

ALINA PREDA

HOW FAITH-BASED MARKETING CAN FORESTALL
THE CRISIS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION –
THE CASE OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

Alina Preda

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, Cluj, Romania.

Email: alinapreda74@gmail.com

Abstract: The universal prominence of religion is substantiated by the craving for transcendence – an essential characteristic of human existence. Yet, as the times are changing, religion must keep evolving in order to maintain its authority and bolster its influence over the society that produced and cultivated it. Thus, in the United States, for instance, evangelism – the cardinal impulse of Christianity, has been able to stay on top of the waves of change that are rocking our globalized world by putting both the modern principles of economics and the perks of technologically mediated communication in the service of revivalism. Starting from Sandu Frunză's take on the crisis of institutionalized religion and using Aurel Codoban's 'weakened transcendence' concept and his model of communication contingent on seduction and manipulation, in order to explore some examples of faith-based marketing aimed at various age groups, this paper sets out to evaluate the strategies of religious evangelism that account for its success in the case of American Christian Fundamentalism.

Key words: institutionalized religion, crisis, transcendence, fundamentalism, evangelism, seduction, manipulation, faith-based marketing.

Religion is like a living organism whose survival depends on its adaptability. As the times are changing, religion must keep evolving in order to maintain its authority and bolster its influence over the society that produced and cultivated it. In the history of humanity there have been numerous religions worldwide, of which some have become extinct and others are on the brink of extinction, whilst new religions, generally bound to remain marginal, can be generated constantly. The Abrahamic religions, however, seem to have been the most resilient so far, able to maintain their grip on the masses and to cater for the needs of the new generations, though not in an identical manner and not to the same degree. Starting from Sandu Frunză's take on the crisis of institutionalized religion and using Aurel Codoban's 'weakened transcendence' concept as well as his model of communication contingent on seduction and manipulation in order to explore some examples of faith-based marketing aimed at various age groups, this paper sets out to evaluate the strategies of religious evangelism that account for its success in the case of American Christian Fundamentalism.

The universal prominence of religion is substantiated by the craving for transcendence – an essential characteristic of human existence. Our inability and unwillingness to settle for the 'here' and the 'now' stems from the dissatisfaction with an understanding of the world provided by our perception and cognition only, and from a yearning for the recovery of what we believe to have been the original state of perfection and completeness, totally devoid of suffering. The promise of transcendence alone is able to resolve the resulting tension, as by experiencing a sense of transcendence we deepen our awareness of the sacred. Transcendence constitutes a universal structure of the religious experience (Eliade 1992, 12-13) because religion "invariably points us 'beyond' the relative, historical, 'natural' world of 'ordinary' experience" (Allen 2002, 70). What is more, as Eliade explained, both the "crude product of nature" and the "object fashioned by the industry of man" can secure their identity and procure their reality "only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality" (Eliade 1954, 5). Given the human fascination with primordial myths, there exists a seemingly natural tendency in *homo religiosus* to allow his religious consciousness to offer him a heightened apprehension of "the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs" of the sacred into the profane world (Eliade 1963, 6). Eliade obviously used the term *homo religiosus* to refer to the archaic, traditional, pre-modern man, whereas the post-archaic, modern man "has fallen into historical time" and lost his freedom, yet "shadowy relics of the old cosmic sacred still abide on the fringes of consciousness, and can be evoked" (Ellwood 1999, 99-100). Consequently, the renowned Romanian philosopher and historian of religion surmised a revival of religiosity in the midst of modern humanity and predicted "the return of the religious as a social and political ideology" (Codoban 2002, 3). Unfortunately, as Aurel Codoban

points out, due to our reliance on mass-communication, we have not been witnessing “a return to the historical traditions, but rather an extension of those existing”, just as Ioan Petru Culianu, Eliade’s protégé, had anticipated (Codoban 2002, 4).

Thus, in the United States, for instance, evangelism – the cardinal impulse of Christianity, has been able to stay on top of the waves of change that are rocking our globalized world by putting both the modern principles of economics and the perks of technologically mediated communication in the service of revivalism. Despite the plethora of information available nowadays, it is not difficult to exploit the perceived limitations of human endeavors by pointing out that our current knowledge is finite and incomplete. By replacing the transfer of information with their own brand of reality, constructed through behavior-altering instances of communication, and by forgoing futile attempts at persuasion in favor of the more efficient techniques of manipulation and seduction, which work better on the subconscious programming of the masses (Codoban 2003, 129), American Christian Fundamentalists have so far managed to avert the crisis of institutionalized religion that has been looming over our globalized world.

The terms ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘fundamentalism’ cannot be employed to describe only one particular denomination, so they are used here, in line with Jonathan J. Edwards’s proposed terminology, to cover not only the representatives and the dogmas of the particular movement within Protestant Christianity which at the beginning of the twentieth century “coalesced around a set of inter-church disputes”, but also those of contemporary Christian evangelicals who would refuse to accept the label but “who are – knowingly or not – party to the same disputes and tensions” (Edwards 2015, quoted in Eric C. Miller 2015). Although these two umbrella-terms have been used to disparage militantly irrational opinions and worldviews, the concept of ‘fundamentalism’ is here essential because neither ‘conservative’ nor ‘evangelical’ can amass and convey the unwillingness to compromise and the inability to accept pluralism manifested by those who claim the right “to authoritatively define the fundamentals of truth and public morality, based on an authoritative interpretation of an authoritative Bible” (Edwards 2015, quoted in Eric C. Miller 2015). Edwards contends that religious fundamentalism can be said to characterize those groups that, despite the proliferation of beliefs and churches, are convinced that there can be one *true church*, “defined not by organizational (i.e. denominational) distinctions, but by common commitment to a set of definable norms for belief, practice, and communication” (Edwards 2015, xi-xii). Edwards pertinently points out that, in this sense, fundamentalism is “unquestionably modern”, constituting “a particular response within modernity to a problem of modernity – the need to maintain associational commitments in the context of pluralism – organized around an

idealization of the local church as representative of an invisible but effective public association” (Edwards 2015, xi-xii).

Since the modern concept of *religion* no longer fits the minimalistic definition given to it by essentialists such as Edward Burnett Tylor or Rudolf Otto, being much more than a mere belief in supernatural beings or a constant craving for the numinous, it cannot be dismissed as a simplistic collage or even a palimpsest of myths easily dispelled by scientific evidence. A far better-suited term would actually be that of *religiosity*, this fundamentally social phenomenon that mirrors society’s concerns and needs whilst, as Émile Durkheim explained, reinforcing common interests, thus stifling individuality in order to foster group cohesion. As Aurel Codoban claims, although contemporary philosophy had announced the death of God, it could not escape the religious inheritance and, thus, even those who reject the idea of a philosophy of religion cannot elude that of a *philosophy of religiosity* (Codoban 1998, 15). While theophany may no longer constitute the central core of the modern existence of *homo religiosus*, this is not necessarily the case for hierophanies, cratophanies and ontophanies, since for a traditionally religious man the social construction of reality rests on the assumption that the sacred is manifest in the profane, or that it emerges from the profane (Frunză 1999, 169).

In his analysis of the crisis that institutionalized religion is undergoing in this age of globalization, Sandu Frunză explains that the mechanisms of such a crisis “must be sought in the society built on knowledge” and that in order to find a solution to this crisis one must look towards “the society based on communication” (Frunză 2011, 180-181). And, indeed, since unprecedented scientific discoveries and technological advances in various fields of enquiry have provided evidence and explanations for many aspects of reality previously regarded as miraculous or divinely inspired occurrences, whilst globalized media technologies have fostered the transmission of information to inquisitive minds all over the globe, there have been registered a rise of antagonism against faith-based claims and an increase in the secularizing trend. What has been noted is not only a decrease in congregation numbers, which has stalled or, in certain cases, even stopped church growth, but also a sharp fall in the number of people who declare themselves religious. This situation was appraised in Barna Group’s *Research Releases in Faith & Christianity* published on September 15, 2016. Entitled “The State of the Church 2016”, the report was meant to assess “the overall health of Christ’s Body in America” and began as follows: “The Christian church has been a cornerstone of American life for centuries, but much has changed in the last 30 years. Americans are attending church less, and more people are experiencing and practicing their faith outside of its four walls. Millennials in particular are coming of age at a time of great skepticism and cynicism toward institutions – particularly the church” (Barna Group 2016). The crisis of institutionalized religion has thus been acknowledged

even by this self-proclaimed “visionary” company, a research organization “focused on the intersection of faith and culture”.

Nevertheless, the degree to which various particular denominations are affected by this crisis differs, some churches being more prosperous in American society, a case in point being constituted by Christian fundamentalist churches in the United States. This group has been extremely successful in steering clear of the crisis by controlling the flow of information towards their parishioners and by offering, instead of access to knowledge, an insidious blandishment of belonging to a community that shares a worldview constructed through carefully planned blueprints of communication. The Christian religion, they claim, is the only true religion and the Bible is the only truly sacred book, God’s inspired word. Having been born sinful and deserving of God’s judgment, we must receive Jesus Christ as our saviour in our hearts. Once we know Jesus, having been introduced to Him, we are part of His army on Earth, our duty being to share and spread the Gospel, to speak out and act so as to strengthen the body of Christ by introducing ever more people to Jesus and by conveying to the world the only message sanctioned by God: the literal interpretation of the Bible. Their strategy illustrates both Sandu Frunză’s above-mentioned take on the information-communication dichotomy and Aurel Codoban’s view of communication as based on seduction and manipulation. Elaborating on Codoban’s model, Frunză states that what sheds light on the way in which reality is constructed through communication is “the transition from the hierarchical thinking specific to persuasion systems to the manipulation specific to systems in which individuals become a mass that functions as a collective consciousness, which aims at amorphous masses, at seduction, forming masses that act under the affirmative impulse of the unconscious, but it keeps individualities beyond the sum of the individuals making up the masses. It is all about individuals who build a world and offer it to others as an alternative in their desire to participate in a common identity” (Frunză 2011, 189).

The need for transcendence represents a fundamental phenomenon for the concept of the sacred (Codoban 1998, 54). When confronted with novel, unfathomable, or extraordinary phenomena, humans are prone to the theorization of a spiritual power that is “neither anonymous, nor impersonal, but not collective either”; this sacral force engenders in those who discover and accept it a dynamism which modifies their behavior (Codoban 1998, 55). Religious experience is said to enhance the feeling of the numinous, which combines two fundamental aspects – “sheer fright, terror and veneration, fascination” (Codoban 1998: 56) with the appearance, evolution and advances of the sacred mimics – “the socialization process of religious experience: from the feeling of the numinous, situated somewhere between the unconscious and the conscious, proximal to fear, through the individual religious experience,

towards the collective religious experience, vouched for by the sacred situated at the trans-conscious level” (Codoban 1998, 68). Since in our contemporary society the increasingly dominant trend to value hard facts, objective truth and scientific knowledge makes full transcendence no longer possible, a displacement occurred, the place of full transcendence being taken by what Codoban calls ‘weakened transcendence’, “a presence pertaining to an ontological model of the postmodern world where the media actively contribute to the construction of reality” (Codoban 2000, 185 quoted in Frunză 2011, 184). This type of transcendence differs both from full or positive transcendence – which allows only for a transcending process mediated by divine grace – and from empty or negative transcendence – which renders the transcending process meaningless. Weakened transcendence actually enhances the possibility of transcending and thus “leaves room for the reconstruction of the religious experience” (Frunză 2011, 184). This happens because humans can take part in the creation of reality, being given a voice by the very choice that divinity had made to remain silent. God’s silence in our contemporary world gives humans permission to speak, or even makes it their duty to speak up.

This duty has eagerly been assumed by missionaries and evangelists. In the United States, for instance, explains Edwards in his analysis of revivalist fundamentalist rhetoric, churches constantly urge believers “to speak and act as members of ‘the body of Christ’ in the world, enforcing the bonds between sacred and secular demands” (Edwards 2015, x). The strategies used in order to avoid congregation shrinkage, to prevent current believers from being lured away and to attract new ones, introducing them to Christ, are actual marketing strategies, as Richard L. Reising’s bestselling book, *Church Marketing 101: Preparing Your Church for Greater Growth*, clearly illustrates, since demographics, client experience, basic psychology, branding, packaging and advertising – all fundamentals of corporate marketing strategies – are perfectly suitable for church growth endeavors (Reising 2006, 12). In order to register sustained success and to eventually garner ever better results, a church determined to grow must function like a company whose employees work on commission. Ministry marketing by individuals means that a demand is being made on each private believer to speak publicly and persuasively to the unconverted. This is achieved by getting to know the target market, learning how to relate to and attract new congregation members, how to evaluate external perspectives in order to identify what people are looking for, shaping stronger connections and forming deeper bonds with the persons whom “they are trying to affect for God” (Reising 2006, 14). The basic elements that create growth are the ability to attract new people to one’s worship services and the skill to ensure that they return. Each believer’s participation in worship services needs to be supplemented by an evangelistic expression of his or her passion for the body of Christ,

because numbers matter, given that the percentage of return-customers to a faith-based institution is normally as low as 10%, according to Senior Pastor Brian Jones, who attempts to explain ‘the Mathematics for Church Growth’ (Jones n.d.). Church growth thus heavily depends on how successful the seduction of the unchurched proves to be and on how skillfully their subsequent manipulation is carried out.

Ministry marketing is also an institutional task for those church leaders who are determined to position their church for success. According to Yvon Prehn, ministry marketing is people-oriented, pop-culture savvy, precise yet playful, persistent and planned, programmed and publicity proactive, pervasive and partnering, properly equipped and prayer saturated (Prehn 2004, 2012). The growing church is one that creates its own media in order to influence the community at large – having its own radio programs, television channels, etc., one that trains the staff and volunteers working at the welcoming centers with regard to appropriate dress-codes and instructs the greeters and the ushers to adopt a proper demeanor, so as not to alienate the target customers; one that offers facilities such as cafeterias, nurseries, adult education classes, making sure there are clear signs directing visitors to each desired area. Prehn explains that just as lives are at stake in hospitals, souls are at stake in churches and losing a soul for lack of signage must be avoided (Prehn 2012, 150). In an effort to attract unchurched people into the believing community, even a smoking area should be created, since to attend a church event when you have a tobacco addiction is difficult and, if smoking is completely forbidden on church grounds, many potential believers may choose to stay away, but an institution in crisis cannot afford to factor out an entire group of people. There are churches in Florida, Michigan and Texas that provide alternate religious experiences to those who are uncomfortable with the traditional, formal church setting, by hosting car-based worship sessions. The Daytona Beach Drive-In Christian Church started to allow people to worship from the comfort of their vehicles as early as 1953 (DeFeo 2013; Blumberg 2017); founded in 1970, Woodland Drive-In Church has as its motto “A Unique Worship Experience - Reaching Out to Those Who Don’t Come In” (Verbrugge 2004) and in the summer of 2011 a new drive-in church was opened under the name “Sanctuary Under the Sky” by Reverend David Ray, pastor of Presbyterian Church of the Master (Hopper 2011). To seduce ever more potential church goers of all ages and backgrounds, new and old technologies need to be employed, from posters, postcards, invitation cards, flyers and niche newsletters, to radio broadcasts, television programs and Internet sites. Thus, the engaging and challenging process of ministry marketing takes the form of age-appropriate need-oriented evangelism.

In our globalized world, people are overwhelmed by the amount of information bombarding them from all directions: the radio, the television

and the Internet are endless sources of messages often difficult to decode and sometimes impossible to rate in terms of accuracy and trustworthiness. When confronted with contradictory ideas, people experience a highly unpleasant state they desperately try to avoid: cognitive dissonance. For those with a proclivity for religiosity, evangelism comes with the perfect alternative: to avoid the uncomfortable tension brought forth by cognitive dissonance, and the possibility of being exposed to conflicting thoughts, they are urged to surround themselves exclusively with information carefully selected so as to conform to the Christian dogma. Christian radio stations and television networks abound, congregation meetings and activities are tailored for a wide range of interests, communication, whatever the channel, is trimmed to suit the needs of the believers. This exemplifies how “the postmodern perspective on the weak transcendence makes possible the mediation between the excess of meanings and the excess of communication. This recovery of religiosity is needed in order to avoid the excess of communication so as to avoid an overexposure to this excess” (Frunză 2011, 189). By harnessing the power of information technology, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the media, not only their own Christian radio broadcasts and television programs, but the Internet as well, American evangelists have relentlessly been expanding the initially smaller faith-based niche market for products specifically targeted to the Christian family.

What had set apart certain American Christian Fundamentalist churches from others, as far back as the 1960s, slowly fostering their constant growth and eventually ensuring not only their survival but also their prosperity, was a more vivid vision of the future: they realized that children and youngsters, young adults and the elderly alike must all be persuaded to abandon outside attachments and urged to embrace the exclusive company of the faithful. “Make the children come to me!” could constitute the new logo of faith-based marketing, a most appropriate paraphrase of Jesus’s words (quoted in Luke 18: 15 -17): “And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.’” In line with Proverbs 22:6 – “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it”, promoters and enforcers of faith-based marketing have made sure that parents can make the choice to surround their children exclusively with Christian toys. They can easily find a wide range of stuffed teddy bears on-line, such as the Musical *Jesus Loves Me Bear* or the *Prayer Bear with Book and Backpack. Messengers of Faith* await the eager customers to choose between *Talking Jesus – Lord’s Prayer* (either an English or a Spanish version) and *Talking Jesus – Scripture* – which includes a small

colorful book, if they want their children to listen to Jesus telling his life story and quoting bible verses (the recording is only two-minute long and there is a convenient pause/restart button). A more active offer comes from the interactive *Tales of Glory* play-sets – *Noah's Ark*, *Jonah and the Big Fish*, *David and Goliath*, *Daniel and the Lion's Den*, *The Birth of Baby Jesus*, *Glory Galilee Boat*, *Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand*, etc. To these, one may add the *Tales of Glory* Spirit Warrior Action Figures that come with a mini-book (David, Samson, Goliath, Joshua, etc.), Bible-themed board books (*The Nativity*, *Noah's Ark*, etc.) and coloring books (*The Old Testament*, *Miracles of Jesus*, etc.).

Secularism can be kept at bay by making sure that Christian parents are supported in their efforts to share the faith with their offspring every hour of every day. Thus, spinoffs of secular commercial products that proved successful are targeted to young children. To replace the popular Superheroes (Batman, Spider-Man, Iron Man, Batgirl, Catwoman, etc.) buy the Almighty Heroes (Samson, David, Noah and Moses, Queen Esther and Deborah the Warrior). Similarly, God's Girls (dolls named Sarah, Abigail, Hannah, etc.), who state that they love praising God, set far better examples for children than Barbie Dolls and, when compared to the Dark Night, so does Bibleman, who constantly quotes Scripture in his attempt to fight Evil protected by the armor of God (the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the boots of peace, the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit): "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6: 11-17).

Believers and non-believers alike are urged to combine fun and faith at *The Holy Land Experience*, a biblical park and living museum whose visitors, dressed in modest attire, are invited to drop a prayer request at the Testimony Cross Prayer Garden and encouraged to buy snacks at the Fast Food Concessions to be found at this alcohol-free, smoke-free and vape-free site – the Christian counterpart of *Disneyland*. *The Experience* includes "a fun interactive time of Praise & Worship for the young at heart", "a live game show where YOU can test your Biblical knowledge" as well as live drama presentations such as *The Good Shepherd*, *Temple Praise*, *Out of Darkness*, *The Prodigal Son*, *JESUS: The Sacrifice*, etc. The members of the audience attending these live stage productions are cautioned as

follows: “we respectfully request that you remain seated until they are complete. All of our plays point us to Jesus, and could truly be the moment someone near you comes to know Jesus for the very first time. We don’t want any unnecessary distractions for anyone in the Church.”

Since pop-rock culture is believed to negatively influence impressionable teenagers, they need to be helped to steer clear of the Devil’s music. In the 1980s, for instance, following the rock revolution, churches recognized the danger posed by metal rock music lyrics, but did not fail to acknowledge the appeal of the genre on certain age-groups so, in order to make teens forget all about *Quiet Riot* or *Poison*, churches promoted Christian metal bands: *Barren Cross* – created in Los Angeles, California in 1983, *Bloodgood*, formed in 1984 in Seattle, Washington, whose name reminds us of the blood shed by Jesus Christ for our sins, *Whitecross*, from Illinois, formed in 1985, *Holy Soldier*, a Christian hard rock band created in the same year in Los Angeles, California and, probably the most successful of them all, *Stryper* the 1983 American Christian metal band from Orange County, California, named after the Scripture of Isaiah 53: 5: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed”. As Seth Andrews attested in his speech at Apostacon, their members always gave in to their urge to introduce Christ to their audience, so the performances had a strong evangelical focus and “they had Bibles with *Stryper*’s emblem on them and they chuck these New Testaments out into the audience. This was part of how they evangelized young people” (Andrews 2014, 5:10 – 5:22). To this day, Christian music festivals have been heavily advertised to encourage an ever wider range of people to take part: *Creation Northeast* and *Creation Northwest* – two four-day long outdoor Christian music festivals, *Ichthus Music Festival* in Lexington, Kentucky, and *Heaven Fest* in Denver, Colorado are only a few of the concerts on offer.

For avid readers, it is not only Christian versions of romance novels that are available, but also more captivating works, such as best-sellers authored by Frank Peretti, the 2013 recipient of the American Christian Fiction Writers’ Lifetime Achievement Award (ACFW), hailed as ‘a sanctified Stephen King’ (Hexham 1992, 156). Online video sharing platforms and social networking sites are just a click away: *GodTube* – *Broadcast Him* and *Faithbook* (a safe de-secularized prayer-filled alternative to Facebook).

The sports lovers have not been forgotten: CWF – *The Christian Wrestling Federation* is here for them. Here is part of their mission statement: “The CWF uses a unique evangelistic approach to embrace the youth of today. CWF Events are conducted in communities, churches, conferences, and festivals to spread the message of Jesus’ love. The Bible says we are to use unique and different ways to reach people for Christ. This is what the CWF is all about... reaching people in a unique way. With

wrestling's popularity at an all-time high, many people can be reached, and in turn, our goal is to convert them to Christ's love. The focus of the CWF is to win souls for Christ. Our passion is seeing the lost become saved. The CWF would love to come to your church or city and be a strong evangelistic tool for you."

As early as 1982, fitness aficionados could buy *The Firm Believer*, an exercise program featuring that day's most appreciated Christian music: The Mighty Clouds of Joy – *Jesus Is The Rock*, Al Green – *Hallelujah (I Just Want To Praise The Lord)*, Leon Patillo – *Saved*, Imperials – *I'm Forgiven*, Al Green – *His Name Is Jesus*, etc. At present, they can purchase the *Body Gospel* DVD Box Set, which has as a motto the following Bible verse: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13) and has each workout session open with a prayer. The more recent *Cardio Praise* with Karen Joy Allen (2010) visually delights its users with "backgrounds depicting God's creation and accompanying Scriptures" whilst they are busy doing each of the eight workout sessions on Cardio Gospel Praise music.

The above-mentioned examples mirror the veracity of statements like "everything I've ever learned about marketing, I learned in church" made by Andrea, one of the people featured in the documentary "*Get Them While They Are Young*" (The Thinking Atheist 2011, 1:55 – 1:58). Faith-based marketing employs the mechanics of the advertising industry to seduce and manipulate as many people as possible, regardless of their age, fomenting the religious indoctrination of young minds, taking advantage of the highly impressionable nature of children and of teenagers, ensuring that they become eager and tireless promoters of the dogma, future parents that, in turn, will bring their offspring in the midst of an ever-growing congregation. Since the employment of tactics like these is in breach of the traditional religious practices, such an expression of transcendence-seeking methods might seem to be the proof of a profound religious crisis, the desperate attempt to arrest the secularization of the contemporary world. But these instances of faith-based marketing may be viewed as crisis-related solely from "the perspective of the totalitarian spirit of religion based on a positive transcendence that claims an absolute truth" (Frunză 2011, 184). It is undeniable that the religious institutions of today are "only slightly capable of meeting the spiritual needs of individuals" and that we are witnessing a marked tendency of traditional religious institutions "to move their activity focus from the needs for meaning and internal development of individuals towards exterior forms, towards activities that are not directly related to spiritual life", which constitutes an attempt to both recover their influence and to boost their authority (Frunză 2011, 184-185). The degree to which such attempts have succeeded in the case of American Christian Fundamentalists is disturbing, given that these revivalist trends offer neither a novel apprehension of religiosity, nor a new-fangled conceptualization of the sacred and,

consequently, they “do not correspond to a tendency to rethink theology and religious practices so as to meet the needs of the individual of the postmodern society” (Frunză 2011, 185).

The concept of the sacred seen as “a structure of human consciousness” (Eliade 1991, 9) explains our irresistible fascination with the depths of transcendence, in the absence of which we become vulnerable because, as religious beings, we can only find and maintain our balance by taking equally long journeys of introspection, to match the outward ones through which we aim at finding happiness in the everyday life (Frunză 1999, 173). Religiosity implies the outward manifestation of interior fervor, so the inward feelings must be exteriorized in order for the religious act to gain ever increasing depth (Ionescu 1994, 99). American Christian Fundamentalists rely on this inherently human drive, and force the sacred into the profane in an attempt to give people the illusion that they can still apprehend hints of the sacred. They claim to be able to draw people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and their call to action is clear, specific and simple: pledge blind allegiance to the army of Christ, and vow to share the faith with the unchurched.

For fundamentalists, lifestyle evangelism and servant evangelism are not enough. The former method is based on living a pure life in accordance with the gospel and the latter involves doing simple acts of kindness in order to create faith-sharing opportunities, thus drawing others to Christ by personal example. Both are viewed as passive and often ineffective, because biblical evangelism requires sharing the faith by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in a coherent, consistent and active manner. Consequently, the two above-mentioned strategies need to be supplemented with conversational, relational or neighborhood evangelism and, most importantly, event evangelism, in order to reach out to more people. A biblical worldview can easily be developed by teaching children from a very early age that the Bible “provides a reliable, eye-witness account of the beginning of all things, and can be trusted to tell the truth in all areas it touches on” and that we can “use it to help us make sense of this present world” (answersingenesis.org). Ensuring that children and teenagers play Christian games, enjoy Bible-themed movies and books, listen to Christian radio and watch Gospel television channels, are sent to vacation Bible schools or to Jesus camps, attend Christian music festivals and use *GodTube* and *Faithbook* instead of their secular counterparts is the perfect scenario for promoting a single point of view on human existence. A unique perspective never to be challenged as long as those told from an early age that the Bible, “the history book of the universe” provides “the best explanation of the world’s geology, astronomy, and genetics” (answersingenesis.org) are sheltered from undesirable viewpoints, prevented from acquiring critical thinking skills and, thus, manipulated into believing only in the gospel. Even those seduced into joining Christian fundamentalist churches later, as adults,

generally undergo an extremely effective brainwashing process and, having lost all sense of reverence for scientific reasoning, are bound to the faith for life, especially since leaving such extremely close-knit communities is a daunting prospect, as it involves not only suppressing the powerful human craving for acceptance, but also forsaking the profound need for a sense of belonging.

As Sandu Frunză points out in his study on the mechanisms of the dialectic between the sacred and the profane and on Codoban's theory of postmodern religiosity, human existence is influenced, to a large extent, by a "seduction of communication". The manipulative powers that communication wields over contemporary individuals are indomitable, to the extent that the phenomenon of communication brings forth and fosters addiction, as it both creates and conquers reality through ideology, seduction and manipulation (Frunză 2011, 181). Communication is a force that moulds human behavior at both the individual and the societal level, yet in our globalized era it must no longer be approached from the theoretical perspective of structuralism, but rather from the one characteristic of an anthropology of communication uprooted from its formerly metaphysical nest and anchored into the realities of postmodern existence, which grants a higher degree of applicability to the approach (Codoban 2003, 123). Thus, when considered from the point of view of the anthropology of communication, seduction and manipulation can be "explained as the elements of an 'ostensive ideology', that is the contemporary ideology of advertisement" (Codoban 2003, 122).

Realizing that it is not enough to lure people in, that they must be determined to stay and to return, American Christian Fundamentalists understood the need to offer a Christian alternative to the worldly sponsored products and services and, thus, figured out how to extend weekend worship to almost all areas of daily living and how to encourage churchgoers to deepen their religious awareness and connection and to build a sense of community by enhancing the pleasure they take from their everyday encounters with like-minded individuals. Such strategies based on seduction and manipulation reveal the inner workings of an extremely well-adapted system, able to foster the consolidation of responsive and adaptable worship communities convinced that their entire existence is swayed by an unmanifest continually manifesting itself. As the examples of faith-based marketing analyzed above clearly show, this new paradigm of communication, which acknowledges the heavy reliance on advertising techniques normally employed by the media, is the key to a better understanding of the grip that certain religious denominations continue to have on the masses, despite the crisis that institutionalized religion is undergoing in contemporary times.

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