

How Weird: Out of the Box of Expectations

RELIGIONS AS MARKET COMMODITIES:

The Economics of Faith

If religions were market commodities, how would they work actually work? In a spirit of satire, I wrote some scenarios about this. My intention is not to disavow any religion, but rather to suggest a way of viewing religions as “ideological production systems” in which thoughts or beliefs are likened to “consumer products.” Of course, there are limitations to this metaphor and I do not deny that religion has other dimensions. Still, in a spirit of jest I share these lines –

I. JUDAISM

Several thousand years ago
your forefathers made an agreement
to buy the Unnameable Product.
You must honour that tradition –
consumer loyalty is a duty.

It is your obligation to purchase the Product,
and boycott all rival goods.

You must follow the Consumer Guidelines to the letter.

If you deviate, one thing is clear:
you will become ḥērem and learn the meaning of fear.

II. CHRISTIANITY

Product faith is paramount.
You must believe you have
the Only Valid One.

The Product Manufacturer
is not only flawless,
but also munificent, benign,
omniscient & all-forgiving.

Due to design parameters,
things are bound to go wrong.

However, if you sincerely ask the Manufacturer
for forgiveness, and remember
His Authorized Sales Representative
all mistakes shall be redeemed:
the Scriptures offer a written guarantee.

III. ISLAM

Once you have purchased this Product,
it is with you for life.

This Product is perfect in every way,
and criticism is a sin
causing discord and strife.

Anyone disloyal to our Product merits death –
Our Product Alone is Great!

Imitations should be eradicated:
the Grand Manufacturer Alone Knows the Way.

IV. BUDDHISM

There is no product.
There is no consumer.
There is only the illusion of a "market"
and transactions taking place:
ignorance has veiled our perception –
we are asleep in so many ways!

Get out of this world
Renounce all pretense!

What is being bought and sold,
are products of insatiable desire
that cloud judgment &
insure suffering takes place.

Cut desire at its root:
Be at peace today.

Consume less and less
until achieving Eternal Rest:
this is the only way to escape
the wheel of the marketplace.

V. HINDUISM

This product has been around 155 trillion years
and during this degraded age,
inferior manifestations have appeared.

However, it is all karma –
if your deal seems unsatisfactory,
take it in stride.

Do you think the Manufacturer makes mistakes?
Isn't the Ultimate Supplier Always Right?

Chant the Name of the Market Creator
and recognise each event
as an invitation to merge with That.

You are not a consumer:
merely a dream about consumption.

Your Real Self
Is Beyond All Markets.

VI. ATHEISM

As both products and manufacturers
we create multiple stories about each transaction perceived.

All stories are forms of localised merchandise
fashioned to fulfil specific needs.

Each story is an incomplete fiction
and the commoditization of belief is something
most humans seek.

It seems we are natural-born story-makers
fabricating reality, and in the process,
start to become what we believe.

Nadia: (yawning) This idea of a religious economy has been espoused many times before. Haven't you read the works of Bankston, Bruce, or Bainbridge? Actually, there are many more ...

Kasim: (lightly laughing) Those names don't ring any bells. But, hey – what about Finke,

Iannaccone, or Stark? Aren't their insights amazing and sharp?

Nadia: (shaking her head) I'm not familiar with those blokes, but to me Johnson's distinction between "church" and "sect" is spot on.

Kasim: Does it? (raising his eyebrows while coughing) How so?

Nadia: Well, it seems religious institutions have limited lifespans. So many faiths claim to be "eternal". Where are the gods of the Canaanites or Minoans? What has become of the followers of Mithras or Aten today?

Kasim: Fair enough. And in another few hundred thousand years, I wonder how our current gods will seem to the beings of that day.

- T Newfields

Beg.: 2016 in Tokyo, Japan Fin.: 2020 in Yokohama, Japan

