

Churches Find It Pays To Advertise

The Dominican Sisters, the Passionist Fathers and the Baptist General Convention all have something in common with soap manufacturers, cereal makers and other mass merchandisers — the use of commercial advertising to get their message across.

Many religiously affiliated groups and movements are finding it advantageous to advertise — on television, radio, in the newspapers and magazines, on billboards and even through the use of bumper stickers — to recruit, evangelize or push a special cause.

The Trinitarian Fathers, a small, obscure order of Catholic priests until they received national attention five years ago by advertising in Playboy magazine, have quadrupled the number of priestly candidates at their monastery in Baltimore, a spokesman said last December.

And now the Passionist Fathers, a Catholic order headquartered in Riverdale, N. Y., have launched a nationwide television advertising campaign which includes seven 30-second TV "spots", five in English, two in Spanish aimed at recruiting young men for the priesthood. The Passionists also have six radio "spots" and are looking to an eventual billboard campaign.

The New York Times said the Passionist campaign is "one of the more dramatic examples of the efforts the Roman Catholic Church is making to recruit priests."

In March, the Baptist General Convention of Texas initiated a \$1.5 million advertising campaign which has three goals: to persuade non-Christians to approach Christianity; to persuade inactive Christians to "return to full participation in Christian discipleship," and to persuade active Baptists "to reaffirm their faith through more church involvement."

The advertising agency which prepared the campaign estimated that the evangelical message commercial on 50 TV and 300 radio stations, ads in 76 newspapers, outdoor posters and magazine ads would reach every Texan over age two an average of 40 times.

Recently, a congregation of Catholic nuns purchased advertising space in two national publications, the New York Times and the National Catholic Reporter, asking U.S. Catholics to petition the World Synod of Bishops to reconsider the recent Vatican declaration which excluded women from the priesthood.

The ad, inserted by the General Council of Adrian (Mich.) Dominican Sisters included a petition form with 20 spaces for names, addresses and dioceses that was earmarked for return to the nuns' headquarters.

The purchase of ad space by religious groups to explain resolutions relating to investments, fair employment, multinational corporations and business policies of corporations in foreign countries particularly those where human rights are allegedly violated, is another use of advertising growing common.

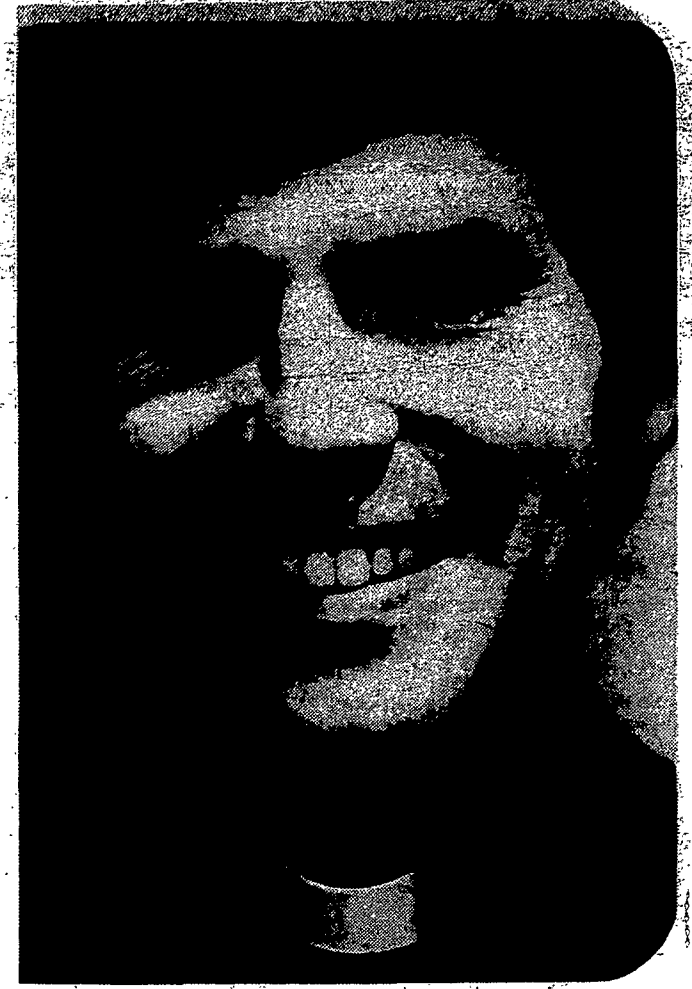
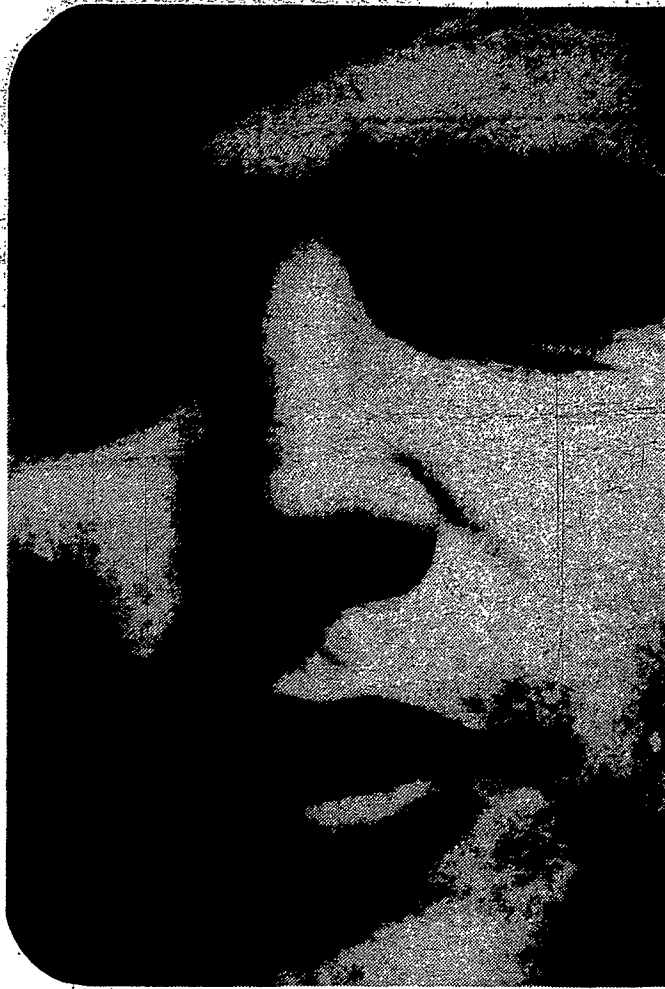
In commenting on why Catholic religious orders and dioceses are turning to advertising, spokesmen have agreed that the main source of promotion for the priesthood used to be the parish priest who had contacts within the parochial school structure. With those contacts no longer working, dioceses and orders are turning to more contemporary methods, among them advertising.

The Christian Brothers' Winona, Minn., province, in launching a 1975 advertising campaign to attract candidates for the religious life, also utilized the advertising media to try to change their image of "stuffy old men sitting around being pious." They sought to stress "new" and "more dynamic" lifestyles.

A pioneer in the use of commercial advertising for religious purposes is Religion in American Life, an organization founded in 1949 that works in cooperation with 43 national religious bodies, representing Catholic, Protestant, Christian Orthodox and Jewish groups. Its campaigns, distributed through the Advertising Council, are built around a different theme each year.

The current campaign which can expect to receive some \$25 million worth of advertising time and space contributed by the media focuses on the theme, "Loneliness — nobody needs it."

One newspaper ad prepared for the campaign depicts a man sitting alone at a lunch counter. The ad says, "Loneliness. Nobody needs it. Find the strength of family values in God's family — in your use of worship. There's a cure for loneliness — in



Priests Try TV Spots

The cheerful faces on the left and right both belong to one Catholic diocesan priest, Father Terry Attridge of New York City, who, with other priests is seen on TV spots, individually proclaiming the fulfillment of their work, through experiences which they live. It is part of a campaign technique on 40 television channels across the U.S. which first shows a man closeup, without identification, telling his story to the camera. The viewer does not become aware that the subject is a priest until the final instant when the camera backs off (as above) to reveal his collar. The program is one of the more dramatic examples of the efforts the Roman Catholic Church is making "to create interest in the priesthood by providing awareness of the priest's role in today's world, by encouraging families to think about it as a possibility for one of their own number, and by directly appealing to men to consider it as a rewarding vocation." (RNS)

strength that families offer. Remember, you're part of God's family, and you can find the strength of family values in your house of worship — working with others, giving of yourself. Then you're not lonely, and there's also help for the problems we all face."

Another broad media-centered outreach is conducted by the evangelical Campus Crusade for Christ, headed by Bill Bright of Arrowhead Springs, Calif. Its "Here's Life, America" campaign is an intensive one that is hop-scotching around the country. It utilizes TV and radio spots, ads in daily newspapers, billboards and bumper stickers to excite fervor in a commitment to Christ. People are invited to dial a telephone number for more information and referrals.

Described as an interdenominational effort, "Here's Life" involves thousands of volunteers in each of its campaigns who answer telephones. In Washington, D. C., for instance, about 38,000 persons responded to the campaign advertising, either phoning in or being visited by volunteers and given the opportunity "to pray to receive Christ as Lord and Savior."

The controversial reconciliation rites for Roman Catholics in Memphis, Tenn. was helped along by advertising. The diocese spent \$1700 on newspaper advertisements to publicize the reconciliation campaign which ultimately attracted some 13,000 alienated Catholics to two reconciliation rites promoted by Bishop Carroll Dozier last December.

The unprecedented and controversial reconciliation campaign which drew criticism from some U.S. and Vatican church circles also utilized television and radio "spots" in the Memphis area.

A diocesan spokesman said "we have our own diocesan newspaper but if a man or woman is inactive in the faith, he or she is not on any parish rolls and naturally doesn't get the newspaper. So, to reach these people we had to go to the general media the newspaper ads and the radio and television announcements."

While religious agencies and church groups are taking a greater interest in the advertising media to get the message out or to attract vocations, advertisers are also taking a greater interest in specialized publications, including those in the religious field.

An interreligious magazine "network" involving nine publications has been formed to offer advertisers a combined circulation of three million readers. The "Interfaith Network" offers space in

Presbyterian, Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal, United Church of Christ and non-denominational Protestant publications.

Robert Fenton, editor of the Catholic Digest (one of the member publications) said advertisers are more open to a larger circulation figure, such as that provided by the network, and that advertisers are leaning more toward media that reaches a specific segment of the population. He said readers of religious magazines are "serious, responsible people," the kind of consumers advertisers want to reach.

None of this is to say that the marriage of religion and commercial advertising is at all times smooth and easy. Questions of superficiality, good taste and propriety are always at the forefront in the use of a technique that can be used as easily to sell soap as to invite inquiries about a religious vocation.

Pope Paul VI reminded advertisers of this last year when he asked them to be "ever mindful of the serious responsibilities of their profession."

He stressed to members of the European Association of Advertising Agencies during a Vatican audience that advertising should always be truthful and respect a consumer's freedom of choice. The consumer, he said, should not have "his hierarchy of values distorted" by advertising or be "titillated in his baser tendencies" or "oriented toward needs that he cannot or should not satisfy."

Whenever a religious group does find advertising offensive, there has been no hesitancy to speak up. In some cases, it has effect.

In Charlotte, N.C., last year, two daily newspapers helped publication of ads for a brand of Scotch whiskey which many persons protested made a "mockery" of the Bible. The ad featured a picture of a bottle of Scotch called King James, flanked with the words, "The" and "Version." The phrase read "The King James Version."

The National Council of Churches has opposed broadcast advertising of non-prescription contraceptives, and recently the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano cut out an ad for Johnson's Wax, on the grounds that it was in "bad taste." The ad extolled the virtues of Johnson's Wax as it was used to polish up St. Peter's Basilica.

Whatever the context, religion and advertising in this country and throughout the world are beginning to come to terms. Churches are more and more accepting advertising as a powerful modern tool in the promotion of an age-old message.