



## CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	153/03
2. Advertiser	Levi Strauss (Aust) Pty Ltd (Born Again Jeans)
3. Product	Clothing
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Religion – section 2.1 Portrayal of sex/sexuality/nudity – section 2.3
6. Date of determination	Tuesday, 13 May 2003
7. DETERMINATION	Dismissed

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This music-backed television advertisement features a young woman being taken by a group of young men and women to a river at night where she removes her skirt before being ceremoniously pushed under the water. As she re-emerges, she is wearing jeans and a superimposed caption appears reading: ‘Born Again.’ The young woman walks from the water fastening the jeans alongside a logo and caption reading: ‘Re-Cut 501 Ò Jeans. Men—Women.’

## THE COMPLAINT

Comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

*“The content of this advertisement is offensive and an affront to all Christians who believe in the sanctity and symbolic representation of baptism and the concept of being born again in Christ. In this vulgar advertisement, this fundamental Christian concept is mocked and misused.”*

*“...this I am afraid has crossed the line and...I have been personally insulted and so have all born again Christians who feel you have degraded our faith, our beliefs and our most sacred baptism ritual.”*

*“...I think it is a bit extreme and eerie and has other motives...”*

*“...using a Christian sacrament in a mocking style is simply uncalled for and offensive.”*

*“I found the advertisement to be in very poor taste and quite offensive.”*

*“...very offensive as it is mocking Christianity.”*

*“The ‘baptism’ of a young girl by several men is making a mockery of a significant act.”*

*“...I find it very offensive that an advertiser could depict water baptism in this way.”*

*“This has links to losing one’s virginity, death, or any sort of ‘baptism of fire.’ This adds to the worrying and disgusting nature of this ad, which I anticipate would encourage violence of a sexual nature.”*

*“...a mock of TV evangelism...”*

*“...this ad does vilify my beliefs, along with the beliefs of all born-again Christians.”*

*“It is Blasphemous, making fun of Baptism, a fundamental of the Christian faith and highly offensive to people who follow the teachings of the Lord, Jesus Christ.” [Complainant’s capitalisation ]*

*“This gives conflicting messages about Christian practices coupled with very dark imagery of Satanism. In my opinion there is an undertone of sexual violence reminiscent of disturbed individuals dragging young women down to the river to rape and murder them.”*

*“It is making fun of a ceremony that we consider very important...I feel insulted every time I see the ad ...”*

*“I think the ad is an inappropriate portrayal of an important Christian ceremony and it is insensitive to those who recognise the significance and importance of a baptism.”*

*“As a Christian I find the portrayal of the advertisement to be sacrilegious and I am extremely offended by it.”*

*“I found this advert to be extremely offensive as it undermines and mocks my personal faith as a ‘Born Again Christian.’”*

*“If members of the public see this, then this is what they will associate the ‘born again’ experience with, and would want nothing to do with it.”*

*“The ad has offended myself and many others with its insensitivity. Every time I see it I feel disturbed and disappointed that this ad even made it to air-time.”*

*“It is highly offensive and bordering on blasphemy.*

*“The symbolic use of baptism, which is sacred to all denominations, is not acceptable.”*

*“I was deeply affected and felt as though my Christian beliefs had been personally attacked.”*

*“In this vulgar advertisement, this fundamental Christian concept is mocked and misused.”*

## **THE DETERMINATION**

The Advertising Standards Board (‘the Board’) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (‘the Code’).

The Board noted the advertiser’s response that the Levi company has a long tradition of celebrating and respecting diversity and tolerance and that “our core value is based on freedom of expression and self-empowerment and we believe this advertising supports and communicates these ideologies.”

Board members considered that, while some people were clearly offended by the content of this advertisement, the majority would find it an acceptable communication under prevailing community standards.

The determination of the Board was that the material did not constitute discrimination and/or vilification as represented in the Code, and that it did not otherwise offend the Code.

Accordingly, the complaint was dismissed.