

# **The Catholic Church's Handbook on Ethics in Advertising**

*The Pontifical Council For Social Communications' handbook*

## **I. Introduction**

**1. The importance of advertising is “steadily on the increase in modern society.”<sup>1</sup> That observation,** made by this Pontifical Council a quarter century ago as part of an overview of the state of communications, is even more true now.

Just as the media of social communication themselves have enormous influence everywhere, so advertising, using media as its vehicle, is a pervasive, powerful force shaping attitudes and behavior in today's world.

Especially since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has frequently addressed the question of the media and their role and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> She has sought to do so in a fundamentally positive manner, viewing the media as “gifts of God” which, in accordance with his providential design, bring people together and “help them to cooperate with his plan for their salvation.”<sup>3</sup>

In doing so, the Church stresses the responsibility of media to contribute to the authentic, integral development of persons and to foster the well being of society. “The information provided by the media is at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity.”<sup>4</sup>

It is in this spirit that the Church enters into dialogue with communicators. At the same time, she also calls attention to moral principles and norms relevant to social communications, as to other forms of human endeavor, while criticizing policies and practices that offend against these standards.

Here and there in the growing body of literature arising from the Church's consideration of media, the subject of advertising is discussed.<sup>5</sup> Now, prompted by the increasing importance of advertising and by requests for a more extensive treatment, we turn again to this topic.

We wish to call attention to positive contributions that advertising can and does make; to note ethical and moral problems that advertising can and does raise; to point to moral principles that apply to this field; and, finally, to suggest certain steps for the consideration of those professionally involved in advertising, as well as for others in the private sector, including the churches, and for public officials.

Our reason for addressing these matters is simple. In today's society, advertising has a profound impact on how people understand life, the world and themselves, especially in regard to their values and their ways of choosing and behaving. These are matters about which the Church is and must be deeply and sincerely concerned.

**2. The field of advertising is extremely broad and diverse.** In general terms, of course, an advertisement is simply a public notice meant to convey information and invite patronage or some other response. As that suggests, advertising has two basic purposes: to inform and to persuade, and — while these purposes are distinguishable — both very often are simultaneously present.

Advertising is not the same as marketing (the complex of commercial functions involved in transferring goods from producers and consumers) or public relations (the systematic effort to create a favorable public impression or ‘image’ of some person, group, or entity). In many cases, though, it is a technique or instrument employed by one or both of these.

Advertising can be very simple — a local, even ‘neighborhood,’ phenomenon — or it can be very complex, involving sophisticated research and multimedia campaigns that span the globe. It differs according to its intended audience, so that, for example, advertising aimed at children raises some technical and moral issues significantly different from those raised by advertising aimed at competent adults.

Not only are many different media and techniques employed in advertising; advertising itself is of several different kinds: commercial advertising for products and services; public service advertising on behalf of various institutions, programs, and causes; and — a phenomenon of growing importance today — political advertising in the interests of parties and candidates. Making allowance for the differences among the different kinds and methods of advertising, we intend what follows to be applicable to them all.

**3. We disagree with the assertion that advertising simply mirrors the attitudes and values of the surrounding culture.** No doubt advertising, like the media of social communications in general, does act as a mirror. But, also like media in general, it is a mirror that helps shape the reality it reflects, and sometimes it presents a distorted image of reality.

Advertisers are selective about the values and attitudes to be fostered and encouraged, promoting some while ignoring others. This selectivity gives the lie to the notion that advertising does no more than reflect the surrounding culture. For example, the absence from advertising of certain racial and ethnic groups in some multi-racial or multi-ethnic societies can help to create problems of image and identity, especially among those neglected, and the almost inevitable impression in commercial advertising that an abundance of possessions leads to happiness and fulfillment can be both misleading and frustrating.

Advertising also has an indirect but powerful impact on society through its influence on media. Many publications and broadcasting operations depend on advertising revenue for survival. This often is true of religious media as well as commercial media. For their part, advertisers naturally seek to reach audiences; and the media, striving to deliver audiences to advertisers, must shape their content so to attract audiences of the size and demographic composition sought. This economic dependency of media and the power it confers upon advertisers carries with it serious responsibilities for both.

## **II. The Benefits of Advertising**

**4. Enormous human and material resources are devoted to advertising.** Advertising is everywhere in today’s world, so that, as Pope Paul VI remarked, “No one now can escape the influence of advertising.”<sup>6</sup> Even people who are not themselves exposed to particular forms of advertising confront a society, a culture — other people — affected for good or ill by advertising messages and techniques of every sort.

Some critics view this state of affairs in unrelievedly negative terms. They condemn advertising as a waste of time, talent and money — an essentially parasitic activity. In this view, not only does advertising have no value of its own, but its influence is entirely harmful and corrupting for individuals and society.

We do not agree. There is truth to the criticisms, and we shall make criticisms of our own. But advertising also has significant potential for good, and sometimes it is realized. Here are some of the ways that happens.

### **a) Economic Benefits of Advertising**

**5. Advertising can play an important role in the process by which an economic system guided by moral norms and responsive to the common good contributes to human development.** It is a necessary part of the functioning of modern market economies, which today either exist or are emerging in many parts of the world and which — provided they conform to moral standards based upon integral human development and the common good — currently seem to be “the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs” of a socio-economic kind.<sup>7</sup>

In such a system, advertising can be a useful tool for sustaining honest and ethically responsible competition that contributes to economic growth in the service of authentic human development. “The Church looks with favor on the growth of man’s productive capacity, and also on the ever widening network of relationships and exchanges between persons and social groups....[F]rom this point of view she encourages advertising, which can become a wholesome and efficacious instrument for reciprocal help among men.”<sup>8</sup>

Advertising does this, among other ways, by informing people about the availability of rationally desirable new products and services and improvements in existing ones, helping them to make informed, prudent consumer decisions, contributing to efficiency and the lowering of prices, and stimulating economic progress through the expansion of business and trade. All of this can contribute to the creation of new jobs, higher incomes and a more decent and humane way of life for all. It also helps pay for publications, programming and productions — including those of the Church — that bring information, entertainment and inspiration to people around the world.

### **b) Benefits of Political Advertising**

**6. “The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.”<sup>9</sup>**

Political advertising can make a contribution to democracy analogous to its contribution to economic well being in a market system guided by moral norms. As free and responsible media in a democratic system help to counteract tendencies toward the monopolization of power on the part of oligarchies and special interests, so political advertising can make its contribution by informing people about the ideas and policy proposals of parties and candidates, including new candidates not previously known to the public.

### c) Cultural Benefits of Advertising

**7. Because of the impact advertising has on media that depend on it for revenue, advertisers have an opportunity to exert a positive influence on decisions about media content.** This they do by supporting material of excellent intellectual, aesthetic and moral quality presented with the public interest in view, and particularly by encouraging and making possible media presentations which are oriented to minorities whose needs might otherwise go unserved.

Moreover, advertising can itself contribute to the betterment of society by uplifting and inspiring people and motivating them to act in ways that benefit themselves and others. Advertising can brighten lives simply by being witty, tasteful and entertaining. Some advertisements are instances of popular art, with a vivacity and elan all their own.

### d) Moral and Religious Benefits of Advertising

**8. In many cases, too, benevolent social institutions, including those of a religious nature, use advertising to communicate their messages** — messages of faith, of patriotism, of tolerance, compassion and neighborly service, of charity toward the needy, messages concerning health and education, constructive and helpful messages that educate and motivate people in a variety of beneficial ways.

For the Church, involvement in media-related activities, including advertising, is today a necessary part of a comprehensive pastoral strategy.<sup>10</sup> This includes both the Church's own media — Catholic press and publishing, television and radio broadcasting, film and audiovisual production, and the rest — and also her participation in secular media. The media “can and should be instruments in the Church's program of re-evangelization and new evangelization in the contemporary world.”<sup>11</sup> While much remains to be done, many positive efforts of this kind already are underway. With reference to advertising itself, Pope Paul VI once said that it is desirable that Catholic institutions “follow with constant attention the development of the modern techniques of advertising and... know how to make opportune use of them in order to spread the Gospel message in a manner which answers the expectations and needs of contemporary man.”<sup>12</sup>

## III. The Harm Done By Advertising

**9. There is nothing intrinsically good or intrinsically evil about advertising.** It is a tool, an instrument: it can be used well, and it can be used badly. If it can have, and sometimes does have, beneficial results such as those just described, it also can, and often does, have a negative, harmful impact on individuals and society.

*Communio et Progressio* contains this summary statement of the problem: “If harmful or utterly useless goods are touted to the public, if false assertions are made about goods for sale, if less than admirable human tendencies are exploited, those responsible for such advertising harm society and forfeit their good name and credibility. More than this, unremitting pressure to buy articles of luxury can arouse false wants that hurt both individuals and families by making them ignore what they really need. And those forms of advertising which, without shame, exploit the sexual instincts simply to make money or which seek to penetrate into the subconscious recesses of the mind in a way that threatens the freedom of the individual ... must be shunned.”<sup>13</sup>

## a) Economic Harms of Advertising

**10. Advertising can betray its role as a source of information by misrepresentation and by withholding relevant facts.** Sometimes, too, the information function of media can be subverted by advertisers' pressure upon publications or programs not to treat of questions that might prove embarrassing or inconvenient.

More often, though, advertising is used not simply to inform but to persuade and motivate — to convince people to act in certain ways: buy certain products or services, patronize certain institutions, and the like. This is where particular abuses can occur.

The practice of “brand”-related advertising can raise serious problems. Often there are only negligible differences among similar products of different brands, and advertising may attempt to move people to act on the basis of irrational motives (“brand loyalty,” status, fashion, “sex appeal,” etc.) instead of presenting differences in product quality and price as bases for rational choice.

Advertising also can be, and often is, a tool of the “phenomenon of consumerism,” as Pope John Paul II delineated it when he said: “It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward ‘having’ rather than ‘being’, and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes advertisers speak of it as part of their task to “create” needs for products and services — that is, to cause people to feel and act upon cravings for items and services they do not need. “If ... a direct appeal is made to his instincts — while ignoring in various ways the reality of the person as intelligent and free — then consumer attitudes and life-styles can be created which are objectively improper and often damaging to his physical and spiritual health.”<sup>15</sup>

This is a serious abuse, an affront to human dignity and the common good when it occurs in affluent societies. But the abuse is still more grave when consumerist attitudes and values are transmitted by communications media and advertising to developing countries, where they exacerbate socio-economic problems and harm the poor. “It is true that a judicious use of advertising can stimulate developing countries to improve their standard of living. But serious harm can be done them if advertising and commercial pressure become so irresponsible that communities seeking to rise from poverty to a reasonable standard of living are persuaded to seek this progress by satisfying wants that have been artificially created. The result of this is that they waste their resources and neglect their real needs, and genuine development falls behind.”<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the task of countries attempting to develop types of market economies that serve human needs and interests after decades under centralized, state-controlled systems is made more difficult by advertising that promotes consumerist attitudes and values offensive to human dignity and the common good. The problem is particularly acute when, as often happens, the dignity and welfare of society's poorer and weaker members are at stake. It is necessary always to bear in mind that there are “goods which by their very nature cannot and must not be bought or sold” and to avoid “an ‘idolatry’ of the market” that, aided and abetted by advertising, ignores this crucial fact.<sup>17</sup>

## **b) Harms of Political Advertising**

**11. Political advertising can support and assist the working of the democratic process, but it also can obstruct it.** This happens when, for example, the costs of advertising limit political competition to wealthy candidates or groups, or require that office-seekers compromise their integrity and independence by over-dependence on special interests for funds.

Such obstruction of the democratic process also happens when, instead of being a vehicle for honest expositions of candidates' views and records, political advertising seeks to distort the views and records of opponents and unjustly attacks their reputations. It happens when advertising appeals more to people's emotions and base instincts — to selfishness, bias and hostility toward others, to racial and ethnic prejudice and the like — rather than to a reasoned sense of justice and the good of all.

## **c) Cultural Harms of Advertising**

**12. Advertising also can have a corrupting influence upon culture and cultural values. We have spoken of the economic harm that can be done to developing nations by advertising that fosters consumerism and destructive patterns of consumption.** Consider also the cultural injury done to these nations and their peoples by advertising whose content and methods, reflecting those prevalent in the first world, are at war with sound traditional values in indigenous cultures. Today this kind of “domination and manipulation” via media rightly is “a concern of developing nations in relation to developed ones,” as well as a “concern of minorities within particular nations.”<sup>18</sup>

The indirect but powerful influence exerted by advertising upon the media of social communications that depend on revenues from this source points to another sort of cultural concern. In the competition to attract ever larger audiences and deliver them to advertisers, communicators can find themselves tempted — in fact pressured, subtly or not so subtly — to set aside high artistic and moral standards and lapse into superficiality, tawdriness and moral squalor.

Communicators also can find themselves tempted to ignore the educational and social needs of certain segments of the audience — the very young, the very old, the poor — who do not match the demographic patterns (age, education, income, habits of buying and consuming, etc.) of the kinds of audiences advertisers want to reach. In this way the tone and indeed the level of moral responsibility of the communications media in general are lowered.

All too often, advertising contributes to the invidious stereotyping of particular groups that places them at a disadvantage in relation to others. This often is true of the way advertising treats women; and the exploitation of women, both in and by advertising, is a frequent, deplorable abuse. “How often are they treated not as persons with an inviolable dignity but as objects whose purpose is to satisfy others' appetite for pleasure or for power? How often is the role of woman as wife and mother undervalued or even ridiculed? How often is the role of women in business or professional life depicted as a masculine caricature, a denial of the specific gifts of feminine insight, compassion, and understanding, which so greatly contribute to the ‘civilization of love’?”<sup>19</sup>

## d) Moral and Religious Harms of Advertising

**13. Advertising can be tasteful and in conformity with high moral standards, and occasionally even morally uplifting, but it also can be vulgar and morally degrading.** Frequently it deliberately appeals to such motives as envy, status seeking and lust. Today, too, some advertisers consciously seek to shock and titillate by exploiting content of a morbid, perverse, pornographic nature.

What this Pontifical Council said several years ago about pornography and violence in the media is no less true of certain forms of advertising:

“As reflections of the dark side of human nature marred by sin, pornography and the exaltation of violence are age-old realities of the human condition. In the past quarter century, however, they have taken on new dimensions and have become serious social problems. At a time of widespread and unfortunate confusion about moral norms, the communications media have made pornography and violence accessible to a vastly expanded audience, including young people and even children, and a problem which at one time was confined mainly to wealthy countries has now begun, via the communications media, to corrupt moral values in developing nations.”<sup>20</sup>

We note, too, certain special problems relating to advertising that treats of religion or pertains to specific issues with a moral dimension.

In cases of the first sort, commercial advertisers sometimes include religious themes or use religious images or personages to sell products. It is possible to do this in tasteful, acceptable ways, but the practice is obnoxious and offensive when it involves exploiting religion or treating it flippantly.

In cases of the second sort, advertising sometimes is used to promote products and inculcate attitudes and forms of behavior contrary to moral norms. That is the case, for instance, with the advertising of contraceptives, abortifacients and products harmful to health, and with government-sponsored advertising campaigns for artificial birth control, so-called “safe sex”, and similar practices.

## IV. Some Ethical and Moral Principles

**14. The Second Vatican Council declared: “If the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in this domain.”**<sup>21</sup> The moral order to which this refers is the order of the law of human nature, binding upon all because it is “written on their hearts” (Rom. 2:15) and embodies the imperatives of authentic human fulfillment.

For Christians, moreover, the law of human nature has a deeper dimension, a richer meaning. “Christ is the ‘Beginning’ who, having taken on human nature, definitively illumines it in its constitutive elements and in its dynamism of charity towards God and neighbor.”<sup>22</sup> Here we comprehend the deepest significance of human freedom: that it makes possible an authentic moral response, in light of Jesus Christ, to the call “to form our conscience, to make it the object of a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good.”<sup>23</sup>

In this context, the media of social communications have two options, and only two. Either they help human persons to grow in their understanding and practice of what is true and good, or they are destructive forces in conflict with human well being. That is entirely true of advertising.

Against this background, then, we point to this fundamental principle for people engaged in advertising: advertisers — that is, those who commission, prepare or disseminate advertising — are morally responsible for what they seek to move people to do; and this is a responsibility also shared by publishers, broadcasting executives, and others in the communications world, as well as by those who give commercial or political endorsements, to the extent that they are involved in the advertising process.

If an instance of advertising seeks to move people to choose and act rationally in morally good ways that are of true benefit to themselves and others, persons involved in it do what is morally good; if it seeks to move people to do evil deeds that are self-destructive and destructive of authentic community, they do evil.

This applies also to the means and the techniques of advertising: it is morally wrong to use manipulative, exploitative, corrupt and corrupting methods of persuasion and motivation. In this regard, we note special problems associated with so-called indirect advertising that attempts to move people to act in certain ways — for example, purchase particular products — without their being fully aware that they are being swayed. The techniques involved here include showing certain products or forms of behavior in superficially glamorous settings associated with superficially glamorous people; in extreme cases, it may even involve the use of subliminal messages.

Within this very general framework, we can identify several moral principles that are particularly relevant to advertising. We shall speak briefly of three: truthfulness, the dignity of the human person, and social responsibility.

#### **a) Truthfulness in Advertising**

**15. Even today, some advertising is simply and deliberately untrue. Generally speaking, though, the problem of truth in advertising is somewhat more subtle: it is not that advertising says what is overtly false, but that it can distort the truth by implying things that are not so or withholding relevant facts.** As Pope John Paul II points out, on both the individual and social levels, truth and freedom are inseparable; without truth as the basis, starting point and criterion of discernment, judgment, choice and action, there can be no authentic exercise of freedom.<sup>24</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, quoting the Second Vatican Council, insists that the content of communication be “true and — within the limits set by justice and charity — complete”; the content should, moreover, be communicated “honestly and properly.”<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, advertising, like other forms of expression, has its own conventions and forms of stylization, and these must be taken into account when discussing truthfulness. People take for granted some rhetorical and symbolic exaggeration in advertising; within the limits of recognized and accepted practice, this can be allowable.

But it is a fundamental principle that advertising may not deliberately seek to deceive, whether it does that by what it says, by what it implies, or by what it fails to say. “The proper exercise of the

right to information demands that the content of what is communicated be true and, within the limits set by justice and charity, complete. ... Included here is the obligation to avoid any manipulation of truth for any reason.”<sup>26</sup>

## **b) The Dignity of the Human Person**

**16. There is an “imperative requirement” that advertising “respect the human person, his right duty to make a responsible choice, his interior freedom; all these goods would be violated if man’s lower inclinations were to be exploited, or his capacity to reflect and decide compromised.”<sup>27</sup>**

These abuses are not merely hypothetical possibilities but realities in much advertising today. Advertising can violate the dignity of the human person both through its content — what is advertised, the manner in which it is advertised — and through the impact it seeks to make upon its audience. We have spoken already of such things as appeals to lust, vanity, envy and greed, and of techniques that manipulate and exploit human weakness. In such circumstances, advertisements readily become “vehicles of a deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality — an outlook that does not respect the true dignity and destiny of the human person.”<sup>28</sup>

This problem is especially acute where particularly vulnerable groups or classes of persons are concerned: children and young people, the elderly, the poor, the culturally disadvantaged.

Much advertising directed at children apparently tries to exploit their credulity and suggestibility, in the hope that they will put pressure on their parents to buy products of no real benefit to them. Advertising like this offends against the dignity and rights of both children and parents; it intrudes upon the parent-child relationship and seeks to manipulate it to its own base ends. Also, some of the comparatively little advertising directed specifically to the elderly or culturally disadvantaged seems designed to play upon their fears so as to persuade them to allocate some of their limited resources to goods or services of dubious value.

## **c) Advertising and Social Responsibility**

**17. Social responsibility is such a broad concept that we can note here only a few of the many issues and concerns relevant under this heading to the question of advertising.**

The ecological issue is one. Advertising that fosters a lavish life style which wastes resources and despoils the environment offends against important ecological concerns. “In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. ... Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray.”<sup>29</sup>

As this suggests, something more fundamental is at issue here: authentic and integral human development. Advertising that reduces human progress to acquiring material goods and cultivating a lavish life style expresses a false, destructive vision of the human person harmful to individuals and society alike.

When people fail to practice “a rigorous respect for the moral, cultural and spiritual requirements, based on the dignity of the person and on the proper identity of each community, beginning with the family and religious societies,” then even material abundance and the conveniences that technology makes available “will prove unsatisfying and in the end contemptible.”<sup>30</sup> Advertisers, like people engaged in other forms of social communication, have a serious duty to express and foster an authentic vision of human development in its material, cultural and spiritual dimensions.<sup>31</sup> Communication that meets this standard is, among other things, a true expression of solidarity. Indeed, the two things — communication and solidarity — are inseparable, because, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out, solidarity is “a consequence of genuine and right communication and the free circulation of ideas that further knowledge and respect for others.”<sup>32</sup>

## **V. Conclusion: Some Steps to Take**

**18. The indispensable guarantors of ethically correct behavior by the advertising industry are the well formed and responsible consciences of advertising professionals themselves:** consciences sensitive to their duty not merely to serve the interests of those who commission and finance their work but also to respect and uphold the rights and interests of their audiences and to serve the common good.

Many women and men professionally engaged in advertising do have sensitive consciences, high ethical standards and a strong sense of responsibility. But even for them external pressures — from the clients who commission their work as well as from the competitive internal dynamics of their profession — can create powerful inducements to unethical behavior. That underlines the need for external structures and systems to support and encourage responsible practice in advertising and to discourage the irresponsible.

**19. Voluntary ethical codes are one such source of support. These already exist in a number of places.** Welcome as they are, though, they are only as effective as the willingness of advertisers to comply strictly with them. “It is up to the directors and managers of the media which carry advertising to make known to the public, to subscribe to and to apply the codes of professional ethics which already have been opportunely established so as to have the cooperation of the public in making these codes still better and in enforcing their observance.”<sup>33</sup>

We emphasize the importance of public involvement. Representatives of the public should participate in the formulation, application and periodic updating of ethical codes. The public representatives should include ethicists and church people, as well as representatives of consumer groups. Individuals do well to organize themselves into such groups in order to protect their interests in relation to commercial interests.

**20. Public authorities also have a role to play.** On the one hand, government should not seek to control and dictate policy to the advertising industry, any more than to other sectors of the communications media. On the other hand, the regulation of advertising content and practice, already existing in many places, can and should extend beyond banning false advertising, narrowly defined. “By promulgating laws and overseeing their application, public authorities should ensure that ‘public morality and social progress are not gravely endangered’ through misuse of the media.”<sup>34</sup>

For example, government regulations should address such questions as the quantity of advertising, especially in broadcast media, as well as the content of advertising directed at groups particularly vulnerable to exploitation, such as children and old people. Political advertising also seems an appropriate area for regulation: how much may be spent, how and from whom may money for advertising be raised, etc.

**21. The media of news and information should make it a point to keep the public informed about the world of advertising.** Considering advertising's social impact, it is appropriate that media regularly review and critique the performance of advertisers, just as they do other groups whose activities have a significant influence on society.

**22. Besides using media to evangelize, the Church for her part needs to grasp the full implications of the observation by Pope John Paul: that media comprise a central part of that great modern "Areopagus" where ideas are shared and attitudes and values are formed.** This points to a "deeper reality" than simply using media to spread the Gospel message, important as that is. "It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications" with its "new ways of communicating... new languages, new techniques and a new psychology."<sup>35</sup>

In light of this insight, it is important that media education be part of pastoral planning and a variety of pastoral and educational programs carried on by the Church, including Catholic schools. This includes education regarding the role of advertising in today's world and its relevance to the work of the Church. Such education should seek to prepare people to be informed and alert in their approach to advertising as to other forms of communication. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out, "the means of social communication. ... can give rise to a certain passivity among users, making them less than vigilant consumers of what is said or shown. Users should practice moderation and discipline in their approach to the mass media."<sup>36</sup>

**23. In the final analysis, however, where freedom of speech and communication exists, it is largely up to advertisers themselves to ensure ethically responsible practices in their profession.** Besides avoiding abuses, advertisers should also undertake to repair the harm sometimes done by advertising, insofar as that is possible: for example, by publishing corrective notices, compensating injured parties, increasing the quantity of public service advertising, and the like. This question of 'reparations' is a matter of legitimate involvement not only by industry self-regulatory bodies and public interest groups, but also by public authorities.

Where unethical practices have become widespread and entrenched, conscientious advertisers may be called upon to make significant personal sacrifices to correct them. But people who want to do what is morally right must always be ready to suffer loss and personal injury rather than to do what is wrong. This is a duty for Christians, followers of Christ, certainly; but not only for them. "In this witness to the absoluteness of the moral good Christians are not alone: they are supported by the moral sense present in peoples and by the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West."<sup>37</sup>

We do not wish, and certainly we do not expect, to see advertising eliminated from the contemporary world. Advertising is an important element in today's society, especially in the functioning of a market economy, which is becoming more and more widespread.

Moreover, for the reasons and in the ways sketched here, we believe advertising can, and often does, play a constructive role in economic growth, in the exchange of information and ideas, and in the fostering of solidarity among individuals and groups. Yet it also can do, and often does, grave harm to individuals and to the common good.

In light of these reflections, therefore, we call upon advertising professionals and upon all those involved in the process of commissioning and disseminating advertising to eliminate its socially harmful aspects and observe high ethical standards in regard to truthfulness, human dignity and social responsibility. In this way, they will make a special and significant contribution to human progress and to the common good.

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By the Pontifical Council for Social Communications,  
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#### NOTES:

- (1) *Communio et Progressio*, 59, in AAS, LXIII (1971), pp. 615-617.
- (2) For example: Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*, in AAS, LVI (1964), pp. 145-157; the Messages of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the World Communication Days; Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, in AAS, LXIII (1971), pp. 593-656; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: a Pastoral Response, Vatican City 1989; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, Vatican City 1992.
- (3) *Communio et Progressio*, n. 2, loc. cit., pp. 593-594.
- (4) Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2494 (quoting Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*, n. 11).
- (5) See Pope PAUL VI, Message for World Communications Day 1977, in L'Osservatore Romano, May 13, 1977, pp. 1-2; *Communio et Progressio*, nn. 59-62, loc. cit., pp. 615-617.
- (6) PAUL VI, Message for World Communications Day 1977, loc. cit., p. 1.
- (7) JOHN PAUL II, Centesimus Annus, n. 34, in AAS, LXXXIII (1991), pp. 835-836.
- (8) PAUL VI, Message for World Communications Day 1977, loc. cit., p. 1.
- (9) JOHN PAUL II, Centesimus Annus, n. 46, loc. cit., p. 850.
- (10) Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, nn. 20-21, Vatican City 1992.
- (11) Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, n. 11, Vatican City 1992.
- (12) PAUL VI, Message for World Communications Day 1977, loc. cit., p. 2.
- (13) *Communio et Progressio*, n. 60, loc. cit., p. 616.
- (14) JOHN PAUL II, Centesimus Annus, n. 36, loc. cit., p. 839.
- (15) *Ibid.*, pp. 838-839.
- (16) *Communio et Progressio*, n. 61, loc. cit., p. 616.
- (17) JOHN PAUL II, Centesimus Annus, n. 40, loc. cit., p. 843.
- (18) Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, n. 16, Vatican City 1992.
- (19) JOHN PAUL II, Message for World Communications Day 1996, in L'Osservatore Romano, Jan. 25, 1996, pp. 1, 6.

- (20) Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: a Pastoral Response*, n. 6, Vatican City 1989.
- (21) *Inter Mirifica*, n. 4, in AAS, LVI (1964), p. 146.
- (22) JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, n.53, in AAS, LXXXV (1993), p. 1176.
- (23) *Ibid.*, n. 64, loc. cit., p. 1183.
- (24) Cf. *ibid.*, n. 31, loc. cit., pp. 1158-1159, and passim.
- (25) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2494, Vatican City 1994 (quoting Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*, n. 5).
- (26) JOHN PAUL II, *Address to Communications Specialists*, Los Angeles, Sept. 15, 1987, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Sept. 17, 1987, p. 5.
- (27) PAUL VI, *Message for World Communications Day 1977*, loc. cit., pp. 1-2.
- (28) Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: a Pastoral Response*, n. 7, Vatican City 1989.
- (29) JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 37, loc. cit., p. 840.
- (30) JOHN PAUL II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 33, in AAS, LXXX (1988), p. 557.
- (31) *Ibid.*, nn. 27-34, loc. cit., pp. 547-560.
- (32) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2496, Vatican City 1994.
- (33) PAUL VI, *Message for World Communications Day 1977*, loc. cit., p. 2.
- (34) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2498, Vatican City 1994 (quoting Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*, n. 12).
- (35) JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 37 (c), in AAS, LXXXIII (1991), pp. 284-285.
- (36) *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican City 1994, n. 2496.
- (37) JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 94, loc. cit., p. 1207.