

HOLY TOYLAND



JULIEN, MY FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON, had two plastic action-figures locked in mortal combat.

“Who will win,” he asked, looking up at me, “Spider-Man or Moses?” We discussed their relative strengths, and he settled on the superiority of Spider-Man. The Moses toy had only a big staff in one hand and a couple stone tablets in the other—not very impressive next to Spidey’s web-slinging power. Also, my son reasoned, Moses, with his long white beard and bathrobe, looked “too old” for serious battle.

This kind of bizarre conversation may soon be repeated all over the country when the Tales of Glory action-figures start selling at Wal-Mart stores this fall. A company called “one2believe” is marketing the faith-based dolls “to find a way to help children learn vital Bible lessons via Scripture and to ultimately come to faith in Jesus,” says founder David Socha. one2believe is the Biblical Doll Division of the Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Company of Valencia, Calif.

I asked Socha which dolls are hot sellers. “Our talking Jesus doll, that teaches children scripture, seems to be the bestseller on all fronts,” he replies. The Beverly Hills Teddy Bear Company has been selling the 12-inch talking “Jesus, God’s Son” since 2005.

Jesus, who looks remarkably like the Brawny Paper Towel Man, has kung-fu grip and utters soothing but authoritarian Bible quotes, like, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). This lumberjack-like Jesus made some headlines in 2006 when the Toys for Tots organization (a branch of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve) refused a donation of 4,000 of the dolls for its annual Christmas drive. The irony of turning down Jesus toys for Christmas seems too obvious for comment, but Toys for Tots worried that children on the receiving-end of these donations may not be Christian and therefore it could seem more like a missionary gesture than plain charity. A few days later, however, Toys for Tots reversed its decision and accepted the Jesus dolls, saying simply that they had “found appropriate places for these items.”

Now the makers of talking Jesus have a new line of PVC figures (made in China), and for the first time Wal-Mart, the biggest toy retailer in the United States, is on their side. Starting

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