

# WORLD NEWS and PROPHECY

## Biblical Perspectives on Current Events

July 2000

Vol. 3, No. 6

# Democratic Dictatorship?

*Let's take another look at the 10 toes of Daniel's image to see how the potter's clay and iron are forming amidst today's geopolitics.*

by Paul Kieffer

In the second year of his reign, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream that none of his counselors could explain. Babylonian culture placed considerable emphasis upon dreams, and Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that this one was of great importance (Daniel 2:1–3). God began His influence over this great pagan king by allowing the prophet Daniel to interpret the dream without any prior knowledge of its content.

Under God's inspiration, Daniel explained the details of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar and provided the king an astounding preview of history. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a human image with four distinct parts, each symbolized by a different metal: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before

you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:31–33).

The image in the dream represented, in symbolic form, the sequence of great empires that would dominate the civilized world's political scene for centuries, with the final part of the fourth empire existing at the time of Jesus' return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God. Daniel's interpretation gives us a "disclosure of God's plan for the ages till the final triumph of Christ" and "presents the foreordained succession of world powers that are to dominate the Near East till the final victory of the Messiah in the last days" (*The Expositor's Bible*



Photo © European Communities, 1995-2000

*European Union flag and scaffolding, symbolizing the EU under construction*

*Commentary*, Vol. 7, pp. 39, 46). In other words, the chronological sequence of the empires depicted by the image is to be viewed from "top to bottom," so to speak, with the feet of the (See "DICTATORSHIP," page 3)

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**Five Trends to Watch in Europe — Teens Pursue Spirituality, But Without God?  
Deutschland AG Versus Corporate America — Vikings Are Coming, Again!**

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Read *World News and Prophecy* as soon as it is completed. The next issue is scheduled to be available on August 4 on the Internet at <http://www.ucg.org/html/literat.shtml#4>.

The United Church of God provides *World News and Prophecy (WNP)* as an educational service for interested persons. The purpose of *WNP* is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of current events in the light of Bible prophecy. Although the staff strives for truth and accuracy in its reporting, analysis and Bible commentary, *WNP* is not a doctrinal publication. Articles do undergo both an editorial and a review process.

**“DICTATORSHIP,”** *(Continued from page 1)*  
image representing the “empire” that exists at the time Jesus returns. The feet of the image are struck by the stone that represents God’s Kingdom (verse 34).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold. “You, O king, are a king of kings...you are this head of gold” (verses 37–38). The silver, bronze, iron and clay components of the image, or statue, represented three powerful empires that were to follow mighty Babylon (verses 39–40). “The silver empire was to be Medo-Persia, which began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539.... This silver empire was supreme in the Near and Middle East for about two centuries” (ibid., Vol. 7, p. 47).

“The bronze empire was the Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great.... The bronze kingdom lasted for about 260 or 300 years before it was supplanted by the fourth kingdom” (ibid.).

“Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness and describes the Roman Empire that reached its widest extent under the reign of Trajan” (ibid.). Trajan reigned C.E. 98 to 117, and the Roman Empire itself ruled for many centuries. Daniel described the fourth empire as crushing its opponents, forcing them into submission (verse 40).

The fourth empire was depicted as having 10 toes. “Verse 41 deals with a later phase or outgrowth of this fourth empire, symbolized by the feet and ten toes...” (ibid.). Jesus returns to earth at the time the “kings” depicted by the feet and the toes are in existence. “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.... Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold...” (verse 44–45; cf. verse 34).

### **Potter’s clay and iron**

The feet and toes were composed partly of iron and partly of clay, “a fragile base for the huge monument” (ibid.). Verse 43 tells us in this regard: “As you

saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.”

Some have wondered about what the mixture of iron and clay would represent in the end time when Jesus returns to the earth. An end-time continuation of the fourth empire, the Roman Empire, will be in existence when the Kingdom of God is established on the earth. Some have speculated that the union depicted represents the diverse cultures and peoples within Europe that would not readily “cleave” one to another, thereby representing a weak union. In this regard, an East-West or a North-South axis within Europe has been suggested in the past.

However, at the peak of its power, the

*In contrast to the early days of the fourth beast when extension of its sovereign realm was achieved by conquest... the end-time extension ...will indeed be a federation in which political authorities... voluntarily transfer power to a central authority.*

Roman Empire had no difficulty assimilating many different peoples and cultures under its rule. Verse 40 tells us why: “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.” It would appear, then, that different peoples and cultures—viewed by themselves—would not seem to be the only reason for the fragile mixture of clay and iron.

In the author’s opinion, the mixture described does not represent the nature of the peoples involved in the final

union, but rather the nature of the union itself. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* views verse 41 in the following manner: “The text clearly implies that this final phase will be marked by some sort of federation rather than by a powerful single realm” (ibid.).

Chapter 17 of Revelation pictures Jesus subduing a union of 10 kings at His return to earth. “The ten horns which you saw [cf. verse 3] are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings...” (Revelation 17:12–14).

The 10 kings of Revelation 17 are analogous to the 10 toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image in Daniel 2. With the chronological sequence of the image in Daniel 2 being from top to bottom, the toes are the “last” part of the image. The Kingdom of God is established at the time of “these kings”—the toes (Daniel 2:44). Revelation 17 describes 10 kings who will exist simultaneously at the time Jesus returns. Just as in Daniel 2, their reign is ended by the return of Christ. Interestingly, these 10 kings cede power to a central authority, called the “beast” in Revelation 17:13.

In other words, in contrast to the early days of the fourth beast when extension of its sovereign realm was achieved by conquest—by crushing opponents (Daniel 2:40), the end-time extension of the fourth beast will indeed be a federation in which political authorities—kings—voluntarily transfer power to a central authority. The economic system described in Revelation 18 indicates the reason for the willingness to cede national or local power to a central authority: prosperity.

### **Dominion by democratic means**

In its current form, the European Union represents a growing but cumbersome supranational dominion by democratic means. Over the years,

democratically elected governments of EU member states have ratified various EU treaties and thereby gradually transferred more and more authority to Brussels, the seat of the increasingly powerful European Commission.

In fact, the amount of influence wielded by “Brussels,” a phrase often used to mean the European Commission, is becoming a sticking point for Germany’s 16 state governors. Representative of their concerns is the point of view expressed this spring by Bavaria’s popular Christian Socialist Union governor Edmund Stoiber. “The commission is attempting increasingly to expand its authority over Germany’s federal states and other regions. It tends to declare itself responsible for everything. . . . Europe must not be molded by central domination through distant and anonymous authorities.”

Some of Mr. Stoiber’s colleagues in Germany have been disappointed by decisions rendered by the Commission in the interest of free and unhindered trade and competition. In line with authority granted to it by EU treaties, the European Commission views itself as the defender of free trade within the EU. One case in point involves the scrutiny of Germany’s state banks (each of Germany’s 16 federal states has its own state bank) by the Commission to ensure fair competition with commercial banks. Germany’s state governors now wonder whether the Commission will intervene to regulate state-run television and radio stations, hospitals and waste-management systems. The Commission likely would claim a need to intervene to prevent state-run or state-subsidized systems from having an unfair competitive advantage in comparison to their commercial counterparts.

Since the EU is currently primarily an economic union and the European Commission is charged with ensuring fair competition, the concerns of Germany’s state governors are justified. As might be expected within the overall democratic context of the EU, they have resolved to use the means available to them to prevent any further erosion of their local authority, including

the option to have the German Bundesrat (equivalent to the U.S. Senate) veto any future EU treaty expanding powers of the Commission.

### **Political union becoming a necessity**

Certain key aspects of national sovereignty remain with the national governments of EU member states. Among these are economic policy and taxation.

However, the creation of a single currency for the 11 EU member states participating in the euro (with Greece likely to become the 12th member by year’s end) has highlighted the need for further political integration. The single currency effectively interlocks national economies and makes them mutually vulnerable to economic decisions made by individual governments within the euro zone. Case in point: the state pension fund crisis developing in several EU countries.

Generous state-funded retirement programs in Europe have often been the envy of many non-Europeans. While the demographic pyramid upon which all such programs were based remained intact—more young people entering the work force than older people entering retirement—no problem existed. However, in recent years the baby boom has gone to “baby bust,” and nearly all Western countries face the problem of more people retiring each year than the system will be able to handle.

Individual European governments are reluctant to cut benefits, always an unpopular political decision. One other way to “solve” the problem would be to raise taxes, but with the euro, that could cause inflation beyond a country’s own borders. If Germany were to raise taxes to fund its retirement programs, higher inflation in Ireland could be the result, even if Ireland had enough money to pay its pensions. If Italy were to fund its state-run pension program by increasing deficit spending instead of raising taxes, the cost of borrowing money in Belgium could be higher as a result.

Some analysts believe that the euro could be strained to a breaking point if a crisis of this sort were to arise. Like the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, the European Central Bank can adjust interest rates for banks borrowing money, but its ability to cope with inflation caused by government spending or borrowing is limited. Although European Commission President Romani Prodi has warned about the possible negative impact of the potential pension funding crisis, he has no authority to deal with the problem: EU national governments are responsible for their individual state-run retirement plans.

When opponents of the euro in Germany stated their case in the months prior to the establishment of the final rate of exchange for member countries, one of their arguments was that without common supranational EU policy on economic issues and taxation the new currency might very well be doomed to failure. Many EU supporters recognize the need for Europe to forge ahead with greater political union to match the intertwining of the economies of the various EU member states. However, an extension of EU powers to include greater influence over national economic policies is simply impossible under the current EU structure, because of the same “mechanism” that Germany’s state governors want to use to influence future EU policy: the single-nation veto right.

Since any decision involving an expansion of EU authority or the admission of new member states into the EU requires a unanimous decision of all current member countries, any country can effectively block progress on political union. It is inconceivable, for example, that the United Kingdom will agree to any extension of EU powers that would diminish U.K. national sovereignty—the main reason why the U.K. is not part of the euro zone. (The unanimous vote rule is one of several reasons why the author believes that, in the current political climate within the EU, there is absolutely no likelihood that Austrian Freedom Party leader Jörg Haider’s political philosophy will be adopted by the EU.)



## A two-tiered Europe ahead?

At the start of the new century, the EU faces the question of what its future will be. Already becoming unwieldy with its current 16 members, the EU could become totally immovable if the ongoing negotiations with the 12 countries seeking admission into the EU are concluded successfully. Will the EU be nothing more than a free-trade agreement—a view held by a minority of current EU members headed by Britain? Or, will the EU proceed on to full political union, as is the desire of its original six members?

A two-tiered Europe has been proposed, most notably by elder statesmen Giscard d'Estaing of France and Helmut Schmidt of Germany. In similar fashion to the way the common currency was handled (only those EU countries wanting to be part of the euro zone must comply with its requirements), those countries who desire to form a political federation within the EU would proceed with the plan in the hope that other countries would eventually join them. The existing free-trade arrangement would continue to apply to all EU members, and membership in the common currency and in a possible political federation would be limited to those EU members who choose to participate.

In a speech titled "*Quo vadis Europa?*" ["Where are you headed, Europe?"] in Berlin on May 12, German foreign minister Joschka Fischer announced his support for a "Europe of two speeds." Mr. Fischer made clear that he was speaking as a private person and not in his official capacity as Germany's foreign minister. His vision calls for a "center of gravity" made up of a few countries within a greater EU: "Such a center of gravity would have to be the avant-garde or the locomotive for political integration and include all elements of a later federation"—a little center of Europe within a greater European Union, according to one commentator.

Mr. Fischer emphasized that for those countries who want to join the "center of gravity" at a later date, but

that do not fulfill all requirements for full political union, there would need to be stages of adjustment enabling them to achieve final admission into Europe's proposed new inner circle.

Criticism of Mr. Fischer's two-tiered Europe is blunted by the fact that an EU moving at different speeds already exists in two different cases: the euro (with 11 of 15 EU member states currently participating) and the Schengen Treaty regulating common internal borders and responsibility for the external border of treaty adherents (with 9 of 15 EU member countries involved). Other than a negative comment from France's interior minister accusing Germany of wanting to revive the Holy Roman Empire, reaction from the original EU countries was generally

*History causes some of God's people to believe that only a dictatorial system in the tradition of Adolf Hitler would be capable of fulfilling the end-time prophecies of the Bible. But Europe isn't headed that way.*

favorable. EU Scandinavian members, Britain and Ireland are seen to oppose the idea, and the newer EU members from the Mediterranean—Greece, Portugal and Spain—are considered skeptical or not interested.

## An "avant-garde" Europe and prophecy

Joschka Fischer's outline for an "avant-garde" Europe prompts a sharper focus on the key prophecies of Daniel 2 and Revelation 17 involving an end-time revival of the fourth world empire of Daniel 2—the Roman

Empire. Instead of wondering how the current 16 EU members (or the potential 28 members in just a few years' time) "fit into" a scheme of 10 symbolized by the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image and the 10 kings of Revelation 17:12–14, a "core Europe" (as Mr. Fischer called it) involving full political union operating within a greater European trade zone could easily fulfill the prophetic vision. This configuration would make it possible for Britain to continue within the free trade zone, but not be part of the inner circle of nations forming the politically unified "core Europe."

The greater European trade zone involving nearly all of Europe provides the large market of buyers and sellers for the economic powerhouse described in the Babylonian system of Revelation 18. And a "core Europe" with its full political integration and proposed majority vote system offers a viable "state" authority for the independent European rapid deployment force proposed within the current NATO structure. In the author's opinion, under existing conditions in Europe, only a supranational political structure of this kind would be able to provide alternative leadership to the superpower influence of the United States.

The "avant-garde" Europe will be formed by consent, continuing the pattern begun when the original treaty was signed in Rome in 1957. Since then, democratically elected governments have increasingly ceded regulatory powers to a central authority, resulting in a remarkable degree of economic integration within the EU.

History causes some of God's people to believe that only a dictatorial system in the tradition of Adolf Hitler would be capable of fulfilling the end-time prophecies of the Bible. But Europe isn't headed that way. Instead, it appears that the pattern established over the last 40 years could continue until the final extension of the Roman Empire grants special powers to a central authority: "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (Revelation 17:13). ❖

# Five Trends to Watch in Europe

*From Santa Maria de Feira, Portugal, site of the latest major meeting of the European Commission, a report on what's ahead.*

by John Ross Schroeder

*Major divisions of opinion between Britain and the core countries of the EU continued to dominate the agenda.*

**E**uropean unity has been gradually developing step-by-step ever since the fledgling beginnings of the economically based European Coal and Steel Community in 1957 with six founding countries. Today there are 15 countries in the European Union (EU) with several more applications for membership being considered.

The latest major meeting of the European Commission with the heads of government present was in late June at Santa Maria de Feira, Portugal, near the city of Porto (home of Port wine). There major divisions of opinion between Britain and the core countries of the EU continued to dominate the agenda.

According to *The Daily Telegraph*, "Germany and France delivered a blunt warning to [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair, during sharp exchanges at the EU summit which ended in Portugal yesterday, that he could not stop the development of a two-speed Europe that could leave Britain behind."

Although Mr. Blair and his economic chancellor Gordon Brown secured somewhat of a victory here at Feira in blocking the introduction of a Europe-wide savings tax, the founding members (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) made it very clear that they were absolutely determined to press ahead with much closer integration.

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was the most adamant. He said: "But let it be clear that if we are stopped we will find a way outside the structure of the union." Very disturbing words! They call to mind a time prior to World War II.

## **Trend #1: the recent emergence of Berlin's assertiveness**

Germany is now pressing harder than ever for an increased pace of integration. It wants a

renewed drive to persuade the European Union's 15 members to cede more of their sovereignty to Europe. Berlin also desires a fundamental rewriting of the founding charter, the 1957 Treaty of Rome. In the German view, no member nation (including Britain) must be allowed to stand in the way of further progress.

The first sign of this renewed assertiveness came in May when the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, delivered a speech setting forth his vision of a federal Europe. In this speech, he called for a European federal superstate with its own elected president and a written constitution.

Mr. Fischer urged "the transition from a union of states to full parliamentarisation [British spelling] as a European federation" (*The Daily Mail*).

The excuse for the proposed rewriting of the Treaty of Rome is that taking on new members from Eastern Europe will require a fundamental revision of the rules.

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has since given Mr. Fischer's vision his full and enthusiastic backing. And according to *The Guardian*, Berlin's intelligentsia has begun to feel "under their new chancellor that Germany has as good a right as any other state to take the head."

## **Trend #2: the French response to German leadership**

No nation in Europe has been more enthusiastic for further integration than France. In past years, the principal architects of the European Economic Community (now the EU) have been French. Some have even called for a United States of Europe. Up to now, the French have been generally much more vocal than the Germans.

Yet, the latest pronouncements from Berlin have met with some official French resistance. In

response, Jean-Pierre Chevenement, French interior minister, spoke of “a tendency for Germany to imagine a structure for Europe which corresponds to its own model. Fundamentally, it still dreams of a Germanic Holy Roman Empire. It is still not cured of the derailment which Nazism was in its history. Germany has a conception of the nation which is that of the Volk; that is to say an ethnic one” (*The Daily Telegraph*).

Strong words those, and the reaction was immediate from staunch French defenders of Germany. Giscard d’Estaing (a former president of France, 1974-1981) “declared that it was intolerable to accuse the German leadership of a Nazi inspiration and culture” (“Federalism Finds Its Time,” Daniel Johnson, June 3, 2000).

But the interior minister was not the only French government official to respond to Berlin’s recent assertiveness. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, “France’s Foreign Minister, Hubert Vedrine, has put the brakes on German ambitions for political union, saying the European Union must concentrate on preparing to expand into central and southern Europe rather than seeking to dismantle nation states.” Paradoxically, this is the very reason given for Germany’s desire for a federation.

The French will preside over the EU for the next six months (July to December), and it will be interesting to see what approach they actually take to this leadership issue in practice.

### **Trend #3: the channel gap—the British conundrum**

But the British position is far more sensitive than that of the French. Britain joined the community in January of 1973, some 16 years after France. Many Britons have been far from enthusiastic supporters from the very beginning.

Notwithstanding Eurotunnel, Britain is geographically separated from the Continent by the English Channel, figuratively highlighting the differences in basic mentality between the British and Europeans in general. They are summed up in the expression, “the channel gap,” and they are profound!

Recently columnist Reginald Dale in

*The International Herald Tribune* expressed the basic problem about as well as anyone. He wrote: “When the British finally committed themselves to European economic...integration by entering the then European Community in 1973, many thought they were becoming members of a club with static rules. Few seemed to realize that they were joining a dynamic process heading inexorably, in fits and starts, toward closer integration. For profound reasons of history, culture, geography and national character, every new step along that road is painful for many Britons.”

Most British citizens want free trade and cultural exchanges with the Continent, to holiday there, to enjoy their fine food and, in some cases, to learn their languages. Pragmatically, they can see the benefit of these and many other mutual activities.

Mr. Dale continued: “But the country’s history cries out against being incorporated into what its opponents call a ‘European superstate’ run by foreigners in Brussels. Even many pro-Europeans [in Britain] have difficulty accepting the Euro, which is now being rejected in opinion polls by about 70 percent of the population.”

A small minority of Eurosceptics would like to see Britain pull out of the European community and replace it with much closer links to the United States, including joining NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). This appears highly unlikely.

### **Trend #4: the Austrian dilemma**

A recent report by *The Sunday Telegraph* from Vienna tells us, “Opponents of the right-wing Austrian politician Jörg Haider claim that his influence is behind new laws to control television and radio networks and to allow snooping on private citizens by the security services and the military.”

This is the thinking, even though Mr. Haider has stepped down as the leader of his party. Some have indicated that “these policies have Haider’s fingerprints all over them.” This view articulates the fear that new right-wing extremism could begin in Austria, and then spread to

Germany and other European nations.

But there is another very valid side to the Austrian story. The question has been asked, “Is the European Union overreacting by unduly threatening Austria’s own freedoms?” Noted British journalist and author, William Rees-Mogg, was particularly concerned about EU sanctions.

He wrote in his regular Monday column in *The Times*: “Under the European treaties Austria could not be excluded from the official operation of the EU. There would have been no grounds for doing that. Yet, the other 14 EU governments have decided to boycott Austria in bilateral relations. Their action is perhaps illegal, as there is no provision in any of the treaties for this sort of penalty. The boycott was imposed without discussing the legalities: it was led by France and Germany, and followed perhaps weakly, by Britain.”

Rees-Mogg summed up the situation thus: “In Britain our public opinion is not nearly as pro-European as Austria. We already fear that the EU is undermining our democracy. In the meantime the British government is party to an unlawful attempt to coerce the democratic choice of a small European nation. Of course, that has happened before, but not, I think, since 1938.”

These sanctions came under discussion here in Santa Maria de Feira and may be dropped in exchange for the eventual jettisoning of Austria’s banking secrecy laws. Yet, the question remains as to what future actions the EU might take against other member nations in somewhat similar circumstances.

### **Trend #5: the European defense issue**

Germany and France have agreed to construct a joint satellite reconnaissance system, driving the EU further down the path towards a common defense policy. This announcement was made at the 75th Franco-German summit meeting in Mainz, Germany. (Despite occasional falling-outs, the number in itself indicates the depth of these mutual exchanges between the two nations.)

On top of this development is a  
(See “TRENDS,” page 12)

# Teens Pursue Spirituality, But Without God?

*Many teens want to live in ways that are healthy and moral, in spite of the example set by the adult generation. But are they choosing spirituality without God?*

by Cecil E. Maranville

*A Newsweek poll of teenagers found that religion was important to 78 percent of them. But they look for or seek to create a philosophy with which they can be comfortable.*

She was about 16, walking with a male companion of similar age, when I saw her in a department store recently. Her carefully crafted outfit caught my eye. Definitely a “style,” it couldn’t be called “stylish.” Her black pullover top matched her baggy, military-style pants, as did her cumbersome, heavy boots. The look she cultivated was “accented” by jewelry pierced through curiously creative locations about her face and head. The pièce de résistance was the pair of men’s flannel boxer shorts she was wearing, carefully arranged to extend 3 or 4 inches above her beltline.

Although garbed in paramilitary dress and similarly decorated with metal studs about his face and head, her male companion did not manage to match her “fashion statement” for garishness.

Are they typical of the 22 million teenagers in the United States? No, thankfully, according to Sharon Begley, whose article about teens, “A World of Their Own,” appeared in the May 8, 2000, issue of *Newsweek*. Psychologist William Damon of Stanford University told Begley, “today’s teens may have less in common with each other than those in generations past.” Teens cannot and should not be lumped into a single category or judged by fringe extremists like those described above. Millions exhibit individuality, strong ambition and genuine values.

Despite the fact that the 22 million American teenagers cannot be depicted by a single stereotype, the purpose of the *Newsweek* article was to address the emerging “portrait of the millennial generation.” There are encouraging signs—and some discouraging ones.

## “They are spiritual”

One of the current trends highlighted in *Newsweek’s* polling grabbed my attention.

“They’re spiritual...” begins the drophead of the above article by Sharon Begley. She writes in the body of the article that the present generation of teens is more spiritual than their parents are. A companion article in the same issue, “Searching for a Holy Spirit,” by John Leland, reports that, “Young people are openly passionate about religion....” A *Newsweek* poll of teenagers found that religion was important to 78 percent of them.

Is this a positive trend or a negative one? Let’s take a more in-depth look at what is taking place in this area.

There is a definite trend among teens toward personalizing existing religions to suit their individual convictions or literally creating their own “faith.” They look for or seek to create a philosophy with which they can be comfortable. Bits and pieces of ideology are drawn from various faiths to produce a unique composite, pulling from such diverse religions as Judaism, Catholicism, Buddhism and Islam. As in so many areas of life, the Internet plays a major role in the faith of teens, providing them with what Leland calls “spiritual supermarkets.” Teens are shopping for religion the same way they shop for music, entertainment and career information—online. Christian researcher George Barna predicts that “cyberchurches” will account for 10 to 20 percent of all organized worship within the next decade (*ibid.*, Leland).

Leland called the developing religious orientation of today’s teens a “religious smorgasbord” and says that they devise “whatever mixture appeals at the time.” Sharon Begley writes that many “put together their own religious canon as they would a salad from a salad bar.”

On the positive side of the ledger, this interest in religion has motivated teens to donate a lot of time to community service. Leland reports that as many as 60 percent do some kind of community service. That’s wonderful.



Equally positive is the fact that teens with strong religious convictions “are less likely to take drugs, have early sex, or engage in delinquent behavior”—a phenomenon that sociologists and educators call “the faith factor” (ibid., Leland).

More power to them. But, is “the faith factor” producing the desired results? Jesus put it quite pragmatically: “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.... Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:17, 20). What are the “fruits” or results of the way of life teens are choosing? According to William Damon, “a significant number are drifting or worse.”

A majority or significant minorities are still practicing destructive personal habits. CDC statistics show that 48 percent of high-school students have had sexual intercourse, 36 percent are smoking and 51 percent are drinking alcoholic beverages. The figures on sexual promiscuity represent a slight downward trend, the number of smokers is on the increase and the number of drinkers is relatively the same as it has been in recent years. *All of these behaviors portend relationship and health problems, bearing a phenomenal price tag for those who are soon to be the adults of the next generation.*

On the subject of “power” and religion, it’s tempting to reach for the lexicon of prophetic scriptures and pull out some of Paul’s words to Timothy: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times [times of stress] will come.... [For people will have] a form of godliness but [deny] its power” (2 Timothy 3:1, 5).

A pastor at Wheaton Bible Church in the Chicago area related to John Leland what he had discovered by asking troubled teens, “Who do you think God is?” One teen echoed the thoughts of all with the opinion that whatever you really believe is all right. “God is whatever works for you,” summarized the teens’ perspective, according to the pastor.

### **Looking for a religion without God**

Their view is wrong. God is a real Being, and He offers invaluable guidance that is not discernible unless we come to know Him personally and listen to what

He has to say. The ancient prophet’s message speaks clearly, “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.... ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:6, 8–9)

The direction our heavenly Father provides is as specific as what parents should say to guide their children. Therein lies the problem—parents haven’t been fulfilling that responsibility.

In too many cases, they aren’t a real presence in the lives of their children. Teens spend 20 percent of their waking hours alone and 9 percent of their time outside school with friends, according to data from the 1999 Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development (ibid., Begley). You do the math. Little time is spent communicating with or even in the presence of parents.

As noble and as wonderful as it is that teenagers are “spiritual,” it’s sad and sobering that they do not want to know God or too many specifics of what He has to say about how they should conduct themselves.

Leland quotes a teen who says, “I believe there is a higher power at work in my life, but I do not have a name for it. When I pray I do not ask a god [sic] to make everything all right. Instead I ask myself to be strong” (ibid.).

Wow, what an incredible contradiction in thought!

Turned off by what they know of religion, many are looking for spirituality without God. I applaud those who’ve perceived the paucity of most organized religions, but for them to seek spirituality without seeking God is like trying to breathe without oxygen.

I can appreciate the frustration and disillusionment that drives the teens’ search for a different religion, but they’re courting disaster, not the Divine. The book of Proverbs, written to guide young people, counsels, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12). Remember the prayer recorded above, in which the teen looks to himself instead of to God.

Are these teens “denying the power of godliness”? Yes, I believe that they are. They have chosen the right objective, but not the right course to it. But I do not fault them. We must ask why teens are directed and motivated the way that they are. In many cases, it’s because the present generation of leaders—public figures and parents alike—have denied the power of godliness.

Teens creating their “salad bar” religious philosophies are offended by and reject what they have witnessed in the present adult generation. Many teens are plainly fed up with not being fed or led in spiritual matters. William Strauss, coauthor of *The Fourth Turning*, reported that “teens had harsher opinions about the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal than any other group” (ibid., Begley). Disillusioned equally with the behavior of their leaders and the inability of their parents and other adult mentors to declare wrong to be wrong, teens have chosen to be *more moral than their adults are*. They have sought to develop a sharper definition of right and wrong than today’s adults have.

### **It’s today’s adults who have denied God**

Whose fault is it that teens are creating a flawed spirituality? Don’t today’s adults, including many parents, share culpability? Any adults willing to take leadership positions, but unwilling or unable to be role models for life, share responsibility for the fact that the up-and-coming generation is creating a nonspecific, “salad bar” spirituality that actually hinders itself from knowing the true God.

Compare the entire generation to a teen in a troubled home. It’s commendable that a young person growing up in the home of an alcoholic parent or parents sets his/her will to exercise self-control and never abuse alcohol. Similarly, it’s commendable that young people growing up in this morally skewed society set their wills to choose a moral and spiritually-based lifestyle. But it is infinitely preferable that young people are reared, guided, loved and

(See “TEENS,” page 12)

# Deutschland AG Versus Corporate America

*No other country but the United States could get away with overspending on such a monumental scale.*

by Melvin Rhodes

*Record U.S. trade deficits are assisting Germany in its challenge to U.S. economic supremacy.*

**T**he U.S. trade deficit for April 2000 was over \$30 billion, a world record. In one month, the U.S. had bought \$30.6 billion worth of goods and services more than it sold to other countries. This trade deficit has been rising for some time, ironically one of the consequences of the booming economy. As people have more to spend, they are spending more of it on foreign-produced goods and services, leaving a whopping deficit that is unprecedented in the history of the world. The rising price of oil has made the deficit worse but is only part of the problem.

Most countries use money that cannot be used anywhere else outside their borders. These currencies are called “soft currencies.” About 20 of the world’s wealthier nations have “hard currencies” that can be used anywhere. American dollars can be taken almost anywhere in the world and changed into local money. So can British pounds, French francs and German marks.

These nations can overspend because people will take their money. Those with soft currencies have to earn hard money before they can buy anything from the rest of the world. Before a nation in Africa can buy oil, it must sell its products to others to earn the dollars or pounds it needs to buy the oil. One month it may sell more than it buys. This is a “balance of trade surplus.” If it sells less than it buys, it suffers a “balance of trade deficit.” After a couple of months of trade deficits, these countries could not buy essentials from the rest of the world.

The rich countries can get away with having a deficit for some time—as long as other nations will accept their money. They usually will do so indefinitely, as “hard currencies” tend to keep their value and can be used almost anywhere for almost anything.

But even rich countries are concerned when

they have trade deficits. Mounting trade deficits often cause panic on capital markets and stock exchanges, as they are likely to lead to increased interest rates to avert a currency falling in value. Governments may also enact legislation to create higher taxes and institute other control measures, with the intent of reducing the deficit.

None of this has happened in the United States. In fact, whereas many economists, bankers and financiers in Europe are expressing concern about America’s trade deficit, it is rarely mentioned in the U.S. media.

There are a number of reasons for this.

One is that Americans are the world’s biggest consumers. The rest of the world needs America to continue to buy the goods it produces. The reason Americans are able to consume more than anyone else is partly because their wages are often higher, but mostly because credit is more readily available in the U.S. than elsewhere.

A second factor is that America has had trade deficits through most of its history. The excess numbers of dollars going out of the country enabled other nations to recycle those dollars—in the form of investments in U.S. industry and services, which in turn boosted U.S. growth. In the early decades of the American Republic, Great Britain alone invested so heavily that the deficit was amply covered. The British remain the biggest investors in the U.S.

So, Americans are not greatly concerned about the trade deficit, although the chairman of the Federal Reserve has expressed his concerns recently.

## **Where does the money go?**

These continuing deficits raise two questions. What is happening to all those dollars going out of

the U.S.? How long will the rest of the world be willing to finance America's increasing debt? The answers to both questions are connected.

Many of the dollars that leave the U.S. are held by people in less stable countries with weak currencies and uncertain economies. They give the hoarders security. They know that they can always use American dollars when times get worse, as the dollar is always exchangeable for goods and services. Some smaller countries do not even have their own currency and use dollars for normal domestic business transactions.

Even those engaged in illegal activities, such as the international trade in narcotics, prefer to use U.S. dollars, as people everywhere tend to know the value of the dollar.

Additionally, governments hold dollars in reserve for trading purposes.

It is estimated that well over half the dollars in circulation in the world are outside the United States.

A sudden loss of confidence in the U.S. overseas would result in people divesting themselves of dollars on such a massive scale it would cause chaos at home in the United States. "He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail," warns Deuteronomy 28:44 of one of the punishments to befall modern-day Israel as a result of turning away from God.

As in the past, a major reason the rest of the world has been content to finance the deficit is that the money received could be used to buy into the world's most successful economy. Some countries are investing far more in the United States than the U.S. is investing in those nations. Britain and the Netherlands are two big investors. But now another investor is buying into America in a big way.

That country is Germany.

## Germany, Inc.

In a new book titled *Germany, Inc.*, Werner Meyer-Larsen, a former editor and columnist on business and economic affairs for Germany's leading news magazine *Der Spiegel*, takes readers on "a penetrating, fact-filled exploration of a development of paramount commer-

cial, geopolitical, and cultural importance."

Two years ago Detroit's newspapers carried banner headline news of a merger between American auto giant Chrysler and the German Daimler Benz. I remember standing in line at an airport one year ago overhearing a conversation between a Chrysler executive and a friend he had just encountered. His comments, expressed in strong language, conveyed considerable frustration. In his opinion, the merger was a hostile takeover and everybody was now taking orders from the new German management, which had a very different style from the former American management.

Meyer-Larsen writes: "Thus, Daimler Chrysler represents the model of a new challenge raised by Germany and confronting the U.S. Economically, it is just as extraordinary as was Kaiser Wilhelm II's vast expansion of Germany's naval force to Great Britain's military strategists 100 years earlier."

This is the third wave of rivalry with the Anglo-Saxon powers in one hundred years. At the beginning of the 20th century, the challenge was economic and military. In the 1930s, the challenge was again both economic and military as Adolf Hitler rapidly developed Germany into a major power. "These American cars are junk compared to a Mercedes," were Hitler's dismissive words on the American car industry, quoted on page 43 of the book.

Now comes the third wave, a major economic challenge to U.S. economic supremacy around the world. Ironically, the U.S. is making it easier for Germany through its trade deficit and misguided foreign policy toward Europe.

## U.S. sees Germany as key to EU

Meyer-Larsen writes: "With England's impact on the continent waning, the U.S. can exert its influence on the EU's economic style only via Germany." He adds: "The U.S. wants to be Europe's partner in many respects, without necessarily playing the lead.... The principal power on the other side of the Atlantic is once again Germany, now

transformed by NATO and the EU from its role as troublemaker into the great integrator."

He continues to show that Washington's policy is for the closest possible relationship with Germany and the German-dominated European Union. "[The] U.S. wants to nip in the bud any hints of a closed European economic fortress. For the U.S., it is a matter of course that the more fully German-American and American-German concepts and values develop the better it is for both sides. All of this understood, Washington simply could not oppose the Daimler Chrysler deal. The times of a tough 'buy American' cross-country movement (with Chrysler being one of its main inspirations!) are over. So are the days of open or even subliminal antipathy toward Germany and the Germans."

It should be emphasized "that nothing like a systematic plan exists for an offensive by Deutschland AG on Corporate America" as there was by Japan, Inc. in the 1980s. As the blurb on the book's jacket puts it:

"As Japan's sun sinks slowly in the West, a formidable new competitor has risen to replace her as America's chief rival in the battle for global business leadership. Emboldened by reunification and its role as leader of the European Union, Germany is flexing its muscles. For the first time in history, a transatlantic global conglomerate is rapidly taking shape, its policies defined by a small band of German business elites."

The new Daimler Chrysler may have seemed like a sudden dramatic change in the fortunes of one of America's leading companies, but it was, in reality, a major turning point in a German offensive that has been gaining ground for some years. In the last 10 years "a handful of Germany's most powerful industrial concerns has been steadily chipping away at America's lead in a range of sectors, including publishing, air travel, steel, insurance, and cars."

It's difficult for the average American to keep up with details of reported mergers and acquisitions in the business world. "Every month I get a list of several dozen companies we have purchased," says the head of a foreign

branch of Mannesmann, “and most of them are in the United States.”

## Germans have less debt

One reason German companies are doing so well is that they take a long-term view. Whereas American companies have to post a profit every three months and aim for a 100 percent return on investment in five years, German companies look ahead 20 years. A quarterly profit and big dividends to shareholders are not as big a priority.

American companies still dominate. On page 112, Meyer-Larsen writes: “Clearly, the Americans are the market leaders, but they also have exorbitant debts and few resources.” A sudden major decline on Wall Street could finish off some American companies. German companies, with less debt and more resources, would be better placed to weather the storm.

Also, American companies are not as big as is often thought. This is due to how Europe and America assess the value of their companies. “On September 23, 1998, for instance—a day chosen at random—the Siemens corporation was worth 54.5 billion marks on the stock market...yet the U.S. company General Electric—by no means a bigger company—\$441.8 billion.” A merger of the two companies based on these figures would give Siemens shareholders less than 11 percent of the shares of the new company, when Siemens is, in fact, a bigger company.

The 19th century is often referred to as “Britain’s century.” In the 20th century, the U.S. economy replaced Britain as the world’s leader. Reading *Germany, Inc.*, it is easy to see which nation could replace the U.S. as the world’s leading economy in the new century.

The magnitude of America’s ongoing trade deficit means that the United States is progressively increasing its international debt while at the same time enabling foreign companies to buy into America in a big way.

The biggest consumers in the world are inadvertently bringing about a significant change in the world’s power structure. ❖

## “TRENDS,” (Continued from page 7)

recent call to arms in Germany, where two billion marks saved through shrinking the number of soldiers would be spent on new technologies for battle in the post-Cold War era. As *The Wall Street Journal* observed: “The proposed reform would mark the biggest overhaul of Germany’s armed forces in half a century.”

Defense is a very complex issue in Europe. U.S. involvement is more direct than in perhaps any other field. America is a charter member of NATO.

The Russians are particularly concerned about the U.S. missile defense plan, and are urging European nations to reject it. For instance, *Times* correspondent Roger Boyes, reporting from Berlin, wrote that Russian “President Putin warned Britain yesterday not to co-operate [British spelling] with the United States in setting up a new anti-missile defence [British spelling] system, stressing that the price could be very high.”

Chancellor Schröder of Germany had already expressed his reservations concerning the proposed American ballistic missile defense system, aimed at protecting the United States from rogue nations. It is interesting to note that Putin had recently met with the German chancellor. Also that the Russian president spent several years in East Germany during his KGB days and apparently speaks German very well. It is said that his family speaks the language even better.

In addition, articles are appearing in the European press with titles like “America doesn’t need all those nuclear warheads” and “America’s nuclear madness.”

Obviously, we have only hit a few of the high spots in this article. There are other very important trends to watch in Europe—the progress of the euro to name one that we have covered previously.

Along with the Middle East, the European scenario is a centerpiece of biblical prophecy. Both areas will play a heavy role in the fulfillment of many major prophecies. (If you do not already have them, please request our free brochures, *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*) Jesus Christ told us to continually watch and pray (Luke 21:36). ❖

## “TEENS,” (Continued from page 9)

nurtured in a home by fathers and mothers who are excellent role models. And similarly, it is infinitely preferable that the future generation of parents and leaders would be able to follow a healthy pattern of behavior and moral values demonstrated by the lives of today’s parents and leaders.

“Do as I do” is better parenting than the implied message for today’s teens: “Whatever you do, don’t do what we have done.”

Should we be positive about the future generation? As Sharon Begley concludes her article, “Every generation has a chance at greatness. Let this one take its shot.” I’m all for them and pleased that there are so many positive examples! But are we saying that hope for the future generation is based solely upon its rejecting and rising above the failings of the present one?

What a sad commentary that is on today’s leaders and parents.

A moving prophecy in the 18th chapter of the book of Ezekiel speaks to the hope that today’s teens have for the future. Dealing with a debate about whether children must pay for their parents’ sins, God assures them that a son (or daughter) *can* look at the lousy example set by a parent and determine not to repeat it. God promises to honor such a mature sense of duty, and says that He does not hold children responsible for their parents’ errors.

Again, more power to those teens who set their mind to know and obey the true God.

What will become of leaders and parents in today’s adult generation? Everyone will answer for his or her behavior. “The soul who sins [and does not turn from it] shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).

The message of the prophecy is not to condemn, but rather to urge those who sin to turn from it. “But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed...he shall surely live; he shall not die” (verse 21).

So, we find in this prophecy a strong message of hope—for adults and teens alike...depending upon what each chooses to do. ❖



# In Brief...

## World News Review

### Wizard-Boy Book Boom

Wizardry is big business. The latest boy-wizard *Harry Potter* book is assured of best-seller status before it even hits the bookstores July 8. If you haven't heard of *Harry Potter*, you will. The series is immensely popular, with the first three books selling seven million copies before the Christmas rush last year. They also topped the *New York Times* best-seller lists.

An initial print-run of over 5,000 copies is considered respectable, but Joanne K. Rowling's latest offering will start with 1.5 million copies! Amazon.com predicts that Rowling's fourth book in a promised series of seven will be "the biggest online best-seller ever." Not surprisingly, the market for *Harry Potter* memorabilia is mushrooming as well. Can a movie be far behind?

The main character is an unusual 11-year-old boy. Raised by abusive foster-parents (relatives), he discovers that he has "special powers" and enrolls in "the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Once he masters the magic arts, he is able to confront his parents' murderer.

Rowling ages Harry one year with each new book, bringing in issues and interests that are age-pertinent. She promises to introduce a girl in the fourth book.

Presented as "good magic" that pursues and overcomes "bad magic," the theme of the books is controversial. Because they are entertaining and easy reading, attracting even young people who are not prone to read books at all, many teachers have introduced the *Harry Potter* books in the classroom.

Challenges to allowing, much less encouraging, their reading in classrooms have been launched in at least eight U.S. states. Passions of *Harry Potter*'s defenders are equal to those who want Harry and his Hogwarts banned from schools.

Who would *defend* books about a child wizard—and *why*? *Christianity Today* for one. It reasons, "the literary witchcraft of the *Harry Potter* series has almost no resemblance to the I-am-God mumbo jumbo of Wiccan circles. Author J.K. Rowling has created a world with real good and evil, and Harry is definitely on the side of light fighting the 'dark powers.'"

*Christianity Today* not only defends the books, it recommends them, saying, the "series is a *Book of Virtues* with a funny bone. Amid the laugh-out-loud scenes are wonderful examples of compassion, loyalty, courage, friendship, and even self-sacrifice. No wonder young readers want to be like these believable characters."

Conservative Christians who take issue with presenting witchcraft in a positive light are ridiculed as excessive, unwilling

or unable to "lighten up and allow kids to have some fun."

Would such critics judge God the same way? He told His people: "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Sources: Reuters, *Christianity Today*, January 10, 2000.

### Vatican Releases Text of Fatima Vision

The Vatican has released the text and commentary on the famous third vision of Fatima. This comes one month after the pope beatified two of the Portuguese children to whom the Virgin Mary supposedly appeared in a series of visions in 1917. Long held a secret in the Vatican archives, the third vision was thought to contain apocalyptic visions foretelling the end of the world.

A reading of the text seems to portray a bishop dressed in white who is killed amidst the bodies of other saints and martyrs. The vision is being interpreted as foretelling the attempted assassination of John Paul II on May 13, 1981. The pope has credited the Virgin Mary for sparing his life. It is interesting that the first of the Fatima visions occurred on May 13, 1917.

While the visions do not reveal any dramatic future events, the Vatican affirms the "personal revelatory" nature of the visions, thus giving credence to the role of visions to the church's faithful. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, writing in a comment upon the visions said, "the events to which the third part of the 'secret' of Fatima refers now seem part of the past.' Insofar as individual events are described, they belong to the past. Those who expected exciting apocalyptic revelations about the end of the world or the future course of history are bound to be disappointed."

The first two secrets have been known for some time. They deal with the outbreak of World War II, divine punishment for human sin and Russian Communism's attempt to eradicate religion. All three visions are officially relegated to past events.

In the long-term, those within the Catholic Church, the present Pope included, who represent the cult of Mary worship will likely gain the most.

Source: BBC News.

Contributors: Darris McNeely, Cecil Maranville

“VIKINGS,” (Continued from page 16)

ambitious private citizens in a way no other country has dared.”

### Being daring for peace

Being daring and being successful are not always synonymous! The best of intentions can quickly be sucked up in the quicksand of international diplomacy.

Solomon, who was no stranger to the complexities of international diplomacy, offered sage advice spotlighted in Proverbs 15:22. “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.”

Imagine the frustration of the citizenry of some of the previously-mentioned countries in conflict. They cannot emotionally afford to see peace negotiations go awry. With this verse in mind, it’s fascinating how the Norwegians are practicing some very real biblical power points in regards to negotiating human relationships.

### How are the Norwegians manufacturing this “planned-daring”?

Reporter Ford begins to lay out a picture for us to understand. Jan Egeland, the Norwegian diplomat who invented the model, and who supervised the “back-channel” through which the Oslo accord was negotiated, is quoted as saying “the purest form of the Norwegian model is the foreign ministry working in symbiosis with one or more academic or nongovernmental humanitarian organizations.”

Ford continues to outline the strength of the Norwegian peace offensive by adding Bishop of Oslo Gunnar Staalsett’s comments. “It is a particularity of Norway’s civil society that no one has a monopoly over bureaucracy or diplomacy. Rather, the government cooperates closely with organizations like churches and trade unions.”

It’s an interesting commentary on Norwegian society that no one has a monopoly or “corner on the market” on being involved in problem-solving.

Ford states that the Israeli-PLO accord remains the classic, but by no means the only, success of this new peace offensive. It is interesting to understand how this model example came about. It began with contacts that Terje Roed-Larsen, a Norwegian academic following his diplomat wife to her posting in Cairo, made with Palestinians and Israeli officials as he planned a study of living conditions in Gaza for FAFO, his labor union-funded think tank in Oslo. Those contacts led to secret talks in Norway over the course of a year that gradually involved even more senior officials, until the world was stunned to learn that the PLO and Israel

had made peace even though public negotiations in Washington had gone nowhere.

“The risk profile is lower if you start with contact at the non-governmental level, and slowly progress to the official level,” said Mona Juul, the wife of Roed-Larsen.

### Becoming moral entrepreneurs

Egeland, who established the model that Roed-Larsen operated from, recognizes the strengths and limitations of Norway’s ability to influence the international scene. He recognizes that such a small country has a limited number of governmental personnel, and therefore is limited in expertise in various parts of the world. So, many players must be brought to the table. Norway has the expertise and the money, but the contacts must come from elsewhere—be it the business world or academia.

Egeland’s vision, which began with a graduate thesis in the 1980s, has ultimately propelled him to responsibility as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s special envoy in the diplomatic hotspot of Colombia. His initial thesis offered the notion that a country like Norway might sometimes be better placed than more imposing nations to broker peace deals. The thesis that ultimately became a book titled *Impotent Superpower, Potent Small*

*State*, clearly outlined that Norway had an unfulfilled potential for facilitating, bridge building and being a “moral entrepreneur.”

A quote from the Nobel Institute’s Lundestad, a professor, interested me. In commenting on Egeland’s initial work he said, “as an academic work, it was no good, but more important was that Egeland believed it, and he used it as a basis for his activism.” His vision was a collaborative effort of private citizens, academia, businesses and movement agencies that Egeland describes as “venture capital for peace.”

Significantly, in all of this, Norway is not a threatening country. Since the days of the Vikings, it hasn’t threatened its neighbors. There are no strategic interests, colonial connections or political stakes. But, Norway is not neutral! It does belong to NATO. Being a peacemaker doesn’t mean that you don’t have values and commitments, but that you have a capacity to reach out and seek solutions through understanding, rather than ready-made conclusions.

Stein Villumstad, assistant general secretary of Norwegian Church Aid, makes a powerful point when stating, “money and reputation are not enough” to solve thorny problems. He goes on to state that, “NCA workers funded by the foreign ministry brokered a peace deal ending a civil war in 1996 by having a presence, a history, legitimacy on the ground, and entry into both sides fighting the war.”



*Viking ships were dreaded a thousand years ago—now Norwegian peacemakers are in demand*

Interestingly, Villumstad at this moment occasionally chairs negotiations between Ethiopia and Eritrea on their border war.

Expanding on this principle, Bishop Staalsett believes the guerrillas of Guatemala asked him to intervene because “they had confidence in my profile as a genuine person involved in the struggle for human rights.” Mr. Ford shares a keen insight: the “peace business” doesn’t always happen overnight. He emphasizes that Norway has shown a willingness to stick with the problems however long they take to solve. A case in point is its seven years in dealing with Guatemala.

Ford concludes his article with a meaningful quote by Egeland. “The United States has big sticks and carrots it can use to mediate, but we are activist facilitators. We can try to beg, convince, propose, suggest, prod, and to help—but we never say here is a draft agreement. We can help those who are willing and able to make peace or those who are willing, but unable. But we have no sticks and a very small carrot, so we cannot help those who are unwilling. And anyway, we haven’t made peace anywhere. The parties have. We have just helped.”

### Meaningful and realistic expectations

The Norwegians have come to understand the strengths and limitations of their role. They also have meaningful expectations regarding the personal responsibilities of the parties involved. Real change comes from the inside-out, not outside-in. But, it is at times necessary to shepherd people towards that awareness. Really what the Norwegian community is emulating is “Christianity 101.” They recognize it is not the size of their country, but the size of their mission that is of prime importance! They recognize that to be peacemakers is simply that—*making* peace—and it is a truly creative effort that entails every fabric of your being and every fabric of society. No one is discounted, and everyone is needed. Peacemaking is contrary to human nature so it demands new thinking, new ways and, at times, new people to achieve the goal.

Foundationally important is the track record that the Norwegians are committed to peace—no matter how long it takes. It’s been said, “There’s a difference between interest and commitment. When you are interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you’re committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results” (Arthur Turlock).

Long ago Christ spoke about people who were not committed. In the book of John, He called such people “hirelings.” He provided a comparison test between true leadership and simply “wannabes.” He stated in John 10:11–13, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.”

Oftentimes, the difference between a leader and a “hireling” is expecting immediate results and immediate turnabout. Often in life, what has taken time to build up to a point of contention also

takes time to bring down, and it takes time to find a worthy replacement to fill the void. The Norwegians have seemingly locked into the understanding of James 1:3–4 that reminds us that patience is not only a virtue, but also a strength. “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” The vision in your mind’s eye and in your heart must be stronger and louder than the tick of a clock or the picture of frustration that lies before you.

### Laying hold of lasting answers, now

Biblical prophecy tells that people will form a stream of humanity flowing towards Jerusalem saying, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (Isaiah 2:3).

This time of peace is further illustrated by a graphic depiction found in Zechariah 8:23. “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’”

There is a time in the future when the saints of God are going to be a “hot commodity,” because they, in turn, have applied living principles that offer hope to the hopeless. Right now people are looking towards Oslo and studying their approach to peace. And yes, Norwegians are everywhere in demand, just like the Jew of Zechariah 8:23, to tackle the thorny issues of peace. It’s amazing to consider the transformation in nature that these Norsemen have undergone over the past millennium. Perhaps this offers us a slight foretaste of how much the entire world will change under Jesus Christ’s millennial rule.

Yes, for now the “Vikings are coming,” again! But this time they have exchanged the instruments of war for the patience required to bring about peace.

We too, as Christians, have been called to be moral entrepreneurs. We are in a state of training to be kings and priests (Revelation 5:10) who will assist in the diplomatic efforts of the world tomorrow. Our challenges today are not necessarily solving the conflicts of Guatemala, Colombia or Jerusalem—but our personal challenges may seem just as big and just as frustrating. These, too, demand a new creativity!

You may wish to reread this article and try to practice some of the biblical power points the Norwegians are using in some of the personal struggles you are facing with family, job, church and school. Like the people of Norway, we must learn to move beyond simple recipes for peace and incorporate visionary activism that motivates people in our sphere of influence to give peace a chance. Like the Norwegians, we too must come to realize that we have everything to win and nothing to lose.

Wouldn’t it be nice to say that “everywhere there is a crisis, there is a Christian”? Yes, the Vikings are coming, again—but this time they echo the millennial refrain of “this is the way, walk you in it” as, step-by-step, they give peace at chance. How about you? ❖

# This Is the Way... Vikings Are Coming, Again!

by Robin Webber

**L**ong ago in Europe, one of the great cries of desperation spoken in many languages was “the Vikings are coming, the Vikings are coming!” As these bands of raiders sailed along the waterways of Europe, their impact over time changed entire political norms of their day.

The cumulative effect of these Scandinavian adventurers from 800 to 1066 A.D. was felt in the courts and ports of Kiev, Palermo, Paris, Dublin, York, London and Constantinople. Seemingly, the Vikings were everywhere! These were not simply hit-and-miss pirates with long ships and horned helmets, but as historians have come to recognize, an ingenious collection of people who were highly organized in their desire to expand their peoples’ impact on kingdoms near and far.

It’s amazing how things change and don’t change over a thousand years. The descendants of the Vikings seemingly are everywhere still, but now their “landings” on foreign soil are of a gentler nature. The anguished screams of terror of long ago have been transformed into the deliberate hush of quiet diplomacy. This is borne out in Peter Ford’s article that appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* of May 31, 2000, titled, “Norway Helps Itself by Helping Others Make Peace.”

Mr. Ford states, “You will find Norwegians in the

most unlikely places. In Sri Lanka, for example, a Norwegian deputy foreign minister is leading efforts to bring the government and Tamil rebels to the negotiating table. In Colombia, a Norwegian United Nations official is seeking to cement peace between the army and the Marxist guerrillas. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, Norwegian church workers are fostering talks between religious leaders on both sides of the war.”

He quotes Geir Lundestad, director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute, as proudly stating, “everywhere there is a crisis, there seems to be a Norwegian.” What an amazing difference a millennium makes, as “the People of the North” have turned from the industry of war to the “business of peace.”

When did this latest peaceful assault on other nations begin? Ford takes us back to when Norway helped broker the Oslo peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993. Since then, according to Ford, “the Norwegian government has been inundated with requests to help solve conflicts from Kashmir to Kurdistan, from Cyprus to Guatemala. Wherever it gets involved, Oslo has practiced its unique brand of diplomacy, blending official overtures with freelance initiatives by

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