

RELIGION

Amid Controversy, Russell-Stover Cancels Line of Chocolate Gods™ Treats

New York, NY – In a surprise move intended to ease shareholders’ concerns over its second-quarter losses, Russell-Stover Candies, Inc. will cancel its Chocolate Gods™ collection, CEO Scott Ward announced Monday. The chocolate and confections giant had been under fire in recent weeks over the religiously-inspired candies, which were deemed offensive by religious conservatives.



An Erstwhile Sample of Russel-Stover’s Delectable Chocolate Pantheon

“To all of you who were in any way offended by our candies, I must offer my own heartfelt apology,” Mr. Ward said at a press conference at the Russell-Stover headquarters in Kansas City, shortly after biting into a caramel-crunch, Sweet Jesus™ treat. Standing alongside a fully-edible nativity scene with peppermint-flavored chocolate representations of Joseph, Mary, and three wise men, he continued. “In no way, shape, or form,” he said, pausing briefly to chew, “did we at Russell-Stover intend to trivialize your faith.”



Chocolate Nativity Scene Too Tasty To Pass Up

The apology stands in stark contrast to the candy company’s aggressive US marketing campaign, which was intended to appeal to a wide diversity of religious groups. “Let a chocolate Jesus wipe away your chocolate sins,” read one add placed in the Wall Street Journal. “Find nirvana through your sweet tooth,” read another in the Time Magazine. A third advertisement featured in the New York Times featured a smiling rabbi biting God’s head off. In a carefully worded statement, Russell-Stover defended the advertisements, but acknowledged that “certain missteps were made.”



Immaculate Nougat and Caramel, Together at Last

The story broke last week amid reports that the candy giant was in the design phase for a chocolate version of the Kaaba, Islam’s holiest religious site, and the tomb of Mohammed. According to one employee, who agreed to speak only on the condition of anonymity, the furor erupted when one executive suggested that the chocolate should have a chewy center. “We in the Muslim community are especially disturbed by the chewy center ... we find a chewy center completely unacceptable,” said Muslim scholar Muhammed Rafi Usmani in a phone interview.

The line of candies was responsible for a wave of heated uprisings in the West Bank on Thursday, when Muslim extremists cried out to Jewish settlers, “Allah is great! Your

god is delicious!” Two Muslims and three Jews were injured in the ensuing food fight, in which both sides threw religiously-inspired peanut-butter brittles at each other. Later in the day, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland pelted each other with toffee-filled Virgin Mary figures and raspberry-crème stuffed John the Baptist heads.

Pope Benedict XVI issued a strongly-worded statement last week in which he called on Russell-Stover to end this “profligate waste of delicious chocolate,” in his words, and threatened to excommunicate the entire corporation. But tabloid news reporters released photos, taken over the weekend, which appeared to show the Pope indulging in the very confections he had so widely condemned.

Not all reactions to the candies have been so critical, however. Al Gore, the former vice president under Bill Clinton, has praised Russell-Stover for making “all religions equally delicious.” European chocolate industry insiders, while praising Russell-Stover’s commitment to religious diversity, have roundly criticized the quality of the chocolate used

in making the religious candies. “We might as well be eating Hershey Bars, for Christ’s sake,” said Belgian chocolate expert Wolfgang Liebler.

Not since 2001, when Russell-Stover introduced its new line of chocolate stem cells, has the company stirred so much controversy. At that juncture, the Bush administration intervened, citing the sanctity of chocolates representing cells that can become life, setting up a policy which it later applied to real stem cells. Shortly after the administration seized the candies, Vice President Cheney suffered a major heart attack.



Citing the sheer volume of religious candies that the corporation has produced, and the state of Vice President Cheney’s cardiovascular health, CEO Scott Ward said he can only hope the administration does not intervene this time.

