

## Jesus Needs Help

**David Germain**

CreateSpace

Unknown (pp)

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The divide between free speech and hate speech is as uncomfortable to define as it is to discuss. When broached in casual conversation, passionate reactions often supplant a civil discourse about the context of the speech in question. David Germain's graphic novel, *Jesus Needs Help*, falls prey to these rhetorical traps at the cost of detracting from his fable's anti-censorship message.

The story is straight forward. Jesus, attempting to deliver his Sermon on the Mount, is harassed by a band of censoring monkeys, each representing a different stereotype intent on suppressing freedom of speech. These include: the goose-stepping Nazi Monkey, the sword-wielding Not Muhammed [sic] Monkey, the Afro-sporting and gun-toting Black Panther Monkey, and the Feminist Monkey with deeply sagging breasts.

Shocked by the abuse, God declares "I do intend to put my son through a brutal crucifixion soon, but this is too much." The Almighty cages the monkeys and forces them to watch winged beings enjoying forms of art and expression that challenge the very ideas they wish to suppress. Heaven, as experienced by the simian antagonists, is a hell of their own making.

An independent animator living in Nova Scotia, Germain produces comic strips for his own blog and, occasionally, for the *Dalhousie Gazette*. He has a great love for classic animation. And, as exemplified in both his blog and *Jesus Needs Help*, he ardently fights all forms of censorship and perceived threats to free speech through humor and illustration. His work challenges the idea of political correctness and demands the reader's attention with a blend of shock and Juvenalian satire.

But when it comes to race, racism, free speech, and censorship, context is everything. In the context of Germain's avocation, his *Horrible Mother Monkey*, for example, could be read as more than a Jim Crow-era mammy complete with hair rollers and a muumuu. Rightly or wrongly, she's a homage to Hanna-Barbera cartoons of the 1940s and 1950s, now censored due to culturally insensitive blackface gags, cannibals, and the perpetually rodent-plagued *Mammy Two Shoes*. Sitting on a shelf at the comic book store, however, the context of *Jesus Needs Help* is reduced to an Anglo Christ whose sermon to an Anglo crowd is interrupted by a parade of brown apes.

Germain's portrayal of Heaven faces a similar challenge. Intended as a celebration of free speech, punk rockers entertain crowds in one area of Heaven, while violent movies and banned cartoons are screened in another. And it works until the reader sees a drawing of a slant-eyed Asian in a sedge hat removing a victim's brain presented in the context of protected speech as being equal to a staging of *Oh Calcutta* [sic] or a gangsta rapper dropping a culturally divisive and defining N-bomb on stage with no consideration for the difference between hate speech and free speech.

Germain attempts to use shock value as a way to raise awareness about the dangers of censorship in a society claiming to value freedom of speech. But his use of outdated and painful stereotypes obscures the noble cause for which he stands.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (July 5, 2011)

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