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HEART OF THE MATTER



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Jesus dishes up indigestion ... as usual

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If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, why does hell break loose at the mention of his name?

With food-fight intensity, comments fly at the A&W Restaurant in Colorado's mountain town of Frisco. Restaurant owners Donna and Reuben Drebenstedt post scripture and the name "Jesus" along with menu items on their outside sign, to the consternation of a few complaining patrons.

What are they thinking? Every hostess knows any dinner-table banter about "Jesus" means instant

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- GO**

indigestion, scuttling hopes for a peaceful repast.

While indignant customers caterwaul about the restaurant's alleged religious impropriety, the Anti-Defamation League demands that A&W's Scripture and "Jesus" disappear.

The friendly proselytizing must somehow constitute anti-Semitism?

Parent company, Yum! Brands Inc., stewes over customer fallout and requests the restaurant's religious overtones be excised. Yum! also owns the Pizza Hut and Taco Bell names. No doubt they dread that other religiously minded franchisers might dish up Praise-Jesus pizza or Bible burritos.

"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, there's just something about that name ..." says the Gospel song. So what *is* there about that name? Why all the fuss?

Jesus prophetically pointed to the Frisco ruckus – and other such strife over the centuries. *"Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"* (Matthew 10:34).

The name "Jesus" has mixed it up since day one. Herod the Great was so peeved at his appearing that he

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ordered all little boys of similar age be killed, hoping the dragnet would eliminate Jesus.

Merchandisers play it safe this time of year substituting "Happy Holidays" for "Merry Christmas" - a silent acknowledgement that the "Christ" in "Christmas" offends enough shoppers to merit his omission.

Public-school holiday celebrations sidestep the potential for constitutional bickering and pretend inclusiveness with Kwanza, Hanukkah and Santa. Excluded is Jesus, an incendiary subject in public education.

Jesus landed New York kindergartener, Antonio Peck, in Dutch. His environment poster, which portrayed people picking up litter and children holding hands around the globe, included a kneeling Jesus in the corner. Before displaying his drawing with 80 others, teachers at Baldwinsville Elementary in Syracuse singled out Antonio's poster, folded the corner, thereby hiding Jesus and obscuring the youngster's name.

Last week an appellate court judge ruled that Antonio's First Amendment freedom-of-speech lawsuit against the district be set

for trial.

The word "Jesus" has prompted both criminality and unlimited philanthropy. Charles Manson convinced followers that he was Jesus and thus worthy of blind allegiance. Crusaders slaughtered their way across Europe and into the Holy Land in the name of Jesus. Yet, universities, missions, hospitals, soup kitchens and refugee programs are still launched in his name.

"Jesus" elicits steadfast loyalty. "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" details the deaths of men, women and children who often died viciously violent deaths for refusing to renounce the name.

"Jesus" even penetrates mental perplexities. I recall the account of a young agnostic traveling in Southeast Asia, who found himself alone with a catatonic man. Neither medicine nor psychiatry had stirred the poor fellow from his silent state.

The visitor decided to experiment, having heard the name "Jesus" could churn up a pronounced reaction.

"Buddha!" he blurted, then, "Mohammed! Vishnu!" No

response. When he whispered "Jesus," the man became severely agitated and pounced on him. A local pastor intervened and, moments later, the same name "Jesus" - used in prayer - thoroughly delivered the man from his oblivion.

If the word "Jesus" sets your teeth on edge or threatens gastronomic distress, skip Frisco's A&W Restaurant. The Drebenstedts are unlikely to erase Scripture and Jesus from their sign any time soon. Royalties are faithfully paid to Yum! Brands Inc. and the Frisco eatery is a "high-producing store for the corporation," says Reuben.


Plus, they are Messianic Jews, Jews who embrace Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Reuben and Donna reflect the tenacious faith of early Apostles, those first-century Jewish believers who didn't duck, but rather utilized controversy to proclaim the name of Jesus. And change the world.

Ellen Makkai began writing columns 16 years ago in response to what she perceived as the moral and intellectual laxity among many feminist

commentators. Her writings have appeared since in the Denver Post, Rocky Mountain News, Cleveland Plain Dealer and periodicals published by James Dobson's Focus on the Family Ministries.

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