

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.

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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.

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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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