

CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number	448/07
2. Advertiser	BSR Group (Betta Electrical)
3. Product	Retail
4. Type of advertisement	TV
5. Nature of complaint	Discrimination or vilification Religion – section 2.1
6. Date of determination	Wednesday, 16 January 2008
7. DETERMINATION	Upheld – discontinued or modified

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement depicts a typical Christmas nativity scene with the Wise Men reverently offering gifts to the baby Jesus in the manger. Suddenly the gifts are thrown out of the manger, and as Joseph and Mary look at each other, text onscreen reads "Give a better gift" and a voiceover advises "Give a Betta Electrical gift this Christmas."

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I object to the advertisement because it is a blasphemous slant upon Christmas, which is the celebration of the birth of the founder of Christianity. Not only does this personally offend me, and many others I know who have seen the ad, but it is also inappropriate to use religious faith in such a bizarre manner. Particularly in the age in which we live, 'political sensitivity and respect' are openly encouraged in areas such as faith, gender, culture, religion. Were this same style of ad produced in relation to some other religions, the reaction would be potentially deadly! It is a sad day when companies such as Betta defiantly denounce the meaning of Christmas in this unnecessary and thoughtless way.

This is offensive to me as a Christian and also our family. It is disrespectful, blasphemous (sic) and insulting to us as Christians. If it was anything to do with a Muslim religion it would not be shown, however because it is about Christianity, our Saviour and Lord is allowed to be mocked and used as advertising material in an insulting manner saying that when people bring gifts to God, he will throw them back at you. People are making a mockery of Christmas which is celebrating the birth of Jesus.

This commercial is an insult to Christians everywhere, especially at Christmas time. I was highly offended. The gifts given to Jesus in the Bible were in that time highly valued and a sign of respect and honour and it is a disgrace that this commercial would insult God and followers of Christ in a bid to gain customers. I would expect that this commercial would be removed immediately.

I am not a particularly religious person but this ad makes a mockery of the true meaning of Christmas. Surely advertisers shouldn't be allowed to stoop to this.

I am actually writing this on behalf of my two children who were disgusted that the special story of Jesus could be so blatantly made fun of. They could not believe the disrespect of Betta Electrical to imply they would have something better to give to baby Jesus. If this ad had implications to any other religion e.g. Muslim it would never have been permitted to be shown. Advertising standards have stooped to a low level to permit such blatant disrespect for the most amazing story of the birth of Jesus. When young children have more morals than adults who create these ads it really shows what kind of standards the general public are so accepting of. The ad also displays the

attitude of ungratefulness, when the presents are just thrown away. What does this portray to children. Christmas is a time for giving and receiving and I believe a attitude of greatfulness should be displayed.

OK - it is Jesus - the one who will never reject anyone - it is a Christian celebration being maocked (sic) shall I go on? I am deeply offended that anyone would think this is "tongue in cheek" advertising at Christmas

There is no better gift than Jesus Himself. It is ludicrous to reduce this to electrical products. This ad is totally insensitive to the whole point of christmas which is a celebration of His birth, life and death for us. I guess 2000 years of civilisation has not changed mankind's behaviour - they mocked him then and still do. Even if the ad is done tongue in cheek it is incredibly offensive to any Christian of any denomination. I am tired of christians being fair go on the media. There are two standards here - if it is not politically correct or too dangerous to depict Muhammed in a cartoon etc. I don't think christians should be fair game either. The vilification laws only seem to protect one faith not all faiths (not that christians here would be incited to violence).

If this type of advertising was related to Muslims and Mohammed, heads would roll immediately. It's okay though to have a go at Christians and their beliefs in Jesus.

As a Christian I find this ad offensive and blasphemous. No advertiser would DARE create such an ad that was offensive to people such as the Muslims, yet it seems to be "open season" on those who adhere to the Christian faith. It is worth remembering that if it were not for the birth of Christ, there would be no Christmas anyway so why poke fun at and blaspheme the central figure of Christianity. This ad is plain offensive.

This advertisement insults the One I and many millions of people call Lord. It implies that God/Jesus will not accept what people have to offer, nothing is good enough. This 'message' is completely opposite to Christian teaching and in very poor taste. If this was Mohamed they were defaming we would have a 'jihad' against this company, probably against this country. I find this advertisement extremely offensive and am particularly sad that Beta Electrical should see fit to make a mockery of Jesus who is in fact the reason for the season' not them, not Santa Claus.

The christian content is being denegraded. Why is it allowed? Absolutely abhorrent to the Christian tradition of Christmas. Try doing it with Muslim, Islam or Jewish faiths and see the reaction. It is highly offensive.

This is religious villification. I find it offensive to make the 'Baby Jesus' into a spoilt brat, wanting better presents. It is offensive to change the origial Christian story - it would never happen in a Muslim country why should Christians have to put up with this violation. It is also a bad example of the way children should behave. Does this mean that if a child does not like it gifts it can throw them away and demand Better ones. I am highly offended!!!!

If this was an objectionable reference to any of the new Religions we now have in Australia, Betta Electrical would be fighting the Villification Law by now. Christians would not do that, however it offends me to think that a country founded on Christianity and who still celebrate the birth of Jesus, and enjoy the privilege of the Holiday that accompanies this special birth, should allow such an offensive advertisement.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

The aforementioned advertisement was genuinely created with no malice intended to the Christian faith. Our advertisement centres on the relevant fact that everyone has experienced a bad Christmas gift. The idea was simply to illustrate this fact.

The nativity scene was chosen as it is universally recognised as the quintessential Christmas gift-giving occasion.

In our storyline, the gifts from the three wise men are simply abandoned for something more appropriate like the Gift Card. This humorous approach was in no way meant to be offensive, demean, denounce or mock Christianity.

Naturally, it is not Better Electrical's policy to discriminate on religious grounds, or any grounds for that matter. We wholeheartedly believe there is no discrimination or vilification of any person or section of the community on the basis of this ad. Though we apologise if any person or persons may have been made upset, or their views disrespected, by the advertisement.

The BSR Group appreciates the opportunity to express our belief that there was never intent to offend or discriminate against any community factions with this particular advertisement.

THE DETERMINATION

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

The Board noted the complainants' concern that the advertisement vilifies Christians and the Christian faith in its depiction of an ungrateful baby Jesus.

The Board noted that it has previously considered advertisements which make light of religious concepts. In those other cases the Board has considered that irreverent, lighthearted use of religious concepts is generally not in breach of the Code - even though the Board accepts that some members of the public are likely to be offended by such use. The Board considered the current Betta Electrical Advertisement and its depiction or suggestion of baby Jesus throwing back the gifts brought to him by the Three Wise Men. The Board considered that this depiction, and the assertion that the advertiser can provide better gifts, went beyond lighthearted irreverence and amounted to mocking of what is the quintessential image of Christmas for Christians.

The Board considered that this depiction was not merely use of a traditional religious image in an unusual context or irreverent manner, and that it amounted to a demeaning take on an important religious belief. In this case the Board considered that the demeaning take on an important Christian belief did amount to discrimination against or vilification of Christians and the Christian religion.

Finding that the advertisement did depict material that discriminated against a section of the community on account of religion, the Board determined that the advertisement breached Section 2.1 of the Code and upheld the complaints.

ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the determination regarding this advertisement included the following:

With reference to the Advertising Standards Board's findings, we wish to advise our referred to advertising campaign completed is scheduled on December 24, 2007.

In accordance with your findings, the BSR Group will desist from advertising this campaign again in future media schedules.