

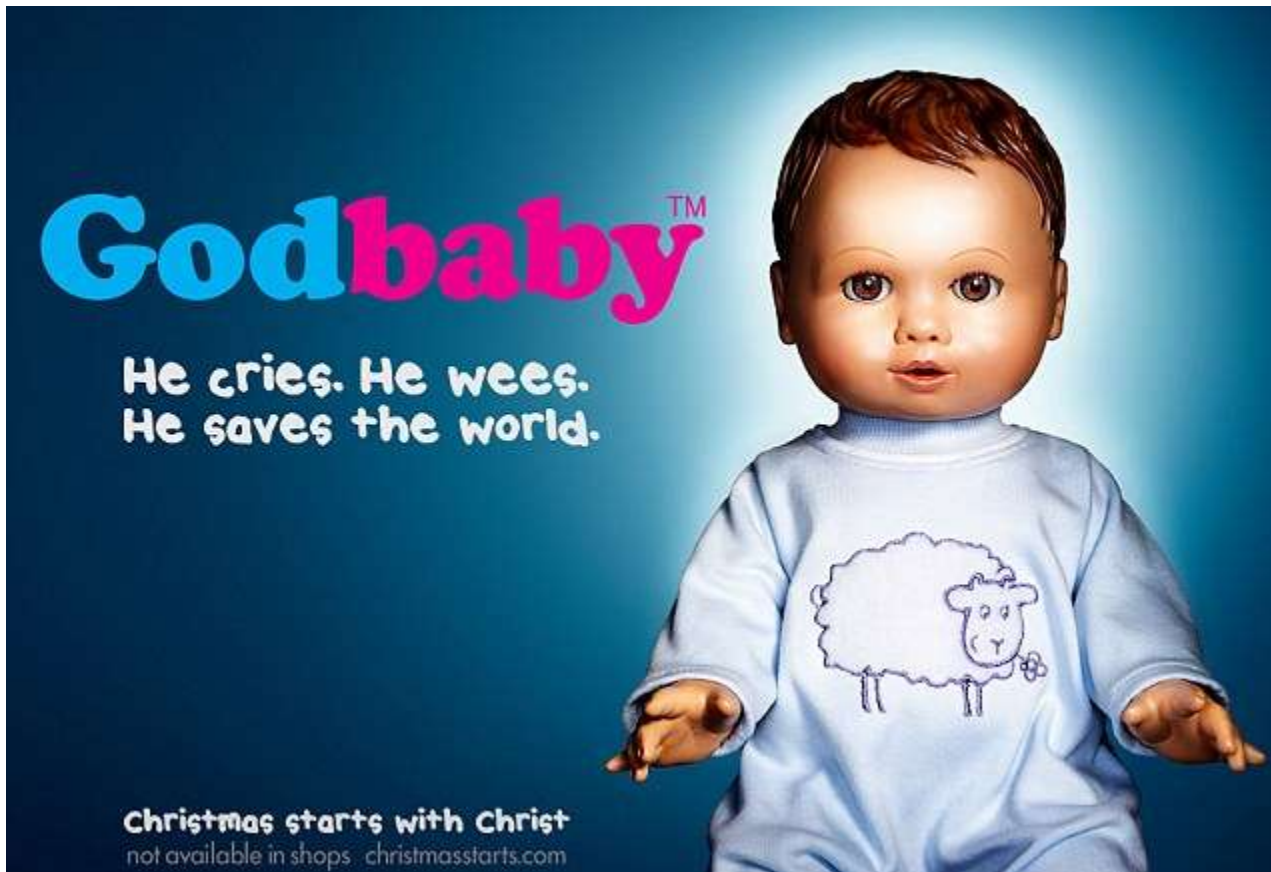
Is this the best way for Church to 'sell' Jesus? Angry worshippers hit out at Christmas poster campaign

By Keith Gladdis

With the commercial clamour of Christmas growing louder over the years, Christians have often despaired of the true spiritual message of the Nativity being heard.

But a Church of England-backed campaign to raise awareness of Jesus Christ – by portraying him as a toy doll – seems to be trying to spread the word just a little too hard.

It has even led some worshippers to brand it as 'tacky' and 'blasphemous'.

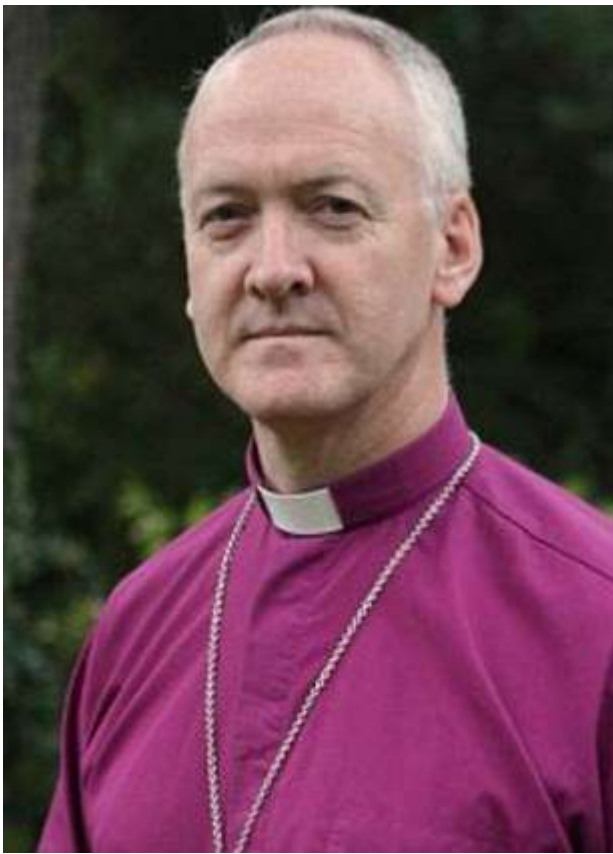


Controversial: A poster from the advertising campaign depicts the baby Jesus as the latest must-have toy

The poster for the fictional 'Godbaby' doll imitates a conventional toy advert and features the slogan: 'He cries. He wees. He saves the world.'

The image is to be emblazoned on bus stops, advertising hoardings and in newspapers in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Another poster of the Godbaby carries the slogan: 'The Gift that Loves You Back.' They come with the words 'not available in shops' printed at the bottom.



Backing: The Right Reverend Nick Baines, the Bishop of Bradford, has given his support to the campaign referring to it as an 'arresting' image

Alongside the £100,000 poster campaign, radio adverts will tell the Nativity story in the style of a celebrity chef. The idea is, apparently, to make the birth of Christ seem more 'modern'.

Church leaders admit the controversial campaign by Christian media group ChurchAds.net, previously known as the Churches Advertising Network, will not be to everyone's taste, but hope it will make the Christmas story appeal to the younger generation.

The Right Reverend Nick Baines, the Bishop of Bradford and one of the favourites to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury, has given his enthusiastic support.

He said: 'It's another strong and arresting image. It will surprise some and disturb others. Which is exactly what the real Jesus did. And it forces us beyond the tinsel to the human reality of "God among us".'

ChurchAds.net says the aim of the campaign is to get a 'Christ-focused' message at the heart of 'seasonal consumerism'. Campaigns from previous years have set the Nativity in a bus shelter and featured a Jesus baby scan.

Arun Arora, the Church of England's communications director, said: 'We need to be re-telling the story of Christ's birth in ways which engage creatively and positively with the public's interest.

Godbaby is edgy and pushes the boundaries of our comfort zones and into the places where people gather.'

But some visitors to the website of Christian charity the Evangelical Alliance were unimpressed.

He's on His way

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**Christmas
starts
with
Christ**

Past form: Christian media group ChurchAds.net made a controversial 'Jesus in the Womb' poster in 2010, which some groups feared could be used to promote an anti-abortion message

One, Ann Johnston, wrote: 'The baby doll is very tacky, very white and its squeaky clean appearance seems to sanitise the Biblical Nativity account completely.'

'I don't think my non-Christian friends and relations would be at all impressed by the ad or even understand what it was trying to achieve.'

On the Chrysolis Christian site one visitor, Susanna, wrote: 'I think this is blasphemous. Does Almighty God need us to market Him in plastic? I think not.'

'A certain commandment mentioning graven images springs to mind.'

Francis Goodwin, chairman and founder of ChurchAds.net, said: 'Many people within the Church are supporting it but some are against it. It has upset a few people.'

'But we wanted to use something that would be talked about in the pub, at toddler groups and in the home. We wanted the campaign to have an impact and we will not be changing it.'