
 A brief look at print religious ads

DIRECTING THE SHINE OF THE LIGHT

By Hand Carré

I SUPPOSE RELIGIONS HAVE ALWAYS SOUGHT FOR EFFECTIVE ways to interest and impress people with God's message: architecture, clerical clothing, staffs and scepters, scripture. So it is no surprise that after Gutenberg's press made possible modern mass communication and then capitalism perfected advertising that churches, too, would use the genre. This article simply shares some religious ads of U.S. Christian churches which have appeared in the printed media; it is not a definitive treatment of religious advertising, merely a fun, curious, and selective glance.

Of course, when religious advertising is mentioned most Mormons proudly think of the Church's award-winning, soft-sell Homefront television and radio spots, which link Mormons with American middle-class, family, and Christian values. Usually with a Spielberg-like touching scene, the often humorous spots conclude with "A thought from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—The Mormons." One of the most popular Homefront theme campaigns featured the thought: "Give your children everything, give them your time." Critically praised and also effective in making Mormonism appear mainstream, the expensively-produced spots are given free to broadcast stations which cheerfully air the non-sectarian spots to fill their FCC public service quota, along with news reports and other public service messages like preventing forest fires and donating blood. (In the 1980s Reagan deregulation eliminated the FCC requirement but stations continue to run public service announcements—PSAs—usually late at night.) Although obviously intended to promote the sponsor's name, PSAs must be carefully constructed to have a generic, nonsectarian message (preaching basic family values or neighborly love).

In contrast to regulated broadcast stations who must theoretically account for their use of the public's airwaves, because of First Amendment protection newspapers and magazines have never been required to provide public service space in their pages, although most do. Since the early 1950s the organization Religion in American Life (RIAL), in partnership with the

Ad Council (which coordinates non-religious PSAs like those for Scouting, United Way, and "Keep America Clean"), has distributed PSAs with variations on the theme "Attend the church of your choice." During the social-consciousness movements of the 1960s and early 1970s, RIAL stressed religion as a way to combat such problems as poverty, crime, war, racism, and alienation. RIAL's latest campaign targets youth-related issues. The spots report a statistic about teenage drunk driving, drug abuse, pregnancy, or suicide, and then urge parents to "Give them something to believe in." The effectiveness of such a general campaign, however, is difficult to measure.

Stronger in the electronic media, the LDS church does not have a Homefront print campaign but has done a few other PSAs including those for National Bible Week and National Family Week.

BY far, church print advertising has primarily been paid advertising partly because newspaper advertising costs much less than television, and churches must advertise in newspapers since people turn to a newspaper's Saturday religious section to find out where church services are held. (To find a Mormon church, however, you usually have to go to the telephone book.) Some ads have considerable success. A number of Catholic dioceses attribute the increase in holiday attendance to their "Come home for Christmas" campaign. In Miami, the Beth David synagogue found its ranks increased by half after running a number of ads. Neighboring synagogue Beth Shira ran an advertisement that said "If you think your child doesn't belong in our Jewish day school, don't worry, you're not alone" and was accompanied with pictures of Yasser Arafat and the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Although the traditional boxed format listing this week's sermons are still the predominant religious newspaper ad, some of today's ads are slick with glossy photographs and slogans more reminiscent of polished Madison Avenue than the simple Mount of Olives. Probably the most widely-respected religious advertisements are created by the Episcopal Ad Project, which has grown in recent years from a single unpaid staff assignment to a \$140 million enterprise involving over 5,000

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NATIONAL FAMILY WEEK

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS



"The biggest hit since Creation"

"A must for those who are tired of drugs, violence, worry, and despair and need the Joy of the Lord"



GLOOMBUSTERS

G GOODY FOR ALL AGES

WRITTEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

IN EVERLASTING COLOR

FAITH OASIS CHRISTIAN CENTER

2838 Street Rd. Bensalem, PA
Showcase Plaza (215) 639-7600

ALSO AT THESE SELECTED SERVICE TIMES

SUNDAY 10:00 a.m. 6:30 p.m. WEDNESDAY 7:30 p.m.

YOU WON'T LEAVE THE SAME AS YOU CAME.



the forgiving place.

The Lutheran Church in your neighborhood.

Love thy family. Worship together.



A Public Service of This Newspaper & The Advertising Council

Looking for Success?

So is everybody else. And most of us don't know what it is, let alone where to find it. Maybe that's because we're not looking in the right places. As United Methodists we've discovered that we learn what success really means when we look for it together, with God's help.



Catch the Spirit
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Living is more rewarding when you do it by The Book.



A public service of this publication and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

1983
Year of the Bible

TRANSFORM YOUR KIDS' SATURDAY MORNINGS



Tired of your kids watching all that Saturday morning cartoon fare? Gung-ho G.I. Joe. Outragious, unrealistic Thundercats. Even Smurfy Saturday mornings get old, don't they?

Bring your kids to the Seventh-day Adventist church for a better Saturday morning this week. That's right, Saturday. We're the Seventh-day Adventists—a fast-growing group of Bible Christians. And yes, we go to church on Saturday, the same day Jesus and all the great Bible characters went to church. The same day the Ten Commandments say is holy. Children's programs start at 9:30. See you then.

Seventh-day Adventists
Enjoy Church Again!

Protestant congregations. The Project produces black-and-white camera-ready ads which local congregations and other religious organizations purchase, add their name and other information (such as meeting times and address), and run in a city newspaper, magazine, or church publication.

Aiming at a wide range of interests, the Ad Project appeals to parents with captions like "Are your kids learning about the power of the cross on the late, late show?" (with a picture of a movie vampire) or to unmarried women with a painting of Jesus and the caption "You can't meet God's gift to women in a singles' bar." Some of the ads have come under fire from laity and clergy for flippancy or a lack of dignity. Nevertheless, their popularity seems to be increasing and several other denominations, notably the Lutherans, have paid for the right to run the ads using their church's name.

Another campaign developed separately by the Lutheran Church is more cautious, respecting the Ad Project's critics. Attempting to appeal to a variety of human needs, the ads bill "the Lutheran Church in your neighborhood" as "the caring place," "the forgiving place," and "the loving place." Significantly, "the thinking place" is also used, reflecting a hope to combat the perception of religion as intellectually stifling. A similar concern informs such Episcopal advertisements as the one captioned "He died to take away your sins, not your mind."

One regular watchdog of religious advertisements is *The Door*, a Protestant magazine which lampoons the ridiculous in American Christianity. Its regular "Truth is Stranger Than Fiction" column reproduces what it considers to be tasteless religious ads, such as one titled "Where's the Beef?—The Church of the Holy Spirit has the Beef!"

In contrast to Protestant churches, the LDS church only uses its own internally produced publications to communicate to its membership and the mass media for missionary purposes. Beginning in the 1970s with the multi-million dollar *Readers' Digest* insert, the Church's missionary department has increasingly experimented using print mass media to preach its message to non-Mormons. Starting in 1990, more paid-print ad campaigns are planned as missionary complements to Homefront PSAs and paid television programs which directly promote the Church's message.

Mormon and Christian critics question the wisdom of spending money on advertising instead of simply spreading the good news by good works. The justifying responses cite the scriptural imperative to preach, the belief that God revealed media technology to help spread the gospel, and the unavoidable, albeit uncomfortable, truce with the marketplace.

Understandably all churches are obliged to advertise in some way or have their message lost, and it is true that most Protestant churches seem to advertise to regain their own lost sheep. Nevertheless, the implicit competition in what ideally should be Christ's single fold should warn us that these appeals to people's religious instincts are not as simple as advertising kitchen appliances. They are dealing with worldviews which have implications that are profound, diverse, and far-reaching. The line between "being in" and "being of" the world becomes

dangerously blurred when God's ministers deal with secular entanglements and marketplace strategies—the "real world" which their beatific vision should transcend. Ultimately, the success or failure of religious advertising should be gauged as much by its fidelity to that transcendence as by its effectiveness in reaching the unchurched. ☒



There's a difference
between being baptized
and brainwashed.

The Episcopal Church believes baptism is a single blessing designed to mark one from darkness that the way to freedom is through a sacrifice of Earthly things. We never give to give with us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Episcopal Church



Now that your
kids can name the
nine reindeer
shouldn't they be
able to name
the twelve apostles?

Is there any other religion that can name the nine reindeer? Or even name the twelve apostles? Only the Episcopal Church can name the nine reindeer and name the twelve apostles.
The Episcopal Church



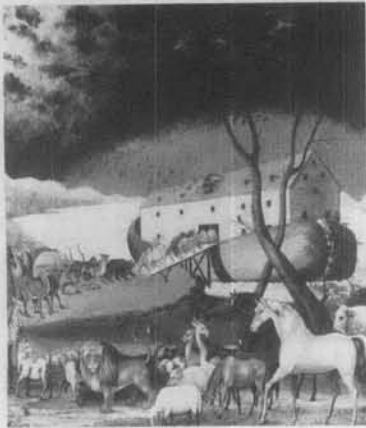
In a religion that
was born in a barn,
an open door
goes without saying.

The Lutheran Church believes that the door to the Kingdom of God is open to all who believe in the teachings and fellowship of Jesus Christ. The door is always open.
The Lutheran Church



Contrary to popular belief,
God welcomes singles, too.

What else can be in the Lutheran Church, you'd think, come alone or in pairs. After that, we consider you single. Come join us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Lutheran Church



What other meal
can sustain you
for a week?

Remember what we used to eat in the old days? Bread and wine? Or spiritual nourishment? Come join us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Episcopal Church



There's only one problem with
religions that have all the answers.
They don't allow questions.

If you've ever been to a religion that has all the answers, you know that you can't ask questions. The Episcopal Church is the only religion that allows questions.
The Episcopal Church



Will it take
six strong men to
bring you back
into the church?

The Episcopal Church welcomes you as you are. When you're in it, we'll make sure you stay. Come join us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Episcopal Church



The Lutheran Church
welcomes you.
Regardless of race, creed,
color or the number
of times you've been born.

Whether you've been born once or twice, the Lutheran Church welcomes you to come and join us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Lutheran Church



If you think
being a Christian is
inconvenient today,
just look back 1500 years.

If you're ready to make the same old commitment that being a Christian means, the Episcopal Church is here to help you. Come join us in the faith and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The Episcopal Church

