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**---FEATURES**

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Coffeehouse Characters Pose  
Stark Contrast with Disney's

By Adon Taft

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--The fantasy land of Disney World near here offers a stark contrast with the harsh reality of The Good Thief Coffee House in Orlando's inner city.

While the coffee house attracts a clientele of characters every bit as outlandish looking as those who inhabit Disney World, there is a big difference.

The Disney characters are a happy, carefree lot of make-believe creations that are almost human. They cavort for the pleasures of thousands of onlookers in the bright, meticulously neat surroundings of the tourist park.

The pathetically grotesque characters who after dark slip into the unpretentious coffee house next door to one adult theater and across the street from another are, however, sometimes looked upon as less than human by the throngs who avoid that section of the inner city just a few blocks from three of the largest churches in Florida.

But The Good Thief Coffee House, sponsored by the First Baptist Church here, is trying to change that.

John Carow, a member of the church who runs the coffee house, says he sees beneath the brazen dress and drug-induced bravado of many of the alienated and fearful youth, a deep desire and search for the one who can save them for their loneliness.

"You've got to love them but not what they do," explained the 57-year-old father of three children who gave up an 18-year career in the insurance business to become director of The Good Thief Coffee House 18 months ago.

"You can't fool the kids," he went on. "You can't say you love them if you don't. They know. You can't work here if you don't love kids."

Strangely enough, it is the older people who seem best able to love such unlovely people, Carow noted. Of the dozen or so volunteers who help him operate the coffee house, most of them are in their sixties. The remainder are over 40.

The youth of the church staffed the place in the beginning, but some dropped out because their limited experience had not given them the capacity to love in the way necessary for the job, he said.

Carow added that it is really difficult to get good volunteers, who have this deep capacity to love the unlovely, to work at the center.

It is not, however, difficult to attract the kids. Up to 100 youth at the time flock to The Good Thief to eat peanut butter sandwiches, listen to gospel rock music, take part in the nightly "God-rap", meet other young people, play games, seek a private talk with "John", or even attend the Sunday night Bible study.

The response has been great among the kids, Carow noted. Although "I am not much on statistics, there have been about 300 or 400 kids converted during the two years the coffee house has been open. This year, 49 have accepted Christ, and we've gotten four girls off the street and found them jobs."

Not all the converts, however, are youth. "We've had anywhere from 16-year-olds to 50-year-olds accept Christ here," said Carow. "We originally intended to work only with those up to 27 years old, but we couldn't say no to anybody."

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During an interview here, "John", as he is affectionately called, was interrupted by a constant stream of young people who came by just to say, "Hello," or "Goodbye." Often they hugged the gray-haired director and promised to write as they left.

"Some of them are just passing through," he explained. "Some of them are runaways. Some are here looking for work--usually at Disney World. Many of the kids are on drugs. Some are prostitutes."

He quickly added the The Good Thief is not a drug abuse center, but "we've seen many of them get off drugs through Christ right here. They're usually between 16 and 21 years of age, and are not on hard drugs."

Two years ago, when a boy named Greg came into The Good Thief, high on drugs, he pulled a knife and wanted to kill someone, Carow recalled.

"Someone told him, 'Jesus loves you, and I love you,' but Greg responded, 'Get out of my way.' They said it again, and he put the knife away. Greg kept coming back, and became a Christian.

"Now he drives a Coke truck, and comes back to help us between runs," the director noted. He added that the church also helped get a job with him for another fellow who came in like Greg.

Many of the kids who come to The Good Thief get jobs, and some wind up attending or even becoming members of a church.

Although Carow finds it difficult to enlist volunteers to work at the coffee house, he said the financial support from the church is excellent. The church started the place with a \$50 investment, and now provides an \$13,000 annual budget.

The church also opened a year or more ago a Bible House for boys who had been converted through the ministry, providing a place for them to live and study the Bible. Some of the neighbors, however, objected and brought pressure to bear on the church to close the house.

While the coffee house has overcome much of the original resistance from some of the people in the church and city, including city officials and police who now even come in to rap with the kids, there is still much to be done, Carow pointed out. They hope to be able to provide a Bible House for girls, believing there would not be much opposition to such a home for runaway girls. He also hopes to expand the operation to serve more of the mixed up kids.

Whatever the future, Carow is convinced that the church must seek to minister to kids on a bum trip that missed all the redeeming qualities of the celebration of life exhibited so dramatically at nearby Disney World.

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BP PHOTO to be mailed to Baptist state papers

Missionaries in Israel Release  
Document Against Anti-Semitism

HAIFA, Israel (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Israel have released the text of a resolution against anti-Semitism which the mission, officially the Baptist Convention in Israel, adopted last May.

The resolution denounced anti-Semitism as "a sin against Christ," as "a sin against the Jewish people," and as "a denial of the spirit and teaching of Jesus."

It was not released earlier pending its ratification by Baptist churches, institutions and officials in Israel, said missionary Dwight L. Baker, chairman of the mission's resolutions committee.

While many Baptist bodies and individuals have signed, some have yet to take action, said Baker. However, the mission decided to announce the resolution without further delay.

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The resolution adopted by the Baptist missionaries in Israel preceded by only a few days adoption of a similar resolution on anti-Semitism by the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Philadelphia. Last year in St. Louis, the SBC adopted its first resolution on the subject, disavowing anti-Semitism as unChristian.

Baker said the 29 Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to Israel hope that the resolutions, "which firmly express the solidarity of the local Baptist body and its sponsoring church body in the United States with the Jewish people, will mark a new milestone in positive, reciprocal Jewish-Baptist life encounters."

"Even more," continued Baker, "we hope that these resolutions will help open the way for an activated deeper fellowship between the people of our closely related faiths."

The resolution reads as follows:

"I. As Christians and Baptists in Israel, we deplore the incomparable suffering of the Jewish people in history and in modern times. We acknowledge that oftentimes the persecution they bore took place in so-called Christian countries and under so-called Christian rulers.

"We further recognize that the unworthy motive which caused most of Jewish ill-treatment was rooted in 'Christian' anti-Semitism, deriving from the assumption that since the Jew rejected Christ, he was considered cursed of God and his sufferings deserved.

"It is some small comfort to recognize the faithful witness of many Christians through the ages, who at the cost of personal peril, protested with their lives against anti-Semitism and gave protection to its victims.

"II. Furthermore, we denounce anti-Semitism as a sin against Christ, whose only conquests are made by love, and a sin against the Jewish people.

"We especially deplore attitudes and actions in history that have resulted in the persecution and suffering of the Jewish people solely because of their religion, for Baptists have always considered themselves to be champions of those who endure religious discrimination, having suffered in no small way for their own beliefs in the past.

"This however, is not to excuse many Baptists and other Christians for their silence while six million Jews perished in Nazi lands under Hitler. Baptists, in the future should resolve to accept responsibility for the welfare of those who suffer if they are to teach and proclaim responsibility.

"III. Therefore, we the undersigned Baptists in Israel, resolve to:

"1. Accept and love the Jewish people and seek for them the common rights and dignities bestowed impartially by God upon all his children;

"2. Denounce anti-Semitism as a denial of the spirit and teaching of Jesus;

"3. Call on fellow Christians not to wrongly present in Christian teaching the historic events which led to the crucifixion of Christ in a way that would either directly or indirectly place upon the Jewish people today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity and not to one race or community;

"4. Help meet the needs, physical when necessary, and especially the need for friends and allies of those who suffer as the result of anti-Semitism, Discrimination and persecution;

"5. Cooperate with Jews in an attempt to erase causes of friction and misunderstanding through forums, discussion groups, dialogue and other meaningful encounters;

"6. Invite other sincere individuals and groups to join us in presenting a common front to combat and attempt to eliminate the sin of anti-Semitism wherever it exists in attitude or practice."

The Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, the national body related to the Southern Baptist mission, consists of seven churches with about 235 members.



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