

Contents

Illustrations vii

Introduction. Faith in Marketing in the USA
Dominic Janes 1

Rewriting the Scriptures

The Commodification of Religion: Fiction that Presents
Religion as a Consumer Good and the New Faux Faith
Jennifer Lee 33

Balancing the Mission and the Market: Christian
Children's Books for Tweens
Diane Carver Sekeres 55

Evangelism and Purification

Capturing the Religious Imagination:
Branding and the United Church of Christ's
"God is Still Speaking" Campaign
Monica Pombo 79

Better than Sex: Working out with Jesus at the Lord's Gym
Kathaleen Amende 115

Selling a "Disneyland for the Devout": Religious
Marketing at Jim Bakker's Heritage USA
Darren E. Grem 137

Marketing Performances

Evangelical Cartoons: the Good News and the Bad
Harry Coverston 161

The Passion and the Profit: Evangelical Christianity and
Media Space in Amish Country

Jennifer Fleeger 191

Pursuing *The Passion's* Passions
Kent L. Brintnall 217

Producers and Consumers

Recasting the Revival Experience for the Youngest:
Celebrities, Rock Music and Action Sports 255
Silvia Giagnoni

The Santafication of Hanukkah: Escaping the “December
Dilemma” on Chrismukkah.com 275
Elizabeth Bernstein

Contributors 286

From the Introduction

Faith in Marketing in the USA

Dominic Janes

Brilliant light, it may be a sunset or a sunrise, flares along a dark horizon and, rising up against it in the foreground, stand the stark silhouettes of three giant crosses. Just below the horizontal beams of the crosses are embossed a series of sixteen numbers. At the top left is the logo of Family Christian Stores and at the bottom right that of Mastercard. The website on which this image is displayed informs us: “The Family Christian Stores Platinum Plus® Mastercard® Credit Card: It’s Everything you Need” (FCS, “The Family”, 2007. Permission to reproduce an image of the credit card was refused). There are over three hundred Family Christian Stores (FCS) spread across thirty seven states of the Union (fig. 1). The merchandise on offer ranges from Bibles to cards, clothing and ornaments with Christian themes, images or slogans. One of the many things you could use the card to pay for is a book by Ethan Pope, *Cashing it in: Getting Ready for a World without Money*, produced by Moody, publishers whose “mission is to educate and edify the Christian and to evangelize the non-Christian by ethically publishing conservative,

evangelical Christian literature” (Pope, 2005 and Moody, 2007). One might assume that this was a work of eschatology; however, the description tells us that what is being referred to is a specific sort of financially efficient heaven on earth, a world with currency but without coins:

With the popularity of credit and debit cards, online banking and internet shopping, the idea of a cashless society is closer to becoming reality. [This book will] explore the issues this raises within a biblical framework and how Christians can become wise stewards of their resources (FCS, “Ethan Pope,” 2007).

Amongst the other items on sale are the “Faith & Friends” dolls which have been, according to their manufacturer, “created to help meet the needs of girls to enjoy and experiment with fashion in a safe and wholesome manner that models femininity and appropriateness” (Faith & Friends, 2007). The FCS web site expands the way in which this doll, with its diverse accessories, provides for parentally monitored role-playing on the part of the young Christian consumer:

With Faith & Friends, girls name their doll and write her story! Each doll comes with a tiny Bible and blank composition book to get girls thinking and writing about their faith and encourage wholesome role playing. Your daughter will grow developmentally, educationally, and spiritually. And you’ll have a window into her soul like never before! (FCS, “Faith and Friends”, 2007).

There is nothing new about Americans who view marketing, capitalism and Christian moral surveillance as entirely compatible aspects of their everyday life. In 1916 Dr Christian Reisner set up a Church Department at the convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World. Shortly afterward Norman Richardson of Northwestern University encouraged the future senator, Francis Higbee Case (1896-1962), then a journalist, to draw up submissions from the 1920 convention and to publish these, together with addresses by the Church Department, in the form of a *Handbook of Church Advertising* (1921). The purpose of this book was to reject the notion that the marketing of Christianity was “shameless self-exaltation or of wanton intrusion into the shop and market place. It is rather, the method of the one in the parable of our Lord who went out into the highways and hedges and compelled others to come in” (1921: 186). Moreover, the novelty of such practices was denied. O. J. Goude, of the O. J. Goude Advertising

Company was quoted as saying, for instance, in the course of a discussion of trademarks, that “steeples were the first form of outdoor advertising” (1921: 37). Yet even in this triumphal appeal to market evangelism a cautionary note was sounded: “we need to remind ourselves over and over again, and in as many ways as possible, that church advertising is an aid to, not a substitute for, religion” (1921: 177). Why was it apparently so easy to forget the essence of religion amid the heat and light of modern promotion? That, in essence, is the problem that this collection of essays seeks to explore.

The twentieth-century United States had a distinct, if heavily contested tradition of asserting the common causes of the Christian and the businessman (and I do stress the reference to masculinity). We can view this tradition via a series of bombastic literary productions ranging from the classic, *The Man that Nobody Knows* (1925) by the advertising man and future congressman Bruce Barton (1886-1967) - which sold 250,000 copies over 18 months on the back of its vision of Jesus in the image of the author (or the author in the image of Jesus) - right up to such contemporary works as *God is my CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World* (Julian, 2001). The origins of these works have been traced to the muscular Christianity movement of the later nineteenth-century and the desire to assert the consonance of both Church and business with masculinity (Ribuffo, 1981). One feature of such thinking is that spiritual and material success are understood to be linked, however, since, ‘in a bottom-line world’, financial credit can be assessed much more easily than spiritual merit, the tendency seems to make assumptions about personal piety based on business performance. This leads to suspicions that the business of such literature was, in fact, business. And it is in just this spirit that other management books have been borrowing the language of religious evangelization in order to explicate commercial objectives. This use of religion to provide a provocative source of business inspiration is not just restricted to contemporary American practice as demonstrated, for instance, by Jesper Kunde, *Corporate Religion: Building a Strong Company through Personality and Corporate Soul* (2000).

Kunde and his ilk tend to present an image of religion as unified realm formed from a generic Christianity in which a hierarchy of Church structures is taken for granted. This is presented in ahistoric terms as a powerful management construct which can inform practices in business (or, some might say, in other non-religious business) endeavors. It is important to be aware of the dangers of anachronism involved in a vision based on such a reductionist image of ‘religion’. The challenge, for the contemporary scholar is to establish a neutral conceptual space between such glib assertions as that identifying St. Paul as the ‘first spin doctor’ (Institute for Cultural

Research, 2000: 9) and the placing of Christianity in a privileged locale entirely separate from commercial processes both in the ancient world and today. Whilst the origins and development of Christianity do hold within them great potential for studying the background to the material under discussion, the present collection of papers cannot seek to find a set of universal answers to such questions as whether Christian denominations can be classified as businesses, or whether businesses should be classified as religious denominations whose purpose is to maintain faith in their corporate brands and to control the nature and reception of its values. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the conceptual boundary between religion and business is blurred and contested in the modern United States. It is the purpose of this collection to engage some of the key areas of this contestation and to explore the cultural landscape of shopping for salvation in our age of the therapeutic ethos (i.e. the idea that contemporary capitalism aims to deliver fulfillment in this life, Lears, 1983). The vital question is whether the engines of material consumption can enable Churches to provide spiritual salvation.

Some say yes. Stark and McCann (1993), for instance, provide a picture of spiritual success ensured by market competition. They argue that attendance at Catholic churches is more frequent in areas in which one finds the presence of the largest number of competing denominations. One of the relatively few recent attempts to study the boundaries of religion and economics to have been carried out by academics from the latter discipline, soundly backs up this viewpoint. The authors of this work, *The Marketplace of Christianity* (Ekelund, Hébert and Tollison, 2006), present their work as an attempt to develop analyses based ultimately on the insights made by Weber in his famous analysis of the Protestant work ethic. They consider the last five hundred years of Christian history as representing the failure of a “dominant company” (the Roman Catholic Church) to contain its competitors in a developing market for religious goods and services. Consumer demand is taken for granted on the basis that existential dread of death is “hard wired”; this cannot be addressed by scientific reason and, therefore, there is an “innate demand for the services of magic, religion, and spiritual experience” (2006: 270). The results have been a triumph: in their concluding remarks the authors celebrate “the competitive revolution in Christianity unleashed by the successful entry of Protestant competitors in the sixteenth century. Just as free and open competition increases the utility to consumers of goods and services, the open and extremely competitive market for Christian and other religious products and product forms creates a variety that maximizes satisfaction for individuals whose demand for such services is unlimited” (2006: 272).

The basis of this view is faith in the free market and the utilitarian notion of the maximizing of the individual and common good. In this analysis the successful denomination is that which outcompetes through offering the maximum spiritual benefit at the most competitive cost. It is important to note that cost refers to time as convertible to money. Those who argue that these processes have been happening, but that they are far from a good thing, tend to pin their arguments on the notion that active commitment is being replaced by spending. In an echo of Reformation disputes over the sale of indulgences, it can be argued that the contemporary American is being encouraged by the use of the familiar business methods of marketing to shop for Jesus-flavored products which provide a temporary therapeutic fix. Michael Budde is amongst the prominent scholars who have warned against such trends arguing, in relation to the Catholic Church, that the “the incorporation of a marketing ethos” undermines “gospel nonconformity and radical discipleship” (1997: 104). His sense is of a threat which is only now becoming critical. He writes: “contrary to the cultured despisers of Christianity, who see nothing new in the Church adopting the best tools with which to bamboozle the gullible, I believe there are *qualitative* differences between the past and the emerging present” (1997: 105).

It is all too easy to universalize when talking about Christianity, but to put such American expressions of peril in perspective, let me give you an example from my own country (the United Kingdom) which is one of world centers of advertising and marketing. On 30th September 2007 the established Church of England held a Back to Church Sunday. As reported in *The Guardian* newspaper clergy received customer-service training from John Lewis’ department store, and “the Bishop of Sherwood, the Rt. Rev. Tony Porter, took off in a light aircraft trailing a banner behind him, while the Rt. Rev. John Pritchard, the Bishop of Oxford, will record a podcast reflecting on his appeal to lost churchgoers” (Butt, 2007). The ironic tone of the article suggested that there was no danger that such basic attempts at marketing would have any effect other than to emphasize how out of touch the Anglicans were from contemporary society. The sense of peril in the case of the USA, by contrast, may stem partly from the strength there of both business and religion: the thought being that the two must inevitably influence each other and produce something that is neither quite commercial nor quite spiritual, but a strangely warped hybrid of both. Doubts can be found on such issues on the part of some marketing professionals. For instance Hutton (2001) wonders whether there are dangers in using the “metaphor of the customer” (or not recognizing that it is a metaphor) in the case of non-profit businesses. Moreover, deeper questions arise over whether the market itself is moral, immoral, or amoral (Blank and McGurn, 2004).

This book is not aimed at providing moral suggestions, let alone solutions. Rather, the contributions have been chosen so as to provide case studies across a range of interactions between Christianity, marketing, visual and textual culture. The aim of this is to explore the connections between belief, its presentation, and the processes by which it is sold and consumed. The contributors have all been thinking about the way in which Christianity operates in a market culture and the degree to which one can use the notions of branding, advertising and marketing to understand missionary and revival activities. They come from theology, history, art history, literature and business studies backgrounds. All the contributors want to understand the production and consumption of images of holiness, rather than judging the quality of those images. That is quite another enterprise, one aspect of which, idolatry discourses in Victorian England, I have been researching for the last few years (Janes, forthcoming). Nevertheless, it is important to explain the general approach to the production of images as being derived from the emerging sub-discipline of visual culture.

Key introductions to this field are Walker and Chaplin (1997); Mirzoeff (1999); Mitchell (2002) and (2005); Sturken and Cartwright (2001); Elkins (2003) and Halsall (2006). Images are understood to be culturally mediated productions in which an emphasis is placed on the meaning-making observer, on evolving technologies of representation and transmission, the importance of mass media and popular culture, consumerism and the manufacturing of desire (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, chapter 6). The effect of this post-modern cultural matrix is understood to be the eroding of the power of institutions in the face of the bewildering patterns of customer attention and choice. Some assert that what nowadays exists is indeed the image rather than the 'actuality' of holiness. However, the studies in this volume are empirically grounded in specific contexts of production and consumption and it is those connections which are the focus of these studies rather than the images themselves. In other words we want to look at the production of images of holiness for what that tells us about business and religion, rather than for what it tells us about the operation of visibility, textuality and the media through which those forms are manifested.

In this regard the current studies are heavily indebted to leading works of American and sacred visual and material culture, notably those of McDannell (1995) and Morgan (1998) and (2005). Two theoretical insights from these works have been particularly influential. Firstly, McDannell's keenness to emphasize processes of consumer agency through bricolage (the personal assemblage of referents to diverse cultural traditions, practices and formations). She notes that "Christian retailing is possible because consumers refuse to separate the sacred from the profane, the extraordinary from the

ordinary, the pious from the trivial. For these consumers, Christianity is intimately bound up in the day-to-day life of the family and its goods" (1995: 261). In other words, we should not assume the authority of religious institutions over the practices of their adherents. Secondly, Morgan helps us to understand that this does not have to be seen in terms of authenticity. For him authenticity is in the way in which things are received. Mass-produced culture can, therefore, be authentic through its manner of reception and use (1998: 134). All of this means that marketing campaigns are to be considered as cultural products which are received and incorporated into believers' lives and practices in an active and engaged manner. This does not mean that people automatically believe what the marketers want, but it does mean that we can study people's beliefs and practices, rather than the mere administering of religious content on the airwaves, movie-screens and the sides of mugs (fig. 2).

What then is marketing? In 1935 the American Marketing Association (AMA) adopted the following definition: marketing is "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers." This was revised in 1985, and again in 2004, resulting in the assertion that marketing is: "an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders" (Keefe, 2004). The equivalent organization in Britain, the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), offers the following definition: "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2005: 2). What has happened is an evolution over time from the concept of marketing as playing a purely informational role, to one according it a much more important function in relation to the development of products. The CIM describes contemporary marketing as consisting of seven key aspects – the 7Ps - product, price, place (i.e. the shop), promotion, people, process, physical evidence (i.e. plausibility of the process). Understood in these terms, the marketing of religion is intimately involved in shaping the content of religion in response to customer needs and expectations.

The challenge this poses to traditional Christianity should be obvious and, if marketing were to play such a prominent role in a religious denomination, one might expect there to be, at the least, a rigorous code of marketing ethics. The AMA web site gives the following definition:

marketing ethics - 1... Standards of marketing decision making based on 'what is right' and 'what is wrong', and emanating from our religious heritage and our

traditions of social, political, and economic freedom. 2... The use of moral codes, values, and standards to determine whether marketing actions are good or evil, right or wrong. Often standards are based on professional or association codes of ethics.

Yet the AMA web site also features an article which poses the question of whether marketing ethics is an oxymoron! (American Marketing Association, "Is Marketing Ethics an Oxymoron?", 2007; compare Nantel and Weeks, 1996). The discourse and practices of marketing are, it should be clear from this, to be understood as cultural constructs that are evolving alongside contemporary religion in America.

I have stated that the papers provide a set of overlapping studies. This has, however, the disadvantage that it makes selecting the order for the chapters something of a challenge since they explore related themes. The following summary of the papers, therefore, aims not simply to sum up some of the key points about each one, but to explore the links between them and the rationale for their collection and ordering in this format. The overall structure is to move from contexts of textuality, to those focusing on material and bodily spaces, thence to visual culture and performance, finishing with objects, branding, bricolage and interfaith expression.