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Good marketing: It's all the church needs

Joe Ferullo | Jun. 29, 2012 NCR Today

Looks like the Vatican is taking a page from the movie business. You see, in Hollywood, there are no bad films, just bad marketing.

Walk into any bar in Los Angeles, and you'll find a bitter writer or producer drowning his sorrows in a tumbler filled with vodka. His complaint: The marketing people ruined my movie. The producer knows a film about dancing roaches who sing songs while hunting down crumbs on a kitchen floor in a mid-Manhattan high rise had huge hit potential. But the marketing didn't "position" the story correctly: They aimed for 8- to 10-year-old girls and their parents, when they should have gone after 9- to 11-year-old girls and their best friend's younger sister.

Take, for example, "John Carter." [1] The Disney film was released earlier this year; it cost $250 million to make, and more than $100 million to market. The picture was a colossal failure -- and heads rolled. Not only the studio chief, but his top marketing officer: dumped. No one could admit that a movie based on an obscure 80-year-old Edgar Rice Burroughs story, without one star attached, might have just been a bad idea. No, no, no -- it was just bad marketing.

The Vatican must feel the same way. They have all kinds of great ideas, many first thought of in previous centuries, but all anyone focuses on are scandals and abuse, and an attempt to ram into the middle of an American presidential election.

The problem is marketing: For people to feel better about the church, a better spin has to put on what hostile media organizations the world over insist on painting as out-of-touch decisions made by an insular hierarchy blind to the negative consequences of its actions .

And so they hire Greg Burke [2]. Burke is the Rome correspondent for Fox News, which -- really -- is okay. At least he's an American, and a Columbia graduate -- smart, open-minded, no doubt in touch with the concerns of everyday people in the pews, etc.

Or maybe not. Burke is also a numerary in Opus Dei. This means he is celibate and lives in Opus Dei housing in Rome. A bit apart, perhaps, from those everyday people in the pews and what matters to them.

And, again, this is okay. Unless you think the Vatican can use some truly fresh thinking, an honest outsider point of view that might shift the paradigm ever so slightly.

If you believe the problem is simply marketing, then Greg Burke fits in nicely. He "gets you," he's "on your side," and he'll find a way -- through some magic words and images -- to make everything all right. That's all the church needs, after all. Marketing.

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Links:
[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Carter_(film)
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/31003