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HOLLYWOOD AND GOD

Despite what the press may convey, America is *not* antagonistic toward the things of God. According to a March 2004 Associated Press poll, an incredible 87 percent of respondents wanted “under God” kept in the Pledge of Allegiance.¹ Contrary to expectations, the blockbuster movie *The Passion of the Christ* grossed hundreds of millions of dollars in its opening weeks, proving that Americans have a strong interest in God. A Gallup poll shortly after the film’s release found that three in four Americans have seen it or expect to see it.²

The New York Times reported, “As the overwhelming success of *The Passion of the Christ* reverberates through Hollywood, producers and studio executives are asking whether the movie industry has been neglecting large segments of the American audience eager for more openly religious fare.”³

What Hollywood Believes explores an area that *has* been neglected in the past—the religious faith of the famous. It is a sad irony that when legendary filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille (director of the epic movie *The Ten Commandments*) first came to California in the early 1900s, he settled in a small town that was giving away free land to anyone willing to build a place of worship. The town, said to be a “Christian” settlement, had a picturesque name—Hollywood.⁴

Yet through the years the famous town has come to bear little resemblance to middle America. For example, a survey conducted

among the 104 top television writers and executives found only 49 percent consider adultery to be wrong—which means 51 percent believe adultery is morally right. Meanwhile 85 percent of the rest of America believes adultery is wrong.⁵

When asked about their religious affiliations, 45 percent of Hollywood executives said they had none, while the general population citing no religious affiliation was a mere 4 percent. Gallup polls reveal that over 90 percent of Americans believe in God, with as many as 40 percent attending worship services regularly,⁶ yet America's true religious nature hasn't been reflected in television shows or movies.

While I had a wonderful time researching for this book, discovering the stars' beliefs was arduous and time-consuming. Because Hollywood has for many years been under the illusion that America isn't interested in God, many celebrities hide their spiritual beliefs for fear of jeopardizing their careers. (Some of the quotes are therefore very short, for which I apologize.⁷) Each time I uncovered something a famous person believed about spirituality, it was like finding a golden needle in a huge haystack of information.

So what you are about to read is unique. The spiritual beliefs of the famous have not often been published—especially in a single resource such as this book. The utmost care has been taken to cite all sources of information, in the belief that each of the sources is accurate.

These findings are both fascinating and informative. Not surprisingly, celebrities expressed a wide range of views. One star thinks God is a woman, while others believe they will be reincarnated. Some beliefs are a little off the wall; others seem to make sense... but who am I to say who is right and who is wrong?

However, if I were researching the thoughts of famous football players on how the game should be played, and found conflicting beliefs on how the players should line up for the snap, it would be sensible for me to go to a respected source of information—the

standard for football plays. I would use that as a plumb line to compare how far to the left or right each player stood.

That's what I have done with this book. In it you will find extremes. So I have gone to the most respected source for spirituality, not only for Jews and Christians but also for many other major religions. I have compared the beliefs of the famous to the best-selling Book of all time, the Book that has stood the *test* of time—the Bible. This is because I don't want *What Hollywood Believes* to be merely informational. I want it also to be *educational*—so that each of us can think beyond what the celebrities say and perhaps even beyond our own beliefs. And the best way to do this is to consider these beliefs in view of a plumb line.

We'll be in good company as we do so. Many of our country's great leaders have looked to the Bible as an educational tool as well as a source of wisdom.

Theodore Roosevelt firmly believed, "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower stated, "The Bible is endorsed by the ages. Our civilization is built upon its words. In no other Book is there such a collection of inspired wisdom, reality, and hope."⁹ John Quincy Adams had similar convictions: "The first and almost the only Book deserving of universal attention is the Bible . . . It is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue."¹⁰ His father, John Adams, said simply, "The Bible is the best Book in the world."¹¹

Commendations for the Bible aren't limited to presidents. The "Father of Science," Sir Isaac Newton, asserted, "We account the Scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy. I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."¹²

With these thoughts in mind, I hope you will find this publication more than titillating. I trust it will help you to see that many of those celebrities to whom we look up are also looking up . . . toward the heavens. Although they are rich, famous, successful, and seem-

ingly self-sufficient, they have the same fears, doubts, and aspirations as the rest of us.

In these pages I have also attempted to address some of the difficulties and objections raised by celebrities as well as others—such as the issue of suffering, proof that God exists, why we should believe a Book that is full of strange stories, who made God, etc.

Researching the content for this book has caused me to not only be more educated about other people's beliefs, but it has helped me to grow in my own faith. I hope it does the same for you. So let's now look at the faith of the famous, and see what they believe.

BIRTH NAME: George Walton Lucas, Jr.
 DATE OF BIRTH: May 14, 1944
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Modesto, California
 OCCUPATIONS: Director, Writer, Producer
 CLAIM TO FAME: *Star Wars* (1977)—earned 11 Oscar nominations



GEORGE LUCAS

In discussing the religious overtones of *Star Wars*, George Lucas explained, “I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people—more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, ‘Is there a God or is there not a God?’—that is for me the worst thing that can happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, ‘I’m looking. I’m very curious about this, and I am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can’t find an answer, then I’ll die trying.’ I think it’s important to have a belief system and to have faith.”¹³

When his interviewer asked, “Do you have an opinion, or are you looking?” Lucas replied, “I think there is a God. No question. What that God is or what we know about that God, I’m not sure.”¹⁴

George Lucas said that he had “more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system.” This is a phrase that you will see is often repeated in this book by celebrities. They have the good sense to separate “God” from the cold religious system that so often portrays itself as the divine representative.

BIRTH NAME: Dolly Rebecca Parton

DATE OF BIRTH: January 19, 1946

PLACE OF BIRTH: Locust Ridge, Tennessee

OCCUPATIONS: Actress, Writer, Musician, Producer, Composer

CLAIM TO FAME: Hit single “Here You Come Again” (1977)



DOLLY PARTON

Dolly Parton recalled, “My grandpa was a preacher, and I guess at an impressionable age, I believed that through God I could do everything. And I still have a lot of faith in God, as I perceive Him, and that’s why so many of my songs have an inspirational feeling.

“Everybody thinks of God as a different thing. To me, God is that greater, higher energy—that greater, wiser wisdom. It’s that thing in all of us that we all have to draw from. I’ve always trusted God and trusted myself, which to me are intertwined. I’m a creative person, and what gifts I have come from that divine place that I try to tap into. So who have I got to be afraid of?”¹⁵

BIRTH NAME: John Joseph Travolta

DATE OF BIRTH: February 18, 1954

PLACE OF BIRTH: Englewood, New Jersey

OCCUPATIONS: Actor, Musician

CLAIM TO FAME: Vinnie Barbarino on “Welcome Back, Kotter” (1975–1979)



JOHN TRAVOLTA

In speaking of his beliefs, John Travolta said, “When I was 21 years old, I found Scientology and that gave me a kind of sanity. The technology I found so brilliant, that that kind of put things

in perspective for me. A film not doing well isn't a disaster—a plane crash is a disaster, you know what I mean?"¹⁶

As far as what happens after death, Travolta explained, "I think that the body ends and you as a spirit go on. It's up to you what you are going to do. It could be [reincarnation] if that is what you chose to do. You want to get back into another body or if you just want to hang out, whatever you feel like."¹⁷

When asked whether he believes in God, Travolta answered, "I think the whole idea of Scientology is to think for yourself. . . . If you ask me personally, I think yes there's God. But each day through a lot of the studying that I do, I think I get to understand, possibly, what God is about but I don't think I fully get the picture yet."¹⁸

After stating that he prays, though not regularly, Travolta was asked, "Who or what would you be praying to?" He replied, "To the yet-not-fully-understood God concept."¹⁹

John Travolta, like the rest of us, doesn't fully get the picture yet. Who of us can say we completely understand God or even the mysteries of this life? The Bible says that "we see in a mirror dimly." There are many questions to which we haven't yet found adequate answers.

Despite this, surveys reveal that most people pray, even skeptics. A good dose of severe turbulence at 30,000 feet is enough to make any atheist backslide momentarily and request help from some Higher Being—even if it's just a one-word prayer uttered deep within the mind. The issue isn't whether we pray, but whether God answers our prayers.

God *does* answer prayer, but often not in a way most of us would want or even expect. Undoubtedly, most of our prayers are selfish, such as for health and wealth. For reasons only He knows, God sometimes says yes and sometimes says no. And sometimes He says, "Wait for a while."

BIRTH NAME: Arnold Alois Schwarzenegger
 DATE OF BIRTH: July 30, 1947
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Thal, Styria, Austria
 OCCUPATIONS: Bodybuilder, Actor, California Governor
 CLAIM TO FAME: Five-time Mr. Universe titleholder,
The Terminator (1984)



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

When asked about his belief in God, Arnold Schwarzenegger said, “I believe in God and I believe, therefore, in the opposite: the devil and evil forces. Everyone has their own interpretation of that. Some people think the devil—they take the ‘d’ away and you have evil. Is there something up in the clouds? Probably not. But we, as people, are much better off if we do believe in good and evil.”²⁰

Although his mother took him to church every Sunday, he rebelled at age 18 or 19. Schwarzenegger recalls, “I thought the whole thing was absolutely absurd. When you get older, and especially when you have children, . . . all of a sudden you start thinking back to what your parents taught you and what you rebelled against. And suddenly it makes sense and you teach it to your kids. In a couple of years they will rebel. It’s the same cycle.”²¹

It’s not uncommon for people to cast off their religious beliefs when they encounter something they find “absurd” or that they don’t understand. Let’s take a logical look at this way of thinking.

Let’s say that you are sitting on a plane. I convince you that you have to jump at any moment. You see your danger and put on a parachute. At that point you are saved from the jump. Your problem is totally dealt with. You have the parachute on, and that’s all you need.

I then hand you the emergency card from the seat pocket so that you can become further informed about the plane. You study it. It shows you the exits and explains the oxygen masks. It shows the location of the parachute, and how to put it on. It even points out a red whistle and the locality of the bright green ripcord.

Everything on the card matches what you know is on the plane, right down to the red whistle. This convinces you that the card you are holding is the right card for this plane, and that it was put there by the plane owners.

Let's say you see something on the card that doesn't make sense. It says the carpet is red, when it's actually blue. Are you going to rip the parachute off? Of course not! That would be a stupid thing to do. The fact that you don't understand *everything* on the card has no bearing on the fact that you're going to have to jump out of the airplane. The important issue is that you are wearing the parachute. The apparent discrepancy is inconsequential.

Now think of someone on the plane who is not wearing a parachute. He studies the emergency card and reads that the carpet is a different color than what's on his plane, so he concludes that the card isn't valid. Because of this seeming inconsistency he makes a decision to reject the offer of a parachute. Think of his plight. He is in terrible danger. He could have to jump at any time. If you try to convince him that the color of the carpet doesn't matter, you are wasting precious time. Besides, you have a *better way* to persuade him.

You simply show him the 25,000-foot jump. You talk about the law of gravity and what it will do to his frail body if he hits the ground at 120 mph. You make him sweat a little. When he looks at you with fear in his eyes, you tell him about the parachute. Once he has it on, you can discuss the color of the carpet to your heart's content. The important thing is that he is wearing the parachute. This is another principle we will look at further in this publication.

BIRTH NAME: Judy Collins
 DATE OF BIRTH: May 1, 1939
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Seattle, Washington
 OCCUPATIONS: Singer, Actor, Composer
 CLAIM TO FAME: Popular singer/songwriter of the '60s



JUDY COLLINS

Judy Collins spoke about how her faith helped her after a tragic suicide in her family. She said, “I was certainly raised in the Christian belief, but I have a practice that believes in all saints and all gurus. Anybody who’s been on the journey can help me. I’m a multi-disciplinary person. I do a meditation discipline, which is probably eastern in its origins, but I think that everything helps.”²²

Asked whether she believes in heaven, Judy answered, “I think everybody has a different definition of heaven. I don’t think I’m going to be greeted by vestal virgins, and I doubt if I’ll be walking among the clouds with Voltaire. I might! We don’t know...I believe in a spiritual existence. My beliefs would more closely parallel the idea of reincarnation, of the spirit not being destroyed but going on in some form or another.”²³

BIRTH NAME: James Vernon Taylor
 DATE OF BIRTH: March 12, 1948
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Boston, Massachusetts
 OCCUPATIONS: Singer, Songwriter
 CLAIM TO FAME: Hit album *Sweet Baby James* (1970)



JAMES TAYLOR

One of James Taylor’s records had a theme of disbelief—trying to make sense of life without believing in God. He explained, “Well, I find myself with a strong spiritual need

—in the past five years, particularly. And, certainly, it’s acknowledged as an important part of recovery from addiction. Yet, it’s hard for me to find an actual handle for it. I’m not saying that it’s not helpful to think of having a real handle on the universe, your own personal point of attachment. But . . . I think it’s crazy. But it’s an insanity that keeps us sane. You might call a lot of these songs ‘spirituals for agnostics.’”²⁴

He was asked, “Does not having faith in a personal God make it harder to stick with a 12-step recovery program?” James replied, “Twelve-step programs say an interesting thing: Either you have a God, or you are God and you don’t want the job.”²⁵

BIRTH NAME: Robert Allen Zimmerman

DATE OF BIRTH: May 24, 1941

PLACE OF BIRTH: Duluth, Minnesota

OCCUPATIONS: Musician, Singer, Songwriter, Actor

CLAIM TO FAME: Leader of the “Beat Generation”



BOB DYLAN

Many years ago when Bob Dylan was questioned about his belief in God, he said, “I feel a heartfelt God. I don’t particularly think that God wants me thinking about Him all the time. I think that would be a tremendous burden on Him, you know. He’s got enough people asking Him for favors. He’s got enough people asking Him to pull strings.”²⁶

When asked if he thought religion was repressive, Dylan said, “Well, religion is repressive to a certain degree. Religion is another form of bondage which man invents to get himself to God. But that’s why Christ came. Christ didn’t preach religion. He preached the Truth, the Way and the Life. He said He’d come to give life and life more abundantly. He talked about life, not necessarily religion . . .

“A religion which says you have to do certain things to get to God . . . , which is a religion which is by works: you can enter into the Kingdom by what you do, what you wear, what you say, how many times a day you pray, how many good deeds you may do . . . That type of religion will not get you into the Kingdom, that’s true. However there is a Master Creator, a Supreme Being in the Universe.”²⁷

BIRTH NAME: Rod Steiger
 DATE OF BIRTH: April 14, 1925
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Westhampton, New York
 OCCUPATION: Actor
 CLAIM TO FAME: *In the Heat of the Night* (1967)



ROD STEIGER

Rod Steiger said, “That’s all religion is—some principle you believe in . . . man has accomplished far more miracles than the God he invented. What a tragedy it is to invent a God and then suffer to keep him King.”²⁸

BIRTH NAME: Howard Allen Stern
 DATE OF BIRTH: January 12, 1954
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Queens, New York
 OCCUPATIONS: Actor, Writer, TV/Radio Host
 CLAIM TO FAME: Shock-jock host of his own radio show



HOWARD STERN

Howard Stern was asked, “How do you feel about religion and politics?” He responded, “I’m sickened by all religions. Religion has divided people. I don’t think there’s any dif-

ference between the pope wearing a large hat and parading around with a smoking purse and an African painting his face white and praying to a rock.”²⁹

BIRTH NAME: Paul David Hewson

DATE OF BIRTH: May 10, 1960

PLACE OF BIRTH: Dublin, Ireland

OCCUPATIONS: Musician, Lead Singer/Songwriter of U2

CLAIM TO FAME: Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize (1993)



BONO

Bono said, “I often wonder if religion is the enemy of God. It’s almost like religion is what happens when the Spirit has left the building. God’s Spirit moves through us and the world at a pace that can never be constricted by any one religious paradigm. I love that. You know, it says somewhere in the Scriptures that the Spirit moves like a wind—no one knows where it’s come from or where it’s going . . .”³⁰

It is obvious that Bono has some sort of knowledge of God and the Bible in his background. “Somewhere in the Scriptures” is a reference to John chapter 3:

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (verses 1–9)

Some people are of the opinion that U2 is a *Christian* rock band. But when questioned on the subject, Bono explained, “We really f— up our corner of the Christian market... I love hymns and gospel music, but the idea of turning your music into a tool for evangelism is missing the point... The most powerful idea that’s entered the world in the last few thousand years—the idea of grace—is the reason I would like to be a Christian.”³¹

BIRTH NAME: Stephen Edwin King
 DATE OF BIRTH: September 21, 1947
 PLACE OF BIRTH: Portland, Maine
 OCCUPATIONS: Writer, Actor, Director, Producer
 CLAIM TO FAME: Horror novelist and screenwriter



STEPHEN KING

Stephen King was questioned by an interviewer, “I am curious to know why you’ve placed the existence of God into the foreground of your recent work?”

He replied, “I think he’s always been there... God is different in different books because it depends on the people you’re writing about. I don’t see myself as God’s stenographer. As someone who believes in God, believes that God is a logical outgrowth of the fact that life fits together as well as it does, but that doesn’t mean that we know God’s mind.”³²