Schulz's Religion: Exploring Faith in the Mainstream Media Through the Peanuts Franchise

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SCHULZ’S RELIGION: EXPLORING FAITH IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA THROUGH THE PEANUTS FRANCHISE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an exploration of various theoretical and cultural issues surrounding depictions of religion and spirituality in mainstream entertainment media properties. Such portrayals cultivate particular cultural norms that dictate the conditions of public and private discourse on religion, and in this study, these issues are approached through a mixed-method study guided by the Peanuts franchise. The Peanuts franchise is a provocatively rich launching point for analysis of dominant media cultures, given its colossal success in the secular mainstream entertainment industry and its explicit references to and even affirmations of Christian theology. Throughout the study, the references to religion manifested across the various Peanuts media are tracked, catalogued, and analyzed – i.e., across the 75 television titles, global product merchandise, Charles Schulz's biographic history, and of course the nearly 18,000 Peanuts comic strips Schulz drew over a 50 year career. Based on theoretical foundations of cultivation theory, narrativity, and public sphere theory, a hybrid approach of social-scientific content analysis, rhetorical analysis, and historical archive research is employed (including original interview data from Schulz’s family and friends). The study demonstrates that while many entertainment media properties tend to reflect and reinforce a cultural public/private split in secularity/religion, rich opportunities for nuanced portrayals of religious belief and action are possible within a mainstream title.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It continues to be a true joy to research the subjects covered in this dissertation. I owe many thanks to many people who helped make this project possible. My family has provided unending encouragement and support – from my sister assisting in my tedious searches for an elusive word to my mother and father looking forward to the next chapter draft they might see.

A deep debt of gratitude is owed to Jeannie Schulz who put me in touch with “Sparky’s” family and friends, and who likewise offered her own time to talk about her wonderful late husband. The staff at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center were generous and inviting during my time in Santa Rosa, California, allowing me access to their holdings, and archivist Lisa Monhoff has been an irreplaceable resource long after I left Sonoma County. The many Peanuts fans that have corresponded with me by email are also to be thanked.

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CHAPTER 1

MEDIA AND THE RELIGIO-SECULAR PUBLIC SPHERE:

WHY PEANUTS MATTERS

“There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin.”
- Linus

The 2012 season opener of NBC’s subtly powerful family drama Parenthood gave viewers a glimpse into an often unseen side of the characters’ lives. As he returns home after a day at his recording studio, the free-spirited new father Crosby Braverman, played by Dax Shepherd, sneaks a peak into his young son Jabbar’s (Tyree Brown) bedroom. The sight he catches is not scandalous in the typical order of scandals – no drugs, violence, or sexual content is shown – yet the boy’s father is still caught off guard, and some home viewers may have been as well, given the subject’s rarity in mainstream media. As he looks around the corner, Crosby sees his son kneeling with his elbows on his hot air balloon sheets and his hands folded in prayer. As return viewers may remember, Crosby grew up with Sunday baseball, not Sunday church. Seeing his son praying, Crosby realizes that he is not comfortable witnessing his son’s unexpected spirituality. After Crosby and Jabbar’s mother Jasmine (Joy Bryant) have a chat with her mother Renee (Tina Lifford) who had taught Jabbar to pray, asking her to let the parents handle talking to Jabbar “about the big questions,” the episode closes this portion of the family’s religious thread by showing Crosby sitting with Jabbar, in a stereotypical scene of contemplation. Perched outside, looking at the stars, Crosby says to Jabbar, “Well I
know grandma told you what she believes in, and I thought maybe I should tell you what I believe. Well, I believe in you. You’re my number one guy. And I believe in your mom. And all of our family, my mom and dad, my brothers and sisters. And sometimes, like on a night like tonight, sitting under the stars with my son, eating delicious cookies, I think I’m pretty blessed, blessed by something, you know.” “Me too, daddy” says Jabbar, and the camera pans to the stars as the scene and the religious discussion end.

While this episode may wrap a rather complex issue of the challenges in a quasi-interfaith family too simply by the end of the 43 minute episode, it nonetheless broached a topic often avoided in television and other mainstream properties. Though religious affiliation and practice are common amongst the American public, neither seem to be common topoi for content creators in the mass entertainment industry. Or, perhaps more specifically, diverse and nuanced depictions of religious thought and experience are not common. Some titles, like Parenthood, occasionally trade in brief questions of religion, while others, like the now-syndicated Touched by an Angel, routinely use simple and generalized notions of faith to offer viewers an uplifting experience – an experience made possible by the engaging characteristic of the narrative drama. Still other mainstream properties maintain a more fluid engagement with religion, depicting faith and action with a range from mere presence to weighted pondering. FOX’s The Simpsons, for instance, has been recognized for its subversive religious content, and science-fiction shows like SyFy’s Stargate Universe and ABC’s Lost have woven interrogations of the divine into their storylines, yet the overall presence of religion remains rare.
As will be described in detail below, there is a massive statistical gap between the non-presence of religion in popular titles and the religious identity of American viewers. While 79 percent of Americans identify as religious, less than 6 percent of television characters can be identified as such. This void calls for continued investigation of the demonstrative expanse between mediated mainstream representations and individual religious perspectives, as mainstream media trends are both a symptom and cause of larger systematic splits in public and private norms. The rarity of religious reference then causes titles with provocative religious content to be not only increasingly salient but also potentially more impactful across the cultural landscape, calling for multi-layered research that circulates through a variety of questions and answers regarding the complex American religio-secularism. One such mainstream property to have incorporated unique conceptions of religious faith into its globally successful titles, spanning over half a century, is Charles M. Schulz’s Peanuts franchise. Religious content is often referentially noted in many biographical and cultural histories of Schulz’s work, but the intricacies and implications of those depictions have yet to be explored. Though recent biographies of Schulz have received much attention, the ways Schulz’s cross-media work informs the critic about the relationships between industry executives, content creators, and viewers regarding religious content have not.

Not typically the subject of scholarly inquiry, Schulz’s influential work has enjoyed significant popular study, even if the treatments leave more to examine regarding its religious components, and even if the treatments do not always enjoy unanimous support upon publication. In 2007, David Michaelis’s Schulz and Peanuts was published,
a New York Times bestselling biography of Peanuts creator Charles M. “Sparky” Schulz. In his lengthy rebuttal against what he saw as an ill-fitting, historically-adjusted-at-best/painfully-misleading-at-worst psychoanalysis of his father’s real life, son Monte Schulz questioned why his father’s story needed any alteration to be engaging. “Of course,” wrote Monte in a special edition of The Comics Journal, “one might also wonder why David feels it necessary to explain my father’s life analogically when he has already at hand the incredible story of a little boy who is given the name of a comic-strip character practically at birth – ‘Sparky,’ after Sparkplug in Barney Google – then grows up to become the most famous cartoonist of the 20th century and dies the night before his final strip appears in the newspapers.”

There is a compelling historical arc prepackaged into Schulz’s personal history, though studies in historiography do remind the scholar that any one retelling is always limited and incomplete, composed in as much of a narrative form as it is a factual recording of history. What Sparky’s son, an accomplished writer himself, was arguing for, however, was not necessarily a monolithic perspective on history, but rather a reasonable attentiveness to verifiability in historical artifacts. Without convincing rationale, and perhaps an explicit acknowledgement of the act, revisionary or radically analogic histories may exhibit hazardous limitations that render them undesirable, especially for those whose personal identity is intricately linked to the portrayal. The popularity of Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code, including a following of many fans who believe or at least suspect the that the author’s admittedly fictitious work is actually true, demonstrates the dangerous political and personal impact that captivating stories, embedded in a sense of historical accuracy can have within a society. In his
criticism of the popular history of his father’s life, Monte levels the claim against Michaelis that “the sins of omission truly drive the central error of this biography.”

This line of critique, however, bears open the tension within any historical treatment – all recountings, be they historical, biographical, or contemporary analyses, are limited by perspective, by access to information, even by word count. Within the specific context of Monte’s claim, one can understand his frustration, given the numerous chronological inaccuracies, frustrating citation tactics, and missing characters, like the family’s generous housekeeper Eva Gray who occupies a large place in the children’s memories but only one sentence in the 600 page tome. Michaelis’s work enunciates and defends a rather direct argument about Schulz’s depression and yearning for love, amassing an array (convincing in breadth, even if suspect in framing and detail) of moments in his historical narrative. Given his purposefulness in constructing his work, one can understand why Michaelis would eschew the family’s distaste for his thematic conclusions, declining to respond to the family’s numerous direct criticisms of the so-called “definitive” biography and contending that the portrait he painted was quite simply the one that his research revealed to him.

While Michaelis’s work offers many new insights into the life of Charles Schulz for the popular reader, it also is fraught with challenging aspects of argument construction and limiting research technicalities like citation and historical omissions. Monte Schulz’s detailed accounting of the limitations of Michaelis’s text allows the historian and popular fan to better approach the biography, but one should be wary to see it as a call for singularity. Circulating in and around the questions of Michaelis’s work are the questions
at the poles of historical accuracy – is biography a reliable record of fact or is it mere construction of narrative from a perpetually subjectively biased perspective? The answer this dissertation rests on is that with proper care, one can reasonably represent aspects of the past and present and deny others, though one must recognize that such a representation will always be limited by constraints of time, access, and perspective. More importantly, this dissertation is concerned with the way one makes meaning out of the details – meaning contingent upon the story told with the particular accumulation and arrangement of these facts, some altered, some omitted, others given preference. In truth, Monte Schulz, along with his brother, sisters, and Sparky’s second wife Jeannie, were not so much concerned about the factual details as a priori objects of truth, but rather about the meaning that was being drawn from and imposed upon a particular retelling of Charles Schulz’s life – the meaning that readers would largely absorb as true as they encounter such a seemingly authoritative work, originally authorized by the family, on the beloved artist. It was the attitudes and beliefs generated about their father and family that concerned them most, not whether or not Michaelis mistook 1969 for 1964 in a given anecdote.

This dissertation, then, is also not particularly concerned with righting any historical innaccuracies in the work of David Michaelis’s bittersweet text or other treatments of Schulz’s life and work, though that may happen along the way. Instead, it engages a concern parallel to the Schulz family’s concern over what meaning the public might draw from reading a perceptually singular text on the life of Charles Schulz. It will do so by using Charles Schulz’s work as a guide to explore an issue provocatively
intertwined within Charles Schulz’s life that is also often given in very singular glossings to the American public through media texts. The issue at hand is the portrayal of religious thought and action within popular American entertainment media. Charles Schulz was interested and active in theological thought, borne out in his biographical affiliations as well as in his creative works. The works serve as exemplary points of comparison and exploration within media environments that do not typically share the same approach of open affirmation exhibited by the Peanuts creator. This analysis will draw from particular historical contexts using multiple perspectives in its content analysis, archival exploration, and rhetorical inquiry. Though the American religio-secular public sphere is a nuanced intermingling of competing forces, traditions, and visions, mainstream American media has tended to portray religious thought and action as a narrowly limited part of social life, often omitting it altogether. As this dissertation will explain, those limited portrayals work recursively with larger parallel historical forces that have created a public/private split in secular/religious normativity. This split has pervaded the entertainment media which in turn reinforces the emptying of religious thought from the public sphere into only the private sphere through its restricted depictions across various mainstream entertainment properties.

As this chapter will begin to explain, demonstrated further throughout each subsequent chapter, Charles Schulz’s work functions as a useful access point to theoretical, historical, and contemporary analysis of the ways in which religious references operate within mainstream entertainment media. This chapter will also establish the historical and theoretical groundings for an understanding of the American
Religio-secular public sphere. The normative public secularity described will give further justification for the use of transdisciplinary paradigms and methods to study the contents and operations of various media texts. Such transdisciplinarity, as will be described, affords not only a form of triangulated study that can offer intricate insight, but it does so by marshaling a variety of perspectives, thereby compensating in part for the limitations of subjective authorship otherwise exacerbated by disciplinary tunnel vision. Following this chapter’s descriptions of the public sphere, the entertainment media’s impact, and the justification for Peanuts as the central access point requiring a transdisciplinary approach, the layout of the remaining chapters will be given, providing an overview of this study of portrayals of faith in the mainstream entertainment media.

***

Religion in the Public Sphere

Though the normative status of religion in the public sphere is guided by more than legal precedence, high profile court rulings since the mid-twentieth century have established strong functional boundaries that have propelled perceptual understandings of the acceptability of religion in public life. In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Engel v. Vitale that school-initiated prayer, even if non-denominational, was a violation of the First Amendment's protection against governmental establishment of religion. In 1982, a federal court ruled in McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education that creation-science was not a “science,” thus restricting the inclusion of intelligent-design theories
from the classroom. In 1987, the Supreme Court upheld the McLean findings in Edwards v. Aguillard, perceptually, even functionally, removing non-Darwinian discussions of origins of life from most public classrooms. In 1994, the NCAA issued restrictions on religious gestures in the end zone, only relaxing and “clarifying” their position after Liberty University (an evangelical Christian university that has often gone by the slogan “Politically Incorrect Since 1971,” the year of its founding, to highlight its incongruency with mainstream American culture) filed a lawsuit.\textsuperscript{15} In 2000, the Supreme Court found in Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe that student-initiated prayer in public schools was unconstitutional if it made use of any public resources, such as the school’s public announcement system. And yet, in 2011, the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute released one of many reports to be found in the daily news cycle addressing the “Mormon problem” facing Republican presidential hopefuls Romney and Huntsman. The study found that, of those Americans surveyed, 83 percent would be somewhat to entirely comfortable with a Catholic president, 80 percent with a Jewish president, 67 percent with an evangelical Christian president, only 60 percent with a Mormon president, and a sparse 37 percent would be comfortable with either a Muslim or an atheist president.\textsuperscript{16} The status of religion in American culture is complex, to say the least. While legal proceedings often result in codifying religion out of public arenas, individuals personally adhere to particularized religious import in their views of American society. One way of understanding this complexity is by viewing the American culture as being influenced by a pervasive public/private split in the norms of acceptability regarding secularism/religion. These are the terms by which religion is
often discussed in both legal and social settings – whether or not religion is “appropriate”
for public affairs, or if it is instead a private matter. While these boundaries are certainly
permeable and the content nuanced, this public/private lens provides one useful means by
which to approach contemporary and historical American culture.

Such discussion of public life has its roots in ancient academic traditions, with
Aristotle, Plato, and even those before them discussing the role of the citizen in the public
arena. Contemporary studies of publicity owe much to Jürgen Habermas’s foundational
1962 treatment of the public sphere. In this sweeping treatise, Habermas describes the
activities and structural attributes of publics across a variety of epochs – from feudal
courts to 19th century Europe and beyond. Of particular interest to him is what he
considered a 19th century bourgeois public sphere, characterized by a highly engaged
citizenry participating in rational critical debate. This debate, according to Habermas,
was afforded to the citizens by an increased amount of leisure time caused by new
infrastructures of capitalism. Individuals would spend their time substantively discussing
literary and political matters within salons and special societies. It even resulted,
according to Habermas, in architectural changes in the way homes were constructed so as
to afford a place for these discussions to unfold.17 For Habermas, this rational critical
debate was to be highly praised, foregrounding his later description of the ideal speech
situation.18 Such a scenario is allegedly an open space, without limitations of access, in
which merely the “force of the better argument”19 is to be the sole determining factor in
assessing a debate. The means by which individuals form public opinion, of course, are
vitally important, as explained by other influential figures like John Dewey. According to
Dewey, a degree of common knowledge needs to be achieved throughout the public by means of education along with reformed methods and conditions for public debate. Reformations should be historically contingent, flexible to meet the needs of minority and majority interests. Dewey’s perspective was a fundamentally pragmatic one, calling for “a method which proceeds on the basis of the interrelations of observable acts and their results.” \(^{20}\) The goal of such method is to solve the “problem of the public,” i.e., reshaping the “conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion” \(^{21}\) so that more than just the limited perspectives of a few controlling voices could be heard. Dewey contended that the public had become “lost” as it was becoming fractured by difference and influenced by detached experts. Similarly, Habermas argued that the public had lost its effective control in shaping public opinion because of the advent of mass communication products and practices. According to Habermas, an uncritical growth of capitalism gave way to advertising and sensationalized news stories that focused on a new consumer mentality. The focus on rational critical debate gave way to obsessions with commodities, thus leaving the public sphere needing to reassert itself with substantive discourse.

While Habermas's narrative provides explanatory power to the consumer culture of contemporary society, his historical and theoretical treatments are not without their detractors. Myer and Moors, for instance, are critical of Habermas for idealizing a notion of an identity-free public sphere. \(^{22}\) In his description of religious identity's relationship to this ideal public space, Habermas argues that while religious belief is not inherently wrong, it requires a certain “modernization,” whereby religious citizens are able to self-
reflexively challenge their own religious perspectives when engaging in public deliberations. This allows, according to Habermas, for a more open and liberalized public arena. Though his recent writings have made clear his desire for the inclusion of religious participants and perspectives in public affairs, his argument that “religious citizens must develop an epistemic stance toward the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the political arena” positions religious perspective as subservient to a secularizing norms of pluralistic public decorum prompted by the tenets of the contemporary liberal state that require “translation” of religious idioms prior to their acceptability. The implications, according to Yates, are that religious perspectives, while advocated on one hand, are actually subject to an unfair treatment, often singled out as needing public sterilization when other ideological positions are unconsciously accepted as normative. Also in critical response to Habermas, Rita Felski has also noted that conspicuously absent from Habermas's historical treatment is the presence of women. According to Felski, a revised history can locate the engagement of women in this period of literary debate, and that normative publics need to be conscious of a plurality of identities.

Criticisms of Habermas's work are many, but as Peter Dahlgren has articulated, the foundational notion of the public sphere provides a highly useful conceptual lens by which to understand the activities of the citizenry across a multiplicity of particular historical contexts. As such, Habermas has been instrumental in prompting an array of terminologies describing publics. Michael Warner's discussion of counterpublics continues to be dramatically important, explaining how the dominant public, the one that sets and exemplifies mainstream norms of acceptable belief and behavior, is often
challenged by oppositional communities. These other communities, or counterpublics, operate under norms incongruent with the dominant public and seek to effect change in the larger society. These changes may be approached through social institutions, or as Asen and Brouwer demonstrate, the counterpublic may be set in direct opposition to state action. Similarly, Nancy Fraser emphasizes an attention to “actually existing publics,” instead of mere theoretical constructs. In these groupings of real, historically situated people, Fraser argues that some communities form strong publics, characterized by opinion formation and deliberative/policy action, while others form weak publics, characterized by simple sharing of opinions and tastes. Fans of a book series, for instance, may comprise a weak public, while environmentalist groups may form part of a strong public. Some publics, as Squires extends through her discussion of African American communities, may also be described at times as enclaved. These publics operate under divergent norms from the mainstream/dominant public, but do not actively set themselves counter to its activities. Traditionally African American churches may be seen as enclaved strong publics, with distinctly active hierarchies and histories, divergent from mainstream culture, but not necessarily characterized by being set in diametric socio-political opposition to dominant practices.

The theoretical lexicon of publicity establishes a means by which to discuss American social life, but as Fraser contends, the theory calls for a description of actual activities within a group of real people. The future lays bright for more studies that rise out of an interest in the ways in which religion is perceived in actual American culture, and recent work has paved the way for such. Charles Taylor describes the American
context as one in which religion has been stripped from the public sphere, relegated to the private sphere. There has been an “emptying of religion,” he contends, as American culture has broken from previous theo-centric epochs, rendering religion no longer a socially essential norm. Taylor's argument is not that religious belief has decreased. It would be hard for him to hold such a position, given survey data that suggests high levels of religious belief and practice – according to PEW data, 73 percent of Americans identify as Christians (Table 1.1). Even further, 39 percent of Americans attend church (or other religious service) at least once a week (aside from weddings and funerals); 54 percent once or twice a month. Thirty-six percent share their faith or views on God monthly (23 percent weekly). Thirty-five percent read their Bible (or other holy book) at least once a week, not including during church services. Fifty-eight percent of adults report praying at least once a day outside of religious services (73 percent once a week). And two thirds of Americans surveyed report that religion is “Very Important” to their daily lives. It is not the case that Americans are necessarily increasingly irreligious. Instead, Taylor explains, religious belief and practice has become a private matter.

The legal cases described above demonstrate this move to privacy, and even the commonplace invoked by Linus in It’s the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown, that one should not talk about religion in public (“There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people,” says Linus, “religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin”) signals a resistance toward religious content outside of one’s private domain. In 2012, the PEW data recorded the largest number of “Unaffiliated” respondents to the religious identification survey since the organization began conducting the studies. In their report, the 2012
researchers extend the argument by Hout and Fischer\textsuperscript{36} that the increasingly controversial public politicization of religious affiliation may be a reason why individuals who may still be spiritual do not want to ascribe to a particular religious organization.\textsuperscript{37} An increase in the unaffiliated, one third of which still claims religion to be “Very Important” in their lives, may be a demonstration of this struggle between desirable enunciations of religion. As this project will explore, the dearth of religious characters on television also seems to reflect Taylor's description of the public/private religious split in American culture. While 79 percent of Americans self-identify as being religiously affiliated, only 5.8 percent of characters on prime time network television have identifiable religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{38} As chapter six will describe, one should not expect a perfected norm of representational correctness on television, but a 73.2 percent gap in correspondence is more than a small suggestion that certain public venues have a serious resistance to overt religious content. As will be explored below, such a significant variance in representation thus adds distinct import to those media properties that do include religion. Moments within mainstream properties that do reflect the otherwise representationally erased spiritual aspect of American life call upon the critic to investigate the social and formal relationships that can be uniquely questioned through those texts.
Major Religious Traditions in the U.S. | % Among All U.S. Adults
---|---
Total Religiously Affiliated | 79
Christian | 73
Protestant | 48
  White* Evangelical | 19
  White Mainline | 15
  Black Protestant | 8
  Other minority Protestant | 6
Catholic | 22
Mormon | 2
Orthodox | 1
Other Faith (Including Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, and other world religions) | 6
Unaffiliated | 19.6
  Atheist | 2.4
  Agnostic | 3.3
  Nothing in Particular | 13.9
Don’t know/Refused | 2

Total Percentage Represented | 100+ (due to PEW Center rounding**)

*Language of “White Evangelical” and “White Mainline” was used by the PEW Research Center to distinguish historically black protestant churches labeled as “Black Protestant” from other mainline and evangelical affiliations, not to describe these churches as comprised only of white congregations.

Table 1.1 Percentage of U.S. adults who self-identify with major religious traditions, according to a PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life 2012 report.  

Of course, one might contend that the need for a presidential candidate to be of a certain religion, or at least to publicly maintain some religious affiliation, would prove a persistent public dominance of religion. Over nineteen percent of American adults identify as religiously unaffiliated and there has never been a viable unaffiliated, atheist, or agnostic presidential candidate. There is a difference, though, in the peculiarity of national politics as an identity marker and a high stakes choice prompting appeals through religious shorthand. Taylor argues that such political necessities are merely vestigial remnants that “barely constitute such an encounter [with God] today” given the West's historical connections with religious belief. A split in survey data indicates that the American electorate is increasingly unsure if even national politics should be a
place for religious expression, with 38 percent saying there is too much expression of religious faith from political leaders and 30 percent saying there is too little. With this distancing between personal belief and public expression, it has become unsurprising, perhaps even uneventful, for instance, for a local school board member in New Hampshire to be agnostic or a neighbor in New Mexico running for city council to be otherwise religiously unaffiliated. National political culture may misconstrue the fact that for much of contemporary daily life, one no longer is under a mainstream social prescription to adhere to a particular set of religious tenets. In many ways (other than national elections), social norms ask one to keep those tenets to oneself. Miller argues, however, that dismissing these components of contemporary culture would be erroneous, crying foul for Taylor's use of the phrase *a secular age*. Instead, Miller's advancement of the revised *religio-secular age* may better identify the nuanced pluralities. The comparative trends of the deep South, for instance, push against some of the mainstream trends (though not completely, despite stereotype, and often in counter-public fashions). In the edited collection *Media and Religion* by de Vries and Weber, Jacques Derrida also reminds the cultural critic that religion is continually re-manifested in other facets of daily life (he explains this through the example of media, whereby the religious desire for immediate connection to an Other inevitably necessitates and employs mediation itself — e.g., the desire to connect to the divine is re-articulated in an inability to ever see an image on television as something other than the “real thing”). It is not that American religious belief and practice has disappeared, but rather that socially there has emerged a public/private split in religious acceptability.
This split has been caused by a number of factors (one cause and product of which is the resistance toward religious inquiry in the public university, which shall be returned to later in this chapter). Taylor explains that depersonalized forms of science in the early twentieth century helped to secure the secularization of the public sphere. Likewise, Gieryn, Bevins, and Zehr\textsuperscript{44} contend that a sort of “professionalization” of the sciences, aided by governmental subsidies for research, established evolutionary, secular scientific inquiry as the norm, isolating religious, faith-based belief within the private sphere. With the development of media technologies, Rosenthal contends, many religious communities broke from remaining perceptual ties to mainstream culture, ultimately seeing the church as a “sanctuary” from the world.\textsuperscript{45} This mid-century moment, described further in chapter four, left the mainstream entertainment media in a largely secularized position, owing much to the values of the society’s Christian heritage, but referencing explicit religious belief and action quite infrequently. Such was not only the product of the retreat of Christianity from the public sphere, but was also a reinforcing cause.

\textit{The Role of Entertainment Media}

\textit{Theoretical Perspectives – An Expanded View of Cultivation}

George Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli have described television as a “centralized system of storytelling.”\textsuperscript{46} These stories are characterized by a comparatively restricted set of depictions. Repeated exposure to patterns of limited portrayals has the strong potential to cultivate certain conceptions of the outside world in the minds of
viewers. This is increasingly true as viewers intake more media. The average American views five hours of television a day while also often engaging countless cross-media variations of his or her favorite properties. As a primary source of entertainment content, television serves as an important nexus for contemporary cultural texts and is thus a guiding medium for understanding the context for this study. It is not only the touchstone for many Peanuts fans, as will be described in chapter three, it also sets much of the tone for mainstream entertainment culture and connects private individuals through their collective viewing habits of common media. As a primary mass medium, television remains ubiquitous and dominant in American culture – the average American watches over 33 hours of television per week; 97 percent of homes have a television (a percentage stable for roughly half a century), and the average household has at least 3 television sets. While commanding twenty percent of the average American’s day (nearly one third of one’s waking hours), television houses annual gala events for most other major entertainment industries (e.g., the Oscars and the Grammys) while also reaching into the minutia of other parts of entertainment culture (e.g., merchandise collection through the 2012 season’s shows Toy Hunter on The Travel Channel and Collection Intervention on SyFy). These other industries each have unique impacts on public and private practices (to be discussed across this dissertation as prompted by the Peanuts franchise), and television serves as a source of guiding reflection – a point of intersection that cultivates in varying degrees particular norms of how one might interact with these other products.

Though Gerbner’s cultivation theory is often employed in studies of the news media, fictionalized entertainment content, with its overtly narrative structure, is a critical
part of television’s cultivative power. Viewers often relate to their favorite characters as friends – as guests they invite into their homes each week. When shows are canceled, or characters depart, viewers often react with dramatic emotions as a member of their extended televisual family will no longer be with them. The portrayals of character-types across the television medium, across what Nancy Signorielli calls “our culture's primary storyteller”\(^{49}\) have the potential to greatly influence viewers, and thus the actual publics that these real people compose. Narrativity theories can thus draw out important components of the cultivation perspective. A key feature for publics, as Warner explains, is that they are formed, in part, through the historical accumulation of texts – and fictional narrative texts should be included as much as any other forms.\(^{50}\) Mediated stories, in the shape of novels, comic strips, and especially the alluring moving-images of character-friends projected through the television screen in the living room, provide ample examples of contemporary connective texts by which publics are (at least in part) formed. Individuals in Minnesota are connected with strangers in New York through their simultaneous engagement with the same stories – the same friends. It is also interaction, says Dahlgren, that creates a public,\(^{51}\) and the Minnesotans not only have commonalities of interaction with New Yorkers through their synonymous viewings, but they are also having interactions with characters that do in fact influence them as individual viewers. While most adult viewers would hate to admit that they are influenced by television characters, Meyer and Moors caution against thinking that any given audience member actually enacts great power against the influence of the pervasive language of television portrayals.\(^{52}\) And again, as Derrida’s thick view of mediation
reminds the critic, no matter how much television viewers seem to learn about television, there is still a lingering interpretation of it as “real.”

According to Gregory, these characters are real. They may actually be more real than the individuals a viewer may interact with physically in person. This is because in narratives, plot lines are often distilled with clear teleological trajectories, guiding morals, and the attempts at ethical influence. The characters themselves are made accessible through a multitude of narrative devices, such as an omniscient descriptive voice or view, and the characters do not erect the same walls between themselves and viewers in the ways that even close personal friends guard themselves from one another. The characters offer individual companionship to mass audiences as millions of viewers each want to be either with or like the character on screen. The former is accomplished through the mediating wonders of tele-technology, and the latter is approached in varying conscious and unconscious ways described in part by Gerbner et al.’s cultivation theory. An engagement garnered through the presence of appealing characters amplifies the cultivative potential of a given media text shared amongst members of a public.

Walter Fisher articulated his narrative paradigm as an explanation of how individuals assess stories (and how they should more critically assess stories). Essential to his paradigm are the concepts of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Coherence refers to the story's ability to make sense within its own construction – do the pieces fit together. Fidelity refers to the story's ability to match up with the real, lived-experience of the reader. Stories that seem incongruous with a reader's experience may be perceived as improbable or inappropriate. If mediated narratives are potent ways by which
individuals experience character-friends, it seems that the reverse process of narrative assessment would be true as well. As viewers experience (or do not experience) certain realities within their daily narratives, perceptions, as cultivation theorists would contend, will be engendered regarding the acceptability or appropriateness of particular aspects of the “real world.” Experience gives individuals the ability to judge the coherence and fidelity of other stories. Mass media provides viewers with experience beyond their daily lives through immersion in engaging character lives that offer escapist, therapeutic, and simply entertaining content. That mediated experience, especially when the perspectives experienced are routinely of a limited type, will then form part of the process by which individuals judge the appropriateness of activities in their daily lives. The more one sees a certain portrayal on television, the more normalized it becomes to accept that position outside of television. Even when merely trading political barbs, conservative Bristol Palin demonstrated a popular understanding of how a culture’s stories impact that culture’s trends, suggesting that President Obama’s deferral to his daughters’ experiences regarding his 2012 reversal on gay marriage policy was “merely reflecting what many teenagers think after one too many episodes of *Glee*”\(^56\) (a social impact that the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation recognizes, generating an annual “Where Are We on TV” report on portrayals of LGBT characters and issues).\(^57\) As it relates to this dissertation, the ways in which perspectives on religious thought are shaped through entertainment media will be of central concern, especially in the ways that cross-media resistance to overt religious messages has sustained a public/private split in religious belief.
Part of the way in which narratives engender particular normative postures is by routinely framing issues, peoples, and practices in restricted fashions. As Goffman described, the language surrounding a particular issue has a way of shaping the perception for viewers.\(^5^8\) Though the term “framing” is often used in loose and varying manners, according to Entman, media portrayals clearly have the power to shape the way particular problems and possible solutions are conveyed through visual and verbal tactics that cue audiences to perceive of the content in a particular way.\(^5^9\) In his 1980 text *The Whole World is Watching*, Gitlin describes how particular assumptions about appropriate responses to a situation are constrained and perpetuated through framed media depictions. In his case, the political group *Students for a Democratic Society* was cast in a polarizing light in the media, with appropriate responsive actions typically offered only in terms of compromise. According to Gitlin, this then guided social perceptions such that compromise was often seen as the most appropriate response to the conflict despite the possibility that one side may have stronger arguments than the other.\(^6^0\) The inclusion, exclusion, and varying emphasis of options guide perceptions of appropriate action. Eliminating one alternative is a powerful strategy in diminishing its impact. This is why commercial branding is so important – competitors know that consumers need to be able to recognize their product in order to consider purchasing it. The same is true for social actions and entertainment media content. As Kuypers explains, media framing makes certain elements more salient than others, which in turn effects audience perceptions of what is important and appropriate.\(^6^1\) The way in which religion is framed across media objects should certainly be seen as a contributing factor in the historical and
contemporary trends that push against religious publicity. As these trends have become historically pervasive in American culture, they then exert pressure back on the mainstream media producers who wish to court mass audiences – a struggle in agenda building that will be discussed in chapter five. As will be described throughout the exploration of religion through the *Peanuts* franchise, even seemingly innocuous media properties exist in a self-feeding recursive cycle of audience impacts and industry resistance toward religious content.

*(Limited) Studies of (Limited) Religious Portrayal*

A growing body of media studies literature has explored the ways in which entertainment and news media sources have portrayed religious belief and action. This subfield of media scholarship studying religious portrayals has developed promisingly over the past decade, covering a wide assortment of topics from contemporary music trends to emergence of online churches. This dissertation will likewise explore a select array of topics, guided by the media in which *Peanuts* is found – the touchstone television programs, a half-century of foundational comic strip source material, and a flood of global product merchandise. Because the television episodes are a primary access points for *Peanuts* audiences as well as the cultivative and intersectional qualities of television, studies of television portrayals of religion provide a foundational understanding for the cultural and scholarly contexts from which this dissertation draws. Hit filmmaker Tyler Perry, 2011’s “highest earning man in Hollywood,”

62 said in 2009
that a key struggle for content creators is the industry’s resistance to Christianity on the screen. According to Perry, “mention Jesus Christ and [the studios] don’t want to deal with you.” Perry's highly lucrative career may make one skeptical of his tales of industry rejection, but the reluctance toward religion in the media is not simply a skewed perception from one industry star. The media studies literature suggests that a real resistance exists.

Large portions of the literature investigating religion and the media have been devoted to two strands of inquiry – coverage of religion by the news media, and religious communities' uses of media technologies. For example, in a study of religion-related news coverage, Bolce and De Maio concluded that the way news reports framed certain religious perspectives contributed to negative perceptions held by viewers. While other studies have demonstrated the broader difficulties in responsible news media representation of a given demographic, such as studies by Entman and Dixon, Azocar and Casas which have found that news media privileges aspects of white identity over African American identity, Bolce and De Maio’s research focused on coverage of what the news media outlets in their sample referred to as “Christian Fundamentalism,” or more generally understood as the conservative Christian right (not merely the small fringe “fundamentalist” sects like outlier Westboro Baptist Church). Their findings indicated that in the news reports involving the so-called “Christian fundamentalists,” there were unfair linkages to militancy and intolerance, painting a picture that Bolce and De Maio likened to reports that unfairly associate African Americans with poverty and crime. To demonstrate that these media depictions are powerful, groups of viewers and
non-viewers of the news reports were surveyed to determine their subsequent perceptions of “Christian fundamentalists.” Heavy viewers of the news coverage reported more unfavorable views of the Christian community than other viewing groups. These higher perceptions of Christian intolerance, according to Bolce and De Maio, are cultivated by the “anti-fundamentalist” news coverage. They also concluded, based on temperature-studies of the conservative Christian traditions in question, that the negative perceptions of heavy viewers were incongruous with the actual views held by the Christian communities, demonstrating the power of the news media to shift perceptions away from lived experiences to the limited framing provided to audience.66 Similarly, Borchert found that in the early 1980s, news media struggled with the same tendencies of portraying religious issues in restricted fashions that preference one religious perspective over another. Through a wealth of news coverage devoted to literal interpretations of biblical doctrines discussed in the Southern Baptist Convention (even if from news outlets not typically sympathetic to the “far right wing of the SBC”), Borchert concludes, more moderate views toward textual interpretation of issues before the SBC were denied political capital as the views were eliminated from the public dialogue happening in the press.67

The practice of journalism, though, does not afford reporters an easy interaction with religious topics. As Schmalzbauer explains, journalists are faced with a limited set of options in determining how to handle religion, especially when it intersects with their own spiritual beliefs. A reporter may, for instance, bracket off issues of religion from issues of the news. This approach embodies the pseudo-Habermasian notion that one
should (and can) abandon one’s personal religious identity and perspective when engaging public matters. According to Habermas, religion is not something that must be kept out of the public domain, but rather an embracing of liberal pluralism places limits on enunciations that must be translated to be acceptable, requiring an intersubjective social tolerance that allows for a rational, objective stance toward topics of public concern (a requirement of pluralism or relativism is described further in chapter six).

The practical applications of such liberalism, however, typically follow a mode of religious privatization. In practice, for example, Schmalzbauer explains that reporters often set aside their own faith beliefs and stories of religious import may be as well. In other situations, reporters may attempt to translate religious issues into the vernacular of the typical news stories, offering a sort of verbal bridge between events surrounding sacred ideals and the everyday secular reporting that fills the page. The task becomes increasingly complex for journalists as some fear that being branded as “religious,” even if by simply covering the religious beat, may skew the perceptions of their “objectivity.” That said, while studies involving news media portrayals of religion may occasionally highlight flawed coverage or practitioner double-binds, few reasonably crafted analyses would argue that news media should ignore religion, or even that it could. Even if explicit religious topics may occasionally get omitted or skewed, according to Silk, it is the very values and ideologies of the Western religious heritage that animate the stories that grace the front pages and the evening headlines. Stories focused on tragedy, justice, and retribution seem to demonstrate Silk's argument.

In addition to the body of literature demonstrating the tendencies toward limited
depictions in the difficult situation of news reporting, studies of religious organizations’ uses of media technologies comprise a significant portion of the religion and media scholarship. An especially large body of cases has been generated in recent decades in evangelical church use of contemporary media technology. Studies, for instances, have focused on the significant genre of Contemporary Christian Music rising out of the 1980s. Others have explored religious communities’ productions of television programming, from televangelism to agenda-based talk shows. Critiques and explanations of such media use by religious communities run the full spectrum from celebratory to cautionary, and demonstrate a healthy development in the academic studies of religion and media.

There is a third category of literature on religion and media, however, that holds the promise for expanded study, and that is most central to the study undertaken in this dissertation. Such research focuses on representations and misrepresentations of the religion in the narrative mainstream entertainment media. Television and film studies comprise a portion of this body of research. This dissertation’s use of Peanuts as an access point will add to the understandings of the ways in which religious references work within the television medium, the entry-point medium for Peanuts fans which is fraught with censorship concerns and dependent upon audience response, and will also expand television studies of religion and media by harnessing the power of the Peanuts franchise as a guide to the interconnected media forms and contexts that television inherently relies upon and feeds. Understanding the ways in which religion has been portrayed on television establishes a starting point for this exploration of religious
reference, and the ways in which other forms (like comic strips, licensed merchandise, and fan creations) tend to incorporate religion will be explored in subsequent chapters, providing a rich view of the diverse yet highly interconnected American entertainment media culture’s approaches to religious content.

One criteria by which researchers have sought to understand television portrayals of religion is exposure. This is the extent to which references to religious belief, practice, and character identity are merely present within the media. Studies of religion on television indicate that religious reference is routinely not present within mainstream properties, but instead is largely invisible. When it is visible, it is often in very limited fashions. A study conducted by Skill, Robinson, Lyons, and Larson is foundational on this point. In their study of prime time television, the researchers viewed episodes across the major broadcast networks in 1990 (ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX), viewing 100 episodes in total. Each episode was coded for references to religious belief or practice by counting communicative acts, both verbal and nonverbal. For instance, characters taking communion, vocally praying, or making the sign of the cross were counted and categorized according to a thorough set of categories. Coders paid particular attention to determining the religious affiliation of characters, then coding for salience (importance to the storyline), valence (positive-negative portrayal), and context (humorous or serious). Across the 100 episodes, religious characters were almost non-existent. Of the 1,462 characters coded, only 5.6 percent were religiously affiliated. Even further, 46 percent of the religiously affiliated characters were found across only three episodes (one episode featured a large gathering of nuns). Skill et al. conclude that critics may have
justification in their frustration with the media, as the mainstream studios have “fictionally ‘de-legitimized’ religious institutions and traditions by symbolically eliminating them from our most pervasive form of popular culture.” In 2005, Clarke’s similar study confirmed a continuation of this trend of non-presence, determining that only 5.8 percent of prime time characters on the seven networks (at that time including ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, WB, PAX, and UPN) could be identified as religious. Even further, of that 5.8 percent, only a total of 2.0 percent were coded as “devout” – which was operationalized minimally as being “engaged in some form of religious behavior” as opposed to the 3.8 percent of characters who were merely “nominally” religious through mere verbal or visual attribution.

Contrary to the Skill findings, however, Clarke’s study demonstrates that religious characters had become more prominent when present, with 81.3 percent of religious characters considered major characters in the episode and only 3.1 percent inserted as background characters (the Skill study found only 18 percent of religious behaviors to be central to the story). As chapter six will explore in relation to particular television shows that share similar nuanced openness found in Charles Schulz’s personal theology and creative Peanuts oeuvre, unique moments of prominent and nuanced religious storylines have emerged in various shows at various historical moments, offering promise for those whose identity is uniquely tied to religious belief, for those wishing for television to prompt complex questions about faith, and for those interested in chipping back against the public-private split in American religio-secularism. The statistical evidence generated by the Clarke and Skill studies, however, makes clear that mainstream media, at least as
reflected by television properties, is typically empty of such overt religious content.

In 2006, one year after the Clarke study was published, the conservative Parents Television Council published an analysis of 2,200 hours of television from the six major broadcast networks (CBS, ABC, NBC, FOX, UPN, WB). Religious references were coded, and the research team found that religion was referenced only once every 1.6 hours, with many of those references being very brief, casual references such as slang uses of “God” or “hell,” or even Lisa Rinna saying on ABC’s Dancing with the Stars that, “some higher power came in and started dancing through me.” The Parents Television Council, motivated by particular ideological interests, explicitly argue that such minimal exposure is markedly insufficient, citing a Zogby poll that found that the majority of Americans would like more portrayals of religion on television. Not all programming was created equal, however, as the study also indicated that reality TV across these networks had a statistically higher rate of references to religion, the Parents Television Council urging network executives to embrace those as examples of successful integration of religion within entertainment media.

Certain shows have historically focused more on religious matters than others, with some programming being centered explicitly on religious contexts (e.g., The Flying Nun, Touched by an Angel, and Joan of Arcadia). Just as in the Skill study where one episode contained a group of nuns that shifted the statistical results, these religious programs make it possible for content analysis to actually over-represent the number of religious references in the majority of television programs. Separating them from the typical television program, Wolff’s historical analysis explores the peculiar aspects of
eight church-centric programs from the 1960s to the 1980s. Within such programming, though, the portrayals, according to Wolff, may be present, but are still routinely restrictive in their limited depictions of religious thought or action. Mostly not present were Protestants, as seven of the eight programs analyzed from the time period were devoted to Catholic characters. Also not present were the laity, as the clergy were the primary characters. This echoes the Skill et al. finding that almost half of the religious characters found in primetime were clergy. Additionally not present, according to Wolff, were rural religious practitioners, as the programs were focused on urban religious centers. These depictions, for Wolff, do not match up with even a meager understanding of the historical religious life in America. Though present, these religious characters were conceptually limited and demographically flattened.  

A case study by Engstrom and Valenzano animates Wolff’s assessment of the media landscape. In a study of the CW network show Supernatural, Engstrom and Valenzano found that the title’s reflections of American religious life are decidedly limited via an over-reliance on a simplified use of Catholic clergy. The show, premised on two brothers waging supernatural warfare against spiritual powers, misses opportunities, according to the study, to explore the breadth and depths of religious belief and practice. Though the premise of the show permits, even invites, exposure to a vast array of religious individuals and themes, it clings to a depiction of Catholicism that, for Engstrom and Valenzano, does not match US Census Bureau understandings of American religious identities. The PEW study confirms their census data, indicating that 51.3 percent of Americans identify as Protestant, more than twice as many as the 23.9 percent
who identify as Catholic. The Skill et al. study likewise found that Catholic characters were more frequent than Protestant characters. Protestants, who were rarely identifiable by denomination, made up 1.4 percent of total coded characters while Catholics were over twice as frequent at 3.5 percent. The Clarke findings, however, differed from these results, finding only a minority representation of Catholic characters, which Clarke suspects may be a result of scandalized reports of abuse from particular members of the Catholic clergy during the season he coded, potentially making the denominational specificity too taboo to be useful in the episodes. If the trend has moved away from stereotypical views of Catholicism, studies have yet to bear this truth out, and the iconography present in many shows premised on the occult, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Supernatural* (Figures 1.1-1.2) has retained the narrative currency of simplified gothic Catholic imagery and character type. These join a handful of other routine simplifications, including the African American gospel woman, the narrow-minded Christian zealot, and the deceived cult member.
Figure 1.1 In the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 2003), Caleb (Nathan Fillion), the minion of The First Evil garbed in the iconic guise of a Catholic priest, gouges out the eye of fan-favorite character Xander Harris (Nicholas Brendon).  

Figure 1.2 In the season three opener of *Supernatural* (CW, 2007), demon hunter Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) holds Lust (Katya Virshilas), one of the seven deadly sins, in a tank of holy water blessed by the presence of a rosary.
Beyond an interest in characters’ religious identity and action, some have argued that such overt, salient references might at times be unnecessary, or misleadingly unimportant, given that religious ideologies are pervasively rearticulated through implicit features across the mass media landscape. Claussen, for example, has argued that traditional religious norms are reintegrated and contested in relation to sexuality across media content, and Morgan has explored the ways in which Western visual culture has a long history with intertwining interests in imagery and religiosity. According to Engstom and Semic, an implicit integration of sacred heritages may be true for Catholic and Protestant religious wedding customs displayed on television that audiences may not need overtly referenced given prior understanding of the ritual. Even if there are historically religious foundations and embedded religious shorthand across media texts, however, a lack of overt reference still seems to be out of joint with data on Americans' religious beliefs and practices reflected in PEW data. The salience of religious references (only one often-minimal/casual/slang religious reference every 1.6 hours, according to the Parents Television Council) is thus not reflective of the personal beliefs and lived practices of the viewing audience, leaving open a wide array of content typically unexplored through these media narratives.

Even if the portrayals of religion are limited and frequently unimportant, a more general category of *depiction* often undergirds studies of religion in the media. This category seeks to understand the particular manners in which religious references are exhibited. The Skill et al. study, for example, foundational for its scope, coded the religious references for their valence – their overall positive or negative depiction of
religion. According to the study's results, portrayals of religion trended slightly more negative (38.7 percent negative; 28.7 percent positive). The Parents Television Council reported similar findings, with 35 percent of references negative and a close 34 percent positive. These results shifted depending on the timeslot, with 8pm shows having comparatively more positive references than 9pm, and 9pm more than 10pm. In no timeslot, however, did positive references ever outnumber negative references. For the Parents Television Council, even a slight negative trend is worthy of criticism, again given the Zogby poll indicating that a majority of viewers would like to see more positive portrayals of religion on television.

As mentioned above, the depictions are often demographically skewed, with many stories relying on stereotypical depictions of Catholic clergy. In his review of the Keanu Reeves’ demon hunter movie *Constantine*, film critic Roger Ebert reflected, “Strange, that movies about Satan always require Catholics. You never see your Presbyterians or Episcopalians hurling down demons.” The laity, especially Protestant laity, as Wolff, Skill et al., and Engstrom and Valenzano found, are not typically depicted as a salient, even important part of the American religious fabric. According to the Parents Television Council, the Protestant laity were depicted most negatively within the study’s sample. Even within the Catholic clergy, however, Wolff finds there to be a missed opportunity with the depictions, as the life of the clergy member is cast as highly practical, logistical, even institutional. The irony, for Wolff, is that though it is the clergy member on the screen, what is missing is a portrayal of more contemplative thought. For Maddux, however, it is within this practical orientation that one can see encouraging diversity
within media portrayals of religion. In her rhetorical analysis of several church-centric media texts including the television show *7th Heaven* and the film *The Da Vinci Code*, Maddux argues that while portrayals of practical, logistical civic participation are highly gendered, there is marked diversity amongst the depicted opportunities for contemporary citizens that can provoke nuanced consideration of the intersections of politics, gender, and religious belief for viewers. To be clear, Maddux is not arguing that all of the gendered portrayals are positive. For instance, she contends that *The Da Vinci Code*’s reductionist portrayal of feminine domesticity forecloses opportunities for societal engagement. Balancing that out, however, is a range of options, such as *7th Heaven*’s portrayal of feminized community outreach. If part of the goal is representational diversity in order to match the opportunities in the lived-experience of viewers, Maddux sees great strength in the religiously oriented program’s wide views on religious civic life. Maddux’s work takes an important turn in studies of religion and media, allowing the references to provoke conversation about what impacts they may have on audiences not solely based on their representational correctness, but by what discussions they can elicit – an approach critical to a healthy exploration of media content, says Ed Schiappa (to be discussed further in chapter six).

It should be noted that while the studies described above primarily focus on American Christianity (as will be the case throughout the dissertation as Schulz’s religious references are almost entirely Christian), the field of media and religion is highly diverse, exploring international contexts and a multiplicity of non-Christian religions. This broader topography is useful to mention, as it forms a more expansive
understanding of the context of American mainstream media analyzed in this dissertation. Within mainstream American media, non-Christian religions are even more underrepresented than dominant Christianity. While the dominance of Christianity may seem understandable, given the statistical data on the dominance of Christianity amongst Americans’ personal beliefs and practices, the dearth of religious portrayals may make it comparatively more difficult to locate non-Christian religious characters at all. The comparative obscurity of these characters, however, including the lack of certain religious public knowledge shorthand that writers can rely on, may make those characters stand out (in useful and problematic ways) at times. In fact, the Skill study found 12.19 of the religious characters to be of non-Christian identities, and the more recent Clarke study found 18.6 percent of religiously affiliated characters to belong to religions other than Christianity (including Buddhism, Judaism, religious cults, and the occult). Though Engstrom and Semic have noted potential for religious diversity found in some reality programming, portrayals on non-Christian religions can of course suffer from the same flattening stereotypes that plague any identity group on television. Diffrient, for instance, has noted how new religious movements have been systematically depicted through narrow views of cult behavior – either through the naïve and comical or the psychopathic and dangerous. Even further, an added difficulty for diverse portrayals of non-Christian religions is the way in which many prominent American rituals have ties to Christianity, making it difficult for non-Christian religions to gain cultural traction. In the context of Christmas, for instance, Shandler says that contemporary Judaism has been forced to deal with the “December dilemma,” finding ways to offer media to its community to substitute
for the cultural emphasis on Christmas – a holiday with which Judaism not only does not identify, but which happens to fall during the same period as Hanukkah. This has resulted in a market for Hanukkah greeting cards that may not have otherwise existed were there not a direct competition with the dominant mediated Christianity.\textsuperscript{93}

Internationally, the religious issues with the media obviously changes from one context to another. In South Africa, for instance, airtime is so highly valued that marginalized religious groups lodge legal claims based on human rights codes in order to stave off further violent marginalization caused by a lack of airtime.\textsuperscript{94} In the war-torn Maluku region of Southeast Asia, on the contrary, journalists explicitly remove religious identifiers from news stories in order to avoid inciting violent rivalries. The irony is that increased vagueness in news reporting has increased panic and fear amongst the citizenry, thereby increasing the potential for violence.\textsuperscript{95} Likewise, the violence possible in Middle-Eastern cultures, where religious dissent (even so-called religious “diversity”) can be met by literal stoning, creates a highly different cultural context than the comparatively liberal American scene. The possibility for hostility over controversial religious media was borne out tragically in the 2012 rocket attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya which killed three staffers and an American ambassador; the Islamist militants responsible for the attack used a 14 minute video posted on YouTube slandering the Prophet Muhammad as a scapegoat for the violence.\textsuperscript{96}

There are distinct cultural differences that have allowed for the references to religion in the United States, which, while typically flattened and invisible, also span the gamut from blessings to blasphemy. Certain differences between many Middle-Eastern
contexts and the United States are clear, but the European media context may provide a more temperate counterpoint by which to better understand the American media setting in which mainstream religious representation struggles but survives. According to Morán, several key differences distinguish the American climate from its European counterparts. The legal history behind each has shaped two different environments regarding religion on television. Across Europe, anti-blasphemy laws prohibited anti-religious references for many years. These were especially enforced in the context of state-religions. The result was limited portrayals of religion, and especially few negative portrayals, for fear of state action, though marginal unofficial religions were less protected. In the wake of the Holocaust, many laws prohibiting anti-Semitism were enacted, thereby further preventing negative portrayals of religion in the media. Anti-blasphemy laws have mostly been repealed, but the media climate established is very different from the U.S. context where the courts have routinely upheld the right to free speech, save for issues of “fighting words” where language will likely directly lead to violence is prohibited. The “Fairness Doctrine,” which required a balance in religions portrayed, has not been enforced since the early 1980s. Additionally, with the popular rise of privatized cable and satellite technologies within a comparatively free society, the U.S. media industry supports a wide array of niche programming across networks that are designed to support smaller viewshipss than the major broadcast networks. As such, one can more readily find religious programming on networks like GMC (The Gospel Music Channel).

Europe's media industry was also largely state-run for many years, only recently becoming privatized. This made it that much more unlikely for negative portrayals of
state-religions to be broadcasted. Though European social change and “secularization” have now been paired with privatization of media companies, the vestiges of religious sterilization has resulted in a continued lack of religious portrayals, and a further lack of negativity. While the corporate American context is characterized by a similar lack of religious references, it does not have the same lack of negativity. This is in part, as Morán notes, due to the privatized nature of the commercial media industry. FCC regulation does limit certain types of portrayals at certain times, but the legal, cultural, and market histories of the American media leave open the possibility for a wide range of portrayals. The market, for example, leaves it up to FOX on whether or not they want to risk their viewership by running animated specials with overtly sacrilegious gags during prime time (Figure 1.3).
In one of the references to religion in the FOX animated prime time sitcom *Family Guy* (2005), God is shown hitting on a woman at the bar. After lighting her cigarette with lightning and bragging about his “magic fingers,” he accidentally strikes the woman with lightning, causing her to explode and the bar to start on fire, after which he yells for Jesus to start their Escalade as they make their getaway.88

Corporate bottom lines, ratings reports, focus groups, and distribution strategies guide many of the content decisions for mainstream properties, including *Peanuts*. The international marketplace allowed for by diverse means of dissemination (global for decades, and recently instantaneous given digital delivery technologies) actually means that hard distinctions between American and other global contexts for media exhibition are likely misleading. The US exports almost all of its mainstream properties internationally – either officially or unofficially through bootleg operations. Content creators, however, often generate their material with a narrower target audience in mind,
which has allowed for more diversity and specificity in content. Cable technology’s
niche programming, the significant development of religious radio stations, and the rise
of national Christian bookstore chains have allowed for increased religious titles. The
increase is fitting with a general American media market model – the more narrowcast or
monetarily low-risk a medium, the more likely one is to find diverse portrayals of
religion. Because of the market nurtured out of the Christian sub-public, one can find
significant amounts of religion across greeting cards (where some greeting card writers
have become famous amongst their peers for their moving religious writing), board
games (such as the catchingly titled Mormon-Opoly), and comic books (such as in the
stylized *The Manga Bible*). Because *Peanuts* as a global property has its roots
explicitly in the comic medium, comics as a medium that offers both mass and niche
appeal will be discussed in this dissertation’s study, as will the other tensions inherent in a
mass-market industry devoted to taking an entertainment franchise’s characters and
turning them into personal property through profitable merchandising – an effort that
often results in the same minimization of religious content reflected in television
properties.

Of course, a characterization of media outlets as reflecting limited understandings
of religious perspectives and practices is not to say that particular communities, enslaved,
counter, or otherwise, are without agency in American culture. Historically, quite the
opposite is true. For the Christian community, though for example, perhaps conceived of
as a contemporary counter-public because of mainstream trends of public secularity, new
media technologies have routinely been met with great resistance. With the mid-century
advent of television, complete with its flash and initial commercial secularity, much of the Christian community, both Protestant and Catholic, recoiled.\textsuperscript{102} In the 1970s, as Hoover and Lackamp describe,\textsuperscript{103} the development of specialization across the television landscape, made possible through a variety of new technologies, afforded the “Christian sub-culture”\textsuperscript{104} a renewed opportunity to engage the television medium and thus the broader culture. Televangelism programming became a new means by which to interact with the dominant, mainstream public, only to be sullied by a myriad of scandals. In the 1980s, then, a niche trend in Contemporary Christian Music developed, with sacred concepts set to pop-rock tunes. After a decade or so, this pocket market would become a vibrant industry. A 2006 survey of one Contemporary Christian Music station's listening area found that even 28 percent of the non-religious participants surveyed reported being frequent listeners. The report contends that this was in large part because of active marketing of the station through billboards, TV spots, and website postings.\textsuperscript{105} Some reports even suggest that this style of music has become so dominant amongst Christian communities that as many as 80 percent of Christians now favor the contemporary worship style over traditional hymns.\textsuperscript{106} By embracing the medium and the market, Christian traditions and lines of contact have been dramatically altered, though it took much longer for the Christian community to come on board with the power of the radio/music enterprise than it did the mainstream music industry.

The same reluctance toward new media characterizes many religious perspectives, with many members of churches, Bailey describes, perceiving new media over the last decade as “of interest only to the MTV crowd.”\textsuperscript{107} In \textit{The New Media Frontier}, Reynolds
and Overton caution Christian communities against adopting new media technologies without critically reflecting on “what consequences we might not intend to bring about by their use,” while nonetheless attempting to convince a certain fearful religious audience that Christians “can use the new media with discernment and grace.”

For some, new technologies are becoming an inherent part of the religious experience as the platforms are offering individuals attractive opportunities. For instance, Rice describes Facebook as a possible site for religious connection, in that the form offers elements of “home” – access to friends, news, photos, etc. While some churches across the nation have yet to even post a website listing their service times, others are engaging new technologies with robust efforts. LifeChurch out of Edmond, Oklahoma, for instance, uses its LifeChurch.tv website to not only vidcast its service live online, complementing the vidcasting already happening to a number of physical satellite churches each Sunday morning, but it also uses the website to point visitors to the church's Second Life campus, where digital avatars can walk freely about, placing real money in the digital offering plate, and donning praise gestures during the streaming worship service. Though the expansive Second Life location is now largely desolate, Estes explains that such endeavors could work if churches take the great commission seriously (even digitally) and dwell in these online domains. Doing so, he contends, will establish a presence amongst the digital publics, allowing for real relationships to be formed and real lives to be impacted.

Diverse media activities such as these, as well as a host of others like online Islamic sites offering connectivity to Muslims in the digital age and animated Hindu DVDs providing children edutainment on the faith’s origin myths, demonstrate
that while television shows do not typically portray a complex view of religious activity, the global landscape of interconnected media and religious practice is anything but flat and unidirectional. In fact, as will be explored in chapter five, it may be because of the trends in mainstream secularity that religious counterculture consumers are able to drive a distinct market for other religious products and platforms.

**Studying Peanuts**

*An Impactful Mainstream Property*

Charles M. Schulz’s *Peanuts* franchise offers this dissertation the opportunity of a guided exploration of a variety of issues surrounding religion and media in contemporary religio-secular culture. As a globally successful franchise, Schulz’s work has made significant impacts in highly diverse markets, reaching countless audiences. *Peanuts* content has been officially translated into 26 different languages, distributed to 75 countries, and has received the highest of awards – including Emmy, Peabody, and Congressional Gold Medal honors for Schulz. Though he never considered himself much of a celebrity, Schulz served as the Grand Marshal of the 1974 Rose Parade in Pasadena, California and enjoyed friendships with high profile figures such as Billy Jean King and Ronald Reagan. His extended franchise includes 75 television titles, 17,897 published *Peanuts* comics, hundreds of other illustrations for independent projects such as Linkletter’s *Kids Say the Darndest Things* and religious publications, multi-million dollar annual profits from the massive global merchandise market, and even innumerable
parodies from unlicensed creators. The Apollo 10 lunar module was named Snoopy and the command module was named Charlie Brown, and to say that Schulz’s work is embedded in the American cultural landscape is an understatement, easily proven by the wealth of references to his work during any given Halloween or Christmas season. As Inge has noted, even the American lexicon has been forever changed through Schulz’s use of “security blanket” and “good grief.”

Peanuts has become, says Inge, “an integral part of the history of American culture through its influence in so many areas of our life and society.” If one is interested in the cultivative potential of a given property, the massive cultural impact Peanuts has had for more than half a century (and continues to have) marks it as a valuable object of study.

Yet three other critical features identify Schulz’s work as a useful access point for studies of religion and media. First, Peanuts is not confined to one medium. While its source material is found in the highly successful fifty years of comic strip art written and drawn by Schulz, the entry point for many fans has become the television shows, and the spin-off expansions have included Broadway musicals, instrumental albums, material merchandizing, books, and much more. Investigating an overtly cross-media franchise allows this dissertation to explore the contexts for religious reference with a better respect for the interconnected as well as uniquely situated natures of convergent entertainment media. Second, Peanuts is not confined to one historical moment. Spanning over a century of distinct influence, significant work, and lasting legacy, Peanuts provides this dissertation with temporal range that most media history scholarship avoids for concerns of feasibility. Though it provides a unique challenge at each stage of research, analysis,
and writing, this historical breadth affords this study the ability to encounter issues surrounding religion, media, and publicity as they arise out of specific historical moments that are as important as the set of issues that may be afforded by a more temporally limited study. By using Peanuts as a discrete guide, the historically and conceptually interconnected matters of early artistic influence and comparison, mid-century censorship and institutionalized secularity, as well as contemporary criticism and pushback can all be explored. Third, though it is not dominantly known for its theological content, Peanuts contains distinct moments of religious reference that can lead the researcher down a path of diverse and provocative religious content – content that is often generally cited by prominent studies of Schulz’s life but that has never been rigorously analyzed or used as a connective node to ask larger questions about media environments. Beyond being merely a study about a comic strip franchise, following the thread of religious references throughout Peanuts provides access to salient issues across media and historical moments regarding the challenges and opportunities for religious reference in mainstream media, particularly as it pertains to questions surrounding the private/public split in American religio-secular society.

The Need for a Transdisciplinary Approach

As the introductions to two edited collections highlight, there has been an emerging trend over the last decade toward interdisciplinary approaches toward studies of religion and media. That trend will hopefully progress further into enactments of transdisciplinary study. Because of the rich diversity that the religious thread in Peanuts
provides access to, a transdisciplinary set of hybridized methods will be employed in this study, though the need for such expands beyond this dissertation. Transdisciplinarity, according to Debra Hawhee, is different than traditional interdisciplinarity in that interdisciplinary studies are characterized by deliberate sharing of theories and methodologies. It would be akin, perhaps, to passing along select chapters from a sociology textbook to an economics major so that he/she can use a particular theory or method alongside his/her traditional, disciplinary work. In the case of recent edited collections, it means there will be quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical essays all bound within the same cover. While this is valuable, transdisciplinarity, Hawhee explains, is more about developing new perspectives than it is simple methods sharing. It requires, she says, a deliberate forgetting of disciplinary bounds in order to see in new ways.

Henry Jenkins' book *Convergence Culture* illustrates why this is necessary, and one can extend his claims in order to provide an analogy for these innovative and hybridized seeing practices. In his text, Jenkins explains how the mass media industry is no longer characterized by clear delineations between media types. Advertising companies are no longer economically and corporately distinct from radio companies or television companies, etc. Instead, conglomeration, in conjunction with new bottom-up and lateral participation from audiences/fans/consumers, has resulted in a highly convergent media landscape with sinewy connections running all throughout. This has resulted in new protocols of industry and fan engagement, whereby corporations do not view their industry as isolated media outlets and neither do audiences (especially given the means of participation afforded fans by new digital mass media technologies and platforms). This
issue of convergence means that any one discipline is inherently limited in its ability to address issues of contemporary media. Jenkins' discussion of convergence may by analogy highlight a needed change in disciplinary protocols whereby researchers no longer see themselves as operating as independent disciplinary actors (e.g., by analogy as an independent radio station), or even as interdisciplinary method-sharing cooperators (e.g., a radio station also buying ad space from a local billboard agency), but instead should see themselves as transdisciplinary scholars, abandoning the requirement of disciplinary bounds, seeking to find the best vibrant, converging means of exploring a rhetorical situation (e.g., a radio station that posts political news updates on their website that is managed by the billboard company which employs an HTML5 writer from an international university specializing in graphic design...).

Transdisciplinarity is more about ways of seeing than it is about ways of doing, though it often solicits hybrid methodologies such as the one enacted in this dissertation’s study through *Peanuts*. In his refutation of the limitations of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, Edwin Black argues that approaching a rhetorical situation with a rigid view of any one critical apparatus will result in stale criticism. Instead, he argues, the critic should be equipped with a wide range of knowledges so that he/she can let the text itself determine how it needs to be analyzed. Black does not naively argue that the critic can ever fully abandon his/her own history, identity, or conceptual limits, allowing the object of analysis to freely “speak for itself,” but he does contend that the more ways of seeing one is familiar with, the exponentially more flexible and valuable his/her analysis can potentially be.¹¹⁸ This dissertation, for instance, adopts a transdisciplinary perspective to
understand media portrayals of religion by way of *Peanuts* as an access point comprised of an array of connective nodes – multiple media types, a significant historical span, a variety of industry actors, a variety of fan responses, etc. Through a hybridization of complementary methods (social scientific, historical, and rhetorical – each explained in more detail as needed in the appropriate chapters) it is designed to explore the situation through an expanded development of complementary theoretical paradigms (cultivation theory, narrativity, framing analysis, perspectives on participatory audiences, and the multiplicity inherent in the lexicon of public sphere theory). While this may seem like too vast of a starting point for any one study, what Jenkins and Black are seeking to demonstrate is that all research subjects are inherently immensely varied and expansive. It is only by blindly adhering to disciplinary bounds that researchers might ever naively think they have a small topic. It is in the very process of discipline-ary manage-ment that possibilities are foreclosed. Following the discrete thread of religious reference across the *Peanuts* franchise provides the necessary logistical constraints, allowing for such breadth to be explored within a single study.

Even further, transdisciplinarity (and interdisciplinarity) affords particular disciplines means by which to check and shore up areas of perceived and actual limitation. As discussed above, for instance, in the field of history a debate persists about the potential to ever account for the “real” past as opposed to particularized “representations” of the past (e.g., Hayden White's argument that historical “fact” is ultimately premised on composed narrative, not dissimilar to fictional literature).¹¹⁹ A transdisciplinary approach could adopt both ends of the polarity (along with other
alternative permutations), denying that the discipline of history is limited by having to choose one. Broadly conceived narratives, as in the case of Habermas's, can be augmented, for instance, by idiosyncratic narratives from those otherwise excluded, such as the engaged female citizenry. Likewise, the formality of the social sciences or the perceived subjectivity of English scholarship can serve, if the research project justifies it, to balance each other. To be fair, the conventions of non-academic readership in American society will continue to provide markets for traditional, disciplinary scholarship. The discipline of history, for instance, is not viewed by the general populace as suffering from a narrativity crisis. Instead, for most casual consumers in American culture, X simply “is” what “really happened,” according to book Y from Barnes and Noble or program Z on The History Channel. As such, readership will continue to supply justification for traditional history programs, and legislative debate will continue to supply justification for social scientific research. The goal of transdisciplinary is not even to abandon these traditional practices. In fact, traditional scholarship can exhibit transdisciplinary perspectives when disciplinary borders are not simply taken for granted or as inherently valuable. This dissertation will marshal voices from a variety of perspectives in order to not only triangulate increased specificity in understanding but also to provide multiple layers by which the complex issue of religion in the media can be understood.

Projects need to be supported, then, that are premised on the notion that the spiritually/religiously related communicative artifact (be it from an interconnected media source like Peanuts, or from any other social context that the scholar might approach) is
inherently converging, and richly operating across nuanced pluralities, thus affording an opportunity, even the need, for transdisciplinary study. Of course, one researcher is always restricted by his/her own individual limitations. Logistically, in the case of graduate study, the dissertation committee serves to further expand the possible ways of seeing and especially of guiding the effective modes of doing. Committees need to be comprised of individuals with an array of content knowledge, methodological skill-sets, and conceptual sensibilities relevant to salient converging components of the case study. As components converge, the call for transdisciplinarity emerges. Departments should insist on, or at minimum encourage, students to seek mentorship and content guidance from faculty with an array of backgrounds. As fields continues to recognize the converging nature of artifacts, especially when they relate to the highly complex web of spirituality/religion within the American religio-secular society, the value of each member of a diverse committee open to cross-paradigm thought rings forth in new and continually developing ways.

This study of religion and media through the Peanuts franchise should not be seen as a unique case where one might atypically study religion in the public academy. Rather it hopefully points to the variety of ways in which one can approach the subject. The growth in studies of religion/spirituality and media, no longer inherently needing a proclamation of a religious calling, demonstrate the ways in which other interactive approaches to spirituality, religious organizations, media, history, the occult, government, etc., can be studied through new paradigms within public institutions. The interdisciplinarity enacted regarding studies of religion and media are promising, as
Hoover and Clark explain, because they help reduce the stress placed upon a researcher speaking solely from the position of religious identity. Though the academy is increasingly characterized by plurality and an understanding of subjectivity, Hoover and Clark point out that religion is still a subject that many are uncomfortable dealing with. While the theoretical base for a study looking at media in the religio-secular public using the theoretical models as described above would likely suggest that such discomfort is merely a symptom of the larger public/private :: secular/religious split, the more immediate need for opening up lines of research into the diverse matters of spirituality and religion across disciplines needs to be met.

The university structure is set up such that niche courses could easily be formed around the question of “Religion and [Insert Topic Here].” Idiosyncratic courses like “Harry Potter and Literacy” or “Middle-Eastern Textiles” demonstrate the precedence for such. One could imagine the literature for the media perspectives described above generating courses in “Religion and Mainstream Media,” “Spirituality and New Media,” “Religious Organizations and Political Rhetoric,” or “The Occult in Narrative” (a handful of such courses certainly appearing on campuses across the nation). While these courses are valuable, by themselves they may potentially reinforce the public/private split by maintaining religious inquiry as something that one has to go to a particular isolated place for. E.g., you have to be a Communication Studies major with room for a 300-level elective in order to study religion in a public university. What is needed instead is the creation of atmospheres of acceptance across a wide array of courses throughout the university structure – from composition and oratory to history and
philosophy. This is not an easy task, though, given the legal environment and the hostile politicization affecting any given departmental hallway.

The risks involved are very real. For instance, one high school math teacher displaying governmental quotations referencing God (“One nation under GOD,” “In GOD we trust,” etc.) was forced to take these down, and lost his subsequent lawsuit claiming constitutional freedom of speech. The court found that his poster, though depicting government documents, was too clearly advocating for religious belief, and as a public school teacher “speaking as the government,” as Judge Tallman’s appellate court decision read, the teacher was not within his constitutional right to display it on school property. Conversely, another high school teacher who referred to creationism as “superstitious nonsense” in the classroom was granted immunity by the state, the court skirting the question of creationism or religious intolerance by simply ruling that the educator had the right to voice diverse opinions in order to stimulate an open exchange of ideas in the classroom. Even more poignantly, the University of Kentucky recently settled out of court for $125,000 after a suit was filed on behalf of Martin Gaskell, a professor who was denied the position of director of the university's new astronomy observatory. Emails that were supplied during the origination of the suit recorded the search committee calling Gaskell the most qualified candidate, but one who was “potentially evangelical” and thus too risky of a new hire.

Given the risks inherent, but with the variety of justifications for studying spirituality and religion across disciplines, the role of the educator should be to create a safe space in individual classrooms across the disciplines whereby students can approach
religious issues that are academically or personally of interest to them. The strategies for creating safe spaces extend even as simply to including religious references amongst the lists of examples for different assignments. One might tell students in a small group communication course, for instance, that “you need to pick a small group you are part of for this assignment – like your defensive line for those of you playing football, or your cheerleader squad, or your book club, or your worship group at your church.” In referencing religious elements in a classroom outside of religious studies, the American Academy of Religion argues that educators will be working towards a reduction of bigotry and intolerance by increasing the perceptible acceptance of the discussion of diverse religions. In their guidelines for K-12 education, they suggest that educators ensure that their language reflect characteristics that would suit the university environment well, in the public classroom focusing on: 1) awareness of religion, not acceptance, 2) study of religion, not practice of it, and 3) an inclusion of diversity in religions and perspectives, not a preference for a particular religion or denomination.125 Creation of a safe space also requires, despite the legal protection demonstrated in the “superstitious” creationism case, that educators avoid making hostile comments about religious belief and practice in their public role as educator. For some, this may even mean tempering their statements in digital spaces, like Facebook, in order to promote an intellectually stimulating atmosphere of safety within the classroom.

This dissertation’s approach may find resistance from some for not only its interest in religious content but also for its examination of a popular culture text. In his defense of the “Aca-Fan” (the academic who studies content she/he also personal enjoys
as a “fan,”), Jenkins argues that the fannish and academic perspectives can work together to reveal radical new ways of thinking about how one might relate to media texts – a justification for “fans” of a particular text writing scholarly and semi-scholarly criticism of their favorite properties. While this dissertation does not explicitly take up the cause of the aca-fan the way Jason Mittell has distilled Jenkins as meaning the involvement of “both intellectual and emotional cultural engagements,” (i.e., this dissertation will not contain explicit investigation of the author’s emotional involvement with Peanuts), this dissertation is rooted in the conviction that emotional enjoyment of a property does not intrinsically disqualify the scholar from any level of “objectivity” that any other scholar brings to the task. Criticism of the author being “too close” to a popular media text likely reveals an inherent criticism of popular culture more than of the training of that scholar. One is less likely to question a scholar for being “too close” to Shakespeare if she admits to enjoying his sonnets than one is to criticizing a scholar for being “too close” to Schulz if he admits to enjoying his television specials. More to the point, negative or ambivalent feelings toward a topic, be it a text or religious tradition, do not uniquely qualify one for scholarship on that topic. That the author of this dissertation has grown up with a heritage of Christian belief that he still personally embraces or that he admits to thoroughly enjoying most of Charles Schulz’s creative works should not in any way be cause for concern over presumed “objectivity,” but instead might even be celebrated as a personal experience with the subject matter that provides unique insight and energy toward the study. This dissertation is designed to make substantive and well-defended arguments and observations that extend beyond the author’s personal habitus without
apology or diminishment, and a thoughtful array of transdisciplinary perspectives and methods will serve to meet those ends.

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The concerns voiced by Schulz’s family over the recent biography of the family’s patriarch reflects the findings of cultivation theory and framing analysis audience research as well as descriptions of narrativity and other participatory theories described in subsequent chapters. Cultural texts across contemporary and historical periods continue to engage audiences, engendering limited perspectives that guide notions of decorous belief and action. As is specifically the concern of this study, portrayals of religious thought and activity in mainstream entertainment properties cultivate cultural norms that dictate the conditions of public and private discourse on religion. The dearth of religious references, typically limited when present, has been propelled by and has recursively reinforced the public/private split in secular/sacred thought and practice in religio-secular American society. In this dissertation, Charles M. Schulz’s massively successful Peanuts franchise, which commands mainstream success, yet contains explicit references to and affirmations of Christian theology, will serve as an access point to a variety of publicity related issues that extend across media and salient historical contexts. In this study, all of the references to religion manifested across the various Peanuts media will be tracked, cataloged, and analyzed. Using a hybrid set of methods (social scientific, rhetorical, and historical), individual chapters will explore media contexts that afford and challenge
religious reference. Chapters will investigate the 75 television titles, global product merchandise, Schulz's biographic history, and of course the nearly 18,000 Peanuts comic strips Schulz drew over a 50 year career. Following the thread of religious reference across these texts will allow for exploration of a variety of contemporary and historical issues surrounding religious content, including censorship, media form, audience participation, corporate interest, and authorial intent.

The intertwined components of the religio-secular American public sphere necessitate the development of transdisciplinary research projects that seek to tease out the converging institutions, practices, and norms enacted across mainstream contexts. Such studies serve as impactful moves against the currently limiting privatizations of religion, allowing for greater communities of discourse on the roles of spirituality and religion within individual and community environments. What follows in subsequent chapters is an exploration of the intersections of the media and the public sphere as a contested site for normative religious acceptability:

Chapter two investigates the religious content in the fifty years of Peanuts comic strips Schulz created. The chapter provides statistical trends in Schulz’s religious content, comparing it to other prominent features in his work (i.e., his “Twelve Devices”). Of particular interest is Schulz’s specific inclusion of scriptural references which serve as a lightning rod, a rhetorical feature that primes readers to be increasingly aware of further religious content or allusion. Analyses of the comic strip form and specific historical moments of controversy temper a view of Schulz’s specificity, highlighting the unique opportunities and challenges that content creators have when introducing content into a
medium that requires a participatory audience.

Chapters three and four are interested in television as a site of public religious content – a central medium in American culture and the touchstone for many *Peanuts* fans. Chapter three takes all 75 television titles, powerful in part because of the seasonal repetition of several key specials, and considers the range of religious references that allow for the occasional explicit moment. The vast array of religious content resists classification, speaking to the broad ways in which one might find religious content in a media property, each type with different possible impacts.

Chapter four then investigates the historical context of the flagship *Peanuts* title, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, demonstrating that religious reference has struggled for salient inclusion since television came to prominence in American culture. The chapter details the conventions of classical Christmas television specials, explaining the ways in which the *Peanuts* property reveals the boundaries of the genre and broader media conventions by pushing against them from within.

Chapter five broadens the notion of entertainment media by exploring the interconnected world of franchise product merchandise. The religiously themed goods, such as a *Peanuts* nativity scene and religious *Hallmark* greeting cards, as well as sanctioned and unsanctioned adaptations are discussed as circulatory extensions of the property’s cultural impact with unique corporate restrictions and consumer possibilities.

Chapter six adds to the literature on Schulz’s life by exploring his theo-biography as a framework for an approach to religious reference in mainstream media characterized by informed, exploratory, and personal attention to spiritual ideas. As with each chapter,
other media texts that relate to the themes of the chapter will be discussed. The provocative moments from diverse titles included in this chapter add to the examples of openness from Schulz’s work, demonstrating that while many entertainment media properties tend to reflect and reinforce a cultural public/private split in secularity/religion, rich opportunities for nuanced portrayals of religious belief and action are possible within a mainstream title.

Guided by the Peanuts franchise’s references to religion, the chapters in this dissertation, designed to explore multiple media from a transdisciplinary perspective with a hybridized methodology, will seek to make advancements across diverse interest areas, providing insights for individuals approaching the project from a variety of vantage points. Media scholars interested in studies of identity representation will be offered theoretical and applied perspectives on the competing interests that shape creation and reception of these portrayals across various media types and contexts. Cultural historians will be given access to quantitative and archival information on distinct periods of media history along with the connective trends and contingencies across these periods. Public sphere theorists will be able to engage extended analysis of actually existing publics, especially the counter-, enclaved, and sub- workings of Christian publics and the religious interests within dominant normative structures. Those interested in popular culture studies, especially animation, comics, and the work of Charles Schulz, will see a thick description of an under-scrutinized aspect of a globally influential franchise. These interests will hopefully coalesce across boundaries and provide a provocative, useful, and engaging study of faith in the American religio-secular mainstream media.
CHAPTER 2

COMIC STRIP RELIGION: THE DOUBLE-EDGE OF THE GUTTER

“I’m not sure we can believe everything we hear, sir.”
- Marcie

Charles Schulz never wrote a great American novel sermonizing a political ideology or dramatizing a historical event, though Snoopy did work diligently to pen a great classic – perhaps Small Women… or Crime and Peace… or Long John Beagle… or The Maltese Beagle… or maybe the biblical classic, John the Beagle.¹²⁸ According to Monte, Sparky’s eldest son, “he [Charles Schulz] actually felt that book writing was a higher art form than cartooning, and he thought that he couldn’t really do that.”¹²⁹ Instead, Charles Schulz fulfilled his childhood dream and drew comic strips for newspapers – a practice he would often diminish as less than meaningful:

Comic strips aren’t art, they never will be art. They are too transient. Art is something which is so good it speaks to succeeding generations, not only as it speaks to the first generation but better, and I doubt that my strip will hold up for several generations to come. […] Comic strips aren’t made to last; they are made to be funny today in the paper, thrown away. And that is its purpose, to sell that edition of the newspaper. Just because something has drawing in it doesn’t make it art, just because something has words in it doesn’t make it literature.”¹³⁰
His doubts, however, were anything but confirmed. For 50 years, Schulz produced what has been called by his colleagues one of the best cartoons of the twentieth century,\textsuperscript{131} winning him two Reuben awards, the most prestigious award in his field.\textsuperscript{132} He wrote and drew 17,897 published \textit{Peanuts} strips, completing all the inking and lettering himself,\textsuperscript{133} involving over 70 total characters in a globally successful narrative.\textsuperscript{134} “We sometimes forget,” says cultural historian Robert Thompson, “that this is arguably the longest story told by a single artist in human history.”\textsuperscript{135} The characters, each with their definable but flexible personas, did not act their parts in the ways of the densely dramatic and adventuresome \textit{Peanuts} predecessors, but instead Schulz crafted minimalized events through which the gang would reflect on the oddities of life and their own inner psyches. Not taking the form of the comics completely for granted, Schulz demonstrated the possibilities for introspective, even profound reference within the panelized narrative medium.

This chapter will explore the religious content in the \textit{Peanuts} strips, grounded in an explanation of Schulz’s historically unique minimalism. A discussion of the guttered comic medium will be expanded through conceptions of priming effects and the rhetorical enthymeme, providing a theoretical foundation for a content analysis of the \textit{Peanuts} comic strips and the ensuing fragmented reader responses. Based on the evaluation of one-third of Schulz’s work, key issues such as priming through specificity, the strategic benefit of the use of child characters, the tensions between censorship and mainstream appeal, as well as efforts to include religious reference in other franchises will be discussed. These all provide contextual details undergirding the centerpiece
explanations of select historical moments in which Schulz’s open approach to religious reference demonstrates the benefits and dangers of priming an audience to attend to a message in guttered, enthymematic media.

***

**Minimalism in the Comics**

Sometimes found in the vehicle of the “graphic novel,” at times in the simple “comic book,” and at other times on the “Funny Pages” of the local newspaper, the comic medium relies on successfully blending reductions of picture and word. Comic theorist Scott McCloud describes the medium in terms of “sequential art,” presuming a meaningfulness to the imagery – that it has the power to convey ideas to the viewer.\(^{136}\)

According to Inge, the comic strip proper “may be defined as an open-ended dramatic narrative about a recurring set of characters, told in a series of drawings.”\(^{137}\) A variety of story-filled genres have developed throughout the century of their mass publications, including cliff-hanger adventures, soap operas, mysteries, and gag comedies, some even developed from previous radio programs (e.g. *The Lone Ranger*). Individual strips would vary on the continuity of stories, but comic artists would soon begin establishing characters with developed storylines through literary devices like dialogue and narration, augmented and transformed through stylized visual components.

The genres were given space to develop thanks to the turn of the twentieth century paper wars between Pulitzer and Hearst. In 1889, Pulitzer began printing the first regular
Sunday comics section, adding humorous drawings as a permanent addition to the entertainment focused Sunday supplement of his *New York World* newspaper. In 1894, *World* acquired a four-color press and the *Sunday World* began printing the comics in color as another move to further increase circulation. In 1896, when the paper was experimenting with a new yellow ink, a prominent illustrated character in the paper – a bald headed urchin drawn by Richard Outcault – was given a yellow shirt, the cartoon thereafter being known as *Yellow Kid* (Figure 2.1). The success of the illustrations in driving up circulation not only ushered in the phrase “yellow journalism” but also ensured that comics would continue to grow as a staple in the newsprint industry. For the first part of the twentieth century, the majority of newspapers faced competing papers in their same city, and editors relied on comics to drive circulation increases against the competition. As comic historian Robert C. Harvey notes, “apart from the political and social views of a newspaper’s columnists and editorial writers (and the extent to which those views slanted the paper’s treatment of the news), the only thing that distinguished one paper from another in a city with several dailies was its feature content. And the most conspicuous of the features were the comics.” Individual papers purchased strips from syndicates with distribution agreements that prohibited competition within a certain geographic region from running the same strips, a practice still in place in contemporary printing.
Figure 2.1 “Yellow Kid” by Richard Outcalt, printed March 15, 1896 in Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. (Used with copyright permission from the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.)

As the demand for comics grew and Sunday supplements gave way to daily features, trends evolved in what readers would typically find in their papers’ comics sections. Many of the early strips that filled papers until roughly the 1920s were designed to be humorous, giving readers comedic breaks from the scandalous or tragic front page headlines. In the 1920s, though, narrative components developed across a wider swath of strips, with the comics designed not just to deliver a punch line but to tell more elaborate stories, many continuing across days (what Harvey calls “continuity strips”). Cliff-hanger endings in continuity strips began to serve as a way of managing
readers, bringing them back the next day to complete more of the story, a tactic that suited the commercial goal of the strips well as it required the purchase of subsequent papers to finish a tale. In the 1920s and 30s, adventure strips like *Tarzan* and *Flash Gordon* and domestic strips like *Mary Worth* were drawn with detailed illustrations, establishing a realism to the genre not previously expected by simple humor strips. These dramatic strips established the tone and style for the development of the superhero field that later developed into its own industry, and even the humorous gag strips began being often characterized by visually full panels and verbose dialogue. Not all strips exhibited this illustrated realism as the century reached its mid-point. Strips like *Buggs Bunny*, *Blondie*, *Nancy*, and *Popeye* were all using a minimalism exhibited earlier by strips like *Krazy Kat* and *Pogo*. As the example below (Figure 2.2) demonstrates, however, ink-heavy realism was the dominant norm through the forties.
Figure 2.2 Comic section of Dubuque, Iowa’s Telegraph Herald (February 8, 1948). (Blondie TM Hearst Holdings, Inc., Copyright King Features Syndicate. Nancy copyright 2013 Universal UClick, reprinted by permission. Red Ryder and Boots and Her Buddies © 1948 Newspaper Enterprise Association.)
Figure 2.3 Comic section of Dubuque, Iowa’s Telegraph Herald (February 8, 1948). (Wash Tubbs © 1948 Newspaper Enterprise Association. Li’l Abner © and ® Capp Enterprises, Inc. Steve Canyon ® and © The Estate of Esther Parsons Caniff. Out our Way and Our Boarding House © 1948 Newspaper Enterprise Association.)
Growing up, Charles Schulz was exposed to the styles and trends of similar comic sections and set his mind to taking part in the trade from an early age. He took to the art naturally, despite there not being any artists in his family, and was a fan of comic strips from age six, at which time he had not only decided he wanted to be a comic strip artist, but was also already able to draw a respectable Popeye imitation. During his senior year of high school, Schulz took a correspondence drawing course through Federal Schools (later known as Art Instruction Schools). Six years later, after he returned from World War II, he was hired by Art Instruction where he worked when his first panel comics were published by the Catholic magazine Timeless Topix in 1947. The art director, Roman Baltes, had given Sparky a job lettering the comic pages, and then agreed to publish panels of his cartoons under the title Just Keep Laughing (Figure 2.4). Only two pages of Schulz’s panels were published, but Schulz’s wit and stylistic minimalism are evident in this work (though the bold strength of his lines is not as apparent in this example of his developing aesthetic, in part because it was done with brush instead of pen).
Figure 2.4 Schulz’s first published cartoon panels, “Just Keep Laughing” in the Catholic magazine *Timeless Topix* (February 1947). (© 1947 The Schulz Family Intellectual Property Trust, Catechetical Guild.)
Later in 1947, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* began running Sparky’s *Li’l Folks* panel comics, which ran until 1950. During that time, Schulz sold 17 strips to *The Saturday Evening Post*. In these works, the establishment of Schulz’s visual style becomes more pronounced (Figures 2.14, 2.16, 2.18). When his first *Peanuts* strips were sold to United Feature Syndicate in 1950 (Figure 2.20), Schulz’s style was markedly sparse. There simply was (and continued to be as his *Peanuts* style evolved) a lot of white space in the strip. Compared to the high-ink norms established by industry leaders like *Tarzan, Li’l Abner* and *Steve Canyon*, Schulz’s art was a striking departure from what might be considered typical strip work. *Peanuts* first ran on October 2, 1950 in only seven newspapers (*The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The Minneapolis Tribune, The Allentown Call-Chronicle, The Bethlehem Globe-Times, The Denver Post, The Seattle Times*, and *The Boston Globe*), but was eventually printed in over 2,600 newspapers across 75 countries and in 26 different languages.\(^{145}\) Over the years, Schulz fine-tuned his style, learning how best he wanted to draw his characters, but he never abandoned the strip’s minimalistic aesthetic.\(^{146}\)

In addition to the limited lines in his images, Schulz dramatically injected a minimalist sense of verbiage into the comic scene. Instead of the paragraph length dialogue between characters often evident in soap, adventure, and even humor strips, Schulz struck strong chords with limited wording. Though he occasionally would use lengthy dialogue, he was able to often write briefly by structuring the plot of the strip around very minute occasions made humorous through his witticisms, and potentially profound through the pondering subtlety of a seasoned provocateur. Schulz referred to...
these ordinary, small events as “slight incidents,” something he believed (in one of his less committedly humble sentiments unlike his comment about great art) that he was the first to successfully introduce into comic strips:

I introduced the slight incident. I can remember creating it sitting at the desk where what would happen in the three panels that I was drawing at that time was a very brief and slight incident. No one had ever done that before in comic strips. Comic strips were the school of ‘Well, what are we going to do today?’ type – much too drawn out and with a little joke at the end that really was not worth the whole page that it was devoted to. So I changed all of that [...]. I think I introduced a whole brand-new approach to comic strip humor.  

This tactic of the slight incident can be seen, for instance, in a strip from 1960 in which a leaf falls from a tree (a motif Schulz frequented), with the only wording in the entire strip being a line, full of potential implication, from the cerebrally-inclined Linus, “I hope you know what you’re doing!” (Figure 2.5) As Harvey notes, Percy Crosby had taken a similar approach in Skippy, but with less success because his cast of characters was not as identifiably idiosyncratic as Schulz’s.
Peanuts strips also often operate through continuous storylines, with a series of daily or Sunday strips exploring a common theme, recurring joke, or developing plot. The total plot reach of these stories tends to be limited, still based on the general principal of the slight incident, though they can often be expansive in their introspective potential. Schulz believed a story should not be planned or plotted out, but rather that it should be allowed to develop creatively and organically in the mind of the comic artist. “I do not prepare my continuing stories in advance, but usually let the daily episodes take a story where they wish to lead it,” said Schulz. “Once a story gets going, all sorts of little episodes come to mind.” In the series that Schulz credits for helping him to develop his knack for telling short stories in the strip, for example, Charlie Brown caught the attention of readers and editors alike by doing very little over an eight day story arc.
“This sequence raised editorial eyebrows from coast to coast,” says Hugh Morrow of The Saturday Evening Post, “for no cartoonist had ever before dared to have absolutely nothing happen in his comic strip for eight days.” With this series, Schulz got the sense for how he would follow a strip’s leading, even if it meant little would happen (which it usually did). Peanuts is a mix of stand-alone gag strips and humorous continuity strips (the longest being a five week series revolving around Peppermint Patty entering a skating competition), and as will be discussed below, the series format allowed Schulz to explore heavier themes at time, such as miracles and the apocalypse.

With the boldness of this thoughtfully limited visual and verbal style, Schulz’s Peanuts ushered in a new era of clean, minimalist comic art. “Its simple graphic treatment,” says Harvey, “began to set a new fashion for gag strips.” In her address at Sparky’s memorial service, Cathy creator Cathy Guisewite said with adoration, “Sparky

**Figures 2.6-2.13** Peanuts (April 12-14, 16-20, 1956). Note: April 15 is not part of the series because Sunday strips operated on a different serial schedule. (PEANUTS © 1956 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
was given a smaller space than any cartoonist in 1950, and he created a whole new style of art and writing that was so eloquent and perfect that every single cartoonist who followed him has tried to copy something from it." The simple abstracted aesthetic of Cathy, along with Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Pearls before Swine, and many others confirm much of Guisewite’s claim. To be fair, as noted before, some similar artistic precedence had been established before Schulz began his influential work. Krazy Kat (which Schulz was influenced by), for instance, often scrapped backgrounds altogether, even eschewing the need for panel frames when it didn’t suit artist Herriman’s purpose. Herriman’s drawings, though, lacked the same visual weight and surety that Schulz would employ. Pogo had similar strong, bold lines grounding the characters on the page, but the animals were certainly more detailed than the Peanuts gang.

Though reflections on Schulz’s work often legitimately note its distinction from previous comic strip styles, Schulz’s work, even if atypical, was not so far from its contemporaries to seem out of place on the comic strip page. While the slowly growing popularity of Peanuts signaled a new possible direction for the medium, it did so thanks in part to the successful style of its close relative, the magazine editorial cartoon. In fact, when Schulz’s panels were printed in The Saturday Evening Post, they were in like company (Figures 2.15, 2.17, 2.19). Other humor and advertising cartoons in the volumes exhibit similar bold lines and quickly executed wit. Sparky himself acknowledges the historical situatedness of his early art, noting that he had to work for years to refine his style:
When the early strips are seen now in reprinted collections, they are judged, unfortunately, by the strip as it is today. What has to be realized is that the characters I drew then came out of a style of a gag cartooning that was prevalent at the time: tiny children looking up at huge adults and saying very sophisticated things. This was the professional school from which I graduated and which formed my style, and it took me several years to break away and develop a style of drawing that would allow the characters to do new and special things.\footnote{155}

\textbf{Figures 2.14, 2.15} Charles Schulz’s first cartoon panel in \textit{The Saturday Evening Post} (left) and a panel from the same issue by Ted Key from his recurring \textit{The Saturday Evening Post} series, \textit{Hazel} (right) (May 29, 1948). (© 1948 The Schulz Family Intellectual Property Trust, The Saturday Evening Post. Hazel © 1948 Distributed by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World Rights Reserved.)
Figures 2.16, 2.17 Cartoon panel by Charles Schulz (left) published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and a panel in the same issue by Salo Roth (right) (July 17, 1948). (© 1948 The Schulz Family Intellectual Property Trust, The Saturday Evening Post. © 1948 Salo Roth The Saturday Evening Post.)

Figures 2.18, 2.19 Cartoon panel by Charles Schulz (left) published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and a panel in the same issue by Henry Syverson (right) (September 25, 1948). (© 1948 The Schulz Family Intellectual Property Trust, The Saturday Evening Post. © 1948 Syverson, The Saturday Evening Post.)
In the newspapers, however, a strip of this type was relatively new. *Peanuts* was not an editorial cartoon for a perusing magazine reader like Schulz’s panels had been, but was a new semi-continuous narrative strip for readers that would seek out the comics section in a newspaper – readers with certain expectations about the typical heaviness of the dialogue and image detail. The newspaper editors at the time recognized the newness of Schulz’s open style, *The Washington Post* running short block teasers elsewhere in the paper for the strip’s debut, saying, “For kids, young and old, a delightfully different kind of comic strip starts today in The Post. See Peanuts, on the Comic Page” and “Kids from eight to eighty will love Peanuts, a new kind of comic strip. Starts today on the Comic Page of The Post.”

Across that first day’s comic section (which ran next to the “Give-Aways” ads, including one for a “mixed beagle, male, good with children”) one can see the uniqueness of Schulz’s work when compared to the dominant themes and styles of the paper’s comics (Figure 2.20-2.23). In that issue of *The Washington Post*, only *Ferd’nand* by Mik uses similar white space, and does so without commanding the deceptive simplicity of Schulz’s “painted quality” lines.
Figure 2.20 The Washington Post comics section as originally printed (October 2, 1950). (Mark Trail and Mary Worth © 1950 North America Syndicate, World Rights Reserved. Steve Canyon © and © The Estate of Esther Parsons Caniff. Joe Palooka © 1950 McNaught Syndicate.)
Figure 2.23 The Washington Post comics section as originally printed, including the first Peanuts strip in the lower right corner (October 2, 1950). (Myrtle and Winnie Winkle © Tribune Media Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission. Donald Duck omitted due to copyright limitations. Napoleon © 1950 McNaught Syndicate. Ferd’nand copyright 2013 Universal UCliclck, reprinted by permission. PEANUTS © 1950 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
The potent harmony of Schulz’s clever wit, strong clean lines, and knack for casting (inartistically validated by the gang’s commercial and cultural successes as explored in chapter five) was, as Harvey describes, “successful in establishing new standards in the medium,” being a “serviceable […] model upon which new strips can be patterned.” Taking note of Schulz’s deliberate aesthetic, however, is not merely an historical or artistic exercise. His refined, open style of minimalism is an important part of the discussion of spiritual reference within the comic medium. It is this openness of style, never fully resolving the images or the topic, which allows Schulz’s art to be a potentially effective vehicle for religious inquiry. By employing such a style, Schulz expands the power of the “gutter” in comic strips. The gutter, the empty white space between the panels, is an intrinsic feature of most all comic art, and “despite its unceremonious title,” as McCloud explains, “the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics.” According to McCloud, that magic takes place through the process of “closure” – the mental establishment of a meaningful connection between separated parts. The reader fills in the narrative leap based on his or her experience, establishing closure and thus participating in the creation of the final product. Abel and Madden, like McCloud, describe these transition moments supplied by gutters as the mechanisms in comics that simulate time and motion for the reader. For readers of Peanuts, the amount of temporal or spatial action that the reader must import is contingent upon a given strip, but often Schulz’s slight incident approach restrains the spatial and temporal action, giving more potential emphasis to the thematic elements. The large amount of visual negative space opens up the ways in which the reader may
enter spatially, temporally… and to add to McCloud, conceptually.

The gutter functions as a negative verbal/conceptual space that requires readers to co-construct the textual and thematic meaning of the scene. The gutters cause comics to operate enthymematically, asking readers to supply a portion of the visual and ideational meaning of the strip. Aristotle described the enthymeme as a “rhetorical syllogism,”\(^{162}\) which Bitzer explains may be understood as an incomplete argument where the audience supplies a missing premise “out of its stock of opinion and knowledge.”\(^{163}\) Margaret Zulick adds to this understanding, arguing that enthymemes also work generatively and “make the unknown appear familiar.”\(^{164}\) In comic strips, the emptiness of the gutter creates an unknown set of actions, duration of time, verbal exchange, and thematic directionality that the reader must generate out of his or her own set of knowledge. Of course, the reader does not do this alone. Instead, the enthymematic moves work coordinately, with the reader following the cues established by the author/artist in the surrounding panels (and even in the history of the strip). To describe comic strips as enthymematic may seem like an ill-fit for strips that do not appear to be advancing a deliberate argument or position statement (though it may be argued that there are implicit, normative arguments laden in every strip, as many works of comic studies scholarship have borne out),\(^{165}\) but in the controversial context of religious reference in a mainstream medium, it is hard to ignore the directional, argumentative potential in any given religious reference.

In some cases, as will be seen below, it is clear that comic strip readers are being asked to take part in the construction of a claim regarding matters of religion. Within the
religious context, the formal call for involvement makes the comic medium uniquely situated to explore concepts of personal import. Issues of identity, socio-politics, and even, as Rushkoff contends, humanity’s “relationship to the gods”\textsuperscript{166} are prime fodder for writers in the field. Comics have an immersive, participatory, and a-temporal potential, Orcutt extends, that match the “deep involvement” inherent in religious narratives.\textsuperscript{167} The very form of the medium corresponds to key elements of the personal yet transcendent aspects of many historical and contemporary religious practices.\textsuperscript{168} The engaging call of the gutter, especially within an open aesthetic, is ripe with possibilities for religious exploration.

The participatory nature of the comic strip, generated by the enthymematic gutter, is a powerful tool for engaging and influencing readers, even in the funny pages of a newspaper. “Participation is,” says McCloud, “a powerful force in any medium.”\textsuperscript{169} This participation, however, demonstrates the double-edged nature of the gutter. Inviting audience participation engages them in the establishment of the position, making them co-creators of the claim, in part complicit with the outcome and thus more likely to agree (be it consciously or unconsciously). That same participation, though, wrests control out of the author/artists hands and increases the uncertainty of the particular outcome. This is the problem with enthymemes. This is the problem with the gutter and the broader open engagement with comics that it represents. The more freedom of active participation the reader has, the more invested in and thus more susceptible to the persuasion he or she will be, but the nuances of that persuasive claim become less certain and may not result in the intended goal of the artist. Many contemporary comics theorists praise the medium
for its potential personal and cultural impact, highlighting the function of the gutter, but not often considered is the ineffective, even dangerous potential in the openness of the gutter. Cara Finnegan notes similar trouble within particular photographic visual norms whereby viewers approach images with problematic conceptual baggage (particularly the a priori belief that photographs are “real” unless proven otherwise).\footnote{170} Similar enthyemematic trouble is inherent within the practice of reading comics. Viewers bring experiences and perspectives to the process – the activity praised when discussing the participatory nature of the gutter – but those perspectives may be incompatible with an artist’s or editor’s desired outcome, a disjuncture difficult to surmount without limiting comics’ open nature. To praise the potential of comics for their engaging qualities means to also recognize the limitations in the very feature most praised – the double-edged gutter.

Though the gutter is a source of requisite reader participation, it is not the only formal element in comics that invites participation, especially in the Schulzian aesthetic. The gutter, however, can be seen as representative of the engaging nature of comics – an art form that McCloud says asks for more from the reader than any other medium.\footnote{171} Within a given panel, the abstracted nature of drawings and the limited space for verbiage requires that readers mentally expand what had already been condensed for them. Kress and Van Leeuwen speak of similar processes required by the visual simplicity of diagrams that work because objects are reduced down to essential components to be understood by active readers.\footnote{172} Such illustrations can actually have a higher modality (or “realness”) in some contexts, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s work may suggest, as
particular historically situated audiences judge for themselves the criteria for accuracy. Because Schulz’s visual components are so minimal, the verbal information is given higher prominence. Across the decades, those who engage the medium have routinely found *Peanuts* to speak to the human condition. One can thus argue that the conceptual components, found to be an accurate depiction of reality by readers, are the elements that raise the overall modality the strip, even if the visual depictions are highly abstracted caricature lines.

Expressive drawing, a skill Schulz had strong command over, attracts readers to his characters, but the visual elements do not require that readers spend significant time to comprehend the image. As abstractions, cartoons generally allow for quick perception of a character’s key features. Ryan and Schwartz demonstrated this in a 1956 study in which subjects were shown images of a character at varying durations in different formats – photograph, shaded drawing, traced line drawing, and cartoon drawing – and were then asked to replicate the posture of the character’s hand. The shortest exposure was needed with the cartoon depictions. The quickness with which one can internalize the visual content of a cartoon drawing explains why the medium can be so visually engaging when only part of a brief morning routine with the early edition of the paper. Influential visual perception theorist Julian Hochberg explains that in some ways the caricatures can serve as an improvement upon more naturalistic images by isolating distinct features and “canonical forms” that the mind’s eye would encode from naturalistic exposures. A round head and a wry curved smile sufficiently correspond to naturalistic perceptions and allow the artist to work in a more compact visual vocabulary through simplification. This
reduces the need for the eye to travel and fixate on every point of the image, says Hochberg. A viewer cannot engage the entire work at once, even in a small comic strip, and the eye must scan and stop based on predictions from the peripheral vision when the mind predicts that a peripheral view is insufficient for understanding. A minimalist drawing like Schulz’s places a lesser burden on the viewer, not drawing the peripheral vision to many elements, and often allowing the peripheral sensation to be sufficient. This reduced amount of fixation needed to sample the work frees more time and energy for the reader to invest in active co-constractive participation and conceptual consideration, actually allowing for the amplified engagement the style requests.

Schulz’s style, unique for comic strips at its debut, establishes a context in which the reader can be highly participatory in developing and identifying with the thematic truths of the strip. The way this is executed in the instances of religious reference is of interest for this study. Specifically, the historical uniqueness of Schulz’s open visual and verbal style exposes a broader understanding of guttered interaction with comic narratives. The reading practices inherent in comic strips, especially those composed in simplified styles like Schulz’s, invite and require an enthymematic approach whereby viewers co-construct the spatial, temporal, and conceptual meaning in the artifact. The benefits and limitations of this characteristic shed important light on Schulz’s sometimes controversial use of religious concepts and texts in his 50 years of narrative comic strip art.
A Sample of *Peanuts* Comic Strips

To say that all of Schulz’s strips are laden with deep, provocative meaning would be a gross overstatement. Many strips are arguably products of just what Schulz claimed he was in the business of – the “business is to draw funny pictures.”\(^{176}\) *Peanuts*, though witty and endearing, albeit cruel and at times merciless, often functions in standardized gag format, with the fourth panel revealing the twist to make the sequence humorous for readers. Schulz was an effective humorist, knowing how to strike a comedic note with an unexpected comment or telling expression from one of his embraceable idiosyncratic characters, and was willing to remove characters like Charlotte Braun and Faron the cat when he found that the humor did not work. As skilled with his words as his India ink, Schulz consistently wrote jokes that landed with editors and readers for 50 years (and beyond). In contrast to many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Schulz often employed a sly humor that was more thoughtful than vaudevillian. In one of Schulz’s writerly strips, for example, Snoopy sits atop his doghouse with his typewriter while Lucy critiques his novel’s opening lines. “It was a dark and stormy night,” writes Snoopy, “Suddenly, a shot rang out.” When Lucy (transformed by this point in 1993 from a fussbudget to a witless expert) offers Snoopy advice, telling him to reconsider his word choice, Snoopy rewrites: “Gradually, a shot rang out” (Figure 2.24).
Schulz enjoyed writing variations on recurring motifs like Snoopy on his doghouse with a typewriter. “A cartoonist is someone who has to draw the same thing every day without repeating himself,” he said.\footnote{177} The strategy not only helps make the strip commercially viable (the success of the franchise will be described in chapter five), but it also allows for an element of tweakable predictability that makes the humor work. Schulz identified twelve such repeating motifs to which he attributed his strip’s popularity: the kite-eating tree, Schroeder’s music, Linus’ blanket, Lucy’s psychiatry booth, Snoopy’s doghouse, Snoopy himself, the Red Baron, Woodstock, the baseball games, the football episodes, the Great Pumpkin, and the little red-haired girl.\footnote{178} Schulz
used these recurring elements, along with others (like the episodes with the leaves, the conversations with the teacher, or the characters leaning on a brick wall) as a foundation for his humor. The dependability in the strip, also founded upon the reliability of the character’s idiosyncratic personalities, allowed Schulz to explore important issues, even through the humor. Along with the recurring theme of anxiety (which Lee Mendelson, producer on the *Peanuts* television specials, notes was a theme at the front of the cultural curve, reflecting a new social attentiveness to lived anxieties in the 1950s and 1960s), readers would find stories referencing such issues as body image (such as the 1972 strip in which Peppermint Patty cries because she’ll never be as pretty as the little red-haired girl) and even nuclear annihilation (as was the case in a 1962 strip in which Lucy hollers at Charlie Brown “Don’t say it!” when he begins to spell out the prospects of global catastrophe).

In addition to the use of the 12 devices, Schulz also took occasion to explore theological concepts in the strips, both as a source of humor and a vehicle for contemplation. According to Sparky himself, he was “the first to use extensive theological references” in a comic strip. For this study, one third (34.4 percent) of the total number of *Peanuts* strips were read to determine the frequency and types of religious references in Schulz’s comics. Every third year was coded, beginning with 1951 (the first full year *Peanuts* dailies were printed) and ending with 1999 (the last full year *Peanuts* dailies and Sundays were printed), totaling 6,157 strips of the complete 17,897 printed. Of that representative sample, 164 strips (2.66 percent) had a form of religious reference. For the purposes of coding, “religious references” were defined as
any recognizable visual or verbal reference (explicit or embedded) to supernatural faith, theology, church practice, or religious iconography. While the majority of the references were to Christianity, such was not a requirement of the coding definition and non-Christian references were coded as well. To be fair, any attempt to define religion, even asserting a definition for operationalizing purposes, will only highlight the blurred boundaries of the term. A great diversity in nuanced references are possible within creative works, and the definition used here is intended to cast an inclusive net – an approach consistent with other major studies such as research by Skill et al, Clarke, and Wolff. However, an additional 33 strips contained items such as the cast of children dressed in costumes for tricks-or-treats, the presence of angel food cake, and the use of terms often otherwise found in a religious context (such as “moral” or “hypocrite,”) but these were excluded for this portion of the study because they did not demonstrate a connection to religious belief or action within the context of the particular strip. For unclear strips, the following two-step standard was applied to determine if the instance would be coded for religious reference: 1) Is it possible to interpret the strip a-religiously without losing significant meaning? If no, then the strip is significantly associated with religion and should be coded. If yes, it can be read a-religiously without harm to the humor or narrative structure, then 2) Are there cues within the context of the strip that indicate that the humor, inference, or narrative plot should be associated with religious thought or action? If no, then for the purpose of this study the strip was not considered to have a religious reference. If yes, then the strip was coded as containing a religious reference. This litmus test allows the scholar to use the artifact itself as the test
for whether or not unclear elements should be viewed as secular or religiously affiliated. For instance, in the December 17, 1987 strip, a girl in Linus’s class tells him her name is Lydia, but has been changed from Rachel and Rebecca. One could read the strip a-religiously, but the combination of three distinct Old Testament names within one strip justifies a religious reading and so the strip was coded as such. Conversely, in the June 6, 1963 strip, Linus and Lucy squabble over counting one’s blessings. While the phrase “count your blessings” is used within religious discourse, it can be interpreted a-religiously as a “glass is half full” practice, and there are no verbal or visual cues within the strip to indicate that the reader should interpret the meaning as associated with religious discourse (chapter three will take note of these broader instances, describing how even such etymologically embedded reference can play an important role in maintaining religious presence within a largely secular mainstream media environment).

Likewise, strips referencing Christmas or the Great Pumpkin were not included unless they otherwise contained references to religious belief or practice within the strip, such as when Linus would go door-to-door with tracts to share the message of the Great Pumpkin. Though several of the Great Pumpkin strips were included in the 1984 collection of Schulz’s theological strips, *And the Beagles and the Bunnies Shall Lie Down Together*, Schulz explained that the Great Pumpkin originated as an idea in which Linus gets confused between the Great Pumpkin and Santa Claus, and many of the strips operate under that secular premise. When other elements in the strip direct a religious interpretation, strips were coded, and Schulz did take occasion to associate the Great Pumpkin with religious belief – but simply not every strip that contains the Great
Pumpkin contains an identifiable association with religious thought or action, just as every Christmas strip does not contain explicit religious content (chapter four will further explain the secularity of Christmas in mainstream culture, and chapter six will discuss the ways in which the Great Pumpkin has been viewed by some as a deeply theological symbol).

Table 2.1 Number of strips containing religious reference by year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (Peanuts published 1950-2000)</th>
<th>Strips with Religious Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<td>81</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the sample, religious reference was almost entirely absent in the first decade of the strip’s printing, (Table 2.1). Beginning in 1960, however, an average of 11.57 strips per year contain a religious reference, almost two weeks’ worth of daily strips per year. For Schulz, the 1950s were formative years in which he refined his aesthetic style, his storytelling, the cast of characters, and was when he built his readership during the incremental growth of the property (which was not an overnight success). By the 1960s, Schulz had hit his stride, and it may be more accurate to view Schulz’s statistical
trends in religious reference beginning in 1960 once they made a more consistent appearance in the strip (only two references were before 1960; 1960 contained 14). From 1960-1999, 3.16 percent of the sample (162 strips of 5,114) contained a religious reference. This is significantly lower than Robert Short’s reported estimation that 10 percent of the strips were centered on “genuine religious concerns.” Short, however, was estimating without a systematic method, and was also working from the premise that theological implications can be found in any art, actively drawing out metaphors from the strip such as Snoopy serving as a messiah figure. Because of this, his rough estimate is understandably high. Short’s relationship with Schulz in the early 1960s, though, may have prompted Schulz to consider more religious references in the strip, as Short would call attention to religious likenesses that Schulz had not realized (such as when he pointed out to Sparky that Charlie Brown standing on the pitcher’s mound looked like Job on a mound of ashes). Around 1970, when Schulz was going through a rough divorce from his first wife Joyce, religious references decline, then surging in the 1980s when Schulz developed extended series centered around religious reference (included in the sample was the “Butterfly” episode described in chapter three). One third of the strips with religious reference were part of a series (32.93 percent; 54 strips) and over half of those (59.25 percent; 32 strips) are from the 1980s. Prior to 1981, the longest series with religion was only 3 strips long. In the 1980s, though, lengthy Peanuts strips highlight the inclusion of religious ideas, such as in a 13 strip run in 1981 and an eight strip run in 1984.
The same sample of strips was also coded for reference to two Schulzian devices: the football episodes (the scenes of Charlie Brown place-kicking a football) and the Red Baron episodes (the scenes where Snoopy plays the role of the World War I flying ace). Across the 17 years of strips coded, a total of 134 strips (2.17 percent) contained Red Baron episodes, which when adjusted for a 1965 starting year (the first year in which the Red Baron episodes entered the strip) totals 3.05 percent. Only 25 strips contained the football episodes, which began in 1951, totaling .40 percent. In the sample, none of the football or Red Baron strips contained religious reference though they do in other strips outside the sample, demonstrating that the themes are not mutually exclusive. The iconic popularity of both devices coded for have been demonstrated by their repetition outside of the strip. The Royal Guardsmen, for instance, recorded two albums devoted to Snoopy and the Red Baron,¹⁹² and the football gag has spawned many parodies, such as an abusive Roadhouse/Peanuts mashup in Fox’s animated television show Family Guy.¹⁹³ These Schulzian devices contain distinct visual elements (Lucy holding the ball; Snoopy in his goggles and scarf) integral to their iconicity. In the sample surveyed here, the religious references in the strip are never accompanied by any distinct religious imagery (unlike the iconography present in the animated specials described in chapter three). This likely accounts for part of why the devices are more well-known than the religious elements in the strip despite occupying the pages of the newspaper less frequently.

As demonstrated in previous research,¹⁹⁴ a religious reading of the franchise is not the dominant reading. Instead, fans of Peanuts routinely point to the success, identifiable characters, and the 12 devices in their secular recollections of the property. The religious
strips, though, have not gone unnoticed. For some readers, clearly identifiable moments of religious content provokes an awareness of, perhaps even interest in, further religious reference and implication. As described in previous research, three aspects of Schulz’s work act as these *lightning rods*:

> By lightning rods, I mean elements found throughout the discourse that attract a distinct interpretation or style of reading. For *Peanuts*, there are three key lightning rods: *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, scriptural references [in the comic strips], and Robert Short's works. These elements attract sacred analysis and for the sacred reader justify a sacred interpretation. The sacred reader sees *Peanuts* in light of these elements, as opposed to seeing *Peanuts* as a composition of the repeated twelve devices. A given strip is not another football episode, but is rather a place where deeper meaning, biblical truth, or parable may be found.\(^{195}\)

These elements, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (discussed in chapter four), Robert Short’s *The Gospel According to Peanuts* (discussed in chapter six), and the identifiable religious moments in the strips through scriptural reference serve what some media theorists have called a *priming* function. Berkowitz and Rogers contend that “for some time after a concept is activated, there is an increased probability that it and associated thought elements will come to mind again, creating what has been termed a *priming effect*.\(^{196}\) A study by Berkowitz, Parker, and West, they note, demonstrates the effect. In that study, they found that school children who had read a comparatively aggressive comic book (*Adventures of the Green Berets*) were more likely to choose aggressive words in a
posttest than their peers who read a neutral comic book (Gidget). \(^{197}\) The exposure to an idea does not necessarily lead to direct imitation, but does increase the salience of that concept in the audiences’ mind for some time after the initial stimulus, exhibited by the choice of aggressive words after encountering aggressive ideas.

Priming occurs at varying degrees of strength and reader awareness. Readers were overtly made aware of the religious content in the extended series in the 1980s, and it also seems likely that one would consider theological matters more when they are included in the longer Sunday strips (9.75 percent; 16 strips) that require more interaction time because of their size. Strips that are associated with Christmas and Halloween also have the potential to amplify the religious content of the strip as the holidays themselves prime audiences because of the festivals’ cultural heritages. Those holiday associations account for 20.98 percent (34 strips) of the strips with religious references. One might argue that readers would expect religious content at Christmas and thus take less note of it because of its predictability (the argument being that the more salient an idea, the greater the priming effect; the more predictable an idea, the less salient). Predictability, however, should not be seen as having an inherent diminishing impact on salience, given that expectations often raise awareness as much as predictability reduces shock.

Regardless, as chapter four will demonstrate, religious meaning at Christmas is not guaranteed across mainstream media properties. Even so, the greater the number of total references, the more likely readers would attend to the references in the other 79 percent of religious strips occurring throughout the year apart from Christmas and Halloween.
Extending ideas from Bargh and Pietromonoca, Berkowitz and Rogers contend that the attentiveness priming effect “can operate automatically and even without awareness.” It should not be surprising, then, that some have interpreted Schulz’s work as being heavily theological, given that the scriptural references in the strips act as lightning rods for sacred interpretation, priming readers to be increasingly considerate of religious concepts as they continue to engage the property. That priming can happen without conscious recognition also explains why the dominant reading of Peanuts has been a secular reading, despite the occasional explicit religious reference. While readers may be increasingly attentive to religious ideas, priming does not guarantee that they will actively register awareness of the concept. Even as such, these references can play an important role in increasing the potential for and salience of religious thought within cultural conversations – especially in a medium with a history of editorial censorship.

The priming paradigm has most often been used to describe political effects of news media publication and broadcast, referring to what foundational priming authors Iyengar and Kinder describe as the “changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations.” As demonstrated by Berkowitz and Rogers, however, the theory and its terminology can function as a more general extension of agenda setting theory, to which it is closely related. The action solicited by the priming effect does not need to be confined to directed decisions at the polls, but should instead be understood as an attentiveness to an issue resulting in subsequent activity increasingly guided by sensitivity to that issue after having encountered it in a previous stimuli. Two types of subsequent activities should be considered as the priming effect of media – 1) and
increased attraction to an issue (not unlike when a pregnant woman suddenly notices all the pregnant women around her), and 2) increased likelihood to form judgments or assessments based on an issue (such as voting for a candidate based on economic record after the news media sets the agenda to revolve around the economy). Voters are primed to consider an issue at the polls because of salient coverage in the news; comic strip readers are primed to further consider religious matters because of salient religious moments found when reading the comic pages. As Scheufele and Tewksbury isolate, the key distinction between agenda setting, which contends that salient issues in the mainstream media will strongly correlate with issues then considered important by the viewing public, and priming is judgement – which one might extend as being rooted in action or activity. Agenda setting theory, founded by the McCombs and Shaw landmark Chapel Hill study, describes the effect by which issues are made part of the dialogue because of their media exposure. Conversely, then, other ideas will be invisibly marginalized by their lack of presence. Iyengar and Kinder’s priming speaks to a similar process, but focuses the attention more on the activity that occurs after an issue has been raised. The press may make an issue part of the social consciousness by heavy reporting on the subject. That sets the agenda, one of the effects being that viewers are primed for activity based on that issue. Scheufele and Tewksbury highlight priming theory as one of the communicative models needing more explication. By isolating two possible activities that result from priming (attentiveness and assessment), one can better understand a breadth of how the salience of an issue in the media influences the content of subsequent audience activity. In the context of Schulz’s work, priming explains in part the
mechanics of the lightning rod phenomenon while also demonstrating the broader impact that the inclusion of distinct religious content like biblical specificity may have on readership (corporate choices in the agenda building phase will be discussed in chapter five).

In 30 of the strips in the 17 year sample, Schulz used explicit biblical quotations in which phrasing, idioms, or verses (partial or complete) repeated from biblical or other sacred texts are identified as being such, either by the use of quotation marks, reference to the source, or reference to the author. In another 14 strips, Schulz made use of embedded biblical quotations where partial phrasing from sacred text is used without a signaling device. As is typical with Schulz’s religious references, these references are all to biblical passages (as with most mainstream Western media, Christianity is clearly the dominant religion referenced by Schulz, though he made a dozen humor-focused non-Christian references in the strips, such as a reference to fortune telling, Native American rain dances, crystal use, and the golfing gods). A total of 43 of the strips (26.21 percent) with religious references contain explicit or embedded reference to the Bible. Adjusting for a start date of 1960, this means that short of one percent (0.84 percent) of Schulz’s strips (0.69 percent with a 1950 start date) contain text from the Bible. While this number may seem dramatically low, the attention it drew from his readers demonstrates its noticeable uniqueness in the medium. Readers across historical moments have commented on the scriptural references in the strip. One reader even wrote in who believed that Schulz was using an incorrect translation of the Hebrew in Jeremiah 31:15 in his December 17, 1961 strip, writing out both the Hebrew and the literal English
translation for Schulz. “I think you may receive other letters about certain mistakes,” the
writer concluded. In 1975, Schulz commented that he has included scriptures “in spite
of severe criticism from people who have written to me saying that it is a desecration of
the scriptures to quote them in ‘such a lowly thing as a newspaper comic strip.’”
Though he did not believe that it should be considered among the high arts, Schulz did
not ascribe to the “low art” theory of comic strips either, and thought he was actually
bringing a certain level of dignity to the medium. Beyond that, he believed that humor
and religion were compatible and was thus content to be of the first to include significant
amounts of biblical content in his strips, saying:

        Faith is positive. Humor is proof of faith, proof that everything is going to
        be all right with God, nevertheless. There is humor in the Bible. I myself
        have wished many times that I could read Hebrew so I could catch the
        humor written between the lines in the Old Testament. The ancient Jewish
        storytellers must have had humor. The Jewish people must have sat there
        around the campfire, listening to their teachers tell the stories of how their
        nation tricked other nations, and laughed mightily. This is all part of the
        humor of the Bible.

In their content analysis of eight years of comics in the Los Angeles Times (1979-
1987), Lindsey and Hereen likewise conclude that religion and humor have strong
functional links, finding meaningful references to religion in a variety of comic strips.
Their study of approximately 65,000 comic strips yielded only a half percent of strips
(365 strips or .56 percent) that contained references to religion (excluding nominal
phrasing like “for heaven’s sake”) such as moralized religious functionaries and stereotypical allusions to an afterlife. As Greenspoon has also noted, one can find such reference scattered across the funny pages in a variety of strips, including *Family Circus*, *B.C.*, *Ziggy*, *Fred Basset*, *Frank and Ernest*, *Andy Capp*, and *Marvin*. Like Lindsey and Hereen, Greenspoon found a limited number of typical biblical stories referenced. Only four Old Testament topics account for an estimated 75 percent of the references: Noah and the ark, Moses and the Ten Commandments, Adam and Eve, and the creation of the world. In a follow-up study, Greenspoon found that New Testament scriptural references are most typically drawn from the Christmas nativity scene and the Sermon on the Mount (particularly Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Figure 2.25).

![Frank and Ernest](image)

**Figure 2.25** *Frank and Ernest* (August 29, 1985). (Frank & Ernest © 1985 Thaves. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)

Schulz’s references are, as Greenspoon acknowledges, highly specific by comparison. “Schulz is among the most adventurous cartoonists in his introduction of
biblical themes because he does not limit himself to well-known incidents. Instead, he regularly cites chapter and verse as a way of drawing his readers into material they might otherwise be unaware of,” observes Greenspoon. Though Schulz does not include visual religious iconography or God himself in his strips (as Frank and Ernest often does – Figure 2.25), the inclusion of explicit passage citations gives unfamiliar readers access to references drawn from Schulz’s robust biblical literacy that they might not have initially caught. “The scriptural references have always been done with dignity and, of course, with much love, for I am extremely fond of studying both the Old and the New Testaments,” said Schulz. Schulz insisted on writing only subjects in which he could command the language, often calling on lawyer, doctor, or ophthalmologist friends when writing a strip on the subject. His studio library included a book on sky diving for such purposes for he had never gone skydiving. Having read the Bible through several times, able to recite verses by memory, Schulz’s studies provided him a deep well from which to draw atypical scriptural references usable when gracing the funny pages with Snoopy and the gang. In addition to Sally’s misnamed reference to “the book of Reevaluation,” in this study’s 17 year sample explicit quotations were found from 27 different passages (Table 2.2). Schulz’s attention was divided equally over Old and New Testament passages, with 51.72 percent of the explicit quotations drawn from the Old Testament and 48.27 percent from the New Testament. Though he did not rely on the typical Old Testament stories as much as other artists, the Old Testament does appear to have given him more inspiration, with a wider array of books represented than in the New Testament. In the sample, he explicitly quoted 12 Old Testament books and only 3 New Testament
books, distributed with reasonable variation across the sample years. The Gospels of Luke and Matthew are used in all of the New Testament quotations, save one (92.85 percent), the other reference being a nod to the name Linus in II Timothy. Over half of the New Testament references appear in December Christmas strips. Perhaps Schulz was more inspired by a wider variety of particular Old Testament verses to account for the trend; perhaps this indicates a caution against including the prominent evangelical directionality and eschatological themes in the New Testament, as Schulz often believed those issues were mishandled. As will be described in chapter five, while verses describing the nativity at Christmas are common, verses describing the crucifixion and resurrection at Easter are not present in the franchise, likely reflecting that same caution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Text (King James Version unless noted)</th>
<th>Peanuts strip date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke 2:1</td>
<td>(1) And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.</td>
<td>December 11, 1960; December 18, 1960; December 25; 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 98:4</td>
<td>(4) Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.</td>
<td>December 18, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Timothy 4:21</td>
<td>(21) Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.</td>
<td>June 1, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah 31:16</td>
<td>(16) Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.</td>
<td>June 23, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 2:8-14</td>
<td>(8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (10) And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (12) And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.</td>
<td>December 18, 1966; December 23, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 1:1-7, 16-18</td>
<td>(1) The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (2) Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; (3) And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; (4) And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; (5) And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obad of Ruth; and Obad begat Jesse; (6) And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; (7) And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; (16) And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (17) So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations. (18) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.</td>
<td>December 21, 1969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 19:30</td>
<td>(30) But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.</td>
<td>March 8, 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:15</td>
<td>(15) Thou shalt not steal.</td>
<td>October 18, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy 25:4</td>
<td>(4) Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.</td>
<td>October 18, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 12:10</td>
<td>(10) A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.</td>
<td>April 26, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 1:30, 38</td>
<td>(30) And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. (38) And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.</td>
<td>December 22, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 5:45</td>
<td>(45) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.</td>
<td>April 13, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 2:14, 22</td>
<td>(14) When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: (22) But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:</td>
<td>December 25, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 26:20</td>
<td>(20) Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains.</td>
<td>December 20, 1987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Kings 9:30-33  
(30) And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.  
(31) And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?  
(32) And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs.  
(33) And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.

December 18, 1987

Luke 6:26  
(26) Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

August 29, 1987

Psalm 91:5  
(5) Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

July 11, 1990

Genesis 30:32  
(32) I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

August 7, 1993

Joel 3:10  
(10) Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.

April 29, 1993

Song of Solomon 2:12  
(12) The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

January 21, 1993

Numbers 12:2  
(2) And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.

October 17, 1993

I Kings 19:4  
(4) But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.

December 3, 1996

Luke 15:20-23  
(20) And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.  
(21) And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.  
(22) But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:  
(23) And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

November 5, 1996

Matthew 10:14  
(14) And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

October 29, 1996

Genesis 7:12  
(12) And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

July 28, 1999

Table 2.2  List of explicit quotations of biblical text in 17 year sample of *Peanuts* (1951-1999).
As noted before, some have criticized Schulz for including scriptural references in the strip because humor and comic art have not always been held in high regards. Most scriptural references in comic strips, says Greenspoon, pass through the page without ruffling the feathers of readers because “the questions they raise are not profound nor are their images complex. They are cute, entertaining and mostly reassuring. They rarely challenge.”

Schulz considered much of this type of humor too syrupy – a shallow humor he disliked. In his use of scriptural passages, Schulz was unique, though the way his references were structured in the strips followed the same humor-first approach. In nearly all of his strips featuring quotations, the verses primarily serve a comedic effect, not overtly posing for readers a controversial theological question, even if the specificity and citation technique does otherwise prime readers who may be biblically untrained to be attentive to such issues (Figures 2.26-2.29).

Figure 2.26 Peanuts (August 7, 1993). (PEANUTS © 1993 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
Figure 2.27 *Peanuts* (December 21, 1969). (PEANUTS © 1969 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
Figure 2.28 Peanuts (October 18, 1981). (PEANUTS © 1981 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
Schulz noted in 1967 that he got the most attention for a 1960 strip in which Linus saw an image of the stoning of Stephen in the clouds (Figure 2.33). These letters may have been lost in the fire that ravaged Sparky’s studio in 1966 (which was played out in the strips as Snoopy’s doghouse burning, perhaps because he was smoking in bed, perhaps because he sinned. Figures 2.30-2.31). The 1960 cloud strip was one of the first of his more pronounced incorporations of biblical figures into the strip, and the reactions were likely mixed – some upset with the inclusion of sacred figures in a “low art” while others were pleased to see religious content in a mainstream medium (perhaps similar to...
the reaction to *A Charlie Brown Christmas* described in chapter four). While the
directionality of the majority of those letters is unknown, two other strips by Schulz
(regarding school prayer and abortion) are recorded to have also evoked strong responses
from readers. These strips did not contain explicit scriptural references, but instead
contained topical references. Topical references without scripture, such as a reference to
sin, church, prayer, demons, or denominations, comprise the bulk of the religious
references in Schulz’s work (78.44 percent). The majority of these topical references are
structured to form a gag not a theological inquiry. Schulz’s most theologically
provocative content, however, occurs in particular topical strips. In these he opens up
potentially challenging lines of inquiry for his readers without providing explicit answers,
thereby demonstrating the implications of a guttered, enthymematic medium.

![Figure 2.30 Peanuts (September 19, 1966). Charles Schulz's studio burned down in 1966, destroying much of his property, but giving him inspiration for several dailies, including Figure 2.31 below in which Lucy claims that Snoopy's sin is the cause of the fire. (PEANUTS © 1966 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)](image)
Figure 2.31 *Peanuts* (September 24, 1966). (PEANUTS © 1966 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)

![Figure 2.31](image)

Figure 2.32 *Peanuts* (July 27, 1981). This strip is part of a two week series in which Peppermint Patty believes an angel in the form of a butterfly brings her a message to give to the world (further described in chapter three as part of an episode of the *Peanuts* Saturday morning cartoon program). (PEANUTS © 1981 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
Figure 2.33 Peanuts (August 14, 1960). (PEANUTS © 1960 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
In a strip that spoke directly to its historical context, Schulz drew a strip in 1963 in which Sally, hiding behind the couch, tells Charlie Brown “We prayed in school today!” (Figure 2.34). In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that school-initiated prayer was unconstitutional, part of a series of rulings that dramatized the growing social awareness of the tensions between religious practice and public space, including a 1963 affirmation of the 1962 decision. Schulz apparently found humor possible in the topic of school prayer, drawing several other strips that called upon the issue as a comedic trope (e.g., Figures 2.35-2.36). The 1963 strip struck a nerve with Schulz’s representative at the syndicate, vice president and general manager Larry Rutman. Because comic strips
were so widely read in the 1960s, commented Schulz to one interviewer, it was “a very strongly ‘censored’ form of entertainment.”

“Religion has always been a bit of a taboo subject [in comics], because you’re writing a strip for the largest mass audience,” another comic artist, Brian Walker of *Hi and Lois*, said to another interviewer. Likewise, *Blondie* creator Chic Young reportedly would tell mid-century cartoonists to avoid mentioning controversial subjects like cigarettes, divorce, liquor, race, and religion.

This caution was uniquely true in the 1950s and 60s. In 1954, the major organization running comic books and operating in close relationship to syndicated comic strips, the Comics Magazine Association of America, had been ordered by the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency (which was influenced by Dr. Frederick Wertham’s book *Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today’s Youth*) to self-regulate, resulting in the code of the Comics Code Authority. The code declared to comic book authors that “ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible,” functionally restricting mention of religion for fear of censorship.

Rutman was thus obviously wary of pushback from readers, political leaders, and especially newspaper editors, and the many letters that came in to the syndicate from readers reflected the very real anger. “I have letters from people who told me that this was one of the most disgusting things they had seen in a comic strip, that they did not think it was funny and indeed thought it was extremely sacrilegious,” reported Schulz. Much of the response was positive, though, one woman writing “I think it is beautiful, and you have our heartiest support.”

Even the positive responses to the 1963 school prayer strip posed a unique problem for Rutman – the positive responses were coming
from both sides of the debate. Not only was Rutman responsible for dealing with the editors of the newspapers, but he and his staff also handled the licensing agent requests for permission to reprint Peanuts materials in their literature and on their products. Organizations defending the Supreme Court’s decisions and groups urging for reversal of the 1962 and 1963 decisions each wanted to include the strip with Sally behind the couch in their literature as a persuasive illustration of their position. “It disturbed [Rutman] when both sides wanted to reprint the strip to promote their beliefs,” said Schulz, “so we talked about it, and he decided that we wouldn’t let anybody reprint them.” Schulz spoke briefly about his position on school prayer by writing a letter to the Church of God’s publication, Vital Christianity, saying “If our spiritual lives need the support of governmental laws, then we are already doomed.”

Years later he summed it up for Gary Groth in 1997 by saying “I think it’s total nonsense.” Believing that prayer was too personal of a matter, he rejected the idea that it should be a school officiated activity, asking “Is the teacher going to be Catholic or Mormon or Episcopalian or what? It just causes all sorts of problems. And what are kids praying about anyway?”

Prayer was sometimes a serious contemplative issue for Schulz (as will be discussed in chapter three), at other times humorous. In the strips he occasionally found things for his characters to pray about, such as in a short series in which Peppermint Patty prays for divine intervention up at the chalkboard (Figures 2.35-2.36). The bind Lary Rutman was placed in regarding the 1963 strip demonstrates two things about religion in Peanuts: First, the guttered reading practices inherent in comic strip writing leave open the possibility for opposing interpretations of loaded content. Second, the openness of the
strip allowed Schulz to incorporate religious content without necessarily voicing a clear position on socio-theological matters.

Schulz has noted that another strip caused similar strong reaction, this time regarding the debates surrounding abortion. In a 1970 strip (Figure 2.37), after Linus asks Lucy a loaded question about an unborn child waiting in heaven to be born only to
have the parents decide they already have enough children, Lucy responds that his “ignorance of theology and medicine is appalling!” Unsurprisingly, this strip prompted responses from readers on each side of the issue, though in 1975 Schulz denied realizing that he was opening up the debate:

I am not always prepared for some of the reactions that certain strips have brought. [...] I was astounded when letters began to pour in on both sides of a subject that I had not realized I had touched [in that 1970s strip]. It was not my intention to get involved in a contraception or abortion debate. My point was simply that people all too frequently discuss things that they know little about. For the next several weeks I received letters complimenting me on my stand on population control, while I also received letters from readers who were fighting abortion. Both sides were sometimes complimentary, sometimes critical.222

It is unlikely that Schulz’s recollections of the strip only five years later accurately depict his awareness of the pregnancy rights debate happening during the 1970s. He did not state his position on abortion in public interviews (though the Michaelis biography includes a description of Schulz reportedly deciding with his first wife Joyce to have Joyce take their eldest, adopted daughter Meredith to Japan for an abortion at age 18, three years prior to the pregnancy strip in 1970),223 and the strip allowed him to remain publicly uncommitted.

This style of raising issues was used in many of Schulz’s religious strips – he introduced provocative questions but left them unanswered, unresolved. Such a strategy
was not only politically useful, but it also fit Schulz’s own evolving theological views, which included a resistance toward believing that one has all the answers (see chapter six). This approach to media content, however, does not inherently diminish the potency by which individuals may connect to the property, and perhaps it may do just the opposite – opening up more room for personal engagement, even if that engagement does not coincide with authorial intent. The 1970 abortion strip even caught the attention of long-time Peanuts follower Ronald Reagan. Reagan had begun occasionally writing to Schulz when Reagan was governor of California and had remembered him throughout the years. When Sparky was recovering in the hospital after heart surgery, for example, President Reagan called him to wish him a speedy recovery, the first lady and president having sent a bouquet of anthurium to his bedside. Weeks after reading the 1970 unborn child strip, Governor Reagan wrote to Schulz, saying that the strip “continues to haunt me in a very nice way.” In the letter, Reagan explained how he believed “our religion does justify the taking of life in self defense”224 (thus allowing for abortion only in the case of the pregnancy threatening the mother’s life). He then lamented at length about a psychiatric self-defense loophole some had found in the restrictions against abortion in California. “Well,” he concluded, “I didn’t mean to let you in on all my problems but just to give the background of why you touched a nerve with your strip the other day.” Whether Reagan believed that Schulz interpreted “their religion” to also mean that the strip had supported the restrictions or the legalization is unclear. The letter does demonstrate that the religious content in Schulz’s work, even when unclear and perhaps because it was unclear, attracts potent connections from readers at the highest social levels.
Some interpretations of the “deeper meaning” in Schulz’s strips are more radical than others. After coming across one strip in which Schulz employs his question “Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?” as a statement against naïve religious absolutism (Figure 2.38), one blogger concluded that Schulz must be an atheist. Charles Schulz was not an atheist. Instead, this strip demonstrates Schulz’s nuanced understanding of religion that isn’t shallow. Schulz resisted the notion that any one theologian or any particular religious denomination could have “all of the answers.” As will be described in chapter six, the rigid separation between religious communities struck Schulz as nonsensical and counterproductive (Figure 2.39).

Figure 2.38 Peanuts (August 9, 1976). (PEANUTS © 1976 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)

Figure 2.39 Peanuts (October 29, 1960). (PEANUTS © 1960 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
Similarly, the overconfidence of “end-times” obsessed preachers and televangelists that sought money from viewers seemed to Schulz to be a backwards practice, saying “I don’t believe in religions that preach ‘This is the end of the world.’ I feel strongly about ‘last days’ preaching” to biographer Rheta Grimsley Johnson.\textsuperscript{226} He also recalled, “I saw Jerry Falwell\textsuperscript{227} advertising a Bible one night, saying, ‘This Bible has my name, Jerry Falwell, right on the cover.’ And I thought to myself: ‘Wait. Why is Falwell’s name on the cover? Is he the author?’”\textsuperscript{228} The overuse of apocalyptic emphasis found its way frequently into Schulz’s strips as a humorous gag. Schulz’s feelings toward closed-minded denominationalism and televangelists formed comparatively overt critiques in his strips, though with softened bite due to his witty style and endearing child characters. In a three week series that appears to have developed its narrative trajectory organically (as Schulz preferred) Schulz dramatized his distaste for judgmental, shallow religion with the gang headed off to camp, faced with criticism of their prayers and inconsistently prompted fear of the apocalypse (Figures 2.40-2.56).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{peanuts.png}
\caption{\textit{Peanuts} (June 3, 1980). This strip is the beginning of a 17 day series (Figures 2.40-2.56) in which Schulz is critical of closed-minded end-times preaching and shallow judgment. (PEANUTS © 1980 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)}
\end{figure}
Figures 2.41-2.44 Peanuts (June 4 – 7, 1980). (PEANUTS © 1980 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
YOU'D BETTER PUT THAT AWAY, SALLY...THEY DON'T ALLOW COMIC BOOKS IN THIS CAMP.

YOU'RE KIDDING! NO, THEY SAY IT'S NOT SUITABLE READING.

THAT'S RIDICULOUS! HALF THE FUN OF GOING TO CAMP IS LYING ON YOUR BUNK READING COMIC BOOKS!

WHAT'S THE OTHER HALF?

SITTING UNDER A TREE READING COMIC BOOKS!

DO YOU LIKE SITTING AROUND A CAMPFIRE SINGING SONGS, SIR?

SURE, MARCIE, BUT I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THESE SONGS THEY'VE BEEN SINGING...

THEY'RE CALLED INSPIRATIONAL CHORUSES, SIR...

I'M GONNA ASK IF THEY'LL SING SOMETHING I KNOW.

I WOULDN'T SUGGEST "A HUNDRED BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL," SIR.

BED CHECK? WHAT IN THE WORLD IS A BED CHECK?

THE COUNSELORS HAVE TO COME AROUND AND SEE THAT WE'RE ALL TUCKED IN...

MAYBE THEY THINK WE'RE ALL GOING TO RUN AWAY OR SOMETHING.

I THINK IT'S JUST ANOTHER ONE OF THEIR PENNY ANNOYANCES!

DID YOU HEAR WHAT THAT SPEAKER SAID, MARCIE?

HE SAID THE WORLD IS COMING TO AN END! HE SAID WE'RE IN THE LAST DAYS!

I'M NOT SURE WE CAN BELIEVE EVERYTHING WE HEAR, SIR.

I'VE HEARD TALK AROUND HEADQUARTERS ABOUT A BIG ENEMY PUSH AT BELLEAU WOOD..

I CAN'T SLEEP FOR WORRYING ABOUT WHAT THAT SPEAKER SAID, MARCIE! I'M SCARED!

WHAT IF THE WORLD COMES TO AN END TONIGHT, MARCIE?

I PROMISE THERE'LL BE A TOMORROW, SIR... IN FACT, IT'S ALREADY TOMORROW IN AUSTRALIA!

HE SAID WE'RE IN THE LAST DAYS, MARCIE!

GO TO SLEEP, SIR... THE SUN IS SHINING IN AUSTRALIA...
**Figures 2.45-2.50** *Peanuts* (June 9-14, 1980). Note: June 8 is not part of the series because Sunday strips operated on a different serial schedule. (PEANUTS © 1980 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
While the tone of these strips pushes back against certain evangelical practices, Schulz’s open style and embraceable characters give him more room to make such claims without as much rejection. In particular, the use of child characters aids in the persuasive acceptance of the content. Since the time of *The Yellow Kid*, a common element across comic strips has been the use of children as characters. Strips like *Little Orphan Annie*, *Family Circus*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, and *Dennis the Menace* feature main characters barely even eight years old. Other strips, like *Krazy Kat* and *Pogo* feature animals that
often translate as something more like a child. They are, at least, certainly not depicted as normal “adults.” Children are shown in a full range of scenarios, from typical youngster affairs like sledding down a hill on a wintry day, to adult matters like worrying over how to pay the bills. The child character is flexible in this regard – a logistically useful tool for the artist, given the plasticity inherent in depictions of youth.

Children offer the comic strip artist a blank slate. Conceptually, they are free of the baggage-laden identities beleaguering adults. They are not weighed down by a history of past mistakes. Instead, they can be anything the artist wants them to be – a lovable orphan, a snarky philosopher, or an annoying neighbor. Their innocence allows them to be transformed, or not at all. As Harvey explains, the potential inherent in the innocent blank slate of the child character offers a unique opportunity for juxtaposition within the comic narrative. For the child character there is a certain detachment from lived-experience that affords a fresh set of eyes to any given scene. For an adult to say something about taxes, it is mundane. For a child to say it, it may be provocative, even profound. This is why Art Linkletter's *Kids Say the Darndest Things* works. It is funny to hear children’s commentary because *out of the mouth of babes springs forth wisdom* that might be lost were it voiced by an adult. It may even be flat out rejected.

Free from the inherent burdens of personal history, children also provide the medium with a unique source of optimism and hope. Though not only about gaining laughs, comic strips, often flying under the banner “Funnies” or “Funny Pages,” intended to sell newspapers would not survive if the genre as a whole were to depress and burden readers. As a character-type, children have the future ahead of them. They are looking
forward. Adult characters can certainly be funny and optimistic, and they can be nostalgic and heartwarming, but as a character-type they provide less future momentum. All the more striking, then, for Schulz to show one of his child characters traumatized by a fear of end times. Conceptually, children characters afford both the hope and nostalgia, as adult readers can empathize with the young characters plans for adulthood while simultaneously reflecting on their own childhoods. What should not be interpreted from the frequent use of child characters is that comic strips have historically been intended for children. Quite the opposite is true. Comic strips originated in the paper wars during a development of sensationalized journalism, whereby readers of the newspapers were courted into buying papers through the inclusion of entertaining drawings. These readers were most decidedly adults. In the post-Flintstones age, when cartoons are no longer largely engineered as sitcoms for adults, and when Saturday morning cartoons define a generation, it is easy to think of comics as directed at children. Instead, child characters have simply been employed as useful artistic narrative device by which to craft humorous, even thought-provoking strips.

While one can find Charles Schulz's teenage and adult characters in his drawings for the Church of God magazine Youth, Schulz took this tradition of child characters and flourished through it. Some artists simply gravitate toward particular character-types, and children suited Schulz's sensibilities remarkably well. The creation of his characters was something that suited his artistic style, a natural artistic development, says son Monte,\textsuperscript{230} not the attribute replication of one of Charles Schulz's coworkers who was a little-person, as David Michaelis contends in his highly-contested 2007 biography.\textsuperscript{231} “It’s funny,” said
Schulz in 1970, “but I never started out to do a cartoon about kids. I just wanted to be a
good cartoonist like [Krazy Kat’s] Herriman and [Wash Tubbs’] Crane.” Through his
visual stylings and narrative content, Schulz in many ways maximized the potential of his
li’l folks, allowing for the possibility of gentle yet sarcastic critique.

**Religious Reference in Other Comic Properties**

Outside of his humor driven critiques of denominationalism and televangelism,
Schulz was cautious not to force explicit declarations of religious doctrine into his strips
in part because he believed it was unfair to ask editors to tacitly support the particular
viewpoints of the syndicated artists on the funny pages. Such views “can become too
personal” for subscribing editors to have to promote, Schulz believed. The inclusion
of religious references without an explicit call for evangelism can still be meaningful in a
mainstream medium, bridging even minimally the private/public divide described in
chapter one. This approach is useful to avoid censorship by way of editorial rejection of
individual strips in a particular paper and potentially the loss of syndicated subscriptions.
It is a perspective that Schulz espoused early in his career when he was drawing for the
Church of God magazine *Youth*. “I work for the secular press through a newspaper
syndicate,” he said in 1963, “and naturally I must exercise care in the way I go about
expressing things. I have a message that I want to present, but I would rather bend a little
to put over a point than to have the whole strip dropped because it is too obvious.” His
*Youth* cartoons, like the majority of his topical *Peanuts* strips, use his knowledge of
Christian belief, scriptures, and especially church practices as source material for humorous gags with the occasional light criticism of shallow religion (Figures 2.5-2.58). Schulz drew the Youth panel from 1956 to 1965 until he became too busy and too separated from the youth gathering culture to feel creatively compelled to draw more strips. In 1965, Schulz provided cartoons for a book on preschool children in church (Figures 2.59-2.60), and in 1969 he produced several more cartoons for the magazine Reach (he also wrote another syndicated comic It’s Only a Game which was partially drawn by Jim Sasseville, but no religious references were made in the comic save for one strip featuring a psychic predicting the next hand in Bridge). The cartoons all ran in the church’s publications, and thus Schulz was able to use more religious jargon, did not need scriptural citation, and could use teenage characters that his audiences would identify with. Because this was an audience already espousing similar views, not a diverse mainstream medium, child characters providing an extra level of conceptual freedom would not be necessary. Overt references priming readers to attend to religious topics is essentially a non-issue in such a media context, as the audience for the work has already crossed the threshold of perceptual attentiveness to the topic at hand. When speaking to friendly audiences, even “preaching to the choir,” guttered media offer less risk of misinterpretation when the artist makes enthymematic moves and relies on insider knowledge for the humor or criticism to work.
Figure 2.57, 2.58 Cartoon panel by Charles Schulz published in the Church of God magazine, 
Youth (c. 1956-1965). Schulz enjoyed the fact that he was the first person to draw cartoon 
Catholic nuns in a Protestant magazine. Schulz worked for the Catholic magazine Timeless 
Topix earlier in his career as a letterer for their comics. (From I Take My Religion Seriously by 
Charles M. Schulz, © 1989 by Warner Press, Inc, Anderson IN. All rights reserved. Used by 
permission.)

Figures 2.59, 2.60 Cartoon panel by Charles Schulz published in the 1965 Warner Press book 
Two-by-Fours accompanied by writing from the Church of God's Kenneth F. Hall warmly 
explaining the experiences of a preschool aged child in church. (From Two-By-Fours by Charles 
M. Schulz and Kenneth F. Hall, © 1973 by Warner Press, Inc, Anderson, IN. All rights reserved. 
Used by Permission.)
Occasionally other comic artists have taken the mainstream medium of comic strips as a potential source for religious proclamation, even evangelism. As noted before, strips from *Family Circus* to *B.C.* sporadically reference religion. *B.C.* artist Johnny Hart drew robust criticism for his 2001 Easter strip in which a Menorah slowly faded panel by panel until all that remained was a cross at the center. On frequent occasion, Hart, a Christian who gained attention for voicing conservative religious viewpoints, incorporated his faith into his strip. This particular strip angered the Jewish Defense League who had been given an advance copy of the printing plate by an unknown newspaper employee, prompting a flood of outraged responses to the Creators Syndicate before the strip even ran. For any syndicate, a comic like *B.C.* would be a prized commodity, given that it had reached 2,600 subscribers worldwide, matching the level of record-setting success of Schulz’s *Peanuts* (a strip that Hart’s *B.C.* emulates in many other aesthetic and thematic ways as well). Standing behind Hart, the syndicate did not pull the strip from newspapers, instead issuing a statement that the strip was “simply a calendar recognition of two important religious holidays: Passover, which occurred the week before, as indicated by the menorah [the candelabra], and Easter Sunday, which begins the day the strip is run, as represented by the cross.” Hart himself spoke out strongly rejecting claims of anti-Semitism or offensive proselytizing, saying that he had intended to honor both sacred symbols, the menorah and the cross, pointing out their relationship to one another – “It was a revelation to me that tied God’s chosen people to their spiritual next of kin – the disciples of the Risen Christ.” Harvey sees justification in Hart’s claim, saying that “throw away panels” that newspapers often cut out of the front of the strip were critical to establishing that Hart was drawing a celebratory comparison between the two holidays, not
arguing for one’s replacement of the other. For Hart, the quick reaction that spread on the internet before he had a chance to explain the symbolism in his strip not only demonstrates yet again the difficulty in controlling the expression of ideas in the medium, but also the complex socio-religious state of the public sphere. “I get incredible response on the positive side,” Hart told a reporter at The Dallas Morning News in 1999. “It’s really sad because the Christians out there ... don’t get anything in the comics that mentions God. [...] The Christians are still out there, but they’re hiding. They’re afraid because every time somebody tries to make a move, somebody steps on them and pushes them back or locks them out. So they think that I’m a hero, and I’m not.” Hart saw humor as a primary goal in the strips, the primary aspect of his earlier strips that garnered great success, but believed that it was also a medium by which he could fulfill the Great Commission of spreading the Gospel (even if only in panel form that sometimes invites controversy).

Overtly religion-centric strips in the mainstream comics industry, however, are rare, and B.C. was not an evangelical strip so much as it was a gag strip in which the cartoonist often purposefully included evangelical messages. It should also be noted that not all references in mainstream properties are overt celebrations of religious ideas, of course, such as in one strip featuring a cursing child at church in a Pearls Before Swine parody of Family Circus. Other markets have provided a space for overt religious material, particularly through digital distribution technologies. Simply posting strips on the web has allowed a new breed of religious comic strip artists the means by which to produce and distribute their works to potentially unrestricted masses of readers. Reverend Zorowski, for instance, draws his online strip Church Mice (Figure 2.61) with explicit intent of sharing the Gospel, wanting to do “whatever it is [God] wanted him to do” with his cartooning talent, even if Christian comic strips are not something that one sees as a success story in the mainstream media. Other artists fall on various points of the spectrum. In Reverend Fun, an online comic
(Figure 2.62), Dennis Hengeveld’s captioned drawings are often religiously themed, but not always overt. Reflecting the challenges that comes with a diverse, even secular, readership, Hengeveld has said, “I don’t write Reverend Fun explicitly to evangelize. If I did, who’d read it? Yet I get email from atheists and agnostics who like the cartoon. One atheist magazine even interviewed me because it appreciated the fact that I didn’t sugarcoat Christianity.”

Kevin Frank’s Heaven’s Loft Thrift Shop (Figure 2.63), by comparison, has achieved an atypical level of success for an overtly Christian mainstream strip. Heaven’s Love, a decidedly Christian strip in which the owner of the thrift shop wears a cross necklace, is seen attending church, and is heard talking on his cell phone about the redemptive love through salvation in Christ, was picked up by a major comic syndicate and purchased by a handful of print newspapers.

![Church Mice](https://example.com)

**Figure 2.61** Church Mice (June, 2012). (Copyright 2012 Karl A. Zorowski. All rights reserved. Used with permission. Visit Church Mice online at www.churchmice.net.)
Figure 2.62  *Reverend Fun* (December 14, 2009). (Copyright 2009 Bible Gateway.)

Figure 2.63  *Heaven’s Love Thrift Shop* (Heaven’s Love Thrift Shop © 2012 Kevin Frank. Distributed by King Features Syndicate, Inc.)
Perhaps more commonly than in mainstream comic strips, the comic book/graphic novel genre has been a place in which comic art has been employed as a space to explore religious themes. Fantastic elements of Superman and Wonder Woman made for early examples of possible spiritual allegory with heroes of supernatural strength rescuing humanity. More recently, though, since the withering of the Comics Code Authority, mainstream comic book properties have taken more explicit approaches to incorporating religion, such as in Mark Waid and Alex Ross’s *Kingdom Come* in which Superman must make his “second coming” in order to save the world from the apocalypse that Magog has brought about ala the Book of Revelations. Characters across the comic book universes have religious identities of varying salience, which one can track at the online user-supported database ComicBookReligion.com. In a more realistic approach to lived religion, in the acclaimed graphic novel *Persepolis* the young Satrapi is forced to negotiate her life amidst absolutist Islamic decrees. That title follows the historical tradition set forth by Art Spiegelman’s compelling *Maus* in which Jewish mice must survive the ravages of the Holocaust. Artists have been drawn to the medium, says Rushkoff, as a means for expressing spiritual ideas because the medium allows the artist the opportunity “to make human beings who are trapped within the panels aware of the gutter beyond – even if for just a fleeting moment, in the obscure shadows of inference.”242 Sacred texts have also been transformed by the compelling potential in the extended comic format, with versions of Christian scriptures being published in the form of *The Comic Book Bible* followed by Siku’s *The Manga Bible*, an approach to Bible publishing that dates back to the 1846 *Illuminated Bible* by Harper. Similarly, Virgin
Comics published a line called *India Authentic* in which origin stories of Hindu deities were retold. While the art and writing in any particular text may or may not be successful, the movement across religious heritages toward comics demonstrates the allure of the open, aesthetically moving potential of the medium that has the capacity of reaching both mainstream and religious audiences.

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![Peanuts comic strip](October 30, 1996). (PEANUTS © 1996 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)

Charles Schulz has been accurately hailed for ushering in a new era of comic strip creation. He did so by successfully employing the child characters, bold lines, and openness only nascent in previous comics, and by championing the minimalist verbiage and event styling of magazine gag cartoons. It was perhaps a combination of his clever wit, literary sensibility, and tenacity that allowed him to marry the elements into an archetype that continues to be run in over 2,000 newspapers more than ten years after the last new strip was created by its sole workman, Sparky himself. Of particular note for
many fans, and for this study, is the injection of religious references into his work, which comprises an estimated and adjusted 3.16 percent of the *Peanuts* strips. Though this may not strike some as a large percentage, it is more striking when compared to notable Schulzian devices like the Red Baron or football episodes which comprise an adjusted 3.05 percent and .40 percent of *Peanuts* respectively, and is significantly higher than the typical rate of .056 percent found by Lindsey and Hereen. The religious content, almost exclusively Christian content, has drawn religious attention from some readers, acting as a lightning rod for further investigation and priming readers to be increasingly aware of future references. As demonstrated by this chapter, however, the particular manner in which Schulz approached religious content highlights the dynamic relationship of priming and participation within a guttered medium.

In his religious strips, Schulz primarily structured the references in a humorous context, using the scriptural or topical elements in a similar manner to the way he used references to Tolstoy or ice hockey. Schulz drew on his interests and daily events, saying that he would be constantly “drawing with his eyes” as he went about his day. He wrote on topics of which he could command the vernacular, and his experience in the church and his extensive studies of scriptures equipped him for his inclusion of religious content. In his religious strips, Schulz made jokes about “having a demon,” Mary wearing glasses, handing out tracts door-to-door, and spending eternity in heaven with commas and crayons. Some strips have provoked strong responses from readers, particularly those strips that overlapped with social issues such as school prayer or abortion. These strips struck a nerve with individuals, garnering strong positive and
negative reactions. Some reflected tensions about the medium itself, others between religious belief and public acceptability.

The polyvalent directionality in the responses demonstrates the double-edged power of the comic strip medium. Operating through only a few panels of content with space in between, the comic strip medium is fundamentally founded upon the gutter – the space between the panels that invites, even requires, reader participation to fill in and make the sparse content meaningful. The gutter, augmented by Schulz’s minimalism, works enthymematically, allowing for what Burke calls identification and consubstantiation. Readers place themselves in the strip, becoming part of its very creation, sharing a certain substance with it. This increases the power for the medium to influence a given reader, particularly in matters of religious thought, given the personal and abstract nature of spiritual affairs that already calls for personal investment. The limitation and potential danger of the medium is that the guttered reader-involvement may produce inconsistent, uncorroborated, even unwanted interpretation, as demonstrated in the reactions to works of Schulz and others. While comic theorists often celebrate the gutter for its engaging potential, the legitimate desire to raise the acceptability of comics as a form of art and literature should not obscure recognition of the limitations of the medium. As media theorists and this study have demonstrated, even if from slightly different vantage points, salient media content primes audiences for further attentiveness to those issues, raising the likelihood that those issues will become socially important and impactful in future assessments. When those issues are referenced in an open medium like the comic strip, however, the predictable outcomes of that priming decreases and
diverse, even contradictory, responses become not only possible but potentially inevitable.

Schulz appears to have understood the various dual natures of his enterprise (chapter three will explain how the new medium of television created a new set of challenges and relationships with the viewers for the franchise). Schulz was not a great American novelist, but rather a cartoonist’s cartoonist from the earliest age who knew how to let a story develop with idiosyncratic characters that could perform the same actions time and time again while still commanding the interest of millions of readers. His interview comments indicate an understanding of the balance between espousing a particular view and allowing his strips to become meaninglessly shallow. According to Michaelis, Schulz went so far as to say that Peanuts was “not an evangelistic strip,” and that “in fact, I’m anti-evangelistic.” Similarly, Johnson notes that Sparky was even annoyed by critics who thought Peppermint Patty should be used to set an example in school, not always falling asleep. “The idea of a comic strip is to be funny and to sell newspapers,” Johnson records Schulz saying. “They [critics] always want to educate, to tell others something. I’m not interested in telling them things. I’m interested in being funny. This business of trying to sway other people over to your way of thinking doesn’t interest me at all.” Yet, as Marty Jones pointed out to Schulz in a 1994 interview, Schulz did take occasion to editorialize on subjects like the anniversary of D-Day, which Schulz acknowledges in his own dual nature.

As Schulz also wrote for the Collegiate Champion in 1963, he believed that “humor which does not say anything is worthless,” continuing that he believes “that a
cartoonist must be given a chance to do his own preaching.” Bill Mauldin even called
him “a preacher at heart. All good cartoonists are jack-leg preachers, reading stories,
drawing morals from them,” to which Schulz responded in 1997, saying, “Cartooning
is preaching. And I think we have the right to do some preaching. I hate shallow humor.
I hate shallow religious humor, I hate shallow sports humor, I hate shallowness of any
kind.” Perhaps, then, Schulz’s *Peanuts* strips represent more of the term Rerun used in
a 1996 strip: a *semi-evangelist* (Figure 2.64). While much of his religious content was
the use of theology for humor, Schulz also used humorous comic strips as a vehicle by
which to ponder larger theological ideas. His style allowed him to both draw funny
pictures and raise important theological questions. Schulz rarely gave the answers to
those questions (save for in his criticism of shallow religion, such as in his jabs at money
seeking televangelism or end-times preachers). This was reflective of his personal
theology (which will be explored in chapter six) and his philosophy for the strip: leave it
unresolved. “There is sometimes a great temptation to complete one or another of the
running themes that are in the feature,” says Schulz, “but this is something that has to be
avoided.” This worked for his humor and created a unique environment for his
religious inquiry – he was “raising the questions that are unanswerable,” as Gary Groth
described. Yet the medium invites an answer from the reader. The form itself calls for
it. In a strip from 1969 (Figure 2.65), Charlie Brown asks Lucy, “Do you ever wonder if
God is pleased with you?” Like for the reader of Schulz’s comics, the answer is not
given, so Lucy must provide it herself. Is God pleased with her? “He just has to be!”
Figures 2.65 *Peanuts* (July 9, 1969). (PEANUTS © 1969 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)
CHAPTER 3

TELEVISION SPECTRUM: RELIGIOUS REFERENCE ACROSS THE NETWORK SPECIALS

“You can’t bluff an old theologian.”
- Linus

By the time *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was aired in 1969 for its fifth consecutive year, five other specials had also aired on television (Charlie Brown’s All-Stars; *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown; You’re in Love, Charlie Brown; He’s Your Dog, Charlie Brown;* and *It was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown*) and the American public returned for the Christmas special in droves, earning the program a 34.8 Nielsen rating257. By this time, the success of Schulz’s television specials had worked to forever change the nature of the property, establishing the television specials as the inevitable entry point for most *Peanuts* fans. Compounded by the lucrative global success of the interrelated merchandising market258 (to be discussed more in chapter five), the decades of continued commitment from the networks to air the specials and the commitment of Schulz to continue producing them ensured that the television programming would stay a critically important part of the franchise. Author Garrison Keiler described the success of the December 17, 1969 airing of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, a broadcast netting over 55 million viewers, saying “on that one night in 1969, he [Schulz] reached a larger, more diverse audience than any other single popular artist in American history. What was more, *Peanuts* was single-handedly expanding an industry that would revolutionize worldwide
While the comic strips would always be the essential identity of the franchise (the direct source material for most of the animated specials), the television presence would become the connective node by which many fans would approach the characters, their traits, and their potential meanings.

With the change in medium would also come possible changes in reader/viewer engagement. The seasonal collective viewing of *Peanuts* specials on television offered audiences different opportunities for encountering the property than the individualistic daily routine of reading comic strips. Both media still connect the readers to the larger public – the daily strips in newspapers and television programs alike often being the source of social and casual workplace conversations around the watercooler, (conversation types which folded over into the message boards of the 1990s and the social networking post-and-comment trend of the 2010s, interactions that extend the circulatory behaviors discussed in chapter five). Even if not prompting overt conversation, the collective acts of reading or viewing the materials serve to create publics through the interaction with common texts (as explained in chapter one). While daily comic strips, though, may spur social exchanges, perhaps as a coworker asking “have you seen today’s *Peanuts*?” the television specials began to make *Peanuts* into a semi-annual event. Print ads would boldly announce when one should gather the family in front of the television set to catch the newest of Schulz’s programs, such as in the following TV Guide advertisements from the 1970s (Figures 3.1-3.3).
Figure 3.1 1973 TV Guide advertisement for the re-airing of *You’re Not Elected, Charlie Brown.* (Copyright 1973 Peanuts Worldwide, LLC, TV Guide.)

Figure 3.2 1974 TV Guide advertisement for the re-airing of *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown.* (Copyright 1974 Peanuts Worldwide, LLC, TV Guide.)
Because many of the notable titles are associated with holidays (e.g., *It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown; Happy New Year, Charlie Brown; Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown;* etc.), this movement across media, from daily comic-based thirty second routines to anticipated events as television-based thirty minute viewings, further worked to make *Peanuts* into a tradition. As the traditions developed, with blockbuster specials like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* airing year after
year, the television titles as awaited events were able to begin to take the place of prominence in the franchise.

Entering the new medium, Schulz and his team were not only faced with new possibilities for the franchise, they were faced with possible limitations due to the executive tendencies and formal conventions of television. The potency of the content of the programming had a more dramatic possibility of being restricted, given that network executives were often wary of offending the national viewership that the transnational medium afforded (to be discussed more in the following chapter). The same practice could of course happen with the comics, Schulz himself noting, “I work for the secular press through a newspaper syndicate, and naturally I must exercise care in the way I go about expressing things. I have a message that I want to present, but I would rather bend a little to put over a point than to have the whole strip dropped because it’s too obvious.” This risk would typically be present only on the local level though, through editorial control of individual papers, typically not effecting nationwide audiences. Perhaps more persistent were the formal conventions of the medium that offered possible limitations to the expression of provocative ideas such as religious inquiry. By the mid-1960s, television was dominated by content largely derived from the radio programming of the preceding era, with many of the same writers, actors, and narrative devices folding over from radio’s golden age. Many radio programs translated directly into television programs, like Lucille Ball’s *I Love Lucy* derived from her radio show *My Favorite Husband*. Jack Benny even kept the same name of his successful NBC radio program *The Jack Benny Show* when he moved to television with his CBS show. As television
developed with this program-based show format, where comedies, dramas, and musical acts were packaged within 30-60 minute regular segments, works like Schulz’s might not seem like an immediately translatable product (which is what corporations said when they refused to buy into sponsoring a special for many years before *A Charlie Brown Christmas*).\(^{265}\) Whereas Schulz had won over the comic industry with his minimalistic lines and four-panel-format,\(^ {266}\) the television medium was dominated by thicker stories filled with laugh tracks and commercial breaks. Comparing the longer form of comic books to television scripts, writer Adam Beecher says, “the pacing is different – in a television show we have commercials to deal with, so we have act breaks. We try to go out on a high note to make sure people come back after the cereal and toy commercials.”\(^ {267}\) These commercial breaks replace the gutter in the comics – the formal element that invites and requires reader participation in the creation of the action and meaning of a comic\(^ {268}\) - taking away one structural component that allowed Schulz to subtly but provocatively engage readers with religious concepts. The narrative content between the gutters was also less participatory and open than in the comics, as television shows like *Green Acres* and *Bonanza* packaged problems with conclusive story arcs that rose and fell in conventional comedic/dramatic fashion, typically resolving by the end of the episode. These storylines differed greatly in their closed resolutions from even Schulz’s more developed daily series, creating a unique context in which Schulz was to expand his work.

Marshal McLuhan, writing about the changes in media during the decade Schulz was entering these new arenas, describes television and comic strips both as “cool media”
those media that do little of the explicit interpretive decoding work for the audience.\textsuperscript{269} A cool medium, including the comic strip and television program as McLuhan considers them, “leaves much more for the listener or user to do than a hot medium.”\textsuperscript{270} The user has to actively participate in the construction and understanding of the medium’s content. Structurally, according to McLuhan, comics and television required more engagement than radio, which McLuhan thought took active control over its particular aural environment. Cooler media, says McLuhan, tend “toward compressed forms of statement, aphoristic and allegorical,”\textsuperscript{271} which can certainly be seen in the strategies and tactics of comic strip creation, asking that the user take an active part in the unpacking of the meaning of the content. Television content, though, avoided the interpretively loose allegory and instead tended from the early years toward conclusive storylines whereby the perils of Marsha Brady’s nose injury on \textit{The Brady Bunch} or Samantha’s magic mishaps on \textit{Bewitched} are resolved inside 30 deliberate minutes. Television, with its practices largely standardized as Schulz entered the scene, is a much warmer medium than comic strips (a distinction that evades McLuhan’s assessment). In using resolved narrative plots and commercial pacing, television does more to “enhance” and “retrieve”\textsuperscript{272} the content of radio programming than McLuhan acknowledges in his analysis of medium as message.

In comparison to radio or comic strips, however, television offers a unique quality of repetitive force to the \textit{Peanuts} franchise. The comic strips made dramatic impacts on American culture, as Harvey\textsuperscript{273} and Inge\textsuperscript{274} have demonstrated. Propelled by such, the television specials associated with holidays became expected and repeated, a powerful
trait further enhanced by the advent of personal video technology (*Peanuts* being released on Laserdisc, VHS, DVD, Blu-Ray, and digital download). Repetitive messages across television stories, as Gerbner et al describe, cultivate in viewers certain perceptions of social reality. The repetition Gerbner et al describe is the “relatively restrictive set of choices” across programming (to be discussed more in chapter four), but this repetition can also be caused by repeated viewing of the same program. Anticipated each year, programs like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* reaffirm particular ideological and social positions to the millions of viewers that rearrange their schedules (or set their video recorders) to participate in the national event of watching these specific shows. The recurring content of known characters and motifs across the less repeated specials and in the daily comic strips also has a cultulative impact, but not caused by a routine return to a particular title. Instead, the readers look for a new strip each day after discarding the previous day’s newspaper. Repetition happens through creative reimagining of personalities and scenes, not through direct duplication. Viewers returning to the property through home video releases or book reprints of the comic strips (a highly lucrative industry, discussed more in chapter five) certainly continues the influence of the franchise, but in different ways than the specials. The television specials take those idiosyncratic engagement opportunities and direct them through distinctly memorable, predictably accessible, and nationally participated broadcasts, a benefit of the re-airing convention of the television medium.

As McLuhan suggests, considering the medium itself and the participatory actions it requires can often tell the critic about the medium’s potential. For Schulz’s work, the
conceptual implications of the medium’s technological structure became clear in the need to search for voice actors to audibly articulate the characters’ words otherwise only heard in print. Prior to television, actual audio was not really a concern for print artists like Schulz, given that readers would individually supply the voices for each character. As they entered television, Schulz and his animation/production team of Bill Melendez and Lee Mendelson established criteria for each character’s voice and maintained those benchmarks throughout the decades. “Charles Schulz created everything,” says Jason Mendelson, the 1980s voice of Rerun Van Pelt, “but these actors helped give them life by giving them their voice. So these original characters, these original actors, are the voices – they’re the archetype for these characters.”

Viewer experience with the characters became comparatively more universalized by having singular voice types represent the characters throughout the years. “I think people really fed off of that and learned the voices that went with the characters,” says Sally Dryer, the voice of Violet and Lucy from 1965 to 1969. Decisions like Charlie Brown having “kind of a blah voice,” as producer Lee Mendelson remembers, imbue the character with a more precise identity that may close off some interpretive freedom from viewers while simultaneously making the character potentially more influential as viewers can more easily identify with and embrace the characters (and fans have embraced the Peanuts gang quite heartily over the years).

Day after day, television characters are routinely invited into homes, into living rooms and dens where viewers sit comfortably on sofas and connect with members of the cast they love (or love to hate). Not only does the revealing nature of narrative (with its
more immediate access to attitudes and moralizing than everyday life) allow plotlines and characters to impact audience’s perspectives, as explained by Marshall Gregory. Distinctly likable characters also open up the possibility for even less audience resistance to controversial ideas. The impact of well-received characters can be manifested through a neoassociation influence, as theorists like Berkowitz and Rogers have advanced.

When ideas are introduced into a narrative, viewers develop cognitive connections between proximally and conceptually related items – ideas, actions, objects, and characters. When one of these items is referenced later, the viewer has an increased likelihood of recalling other items or sentiments established along the associative network generated during the initial introduction. These neoassociations will then influence the viewer’s attitudes toward the new reference. Aristotle may have championed the artistic development of ethos – “the controlling factor in persuasion” – as a rhetorical proof generated solely within a new situation without relying on previous associations, but the networked perceptions generated through the presence of a known character can be a strong force brought to bear on a given rhetorical moment. Television viewers who identify with and embrace particular characters may be more open to receiving controversial topics when they approach it in the context of a beloved characters’ neoassocratively retrieved ethos. According to Burke, when an individual meaningfully identifies with another, the two become consubstantial, sharing a certain substance. This, for Burke, is the heart of persuasion, of moving an individual into a new set of actions or perspectives. As Peanuts moved into television, generations would
grow up watching comparatively universal and highly identifiable instances of the *Peanuts* characters, thus establishing a potent context for possible persuasion.

The transition from the comic strips to television specials as dominant entry points may not have been instantaneous, but the success of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, demonstrated by the wave of viewers that came back six months later to make *Charlie Brown's All-Stars* the highest rated broadcast in its time slot, demonstrated that the public was eager to embrace the televised version of the high-selling comic strip. After seeing that premier, *Washington Post* critic Lawrence Laurent predicted in his review that “Charlie Brown is likely to become a boy for all seasons.” He was right. As newspaper readership struggled through the years (steadily decreasing since 1970 from .30 per capita circulation to .15 in 2009) and the bright lights of the small screen continually increased (Nielsen reporting average household television tuning growing from 43:32 hours/week in 1975 to 59:28 in 2011), more fans would be given the chance to see Peanuts as a living, moving property delivered right to their living rooms. It was also good timing that the specials began to air as color television was becoming the standard for broadcasting and receiving in the late 1960s. Peanuts had typically been seen in black and white on the daily pages, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* established Schulz's world as distinctly colorful, adding to the allure of the medium as a first reference point for fans. The dynamic medium of television brought a new form of life to the already lively comic strip characters, and Schulz and his production team put significant energy into the production of the television specials, especially in the early years, learning how to best make the transition to the new medium. “For example,” said
Schulz to an interviewer in 1981 when asked about the challenges of animation, “Bill Melendez has a terrible time drawing Charlie Brown’s head and making it revolve because I only draw it from the sideview and from two three-quarter views.” Schulz adds, though, that on the other hand “the animators can do something with Snoopy with their drawing that I can’t do in the strip.”

The efforts to make the strip work successfully within the new medium were not only met with routine fan satisfaction, but also with accolades from the industry. Schulz and his team were nominated for 37 Emmy Awards, winning six, were honored with two Peabody awards, and were nominated for an Academy Award. For almost 50 years, Peanuts fans have been treated to both new and re-broadcasted specials that sustain positive recognition. Each year, new animated specials poured in through viewers’ living room television sets. This happened across historically contingent and divergent eras, creating idiosyncratic yet common experiences among viewers through the common act of turning on the television broadcast to see the Peanuts gang on the screen.

Contemporary viewers now have a powerful means of approaching the franchise animation given the release of all of the specials on either VHS, DVD, Blu-Ray, or digital download.

As the first special, 1965’s *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was preceded only by short animations of Peanuts characters – the first being an opener for the *Tennessee Ernie Ford Show*, along with Ford Falcon commercials in 1959, and a brief animated segment for a 1963 documentary about Schulz that was never aired on television (it was the color animation from the documentary that convinced executives and sponsors that there was
potential for a full length animated television special). The total number of animated specials, though, can be difficult to explain. The somewhat complicated answer is that there have been, from 1965 through 2011, 41 animated specials made for and aired on television. One other animated special, *It's Spring Training, Charlie Brown* was produced for network television in the early 1990s but did not air and was sold several years later on retail home video (it was later aired on the Nickelodeon cable network in 1998). An additional three specials were released direct-to-video, and one, the recent *Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown*, was then also aired on television. Four feature-length films were also produced and released in the theaters, and all four were later aired on network television. Two seasons of Saturday morning cartoons were released in 1983 and 1985 called *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show*, featuring 18 total episodes289 of shorts. In 1988 and 1989 there was a miniseries aired on CBS titled *This is America, Charlie Brown*, which included eight episodes. In total, there have been 75 titles produced and released, a cumulative 37 hours. Of these, 72 have been aired on network television, totaling over 35 hours of unique televised content, many titles being repeated annually. (There are also 10 digital motion-comic episodes which take the artwork material directly from the comic strip and add slight animation and vocal tracks, adding to the large merchandise offerings discussed in chapter four and not here as it is not television or film content. See Appendix for a full listing of animation titles).

Schulz himself was directly involved with all of these productions except for the recent digital motion-comics and *Happiness is a Warm Blanket* (which was originally released to video but was subsequently aired on television). These particular recent
products, though, each draw directly and exclusively from the newspaper published comic strips, so it may be misleading to say that Schulz was not involved with their content. Thus, there is a distinct connective thread and sense of potential continuity across the franchise's animated specials. While it is not necessary that all of the *Peanuts* products are created directly, let alone exclusively, by Sparky Schulz to explore their religious components, the general continuity of authorship allows the analysis to fold into later considerations of Schulz’s own personal theo-biography. As will be the case in chapter six, Schulz's personal theological views and their historical evolutions can be brought to bear to understand how religious thought and practice might come into or out of such a mainstream property.

This chapter will examine the network televised animated specials, exploring in each title the religious material. Like chapter two’s analysis of the comic strips, the content of interest to this analysis, the “religious references,” includes any recognizable visual or verbal reference (explicit or embedded) to supernatural faith, theology, church practice, or religious iconography. This chapter will be an explanation of the common ways in which Schulz referenced religion across the televised programs based on a content analysis of all 72 broadcast titles. Chapter four will explore the particular historical and conceptual situatedness of the most prominent of the specials, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, including its relationship to its Christmas contemporaries in the tumultuous 1960s. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that even within the limited religious references in the *Peanuts* television specials, viewers are offered a vast range of religious references, from an easily missed embedded etymologically religious phrase to
an overt discussion of Mary in Bethlehem. Schulz’s television work may not resemble as much socio-theological critique as the comic strips occasionally afford, and more potential exists for poignant religious reference. Religion, often referenced as a vehicle for the episode’s humor, is nonetheless acknowledged for its presence in American life and its possibility for personal investment. In this way *Peanuts* stands out as a model of successful religious nuance amidst the otherwise flattened and secularized television landscape described in chapter one.

**The Types and Tactics**

Classifying the religious references that occur across the *Peanuts* animated television specials proves to be a challenging endeavor if one is searching for discrete categories or definitive statistical findings. No quantitative coding scheme could appropriately account for the variety of references across the franchise. Images, for instance, might be coded based on screen time, but some images of churches are more easily distinguishable than others, meaning that duration is not a reliable measure. Even further, a record of image duration would be difficult to judge against the meaning of a verbal reference, complicated even more when one is faced with verbal religious references that are embedded into the vernacular and others that take the form of explicit biblical quotation. Analysis of the more than 35 televised hours for this project, then, required viewing each title, making descriptive notes of religious references of all kinds,
and then reviewing the findings from all of the titles in order to search for common tactics or categories.

What can be said as a general statement about the animated television content is that religious reference is a recurring, even if minimal, theme across the *Peanuts* programs. Of the 72 animated titles considered here, 59 of the specials have at least minimal references to spirituality, religious belief, or religious practice (See Table 3.1). These religious references across the animated television specials resist classification and vary greatly in intensity and function. References range from halos above cows on a chalkboard to recitations of scripture. It is a slippage across this wide range and between categories and intensities that allows Schulz to simultaneously speak to religious belief and avoid the stigma of evangelism. To list and describe all of the references would be too cumbersome to be useful, and to presume that categories themselves catch all of the nuances would be an overstatement. What follows, then, is a useful set of primary types of religious references, along with a description of the tactics employed within those categories and their functions. As noted in chapter one, all of the references are Protestant Christian references apart from several notable exceptions highlighted in their own category because of their uniquenesses. Each description will seek to point to the range of ways in which each category is manifested in various television episodes while also detailing the various implications of each.

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<th>Length</th>
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<th>Grave</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Phrase</th>
<th>Bible Character</th>
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<td><strong>THIS IS AMERICA, CHARLIE BROWN</strong></td>
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<td>It's the Giant</td>
<td>Saturday, September 14, 1985</td>
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<td>Sally's Sweet Babboo</td>
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| MOVIES | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| A Boy Named Charlie Brown | Friday, April 16, 1976 | 85 | X | X | | | | | | | | |
| Snoopy Come Home | Friday, November 05, 1976 | 80 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown | Saturday, November 03, 1979 | 76 | | | | X | X | | | | |
| Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown | Tuesday, May 07, 1985 | 75 | | | | | | X | | | |

**Table 3.1** List of all the *Peanuts* animated titles, their release dates, and the frequency of religious references in each program.

* = title not aired on network television (See Appendix for complete release dates).

**Religious Iconography (Churches & Graves)**

The use of religious iconography is not an uncommon strategy across the television landscape. When religion is included in television programs, it is standard practice for religious references to be generated through inclusion of church steeples, crucifixes, nun’s habits, and clerical collars. This iconography serves as shorthand for the presence of a religious character or institution such as in the case of the sisters wearing distinct habits at the Convent San Tanco in *The Flying Nun*. M*A*S*H’s Father Francis Mulcahy, for instance, a key figure in the history of the clergy on television, according to Richard Wolff, for his vocal statements about war, is easily identifiable as a religious figure because of his clerical garb (sometimes a clerical collar and at other times a cross
necklace over a black turtle-neck worn under his green military jacket). Religious iconography is also used within television narratives to visually invoke a particular ideology, sometimes in order to enhance its alternative. Television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Supernatural* routinely use this approach, with many scenes shot in or around church structures. *Supernatural*, for instance, Engstrom and Valenzano contend, contains elements (visual and narrative) of Catholicism such as holy water and the priesthood as a way to combat the dark evil of the demonic forces. The iconography may also be strategically corrupted by associating the visual elements of a particular religion with actions and beliefs typically held contrary to its origins, such as in an episode of the BBC series *Doctor Who* when angel statues turn out to be vicious fang-bearing killers.

The inclusion of religious iconography can operate in another way as well. Besides explicitly signaling the presence of a character, institution, or ideology, the visual addition of religious symbols can serve to normalize the religion’s presence within the context of the narrative. In the case of the *Peanuts* franchise, the inclusion of church buildings, recognizable through the cross on the top of the steeple and occasionally stained-glass windows (Figures 3.4 - 3.10), does not have the effect of importing an overt ideology as a plot device or of signaling a religious character. Instead, it has the potential to cultivate in viewers a growing perception that religion is a normal part of social life. As Perelman describes, when a thing is made visible within a sphere of choice, its mere presence acts on our sensibilities, making it more acceptable, and as Berkowitz and Rogers explain, this can *prime* viewers to continue to notice and engage.
related notions. It’s not that the inclusion of a church building would cause a viewer to immediately agree with a particular ideology, but the visual presence encourages and provokes the viewer’s psychological awareness of general religious concepts. These effects, Berkowitz and Rogers defend, “can operate automatically and even without awareness,” as the field of possible dialogue is widened through initial presence.

Religious belief and practice is not out of place within Schulz’s narrative universe, and the iconographic inclusion of the church acknowledges religion through a visual, architectural, geographical statement.

The use of churches across the scenic landscapes may not be purposefully political in the *Peanuts* franchise. It may be the case that the churches’ purpose is a functionally aesthetic one. The actual visual presence of a church never plays a narrative role in any of the *Peanuts* specials. No action happens in the church – not even the Christmas plays which are centered on the biblical nativity scene (which may, in fact, be more provocative, given that it is likely the school that houses the religious performance. There are corresponding resistances to church life across American demographics, reflected in Schulz’s own theo-biography, which will be discussed in chapter six). Other than the animated titles that function through shorts with limited visual backdrops, like *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show*, Bill Melendez and Sparky Schulz were tasked with creating sweeping environments on screen. This was vastly different in many ways from the four panel strips Schulz drew with large amounts of vacant white space. To accomplish the goal of creating environments and depicting communities, the artists were left with few common features of middle-American architecture. Church steeples serve
that functional purpose of being a unique building with a certain character that helps define a cityscape or community backdrop. With its aesthetically pleasing unique lines formed by the cross and steeple, inclusion of churches within scenic shots like those in *Peanuts* may often only be the result of functional aesthetics, though the potential impact through mere presence is not eliminated in such occurrences.

![Figure 3.4](image)

**Figure 3.4** A moonlit silhouette of a church steeple can be made out in the distance as Snoopy slinks across the French countryside as the WWI Flying Ace (*It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*, CBS, 1966).
Figure 3.5 An image of a steeple dome and cross, part of an artistic montage of churches, steeples, and saints fills the screen while Schroeder plays the piano (*A Boy Named Charlie Brown*, CBS, 1976).

Figure 3.6 Woodstock as parade camera operator, aboard Snoopy as his helicopter, pans across the city which includes a church on the street corner (*It’s Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown*, CBS, 1977).
Figure 3.7 During his nightmare as a sled dog, Snoopy stumbles on to a saloon stage where the Parisian set painting includes a church steeple in the background (What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, CBS, 1978).

Figure 3.8 When the camera pans back to the circus from Snoopy and Belle and the bus stop, this church with iconic bell tower and stained-glass windows is seen (Life is a Circus, Charlie Brown, CBS, 1980).
Figure 3.9 As the camera pans across the town toward the Van Pelt's porch for the final musical number, a church tower is clearly visible (You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown, CBS, 1985).

Figure 3.10 A church with cross-topped steeple can be seen in the landscape of the early American colonial period (The Birth of the Constitution, CBS, 1988).
The inclusion of crosses at grave markers may also serve that functional aesthetic purpose, included in specials like *What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?*, out of a need to set the scene. It is likely that the specific images in *What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?* were also chosen out of a desire for historical accuracy, given Schulz’s deep feelings and personal history with war. In this Emmy-nominated, Peabody-winning televised follow-up to the feature film *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown (and Don’t Come Back!!)*, Linus, Charlie Brown, Marcie, Peppermint Patty, and their driver Snoopy visit iconic World War Two locations including Omaha Beach. After looking out on the beach amidst artistically rendered real archival footage from the landing on the beach (including images of soldiers falling, presumably having been shot dead), the group visits the American Cemetery where row upon row of (drawn) cross grave markers are seen while the voice of President Eisenhower is heard saying, “I hope, pray, that humanity has learned... we need to gain an eternal peace for this world.” The iconic image of the cross is repeated in a field of poppies when the group stops and Linus explains the legend of the flower. They then see the British Dressing Station where “In Flanders Field” was written during World War One and Linus recites the poem while the camera pans over rows of cross-bearing tombstones, one bearing the Star of David (Figure 3.11). This special, movingly important in its often silent contemplation of the horrors of war, includes this religious iconography likely not for theological purposes, given a lack of biblical sermonizing or reference to religious beliefs (though the angle chosen that includes the Jewish marker is likely a purposeful political act of inclusion and recognition), but instead the religious icons are seen out of respect for a reality of the
geographic location and its historical significance. Because the scene is anchored in historical meditation, despite the screen being filled with the cross, the most iconic of Christian religious symbols, this work can stay perceptually rooted in a sense of humanism. The historical elements of the narrative, justification for the inclusion of the iconography, means that the special does not need to be revisionary in the visual depiction of the real cemetery and can still avoid espousing a particular Christian doctrine. The program is cast as a historical reflection on humanity, not the meaning of the cross.

Figure 3.11 “Crosses, row on row” can be seen in this depiction of the Flanders Field gravesite, including a Jewish grave marker signified by the Star of David (What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown? CBS, 1983).
A reinforcement of the presence of religion within civic culture is more apparent in the few verbal references to churches. In *The Music and Heroes of America* the influential presence of the church in American history is acknowledged as Schroeder explains that composer Stephen Foster was influenced “by the music he heard in black churches” and as Franklin explains that the “spirituals” of the slaves became “the musical foundation of black churches and black preachers that would spread across America.” This reference to black churches, part of what Squires calls an enclaved public, is one of several important nods in this miniseries to the pluralities of influences that shape American life.

Even brief verbal statements about attending church (a common activity in American society but not on mainstream television) can be normatively powerful when repeated across properties. Seemingly innocuous references, when reoccurring, work toward cultivating perspectives on what is normal or acceptable. Patterns across television stories impose standardized conceptions on the viewing public, over time establishing terms for public dialogue and notions of public acceptability. As Gerbner et al describe, “What matters most for the study of television is not so much what this or that viewer may prefer as what virtually no regular viewer can escape.” Ubiquitous depictions of public life, they explain, result in “the steady entrenchment of mainstream orientations.” A dominantly a-religious portrayal of society on television (as described in chapter one) floods the narrative environment with a particular secularized notion of public life, and thus of acceptable public dialogue and action. The average household has for decades tuned in to television narratives for hours each day, the narratives being
largely absent of religious references across plotlines and characters. These ethically formative stories that “we often treat as knowledge”\textsuperscript{301} of the world, as Gregory describes, create a symbolic environment that over time influence perceptions, set the terms for dialogue, and influence individual action. Given the common lack of overt religious reference on television, occasional explicit verbal references paired with routine iconographic inclusion of the church, can work to engender cultural perceptions that religious belief and action are a normal, acceptable part of one’s world.

In \textit{It’s Arbor Day, Charlie Brown} and the \textit{Snoopy: Team Manager} episode of \textit{The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show}, there is a repeated\textsuperscript{302} example of this sort of brief but collectively important reference, with Rerun, the younger brother of Linus and Lucy, riding on the back of his mother’s bike in each title, saying, “Today it’s the Welfare League, and a church breakfast. Then it’s the League of Women Voters, followed by the visit to a library. From there we go to the hair dresser, then the supermarket, then a rousing meeting of the PTA. Considering I don’t do anything, I lead a very active life.”\textsuperscript{303} The Sistine Chapel and Notre Dame are mentioned in a song in \textit{Snoopy: The Musical}, and Peppermint Patty tells Marcie that she visited “three tabernacles, 14 churches, and two temples” in the provocative “Butterfly” short in \textit{It’s an Adventure, Charlie Brown}. Rerun’s narration, though, is the only time that a \textit{Peanuts} character is portrayed as being part of a church community within the animated specials. This limits the potential perceptual impact that Schulz’s work may have in normalizing the attending of church and may also serve as one of the reasons \textit{Peanuts} is not immediately thought of as a Christian property by many fans. In the television specials, the entry point for many
people, the characters are not seen or heard attending church (though doing so would not be a deviation from the iconographic setting). The proposition that it may be a Christian franchise, then, may not be posed for many fans.

Religious Practice (Prayer)

In the _Peanuts_ television programs, prayer is usually no laughing matter. Instead, Schulz and those that hammered out the scripts with him typically treated this religious practice as a solemn and often personal activity. In nine of the 72 broadcast titles there is reference to or practice of praying – speaking to God for blessing, guidance, or as an expression of thankfulness. In only two instances is prayer part of the joke. The first humorous reference to prayer is in _The NASA Space Station_ episode of _This is America, Charlie Brown_ when Franklin, the social scientist aboard the space station in Linus’s dream, plays the straight-man to the rest of the gang’s antics, idiomatically telling Television News Network, “I hope and pray there will never be an emergency because if there is…[banging noises].” Prayer is embedded in the figure of speech much like the other embedded religious reference explained later, but even if only a colloquialism, the reference to praying helps set up the joke that the gang is unqualified to be aboard the orbiting station. The second humorous reference to prayer is initially one of the more provocative religious references in all of the animated features. In _Lucy Must Be Traded, Charlie Brown_, as the team is losing yet another baseball game, the perpetually useless right fielder Lucy approaches the pitcher’s mound and says to Charlie Brown, “You know what we ought to do? Pray.” The directness and clarity of this religious reference is
striking, but not out of line for the franchise, given that the strips occasionally contain
direct references of this nature. This is not actually one of Sparky’s more contemplative
moments, though, as we quickly hear Linus praying that the ball not go to him, followed
by other voices from the team praying “Please not to me!” When the ball is presumably
hit elsewhere, the gag continues with voices hollering out “Thank you!” “Thank you!”
“Thank you!” and one voice rounding it out with an “Amen.” Given the jovial context of
the scene and the generous references to prayer elsewhere in the franchise, these
humorous moments likely do more to poke fun at the characters’ sports ineptitudes than
they do to express commentary on viewers’ religious practices. While Schulz critiques
socio-political and theological aspects of prayer in the strips, as described in chapter two,
the animated specials tend to avoid a critical or mocking perspective on prayer.

Instead of being humorous, prayer is often imbued with a heavy pathos and
personalization in the animated features. In You’re in Love, Charlie Brown, poor Chuck
unintentionally hollers at his school teacher and is sent to see the principal. As he reaches
the office, we hear the laden voiceover of Charlie Brown praying as the psalmist\textsuperscript{304} did,
“‘Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me. Fight against them that fight
with me. Deliver me from the hand that persecutes me.’ My stomach hurts.” The
mechanism of voiceover adds to the sense of internalized, personal connection with
prayer. Similarly, in It’s an Adventure, Charlie Brown, the viewer is yet again asked to
feel for the poor pseudo-protagonist as he stares up from inside his cardboard box he is
sleeping in after running away to avoid the Environmental Protection Agency. Uttering a
distinctly personal prayer that is delivered with sincerity by the child voice actor, Charlie
Brown says, “Lord, I have a question for you – Why am I sleeping in a cardboard box? Why do I always have to suffer like this? Why me, Lord?! … Don’t answer that.” This is not a traditional Hail Mary or even the Lord’s Prayer. Instead, prayer is offered as a contextually specific activity rooted in the individual character’s relationship to the situation and relationship to God. The solemn tone allows the prayer to have a realness about it – as if it is a genuine outpouring from a heavy heart, instead of simply a trope used for a gag. Even in these few examples, the Peanuts franchise offers a demonstration of the largely inoffensive yet powerful narrative device prayer can play within a scripted television program. Characters may not be portrayed as regularly attending church, but they are, on occasion, portrayed as having a personal relationship with God, which many Christians would argue is the more important depiction of the Christian religious experience.

Though prayer is typically serious and often personal, several of the references to prayer are made within a historical context that could serve to distance the Peanuts characters and the viewers from the act. This structure of historicizing religion is primarily the case in the episodes of This is America, Charlie Brown, where religion is referenced in the setting of specific periods of America’s development. Prayer is seen in this framework, for example, in the episode The Mayflower Voyagers where Charlie Brown’s voiceover describes how the pilgrim’s “belief in God, their desire for freedom from religious persecution, and their dreams of creating a new world for future generations all make their life-threatening journey a risk worth taking” while the viewer sees a panning shot of the passengers on the Mayflower bowing their heads in corporate
prayer (Figure 3.12). This extra level of mediation, a story within a story, allows for greater freedom within the television medium which often seeks to find a lowest common denominator for public acceptability. This structure of “reporting” is what allows Reality TV programs to have a comparatively higher amount of religious portrayal on mainstream television\(^{305}\) – they are simply reporting what “really” happened. The traditional perspective on settler history reiterated in *The Mayflower Voyagers* is largely uncontested by the general American public and Schulz’s team can thus include this image accompanied by the poignant voiceover without fear of significant retaliation.

![Figure 3.12](image)

*Figure 3.12* Mayflower passengers are shown corporately praying and listening to words from the minister (*The Mayflower Voyagers*, CBS, 1988).
In typical Schulz fashion, however, this tactic of historicization is not as simple as it seems. In fact, the historical context, though initially offering a buffer between the viewer and the portrayal of religion in American life, is still occasionally afforded an opening to see prayer as a viable personal choice. This happens, for instance, in The Birth of the Constitution episode of This is America, Charlie Brown, when Sally and Charlie Brown say good night to their friends in the colonial setting after they have been waiting to hear the results of the debates from the Constitution drafters. As they walk into their house, Sally, earnest and unprovoked, says, “I’ll say a little prayer for our people, Linus.” This is similar to the scene in A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, which enjoys annual repeats on network television, when Peppermint Patty asks “Are we going to have a prayer? It’s Thanksgiving, you know. Before we’re served shouldn’t we say
grace?” Some of the other characters appear caught off guard, even dejected at not having a prayer in order. Linus responds by framing a prayer within a little speech about the history of Thanksgiving, saying, “Elder William Brewster said a prayer that went a little something like this…” after which Peppermint Patty says a convincing “Amen.” In both scenes, the call for prayer was couched within a particular historical moment but the scene resists being purely a historical portrayal because individual characters that viewers have no cause to rebuff are genuinely invested in the real importance of that prayer. In fact, this melding of historical tradition and personal interest spills over into effects on viewers. *Peanuts* historian Scott McGuire has noted that, “many people like to give Linus's dinner speech from *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* as part of their Thanksgiving celebration.” The historical context may serve as justification for including these religious references, but the historicization does not inherently negate the religious act’s importance in the story or to the viewer. As Walter Fisher contends, audiences embrace stories based in part on their *narrative fidelity* – the story’s ability to match up with the real, lived-experience of the reader. The personalization of these historical moments through *Peanuts* characters’ engagement with the religious act allows for the possibility of that critical assessment whereby viewers are able to see the religious act as meaningful to their own situations despite its detachment through periodization.

**Biblical Reference (Characters & Quotations)**

In *Charlie Brown’s Christmas Tales*, Lucy tries to convince Linus that he has to buy her a Christmas present because “It says so in the Bible!” Linus, who is holding a
Bible clearly labeled “Holy Bible” (the only time we see a labeled Bible in the television specials) says to her, “You’re bluffing. The Bible says nothing about giving Christmas presents.” Lucy responds, “It doesn’t?” to which Linus comments “You can’t bluff an old theologian.” When she finds the word “sister” in another copy of the Bible they have in the house, Lucy exclaims “That proves you have to give me a Christmas present!” to which Linus can only utter a helpless “Oh good grief.” Schulz, like his character Linus, was biblically well-read and had a strong command of biblical text, knowing a wide range of passages and players. Across the televised titles, one can find references to quite the list of biblical characters, including Mary, Gabriel, the shepherds, the wisemen, Goliath, the Apostles, King Solomon, David, Moses, Luke, and Jezebel, not to mention the references to Lebanon, Bethlehem, Gilead, the biblical names Lydia, Rachel, and Rebekah, or the inn-keeper’s wife who potentially had naturally curly hair. This is in addition to references to monks, saints, prophets, the devil (Figure 3.14), Harold Angel, and God. The programs also contain quotations or phrasings from, and often explicit citations of, passages from the Bible, listed in Table 3.2:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Text (King James Version unless noted)</th>
<th>Peanuts title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke 2:8-14</td>
<td>(8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (10) And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (12) And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.</td>
<td>A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965); It's Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown (1992).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 35:1, 31:15</td>
<td>(35:1) Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. (31:15) My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.</td>
<td>You’re in Love, Charlie Brown (1967)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 3:19</td>
<td>In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.</td>
<td>It’s a Mystery, Charlie Brown (1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 13:57</td>
<td>And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.</td>
<td>It’s an Adventure, Charlie Brown (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Song of Solomon 4:1</td>
<td>How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. (New International Version)</td>
<td>The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show, “The Lost Ballpark” (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth 1:16</td>
<td>And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:</td>
<td>The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show, “It’s that Team Spirit, Charlie Brown” (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 2:1</td>
<td>And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.</td>
<td>Snoopy’s Getting Married (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Reference</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Chronicles 2:8-16</td>
<td>(8) Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and algum trees, out of Lebanon: for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and, behold, my servants shall be with thy servants, (9) Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build shall be wonderful great. (10) And, behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil. (11) Then Huram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the Lord hath loved his people, he hath made thee king over them. (12) Huram said moreover, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the Lord, and an house for his kingdom. (13) And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding, of Huram my father's, (14) The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skillful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father. (15) Now therefore the wheat, and the barley, the oil, and the wine, which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants: (16) And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in floats by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem.</td>
<td>The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show, “Sally's Sweet Babboo” (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 26:20</td>
<td>Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains.</td>
<td>It's Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kings 9:30-33</td>
<td>(30) And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window. (31) And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? (32) And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. (33) And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down: and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses: and he trode her under foot.</td>
<td>Charlie Brown’s Christmas Tales (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 8:7</td>
<td>So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.</td>
<td>Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown (2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 List of Bible passages quoted in part or whole in the *Peanuts* animated titles.
As with the comic strips, these references are more specific than one might expect in a mainstream property and certainly tend to be more specific than other franchises. While one may not be surprised by the infrequent but occasional generic reference in programs similar to Peanuts, such as in a Merry Melodies short\textsuperscript{308} where Bugs Bunny (in disguise) and Yosemite Sam almost get married in a nondescript chapel by an off-screen minister, a reference to the book of Ruth or the forests of Lebanon would likely strike most viewers as oddly particular and particularly odd. This particularity of biblical reference, however, is one of Schulz’s trademarks across the strip and animation media. It allows him to avoid general religious platitudes and associations, freeing him to explore his extensive knowledge of biblical text in order to find humorous lines for the sketch. In Merry Melodies, the off-screen minister does not quote specific biblical text during the ceremony; in Peanuts, Linus has a very specific verse from the Gospel of John ready for Snoopy’s wedding: “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there.”\textsuperscript{309}
Figure 3.14 Distraught that Charlie Brown would make him wear a collar, Snoopy camps out at Peppermint Patty’s where he is forced to do chores, picturing Charlie Brown with a red face, devil horns, and a pitchfork (He’s Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968).

This trope of particularity is not without risks, though. As Newsweek television writer Joshua Alston contends, the perception is often that American television viewership fractures in the face of religious specificity. “There’s a notion,” says Alston, “mostly borne out, that a religious program can serve only one master. Either it attracts people of faith while repelling the secular, or vice versa.” Recognizing, as Linus did in 1966’s It’s the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown that “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people – religion, politics, and the Great Pumpkin,” Schulz and his small team managed to craft television specials that evade the label of being “too religious” while still strongly courting religious communities even from the early years. They were able to accomplish this, in part, because the focus of biblical references within
the animated programs is almost always humor – the goal likely being to provoke an endearing chuckle instead of a theological debate. This is, perhaps, a necessary trajectory for the biblical references in the medium of television animated specials, due to the difference in audience (the comics being geared toward an adult audience and the television specials being watched by families of adults and children).

In regards to the comic strips, one need not fully believe Schulz when he routinely said that he was “someone who just likes to draw funny pictures,” given the provocative content in many of his strips. Yet the goal for the religious references within the animated specials seems to generally fit Schulz’s proclaimed goal of simply charming and entertaining a broad audience. This may have been because Schulz always thought of himself primarily as a creator responsible for a good comic strip, and the work of the animated specials fell on the shoulders of producer Lee Mendelson and primarily director/animator Bill Melendez. According to Schulz,

One of the first things that happens is that our producer, Lee Mendelson, has to find out when the network is ready to accept another show. […] Then Bill Melendez comes up here to my studio, and we sit down and start talking about different things and out of the first conversation comes a rough story. Bill goes back down to Hollywood and roughs out a storyline and then brings it back up here again, and I go through it and we try to think of some more funny things. […] When we first began I think I made a couple of rough drawings to show them the way I thought the characters should be drawn, but since then I just trust it to Bill
Melendez. I really should go down to Hollywood more often to see what’s going on, but drawing the daily comic strip is still the basis and foundation for the whole thing and I feel this studio is where I belong.  

This is not to say, of course, that Schulz did not have creative control over the animated specials. While alive, Schulz was the driving creative force and had final approval on all of the components. Even after his death, his strips serve as the authoritative, even rigid, guideposts for any new materials. Schulz’s children, for instance, insisted that youngest son Craig Schulz and Pearls before Swine writer Stephan Pastis only use material from the strips to create Happiness is a Warm Puppy, the first animated special that Sparky did not work on directly.  

Not only do the humorous biblical references in the animated specials generally avoid much of the critical inquiry embedded in the Peanuts comic strips, this style of endearingly non-confrontational television humor is decidedly different than another wildly successful mainstream television program that confronts religious issues – The Simpsons. The Simpsons has been called, according to Lewis, “the most ‘religious television show’ currently being aired.” The show routinely involves portrayals of religious behavior and questions of religious belief. Citing a study by John Herren, Lewis reports that upwards of “70 percent of the [Simpsons] episodes contain at least one religious reference, and in more than 10 percent, the plot centered on a specific religious issue.” Though one may see the show like Lewis does as presenting “a mixed but ultimately respectful attitude toward religion and its important role in human development,” it remains that the show approaches religion from a subversive and
satirical angle almost foreign to the *Peanuts* animated universe. Religion is approached from a burlesque point of view in *The Simpsons*, exposing American attitudes toward religion by moderately poking a stick at the limits of appropriateness. This comedic strategy, Lewis contends, is a successful tool for acknowledging the importance of religion within America while also criticizing its operations and attitudes. This approach is taken to new levels of mockery, even sacrilege, in other millennial television programs like *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, and the cable broadcast *South Park*. If these shows can use the comedic frame to get television viewers to buy into a portrayal of God trying to pick up women at the local bar\(^{318}\), Jesus rising out of a swimming pool in a Speedo at the Second Coming (not to be confused with the false Christ who seeks to trade sexual favors from the main character Stan in exchange for a late rapture to Heaven)\(^{319}\), or only Mormons going to Heaven and everyone else going to Hell where Satan is trying to get out of his homosexual relationship with Saddam Hussein\(^{320}\), then it should not be a surprise that the gentle humor in the *Peanuts* franchise allows for embraceable biblical references, such as when Sally exclaims “Hockey Stick!” instead of her prepared “Hark!” during the Christmas program, later lamenting, “I ruined the whole Christmas play. Everybody hates me – Moses hates me, Luke hates me, the Apostles hate me – all 50 of ‘em!”\(^{321}\)

This is not to say, though, that the religious references in *Peanuts* only serve as humorous fodder. This certainly is not true in the context of personalized prayer or the presence of meaningful iconography and it is not always the case with biblical references, even though that is the norm. Two instances where biblical references are made also
demonstrate a willingness to use the particular tone and style of Peanuts animation to
explore religious thought. Both instances in different ways resist the muting pull of the
television medium’s typical call for unprovocative yet entertaining generality. The first
instance, 1965’s A Charlie Brown Christmas, took the leap in telling the biblical truth of
Christmas in part because Peanuts was still rooted solely in the comic strips, not
encumbered by a history with television norms. According to David Michaelis, a shift in
the franchise occurred as the television specials “recast Peanuts as a holiday tradition for
children.”322 Before the franchise grew massive with creative teams working on
merchandising and Bill Melendez storyboarding large amounts of the specials, a
dramatically important moment was implanted through the recitation of Luke chapter 2
because Schulz was viewing his product primarily through the lens of the comic medium,
not television. This was the dramatically important religious moment for the franchise,
coming out of a particular historical moment and generating complex relationships with
other franchise texts, as will be described in chapter four.

The second instance of serious biblical reference involves a discussion of angels
and prophets, occurring in 1983’s It’s An Adventure, Charlie Brown, a special comprised
of a series of shorts based almost directly from comic strip series. The following is a
description of the extended short “Butterfly:”

While Peppermint Patty and Marcie are out on the lawn, a butterfly
lands on Peppermint Patty’s nose. Peppermint Patty asks Marcie, “Do
you think it’s an omen?” She soon falls asleep. While Peppermint Patty is
sleeping, Marcie sends the butterfly fluttering away. Peppermint Patty
awakens and says, “Marcie – the butterfly is gone! What happened?!”
Marcie explains to her, “A miracle, sir! While you were asleep it turned into an angel.” Peppermint Patty then tells Charlie Brown that a butterfly turned into an angel and chose her, saying, “Doesn’t that make you shiver all over? I’m trying to stay humble, Chuck.” She tells Sally it was a miracle and that she thinks she was chosen to bring a message to the world, saying, “Why else would a butterfly land on my nose and then turn into an angel?”

According to Linus, “the world could certainly use a message,” which according to Peppermint Patty the angel has told her “How about – if a foul ball is hit behind third base it’s the short stop’s play.” She even goes to a televangelist’s office and tells his receptionist, “I’d like to speak to the preacher please. The one I see on TV all the time. I thought he’d be interested in a miracle that I personally know of.” The preacher is busy, so the secretary gives her the Sunday School paper instead. Later, Peppermint Patty rests against a tree and Marcie tells her that she looks tired. “I am exhausted, Marcie,” Peppermint Patty says. “I’ve been to three tabernacles, 14 churches, and two temples.” Marcie says, “No one wanted to hear about your miracle?” Peppermint Patty replies, “All I got was a bunch of tracts and this,” holding out a paper that Marcie reads aloud: “Want to receive a blessing? Donate to our new lawn sprinkler system.”
Peppermint Patty then calls the Joe Mel Talk Show but is hung up on and called “just another nut.” Peppermint Patty decides to tell Snoopy about her miracle because Snoopy has a big nose too (that explanation irritating Snoopy so he turns away). She decides to tell Schroeder her message. He says to her, “That’s a very disturbing message.” “I expect to be persecuted,” she says. After then telling Sally the message about the third base play, Peppermint Patty says “That’s the message I feel the angel told me to give to the world. There also may be a few earthquakes and some floods.” Sally says, “Boy, that’s frightening!” to which Peppermint Patty responds, “Thank you.”

Finally, sitting on the lawn again, Peppermint Patty and Marcie see the butterfly once more. Marcie, who has been trying this whole time to explain to the oblivious Peppermint Patty that she made the whole thing up, tries another tactic and says that maybe the butterfly is not an angel anymore. Peppermint Patty concludes the short saying, “That’s too bad. Back to the minor leagues.”

In this short, viewers are treated to a classic Schulzian socio-theological pondering. While Schulz often uses religious device to make Peanuts humorous, he sometimes uses the humorous Peanuts strip to explore larger issues of religious thought. In this, if one is willing to think through the issue with him, Schulz extends an invitation to consider one’s relationship to miracles. The scene asks one to question why it is that some are so wonderfully quick to believe that a miracle has happened to them even when the “real”
explanation is being repeated over and over. Yet the viewer is also prompted to consider why others, who are purportedly in the business of miracles (i.e., the church) are so wrapped up with the tedious business of Sunday School papers and sprinkler systems that they lose the ability to listen. One is even asked to consider what it is about the structure across religious traditions (those that inhabit churches, tabernacles, or even temples) that systematically produces systems of closed-circuit results. Schulz’s work does not offer spoon-fed answers, but instead opens up the provocative field of inquiry for internal engagement.

The humorous example of “Butterfly,” distantly related to the satirical ponderings in other programs, shows the potential of the television medium to explore distinct religious concepts in thought provoking ways. Like in The Simpsons, Schulz demonstrates that a subtle and clever wit makes it possible to explore these concepts without going past the lines of sacrilege and blasphemy. In fact, as Lewis contends, it is in the charitable but challenging examples of The Simpsons (or perhaps “Butterfly”) that the real value of the religious tradition is most upheld.

Embedded References (Phrases and Songs)

Like with the comic strips, many religious references are embedded in the vernacular and colloquialisms of American dialect, and Schulz often used phrases and terms that have a religious heritage to create a certain tone to a particular sketch. As seen in Table 3.1, these embedded phrases and concepts can be found in almost half of the televised titles. Some of the phrases are evident and have clear religious foundation, such
as when Linus says in 1972’s *You’re Not Elected, Charlie Brown*, that if elected as school
class president he will “purge the kingdom” and “bring down idols in high places” in
their “spiritual Babylon.” After all, as he tells Violet, they are “in the midst of a moral
decline.” Other phrases are less overt but are nonetheless part of the religious tradition
from which Schulz is writing. Twice Linus says to Lucy to “count your blessings,” and
six times different characters express an apocalyptic, eschatological worry that “the
whole world must be coming to an end!” (the 2:6 ratio of blessings:apocalypse being
appropriate for *Peanuts*). In *She’s a Good Skate, Charlie Brown*, Peppermint Patty says
“Woe is me!” (a phrase found in in Job 10:15 and also used by Linus in the “Snoopy’s
Robot” episode of the Saturday morning series), and three times characters refer to
being “the hero or the [sacrificial] goat.” These phrases are related to a generalized
Christianity, and potentially other religious identities like Judaism as well, and they do
not define Schulz’s work in any radical way. Instead, they help to further fill in the
verbal space with religious connotation and undertone. The frequent use of phrases that
are derivative of or have referential connections with religious thought help to
authenticate the moments where Schulz (or other writers in their own contexts) speaks
more poignantly to religious belief and practice. These phrases normalize religious
inquiry in the franchise enough, inoculating viewers against shock when Peppermint
Patty calls for prayer at the Thanksgiving table. Likewise, these generalized phrases,
with religious history but embedded as American colloquialisms, complement and allow
for the peculiar specificity of biblical citations. Other words and phrases like “miracles,”
“faith,” “sincerity,” “belief,” and “morality” embedded in casual statements across the television specials work the same way.

Similarly, one may or may not take notice of the religious references embedded in or historically attached to various songs that populate the television specials, but the connections are there nonetheless. In *Peanuts* television programs one can hear the gospel spirituals “Get on Board Little Children” and “This Train is Bound for Glory,” Christian American standards “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and “America the Beautiful,” eschatological folk tunes “She’ll be Coming ‘Round the Mountain” and “When the Saints Go Marching In,” Southern Gospel song “Farther Along,” Handel’s famous “Messiah,” and the traditional Christmas hymn “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” These songs play at varying levels of prominence and importance in the various specials, further occupying a wide array of latitudes and depths across the spectrums of religious reference open to Schulz and his creative team. To different individual degrees, but in important collective ways, these songs, like embedded verbal phrases, work to increase the credibility of a religious voice that could come from *Peanuts*. As standards largely familiar to the general American populace, these songs also point to the continued religious heritage of American society. Because the songs remain largely understated in the television specials (that are themselves artistically understated), Schulz and his creative team avoid branding their product as Christian (let alone “too Christian”) for most viewers of the specials, thus creating the environment for but not the foreclosure of effective religious inquiry. With the rise of Contemporary Christian Music since the mid-1980s, contemporary television producers have even more
possibilities for embedded religious reference through music that fits many of the aesthetic trends of the mainstream culture.

*Other Diverse References*

As said before, the references to religious belief, practice, or other spirituality in the *Peanuts* television titles resist categorization, given its nuance and variation across spectrums. As a result, describing broad types of religious reference common to the property leaves a handful of references outside (or on the edges) of even the broad categorization schemes. These include a possible allusion to Creationism in the Saturday morning episode “Linus and Lucy” when Sally says, while delivering a report in school with Snoopy, “Some people think that animals were put here on earth to serve humans. One wonders what sort of response we might get if we were to ask the animals.” Snoopy laughs, and Sally says, “Maybe we shouldn’t ask the animals.” In another Saturday morning episode “Chaos in the Classroom,” Sally says to Linus, “Will you walk home from school with me, Linus? I think the powers of darkness are out to get me.” Linus replies, “I doubt if I could ever protect you from the powers of darkness.” Sally then says, “How about a 3rd grader who claims I broke his ruler?” In *It's Magic, Charlie Brown*, Snoopy performs miraculous stage tricks without practical explanation. The holiday impetus for the Easter special clearly has historically religious roots, as does the practice of painting Easter eggs, though neither is ever explored in *It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown*. A portion of the operatic song whistled in *She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown* includes a brief reference to God in Italian, though the words are not heard in this
special. In *It's an Adventure, Charlie Brown*, Peppermint Patty receives tracts (which may be considered iconic religious paraphernalia) and in *It's Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown*, Charlie Brown quotes Dickens’ classic *A Christmas Carol*, saying to a neighbor who booted him to the curb for trying to sell Christmas wreaths, “Merry Christmas anyway, sir. ‘God bless us, everyone, said Tiny Tim, the last of all.’ And joy to the world” (which may be a sort of historicized prayer). Finally, in three televised specials we see names of cities that have religious etymologies (St. Paul, Abbeville, and St. Olmer, which may be similar to other embedded linguistic references). This potpourri of references again demonstrates that religious references weave in and out of the specials in sometimes small but nuanced ways.

*Reference to Other Religions/Spiritualities*

The moments in the *Peanuts* television properties that point to non-Christian religions or spiritualities deserve attention as well, even if their presence is limited and typically tangential. As Wolff explains, “While Christian denominations must concern themselves with how they are portrayed, non-Christian faiths may be concerned with their lack of representation.” The televised specials in the *Peanuts* franchise never contain any explicit attacks or criticisms of non-Christian religions (unless one views the Great Pumpkin storyline as a metaphor for faith, which some say may be a critique, even of the Christian faith – a complexity explored in chapter six). The televised titles also never contain sustained attention to any non-Christian religion. As such, collectively the references perform a fractional work of establishing the normalized presence of non-
Christian religious belief and expression for viewers (though the possible potency of such an impact is rather small, given the dispersed thinness of the references). The explicit and implicit inclusions\textsuperscript{337} are:

- Characters are dressed as a witch and ghosts in \textit{It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown}.

- In \textit{Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown}, behind the closing credits for a short segment are drawings of the constellations with characters associated with astrology outlined, including the ram, the bull, etc.

- In \textit{It's Magic Charlie Brown}, Snoopy opens a magic book to the section on Alchemy and then concocts potions with a wizard’s hat on, using beakers and boiling chemicals. He learns how to gesturally zap Woodstock’s feet smaller, head bigger, and zaps Lucy into the air and leaves her there.

- In \textit{A Charlie Brown Celebration}, reincarnation is referenced. Standing in a field of snow, Linus says, “I feel like I’ve been here before.” Sally says, “I’ll buy that. You were probably here in a former life, and you froze to death.”

- Peppermint Patty visits three tabernacles and two temples in addition to 14 churches in the “Butterfly” short in \textit{It's an Adventure, Charlie Brown}, though viewers are not told to what particular religions the tabernacles and temples belong.

- In a cemetery shown in \textit{What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?} there is a grave marker in the shape of the Star of David amidst the rows of crosses, a rendering of
the real Jewish markers present in the actual cemetery.

- During the “Clouds” song in *Snoopy: The Musical*, Linus sings that he sees Prometheus waving and Sally sings that she sees the pyramid of Khufu.

- On the wall of Jenny’s living room in the animated live-action special *It’s the Girl in the Red Truck, Charlie Brown* (starring Schulz’s daughter Jill and Snoopy’s brother Spike) is a Native American dreamcatcher.

- In *The Birth of the Constitution*, Peppermint Patty writes to her grandma to keep her fingers crossed about the success of the convention.

- After native images of winged creatures are shown, Sally briefly tells the story of Icarus in voiceover in the special *The Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk*.

- On a Yosemite camping trip scene in *The Smithsonian and the Presidency* with President Teddy Roosevelt, conservationist John Muir compares the valley and its great trees to “a hall,” “a temple that’s lighted from above” and that “nature had gathered her choicest treasures here.”

- In the film *Snoopy Come Home*, Linus says “happiness lies in our destiny.”

***

Entering the television medium, with its deliberate narrative conventions and requirement of audible voices, Schulz’s *Peanuts* characters were transformed into comparatively singular versions of their more open comic selves. The power of the
medium to transform the franchise was recognized very early by the production team, Lee Mendelson recalling that they thought they “killed Peanuts” after they saw the final product of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* before it aired. The production team was proven wrong, and the tens of millions of viewers across the American public that tuned in special after special demonstrated that television had actually given a new life to the already vastly successful comic franchise. The *Peanuts* programs became events, the characters became more identifiable with their distinct voice types, and the television content became the entry point for many fans’ perceptions of the property.

Since the beginning of its move to television, as will be discussed more in the following chapter, *Peanuts* has been situated within a medium that routinely broadcasts an a-religious, secular vision of society. This display is powerful, with its ubiquity cultivating normative perceptions of acceptable belief and action within the viewing populace. *Peanuts* television programs are borne out and continually alongside of Schulz’s subtly provocative comic strip work, and are faced on television with a new environment that in many ways structurally and conventionally resists provocative or nuanced inquiry. Thoughtful religious consideration, one of the conceptual spaces that Schulz explored through his comic strips, is not typically performed through mainstream television programming. This programming, however, does have a vast cultural reach and real social impact through the cultivation of ideas that are expressed within its narrative content. This is a different type of moving potential than that of the guttered comics, which require more engagement and reader participation. Schulz and his team, though, did not mobilize the impactful television medium to overtly express concise or
singular theological edicts (save, perhaps, for his inclusion of the gospel account as the “real meaning of Christmas,” to be discussed more in the following chapter).

Considering the degree of credibility that they did generate through the spread of diverse reference they did make, it is possible that Schulz and his team actually could have been more overt if they had wanted to be. Instead of being heavy handed, with a particular blend of biblical specificity and humorous colloquialism, the Peanuts titles on network television more routinely reference and speak to religious practice and belief with nuance and restraint. This array then works to retrieve a certain normative presence of religious thought across viewers’ perceptions of American life.

The religious references across the titles characteristically resist categorization, ranging from embedded religious idioms to personal prayers to a relational God. The vast array of types, strengths, and explicities are an example for the television medium because of their inherent variety. The open-ended and diverse references couched within a clever property with endearing characters serve as a model for the expansive opportunities of religious reference across the typically resistant television landscape. It is this consistent diversity of even the most subtle of references that establishes a presence of religious thought in the franchise which allows for the more overt moments, such as the gospel account of Jesus’s birth, Lucy’s call for prayer on the baseball field, or Peppermint Patty’s encounter with a butterfly-cum-angel. Given the medium’s typical lack of religious reference, an undergirding demonstration of religious fluency, even through mere colloquialisms, may be a critical precondition for successful religious reference on television.
In the next chapter, the context from which the poignant affirmation of the gospel in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* will be discussed, establishing the degree to which Schulz’s work did stand out for its religious affirmation, even from the franchise’s start on television. For many, this uniquely deliberate moment of religious proclamation on television also leads to many questions about conceptual relationships across other *Peanuts* titles. The focused attention on *A Charlie Brown Christmas* will serve as a complement to the broader discussion in this chapter of the full spectrum of religious references across the television specials. It is because of this full spectrum that *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, with its full minute of the gospel, can be accepted as the heart of the franchise and not a wild aberration.
CHAPTER 4

CHRISTMAS IN CONTEXT: A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

AND ITS CONTEMPORARIES

“But if we don’t do it, who will?”
  - Charles M. Schulz

In 1965, after receiving an unexpected offer from Coca-Cola to buy a Peanuts Christmas show, Charles Schulz, producer Lee Mendelson, and animator Bill Melendez had mere months to put together their first television show.\(^{340}\) “The very first and most successful show we ever did was *A Charlie Brown Christmas* which was done in four months\(^{341}\) but that is not enough time,” Schulz told Jud Hurd of *Cartoonist Profiles* in 1979.\(^{342}\) The show, based on the outline that they put together in only a weekend, has persisted for generations as one of the most successful Christmas programs ever on television.\(^{343}\) Many retrospectives on the special enjoy discussing the “show that almost wasn’t,” referencing the atypical use of jazz music, limited animation, child actors, and biblical quotation as reasons why the show was not expected to work. “After decades of being a tradition,” says comic writer and historian Nat Gertler, “it’s easy to forget what a radical special it was, not just in its format (although its use of jazz music and real kid voices was groundbreaking for animated television), but also in its content. The story of people getting caught up in the trappings of the holidays, the decorations and pageantry, the glitter and the gifts, only to be reminded of what Christmas is truly about via a reading straight from the Bible, was not the safe path.”\(^{344}\) Yet the work has reaped
significant reward, becoming “part of the visual language of Christmas.”

Retrospectively, as chapter three suggests, the breadth of religious references in the *Peanuts* franchise makes the recitation of the gospel in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* as “the real meaning of Christmas” seem like less of an aberration – it would not likely strike fans as particularly out of place (though it does strike many as particularly meaningful). It is not that the religious history of Christmas is denied or wholly unknown by secular observers – i.e., no one was shocked to learn that Christmas was associated with the nativity scene after watching *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. In the context of the program’s initial broadcast, however, the perception was that the content was indeed rare for mainstream broadcast television.

At the time of its original airing, three groups acknowledged the atypical quality of the inclusion of the Christian text. First, industry figures expressed caution toward the idea. According to the producer of the *Peanuts* specials, Lee Mendelson, CBS executives told Schulz that “the Bible thing scares us” after screening the program in their New York headquarters. The two network vice presidents in the room disliked the show for a variety of reasons (slow pacing, lack of laugh tracks, unprofessional sounding child actors, jazz scoring, and crude animation). “The network thought it was awful,” says Mendelson. “They didn’t try to hide their disappointment.” In some interviews, though, Mendelson eschews the claim that the network executives were explicitly concerned about the religious content in the show, saying “frankly, none of us thought anything about it; it just came naturally because it was about Christmas and it just evolved.” More frequently, however, Mendelson (an award winning documentary
filmmaker before working with Schulz)\textsuperscript{353} and director Bill Melendez (an internationally acclaimed animator for years before joining Peanuts),\textsuperscript{354} recall voicing their own concern over the inclusion of a full minute of biblical recitation (which had originally been pitched as Bible reading). In a behind-the-scenes mini-documentary, Mendelson recalls, “And everything was going along very smoothly and Sparky said we’re going to have to have Linus read from the Bible. And Bill and I looked at each other and said ‘Oh, gee, I don’t know if you can animate from the Bible, you know, it’s never been done before.’” And he [Sparky] said, ‘if we don’t do it, who will?’” In an interview for TIME, Mendelson also remembers:

> When we were writing the show, Schulz said, “If we’re doing this show and it’s going to be on at night, I’m going to add some meaning to it. I don’t want it just to be something funny. If we’re going to do it, I think we should talk about the true meaning of Christmas — at least what it means to me.” Bill and I just looked at each other. We weren’t so sure it was a good idea.\textsuperscript{355}

Bill Melendez, remembers the same, saying, “I thought it was a very dangerous place to go into, especially as I didn’t know anything about it, and I didn’t like to being involved.”

In the \textit{Making of a Tradition} retrospective, Melendez also recalls:

> [Sparky] wanted to be very straightforward and honest, and he said what he wanted to say because he was a very religious guy. When I first looked at that [religious] part of the story I told Sparky, “We can’t do this, it’s too religious. And he said to me, “Bill, if we don’t do it, who else can? We’re
the only ones who can do it.” I wasn’t convinced that was true at the time, but he was right about so many things. It just didn’t sound right for a cartoon, an entertainment. When I read that part, I thought we were going to kill this thing, but by golly he came through.\textsuperscript{356}

Concern over the inclusion, though, was not a major obstacle to the development of the program. Coca-Cola signed off on the use of a gospel message when they bought the program off of the initial outline (which the final product mirrors closely).\textsuperscript{357} The network executives had little time to rescind any endorsement of the program given that the special had already been slotted into their broadcast and advertising schedules.\textsuperscript{358} The hesitant concern does point, though, to a perceived resistance from entertainment executives to include religious reference in mainstream properties.\textsuperscript{359}

The second indicator that religious content for works like \textit{A Charlie Brown Christmas} was rare came from Schulz himself. In responding to Melendez and Mendelson with the question “If we don’t do it, who will?” Schulz signals that other properties at that time were not making the choice to include explicit religious reference in their Christmas programming (and perhaps beyond). In a question and answer session at the National Cartoonists Society Convention, Schulz affirms the recollections of Melendez and Mendelson, saying for himself,

\begin{quote}
It was in the midst of deciding what would happen [in the Christmas story], I said, “Gee, Bill, we can’t get around it – if we’re going to do a Christmas story, we have to use the famous passage about the baby Jesus.” And we did. Linus walked out and said, “Lights, please!” And he recites
\end{quote}
the wonderful passage. No one had ever done this sort of thing before.

And we did.\textsuperscript{360}

A well-established popular culture figure by 1965, Schulz appeared to command an awareness of the television landscape, and the perceived lack of religious reference elsewhere was a motivating force for his insistence that \textit{A Charlie Brown Christmas} break the mold in a meaningful way.

The television audience’s reactions to the special provide a third, consistent view of religious non-presence in programming. Sensitive to particular perceptions of the changing social order of the 1960s (discussed more below), first-time viewers of the \textit{Peanuts} special made note of the religious content they were unaccustomed to seeing on their television sets. Many wrote to Coca-Cola after watching the program, and the soft-drink company saved the letters, later donating their scrapbook to the Charles Schulz Museum and Research Center archives. The notes to the sponsor offer a unique glimpse into the time period’s religious nuances as well as the transitional sponsorship arrangements, with the hundreds of letter writers praising Coca-Cola directly for their involvement with a religious-message-affirming program showcasing the “true meaning of Christmas” (Figure 4.1). One viewer from South Miami wrote, saying, “At the point where the little character said: ‘Can’t anyone tell me what Christmas is all about?’ I said, ‘Don’t tell me they’re going to mention Jesus,’ and I was so gratified and heartened at the next scene when he began to relate the Christmas story.” The sisters of St. Sebastian Convent in Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania thanked Coke for their portrayal of the “real spirit
of Christmas which is so often obliterated by a false one,” adding, “It is our hope that ‘Peanuts’ may find a permanent place in the T.V. realm.” The praise for the religious content was often even coupled with praise for the Coca-Cola product, another viewer writing, “The religious meaning of the season is sadly neglected in many of the events that are staged during this time of the year. Coca Cola is to be saluted in producing not only refreshing products but also in sponsoring such a refreshing program.”
President,
Coca Cola Bottling Company

Dear Sir:

Congratulations on your presentation of "Charlie Brown's Christmas" last Friday evening. It was a charming program well presented and at a time when the children could really appreciate it. Both of my children (ages 8 and 11) enjoyed every minute of it - even the Coca Cola advertisements!

I particularly salute you for sponsoring a program stressing the true meaning of the Christmas season. In this dark day of everyone being afraid to mention Jesus and the Church for fear of some group boycotting their product or getting a Court Order handed down, of prayer being banned from schools and public meetings and the mention of God in general being hush hushed, I really commend you for this timely presentation.

Thank you very much.

I feel sure that I echo the gratitude and sentiments of most concerned parents. Unfortunately, we are more prone to criticize than compliment. As a result, most of the good things that are done daily go unheralded while all the evil and vile things receive banner headlines.

Best wishes for the holiday season.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Betty

Figure 4.1 Letter from A Charlie Brown Christmas viewer to Coca-Cola, celebrating the show’s content, after watching the initial broadcast in 1965. (© 2013 Stephen J. Lind used courtesy of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center.)
These letters, joyously supporting not only the religious content but also the wonderful Coca-Cola product that will be re-stocked in their refrigerators, join the industry players and Schulz in pointing to 1960s mainstream broadcasts as being characterized by, even suffering from, a dearth of religious content. Some Peanuts fans, as described in chapter two, had already criticized Schulz for incorporating religion into his “low art,” and some reviews of A Charlie Brown Christmas shared a distaste for its move to animation. According to one reviewer writing the day after the special aired, the characters “lost most of their special, piquant charm” and “fell on their little round faces as TV stars,” because the special spelled out too much for viewers. The press reviews were overwhelmingly favorable, however, and as the CBS-TV program chief Mike Dann reported in the days following the special, the network “had the most amazing [viewer] reaction to this show […] far more than we expected. We not only got letters, but schools sent in long petitions asking us to repeat the show.” As the similar Coca-Cola letters above demonstrate, many fans took notice of the reportedly unique religious content in the animated special. These indications of uniqueness – from Schulz, the producers, and the viewers – however, stop at the level of assertion, even if from individuals with expertise on the subject. This chapter, then, will serve to fill in the context surrounding A Charlie Brown Christmas’s supposed “radical” departure from the genre. This portion of the study, as will be explained later, will also provide an analysis of an important period in television history through the strategic cross-section of Christmas specials across the 1960s.

Guided by the question of “radicalism” prompted by the Peanuts retrospectives,
what follows is a study of the religious portrayals on television Christmas programming throughout the decade of the 1960s. A survey of television shows contextualizes in a specific historical period a key religious portrayal in Schulz’s oeuvre, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. The findings substantiate the repeated assertion that *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was in fact an aberration from the typical message on television during the holiday season. The survey, though prompted by and tied to the larger study of *Peanuts*, also stands independently as an analysis of religious portrayal during a historically influential period in the television medium.

***

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that little scholarly attention has been given to portrayals of religion in Christmas programming on television. While, as Hoover and Clark have pointed out, studies of the intersections of religion and media are growing in prominence and meaningful diversity, the subfield remains somewhat of a niche domain amongst the broader media/cultural studies research. A historical focus on holiday programming from a particular decade certainly would then narrow the likelihood of possible previous study. In fact, media history as a general discipline, says Hampton, is under-developed, sparse because its “narrowly specialized scholarship” can be “bewildering” to newcomers. This study of American Christmas episodes aired on television in the 1960s may seem to be one such bewilderingly specific piece of research and is one of the first treatments of the subject. Each of the elements, though – religion,
television, Christmas – command massive influence over American society and have thus garnered scholarly attention toward select overlapping elements. The intersections allow for this study to speak not only to a conversation about the historical context of Peanuts, but also to a broader understanding of what it means to discuss religion in public spaces (such as television), or at least part of what it meant in the 1960s.

Because this study speaks to the junctures of larger topics of interest, there are existing studies that ground this further analysis. Directly related are the histories of classic Christmas programming. These typically take the form of popular cultural or biographical accounts of the development of a particular title, such as the books featuring Lee Mendelson’s recollections – *A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Making of a Tradition* and the subsequent *It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown: The Making of a Television Classic.* Similarly, Rankin/Bass historian Rick Goldschmidt has published several works on the production company’s ani-magic and cell animation specials like *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman,* and *The Year Without Santa Claus*.\(^{365}\) Broader trends in the television industry at the time, though, are typically glossed over or asserted without many specific details or demonstration. In the histories of *A Charlie Brown Christmas,* for instance, it is routinely noted that the inclusion of the gospel message was something that executives were concerned about, but statistical or anecdotal explanation of the norm is not developed. While these popular histories are very useful for establishing engaging behind-the-scenes details of various titles, they do little to generate comprehensive understandings of particular parts of the television landscape their properties inhabited. Conversely, Joanna Wilson goes to great lengths in her work
to catalogue the vast array of Christmas programming. In her extensive encyclopedia of Christmas television, *Tis the Season TV*, she summarizes thousands of Christmas-themed TV programs (including Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and New Year’s TV series episodes, TV specials, and made-for-TV movies).\(^{367}\) Wilson, a self-described “TV junkie” (and who was cast as Peppermint Patty in her school’s second grade production of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*... and who was inspired to write the encyclopedia after receiving a copy of Goldschmidt’s *The Enchanted World of Rankin/Bass*),\(^{368}\) offers readers an immense resource for future scholarship (especially if the work becomes available in searchable digital text\(^{369}\)). The expansive (but perpetually incomplete) list demonstrates just how eager the viewing public is to embrace television as a meaningful part of their traditions. Wilson describes:

> In the intimacy of our own living rooms, we gather together on the sofa to once again share the spirit of the season with familiar old friends, whether it’s Charlie Brown and Linus, Rachel, Monica, Chandler, Ross and Phoebe, Bing Crosby, The Waltons, or even the outrageous kids from South Park in a Christmas special. […] As a culture, we never seem to tire of the stories that go with Christmas, and each year, TV brings us new holiday specials as well as treasured classics from our past.\(^{370}\)

Wilson’s cataloguing approach, spanning more than half a century and filling over 700 pages in its first printing, opens wide the vast and vibrant possibilities in the studies of Christmas on television. She does not make developed thematic claims herself, instead opting to summarize without rubric basic plot-points and possible stand-out features of
each episode listed. The work then serves as an indexical starting place, needing further research to cull particular cross-sections for common traits. Similarly, Diane Werts’ *Christmas on Television* streams decades of episodes synopses into her broad catalogue of holiday programming, though with so much ground to cover Werts is unable to enumerate a depth of detail for any given period or trope.\(^{371}\) This study of Christmas in the 1960s is one such study that conceptually follows the scholarly trajectory that Wilson’s and Werts’ works affords.

Also aiding in the foundation of this study are works that describe the social dynamics at play between the Christian church and mainstream society (including the television industry) in the 1960s. The decade was unmistakably filled with landmark moments that would define many of the histories of the era – from the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr., to the lunar landing, Vietnam War, and the broader Civil Rights Movement. Religious perspectives were also being transformed during this time as the citizenry was forced to reconcile their traditional habits and beliefs with an increasingly complex set of legal and social norms. Contrary to simple historical glossings, the 1960s was not a decade of religious abandonment in the United States, but rather it was a time of internal and organizational negotiation, even struggle. Church membership stayed relatively steady across the decade (see Table 4.1), though perceptions of the church’s place in public society evolved in diverse ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Church Membership</th>
<th>U.S. Population</th>
<th>Memb. % of Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>86,830,490</td>
<td>151,325,798</td>
<td>57.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>114,449,217</td>
<td>179,323,175</td>
<td>63.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>131,045,053</td>
<td>203,302,031</td>
<td>64.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>134,816,943</td>
<td>226,542,199</td>
<td>59.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>156,331,704</td>
<td>248,709,873</td>
<td>62.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>152,134,407</td>
<td>281,421,906</td>
<td>54.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>159,848,057</td>
<td>308,745,538</td>
<td>51.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 This table lists the total amounts of church membership reported by churches according to the National Council of Churches’ *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches.* Population figures are according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

It was, as McLeod contends, an era characterized not by a decrease in Christian faith as much as it was by a decrease in Christendom – a society defined by institutional overlaps between church and social elites. Across contexts, the role of dominant elites was challenged in the 1960s, including the assumed dominance of previous church practices and roles. Major court cases established new legal limitations on religious practice in public. In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled in Engel v. Vitale that school-initiated prayer, even if non-denominational, was a violation of the First Amendment's protection against governmental establishment of religion. The following year, the Supreme Court affirmed the directionality of that case in Abington School District v. Schempp, which the Washington Post had suggested “may go a long way toward settling the arguments about what the justices meant [in Vitale].” In Schempp, the Court found that a Pennsylvania school district violated the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses by performing daily Bible readings over the loud speaker.

Philip H. Ward,
representing the school district before the court, said in his opening arguments that the reading of the Bible was part of moral, not religious, education based on an “ancient custom” of reading from the Bible. The majority of the Court disagreed, and the American public was faced with perceptual tensions among their traditional practices, legal precedence, and developing notions of social pluralism. Some feared that the court’s decisions was an attack on religion, with the president of the American Bar Association responding a year after Schempp that many had read too far into the court’s rulings, even though, he said, “the Court made quite clear that its opinion was not hostile to religion but rather in favor of religion. The Court pointed out that state-sponsored secular studies about religion were not invalid under the decision.” The perception of the Court’s involvement in religious affairs was compounded when the 1964 Civil Rights Act brought the state into questions of workplace discrimination of religion through Title VII claims. Though the legal implications and technicalities of these events are still debated, the social result in the 1960s was further social rupture in notions of the normative public acceptability of religious activities. The 1960s were not marked by a questioning of the value of religion, but the legal cases propelled a questioning of the proper place of religion.

The simple and direct religious message in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was certainly not part of an era of uniform cultural perspective. Traditional views on religious belief and practice were challenged through an increased exposure to diversity in the 1960s, resulting from the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement and the 1965 Immigration Act. A variety of social questions rose to prominence in that time, such as debates over
birth control (which the National Council of Churches formally approved of in 1961) and questions over the appropriate view of homosexuality. According to Toulouse, diverse sets of ideas regarding homosexuality began to emerge from different poles in the Christian faith. The dominant Christian view was still that homosexuality was in some way wrong, but difference arose in the type of wrong and what the consequences should be. Responding to those that claimed deep religious schisms coming out of the era, Toulouse contends that, “Instead of a large rupture that illustrates a culture war, the resulting changes have produced what, for lack of any other more appropriate term, I call a ‘muddled middle.’” By “muddled” Toulouse means to point to subgroups of Christianity that were “muddling through” the changes and questions of the era by way of increased discussion and debate. Nuanced voices from the period, he contends, can be seen in the independent journals Christianity and Crisis and Century which recommended in 1964 and 1965 editorials that homosexuality, even though sinful, should be decriminalized. Even further, in 1967, a gathering of ninety Episcopal priests who held a meeting at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York issued a statement that the church should consider homosexual acts “morally neutral,” and in 1968 a Church of God minister named Troy Perry announced his homosexuality, left his church, and formed the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, focusing on ministry to gay Christians. The dominant attitudes were not reversed in the era, but individual groups began to overtly challenge traditional norms, and an increase in diverse thought could be heard. “Mainline protestant hegemony,” contends Rosenthal, “was increasingly called into question” and religious organizations as well as individual citizens were forced to
reexamine their role in society. Schlulz’s voice was already a small part of this discourse of challenge, having jabbed at denominationalism in the comic strip, even while embracing theological thought more broadly. Because of the cultural shifts, however, critics assessing the historical context of the era should not expect presence or non-presence of religious discourse in any given space (including the burgeoning entertainment media).

The Catholic Church undertook massive introspective consideration through the activities of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which took place from 1962 to 1965. This event paralleled the trajectory of the 1960s rejection that tradition was inherently valuable, resulting in significant articulated changes to the Catholic Church. With a new sense of timeliness, the Church expressed a more distinct sensitivity to its human situatedness, determining that it needed to be more responsive to and engaged with the broader public, attentive to its needs. Vatican II changed the way clergy and professed religious interacted with the public, with nuns, for instance, increasingly seeking charitable opportunities outside the walls of convents. The laity was also charged with charitable works, as such were the responsibility of all possible actors as a way of fulfilling the commandment to love God with all one’s heart and to love one’s neighbor as one loves oneself. In *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* from Vatican II, the Catholic Church, through the leadership of Pope Paul VI, declared:

> In her very early days, the holy Church added the agape to the eucharistic supper and thus showed itself to be wholly united around Christ by the bond of charity. So, too, in every era it is recognized by this sign of love,
and while it rejoices in the undertakings of others, it claims works of charity as its own inalienable duty and right. For this reason, pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind are held in highest honor by the Church. At the present time, with the development of more rapid facilities for communication, with the barrier of distance separating men greatly reduced, with the inhabitants of the entire globe becoming one great family, these charitable activities and works have become more urgent and universal. These charitable enterprises can and should reach out to all persons and all needs. Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education; wherever men lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are afflicted with serious distress or illness or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great solicitude, and help them with appropriate relief. This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous nation and person.¹⁸³

Documents that emphasized charity began the restructuring of the position of the Catholic Church in society, altering a previous “super-state” paradigm that had guided some in the church and many perceptions of the church.¹⁸⁴ Vatican II did not erase problems within the Catholic Church during this era, especially with the Church’s controversial perspectives on birth control and celibacy, and some have argued that the goals of Vatican
II have yet to be realized. The changes surrounding Catholicism in the 1960s, though, contributed to the larger flux in socio-religious positioning.

While new middle-grounds were forming during this decade of change, some Protestant groups feared the shifts happening, such as the rise in prominence of Catholicism, and legal restrictions insisted by the Court, causing some to retreat to the church as a haven from the world. As Rosenthal explains, one way this was manifested was in a condemnation of the secularity of television. In this era before the televangelism of the 1970s caught on, church use of the emerging medium was not common, though it did occur within limited programming, just as it had with select broadcasts in radio programming, such as Billy Graham’s televised crusades. Religious content in mainstream programming was also infrequent, according to Wolff, typically portraying a limited version of Catholicism that offered little accounting of religious diversity. In light of the larger attention Vatican II was drawing to the Church, says Wolff, a dominant focus on Catholicism “historically […] is not surprising, given the events in that church during this time,” though the depictions did not reflect a representative accounting of the Church’s emerging traits (this misrepresentation trend of flattening demographic nuances was not unique to religious groups in the 1960s, of course). The flattened, monolithic view tended to include only depictions of the clergy and professed religious (e.g., nuns), excluding the laity from the typical episode plotline. Even further, contends Wolff, the storylines in church-set programs like Going My Way and The Flying Nun were part of a trend that disproportionately cast younger, more liberal ecclesiastics as preferable over
their older, more conservative counterparts who may have resisted the changes from the Vatican.

Even if the depictions were biased, though, some Protestant groups feared that the rituals of Roman Catholicism offered an aesthetic appeal that was more televisual and could thus sway popular opinion. This dominance, combined with the unacceptable secular commercialism of sacred holidays like Easter, was enough to prompt the editors of *Christian Century* to urge its readers to reject the medium as vice, echoing the FCC chairman Newton Minow’s 1961 condemnation of television as a “vast wasteland.” At the same time, however, some Protestant groups were actively invested in monitoring the practices of television stations. The United Church of Christ, for instance, played a key role in opening Federal Communication Commission television license renewal procedures to the public, as well as being influential in seeing that the Commission adopted Equal Employment Opportunity rules for broadcasting. The church leaders’ concerns over television influence were part of a growing understanding of the medium’s impact during that time, including theoretical developments in academic disciplines. Throughout the 1960s, scholars and cultural leaders were realizing that television’s growing hub of news and entertainment programming exerted important influence over society. The emerging perception, though, was not that television posed an all-powerful threat like the some in the behaviorist school had previously claimed. In the wake of Nazi propaganda, Harold Lasswell had contended that consumers of media were almost powerless to resist messages from delivered programming. In 1938, when un-savvy listeners panicked after hearing Orson Welles’ *War of the Worlds* radio program, many
behaviorists claimed that media programming acts as a “hypodermic needle,” injecting predefined notions into defenseless audiences. Social scientific research by Lazarsfeld and others disproved this overstretch, demonstrating that there are a number of historically situated mitigating factors like audiences’ selective perceptions and recall that diminish the totalizing influence of media. With the work of Lazarsfeld and others challenging the strong effects paradigm, in favor of a more limited effects approach, more research trajectories developed and the spectrum of critical perspectives began to fill in. At the start of the 1960s, while Minow was claiming that television was a vast wasteland, others were optimistic about the medium, such as Joseph Klapper who eventually would lead CBS’s research division. Klapper argued for a limited effects understanding of television, contending that while television may have some effects on viewers, the effects tend to at most be a reinforcement of other influences, namely the nexus of church, family, and school. The realization developing throughout the decade by religious organizations and social scientists, however, was that while television’s effects on society may have limits, the impact of televised news and entertainment programming could still dramatically influence normative social attitudes and behavior, especially given that the nexus of church, family, and school were no longer unchallenged institutions.

As individual religious organizers expressed concern over the social power of television broadcasts in the 1960s, media scholars would then turn the concern into lasting disciplinary paradigms by the early 1970s. In a report published in 1972, McCombs and Shaw demonstrated through a study of the Chapel Hill electorate that the
social and political issues most salient in the national news media during the 1968
election had a significant correlation with the views held by the electorate in that region.
The implication of this study was that the media portrayals played a role in shaping those
opinions – setting the agenda of concern.\textsuperscript{396} In 1973, Funkhouser then demonstrated a
reasonable causal link from press coverage to public opinion by assessing the correlations
against statistical indicators of “reality” (for example, he found that press coverage and
public concern over urban riots in the 1960s spiked before the actual number of urban
riots did).\textsuperscript{397} The foundational and often cited Chapel Hill study by McCombs and Shaw,
confirmed by the testing of others,\textsuperscript{398} established the Agenda Setting paradigm – that
media portrayals do not tell viewers what to think, but they do tell them what to think
about. Because television news and entertainment was not an immediate source for
religious moralizing, instead often including slapstick humor and reports of violence, it
may not be surprising then that religious groups feared what the programming might
instruct their parishioners to think about.

Studies by Lazarsfeld, McCoombs and Shaw, and others that explore and
pronounce a limited effects paradigm of media influence are typically based on studies of
news media and political campaign communications. Rooted in an understanding of
narrativity,\textsuperscript{399} work by George Gerbner et al allows for the extension of media effects
analysis into entertainment programming through their Cultivation Theory developments.
The scripted entertainment programming that Gerbner and his colleagues experienced
through the 1960s and into the 1970s demonstrated to them that entertainment
programming offers a very limited selection of character portrayals and ideological
perspective, “designed to disturb as few as possible.” Networks sought to cast a wide net with their trans-regional broadcasts, and the high-cost programming thus tended to offer limited variation. In the context of Schulz’s half-million dollar Christmas program, it seems reasonable then for the production team to make concerned pronouncements about the trends across animation, given that characteristics of any genre were routinely narrow. Using these confined conventions, network television replaced previous sources of myth and legend and became the nation’s dominant disseminator of dramatic stories. Beginning in 1969 and expanding through the 1970s, George Gerbner and his collaborators tested the impacts of these dramas, explaining that television, an increasingly invisible medium because of its popularity and yet “the source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history,” engenders in viewers a constricted conception of reality. Operating through a robustly limited set of tropes and stereotypes that viewers are essentially unable to escape, television programming cultivates a limited set of perceptions. These perceptions do not materialize ex nihilo, but instead are shaped by historical context. Because of the ubiquity of television, however, Gerbner et al argue that the nexus of the church and state were no longer unique contributors to personal action, but instead were not only overshadowed in many ways by the influence of mass media but were also themselves influenced by social norms cultivated through television. Personal differences like race, class, and gender influence the way one interacts with television programming, but the “gravitational process” of cultivation pulls viewers toward a common mainstreamed set of ideals. The normative models embedded through implicit cues in the way character types are portrayed, orientations given value, facts
represented, and plots resolved, do not brainwash viewers, according to a cultivation perspective. Instead, the routine and highly repetitive exposure to a limited set of portrayals works to develop within viewers (especially heavy viewers) a sense of normalcy as they experience different social activities and groups through the stories streamed into their living rooms.

These theoretical perspectives germinating out of the late 1960s complement one another and should be seen as speaking toward a unified claim about portrayals in television programming. As a representation of interaction in the public sphere, television broadcasts not only raise certain issues while erasing others, it engenders in viewers a sense of what is appropriate and normative. Understanding these concepts together allows the critic to see that in the context of religious belief, a lack of religious content on television would diminish the perceived importance of the issue in public dialogue (lowering it on the cultural agenda), engendering instead a sense that religious belief and action are not part of one’s public actions or pronouncements. While these theories were only developing across the 1960s, brought to prominence through publications in the 1970s, the concern from religious leaders during the 1960s reflects a emerging understanding of television’s growing influence during that decade.

Despite the shifting perceptions in institutional authority, media influence, and religious decorum, however, the 1960s landscape of American belief was still characterized by a prevailing dominance of the Christian faith. Simultaneously, the diverse aspects of what Christianity meant became more pronounced as religious institutions and traditions became the site of challenge. Multi-vectored change
happened across a variety of prominent arenas, with the state asserting boundaries to publicity, social issues prompting internal diversity amongst the citizenry, and churches approaching social and media relations from a variety of positions of interest and concern. This chapter does not presume authority over the vastly complex religio-social dynamics of the 1960s (though key elements do provide context for approaching this study’s findings). Instead, this portion of the study is designed to understand what television said about 1960s religio-social dynamics. Such a study will provide not only further understanding of this period of American history, but more directly is intended to demonstrate how contemporary norms of television’s religious content reflect back to this influential period. At the heart of the study, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* stands as a unique point of departure and return. The assertions surrounding is religious uniqueness prompt inquiry into the veracity of those statements, and the conventions discovered throughout the study return the critic to Schulz’s Christmas program as a provocative challenge to the genre. Such television portrayals have unique capacities to shape the public perceptions of normative behavior. A study of the framed (non-)presence of religious belief and action in a decade of formative cultural change is thus an important undertaking.

**The Sample of 1960s Television Programming**

The 1960s were not only formative for new sets of legal and social relations, they were also an important time for the television medium, making a study of the eras
religious content uniquely significant. For television, three elements make the 1960s distinctly integral to the medium’s historical development. First, technological factors contributed to the rise in television ownership and reliance. In 1962, NASA launched AT&T’s Telstar I satellite, connecting the nation in a video news network that allowed television to have increased importance during the “newsworthy” era of assassinations, riots, and space missions. Television ownership reached a full saturation point by the 1960s, with 87.1 percent of American homes having a television in 1960, increasing to 95 percent by 1969. This reflected the increased popularity of the programming and also ensured that the type of programming offered would be established as the norm for viewers. As programs were successful, industry executives would then more strongly rest on those established conventions. The rise of color television also added to the visual appeal of the medium. In 1961, NBC began airing Walt Disney’s “Wonderful World of Color.” By 1965, over half of the prime time programs on all networks was broadcast in color. In 1966, NBC cemented the trend by broadcasting all of its programming in color, and the percentage of American households with color sets quadrupled over the following four years. Second, though television had been in homes throughout the previous decade, broadcasts made direct and noticeable impacts on socio-political life for the first time in the 1960s, as described above. Poignantly, the televised “great debates” between Kennedy and Nixon demonstrated television’s power to shape attitudes and inform viewers about the world. Over half of voters reported at the polls that the broadcasts of the visual-verbal contests influenced their decision. In a 1963 poll, Americans favored television as their “reliable source” of information over newspapers.
(36 percent favoring television, 24 percent favoring newspapers). In 1968, the Public Broadcasting Service began, making dramatic impacts in children’s edutainment through its influential Sesame Street program. Third, sponsorship structures changed, concentrating influence more heavily in the hands of network executives in a manner that established the basic business model for the medium’s subsequent decades. In the 1960s, networks were forced to forge new advertising arrangements, given the events that had transpired at the end of the 1950s with the “Quiz Show Scandal.” In 1958, after bitter contestants blew the whistle on rigged game shows like Twenty-One, networks had received increased pressure and criticism based on their programming and thus decided to command control of their own shows. Individual shows would still be underwritten by one or more companies through commercial break and print advertisement, but network executives would make the primary decisions about content from the 1960s on.

In order to evaluate trends in television during this time period, a particular cross-section must be chosen as viewing all of the content would not be logistically feasible. Christmas episodes serve as a useful cross-section for the purposes of evaluating religious portrayals. Because religious references are rare in mainstream programming, many researchers focus on titles that are based in a religious context (e.g., 7th Heaven, The Flying Nun, or even Supernatural, etc.), isolating a strong enough concentration of references to allow for analysis. These studies are important and can provide in-depth analyses of the most salient portrayal of religion on television, but they also suffer from the inability to discuss what the vast majority of programs on television are saying about religion, missing the opportunity to evaluate whether or not “standard” shows approaches
religion differently than church-plot programming. There is also the potential for such studies to focus on religious programming that speaks to a niche audience already sharing the primary ideals of the show. While important findings can come from such studies, they are less likely to generate an understanding of dominant perspectives. A sample that includes programming watched by a large cross-section of the viewing public is most likely to result in findings regarding the mainstreaming effect that Gerbner et al described, whereby viewers from different social locations form similar basic perspectives cultivated through common exposure to television content.413

Another approach is to canvas a large cross-section of programming across an era and compile comparative data. This approach is highly advantageous, establishing trends and providing statistical data that has political and scholarly usefulness. In order to draw out the often isolated portrayals of religion in television programming, such a study requires a very large sample size and more discrete coding schemes. Interpretive analysis and close-readings are not as germane to this type of research, operating differently than the case-study approach, and the values of those approaches are thus sacrificed for the more comprehensive quantitative data. It can also be challenging to accomplish for historical research, as access to that many different episodes through archives and rereleases can be difficult to obtain.

While one could certainly use both approaches, it would require a larger effort than most scholarly endeavors afford, and may discourage other smaller research projects that could yield significant results. A study of Christmas episodes, serves as a valuable middle-ground between the selective case study and the broad survey (and in the context
of *Peanuts* is begged by the historical context of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*). A Christmas cross-section not only limits the number of episodes to a manageable amount, but it does so in a purposefully representative fashion. As political scientist Geoffrey Brahm Levy extends, perceptions of Christmas indicate larger cultural perceptions of religious identity and practice. “There is no question,” he says, “that the public recognition of Christmas – and like festivals – offers a fascinating window into the abiding entanglement between the liberal state, ethno-religious hierarchy, and the construction of national identity.” Though often a site of controversy in recent decades, as Levy discusses, the public square is a common, almost inevitable place for displays of religious holiday expression. Christianity in societies like America has such historical/cultural dominance that religious meaning is naturally a part of public expression during the Christmas festival (even if such expression causes contention from vocal minorities, Levy explains). Television, as a part of the public square, is thus one space that could be expected to have religious reference during the season. In fact, it seems reasonable to believe that if there were to be religious reference on television at any time during the year, Christmas would be the one time that one would be guaranteed to find it across the networks. Christmas is a historically religious festival, celebrated by the dominant portion of the population that is demographically largely associated with the Christian faith, and it is a holiday with easily imported iconography and plot points for any given television program. In this way, it may seem that a study of religious portrayal in Christmas programming may be setting the bar low for criticism and analysis. There is some validity to that argument. All studies of religious portrayal should not solely focus
on Christmas programming, but the cross-section is a useful snapshot for select research initiatives. Because of the religiously charged aspect of the season, the sample should allow the researcher to have a high enough concentration of reference for analysis while still incorporating the wide breadth of mainstream titles. Research that goes beyond Christmas programming to code or analyze across a whole season should also consider excluding Christmas programming from the sample, as Christmas programming has the increased likelihood of skewing the results. Conversely, then, if the religious references are found to be rare in Christmas programming, it stands to reason that religious portrayal across the spectrum of a season would be highly infrequent, given that Christmas is comparatively low hanging fruit for the inclusion of religious reference.

For this study, all of the Christmas entertainment television (non-news) broadcasts from 1960-1969 were considered, according to the Wikipedia lists of Christmas television specials and episodes. Three types of programming were included across these lists – specials (programming produced and broadcast for the holiday season, not associated with a regular title, such as Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer or The Cricket on the Hearth); variety shows (programming characterized by a hosted display of various entertainment acts like songs and dances, such as The Judy Garland Christmas Special and The Bing Crosby Christmas Show); and scripted episodes (Christmas themed episodes, as determined by their airdate and content by the list contributors, from regular broadcast series, such as Bonanza or Mister Ed). All three types were considered as they each add to the broadcast culture of the era. Though in larger studies of full seasons it may be valuable to separate shows based on type, such as dividing dramas and comedies...
(at least in the analysis of findings), no significant rationale for separation or exclusion was evident across the three varieties present in this study.\textsuperscript{417}  

According to the lists, 140 Christmas television titles were broadcast in the 1960s, including broadcasts of different content from the same program in different years (e.g., \textit{Lassie} Christmas episodes from season eight and season 10). Of these 140, a total of 35 titles were chosen randomly for analysis, comprising 25 percent of the total possible titles and over 18 hours of television (See Table 4.2). Episodes from the same series were skipped after the series had already been viewed for a different year, and replacements were chosen when access was not available to an episode. A challenge to media history research is always access, especially for obscure television properties that may not yet be released on home video collections or through online access.\textsuperscript{418} Because no episodes were prioritized over others, replacing episodes for this analysis was acceptable.

The Method of Analysis

Episodes were viewed on VHS, DVD, digital download, and online. Each was coded for religious reference, defined as “Any recognizable visual or verbal reference (explicit or embedded) to supernatural faith, theology, church practice, or religious iconography.” For the purposes of this study, references to Santa Claus (and his elves, reindeer, etc.) were excluded from consideration of religious reference or supernatural faith. This study begins with the premise that Santa Claus is no longer an inherently religious figure, but instead represents the secularized and commercial celebration of Christmas, not a theological, faith-based event. This distinction, while perhaps difficult
to philosophically maintain, is reflected in popular understandings of the holiday. The reactions from Schulz, industry executives, and viewers indicate that while Santa is ubiquitous across holiday depictions, he no longer holds any inherent or recognizable symbolic religious value for the populace. It should be recognized, as Levy notes, that the presence of Santa is an inherent acknowledgement of the Christian heritage of Western civilization. That an episode may contain a commercialized Santa wishing children a Merry Christmas instead of a commercialized dreidel or Kwanzaa figure is important. A list of “Christmas episodes” itself is a recognition of the religious tradition of popular culture. Christianity, as Taylor notes, undergirds practices in contemporary society, even if explicit acknowledgement of belief and practice has been edged out of public space. To make useful distinctions between the secularized Santa-filled Christmas episodes and those episodes that may also contain more overt acknowledgements of religious belief (perhaps while also including Santa), references to Santa were excluded from coding for religion. Likewise, phrases from characters wishing for “goodwill toward fellow man” during the season were excluded from the data shown in Table 4.2. While these phrases have a religious etymology, they do not function as an acknowledged reference to religious faith, but instead were deemed to function as a universalized, secular phrase, and were not coded as a religious reference.

A binary coding of religious reference or no religious reference does limit the possible analysis. Discrete measurements such as duration of religious reference, number of religious characters, or frequency of prayers were not recorded, however, as this study is interested in a wide variety of reference types not directly comparable through
quantitative means. Instead, descriptions of the religious references were recorded for further analysis and categorization. The salient themes and tropes in each title were also noted in order to determine, if possible, a set of conventions for the period. These findings, especially those regarding religious content given the perception of its uniqueness at its debut, then provide a context by which to consider *A Charlie Brown Christmas* in light of the genre to determine whether its content was an aberration or in line with its contemporaries.

**Religious References in Christmas Episodes**

Consistent with most all other studies on portrayals of religion on American television, two traits are clearly evident in the sample of 1960s Christmas television programming: 1) Christianity is the dominant religion on television, and 2) when present, religious references are rarely substantively meaningful components in the constructed storylines. It is not that there are no religious references across the period’s media landscape, but rather that they tend to be only subtle and unaccented. More specifically, when religion is referenced, it is rarely explicitly affirmed. Religious references in these Christmas episodes were primarily related to the birth of Christ with varying degrees of explicitness and affirmation, most being only minor moments in the program. Table 4.2 shows which titles contained these Nativity references. While these references were common, most were contained within sacred Christmas carols in the program. Various other religious references were made throughout the specials, such as in phrases referencing prayer and scenes containing churches. Table 4.3 shows these other diverse
references. A number of programs included these non-Nativity moments, but typically as fleeting moments that did not compose a significant theme for the titles, and they did not form any consistent, conventional trends across the sample. Contrary to previous studies, a dominance of Catholicism was not present among the sample, and a generalized Protestantism lacked any further definition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM (Episode)</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>RUNTIME</th>
<th>Nativity Reference</th>
<th>Verbal, Not Song</th>
<th>Verbal, Not Song, A Central Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Twilight Zone (The Night of the Meak)</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Andy Griffith Show (A Christmas Story)</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis the Menace (The Fifteen-Foot Christmas Tree)</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawhide (Twenty-Five Santa Clauses)</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beverly Hillbillies (No Place Like Home)</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Garland Christmas Special</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dick Van Dyke Show (The Alan Brady Show Presents)</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Andy Griffith Show (Christmas Present)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bewitched (Santa Plums)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilligan's Island (Birds Gotta Fly, Fish Gotta Talk)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel: Just Be Shopping Minutes to Christmas</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flintstones (Christmas Flintstone)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Refrigerator (The Plight Before Christmas)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Charlie Brown Christmas</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nutcracker</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davey and Goliath (Christmas Lost and Found)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big Valley (Judgement in Heaven)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Addams Family (Christmas with the Addams Family)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Mother the Car (Many Happy No-Returns)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lucy Show (Lucy the Choirmaster)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonanza (A Christmas Story)</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Acres (An Old Fashioned Christmas)</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cricket on the Hearth</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Girl ('Twas the Night Before Christmas, You're Under Arrest)</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flying Nun (Wailing in a Winter Wonderland)</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Little Drummer Boy</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia (I'm Dreaming of a Black Christmas)</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Brady Bunch (The Voice of Christmas)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frosty the Snowman</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bill Cosby Show (A Christmas Ballad)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Doris Day Show (A Two-Family Christmas)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 (Nativity References) List of titles in sample (including year of initial airing and runtime in minutes), coded for religious reference. Programs marked contain a reference to the birth of Christ (The Nativity), ranging from instrumental sacred hymns to explicit affirmations of the gospel. The coding progresses in specificity, from any reference, to verbal references, to verbal references that are not included in a song, and finally to verbal references that are not in a song and develop a (but not necessarily the) central theme in the program.
### Table 4.3 (Other Religious References)

List of titles in sample (including year of initial airing and runtime in minutes), coded for religious reference. Programs marked contain other various references to religion that are not directly associated with the birth of Christ (nativity scene).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM (Episode)</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>RUNTIME</th>
<th>Show Premise</th>
<th>Prayer Reference</th>
<th>Phrase Referencing “God”</th>
<th>Sacred Architecture/Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Twilight Zone (The Night of the Meak)</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Andy Griffith Show (A Christmas Story)</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis the Menace (The Fifteen-Foot Christmas Tree)</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawhide (Twenty-Five Santa Clauses)</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beverly Hillbillies (No Place Like Home)</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy Garland Christmas Special</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dick Van Dyke Show (The Alan Brady Show Presents)</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Patty Duke Show (Christmas Present)</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bewitched (Sugar Plums)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilligan's Island (Birds Gotta Fly, Fish Gotta Talk)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hazel: Just 86 Shopping Minutes to Christmas</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flintstones (Christmas Flintstone)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Skelton Show (The Plight Before Christmas)</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Charlie Brown Christmas</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nutcracker</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davey and Goliath (Christmas Lost and Found)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hollywood Palace with Bing Crosby</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big Valley (Judgement in Heaven)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Addams Family (Christmas with the Addams Family)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Mother the Car (Many Happy No-Returns)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lucy Show (Lucy the Choirmaster)</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonanza (A Christmas Story)</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Acres (An Old Fashioned Christmas)</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cricket on the Hearth</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Girl ('Twas the Night Before Christmas, You're Under Arrest)</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Flying Nun (Wailing in a Winter Wonderland)</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Little Drummer Boy</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia (I'm Dreaming of a Black Christmas)</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Brady Bunch (The Voice of Christmas)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frosty the Snowman</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bill Cosby Show (A Christmas Ballad)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Doris Day Show (A Two-Family Christmas)</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nativity References

At basic levels, the Christian meaning of Christmas – the celebration of the birth of Christ – is a common feature in Christmas programming on television in the 1960s, according to the sample studied here. Over half of the episodes coded, 54.3 percent (19 of 35), contained some reference to the birth of Christ. This, when combined with the perception that Santa Claus signals a Christian dominance, further demonstrates the degree to which non-Christian religions have historically been absent from mainstream television programming. This may not be surprising to some, given the demographic dominance of Christianity amongst the populace. The portrayals of Christianity on television, though, even in the 1960s decade of change, are routinely marginal components in the overall program. This is the case with the Nativity references across the sample. While 54.3 percent contained a Nativity reference, only 48.6 percent (17 of 35) contain verbal references. In three of the programs, instrumental arrangements of sacred Christmas hymns provide the background track for scenes. In *The Flintstones*, for instance, “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” plays in the background without lyrics as Fred plays Santa at the local department store. While this inclusion may be noteworthy because *The Flintstones* is set to be dated thousands of years before the famous midnight clear, these musical scores, potentially missed by some viewers, do not make a dramatic impact on the meaning of the program.

The 48.6 percent that contain a verbal reference may still seem like a significant portion of television programs including religious content. This is true when religiosity is compared with complete secularity or when the presence of Christianity is set against the
almost non-existent presence of other religious orders. Most of these verbal references, however, are not significant features in the program, contained within the distancing trope of songs. Similar in effect to the historicization tactic in the broader Peanuts franchise, the dominant trend in Christmas programming is to include religious reference only through sung sacred lyrics. Only 14.3 percent (five of 35) of the episodes contained Nativity references that were not in song. While 84.2 percent of the episodes that had songs included at least partially vocalized lyrics to the song, these songs almost always existed in the episode without contextualization or commentary. Affirming or explanatory phrases from characters were absent in the inclusions of verbalized sacred hymns. Instead, the songs occurred in three manners without annotation: First, songs with lyrics served as the background music track. In the episode of The Red Skelton Show, as the camera pans to the likable vagabond Freddie Freeloader, a children’s choir sings “Joy to the World” and “Silent Night,” providing a musical transition. These function similarly to the instrumental music. While they contribute to the overall presence of religious thought, they do so minimally. As background music, viewers may likely not notice the songs, and they lack the poignant salience of iconography like the crucifix possible in visual displays.424

Second, songs were performed in the context of variety show entertainment packages. Because these songs are deliberately chosen, staged acts, they stand out as more prominent and establish a context in which religious affirmation could be made. The songs, however, are set in conjunction with other vaudevillian entertainment acts, diminishing the perception that the program is making an explicit statement about belief.
Instead, the songs often have the context of “another holiday favorite” or “another nice song” instead of “the reason for the season.” This may explain why viewers and executives who would have heard various sacred hymns on television still did not perceive television as a safe space in which to vocalize religious faith, even at Christmastime. In *The Judy Garland Christmas Show*, for instance, an extended medley of six sacred carols are sung, rounded out by a joyous “Deck the Halls” as the seventh song in the compilation. This strategy normalizes the presence of religious heritage by diminishing its uniqueness as sacred. The sacred songs are not typically set apart or highlighted as containing a special message, but instead fill the same type of slot that are otherwise filled by a dance number from Liza Minnelli or dog tricks from a Bing Crosby guest. These religious references were contained within a song, within a vaudevillian program, set amongst many other similar performances. As such, a certain distancing takes place, similar to the historicization of religion in several *Peanuts* titles. The presence of these songs is important in that they contribute to an environment in which religious statements *could* be made (like with the full spectrum of religious references giving *Peanuts* a religious credibility). In the 1960s, television was still a medium most conducive to family viewings, with a group collectively in front of the one small set in the home. The variety show format invited participation, with the host speaking directly to the audience, both in the studio and at home. Stand-alone sacred hymns, even without explanation, in this context provided at least a possible opportunity in which families might interact with the set, much like they would have interacted with the interactive radio programming, singing along with these sacred hymns as their favorite
artists performed them on television. The typical manner of inclusion with no commentary, however, marginalizes their impact in the program, thus minimizing the perception that television would otherwise sustain religious affirmation.

Third, in several cases, characters within narrative-based scripted episodes and specials sing sacred hymns. While the context of the particular episode greatly dictates the importance and impact of any religious reference, in scripted programming from the 1960s characters would occasionally sing partial to complete sacred hymns. In The Doris Day Show, for example, after the office party goes better than usual (the officemates get less drunk than in previous years), Doris’s colleague-friends join her at her home for Christmas Eve. One of Doris’s young boys starts up the player piano on “Silent Night” and they all gather around and sing in parted harmony. In Dennis the Menace and Bonanza, characters also sing “Silent Night,” and in The Brady Bunch, Carol recovers her voice just in time to sing “Oh Come All Ye Faithful” for the church service. These songs also largely proceed without commentary, the scene otherwise moving characters into place around the piano or near a spot to sit with a guitar. The connection to beloved characters, though, as described in chapter three, imbues these moments with potential power to impact viewers – the character bringing an associative ethos that allows the religious content to be better received and more likely to be accepted. Because of the typical lack of commentary and the dominance of other elements in the plot, however, it is not surprising that many had a perception of 1960s television as a-religious. The religious references may not be strong enough, even when sung by a favorite character, to attract attention in the same “lightning rod” fashion that has attracted religious
attention to Peanuts. A general lack of potent religious references leaves the viewers unprimed for these more subtle moments to be as impactful as they might be within a franchise that more consistently includes a variety of references.

Of the five titles (14.3 percent) that contained verbal Nativity references outside of a sacred carol, only three references (8.6 percent of the total sample) composed a central theme to the program. The other two titles contained clear verbal non-song references, but they served basic plot functions in stand-alone scenes, not representing a directional theme for the episode. In The Lucy Show, Mr. Mooney, Lucy’s (Mrs. Carmichael) boss, says that Lucy’s young boys choir is not able to sing carols at the bank. Lucy contends that they used to do it back in Danfield. “We’re in a big city now,” demands Mr. Mooney, “Danfield was a little town.” “Yeah, well so was Bethlehem,” retorts Lucy. A defensive Mr. Mooney responds, “What does Bethlehem got to do with Christmas carols and the spiri…spir..?!” An incredulous look from Lucy stumps Mr. Mooney who says, “You baffle me, Mrs. Carmichael. I know I’m smarter than you are, but I can never win an argument!” The comedic turn that Lucy’s expressive pause provides serves the humor of the joke well, giving the audience the opportunity to fill in the missing gap for themselves (Bethlehem has everything to do with Christmas, contends the joke). The structure of this moment, though, exemplifies what seems to be the general dynamics of religion on television – if it is referenced, it is not fully explained or affirmed with any depth or nuance. Engagement, if present, is structured (for better or worse) so that the individual viewers have to put together significant details on their own. Explicit statement of theological nuance, performance of religious practice, or affirmation
of religious belief is not deemed proper content for the public mainstream entertainment property. Instead, it is cast as the responsibility of the private viewer to make those connections.

The 1968 Christmas episode of Julia contains a Nativity reference that stands out from all of the others in the sample with the provocative scene, set in the doctor’s office where Julia, played by Diahann Carroll, works as a nurse. When Corey, Julia’s young son, asks if Dr. Chegley is going to join them for the office party, the doctor says, “No, I’ll pass.” “They’re giving out presents and cake,” responds Cory. The doctor then sits Cory on the desk, leans down and says with an increasingly stern expression on his face (and inevitably crossed arms), “As you march through life you’ll realize there’s more to Christmas than presents and cake. It’s supposed to be the celebration of the birth of Christ, but over the years the jackals of merchantdom have pounced on it until baby Jesus runs a poor fifth behind toys, trees, turkeys, and yo-ho-ho. Christmas is a day for family, for the counting of blessings. I resent the intrusion of anything more than that.” Julia then picks up Cory to leave, coolly telling the doctor that because their family is back in Kansas they are going to go enjoy “presents, and gifts, and if we’re lucky a little ho-ho-ho.” Nurse Yarby then scolds the doctor, saying, “What did you do that for?! Lecture the child on Christmas. Can’t anybody enjoy the holidays without your Scrooge philosophy?!” Already a progressive show for its early network portrayal of a non-stereotypical and successful single African American woman, this episode has one of the most poignant statements of the meaning of Christmas of any of the titles in the sample. Curiously, however, the message is turned around when the doctor is chastised for his
position. His religious beliefs are not openly criticized, but the ways in which they might interfere with a secular celebration for a child are. In a very sober scene, counting one’s blessings and cherishing the birth of Christ are cast as second (at best) to cake, toys, and Santa Claus. The perceived conflict between religious belief and entertainment is performed in this scene. This conflict is potentially a direct reflection of the position that Carroll and Julia creator Hal Kanter took against critics who thought the show ignored too much of the suffering of the African American community. “Many people were very very incensed about that [...] We were of a mind that that was a different show. We were allowed to have this show [...] We were allowed to have a comedy about a black middle class family,” Carroll defend.\textsuperscript{428} The scene critical of impediments to freely enjoying the holiday season reflect a parallel sentiment, perhaps derivative of the same perspective. Like the joke in The Lucy Show, though, the critical moment in the Julia episode does not represent a critical theme for the majority of the episode.\textsuperscript{429} The doctor’s comments are not mentioned again and there are no other religious references. In both episodes, the moments of religious reference do serve as turning points for plot-moving character decisions – Mr. Mooney decides to back the choir’s request to sing at the bank, and Dr. Chegley pays for Corey’s relative from Kansas to visit – but the religious references are not portrayed as central to the episode’s conceptual content. Because of the direct nature of the scene in Julia, however, it was coded with a “?” in Table 4.2. The theme was not central to the episode, but it was dramatic and salient, and the only explicitly vocal resistance to a religious message in any of the sample.

With the Nativity references removed that are based only in instrumental
arrangements, sacred carols, or one-scene stand-outs, few programs remain. Of the 35 titles, only three (8.6 percent) had explicit references to religion that composed a central theme to the episode: *Davey and Goliath*, *The Little Drummer Boy*, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. In 1965’s *Davey and Goliath*, the young Davey is searching inwardly and externally for “the Christmas spirit.” He shops for a tree and presents, organizes a Christmas play, and stares at the crèche Nativity scene in order to “feel Christmas.” Throughout the 30 minute special, Davey is surrounded by religious reminders, such as his sister Sally telling him to look at the crèche, for “that’s the real Christmas right in there, ‘cause right there is the most wonderful present ever.” Also throughout the special recurs the character Kenny, who misses out on the joining the Christmas play because he has to work the Christmas tree sales. It isn’t until Davey gives up his part in the play to work the tree stand in order to let Kenny be the king, riding on the back of Goliath the (talking) dog, that Davey feels the spirit of the holiday. Returning home to the crèche, Davey says, “I’ve found the real Christmas. It’s here. Here’s the King. God loves us, so He gave us what He loves best, like I loved Kenny and gave him what I loved best. I love Christmas.” The message is quite direct, more direct and developed than any other television broadcast. The special, however, might be expected to have that content, given that *Davey and Goliath* was a stop-motion program, produced by Clokey Productions (makers of *Gumby*) at the behest of the Lutheran Church of America. Unlike others across denominational aisles, the Lutheran Church engaged the opportunity for influence that media outlets afforded, having a department of Press, Radio, and Television. The programs were not picked up by a network, though, and instead *Davey and Goliath*
episodes were syndicated, only aired on the particular local stations that would buy the content. As such, it functions differently than the other explicit references on television, given that its content did not blanket the nation like the other programs did in the pre-niche-programming era of television. Syndication allows the creators much more freedom in creation, as they acknowledge a segmented audience from the start. Similar trends have developed in the era of channel diversity, with religious networks like PAX developing religious characters and themes more robustly than other networks, given their narrower core demographic.  

The Rankin/Bass 1968 ani-magic production of *The Little Drummer Boy* also contains explicit religious content, being based on Katherine Kennicott Davis’s popular Christmas song (originally titled “Carol of the Drum”) and containing portions of voiceover narration from the Gospel of Luke. The special follows the orphan Aaron who has suffered the loss of his parents in a fiery raid by bandits. After he escapes with his animal friends (including a camel named Joshua, a donkey named Samson, and a lamb named Baba), he is captured by Ben Haramed who forces him to sing and dance with his animals to make money. They run into trouble because Aaron, who hates everyone after losing his parents, is angry at the crowd in Jerusalem for daring to be happy. When Haramed, his partner Ali, Aaron, and the animals leave Jerusalem, they encounter the caravan of the three kings who are following the star to Bethlehem. Though Haramed and the others cannot see the star because they are too filled with greed, Haramed does see an opportunity and sells the camel Joshua to the caravan after one of their own animals collapses. Horrified, Aaron goes looking for Joshua, only to have Baba the lamb
run over by a cart outside the stable where Mary and Joseph rest. The kings cannot help him, but suggest that the baby Jesus can. Reluctant and confused, Aaron places Baba down before the shining baby and offers a song on his drum as a gift. Recognizing that “there is something more about Him [Jesus], so much more,” Aaron is relieved of his hate and Baba is alive. The theme is clear that the baby Jesus, the “King of Kings” is a divine power to be sought. The narration at times remains slightly oblique in its loftiness, though it is fitting for the ani-magic aesthetics. The wording at the end points to Aaron’s act of love as a key to saving himself and Baba, but the religious intent is clear as the camera fades on the image of the miraculous star while the narrator recites Christ’s words from Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The structure of the program as a period piece does distance the viewer from the religious meaning to a degree. The program could be read as a depiction of the Bible story, not as an affirmation of its truth in contemporary life. This is the strategy used by Peanuts executives when marketing Nativity scenes including Charlie Brown and the gang – have it set as a Christmas pageant to remove a level of potency from the religious content. It allows the property to “report” more than to “embrace.” This same logic also likely explains why contemporary reality television includes comparatively more religious content—decision makers view the property as telling a story, and less as affirming an ideology.

Three years before Rankin/Bass’s compelling portrayal of the Nativity, A Charlie Brown Christmas aired the iconic scene, captured in Hallmark cards and plush toys, of Linus reciting the Gospel of Luke to answer Charlie Brown’s burning question, “Isn’t
there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” “Sure, Charlie Brown,” says Linus, “I can tell you what Christmas is all about.” Walking to the center of the stage, Linus requests, “Lights, please.” The lights dim, and Linus humbly recites from the Gospel of Luke 2:8-14:

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’

As Charlie Brown walks back to his home, Linus’s words echo in his mind. Though Snoopy’s commercial success and Charlie Brown’s failure at decorating his tree with even a single ornament still threaten to ruin his holiday, the reassurance of his friends by decorating the tree and singing the sacred “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” end the special on a high note, with clear religious content. *A Charlie Brown Christmas* proclaims that the meaning of Christmas is the Nativity. It does so, though, within a very middle-America property, not segmented through syndication or distanced through periodization in the ways that *Davey and Goliath* and *The Little Drummer Boy* are. It is the only
portrayal of “normal” America from network broadcasts within the sample that depicts contemporary characters embracing the Christian Nativity as the central meaning to the Christmas holiday. It should not be surprising, then, that the special is still seen as a radical break from its contemporaries, even when viewed retrospectively to include *The Little Drummer Boy* in the era.

There are important differences between these three titles, but perhaps the more striking is their similarity. Only three titles out of 35 contain a substantive non-song religious reference that is portrayed as a central theme in the episode, and all three are animated specials about a young boy and his pet (Figures 4.2-4.4). Animation, the use of child characters, and the inclusion of animals create a perceived buffer between a forceful statement and an uncertain audience. That the only robust affirmations of religion come from an animated boy further demonstrates the overall resistance to religious content in the television medium of the 1960s.
Figure 4.2 Still frame of Aaron and his sheep Baba and donkey Samson (The Little Drummer Boy, Rankin/Bass, NBC, 1968).

Figure 4.3 Still frame of Davey and his dog Goliath (Davey and Goliath: Christmas Lost and Found, Clokey Productions, Lutheran Church in America, 1965)
Other Diverse References

As a rule, religious references in 1960s Christmas programming are not in-depth affairs, beyond the few substantive references to the Nativity, regardless of religious affiliation. For instance, no episode contains a reference to the theological importance of a Christian Christmas celebration beyond recognition of Christ’s birth (e.g., that Christ’s birth made possible His instructive teaching later in life, followed by His sacrificial death). As seen in Table 4.3, there are a variety of other diverse non-Nativity religious references in the titles analyzed, making the total number of episodes with some religious reference 26 (74.3 percent of the sample). The large percentage, though, is likely misleading, as the titles in the sample were not characterized by frequent, salient references to faith practices or belief. Compared to the array of religious references
across the *Peanuts* franchise described in chapter three, the religious references in the Christmas episodes of the 1960s may do less to establish a credible space for religious affirmation because these references tend to be fleeting unspecific moments with minimal significance to the characters or scene. The religious phrases have less diversity, primarily consisting of “God bless you.” Only once was a character shown praying (another character also asks others if they have prayed). Images of churches across titles serve the same aesthetic function as described in chapter three, and an iconic statue of Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children, is a salient feature in an episode of *Rawhide*. Only three programs, though, contained non-Nativity religious references without Nativity reference, and three other programs contained no Nativity reference but were premised on an arguably religious theme (i.e., *Bewitched* and *The Addams Family* are grounded in certain elements of the occult, and *My Mother the Car* is based on a man’s mother being reincarnated into his classic automobile). These (in addition to the view of the sphinx and pyramids in *The Flintstones*) were the only references to non-Christian religions in the sample, and were only present by virtue of the show’s premise. Some references were part of substantive moments in individual titles (such as Carol singing in church in *The Brady Bunch* and George asking for Harold to say grace in *Hazel*), but the majority of the non-religious references coded tended to be vague and marginal at best.
Conventions of the Genre

In addition to an analysis of religious portrayal, this study also provides, through the cross-section of 1960s Christmas programming, a glimpse of the standard conventions of the genre during that period. Five key characteristics were repeatedly present across the titles: (1) an emphasis on a universal (a-religious) “Spirit of Christmas,” (2) the inclusion of a primary “Scrooge” character, (3) the use of (secular and sacred) carols as aesthetic devices, (4) the prominent presence of a Christmas tree, and (5) the ubiquitous presence of Santa Claus.

(1) Universal “Spirit of Christmas” – The dominant theme in the wide majority of Christmas programming from this era is the emphasis on an undefined, universal sentiment that is expected to pervade all of the characters during the holiday season. This attitude is not associated with any particular religious heritage, operating instead as a secular directive. Individuals hold themselves and others to an anticipated sense of generosity and charity, attitudes cast as uniquely important during Christmastime. Language of “the spirit of Christmas” is often used in conjunction with calls for “peace” and “goodwill toward men” (though the religious connotations of those phrases were never exposed in any of the titles sampled when associated with notions of this universal spirit). This paradigm was to guide not only attitude but also actions, with characters expected to give instead of expecting to get. In the episode of The Red Skelton Show, for instance, actress Greer Garson (playing herself playing a vagabond grandma) tells Red Skelton’s Freddie Freeloader character that he showed the “true spirit of Christmas […] by making it such a, such a happy occasion for so many others.” Likewise, Santa tells
Samantha and a boy from an orphanage in *Bewitched* that “the real happiness of Christmas isn’t found in what we get, but what we give.” Strong themes of anti-commercialism are also commonly associated with the spirit of Christmas – a sort of definition by contrast. As a highly commercial holiday, the portrayals of the spirit of Christmas offer a paradox whereby viewers hear from their favorite characters that “Christmas is getting too commercial,” but they are then confronted with advertisements at program breaks, and mid-century commercial products are often exchanged as presents in the episode (corporate conflicts with theological resistance to capital are explored in chapter five). Perhaps attempting to resolve the contradiction for viewers, gifts are often cast as secondary to the “thought” that went into the act of giving. In *My Mother the Car*, for instance, the husband and wife each develop elaborate plots to surprise the other with a high-tech modern gift, but after the schemes fall apart the sentiment of caring about someone else remains the paramount theme in the episode.

Children also participate in the spirit of charitable perspective, Charlie Brown and Davey both expressing how giving to others is important. The majority of main characters in the programs are adults (though children would be expected to watch some of the Christmas programming, even at prime time, given the nature of many of the specials), but Christmas is often talked about as something that is “for children” (though adults are cast as organizing, taking part in, and enjoying the holidays as much as, if not more frequently than children). Additionally, whether it is with the family’s children or with close friends, this spirit of charity and generosity involves not only giving to others, but also spending time with others. In *The Andy Griffith Show*, for example, Ben tries to
get arrested simply so he can enjoy Christmas with the rest in the jail. In *The Big Valley*, Jarred Barkley tells his imprisoned client Maybelle that she can’t spend Christmas alone.

The particular manifestation of the “spirit of Christmas” varies slightly from title to title, but the phrase is routinely employed in these acts and perspectives of togetherness, goodwill, and charity. As Gerbner et al explain, “Most of [television’s] programs are by commercial necessity designed to be watched by nearly everyone in a relatively nonselective fashion.”

This is truer of the major broadcast networks, which are designed to cast a wide net with their free broadcasts, and it was certainly even truer in the 1960s era of only three channels available. It is not that religious reference would be philosophically inconsistent with the “spirit of Christmas,” but particular religious affiliation would provide a point of possible dissent in an otherwise universally acceptable theme. Conversely, however, religious references can also court stronger allegiance from particular demographics, but this does come with the risks inherent in allowing for identifiable specificity in the programming. The universal spirit of Christmas theme provides a thematic template that is easy to map onto a variety of programs.

(2) The “Scrooge” Character – Referencing Charles Dickens’ influential *A Christmas Carol*, the character traits and even name of the Dickens’ protagonist are routinely imported into Christmas programming. This is often accomplished through a straightforward pairing with a generalized advancement of the spirit of Christmas. The Scrooge character is set up as someone who either doesn’t understand or is not enjoying Christmas, beleaguered by a depressed or curmudgeonly attitude. By the end of the
episode, this character is consistently reformed, providing a clear story arc of character development for a lead player in the drama. The Scrooge character can take a variety of forms, being the grumpy old Ben character in *The Andy Griffith Show* and a young orphan boy in *Bewitched*, but is almost always a male (save for in the episode of *The Big Valley* where Maybelle is reformed by the end of the episode, no longer willing to run off with her outlaw beau). Characters are often called by the “Scrooge” name, a shortcut for identifying that character as the one with particular personality traits in need of change within the 30 minute block, reform being critical to the Scrooge character’s place in the episode. This reform is not necessarily a religious reformation, but rather typically a social realignment to enjoy the universalized “good” of the season. After 1966’s successful *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the moniker “Scrooge” has become interchangeable with “Grinch.”

(3) Carols as Devices – As discussed before, sacred and secular carols are common throughout Christmas programming. These carols almost always go without commentary or thematic contextualization. When *Bonanza’s* Andy Walker, played by Wayne Newton, sings “Silent Night” with Pa, for example, no explanation is given. Instead, the songs are expected, natural parts of the holiday décor. They may be meaningful to the characters, live studio audience members, or home viewers, but no verbal statement of such is given. The songs do not move the plot along, and both secular and sacred tunes are used for joyous and somber scenes. “Jingle Bells,” “The 12 Days of Christmas,” “Joy to the World,” and “Silent Night” are among the most common songs during this era of programming in both instrumental and vocal forms.
Outside of television programming, Christmas trees have both pagan and religious histories, often the source of debates between those who do and do not want religion to be associated with the festival (hence the occasional renaming of the plant as a “Holiday Tree”).\textsuperscript{438} In the television programming of the 1960s, however, the Christmas tree is an unquestioned symbol of the season, often spoken of as a key component in conjuring the general spirit of the season. “It ain’t Christmas without a tree,” Harry the salesman tells Oliver in \textit{Green Acres}. Scenes selecting the tree and subsequently decorating it are among the most common conventional scenes across the titles. In the programming from the 1960s, however, the scenes offer a glimpse into the market developments of commercial culture, as many of the episodes contain a reference to the burgeoning artificial tree business. Artificial goose feather trees had been used since the late 1800s, quelling some of the concerns about deforestation from poor Christmas tree harvesting practices, but in 1930 the Addis Brush Company revolutionized the market.\textsuperscript{439} The company used its toilet brush patterns to fashion a new breed of artificial Christmas trees that would last longer and could hold ornaments better. In 1950, Addis received a patent for their “silver pine” brush-based tree,\textsuperscript{440} and in 1958 a Chicago company also began producing aluminum trees.\textsuperscript{441} By the 1960s, the artificial tree business became quite popular, with colored aluminum trees popular at department stores costing as little as $4.97\textsuperscript{442} and natural trees painted in various in vogue colors. This trend is reflected in the Christmas tree’s inclusion in a 1960 print advertisement for Pepsi, where the chic, “sociable” modern couple decorates their artificial table-sized tree (Figure 4.5).
The American culture’s amore toward the artificial tree industry became a unique point of humorous poking in the television programming of the mid-1960s. “Well, these small trees are very popular,” a tree salesman tells Lucy in *The Lucy Show*, “They come in all the pastel colors.” “Yeah, I’ll say they do,” retorts Lucy. Many shows made references to colored, artificial, and table-sized trees – a unique manifestation of the Christmas tree convention on 1960s television (Figures 4.6 – 4.9).
Figure 4.6 Still frame from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (CBS, 1965) showing Linus banging on an aluminum Christmas tree in a lot full of them.

Figure 4.7 Still frame of *Dennis the Menace* (CBS, 1961) showing Mr. Wilson being critical of the Mitchell’s white tree, favoring instead to take Dennis out to chop down a real tree.
Figure 4.8 Still frame of *The Flintstones* (ABC, 1964) showing Fred dressed as Santa Claus in front of two pink trees decorated in a department store.

Figure 4.9 Still frame of Lucy in *The Lucy Show* (CBS, 1965) surveying a tree lot full of table-height trees painted pastel colors.
Some colloquial histories credit *A Charlie Brown Christmas* with the fall of the artificial tree market in the late 1960s, given its iconic criticism of the trees that Linus knocks on (Figure 4.6) and sarcastically says “really bring Christmas close to a person.” The wealth of other episodes from that same time picking at the trend, though, indicates that a cultural shift away from the practice was on the rise. Many episodes emphasize the need for a “real tree” in order to enjoy the season – “It ain’t Christmas without a tree” Harry the salesman tells Oliver in *Green Acres* before Oliver insists on cutting down his own (which his neighbors alleges must be illegal); Lucy’s tree salesman in *The Lucy Show* says they can paint the trees any color she wants, and she says “well could you spray one green so it’d look like a Christmas tree;” and in *Dennis the Menace*, Mr. Wilson insists on taking Dennis out to chop down their own real tree to replace the inferior white artificial tree Dennis’s father had purchased. Additionally, in 1966 The National Christmas Tree Association began a tradition of presenting the First Lady with that year’s champion tree to put on display in the White House, likely increasing the prominence of real trees in the eyes of the American populace. To credit *A Charlie Brown Christmas* alone with the downturn of the industry is thus likely an overstatement.

(5) Santa – It may not be surprising that Santa is featured as an embodied or referenced character throughout many of the 1960s Christmas programs. There are witnessed or alluded-to visits from the real Santa in *Bewitched, The Flintstones, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, and *Gilligan’s Island*; characters dress as Santa in *The Twilight Zone, The Dick Van Dyke Show, The Bill Cosby Show, The Judy Garland Christmas Show*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*; and children debate the various merits of
Santa Claus in *Julia, A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and *The Addams Family*… just to name a few references. While there is a religious history to Santa’s presence in Christmas traditions, he serves as a mythological, even magical, character in the programming, only having religious significance in one episode (in the episode of *Rawhide* where the historical saint Nicholas is referenced when a statue of the patron saint of children is given to the allegedly ailing child, Danny). Because of his religious genealogy, Santa’s presence may create a conceptual tension with the universalized a-religious nature of most programming. In Christmas programming, however, Santa stands in as a simple symbol of the joy and cheer that is to be associated with the season, without any complex baggage or history. His presence also often has the effect of associating Christmas uniquely with children as they sit on his lap in shows like *The Twilight Zone*, *The Flintstones* and *The Brady Bunch*. This is the second tension that Santa’s presence possibly creates, as adults are the primary actors in most of the Christmas programming and thus uniquely associated with its meaning. While Santa is often portrayed in his relation to children, adults still celebrate in the festivities through the common presence of office parties and other holiday traditions (such as gift giving and tree procurement), likely resolving this perceptual dilemma, allowing the Christmas programming to speak to a universalized age demographic. Finally, Santa also creates a tension with the anti-commercialism, un-selfish theme that is often associated with the spirit of Christmas. As a character, Santa might be described as the magical figure that brings toys to good little boys and girls, which invokes a materialism performed by children asking for things from the jolly man. This conflicting perception is balanced,
though, as Santa is also representative of charity – not only a giver himself, but a solicitor of further giving by ringing a bell behind a donation bucket. This charity work tends to focus on the role of the adult, though, and Christmas may thus be seen in these programs as being a joyous time for children who are to eventually grow into adults that learn the benefit of charity (though explicit explanations of such are never part of the Christmas programs).

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Based on the sample of 1960s programming surveyed in this chapter, prior to *A Charlie Brown Christmas*’s debut in 1965, no television programming came close to the explicit religious affirmation found in the *Peanuts* special. Coincidentally, that same year the syndicated program *Davey and Goliath*, built on many narrative components similar to *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, made a like proclamation, to be repeated again in the 1960s by Rankin/Bass’s period piece *The Little Drummer Boy*. Religious references to the Nativity and other diverse elements are not particularly uncommon across the 1960s Christmas television landscape, but a wide gap exists between the fleeting image of a church or utterance of “God bless ya” and the affirmative proclamations made in these three animated programs. This chasm was crossed by three boys, two dogs, a camel and a lamb. Distancing strategies are frequently used in religious reference (e.g., historicization, packaging in song, etc.), and the use of animated children and anthropomorphic animals is a strong distancing package. While Lee Mendelson was
wary of including the religious message in a *Peanuts* animated program because “it’s never been done before,” the use of animation was actually a critical feature in the successful inclusion of the religious affirmation. Because *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (and the two others) so strongly bucked convention by abandoning universality in favor of inclusion of an explicit religious message, other elements were needed in order to soften the blow for unexpectant viewers. Animation (along with the use of stylistically open jazz music in Schulz’s work) provided the space needed for the religious message not to be perceived as inappropriately heavy-handed.

Additionally, the conventions of 1960s Christmas programming demonstrates that while *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was “radical” in its religious message, it was in most other ways seated at the heart of the genre. The program broke convention in affirming the Christian meaning of Christmas through the statement from the gospel, but it otherwise maintained elements of the general “spirit of Christmas” through its anti-commercialism theme. Charlie Brown has a distaste for Snoopy’s materialist decoration competition and Sally’s request for money from Santa Claus. Linus even explicitly says that Christmas is getting “too commercial” (and “too dangerous”). Charlie Brown also acts as one standard version of Scrooge – a negative character who does not understand Christmas and must be reformed by the end of the program. “Christmas is coming,” he tells Linus, “but I always end up feeling depressed.” It’s through the combined statement of the gospel message and the gang’s charitable decoration of his Christmas tree that he is reformed at the end, ready to sing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” with all the rest. That song, and others, provide a tasteful backdrop for the program, but go without
commentary. The creators of the program robustly embraced the use of aesthetic carols, Grammy-winning *Peanuts* jazz composer Vince Guaraldi even writing the score for an original song, “Christmastime is Here” (lyrics by Mendelson). The Christmas tree scene is featured prominently in the special, even employing the traditional 1960s theme of artificiality, and Santa Claus is present in Sally’s letter that she asks her brother to write to him. Because it so thoroughly exemplifies the conventions of the genre during that period, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was able to push the boundaries in one area, incorporating plans for a Nativity-based Christmas play and spotlighting a recitation of the Gospel of Luke as “what Christmas is all about.”

Within the context of the *Peanuts* franchise, occasional religious specificity is not odd, though overt proclamation in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is not repeated elsewhere; instead it is performed through acts of prayer and theological reference. Within the context of broadcast television programming at large, though, the reference is atypical. “This TV special challenges the commercial nature of the very medium of which it is a part,” says Wilson, highlighting a tension to be discussed in chapter five. “What could easily have been a dismissible children’s cartoon,” she continues, “turns out to be though-provoking and this perhaps explains at least part of its lasting legacy.”

Such an assertion, common amongst histories of the program, is born out to be accurate in this study, demonstrating the history of television’s paradoxical resistance toward religious messages. Generalized market sensibilities create the allusion that specificity in a mass medium will fragment audiences and decrease the program’s share. In the case of religious references, however, programs that are otherwise successful (such as in the case
of *Peanuts* which was built off from a highly successful comic strip franchise, executed with an aesthetic appropriate for its content, and germane to the genre) are unlikely to scare off viewers for expressing a religious view that is consistent with the statistical majority of the population. In fact, a 2006 Zogby poll found that 84 percent of American adults are not offended by references to God or the Bible on network television. Even further, 51 percent advocate for development of more positive messages that include specific references to God or the Bible. As evidenced by this study of Christmas in the 1960s, though, this gap between viewer desire and network convention is clearly not a new phenomenon.

As Nancy Signorielli, a colleague of cultivation theorist George Gerbner, describes in a 2004 extension of their formative cultivation work, television remains “a primary storyteller, telling most of the stories to most of the people, most of the time.” These ubiquitous stories do not come from family or church structures, but instead from a centralized system of production that tends to favor limited portrayals assumed unlikely to upset viewers. In doing so, the complexities of society are not only often inaccurately displayed, they are also reshaped. “This story-telling function,” says Signorielli, “is extremely important because television’s stories tell viewers about the intricacies of the world and its people.” Whether it is regarding age, or race, or religious practice, these restricted depictions, repeated across channels and programs, diminish the perceived importance and acceptability of certain topics from public agenda and cultivate in viewers a sense of what belief and action are normatively acceptable within public arenas. From its early years, television has historically not been deployed as a public
space in which religious belief and practice can be investigated or affirmed with meaningful nuance or substance. Instead, an incongruous conception of a universalized secular public dominates decision-making. During the 1960s decade of change, it was only a few animated boys and pets that were able to bridge the gap.
CHAPTER 5
EXPANDING THE MATERIAL FRANCHISE: FRAMED ADAPTATIONS

AND CIRCULATORY PEANUTS

“If you buy two, we’ll throw in an autographed photo of King Solomon!”
- Sally Brown

Since the late 1950s, *Peanuts* has been a significant part of the merchandizing marketplace, promoting 1960s Ford Falcons in print and television ads, headlining a videogame in the late 1980s, and expanding its Camp Snoopy locations at the turn of the millennium. In 2010, as the century-old United Media syndicate closed its doors, it sold its lucrative rights to the *Peanuts* franchise to a joint venture between the merchandizing company *Iconix Brand Group*, owned by shoe designer Kenneth Cole and his brother, and *Charles M. Schulz Creative Associates*, owned by the Schulz family, under the newly formed LLC, *Peanuts Worldwide*. While 80 percent of ownership belongs to *Iconix*, the Schulz family’s 20 percent holdings mark a strong corporate reclamation of the late Charles Schulz’s work. Though Schulz himself never actually owned the rights to his characters, the obligatory relinquishing of rights to the syndicate being customary in cartooning, his influence in the product lines was strongly felt, and he maintained approval status over all uses of his art after renegotiating his contract in the 1970s. With a sizeable ownership of the company, the Schulz family has legal leverage over the direction of the franchise, adding to its already sizeable social capital gained through perceptual familial rights. The new ownership agreement has ushered in
a new wave of products, including branded clothing, new film releases, and a new line of original comic book stories. This is not to say, though, that *Peanuts* has not enjoyed significant merchandizing prior to the change in ownership. To say that *Peanuts* has had a success in its merchandizing in the half-century leading up to the buyout would be a significant understatement. Sold to *Peanuts Worldwide* for $175 million, the *Peanuts* brand has been a lucrative industry for decades, topping $1 billion in annual global revenue by the late 1980s, now estimated at over $2 billion. Schulz himself earned an estimated $1 billion from *Peanuts* over his lifetime, and is a regular on *Forbes’ “The Top Earning Dead Celebrities”* list, accompanied by other cultural icons like Marilyn Monroe, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley (Table 5.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebrity</th>
<th>2011 Estate Revenue</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>$170 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvis Presley</td>
<td>$55 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Monroe</td>
<td>$27 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Schulz</td>
<td>$25 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lennon</td>
<td>$12 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Taylor</td>
<td>$12 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Einstein</td>
<td>$10 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss)</td>
<td>$9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimi Hendrix</td>
<td>$7 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stieg Larson</td>
<td>$7 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve McQueen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Rodgers</td>
<td>$7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Harrison</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Paige</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Warhol</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.1* *Forbes* magazine’s 2011 “The Top-Earning Dead Celebrities” list, determined by estate gross earnings.

Ronald Nelson, Schulz’s business manager and retired VP of Creative Associates whose wife was arrested and served time for non-fatally shooting her husband at Schulz’s
studio offices, once estimated that the merchandise accounts for 80 percent of the franchise’s revenue, with the other 20 percent being from books and newspaper syndication royalties. With hundreds of global licensees and thousands of products on the market, such profit distribution is understandable. Since its debut in 1958, Peanuts merchandise, mostly in the form of Snoopy products, run the gamut from plush toys to sterling silver pendants, adding to the global translations of the strips and animation specials as well as countless unlicensed parodies. In between the plush toys and Snoopy pendants, one will find beach balls, cookie cutters, toy cars and finger puppets … and Christmas ornaments, and bookends, and glass banks, and ceramic banks, and paper mache' banks, and T-shirts, and sweatshirts, and blankets, and ViewMaster reels, and Christmas lights, and Christmas trees, and Christmas wreathes, and wind-up toys, and toy telephones, and real telephones, and skateboards, and cookie jars, and jelly jars, and snowglobes, and inflatable lawn ornaments, and fishing rods, and picture frames, and photo albums, and calendars, and paperweights, and kites, and balloons, and much, much more. Amidst the vast assortment of the licensed merchandise, however, products with routine religious content occupy only a handful of product types. Though the comic strips and television specials contain a variety of religious content, one will only find routine religious content in greeting cards by Hallmark (and its subsidiary DaySpring), Christmas pageant nativity displays, and a small handful of miscellaneous products such as a day calendar and coffee mug by DaySpring, most prominently sold at Christian bookstores alongside the greeting card line. These products will be the interest of this chapter.
Figure 5.1 *Peanuts* strip (December 15, 1982) in which Charlie Brown goes door-to-door attempting to sell Christmas wreaths. (PEANUTS © 1982 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)

Figure 5.2 Still image from a scene in the 1992 television special *It’s Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown* (CBS) adapted directly from the serial story in the comic strips.

Figure 5.3 2005 Coyne’s & Company 9” plush Charlie Brown with wreath doll. Two lights on the wreath blink and three different sounds play when his stomach is pressed: Music to 16th century English carol “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” // Music to Parish and Anderson’s 1948 “Sleigh Ride” // Charlie Brown voice saying “Merry Christmas, everybody!” (PEANUTS © 2005 Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)
While the strips have provided the characters and tropes for the franchise, and the television specials function as the public touchstones, the merchandise has provided the financial resources for continued success. These products, religious and otherwise, serve as extensions of the original source material, often material adaptations of the television adaptations of the original strips (Figures 5.1 – 5.3). Many literary and film studies scholars have long been interested in the practices of transforming canonical texts to screen performance. Hutcheon even celebrates the practice of adaptation, suggesting that it may be an inherent byproduct of the human imagination. Few studies, however, have taken seriously the practice of merchandizing as adaptation, yet central concerns of the scholarly filmic genre are nonetheless useful for this study. The most ubiquitous concern for adaptation scholars is *fidelity*. As described in chapter one, for Walter Fisher fidelity refers to the ability of a story to resonate soundly with outside experiences; likewise, for adaptation studies fidelity refers to the consistency of products to their original source material when enunciated in another medium. Essays on the subject typically assess how close a movie is to its original book, and though many prominent scholars have urged the field to move away from the concept as central concern and methodology, an interest in faithfulness nonetheless persists. Lamenting critical deferments to fidelity, Hutcheon suggests that the creative endeavor itself should be the focus:

Perhaps it is the very possibility of telling the same story in many different ways that provokes us to make the attempt. When we adapt, we create using all the tools that creators have always used: we actualize or
concretize ideas; we simplify but we also amplify and extrapolate; we make analogies; we critique or show our respect. When we do all this, does it matter whether the narrative we are working with is ‘new’ or adapted? Our postromantic valuing of the originary is, after all, a late addition to a longer history of borrowing and stealing – or, more accurately, of sharing – stories.  

Connor reflects on this resistance to fidelity as “critical orthodoxy,” suggesting that adaptation scholars often feel a reflex-like need to reject fidelity as a focus and methodology while the field simultaneously continues to emphasize it. Suggesting a way to transform modes of analysis, Murray suggests adopting an “industry-centric adaptation model” that moves away from textual analysis and toward a study of “a material phenomenon produced by a system of institutional interests and actors.” Doing so would move such analyses out of what Murray calls their “intellectual dolours” and would circumvent perfunctory aesthetic discussions of fidelity. In the case of the Peanuts franchise, however, fidelity is not so much the concern of the critic as it is the cultural producer. The goal of this chapter’s study is not to replicate what Andrew calls the “most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation” by once again focusing on fidelity, but instead the goal is to bypass Connor’s “fidelity reflex” by adopting a version of Murray’s attention to industry. While Murray’s suggestion is to adopt sociological methods, this chapter will demonstrate that a critical cultural history paradigm will also supply a potent means by which to understand the industrial constraints and incentives
that drive mainstream media transformations from originals to extensions. In the context of the *Peanuts* franchise, an emphasis on fidelity happens to be a driving constraint.

The analysis here will be concerned with two interconnected poles of the merchandizing environment – corporate production and consumer engagement. In the case of the material merchandizing products of the *Peanuts* franchise, executives act in order to establish a brand identity, making decisions about inclusion, exclusion, and framing that function similar to news media agenda building, creating the content that will then guide consumers' perspectives. The perceived need to balance religion with consumer appeal in American culture demonstrates the commercial contributions to Taylor’s “secular age,” as companies expect customers in mainline megastores to typically avoid religious purchases – a part of Taylor’s public emptying of religion. ⁴⁷² As will be shown, however, the relationship between religious belief and consumerism is more complex than simply assuming that the average American will not buy religiously affiliated goods. For decades, individual fans and major organizations have sought out *Peanuts* for its religious content and connotation. This has propelled the emergently robust DaySpring line from Hallmark, most prominently sold in Christian bookstores. ⁴⁷³ The resistance to religiously affiliated merchandise in mainline stores from major producers actually creates the conditions for such stores. “You’re not going to see big t-shirt companies doing John 3:16 [on a shirt],” comments one member of Creative Associates, “Walmart or Kmart or Target are not going to buy it, for better or worse. But that’s just the reality of global capitalism.” ⁴⁷⁴ Yet significant amounts of religious products are purchased each year, being a $4.63 billion annual industry, ⁴⁷⁵ with a majority
of products purchased through religious stores – sales of Christian books, for instance, are 103 percent higher in Christian retailers than in mass merchandisers. “Christian bookstores,” explains Borden, “and the sale of Christian commercialized material culture survive against a background of secularization.” Organizations like the CBA (formerly called the Christian Booksellers Association) attempt to fulfill their mission to “help improve the business conditions for Christian retail” given this mass market secularization by bringing together producers and retailers through global networks facilitated by efforts like the annual International Christian Retail Show. A perceived niche status of religious products and stores that must band together to provide the desired products not supplied elsewhere thus reinforces the relationship of Christian communities as counterpublics. As mainstream products, however, licensed uses of the mainstream Peanuts franchise in religiously related merchandise have provided attractive qualities to texts of the subaltern, often counter-culture Christian communities, disrupting a strict notion of public/private religious decorum. The very structure of the religious Peanuts products themselves complicate a dominant/counter split, as religious greeting cards and figurines function through cross-boundary modes of procurement, circulation, and display.

**Framing Material Adaptations**

A vast amount of Peanuts merchandise is produced and sold during the Halloween, Christmas, and Easter seasons, in conjunction with the annual airings of *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown; A Charlie Brown Christmas; and It's the Easter*
One can find an assortment of pseudo-religious references in the Halloween products, such as poseable toys of Lucy dressed in a witch’s mask and hat, Charlie Brown donning his ill-cut ghost costume, or an animatronic Schroeder dressed in a vampire cloak and playing the piano (Figures 5.4). Similarly, as discussed in chapter three, there are embedded references to religious thought in the Easter properties, such as Snoopy in an Easter egg (Figure 5.5). As mere references to the holiday, these products inherently reinforce a Christian cultural heritage, even if through commercially secular frames. That there is an Easter Beagle and not a Passover Beagle speaks to the particular religious history of American culture, reinscribed even as secular versions of sacred holidays shape product merchandise. Yet, as argued in chapter four, these secularizing trends also serve as a way to make Christian holidays a-religious for the public arena. In terms of Peanuts products, one will not find overt religious references related to Easter as the crucifixion/resurrection holiday, given the branding considerations by Schulz and subsequent executives to stay away from such overtly weighted references. Over the years of franchise expansion, a variety of disparate products and parodies have made reference to religion in Peanuts, such as the 1973 Charlie Brown version of The Rainbow Dictionary by Wendell Wright which includes definitions of church as “a place where people come together to think about God,” and God as someone to pray to “because we feel He loves us and takes care of us.” Schroeder speaks a brief scriptural reference during a song in the most re-produced Broadway musical ever, “You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown,” and Bert V. Royal’s unauthorized and rather dark adaptation of the characters as distraught teenagers in his off-Broadway success “Dog Sees God” positions
the characters wrestling with notions of the afterlife when CB’s dog dies of rabies. While adding to the pervasive and varied references to religion in *Peanuts* properties, the individuality and isolation of each of these instances may be lost to many in the enormity of the franchise. The most salient religiously related *Peanuts* merchandise is instead found in plush dolls, decorative figurines, and greeting card lines. Other than the casual secular allusions to the occult at Halloween and an embedded reference to a religious history given the mere presence of the Easter holiday through the Easter Beagle, the Christmas products are the only ones in which consumers will routinely find explicit connections to religious belief in the material, three-dimensional *Peanuts* product merchandise. While the decisions to maintain limitations in religious merchandise originate in part from Schulz’s creative works, they are managed by the corporate wing of the *Peanuts* franchise, guided by mixed industry and internal constraints.
Figure 5.4 Gemmy Industries 12” animatronic Schroeder dressed in a vampire cloak while playing the piano. Pressing the button causes Schroeder to move and the song “Linus and Lucy” to play. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)

Figure 5.5 Whitman’s 4” candy filled Easter egg with Snoopy sitting amongst other Easter eggs as the lid. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)

Creative Associates, the business management wing of the Peanuts franchise operating out of 1 Snoopy Place in Santa Rosa, CA, is a comparatively small operation that accomplishes a large amount of work, setting the limits on product content before any merchandise hits the shelves. Reviewing between 2,000 and 6,000 products a month (depending on the season) through their low-key offices, the staff, currently helmed by Vice President Paige Braddock, works with licensees on the art and copy of every piece of licensed merchandise. Some submissions are rejected, others are approved, and many are modified through the Creative Associates editorial process, with Snoopy’s nose being
reshaped here and text being worded there. “A lot of licensees we’ve worked with for a long time,” says Braddock about licensing requests, and “there’s only a few that require a lot of hands-on management. A lot of those are: open it, check it, make sure they didn’t use profanity or alcohol.” Efficiency is possible because of the business’s long relationships with many licensees as well as because of the “quick-reference art guide” that Creative Associates distributes to licensees. The guide instructs licensees not to use profanity or make references to alcohol, not to use *Peanuts* artwork in “morally suggestive designs,” and also requires that licensees to “not mix *Peanuts* artwork with overtly religious elements.” Braddock, a skilled cartoonist hired by Charles Schulz in part for her artistic and conceptual ability to help struggling licensees improve their products, explains that there are occasions in which contested interpretations of appropriateness arise, such as in the context of religion. Some products must be rejected as they adopt a thematic direction not consistent with the executives’ branding directives. In Asian cultures, for instance, especially the lucrative Japanese market, licensees often want to place *Peanuts* characters in front of tourist attractions on postcards and related merchandise. Many of these attractions, however, are temples and Buddhist shrines. “We have some tough editorial conversations about how we can accommodate that without looking like we’re trying to be Buddhist,” says Braddock. Chinese licensees offer another example of an editorial challenge, as the Chinese culture highly values astrological horoscopes that Schulz himself did not care for and that embrace a particular spiritual perspective. “You have to be relevant in some way to a buyer in China,” explains Braddock, and “every year it’s a struggle with how we honor that while still
keeping an editorial boundary.” There is no evidence in the comic strips or television specials that *Peanuts* has been historically antagonistic to non-Christian religious, and Creative Associates has not taken action that would seek to create such a paradigm. Instead, a desire to honor the history of *Peanuts*, especially its moments of affirming Christian religious belief, while also keeping the products commercially viable offer religious editorial decisions that are truly “a balancing act,” says Braddock. The executives must weigh the marketability of an idea with the brand’s conceptual self-identity, and the result has been a very particular approach to religion enunciated in the franchise products.

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, Schulz’s work contains distinct elements of Christian theology, with particular affirmations of religious practice and belief. Though these portrayals are often subtly crafted and open for diverse interpretation, Schulz was very aware of his unique integrations of a Christian presence in his franchise, a fact still understood by the executives at Creative Associates. Braddock, a former Emory Candler School of Theology student now extensively familiar with the *Peanuts* world that Schulz created, recognizes the religious heritage embedded in the strip and television specials. “You’d be hard pressed to say that *Peanuts* does not come from a Christian background,” she says. “It is Sparky – ‘I grew up in Minnesota, I went to the Church of God.’ You don’t want to pretend that you don’t have that.” Schulz has been mythologized for having a wholesome Midwestern perspectives, emblazoned by his abstaining from alcohol or profanity (an oft repeated part of his moral persona described in chapter six), and as these attitudes were imbued into his properties, the
product teams seek to continue honoring those ideals. “You may feel we do not understand the market when we reject something, or request a correction,” they instruct licensees in their art guide. “However, our first concern is always the protection of the Peanuts characters as created by Charles Schulz.” Before Schulz died, his children had decided that they wanted his contract renewal to insist that no one would draw new Peanuts comic strips after their father died. Since his death, as other new (non-comic-strip) products are created internally and through licensees, the editorial directive has been given to protect a Schulzian legacy by modeling products after the spirit of the original content. This editorial directive is borne partially out of a corporate strategy to present a clear brand image to consumers. It is also the result of personal respect for and attachment to Sparky who many in the remaining executive team knew personally, including of course his widow Jeannie and younger son Craig who represent and direct most major decisions for the franchise. Articulating a model of fidelity to Sparky’s original works affords not only a sense of nostalgia for both the consumer and producer, but it also provides the creative team a primary model for editorial decision making.

Corporate branding strategies like those considered by Peanuts Worldwide are a form of commercial frame building, Scheufele’s modification of Cobb and Edler’s agenda building and the chronological precursor to the effects of agenda setting. Agenda building is the concept political news media scholars discuss as the process by which issues and topics are included, excluded, and varyingly emphasized in news coverage based on competing influences before the content is dispersed to audiences. It is the set of decisions and actions that actually generates the particularly framed narrative
content that can set a social agenda and cultivate normative cultural perspectives. As Cobb and Edler describe in their 1971 treatise, issues of concern are chosen through exertions of political influence. Various cultural actors with varyingly biased influence serve as cultural gatekeepers that influence news media decisions on what to cover, and thus what issues become prominent within in systemic social agenda. For instance, as Schmalzbauer describes, journalists are often faced with the decision to disregard stories related to religion so as to not diminish their perceived objectivity by associating with issues of faith. Scheufele extends the agenda building perspective by introducing the concept of frame building, designed to explore “what kinds of organizational or structural factors of the media system, or which individual characteristics of journalists, can impact the framing of news content.” To frame, as Entman clarifies, “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Applying a framing and framing building perspective to merchandise as media adaptation directs the critic to assess the motivating industrial factors that often literally shape the final products. Adding these perspectives to adaptation studies might, for instance, prompt a scholar to suggest that a male dominated sculpting industry establishes hypersexualized frames for female superhero action figures. In Film Adaptation and its Discontents, Leitch’s brief reference to Lord of the Rings toys that frame the more docile characters as disproportionately involved in warfare through garments and accessories similarly demonstrates the possibility of the commercial frame building perspectives being
employed in media studies analyses of entertainment adaptations – i.e., one might argue that the merchandizing extensions to the Tolkien/Jackson franchise were guided by corporate views of the marketability of fashionable violence. For Schulz’s work, assessing the mode of frame building that articulates a desire for nostalgic fidelity directs the critic to pivotal moments where commercial forces and franchise history conflict due to the presence of religious content.

Figure 5.6 First book printings of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* in hardcover and Signet paperback by World Publishing (New York, 1965). [Photo: Author]

Taking time away from his strip work, Schulz himself approved all products for many years, picking up submissions his secretary Evelyn would leave on a chair for him after her initial screening. After a few low points in relations with the copyright syndicate in New York, the new millennium has offered a renewed attention to Schulz’s
desires through the work of Creative Associates and Peanuts Worldwide. Acknowledging that Schulz himself went out on a limb to include religion through the nativity narrative in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Braddock reports that this is one of the content areas she guards the most. Since the special’s 1965 release, a wealth of merchandise has been produced, first with book reprints of the program (Figure 5.6). Publishers often request to paraphrase or eliminate Linus’s iconic recitation of the Gospel of Luke in their reprints, in an effort to make the book more commercially neutral. Such was the case for a board book published in 2007 by Running Press Kidz, adapted by *Pearls Before Swine* cartoonist Stephan Pastis and illustrated by Creative Associate’s Justin Thompson. Thumbing through the book during an interview, Thompson recalls, “the publishers requested that we take this part [Linus’s recitation of the Gospel] out, because they wanted to keep it lively and everything, and we fought them on it because it’s the soul of the whole piece, it’s the point of the whole thing, and we finally got our way.”

Though the editorial decisions are a balancing act, this particular enunciation of mainstream secularization by removing Linus’s scriptural moment is beyond the bounds of what the franchise will allow. “That’s where I draw the line,” says Braddock. “I think that would not be honoring who Schulz was.” In this way, the corporate sense of fidelity, of consistency within the franchise’s thematic history as per its primary author, provides a unique and effective mode of resistance to commercial forces that would seek to secularize mainstream content. Emblemataized in the struggle over the adaptations of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, one can simultaneously see a common mainstream market desire for secular avoidance of religion and a particular means by which opposition has
historically been successful. This is not to say that all *Peanuts* Christmas products contain a gospel message, however. A 2010 Hallmark sound recording greeting card contains a shortened version of Linus’s speech that still references God, with Linus speaking as the reader opens the card: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying ‘glory to God in the highest and on Earth, peace, goodwill toward men.’ That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown!” A 2011 plush Linus doll from Hallmark (Figure 5.7), however, speaks only an abbreviated version of the gospel text which eliminates a religious reference to Christ’s birth: “For behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. And on Earth, peace, goodwill toward men. That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

While fidelity claims keep the content in the books, the balancing act occasionally tips slightly in the direction of secularizing commercial forces that insist on removing explicit religious affirmation from mainstream products. This is in part because of Hallmark’s own historical editorial view, according to Hallmark creative director Peggy Wrightsman-Parolin, that the *Peanuts* franchise “knows no religion, nor nationality. This has been the guiding principle for how Hallmark has used the *Peanuts* characters on products throughout the years.”\(^{499}\) Despite Hallmark’s traditional perspective, now modified through the success of its subsidiary DaySpring, the religious content across the strips and television specials nonetheless allows for claims to fidelity that could justify a plush Linus alternatively stating “for unto you is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord … that’s what Christmas is all about,” as a consistent adaptation embracing religion more robustly.
Constructing fidelity as an editorial framework to guide content decisions in adaptations requires that certain conditions be fulfilled. The degree to which these criteria are met will dictate the limits of the success of the fidelity claim in the creative process. First, there must be a relatively clear vision of the thematic and narrative history.
for the tactic to result in consistent effects. This has not always been the case with the
Peanuts franchise, with moments throughout the history in which the copyright agents in
United Feature Syndicates (the original copyright owners under the United Media
umbrella) strayed from a connection to Schulz’s voice. “In the 1970s,” writes Schulz
biographer Rheta Grimsley Johnson, “products began showing up on the market that
Schulz had not even seen, much less endorsed. It seemed United Feature Syndicate’s
New York-based Peanuts operation had forsaken its Santa Rosa roots, or at best was
ignoring them. The resulting discord was based less on what happened than the fear of
what could.” Under the current Peanuts Worldwide management, with the renewed
strength in direction from Creative Associates, an understanding of the Schulzian voice
can still be hard to discern at times. The 2011 plush Linus’s degree of fidelity is
debatable – he quotes the same scriptural passage while wearing a shepherd’s outfit
indicative of the nativity scene, but his truncated recitation is not explicit about Christ’s
birth (which Schulz had been). Other products mark similar situations where products
may not seem egregiously out of character but that evidence a less clear corporate vision
of branding through fidelity. For example, though the art guide instructs licensees not to
use profanity or trendy phrases, the t-shirt in Figure 5.8 and the greeting card in 5.9 were
produced including terms “freakin” and “p.o.o.p.”. The guide indicates that “when in
doubt about appropriate use,” one should “refer to the strip,” but the nearly 18,000 comic
strips and several canonized television specials require a substantial amount of corporate
distilment for such a reliance on fidelity to work. This is the broad, essentialist problem
with concerns of fidelity in adaptation, says Stam, as a text “feeds on and is fed into an
infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation.” As evidenced by this dissertation’s breadth, understanding the religious character of the *Peanuts* property is a complex endeavor, and this creates a challenge for knowing what editorial decisions a spirit of fidelity would dictate.

![Image of a licensed Peanuts t-shirt with the copy “I'm just one big freaking ray of sunshine aren't I?”](PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)
Products like those seen in Figures 5.8 and 5.9 can at times be the result of the second limitation of fidelity claims – the requirement of sufficient authority. One must possess the legal and moral power to make direct corporate decisions that impact the frames for product creation. Even after the move from United Media to Peanuts Worldwide, the majority rights ownership of *Peanuts* rights is still controlled by the New York based brand management company, ultimately giving them the final legal authority on licensing decisions. As one Creative Associates team member has noted, “Power often resides where the money is, and that’s in New York, so it’s a dance with New York trying to figure out how we’re working together on who can say ‘Yes’ to what, or ‘No’ –
because sometimes we would like to say ‘No,’ but of course the imperative to earn money is very strong. So it’s commerce versus art, as we always say.” Because of Schulz’s ethos, and likely because his family is still publicly involved in the franchise, particularly through the close work of wife Jeannie and son Craig who both reside in Santa Rosa and work with the franchise daily, deference is often given to the historic precedents set by the particularities and general spirit of Schulz’s work.

An aversion to controversy often tips the balance in religious market claims, such as Lowes’ decision to remove television commercials from TLC during its single-season “All-American Muslim” program. Even if one individual within the company saw value in associating with the product, it is ultimately the corporate rights holders that have authority over such editorial decisions. Individuals with particular religious views who control their own products can implement a desire to include religious content within the franchise’s history, as seen with the independent religious comic strip artists referenced in chapter two. Likewise the family-based creators of the popular Berenstain Bears children’s books and television series chose to produce an Easter storybook that tells of Christ’s death and resurrection. With most mainstream properties being owned by large studios part of large media conglomerates and managed by replaceable producers, the legal and social authority over a property is rarely so vested in artist or familial power. Instead, fidelity can easily become merely one corporate branding strategy weighed against other strategies of adaptation, often arbitrated by the greatest promise for monetary gain.
The third, and perhaps most obvious requirement for fidelity to guide adaptation decisions is the necessity of a first cause. For an entity with proper authority to exercise an editorial vision based on a clear understanding of a property’s thematic history, a history must exist. Holiday shoppers will not find licensed *Barbie*\textsuperscript{505}, Mickey Mouse, or *Looney Tunes* displays with overt religious content, given the brands’ overall a-religious content elsewhere in their franchises. Unlike in the history of those franchises, however, Schulz’s 1965 *A Charlie Brown Christmas* decision to include the Gospel story because “if we don’t do it, who will?”\textsuperscript{506} has cast a long shadow on the content of *Peanuts* merchandise. Because Schulz included religious content so distinctly in the flagship television special, religious content has persisted in Christmas merchandising, albeit in very a very specific and limited fashion as determined by the merchandise gatekeepers.

Beyond book sales, a large amount of product merchandise has been created and sold since *A Charlie Brown Christmas*’s 1965 release, from Christmas stickers and wrapping paper to toys and decorative figurines. A variety of *Peanuts* Christmas products have contained the generalized phrase “Merry Christmas,” which to some is an overt religious declaration, and others “Season’s Greetings.” Most products use the conventional winter scenes, Santa hats and presents, or the iconic Charlie Brown Christmas tree for the visual renderings (Figures 5.10 – 5.11). A 1987 Lucy figurine (Figure 5.12) does include a sign reading “NOEL,” a somewhat secularized term etymologically connected to the birth day of Christ. Overt references to religion in the Christmas products can be found in nativity references in plush dolls, ornaments, and display pieces or crèches. The reference to the birth of Christ through the nativity scene
is rare for mainstream entertainment franchise merchandise, yet they exist in the *Peanuts* franchise largely because of the initial 1965 inclusion. The precedent of Schulz’s success may be comforting to others considering including religious content in their properties, but it does not provide new content creators with the powerful strategy of fidelity. The initial risk must be taken, and the mainstream trend is to avoid risk.⁵⁰⁷

![image of Whitman's Chocolates tin](image)

**Figure 5.10** Whitman’s Chocolates 4.5”x12” tin with Snoopy, Woodstock, and “Happy Holidays” message. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)
Even if all of these editorial conditions are met – a rights holder with editorial authority over a property that at one time in its history took the perceived risk and included religious content has a clear vision of that history and decides to impose a spirit of fidelity on future adaptation decisions regarding the inclusion of religious content – the appeal to fidelity does not guarantee one-to-one re-articulation of religious thought in the new material product. Instead, the commercial interests of appealing to the broadest range of consumers may mean that strict fidelity is tempered by a sense of commercial and social compromise, with religious reference framed in a particular way to minimize the perceived risks. Though in his strip and television work Sparky raised questions concerning the appropriateness of school prayer, the ability to know if God is pleased
with oneself, the acceptability of apocalyptic rhetoric, and other theological issues, the only explicit routine religious reference in the material *Peanuts* merchandise (other than by association with scripture verses in greeting card products described below) is found in the nativity portrayals in the Christmas products (plush dolls, nativity figurines and ornaments). Schulz pondered diverse aspects of theology through his strips, but the landscape of mainstream consumer products is not characterized as a venue for such. An appeal to fidelity does not require a one-to-one replication of every aspect of Sparky’s work, and his more general desire to avoid doctrinal proclamation provides a compromise that ameliorates much of the market concerns. The Christmas products then exemplify a tactic of compromise, where licensees produce limited religiously affiliated products without strong proclamation of doctrinal theology.
Figure 5.13 Lenox “The Christmas Pageant” nativity display, approx. 3.5”. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)

Figure 5.14 Hallmark “Peanuts Pageant” 2001 Keepsake Ornament packaging. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC. [Photo: Author])

Figure 5.15 Hallmark “Peanuts Pageant” 2.75” 2001 Keepsake Ornament. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC. [Photo: Author])
**Figure 5.16** 2011 Forever Fun 3” *Peanuts* Christmas play mini figure set. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)

**Figure 5.17** Close-up of Forever Fun nativity display prop styling, including Sally’s tinsel halo, wing straps, and Christmas play sign. (PEANUTS © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC [Photo: Author].)
Each nativity display adheres to the established frame determined by Creative Associates. The religiously-related plush dolls, which are relatively recent additions through the Hallmark line of products, depict characters in Christmas pageant attire, such as the 2009 Linus dressed as a shepherd (Figure 5.7). The ornaments are a pictorial depiction of the larger nativity displays (Figures 5.13-5.17). Like the plush toys, according to Braddock, these displays are purposefully crafted to portray a Christmas pageant, not a historical scene of Christ’s birth. In the plush Hallmark doll, Linus wears his blanket on his head with a button-up shirt. In the high-end Lenox set (Figure 5.13), which the certificate of authenticity notes to be “crafted of ivory fine China, painted by hand, and accented with 24 karat gold,” and retailing at over $100, a Christmas tree is included, adorned with modern lights and trimmings, marking the scene as performance not witness. Demonstrating this approach most clearly, the mini figure set by Forever Fun (Figure 5.16-5.17), is molded so that Sally’s wings are attached by straps, her halo is made of actual tinsel, and a sign is even included reading “Christmas Play Today 4:00 P.M.” in case there were any question about the scene’s status as pageant. This framing strategy allows the franchise to maintain its semi-Christian spirit without robustly espousing a particular theology. These figurines would be significantly different were they to include signs saying “Jesus is the Reason for the Season” or were they to embrace a strict sense of adaptation fidelity and package the sets under the title “What Christmas is All About,” the iconic phrase from the Christmas special. Cast as a Christmas pageant, the pieces can minimize their theology by maximizing their reference to a childhood seasonal tradition. Without disavowing Schulz’s statement in *A Charlie
Brown Christmas, the figurines are crafted as displays of cuteness and warm sentiment instead of risk-laden heavy-handed statements about biblical importance.

The managed approach to the religious Christmas portrayals not only ameliorates corporate fear of a drop in sales due to religious specificity, it also allows the licensees and rights holders a layer of defense against claims of sacrilege. As noted in chapter two, readers of Schulz’s strips have on occasion been critical for his inclusion of scripture in a “low art” like the funnies. To represent the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and a newborn Christ through plastic toy characters derived from those strips may strike some as a compounding of the problem of lowness. Commenting on his neighbor’s outdoor Christmas display, one blogger rants, “What is the deal with people? I mean, he has a 12-foot-tall Santa Riding a Reindeer with Jesus on the back and a dozen six-foot-tall Angels gazing down upon this monstrous sight from the roof of his house. And don’t get me started on Frosty and the Peanuts Gang nativity scene. I mean, I’m not Catholic or anything, but could you be more sacrilegious?” While the nuances of the blogger’s arguments are somewhat lacking, it represents a line of criticism that Creative Associates and licensees like Forever Fun would certainly like to avoid, and the pageantry approach mediates the reference in slight ways that may dispel some critique. The pageant frame is intended to redirect some of that criticism towards the ritual of Christmas plays instead of the practice of representing religion in low arts.

Criticisms of a Peanuts crèche can be seen as primarily rooted in two larger problems with religious merchandise – religious prohibition against representational imagery and a perceived tension between capitalism and faith. Strict readings of holy
texts such as Exodus and Deuteronomy have prompted some followers of the Abrahamic religions to reject visualized renderings, especially of holy figures. In Exodus, Moses records a commandment from God concerning visual idolatry, instructing the Israelites:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

Traditional Islamic prohibition against imagery of animate figures comes from the Hadith, collections of Islamic wisdom, such as the Sah Bukhari, which records, “Ibn 'Abbas said, ‘I will tell you only what I heard from Allah's Apostle. I heard him saying, 'Whoever makes a picture will be punished by Allah till he puts life in it, and he will never be able to put life in it.’” Hearing this, that man heaved a sigh and his face turned pale. Ibn 'Abbas said to him, ‘What a pity! If you insist on making pictures I advise you to make pictures of trees and any other unanimated objects.”

The 2006 and 2012 violence committed by extremist Muslims tragically illustrated the influence of such beliefs, as the cause for killing was scapegoated onto an offensive cartoon published in a Danish newspaper and a scandalized video short posted on YouTube. Yet, historically, literal traditionalists in each religious group have found ways of working within the prohibition. Amish artisans, for instance, leave dolls faceless. Similarly, in the sixteenth century, Islamic Sufi took a moderate approach and allowed for popular Karagöz shadow puppet performances to continue so long as the puppets were perforated and thus not accurate representations of individuals. Religious practices have long been associated with strong perspectives on religious iconography, and as Morgan has described, American culture has an intricate history of religious interests intersecting with
the appeal of imagery – from 19th century lithographs of the laity reading scriptures to 21st century hand painted roadside church signs.516 While criticism may occasionally arise, the dominant American Christian traditions have embraced the combination of visuality and religion,517 and thus religious Peanuts products tend to avoid significant vocal disapproval.

Across the vast landscape of consumer goods sold, certainly not all merchandise creators embrace a sense of propriety, and contentions may arise over the appropriateness of individual products entering the marketplace annually. How to appropriately enact their chosen pageant frame poses a challenge for Creative Associates. Braddock encounters the question of proper iconic representation with each nativity scene, faced with what she sees as “a big kind of editorial problem… because who’s baby Jesus in that scenario?” Occasionally it’s a faceless sketch, but typically it is Woodstock in the place of the newborn Jesus. Given that Woodstock’s the smallest, he fits in the manger bed, and including Snoopy in costume supports the frame of cute pageantry not recorded history. The 2001 Hallmark Keepsake Ornament (Figure 5.14 – 5.15), however, violates this norm, offering a comparatively realistic depiction of Mary and Joseph with a baby Jesus who has an actual face and tufts of hair. The product is labeled as the “Peanuts Pageant,” however, and the back of the packaging, complete with picture of sculptor Tammy Haddix, reads as: “Charlie Brown and Lucy star in this year’s Christmas play, As they honor the true meaning of this happy holiday!” By including this package copy, the producers are able to stay within their own editorial guidelines of creating a level of
distance from the religious reference, even if individual manifestations call for idiosyncratic interpretation and adjustment.

In American culture, the debate over production of religious merchandise is usually less about doctrinal beliefs on iconography and instead centers on a critique of capitalism’s undue connection with faith. The tensions stem from a range of biblical passages cautioning against the allure of monetary wealth and of material possessions. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his followers, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Also recorded in Matthew, Jesus tells a rich man that he must be willing to sacrifice his earthly possessions in order to truly accept salvation, a task unlikely for many wed to their material wealth. “If you want to be perfect,” says Jesus, “go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” The Apostle Paul then extends this caution against monetary riches, charging Timothy in Paul’s first epistle to him: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.” The gospels also record the dramatic scene in which Jesus drives out the money changers from the temple courts upon his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, teaching them, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it a ‘den of robbers.’” While these are not doctrinal statements about actual earthly poverty as a necessary requirement for entrance into Heaven, these passages make clear that one’s
spiritual interests should never be encumbered by concern for material possessions, nor should one use spiritual matters as a ploy for financial gain.

For stores, then, to be selling “religious goods” to the masses may strike some as heresy. In many cases, a greedy accumulation of significant material possessions, be they Peanuts products or otherwise, may indeed be in contest with biblical teaching. Certainly there have been historical instances in which religious ideals have been corrupted by financial interests, such as the high profile late 1980s scandal involving televangelist Jim Bakker’s fraudulent sales of time-shares at the Christian theme park, Heritage USA, and the 2010 Alanar Inc. embezzlement by Indiana pastor Vaughn Reeves Sr. who led donors to believe funds were for church construction projects. As Bado-Fralick and Norris explain in Toying with God: the World of Religious Games and Dolls, however, “the relationship between religion and commerce has always been present, and even thrived, in religious practice.” The concern, they contend in their expansive treatise of historical and contemporary religious games like Mormon-Opoly and Muslim Barbie-like Fulla dolls, should not be over whether religious and commercial practices are linked (for such seems inevitable, especially in contemporary culture), but instead concern should be rooted in a consideration of whether commerce is serving religion, or if religion is serving commerce. Such an analysis must be contextually specific, recognizing that as religious pursuits must compete for attention and devotion, material products that cost money are often involved, even simply producing Bibles and purchasing light bulbs for the pulpit. These practices do not inherently corrupt the religious meaning of the community given that the sheer use of material product or monetary exchange is not in
itself antithetical to most religious doctrines. Instead, the specific historical context and motives of a given practice should produce unique analysis to determine the degree of commercial conflict.

As described in chapter two, Schulz himself agreed with the perspective that the medium does not inherently corrupt the veracity of thematic meaning, nor did he think the merchandizing endeavors were an inherent drag on the strip’s potency, despite some criticism that he was “selling out” or becoming “too commercial” when promoting products like the Ford Falcon or MetLife Insurance. “The strip is a commercial product to begin with,” he said. “How can you go commercial with something that’s already there?” Though he critiqued the commercial cooptation of sacred holidays in his Christmas specials, he approved of moderated approaches to merchandizing, saying in 1977 that “it’s not that we’re out to clutter the market with products. In fact anyone that says we’re overdoing it is way off base because actually we are underdoing it. We could be turning out much more material than we do.” Yet he was concerned with his own personal wealth and success. “It’s really more of a disturbing element in my life than anything else, I think, especially because of my Christian belief,” he told the Christian Herald in 1967, “I’ve never quite been able to resolve this. I cannot help that the comic strip brings in a good deal of money. I do not draw the comic strip to make money. I draw it because it is the one thing which I feel I do best.” Ultimately for Schulz, the merchandizing was a useful means by which to be generously, even if quietly, philanthropic, and thus one could make a sound argument that in the context of Peanuts merchandise, commerce seems to have served charity.
From the early years of Schulz’s control over the merchandise, to the more recent appeals to fidelity as the franchise content is adapted to material products at a rapid pace, the result has been a negotiated response to commercial and thematic pressures. In the context of the religious products, the perceived need to balance a sense of fidelity with commercial concerns demonstrates the general perception that the public will not embrace religiously related content. As will be shown in the next section, however, historical and contemporary examples from Peanuts demonstrate the meaningful ways in which broad swaths of consumers have in fact embraced Peanuts product-based associations with religious themes, demonstrating the broad appeal of religiously related products.

**Circulatory Engagement**

Though the merchandise products are produced with a frame of managed religiosity, Peanuts has nonetheless enjoyed significant circulation and redistribution throughout religious subcultures. For many years, Schulz was extremely generous in his gifting of original strip drawings to readers of diverse backgrounds and faiths. Now worth tens of thousands of dollars each, the original two foot boards were sent to fans across the world who simply wrote in to Schulz and the syndicate office requesting that they receive a particular date’s art. For example, in a 1956 letter, a reader working in the Anti-Defamation League of the B’Nai B’Rith writes “I am particularly intrigued with the cartoon that appeared in ‘The Evening Bulletin’ on Monday, July 9, in which the ‘ants’ are accused of being a stubborn race. Working in the field of human relations, this would
be a terrific picture for my office. I am wondering if the original is available and whether or not I may have it.”  

This particular original had already been given out, so in his response, United Feature’s Jim Hennessy apologized, including a print and saying “I can tell you that the proofs are often better than the originals which are never free of markings of one sort of another.” Other times when the original was already given out, Schulz or the syndicate would write back to the admirer, asking if he or she would choose one or even two other dates that they would like instead, never asking for payment in return. It was decades until Schulz and the syndicate stopped freely distributing the originals, now often purchased back by the Schulz Museum or Jeannie herself.

Sparky’s liberality filled many hallways and waiting rooms with original strip drawings, including more than one pastor’s office. Many personal requests came in from individuals associated with various Christian churches, from an assistant minister in a Presbyterian church whose mother had sent him Peanuts clippings all through his time in seminary to an apostolic administrator in the bishop’s residence at Infanta, Quezon. One Methodist pastor from New Mexico wrote to Schulz, letting him know that a strip in which Lucy is oblivious to what Charlie Brown was trying to share with her “is what every minister must feel time after time.” Sparky forwarded this request to the syndicate, and production manager William Anderson happily forwarded the original to the pastor. A number of requests even came from or on behalf of ministers who had actually incorporated Peanuts strips into their sermons. Requesting the original as a surprise for her Lutheran pastor, one church-goer wrote in 1958:
Dear Mr. Schulz:

Your PEANUTS strip is loved by millions, I’m sure, but last Sunday I discovered another admirer in the Pastor of our church.

We were attending a bible study class and the strip on Sunday (copy enclosed) [Figure 5.18] was particularly appropriate for the subjects under discussion, and [the Pastor] called attention to it, prefacing his remarks by stating he was an avid PEANUTS fan and believed the artist possessed of a remarkably keen insight of human nature. I gathered he was really quite taken with the strip […]\textsuperscript{534}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{peanuts_comic}
\caption{Peanuts (November 2, 1958). The original was requested for and given to a Lutheran pastor. (PEANUTS © 1958 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)}
\end{figure}
The ministerial connections between Schulz’s strips that address both theology and more generalized human foibles has persisted, and half a century later, readers of the popular light Christian devotional Our Daily Bread will occasionally find daily entries to the printed booklets in which the writers reference a Peanuts strip. For example, the January 31, 2005 entry by managing editor Anne Cetas illustrates James 4:17 – “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” – by referencing a Peanuts strip in which Peppermint Patty questions the exchange value of her own good intentions (Figure 5.19). In 2004, Radio Bible Ministries out of Grand Rapids, Michigan produced a pamphlet entitled “Been Thinking About Snoopy” which uses Snoopy as metaphor for thinking about the character of God. The pamphlet ends with a prayer:

Father, thank You for a man named Charles Schulz who brought us elements of truth amid our smiles. Thank You for being God on Your terms rather than ours. May Your name be hallowed as we wait on You. May Your kingdom be reflected in our patience. May Your will be done in our disappointments. Please, give us this day our daily bread.\textsuperscript{535}
The ways in which these sermon and devotional writers have picked up Schulz’s work in their own vocations not only speaks to the connection religious readers have with the widely relatable and seemingly timeless insights of Peanuts, but also the willingness for Christian communities to embrace mainstream properties when they are not in conflict with biblical ideologies.

Even if the strips’ religious moments are not the moments integrated in a sermon or request for an original, the pervasive array of religious references throughout the franchise provides the common ground and perceptual permission for the property to speak across dominant and counter-public borders. As Warner describes, “to address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one’s disposal certain media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology.”536 The religious content in the strips and television specials provide the basis for leaders and editors within Christian publics to see the Peanuts properties as inhabiting a shared ideological space necessary for inclusion. As moments of identification are made reading a theologically relevant strip, a sense of in-group status is repeated and amplified by the reprinting within the community’s circulated texts. For Peanuts, this has not only happened on the walls of pastors’ offices and in their sermons, but also through explicit religious organization’s publications. As other organizations over the years like Ford and MetLife have sought out Peanuts for commercial advertising purposes, various religious organizations have requested the use of characters and strips for their non-profit
print products. The Education and Culture Committee of the Riverside Church in New York City, for instance, included an approved *Peanuts* strip regarding marriage in their weekly paper, *Horizons*,\(^\text{537}\) and the Billy Graham Evangelical Association included a strip in their monthly paper, *Decision*.\(^\text{538}\) Christian student groups at Emory University in Atlanta, Cascade College in Portland, Brown University in Providence, and other campuses across the country used authorized images of the characters in tracts and circulars.\(^\text{539}\) The General Board of Education of the Methodist Church even successfully requested a strip with Snoopy dancing for use in their *World of Fun* step-by-step instruction manual that would accompany their dance album.\(^\text{540}\)

One way publics are generated is through commonly engaged texts, reflexively and routinely circulated throughout the membership, what Warner describes as the “concatenation of texts through time.”\(^\text{541}\) The overlapping relationship that individuals have with the common discourse found in such reoccurring materials, whether in the form of television shows, radio broadcasts, pamphlets, or monthly newsletters, reflects, establishes, and reinforces the generally shared points of reference characteristic of a public. The religious publications in which *Peanuts* has been reproduced have often been instructional, such as devotional materials directing the faithful, but have also been highly interactional – inviting new members to join, advertising upcoming events, even teaching members how to dance together. Dahlgren describes such interaction as a critical component of a public.\(^\text{542}\) The acceptance of *Peanuts* as part of Christian community-building speaks to the degree to which modern Christian communities are not wholly interested in remaining enclaved or isolated from all aspects of the dominant culture’s
media. Instead, they can be characterized as being selective but not isolationist. Well-received books detailing the religious implications of C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* and J.R.R. Tolkein’s *Lord of the Rings* reflect the same selectivity, with mainstream and semi-mainstream products being incorporated when an ideologically congruent theme is salient enough to be rhetorically useful for the non-dominant public. Though sermons heard in churches integrating mainstream properties such as *The Matrix* and *Spiderman* movies indicate that authorial intention is not a necessary criteria for inclusion (given that their authors are not frequently cited for their religious identities), the common religious community interests in Lewis’s and Tolkein’s fictional texts demonstrate that authorial commonality with in-group ideology aids in a property’s inclusion across communities.

![Figure 5.20 Peanuts (May 28, 1959). Hung with permission in the waiting room of a Planned Parenthood center in San Francisco. (PEANUTS © 1959 Peanuts Worldwide LLC. Used by permission of Universal Uclick. All rights reserved.)](image)
Re-circulation of *Peanuts* through requests for originals and reprints in community publications was not just an activity of overtly Christian circles. Planned Parenthood, for example, was given permission to hang an original in their waiting room (Figure 5.20) and the United Jewish Appeal used a strip in a 1960 circular (Figure 5.21). Biographical write-ups of Schulz in Christian newsletters, however, paved the way for frequent adoption within the Christian communities. As described in chapter one, Christian communities often take the form of counterpublics, actively desiring to change the mainstream ideology of the dominant culture. As Warner describes, “counterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely.” The mid-century biographical accounts bearing out versions of Schulz’s ideology of Midwestern values, history of church service, and interest in theology sufficiently conveyed the perception that his work was not about merely replicating mainstream ideals. Instead, his work and his ideology were seen as potentially transformative. Though at times functioning as great simplifications of Schulz’s nuanced and evolving theology (as will be described in chapter six),
prominent write-ups from Church of God publications editor Kenneth Hall and Robert Short’s widely sold *The Gospel According to Peanuts* paved the way for increased adoption of what many mainstream readers had simply seen as a secular property.

Henry Jenkins describes contemporary media as highly interconnected, a set of relationships and redundancies that he calls a “convergence culture.” Within the ever-emerging technological culture, critical attention to patterns of interaction is often focused on social media, one environment in which Jenkins focuses his concern with “spreadability” – the possible ease for an idea to be repeated and shared across media. Technical components of the online environments, such as widgetization and the rise of social networking sites, have allowed for viral dissemination of content – a characteristic organizations often crave in order to expand the reach of their commercial brand. As Jenkins describes the developing reality of media content, “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead.” Yet the case of *Peanuts* demonstrates that such vitality based on circulation practices is not new, the Facebook “Share” and “Like” buttons being predated by mimeographs of Linus and Lucy printed in church bulletins. Of course, new technology has allowed for robust and immediate practices of spreadability across new media platforms. Largely since forming Peanuts Worldwide, the *Peanuts* franchise has expanded into these new spaces as well, with motion comics, street fair games, and well-crafted digital pop-up book versions of *It’s the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown* and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (complete with scripture reference) available for download on iTunes. These trends of spreading, however, are not new for the *Peanuts* franchise, as the Christian communities adopted such practices at the franchise’s start, and are continuing
them through publications like *Our Daily Bread* and weekly sermons across the country. Beyond these practices, *Peanuts* is robustly spread in contemporary culture through other material means in operation for more than half a century – the sending of greeting cards.
Figures 5.22-5.24 2012 DaySpring triptych *Peanuts* seasonal box set Christmas card. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC.)
Figures 5.25-5.26 2011 DaySpring *Peanuts* box set birthday card. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC.)
Figures 5.27-5.28 2011 DaySpring *Peanuts* box set birthday card. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC.)
Figures 5.29-5.30 2011 DaySpring Peanuts seasonal Easter card. The Peanuts franchise does not contain any explicit references to a religious meaning to the Easter holiday. This card’s implication that Charlie Brown explained a “real meaning” to Snoopy is the closest inference. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC.)
Figures 5.31-5.32 2012 DaySpring Peanuts occasional greeting card released as part of a large new line of occasional Peanuts cards by DaySpring. (Courtesy of © Peanuts Worldwide, LLC and Hallmark Licensing, LLC.)
Hallmark first began sending *Peanuts* themed greeting cards in 1960. While the company has produced cards and products with a variety of licensed characters, from Rainbow Brite and Barbie to Harry Potter and Dr. Seuss, *Peanuts* affords the company a unique opportunity by allowing a mainstream character to be associated with religious content. Such commercial relationships are rare – one will find Disney characters produced as ceramic *Precious Moments* figurines, but one will not find Mickey Mouse printed on a greeting card next to a verse from Nehemiah. Now primarily through its subsidiary DaySpring, which it acquired in 1999, Hallmark publishes greeting cards and gift products like coffee mugs and day planners that rearticulate a connection between the *Peanuts* characters and scriptural meaning. Creative Associates, however, having final editorial say over the content, requests that the characters are not shown articulating the theological statements or the Bible verses themselves (save for Linus’s recitation of the nativity story from Luke 2). Instead, the characters adopt sentimental or humorous statements that may have religious undertones while a Bible verse is then included elsewhere on the card or coffee mug (Figures 5.22 – 5.32). The occasions for the cards are widespread, and in 2012 DaySpring launched a line of more than 40 religious *Peanuts* occasional cards with rich art designs and textural embellishments, spanning events from sympathy to birthday (e.g., Figures 5.31 – 5.32). The Bible verses in each of these cards tend to be thematically broad, truncated, and excerpted from their scriptural contexts in order to establish wide market appeal through generality. Because of this, and the framing practices insisted by Creative Associates, one might contend that these religion-lite products do not offer a meaningful religious opportunity for consumers. As with the
rest of the franchise, for instance, there are no overtly religious Easter cards or products, as Schulz himself opted for the jovial Easter Beagle instead of branding himself and his products as evangelical through a reference to the crucifixion. As D’Angelo contends, however, the rhetoric of greeting cards allows for a more complex engagement with copy than a superficial analysis of the medium might suggest:

Like proverbs, maxims, quotations, and anecdotes, when they are decontextualized and put into collections, greeting card verse is decontextualized when it is put on racks of cards in card shops, drug stores, and supermarkets. Under appropriate circumstances, however, the person who buys greeting card verse recontextualizes it, appropriates it to his or her own intention, and sends it to someone else as a personal message. As a result, there is a dialogic relationship set up between the writer's intention and the sender's intention, between the writer's words and the sender's words.

Greeting card copy is a form of epideictic discourse, he explains, and “they provide the starting point and the exigency for the writer’s and the sender’s intention.” The very form of the card invites modification, personalization, and explication of the prompt given by offering the writer vast amounts of blank card space on which to write. The generic scriptural excerpts, then, are sufficient as starting places, as the medium and the genre are characterized by an expectation of participatory agency.

Religious greeting cards routinely prove successful in the lucrative card industry. In 2012, the Greeting Card Association estimated annual retail sales of greeting cards to
exceed $7.5 billion,\textsuperscript{554} and mainstream merchants report an increasing demand for religious cards even in a sluggish economy.\textsuperscript{555} As a circulatory medium, intended for delivery across distances through the postal system, the greeting cards are a unique medium that extends one’s private sphere through modification of common texts available across the public sphere in the aisles of mass-traffic shopping centers. This complication of the public/private : secular/religious split is driven by the actions from the private sphere as individuals actively seek out, modify, and distribute religious cards. It is also facilitated by the inclusion of well-adored and engaging licensed \textit{Peanuts} characters by a mainstream company, even if framed in limiting fashions. As Jenkins describes in his examples of fan cultures, mainstream media intentions are often subverted and augmented by devoted fanatics.\textsuperscript{556} Though one woman did turn a greeting card into a large plywood nativity display that she has set up each Christmas since 2003 (Figure 5.3),\textsuperscript{557} DaySpring greeting cards featuring Charlie Brown and the gang do not require robust fanaticism, inherently offering a managed but meaningful means of participatory action across public/private borders. By including the engaging characters, DaySpring makes the religious cards increasingly visible and marketable for wary mainstream marketers.
Figure 5.33 Unlicensed scene of Peanuts characters as part of the nativity story, adapted to plywood by a homeowner from a greeting card image. On display each Christmas since 2003. The response to unauthorized use of copyrighted Peanuts material has shifted over the years, estimated in 1989 to be a $1 million per year cost to stop instances like a group of Hare Krishnas who allegedly had a warehouse full of bootleg Peanuts products. In 2012, the Peanuts.com site of Peanuts Worldwide suggests that current action against online copyright violation is directed uniquely at content that uses the characters “in an unfavorable fashion.” [Photo: Courtesy of Homeowner]

DaySpring products, including the religiously themed Peanuts products, can be found in mainstream stores like Hallmark and Walmart in varying degrees of prominence and quantity around the globe, directed by the store’s perceived shopping demographic. Because many mainstream stores are historically reluctant to carry significant amounts of overt religious material, religious Peanuts merchandise is most prominently found in niche Christian stores like Lifeway and Family Christian Bookstores, typically the only mainstream licensed character on the shelves alongside the Christian VeggieTales line. These niche stores, catering specifically to the subaltern/counter-public Christian community, have been made possible because of the simultaneous realities of the
aversion to religious content in mainstream marketing and the strong buying power of Christian communities. As Borden describes, these niche stores are faced with the balancing of commercial and sacred tensions endemic to religious commerce described in the discussion of fidelity above. Many of the stores successfully adopt a strategy of sacralization, says Borden, whereby a religious calling is fused with the realities of capitalist business in order to economically survive while meeting the product needs and interests of a religious community.\textsuperscript{560} The reach of the products found in these stores, however, is not limited to those religious communities that patronize them, especially when adorned with the spreadable \textit{Peanuts} characters. The greeting cards demonstrate this, as do the gift products. Religious greeting cards are not only sent to fellow religious community members, but function across publics as religious senders mail messages to friends and family members of different faith perspectives. Other religious \textit{Peanuts} products available on the market such as the nativity scenes and coffee mugs may not provoke the same form of engagement through textual modification. Instead, they function through the act of display, extending religious messages to those who might see the mug passing by the work cubicle or the nativity scene on the mantle as a guest invited over for a holiday party. As such, these products have, in a variety of ways, served as vehicles by which religious content continues to oscillate across spheres.
First introduced in the mid-century market with products like Connie Boucher’s *Peanuts* date book/calendar, *Peanuts* merchandise has extended the franchise into the strollers, living rooms, and workplaces of consumers across the globe. Charlie Brown has put his stamp on everything from children’s coloring books to NASA command modules. In a collection of short essays titled *Security Blankets*, an array of individuals make clear how these products can and have impacted the lives of countless people throughout the last half century. When battling through a traumatic brain aneurysm as a small child, for instance, a Snoopy-hugging-Woodstock piggy bank the hospital staff gave young Scott Alan Blanchard became so meaningful that it inspired him later in life to donate back to the hospital and other research centers. For Ann Elizabeth Downard, Snoopy was a respite from a traumatic childhood of foster care. “Having a Snoopy plush of my own meant everything to me,” writes Downard. “He hugged me, listened to me, and was my best friend. I could always count on him to be there for me.” For some, the joy of *Peanuts* merchandise is borne out in single impulse purchases, for others a lifetime of collecting. When Freddi Margolin, the collector featured in Rheta Grimsley Johnson’s 1989 Schulz biography, recently sold her collection overflowing her Long Island basement, she was able to move to Florida and begin taking in rescue dogs – including one named Lucy VanPelt and foster dogs named Linus and Sally Brown. Freddi is among many for whom such products have been
meaningful. For her, the droves of Snoopy merchandise were not only meaningful in her possession, but served her well when they were passed on to others.

Material products can be deeply meaningful through the stories attached to them. Glenn and Walker’s inventive *Significant Objects* work bears this out through their scientific experiment of adding fictional stories to yard sale objects and selling them on eBay. After thousands in profits, the pair concludes that the ordinary can become significant through its narrative attachments. For the *Peanuts* franchise, the material products are not merely kitsch commercialism, but are adaptations of the meaningful narrative world that Schulz created in the comic strips and the television specials. The products offer consumers a possibility of further connection with the characters, the philosophical themes, and even a perceived sense of Charles Schulz himself. Any given product may lack the artistic cues to motivate substantial engagement, and it is likely that most sticker books and Snoopy pencils are encountered with little-to-no robust philosophical inquiry involved. Yet the connection to the broader franchise and the inherent interactive features of consumer products at least offer the possibility for meaningful engagement.

Like the comic strips and television titles, a variety of *Peanuts* adaptations and material products have contained references to religion. A church in Buffalo, New York even included Schroeder in one of its stained glass windows as part of a tribute to music. The circulation of *Peanuts* references and licensed reprints in religious organization newsletters, pamphlets, sermons, and even windows demonstrates the spreadability of the franchise which has become part of the textual formation and history of many Christian
communities. A Schulzian ideology gathered from write-ups and noticeable religious references in his strips and television work allowed for the subaltern and counterpublic communities to embrace the franchise out of the dominant mainstream medium as a rhetorically useful means of identification and even recruitment. Though Christian communities are occasionally seen as isolationist, the widespread integration and circulation of mainstream franchise content suggests that many of these counterpublics are better characterized as selective in the media products they adopt.

The most prominent religious *Peanuts* material adaptations, though, do not require a trip to a New York sanctuary to find, but instead can be found in specialty shops and greeting card aisles in a nearby store. The plush dolls, ornaments, and crèches sold at Christmas along with the Hallmark lines of occasional greeting cards and gift products sold throughout the year extend the *Peanuts* franchise’s religious connections beyond the nuanced yet pervasive inclusions in the successful comic strip and animation media. Religious *Peanuts* products exhibit the dual ends of the mainstream material product marketplace. While franchise executives insist on branding through commercial viability, explicit practices of frame building are at times modified through seemingly counter-commercial strategies like an appeal to fidelity in a franchise with historic ties to religious thought. As the market demonstrates, though, such balancing acts may not be as risky as sometimes perceived, given the demand that has given life to Christian bookstores. Even further, the increased call for religious greeting cards in mainstream stores indicates that religious interests are not confined to niche shopping habits, but instead are a part of the broader consumer culture. Religious greeting cards, such as
those made more attractive through the inclusion of the *Peanuts* characters, offer individual senders an opportunity to increasingly disrupt public/private notions of religious decorum by modifying and adding to the general biblical platitudes printed in the cards purchased from a major department store and then sending them through the postal service to individuals across the globe who will read and perhaps even share the messages sent to them. Through practices of circulation and display, *Peanuts* products participate in the individual-driven oscillation of religious content across communities and counter/dominant paradigms. Though many may simply treat these products as merely cute adornments, for others they are indeed spiritually meaningful.
CHAPTER 6

A SCHULZIAN APPROACH: EXPLORING FAITH IN
THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

“Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?”
- Snoopy

In his 1962 treatise, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas argues that societies have lost much of the open, critical discourse afforded to previous epochs, in part because of the rise of uncritical modes of mass communication and overbearing commercial practices of capitalism. While critiques of Habermas’s historical and theoretical approaches have been common, such as for his idealizing of the bourgeois public sphere and a general exclusion of domestic interactions and issues of gender, his starting point has nonetheless proven useful as a way to situate discussions of societal interactions. As Nicholas Garnham explains, the various justifiable criticisms “do not undermine the book’s continuing claim to our attention as a fruitful starting point for work on urgent contemporary issues in the study of mass media and democratic politics.” For Habermas, the discussion of a lost public sphere, even if idealized, has provided the catalyst for his continued exploration of desirable characteristics for ideal communication. Such discussions of the normative practices of public discourse remain relevant for works such as this dissertation which seek a vibrancy in the mainstream mass media – not only a site of actualized discourse, but a source of cultivative ethical training on how to conduct discourse. Viewers engage in circulatory publicity as they interact
with the same texts across time and space, and the standard decorum expressed across routine stories trains audiences in the ethics of public and private conduct. “We do in fact go to stories to receive ethical instruction whether we think of ourselves as doing so or not,” explains Gregory.570 Given the challenges continually facing religious discourse, continued inquiry such as Habermas’s into preferred modes of public interaction, even in the context of entertaining stories, seems inherently important.

Though Habermas has made clear in recent writings about the “postsecular” perspective that religious citizens, their practices, and their perspectives should not be excluded from the public sphere,571 the historical performances of societal norms (described in chapter one) speak to a notion of liberal pluralism that is contingent upon a-religious and secular normativity in the public sphere. The norm of privatization as a cause and byproduct of public a-religiosity has short-circuited goals of discursive inclusivity by avoiding meaningful interactions with the beliefs and practices of spirituality and religion across public texts, including the pervasive and powerful entertainment mass media. Through their provisos of egalitarianism, unfulfilled in a mainstream media landscape characterized by a dearth of religious content,572 descriptions of communicative ethics highlight the gap in idealized public interaction. Such theoretical frameworks argue for an approach to discourse that emphasizes a general openness toward difference and a foundational respect for the other. Johnstone, for example, offers a notion of bilaterality as a humanizing component of ethical communication whereby “each interlocutor speaks as if the others were capable of propagating a message fully as credible as his own.”573 Brockriede describes ethical
arguers as *lovers* who ask for free assent from coarguers respected for their personhood in contrast to *seducers* and *rapists* characterized by coercion and force toward identity-less others. While Derrida notes the inherent incompatibility in an absolute openness (hospitality) toward an other, the type of approach Brockriede and Johnstone direct discourse toward embraces the possibility for difference.

Habermas’s own prescriptive theoretical framework follows a similar trajectory rejecting perfunctory acceptance of the dominating discourse, instead arguing that consensus requires the “the anticipation of an ideal speech situation.” Such a situation is characterized by an allowance for all possible participants to speak, to introduce and/or question any assertion in the discourse, to express beliefs, and to be free from prevention or coercion in participation. “It is a kind of consensus,” explains White, “which is the normative ideal: one which equally respects each individual as a source of claims and opinions, and which draws fully on the resources of a rationalized lifeworld.”

Habermas’s view is in contrast, continues White, to a “*normatively secured consensus*” that “blocks in some way the process of critical communicative dialogue.” On the surface, such political ethics appear to speak toward an inclusive model that would freely allow for religious content in mainstream discourse, even in entertainment texts. Indeed, according to White, Habermas argues against the very normative exclusions this dissertation seeks to undermine. Yet, like the larger public sphere, mainstream entertainment properties do not reflect such an open approach to discourse in matters of religious interest, thereby reinforcing the norm of segmentation by a-religious public dominance. The problem is not that the compelling ethical provisos mentioned above
argue for exclusivity (they argue for just the opposite). Instead, the problem with seeing them brought to bear on media texts is that the contemporary social tenor does not support a mature execution of the multilateral public discourse on religion, given the broader trend of normative privatization described in chapter one. Perhaps more to the point, however, social actors are typically not equipped to approach issues of spirituality when confronted with the possibility of difference.

Citizens learn from an early age the polite maxim of avoiding religious discourse, a commonplace uttered by Linus as “There are three things I have learned never to discuss with people: politics, religion, and the Great Pumpkin.” According to Keaten and Soukop, “the reason we are inundated with clichés about avoiding religion in social situations is that, to state it simply, we do not know how to talk about religion with our friends, peers, and families. The combination of ignorance and volatility make discussion of religion unmanageable and potentially hurtful.” Of course, the volatility that Keaten and Soukop point to is very real – claiming that another’s different religious viewpoint will condemn them to an eternity in hell can provide for more than sufficient hostility to derail respectful discussion of difference. Yet, the very nature of such claims, the stakes in the debate potentially being one’s eternal disposition, expose the significance of allowing for open contemplation and exchange of perspectives, and make the efforts to seek out models of successful consideration in mainstream properties ever more valuable. Though spiritual concerns are vitally important to many individuals inhabiting the public sphere, efforts to disrupt notions of privatized religion have little hope of success if
even in private circles of family and friends individuals are incapable of expressing their spiritual ideas.

In order to serve as a corrective to this trend, Keaten and Soukop offer *humanization* as the critical component in effective interfaith exchange, broadly echoing the communicative ethics of Brockriede, Johnstone, and Habermas. This humanizing, they explain, “is committed to a compassionate orientation to the others inherent subjectivity, in contrast to dehumanizing the other as object.”\(^{582}\) Though not discarding the potential value of other approaches, Keaten and Soukop then specify a *humanizing pluralism* as the ideal mode of difference-based spiritual communication. Humanizing pluralism is characterized by “embracing both openness and the differences of others” without requiring a relativistic frame that would assume “everyone has their unique ‘version’ of the truth.”\(^{583}\) Nonetheless, their descriptions of *humanizing relativism*, *humanizing exclusivism*, and even to a degree *humanizing reductionism*\(^ {584}\) illustrate their claim that an array of approaches to communication about spirituality in the context of faith differences, so long as they are characterized by humanizing respect for the other, can be productive. Even the frame of exclusivism, characterized by a belief in a singular orientation to one spiritual Truth, they explain, can often result in remarkable generosity and collaboration amongst differences. As such, the guiding principle across an array of potent ethical perspectives is the humanizing recognition of the personhood, i.e., a respect and valuing of others, despite dissimilarity when sharing in matters of difference, be it in a merely informative, persuasive, or entertaining setting. The challenge, as Keaten and Soukop highlight, is that the successful enactment of these principles is not a common
skill, and the mainstream entertainment industry appears to share this shortcoming, evidenced in the common use of flattened religious stereotypes and the overall avoidance of spiritual topics.

Instead of nuanced, humanizing depictions of religious thought, mainstream titles tend to trade in superficial, stereotypical character types and iconography that do not reflect the actual attitudes, beliefs, or practices of the viewing public.\textsuperscript{585} Perhaps worse, the more dominant trend is to simply avoid topics of spiritual concern,\textsuperscript{586} not simply dehumanizing spiritually invested individual perspectives but erasing them altogether. The study of religious content through the \textit{Peanuts} franchise, however, demonstrates that such trends are not necessary parts of the various media that have saturated historical and contemporary American culture. Instead, Schulz’s work establishes a model of a nuanced approach to pervasive yet tonally adept religious content in a mainline property that, like his artistic style in the comics, could be replicated successfully in the work of others. In some ways even beyond the way Schulz enunciated it in his own works, Schulz’s personal approach to theology – one that was \textit{informed}, \textit{exploratory}, and \textit{personal} – provides the attributes of a model that not only fulfills the desire for respectful humanizing in communication but also provides a heuristic impetus for further engagement with a property’s spiritual content beyond one’s private sphere. Drawing on the exemplars and conclusions from the previous chapters, Schulz’s evolving commentary on his theological perspectives, and reflections from close family and friends, this final chapter will outline these three components (informed, exploratory, and
personal), offering a Schulzian approach to mainstream entertainment art as a guide for content creation and media engagement.

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An Informed Approach

The broader media landscapes described in the previous chapters are not characterized by a common occurrence of thick portrayals of religious belief and practice. Prime time network programs have less than six percent of characters with spiritual identities that are manifested often only through infrequent and often cursory references, commonly trading in superficial iconography and flat stereotypes, even at sacred holidays like Christmas. When referencing religion, comic strips tend to repeat simple plot points of common biblical tales, and even commercial merchandizing is segregated as mainline merchants avoid the products carried by niche religious bookstores. Schulz’s work, however, demonstrates that there is vibrant commercial potential in producing works that are guided by an informed approach to religious content. As described in chapters two and three, Schulz used specific and comparatively atypical biblical content in many of his religious references. In one Christmas strip, for instance, instead of a simple reference to the nativity, Schulz mentions the Garden of Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River (Figure 6.1). Such references are products of Schulz’s educated approach to referential content. “I never draw about anything unless I feel that I have a better than average knowledge of...
my subject,” said Schulz in 1969. It is not that Schulz commanded an expertise on every topic he introduced, sometimes simply calling a doctor friend before introducing a medical idea, for instance, but in the case of religious content he wrote from a position of informed engagement.

Despite having no formal religious training, Schulz was engaged with religious thought for most of his life, and was active in Christian churches for many years. Schulz, known as “Sparky” by family and friends from birth, only attended church for one brief
summer as a child, going with neighborhood kids, as his father, Carl, who always worked late on Saturday nights, would take advantage of his Sundays off by enjoying what Sparky later called his father’s “only recreation, his only sport,” fishing. Sparky was then first drawn to the Church of God when pastor George Edes of St. Paul, Minnesota’s Merriam Park Church of God conducted the funeral service for Sparky’s mother, Dena, after she died of cancer when Sparky was only 20 years old. Edes had been a customer of Sparky’s father, who was a barber, and Sparky began a long relationship with the Church of God after the pastor’s compassionate attention to the family during their difficult time. As a young adult, Sparky found community in the church upon returning from the war, attending a camp meeting at the Anderson, Indiana headquarters in 1949, and even attending at least one, perhaps two, street evangelism sessions with the group. Though Michaelis reports that during this outing Sparky was a “vibrant convert” who was “triumphantly testifying his love of Jesus Christ to the harsh indifference of skid row,” Jeannie hedges back that Sparky may have joined the street preaching trip out of a sense of obligation, having recalled to her that “one of his golf buddies went by and he realized, ‘I don’t belong here; this isn’t what I’m about.’” Whether that was the sentiment he had at the time or a reflective perspective later in life as his resistance to evangelical tactics developed (reflected in his criticisms of apocalyptic rhetoric in his strips from the 1980s) is unclear. Nonetheless, he spent significant time with his religious social circle and felt a close kinship with his Church of God friends, many of them recalling their friendships in the collection of letters, They Called Him Sparky. The church “gave him friendship, gave him a place to be, gave him community,” says
Jeannie.\footnote{601} It also gave him significant exposure to the Bible. Years later, he would return to be awarded an honorary doctorate from the Church of God’s formal institute of study – Anderson University (Figure 6.2).

![Figure 6.2 Charles Schulz (left) awarded an honorary doctorate at the Church of God’s Anderson University in Anderson, IN, by Dr. Robert H. Reardon, college president, June 17, 1963. (Photo: Courtesy of Chicago Tribune Archives. Used with permission of The Schulz Family Intellectual Property Trust).](image)

Schulz’s time with the Church of God instilled in him a love for studying the scriptures. Diligent study was a characteristic of the denomination (in favor of calling itself a movement over a denomination). When they moved to Sebastopol, California in 1958, there was no local Church of God congregation in the area, but Sparky soon found
himself leading an adult Bible class at the Methodist church in town. “A doctor came by our house and brought us some apples and invited me to their Sunday School class at the Methodist Church,” recalled Sparky to Gary Groth, “And like I always do, I speak up too much in those classes, and the next thing I know they invited me to teach a class, which I did for about 10 years.” As a study group facilitated by Schulz, that class read through the entire Bible twice, after which Schulz gave the dozen members of the study each an Abingdon Bible Commentary, one of Schulz’s preferred study aids. Schulz’s library was full of such commentaries and a variety of Bible translations, the portion of his diverse library totaling around 100 books. Reading the commentaries and especially through the Bible itself was important to Schulz for the greater portion of his life. Father Gary Lombardi, one of Sparky’s regular golfing partners and a Catholic priest, fondly remembers his last visit to Schulz before his friend died, during which Schulz asked him to read a few passages from Sparky’s well-worn Bible. “He was a man truly immersed in scripture,” recalled Lombardi at Sparky’s 2000 memorial service, “and it was a living part of his life.”

Schulz’s enduring attention to scripture was a critical part of his engaged approach to theology. It also reflects the way in which one might successfully approach religious content in a mainstream media property; it was one of the means by which Schulz was successful. Integrating spiritual topics into mainstream properties from an informed position provides significant currency to the creative act. It abides by the artist’s call to work on one’s craft as a means of improving content and securing positive audience response. “Writing is part magic, part craft,” describe Jackson and Sweeney in their
guide to journalism. “If you learn all you can about the craft,” they contend, “you enhance your chances of achieving magic at the keyboard.” Part of the craft of creative content generation is to be mentally immersed in the subject matter so that the creator has the best possible understanding of the material from which they may draw. This does not mean that one merely repeats what one has read, but that thick knowledge of a subject increases the likelihood that the new creation will be richly engaging for the audience. T.H. White took this approach, for example, when writing his Arthurian classic *The Once and Future King.* White drew on a vast amount of internalized education he had in Latin, hunting, fishing, carpentry, medieval life, philosophy of warfare, and even the extravagant art of falconry as he molded his lasting tome. The array of accomplished contributors in *Snoopy’s Guide to the Writing Life,* from Danielle Steel to William F. Buckley Jr., each attest to the benefits of attending to one’s craft. Cherie Carter-Scott, author of the best-seller *If Life is a Game, These are the Rules,* for instance, demands, “Know your subject matter like a pro,” underscoring that whether it is through demonstrative testimonials, lived experience, or arduous study, command of subject matter is a critical part in successfully engaging audiences.

A Schulzian approach involves an active investment in the quality of the title’s content. Creative Associate’s Vice President Paige Braddock was even offered her job by Sparky for her espousal of such. In a soap-box style presentation at a national cartooning conference, she tried to impress upon the audience the need to eschew superficial concerns for the newest hook in favor of consciously working to improve one’s craft. “I don’t know what you do,” Sparky said to her after hearing her presentation, “but do you
want a job?" Varyingly robust methods of infusing craft with an informed knowledge base are at times taken up by Hollywood creators who have made the active decision to increase their topical knowledge – CBS executives employ professional forensic scientists as consultants on the crime drama *CSI*, and each branch of the military has had a Hollywood liaison for years to provide guidance to creators. Occasionally, a similar educated approach undergirds spiritual references, such as in the Emmy nominated family drama *Joan of Arcadia* which employed a religion and philosophy consultant. Such an actively informed approach to content decreases the perceived commercial risks by increasing the quality of one’s craft practices.

Additionally, an informed approach is likely to better meet the ethics of humanization, which in turn has the strategic benefit of connecting with audiences. According to Keaten and Soukop, a humanizing pluralism “emphasizes understanding” and a humanizing relativism expresses a “genuine curiosity” about differing perspectives. Similarly, Brockriede’s description of communicative love is only consistent with an informed perspective – care and respect for an other requires sufficient knowledge in order to know how care can and should be actualized. Because of the cultivative power of the entertainment media, even creative storytellers not intending explicit suasion will uphold an ethic of purposeful humanization in the context of possible difference only if they command sufficient knowledge on the topics they include. The effects of an approach to humanizing informedness are likely to include an increased opportunity for audience identification, given that the content will more closely match the real perspectives of those audience members represented. This is especially
true as an increased level of subject knowledge subsequently increases one’s awareness of creative opportunities, thereby decreasing the likely need to trade in superficial or even harmful stereotypes that ostracize and offend. Successful identification, according to Burke, is the critical component to persuasion, and it is an obvious goal for media executives – the more audience members identify with the entertainment property’s content, the more likely they are to view, recommend, and support the program. As Schulz demonstrated through his diverse references to religion, drawn from his deep knowledge of the subject, an informed approach to religious reference allows content creators to more robustly connect to the nuanced spiritual lives of American viewing audience.

An Exploratory Approach

Charles Schulz’s religious identity has been described in an assortment of seemingly irreconcilable ways – from a “devout Christian” to an “avowed atheist.” He is listed not only in the Notable Members section of the Church of God Wikipedia page, but also on the celebatheist.com wiki. Those advancing a Christian identity often reference key points in his biography, such as, “When he returned from war, he began attending church services and studying the Bible,” and “Schulz, who was raised Lutheran, is active with the Church of God.” Others note the street evangelism scene or Schulz’s time leading the Bible class. “Born into a Lutheran family, he was active in the Church of God, a ‘firm believer in Jesus Christ’ as a young adult, and even taught Sunday school in a Methodist church,” described Michael Taube of The Weekly
Standard. Others have made glossing references to the work of Robert Short as indications of Schulz’s intentional theology – “In the ‘Hound of Heaven’ chapter,” describes one Beliefnet writer, “Short shows how Schulz used Snoopy to stand for Christ or ideal Christians.” Robert Short had turned a slide projector presentation on the way Peanuts could be used to illustrate biblical principles into a best-seller, selling over 10 million copies (similar to Rabbi Abraham Twerski’s use of Schulz’s art to demonstrate psychological principles in the therapist’s books on “life’s ups and downs”). A slippage occurs between Short’s strict description of his intentions and the way the book unsurprisingly connects Schulz with a theological perspective: “Our approach to Peanuts, then, will not be one of ‘reading into’ but of ‘reading out of,’” describes Short, continuing that “our concern will not be so much in trying to say what Mr. Schulz has actually put into his cartoons, as in saying what has come out of his cartoons to us.”

The back cover of the thirty-fifth anniversary edition, however, reports Time as saying that the book “… argues not only amusingly but also convincingly that Peanuts indeed has intentional theological significance.” A few years before the publication of Short’s book, which proved lucrative for not only Short who followed with two sequels but also for Sparky as Short toured college campuses giving lectures on the book, Church of God editor Kenneth Hall had written a biography on Sparky for the church’s Upward magazine in which he described Sparky’s life as a “committed Christian.” The write-up included notes on Schulz’s time serving in the Church of God as well as the oft-repeated moralizing note that Sparky “doesn’t drink, smoke, or swear.”

Such
descriptions have persisted across decades, salient items in both major biographies, retaining an understanding of Schulz’s theology as decidedly Christian.

Yet for some fans, uncertainty nonetheless abounds, some going as far as describing Schulz as an atheist. “His faith, like his self-esteem,” posted one blogger, “was nonexistent.”629 After seeing a comic strip originally published in 1976 (Figure 6.3), another blogger writes, “After seeing the strip below, I wondered whether Charles Schulz, the creator of Peanuts, was an atheist. It turns out he was.”630 Other online comments reflect the same belief: “You might want to check your facts. Schultz [sic] was an avowed atheist;”631 and “Even in the overtly religious cartoons […] he’s got a strong strain of… well, if not cynicism something like it. Disillusionment?”632 Such perspectives reflect individual, often anonymous, but yet not uncommon fan interpretation of Schulz’s work, shared on message boards and spread as part of the mythos of Schulz the popular artist. While not relying on the interview data used by the biographers and journalists described above, these depictions add to the disparate and contradictory interpretations of Schulz’s faith by arguing for his atheism.

Charles Schulz was not an atheist (though he was also not a fundamentalist Christian). His own descriptions of his faith, however, have propelled such misunderstandings. Though a well-read lay-theologian, in formal interviews Schulz often spoke only in brief terms about his nuanced religious beliefs. “I do not find it easy to discuss with an interviewer things of a spiritual nature […]; there are too many ‘howeverers’ that need to be spoken when discussing subjects this sensitive,” Schulz wrote in 1975, “and they simply do not come out well in the average magazine or newspaper
He did strike a good rapport, though, with biographer Rheta Grimsley Johnson, whose 1989 biography records Schulz as saying, “I do not go to church anymore, because I could not be an active part of things. I guess you might say I’ve come around to secular humanism, an obligation I believe all humans have to others and the world we live in.” Schulz would later explain that the term “secular humanism” was simply one suggested to him by a friend, Joanne Greenberg, author of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, who thought it fit Sparky’s philosophy of living. His use of the phrase has prompted simple readings of Schulz as abandoning his faith, often simply restated as “Schultz himself claimed later in life to be a secular humanist” in contrast to his earlier affiliation with the Church of God. A variety of factors contributed to Schulz no longer attending church: a lack of a local Church of God congregation, an increasingly demanding schedule, troubles with his first marriage, a variety of affiliations outside of the church that provided socialization, and a sense that he “simply ran out of things to say” after completing two thorough readings of the Bible in the Sunday School class he led at the local Methodist church. His comment about secular humanism, then, was not an atheistic abandonment of faith in the possibility of God, but was a reflection of the developments in his own spiritual life that repositioned him as no longer affiliated with an organized religious community but instead as fulfilling his theological commitments through a perspective on living well in service to others.
Sparky’s relationship to his spiritual beliefs certainly changed over time, but not such that new beliefs became inherently mutually exclusive with older ones. Instead, Schulz’s spiritual life may be best described as an evolving set of nuanced beliefs borne out of his thoughtful commitment to self-reflexivity. His approach to spirituality became more about sincere curiosity and thoughtful exploration than dogmatic doctrinal adherence. This was not a departure from his earlier belief, but rather a natural development of it based upon his inherent cerebrality. Nonetheless, the misconception of a personal crisis of faith has persisted in understandings of a disjointed Schulzian theology (not unlike the ways some have scandalized Mother Teresa’s relationship to her faith as she continued to question and explore in the harder periods of her later life\textsuperscript{638}). In a training session for assistants and docents at the Charles M. Schulz Museum, for instance, one volunteer asked the panel that had been invited to discuss Sparky’s spiritual beliefs, “There is such a difference in Sparky’s thinking on religion when he was with the Church of God in St. Paul and his later years. Did he ever give any of you an idea why he changed his thinking so much? ‘Cause there’s a tremendous difference between what
he originally thought and what he thought in later times.” Jeannie and the other panelists resisted this characterization, Jeannie emphasizing that Sparky retained his appreciation for going to the scriptures and Father Gary Lombardi telling a story of his travel to Assisi with Sparky during with Sparky’s eyes “hooded over” when a brother in the local monastery spoke of the exclusivity of the church. 639 “It was in [Sparky] to have a grasp of the other side, that life is a mystery,” explained Father Lombardi. 640

Maturing naturally over many decades, the inherent exploratory duality in Sparky’s theological ponderings and beliefs can be seen early in his television work, performed in 1965’s A Charlie Brown Christmas and 1966’s It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown. Though he later felt restricted by television – a “tyrannical kind of medium” in which “all too little of [the strip’s] kind of low-key poetry finds its way into the script,” 641 Schulz’s early television titles are a strong reflection of his own pondering voice. “That area [of script writing] was 100 percent Charles Schulz,” says long-time Peanuts producer, Lee Mendelson. 642 In the first of these two classic television specials (separated only by the seldom-remembered summer baseball special Charlie Brown’s All-Stars), Schulz proclaims the theological history of Christmas to be the festival’s “real meaning;” in the second, he questions whether sincere belief is sufficient or if it may at times be painfully misguided. Taken together, these two classic television specials illustrate that even during the time he was teaching Sunday School lessons, Schulz’s own approach to theology was one that allowed for both the possibility of discrete meaning and an openness to pondering the possibility of being wrong.
The same combination is reflected in Snoopy’s theology book title, “Has It Ever Occurred to You that You Might be Wrong?” (Figure 6.3), a question Schulz was fond of asking (and that he had Linus ask in the summer church camp series of 1980, described in chapter two). While the first inclination may be to emphasize Schulz’s focus on beliefs that are “wrong” in these strips, what is more characteristic of Schulz’s theological thought process is that it one should allow additional perspectives to “occur to” oneself as a source for additional thinking on complex matters of such importance. Even Charlie Brown’s search for the “real meaning of Christmas” reflects this same basic premise – “[Schulz] was truly a seeker and a searcher,” described Sparky’s friend professor Larry Meredith who once took a group of theology students to visit Sparky at his studio.643 The blogger concluding that this strip proves Schulz’s atheism thus seems to miss the point – Schulz was applying that prescription for open consideration universally, to fundamentalists, atheists, and all of those in between. Exploration, however, does not preclude establishing findings and footholds, though it does require reflexivity and openness. The possible contemplative duality of belief and a questioning is reflected in Schulz’s flagship specials from the 1960s. Later in life he espoused that same pondering duality, though the natural evolution of his thoughts led him to emphasize priorities differently – he became more vocal in his resistance to bureaucratized religion,644 but he still asked his Catholic friend and Mormon daughter to read scriptures with him,645 he hummed hymns in the studio,646 but he argued that singing songs was not worshipping God, something that could only be achieved through love and service to others.647 Such a theological model of inherent thoughtfulness can serve as a model for not only other lay
and priestly theologians, but also for mass media content creators as spiritual matters are considered in mainstream entertainment properties.

An exploratory approach to spiritual reference in the mainstream media is characterized by nuanced and diverse consideration and a self-reflexive openness often actualized through unresolved questions. Creating content in entertainment texts that is sensitive to moving beyond stale but convenient stereotypes serves the ethical humanizing task of respecting the inherent difference in viewers’ religious experiences. The goal of such a model, though, is not to simply move beyond stereotypes. As Ed Schiappa describes in Beyond Representational Correctness, such negative rejections of media texts based solely on the inclusion of a problematic stereotype is too common and too limited of a response. “The dream of a perfectly Correct Representation is unreachable,” says Schiappa, and “we must recognize that no representation is going to be perfectly accurate, ideologically pure, and innocent of any possible offense.” Instead of dictating the constraints of “correct” portrayals of a particular religious group, a Schulzian model of exploration would tend to leave portrayals more complicated and unresolved. The approach does not presume to speak for representational correctness, recognizing Schiappa’s argument that such can never be achieved. In its move past concern over correct or incorrect stereotypes, an additional benefit of an exploratory approach to spiritual portrayals is that it hedges back against the hegemony of religious privatization cultivated in part by monolithically flat depictions of religious faith as the only salient public portrayal. The explorative tactic of unresolvedness incorporates spirituality as a set of ideas, questions, contradictions, and tensions that the entertainment
narrative can think through but is not compelled to necessarily answer, thus asking audiences to continue the exploration. Schulz performed this aspect of his theology in much of his religious reference, such as in the prayer and abortion strips that yielded significantly different readings (described in chapter two). While that approach limits some of the creator’s persuasive control over the message, a prevalence of such content would move reactions past a resistance to stereotypes and would work toward normalizing the acceptability of religious inquiry outside of private realms.

In the second and third seasons of the Emmy award-winning network drama *The Good Wife*, the writers offer viewers a unique and rich, even if only briefly shown in some episodes, narrative inquiry into the topic of youth faith and conversion. In an arc made salient in two key episodes across the seasons, the likably semi-elite attorney, Alicia Florrick, played by Julianna Margulies, wrestles with her daughter Grace’s foray into religious belief. Grace’s storyline, including a typical innocent-but-sincere youth group friend, a testing of the immediate power of prayer, and a new-cool podcasting preacher, complement the politician father’s own allegedly strategic “finding of religion” by positioning the self-identified atheist mother as a tentatively supportive but ultimately otherized spectator as the teenage daughter independently pursues her own relationship to faith, even undergoing baptism without seeking approval from her family. The meaningful dramatic subplot contains sufficient Schulzian “howevers” that leave the moralizing trajectory unresolved, allowing viewers to engage a provocative issue without requiring them to ascribe to a single uniform perspective. To be clear, though, exploration does not require a relativistic approach in its inclusion of spiritual content.
Schulz’s theology was characteristically reflexive but not relativistic, and media creators have successfully offered open-ended portrayals still couched within a particular spiritual paradigm. In most the of episodes of *Joan of Arcadia*, for instance, the existence of an omniscient and caring God is stipulated, allowing viewers to then contemplate the themes of the problem of evil and one’s relationship to a divine plan. The award-winning comic book mini-series *Kingdom Come* by DC Comics likewise requires a broadly crafted universe explicitly made consistent with Christian prophecy in order to afford the writers the opportunity to then narrate an inquiry into humanity’s need for a supernatural savior. Such efforts are successful because they provide sufficient grounding so that the narrative can support a broader exploration of spiritual affairs, demonstrating the capacity for such content to thrive in other media properties, even beyond the successes of such content in the Schulzian properties.

A Personal Approach

In the late 1940s, Charles Schulz was baptized, and in a 1948 letter to his army buddy Frank Dieffenwierth, Schulz wrote, “I wasn’t a steady churchgoer when you knew me, but I did believe in God. My lack of formal religion was due merely to not knowing better. Now, however, I am right where I belong. I am a firm believer in Jesus Christ.” For Sparky Schulz, religious thought was a deeply personal endeavor. His religious identity was not rooted in membership to a local church congregation, but in his own relationship to spiritual faith, service to others, and a sense of mature gratitude based on a
unique set of beliefs given his understanding of the Bible. In 1963, Schulz wrote in Collegiate Challenge, the magazine of Campus Crusade for Christ,

I accepted Jesus Christ by gratitude. I have always been grateful for the things the Lord has provided me with. [...] What Jesus means to me is this: in Him we are able to see God and to understand His feelings toward us. [...] Recently I published a little series of cartoons on the subject of security. Perhaps the way I feel about Christ is best told in the last cartoon of that series. Linus is kneeling with his arms on his bed, and the caption reads, “Security is knowing you are not alone.”

Three years later, delivering the 1966 commencement address at Saint Mary’s College, Schulz expressed further the way he found his faith to be an intimately personal experience, at times beyond the reach of human utterance:

I would like to use a text from Romans 8:26 as a basis for my thought this morning. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” [...] During this past week, speakers on campuses all across the country have been talking to graduates about many subjects. When we did the Christmas show for television last year, we wanted to do something that would show the children’s search for the true meaning of Christmas, and after days of pondering, I finally decided that every idea we had was an idea that really avoided the essential truth which was that the true
meaning of Christmas could be found only in the Gospel according to
Saint Luke and so we had Linus recite those famous passages. The same
thing is happening here today. No matter what I consider to say, I come
back to a passage in the New Testament that contains a truth in which I
firmly believe. In the last chapter of the Book of John we find Peter and
Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zebedee, and two others who are unnamed
turned back to their old profession of fishing. […]

[…] As we move over the shore of the Sea of Tiberius we find
Peter and his friends returning at dawn from fishing. A figure is standing
on shore by a small charcoal fire. They gather round this fire, none daring
to speak even though they know it is Jesus who has been waiting for them.
Jesus turns to [Simon] Peter, and asks, “Simon, son of John, do you love
me more than these?” Yes, Lord, You know that I love you.” Jesus said to
him, “Feed my Lambs.” Then a second time Jesus asks, “Simon, son of
John, do you love me?” and Peter answers, “Yes, Lord, You know that I
love you.” Jesus said, “Tend my sheep.” Then a third time Jesus turns to
Peter, and asks, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Imagine the flood
of words that could have sprung from Peter’s mouth at this time. The
explanations, the apologies, the tears of anguish, but Peter has a better
answer. It is the answer of supreme faith. “Lord, you know everything;
You know that I love you.”

When the excitement of these days passes away, and when some of the visions begin to grow a little dim; when it becomes impossible to put into words the prayer you want to speak, then we must be able to lift our heads up, and say with all faith as Peter did, “Lord, you know that I love you.”

In this address, Schulz speaks to the view of spirituality as individuated, relying on a unique one-to-one relationship with the divine. One might not have the words with which to pray, or with which to answer questions asked by the divine, but one can rely on a personal relationship to fulfill the requirements and express the necessary sentiments to secure the spiritual relationship. This view of individuated spirituality would drive his later criticisms of bureaucratic, denominational, and mega-church approaches to religion. Schulz’s view of spirituality as personally and not organizationally determined provided the structure through which his idiosyncratic views of Christian faith could develop, making more palatable his use of the term secular humanism as a means of fulfilling a personal obligation to others. In 1977, he repeated the importance of the same scene between Simon Peter and Jesus to interviewer Peter France on BBC’s Everyman program, but then extended his explanation in a deeply informed but perhaps unexpected direction for some mainline Christians whereby strict definitions of what it means to be a “believing Christian” are replaced by an inclusive model of personal inheritance through care for others:

I think we merely have to live with the faith that God understands our heart and that Jesus knows we love Him, and with that faith, simply
carry on through life. [...] In the Book of Acts it says the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved; those people are in the church and they are part of the Kingdom of God, but I think there are people who are outside the Christian church who have to be part of the Kingdom of God, and this is much more important. I am sure that these friends that I’m talking about, and I know they are good people, and they are doing good things for others – I have a host of doctor friends, and they’re marvelous people, and I am convinced they are part of God’s kingdom.

[“Can you be part of the Kingdom of God without knowing it?” asks Peter France] Oh yes. In fact, you may be better off. [Sparky laughs] [...] I think God wants us to be able to stand on our own two feet and not continually pray for his help and his security and every time we venture out of the house we pray God keep me safe. He wants us to go out and live in His world – the world He has given us – and not to hang on to his apron strings.

[“In what way would your life be different if there were no God?” asks Peter France] Oh, I wouldn’t have any idea. Now you’re… that’s beyond me. I don’t know. Who can say? [...] I just have a feeling that the church has taken much away from us. It’s a very difficult thing to define what a “believing Christian” is because the minute I say I’m a believing Christian, then these definitions leap to mind that others might have, and I don’t know what that belief would be. Isn’t it a pity that a
religion which is supposed to draw all of us together simply drives us apart? This is the thing that bothers me so much. [...] 

To me, God does not want to be worshipped, and this is the key to the whole thing. The minute you attempt to worship God in some manner, the minute you approach the altar, the minute you bring Him a gift, the minute you do anything like that, you are substituting love for your fellow man, which is the only way in my way of thinking that God can be worshipped. He can be worshipped only by the love that we show for other creatures. He cannot be worshipped by singing him a song, by writing him a poem, by listening to a preacher preach. This is a substitute. The minute this happens, you are slipping backwards.

[...] In the 25th chapter of Matthew in the 34th verse, Jesus is telling them, [reading from his Bible] “Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was and hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in. Naked and ye clothed me, I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me.” Now here’s the point – “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying ‘Lord, when saw we thee hungered and fed thee or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee?’” See, these people did all of
these things just because this is what you should do for your fellow man. [Reading] “And the king shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.’” And that to me is pure worship. There’s no other way of worship. When it talks about worshipping in spirit and in truth, this is what it is.\footnote{660}

Schulz’s views were not the traditional doctrine, espoused by mainline denominations, even the Church of God movement. “He was a heretic,” half-joked Father Lombardi, years later.\footnote{661} Sparky’s views were directly a product of his personal relationship with Bible study and spiritual thought. This same form of personal connection was demonstrated in his writing, with Charlie Brown praying personal prayers and Linus being alone with his belief in the pumpkin patch. The way Schulz conducted his adult Bible study exhibited the same approach to belief as well. He brought his own knowledge of the Bible (and his Abingdon commentary) with him to the class, but it was not a lecture class, and Schulz did not don the persona of instructor. Rather, he facilitated the discussion among the dozen adults in attendance by having the class members themselves systematically read through the Bible and then discuss what the author of that passage was trying to convey. Paul Schoch, a member of the church who occasionally filled in for Sparky when traveling took him out of town, remembers that Schulz “was pretty quiet; he leaned back and tried to bring out what the students would think.”\footnote{662} “He would not jump on anybody and try to change their mind,” remembers fellow classmate Pete Coleman, “he may try to make a point, but he was not aggressive about it or
According to Schulz “this is the church” – the church was not temples, rituals, or labels, but a small group of individuals personally and sincerely seeking out what the scriptures say and how it might inform their lives.

For Charles Schulz, however, religion may have been personal, but it was not private. While he was uncomfortable with most understandings of evangelism, not wanting to label his own practices as such (though more than one interviewer caught him in the trap of his own work doing the work of preaching), and he feared that reporters would misconstrue his nuanced theology in their short articles, he enjoyed talking about spiritual matters in public. During one of the first times she met Schulz, Creative Associate’s Paige Braddock (whose influential contemporary editorial role in the franchise is described in chapter five) had an unexpected conversation with him about the possible presence of evil as an entity in the world, with similar conversations occasionally occurring between Sparky and the staff in the Creative Associates lunchroom. He would even use theological conversations to his strategic benefit on the golf course, once warning Catholic golfing partner Lombardi as he teed up that up ahead were two water traps, and one was filled with holy water. During another conversation, Sparky humorously interjected to the priest, “so what makes holy water holy, anyway?” “I hate when you ask me those questions,” responded Lombardi (who actually enjoyed the exchanges and to whom Sparky had given a whole series of Bible commentaries).

Though the cultural norm is to avoid discussions of religion, Sparky embraced an approach to religion that was personal but not private, asking provocative questions, and always curious to hear what personal answer others might supply.
The model of a personal-but-not-private approach is key to a Schulzian approach to religious reference in entertainment properties. It may, in fact, be the key component as it relates to this dissertation in that it is diametrically opposed to the historical trend of expunging religious content from mainstream properties. For open-ended exploration to take place, spiritual content simply must be present within mainstream titles. Despite the trend toward secular erasure, throughout this dissertation it has been demonstrated that one can have success while integrating personal questions and interests in religion within a publicly accessed property. As has been discussed in each chapter, one of the ways that such non-private discussions retained a personal connection was through Schulz’s idiosyncratic use of medium. To be most successful, an individuated approach to religious thought through mainstream media requires an openness to the potential of that given medium. Schulz’s revolutionary form of comic art, complete with its enthymematic minimalism and open artistic space invited the participation and personal reader connection. Likewise, the limited animation and free-flowing jazz score of the child characters on television aided the engagement television viewers felt as they prepared to write letters of thanks to Coca-Cola for sponsoring a religiously themed program. Additionally, as chapter five describes, the seemingly generic verse of mass produced greeting cards invites personalization, even as part of a mass distributed artifact dispersed across a varied public.

A personal approach is an approach that affords possible idiosyncratic attention to form and content, and the model is characterized by a preference for nuanced characters and storylines, not flattened stereotypes. “Stories trafficking in prejudices and clichés,”
explains Gregory, “anesthetize our ability to think about the very issues they pretend to illuminate.”\textsuperscript{667} The landscape of mainstream properties is wide open for diverse and atypical references to religion that continue the successful trends of meaningful moments of spirituality performed by others – from Phylicia Rashad singing a spiritual hymn at a historically black college as the successful Claire Huxtable on The Cosby Show\textsuperscript{668} to characters on Grey’s Anatomy struggling with the intersections of sexuality and religious belief.\textsuperscript{669} Writers need not trade in routine portrayals simply out of convenience or institutional tradition, but should strive for compelling storylines that explore through substantive engagement issues of spirituality. By attending to the idiosyncratic opportunities within a given medium, content creators can maximize the likelihood for meaningful personal connection between participatory audience members and well-crafted religious reference.

As Orcutt and Rushkoff describe, the comic medium’s gutter is inherently primed for such personal connection.\textsuperscript{670} Within television broadcasting, the genre of reality programming has allowed for successful integration of comparatively high amounts of religious content.\textsuperscript{671} This is because not only does the pseudo-documentary style provide a strategic perceptual distance between the producers and their content as merely reported event, but also because the casting procedures invite diversity across specific character-types, including religious characters. The Emmy award-winning\textsuperscript{672} Survivor, for instance, occasionally includes religious content attached to individual personalities that viewers can love or hate, such as in the 2012 fall season during which former Facts of Life child-star Lisa Welchel struggles to strike a balance as demands of in-game treachery
collide with her religious convictions and her own emotional history. By casting Welchel and editing in her religious narrative, the producers are able to maximize the character-type conventions of the genre in ways that allow for meaningful spiritual content that many viewers at home are likely to identify with. The mere presence of a religious character, of course, is insufficient to garner robust viewer endearment, as audience savvy produces idiosyncratic discernment between likable and unlikable characters, but Welchel’s success on the show – being voted by the home viewers as the season’s *Sprint Player of the Season* – speaks to the potential for potent audience identification with a character whose personal spiritual journey is allowed to unfold on the screen. If such inclusions trend across programs, they can cultivate within viewers a sense of openness through which individuals can personally relate to spiritual issues within public contexts without the fear of privatized censure. Like the openness of an idealized Habermasian ethical paradigm, a Schulzian approach to content creation encourages such.

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At his memorial service in 2000, one of Schulz’s 18 grandchildren played the hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer” on the piano as the large crowd of family and celebrity-friends gathered to personally mourn their loss and publicly celebrate the life of Charles M. “Sparky” Schulz. This was one of three sacred hymns included in the service, joining “In the Garden” and “Softly and Tenderly” sung by local vocalist Carol Menke. Before
Sparky became terminally ill, Jeannie had taped the names of these three songs to the bathroom mirror after Sparky had told her he wanted them at his memorial. “She’s planning my funeral already!” a then-healthy Sparky would joke. Like the note itself, reminding Jeannie of Sparky’s interests, the inclusion of these hymns at his memorial marked Schulz’s life as one that was invested in a personal connection to spiritual thought. The embossed cross on his military grave marker does the same, as do his fifty years of Peanuts work populated with nuanced and unique references to theological thought and practice.

Like the examples his creative works provide, Schulz’s approach to theology provides a useful model for considering how religious references may be included within mainstream media properties in viable and ethically humanizing ways. This Schulzian approach to faith in mainstream entertainment media titles is characteristically informed, exploratory, and personal but not private. By attending to their craft and immersing themselves in sufficient knowledge of spiritual matters, writers can create informed and engaging content that audiences can identify with and support. Through open-ended exploratory practices, such as evolving questions and topical references without singular answers, titles can avoid risk and prompt interrogation of important issues while still positioning themselves within a particularly chosen paradigm of belief. As these approaches remain personal and idiosyncratic, the drive to trade in stale stereotypes may be discouraged, instead allowing nuanced portrayals to be a part of public, participatory media landscape. Schulz’s Peanuts franchise proves the potential for success using this approach, and the host of other examples throughout this chapter and the preceding ones
demonstrates the same – at times even with religious references more potent, salient, and provocative than Schulz’s.

The broad body of *Peanuts* works provides an effective access point by which to consider references to religion across mainstream media landscapes. Since early in the twentieth-century, the American culture has resisted public expression of religious belief and practice. Entertainment media, from comic strips to television and merchandizing products, reflect the public/private : secular/sacred split – what Charles Taylor describes as an emptying of religion from public spaces. As potent components in the American religio-secular public sphere, the entertainment narratives cultivate and reinforce this normative split by framing religion as unacceptable outside of the private sphere. This is accomplished in large part due to the sheer absence of overt spiritual affairs from most mainstream properties. When present, references to such belief and practice are often cast in flat, limited manners that do not reflect the statistical data of actual historical American viewing publics. Yet, this study of Schulz’s religion, his theological interests integrated throughout his varied work, demonstrates the viability of religious engagement by mainstream narrative franchises in the public marketplace. Individual media forms and genres uniquely give rise to opportunities and constraints – comic strips invite powerful reader participation but with the tradeoff of the artist abandoning complete control over persuasive directionality; television programs beam influential characters into households each week, and the mere presence of religious settings and references can work toward normalizing religious discourse in public arenas, but conventions of certain genres like Christmas programming may surprisingly push back against the inclusion of
content that abandons a baseline call for universalism; and product merchandising is heavily guarded by commercial interests as the financial driver of many franchises, yet the display and modification potential in the products makes possible the means to hedge back against the hegemony of privatization of interests otherwise relegated to realms of counter-cultures. These efforts to explore issues of faith in the mainstream media afford rich opportunities to engage issues of great importance. Perhaps as disciplinary lines of publicity are challenged through such media texts, those who would otherwise trade in erasures and flattened stereotypes will ask themselves, “Has it ever occurred to me that I might be wrong?”
**APPENDIX**

**LIST OF PEANUTS ANIMATED SPECIALS**
(with listed awards)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NETWORK</th>
<th>RELEASE/ PREMIERE DATE</th>
<th>AWARDS/ NOMINATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>A Charlie Brown Christmas</em></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>December 9, 1965 (Thursday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Children’s Program (Winner); Special Classification of Individual Achievement – Charles Schulz /writer (Nominee); Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Charlie Brown’s All-Stars</em></td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>June 8, 1966 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Children’s Program (Nominee); Special Classification of Individual Achievements – Charles Schulz /writer (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 27, 1966 (Thursday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Children’s Program (Nominee); Special Classification of Individual Achievements – Bill Melendez /director (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Broadcast Network</td>
<td>Date/Time</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>You're In Love, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>June 12, 1967 (Monday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Achievement in Children’s Programming – Lee Mendelson (Nominee); Special Classifications of Individual Achievements – Charles Schulz /writer (Nominee); Special Classifications of Individual Achievements – Bill Melendez/director (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s Your Dog, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>February 14, 1968 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Achievement in Children’s Programming – Lee Mendelson/producer (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 27, 1969 (Saturday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Air Date</td>
<td>Emmy:</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Play it Again, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>March 28, 1971 (Sunday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Achievement in Children's Programming – John Scott Trotter/music director (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Snoopy Come Home</em></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>CBS, films; CBS</td>
<td>Original Theatrical Release July 14, 1972 (Friday); Broadcast Network Premiere/CBS November 5, 1976 (Friday)</td>
<td>Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain: Best Children's Film (Winner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 29, 1972 (Sunday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Achievement in Children's Programming – Charles Schulz/writer (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving</em></td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 20, 1973 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Individual Achievement in Children's Programming – Charles Schulz/writer (Winner); Outstanding Children's Special (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It’s a Mystery, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>February 1, 1974 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It’s the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>April 9, 1974 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Children's Special (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Emmy:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>January 28, 1975 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Children's Special (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're a Good Sport, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 28, 1975 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Children's Special (Winner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's Arbor Day, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>March 16, 1976 (Tuesday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Children's Special (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race For Your Life, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Original Theatrical Release:Paramount; CBS/HBO May 12, 1978 (Friday); Premium Cable Release/HBO May 12, 1978 (Friday); Broadcast Network Premiere/CBS November 3, 1979 (Saturday)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It's Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 24, 1977 (Monday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You're the Greatest, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>March 19, 1979 (Monday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>February 25, 1980 (Monday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Original Theatrical Release</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown</em> (And Don’t Come Back!)</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Paramount; CBS/HBO</td>
<td>Theatrical Release June 13, 1980; Premium Cable Release/HBO June 6, 1981 (Saturday); Broadcast Network Release/CBS May 7, 1985 (Tuesday);</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life is a Circus, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 24, 1980 (Friday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Winner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Someday You’ll Find Her, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 30, 1981 (Friday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee); Outstanding Individual Achievement in Animated Programming – Phil Roman/director (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Charlie Brown Celebration</em></td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>May 24, 1982 (Monday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Is This Goodbye, Charlie Brown?</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>February 21, 1983 (Monday)</td>
<td>Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>It’s an Adventure, Charlie Brown</em></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>May 16, 1983 (Monday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Awards</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>May 30, 1983 (Monday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee); Peabody Award for excellence in broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Flashbeagle, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>April 16, 1984 (Monday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy’s Getting Married, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>March 20, 1985 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 6, 1985 (Wednesday)</td>
<td>Young Artist Award: Exceptional Young Actors in Animation Series, Specials, or Feature Film – Jeremy Scott Reinbolt (Nominee); Exceptional Young Actress in Animation Series Specials or Feature Film – Tiffany Reinbolt (Nominee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happy New Year, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>January 1, 1986</td>
<td>Young Artist Award: Exceptional Young Actress in Animation Series Specials or Feature Film – Kristie Baker (Winner); Exceptional Young Actors in Animation Series, Specials, or Feature Film – Chad Allen (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's the Girl in the Red Truck, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 27, 1988</td>
<td>Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program – One Hour or Less (Nominee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy's Reunion</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>May 1, 1991</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 27, 1992</td>
<td>Young Artist Award: Outstanding Young Voice-Over in an Animated Series or Special – John Christian Grass (Nominee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>It Was My Best Birthday Ever, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Direct-to-Video</td>
<td>August 5, 1997 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's the Pied Piper, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Direct-to-Video</td>
<td>September 12, 2000 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Charlie Brown Valentine</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>February 14, 2002 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie Brown’s Christmas Tales</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>December 8, 2002 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Must Be Traded, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>August 29, 2003 (Sunday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>December 9, 2003 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s a Bully, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>November 20, 2006 (Monday)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Happiness is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>FOX</td>
<td>November 24, 2011 (Thursday); First Released on Video on March 29, 2011</td>
<td>Young Artist Award: Best Performance in a Voice-Over Role Young Actress – Grace Rolek (Winner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is America, Charlie Brown (MiniSeries)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>---The Mayflower Voyagers</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 21, 1988 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Network</td>
<td>Air Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Birth of the Constitution</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 28, 1988 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 4, 1988 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NASA Space Station</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 11, 1988 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Building of the Transcontinental Railroad</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>February 10, 1989 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Inventors</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>March 10, 1989 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Smithsonian and the Presidency</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>April 19, 1989 (Friday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Music and Heroes of America</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>May 23, 1989 (Tuesday)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show (Saturday Morning Series) |      |         |                             |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Air Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy’s Cat Fight</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 17, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy: Team Manager</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 24, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linus and Lucy</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 1, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy vs. the World</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 8, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linus’ Security Blanket</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 15, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy: Man’s Best Friend</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 22, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emmy: Outstanding Animated Program (Nominee); Young Artist Award: Best Family Animation Series or Special (Winner); Outstanding Young Actress – Gini Holtzman/animation voiceover (winner); Outstanding Young Actor – Jeremy Schoenberg/animation voiceover.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Broadcast Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy the Psychiatrist</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 29, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Can’t Win, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 5, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lost Ballpark</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 12, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy’s Football Career</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 19, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaos In the Classroom</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>November 26, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s that Team Spirit, Charlie Brown</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>December 3, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Loves Schroeder</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>December 10, 1983 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy and the Giant</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 14, 1985 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy’s Brother Spike</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 21, 1985 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoopy’s Robot</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>September 28, 1985 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppermint Patty’s School Days</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 5, 1985 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally’s Sweet Babboo</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>October 12, 1985 (Saturday)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES AND NOTES

1 Parenthood: “Family Portrait” NBC (September 11, 2012).
6 Lost. ABC (2004-2010).
12 Monte Schulz, “Regarding Schulz and Peanuts” 60.
14 Monte was given the opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies in the book but refused, given that he disagreed so vehemently with the thesis of the book. As his sister Amy recounts, “these are just factual details, but they're not personal. And, yes, we could help David correct the factual errors, and then he would leave the whole negative twist to the book, and then be able to say, 'Well, they corrected the book,’ when, in fact, he wasn't willing to correct the feeling that came across in the book. That would be impossible.” Qtd. in CBS News “Peanuts Creator’s Daughter Defends Him” Interview Transcript from The Early Show (February 22, 2009) available online: http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-500186_162-3360979.html.
15 Andrew Bagnato, “NCAA Sued Over Ban on End Zone Prayers” Chicago Tribune (September 1, 1995).
Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere” section 5.
30 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” in Craig Calhoun (ed.) Habermas and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 109-142.
33 The PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, “‘Nones on the Rise.”
38 Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?”
39 The PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, “‘Nones on the Rise.”
40 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, 1.
50 Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics.
51 Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*.
52 Bridget Meyer and Annelies Moors, *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*.
53 Jacque Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!”
64 Robert M. Entman, “Representation and Reality in the Portrayal of Blacks on Network Television News” *Journalism Quarterly* 71.3 (1994), 509-520.
75 Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?” 143.
Dancing with the Stars, ABC (January 27, 2006).

“Inteligência and American Bible Society First Amendment Poll Finds Majority of Americans Want Religion and Values Television Entertainment.” IBOPE inteligencia (December 1, 2006).


Supernatural: “The Magnificent Seven” CW (October 4, 2007).

Dane Claussen, Sex, Religion, Media (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002)


Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box.”


Erika Engstrom and Beth Semic, “Portrayal of Religion in Reality TV Programming.”


Patricia Spyer, “Media and Violence in an Age of Transparency: Journalistic Writing on War-Torn Maluku” In Bridget Meyer and Annelies Moors, Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere, 152-165.

See the following reports about the attacks and the video titled “Innocence of Muslims.” Ross Douthat, “Offensive Video Not Cause of Violence,” The Omaha World Herald (September 18, 2012); David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Myers “Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.” The New York Times (September 12, 2012); Adil Jawad, “‘Innocence of Muslims’ Protests: New Demonstrations in Pakistan Against Anti-Islam Film” The Huffington Post (September 30, 2012).


Michele Rosenthal, “Turn it Off!: TV criticism in the Christian Century magazine.” In Stewart M.
Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.) Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media.

110 Douglas Estes, SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).
112 “Tales of Vishnu” Amar Chitra Katha Animation DVD (2010).
114 M. Thomas Inge, Comics as Culture, 104.
115 Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.) Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media; Bridget Meyer and Annelies Moors Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere.
119 Hayden White, “The Fictions of Factual Representation.”
120 Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.) Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media, 18-20.
121 In fact it did generate a Fall 2012 course at Clemson University, taught by the author, investigating the public contest that narrative entertainment media depictions of religion solicits, titled COMM 405: Public Contest (Religion & Media).
132 Schulz won his first Reuben award in 1955 and his second in 1964, making him the first person to win two of the prestigious awards by the National Cartoonist Society. The society also awarded him the 1980 Elzie Segar award and posthumously awarded him the 1999 Milton Caniff Lifetime Achievement Award.
133 In late 1999, when Schulz was struggling with cancer, an associate at his office completed some of the lettering on the final strips.
134 For a complete cast list with debut dates, see: Derrick Bang, “Meet the Gang” FiveCentsPlease.org.
137 M. Thomas Inge, Comics as Culture, xi.
138 The term “yellow journalism” refers to sensationalist journalistic practices that are more concerned with attracting readership than reporting substantive or timely information for the betterment of the readers.
139 Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi), 6-12.
140 Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies, 7.
141 Used with permission. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library.
142 Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies, 11.
143 Schulz’s dream was not an aspenential one filled with grand visions of lofty success or generous philanthropy; even at that early age he simply wanted to draw funny pictures. See Charles Schulz. People are Talking. Interview by Ann Fraser and Ross McGowan. (KPIX, 1984). Television.
146 Schulz’s bold lines did take on a wavering characteristic later in life as his health began to be a struggle.
150 Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 164.
152 Peanuts November 4 – December 7, 1974
154 Not only are there similar expressive similarities between Krazy Kat and Peanuts, but Schulz himself said that Herriman’s work made an impact, saying, “I really liked the things that [Roy Crane] did [with Wash Tubbs and Captain Easy], and I wanted to do something of that kind myself for a long time. Later, George Herriman’s Krazy Kat had a great influence on me, as did, of course, Al Capp and Milt Caniff. And I particularly enjoyed Out Our Way... a great panel.” (Lee Mendelson, Charlie Brown and Charlie Schulz (New York: New American Library, 1971), 54.
155 Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 39.

376
Schulz enjoyed drawing with pen and ink and lamented that the reproduction process from large strip board to newspaper page lost much of the artistic nuance in the rendering (Charles Schulz, *Jubilee*, 173).


Douglas Rushkoff, “Foreword: Looking for God in the Gutter” in A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kraemer (eds.) *Graven Images*, ix-xii, see ix.


Derrida makes a similar claim in his essay “Above All, No Journalists!” in which he argues that the appearance of visuality on the television screen seemingly immediately before the audience but always mediated in a forgotten fashion is itself an actualization of religious desire – to connect immediately to a mediated being beyond. Source: in Hent DeVries and Samuel Weber (eds.), *Religion and Media*, 56-93.


Recalled by Lucy Caswell, member of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center board. Source: Susan Wittstock, “Fifty Years of Peanuts” *onCampus: The Ohio State University Faculty Staff Information Hub*, 30.3 (September 14, 2000). http://oncampus.osu.edu


Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?”
Richard F. Wolff, “Prime Time Television’s History of the American Church.”

These secular usages were for the following terms: moral, hypocrite, blessings, spiritual, martyr, and the phrase bless you. Each were used in a-religious manners, such as the November 23, 1960 strip where Lucy calls Snoopy a hypocrite and the December 12, 1972 strip where Lucy laments that she must “suffer martyrdom.”

In 1967, Schulz said that he could not remember how the Great Pumpkin had exactly become an idea, saying, “I can’t remember exactly. I know I was drawing some Halloween strips about Linus, who is bright but very innocent and he was confusing Halloween and Christmas because he was one holiday ahead of himself.” Source: Mary Harrington Hall, “A Conversation with Charles Schulz: or the Psychology of Simplicity” Psychology Today (January, 1968), 19-21, 66-69, reprinted in M. Thomas Inge (ed.), Conversations, 45-62, see 60. See: Peanuts, October 25, 1960. According to Michaelis, Schulz received a letter once from a woman who thought the Great Pumpkin strips were sacrilegious, which Schulz reportedly responded to by saying that he had been trying to show that Santa Claus was sacrilegious through the Great Pumpkin storylines. Source: David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts: A Biography.


Schulz reports that Short was quite surprised when Schulz told him that he had not thought of that before (Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 97).

“Snoopy vs. the Red Baron,” (Laurie Records, 1967); “Snoopy and His Friends,” (Laurie Records, 1967).


Stephen J. Lind, “Reading Peanuts.”


Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 99.


According to Lindsey and Hereen, “the most common and repeatedly used Biblical narratives that become objects for cartoonists’ pens are the accounts of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Noah and the flood, and Moses in his role as recipient of the Ten Commandments.” (75).


Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 99.

Leonard Greenspoon, “The Bible in the Funny Papers” 32.


Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 129.

Comic Book Code. The last remaining publisher withdrew from the Comics Authority in 2011 and each now follows its own internal codes of publishing.

According to Schulz, at that time the syndicates were “terrified of editors.” Source: Gary Groth, “Schulz at 3 O’Clock in the Morning” Comics Journal 200 (December 1997), 3-48, reprinted in M. Thomas Inge (ed.), Conversations, 167-275, see 256.

Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 175-176.

Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 176.


Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 175.

David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts, 427.


Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 131.

The author of this dissertation attended Liberty University, the Christian university founded by Jerry Falwell, and met on him on several occasions. He was a generous and warm individual, even if prone to speak before he thought through his ideas.

Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 131.

Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies, 216.


David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts, 188-189.


Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 99.


Harvey describes the similarities between the strips saying, “As in Schulz’s strip, the comedy in Hart’s was original, inventive, and highly individual, and the reader finds again the devices and techniques made familiar to him in Peanuts—artwork deceptively simple, personality traits sharpened nearly to the point of eccentricity, repetition of set prices, the running gag, animals with human aspirations.” (Robert C. Harvey, “Johnny Hart to Appear B.C.” The Comics Journal (March 22, 2012)).

Robert C. Harvey, “Johnny Hart to Appear B.C.”

Pearls Before Swine, June 24, 2012.


interview, see: http://freethunk.net/reverend-fun/reverend-fun-interview.php


Donald B. Lindsey and John Hereen, “Where the Sacred Meets the Profane.”

Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 176.


Peanuts October 25, 1987; October 27, 29-30, 1996.

Peanuts September 30, 1960; November 29, 1993; February 1, 1996.


David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts, 353.

Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 130.


Charles Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 172.


As a merchandized brand Peanuts earned $20 million by 1967, $50 million by 1969, and $150 million by 1971. (David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts, 387). In 2010, the brand was acquired by a new holding group for the cost of $175 million and is estimated to generate over $2 billion annually (Chavon Sutton, “Good grief: Peanuts gang rights sold for $175 million” CNNMoney. 27 Apr. 2010. Web. 16 May 2012).


For more on interaction as a key to a public see Peter Dahlgren, Television and the Public Sphere. For more on common texts as key to a public see Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics.

Schulz’s content was not typically overtly provocative but in the case of religious reference he did meet resistance from executives (Lee Mendelson, A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Making of a Tradition, 40).


See chapter two, also Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies, 238.


Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics, 60-93.


Robert C. Harvey, The Art of the Funnies.
“Together Again: A Peanuts Voice-Cast Reunion”  Snoopy’s Reunion.  The voices were routinely associated with the characters because of the attempts at fidelity to the original archetypes over the years, sometimes achieved by hiring siblings to play the roles as the previous actor’s voice changed with age. Gabrielle DeFaria and her brother Chris DeFaria, for instance, both played Peppermint Patty.

For examples of fan identification with individual characters see fan responses on the YouTube channel “I'MaLucy” at www.YouTube.com/ImALucy.  For analysis of fan responses to characters see Stephen J. Lind, “Reading Peanuts.”

“Charlie Brown: Peanuts to You!” (June 9, 1966 late edition, reprinted June 10, 1966, B11).  It should be noted that Charlie Brown’s All-Stars were given a strong 8:30 timeslot, up against two documentaries (not must-see programming) and airing between hit CBS shows Lost in Space at 7:30 and Green Acres at 9:00. In his negative New York Times review, Jack Gould also acknowledged that “cartoons obviously are going to have a place in the future of television,” but Charlie Brown’s All-Stars left something to be desired as “the drawings themselves lacked the all-important element of humor.” The show was nonetheless nominated for an Emmy and was followed months later by the blockbuster It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown.  (“TV Review: Charlie Brown and His Friends Visit C.B.S.” 9 Jun. 1966).

The episodes contained several shorts largely generated directly from the comic strip content, unlike the other animated specials which often included larger stories or contexts written to make a larger narrative arc.  The shorts are all visually labeled in the episode, much as if someone were turning to a new series in the newspaper.  Creative Associates gave names to each of the episodes for cataloging purposes, which is how they are labeled in Table 3.1.  The episodes have been released for digital download on iTunes and Amazon Instant Video but they are labeled by episode number not name, and the number is based on their production order which is not the same as their airdate order.  In Table 3.1 these episodes are arranged by production order.

Happiness is a Warm Puppy, Charlie Brown was aired on television November 24, 2011 (FOX) and Snoopy Come Home was aired on television November 5, 1976 (CBS).

The one exception occurs in The Smithsonian and the Presidency when an actual archival photograph of a minister wearing a clerical collar while selling apples is shown as Peppermint Patty and Franklin explain how during the Great Depression people would sell apples one at a time in order to make a dollar a day. Franklin says, “All kinds of people sold apples just to survive – ministers, housewives, business men...”

296 Berkowitz and Rogers, “A Priming Effect Analysis of Media Influences” 59.

297 Catherine R. Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere.”

298 Other short but important references occur, for instance, in *The Building of the Transcontinental Railroad* (CBS, February 10, 1989) when the difficult conditions for the Chinese labor force and the destruction to the Native American culture are acknowledged as part of the railway expansion. *The Music and Heroes of America* (CBS, May 23, 1989) also contains further explanation of the ongoing struggles for African American communities caused by slavery and segregation.


302 Repetition of sketches and gags across the animated titles is not uncommon, not unlike the repetition found across the 50 years of strips.

303 Quotation from *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show* iteration of this sketch.

304 Psalm 35:1, 15b, King James Version, adapted.

305 Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box.”


308 *Merry Melodies*: “Hare Trimmed” Warner Bros. Pictures (June 20, 1953).

309 Linus does not actually get the chance to read this verse from John 2:1 (King James Version) because the wedding gets called off when Snoopy’s poodle fiancé, Genevieve, runs off with a Golden Retriever in *Snoopy’s Getting Married*.


312 Charles Schulz, qtd. in M. Thomas Inge (ed.), *Conversations* 126.

313 Craig Schulz, personal interview, Santa Rosa, CA, November 4, 2011.


319 *American Dad*: “Rapture’s Delight.” FOX (December 13, 2009).

320 *South Park*: “Probably.” Comedy Central (July 26, 2000).


322 David Michaelis, *Schulz and Peanuts*, 385.


382
Charlie Brown’s All-Stars; It’s Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown, CBS (October 24, 1977); A Boy Named Charlie Brown.

The Building of the Transcontinental Railroad.

The Music and Heroes of America.


It’s Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown.

A Charlie Brown Christmas.

The song “O mio babbino caro” from Puccini’s opera “Gianni Schicchi” containing the word Dio in the line “O Dio, vorrei morir!” (translated “Oh God, I'd like to die!”) is whistled by Woodstock in She’s a Good Skate, Charlie Brown, CBS (February 25, 1980) and sung by Mimi in the direct-to-video program It Was My Best Birthday Ever, Charlie Brown ( Paramount Home Video, 1997).

It’s Christmastime Again, Charlie Brown

Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown (and Don’t Come Back!!)

What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?


In the non-televised special It’s Spring Training, Charlie Brown (later released on video in 1996 by Paramount Home Video), Charlie Brown says wearing his cap the night before a baseball game is “superstition.” In It Was My Best Birthday Ever, Charlie Brown, the enchanting little girl in the garden, Mimi, says to an enamored Linus, “There’s a wonderful Chinese proverb that says, ‘He who plants a garden plants happiness.’”


For a retelling of the production story of the show, see Lee Mendelson, A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Making of a Tradition, 33.


Qtd. in M. Thomas Inge (ed.), Conversations, 107-108.

The dominance of A Charlie Brown Christmas’s success in the Christmas specials genre is demonstrated by through its annual re-airing on television since its initial release (second in annual repeats only to Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer which was released the year before), the decades of advertisement that package it as a “classic” (often along with other animated programs, like How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, and Frosty the Snowman), and persistent parodies across other programming (For more on parodies, see chapter five).


Ibid., 24.


Many more would likely be surprised, though, by the historical context in which the celebration originated, connected to numerous global traditions and especially related to responses to pagan winter solstice festivals. See: Susan K. Roll, Toward the Origins of Christmas (Kampen, Netherlands: Peeters, 1995); and Cyril Charles Martindale, “Christmas” The Catholic Encyclopedia 3 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1908).

Lee Mendelson, Charlie Brown and Charlie Schulz, 156.


Lee Mendelson’s first production was The Innocent Fair, which led to a history series on San Francisco called San Francisco Pageant, which earned Mendelson a Peabody Award. Mendelson also produced a successful documentary about Willy Mays before joining Schulz on the documentary about Schulz’s work that led Coca-Cola to buy into an animated special. See: Marc Greilamser, “Life After Snoopy.” Stanford Magazine, (November/December, 1997).

In 1941, Melendez signed with Leon Schlesinger Cartoons. That company became Warner Bros. Cartoons, and Melendez animated many famous shorts including Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and others. He went on to direct industrial films and over 1,000 television productions for Playhouse Pictures, also being recognized at international film festivals like Cannes and Edinburg – all before joining as animator/director/producer for the Peanuts specials. See: “Bill’s Bio” at BillMelendez.TV and “Bill Melendez” at IMDB.com.


Successful mainstream entertainer Tyler Perry has recently reflected on similar contemporary resistance. See: Roland Martin, “Commentary: Hollywood and God can Co-Exist.”


Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media, 7.

Mark Hampton, “Media Studies and the Mainstreaming of Media History.” Media History, 11.3 (2005) 239-246; qtd. 239.


Joanna Wilson, Tis the Season TV, iv, ii.

See Note 415.

Joanna Wilson, Tis the Season TV, i.

Diane Werts, Christmas on Television (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).


Engel v. Vitale.


May 2012.

380 Mark G. Toulouse, “The Muddled Middle: Protestantism’s Encounter with Homosexuality since the 1960s.” In Sex, Religion, Media, Dane S. Claussen (ed.), 43-64.

381 Michele Rosenthal, “‘Turn it Off!’” 140.


383 Decree On The Apostolate Of The Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem), (November 18, 1965), ch. II.


386 Billy Graham was one of the early (and few) pioneers, first testing the television medium in 1951 as a new medium for his The Hour of Decision radio show. The show ran for three years. It was during the late 50s and 60s, though, that he established his successful formula for the television medium, filming his crusades and airing them quarterly as primetime specials. See: Stewart M. Hoover and J. Jerome Lackamp, “Religion on Television” and “Billy Graham Crusades” The Encyclopedia of Television.

387 Richard Wolff, The Church on TV, 7.


389 Michele Rosenthal, “‘Turn it Off!”


399 See chapter three for a discussion of later views on character influence in narratives, especially Marshall Gregory, Shaped by Stories.


403 Joanne Beckman, “Religion in Post-World War II America.”


406 Tom Genova, “Television History – The First 75 Years.”


See Figures 3.1-3.3 for examples of print advertisements with television sponsors listed.

Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box.” And Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?”


Though Wikipedia is the subject of significant academic debate regarding its credibility and usefulness, this study is exactly the type of scholarly endeavor for which Wikipedia is highly useful. A list of thousands of television titles would be a considerable undertaking for any one scholar, and obscure programming or forgotten titles may not be found. Crowd-sourcing the list increases the likelihood that all of the possible episodes will be listed, easing the burden of error from any one researcher. The large number of contributors ensures that episodes are not purposefully omitted, and any wrongfully included episode will easily be spotted during the coding process once a sample is chosen, if not initially removed by the crowd of users. The validity of the online list simply requires that contributors have knowledge of a popular culture text’s existence, not that they have expertise in it – so the likelihood that Wikipedia contributors have sufficient knowledge to create a reliable database for this subject is very high. Even further, as James Surowiecki contends in *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Random House, 2004), large groups of individuals are often more likely to generate accurate information than single elite sources. This seems especially true when generating mere records of facts, as in the lists here. Even if Wikipedia’s list is not complete, it still serves as a definable population, which is itself a sampling of the “real” population from the 1960s. Joanna Wilson’s encyclopedia of Christmas episodes, *Tis the Season*, would seem to be either a desirable replacement or a supplement to the online list, but she admits that her text is not a complete catalogue. Additionally, her 700 page text is arranged alphabetically, not chronologically, and combing through pages for dates in the 1960s is accomplished more easily in a digital text like Wikipedia than a printed one.


Even if a need for segmentation exists, such could still be done with the findings as coding/analysis would be conducted identically for each segmented sample. The only difference in a segmented approach would exist if a programming type were excluded, allowing for more of another type to be studied. No significant reason was seen for doing such in this study.

For instance, an episode of Kentucky Jones could not be viewed because both CBS and NBC claimed the other network had the distribution rights to the program in personal correspondences, resulting in neither allowing access to the episode (which is not on DVD or posted online).


A distinction to this exclusion was made when coding the episode of *Rawhide*, as a small statue of Saint Nicholas, “the first Santa Clause” was presented to a character. The references was to the saint, however, not only the character of Santa, and the references was included in the coding of “other religious references” (Table 4.3).

The wide possible diversity in type of actualized reference makes determining an appropriate measure to account for all possibilities that could then be used for responsible comparison unsound. Even if distinct measurement categories were established, responsible quantitative comparison between number of prayers per episode, number of sacred carols without lyrics, and an image of a nativity scene would be impossible. Further studies may focus on particular aspects in order to generate statistical comparisons in more depth.

See chapter one.

See chapter one.

See chapter three for a discussion of presence and cross iconography.

Advertising compounded the problems of perception across television. In *The Hollywood Palace*, for instance, after a performance of “Stille Nacht” (“Silent Night”) on the very guitar that Franz Gruber used to write the song, the program cut to a commercial break advertising Schlitz Beer.

John Carey, “The Evolution of TV Viewing.” *Media and Communication Industries: Professor John*

The episode of The Lucy Show is comprised of several humorous scenes – the wrapping of presents, the purchasing of a tree, the choir practice, and the choir performance. The episode of Julia is based primarily on an argument between Cory and his friend over whether Santa Clause is black or white.

The similarities between the Davey and Goliath special and A Charlie Brown Christmas are striking – a boy and his anthropomorphic dog star in a special about the boy searching for the meaning of Christmas while putting on a play, visiting the tree lot, and being wished a “Merry Christmas!” by a group of friends to close the show. Barring definitive evidence, though, such must simply be a coincidence, given that each aired during the 1965 Christmas season, and were generated out of relatively small production teams.

Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?”

Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box.”


Additionally, Hewitt contends that the U.S. experienced a nostalgia for the Victorian Age in the 1970s, which may account for an increased interest in “real” (or at least “real looking”) trees.


See Note 430.


Joanna Willson, Tis the Season TV, 117.

In fact, if the “greeting wars” are any indication, secularizing Christmas too far may excite more dissent than the reverse, a 2006 Zogby poll indicating that 95 percent of shoppers were not offended when greeted by “Merry Christmas” while 46 percent were offended by “Happy Holidays.” See: “Zogby Poll: ‘Happy Holidays’ Strikes Out.” IBOPE inteligencia, (December 6, 2006).
The survey was conducted in conjunction with the American Bible Society and polled 9,095 respondents in the interactive poll titled “What Is More Offensive on Television: Religion or Sex and Violence?” See: “Inteligência and American Bible Society First Amendment Poll Finds Majority of Americans Want Religion and Values Television Entertainment.” IBOPE inteligência (December 1, 2006).

Several Camp Snoopy locations are now renamed Planet Snoopy – at Dorney Park in Pennsylvania, Valleyfair in Minnesota, and Worlds of Fun in Missouri – joining the Camp Snoopy locations at Cedar Point in Ohio and the original location at Knotts Berry Farm in California.


Dorothy Pomerantz, “The Top-Earning Dead Celebrities” Forbes (October 25, 2011).


Rhora Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 161.

See the website “Collect Peanuts” for more products (Available at http://www.collectpeanuts.com), the “Peanuts Collector Club” (Available at http://www.peanutscollectorclub.com) or Peanuts collectible guides such as Andrea Podley and Derrick Bang Peanuts Collectibles Identification and Values Guide (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 1999).


Charles Taylor, A Secular Age.

DaySpring cards are sold in over 3,000 Christian stores in the U.S. and in 60 countries around the world. Source: “Hallmark’s Major Subsidiaries & Related Business” Hallmark Corporate Information (2012). Available at: http://corporate.hallmark.com/Company/Hallmarks-Major-Subsidiaries

Anonymous, Personal Interview (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).

Statistics reported by the CBA’s “Media Information on Christian Retail” based on data collected by the publishing industry monitor Bowker.


One can find the evidence of this most holiday seasons as the display ads in Hallmark stores announce their new Peanuts products. In a search of snoopy4pnuts.com, the self-titled “World’s Largest Peanut Gang Collectibles Stores” online, over 1,400 of the vendor’s 13,000 listed collectible Peanuts items are tagged as Christmas, Easter, or Halloween products (Accessed November 28, 2012).

Parodies of A Charlie Brown Christmas routinely affirm its religious content, some in intentionally offensive manners, such as the short “It’s Jihad, Farley, Towne” in which Charlie Brown turns to Islam and blows up the gang at the Christmas pageant. “Denis Leary’s Merry F#%$in’ Christmas” Comedy Central (November 27, 2005).


Paige Braddock, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).


Braddock write and illustrates Jane’s World and has illustrated other work like The Martian Confederacy. Available online at http://www.JaneComics.com

Paige Braddock, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).


John A. Schmalzbauer, “Between Objectivity and Moral Vision.”

Dietram A. Scheufele, “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects” 115


Thomas Leitch, Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2007), 147-148.

Justin Thompson, Personal Interview (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).

Peggy Wrightsman-Parolin, Personal Correspondence (November 13, 2012).

Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 157.


Anonymous, Personal Interview (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).

Elizabeth Blair, “Lowes Hammered for Bowing to Ad Pressure” NPR (December 13, 2011); Ely Portillo, “Lowe’s Stands by Decision to Pull Ads from Muslim-American TV Show” Charlotte Observer (December 20, 2011).

Stan and Jan Berenstain created the Berenstain Bears. In recent years, Jan and son Mike have released several religious Berenstain Bears books, such as The Berenstain Bears and the Easter Story (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) and The Berenstain Bears Holy Bible, NIV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

One can, however, find custom made religious garments for Barbie sold online, such as at the Doll
Clothes Superstore, which sells a “Barbie Doll Nativity Outfit.” Available at: http://www.dollclothessuperstore.com/nativity.html


This description is included on the certificate of authenticity accompanying the set.

For the 2012 holiday season, Lenox retailed the set at $124.95, marked down from its previous $179.00.


Exodus 20:4, King James Version.

Sahih Bukhari volume 003, Book 034, Hadith Number 428.


See the following reports about the attacks and the video titled “Innocence of Muslims.” Ross Douthat, “Offensive Video Not Cause of Violence,” The Omaha World Herald (September 18, 2012); David D. Kirkpatrick and Steven Lee Myers “Libya Attack Brings Challenges for U.S.” The New York Times (September 12, 2012); Adil Jawad, “Innocence of Muslims’ Protests: New Demonstrations in Pakistan Against Anti-Islam Film” The Huffington Post (September 30, 2012).


David Morgan, The Lure of Images.

See also the following edited collections for numerous examples of contemporary and historical trends in major religious groups’ uses of visuality: Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.), Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media; Quentin J. Schultze and Robert H. Woods Jr. (eds.) Understanding Evangelical Media: The Changing Face of Christian Communication (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

See, for example, David Platt’s New York Times Best Seller, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2010). Popular outlets, like blogs, reflect this common critique as well, such as an entry in the blog revelife which asked “Do You Have a Problem with a Church Selling Starbucks Coffee?” (June 15, 2009), Available at http://www.revellife.com/704754420/do-you-have-a-problem-with-a-church-selling-starbucks-coffee/ . See also Borden’s explanation of the sacralization approach taken by many Christian bookstores to negotiate the tension with commercialism in “Making Money, Saving Souls.”


Matthew 19:21-24, New International Version. The statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle is a proverbial statement which Clarke notes in his commentary was a common expression, used in other Jewish Talmudic literature, even similarly recorded in the Koran (The Adam Clarke Commentary). Some have argued that this refers to a small mountain pass or a city gate that was difficult to enter, but there is less evidence for this and the saying is likely a hyperbolic idiom, symbolically meaningful in its original culture and time and not a geographical reference.

I Timothy 6:9-11, New International Version.

Mark 11:17, New International Version. In this passage Jesus refers to language from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11.


Lisa Trigg, “Vaughn Reeves Sentenced for Role in Fraud” The Tribune-Star (December 8, 2010).
“Vaughn Reeves Sr. Convicted in Alaran Case” *WTWO News* (Terra Haute, IN, October 22, 2010).

Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris, *Toying with God*, 70.


Letter to Charles Schulz (July 11, 1956) courtesy of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center.

Letter to Charles Schulz, (June 29, 1960) courtesy of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center.


Letter to Charles Schulz (November 18, 1958) courtesy of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center.

Letter to Charles Schulz (November 4, 1958) courtesy of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center.

“Been Thinking About Snoopy” *RBC (Radio Bible Class) Ministries* (Grand Rapids, MI, August 2004).


*Horizons* (New York City: Riverside Church, March 1958).

*Decision* (Minneapolis: The Billy Graham Evangelical Association, 1960).


Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*.


Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Hobbit* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2006); Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Lord of the Rings* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2003).


Kenneth F. Hall, “It Scares Me: Says the Inventor of Peanuts For He has Thirty Million Fans” *Upward* (February 1, 1959), 14-19.


Stephen J. Lind, “Reading Peanuts.”

Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li, Ana Domb Krauskopf, and Joshua Green, “If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace” *Convergence Culture Consortium* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008).

In one strip, Linus does make a reference to Gethsemane, but not to the crucifixion (December 25, 1977).


555 Adelle M. Banks, “Despite Sour Economy, Religious Card Sales are Up” Christian Century (December 17, 2010).


557 Anonymous, Personal Correspondence, August 4, 2011.

558 Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 161.

559 A question in the Peanuts.com FAQs screen, accessed November 11, 2012 reads:

[QUESTION:] As a PEANUTS fan, I often come across content on the internet that uses the PEANUTS copyrights and trademarks in an unfavorable fashion, and I don’t think it is authorized by PEANUTS Worldwide. What actions does PEANUTS Worldwide take to protect the work of Charles Schulz and the PEANUTS property?

[ANSWER:] Read in over 2,200 newspapers, in 75 countries and 21 languages, PEANUTS is truly a global presence. As you can imagine, PEANUTS Worldwide must fight copyright infringements on an ongoing basis in almost every territory worldwide; a constant challenge, and an issue we take very seriously. The PEANUTS Worldwide legal team, assisted by vigilant PEANUTS fans around the globe, is constantly learning of and reviewing various unauthorized content and, within the bounds of the copyright law, takes action where appropriate.

560 See Anne L. Borden, “Making Money, Saving Souls.”


562 Don Fraser and Derrick Bang (eds.) Security Blankets, 92-94.


564 Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 138-141.

565 Freddi Margolin, Personal Correspondence (August 9, 2011).

566 See, for example, the “Peanuts Collector Club” network of devotees, available online at http://www.peanutscollectorclub.com


568 Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.


570 Marshall Gregory, Shaped by Stories, 175.

571 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere;” “Religious Tolerance.”

572 Explained in chapter one. See, for example, Scott H. Clarke, “Created in Whose Image?”


575 In Of Hospitality, Jacques Derrida discusses the tension between an absolute “Law” of hospitality that requires absolute inclusion and the “laws” of hospitality that resist incorporation of dangerous actors. (Stanford: Stanford U P, 2000).

576 Jürgen Habermas, On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction, 97.


578 Loobuyck and Rummens demonstrate the ways in which Habermas’s own thoughts contradict his attempts at inclusion by requiring that religious provisos be translated into secular reasoning to be admitted into not only the formal public sphere of political deliberation, but also the informal public sphere which this dissertation has demonstrated mainstream entertainment media is part of. Source: Patrick Loobuyck and Stefan Rummens, “Religious Arguments in the Public Sphere,” see 241-242. Habermas continues his


See chapter one.


Humanizing relativism is characterized by a “genuine concern for the unique experiences of the religious other as expressed in ‘universal’ practices” while holding to a postmodern perspective that each individual has a unique “version” of truth. Humanizing reductionism “seeks understanding via common ground,” whereby nuances in difference are eschewed for the sake of finding baseline similarities between individuals’ spirituality. Humanizing exclusivism is characterized by “absolute certainty” concerning one’s own faith but is still compassionate, allowing for mutuality and reciprocity in the communication. James Keaten and Charles Soukop, “Talking about Religion in (im)Polite Company,” 2.

Explained in chapter one. See, for example, Erika Engstrom and Joseph M. Valenzano III, “Demon Hunters and Hegemony;” and Richard Wolff, *The Church on TV*.

Explained in chapter one. See, for example, Thomas Skill, James D. Robinson, John S. Lyons, and David Larson, “The Portrayal of Religion and Spirituality on Fictional Network Television.”


Explained in chapter one. See, for example, Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box.”

Explained in chapter four.

Explained in chapter two. See, for example, Leonard Greenspoon, “The Bible in the Funny Papers.”


After Carl remarried, he began to attend a large church, a fact that pleased Sparky. Gary Groth, “Schulz at 3’OClock in the Morning” reprinted in M. Thomas Inge (ed.), *Conversations*, 207.


Jeannie Schulz, “Sparky University, Unit 5: Sparky & Spirituality” Volunteer Training Session (Santa Rosa, CA, August 21, 2008).

Jeannie Schulz, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, October 29, 2011).

Pete Coleman, a member of Sparky’s bible study class at the Methodist church in Sebastopol, CA, remembers Sparky humorously telling the story of meeting his Art Instruction friends on the street during the outing, these work friends being very surprised to see their mild-mannered colleague evangelizing.

Pete Coleman, Personal Interview (Sacramento, CA: October 25, 2011).

See chapter two.


Jeannie Schulz, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, October 29, 2011).


Paige Braddock, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).

Kerry Raadt, “Forensics Pathologist and ‘CSI’ Consultant to Present January 9 Convocation” *Carleton College – College Relations* (January 5, 2009) Available at http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/currently/?story_id=483486&issue_id=483471


In 2004, *Joan of Arcadia* was nominated for Outstanding Drama Series, Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series (Amber Tamblyn as Joan Girardi), and Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (Louise Fletcher as Miss Eva Garrison). In 2005, it was again nominated for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (Cloris Leachman as Aunt Olive).


James Keaten and Charles Soukop, “Talking about Religion in (im)Polite Company,” 2. Explained in chapters one and three. See, for example, George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli, “Living with Television.”


Sarah Foss and Scripps Howard, “Subtle Blend of Humor and Religion in the Comics” *Plain Dealer* (February 21, 2000), 1F.


Short Meditations on the Bible and Peanuts; *The Parables of Peanuts*.


See chapter five for the impact of such a write-up on the Christian sub-public. Kenneth F. Hall, “It Scares Me.”


Jerry A. Coyne, “OMG: Peanuts is atheistic?”

Anonymous, Comment (October 30, 2009) on Blog by The Mutineers, “Was Charles Schulz an Atheist?” *The Sun Sets on Indiana* (September 27, 2007) Available at
http://thesunsetsonindiana.blogspot.com/2007/09/was-charles-schulze-atheist.html


633 Charles M. Schulz, Peanuts Jubilee, 100.

634 Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief, 137.


636 Mark 2000, “Exactly What Kind of Christian was Charles Schulz?”


639 Father Gary Lombardi, Personal Interview (Petaluma, CA: November 1, 2011).

640 Father Gary Lombardi, “Sparky University, Unit 5: Sparky & Spirituality” Volunteer Training Session (Santa Rosa, CA, August 21, 2008).


642 Lee Mendelson, Personal Correspondence (June 25, 2012).

643 Larry Meredith, “Sparky University, Unit 5: Sparky & Spirituality” Volunteer Training Session (Santa Rosa, CA, August 21, 2008).


646 Rheta Grimsley Johnson, Good Grief; Jeannie Schulz, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, October 29, 2011).

647 Everyman: “Happiness is a Warm Puppy.”

648 Edward Schiappa, Beyond Representational Correctness 6, 26. See Also Marita Sturken, who claims in Tangled Memories that “we need to ask not whether a memory is true but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present,” including the memories composed by camera technologies like the television and film (Berkley: U of California P, 1997), 2.

649 In 2010, the show was nominated for nine Emmy awards, including Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series and Outstanding Drama Series. In 2011, the show was again nominated for nine awards, including Outstanding Drama Series, and Julianna Margulies won Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for her role as Alicia Florrick. In 2012, the show was nominated for seven awards.

650 The Good Wife: “Nine Hours” season 2 episode 9, CBS (December 13, 2010); “Parenting Made Easy” season 3 episode 10 (December 4, 2011).


652 While Schulz was ultimately more concerned with how people lived and not what they believed, he was not averse to outright rejecting certain religious doctrines. Though his daughter converted to Mormonism, for instance, the doctrines of the faith were not ones that Schulz found to be particularly convincing. Monte Schulz, Personal Interview (Santa Barbara, CA, August 8, 2012).


654 Charles M. Schulz letter to Frank Dieffenwierth (July 17, 1948), qtd. in David Michaelis, Schulz and Peanuts, 190.

655 Charles M. Schulz, Security is a Thumb and a Blanket (San Francisco: Determined Productions, 1963).


657 This was one of a few Bible verses that Schulz’s uniquely connected with. Hosea 6:6 was another, in
which God declares through his prophet Hosea, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”


659 Prayer was a complicated and deeply personal issue for Schulz. He once said to Father Lombardi, “I believe in prayer, but I do not believe in a prayer.” (Lombardi, Personal Interview, 2011). When Sparky was dying, his close friend Chuck Bartley told Sparky that he probably had millions of people praying for him whereas Chuck would probably only have seven or eight. “Then why am I dying?” asked the distraught comic artist. (Chuck Bartley, “Eulogy” Memorial for Charles M. Schulz (Santa Rosa, CA, February 21, 2000).

660 Everyman: “Happiness is a Warm Puppy.”

661 Father Gary Lombardi, “Sparky University, Unit 5: Sparky & Spirituality.”

662 Paul Schoch, Personal Interview (Sacramento, CA: October 25, 2011).

663 Pete Coleman, Personal Interview (Sacramento, CA: October 25, 2011).  

664 Everyman: “Happiness is a Warm Puppy.”

665 Paige Braddock, Personal Interview, (Santa Rosa, CA, November 1, 2011).

666 Father Gary Lombardi, Personal Interview (Petaluma, CA: November 1, 2011).


669 Grey’s Anatomy: “Invasion” season 6 episode 5, ABC (October 15, 2009); “Love the One You’re With” season 9 episode 3 (October 18, 2012).


671 Christopher Gildemeister, “Faith in a Box;” Erika Engstrom and Beth Semic, “Portrayal of Religion in Reality TV Programming.”

672 From 2001 to 2012, Survivor has been nominated for over 40 Emmy awards, including winning the 2011 Outstanding Non-Fiction Program and being nominated for Outstanding Picture Editing for Reality Programming for the editing of the 2012 episode Cult-Like that focused on the cult-like religious tones of one of the tribes.

673 Survivor (Philippines), season 25, CBS (2012).

674 Roxy, for instance, a seminary student on the same season, may not have been as accessible as a character for some viewers with her bold attitudes and speaking in tongues (though because she was voted out early such remains unconfirmed). See episode “Don’t be Blinded by the Headlights” (September 26, 2012).

675 Welchel even gave a concise but moving description of Christianity in the live televised “Reunion” episode of the season (December 1, 2012).

676 Charles Taylor, A Secular Age.

677 In 2012, Peanuts Worldwide, 20th Century Fox Animation, and Blue Sky Studios announced plans for a November 25, 2015 theatrical release of a new animated special, penned by Craig Schulz and his son Bryan to coincide with the 65th anniversary of the strip debut and the 50th anniversary of A Charlie Brown Christmas.

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