the local church under the more applicable rubric of a nonprofit organization. This classification does not diminish the relevance of our analysis because marketing scholars have extended their examination of market orientation into the nonprofit realm (e.g., Gainer & Padanyi, 2002; González, Vijande, & Casielles, 2002; Vázquez, Santos, & Álvarez, 2002; and Liao, Foreman, & Sargeant, 2001). This perspective, however, is not a recent one. More than 35 years ago, Kotler and Levy (1969) advocated broadening the marketing concept to encompass non-business organizations, which in their conceptualization included nonprofit organizations generally and churches specifically. A central characteristic of nonprofit organizations that distinguishes them from business organizations is that the constituencies providing most or all of their financial resources are generally different from those who receive the benefits of the services offered. This has led scholars to modify somewhat the definition of market orientation, as well as methods of measuring it, in order to account for the unique dual market (donors and beneficiaries) situation nonprofit organizations face.

Accordingly, nonprofit organizations are given value (usually money) for services provided to others. Although the actual exchange of money is not an indispensable element for a business analogy, the presence of money in any transaction adds a unique set of factors, behaviors, and needs that influence organizational decision-making. If we are to demonstrate that the secular principles of market orientation are consistent with Scripture, the best analogy is one that contains the least incongruence. Another advantage of this choice is that the analogy of the local church as a nonprofit organization avoids dubious metaphors, such as the gospel as a product to be "marketed" to the unsaved or God as a customer whose needs must be serviced. Market orientation is a philosophy that emphasizes customer needs; local churches can accurately be described as nonprofit organizations on the basis that they have two distinct types of customers: those giving value (e.g., money) and those receiving services. Each of these types of customers has separate and distinct needs. To sum it up, an appropriate analogy of market orientation, if it is based upon the local church in Scripture as a nonprofit organization, must present a situation that focuses upon the organization-wide gathering, dissemination, and responsiveness to information about the needs of both sets of customers and demonstrate that a market orientation was essential to the success of that church.

The Loss of Market Orientation in Acts 2:41-6:1

The book of Acts is an account of the foundational period of the history of the church from God's perspective. Luke, the author of Acts and the Gospel that bears his name, chronicles the growth and development of local churches as the culmination of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1; all the biblical citations are from the New King James Version of the Bible). Undeniably, the primary focus of the book of Acts is the growth of the church by the spreading of the gospel from its exclusively Jewish roots, the first local church in Jerusalem, to the inclusion of Gentiles from all nations "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). However, it is also clear that the local church was not one-dimensional, having an outward, evangelistic focus only. In Acts 2:41-47, the members of the church at Jerusalem *proskarterountes* ("devoted themselves") to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to "breaking of bread," and to prayer, practices designed to meet the needs of members of the church itself.

One specific practice of the church was the collection of money to meet the physical needs of the poorer members of the church. "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45). The church gathered and disseminated information about the needs of its members in an innate yet purposeful way by meeting together daily with one accord.

As a result, the success of the local church was in jeopardy ...

As the church grew, the giving of money continued in a spontaneous and generous fashion, but the distribution of the money to meet the needs of the poor became more organized. In Acts 4:32-37 the church gave the responsibility for the distribution of money to the apostles — they "brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." With the best of intentions, the church made a critical error. The gathering of information about needs and the dissemination of this information was no longer an organization-wide activity; it became the responsibility of a few upper-level managers of the organization, managers for whom this process could not be a priority. Acts 5 details how the public ministries of the apostles — performing signs, wonders, and healings (Acts 5:12-16); teaching and preaching "daily in the temple, and in every house" (Acts 5:42) — consumed their time and made them less responsive to their role in the distribution of money to meet the needs of the poor. Expressed in marketing terms, the church in Jerusalem was succeeding in its role as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but failing in its role as a nonprofit organization meeting the needs of its customers — the givers of money and the recipients of services.

In Acts 6, the church at Jerusalem faced two distinct problems because it failed to meet the needs of its two types of customers. Certain widows, customers in the sense that they were receiving services from the organization, were "neglected in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1). The needs of the "Hellenists," customers in the sense that they were giving money to the organization, were not being met because they felt they were being poorly served as a result of discrimination. As a result, the success of the local church was in jeopardy because they had lost the harmony and one accord that characterized the successful church in Acts 2:41-47.

The Demonstration of Market Orientation in Acts 6:1-7

The solution of the organizational problem in Acts 6:1-7 was the implementation of a philosophy which is now called market orientation. In a curious way, the public complaint of the Hellenists in Acts 6:1 represents the first essential of market orientation: the organization-wide gathering of market intelligence. To provide an understanding of this principle, we must present the biblical context problem of the Hellenists and their public complaint. Luke uses the term "Hellenist" to describe Christians who came from the portion of the Jewish community which had adopted and assimilated the ways of the Greeks. This assimilation of Greek customs was most apparent in the upper levels of Jewish society, among the priests and the religious party of the Sadducees. Luke uses the term

“Hebrews” to describe Christians who came from the portion of the Jewish community known for their adamant rejection of Greek customs. Many of these “Hebrew” Christians had come from the religious party of the Pharisees, whose name means “separatists.” Because the religious party of the Pharisees believed that the dead would be resurrected and the religious party of the Sadducees (including the priests) rejected the possibility of resurrection, the Pharisees were much more open to the teaching of the gospel about the death and resurrection of the Messiah than were the Sadducees. Acts 5 highlights this social division (and prepares the reader for the background of the problem in Acts 6) by contrasting the high priest and Sadducees (who, filled with indignation, imprison the apostles in Acts 5:17, 18) with the very moderate advice of the Pharisee Gamaliel concerning the apostles’ teaching: “… if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:39). As the minority party, the Hellenistic Christians in the church, especially because they were considered more well-to-do, were prone to complain that neglect of their widows in the daily distribution for the poor was the result of discrimination by the less affluent “Hebrew” Christians.

How can this complaint represent the first step of market orientation, the gathering of market intelligence? The key lies in the reaction of the apostles. In Old Testament texts (Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3; Numbers 11:1, 14:2, 27, 29, 16:11; Deuteronomy 1:12, 27) and in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 5:30, 15:2, 19:7) complaining is cast in a very negative light and, in the Old Testament, often is tantamount to rebellion and results in severe punishment. By contrast, the text of Acts 6 does not display any censure of this complaint behavior, and the apostles orient themselves and the congregation of the church to treat this organization-wide activity as market intelligence. The plausible explanation for this attitude is that the apostles recognized the legitimate needs of the Hellenistic donor customers as well as the evident needs of the widows as recipient customers.

Acts 6:2 details the dissemination of customer needs throughout the organization. The 12 apostles summoned “the multitude of the disciples” to explain the problem and to discern the many needs. At the congregational meeting, the apostles presented their own need to focus on the word of God and prayer, as well as the needs of the widows. We can see from the results of the process that the needs of the Hellenists to be assured of enfranchisement and equal treatment within the body were made clear. The apostles recommended only spiritual qualifications for these new "deacons" — seven men, with good reputations, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. No mention is made of any political or ethnic requirements, yet all of the seven men chosen by the congregation had Hellenistic names (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, who is specifically called a proselyte — a Gentile who had converted to Judaism).

> ***... the apostles proposed that the organization adopt an ongoing structure ...***

Finally, and most specifically, the organization-wide responsiveness to the needs is shown in many ways. First, the apostles proposed that the organization adopt an ongoing structure — seven deacons — to ensure responsiveness to both donor and recipient customer needs. Second, the apostles' proposal ensures an organization-wide participation in the solution. The qualifications for deacons involve a high degree of spiritual discernment, and it would seem natural that the apostles themselves were best qualified to select the deacons. The apostles proposed that the whole organization involve itself in seeking out and electing the deacons. Finally, the text tells us that the proposal "pleased the whole multitude," indicating a positive and unified organization-wide response to the needs that were presented: the needs of the apostles for release from the responsibility, the need of the Hellenist givers to be assured of equitable treatment, and the needs of the widows in the daily distribution.

The market orientation philosophy adopted (or reinstated) by the church in Jerusalem resulted in several successful outcomes set forth in Acts 6:7. First, "the word of God spread;" market orientation had a positive outcome on the primary ministry focus for the church in the book of Acts. Second, "… the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem;" a quantifiable measure of success in the growth of the church. And, finally, "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." The willingness of the church to set up an ongoing structure, whose design to meet the needs of Hellenistic Christians was made evident by the selection of Hellenistic deacons, was successful in demonstrating the reality of the core values of the organization.

Directions for Future Research

The single biblical analogy that we offer does not in and of itself constitute scriptural advocacy of a market orientation in a business context. It does, however, suggest the various activities embodying the heart of the market orientation philosophy, at least in their most general sense, whether practiced by a nonprofit organization or a business enterprise, *can be* consistent with biblical teaching. Certainly, additional support is necessary before stronger conclusions are drawn.

An obvious avenue for future research would begin by appraising our biblical analysis. Such an appraisal could focus on our criteria, assumptions, method, or conclusions. This could be followed by generating other analogies that overcome the deficiencies of our work. Alternatively, researchers could employ our criteria and general methods and endeavor to provide analogies that contradict our tentative conclusions. Another route yet could involve supporting or disconfirming our work by some means other than the use of analogy from Scripture.

As we have stated several times, our central purpose is to encourage Christian academicians and practitioners to complete the extensive work necessary to build a framework for a "biblical" market orientation. This larger stream of research should strive to identify facets of the secular perspective that are congruent with scriptural teaching and highlight aspects that are either inconsistent with Scripture, or at least likely to create tensions for Christians, and offer suggestions for how the philosophy could be modified or qualified in order to render it more suitable for believers. Emphasizing the needs and wants of key constituencies is central to the market orientation and would likely be a very fruitful direction for much future research. As we will attempt to reveal below, this issue can be addressed on many different levels.

Rushkoff (2001) essentially argues that organizations can seemingly follow the market orientation philosophy yet have deleterious effects on their customers by concentrating on inappropriate wants or desires. He documents how major media organizations conduct research to identify what teenagers consider "cool." By employing these market intelligence-gathering processes, Rushkoff maintains that the media companies produce offerings for teens that appeal to their basest desires and thereby create a continuous downward pressure on the standards of teenagers and culture at large. From this vantage point, future research could seek to generate biblical criteria for determining what needs and/or wants are appropriate for marketers to address.

Needs are often defined by marketers as "states of felt deprivation." Given biblical teaching concerning contentment (e.g., I Timothy 6:6-8; Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5), to what extent are Christian marketers responsible for helping others achieve a state of contentment rather than overcoming feelings of deprivation? A highly valuable line of research could seek to carefully delineate the nature of the tension between these two conditions and develop a framework for guiding Christian marketers toward understanding which condition should be the aim of their efforts.

Kotler (1972) argued more than 30 years ago that the marketing concept should be supplanted by what he called the "societal marketing concept" (p. 54). This philosophy "calls for a *customer orientation* backed by *integrated marketing* aimed at generating *customer satisfaction* and *long-run consumer welfare* as the key to attaining long-run profitable volume" (p. 54). This added responsibility of pursuing the long-term best interests of customers has been criticized by many as being dangerous or inappropriate. The primary argument against this perspective is that business organizations are not able to determine what is truly in society's best interests (e.g., Gaski, 1985; Crane & Desmond, 2002), and one scholar goes so far as to suggest an attempt to accomplish this goal is tantamount to replacing the democratic process with plutocracy (Gaski, 1985). Other scholars leave room for adopting the societal marketing concept as long as it is not taken to an extreme (Abratt & Sacks, 1989) while also expressing the difficulties of achieving the long-term best interests of *all* stakeholders (Carrigan, 1995). A societal orientation recently was advocated as the most appropriate perspective for nonprofit organizations (Liao, Foreman, & Sargeant, 2001). Hence, future research could seek to draw clear conclusions about the importance or necessity of Christian marketers seeking to identify and achieve the long-run welfare of customers and society as a whole. To what extent, for example, does teaching about looking out for the interests of others (Philippians 2:4) within the church carry over into the realm of marketing?

Pursuing work in the area of the societal marketing concept has the potential for a transition into the broader discussion of what moral and ethical philosophy should guide the field of marketing (e.g., Robin & Reidenbach, 1993; Laczniak, 1993; Karande, Rao, & Singhapakdi, 2002). Marketing scholars are clearly struggling to develop a generalizable framework in this area. Certainly, Christian scholars armed with Scripture should have a voice in this discussion.

Finally, our literature review was by no means exhaustive. We attempted to capture the essence of market orientation without delving very deeply into the nuanced differences in competing definitions or formulations. Consequently, there is much room to explore these areas and analyze them through the lens of Scripture. Similarly, empirical research has identified several variables that mediate and moderate the relationship between market orientation and various performance outcomes. Christian scholars could examine these mediated and moderated relationships with an eye toward providing Bible-based arguments for why the philosophy may be less desirable than other worldviews in certain types of situations or organizations in which Christians might find themselves.

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ENDNOTES

[1]As an example, Keith (1960) traces the philosophical evolution of The Pillsbury Company from its early years as a production-oriented company (1869-1930s), to its subsequent years as a sales-oriented company (1930s-1940s), and finally to its adoption of the marketing concept in the 1950s.
[2]In his formal definition, Felton (1959) does not specifically highlight a customer orientation, but he does stress the need for a proper state of mind, and elsewhere in his article he emphasizes the need for a customer orientation.
[3]Barksdale and Darden (1971) incorporated only the customer orientation and profit motivation elements in their operationalization of the marketing concept.
[4]Lawton and Parasuraman (1980) included only the customer orientation and interdepartmental coordination components in their formulation of the marketing concept.
[5]The interested reader can refer to Lafferty and Hult (2001) for a concise review of these augmenting perspectives and a bibliography of literature in these areas.

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