

## **Viewing Advertising through the Lens of Faith: Finding God in Images of Mammon**

TONY KELSO

*Iona College, Department of Mass Communication, 715 North Avenue, New Rochelle, New York 10801, USA*

*AKelso@iona.edu*

*Various scholars have noted connections between traditional Protestantism and advertising in the United States. Not only did the two institutions inform one another as modern advertising emerged and matured, but, arguably, the two systems also exhibit parallel rhetorical formats and functions today. In this qualitative study, it is suggested that a shift in emphasis, from advertising's relationship to explicit religion to its interaction with implicit religiosity, could provide fresh insights. This framework was explored through focus group interviews, participant journal entries, and one-on-one, in-depth interviews with Protestants from three mainline congregations. The findings show that some of the participants can, on occasion, touch the spiritual realm through transactions with advertising. Indeed, it is contended that, although they belong to formal religious organizations, these respondents can also engage in practices associated with implicit religion. At the same time, the interviewees also indicated they have little awareness of how advertising perpetuates the economic status quo. Displaying hegemony at work, they are seemingly able to pursue both explicit and implicit religious experiences and support their market-driven culture without bearing significant cognitive dissonance. The paper makes the case that advertising can sometimes function as a vehicle for helping to reconcile this apparent conflict.*

It almost goes without saying that advertising has become, over the past 125 years, an ubiquitous force—particularly in the United States. At the same time, one of the apparent contradictions that defines the U.S. is that, while it pushes the culture of commodities—and the mass media

that sustain it, which are themselves chiefly supported by advertisers—probably more than any other country, it remains, according to several barometers, the most explicitly religious land in the West. The University of Michigan's World Values Survey, which has been reported four times over the past two decades, for instance, consistently cites the U.S. as the nation whose citizens lead those in all other 'western' industrialized countries in church attendance and professed belief in God. Perhaps, then, a fruitful aspect to consider would involve the relationship between advertising and religion in general. Moreover, understanding some of the dynamics at work in the interplay of these two practices—one recognized as secular, the other regarded as sacred—could shed light on matters related to implicit religion in particular. The study that will be described attempts to begin such a task.

Interestingly, several historians note an interconnection between traditional religion and modern advertising, when the latter emerged and came to maturity during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While churches were sympathetic to the efforts of advertisers, and even incorporated their formulas into their own practices (Curtis 1991; Leach 1993; Lears 1981; Lunden 1986), various early advertising practitioners—a noticeable number of whom were either sons of ministers, had contemplated ministry, or were actually former ministers themselves (Bush 1991; Fox 1984; Lears 1994; Twitchell 1996)—occasionally gave their profession an almost holy cast (for examples in primary sources, see Barton 1925, 1927; Bates 1927; Calkins 1928; Presbrey 1929; for discussion in secondary sources, see Laird 1998; Lears 1994; Pope 1973). Historians (Hatch 1994; Huber 1971; Laird 1998; Leach 1993; Lears 1981, 1982) have also pointed out the emotional ambiguity that Victorians in the United States faced as they drew upon the Protestant Ethic to blend traditional Protestant principles with the budding market economy supported by advertising.

Yet a link can still be drawn between religion and advertising today. For example, a variety of scholars (Burton 1983; Copp 2000; Laski 1959; Spitzer 1962; Tedlow 1990; Twitchell 1996, 1999) illustrate, usually from a critical perspective, that the two enterprises express a similar didacticism or function, or even imply that the 'gospel' of advertising has partially supplanted the Protestant Gospel, in swaying the populace to adopt a new 'meaning of America'. Some researchers (Jhally 1990; Lears 1994; Leiss et al. 1990; White 1992) contend that advertising derives its strength by filling goods with symbolic properties to provide meaning—

a task commonly attributed to religion—in a technological environment, or by supplying a sense of hope or therapeutic promise. In essence, many of these theorists seem to be arguing that advertising represents a type of belief system. As the popular culture critic Laurel Arthur Burton puts it, ‘The religion of Madison Avenue is a slickly packaged (and well researched) blend of doctrine and sacrament’ (1983: 141). But such claims are typically grounded on a semiotic analysis of the ads themselves, or on historical data and theoretical speculation.

Then again, a number of other scholars (e.g., Clark and Hoover 1997; Ferré 1990; Goethals 1990; Hoover 1997; Hoover and Lundby 1997; Linderman 1997; Martin-Barbero 1997; Newcomb 1990; Schultze 1990) adopt an audience-centred outlook and maintain that popular culture—of which advertising, of course, is a major part—is imbued with a spiritual element and that as they watch television, peruse magazines, or sit in dark cinemas, individuals themselves fabricate, along with other messages, ‘religious’ meanings from the secular material with which they are engaged. Their perspective perhaps provides a valuable opening into investigating the relationship between advertising and religion. For it could be that advertising has in no way replaced religion, but affords additional possibilities for experiencing a sense of the sacred. In this sense, it might prove beneficial to shift the focus of inquiry, from advertising’s connection to explicit religion, to its interaction with implicit religiosity. As Robert Wuthnow (1998) points out, many men and women are increasingly attempting to ‘resacralise’ their world, that is, striving to find ways to come to terms with ostensible secularity and infuse their lives with a sense of awe. They can hope to achieve this, for example, through their transactions with secular rituals or mass-produced texts that help them negotiate their travel through daily life and, from time to time, to approach a transcendental reality. Hoover and Lundby (1997: 7) propound that the media ‘play a quasi-religious role in everyday life’. They do not, however, *constitute* faith, but convey words and images that are so symbolically charged within the culture that they take on religious implications; an active audience, then, can process these connotations for its own ends. If implicit religion involves the quest for meaning through secular sources (Bailey 2002), then exploring people’s potentially spiritual interpretations of the products of popular culture becomes a significant endeavour.

To understand how people can possibly create sacred meanings from profane sources, the researcher must view religion in a different light.

As alluded to above, Wuthnow (1998) elucidates that, today, spirituality—a concept that incorporates both traditional religious practices as well as broader manifestations connected to the search for transcendent meaning, which, arguably, encompass activities associated with implicit religion—is woven into daily experience. It is, then, no longer confined to what transpires in a ‘sacred’ setting, but can be generated through the myths that sustain social structures of belief and activity. Accordingly, culture and religion or spirituality cannot be detached from each other. The important point here is that ‘religious media’ do not emanate only from religious institutions. That the ‘vast majority of what goes on in the realm of religious use of media’, Hoover tells his reader, ‘is, in fact, embedded in what in another era we might have called the “secular media” should now have us thinking in entirely new ways’ (Hoover 1997: 287, 295). He boldly adds that this fresh standpoint of spirituality ‘opens up the whole question of the extent to which all media, and the entire sphere of commodity culture, can be, and is, a religious sphere’ (p. 295). But it would seem, at least to this researcher, that only an audience-centred mode of inquiry is likely to get at the heart of the matter.

To explore this issue from ‘below’, I conducted in-depth interviews with lay mainline Protestants as a means of learning more about the relation between modern advertising and religion in terms of deriving meaning. Although, as David Hay argues, religious or spiritual experiences ‘cannot be confined to formally religious people’ (Hay 2003: 19), I felt insight could be gained by exploring whether those who self-define themselves as explicitly religious can also participate in implicit religion by demonstrating a tendency to behold the transcendental realm through a vehicle that is both pervasive and often regarded as utterly secular. I chose to speak with mainline Protestants in particular because their branch of religion has historically had considerable impact on values within the United States. The scholar Michael L. Budde draws upon the work of Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney to designate a mainline Protestant denomination as displaying five qualities: ‘group size, power, vitality, support for the “American Way”, and a lack of religious/secular tension’ (p. 81). Presumably, the last characteristic is a more recent development within the country’s Protestant expression. The authors specifically identify these denominations as those associated with the National Council of Churches, which include the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and two of the leading Lutheran denominations;

these spiritual groups, traditionally, have been largely responsible for carrying the nation's 'civil religion' and have 'interpreted American life in relation to a transcendent order' (p. 82). Each of the three congregations that appears in this study belongs to one of these denominations.

The study was conducted in part because, in spite of the potential spiritual dimension of popular culture (and the advertising that drives most of it), media scholars have too rarely considered the matter when contemplating how an audience actually receives and processes mass-produced texts. Often, they view the subject as insignificant (Hoover and Lundby 1997). Or the topic is regarded as problematic and simply dismissed (Hoover 1997). Hoover and Lundby (1997: 3) contend that researchers too often buy into secularization theory, which posits that religion has lost its authority and therefore is not a salient presence in people's lives. Investigators operating under this paradigm feel that if faith exists only on the margins of women's and men's consciences, then there is no pressing need to attend to the issue. But, as it has been argued, the sacred continues to be enormously important to individuals, although it is often expressed in diverse ways that differ from those prescribed by established institutions.

If religiosity still functions as a significant governing agent in people's lives, then media scholars who take an interest in culture are remiss if they give no attention to spirituality and its interaction with other sociological forces. Hoover and Lundby (1997: 3) assert, 'Media, religion, and culture should be thought of as an interrelated web within society'. To assume that the sacrosanct remains a central concern to many people gives impetus to exploring the relationship between secular media and implicitly religious interpretations.

Even researchers who fall under the rubric of cultural studies generally fail to account for the spiritual factor in people's experience. These scholars limit their inquiries to 'rational' or 'realistic' matters, and, consequently, bracket off a domain such as 'non-rational' religion, which points to an otherworldly, transcendent, or ethereal realm. Ironically, cultural studies investigators foreground the process of meaning-making. Yet religion, which, perhaps more than any other sphere, is associated with the search for meaning, does not enter into their equation (Hoover 1997; Hoover and Lundby 1997).

But it would seem that the topic of how individuals construct meaning in their transactions with mass-produced messages would be the precise point of entry for the pursuit of an understanding of the relationship between religion and media. After all, in contemporary Western

society, cultural studies practitioners would agree that the media are crucial sites for the creation of individual and shared meanings (Linderman 1997). And as Alf Linderman (1997) avows, to probe into the manner in which persons devise meaning in their exchanges with media is to inevitably invite spirituality into the exploration. Hoover (1997: 284) agrees. ‘What has been called the “unpopular popular culture”—religion—is necessarily implied by studies that look at ontologies and rituals of everyday life’. Meaning, according to the social theorist, ‘is obviously a point of clear convergence between religion scholarship and media scholarship’ (p. 292).

The current investigation is rooted in the cultural studies tradition. Cultural studies adopts a number of methodological approaches to media, including an examination of texts and an analysis of the organizations that produce them. But practitioners within the interdisciplinary field also conduct audience studies predicated on the idea of the active audience, which ‘suggests that audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context’ (Barker 2003: 325). In other words, audience members are respected as co-producers of meaning who use media products on their own terms rather than passively absorb whatever messages their originators hoped to convey. The results of this project reveal that a significant number of participants can on occasion touch the ‘sacred’ domain through their encounters with advertising. The implications of these findings for implicit religion, especially within the context of a capitalist economy, will be discussed in the final pages.

### Qualification

Because the focus of this research is on mainline Protestantism, it might appear to bias white, male versions of faith. But the study is based on an exploration of particular institutions that tend to sustain dominant ideologies within the United States, which, of course, have grown out of and continue to be advanced by white, male hegemony. So while consulting the pages ahead, the reader should remember that American Protestantism inevitably altered over time not only from interactions among the primarily white sects, but also due to contact with Native Americans, African Americans, and waves of immigrants. As Zuckerman notes, there was never *one* Protestantism in the nation, but *many* ‘Protestantisms’ (1991: 213-14).

**The methodology**

The research revolved around three methodological approaches: (1) focus group interviews; (2) an analysis of ‘advertising journals’ that were completed by the people participating in the focus group sessions; and (3) a semi-structured, in-depth interview with each informant. Using three methods for gathering data allowed patterns to be crosschecked and a wider array of sources to be drawn from to construct a more comprehensive report. Each interview was broken down into two central areas: the first part emphasized the respondents’ faith and religious or spiritual experiences in general, while the second half concentrated specifically on advertising. All of the recorded dialogues were converted into transcripts and then coded, with particular attention paid to any themes that pointed toward an intersection between advertising and religiosity.

Twenty people were selected from three different denominations that are classified as mainline churches. All of the respondents are adults. Using the ‘purposeful sampling’ procedure that Seidman (1991) describes, an attempt was made to recruit groups from each congregation that reflect gender and ethnic diversity. The churches that were selected are located in New York, New York, a city that, even more than most other cities in the U.S., is awash in advertising. Yet as is typical of qualitative inquiry of this sort, the sites were primarily chosen because the researcher faced certain logistical and financial limitations that required the data collection to occur close to home. To protect the participants’ confidentiality, the interviewees devised their own pseudonyms. In the following pages, the report will centre on advertisements that the respondents themselves either wrote about or brought up in the group or one-on-one sessions. In keeping with the spirit of research based on qualitative, in-depth interviews, many quotations uttered by the participants have been included so that their voices can be heard amid the researcher’s analysis.

**Finding meaning in advertising**

The participants demonstrated several ways in which they can touch the sacred domain through encounters with advertising—here, stress will be placed on three of them. By making connections as they relate certain advertisements to their lives, as well as engaging in entertaining or vicarious experiences that allow them to ‘let go’ of themselves, some

of the interviewees are able to, on occasion, use advertising as one approach to 'resacralising' their existence. At the same time, many of the persons in this study revealed that by transacting with advertising's aesthetic portrayals, they are able to more consistently come into contact with a sense of creativity, which they perceive as a fundamental force behind all existence.

Based on the respondents' accounts, the episodes in which certain advertisements resonate with them as they relate the texts to their lives appear to accord with the sensation of bonding with something or someone beyond the self, which was one of the characteristics the interviewees frequently identified as being part of a spiritual experience in general. Sometimes a respondent related to the depicted scenario because he or she could imagine being in that situation. For instance, Bob identified with a commercial for Volkswagen Passat that he regarded as 'perhaps my favourite of the year'. The commercial portrays a man who is stopped at a traffic light and flirting with a woman in the car beside him as though he were single. Soon, however, he is comically exposed as married, when his young daughter throws a toy from the back seat which crashes into his face. 'It was a story, it was like a little movie', Bob recounted. But more than that, *'it was so real'*. When asked what made it seem authentic, he replied, 'That I can relate to it. That I can be in it. That I can be in that experience. That it could be a "Bob" experience'. Clearly, he was able to symbolically place himself into the setting.

A point should be made about this example. Notice how Bob related to the Passat commercial as 'like a little movie'. Several interviewees mentioned that they were more likely to identify with commercials framed in the form of a story than those structured in other ways. Their reflection calls to mind an idea posited by Schultze (1990), who discusses the manner in which secular narratives can function as traditional religious tales do, communicating shared beliefs and values. Here, Bob was able to recognize himself in a thirty-second piece that affirms culturally prescribed rules for pursuing and governing romantic relationships.

Sometimes, an interviewee disclosed identifying with an advertisement because she, or he, *would like* to be in the circumstances represented. Christine, for instance, spoke about a Hallmark commercial that features a tender wedding scene between the bride and her father. 'I have a good relationship with my dad and I want to get married so, yeah, I mean, it was very relatable to me', she said while laughing. Her

account also correlates with the way in which men and women can use advertising as a means of enjoying a vicarious experience, another phenomenon that will be examined further below.

Several respondents pointed out that they can occasionally identify with a character in an ad or commercial. Abby talked about feeling a connection with a man in a Nyquil commercial who is trying to avoid sneezing and spilling milk as he heads to his bedroom. 'What is interesting', Abby, a white woman, reported, is 'you so identify with this guy. You don't think of him as male or black. You know what he is feeling'. Race was not an issue for Ann either. She related to a black woman in a Charles Schwab commercial not on the basis of the situation the person is in *per se*, but because Ann admires her qualities. 'And she's...a well groomed, well dressed, well informed, no nonsense kind of woman, you know', Ann stated, 'and she's a loving mother. And she's savvy about business'.

Probably the identification that emerged more than any other had to do with being reminded of an episode or series of events in one's life. Nina recalled a Budweiser commercial that portrays a woman buying a beer for a man she is attracted to who, unfortunately for her, turns out to be gay. 'I've been, you know, in that situation and I've done [it] with [my] friends', she revealed. Nina enjoyed the commercial not only because it triggered memories, but since it also puts a woman in the role of protagonist and shows respect for homosexuals. She found the representation of female empowerment inspirational and, she highlighted, in regard to its illustration of gay males, 'I really applaud the company for doing that. I mean...it's a fact and it should be acknowledged'.

Major Major outlined a commercial for a fishing lure about a bumbling man who, as he carries his bride across their motel room's threshold, is distracted by a picture of a fish, which results in him bumping his wife's head into the door frame. Major Major laughingly divulged that, during his younger days, when he was admittedly insensitive, he had taken his wife fishing on their honeymoon. 'Yeah, we went up in Montana, the Madison River and rented a beautiful cabin. I went fly-fishing—I'm a fisherman. It seemed okay at the time and it didn't seem like a stupid male thing to do, but of course I'm still paying the price for that many years later'.

Sometimes an ad evoked a memory not of a past episode but of a person or people in the respondent's life. Talula presented an exemplary

case. She described a commercial for Lipton Sizzle and Stir that features an eccentric assortment of washed-up celebrities, each of whom surrealistically takes on the role of a member of a comically dysfunctional family. The bizarre representation loosely reminded Talula of her own parents and siblings. 'I think it is very much a reflection of, of what our, you know, family situations are'. What she appreciated, she explained, was that these family members have stayed together and supported one another despite their inadequacies, a trait Talula ascribed to her own extended household. She suggested that, unlike so many others today, her family would never consign a parent or grandparent to a nursing home or cast out a sibling in need. Instead, she contended:

the idea of like homelessness to a certain extent we can't understand it because you, you know, you take care of your family...it would just be automatically that, you know, you have grandparents if you have them live nearby and to a certain point they will be in your household.

Obviously, Talula displayed that she had reflected relatively profoundly on what some might dismiss as just another trivial sales vehicle.

But if anyone exhibited the proclivity to generate strong sentiments of connection through incidents with advertising, it was Buster. Consider these two examples—one minor and one more substantial. Often the participants measured themselves against the beautiful individuals featured in advertisements and believed they came up short. Yet when Buster was asked how he had felt about himself as he imagined entering the scene portrayed in a Budweiser ad on the subway and being surrounded by attractive people—and sitting next to a particularly striking woman—he uttered, 'Like a general sort of well-being and I guess I'd have to say a sense of either being younger or being accepted by people that were younger than I... Feeling cool, you know'. Fantasizing that he had been welcomed as a member of this trendy crowd was quite pleasurable to him.

Later on in the same interview, Buster reflected on whether any advertising had ever had an impact on his perceptions about himself. He brought up a campaign for Apple Computers and disclosed that 'there have been times when advertising has allowed me to feel that I was part of some group...by virtue of having, using that product, you know. A feeling of belonging, you know'. He took pride in the idea that, compared to all the other models, Apple stands for, according to him, 'individuality', 'fighting against the tide', or 'bucking the trend'. Buster's

revelations reinforce a notion once raised by Daniel Boorstin (1967), who maintained that one of the joys people gain in their interplay with commercial culture is the opportunity to join a ‘consumption community’, that is, an abstract collection of men and women who are tied together only through common purchasing patterns. Apparently, Buster, in some fashion, enjoys apprehending that he is among the ‘renegades’ who use Apple computers and, in the words of the company’s campaign, ‘think different [*sic*]’.

### **Advertising and the meaning of play**

Interestingly, the most common reason an interviewee gave for liking an advertisement was because he or she thought it was entertaining. Suffice it to say that dozens of examples could be given to substantiate the finding. At first glance, not measuring up to the hope for deeper reactions, these replies did not seem to merit further exploration. Moreover, it might surprise the reader that the participants so frequently linked advertising with entertainment; to be sure, many critics would claim that advertising interrupts the ‘real’ entertainment (television shows, for example) that people seek out. Perhaps comparative research between audiences from different cultures would uncover decidedly different perspectives on advertising as a source of entertainment. In the end, however, it became apparent that if this study’s respondents’ most typical association with advertising has to do with being amused by it, then to be faithful to them, the significance of entertainment in general, as well as advertising’s relationship to it, needed to be probed more fully.

Not a single person declared that entertainment *per se*—even so-called escapist fare—is something to be shunned. In fact, nearly all of the participants discussed what it means to them and what they get out of it. Nearly half of the participants described wanting to receive more from entertainment than mere titillation. Andrew, for example, said that when he is watching a movie, ‘I think a lot about the social implications of what it’s trying to say’. Buster sounded a similar note, explaining, ‘I want it to eventually have some sort of larger value, you know’. Griffin, Elizabeth, Pat, and Victoria all talked about being able to either teach or learn something through entertainment. Or, it can help one ‘think of themes’, Abby declared. Furthermore, according to a few of the respondents, entertainment can be inspiring. Abby illustrated that when she is being entertained, she feels that she is ‘being lifted up. Just being pulled out of yourself’. Nina suggested that she delights in aspirational themes.

Pat stated that, on occasion, she processes ‘some kind of message’ that is ‘uplifting’. Emily noted that when she takes in a particularly moving production, ‘I can just think of it as inspiring’.

Clearly, then, from time to time, an interviewee’s experience of entertainment manifests aspects associated with a quest for meaning. Reflecting on social issues and values, teaching and learning, gaining inspiration—all of these activities represent things that point toward implicitly religious events.

Yet entertainment carries different significations for other respondents. Several participants at least implied that they appreciate the sheer pleasure or positive feelings they gain through entertainment in general. Often, an interviewee specified that part of the gratification involves being able to ‘escape’ or obtain release from problems. When asked what entertainment signified to her, Christine happily answered, ‘Let go; leave your life for a little while. Leave your worries on the doorstep; pick ’em back up on the way out’. Jennifer argued, ‘Escapism is, is good for people to be able to, I think God wants people to have a chance to—in whatever way—to relax’. For Elizabeth, it is about ‘an escape from negative feelings’. Notice that their comments hint at the possibility of ‘letting go’ or engaging in a brief period of transcendence. Their responses correlate with the idea of ‘play’ posited by Goethals (1997), who contends that, through play, individuals can move beyond social boundaries and encounter a sense of self-surrender.

Others were more explicit about the issue. ‘I think again it’s kind of like an out-of-body experience...it’s like a phenomenal experience that kind of transcends, you know’, Lily reported. Nina claimed that when she is being entertained, ‘you can sort of relate to it but you really are transported out of yourself and out of the immediate moment’. Buster, who showed a bias toward ‘high culture’, nonetheless said that late at night he might seek to be ‘plain entertained’ and end up ‘just kind of zoning out’. Again, their descriptions reveal that engaging with forms of entertainment can, on occasion, induce some of the participants to ‘let go’ of their worries and get outside their conceptions of self.

Related to the idea of temporary and partial self-abandonment is the notion of the vicarious experience. Nearly all of the respondents acknowledged that they are sometimes able to, so to speak, enter into the world depicted by a piece of entertainment or forget about themselves and live through the lives of its characters. But does the argument hold up when the subject is advertising in particular?

Many, if not the majority of the respondents indicated that they can, indeed, have a vicarious experience through advertising. Buster, for instance, divulged, 'I have that kind of response that you talked about with movies and TV shows, so I'm sure I do with advertising too'. He described the conditions in which this might occur, saying, 'If there's a little playlet, if there's a dramatic structure that I can somehow enter into—some character that I can relate to—well, then, yeah, I do that fairly often'. Alina revealed, 'When I am in a very difficult situation... and I want to escape something, I go to ads... And I forget my troubles for a while'. Talula was more definite in providing an example of a vicarious experience with advertising. She recounted a commercial that portrays a woman on a beach in an exotic environment. Suddenly, however, she is jolted back to reality—the viewer discovers that the woman is at the office and had been merely daydreaming about the sand and the sea. 'I'm there, you know', Talula said, noting that 'a lot of times I'm in my office and I'm thinking like, [I] wish I was on the beach'.

But are the participants' vicarious experiences through advertising as intense as those they enjoy through other media? They seemed to indicate otherwise. Yes, advertising often serves as a form of entertainment for the interviewees. Moreover, many of them are able to sometimes 'let go', 'enter into another world', 'lose themselves', or take pleasure in a vicarious experience through their interactions with advertising, just as they can with other sorts of media. A key point, however, is that their contact with advertisements is so ephemeral that any sensation of self-abandonment they perceive as they view ads or commercials is relatively insignificant when compared to, say, a two-hour movie.

### **Advertising and aesthetic expression as a sacred act**

A third way in which many of the participants can approach the sacred realm through advertising is by appreciating its aesthetic appeal. To start, here again, scores of examples could be provided to demonstrate how often the respondents reacted to ads and commercials on artistic grounds. In fact, it became clear that, for some of the interviewees, advertising itself represents a particularly important source of aesthetic pleasure. One episode during a portion of a group session reinforced the point. The respondents were presented with a hypothetical scenario that challenged them to imagine living in the identical environment in which they currently reside—fully industrialized, replete with media in

its various forms, packed with all the conveniences and technologies of contemporary civilization—except for one thing: for some reason, modern advertising no longer exists. Maybe Congress has passed and the President has signed into law an order barring it. Advertising will still be allowed but it must be only informative in nature, akin to classified ads. They were then asked how they would feel about this transformed milieu. The participants fired back with overlapping voices in what seemed to be a resounding display of unanimity—they would rather see attention-getting advertising remain in place. Jennifer declared she would miss ‘the fantasy’. Major Major asserted, ‘It’s an art form’, a statement with which several others instantly agreed. ‘It’s creative, it’s funny, it’s entertaining’, he continued. ‘The world would be a duller place without advertising’. A few respondents quickly concurred with this last remark as well.

During the one-to-one interviews, nearly all of the participants suggested that at least some advertising is artistically pleasing. Griffin explained that, for instance, ‘if there’s a really nice lighting on the face’, he might think to himself, ‘Wow, that’s really nice’. Mana stated that once in a while she sees ‘a lot of artistic values—the colours that they use, you know. The beautiful beaches, shows the beauty of God, the beauty of the earth’. Buster asserted, ‘I shy away from saying, “in general”’, yet admitted, ‘there’s plenty of advertising that I think is aesthetically, artistically very interesting and innovative and gratifying’. Ann declared, ‘That’s the part of it that I like the best, is when I think it’s artistically and intellectually gratifying’.

Indeed, several of the interviewees maintained that, overall, advertising is an enhancement to the country’s artistic terrain. So-called high art and commercial art work together ‘very much like a symbiosis’, Buster argued. ‘I think that fine art or purposeless art stretches some boundaries that then advertising is allowed to also stretch; and sometimes advertising stretches some boundaries like visual boundaries, cultural boundaries, that come back into the fine arts’. Andrew articulated a similar idea. Although he is critical of many ads, in the end, he posited that they make a significant cultural contribution. ‘I think that advertising has done a great service to art and I think it is an art form, and I think of it *as* an art form, sometimes’ (Andrew’s emphasis). Nina contended that, without the presence of modern ads and commercials, ‘there would be all this creativity that wouldn’t sort of automatically come your way’. In other words, the populace is more regularly exposed

to human ingenuity than it would be if promotional materials were absent. Alina echoed the sentiment. Contemporary advertising, she explicated, ‘reaches everybody, so the masses can have these aesthetic experiences through advertising...people can be more aware of, of art or aesthetics through advertising’. Pat expanded on the point. Without advertising, ‘we’d have exposure [to popular art] but then you’d have to go to specific places to find it, as opposed to just driving along and seeing it on a billboard’. It must also be pointed out, however, that the people who almost ringingly endorsed advertising on aesthetic grounds were not in the majority. More typically, the participants showed mixed emotions when contemplating whether modern advertising beneficially contributes to the culture’s aesthetic milieu. Still, almost all of the respondents held that *some* ads and commercials are aesthetically pleasing and that advertising, in general, has at least *some* positive artistic impact on the nation’s symbolic environment. If advertising, therefore, partly functions as a vehicle for creative expression, then what is the importance of aesthetics in general within the context of life’s meaning?

The participants were almost unanimous in affirming that the realm of art or aesthetics has religious implications and manifests an element of what they perceive as God’s nature. Perhaps this suggests that they are implicitly endorsing the explicitly religious doctrine of universal creativity or using advertising to simply affirm their belief in God. But viewed another way, in keeping with Bailey’s definition offered above, it also indicates that they are engaged in an implicitly religious activity by gaining meaning through sources that are generally recognized as decidedly secular. Griffin avowed that beauty produced through human enterprise, in some fashion, reflects creation. ‘I mean for me they’re pretty intertwined’, he noted. Buster elaborated on this idea.

I guess what I believe is that I see aesthetic expression as kind of an echo of creation, you know. I mean it’s creation with a small ‘c’ as opposed to a big ‘c’. It’s our approximation of what God has done and what God really does every moment in terms of allowing the world and enabling the world to continue to exist.

Another pattern to emerge was the belief that the capacity to create art or engage in creative expression reflects a talent that has been bestowed by God and embodies a way that he (all of the participants use the pronoun ‘he’ when referring to God) communicates through the human animal. Jennifer contended that aesthetics are ‘divinely inspired’. ‘I believe...it’s a gift that we get from God’, Lily claimed. Nina uttered

similar words. 'I think the ability to do any of this is something that is given to you....it's a God-given talent and a gift and it's a very important part of the whole surroundings'. Andrew averred that artistic endeavour 'brings us closer to God' and exhibits one manner in which 'God comes through us'. Ann articulated a comparable thought. 'I think that almost any artistic expression is, is an expression of something Godly about us'.

Can advertising, then, point toward the spiritual dimension through its aesthetic representations? At least five respondents suggested that, in fact, it is possible for it to do so. According to a few of the participants, God can reveal himself through advertising just as he can via any other form of artistic creation. 'You're maybe not painting the Sistine ceiling, but you know, I think the same thing's at work with those people who created those clever Apple computer commercials', Nina remarked. 'I think being a commercial artist is, it's, you know, it's a gift too', Lily reasoned. Andrew agreed, stating, 'I think that God comes through in any creative thing we do'. Elizabeth expanded on the notion. 'Someone who has been granted a gift to be good with advertising, to...know what people want to see or to know how to reach people in that way, then advertising can be a mode of doing God's work'. Yet, she acknowledged, 'it doesn't always go that way'. Major Major contended that advertising mirrors poetry in maximizing its use of time and space. Finally, Jennifer indicated that, because of advertising, far more people are able to put their creative, God-given talents to use than would be the case if it were not a force in the culture.

In short, from the respondents' perspective, the significance of advertising within the domain of aesthetics and spirituality is two-fold: thanks to advertising, more individuals can exercise the artistic skills that God has imparted to them. Conversely, there is greater opportunity for people to integrate art, which is a reflection of God's creative power, into their lives as an *audience*. On the one hand, these findings do not contribute much to understandings of implicit religion because they position the interviewees as advocating a particular doctrine or the need for religious meaning to be centred on belief in God. But on the other hand, they also demonstrate that some of the respondents indicate the secular institution of advertising affords more possibilities to discover the sacred in everyday life. Just because the participants belong to formal religious institutions does not preclude them from also engaging in implicitly religious activity. If, as Hay (2003) maintains, spirituality is not limited only to

formally religious people, then could it not also be true that implicit religion is not confined only to non-formally religious people and that, therefore, explicitly religious people can also participate in implicit religion? At the same time, one would expect such implicitly religious encounters to be experienced within the framework of their explicitly religious beliefs. For these interviewees, then, forms of both explicit and implicit religion are intertwined. They need not be mutually exclusive.

The reader might object that advertising's relationship to aesthetics hardly sets it apart from the rest of the mass media. The argument is valid, but only to a certain extent. When one considers the degree to which advertising permeates nearly all popular communication vehicles in the United States—not only through direct sponsorship but by influencing their very style and the content they disseminate—then one realizes that it is a major component of the realm of aesthetics for many citizens.

The idea that advertising enables more people to derive their own meanings within the sphere of aesthetics brings to mind Walter Benjamin's classic essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Benjamin (1969) defied the Frankfurt School with which he is associated by developing a more optimistic view of the then burgeoning forms of popular culture than his colleagues theorized. Frankfurt School thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer bemoaned that mass culture was instilling a sense of false consciousness through ideological messages which were designed to promote capitalist interests and forms of entertainment which were meant to distract working class people from their purportedly exploited lives and render them passive. Benjamin, on the other hand, contended that new types of mass media were challenging the 'aura' of traditional works of art, especially painting, and thus had a democratising influence. Formerly, only a privileged elite contemplated 'original' pieces of 'high' art, generated 'expert' interpretations, and assigned them almost sacred significance and magical force because of their 'authenticity'. Now, according to Benjamin, via modern methods of reproduction and distribution, culture is freed from its narrow confines and accessible to everyone. Consequently, art, since several decades even before Benjamin drafted his essay, has no longer been ascribed meaning merely within the exclusive province of a 'chosen few', but has been open to multiple interpretations generated by the multitudes that have come in contact with it. Moreover, people are empowered to use the messages they produce to suit their own

purposes, based on their own social contexts. For Benjamin, the extension of culture into everyday activity has political implications. In this study, the participants do not appear to be employing advertising art to serve political ends but are, nonetheless, utilizing it on their own terms—which do not necessarily fulfil the interests of its originators. Benjamin suggested that culture's prolific dissemination would remove it from its ritual dimensions. Ironically, here, the respondents indicate that advertising, despite its lack of aura (where would one find an 'original' print ad—on an art director's desk?), can from time to time evoke a sense of the sacred. Somewhat paradoxically, people can draw on it in this manner, even though it is not rare, but pervasive.

### **Discussion: reconciling faith and capitalist expression**

It seems that, just as one would suspect if one holds to the ideas advanced by several of the previously cited researchers, who advocate an audience-centred approach to media and detect a spiritual dimension to popular culture, some of the interviewees, some of the time, indeed briefly and indirectly behold the sacred realm through the ostensibly worldly products of advertising. The finding is significant for researchers devoted to the study of implicit religion because it goes beyond the theoretical discourse on the subject to at least anecdotally confirm that religiosity can sometimes be experienced even through a form often scorned as especially base and profane. Naturally, this conclusion cannot be generalized to any population at large but it does provide a starting point for further investigation.

Although this type of research, by its nature, attempts to give everyday people a voice and avoid an overly constraining ideological or Frankfurt School perspective (excluding Benjamin), another important point must be raised. During the entire course of the conversations, although they sometimes discussed the influence that advertising has had on self-esteem, only two of the twenty participants expressed unquestionably negative stances toward advertising and almost never did any of them display a keen awareness of how advertising relentlessly perpetuates a capitalist worldview. Based on this discovery, I find that an idea delivered by Schudson (1986) resonates significantly. He argues that advertising shapes outlooks precisely because people do not have 'faith' in it, thus propagating dominant American ideology and functioning as 'capitalist realism'. The results of this study, in general, appear to back up

his position. Rarely did a participant sharply acknowledge how advertising symbolically buttresses the 'American Dream'. Nor did the interviewees evidence much resistance to the concept. Displaying hegemony at work, they are apparently able to reconcile an approach to life that allows them to concurrently practice forms of both explicit and implicit religion and support their market-driven culture without bearing significant cognitive dissonance.

Of course, this tension between the sacred and secular, particularly in relation to Protestantism and capitalism, has been debated at least since Max Weber (1993) argued in his foundational work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the philosophical and psychological disposition engendered by the Protestant Ethic facilitated the ascent of modern capitalism. One might argue that advertising adds a new wrinkle. For not only does it relentlessly endorse the free-market economy, but in celebrating the world's pre-eminent consumer society, it also indirectly sustains a type of implicit religion, namely an American civil religion, which, as John Howard Yoder (1984) illustrates, is alive and well today and can be seen in:

the Memorial Day rereadings of the Gettysburg address which lose its note of repentance and tragedy, the various references of politicians to prayer, the nondenominational blessings invoked on flags and battle-ships, the trust in God which our money announces but our investment policies do not (p. 192).

Yet civil religion in the United States not only involves national holidays, sanctimonious politicians, flags, and reverence for the machines of war. It was no accident that, shortly after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, George W. Bush attempted to mollify people's shock and restore the feelings of pride they have for their country by asking them to perform one of the main duties patriotic citizens are expected to carry out—shop. Indeed, the 'American way of life' is predicated on consumers exercising their freedom to choose among myriad brands of products and services and secure their selections with increasingly easy-to-obtain pieces of plastic. No vehicle supports this calling more than advertising.

Tapping into a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with capitalist enterprise, David Hay (2003) makes the case that in Western cultures, especially in Europe, people are increasingly experiencing and expressing their religiosity implicitly because, since the Enlightenment and subsequent expansion of literacy, an intense emphasis on individualism

has largely replaced a sense of 'relational consciousness', thus driving persons away from formal religious institutions, which are social in nature, toward more idiosyncratic means of exploring life's meaning; put simply, due to these cultural forces, people are '*embarrassed* by religion' (p. 20) and seek private solutions to their spiritual yearnings. Through qualitative interviews, Hay discovered that 'relationship' is central to the spiritual experience (p. 26). His findings vividly highlight the incongruity between 'social religion' and the individualistic market system that drives Western economies.

Applying Hay's analysis to ads and commercials can lead to illuminating contemplation. Advertising, of course, is capitalism's loyal symbolic servant, relentlessly promoting a way of life that pits every person against every other person. But it does more than this. Advertising conceivably has the ability to encourage individualism and relationship at the same time; consequently, it can help to relieve some of the tension inherent in the religion-capitalism dichotomy. Although it is placed for mass consumption, successful advertising gives the illusion of addressing each audience member in a one-to-one fashion. It repeatedly appeals to an individual's egocentrism with exhortations that amount to 'you can have it all—now', 'you can stand apart from the crowd', 'you deserve to follow and fulfil your desires', 'you should do what you want to do', and so on. Yet simultaneously, it advocates social conformity. For to gain that special look, one must buy the same brand that thousands of others are also purchasing. Furthermore, advertising images display again and again that the way to meet a basic human requirement, that is, the need for love and intimacy, is through the correct accumulation of products and services. Contradictorily, one becomes an individual through conformity. Recall how Buster revealed that using an Apple computer evoked in him feelings of both 'fighting against the tide' and belonging to a kind of community.

The participants in this study, obviously, do not exemplify the type of people Hay discusses. After all, the respondents indeed practice explicit religion among fellow believers within established religious structures. But this does not signify that they cannot concurrently encounter the sacred through explicitly religious channels, while, like their non-churchgoing neighbours, augment their connection to a transcendent realm through implicitly religious activity. And although the interviewees do not reside in Europe, they live in a land that, despite its differences, is still heavily culturally rooted in European traditions, a

place that is celebrated as a bastion of 'rugged individualism'. Hay's analysis provides a framework for better understanding how advertising can implicitly function as a belief system that partially reconciles individualism with sociality, capitalism with religion. One could hastily conclude that the convictions of the respondents have simply been co-opted by consumer culture. But such a proposition provides only one part of the picture because it does not give the audience enough credit for forming meanings on its own terms.

To further problematize the matter, another point must be made. Could it be that resistance to the idea that spirituality can be implicitly encountered not only through popular culture, but also through the very instrument that 'interrupts' people's interactions with it and explicitly connects it to the capitalist quest for profit, is but another example of the 'high' versus 'low' culture debate? If art, once sanctioned by the Catholic Church or later endorsed by a coterie of cultural intellectuals, could purportedly either teach everyday people the lessons of Christ's mission on earth or, in Matthew Arnold's famous words, communicate 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', then to deny advertising's potential to persistently expose persons to acts of creativity, which can offer moments of transcendence, is to take a decidedly *elitist* position.

Interestingly, John Berger (1972), in his renowned text, *Ways of Seeing*, assumes such a stance toward advertising. He offers a scathing critique of it, actually comparing advertising's similarities (as well as differences) with traditional oil painting. Ironically, although Berger, directly drawing from Benjamin, renounces the tendency of a privileged minority to attempt to separate from the rest of humanity by mystifying so-called high art and, in so doing, 'invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes' (p. 11), he, nonetheless, adopts a non-Benjamin, traditional Frankfurt School perspective in his assessment of advertising. Indicating that advertising is a pervasive phenomenon with enormous impact, Berger claims it proffers only one proposal—the promise of becoming a glamorous, enviable self through the purchase of advertised products. According to the author, in past centuries oil painting also prominently celebrated a theme that centred on the desirability of owning property and objects. Even religious art betrayed its sacred themes and displayed a certain hypocrisy by serving as a possession designed to bring its owners the pleasure that comes with status. In this sense, advertising has not supplanted the visual art

of post-Renaissance Europe but, through modified form, picks up and extends its agenda. Mirroring an argument advanced by other scholars (Lears 1994; Williams 1980), Berger asserts that advertising works by triggering a sort of magical thinking, a belief in personal transformation through product accumulation; it does this not through appeals to reality but to dreams. Along the way, advertising encourages people to focus their energy on buying things, rendering them passive on the job yet vibrant at the mall. Distracting citizens from active participation in political struggle, advertising enables consumption to substitute for democracy. In the end, it depicts social and material conditions that are vastly different from those in real life. The resemblance between Berger's thesis and the Frankfurt School view, that mass culture evokes 'false consciousness', is plain.

While Berger contends that advertisements are 'heartless' (1972: 111), it would appear that the participants in this study demonstrate otherwise. For as it has been revealed, to some of the respondents, advertising, albeit in limited measure, can offer opportunities to encounter spiritual meaning through secular vehicles. Berger sees both high art and advertising as advancing the interests only of privileged classes. He describes how, as it moved to museums, expressions of the former, because of their ostensible rarity and social standing, acquired spiritual dimensions, a 'bogus religiosity', as if 'they were holy relics' (p. 21), each piece housed in a room that 'is like a chapel' (p. 23). Berger would probably not concede that advertising has a comparable mystical aura. But he does state it represents 'a kind of philosophical system' (p. 149), one that invites the audience to enter into a magical space, 'The Enchanted Palace' (p. 145). Thus, high art gains a kind of false spirituality through its uniqueness; advertising does so through its ubiquity.

But Berger's criticism echoes the words of most of the theorists associated with the Frankfurt School; despite his sympathy for everyday people, Berger actually does not grant them enough authority. He focuses too firmly on the power of advertising and the select few who create it to dupe the masses. Yet, as numerous audience reception studies have made clear, individuals form their own meanings from the texts with which they are presented (even Benjamin suggested this). They are free to internalize the propagandistic messages of advertising, subvert them, or negotiate with them as they please.

Ultimately, one can quibble about definitions of art and whether or not compositions and edited images and sounds dedicated first and

foremost to the branding and selling of goods and services merits the distinction. But advertising, as it is received in daily life, is no doubt perceived as a type of art by many people. Indeed, several of the interviewees in this study, as pointed out above, alluded to advertising's ability to democratize both the making and experiencing of aesthetic expression. This may or may not be cause for celebration but it certainly should not be facetiously dismissed. Moreover, this 'art' does not belong only to a cultural elite but to the entire population. It could be that, because of advertising's near omnipresence, more people than ever are implicitly coming into contact with a sense of the sacred as they engage with a secular tool that is here to stay.

## References

- Bailey, E. (ed.) (2002) *The Secular Quest for Meaning in Life: Denton Papers in Implicit Religion*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Barker, C. (2003) *Cultural Studies: Theories and Practice*, London: Sage Publications, 2nd edn.
- Barton, B. (1925) *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of the Real Jesus*, Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Barton, B. (1927) 'Advertising as an Incentive to Human Progress', in Kendall F. C. (ed.), *The New American Tempo: And Other Articles on Modern Advertising and Selling Practice*, New York: J. J. Little and Ives, pp. 71-80.
- Bates, C. A. (1927) 'What Yesterday Can Teach Advertising's Tomorrow', in Kendall F. C. (ed.), *The New American Tempo: And Other Articles on Modern Advertising and Selling Practice*, New York: J. J. Little and Ives, pp. 57-70.
- Benjamin, W. (1969) 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Benjamin W., *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, pp. 217-51.
- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin.
- Boorstin, D. (1967) Welcome to the Consumption Community, *Fortune*, 1 September: 118.
- Budde, M. L. (1992) *The Two Churches: Catholicism and Capitalism in the World-System*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Burton, L. A. (1983) Close Encounters of a Religious Kind, *Journal of Popular Culture* 17/3: 141-45.
- Bush, G. W. (1991) *Lord of Attention: Gerald Stanley Lee and the Crowd Metaphor in Industrializing America*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Calkins, E. E. (1928) *Business the Civilizer*, Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Clark, L. S. and Hoover, S. M. (1997) 'At the Intersection of Media, Culture, and Religion: A Bibliographic Essay', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 15-36.
- Copp, L. R. (2000) *Gods on Madison Avenue: The All-Consuming Power of Advertising* (Doctoral dissertation, Pacifica Graduate Institute), *Dissertation Abstracts International* 61/09: 3402A.
- Curtis, S. (1991) *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

- Ferré, J. P. (1990) 'Introduction', in Ferré J. P. (ed.), *Channels of Belief: Religion and American Commercial Television*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, pp. xi-xviii.
- Fox, S. (1984) *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and its Creators*, New York: William Morrow and Company.
- Goethals, G. T. (1990) *The Electronic Golden Calf: Images, Religion, and the Making of Meaning*, Cambridge, MA: Cowley.
- Goethals, G. T. (1997) 'Escape from Time: Ritual Dimensions of Popular Culture', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 117-32.
- Hatch, N. O. (1994) 'The Puzzle of Methodism', *Church History* 63: 175-89.
- Hay, D. (2003) 'Why is Implicit Religion Implicit?', *Implicit Religion* 6: 17-40.
- Hoover, S. M. (1997) 'Media and the Construction of the Religious Public Sphere', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 283-97.
- Hoover, S. M. and Lundby, K. (1997) 'Introduction: Setting the Agenda', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 3-14.
- Huber, R. M. (1971) *The American Idea of Success*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jhally, S. (1990) *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, New York: Routledge.
- Laird, P. W. (1998) *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Laski, M. (1959) 'Advertising: Sacred and Profane', *The Twentieth Century* 165: 118-29.
- Leach, W. (1993) *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, New York: Vintage Books.
- Lears, J. (1981) *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lears, J. (1982) 'From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930', in Fox R. W. and Lears T. J. (eds.), *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 3-38.
- Lears, J. (1994) *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, New York: Basic Books.
- Leiss, W. et al. (1990) *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well Being*, Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson Canada.
- Linderman, A. (1997) 'Making Sense of Religion in Television', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 263-82.
- Lunden, R. (1986) 'The Protestant Churches and the Business Spirit of the Twenties', in Kroes R. and Portelli A. (eds.), *Social Change and New Modes of Expression: The United States, 1910-1930*, Amsterdam: Free University Press, pp. 47-62.
- Martin-Barbero, J. (1997) 'Mass Media as a Site of Resacralisation of Contemporary Cultures', in Hoover S. M. and Lundby K. (eds.), *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 102-16.
- Newcomb, H. M. (1990) 'Religion on Television', in Ferré J. P. (ed.), *Channels of Belief: Religion and American Commercial Television*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, pp. 29-44.
- Pope, D. A. (1973) The Development of National Advertising (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University), *Dissertation Abstracts International* 34/06: 3318A.
- Presbrey, F. (1929) *The History and Development of Advertising*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company.

- Schudson, M. (1986) *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, New York: Basic Books.
- Schultze, Q. J. (1990) 'Television Drama as a Sacred Text', in Ferré J. P. (ed.), *Channels of Belief: Religion and American Commercial Television*, Ames: Iowa State University Press, pp. 3-27.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Spitzer, L. (1962) 'American Advertising Explained as Popular Art', in Hatcher A. (ed.), *Essays on English and American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 248-77.
- Tedlow, R. S. (1990) *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, New York: Basic Books.
- Twitchell, J. B. (1996) *Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Twitchell, J. B. (1999) *Lead Us into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weber, M. (1993) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons), London: Routledge.
- White, M. (1992) *Tele-advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Williams, R. (1980) 'Advertising: The Magic System', in Williams R., *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London: Verso.
- Wuthnow, R. (1998) *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yoder, J. H. (1984) *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Zuckerman, M. (1991) 'Holy Wars, Civil Wars: Religion and Economics in Nineteenth-Century America', *Prospects* 16: 205-40.