



Prez Release

Jiminy Cricket and Hollywood Hell House October 2004

Both the *Dallas Morning News* and *Wall Street Journal* recently carried stories about the opening of *Hollywood Hell House*. This new theatrical presentation is a satire of the haunted house strategy that many churches use as an outreach during the Halloween season. The *Hollywood Hell House* is directed by Jill Soloway, a writer for HBO, and takes its primary motivation from the most visible of these seasonal hell house strategies, the Hell House Outreach led by Rev. Keenan Roberts in suburban Denver. Celebrities like Bill Maher, Andy Richter and others play the roles of Satan, Jesus and the varying personalities in this parody of Roberts' Hell House.

Under the veneer of "Hollywood slick" lurks the ever-present message that the intolerance of Christian fundamentalists must be "outed" and seen for what it really is: a threat to peace, comfort, and tolerance. The "entertainment power-brokers" would like us all to believe that our inalienable right is really the license to live life by rules that can change to accommodate the current version of self-indulgence that media elites create to foist/market on the rest of the world as necessary for "living cool."

Yet any person wanting to live in a civil society, where vastly different opinions are given true respect, can see that destructive elements of fundamentalism are not the exclusive domain of either political or social pole. Taliban types exist on both the left and right wing ends of these societal continuums. So why is this current version of the culture wars simply testimony to the fruit that is being borne after years of incubation?

Author Mark Pinsky has just authored "*The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust*." His look at the Disney legacy and media empire goes beyond the "wishing on a star" of Jiminy Cricket and the growing discomfort that many evangelicals have with the themes of current Disney productions. His argument is that secular "toonism" is an inevitable product of the venerable Walt Disney's rejection of his religious upbringing. The influential Disney media efforts have played well in a world that has steadily jettisoned anything that would challenge personal autonomy in social and religious dimensions of life. The market savvy of Disney has simply developed the characters and themes that would sell product in the world of entertainment.

The co-dependent relationship between the media empires and popular culture reacts vehemently to the Christian suggestion that objective good and evil really exist today and might have something to say about how we live our lives. The silver smiths in Ephesus of old rioted at the Gospel's life-transforming impact that was ruining their business producing

silverwork honoring the goddess Diana (See Acts 19:23-41). *Hollywood Hell House* is a slightly more sophisticated “riot”, but its motivation is the same. Followers of Jesus who take the Bible seriously are viewed as the enemy that is threatening the “comfort zone” and the empire of tolerance they portend to be developing for the “common good” of the global community. Creating a need and then providing a product to fill that need is capitalism at its optimum. When followers of Jesus threaten the monopoly media giants presume they have in defining the “good life”; characterizing Christianity as intolerant, bigoted and “fundamentalist” is to be expected. Why are the purveyors of tolerance so wrought up? Could it be there is actually a list of groups that it is OK to be intolerant of? Hmmmmm! I wonder when Jill Soloway, Bill Maher et. al. will offer us Hollywood Mosque? Don’t hold your breath!

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