

<b>COMPLAINT NUMBER</b>	20/425
<b>ADVERTISER</b>	Living Church of God
<b>ADVERTISEMENT</b>	Tomorrows World, Television
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	27 October 2020
<b>OUTCOME</b>	No Grounds to Proceed

**Advertisement:** The Living Church of God's Tomorrows World television advertisement is titled "Big Brother is Watching You." The Advertiser presents views about what it considers are the "oppressive levels of government surveillance". The advertisement relates this to COVID-19 health response measures such as contact tracing and mask wearing. The infomercial repeatedly shows the Tomorrows World name and offers the viewer a free study guide booklet called "The Beast of Revelation – Myth, Metaphor or Soon-Coming Reality?"

**The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.**

**Complaint:** Conspiracy theory mixed with religious bias, scare tactics and misinformation... just following a children's program and all the while during a pandemic that has been exacerbated by the Mt Roskill Evangelical Fellowship and the political party, New Zealand Public Party, running on a platform of much of the above. I made a complaint to TVNZ but they're not taking any responsibility and advised me to contact you.

**The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Principle 2, Rule 1(g), Rule 2(b), Rule 2(e);**

**Principle 1: Social Responsibility:** Advertisements must be prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.

**Rule 1(g) Fear and distress:** Advertisements must not cause fear or distress without justification.

**Principle 2: Truthful Presentation:** Advertisements must be truthful, balanced and not misleading.

**Rule 2(b) Truthful Presentation:** Advertisements must not mislead or be likely to mislead, deceive or confuse consumers, abuse their trust or exploit their lack of knowledge. This includes by implication, inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, unrealistic claim, omission, false representation or otherwise. Obvious hyperbole identifiable as such is not considered to be misleading.

**Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising:** Advocacy advertising must clearly state the identity and position of the advertiser. Opinion in support of the advertiser's position must be clearly distinguishable from factual information. Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

**The Chair** noted the Complainant's concern the advertisement was using religious bias, misinformation and scare tactics which are misleading.

### **About Advocacy Advertising**

Complaints about advocacy advertising are considered differently to complaints about advertising for products and services.

In assessing whether an advocacy advertisement complies with the Advertising Standards Code, the freedom of expression provisions under the Bill of Rights Act 1990 must also be considered.

Section 14 of the Act says: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form." This freedom of expression supports robust debate on current issues in a democracy.

Under Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising of the Advertising Standards Code:

- The identity of the advertiser must be clear
- Opinion must be clearly distinguishable from factual information, and
- Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

If the identity and position of the Advertiser is clear, a more liberal interpretation of the Advertising Standards Code is allowed.

### **About this complaint**

The Chair acknowledged the Complainant's genuine concerns about the advertisement and its placement.

The Chair said the 28-minute infomercial style advertisement presents the Advertiser's opinion about the parallels between teachings in the bible and the current level of government surveillance. In advocacy advertising, opinions are permitted. The Chair said the identity of the Advertiser, The Living Church of God – Tomorrows World organisation, was shown repeatedly throughout the advertisement.

The Chair confirmed the advertisement had been given an M (Mature) rating by the Commercial Approvals Bureau, which means it may be broadcast after 7.30pm or during news programmes, or daytime programmes suited for mature audiences but is not necessarily unsuitable for child viewers when subject to the guidance of a parent or an adult.

The Chair said that while the advertisement does refer to COVID-19 by talking about mask wearing and contact tracing, the statements made in the context of advocacy did not meet the threshold to mislead consumers under Rule 2(b) or cause fear and distress without justification under Rule 1(g) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair acknowledged the Complaint's concern about the timing of the advertisement immediately after a children's programme but said 9:00am was an established timeslot for this type of infomercial which played during a time children were generally in school.

The Chair said the advocacy advertisement was not in breach of Principle 1, Principle 2, or Rules 1(g), 2(b) and 2(e) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

**Chair's Ruling:** Complaint **No Grounds to Proceed**

**APPEAL INFORMATION**

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website [www.asa.co.nz](http://www.asa.co.nz). Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 calendar days of receipt of this decision.