

Considerations on the paper “*Aplicații etice în publicitate: reinterpretări ale filosofiei sacralului [Ethical Applications in Advertising: Reinterpretations of the Philosophy of the Sacred]*” defended by Ph.D. student Cășvean Ioan Emanuel

Antonio SANDU¹

¹ Ph.D. prof. habil., „Ștefan cel Mare” University, Suceava, antonio1907@gmail.com, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6605-3453>

Abstract: *The doctoral thesis entitled “Aplicații etice în publicitate: reinterpretări ale filosofiei sacralului [Ethical Applications in Advertising: Reinterpretations of the Philosophy of the Sacred]”, developed by Mr. Cășvean Ioan Emanuel under the supervision of Ph.D. Prof. Mihaela Frunză at “Babeș Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, represents a scholarly endeavor of remarkable complexity and pressing relevance. The chosen topic, though considered somewhat unconventional for a philosopher or theologian in a profoundly secularized and hypertechnologized era, is fully justified as a natural extension and in-depth continuation of the doctoral candidate's initial research - focused on the analysis of the sacred – sacrum - in postmodernism.*

Keywords: *ethical applications in advertising; Cășvean Ioan Emanuel; philosophy of the sacred; review.*

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Introduction

The paper entitled *Ethical Applications in Advertising: Reinterpretations of the Philosophy of the Sacred*, developed by Mr. Cășvean Ioan Emanuel (Cășvean, 2025), aims to analyze the complex and controversial relationship between the sacred – the *sacrum*¹ - and the contemporary advertising, observing that many advertisements possess an overt or subtle religious substratum. The major objective of this research is to constitute a veritable forum for critical reflection on existing research in the field, identifying metamorphoses of the sacred and highlighting the ethical messages of advertising with religious content. The approach to the subject is necessarily pluri- or interdisciplinary, employing rigorous methods from philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, and art studies.

The doctoral candidate has correctly identified that religious elements are often inserted subtly into advertising endeavors through symbols or brief biblical narratives, combining historically or scripturally attested elements with those from the realm of the imaginary. It is notable the constant preoccupation with analyzing the mechanisms underlying advertising success, including through appeals to fundamental symbols from major religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism), capitalizing on audience familiarity.

The thesis is anchored in a solid theoretical framework, exploring ethical dimensions through the lens of the most relevant philosophical theories: deontology, which emphasizes honesty and respect for human dignity; utilitarianism, which evaluates actions from the perspective of maximizing long-term social benefits; and virtue ethics, which underscores social responsibility and empathy.

Reading the work reveals three essential merits that distinguish the thesis:

1. Originality and interdisciplinary character in analyzing metamorphoses of the postmodern *sacrum*

An indisputable merit of the work resides in the originality of the subject addressed and in its elaborate interdisciplinary methodology. The doctoral candidate explores not merely the presence of religious elements in advertising, but he understands this phenomenon as a reinterpretation of the philosophy of the *sacrum*. Through this perspective, the paper positions itself at the boundary between commercial communication and spiritual

¹ The nominative/accusative neuter singular form of *sacer* (lat.). Used as a substantive noun to refer to sacred things, rites, or mysteries.

sensibility. The analysis extends beyond confessional or strictly religious boundaries, integrating contributions from authors such as Jérôme Cottin (2022), who highlighted the "inflation of religious symbols" in the advertising domain.

The research identifies how the sacred (*sacrum*), though desacralized in postmodern society, continues to hide and camouflage itself mysteriously in advertising endeavors. This dynamic is explained through the permanent need for meaning-seeking in the re-enchanted world. The work explores how advertising revalorizes elements of classical culture and Christian art, appealing to ancestral archetypes and mythical thinking. It also investigates Professor Sandu Frunză's concept that advertising "constructs reality" (Frunză, 2023), becoming a veritable repository of the sacred (*sacrum*), in the form of imaginative constructions. This approach opens new research horizons at the intersection of theology, sociology, and philosophy of communication.

Elaboration and application of a critical and normative ethical framework

The second fundamental merit of the thesis consists in the detailed analysis of ethical dimensions in advertising and the effort to establish clear moral boundaries. The doctoral candidate acknowledges that, although advertising pursues economic-financial goals, ethics demands respect for principles such as truth and honesty. The paper critically analyzes the manipulative role of advertisements, emphasizing that manipulation, though often an economically efficient strategy, is criticizable and condemnable from an ethical perspective.

The research focuses on the ethical consequences of the interested instrumentalization of the sacred for profit, demonstrating that distortion, excessive simplification, or caricaturization of religious elements can offend the religious sentiments of communities. Particularly emphasized is the importance of protecting vulnerable groups (children, minors, persons with disabilities), showing that ethics must prevail over material gain. Through the presentation of extreme cases such as Benetton campaigns, the thesis illustrates the violent and juridical consequences of violating ethical norms and taboos.

Additionally, the work brings church advertising into discussion, offering a constructive perspective through which religious institutions can communicate ethically, using a warm and friendly tone (as in the "God Speaks" campaign), avoiding trivialization. This dual approach—critique of manipulation and proposal of ethical solutions—demonstrates the doctoral candidate's commitment to developing a healthy and equitable communicational environment.

Detailed analysis of archetypal religious symbolism (Red Bull and Angels case study)

The third major merit consists in the in-depth analysis of the use of archetypal religious symbols, exemplified through the detailed case study of the Red Bull brand and angel symbolism. The doctoral candidate demonstrates that the symbol of angels, present in the three major monotheistic religions, is appropriated by advertising to inspire trust, security, and protection. The Red Bull campaign utilizes the metaphor of wings, associated with freedom and transcendence of limits, suggesting an almost supernatural energy.

Through this case study, the paper demonstrates that advertising capitalizes on the emotional and rational efficacy of religious elements. The logic of this endeavor is highlighted: despite secularization, humans are attracted to advertisements with religious content because they activate humanity's innate religiosity. However, the ethical contradiction is emphasized: although the angel symbol is a herald of divine will in Scripture, in advertisements it is emptied of solemnity and transformed into a commercial instrument serving material interests, representing a diversion of its original meaning.

The paper also analyzes the storytelling strategy specific to advertising with religious substratum, where biblical and mythological narratives are combined (agglutinated) to achieve the commercial goal: attracting attention and prompting purchase action. The role of humor and the ludic in enhancing message reception is also acknowledged, though with the warning that these can lead to trivialization and blasphemy. Through these findings, the work contributes significantly to understanding how the sacred and profane interact in digital pop culture.

Conclusion

The work *Ethical Applications in Advertising: Reinterpretations of the Philosophy of the Sacred* makes a valuable and necessary contribution to research on socio-cultural and ethical phenomena of contemporaneity. Its interdisciplinary approach, depth of ethical analysis, and detailed case studies confirm the scientific quality of the work. The author Cășvean Ioan Emanuel has demonstrated excellent synthetic capacity, critical vision, and rigorous command of the specialized literature (philosophical, theological, and sociological).

The work represents a call to awareness of the profound impact that advertising messages can have on the collective mentality, encouraging balance between commercial creativity and respect for consumers' spiritual values.

Statement on the Use of AI Tools | *In the development of this article, the AI software Claude Sonnet 4.5 was used for copy-editing and translation into English.*

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