

WORLDWIDE FANFARE MARKS DARWIN'S 200TH BIRTHDAY

February 12, 1809, was a unique day in history. On that date two prominent historical individuals with very different beliefs about and effects upon humanity were born. The one, Abraham Lincoln, battled for the parity of all mankind proclaiming that "all men are *created* equal." The other, Charles Darwin, devalued man by maintaining that all species of life, including humans, have evolved over time from a common ancestor.

This past February marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of both men. And there is little doubt that the fanfare for Darwin vastly surpassed any celebration or recognition of Lincoln's birth. Websites proliferated that heralded the "Darwin Day Celebration" which is described as "a global celebration of science and reason held on or around Feb. 12." According to one of these websites, there were more than 370 events scheduled in 31 countries for Darwin Day 2009.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, described "Darwin Day" as a "celebration intended to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin on February 12, 1809. The day is also an opportunity to highlight Darwin's contribution to science and to promote science in general." In the United Kingdom, a two-pound special commemorative coin was released. The coin features profile images of Darwin and an ape facing each other, arched by the inscription 1809 DARWIN 2009. The coin's edging contains the inscription, ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES 1859. This coming Nov. 24 will mark the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, which is said to be his "landmark work in evolutionary biology." The Perth Mint, Australia, also planned to issue a 2009 dated commemorative (1 oz.) silver legal tender coin depicting Darwin.

And, it seems, that everybody — even those who should resist Darwin's theory — wanted to get in on the celebration. Last September, "the Vatican said the theory of evolution was compatible with the Bible" and announced that it was planning to host in March "a new interdisciplinary conference to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's Origin of the [sic] Species," according to *The Christian Post*. The Church of England even released a news article conveying that the 200th anniversary of his birth was the right time to issue an apology to Darwin "for misunderstanding you and, by

getting our first reaction wrong, encouraging others to misunderstand you still."

The self-proclaimed agnostic died April 19, 1882, and is buried at Westminster Abbey, London's gothic monastery church.

—MKG

YOUNGER SCHULLER TO START OWN CHURCH

The Rev. Robert A. Schuller, son of Crystal Cathedral founder Robert H. Schuller, has resigned as the church's senior pastor with plans to begin his own ministry. According to a brief news release posted on the Crystal Cathedral website, "The Executive Team of Crystal Cathedral Ministries has received and accepted the resignation of Rev. Robert Anthony Schuller as Senior Pastor of the congregation. Robert continues to be a valued and long-standing member of the Classis of the Reformed Church in America." The notice was posted Nov. 29, 2008.

The younger Schuller was deposed last October by his father as the sole preacher on the church's popular *Hour of Power* television broadcast. He had inherited the role from his father in 2006. The elder Schuller said a "lack of shared vision" which placed the entire ministry in "jeopardy" led to the removal of his son. The move only ousted the younger Schuller from the television program, and was not intended to take away his role as the church's senior pastor.

Upon the resignation, Juan Carlos Ortiz, who founded the church's Hispanic ministry, will assume the position of senior pastor until a permanent replacement is found.

—MKG

WITHOUT WALLS CHURCH MAY BE WITHOUT BUILDINGS

They were once the up-and-coming darlings of the Charismatic world and co-pastors of Without Walls International Church, a Tampa, Fla., mega-church. But the fame and prosperity that Randy and Paula White

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instance, she still condones homosexuality and gay marriage" ("Vampire Author's Fictionalized Jesus Promoted by James Dobson," *Christian News*, Nov. 17, 2008, pg. 3).

More recently, the novel *The Shack* presented a Jesus who is a middle-aged, presumably Jewish, carpenter. God the Father takes on physical form as a woman, even though God is Spirit, according to John 4:24. It is fanciful and wrong. Some say, "Oh, it's only a novel." And while that may be true, it is a novel that can teach untaught people *something* — and that something is misleading and wrong. It is also another example of wittingly or unwittingly adding to the Scriptures.

All of this fiction suggests strongly that the eyewitnesses in the Gospels had nothing substantial to offer us and that the picture of Jesus presented by people who walked with Him and talked with Him is not all that urgent, compelling, or important. So current authors go ahead and make things up about Jesus.

Distorted presentations of Jesus have been around since the days of the early Church. The Gnostics did it in the third and fourth centuries A.D. The *Protoevangelium of James*, which began being distributed around A.D. 200, contains in its 12 pages bizarre legends about the infancy of Jesus. Its publication date rules out authorship by James, the brother of Christ. Furthermore, it was rejected by Jerome, an early Church leader, and a number of popes. It is sometimes referred to as part of the *Pseudepigrapha*, or false writings. However, over time, the Roman Catholic Church began to give it faint recognition and its legends were taught in some Catholic schools.

In this brief novel, the parents of Mary are identified as Joachim and Anna. These names have become enshrined as fact in the Crusader Church at the Bethesda pool in the Old City of Jerusalem. In the story, Mary, at age 16, becomes pregnant with Jesus. Mary then gives birth *outside* of Bethlehem in a desert cave. Whoever wrote it was unaware of the geography of Bethlehem and depicted the outskirts of Bethlehem as desert. Bethlehem's environs are lush grazing fields and rich olive groves. The legend also asserts that Joseph had not been there for the birth of Jesus, but was somewhere in the area looking for a midwife. The midwife, Salome, expresses doubt that a virgin could conceive and is stricken with a skin condition on one of her hands. An angel tells Salome that if she touches the child, she will be healed and when she does touch the infant Jesus, she is.

There is also *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, a sixth-century work that purports to be an account of miracles performed throughout Jesus' boyhood. (See *The Other Gospels, Non Canonical Texts* by Ron Cameron.) *The Infancy Gospel* is written in Syriac, which is akin to Aramaic.

We know that no miracles took place during the infancy or boyhood of Jesus. The first miracle took place at the wedding feast at Cana, as recorded in John chapter 2, when He was about 30 years old. John wrote that after the water was turned into wine, "This *beginning* of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (John 2:11, emphasis added).

If Jesus had been doing miracles prior to Cana, John would not have written that He started to do them in Cana. His boyhood in Nazareth was uneventful, according to Luke 2:51-52. Luke wrote that Jesus and His family went to Nazareth and that Jesus was subject to His parents as He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." This indicates a normal Jewish childhood and upbringing.

As well, in support of John 2, Luke 4:16-20, where Jesus mentions the dawning of the Messianic age, strongly implies that Jesus' Messianic miracles had their inauguration at the start of His public ministry and not before. The people of Nazareth did not know Him as a miracle worker, but only as "Joseph's son" (Luke 4:22). The simple son of a carpenter could not be taken seriously. They had known Him as an ordinary child and were so offended at His claims of Messiahship that they sought to throw Him from a cliff.

So we see that people in Nazareth never saw anything different about Jesus and simply knew Him as "Joseph's son." If there was anything different or sensational or miraculous about Him, they would have said so. To them He was just a carpenter's offspring.

No doubt more books will be published that purport to portray Jesus in a new or different light. Perhaps one could apply Matthew 24:23 to this troubling trend: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it."

There is nothing new under the sun and when one turns from the truth, all that is left is fiction, fables, and myths. We have one dependable, unchanging source for all we need to know about Jesus. It is rich, full, and inexhaustible. It has sustained believers through 20 centuries of heresy and confusion. No one can improve on the New Testament's eyewitness accounts. We stake our lives and our eternity on them.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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once enjoyed has devolved into infamy, tragedy, and financial straits.

In August 2007, the Whites announced that their 18-year marriage was ending. And then just a few months later, they were one of six religious ministries targeted by the Senate Finance Committee headed by

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa. These two factors prompted the departure of a substantial number of church members. While *Charisma* magazine reported that the church's 2008 membership decline was 30 percent, according to an article in the *St. Petersburg Times*, "Some 50 percent of the 22,000-member congregation left in the aftermath, dragging collections down by half." Paula left Tampa and Randy settled in as sole pastor. The church's two morning services were combined into one.

Less than a half year later, Kristen Hernandez-White, 30, Randy's daughter from a previous marriage, died April 30, 2008, of cancer. She had been diagnosed with a brain tumor in December 2006.

Last November, Evangelical Christian Credit Union, which holds the mortgage for White's church, filed foreclosure proceedings against Without Walls. The bank claimed in court documents that the church had defaulted on its loan, which was due in August. According to reports, the credit union demanded repayment of both a \$1 million loan that was due in August and a \$12 million loan, made in December 2003, for expansion of its church property in Tampa. Then the California-based lending institution initiated a foreclosure proceeding involving a \$12.5 million loan on the church's satellite campus in Lakeland.

White immediately went on the defensive. The Sunday following the foreclosures, he delivered a 90-minute sermon. He spent 30 minutes addressing the foreclosures, and then devoted the remainder of his sermon to disputing various charges contained in articles from the *Tampa Tribune*.

White vowed to fight the move by the lender and said he would try to continue to negotiate. But if the talks fail, it was announced that the church will consider other options, including refinancing, selling the church, or filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported White as saying, "I'll be damned if I'm leaving. I promise you this: I will handcuff myself to that column right there because right is right and wrong is wrong. We are a great church, and the devil has tried to take us out every single way that he can."

The church and the credit union for months had been negotiating terms of the loans. When White refused to sign a modified version of the loan agreement, the credit union began foreclosure proceedings. According to Jac La Tour, spokesman for the credit union, "We worked with them for a number of months to reach an agreement. When that process was unsuccessful, we had to file foreclosure. It wasn't a quick decision." White explained to his church members, "I could've signed the modification agreement, everything would've gone away, but if we hiccup they would've owned it all."

According to *Charisma*, "White said the credit union initiated the action because of its own financial struggles.

He claims the ECCU decided to confiscate the Tampa property after learning the church had a waiting buyer who was paying \$33 million." La Tour denied White's allegation. Both the Tampa and Lakeland church properties have been on the market since March of last year.

The church has also made plans to repay the \$1 million loan which was due in August with money it received from the sale of a \$1.4 million piece of property at the Lakeland campus.

Then, in December, the church faced fines for several fire code violations. In February 2008, Tampa fire department officials inspected church buildings and discovered numerous safety-related issues, including emergency lighting, exit signs, and fire extinguishers. The church was also to have its alarms and sprinklers checked out to ensure that they were in proper working order. Last December, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that a Tampa Fire Rescue spokesman said, "the church hasn't made any of the repairs or hired an inspector to check out the sprinklers and alarms."

Despite all the tribulation, White vows to stay the course. WTSP-TV, the CBS-affiliated station in Tampa and St. Petersburg, reported, "The pastor does not plan on resigning right now."

—MKG

EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER CO-FOUNDER DIES

The Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, who co-founded the group Evangelicals and Catholics Together, died Jan. 8, at age 72, of cancer. Neuhaus was hailed as "an eminent Catholic intellectual" and in 2005 was named by *Time* magazine as one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals.

Neuhaus, the son of a Lutheran pastor and a Lutheran clergyman himself, converted to Roman Catholicism in 1990 and was ordained a priest the following year. He wrote, "I was 30 years a Lutheran pastor, and after 30 years of asking myself why I was not a Roman Catholic, I finally ran out of answers that were convincing either to me or to others."

Shortly after his conversion to Catholicism, he began inviting Catholic and evangelical leaders to discuss their differences. These meetings led to his alliance with former Nixon White House counsel and Watergate figure, Charles Colson. Together they edited *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* and founded the ECT group. Colson, in eulogizing Neuhaus, explained that in spite of the "initial uproar among many evangelicals and Catholics," he and Neuhaus progressed