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Advertising

Letter draws mixed responses

When asked by the *Catholic Courier* how many commercial advertisements appeal to her as an intelligent, ethical consumer, Lorraine Trude replied:

"I wouldn't say half of them."
The president of Trude & Farr, Inc., a Pittsford-based advertising and publicity firm, particularly decried the exploitation of sexuality in ads.

"They use sex to sell everything," she said of many advertisers. "There's a blatant use of sexuality to sell products and services in this country - sunglasses, cars."

On the other hand, Jay Quinn, a managing partner of Eric Mower & Associates, a marketing/communications firm with offices across New York state, sees a lot of advertising in a more positive light. Quinn maintained that ad agencies in this country generally comply with both their own ethical codes as well as governmental regulations that prohibit false and misleading advertising.

"All in all," he said, "advertising has a very clean reputation."
The fact that Quinn and Trude can see the world of ads so differently casts light on why the Catholic Church's recent attempt to speak to the advertising world has drawn such a mixed reaction.

The church and advertising

The Pontifical Council for Social Communications, headed by U.S. Archbishop John P. Foley, issued a document Feb. 25 titled "Ethics in Advertising." Several years in the making, the document represents the church's most extensive formal treatment of advertising.

Its authors wrote that the church was addressing the advertising community because of its growing importance in the global marketplace. They also noted the church has long concerned itself with media questions, especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Among the main points in the document:

- The church is concerned with how ads can affect

"how people understand life, the world and themselves, especially in regard to their values and their ways of choosing and behaving."

• Advertising "has significant potential for good, and sometimes it is realized." Ads provide information that enables people to choose products and political leaders; they also aid cultural and religious institutions to convey their messages, the document said.

• Advertising can harm people through misrepresentation of facts, exploitation of sexual instincts and appeals to materialism. Political advertising, through distortion, slander and demagoguery, can usurp true democracy. The cost of political advertising can also limit office-seeking to wealthy candidates or to ones beholden to special interest groups that fund their campaigns.

• Advertising can also harm cultures by promoting "First World" values at the expense of "sound traditional values in indigenous cultures." Ads can also promote stereotypes, sexism, tawdriness and moral squalor.

The document calls for more truthfulness in advertising as well as a sense of social responsibility among advertisers. It also calls for media education of the public so that people are better prepared to deal with advertising.

From hostile to welcoming

Even before they had a chance to read it, some advertising professionals scoffed at "Ethics in Advertising" - if a recent article published in *Advertising Age* is any indication.

"I think the Catholic Church has enough problems, and they shouldn't be worried about advertising," said one ad executive quoted in the March 3 story titled "Pontifical Council sets guidelines for making ads - Vatican values leave U.S. admen unimpressed."

His attitude echoed that of most of the article's inter-

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Story by Rob Cullivan



Kim Parks