

A Review of
Christotainment: Selling Jesus through Popular Culture

by
Shirely Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (eds.)
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Good God, Now THAT's Christotainment!

Whether you are a lifelong fan of Jesus or just now joining the bandwagon, there is no denying Christianity's rising popularity in American media. Steinberg and Kincheloe edited a collection of papers on the topic in *Christotainment: Selling Jesus through Popular Culture*, wherein readers discover how Christianity has ditched its longtime aversion to media in favor of adding Christian flavor to numerous aspects of everyday life. For readers who enjoyed Maher's (2009) humor in *Religulous* or occasional religious innuendo in "Family Guy," Steinberg and Kincheloe shed similar light on a seemingly dead subject. Chapters describe the recent marriage between Christian messages and extant media icons like NASCAR and Veggie Tales. This book is not the empirical project that *The Psychology of Religion* (Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009) offers and lacks the discourse-setting umph of Armstrong's (2009) *The Case for God*. Still, it lands on the book shelf in a void so perhaps its drawbacks are forgivable.

Is the church using entertainment to fill empty pews? Christianity has long been the chosen way of life for some individuals, but now, as if the church attended "Advertising 101" at a local community college, old ideas are repackaged and marketed for public consumption; tah-dah, this is Christotainment! The result: Jesus and Christian ideals weave their way into many products fit for consumer purchase. Sometimes discrete, sometimes not, *Christotainment* is about Jesus-as-product and each chapter reveals the deepening connection between Christian beliefs and music, NASCAR, major motion picture, and children's toys. While Christianity in the media, in popular culture, and on the shelves at Toys 'R Us smacks of low-grade brainwashing, it has become Christianity's most efficient tool to ready young people to live as Jesus did. Only this time Jesus is an American celebrity.

Steinberg and Kincheloe uncover almost nothing new by identifying for readers which media is and is not influenced by Christianity. And that is why, to be critical, *Christotainment* reads like a detailed grocery list rather than a theoretically driven sociological exegesis unveiling Christianity's upswing in contemporary media.

About The Beatles, John Lennon (2009) famously said "We're more popular than Jesus now – I don't know which will go first, rock and roll or Christianity." Ironically, Lennon was trying to blast the church. Little did he know, Lennon's prophetic insight regarding the power of media propaganda was well-heeded by the American Christian church and is now their saving grace.

References

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