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Faux tell-all by God himself raises eyebrows

Piet Levy Religion News Service | Dec. 6, 2011

Note to believers everywhere: God apparently wants a do-over.

The first couple was Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve, according to a new divine memoir. The Book of Mormon is "a preposterous, laughable and absurd series of fairy tales," and Jesus -- well, there's no easy way to say this -- pleasured himself as a teenager.

Blasphemous? Most definitely. And that's exactly the point.

Former "Daily Show" executive producer David Javerbaum has assumed the voice of God in his new book, "The Last Testament: A Memoir by God." As might be expected, it's already too hot to handle for some major retailers.

Released on All Saints' Day by Simon & Schuster, the satiric faux tell-all has its own Twitter account, The Tweet of God, which has amassed 53,000 followers with such comic bits as, "The pope just sent me a friend request. Dammit! I hate it when employees try to suck up."

Javerbaum isn't shy about his intentions.

"This book was not written primarily to be polemic," he said. "It was written to sell a lot of copies and become a best-seller."

But there is a bit of a higher purpose -- creating a comic tome that his fellow unbelievers can get behind.

"People in this country who don't believe in God or don't know if there's a God or not are made to feel so uncomfortable," Javerbaum said. "It's nice to have a weapon available now that just mocks the other side."

Naturally, not everyone is laughing.

Brent Bozell, founder and president of the conservative media watchdog group the Media Research Center in Alexandria, Va., deemed Javerbaum's book an "Anti-God" book on his blog.

"Anyone who actually believed in God or the apparently archaic concept of blasphemy wouldn't be so eager to take the Lord's name in vain with such gleeful abandon," Bozell wrote. "Such is the dreadful state of our top publishing houses."

"It's a good start," Javerbaum said of Bozell's criticism, hoping more controversy, and consequently better sales, will follow.

The British arm of Javerbaum's publisher, Simon & Schuster, won't publish "Testament" because it was "too inflammatory," Javerbaum said. A company spokesperson could not be reached for comment.

Wal-Mart and Target are selling the book online, but not in their stores. Target did not return multiple calls, and Wal-Mart spokeswoman Tara Raddohl sidestepped the controversy over the book's contents.

"As with any merchandise selection, what we carry is based on what our customers are seeking and what is anticipated to be in customer demand," she said. "Our book selection online has a greater assortment, so the online selections vary from what we carry in stores."

Javerbaum said retailers have "a right not to sell it," but said he's actually "humbled and flattered" that Simon & Schuster U.K. isn't touching the book. "What that means is they think my book might make a difference," he said.

After leaving "The Daily Show" in 2009 to pursue his own projects, Javerbaum said he wanted to write a satire pointing out what he saw as the absurdities of religion. "It was the lowest hanging fruit out there," Javerbaum said.

From "Oh God!" to Monty Python to Comedy Central's "South Park," the Almighty has long been a mighty big target for comedians. But rarely has religious satire been so thorough.

Javerbaum read the Bible for research and twisted passages for comic effect. Sodom and Gomorrah, for instance, weren't destroyed because of "rampant homosexuality," God says in Javerbaum's account, but because they were hubs for "a massive international money laundering operation." And Goliath wasn't really a thug but actually worked with troubled youth in inner-city Gaza and co-founded the Philistine Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

There's also unapologetic shock humor. Perhaps most offensive is the implication that Jesus was so taken with Adolf Hitler's way with words he "felt as if he could walk on water."

Hitler references aside, Javerbaum said he tried to make sure the jokes weren't too alienating by depicting his God as vain but genially ignorant, like Stephen Colbert's alter ego on "The Colbert Report."

"He's so wrong in so many ways, but you can't help but like him," Javerbaum said.

That was the case amongst an unlikely audience of some 400 Jewish literary buffs at the recent St. Louis Jewish Book Festival. Festival director Marcia Evers-Levy said there were no concerns about spotlighting a book that skewers religion, and Javerbaum's reading of "Testament" excerpts received no backlash and plenty of positive reactions.

"The people that come to our festival are intelligent enough," Evers-Levy said. "Anyone that wanted to come to a learned discussion on religion could have seen one of the rabbis speaking at our festival. If they wanted to come and laugh, then David's (presentation) was just for that."

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