

Ron Luce Responds to 'Cult' Implications on MSNBC

An MSNBC documentary about Teen Mania Ministries suggests the Christian youth organization Ron and Katie Luce launched in 1984 may be a cult.

Teen Mania Ministries has sent more than 67,000 teens on mission trips with its Global Expeditions arm. More than 6,000 have participated in the Honor Academy, a yearlong internship for high school graduates and young adults to provide leadership training and present opportunities to grow in God. And more than 1 million have attended Acquire the Fire Youth rallies. Hundreds of thousands of teens have accepted Christ through Teen Mania programs.

Nevertheless, five former interns for Teen Mania say the ministry caused them harm. There is also a group of former Honor Academy interns that are making claims of spiritual abuse.

Charisma News sat down with Ron Luce to discuss the MSNBC documentary, called "Mind Over Mania," which portrays Teen Mania as a mind-controlling cultish group. Luce says MSNBC's broadcast is not only an attack against Teen Mania, but an attack against Bible-based Christianity.

Charisma News: Why did you agree to the interview with MSNBC?

Luce: The producers came to us under false pretenses about four months ago. They said they were doing a series on ministries in America. They wanted to interview us about youth ministry. We found out the day after the interview that a blogger group led by a girl who had a bad experience in our Honors Academy 12 years ago put them up to this. The documentary featured five girls who had been a part of our Honor Academy.

My heart goes out to these girls. You can tell that they are really hurting. We have met with most of them over and over again over the years trying to assuage them and love on them and help them walk through the challenges they face. We've asked them to forgive us for anything we've done to hurt them while they were interns. We are not a perfect organization, but we seek to improve ourselves and get better. They were taken advantage of by this MSNBC group for the sake of sensationalizing a story and generating revenue.

Charisma News: What did the documentary misrepresent about Teen Mania?

Luce: The program offered massive distortion and took things out of context. We used to do a weekend military-esque Navy Seals for God program, where we taught interns how they can endure more than they think they can.

MSNBC showed kids crawling through the mud and crying. They show a close-up where it looks like some of the kids are about to eat worms. This was in the day and age when Fear Factor was a huge sensation and kids really wanted that kind of raw challenge. No one was forced to eat worms, and these worms were organically grown for human consumption. So it seems MSNBC intentionally misled viewers by painting a picture of abuse.

For MSNBC to clearly imply that Teen Mania is negatively impacting the youth who come through our programs is completely untrue and unfair. But we have to consider the source. Christians can't just believe what the furthest left-leaning network in the entire country is saying about a Christian ministry. We need to be careful and ask thoughtful questions about what MSNBC is airing.

Charisma News: MSNBC suggested Teen Mania uses mind control. Can you address that?

Luce: The producers have these self-appointed cult experts and

walk the girls through eight points of how you can tell if mind control is being used. The eight points actually come from a booklet that was published about Chinese mind control, which has been totally debunked by all of psychologists and psychiatrists. They are using that as the standard of whether or not these girls have been under mind control.

Charisma News: What did Teen Mania do that was painted as mind control?

Luce: The producers suggest that if we insist on purity, then that's mind control. But purity is all through the Bible. The points of contention that MSNBC called us out on have nothing to do with practices unique to Teen Mania. It's more about what Scripture says we as Christians should be doing. This broadcast is contending and confronting core Christian beliefs. They are confronting every Bible-believing church in the country. These are things we all believe.

If MSNBC can show a program like this and get some believers to agree that this is mind control, they start softening our resolve to live scripturally and take the Bible for what it intends to communicate and live it. The program purports to be about Teen Mania but the case it makes is against the whole of the Body of Christ that believes the Bible.

Charisma News: Are you getting any feedback from supporters?

Luce: We have been overwhelmed with intern alumni who are telling us how God changed their life through our program. These five girls are not representative of the literally thousands that are out there changing the world. They are making a difference. They are missionaries around the world. They are executives of corporations. They are entrepreneurs and they are thriving in their faith. But some are questioning Teen Mania now because they've seen this program. But consider the source and how they've taken everything out of context.

Charisma News: Why do you think you are getting this attack?

Luce: We just started our new Acquire the Fire tour. We have events that are sold out across the country. This is a distraction the enemy is trying to put in our path and other people's path.

Charisma News: What have you learned from this experience?

Luce: I've been interviewed by some of the toughest people in the media, like Christiane Amanpour from CNN. I've been on *Nightline*. I've been on O'Reilly. Secular media is not a new thing and secular media has dug and interviewed me with scrutiny. They've come to our campus. When it's fair journalism, the stories turn out to be positive because they are really looking at the facts. What kind of hit us unknowingly is how blatantly biased MSNBC would be. In retrospect we should have known better. That's their DNA.

Charisma News: What can Christians who believe in your ministry do to help?

Luce: Get on the blogosphere any place you are convicted and tell the story of how your kids were involved in Acquire the Fire or one of our missions trips or our Honor Academy and how God used it to change their lives. Post it all over the place so people from various streams can see that the truth. We are going to be releasing our own documentary in the next few days that gives context and tells the story from kids who have had a positive experience.