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**A Pious American Materialist: Analysis of Religious
Elements in Sinclair Lewis' *Babbitt***

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením své bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed to study purposes.

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Abstrakt práce

Třebaže různí literární kritici zkoumali rozličné aspekty Babbittova života, téměř žádný z nich se nezaměřil na otázku Babbittova náboženského přesvědčení. Na povrchu se zdá, že Babbitt je křesťan, ovšem cílem této práce je dokázat, že křesťanství je jen nálepka, která mu pomáhá získat určité postavení v jeho komunitě. Jeho skutečným náboženským přesvědčením je materialismus (resp. spotřební kultura), protože obdivuje jeho hodnoty a také podle nich jedná.

Práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí. Ta první definuje klíčové pojmy, tj. náboženství a spotřební kulturu. Dále je rozebrán praktický (především psychologický a sociologický) dopad spotřební kultury na lidskou společnost a na jeho základě se obhajuje teze, že může sloužit jako náboženství. V druhé části je pak dokázáno, že Babbitt je příkladem člověka, který materialistické náboženství úspěšně praktikuje. Tato teze je podložena analýzou hierofanií a idolů, které obdivuje, stejně tak jako rituálů, které praktikuje. V závěru se zváží nejen důvody, proč by se měl považovat za materialistu a nikoli za křesťana, ale také aktuálnost tohoto Lewisova románu.

Klíčová slova

Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, náboženství, křesťanství, presbyteriánství, materialismus, spotřební kultura, hierofanie, idoly, rituály, komodifikace

Thesis abstract

Although many literary critics have examined various aspect of Babbitt's life, only a very few were somehow concerned with the question of Babbitt's faith. On the surface it could seem that Babbitt is a Christian; however, the aim of this work is to prove that the Christian belief is only a label helping him to win a certain position in his community. His true religious belief is materialism (or consumer culture), since he admires its values and acts according to them.

This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first one defines the key terms, i.e. religion and consumer culture. Then it analyses the practical impact (mainly the psychological and the sociological one) of consumer culture on the human society; on that basis we defend the thesis that consumer culture can serve as religion. In the second part we prove that Babbitt serves as an example of a man who successfully practices the materialistic belief. This thesis is supported with the analysis of hierophanies and idols admired by Babbitt as well as rituals performed by him. In the conclusion, the reasons are considered why Babbitt should be seen as a materialist and not a Christian as well as the fact that Lewis' novel is relevant even these days.

Key words

Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, religion, Christianity, Presbyterianism, materialism, consumer culture, hierophanies, idols, rituals, commodification

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Although nearly one century old, the novel *Babbitt* (1922) still belongs to one of the most popular and at the same time the most analysed book by Sinclair Lewis. He already touched the problems of American middle-class in his novel *Main Street*; however the peak came in George Follansbee Babbitt, i.e. in “a character who ‘completely sums up certain things in all contemporary Babbitts’”.¹ These “things” as for example political opinions, the question of role of the American managerial class as well as the role and problems of the middle class as such belong to the favourite topics for scholarly examination. However, this work focuses on another topic, which does not belong to the most “popular” ones.

Religion in comparison with political or sociological topics presents a kind of challenge. This phenomenon is, first, hardly definable and, second, hardly researchable, although it plays a crucial role in a human life (or maybe precisely because of that). Babbitt is no exception in that aspect; he is also a religious man (as he himself admits). However, there occurs a discrepancy between his official and real faith. Babbitt presents himself as a Christian, more precisely a member of Presbyterian Church; nevertheless, his behaviour indicates a different kind of belief: Mammon. As Darryl Hattenhauer shows in his essay, “civil religion has become an idolatrous corruption of the gospel and serves not God but Mammon”.² Hattenhauer gives various examples from the novel proving his point, but his approach misses more precise and thought-through classification. This work therefore aims for a more systematic approach when connecting to Hattenhauer’s points and expanding on them.

To be able to classify Babbitt’s religious behaviour into detail, it was necessary to penetrate deeper into the question of what religion is and how it manifests itself. Pavel Říčan in *Psychologie náboženství* (Psychology of Religion) stresses the roughness of our knowledge of religion, its social and historical relativity and also the subjectivity that necessarily comes when assessing if

¹ James M. Hutchisson, “‘All of Us Americans at 46’: The Making of Sinclair Lewis’ ‘Babbitt’,” *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1992): 112–113, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831549> 25. Sep 2017. Hutchisson cites out of Lewis’ letters: Lewis to Harcourt and Brace, 20 January 1922, *Letters*, p. 95.

² Darryl Hattenhauer, “Politics and Religion in ‘Babbitt’,” *CEA Critic*, WINTER 1997, Vol. 59, No. 2 (WINTER 1997): 29, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.com/stable/44377434> 11 Aug 2020.

something presents a religious phenomenon or not.³ In the striving for as much objectivity as possible, we deliberately chose and confronted works and thoughts of various scholars from various countries. When handling the more theoretical question of the substantiality of religion, we strived for heterogeneous perspectives, therefore we used as the main sources the work *Psychologie náboženství* from a Czech psychologist Pavel Říčan, then the book *To Have or To Be* from a humanistic philosopher, social psychologist, psychoanalyst and sociologist Erich Fromm as well as *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* from an American anthropologist Roy Rappaport and finally two works *The Sacred and the Profane* and *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství* (Treatise on the History of Religions) from a Romanian religious scholar, historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade. The latter two also handle the manifestations of religion (Eliade hierophanies and idols, Rappaport rituals) and we adopted their approaches for the purpose of this thesis to be able to systematically classify Babbitt's religious behaviour, since their classifications are universally applicable to any religion and are not bound to Christianity only.

The description of Babbitt's religious behaviour is based on chosen abstracts from the novel, which demonstrate it sometimes more and sometimes less directly. The behaviour is classified in a form of a list of three kinds of phenomena and by every hierophany, idol or ritual, the author of this thesis indicated the signals that led her to classifying a phenomenon as one of them; she also provides her readers with a deeper analysis of a chosen representative for every group and shows how and why it can be identified so. For supporting her claims, the author also adds two theoretical chapters in which she, first, generally describes Babbitt's real religion, i.e. consumer culture, and then shows that sociologists already started treating consumer culture in religious terms; as the main source for these chapters she chose a Czech work *Spotřební kultura* which gathers studies from various sociologists coming from various countries (Germany, Czech Republic, Italy, Canada etc.). The studies that were relevant for this thesis, were "Historie spotřební kultury" (The History of Consumer Culture) by a Czech sociologist and andragologist Jan Kalenda, "Sociologie spotřeby: jednání, distinkce a identita" (Sociology of consumption: acting, distinction and

³ Pavel Říčan, *Psychologie náboženství* (Praha: Portál s.r.o., 2002) 40–41. All translations from this book (quotes as well as paraphrases) are mine.

identity) by an Italian sociologist Roberta Sassatelli as well as a theoretical introduction “Úvod do historie, teorie a výzkumu spotřební kultury” (Introduction to history, theory and research of consumer culture) by the editor of this book, a Czech sociologist, philosopher and aesthetician Pavel Zahrádka. Their claims were supported also with the thoughts of Erich Fromm as well as of George Simmel, coming from his book *Peníze v moderní kultuře a jiné eseje*.

Chapter 2: RELIGION

Before analysing the role of religion in Babbitt's life (i.e. examining religion in a specific context), we need to examine religion as a general phenomenon and to identify its manifestations as well.

2.1 Religion as a general phenomenon

Religion presents a very complex, and therefore not easily definable phenomenon. Pavel Říčan in his book *Psychologie náboženství* (*Psychology of Religion*) opens his chapter on general definitions of religion with a claim that "religion is a subject of religious studies"⁴, i.e. a phenomenon studied by religious studies. He finds this definition (although it may seem rather empty) very useful, since it points out not only the **roughness** of our knowledge of religion, but also its social and historical relativity. Religion is defined in a way that is being understood by a wide consensus of religious studies scholars in a specific moment of history, which suggests that this consensus is not stable and depends on historical circumstances. Moreover, every scholar has a right to define religion in such a way that is in agreement with his research and his way of thinking.⁵ It is therefore impossible to present one, universal definition of this phenomenon.

Another point, mentioned by Roy Rappaport in *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, is that "the concept of religion is irreducibly vague"⁶ (which at the same time does not mean empty) and Rappaport tries to avoid any specific definition of religion. For the purpose of his argument (analysis of ritual), he characterizes religion through its constituents and manifestations, which is very similar to Eliade's approach to this question (specified and elaborated in Chapter 2.2.2). Eliade also characterizes a religious man as a creature distinguishing and living in tension between two existential modes: a sacred one and a profane one.

Pavel Říčan, who also introduces and discusses various general definitions of religion, given by various scholars in various moments of history, points out that the modern meaning of religion as a general term including various religions was established in the 18th century when the idea of Christianity sharing one **class** together with other religions ceased to be "scandalous". From the psychological

⁴ Říčan 35.

⁵ Říčan 35–36.

⁶ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 23.

point of view it is very probable that the Christian enlightened thinkers, standing behind this ideological change, considered Christianity a prototypical religion and the other religions (Islam, Buddhism etc.) were seen as “also-religions” based on their accepted similarities with Christianity. When classifying any kind of social or cultural phenomenon (whether it be an explicitly religious movement, or a scientific, philosophical, artistic or political one), the answer to the question whether such phenomenon presents or does not present a religion (or a religious phenomenon) depends on similarities to our prototypical religion, i.e. if we find any similarities (and how many) or not. Such classification therefore necessarily requires using our subjective estimation or impression, or a consensus of a group of religious studies scholars. Based on that thought⁷ it seems plausible to state that a real working definition of the most religious studies scholars is an “implied definition based on Christianity as a prototypical religion covering phenomena which are more or less similar to the Christian ones”.⁸

The way religion is understood also depends on a chosen scholarly perspective. Erich Fromm, a humanistic philosopher, social psychologist, psychoanalyst and sociologist, offers another approach to the term “religion”. He points out that

‘religion’ [...] does not refer to a system that has necessarily to do with a concept of God or with idols or even to a system perceived as religion, but to *any group-shared system of thought and conduct and offers the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.*⁹

The strongpoint of this definition lies in the fact that it does not mention any specific content of such “devotion”. Therefore

[p]eople may worship animals, trees, idols of gold or stone, an invisible god, a saintly person, or a diabolic leader; they may worship their ancestors, their nation, their class or party, money or success.¹⁰

They can either be aware of their system being religious (different from the profane domain), or they can *think* that they do not have any religion and appreciate only earthly goals as might, money or success – but that does not mean

⁷ ...and also on the fact that we live in a Christian society as well as the authors of the bibliography used for the purposes of this work...

⁸ Říčan 40–41.

⁹ Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be* (London: ABACUS, 1979) 134–135. All quotations in this work (if not told otherwise) respect the author’s original use of italics.

¹⁰ Fromm 135.

they have no religion. A specific kind of religion which successfully motivates and drives their actions is rooted in the specific structure of their character in the same way group religion is rooted in social character. That means that their religious attitudes correspond with the structure of their character “*for we are what we are devoted to, and what we are devoted to is what motivates our conduct*”.¹¹ However, a man often does not realize the real objects of their devotion and their “official religion” is confused for their “real and *secret*” religion. It is natural for a man to have *some* kind of religion (be it a secret one) since “[t]he religious need is rooted in the basic conditions of existence of the human species”.¹²

As Mircea Eliade points out, it does not matter how desacralized our existence is, since even the most desacralized one still bears traces of religious evaluation of the world.¹³ Modern times are characterized by their proclaimed denial of religion, but the natural human need for religion did not disappear. Religious needs may be fulfilled in a form of a quasi-religion.¹⁴ This concept was created by an American sociologist Arthur L. Greil¹⁵ and presents such religion that does not declare itself a religion or even denies its religious character.¹⁶ A man accepts such religion without being aware of it being a religion, since it can include signs and/or manifestations that are not related to the conventional understanding of religion; in spite of that, such manifestations still have a “religious” impact on them. Quasi-religion is based on sacralization of various introspective phenomena and this process is analogical to explicit religions in terms of meaning. The only difference is that those phenomena are not related to the transcendence. Natural as well as cultural phenomena can be sacralized as well as very charismatic personalities.¹⁷

¹¹ Fromm 135.

¹² Fromm 135.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, 1959) 23.

¹⁴ Another terms being used are secular religion or implicit religion.

¹⁵ Dalibor Hejna, *Náboženství a společnost: Věda o náboženství a její historické kořeny* (Praha: Grada Publishing a.s., 2010) 37. Google Books

<https://books.google.cz/books?id=7kmyOvDlbQMC&pg=PA37&lpg=PA37&dq=krypton%C3%A1bo%C5%BEenstv%C3%AD&source=bl&ots=M5ddf3an9K&sig=Bgx24B8naHHfnmCNnupbzE0wag&hl=cs&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjEyceZ9vTeAhVPafAKHS0DD2QQ6AEwCHoECAAQAAQ#v=onepage&q=krypton%C3%A1bo%C5%BEenstv%C3%AD&f=false> 27 Nov 2018.

¹⁶ Říčan 41.

¹⁷ Hejna 37.

As demonstrated in this chapter, it is not easy (and for some scholars it is even impossible) to define religion as such; still, it can be *characterized* through its manifestations.

2.2 Manifestations of religion

For the description of manifestations of religion two main sources are going to be used: Roy Rappaport's conception of ritual as the main constituent of religion (described in his book *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*), and Mircea Eliade's conception of hierophanies and the contrast between sacred and profane (from his *Treatise on the History of Religion*).

2.2.1 Ritual

In Roy Rappaport's conception "ritual is taken to be the ground from which religious conceptions spring".¹⁸ He defines ritual as "*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*".¹⁹ When characterizing ritual through its manifestations, this work sticks to the way Rappaport introduces this phenomenon in his book. The actual features (Rappaport recognizes five in total) are going to be introduced individually.

1) encoding by other than performers²⁰

Rappaport in his definition stipulates that

the performers of rituals do not specify all the acts and utterances constituting their own performances. They follow, more or less punctiliously, orders established or taken to have been established, by others.²¹

Already set rituals may undergo changes but those changes have to meet with agreement of those who follow them and believe in them, since those followers tend to be rather conservative. A ritual never performed before may seem to them more as a charade than a ritual. As Rappaport points out

[r]ituals composed entirely of new elements are, thus, likely to fail to become established [...]. [Such] rituals are, however, seldom if ever

¹⁸ Rappaport 3.

¹⁹ Rappaport 24.

²⁰ This work fully adopts Rappaport's classification including the titles to the individual features of ritual.

²¹ Rappaport 32.

attempted. “New” rituals are likely to be largely composed of elements taken from older rituals.²²

Although there is some room for rearrangements of elements of a ritual or for discarding some of them and introducing others, this room is not large; “invention is limited and the sanction of previous performances is maintained”.²³

2) formality

Adherence to form is a natural part of a ritual, and it is usually through the set form determining the repetitive, punctilious behaviour of the performers that we recognize an event as ritual. Ritual sequences contain conventional, sometimes even stereotyped elements.

Rituals are performed in specified contexts, that is, they are regularly repeated at times established by clock, calendar, biological rhythm, ontogeny, physical condition, or defined social circumstance, and often they occur in special places as well.²⁴

3) invariance (more or less)

The word “invariance” has to be taken relatively, since “imprecision is unavoidable in even the most punctilious performances” (although the congregation may not be fully aware of such “imperfections”).²⁵ As was already mentioned above, there may also appear minor changes to the actual ritual (since various parts of ritual are differentially susceptible to change). Finally, no ritual can be defined to such a degree that no room for logically necessary or deliberate variation would be possible.²⁶

4) performance

“Unless there is a performance there is no ritual”.²⁷ Although there may exist records that precisely describe some rituals, such records are not themselves rituals, they are merely instructions. A ritual has to be performed to become a ritual, since “the medium [...] is itself a message, or better, a meta-message”.²⁸

²² Rappaport 32.

²³ Rappaport 32.

²⁴ Rappaport 33.

²⁵ Rappaport 36.

²⁶ Rappaport 36.

²⁷ Rappaport 37.

²⁸ Rappaport 38.

5) formality (vs. physical efficacy)

In this sense, it is necessary to understand formality in contrast to physical efficacy. Edmund Leach recognizes two “layers” or “components” of ritual: the ritual itself and so-called “technique”.

Technique has economic material consequences which are measurable and predictable; ritual on the other hand is a symbolic statement which ‘says’ something about the individuals involved in the action.²⁹

It means that any action can be ritualized if we add “a symbolic statement” to the actual “technique”. The ritual action itself (i.e. “the symbolic statement”) “do[es] not produce a practical result on the external world – that is one of the reasons we call [such action] ritual”.³⁰ On the other hand, it does not mean that it would lack a function (see Chapter 2.2.1.1).

2.2.1.1 The function of ritual

As was already foreshadowed in the characterization of ritual as a “symbolic statement”, ritual has a communicative function. “[T]he participants transmit information concerning their own current physical, psychic or social states to themselves and to other participants”,³¹ or, as Leach puts it, “ritual serves to express the individual’s status in the structural system in which he finds himself for the time being”.³² Rappaport labels such messages as “self-referential”. More closely, we can also distinguish so-called “canonical messages” that are encoded in the liturgy and not by the performers themselves, and therefore such messages “cannot in themselves represent the performers’ contemporary state”.³³

For the communication through ritual to be successful, the signals emitted by the ritual act should be clearly distinguishable from the physically efficacious acts. “The more extraordinary a ritual movement or posture the more easily it may be recognized as a signal and not a physically efficacious act”.³⁴

²⁹ Edmund R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954) 13.

³⁰ George C. Homans, “Anxiety and ritual: The theories of Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown,” *American Anthropologist* Vol. 43, No. 2, Part 1: 172.

³¹ Rappaport 52.

³² Leach 11.

³³ Rappaport 52.

³⁴ Rappaport 52.

2.2.2 Hierophanies

For Mircea Eliade religion is manifested as a contrast between sacred and profane. “Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, as something wholly different from the profane”.³⁵ To designate the way the sacred manifests itself (the *act of manifestation*), Eliade proposes the term *hierophany*. This term implies that “*something sacred shows itself to us*”.³⁶ Every kind of documentary evidence can be considered a hierophany, since it expresses (in its own way) a certain way the sacred manifests itself and a certain moment of its history. A hierophany always has a historical nature (i.e. it is always defined by very specific circumstances); some hierophanies can possess only a local meaning, some other can possess a universal meaning. Therefore, every category (or form) of such evidence has, in fact, the same value for us if we want to understand religion as such.³⁷

Anything can become a hierophany. Sacred manifests itself in any form, even in the most absurd one.³⁸ Eliade points out that it is impossible to estimate something that has not ever become a hierophany. The only thing one can be sure about is that anything human sensed, loved, manipulated with, or met with could have become a hierophany.³⁹ “The dialectics of hierophanies presumes more or less obvious *selection*, a certain differentiation. An object becomes sacred if it includes (i.e. reveals) ‘*something different*’ than it is itself”.⁴⁰ It means that a hierophany needs to be clearly distinguishable from “other objects”. These “other objects” still exist, even if a large area becomes a hierophany, e.g. heaven or “homeland”.

Acts also can be considered hierophanies, since for an archaic man an act makes sense only if it copies a certain archetype. At the same time, such act can be perceived as ceremony.⁴¹ A hierophany is at least distinguished in relation to itself, since an object can become a hierophany only when it ceases to be a mere profane object and takes on a new dimension: a sacred dimension.⁴²

³⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 11.

³⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* 11.

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, trans. Jindřich Vacek (Praha: Argo, 2004) 22–23. All translations from this book (quotes as well as paraphrases) are mine.

³⁸ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 49.

³⁹ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 31–32.

⁴⁰ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 33.

⁴¹ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 53.

⁴² Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 33.

Sacred has a twofold character: it is “sacred” and “impure” at the same time. An example can be found in the Latin meaning and use of the word “sacred”. When Servius comments upon Virgil’s expression *auri sacra fames*⁴³, he points out correctly that *sacer* can mean both “cursed” and “sacred”.⁴⁴

At the same time, no hierophany is “closed” to change, or with unchangeable effect. A hierophany can expand its religious content or its formal function. An old hierophany can even lose its original meaning when its admirer is exposed to a new revelation.⁴⁵

Every hierophany (even the simplest one) reveals the paradoxical conformity of sacred and profane. In case of an idol it takes a concrete form.⁴⁶ The act of admiring an idol is called idolatry. This phenomenon includes not only idols, but also fetishes and material traces and considers them as paradoxical incarnations of deity.⁴⁷

2.3 Presbyterian Church and its values

Presbyterian Church belongs to Protestant churches, which originated from Reformation in the 16th century in Switzerland. The word “reformed” means that these churches are regarded as essentially Calvinistic in doctrine. The term “presbyterian” designates the way this church is governed, i.e.

by pastors and by lay leaders called elders, or presbyters, from the New Testament term *presbyteroi*. Presbyters govern through a series of representative consistories, from the local congregation to area and national organizations, commonly termed sessions, presbyteries, synods, and assemblies.⁴⁸

The *Book of Order*, which among other things describes the governing structure of the church, states the following principles:

- 1) The higher governing body governs the lower one.
- 2) Majority wins and governs.

⁴³ “Sacra” (feminine form) meaning “sacred”

⁴⁴ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 35.

⁴⁵ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 44–45.

⁴⁶ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 48.

⁴⁷ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 47.

⁴⁸ John Colin Stillwell and James C. Spalding, “Reformed and Presbyterian churches,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online], 2006 ed. Accessed via <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Presbyterian-churches> 29 Dec 2018.

- 3) “[A]ppeals may be handed from a lower governing body to a higher body until ultimately a decision is reached”.⁴⁹
- 4) The principles and procedures on church government are drawn in the Bible.⁵⁰

Clifton Kirkpatrick and William H. Hopper, Jr. also stress, that “[i]t is very clear that the aim of everything that follows in the *Book of Order* and everything in the church is to recognize Jesus as the great Head of the church”.⁵¹

There occurred a few splits (so-called schisms) in the history of this church, e.g. during the Civil War (1861–1865), when the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (commonly called the Southern Church) left the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and, as Kirkpatrick and Hopper state, “that rupture was not finally healed until 122 years later, in 1983”.⁵² Despite those schisms, we can (as Kirkpatrick and Hopper believe) identify essential values that are common to all Presbyterians; “[t]oday the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [...] unites in relating to partner churches in over eighty countries around the world”.⁵³

Kirkpatrick and Hopper place the “Reformed heritage” of the Presbyterians even before Reformation. “[I]t has roots firmly planted in the soil of Iraq, Israel, Egypt, and the entire Mediterranean Basin of the biblical period [...].”⁵⁴ They are careful to include also the Bohemia of John Huss, the Germany of Martin Luther as well as the Switzerland of Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin, the England of the Westminster Assembly, and the Scotland of John Knox. From all these influences, the following historical principles originated:

- 1) The rejection of the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that pope or priests (i.e. the church itself) can provide salvation (e.g. Luther disputed selling indulgences).
- 2) “Only scripture is authoritative, not the church or the teachings of the church”.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Clifton Kirkpatrick and William H. Hopper, Jr., *What Unites Presbyterians: Common Ground for Troubled Times* (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 1997) 35.

⁵⁰ The described principles are based on Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 35–36.

⁵¹ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 24.

⁵² Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 4.

⁵³ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 2.

⁵⁴ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 13.

⁵⁵ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 13.

3) Every Christian should have the privilege and responsibility to carefully “study, learn and interpret” the Bible. “[E]ach Christian [can] interpret the Bible”⁵⁶, therefore there is no need for other interpretation by the church.⁵⁷

To be able to fulfil especially the second and third point mentioned, the Presbyterian Church provides theological education through its own church schools, church colleges and campus ministries.

As was already stated, the main and the most authoritative source is the Bible. But it is not the only authority: rules concerning predominantly organisation and administrative procedures are described in the *Book of Orders* and in the *Book of Confession*. Since the beginning of the 20th century constitutes the main focus of my work, only *Book of Orders* is considered relevant for deeper analysis. *Book of Confessions* was adopted in 1983 and a special committee for its creation was chosen in 1958 at the 170th General Assembly in Pittsburgh⁵⁸, which means that members of the Presbyterian church could not have been familiar with this document in 1920s.

Kirkpatrick and Hopper see the aim of the *Book of Order* in recognizing Jesus Christ “as the great Head of the church”.⁵⁹ The centrality of Jesus Christ as the living Lord unites all Presbyterians. As the authors state,

“Christ gives to his church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its officers and ordinances.” The Spirit of God provides guidance, and we are to use sound judgment, following the clear teachings of scripture, when subjects have been treated in the Bible.⁶⁰

They also stress that this book is “far more than just rules”.⁶¹ The “rules” include the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline.⁶² The basic historic principles of this church order can be summed up as following:

- 1) The right for “disagreement, dissent, and disputation. [...] With tolerance and respect within prescribed strictures, the majority is constrained to hear the minority, even if it is a minority of one”.⁶³

⁵⁶ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 13.

⁵⁷ The described principles are based on Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 13–14.

⁵⁸ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 40.

⁵⁹ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 24.

⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 25.

⁶¹ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 23.

⁶² Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 36.

⁶³ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 33.

- 2) “[T]he rights of private judgment in religious matters as universal and unalienable. [...] [T]he religious constituencies should not be aided by a civil power – the strong doctrine of the separation of church and state”.⁶⁴
- 3) “[A]ny church is free to adopt its own terms of membership. [...] Although there is almost unanimity across the denomination in how sessions actually accept new members, the principle of ‘local option’ is in effect”.⁶⁵
- 4) “The qualification that the governing bodies ‘may... err’”.⁶⁶

As well as for all Christians, liturgy is also an essential part of the Presbyterian belief. Stillwell and Spalding sum up its basic signs:

In the Reformation earlier liturgies were modified by using the vernacular, removing anything that implied the reenacting of sacrifice in the mass, providing for congregational confession, and emphasizing the preaching of the word. Following Erasmus’ recommendation, the singing of Psalms became characteristic of Reformed worship. While most Reformed churches today use a broad spectrum of vocal music, some hold exclusively to Psalms. [...] In the 20th century attention has been given to relating worship to the social and material needs of human beings as well as to communicating the word to human hearts and minds. [...] In recent years there has been emphasis upon celebration in response to the good news of God, a greater appreciation of the arts in worship than in the past, and a concern for inclusive language.⁶⁷

Education also plays a crucial role for the Presbyterians, since [t]he requirements of Reformed life have demanded an educated clergy and an informed laity. Besides academic training for pastors, the early practice was for them to meet often and for one to interpret Scripture and for the others to engage in critical discussion. [...] Lay education was accomplished through preaching the word and teaching the catechism [...]. More recently catechetical instruction has given way to inductive forms of education, with emphasis on the age level at which instruction takes place.

⁶⁴ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 34.

⁶⁵ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 35.

⁶⁶ Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 35.

⁶⁷ Stillwell and Spalding (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

There is also concern to relate the Christian faith to the daily life of the larger community.⁶⁸

As was already suggested, community is for the Presbyterians very important. “Concern to achieve greater social justice for humankind has been normative among Presbyterian and Reformed churches”.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Stillwell and Spalding (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁶⁹ Stillwell and Spalding (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Chapter 3: CONSUMER CULTURE

Consuming (in the basic meaning of the word) is natural to every living creature. We consume food, water and other things that are necessary for our survival. But objects can be consumed as well, physically or mentally. In all times, people consumed objects that were useful for them. A sociologist Pavel Zahrádka in his introduction to the book *Spotřební kultura (Consumer Culture)* names this general phenomenon “material culture”. Material culture designates human’s relationship to objects. The term “consumer culture” is more focused: it indicates a specific form of material culture in the contemporary Euro-American civilisation.⁷⁰ The aim of this chapter is to introduce and describe this phenomenon.

3.1 Consumer culture as a general phenomenon

First of all, it is necessary to define who a consumer is and what “to consume” means. A consumer is a person who buys and uses objects for the sake of satisfaction. “To consume” means physically or mentally wear out or consume objects.⁷¹ Zahrádka defines “consumer culture” as following:

The term ‘consumer culture’ designates the human’s relationship to things, i.e. the way we use and understand things. Consumption thus depends on culture, since culture provides it with meanings. On the other hand, culture needs consumer goods as they are tools reproducing and transmitting it.⁷²

Zahrádka describes four basic signs of consumer culture:

- 1) The meaning of things does not lie only in their utility value (“užitná hodnota”) or their functioning as symbols of social status. They possess so-called symbolic utility value as well. As Zahrádka states,

[t]his value describes the fact that consumer goods co-create our identity; they help us to be successful in our social roles; they serve as tools for our self-stylization, communication and we express our belonging to a certain social group through them.⁷³

Our identity, values and aspirations are not determined primarily by our citizenship, by the religion we believe in or the race we belong to; they are

⁷⁰ Pavel Zahrádka (editor), *Spotřební kultura* (Praha: Academia, 2014) 8. All translations from this book (quotes as well as paraphrases) are mine.

⁷¹ Zahrádka, 7.

⁷² Zahrádka, 8.

⁷³ Zahrádka, 8.

determined by consumption as such. Consumer culture shapes our everyday life and we cannot avoid it by decision or protest.⁷⁴

- 2) The things we use are commodities; this means we do not produce them for our own use or inherit them from our ancestors; we buy them in the market environment. This phenomenon is caused by the asymmetry of the manufacturing relationships, since the means of production are predominantly owned by private persons, which prevents the workers from producing the consumer goods for their own sake. Therefore they are made to offer their labour force for wages, which enables them to buy the consumer goods indirectly. This is the reason why consumer culture can occur only in capitalist economic system.⁷⁵
- 3) Advertising of goods being sold, which started already in the 18th century when first store windows with mannequins or fashion magazines appeared. The purpose is to give meaning to things produced anonymously within an impersonal mass market and to make the commodities attractive and necessary for the consumer.⁷⁶
- 4) Consumers are sovereign instances that have to decide what they want and in what way they are going to satisfy their needs. They consider consumption of offered things and services very important; it can even be their main activity during leisure time (in that case we can talk of “commodification of leisure time”). Consumer culture supports focus on the present, hedonistic ethos, changing fashion trends and technical or psychological obsolescence of consumer goods instead of focus on the future, protestant ethics, keeping of things, temperance and economy. Consumption also serves as a criterion through which we measure and evaluate our status and success. The ability to participate in consumer culture is a sign of successful life and stands as a goal for those who are not able to afford consumption, although the things being consumed are not absolutely necessary for their life; the point is that these things constitute the generally shared and expected standard of a “normal” life.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Zahrádka, 8–9.

⁷⁵ Zahrádka, 9.

⁷⁶ Zahrádka, 9–10.

⁷⁷ Zahrádka, 10–11.

3.2 Capitalism

Capitalistic economic system is one of the basic corner stones of consumer culture. This world system started (right from its birth) to influence (more or less indirectly) the nature of various social phenomena and of consumer culture as well.⁷⁸ It is characterized by three main features:

- 1) exchange relations, based on using money as the main medium of exchange; within these relations, people act as mutually interchangeable persons;
- 2) most estates become goods, which implies that firstly, they can become exchanged for money and secondly, they can be changed for another type of goods;
- 3) the central axis of capitalistic system is capital and its self-valorisation.⁷⁹

Capital can be valorised in three ways: through interest-bearing loans; within the trading process that indicates a positive balance between the purchase and sale of goods; by producing new goods for sale – in this case, the accumulation of capital is supported by the fact that production costs are lower than the selling prices of the goods.⁸⁰

Within the world capitalist system, various commodities from the whole world are being exchanged for money. The value of goods (expressed by their prices) is one of the main regulators of this system and as such it influences the social accessibility of individual products and therefore their actual consumption as well. Market is thus the main regulator and mediator of both production requirements (based on demand) and requirements of consumption itself (based on supply). World society is therefore integrated in capitalist economic system not through political or cultural bonds but through economic relations. These relations are characterized by two important aspects:

- 1) Individual regions and social groups depend on each other.
- 2) Such relations are profitable only for some groups (and only for some people in these groups).

Due to the second fact, capitalist economy displays hierarchical and spatial inequality. This inequality then influences the character of consumer culture in

⁷⁸ Jan Kalenda, "Historie spotřební kultury," *Spotřební kultura*, ed. Zahrádka (Praha: Academia, 2014) 25.

⁷⁹ This categorization is adopted from Kalenda 24.

⁸⁰ Kalenda, 24.

each region, since some regions profit at the expense of other regions and their workers. Based on these criteria, we can divide the regions participating in this system into three groups: core-countries (belonging to the central zone of capitalist economy, making the profit), periphery countries (on the edge of the system; according to the world systems theory, they are being exploited by the core-countries) and semi-periphery countries (halfway between the core-countries and the periphery countries).⁸¹ The U.S.A. (a country which is the main focus of this paper) already belongs to the core-countries in the 1920's.

3.3 History of consumer culture

In order to really understand consumer culture, we should examine not only the phenomenon itself but its evolution as well, i.e. where its roots lie and which cultural and historical changes it underwent. Some scholars treat consumer culture as a phenomenon occurring first in the 20th century since they find it typical only for modern society characterized by national states, industrial production, urbanization, secularization, rationalization, differentiation and individualization. The authors of the book *Spotřební kultura* dispute this opinion and argue that this kind of culture was there much earlier. On the one hand, they treat it as a socio-cultural dimension of economics, where goods and products do not have only utility and exchangeable value: their main functions are to be searched in mutual delimitation of social actors ("sociální aktéři") and creating status groups. On the other hand, they consider consumer culture being a social phenomenon closely tied to the economic dimension; its existence is therefore conditioned by structure and dynamics of the economic system.⁸²

The examination of the evolution of social culture means that we need to analyse the changes consumption patterns ("spotřební vzorce") of social actors went through during various historical periods. As the economic system has been transforming, we can spot changes in qualitative and quantitative character of consumption as well; these include for example rituals and occasions on which presentation and evaluation of social status can take place using certain typical type of consumer behaviour; for example, in the 18th century such occasion could have been a wedding on the royal court. A century later statuses of actors were being manifested in drawing-rooms, cafés, clubs and fashion restaurants as well as

⁸¹ Kalenda, 24–27.

⁸² Kalenda, 21–22.

during Sunday strolls in parks and along boulevards. Tools being used on such occasions are historically conditioned too: not only the significance of these tools but also social groups that carry out these kinds of activities.⁸³

We can identify two main long-term social processes that are bound to the evolution of consumer culture. These are:

- 1) democratization of consumption,
- 2) evolution of capitalism.⁸⁴

The former leads to the gradual disappearance of the distinction between higher and lower culture, which is caused by the fact that a certain type of consumer behaviour is becoming less and less exclusive. The latter represents an important aspect as well because capitalism creates optimal conditions for the development of consumer culture; another point is that capitalism represents the main economic sphere of the Western civilization in the last few centuries.⁸⁵

Being interested in consumer culture means being interested in the history of capitalism as well, since the relations between consumer behaviour and economic system are very tight; on the one hand, consumer behaviour influences the trajectory of the economic system, but on the other hand, the key signs of the system influence the possibilities of this behaviour in return (mainly the inquiry). It is therefore necessary to see the economic system as a basic reference framework in which consumption takes place. This system also possesses its cultural dimension that intervenes into the symbolical meaning of exchange, production and consumption; this cultural dimension includes ideologies and strategies of justification of these abovementioned relations⁸⁶, ideas, values and norms from which the practice of justification is derived and from which such discourses are later created that are going to carry these ideas. The onset of modernity plays a crucial part here, since it brought the concept of a free individual being responsible for their decisions and having the right to fulfil their personal interests.⁸⁷

The authors of the book *Spotřební kultura* offer a very elaborate analysis of five phases of the development consumer culture (according to their perspective) underwent. Because this paper is focused on a literary work set in the

⁸³ Kalenda, 22–23.

⁸⁴ This distinction is adopted from Kalenda, 23.

⁸⁵ Kalenda, 23.

⁸⁶ I.e. exchange, production and consumption.

⁸⁷ Kalenda, 23.

U.S.A. of the 1920's, the only relevant part for our purpose is the fourth stage called "Fordist capitalism" ("fordistický kapitalismus").

3.3.1 Fordist capitalism

Fordist capitalism dates from 1918 to 1970. The word "Fordist" is derived from "Fordism", a phenomenon occurring after the First World War and denoting reconfiguration of commodity production, mainly of its socio-organizational relations. This new system connected world economics (including the whole planet already) with the increasing effectivity of industrial production; it institutionalized former economic structures and added a new type of social organization: precisely defined employment relationships ("zaměstnanecké vztahy"), hierarchically structured bureaucratic organizations and the first wave of significant automation of work. Sometimes it is even called "organised capitalism". Fordism led to production of relatively cheap standardized goods, which was then reflected in the unification of consumption and the significant extension of middle class that took the leading position in the newly constituted employment system.⁸⁸ Middle class's strength laid not only in the amount of funds, but also in its amount of leisure time. A new phenomenon of leisure time and tourism occurred, being another important status indicator (next to the goods being owned by the actor himself or his household). This led to clear spatial as well as temporal distinction: whereas a factory or an employer organization became the places of production, the household became a dominant place of consumption.⁸⁹

The spatial structure of world economics changed as well. After a few centuries of Europe being the core of capitalist countries, the United States of America became a new core of economic system and owing to this fact a new centre of "geoculture" and of most new forms of consumer culture as well. Many American companies such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Nike, Ford, Starbucks and others became iconic representations of consumer culture in the 20th century. Although Western Europe continued being an important centre of consumer culture, its position ceased to be as prominent as it used to be and it was not safe from Americanization.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Kalenda, 44.

⁸⁹ Kalenda, 46.

⁹⁰ Kalenda, 44–45.

Mass production enabled consumer culture to play an even more crucial role in people's common lives. It shaped everyday rituals of most people through advertisement; owing to the fact that society started to depend on market mechanisms, consumer way of life became an omnipresent major social phenomenon. In the end, mass production resulted in homogenization of consumption and in levelling and weakening of cultural differences. Democratization of consumption and of cultural goods as such was very often seen as negative and treated as vulgarization of high culture, or at least as lowering good taste.⁹¹

⁹¹ Kalenda, 45–46.

Chapter 4: CONSUMER CULTURE AS RELIGION

The aim of this thesis is to prove that Babbitt's behaviour is not determined by his official religion (Presbyterianism), but by his real and secret⁹² faith which is consumer culture and its principles; this is one of the main reasons that lead us to calling consumer culture a religion. This chapter is going to make use of the information mentioned in the previous two chapters and explain why and in which context we are able to label consumer culture as religion.

4.1 Consumer culture as religion

As was already discussed in Chapter 2.1, there are more approaches to the question how to establish what a religion is and what not and that the understanding of this complex phenomenon can change in the course of time. Chapter 2.1 provided a basic survey made on this topic; the aim of this chapter is to choose perspectives being relevant for our thesis and use them for our analysis.

Erich Fromm names the main function of religion: religion serves as an individual frame of orientation.⁹³ In other words, religion should help us with deciding what is right and what is wrong, what we should and should not do. It constitutes a basic framework which both helps us to gain orientation in our conduct and direct it at the same time. Religion (according to Fromm) also provides us with an object of devotion. The nature of this devotion is not defined anyhow and it can be anything, even money or success.⁹⁴ In consumer culture, money plays a crucial part since it has two main functions: the amount of it can serve as an indicator of our success and social status, because (at the same time) by using it we can buy such things that can demonstrate the amount of money we have and therefore we can indicate our social status and success through them. These things can be of physical nature (e.g. a car, a house) or they can have a form of an experience (e.g. an expensive vacation in an exotic country) we can then share with others (and use it to demonstrate our status). Fromm points out that one does not necessarily have only one religion; he recognizes two types of religion: an official one and a real, secret one, demonstrating his idea on the following example: "if, for instance, a man worships power while professing a religion of love, the religion of power is his secret religion, while his so-called

⁹² This classification of faiths is based on Erich Fromm's classification. See Chapter 2.1.

⁹³ Fromm 134–135.

⁹⁴ Fromm 135.

official religion, for example Christianity, is only ideology".⁹⁵ One can be aware of this discrepancy and use the official religion to help them reach one or more goals set by his secret religion; but it happens very often that a man does not realize the real objects of their devotion and the so-called secret religion constitutes a secret even for themselves. Babbitt can serve as a nice example since (as we are going to prove in Chapter 5) his official religion is Christianity, specifically Presbyterianism, but his conduct is driven by his secret religion which is consumer culture. It is consumer culture that shapes his view and sets the goals he wants to reach.

If we want to be more specific, we can adopt Arthur L. Greil's concept of so-called quasi-religion (see Chapter 2.1 for more details) and treat consumer culture as a quasi-religion, since its manifestations, signs and introspective phenomena being sacralized are not related to the transcendence. Still, the influence quasi-religion has on people is comparable to the strength of influence of e.g. Christianity, therefore this work labels consumer culture as religion, not quasi-religion. This strength of influence is examined in the following chapter.

4.2 Religious influence of consumer culture

As Roberta Sassatelli in her study about the sociology of consumption points out, the first sociologists focusing on this question identified the logic of distinction as the main principle that nowadays governs this phenomenon. The consumer strives for gaining and using things that can serve as positional goods ("poziční statky") or status symbols; it helps them demonstrate (or even enhance) their position in the social structure and confirm social hierarchy and social boundaries. Fashion can serve as a good example. Fashion stresses the boundaries between those who know the newest trends and goods and can afford them, and those who are predestined to follow the changes of other people's tastes.⁹⁶ If we follow fashion trends, we express unity with some people and we differ ourselves from the others; at the same time we can use fashion for self-expression through a common semantic code that is understandable for everyone. We can observe the same logic in all other religions; religious people divide other people into two groups: those

⁹⁵ Fromm 135.

⁹⁶ Roberta Sassatelliová, "Sociologie spotřeby: jednání, distinkce a identita," *Spotřební kultura*, ed. Zahrádka (Praha: Academia, 2014) 87.

who believe and those who do not (i.e. believers and non-believers). The logic of distinction is therefore a very important principle.

As was already mentioned in Chapter 4.1, religion should help us with orientation in the world. Objects play the same role. According to works of Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction* and of Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood *The World of Goods*, objects serve as material support of social interaction and at the same time as symbolic indicators that make the world understandable; they can be used as symbolic means classifying the world and serving as tools of specific form of non-verbal communication.⁹⁷ Goods are considered material units through which actors reproduce cultural meanings structuring the social space. As a result, the social actors learn to prefer certain objects according to their specific socio-cultural position; they confirm this position and reproduce it through their distinctive choice of consumer goods (often they do not realise doing so).⁹⁸ Consumption can very often serve as a relationship mechanism that is not only rooted in social relations but is also used for maintenance, negotiation and change of human bonds, especially of those related to family and life in a household with their hierarchies and power structure. Consumption can be treated as an expression of kinship and other social and personal relations; the frequency and amount of purchases made by the consumer can mirror the density of his social grid.⁹⁹ This means that consumer culture strongly shapes our perspective; it influences our relationships and provides us with the framework of orientation, i.e. it does all the things typical for a religion, which is the reason why consumer culture is labelled as religion in this thesis.

4.2.1 Hierophanies

It was already suggested that objects are of great importance in consumer culture. They can even possess characteristics of hierophanies. Firstly, hierophanies are also governed by the logic of distinction. “The dialectics of hierophanies presumes more or less obvious *selection*, a certain differentiation. An object becomes sacred if it includes (i.e. reveals) ‘*something different*’ than it is itself”.¹⁰⁰ The symbolic function of goods (the fact that they contain more levels

⁹⁷ Sassatelliová, 101.

⁹⁸ Sassatelliová, 88.

⁹⁹ Sassatelliová, 104.

¹⁰⁰ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství* 33.

of meaning¹⁰¹) makes them hierophanies as well. A hierophany represents a form of non-verbal communication, as well as goods. They provide the social actor with material basis for stabilization of cultural categories and enable them to orientate themselves in the reality.

As Mircea Eliade points out, no hierophany is “closed” to change, or with unchangeable effect. A hierophany can expand its religious content or its formal function. An old hierophany can even lose its original meaning when its admirer is exposed to a new revelation.¹⁰² This change of meaning can be observed by goods as well. A good example could be the ever-changing fashion trends (this example is more elaborated in the Chapter 4.2 Religious influence of consumer culture).

Nowadays, consumption as a relatively autonomous field of action is defined as appropriation (“přivlastňování”) taking place in various socially organized situations. Each of these situations is relatively autonomous and translates into its own language what was encoded into the goods by production and distribution chains. The moment of purchase is only a beginning of a very complex process during which the consumer tries to transfer the goods to a different context which can even result in the goods losing any recognisable relation to the world of money exchange. This shows that the symbolic content of goods can change, as well as hierophanies can. Another important point is that a hierophany always has a historical nature (i.e. it is always defined by very specific circumstances); some hierophanies can possess only a local meaning, some others can possess a universal meaning.¹⁰³ The same is true of goods as well. There exists local and institutional practice bound to specific historical occasions and various institutions in which consumption takes place and these determine the way the everyday consumption looks like.¹⁰⁴

When Eliade analyses hierophanies he also points out that it is not necessary for a wizard to know the theory behind his magic: the fact that it works is sufficient.¹⁰⁵ It is not necessary for the consumer to know that he or she uses goods as a kind of non-verbal communication and how precisely this kind of

¹⁰¹ For instance, a car can be used not only as a way to get from one place to another (which is usually its primary function), but it can also express the social status of his owner (by owning a Mercedes, the owner identifies themselves with the wealthy group of people).

¹⁰² Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství* 44–45.

¹⁰³ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství* 22–23.

¹⁰⁴ Sassatelliová, 106.

¹⁰⁵ For more information see Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 30.

communication works: the fact that it works is sufficient for them; therefore the use of goods as hierophanies is very often (at least partly) subconscious.

4.2.2 Rituals

As Rappaport points out, “no society is devoid of what a reasonable observer would recognize as ritual”.¹⁰⁶ For the purpose of the following analysis, it is very useful to repeat Rappaport’s definition of ritual so that we can work with it: a ritual is “*the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*”.¹⁰⁷ Within consumer culture, we can also identify many rituals; fashion can serve as an example. Fashion used to be the domain of aristocracy and rich people, something only a few could afford to follow. As the modernity arrived and the middle class expanded, more and more people could afford to follow fashion trends and imitate the ones who set them. According to Simmel, the newest fashion trends belong only to upper classes. Once lower classes begin to adopt it and by doing it they cross the borders lined by upper classes and the unity of upper classes symbolized by fashion is disturbed, the upper classes leave these trends and start to create different ones to become unique again and the whole game begins again.¹⁰⁸ We can see that in this process, lower classes follow something that was not entirely encoded by them, on the contrary: there is someone else setting the trend and serving as a model. There is a certain discourse as well, belonging to the fashion industry, which we can find, for example, in the fashion magazines transmitting the newest trends. In the world of fashion, it is also possible to identify certain trends that keep repeating after a certain amount of time, e.g. retro style used to be very popular in the 1960’s, but nowadays it is popular again. Rappaport also points out that ritual has a communicative function and serves as a “symbolic statement” (for more information, see Chapter 2.2.1.1). Following fashion trends has a clear symbolic message: I am successful; I have money and therefore I am able to afford fashion.

Rappaport also adds that no ritual can be defined to such a degree that no room for logically necessary or deliberate variation would be possible.¹⁰⁹ This observation can be applied on rituals occurring in consumer culture as well.

¹⁰⁶ Rappaport 31.

¹⁰⁷ Rappaport 24.

¹⁰⁸ Georg Simmel, *Peníze v moderní kultuře a jiné eseje* (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2006) 106. All translations from this book (quotes as well as paraphrases) are mine.

¹⁰⁹ Rappaport 36.

Sassatelli stresses the fact that when acting as consumers, we use cognitive and normative frameworks that we have created in our lives; we refer back to the position we have in the social structure and we cope with many roles which cannot be reduced to our consumer experience only. We form ourselves through our consumer behaviour and the way we use consumer goods not only shapes us but expresses and stabilizes our other identities as well.¹¹⁰ As ritual is “more or less invariant”, we can spot differences in regional and institutional practice bound to specific historical occasions and various institutions in which consumption takes place.¹¹¹ Another thing is individual experiencing of rituals. As Sassatelli points out, a weekly purchase in a supermarket can present a try to save money for someone, but someone else can take it as a festive occasion.¹¹² Many people nowadays spend their weekends in shopping centres demonstrating their wealth by being able to buy things they very often do not necessarily need.

¹¹⁰ Sassatelliová 94.

¹¹¹ Sassatelliová 94.

¹¹² Sassatelliová 105.

Chapter 5: BABBITT – A MATERIALIST¹¹³

In the previous three chapters we presented arguments why materialism (or more specifically consumer culture) can be taken as religion. In this last chapter our aim is to apply these conclusions when analysing the behaviour of a fictitious character George Follansbee Babbitt and, more importantly, his relationship towards religion, taking into account other important circumstances and contexts as well, be it Babbitt's surroundings (primarily the city of Zenith) or the way Lewis chose to present the religious questions in his book.

5.1 The importance of Zenith

Zenith plays a crucial role in Babbitt's life. It is more than a small American town he lives in; it is the town itself as well as the people living in there that shape and influence Babbitt's identity. Although he claims boastfully that “[n]obody can dictate to [him] what [he] thinks,”¹¹⁴ his behaviour presented in the book proves exactly the opposite. The way he creates his own “original” opinions is described sarcastically in the following passage:

[H]e felt that on the subject of Shakespeare he wasn't really an authority. Neither the *Advocate-Times*, the *Evening Advocate*, nor the *Bulletin of the Zenith Chamber of Commerce* had ever had an editorial on the matter, and until one of them had spoken he found it hard to form an original opinion.
(66)

This is only one from many examples occurring in the novel on which it is apparent that at the beginning of the novel Babbitt lacks intellectual capacity to think critically and create his own authentic opinions based on analysing his environment. In the course of the novel, Babbitt comes through a kind of personal evolution and his mentality changes (more to this process in Chapter 5.4).

¹¹³ In Chapters 3 and 4, the phenomenon that was at the beginning of this thesis labelled as materialism, has suddenly begun to be referred to as consumer culture. As was already explained at the beginning of Chapter 3, materialism (or material culture) is a more general term and consumer culture indicates a specific form of material culture in the contemporary Euro-American civilisation. For the purpose of this thesis, we are going to label Babbitt as “materialist”, sticking to the more general term, because we cannot create a one-word term from “consumer culture”. This step is purely practical and the author is aware that it does not one hundred percent correspond with the strict definitions of the term. On the other hand, after having explained the situation and based on the fact that both terms describe nearly the same phenomenon, only the second one sets it in a more specific spatial and historical environment, the author believes that the reader of this thesis can bear this fact in mind and be tolerant towards this slight violation of the precision of terms.

¹¹⁴ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1992) 249. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

However, the main aim of this thesis is to analyse the Babbitt we get to know at the beginning of the novel, since in this phase his real religion demonstrates itself most prominently. Therefore it is useful for our purposes to first describe and analyse the environment Babbitt lives in to be able to fully understand and later analyse Babbitt's religious behaviour from the inside.

Zenith as a town plays a very important role in the whole context of Lewis' literary work. It was modelled on real American towns and cities that Lewis visited. The credibility and authenticity of Zenith lies in small details,

[for which] Lewis went to the Midwest and gathered data first-hand on his subject. He went about his task almost like an anthropologist, mingling with the type of people the novel would concern and making notes on what he observed. [...] Study of the material he gathered here shows Lewis incorporating his research directly into *Babbitt*.¹¹⁵

Not only observations and real names of city suburbs, streets etc., served as authentic material for Lewis: “[c]lippings from Cincinnati newspapers provided much material [as well]”.¹¹⁶ All these authentic materials served Lewis' intention to

give a ‘Picture [sic] of, and [do] justice to, *all* the city’ as ‘a cosmos,’ mentioning the ‘excellence of the suburbs in which U.S. equals the world’ but also the fact that businessmen do not appreciate the ‘fine system of parks, symphony orchestra, etc.’ Lewis also clipped society columns, then replicated their syntax and language [...].¹¹⁷

Based on the information Hutchisson's essay provides us with¹¹⁸ we can see that it is possible for our purpose to take Lewis' picture of Zenith seriously as a certain kind of a representative of small American cities since it is based on authentic data the author himself carefully collected.¹¹⁹

Another important aspect is the authenticity of the discourse presented in the book. Hutchisson mentions that Lewis in his notebook had one section called

¹¹⁵ Hutchisson: 99-100.

¹¹⁶ Hutchisson 100.

¹¹⁷ Hutchisson 100.

¹¹⁸ Hutchisson based his research on Lewis' papers and other authentic documentary evidence mapping the process how *Babbitt* as a novel was created.

¹¹⁹ Of course, we need to count on a fact that every writer can shape his material as he likes (he is no scholar or scientist, but an artist) and we could not use information about Zenith as data for any scientific study. On the other hand, for the purpose of our literary analysis, it is good to be aware of the fact that Zenith is a product of a careful sociological study the author undertook because it influenced, as we are going to see later in this thesis, the whole reception of Lewis' novel.

“Locutions” in which he “listed whole catalogues of expressions and variations on them [like]: ‘How’s the old Bolshevik/anarchist/grouch today?’”¹²⁰ and many others. Added to which, religious discourse in *Babbitt* can be (at least partly) taken for authentic as well. For example, Hutchisson states that

the Reverend John Jennison Drew’s description of the church choir as providing ‘mountains of melody, mountains of mirth’ (p. 206) [belongs to] phrases that Lewis jotted down on the bulletin of the First Congregational Church of Oak Park, Illinois, where he evidently attended services on 20 March 1921.¹²¹

Lewis’ extremely strong concern with verisimilitude became a base for some of his critics who claimed that Lewis seemed “more interested in socio-historical detail of his subject matter than in the psychological complexities of his characters.”¹²² As a result, “Lewis [in their opinion] had trouble keeping his focus on the central character and not letting his descriptions of Zenith (or of other characters) detract from the emphasis on Babbitt.”¹²³ Although these critics view this aspect of *Babbitt* as problematic, for the purposes of this thesis it is on the contrary beneficial. Thanks to Lewis’ elaborate descriptions of Zenith, we are not only able to analyse Babbitt’s background that shapes him and influences so much during the whole novel, but we are also able to make connections between the fictitious world of this novel (which is after all not so much fictitious at all) and the scholarly conclusions and observations based on the perception of our non-fictitious reality we presented in the previous three chapters.

5.1.1 Zenith as a hierophany

At the beginning of this chapter we stated that not only people in Zenith influence Babbitt, but the town itself as well. The importance of Zenith and its appearance is probably most prominent at the very beginning of the novel. The novel starts with the following sentences:

The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods.

¹²⁰ Hutchisson 100.

¹²¹ Hutchisson 100.

¹²² Hutchisson 101.

¹²³ Hutchisson 101.

They were neither citadels nor *churches*¹²⁴, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings. (5)

It cannot be a coincidence that Lewis chose the word “churches” when introducing first impressions of Zenith. The feeling, which the “towers of Zenith” should awake, is the same awe a Christian feels when entering a church (therefore the implicit hint we get in the second sentence of this depiction) – and it really works, as we can see a few pages later when Babbitt looks at nearly the same picture we as readers were introduced to a while ago:

[...] [Babbitt] could see the top of the Second National Tower [...]. Integrity was in the tower, and decision. It bore its strength lightly as a tall soldier. As Babbitt stared, the nervousness was soothed from his face, his slack chin lifted in reverence. All he articulated was “That’s one lovely sight!” but he was inspired by the rhythm of the city; his love of it renewed. He beheld the tower as a temple-spire of the religion of business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men; and as he clumped down to breakfast he whistled the ballad “Oh, by gee, by gosh, by jingo” as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble. (14–15)

Babbitt’s reaction is self-speaking. He feels awe (or in Lewis’ words “reverence”) when seeing the symbol of materialistic culture: a building where “the business” takes place, where people like him meet every day to “[make] the wheels of progress go round” (152) and perform “Good Sound Business Administration” (137). The Second National Tower is more than a building where people work in: it reveals “*something different*” than it is itself¹²⁵ and therefore becomes a hierophany of the consumerist religion. This is visible not only on Babbitt’s religious reaction (awe, love and comfort at the same time) but also on the religious discourse Lewis chooses when describing the situation. The choice of words as “temple-spire of the religion of business”, “the faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men” and then likening Babbitt’s singing to “a hymn melancholy and noble” deliberately point at similarities with religious behaviour. Materialism and its representative building are presented in this scene in religious terms and we can see that the Second National Tower became a mighty symbol demonstrating the power it has over its admirers.

¹²⁴ Emphasis mine.

¹²⁵ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 33.

Obviously enough, Zenith is presented as an epicentre of materialistic religion and as such is admired as well. Vergil Gunch even states that all small towns “want to be just like Zenith” (101), putting Zenith on a pedestal as a role model for other towns and cities. What can at the first sight look as a kind of patriotic enthusiasm (the *patria* being the small town all of them live in), is actually much more (as we get to know in the course of the novel). The first hints are given to us at the beginning of Babbitt’s great speech (the Annual Address) at the dinner of the Zenith Real Estate Board when we get to know that Zenith is “the home for manly men and womanly women and bright kids” and we can find there

the largest proportion of these Regular Guys and that’s what sets it in a class by itself; that’s why Zenith will be remembered in history as having set the pace for a civilization that shall endure when the old time-killing ways are gone forever and the day of earnest efficient endeavor shall have dawned all round the world! (154–155)

Zenith is again treated as something unique, something that deserves awe being a role model, a chosen one being remembered in history. From the perspective of religious studies, Eliade points out that “the dialectics of hierophanies presumes more or less obvious *selection*, a certain differentiation”¹²⁶ and Sassatelli, from the sociological perspective, mentions “the logic of distinction” (more about these two phenomena in Chapters 2.2.2 and 4.2). Both these principles meet in this view of Zenith as a symbol of materialistic religion. Zenith itself can be therefore seen as a hierophany through which the essence of materialism is expressed.

Zenith’s hierophanical status is confirmed as we proceed through Babbitt’s speech. As we can observe by great religions as Christianity or Islam, another distinguishing mark of religion is the effort of its admirers to disseminate their beliefs between more and more people, in other words to gain more and more admirers. Babbitt mentions another “great thing” about Zenith which is that it (together with its sister-cities) “[produces] a new type of civilization”. (155) Then he expands on this idea stating that all “stores, offices, streets, hotels, clothes, and newspapers throughout the United States” become standardized (this standardization is of course “extraordinary, growing, and sane”) (155), i.e. Zenith and other cities (that follow Zenith as their role model) spread this materialistic

¹²⁶ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 33.

“religious” model further among new admirers, gaining more and more cities and their people which are going to participate in this process of unification that Babbitt calls “standardization”. May this theory seem a little exaggerated, Babbitt is going to prove it one page later when he comments upon this “holy process” in religious terms, likening news about Zenith to news in the Bible:

[...] I give a few statistics to back up my claims. If they are old stuff to any of you, yet the tidings of prosperity, like the good news of the Bible, never become tedious to ears of a real hustler, no matter how oft the sweet story is told! Every intelligent person knows that Zenith manufactures more condensed milk and evaporated cream, more paper boxes, and more lighting-fixtures, than any other city in the United States, if not in the world. (156)

However, at that point Babbitt does not stop. His admiration of Zenith goes on, explaining that

our greatness [...] lies not alone in punchful prosperity but equally in that public spirit, that forward-looking idealism and brotherhood, which has marked Zenith ever since its foundation by the Fathers. We have a right, indeed we have a duty toward our fair city, to announce broadcast the facts about our high schools, characterized by their complete plants and the finest school-ventilating systems in the country; [...] (157)

Then he names all various “signs of civilization” as “bathrooms, vacuum cleaners” etc., in other words other materialistic hierophanies (or we could call them status symbols that define wealthy, and therefore great, people of Zenith). These all symbolise “all-round unlimited greatness of Zenith” (157). And the last we need to know to make our picture of Zenith complete: “progress and braininess [are] synonymous with the name Zenith!” (157)

We have already stated in Chapter 2.2.2 that anything can become a hierophany because (according to Eliade) sacred manifests itself in any form, even in the most absurd one.¹²⁷ Moreover, Eliade points out that it is impossible to estimate something that has not ever become a hierophany. Although in later chapters most of the hierophanies are going to be material objects, we can already see that materialistic religion (as well as other religions) can manifest itself in various forms, be it “the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced

¹²⁷ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 49.

alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments, including a cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial” (7), a Dutch Colonial house or a whole city.

5.1.2 Presbyterian Church in Zenith

In Chapter 2.3, we have characterized Presbyterian Church as a whole and we have named basic values that all bodies (or branches) should share. One could think that Presbyterian Church in Zenith will represent these values and teach all people practicing “Good Sound Business Administration” (137) to draw their attention to Bible, since one of the main principles sounds, as being defined by Kirkpatrick and Hopper:

Every Christian should have the privilege and *responsibility*¹²⁸ to carefully “study, learn and interpret” the Bible. “[E]ach Christian [can] interpret the Bible”, therefore there is no need for other interpretation by the church.¹²⁹

Bible is seen as the most authoritative source and one would therefore expect that the values contained in it will be defended by the Presbyterian Church of Zenith as well. All these assumptions prove wrong as we get to observe how the church (represented by Reverend John Jennison Drew) acts.

One does not need an elaborate analysis to reveal that Reverend John Jennison Drew is the reverend of Zenith Presbyterian Church only by name – the true values he stands for are those of materialistic religion. Reverend grants us this information himself when he “often sa[ys] that he [is] ‘proud to be known as primarily a business man’”. (171) This label of a businessman already presumes a set of characteristic features that lead to his identification with a narrowly defined group of people (i.e. businessmen). His “membership” is obvious in the way Drew is engaged in politics. His opinions and the way he expresses them are far away from a distinguished and restrained manner one would expect from a reverend who should be there for all Christians, providing all-embracing understanding for everyone. We get to know that “[Reverend Drew] presided at meetings for the denunciation of unions or the elevation of domestic service”. (171) The names of editorials he writes for the *Evening Advocate* are self-speaking: “The Manly Man’s Religion” and “The Dollars and Sense Value of Christianity” (171), implying that dollars play a key role in Christian religion. If we read Chapter 2.3

¹²⁸ Emphasis mine.

¹²⁹ Based on Kirkpatrick and Hopper, 13–14.

about Presbyterian values again, we would look for any mention of dollars in vain.

The way Reverend Drew expresses himself confirms his identification as a businessman:

[Reverend Drew] often said that [...] he was not going to “permit the old Satan to monopolize all the pep and punch.” [...] He admitted that he was too much the scholar and poet to imitate the evangelist, Mike Monday, yet he had once awakened his fold to new life, and to larger collections, by the challenge, “My brethren, the real cheap skate is the man who won’t lend to the Lord!” (171)

The emphasis put on the role of money in the religious practice is again very prominent here: the way Reverend Drew speaks is not different from the way the other businessmen do, using words as “cheap skate” or “pep and punch”.

The most prominent demonstration of his businessmen-like discourse appears during the strike of unions. Reverend Drew’s sermon is called “How the Saviour Would End Strikes” and in this sermon he does not try to reconcile both sides and encourage them to lead a constructive dialogue, on the contrary; not only he openly criticizes the striking ones – he takes this sermon as a chance to disparage scientists, label them as enemies of church and declare that church has won a battle against science, summing up that “the only answer a Christian pastor needs make to the long-haired opponents of his simple faith is just a pitying smile!” (256). He oversimplifies everything, does not provide a deeper insight into the problems... in another words, he behaves exactly like all the businessmen around him and is not able to act as a moral leader one expects him to be.

There is another businessman-like characteristic feature of Reverend Drew related to the above described moment and that is his fierceness. Although the Sunday School of the Chatham Road Presbyterian is “the fourth largest in Zenith [...]”, Drew assumes that “there is no reason why [it] should take anybody’s dust [, it] ought to be first”. (173) And he asks William Eathorne, Babbitt and Chum Frink to help him “buck it up”. (173) This particular situation is going to be analysed more deeply in the next Chapter 5.2, but we can already state that the proposed solutions and accented values are again going to be far from those presented by Kirkpatrick and Hopper in Chapter 2.3.

The talent of Reverend Drew to attract only certain types of people is easily identifiable in the way he “improved” his church on the Chatham Road.

[It was] a true community center. It contained everything but a bar. It had [...] a gymnasium, a fortnightly motion-picture show, a library of technical books for young workmen – though unfortunately, no younger workman ever entered the church except to wash the windows or repair the furnace [...]. (171)

From the last sentence it is clear that Reverend Drew’s obvious inclination to the social group of businessmen has a logical consequence: the only people feeling well in his church are people belonging to the businessmen group. The library does not serve its primary purpose (i.e. the workmen studying): it should give the impression that the church is open for everybody (consistently with basic Christian values), but the real situation is analogical to Reverend Drew defending the values of Presbyterian Church – it is only a pretence.

Zenith is obviously divided into more social groups distancing themselves from the other ones and “businessmen” (among them Reverend Drew as well as Babbitt) constitute one of them. Reverend Drew’s sermons (although they are officially open to everyone) are in fact meant only for one strictly defined social group of people. Based on Fromm’s approach we can observe a contrast between an “official religion” (the Presbyterian one) of Reverend Drew and his congregation and their “real and *secret*” materialistic religion (more to Fromm’s classification in Chapter 2.1).

Being a part of Presbyterian Church (or of any other religious or spiritualistic group¹³⁰) undoubtedly belongs to signs defining the businessmen social class. This fact is explicitly described on a concrete example of “two red-necked, meaty men”,

newly rich contractors who, having bought houses, motors, hand-painted pictures, and gentlemanliness, were now buying a refined ready-made philosophy. It had been a tossup with them whether to buy New Thought, Christian Science, or a good standard high-church model of Episcopalianism. (290)

¹³⁰ The need for some kind of spiritual life (have it any possible form) is characteristic not only for businessmen themselves but also for their wives (therefore we take it here as a characteristic sign defining the whole social class). Zilla Riesling and her conversion to Pentecostal Communion Faith can be taken as one example (251–252), Myra Babbitt’s visit of a lecture given by Mrs. Mudge for the American New Thought League can be taken as another example (290–293).

The creed is clear: anything can be bought. Anything, be it any kind of goods (house, motors), an abstract value (as gentlemanliness) or spiritual dimension of life (refined ready-made philosophy). The superficiality in their approach is more than obvious: they do not need religion or philosophy to enrich their lives and thinking; they need it to strengthen their image (so that they can *speak* of it and *be seen* on the meetings, i.e. demonstrate their status), therefore it is irrelevant if they are members of New Thought, Christian Science or any other groups or churches – all of them can successfully fulfil the goal of being a part of the status (more to the system how status works in Chapter 4.1). After all, Babbitt states it clearly at the dinner of the Zenith Real Estate Board when he characterizes “the ideal of American manhood and culture”: it is a “God-fearing, hustling, successful, two-fisted Regular Guy, who belongs to some church with pep and piety to it [...].” (158)

When Babbitt (at the end of the novel) is working on his readmission into the businessmen community he left earlier in the novel, one of the necessary steps he needs to take is returning back to the church. This step is essential for two reasons: first, being a member of a church (i.e. having the label of a pious man) is crucial for the image of businessman (as mentioned above), and second, Babbitt does not want to risk his afterlife in case God existed:

[Babbitt] had returned to the church as he had returned to the Boosters' Club. [...] He was worried lest during his late discontent he had imperiled his salvation. He was not quite sure there was a Heaven to be attained, but Dr. John Jennison Drew said there was, and Babbitt was not going to take a chance. (319)

To sum up, not only Zenith as a city consolidates Babbitt in his materialistic belief – the church he belongs to does as well, because being a member of the Presbyterian Church in Zenith serves as a necessary label one needs for being a successful member of the businessmen community.

5.2 Babbitt's “Presbyterianism”

In the previous Chapter 5.1.2, we focused on the Zenith Presbyterian Church as such; in this chapter we want to focus on Babbitt's personal relationship not only towards the institution but also towards the Presbyterian belief and its values. In other words, adopting Fromm's classification we are focusing on Babbitt's *official* religion.

Babbitt's absence of self-reflection (which is something the Presbyterian Church *ought* to lead him to but completely fails to do it practically¹³¹) is obvious in the discrepancy between his words and actual deeds:

[...] Babbitt was virtuous. He advocated, though he did not practise, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised, though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; [...] he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only as it was sanctioned by precedent [...]. (41)

This is one of many situations when we can observe the superficiality of his Christian faith. He speaks so because it *sounds* good, because these rules a “good Christian” should obey – and as a label it works perfectly. Nobody cares if he *really* lives according to what he preaches: the outside look and the act of *being heard* is enough; it is enough as a demonstration of his status.

Babbitt's official religion (and the “depth” with which he believes in it) is aptly described in the following passage:

If you had asked Babbitt what his religion was, he would have answered in sonorous Boosters'-Club rhetoric, “My religion is to serve my fellow men, to honor my brother as myself, and to do my bit to make life happier for one and all.” If you had pressed him for more detail, he would have announced, “I'm a member of the Presbyterian Church, and naturally, I accept its doctrines.” If you had been so brutal as to go on, he would have protested, “There's no use discussing and arguing about religion; it just stirs up bad feeling”. (173)

This passage represents another demonstration of the superficiality of Babbitt's official faith and his “Christian ideals”. He is not able to classify concretely what the Presbyterian doctrines are, therefore he tries to perform an evasive maneuver to save his own face. Something very similar happens to him when he speaks about dr. Drew and the church with Kenneth Escott: “You remember that in the Bible about – about being diligent in the Lord's business, or something?” (184) He is not able to verbalize precisely the value he wants to reference to to defend dr. Drew.

One of the reasons why Babbitt's religious knowledge is so poor is the fact that “the content of his theology” is in fact very simplistic:

¹³¹ The reasons why are elaborated and explained in Chapter 5.1.2.

[Babbitt believed that] there was a supreme being who had tried to make us perfect, but presumably had failed; that if one was a Good Man he would go to a place called Heaven (Babbitt unconsciously pictured it as rather like an excellent hotel with a private garden), but if one was a Bad Man, that is, if he murdered or committed burglary or used cocaine or had mistresses or sold non-existent real estate, he would be punished. Babbitt was uncertain, however, about what he called “this business of Hell.” [...] [He didn’t] exactly believe in a fire-and-brimstone Hell. [...] [However,] a fellow can’t get away with all sorts of Vice and not get nicked for it [...].

(173)

For him, the “Good” and “Bad” is strictly defined and there is nothing between: one is either bad or good. While his idea about Heaven is quite clear (and accommodated to his own perspective that is shaped through consumer culture), his idea of Hell is a bit vague; however, the distinction is again strictly polar (either Heaven, or Hell). This depiction of his “theology” aptly shows Babbitt’s inability to see the world in its complexity.

It is obvious that theoretical thinking is not Babbitt’s strongpoint. But his “practical religion” is straightforward:

The kernel of his practical religion was that it was respectable, and beneficial to one’s business, to *be seen*¹³² going to services; that the church kept the Worst Elements from being still worse; and that the pastor’s sermons, however dull they might seem at the time of taking, yet had a voodooistic power which “did a fellow good – kept him in touch with Higher Things”. (173–174)

In this passage, there is explicitly expressed the importance of *being seen* going to services; in other words the participation itself is not as important as the label of “respectable businessman” it gives him. We see that Babbitt’s perception of the sermon and the effect it has on him is in fact closer to the effect of a Catholic mass held in Latin than the Protestant one. The Protestant service is based on the fact that all members of congregation understand what they are being told and are able to internally process the words they hear. The Catholic mass is incomprehensible for ordinary people (i.e. people not educated in Latin) and the effect is therefore based on the power of the impression people get from the

¹³² Emphasis mine.

splendidly decorated church building, the pastor's voice etc. Babbitt's perception is also based on indefinite (but at the same time strong) impressions and vague interpretations ("did a fellow good – kept him in touch with Higher Things"). Obviously, the pastor's sermon does not touch him in the way a Protestant sermon should (or is expected to) do, because first, Reverend's Drew sermons do not have true Presbyterian content (as we have already argued in Chapter 5.1.2), and second, it does not enhance Babbitt's spiritual life and his morality anyhow, on the contrary: it supports his materialistic worldview by making practical use of it for its own benefit.

When Reverend Drew asks Babbitt to help him to "buck up" the Sunday School, Babbitt approaches this task very pragmatically, as a true businessman, because that is the only *modus operandi* he knows and is good at. Let him now present all his great ideas to us:

I think if you analyze the needs of the school, in fact, going right at it as if it was a merchandizing problem, of course the one basic and fundamental need is growth. I presume we're all agreed we won't be satisfied till we build up the biggest darn Sunday School in the whole state, so the Chatham Road Presbyterian won't have to take anything off anybody. Now about jazzing up the campaign for prospects: they've already used contesting teams, and given prizes to the kids that bring in the most members. And they made a mistake there: the prizes were a lot of folderols and doodads like poetry books and illustrated Testaments, instead of something a real live kid would want to work for, like real cash or a speedometer for his motor cycle. Course I suppose it's all fine and dandy to illustrate the lessons with these decorated book-marks and blackboard drawings and so on, but when it comes down to real he-hustling, getting out and drumming up customer – or members, I mean, why, you got to make it worth a fellow's while. (179–180)

There are a few characteristic moments we can identify in Babbitt's monologue. First: the needs analysis – the first step every businessman takes when a new customer comes; it is a "formal and systematic process of identifying and evaluating [...] specific needs of an individual or group of employees, customers,

suppliers, etc.”.¹³³ Then expansion, another typical element of building a successful company. Babbitt’s discourse is also self-speaking: he uses typical words and phrases like “customer” (although he immediately corrects himself, the slip of the tongue is irrevocable), “analyzing the needs of the school” or “merchandizing problem”. And finally, the kind of motivation he wants to use to support the kids in even more intensive recruitment of new members is truly profane. With a slight exaggeration we can state that he wants to “hire” the children to bring new members. From his wording (“you got to make it worth a fellow’s while”) it is obvious that he cannot imagine that the children would make something like that voluntarily, only because they believe it is a good thing. By doing this, he completely changes the spirit of the recruitment: now, they are not recruiting new people to make these people’s lives better as a whole by offering them the opportunity of enhancing their spiritual lives – they are doing it for themselves so that *they* and their church can be better on a fully secular level, because they can boast that they have more members than the other churches. Moreover, the main reason for the children to cooperate will be the fact that they are going to get what they have wished for (real cash or a speedometer for their motor cycle), i.e. the results will not be enhancement of their spiritual lives, only of the material site of it.

After having analyzed Babbitt’s approach we get another proof that everything in the church is done only to be *seen* and *heard*. And by making the children act like this, by showing them these behavioral patterns and supporting them in their following, Babbitt and others only replicate and pass on their own materialistic values to the young generation (which is, after all, logical because they do not think they are doing something wrong...). Someone could argue (Babbitt, for example) that they only try to “bring the religion closer to the young generation”; at the first sight, that may be true but the message they bring with them about it is in contradiction with the true Presbyterian values the church should represent and defend.

5.2.1 Practical function of Babbitt’s Presbyterianism

The main thesis of this work is that whereas Babbitt’s official religion does not enhance his spiritual life anyhow, it does have a positive influence on his business

¹³³ “Needs Analysis,” *Training Industry*, 2020 <https://trainingindustry.com/glossary/needs-analysis/> 30 April 2020.

life and on his position in the community. His engagement in the “bucking up” of the Sunday School showed to be a real success because:

[t]he Sunday School adopted Babbitt’s system of military ranks. Quickened by this spiritual refreshment, it had a boom. It did not become the largest school in Zenith [...] but it climbed from fourth place to second [...], while Babbitt had much praise and good repute. (182–183)

He becomes so popular that he appears in the local newspapers: “Within a week three newspapers presented accounts of Babbitt’s sterling labors for religion [...].” (183) And finally, his new prominent position helps him to win a new prominent ally, William Washington Eathorne, who presents a valuable support to his business:

A few months later, when [Babbitt] had a chance to take part in the Street Traction Company’s terminal deal, Babbitt did not care to go to his own bank for a loan. It was rather a quiet sort of deal and, if it had come out, the Public might not have understood. He went to his friend Mr. Eathorne; he was welcomed, and received the loan as a private venture; and they both profited in their pleasant new association. (185)

Active engagement in the church brought Babbitt social and business advantages, therefore

[a]fter that, Babbitt went to church regularly, except on spring Sunday mornings which were obviously meant for motoring. He announced to Ted, “[...] there’s no stronger bulwark of sound conversation than the evangelical church, and no better place to make friends who’ll help you to gain your rightful place in the community than in your own church-home! (185)

This passage aptly demonstrates the role the Presbyterian Church plays in Babbitt’s life which is purely practical and pragmatic, i.e. not spiritual at all (which can be demonstrated on his approach towards Sunday sermons when he gives preference to motoring over the visit of the church). Babbitt’s official religion serves him to enhance his social position and gain valuable allies who can support his business. His relationship towards Presbyterianism can therefore be characterized not only as superficial but also as utilitarian.

5.2.2 The influence of Paul Riesling

The only moments when Babbitt is able to think more deeply about his life (although he is not able to really analyse it into depth) come when he hangs out with Paul Riesling. Paul is not a “typical” businessman like those who have been characterized above – he is not content with his life, with his marriage and his job and he is able to openly think and speak about it. He has something Babbitt misses: a deeper insight. He does not lie to himself and in this aspect he influences Babbitt as well (although little by little). It is him who actually fulfills the moral role of the church: he manages to make Babbitt look at himself and think about his life. It is important to stress that it is a really *slow* evolution, not a revolution, but already at the beginning of the novel, under Paul’s influence, Babbitt is able to confess that there is some pretense in his life:

Sometimes – I’m always blowing to Myra and the kids about what a whale of a realtor I am, and yet sometimes I get a sneaking idea I’m not such a Pierpont Morgan as I let on to be. (55)

Moreover, Paul is able to show a mirror to Babbitt’s empty talks (those we have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) when he says to him:

You’re always talking about “morals” [...]. You’ve been the rock of ages to me, all right, but you’re essentially a simp. You [...] love to look earnest and inform the world that it’s the “duty of responsible business men to be strictly moral, as an example to the community.” In fact, you’re so earnest about morality, old George, that I hate to think how essentially immoral you must be underneath. (55–56)

Of course, in the moment when Paul states that, Babbitt is unable to think about his words or even admit that they are true. This kind of discussion makes Babbitt “elephantishly uneasy”, because he feels unconsciously that his friend hit the nail on the head – but admitting that would mean to deny everything he so blindly and passionately believes in. “Now and then Babbitt suddenly agreed with Paul in an admission which contradicted all his defense of duty and Christian patience [...]. (57) However, as the story of the novel proceeds forward, Babbitt starts to realise, step by step, that Paul’s remarks were valid.

From this chapter it is prominent that it is only Paul who can really impose a positive influence on Babbitt’s self-reflection and make him think deeper about his life. The church again fails to fulfill its role.

5.3 Consumer culture as real religion

The preceding chapter focused on Babbitt's *official* religion (Presbyterianism) – this one analyses his *real* religion, which is consumer culture. The first aspect to be examined is the broader context of materialistic religion and how it displays itself not only in Babbitt's life, but also in the social life of whole Zenith; the second examined aspect is Babbitt's faith as such and its specific forms, which are hierophanies, idols and rituals.

In Chapter 5.2.1, it has been argued, that the Presbyterian Church, although not being primarily materialistic by definition, gained materialistic character in Zenith and does not fulfil its basic spiritual function; also, the practical function of official religion has been described, which is mainly creating a good image in the society. The church too serves like a source of social contacts that can strengthen not only one's image but his business as well. Babbitt himself aptly characterizes this function after having won William Washington Eathorne for his friend thanks to being a member of the Chatham Road Presbyterian Church (and especially thanks to Dr. Drew):

there's no stronger bulwark of sound conversation than the evangelical church, and no better place to make friends who'll help you to gain your rightful place in the community than in your own church-home! (185)

In the 7th chapter of the novel *Babbitt*, we reveal another practical effect a "Protestant pontiff" can have for the businessmen: "turn[ing] the minds of workmen from wages and hours to higher things, and thus avert[ing] strikes" (84). For the committee of manufacturers this is the first (and at the same time the last) argument that changes their hesitation and they agree to invite Mike Monday to Zenith. This former prize-fighter presents himself as Protestant, but he is similar to Reverend Drew: under the official religious label there is purely unspiritual and superficial content. No wonder, since religion (not only) in Zenith, as we have already argued, has been commodified and in the following passage, it is presented as a profitable business; obviously enough, money was the main reason for Mr. Monday to engage himself in that field, since

[a]s a prize-fighter he gained nothing but his crooked nose, his celebrated vocabulary, and his stage-presence. The service of the Lord had been more profitable. He was about to retire with a fortune. (84)

This man has no formal qualification for being a “pontiff”, no religious education, but in the context of materialistic religion this insufficiency presents no problem at all since his main qualification is being

the Prophet with a Punch [...] and the world’s greatest salesman of salvation [...] [because] [h]e has converted over two hundred thousand lost and priceless souls at an average cost of less than ten dollars a head. (84)

This shows that he is no real preacher but a businessman selling some product (“religion”, or rather “salvation”) successfully, since he reaches higher effectiveness for less money. Quantity makes him popular, not quality.

Mr. Monday’s speech on the pages 84 and 85 only proves in terms of content as well as form the conclusions we have come to. In his speech, Monday (as well as Reverend Drew) only disparages educated people and threatens to hurt them if they say a word against him. The expressions he uses can be met with in a pub but not in a true sermon; examples like “swell bunch of Lizzie boys”, “lemon-suckers” or “pie-faces” can be named. His sermons are only exhibitions of vulgarity and roughness, however, these only increase his popularity and cannot do any harm to his image because he fits into the materialistic world where businessmen “fight” every day to get the most money they can and are adored for it.

Another example of commodification of church can be found in Sunday School journals that are “as technical, as practical and forward-looking, as the real-estate columns or the shoe-trade magazines” (175). They contain advertisements – some of them try to look like they have something to do with faith; some do not even try, like the one below:

In their advertisements the Sunday School journals were thoroughly efficient. Babbitt was interested in a preparation which “takes the place of exercise for sedentary men by building up depleted nerve tissue, nourishing the brain and the digestive system.” (176)

The commodification of religion can be observed also in the way the church presents itself. It has its regular PR, since Dr. Drew makes his best to appear in newspapers regularly. A lot of stress is put, like in business, on efficiency that is expressed through numbers and statistics:

The Rev. Dr. John Jennison Drew, M.A., pastor of the beautiful Chatham Road Presbyterian Church in lovely Floral Heights, is a wizard soul-

winner. He holds the local record of conversions. During his shepherdhood an average of almost a hundred sin-weary persons per year have declared their resolve to lead a new life and have found a harbor of refuge and peace. (184)

Taking into account also the previous example of Mr. Monday, we see that it does not matter, whether it is one “preacher” or the whole church – the stress put on efficiency and measuring the success through numbers and statistics is omnipresent. Quantity wins over quality, form over content. It is about PR; image is what one is interested in, appearance.

Eunice Littlefield, the daughter of Howard Littlefield, presents an example demonstrating what effect all the above discussed questions have on the young generation. It is image and appearance she admires, which is obvious from the following passage:

[S]he [...] read the motion-pictures magazines, those extraordinary symptoms of the Age of Pep – monthlies and weeklies gorgeously illustrated with portraits of young women who had recently been manicure girls, not very skillful manicure girls, and who, unless their every grimace had been arranged by a director, could not have acted in the Easter cantata of the Central Methodist Church [...]. These authorities Eunice studied.

(187)

Although the “manicure girls” become actresses, they are only marionettes in the hands of directors. It is their appearance that is valued, not their skills. But because the main focus is put on form, not on content, they can become idols and “authorities” for a young seventeen-year-old girl. Fromm points out that in our times (and in the time of the novel *Babbitt* as well) “authority by competence yields to authority by social status [...]; competence is not an essential element of authority”¹³⁴ – and Eunice’s idols only prove him right. The strength of Eunice’s admiration is after all indicated in the following paragraph stating that “Babbitt was bewildered by this worship of *new gods*¹³⁵” (187).

In *To Have or To Be*, Erich Fromm analyses the distinction between *having* and *being* in daily experience. Our aim is to show that Babbitt always

¹³⁴ Fromm 46.

¹³⁵ Emphasis mine.

operates in the having mode. That is a logical consequence of the consumerist religion, since, as Fromm points out,

'religion' [...] does not refer to a system that has necessarily to do with a concept of God or with idols or even to a system perceived as religion, but to *any group-shared system of thought and conduct and offers the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.*¹³⁶

Because *having*, or in some aspects rather *owning*, presents a crucial part of Babbitt's real religion, it drives his thought and conduct and influences him in all areas of his life. First, let us focus on the area of faith, where it is most prominent. According to Fromm,

[f]aith, in the having mode, is the possession of an answer for which one has no rational proof. It consists of formulations created by others – usually a bureaucracy. It carries the feeling of certainty because of the real (or only imagined) power of the bureaucracy. It is the entry ticket to join a large group of people. It relieves one of the hard task of thinking for oneself and making decisions. One becomes one of the *beati possidentes*, the happy owners of the right faith. Faith, in the having mode, gives certainty; [...].¹³⁷

Chapter 5.3.1 provides a list of things Babbitt needs to own and/or do to be a right member of his community. He needs a new car: not because his old one would be broken or unreliable – a new car presents a status symbol and owning it ensures Babbitt's social position. We have already showed that Babbitt does not think for himself – he always adopts the “right” opinions from the “right” people, be it editors of *Advocate-Times* or admirable people like Howard Littlefield – “Great Scholar” (24) – or William Washington Eathorne. Adopting of the “right” opinions not only makes him a valuable member of his community, but also gives him a very pleasant feeling of certainty.

Another area in which Babbitt practices having mode is reading. Reading of *Advocate-Times* belongs to Babbitt's regular rituals; from this journal he gains his “own authentic opinions” (as we have mentioned them in the preceding paragraph) without having to really think about what he is actually reading. According to Fromm,

¹³⁶ Fromm 134–135.

¹³⁷ Fromm 49.

in reading (as well as in a personal conversation) *whom* I read from (or talk with) is important. Reading an artless, cheap novel [...] does not permit productive response; the text is swallowed like a television show [...]. But a novel, say by Balzac, can be read with inner participation, productively – that is, in the mode of being. Yet probably most of the time it is also read in the mode of consuming – of having. [...] [The readers] have not understood the person in the novel and thus have not deepened their insight into human nature, or gained knowledge about themselves.¹³⁸

Although Babbitt is no fan of Balzac's novels that Fromm uses as an example, Fromm's description is applicable not only to Babbitt's favourite *Advocate-Times* which he "consumes" on a daily basis; Babbitt knows many "great names" of the literary world (after all, he studied humanities) – but he knows them only by name. And had he read them, he would read them in the having mode, not in the being mode. His approach to authors like Shakespeare is purely "functionalist", as it is obvious in the following passage where Babbitt explains the importance of Wordsworth, Milton and Shakespeare to Ted: "I'll tell you why you have to study Shakespeare and those. It's because they're required for college entrance, and that's all there is to it!" (66)

The same approach can be traced in Babbitt's relationship towards education and educated people.

[The students in the having mode] do not have to produce or create something new. In fact, the *having*-type individuals feel rather disturbed by new ideas about a subject, because the new puts into question the fixed sum of information they have. Indeed, to one for whom having is the main form of relatedness to the world, ideas that cannot easily be pinned down (or pinned down) are frightening – like everything else that grows and changes, and thus is not controllable.¹³⁹

Fromm's description of people studying in the having mode can be aptly applied to Babbitt's situation as well. To some point, he is unconsciously afraid of education and educated people (because of the abovementioned reasons Fromm describes, but it can also be for the fear that his knowledge is not good enough and he would look "stupid") and the easiest defence for him is to disparage these

¹³⁸ Fromm 43.

¹³⁹ Fromm 38.

individuals and their opinions. Like in the following passage: “Makes me tired the way these doctors and profs and preachers put on lugs about being ‘professional men.’ A good realtor has to have more knowledge and finesse than any of ‘em.”

(133) For this reason, Babbitt always repeats the same “mantras” (and also practices the same rituals) – because it makes him feel safe and certain.

Having knowledge is also important for Babbitt. Fromm describes the difference between having knowledge and knowing:

Having knowledge is taking and keeping possession of available knowledge (information); *knowing* is functional and part of the process of productive thinking. [...] Our education generally tries to train people to *have* knowledge as a possession, by and large commensurate with the amount of property or social prestige they are likely to have in later life. The minimum they receive is the amount they will need in order to function properly in their work. In addition, they are given a ‘luxury-knowledge package’ to enhance their feeling of worth, the size of each such package being in accord with the person’s probable social prestige. The schools are the factories in which these overall knowledge packages are produced [...].¹⁴⁰

Fromm’s description of schools is in accordance with Lewis’ depiction of Babbitt’s education: “Babbitt was a sound and standard ware from that great department-store, the State University” (60), indicating that Babbitt (as well as the rest of the students from the State University) studied in the having mode, not the being one. This overall approach to education, shared by Babbitt’s community, directly influences also the future generations, namely Ted, Babbitt’s son, whose appreciation of education is not higher than his father’s at all:

Oh punk, I don’t see what’s the use of law-school – or even finishing high school. I don’t want to go to college ‘specially. Honest, there’s a lot of fellows that have graduated from colleges that don’t begin to make as much money as fellows that went to work early. Old Shimmy Peters, that teaches Latin in the High, he’s a what-is-it from Columbia and he sits up all night reading a lot of greasy books and he’s always spieling about the ‘value of languages,’ and the poor soak doesn’t make but eighteen hundred a year, and no travelling salesman would think of working for that. (66)

¹⁴⁰ Fromm 47–48.

But no wonder that he thinks so when he has real evidence all around him and when he lives in a society where success is measured by the amount of money one earns a year... Moreover, traditional education is not considered worth much money because there is a new and “better” type of education.

We argued that religion has been commodified and the same happened to education as well. As well as Mr. Monday in the area of religion, so-called home-study courses also try to gain fortune by offering a new (and of course much easier and more effective) perspective on another traditional area; these courses present “the energy and foresight of American commerce [contributing] to the science of education” (67). Their creators know precisely the values of their target group and what it needs to hear: in this thesis, we have already argued that effectiveness and success are measured by numbers and statistics, but they also focus on another important feature of “successful people” which is authority. In one of the advertisements Ted is so excited about (67–69), they are going to teach you “[h]ow to be a MASTER MAN!” (67). Relating back to Fromm’s analysis of authority earlier in this chapter, this is another situation where authority is not based on actual skills (although this advertisement tries to teach us the opposite). The strength and effect of these advertisements lies in offering things people need for “good price”, that means not only the actual sum of money, but also the very low amount of time one is asked to invest, which makes this rival of traditional education so attractive. Paradoxically enough, traditional education still plays a role in Babbitt’s community: but this role went through change, as we can see in the following passage where Babbitt explains to Ted the importance of traditional education:

I’ve found out it’s a mighty nice thing to be able to say you’re a B.A. Some client that doesn’t know what you are and thinks you’re just a plug business man, he gets to shooting off his mouth about economics or literature or foreign trade conditions, and you just ease in something like, ‘When I was in college – course I got my B.A. in sociology and that junk – ‘ Oh, it puts an awful crimp in their style! (74)

In other words, education works the same way as religion: it serves as an entrance ticket to a certain community. It is a label one needs to create a good image – and as we have already demonstrated, image is all that it is about.

5.3.1 Concrete forms of Babbitt's faith

In this chapter, our aim is to map concrete tokens and/or manifestations of Babbitt's real religion, analyse them and group them according to their character (whether it is a hierophany, an idol or a ritual); for a profound theoretical analysis of each group, please see Chapter 2.2. For each category, we choose only one representative that we analyse more into depth; all other evidences are included in form of a list (since they belong in the same group and therefore their character and function is very similar, if not the same completely) in appendix at the end of this work.

The crucial importance that many "common" things, values or parts of a specific discourse have for Babbitt (and for his community as well) is very often indicated in the way they are written in the text: their initial letters are capital¹⁴¹; for instance "God of Progress" or "Solid Citizen" (11). This phenomenon can be also viewed as a satirical tool; more to this perspective in Chapter 5.5.1.

5.3.1.1 Babbitt's hierophanies

In *Treatise on the History of Religion*, one of Eliade's crucial observations is that a wizard does not have to necessarily know and understand the whole *theory* hidden behind his act. The point is that it has been empirically proved that e.g. between someone and their hair, nails or other things close to this person there still exists a very close relationship even after their separation; but how precisely this observation fits into the whole and very complex context of the religion is for the wizard in fact irrelevant, since he can perform the action anyway.¹⁴² In other words, faith as such is everything that counts. And the same can be said about Babbitt and his relationship towards hierophanies. He admires carefully *selected* (since hierophanies presume an act of selection) "common" things or concepts of everyday life because, apart from the profane domain (i.e. the common aim they have in everyday life, e.g. a lighter is used for lighting a cigar), there is also another domain: they express some symbolical value closely related to Babbitt's real religion. Babbitt senses this value unconsciously; precisely like the wizard, he is not aware of the whole context. He has only empirically proved that e.g. owning a new car is necessary for being successful in his social group. And the

¹⁴¹ The Czech translator of this novel Jiří Hanuš went even further and put these words as a whole into capital letters; for example "BŮH POKROKU" or "SPORÁDANÝ OBČAN".

¹⁴² Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství* 29–30.

reason for this success is that the whole group admires the same hierophanies because, as Fromm points out, religion is a *group-shared* system of thought and conduct.

As a representative example for deeper analysis can serve us one of very important symbols of a realtor which is an electric cigar-lighter, “a nickeled cylinder with an almost silvery socket, to be attached to the dashboard of [Babbitt’s] car”. (47) Its function is twofold. First, it is “a priceless time-saver”: “[b]y freeing him from halting the car to light a match, it would in a month or two easily save ten minutes”. (47) And a perfect excuse for not giving up smoking completely. But it can have another very important function:

Be a great convenience for other folks. Might make just the difference in getting chummy with some fellow that would put over a sale. And—
Certainly looks nice there. Certainly is a mighty clever little jigger. Gives the last touch of refinement and class. (48)

This lighter clearly serves as a status symbol, as a token for other businessmen to see that Babbitt follows the same faith as they do and therefore belongs to their class. And it really works: “[Babbitt] was inspired by the customer’s admiration of the new cigar-lighter. [...] Their ample discussion of every detail of the cigar-lighter led them to speak of electric flat-irons and bed-warmers”. (65)

Not only the cigar-lighter serves as a hierophany, which is clear from this passage: “[Babbitt] had enormous and poetic admiration, though very little understanding, of all mechanical devices. They were his symbols of truth and beauty”. (59) It is clear from this demonstration that the cigar-lighter is only a representant of a bigger category. Every mechanical device has a very high probability to become a hierophany and most of them really do (like flat-irons and bed-warmers), since they symbolise “truth and beauty” and represent consumer religion. Moreover, as we have already pointed out above, no deep understanding for the believers is needed: it is admiration that is important. Babbitt does not understand technical specifics of the lighter and other devices at all but that does not impair his admiration in any way.

The complete list of Babbitt’s hierophanies is to be found in appendix.

5.3.1.2 Babbitt’s idols

Mr. Eathorne was the seventy-year old president of the First State Bank of Zenith. [...] If Babbitt was envious of the Smart Set of the McKelveys,

before William Washington Eathorne he was reverent. Mr. Eathorne had nothing to do with the Smart Set. He was above it. He was the great-grandson of one of the five men who founded Zenith in 1792, and was of the third generation of bankers. He could examine credits, make loans, promote or injure a man's business. In his presence Babbitt breathed quickly and felt young. (172)

In this description of William Washington Eathorne, we can see that the feelings Eathorne provokes in Babbitt are twofold. The dominant ones are of course awe and admiration. Eathorne presents a model and authority at once because of his origin and merits. Babbitt wants to be like him:

[Babbitt] was ambitious. It was not enough to be a Vergil Gunch, an Orville Jones. No. 'They're bully fellows, simply lovely, but they haven't got any finesse.' No. He was going to be an Eathorne; delicately rigorous, coldly powerful. (182)

We have already proved that Babbitt does not have his own personality and always accepts others' patterns, therefore Eathorne presents another strong influence. However, its intensity can be affected and strengthened by the second type of feeling Eathorne awakes in Babbitt.

Mircea Eliade shows that sacred has a twofold character, it is "sacred" and "impure" at once (more in Chapter 2.2.2). In connection with the second feature, he speaks about so-called cratophany, a manifestation of power. If the sacred manifests its power, people are afraid of it and therefore they worship it.¹⁴³ This discrepancy can be traced in Babbitt's relationship towards Eathorne as well. He is aware of Eathorne's power as a great and powerful banker and knows that Eathorne could become a mighty enemy, since he can "promote or injure a man's business". Maintaining good relationships with influential people is therefore crucial for Babbitt's business and Eathorne belongs to one of the most important ones.

Cratophany does not necessarily have to be present by every Babbitt's idol, but it can often accompany awe and admiration, at least to some extent. That something plays the role of Babbitt's idol is usually directly formulated in the novel, often using the word "god". The complete list of Babbitt's idols is to be found in appendix.

¹⁴³ Eliade, *Pojednání o dějinách náboženství*, 34–35.

5.3.1.3 Babbitt's rituals

In Babbitt's behaviour we can also find some activities that are nearly mechanical: Babbitt always practises them the same way, they are predictable and always repeat at the same time; their great importance is very often clearly indicated in the book. Therefore we identify them as rituals.

Reading papers is of great importance to Babbitt, since it shapes his ("authentic and original") opinions. Reading is a ritual because his behaviour at it is always clearly predictable:

[...] he crossed his legs and fidgeted. When his story was interesting, he read the best, that is the funniest, paragraphs to his wife; when it did not hold him he coughed, scratched his ankles and his right ear, thrust his left thumb into his vest pocket, jingled his silver, whirled the cigar-cutter and the keys on one end of his watch-chain, yawned, rubbed his nose, and found errands to do. He went upstairs to put on his slippers – his elegant slippers of seal-brown, shaped like medieval shoes. He brought up an apple from the barrel which stood by the trunk-closet in the basement.

'An apple a day keeps the doctor away,' he enlightened Mrs. Babbitt, for quite the first time in fourteen hours. (79)

The phrase "first time in fourteen hours" obviously suggests repeating this whole sequence of movements and phrases every day.

When the newspaper-reading ritual gets disturbed by Ted who is planning a party for his set in the Senior Class, Babbitt gets angry and uneasy:

No one listened to Babbitt's bulletins about the February weather or to his throat-clearing comments on the headlines. He said furiously, "If I may be *permitted* to interrupt your engrossing private *conversation* – Juh hear what I *said*?" (189)

The uniformity and predictability of Babbitt's life is obvious to his family as well and it is commented upon by Ted:

I don't believe the outside of the office and playing a little bum golf on Saturday he knows there's anything in the world to do except just keep sitting there – sitting there every night – not wanting to go anywhere – not wanting to do anything – thinking us kids are crazy – sitting there – Lord! (191)

The complete list of Babbitt's rituals is to be found in appendix.

5.4 Babbitt's evolution

In the preceding chapters, we described Babbitt's religious behaviour using a lot of examples from the novel. However, we use passages only from the first half of the novel, since it is where we meet the "archetypal Babbitt"; this Babbitt is conformist, exemplarily representing his businessmen social group. Although even in the first half there are some moments (usually not lasting longer than a minute or two) when Babbitt thinks and/or doubts about his life (they come mainly in the presence of Paul), they do not cause any visible change in his behaviour and personality. The first real and enlightening realization comes when Babbitt falls ill in February and suddenly has more time to think. And he sees how mechanical his life is, but at this moment he has no idea how to change it:

With no Vergil Gunches before whom to set his face in resolute optimism, he beheld, and half admitted that he beheld, his way of life as incredibly mechanical. Mechanical business – a brisk selling of badly built houses. Mechanical religion – a dry, hard church, shut off from the real life of the streets, inhumanly respectable as a top-hat. Mechanical golf and dinner-parties and bridge and conversation. Save with Paul Riesling, mechanical friendships – back-slapping and jocular, never daring to essay the test of quietness.

He turned uneasily in bed.

He saw the years, the brilliant winter days and all the long sweet afternoons which were means for summery meadows, lost in such brittle pretentiousness. He thought of telephoning about leases, of cajoling men he hated, of making business calls and waiting in dirty anterooms – hat on knee, yawning at fly-specked calendars, being polite to office-boys.

‘I don't hardly want to go back to work,’ he prayed. ‘I'd like to – I don't know.’

But he was back next day, busy and of doubtful temper. (194)

Although nothing really happens, this is the first important moment signalling things are soon going to change for George F. Babbitt.

The crucial moment which starts the gradual change in Babbitt's manners comes when Paul Riesling is arrested for having shot his wife Zilla. After his process Babbitt realizes that “he face[s] a world which, without Paul, [is] meaningless” (222). From March to June, he has a lot of work and “[keeps]

himself from the bewilderment of thinking” (222). But then in June “Mrs. Babbitt and Tinka [go] East, to stay with relatives, and Babbitt [is] free to do – he [is] not quite sure what” (222). And that is exactly the moment when Babbitt starts rethinking his life and tries to find an alternative to his existing lifestyle, which suddenly, without Paul, starts to suffocate him.

Babbitt’s evolution comes gradually but has huge consequences, and for a while he even becomes excluded from the businessmen community. However, the material world and his true confession do not let him go. As Glen A. Love points out,

[...] Babbitt heads off to the Maine woods to repeat the familiar American gesture of nonurban renewal. Even in Maine, of course, he cannot shake off the city which claims him. [...]

Babbitt’s retreat into nature fails as do his escapes into bohemianism and liberalism because Zenith has drained him of the values of hope and freedom which are his Western birthright, and he is thus incapable of grasping the terms of his dilemma. The call of the wild is indubitably real to Babbitt, as it has perhaps always been to Americans, but his fragmentary and childish conception of it (“moccasins – six gun – frontier town – gamblers – sleep under the stars – be a regular man, with he-man like Joe Paradise – gosh!” [p. 238]) renders him vulnerable to confusion and failure.¹⁴⁴

At the end of the novel, Babbitt returns back to his original lifestyle:

He indignantly told the Tempter that he was content to do things in the good old-fashioned way. The day after, he went to see the purchasing-agent of the Street Traction Company and they made plans for the secret purchase of lots along the Evanston Road. But as he drove to his office he struggled, “I’m going to run things and figure our things to suit myself – when I retire.” (323)

Although behaving precisely like at the beginning of the novel, this post-evolutionary Babbitt is still somehow different: he gained self-reflection.

¹⁴⁴ Glen A. Love, “New Pioneering on the Prairies: Nature, Progress and the Individual in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 5, Dec. 1973: 568–569, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711696> 28 Sept 2017.

He felt that he had been trapped into the very net from which he had with such fury escaped and, supremest [sic] jest of all, been made to rejoice in the trapping.

‘They’ve licked me; licked me to a finish!’ he whimpered. (323)

Moreover, there is another new thing to Babbitt’s behaviour: he starts to support his son Ted who is trying to escape from the golden cage his father is caught in. As Love points out:

Only Babbitt’s son Ted, the rebellious would-be inventor and mechanic, emerges at the end as an emblem of the hopeful future, a potential new technocrat who may rise out of Babbitt’s ashes.¹⁴⁵

5.5 Religion and Babbitt in context of Lewis’ literary work

As John E. Borrego shows in his essay, faith appears as an important topic in Lewis’ books. “Lewis is interested in faith as a very real force that drives a person’s life” and in his novels, he deals with it not only “in its orthodox Christian form”, but also “with a secular, this-worldly faith”. No wonder: “the 17-year-old Lewis in 1902 had a conversion experience at a YMCA meeting”.¹⁴⁶ And as it turns out, it was very intense:

The young convert, who had been raised in a lukewarm Congregationalist home, took his profession of faith very seriously. He became active in the YMCA and taught Sunday School. [...] Lewis hoped to prepare at Yale to be a missionary.¹⁴⁷

However, “[t]he intellectual atmosphere of the college was inimical to Lewis’s type of rather simple, evangelical Christianity”.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, “Lewis was losing his faith”. As Borrego puts it,

Lewis wavered in his college years. The Christian faith still had an emotional hold on him. But he eventually left it forever while at Yale. Lewis had exchanged his religious faith for a new kind of faith. In his new faith, Voltaire and Eugene Debs were the saints of a rationalistic, secular

¹⁴⁵ Love 569.

¹⁴⁶ John E. Borrego, “‘If There Be Saints’: Faith in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Dec. 1978: 463, JSTOR https://www.jstor.org/stable/42973647?seq=10#page_scan_tab_contents 27. 9. 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Borrego 464.

¹⁴⁸ Borrego 464.

humanism. God has become one of the old friends he knew before he went to Yale.¹⁴⁹

From all these Lewis' experiences crystallized two motifs that recurrently appeared in his books. The first is the motif of what Borrego calls "secular faith"; an example can be found in *Arrowsmith*, which "is the story of a man driven by faith. Martin Arrowsmith's faith is in the purity of the scientific spirit".¹⁵⁰ As another example he mentions Myron Weagle from *Work of Art*. Although Borrego does not mention Babbitt, the author of this thesis believes he should be added to this list, since his real religion is also secular.

The second motif to be found in Lewis' work is the loss of religious faith. As Borrego shows:

In the stories of Aaron Gadd, Frank Shallard and Elmer Gantry, we see three different ways in which religious faith can be lost. [...] In each of these presentations of the loss of religious faith, there is a sense that what was lost was not worth having anyway. For Aaron Gadd it was confining.

For Frank Shallard it was dishonest. For Elmer Gantry it was irrelevant.¹⁵¹

All these described feelings came from Lewis' own experience as the YMCA Sunday School teacher and would-be missionary.¹⁵² Describing Zenith church in *Babbitt* as corrupted and not being able to fulfil its role was therefore very probably influenced by Lewis' own experience with church and his scepticism towards it.

The faith of Christianity, for Sinclair Lewis, is hollow and meaningless. It cannot offer a worthwhile dream to which an intelligent man would willingly give his life. [...] it is secular faith that should command our loyalty, not empty pietism.¹⁵³

And for Sinclair Lewis, his personal secular faith was socialism.¹⁵⁴ However, in his books, there appear more kinds of secular faiths.

The kind of secular faith we are interested in is consumer culture and its influence on Lewis' characters. Materialism as a kind of religion appears not only

¹⁴⁹ Borrego 465.

¹⁵⁰ Borrego 469.

¹⁵¹ Borrego 469.

¹⁵² Borrego 469.

¹⁵³ Borrego 471–472.

¹⁵⁴ Borrego 469.

in *Babbitt*, but also in *Main Street*. There are more parallels to be found between these two most popular Lewis' book.

The first can be found in the way Carol and Babbitt are presented at the very beginning of their story. As Joel Fisher in his essay points out, “[a]t the start of the novel, as Carol Milford, Carol is unambiguously set up as an archetype [...]”,¹⁵⁵ and so is then the city she moves in with her husband:

the place she eventually does engage with, Gopher Prairie, is immediately and literally set up as an archetype: Carol sees in it “not only the heart of a place called Gopher Prairie, but ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego.”¹⁵⁶

In *Babbitt*, we can observe the same method: Lewis puts a great stress on Babbitt's conformity and presents him as an archetypical businessman living in the same house, saying the same things, doing the same things and owning the same things as other people of his sort. Lewis “wanted to create a character who ‘completely sums up certain things in all contemporary Babbitts’”.¹⁵⁷ And although Babbitt thinks that Zenith is unique and the best city in the world, we as readers can observe that this town is not anyhow different from many other American cities of similar size.

Another parallel presents the ubiquitous materialism and its great influence on all characters. In *Babbitt* (and the whole Zenith) it has religious proportions and in *Main Street* (and Gopher Prairie) as well.

[Carol's] introduction to the community makes it clear that she is not structurally necessary; that she is of interest only to the extent to which she has purchasing power (hence the emphasis on shops and shop-keepers) and commodity value (hence the emphasis on “society” and the newspaper reports of her arrival). This setting is Main Street's materialist base.¹⁵⁸

In *Main Street* as well as in *Babbitt*, at the end, the commercial base wins.

Glen A. Love discovers another two common aspects of these two novels. The first one is connected to the role the cities (Zenith and Gopher Prairie) play there:

¹⁵⁵ Joel Fisher, “Sinclair Lewis and the Diagnostic Novel: ‘Main Street’ and ‘Babbitt’,” *Journal of American Studies*, Dec 1986: 428, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27554792> 27 Sept 2017.

¹⁵⁶ Fisher 428.

¹⁵⁷ Hutchisson 112–113. Hutchisson cites out of Lewis' letters: Lewis to Harcourt and Brace, 20 January 1922, *Letters*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁸ Fisher 428–429.

As he did in *Main Street*, Lewis was dramatizing, in *Babbitt*, Lewis Mumford's contemporary observation that "architecture and civilization develop hand in hand: the characteristic buildings of each period are the memorials to their dearest institutions."¹⁵⁹ Lewis established the pattern at once as the novel opens: "The towers of Zenith aspired above the morning mist; austere towers of steel and cement and limestone sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadels nor churches, but frankly and beautifully office-buildings."¹⁶⁰

Love's second observation focuses on the ends of both novels and the slight difference between both main protagonists:

[*Babbitt*] ends, as did *Main Street*, with a chastened rebel, but Babbitt remains at last a more pathetic figure than Carol Kennicott, for unlike her he is never able to formulate coherently the dream which he is finally forced to deny.¹⁶¹

Until now we have looked only for parallels and similar motifs. However, there is one important aspect making George F. Babbitt different from Carol Kennicott and Martin Arrowsmith. The latter two start the novels with their unmaterialistic dreams and ideals, which in the course of the story become lost under the pressure of their materialistic surroundings; they change and succumb to the pressure. Babbitt never had such dreams (and had he them in his youth, we cannot read about it in the novel); the character of George F. Babbitt starts as an archetypical businessman sitting in the middle of the consumerist, materialistic world and living his consumerist, materialistic life. And although in the course of the novel he tries to escape this life (as well as Carol and Martin do), at the end he comes back, nearly unchanged. Whereas Carol and Martin were pushed to become a part of the materialistic world and its religion, Babbitt was already in and at the end returned back in, unsuccessful in his escape.

5.5.1 The role of satire in Lewis' depiction

The satirical element is of great importance in Lewis' work and therefore it is important in our analysis to take it into account as well. In *Babbitt*, satire is present on the level of content as well as form. Our aim is to characterise these

¹⁵⁹ [Lewis Mumford,] *Sticks and Stones*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 193. (This footnote is taken over from Love 567.)

¹⁶⁰ Love 567.

¹⁶¹ Love 569.

levels and then consider if the satirical element could have any influence on the conclusions we have made so far.

Firstly, we focus on satire on the level of form. We have already mentioned in Chapter 5.3.1, that many “common” things, values or parts of a specific discourse are written with capital initial letters, e.g. “Solid Citizen” (11). This satirical tool can have two various functions. In the first case, this formal element often complements the satire on the level of content and increases its effect. As an example we choose a part of Babbitt’s monologue to Stanley Graff, when Graff comes to ask for an increase of commission:

What’s your Ideal, anyway? Do you want to make money and be a responsible member of the community, or do you want to be a loafer, with no Inspiration or Pep?”

Graff was not so amenable to Vision and Ideals as usual. (61–62)

Words written with the capital letter like “Ideals” gain here a new content. Usual contents and connotations are replaced by new ones, which are in accordance with the purely materialistic worldview. The capital letters, first, help the reader to identify this change of content and second, when the characters repeat these words on and on like empty mantras, the reader can more easily identify how ridiculous they are in their beliefs.

The second case was already foreshadowed in Chapter 5.3.1: the aim of this formal element is to designate things (usually of everyday use) whose importance goes beyond their original use. As an example can be named the “Great God Motor” (19): it does not only enable cars to move; for the characters, it serves as an status symbol as well, a symbol of a well-situated person, therefore they adore it, and it is exactly this, sometimes even ecstatic, adoration that causes the comical effect.

However, satire in *Babbitt* appears more on the level of content; we could identify more various elements like contradiction (e.g. Seneca Doane speaking about standardization, page 85–86), use of absurdity (e.g. home-study courses, that teach you “boxing and self-defence by mail”, page 69) or illogical combinations (e.g. Babbitt’s “sonorous Floral Height gallantry” towards Louetta Swanson: “You’re looking like a new soda-fountain to-night, Louetta”, page 106). The same techniques were also used in the reference to the Zenith Presbyterian Church; e.g. in Reverend’s Drew sermon, which he gives during the strike, we can

identify using illogical connections like: “Now, let me tell you that the most unscientific thing in the world is science!” (256) By using these techniques, the reader understands that the people working for the church are not anyhow different (intellectually or morally better) from their congregation, to which they should serve as examples.

Satire plays in Lewis’ work a crucial role: through satirizing, Lewis sends his message to his readers.

The story of Carol Kennicott did not mock middle-class readers but warned them of the stagnation of small-town, middle-class living and guided them toward safety [...] *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925) and *Dodsworth* (1929) function in a similar way. But rather than being centrally concerned with the “stagnation of small town... living,” they worried about the corrupting influence of a corporate society on the “pioneer” ideals of the professional managerial class [...]. Using a rhetoric of the “true” self, and a satiric humor based on the self-contradiction and insecurity resulting from a loss of that self, Lewis illustrated for his audience how the “viruses” of commercialism, bureaucracy, and comfortable bourgeois social life could infect and even kill the noble, creative aims of the professional ideal. He portrayed the blatant ironies within his characters’ lives in order to provide his professional managerial readers with the inspiration necessary to uphold traditional professional ideals in modern society. Those readers, Lewis hoped, would laugh at the conformity and self-importance in *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, and *Dodsworth* and, in doing so, would accept the “substantial values” of the adversary professional as their own.¹⁶²

As Augspurger shows in his analysis, using satire does not anyhow diminish the content of the novel and its trustworthiness; it is only a tool how to transmit its message and reach its goal. Moreover, as we showed in Chapter 5.1, Lewis carefully collected authentic material, noticed real utterances and the basis of *Babbitt* are observations made on sociological level. And the success of this strategy can be demonstrated in the way *Babbitt* would love: in numbers. Augspurger provides his readers with statistics that show that by 1959, *Babbitt*

¹⁶² Michael Augspurger, “Sinclair Lewis’ Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: ‘Babbitt’, ‘Arrowsmith’ and ‘Dodsworth’,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Spring 2001: 75, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315141> 28. 9. 2017.

had sold 1,6 million copies, which is more than *Main Street* (ending on the second place with 1,1 million copies) and *Arrowsmith* (third place, 700 000 copies).¹⁶³ Until now, *Babbitt* stays the most popular of Lewis' novels and its popularity and influence can be also demonstrated on the fact that “Babbitt” became synonym for “a person and especially a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards”.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Augspurger 94.

¹⁶⁴ “Babbitt, noun,” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Babbitt> 5 Aug 2020.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

Although not so intensively as in the 20th century, *Babbitt* still belongs to works attracting scholarly attention. Babbitt is usually examined together with another novels, very often *Main Street*, with which he displays various parallels that have been dealt with in Chapter 5.5. The range of topics is relatively broad: Stephen S. Conroy focuses on the sociological aspect in “Sinclair Lewis's Sociological Imagination”; Joel Fisher re-evaluates Lewis' role as a novelist in “Sinclair Lewis and the Diagnostic Novel: ‘Main Street’ and ‘Babbitt’”; Michael Augspurger in “Sinclair Lewis' Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: ‘Babbitt,’ ‘Arrowsmith,’ and ‘Dodsworth’” examines the influence of Lewis' novels on American managerial class; and Glen A. Love in “New Pioneering on the Prairies: Nature, Progress and the Individual in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis”

suggests that Lewis' heroes meet the need to replace the vanishing physical frontier by finding new challenges in “creative endeavors— invention, building, [and] medical discovery.”¹⁶⁵

These authors belong to scholars who concentrate on some more general problem and use *Babbitt* together with other Lewis' works to show their point.

However, there exist another (and smaller) group of authors who focus on *Babbitt* only. Darryl Hattenhauer is for us the most important of them since in “Politics and Religion in *Babbitt*” he deals with the same topic as this thesis. John E. Borrego (belonging to the first mentioned group) in “‘If There Be Saints’: Faith in the Novels of Sinclair Lewis” writes about Lewis' personal experience with Christian religion including the way he found his own secular faith (socialism) and shows how all these impressions are reflected in Lewis' work, but Hattenhauer's perspective is more focused: he demonstrates (like this thesis does) that Babbitt's real religion is “Mammon”, in our terminology consumer culture. He also bases his research primarily on the novel itself but his approach misses deeper theoretical basis that this thesis aims to add. In this work, Babbitt's religious behaviour is classified according to manifestations defined by religious scholar Mircea Eliade and anthropologist Roy Rappaport. Moreover, this thesis

¹⁶⁵ Robert E. Fleming, “RECENT RESEARCH ON SINCLAIR LEWIS,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Autumn 1985, Vol. 31, No. 3, SPECIAL ISSUE: SINCLAIR LEWIS (Autumn 1985): 614, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.com/stable/26281395> 11 Aug 2020.

sets the problem of Babbitt's real faith into broader context of religious, sociological, psychological as well as philosophical studies.

Lewis' aim in *Babbitt* was to satirize the behaviour of the American managerial class, hoping that these readers

would laugh at the conformity and self-importance in *Babbitt* [...] and, in doing so, would accept the “substantial values” of the adversary professional as their own.¹⁶⁶

Although put satirically, all the characteristic features of the managerial class presented in the novel are based on real sociological observations Lewis thoroughly performed. Therefore it is possible to view George F. Babbitt (until the beginning of his evolution) as an archetype representing his social group.

Babbitt's real religion is presented from the very beginning of the novel when he observes the towers of Zenith (14–15), which in fact echoes the passage from the first page of the novel (5). His reactions are religious and Lewis supports this impression by using clearly religious discourse (“temple-spire”, “faith”, “hymn”) and this tool is used by him in the whole book. Idols are often introduced by the word “god”, rituals by the word “rite” or by clear time stamp suggesting its regular repetition, and the exclusiveness of hierophanies (i.e. that a thing of everyday use reveals more than it is itself) is presented either in religious terms or through the depth of emotions they awake. All these manifestations serve Babbitt for demonstrating his status and showing that he is a rightful member of the managerial class.

Faith as such also belongs to status symbols. The managerial class in Zenith believes that anything can be bought and commodification of the Zenith Presbyterian Church only affirms their assumptions. Christian religion in Zenith has the same character as other quasi-religious groups (like the American New Thought League or Pentecostal Communion Faith): its success is measured in numbers, i.e. in the amount of believers; their sermons are superficial, usually performed by people with no religious education at all (like Mike Monday) and their messages do not enrich the inner life of their congregation at any point; religious service serves them only to make money: the best example is Monday who saw that “[t]he service of the Lord had been more profitable. He was about to retire with a fortune”. (84) And even if these people have religious education, they

¹⁶⁶ Augspurger 75.

present themselves as members of the managerial class, like Dr. Drew who “often sa[ys] that he [is] ‘proud to be known as primarily a business man’”. (171) Therefore, Christianity (as his official religion) presents for Babbitt a way how to win and keep his position in the managerial community. His conduct is driven by consumerist goals and values which, put simply, are “to make money and be a responsible member of the community”. (61–62) The consumerist worldview is nearly completely replicated in the thinking of the young Zenith generation, represented by Ted Babbitt and Eunice Littlefield, although the end of the novel brings slightly promising climax when George F. Babbitt supports his son in “taking his factory job” and gets “a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that [Ted] knew what [he] wanted to do and did it”. (326)

The problems Sinclair Lewis indicated in his novel are still present today. One example for all: throughout the whole world, we can meet people holding a cup of Starbucks coffee, with a proud look on their face. If you ask them, what Starbucks means for them, they immediately answer that it is more than coffee. It is a way of showing that you are successful and can afford to buy it; it makes you feel at least a bit better than the other people.¹⁶⁷ Every day we can observe many Babbitts holding their Starbucks on their way to perform “Good Sound Business Administration”. (137) Starbucks became another status symbol, next to expensive cars, houses and other things of everyday use, most of which were already known to Babbitt in the 1920s. The verisimilitude of Babbitt and his background based on Lewis’ careful studies make this novel more than a novel: they make it to a unique, universal, authentic and non-aging testimony of our modern materialistic world.

¹⁶⁷ “Er wird zu einem hohen Preis verkauft um zu zeigen, Sie haben es geschafft; Sie sind erfolgreich und können es sich leisten. Das lässt Sie glauben, dass Sie zumindest ein wenig besser sind als die anderen.” *Starbucks ungefiltert – Die bittere Wahrheit hinter dem Erfolg* (Starbucks Unfiltered), prod. Arte France, dir. Gilles Bovon and Luc Hermann, 2017, 0 h., 0 min., 16. sec. Translation mine.

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APPENDIX

5.3.1.1 Babbitt's hierophanies

Here follows a list of hierophanies representing Babbitt's faith:

- a) **Alarm-clock**: “[...] the best of nationally advertised and quantitatively produced alarm-clocks, with all modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial. Babbitt was proud of being awakened by such a rich device. Socially it was almost as creditable as buying expensive core tires”. (7)
- b) **Yard**: “[The yard] delighted him as always; it was the neat yard of a successful business man of Zenith, that is, it was perfection, and made him also perfect”. (8)
- c) **Standard suit**: “[...] with respect you beheld him put on the rest of his uniform as a Solid Citizen. The gray [sic] suit was well cut, well made, and completely undistinguished. It was a standard suit. White piping on the V of the vest added a flavor of law and learning”. (11)
- d) **Spectacles**: “There is character in spectacles [...]. Babbitt's spectacles had huge, circular, frameless lenses of the very best glass; the ear-pieces were thin bars of gold. In them he was the modern business man; one who gave orders to clerks and drove a car and played occasional golf and was scholarly in regard to Salesmanship”. (11)
- e) **Contents of his pockets**: “They were of eternal importance, like baseball or the Republican Party. They included a **fountain pen** and a **silver pencil** (always lacking a supply of new leads) which belonged in the righthand upper vest pocket. Without them he would have felt naked. On his watch-chain were a **gold penknife**, **silver cigar-cutter**, **seven keys** (the use of two of which he had forgotten), and incidentally a **good watch**. Depending from the chain was a large, yellowish **elk's-tooth** – proclamation of his membership in the Brotherly and Protective Order of Elks. Most significant of all was his loose-leaf pocket **note-book**, that modern and efficient note-book which contained addresses of people whom he had forgotten, [...] **clippings of verses by T. Cholmondeley Frink** and of the **newspaper editorials** from which Babbitt got his opinions and his **polysyllables**, **notes** to be sure and do things which he did not intend to do, and **one curious inscription** – D.S.S.D.M.Y.P.D.F.” (12)

- f) **The Boosters' Club button:** "With the conciseness of great art the button displayed two words: 'Boosters – Pep!' It made Babbitt feel loyal and important. It associated him with Good Fellows, with men who were nice and human, and important in business circles. It was his V.C., his Legion of Honor ribbon, his Phi Beta Kappa key". (12)
- g) **Babbitt's house (garden + yard as well as the interior)¹⁶⁸:** 1) bedroom: "The room displayed a modest and pleasant color-scheme, after one of the best standard designs of decorator who 'did the interiors' for most of the speculative-builders' houses in Zenith. [...] a **standard bedside book** with colored illustrations – what particular book it was cannot be ascertained, since no one had ever opened it. The mattresses were firm but not hard, **triumphant modern mattresses** which had cost a great deal of money [...]. It was a masterpiece among bedrooms, right out of Cheerful Modern Houses for Medium Incomes. Only it had nothing to do with the Babbitts, nor with any one else. [...] It had the air of being a very good room in a very good hotel. [...] Every second house in Floral Heights had a bedroom precisely like this". (15–16) 2) the house itself: "The Babbitts' house was five years old. It was all as competent and glossy as this bedroom. It had the best of taste, the best of inexpensive rugs, a simple and laudable architecture, and the latest conveniences. Throughout, **electricity** took the place of candles and slatternly heath-fires. [...] In fact there was but one thing wrong with the Babbitt house: It was not a home". (16) 3) living room: "It was a room which observed the best Floral Heights standards. [...] Though there was nothing in the room that was interesting, there was nothing that was offensive. It was as neat, and as negative, as a block of artificial ice. The **fireplace** was unsoftened by downy ashes or by sooty brick; the **brass fire-irons** were of immaculate polish; and the **grenadier andirons** were like samples in a shop, desolate, unwanted, lifeless things of commerce. Against the wall was a **piano**, with another **piano-lamp**, but no one used it save Tinka. The hard briskness of the **phonograph** contented them; their store of **jazz records** made them feel wealthy and cultured; and all they knew of creating music was the nice adjustment of a

¹⁶⁸ The list in this thesis contains only selected objects from Babbitt's house, which the author held for the most representative; for viewing their full list please see the respective pages in the novel.

bamboo needle. The **books** on the table was [sic] unspotted and laid in rigid parallels; not one corner of the **carpet-rug** was curled; and nowhere was there a hockey-stick, a torn picture-book, an old cap, or a gregarious and disorganizing dog". (78–79)

- h) ***Advocate-Times* and other periodicals** (their importance and function has been already analysed, e.g. in the Chapter 5.1)
- i) **Water-cooler:** "[I]t was the very best of water-coolers, up-to-date, scientific, and right-thinking. It had cost a great deal of money (in itself a virtue). It possessed a non-conducting fiber ice-container, a porcelain water-jar (guaranteed hygienic), a dripless non-clogging sanitary faucet, and machine-painted decorations in two tones of gold". (31–32)
- j) **Purse:** "It was only when they attacked the sacred purse that he was frightened into fury [...]" . (62)
- k) **Car:** "To George F. Babbitt, as to most prosperous citizens of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. The office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion ashore". (23) "He noted how quickly his car picked up. He felt superior and powerful [...]" . (46–47) "They went, with ardor and some thouroughness, into the matters of streamline bodies, hill-climbing power, wire wheels, chrome steel, ignition systems, and body colors. It was much more than a study of transportation. It was an aspiration for knightly rank. In the city of Zenith, in the barbarous twentieth century, a family's motor indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family – indeed, more precisely, considering the opinion of old county families upon newly created brewery barons and woolen-mill viscounts. The details of precedence we never officially determined. There was no court to decide whether the second son of a Pierce Arrow limousine should go in to dinner before the first son of a Buick roadster, but of their respective social importance there was no doubt [...]" . (64)
- l) **Standard advertised wares:** "[T]he large national advertisers fix[ed] the surface of his life, fix[ed] what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares – **toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters** – were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and

wisdom. But none of these advertised tokens of financial and social success was more significant than a **sleeping-porch with a sun-parlor below**”. (82)

5.3.1.2 Babbitt's idols

- a) **Modern appliances:** “But the Babbitt whose god was Modern Appliances was not pleased”. (8)
- b) **Progress (or God of Progress):** “He never put on B.V.D.’s without thanking the God of Progress that he didn’t wear tight, long, old-fashioned undergarments, like his father-in-law and partner, Henry Thompson”. (11)
- c) **Motor (or Great God Motor):** “There were masterly arrangements regarding leaving the key, and having the gasoline tank filled; and passionately, devotees of the Great God Motor, they hymned the patch on the spare inner-tube, and the lost jack-handle”. (19)
- d) **Howard Littlefield, Ph.D.:** “Littlefield was the Great Scholar of neighborhood; the authority on everything in the world except babies, cooking and motors. He was a Bachelor of Arts in Blodgett College, and a Doctor of Philosophy in economics of Yale. [...] All his acquaintances turned to Littlefield when they desired to know the fate of the battle of Saragossa, the definition of the word ‘sabotage’, the future of the German mark, the translation of ‘*hinc illae lachrimae [sic]*,’ or the number of products of coal tar. He awed Babbitt by confessing that he often sat up till midnight reading the figures and footnotes in Government reports, or skimming (with amusement at the author’s mistakes) the latest volumes of chemistry, archeology and ichthyology. But Littlefield’s greatest value was as a spiritual example. Despite his strange learnings he was as strict a Presbyterian and as firm a Republican as George F. Babbitt. He confirmed the business men in the faith. When they knew only by passionate instinct that their system of industry and manners was perfect, Dr. Howard Littlefield proved it to them, out of history, economics, and the confessions of reformed radicals”. (25)
- e) **Senators in Washington:** “[...] the senators who controlled the Republican Party decided in little smoky rooms in Washington what [Babbitt] should think about disarmament, tariff, and Germany [...].” (81–82)

5.3.1.3 Babbitt's rituals

Here follow other Babbitt's rituals; the author of this thesis has emphasized in the text either the mechanicalness/repetition of the behaviour suggesting a ritual, or the direct designation of the activity as a rite/ritual:

- a) **Morning ritual:** Babbitt's common morning is described into detail in the novel from page 6 to page 23. Here follow only chosen passages representing its mechanicalness and everyday repeating: 1) "He grunted; he dragged his thick legs, in faded baby-blue pajamas, from under the khaki blanket; he sat on the edge of the cot, running his fingers through his wild hair, while his plump feet **mechanically** felt for his slippers". (7) 2) "[...] he looked blurrily out at the yard. It delighted him, **as always**; it was the near yard of a successful business man of Zenith, that is, it was perfection, and made him also perfect. He regarded the corrugated iron garage. For the **three-hundred-and-sixty-fifth time in a year** he reflected: "[...] But by golly it's the only thing on the place that isn't up-to-date!" (8) 3) "He was fairly amiable in the conference on the brown suit. [...] He was able to get through the other crises of dressing with comparative resoluteness and calm. [...] He **never put on B.V.D.'s without thanking the God of Progress** that he didn't wear tight, long, old-fashioned undergarments, like his father-in-law and partner, Henry Thompson". (10–11) 4) "'That'll do now!' Babbitt flung in **mechanically**, as he lighted the gloriously satisfying first cigar of the day and tasted the exhilarating drug of the *Advocate-Times* headlines". (19) 5) "'No, dear.' In **twenty-three years** of married life, Mrs. Babbitt had seen the paper before her husband **just sixty-seven times**". (20)
- b) **Filling the gasoline-tank:** "He lost his dawn depression; he was ruddily cheerful when he stopped on Smith Street to leave the brown trousers, and to have the gasoline-tank filled. The familiarity of the **rite** fortified him; the sight of the tall red iron gasoline-pump, the hollow-tile and terra-cotta garage, the window full of the most agreeable accessories – shiny casings, spark-plugs with immaculate porcelain jackets, tire-chains of gold and silver. He was flattered by the friendliness with which Sylvester Moon, dirtiest and most skilled of motor mechanics, came out to serve him". (27)

- c) **Leaving the office:** “Babbitt’s preparations for leaving the office to its feeble self during the hour and a half of his lunch-period were somewhat less elaborate than the plans for a general European war. [...] He placed a difficult unanswered letter on the pile of unfinished work, that he might not fail to attend to it that afternoon. (For **three noons, now**, he had placed the same letter on the unfinished pile.) [...] He discovered he was smoking another cigar. He threw it away, protesting, ‘Darn it, I thought you’d quit this darn smoking!’ He [...] raged, ‘Ought to take care of myself. And need more exercise – walk to the club, every single noon – just what I’ll do – **every noon** – cut out this motoring **all the time.**’ The resolution made him feel exemplary. Immediately after he decided that this noon it was too late to walk”. (45)
- d) **Preparing for bed:** “The **rite** of preparing for bed were elaborate and **unchanging**. The blankets had to be tucked in at the foot of his cot. [...] The rag rug was adjusted so that his bare feet would strike it when he arose in the morning. The alarm clock was wound. The hot-water bottle was filled and placed **precisely two feet** from the bottom of the cot. These tremendous undertaking yielded to his determination; one by one they were announced to Mrs. Babbitt and smashed through to accomplishment. At last his brow cleared, and in his ‘Gnight!’ rang virile power”. (82)