

Yesterday we began a conversation about the destructive power of Hell Houses. Now I'd like to talk about the many religious officials that have stood up against the psychological torture of American children, and why we need more Christian voices supporting them.

According to tolerance.org, Rev. J.T. Tucker, director of youth ministries at *Northway Christian Church in Dallas*, voiced his concerns over Hell Houses. He's quoted as saying, *"I detest those things...Trying to scare people into a decision [for Jesus] is very wrong...If you consider all the money, along with ministry hours...if they would refocus those areas on missions in urban Dallas, I think they would have a lot bigger return..."* Reverent Tucker understands that Hell Houses are not what Jesus intended when he said "go out and spread the word to the masses." Jesus was supposedly a man of peace, and using his name to torture, to not bring peace or destruction, should be akin to blasphemy in the eyes of the faithful. As it turns out, many Christians agree with Rev. Tucker. So, why aren't they yelling about it?

Belief.net also ran a story on the negative effects of Hell Houses a while back. According to the Cincinnati Enquirer, a Christian radio station in Fairport, Ohio pulled ads promoting a Hell House in their area. Their reason: "[the church] was inviting listeners to 'come see the funeral of a homosexual AIDS patient...[which is] blatant gay bashing.'" The sad truth is that even the most glaring atrocities are pushed aside in the name of organized religion. This radio station had the courage to look outside the box of religion; they realized that using religion to mask overt intolerance is not what faith is supposed to be about.

But it's people like Keenan Roberts, youth pastor and director of Abundant Life Christian Center's Hell House, that drown out the voices of reason that are dwindling within the Christian faith. Roberts believes that Hell House is "Romans 6:23 in contemporary packaging. 'The wages of sin is death.'" Using the Bible as a shield to torture, to create memories that will haunt children--especially the young ones--for life, is something that the Christian faithful should rise up and stand against. Paul also says in **Romans 3:10** "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Is it not ill will to show a 10-year old "meat product that will resemble as much as possible pieces of a baby that are being placed in the glass bowl for all to see[?]" Roberts thinks this is perfectly fine. He wants our young people to be so afraid that they will follow the

bible and 'be



good.'

What Roberts fails to understand is that fear is no substitute for genuine faith. Genuine faith comes from studying the bible, understanding Christ's message and living accordingly, peacefully, with oneself and others, but the road through a Hell House won't accomplish this.

Unfortunately, this post is much smaller than yesterday's rant session. Part of that has to do with the nature of rants of course, but a larger part has to do with the absence of Christians crying in unison against psychological torture. Perhaps there are no voices emanating from the church pews because, according to a new Pew research poll, 54% of churchgoers believe that torture is acceptable. While the research questions focused on the hotly debated interrogation techniques of the Bush Administration, torture is torture. Does it follow then that most Christians are keeping quiet because, in reality, they condone these abhorrent acts?

Surely the 46% of churchgoers that oppose such techniques can use their 'outside voices' on this moral issue. If Christianity begins to look like it did during the Dark Ages, the faith will shrink even further in number as the years progress. Yesterday, Bill Tammeus, who blogs with the Kansas City Star on issues of religion and ethics, wrote that "50 or 100 years from now[,] the percentage of true atheists (not just the religiously unaffiliated) in the American population will be roughly what it is today." The problem for Bill is that he hasn't considered the human rights violations that Christianity in general has begun to endorse. With a majority of churchgoers (Evangelical Protestants leading the way) condoning torture, the Catholic church nearly bankrupt with child-molestation lawsuits, and Americans tired of being used by Republican politicians every time voting season comes around, Tammeus is WAY off the mark with his

prediction. 50-100 years from now, at the rate the church is going, freethinkers will end up breaking even, or maybe, becoming a majority of the American population.

But the issue is larger than who has the most people in their corner: Atheists or Theists. Hell Houses warp the lens from which children view their world; they spread misconceptions and misinformation. Hell Houses create children that grow into ignorant teens who don't understand how to keep their body safe, their mind sound and their values and judgment in-tact. Those same teens become close-minded, contemptuous adults; people that judge prematurely and put the human and civil rights of individuals well behind the mantras they've that have been ingrained in their memory. We are ALL ill-served when that happens: religious and non-religious alike.

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