

Beyond the News

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The Mormon Trap

By Peter Eng



"The Mormons are nice people." That is the Mormon message to the general public. To the music lovers, "The Mormons sing the songs we sing and do it well, so they must be OK." To people who struggle with family issues, the message is, "Mormons have strong families."

Christians need to look below the surface of Mormonism; and take a second look at ourselves.

The Mormon marketing machinery is rich, well-directed, and powerful. Many are unaware that Mormons have a firm financial policy of secrecy. Where Mormons spend their money is not subject to public view. This is possible in the US, but not possible in many countries. Ordinary Mormons are not allowed to look at how the Mormon organization spends its money. They are accountable only to a very select group of highly placed Mormons.

I am not suggesting that they are corrupt, or that they use money for personal gain. I do not know enough to affirm or deny if greed or corruption are motivations for their lack of financial accountability. What I can say for sure is that it hides how the money is spent. Mormons practice strict tithing. They are a wealthy organization. Make no mistake about that. At the same time, it is impossible to follow the money trail of Mormons. How they spend their money is deliberately opaque. There is every likelihood that they support Mormon musicians, politicians, etc.

What is apparent is that Mormons manage their public image aggressively; and not be unreasonable to think that PR is one area they pay to manage. While Christians today clamor for greater transparency and accountability, Mormonism (a cult) exercises greater secrecy and image management.

Mormons manage their music representation. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir is world famous for their fantastic rendition of Handel's Messiah among other things. They intentionally seek to give the most consistently powerful rendition of this Christian celebration at Easter. Anyone who loves Handel's Messiah would loath not to have a copy of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's rendition of it. While we can dispute if they are the best, there is no doubt that they want to be the face of this all-time Christian favorite.

If you go on YouTube to look for strong traditional Christian music, you will encounter Mormonism in the person of David Archuleta with a lot of free downloads. He has an excellent voice, and he is a Mormon. I do not

wish to publicize Mormon musicians here, but he, and other Mormons cultivate the public face of Mormonism.

This is also true in the realm of secular music. When they discover talent in their midst, they promote it aggressively. An example would be the "The Osmonds" of yesteryear fame. They project a clean image of a singing family, and place their Mormon faith front and center so everyone knows they are Mormons. This is not true with most other singers. When do we see other singers or music group presented as Presbyterian, or Methodist, or Baptist?

Mormon representation of the family is another example of a public relations exercise. Mormons are known for their polygamy in the past. They now reject this practice. But from time to time, fringe Mormon groups, and families that practice polygamy secretly, would come to light. The other face of Mormonism is a very active representation of strong families. When there is a public figure with a strong family, that image is aggressively cultivated by the Mormons. Problems are quietly allowed to pass from public view.

One example is Mitt Romney's image as he presents himself for the Republican nomination as the presidential candidate. He attacks Newt Gingrich for his poor family record. This is part of the Mormon agenda to present Mormonism as the group that has strong families. Mormons first qualify the marriages they wish to include in their statistics and then claim they have only a 6% divorce rate. The Baptists have the highest at about 26%. But when we use other less selective criteria for Mormon divorce rates, it may be as high as 24%, which is virtually the same as Baptists. One of the lowest rates of divorce is among atheists at 21%. (US figures). But this may simply mean many atheists live together and break up without ever marrying. The Mormons hide their divorce rates and there is no easy way of reckoning. This is just another PR effort.

There are strong Christian families, but Christians do not market them. We keep beating ourselves and each other over our

failures. We think that transparency means washing dirty linen in public. We defame and castigate each other. And then we wonder why the world looks to Mormons as examples of strong marriages. Perhaps some of us may be victims of Mormon deception and we too say that Mormons have strong marriages and families. I like to suggest to you they are examples of strong image management.

There is something about family that Christians need to consider. In our age when family breakdown is endemic, Christians need to ask if having strong families is the way forward for us. That is to say, if we are able to be different from the world in that we have strong families, that may be the best way to present Christ to the world. If Christians will live according to the principles of marriage and family found in Scripture, we will have strong families. Perhaps we should ask if building strong families should be the focus of our generation in both Christian living and as our testimony to the world.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.