

Supporters of 'Antichrist' minister protest Miami-Dade judges

MiamiHerald.com 

Posted on Wed, Mar. 11, 2009

BY JACK DOLAN

Wearing white T-shirts emblazoned with "666", about a dozen followers of Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda, the Miami-based minister who proclaimed himself the Antichrist, protested his "persecution" by the justice system in front of the family courthouse on Tuesday.

Last year, after a bitter divorce that featured dueling claims of lesbianism and physical abuse, Miami-Dade judge Roberto Pineiro awarded more than \$2.2 million to the minister's ex-wife, Josefina de Jesus Torres.

In his ruling, Pineiro determined that de Jesus' Growing in Grace church was a personal business, rather than a religious nonprofit, so the ex-wife was entitled to half of its assets.

Jo-Ann de Jesus, the minister's daughter who also handles the church's finances, said the judge based his decision on a "prejudice against my dad" and not on evidence.

De Jesus and her father's followers are hoping to get the multimillion dollar judgement overturned.

Pineiro could not be reached for comment Tuesday afternoon.

The minister, who claimed his teachings have replaced those of Jesus Christ and therefore he should be known as the Antichrist, has refused to pay up.

He has been "moving around a lot lately", his daughter said, to avoid the arrest warrant issued against him for contempt.

"My father is afraid if he is captured, people will sell their houses to help him because they love him so much," she said.

Many of de Jesus' followers say his clash with the secular justice system is further proof that he is the Second Coming. The original Messiah also faced significant legal difficulties, they note.

"It just makes me more secure," said 38-year-old de Jesus follower Angel Toro. "His persecution means he's really divine."

While de Jesus cannot preach before a live congregation for fear of being dragged away in handcuffs, he still records video sermons that are broadcast to more than 20 nations through a sister church in Colombia, his daughter said. In explaining his decision to treat de Jesus' and the church's finances as one, the judge wrote that de Jesus "dominates the ministry like only a god can. . . . In what other corporation does the board of directors literally worship the president?"

De Jesus exploded into popularity -- and controversy -- in the past few years after he declared himself to be Christ. His ministry, Growing in Grace, quickly expanded to more than 300 churches in 30 countries. Eventually, de Jesus amended his title to Antichrist and he, his ex-wife and many followers got tattooed with the number of the beast, a practice that generated headlines worldwide.

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/southflorida/story/943455.html>