

NEW ATHEISM'S HITCHENS DIES

One of the protagonists of the new atheism movement has died. Journalist and polemicist Christopher Hitchens died of pneumonia on Dec. 15 in Houston, at the age of 62. Hitchens had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer in 2010.

The Christian community gained a greater awareness of Hitchens in 2007 upon the publication of his book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. Yet it was not just the Christian faith that he targeted. Hitchens saw the radical elements of Islam as a mortal danger, and was an unapologetic supporter of the Iraq war. The socialist-turned-Marxist took aim at what he saw as abusers of political power, including Bill Clinton and Henry Kissinger.

Hitchens' criticisms knew no bounds as, according to his friend and *Vanity Fair* magazine editor Graydon Carter, Mother Teresa was "at the top of the list" of "the things that Christopher has taken on." Hitchens, in 1994, co-authored and narrated a documentary about the Roman Catholic saint calling her *Hell's Angel*. More recently, in a 2007 *Newsweek* article, he labeled her a "troubled and miserable lady." He was also a persistent advocate for the Palestinian cause.

Years of alcohol and heavy tobacco use apparently took its toll in the summer of 2010 when he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. Despite his imminent appointment with death, "He gave early notice that there would be no deathbed conversion to religion. If we ever hear of such a thing, he advised, we should attribute it to sickness, dementia or drugs," the online version of the British publication *The Guardian* reported.

—MKG

Crystal Cathedral for \$57.5 million. It apparently was the buyer Schuller wanted. A *USA Today* article, citing the *Los Angeles Times*, stated that Schuller sent a letter to the court in which he "said he could not abide the thought that Chapman University, which had tried to buy the 40-acre facility, might someday use the cathedral for non-religious purposes."

The church's board had on two separate occasions selected Chapman University as its preferred buyer. The evening prior to the judge's ruling, the board altered its previous plan, because board members became "uncomfortable with Chapman's lease terms and its future plans for the campus," according to *The Orange County Register*. The university, which is associated with the Disciples of Christ denomination, offered as much as \$59 million according to reports.

Some members of the Crystal Cathedral also are not exhibiting much positive thinking. One member said, "The cathedral's administration and the board have really stripped us of our ministry. In the end, it was all about the money. The congregants have lost their ministry." Another member called the developments "the death of the church," saying a "mass exodus" will follow. The *Register* report noted, "Congregants, who left the courthouse tearful and disappointed, said they felt betrayed."

Under arrangement with the diocese, Schuller's church will continue at its present site — at least into the immediate future. The ministry can obtain a three-year lease of the main buildings, which includes both the cathedral and the Tower of Hope, at a cost of \$100,000 a month for the first year, and then \$150,000 per month during the following two years.

—MKG

CATHOLIC DIOCESE BUYS CRYSTAL CATHEDRAL

The optimistic thinking of Robert Schuller hasn't yielded him many positive results these past few years. Family and church strife, along with financial disaster and bankruptcy, have plagued the 86-year-old minister and the church he founded over a half century ago.

But if there was a positive note, it was that a federal bankruptcy judge ruled that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange would be allowed to purchase Schuller's

HERITAGE TOWER STILL A HURDLE FOR JOYNER

Superman may have been able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but super-prophet Rick Joyner just can't seem to get over his Heritage Tower. Neighbors of Joyner and his MorningStar Ministries have grown weary of what they call an "eyesore." For years, residents in the Fort Mill, S.C., community have sought the attention and action of state and local government officials to deal with the vacant and deteriorated 21-story structure originally built by televangelist Jim Bakker 25 years ago.

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Word. A re-reading of 2 Corinthians would cure thrill seekers with the reality of the ups and downs of life. We all have to decide whether it will be for us madness and muddle, fantasy and fads, or the never-changing assurance of biblical promises.

The old hymn says it well: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

—GRF

WHERE'S WALDO?

Most people are familiar with the "Where's Waldo?" cartoons. They are expansive pictures which are a hoarder's delight. And somewhere within the panorama is Waldo, a tall thin character dressed in a red-striped shirt. Usually the drawings are cluttered with objects and people; some red and white to throw off the observer who must search the picture to try to find Waldo.

Finding truth today is something like that. We have to constantly ask, "Where's Truth?"

Walk into a bookstore that is advertised as being a "Christian bookstore" and what do you find? There will be a jumble of books and publications that run the gamut from New Age to hyper-Charismatic, and from heretical to semi-evangelical.

There are the self-help publications stacked among the books on pop psychology. There are claimed visitations to heaven, trips to hell, angelic appearances, UFO abductions, dated predictions for the rapture, and a surfeit of purported Holy Ghost-given revelations. There are instruction manuals on "breaking strongholds" and ancestral bondage. There are books about signs and wonders, including people rising from the dead and end-time revival reports.

Then there are all the books on sowing your financial seed and multiplying money a hundredfold by sending the author a "seed faith" offering. One wonders why he does not send money to his readers so that his seed can be multiplied.

There will also be books on Jesus' teenage trips to India. Or was it Mongolia, or Egypt, or maybe somewhere else where He learned ancient wisdom? And, oh yes, the section on dream interpretation and the book on "What Would Jesus Eat," along with other biblical diet books.

Then there are books by Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Miles Munroe, T.D. Jakes, and a flock of other "Major League Charismatic Players," all vying for the book buyer's cash. And on and on it goes and where it stops nobody knows. As you stagger out of the bookstore in a daze, a question occurs to you — "Where's truth?"

One of the more recent charlatans on the minor league parade of extremist Charismatics is John Crowder.

Crowder knows that there is a hard-core audience that has been so jaded by past emotional "revivals" (slaying in the Spirit, laughing revivals, animal noises, violent head shaking, and even being kicked and wrestled to the ground) that experience seekers will put up with anything — the wilder and freakier the better. Insanity and total loss of control is now one of the premier marks of the Holy Spirit which you know if you watch the Trinity Broadcasting Network or read *Charisma* magazine.

On Crowder's Sons of Thunder Web site and on the myriad of "sermons" and reports posted all over YouTube, he claims to smoke the Holy Spirit like pot and get wasted. He claims people have weight loss in his meetings. (Of course, Crowder provides no documented evidence for the biggest loser.) He boasts of levitations and spirit travel. In the occult world spirit travel is called astral travel, but to his followers who cares. There are things that Crowder speaks about that are too inappropriate and vile to mention. Crowder arrogantly goes to places others like him have feared to tread. He not only pushes the envelope, he shreds it. Anyone with any discernment wants to scream — "Where's truth?" It is certainly not with John Crowder.

Despite all of the above, the Berean is neither discouraged nor does he lose heart. It is interesting that once you spot Waldo in a picture you know exactly where to look next time. Bereans have to become adept at knowing truth as it is found in Scripture. Truth, in fact, is not hard to spot. It is where it has always been, which is in the Bible. God is truth and His Word is truth. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Truth is actually in plain sight and not hard to find at all. Go to the Word, and stay safe by listening to preachers who are trustworthy and faithful to the truth. It is also important to commit to a church where truth is honored and proclaimed, and error is exposed and false teachers named (as Paul did). Above all, get grounded in doctrinal truth.

Next time you happen to see a "Where's Waldo?" cartoon, remember where you must look to find truth. Don't be misled by the religious clutter and heretical diversions that are everywhere.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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Years after Bakker's publicly exposed moral failure, financial improprieties, and downfall, Joyner and his ministry began purchasing the portion of PTL network property known as Heritage USA. In 2005, MorningStar acquired the failed hotel tower building with the intent to renovate the facility and then sell what it termed as "life leases" of age-restricted apartments. In the fall of 2008, it was announced that a \$40 million redevelopment of the structure, yielding 215 units, would begin the

following January, with residents moving in by mid-2010. As that projected occupancy date arrived, the tower still sat vacant and unrepaired. The York County Council found MorningStar “in default” of their agreement and since that time “the county and MorningStar have been going back and forth in legal battles,” according to a WBTV Channel 3 local television news report.

Fort Mill residents are now hoping that a loophole in a county ordinance will be the key to bringing down the curtain on Joyner’s failed project. The ordinance says that unfit dwellings are unlawful if found in dilapidation or are unsafe to residents of the county. Once this designation is made, and if the owner is unable to repair the property, the county is allowed to demolish it. Residents have filed a petition to this end. This new plan, however, could result in years of legal wrangling.

Joyner is part of a movement of modern-day prophets and apostles and associates with other self-appointed prophets such as Mike Bickle, Paul Cain, and Todd Bentley.

—MKG

HOWARD-BROWNE ACCUSED OF MORMON-BASHING

Some people think politics and religion are two subjects better left unspoken. But when the two are united and expressed, conflict and contempt are sure to ensue.

Pentecostal pastor Rodney Howard-Browne received some negative press when, following a political event for Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich, he expressed to reporters “grave reservations” about rival candidate Mitt Romney and his Mormon faith. “Mormonism is a cult and that’s the problem,” Howard-Browne was reported to have said according to an online article by *The Daily Mail*, a British publication. The article further cited Howard-Browne as saying, “Mormonism, if you study the whole history of it, and I’m not trying to create a problem, but they had death squads that would go around kill[ing] everybody that wasn’t a Mormon.”

Another online article reporting Howard-Browne’s statements prefaced its story by saying, “At least he’s being creative. The latest anti-Mormon comments from a pastor backing one of Mitt Romney’s primary opponents.”

The rally for Gingrich was held on the grounds of Howard-Browne’s The River at Tampa Bay church on Jan. 23.

Howard-Browne’s comments did not create a stir comparable to one created last fall by prominent Baptist minister, Dr. Robert Jeffress. Jeffress, senior pastor of

First Baptist Church of Dallas, stated that Mormonism was a non-Christian cult and that evangelical voters “ought to give preference to a Christian instead of someone who doesn’t embrace historical Christianity.”

Other news outlets have offered a more shrewd response to the negative comments about Mitt Romney and Mormonism. At the same time Howard-Browne’s comments were being reported, *The Salt Lake City Tribune* intoned that “True Christians don’t demonize Mormons.” The article stated, “Mark DeMoss has a message for his fellow evangelicals: You can’t attack and demean Mormons or President Barack Obama and still consider yourself a follower of Jesus Christ.” DeMoss made his remarks during a devotional given at Brigham Young University.

DeMoss heads up a faith-based public-relations firm in Atlanta and has, for the past five years, been an unpaid adviser to Romney’s presidential campaign. He also told the *Tribune* in a telephone interview that he “believes that any question about whether Mormons are Christians is ‘irrelevant to me in the context of choosing a president.’”

In the 1990s, Howard-Browne rose as a major celebrity within Charismatic “signs and wonders” circles promoting the “laughing in the Spirit” phenomenon. He labeled himself a “Holy Ghost bartender” and “laughing evangelist.” As the laughing spectacle ran its course and the novelty waned, Howard-Browne settled into the role as a Tampa pastor.

—MKG

ROBERTS ARRESTED ON DUI, SPEEDING CHARGES

Televangelist Richard Roberts has attracted the attention of the national media, but not for a reason he would like. In January, the former president of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa and son of late faith healer Oral Roberts was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol and speeding. The arrest report, complete with a mug shot, was picked up not only by Tulsa-area television and newspapers, but also by national outlets including CNN and CBN News.

The arrest report stated that Roberts, 63, was pulled over in his Mercedes-Benz sedan just after midnight on Jan. 24 by an Oklahoma Highway Patrol after the trooper “checked the vehicle’s speed at 93 MPH in a 65 MPH zone.” The report also stated that upon contact with Roberts, the police officer “immediately detected the strong odor of an alcoholic beverage about Roberts’ breath and person.”

According to a *Tulsa News* article, “Roberts was unable to complete two field sobriety tests and was taken to the Jenks Police Department to determine his blood-alcohol