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Political Correctness Hides the Truth

How the West's obsession with political correctness hides some sobering realities.

by Melvin Rhodes

Many readers will be familiar with the old Hans Christian Andersen fable about the emperor's new clothes, which was turned into a popular song in the 1940s.

The story was told about a not very bright emperor in medieval times who was visited by a tailor. The tailor told the emperor about a new miracle cloth that was the most expensive and best quality cloth ever produced. The miracle was that only the wise could see it. The emperor asked to see the cloth. When the tailor pulled it out of his bag there was, of course, nothing there. But the emperor, not wanting to appear ignorant, professed his admiration for the cloth and ordered a new suit for himself.

Some time later the emperor "wore" his new suit as he went out in a procession. Everybody in the empire had been told about the new miracle cloth and all the crowds lining the route shouted out their approval. Except for one little boy. When the emperor and his entourage passed by, he exclaimed:

"The king doesn't have any clothes on!" Once the obvious was stated, the crowds saw the truth of the boy's remarks and the emperor was ridiculed.

Political correctness is like the emperor's new clothes. Not wanting to seem "un-wise," the vast majority of people go along with it, few ever actually thinking for themselves and questioning the prevailing "wisdom" of the age. As the apostle Paul wrote of a previous age, "Professing to be wise, they

became fools..." (Romans 1:22). This was certainly the fate of the fabled emperor. For the rest of us, political correctness could prove fatal.

Historic continuum

The horrific terrorist attacks of September 11 were the worst single terrorist action against any nation in history, but they are part of a historic continuum. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has aptly described the goal of the forces of Islamic fundamentalism as "a war to reverse the triumph of the West" (quoted by George F. Will, *Lansing State Journal*, September 15, 2001). Herein lies a paradox. While Western culture and the Western economic system are both making inroads into even



Pakistani Muslims watch a pro-Taliban rally from the roof of a mosque in Rawalpindi (Reuters/Pawel Kopczynski)

the remotest parts of the world, Western influence and power have
(See "POLITICAL," page 3)



A President Who Prays

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America is on a war footing, as daily reports come out of Washington about the latest military operations in Afghanistan. Meanwhile on the domestic front there is the appearance of anthrax. As anxiety grows, there is one piece of information that is encouraging to those who look to the higher power of God as their guide and stay during this time of national testing. America has a president who prays, and in that we can all take a measure of hope.

A recent article in *USA Today* focused on the personal habit of President George W. Bush to start his day in prayer. "Religion infuses the president's daily life. Bush, 54, starts every day on his knees, praying. He reads the Bible each morning and studies daily Bible lessons. He often asks a Cabinet secretary to lead a prayer at the beginning of Cabinet meetings. He says he frequently prays in the Oval Office."

President Bush is not reluctant to talk about his faith. He says, "I pray all the time, when I am alone in the Oval Office (and) something might be on my mind...I will pray. I don't think that I could be sitting here as comfortable as I am and as peaceful as I am had it not been for my religion."

The Bible records the prayers of many leaders who cried out to God in prayer during a time of national crisis. Often there was an admission of sin, or transgression, against the commandments and covenant. A common plea in the prayers was for God to vindicate His sovereignty before the nations.

An example is the prayer of Judah's King Hezekiah during the time of an Assyrian invasion. It is recorded in 2 Kings 19:15-19: "O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.... Hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods.... Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone."

God heard this prayer and turned back the threat to the nation. Judah had another opportunity to prove herself faithful before God.

The outcome of this current conflict is unseen. God has blessed America with prosperity and protection during its 225-year history. Pending the final casualty list, the September 11 attack could result in more American deaths in one day on its own soil than any previous day in the nation's history. That is a staggering fact which has deeply wounded our national psyche.

In his inaugural address, President Bush made reference to the divine protection and presence of God over America's history. He referred to an observation made to Thomas Jefferson after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "We know the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?" The new president concluded, "This work continues. This story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm."

Along with the president, we pray that God is still directing this storm into which the United States has entered. The poet Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of...." Never undervalue the power of fervent, heartfelt prayer.

—Darris McNeely

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“POLITICAL,” (Continued from page 1)

been declining in another sense since World War II.

The dominant Western powers of the last two centuries have been the United Kingdom and the United States, fulfilling the prophecies in Genesis 48 and 49, which prophesied Joseph’s supremacy “in the last days” (49:1, 22; 48:19). No other two nations have been so influential around the world in the last two centuries. Prior to World War II the British Empire was the pre-eminent power in the world; since World War II the United States has been. In 1945, following their triumph over the Axis powers, it seemed as if the two nations would remain the major powers for an indefinite period. But shortly after the end of the war the British started dismantling their empire. Within two decades almost all of it was gone.

Other empires were also coming to an end, as the European empires handed over political control of their former colonies to new indigenous leaders, most of whom rapidly became despotic tyrants. In some cases, terrorism was used against the ruling Western colonizers, forcing them into retreat. My wife and I lived through the terrorist war in Rhodesia, which resulted in Rhodesia’s defeat and the birth of Zimbabwe. Political correctness saw this change as progressive, but it was another milestone in the “war to reverse the triumph of the West.”

The West since 1945 has clearly been in political and military retreat. At the same time, Western culture has become more pervasive as world trade boomed and modern communications spread American influence into every region.

With the changing political climate after World War II, this period of decolonization was seen as progressive. Political correctness ridiculed the empire and applauded the newly independent nations that replaced it. This has obscured a significant reality that has a bearing on the events of September 11. The fact is that for the best part of two hundred years, the British kept the lid on some of the major tensions that have now come to the fore. Hindus and Muslims lived in comparative harmony on the Indian subcontinent

during the time of the British Raj. Today Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan are enemies, armed with nuclear weapons that could be used in a future conflict.

Similarly the British Mandate of Palestine between the two world wars tried to keep the lid on Arab-Jewish tensions following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

American historian John Truslow Adams wrote a prophetic passage in his 1940 book, *The British Empire (1784-1939)*. Writing at a time when the British Empire and Commonwealth were already at war with Nazi Germany while America remained neutral, he



A man sells Osama bin Laden posters outside a mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia. Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim country, has repeatedly said it supports the U.S.-led war on terrorism (Reuters/Darren Whiteside)

warned that “the possible overthrow of the British Empire would be a catastrophe scarcely thinkable. Not only would it leave a vacuum over a quarter of the globe into which all the wild winds of anarchy, despotism and spiritual oppression would rush, but the strongest bulwark outside ourselves for our own safety and freedom would have been destroyed” (p. 358).

In answering the disciples’ question “...when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3), Jesus prophesied an increased frequency of war between ethnic groups (verse 7) as “nation [would] rise against nation.” The Greek word for nation here is *ethnos*. There has always been ethnic

conflict, but in the past, large multinational empires largely subdued it. The end of these empires in the 20th century has led to a quadrupling in the number of nations and a proliferation in ethnic conflict. Interestingly, Luke 21:20 shows that Jerusalem will become a focal point of world conflict at the end, something that might not have been the case if the Ottoman Empire had continued to rule over the area.

Christ also warned of false religious leaders, saying that “many will come in My name, saying ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:5).

This is not only true of false Christianity. There have been secular leaders in the last few decades who claimed they were giving the people a millennial utopia—Hitler, Stalin and Mao, among others. Islam also has had its share of radical leaders claiming to speak for God.

The increased chaos and confusion of the last 50 years has largely resulted from the end of the empires that previously dominated the globe. As the West has retreated, ethnic and religious tensions have come to the fore.

This is a religious war

Osama bin Laden has called the current conflict a “war between Islam and atheism.” Interestingly, 10 years ago

Saddam Hussein described the Persian Gulf War as a conflict between “Islam and Christianity.” Neither phrase is correct. The West can hardly be called Christian anymore, but neither is it atheist, as most people, in America at least, still hold to some religious beliefs. The

today vouching for the ‘peaceful’ nature and intent of Islam. Oprah Winfrey has done a show on ‘modern Muslim women’—none of whom would be allowed to dress in contemporary clothing, be educated, or even appear on television if they lived in

fire on a church service, killing 16 people.

Alarming, Pakistan’s former intelligence chief Hamid Gul warned that if Taliban leader “Mullah Omar declares jihad, Muslim youths will again come to fight. The Americans will light a fire from Morocco to Mindanao” (“Blood and Fundamentalism” by Julian Manyon, *The Spectator*, September 22, 2001). Added to which we should bear in mind that in the Islamic world “most countries have a rapidly growing population, at least 60% of which is under 25” (“Damping Down the Haystack” by Bruce Anderson, *The Spectator*, September 22, 2001). Outside of the Gulf states, “this means that there is a large supply of young men with few career prospects, whose lives have no meaning except dreams, violence and religion” (ibid., Anderson).

In a column titled “This IS a Religious War,” Andrew Sullivan warned, “Individual faith and pluralism were the targets Sept. 11th, and it was only the beginning of an epic battle” (September 17, 2001).

The Old Testament prophetic book of Daniel warns of a coming conflict between the “king of the South” (likely the Islamic nations) and the “king of the North” (some of the Western powers) (Daniel 11:40-44). It is a continuation of a historic struggle that has gone on for over two thousand years.

Changing demographics have been factors here. The West’s decline reflects declining birth rates in Western nations, while the rise of Islam as a world force is partly due to a high population growth rate.

“In the long run...Mohammed wins out. Christianity spreads mainly by conversion, Islam by conversion and reproduction. The percentage of Christians in the world peaked at about 30% in the 1980s, leveled off and is now declining, and will probably approximate about 25% of the world’s population by 2025. As a result of their extremely high rates of population growth, the proportion of Muslims in the world will continue to



Mourners pray in front of coffins of Pakistani Christians massacred by six men firing assault rifles in Bahawalpur (Reuters/Asim Tanvir)

present crisis could best be described as a war between militant Islam and secularism. It is, however, the continuation of a conflict that follows 14 centuries of on-again, off-again wars between Islam and Christianity.

As the West has secularized, it has become more tolerant of other religions. Changes to immigration laws have encouraged the immigration of millions of people from Islamic countries into the liberal Western democracies. Significantly, not one of the 56 countries that are members of the Islamic Conference allows Westerners to settle and become citizens, unless they marry a native Muslim and convert first. In their eyes, Christianity and Western secularism are not compatible with Islamic values. Could it be that the West has made a mistake in supposing that they are? Political correctness maintains that all peoples can be successfully brought together in the American melting pot. But what if this is wrong?

Columnist Cal Thomas writes: “One sees many white, Anglo-Saxon, mostly Protestant members of Congress and others on television

radical Muslim states” (“Radical Islam Is a Real Threat,” *Lansing State Journal*, October 28, 2001).

Thomas asked a Sudanese Episcopal bishop “what he believes about the nature and intent of contemporary Islam. ‘It is a militant religion,’ he tells me and laughs at those who serve as its character witnesses.” Continuing, “Bishop Dolli was in Washington recently. He attempted to warn Congress and anyone else who would listen of the dangers posed by Islam, especially in its militant form.”

Sudan is a front-line state in the present day conflict between Islam and Christianity. Others include Nigeria (where Muslim mobs burned down 12 churches in the city of Kano on one Sunday morning recently, killing hundreds of people), the Balkans, Chechnya, Indonesia and the Philippines. Pakistan’s small Christian minority was attacked at the end of October when gunmen opened

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increase dramatically, amounting to 20% of the world's population about the turn of the century, surpassing the number of Christians some years later, and probably accounting for about 30% of the world's population by 2025" (Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 1996, p. 65).

The enemy within

The changing world demographics that Huntington refers to are evidenced by internal changes in the demographics in Western countries. Falling birth rates since World War II led to significant and unprecedented changes to immigration law that have resulted in substantial numbers of people of other cultures being present in the West. Among others, tens of millions of Muslims have moved from high birthrate countries to the low birthrate nations of the Western world. This has compounded the West's problems in dealing with terrorism. Although the focus right now is on Afghanistan and the Taliban, the fact remains that the terrorists who were directly involved in the events of September 11 had all lived in the United States for some time.

Political correctness continually reassures the public that American Muslims are loyal Americans. But "Michigan State Police confirmed Monday [October 22] that many terrorist groups—including Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network—have members and financial supporters in the state" (*Lansing State Journal*, October 23, 2001). With an estimated eight million Muslims in the United States, if only 1 percent are supporters of extremism, that's a potential 80,000 terrorists.

Disturbingly, "in the U.S., 80% of mosques are estimated by the Sufi Hisham al-Kabbani, born in Lebanon and now living in the U.S., to be under the control of Wahhabi imams, who preach extremism..." ("Ground Zero and the Saudi Connection" by Stephen Schwartz, *The Spectator*, September 22, 2001). This suggests that many in the next generation of followers in the United States are more likely to be extremists.

Political correctness assures us that

the second generation of any immigrant group is fully assimilated even if the parents aren't, but Schwartz's article points out that this will not be the case with the next generation of Muslims in the United States.

"These Wahhabis...accuse their own fathers of heresy, sin and unbelief. And the young children of the immigrants, when they grow up in this country [the United States], get exposed only to this one-sided version of Islam and are led to think that this is the only Islam" (ibid.).

Explaining Wahhabism, the same article says it is "a strain of Islam that emerged...less than two centuries ago. It is violent, it is intolerant and it is fanatical beyond measure. It originated in Arabia, and it is the official the-

So we see here a contradiction. The enemy is largely within, but political correctness cannot admit to that, for fear the emperor will be exposed. So, the pretense is maintained that the enemy is solely without.

ology of the Gulf states. Wahhabism is the most extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism, and its followers are called Wahhabis. Not all Muslims are suicide bombers, but all Muslim suicide bombers are Wahhabis." The sect was founded by Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-92). "From the beginning...his cult was associated with the mass murder of all who opposed it. For example, the Wahhabis fell upon the city of Qarbala in 1801 and killed 2,000 ordinary citizens in the streets and markets."

Continuing from the same article: "Bin Laden is a Wahhabi. So are the suicide bombers in Israel. So are his Egyptian allies, who exulted as they stabbed foreign tourists to death at

Luxor not many years ago, bathing in blood up to their elbows and emitting blasphemous cries of ecstasy. So are the Algerian terrorists whose contribution to the purification of the world consisted of murdering people for such sins as running a movie projector or reading secular newspapers. So are the Taliban-style guerrillas in Kashmir who murder Hindus."

Interestingly, "Wahhabism is subsidized by Saudi Arabia," America's chief ally in the Gulf! They are motivated by a similar conviction as motivated the communists, who threatened the West during the Cold War: "the belief that the West was or is decadent and doomed."

So we see here a contradiction. The enemy is largely within, but political correctness cannot admit to that, for fear the emperor will be exposed. So, the pretense is maintained that the enemy is solely without.

Contribution of liberalism

Clearly, liberal thinking has been a contributory factor to the crisis in which the West now finds itself. Not only have the post-war "progressive" policies on decolonization, religion and immigration played a role, but major contributors also include the West's liberal moral laws, all dating back to the Sexual Revolution of the '60s.

"The belief that the West was or is decadent and doomed," quoted above, is a significant factor here. In spite of religious differences, there was a time when the rest of the world looked up to the United States, Britain and the European powers. "Righteousness exalts a nation" we are told in Proverbs 14:34, "but sin is a reproach to any people." The rest of the world gets its impression of America from television, movies and music, all of which are heavily violent and sexual in content.

Our relations with the rest of the world will only be helped if we clean up our nation and become a godlier people. "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:1). ❖

War on Terrorism Is Spiritual Warfare

Al Qaeda terrorists labor to define the war on terrorism as the West vs. Islam—a definition that Western leaders throw off. Yet deeply entrenched religious issues are at the heart of the current war. And they are inflamed by a power greater than either the worldwide terrorist network or the combined military might of the United States, Britain, the rest of NATO and Russia.

by Don Ward

The earth's geopolitical landscape shifted dramatically with America's recent declaration of war against terrorism. Even one who regularly watches the news may be unaware of how dramatic this shift is.

Changing coalitions

The nations of NATO invoked article 5 that states an attack on one member is an attack on all. NATO allies further agreed to provide the United States with a complete eight-point list of assistance, including the use of AWACS surveillance planes that are now patrolling the U.S. East Coast (Reuters, October 7, 2001).

Several Arab states voiced their support of America's war on terrorism. But most Arab states were long on rhetoric and short on substance as the coalition developed. Saudi Arabia granted the United States permission to use one of its bases, but stated that it would not permit the United States to launch attacks on Muslims from Saudi soil. Pakistan granted the United States permission to use her air space and eventually granted the United States permission to use an air base. But the United States still needed support from countries in Central Asia that border Afghanistan and from Russia. Support from this region was needed to buffer Russia and China.

Russia has dropped objections of the expansion of NATO eastward and may be rewarded for its cooperation with NATO by being accepted into NATO. During his attendance at the eighth annual European Union-Russian Summit in Brussels, Belgium, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that "step by step the partnership between Russia and the EU is gaining momentum." Putin also declared his willingness to take "an entirely new look at the expansion of NATO," if the alliance develops into a "political organization," and Moscow is "involved in that process" (BBC Radio Report). Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair has said, "We are only at the

start of what we can gain from the new role for Russia" (Reuters, October 5, 2001).

Central Asian oil fields

The United States' interest in Central Asia extends far beyond its war on terrorism. Central Asia is the repository of one of the world's largest oil reserves. One field alone, the Kashagan field, located southeast of Kazakhstan's port of Atyrau in the northeast sector of the Caspian Sea, has estimated recoverable reserves of 10 to 30 billion barrels. At the end of October, ENI, operator of the field, announced that the site's second appraisal well flowed at 7,400 barrels per day. Up to five wells are planned by 2003 (Reuters, October 29, 2001). Thus the importance of this region to the industrial nations is of great significance. Afghanistan has long served as the principal crossroads in this region. So the geopolitical implications of who controls Afghanistan are incalculable.

The United States is counting on logistical support from Turkey and Israel in case there is an attack on the rear flank. In fact, Turkey announced on November 1 that it will deploy 90 special forces troops to Afghanistan, making it the first Muslim nation to join the American-led attacks on the Taliban and Osama bin Laden. Turkey maintains NATO's second-largest standing army behind the United States. Unlike Afghanistan and other Muslim nations, however, Turkey is strictly secular and it has been a close ally of the United States and Israel (*New York Times*, November 1, 2001).

Since the development of the coalition against terrorism, and with Russia's move toward the West, China is left scrambling to try to regain her political bearings. China does not know whether to support the war or join in with the Muslims or raise the heat over Taiwan. But after the recent APEC meetings she has at least voiced support for the war on terrorism.

In the meantime, Israel, with the greatest

This war is a spiritual war. Satan is the author of sin and death and his purpose is to subvert and thwart God's plan for bringing sons and daughters into His family.

knowledge and experience in fighting terrorism, is told to sit on the sidelines and cheer for the coalition. But many voices and parties in Israel object to sitting on the sidelines since the U.S.-led coalition includes Arab nations that have waged terrorist activities against Israel.

Ancient seeds of strife

Here is the heart of the current conflict. The terrorists claim that they are attacking America for two principal reasons: first and foremost because of her support of Israel, and secondly, to drive the infidels out of their sacred lands. But the age-old family feud between the sons of Abraham, provoked by the real author of evil, the devil, is the real reason people are willing to kill themselves in order to destroy others who are also made in the image of God.

Bible prophecy reveals that Abraham's son Ishmael (and by implication, his descendants) "shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Genesis 16:12).

This ancient history comes to a catastrophic climax at the end of the age when the descendants of Ishmael and surrounding nations enter into a covenant for the destruction of Israel. "They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more. For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot" (Psalm 83:3-8).

No one can possibly understand the age-old hatreds that exist among the peoples of the world unless they understand the spirit world. Most, if not all, of the nations of the world believe in some higher power. That is, they believe in the existence of an unseen world. Most of the world's religions believe that there is one supreme deity. Most religions teach their followers that their ultimate reward is eternal life in some form. However, the



Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

The battle that is being waged against terrorism in Central Asia will eventually shift to the Middle East. The focal point will eventually become Jerusalem.

perceived road to eternal life is not the same for all religions.

Moreover, the teachings and practices of the world's religions vary greatly. Islam, Judaism and Christianity all have a different view of the nature of God. To some degree, Christianity has its roots in Judaism, in the sense that both accept the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God. The Jews are still looking for the prophesied Messiah. Christians believe that Jesus, the Christ, is the Son of God. Muslims view Jesus as a great prophet, but they do not view Him as the Son of God.

No religion views the Supreme Deity of the universe as evil. God, as each religion interprets God, is the ultimate arbiter of good and evil. So the determination of good and evil is a spiritual matter. Thus good and evil must be revealed to humankind.

So how does the Supreme Deity of the universe reveal His will to humans? Christians and Jews believe that God inspired the prophets who then faithfully recorded and communicated the Word of God to the people in the form of the Bible—the written Word of God. Muslims believe that the archangel Gabriel revealed the words of Allah to the prophet Mohammed.

If it is the same God who inspired both the Bible and the Koran, why is there such a variance in the definition of good and evil? And why is there such a difference in how the process of salvation is viewed?

All war has spiritual roots

President Bush states that the war on terrorism is not against Islam but against evil. He apparently equates evil with terrorism. Other coalition leaders also insist that this is not a religious war. On the other hand, the Islamic fundamentalists have proclaimed jihad or holy war against America. Both sides claim that they are fighting against evil. The Islamic fundamentalists openly state that they are fighting against the great Satan, which they define as the United States of America.

In one sense, one can agree with President Bush when he states that this is not a religious war. That is, the battle is not against a particular religious group, but against evil. But no one can logically argue that this is not spiritual warfare. All wars in fact are ultimately spiritual in nature, since all wars are fought in the name of justice for someone or some cause. In fact, the United States initially labeled the war on terrorism as "Operation Infinite Justice." Muslim cler-

ics objected, however, arguing, “Only Allah can administer ‘infinite justice.’” The war was eventually labeled “Operation Enduring Freedom.”

So, what is this war really about? And for that matter, what are all wars really about? Based on the rhetoric of the day, it seems quite logical to assert that war has to do with the battle of the ages—that is, the great war between good and evil. In nearly all the wars that have ever been waged by humans against humans, both sides were usually wrong, since in most cases neither side represented the true God of the universe. Yet each side proclaims that it is fighting a righteous war in the name of its god(s).

To really understand the origin of war and terrorism, one must understand who God is, what God is and what is His purpose; and the corollary to that is who man is, what man is and what is his purpose? God is spirit; He is our Creator and Father. He created human beings for the purpose of bringing them into a relationship with Him that would allow them to be born into His family as glorious spirit beings. But as we shall see, a great spirit being rebelled against God and His plan for bringing sons and daughters into His family.

Before God created humans, He created the angels for the purpose of helping Him to bring sons and daughters into His family (Hebrews 1:14). The angels were organized in a hierarchical order. Three great archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer, were created for specific purposes. Since God is righteous and perfect in all His ways, He cannot be the author of evil. So the angels were created perfect and given free will to choose whether they would be the servants of God or of iniquity (Ezekiel 28:15).

One of the archangels, Lucifer, along with a third of the angels, rebelled against God and tried to take over the throne of God (Revelation 12:3-4; Isaiah 14:12-15). This event marked the initial battle between the forces of good and evil. From this event to the present day, Satan has tried to subvert and thwart God’s great purpose of bringing sons and daughters into His family.

The first humans, Adam and Eve, were created without sin. That is, in their initial state, they were created neutral with free will to choose good or evil. God

told Adam and Eve to look to Him for the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). But Adam and Eve decided to choose for themselves what is good and what is evil and thus cut themselves off from God (Genesis 3:22-24). Satan is the god of this world and to a large degree controls the kingdoms of this world. In one of Satan’s temptations of Christ, he offered Him the kingdoms of this world if He would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4:8-10). This temptation reveals the very motive and purpose of Satan’s current objective and strategy. Satan is filled with an insatiable quest and desire to be worshiped.

The spiritual objective: obscure the true goal

One should never forget that Satan is the author of sin and death and his purpose is to subvert and thwart God’s plan for bringing sons and daughters into His family. Satan knows that if he can deceive humans into worshiping him, they will be denying the great Creator God and Father and thus losing out on salvation.

Furthermore, Satan knows that Jesus Christ is coming back to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. So Satan has conceived a plan of deceiving the world into worshiping him. Satan is going to possess one who will sit in the temple of God proclaiming that he is God; and all the peoples of the world, except those whose names are written in the book of life, will worship him (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 13:8).

Moreover, Satan knows that Jesus Christ is going to return to Jerusalem. He knows that Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the world. So the battle that is being waged against terrorism in Central Asia will eventually shift to the Middle East. The focal point will eventually become Jerusalem.

The consistent cry of the Israelis and the Palestinians centers on each one calling the other terrorists. The Jews believe that God gave them the land that is now called Palestine. The Islamic world believes that their soil and Jerusalem must be purged of the infidels. At the moment there is somewhat of a lull before the storm in Jerusalem. President Bush has placated the Arab world momentarily by speaking in favor of a Palestinian state. And the Jews are so weary from the

constant threat of terror that they are willing to compromise on Jerusalem for the sake of peace.

One must never forget that Satan is the source of all evil and that one of Satan’s age-old strategies is to divide and conquer. Sadly, the nations that form the coalition against terrorism and those who foster and perpetrate terrorism are all pawns on Satan’s great chessboard of deception. Christ said, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there shall be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8).

The world has indeed entered a period of sorrow and terror, and the world will never be the same. From this point forward, history will be divided into two distinct periods, pre-September 11 and post-September 11.

Bible prophecy reveals that the Holy City, Jerusalem, is going to be divided and trodden down by the nations before Christ returns to bring true peace to this world (Revelation 11:1-2). Moreover, Jerusalem is going to become the headquarters for the beast power (Daniel 11:45). But the good news is, Jesus Christ and the saints are going to take over the kingdoms of this world and usher in a new age of peace for all nations (Revelation 11:15).

No matter how just a war might seem to be in the minds of humans, and regardless of how humans seek to justify their cause, this world will never know peace until the peoples of the world look to the true source of peace. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and only He can bring peace to this world.

So, regardless of what the U.S. president or any other political leader says, this war is a spiritual war. It is war for the souls (the life essence) of men and women. Indeed the geopolitical landscape has changed, but this is just one more ugly scene in Satan’s montage. Jesus Christ is going to come again and crush the kingdoms of this world and establish an everlasting kingdom and the nations will learn war no more (Isaiah 2:4). ❖

Beware of Prophecies!

Does this strike you as an unusual article title for this publication? It shouldn't. Not all prophecies are worth your time and consideration—even some of the most intriguing ones! The indiscriminating face two dangers: being taken in by misleading information or failing to hear and heed genuine prophetic messages.

Two "prophets" whose messages are currently being given wide circulation illustrate the problem.

by Cecil E. Maranville

Interest in prophecy has skyrocketed since September 11. Religious authors aggressively market their prophetic books, and preachers push the theme on their television programs. Even secular publications feature articles on the subject. With the Internet now a part of everyday life, e-mail circulates ancient prophecies with a speed that would mystify their long-dead authors.

One of the most popular "prophecies" being circulated by e-mail is a message said to have been written by the 16th-century doctor cum prophet, Nostradamus. You may have read it: "In the City of God there will be a great thunder, two brothers torn apart by chaos, while the fortress and doers, the great leader will succumb, the third big war will begin in the big city is burning" (Nostradamus, 1654)."

A different version of this message is also being circulated in which "the City of York" replaces "the City of God." Still another adds the following: "On the 11th day of the 9th month, two metal birds will crash into two tall statues in the new city, and the world will end soon after." There are other versions, but you get the idea. The messages are obviously intended to demonstrate that Nostradamus foretold the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

Glaring problems challenge this assertion. The first is, Nostradamus died in 1566! Obviously, he didn't write anything in 1654! But, beyond that, he didn't write anything like the above messages or the several variations of them that are making the rounds of private e-mail lists.

A similar message to the first one noted above actually was written—not by Nostradamus—but by Neil Marshall, a Canadian university student. Mr. Marshall wrote it in an essay about Nostradamus in 1997 to demonstrate how easily his "prophecies" could be manipulated to say virtually anything (Urban Legends Reference Page, © 1995-2001 by Barbara and David P. Mikkelson). Probably, someone carelessly did a word search for "Nostradamus" and pulled up this essay without bothering to read it in context. It was cut and pasted into an e-mail—and off it went around the cyber world, repeatedly!

Even if Nostradamus was a true prophet (and he wasn't), and even if his predictions came true (and they haven't), these factors would still not qualify him as

someone whose writings you should read and heed. Why not? We'll explain the answer later in this article.

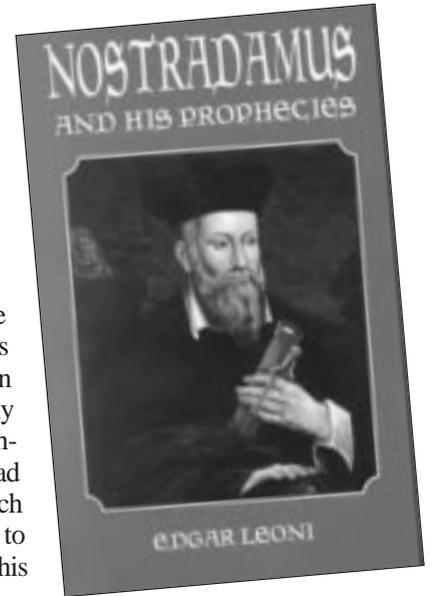
Malachy's "prophecies"

Another man whom some think of as a prophet is having his prophecies circulated widely. An Irishman named Malachy O'Morgair was a Catholic archbishop in the 12th century. He had a series of visions in 1140, which he wrote down and presented to the pope. For whatever reason, his 111 prophecies were placed in the Vatican's archives, where they were forgotten for the next four and a half centuries.

When they were "discovered," people with creative imaginations claimed that they prophesied the names of every pope from Innocent II through to the present. No pope was actually named, of course, because Malachy's "prophecies" were written in the same type of non-specific language as those of Nostradamus. It's therefore easy to read meanings into them.

You may have heard about a "prophecy" that claims the present pope is the next-to-the-last one, without realizing that it comes from Malachy's "prophecies." Again, failing to look at the man and his messages in the broader context has caused many people to stumble into giving this single "prophecy" unjustified credibility.

The non-specific language of his messages is only one of the discrediting features. His list also includes so-called anti-popes—men who were not recognized as popes by the Catholic Church! As for those who are inclined to say that his list proves the next pope will be the last one, not even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* makes that claim. "It has been noticed concerning *Petrus Romanus*, who according to St. Malachy's list is to be the last pope, but the prophecy does not say that no



Even if Nostradamus was a true prophet, and even if his predictions came true, these factors would still not qualify him as someone whose writings you should read and heed. Why not?

popes will intervene between him and his predecessor.... It merely says that he is to be the last, so that we may suppose as many popes as we please before 'Peter the Roman'" ("Prophecy").

(Lest we leave you curious about what Malachy foretold about the last pope, he only pulled together a few words from prophecies you can read in the book of Revelation. The Bible, by the way, is much more specific than Malachy was.)

In spite of the facts, you will likely hear a great deal more about Malachy's prophecies. A major movie on Malachy is currently in the planning stages and is scheduled to be released in 2002. *End of Time* features a renegade monk (to be played by Martin Sheen) who tries to block the election of the final pope. The plot centers on this monk's belief in Malachy's prophecies, which, of course, the moviemakers portray as 100 percent valid. The lowly monk must convince the great political leaders of the world of the disaster they will invite if they fail to block the appointment of "the last pope."

Sometimes fiction imitates truth. Students of Bible prophecy know that the Bible actually does predict that a religious leader will play a prominent part in the crescendo of human history at the end of the age. It's a shame that the Bible's message is potentially overshadowed or denigrated by a fraud and a movie about him. (See our booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* for a presentation of the truth of the subject.)

That's why we need to beware of (some) prophecies!

Purpose of prophecy

What good is prophecy? What purpose does it serve? If a genuine prophet with bona fide "credentials" walked into your life today and could tell you what was going to happen tomorrow, what difference would it make to you? Why do people want to know the future?

Clearly, after September 11, many people want to know what disasters are impending, so they can save themselves and their families. Where will the next bomb be detonated? Where will the next anthrax-tainted letter be delivered? These are reasonable concerns, but the purpose of biblical prophecy does not speak to them.

In one congregation I pastored, two brothers would occasionally invite me to their home to answer their questions about the Bible. Their questions always centered on the same theme: What's going to happen next in Bible prophecy?

Their lives were not in imminent danger; nothing like September 11 had occurred. Their motivation to learn about prophecy was different. Their interest was similar to that of the millions who will line up to see *End of Time*—it holds entertainment value. People want to be intrigued by the mysterious aspects and frightened by the terrifying portions of the Bible that encompass prophecy. Those young men learned the basic framework of what the Bible predicts. But, like so many people today, they didn't grasp *the reason for Bible prophecy*.

Do you know what it is?

In the simplest of terms, its purpose is to motivate people who hear it to change the way they live. It's not intended that they should merely change their investments or their physical location for their own safety and well-being. Neither is it intended to be "a last warning" so people can "get right with God" before they die. It's intended to motivate them to change the way they live in normal times.

In broader terms, biblical prophecy is targeted to the principal descendants of the ancient tribes of Israel. It forecasts their future and, by extension, the future of all nations. It's framed in terms of the unique, personal relationship that Israel of old had with the Creator. As the people of Israel abandoned the covenant relationship into which God had invited them, they began to incur the consequences of going it alone.

Far from being merely an anecdote of ancient history, the messages to Old Testament Israel extend through the present and into the future. Superficial readers of the Bible do not realize that *the prophet* Jesus Christ spoke the same language that the Old Testament prophets spoke. That is, He preached a message of a personal relationship with God within the same framework—that of a covenant.

The Old Testament, including its prophetic messages, should help us understand how to be a Christian. Sadly, most religious teachers possess and convey only

a shallow understanding of its profound truths.

When a man or woman actually can predict the future

In this article, we have exposed two frauds. Can anyone predict the future? What should we do if we encounter a man or a woman who actually can tell us what is going to happen tomorrow? Wouldn't that mean that this person is someone to whom we should pay attention?

Surprisingly, no, it wouldn't.

Read what God counseled His people on this matter: "If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, *and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place*, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 13:1-4, NIV).

Do you perceive the heart of the matter? We must discern prophecy from the point of view of where it takes us—specifically, if it helps us to fulfill our covenant obligations to God. It is a tragic mistake to view prophecy from the singular perspective of "will it come true?"

The apostle John repeats the message with the admonition: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

Please read beyond verse 4 of Deuteronomy 13 to find the shocking instruction on how Old Testament Israel was to deal with these prophets. They were frauds, not because they could not predict the future, but because their predictions led people into spiritual traps. Rather than have their prophecies published and widely circulated, those false prophets faced the death penalty—literally.

While we understand that this penalty phase of God's law isn't administered today, shouldn't we take direction from the principle that is so clearly expressed? Beware of prophecies. ❖

What Do We Do Now?

In the wake of the war with international terrorism and the subsequent Allied response, a new kind of protracted conflict is shaping up. We are threatened with the shadows of an apocalypse of long duration. How do we cope?

by John Ross Schroeder

Our generation is getting used to the fact that this planet is not a safe place. In truth it hasn't been for a very long time.

America's sheltered life has drawn to an abrupt end. We still long for normalcy, but don't really expect it anytime soon. Terrorist strikes from the air and bioterrorism on the ground in New York City and Washington D.C. have revealed the terrifying vulnerability of the open societies of the West. In fact no nation feels safe on an earth that is rapidly developing into a new kind of war zone.

Our uncertain future

We have the uneasy feeling that the world is moving from one era into another, and most human beings tend to be very uncomfortable with too much change in too short a time.

The 20th century was always the age of anxiety. Yet, after two world wars and two draining conflicts in Southeast Asia, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 seemed to herald a new era and a fresh opportunity for world peace. Leaders talked of a "new world order."

Just 12 years later, we seem further from real peace than ever. The future seems uncertain as the present world crisis escalates. We appear to be on the edge of global anxiety.

One of the purposes of preaching and publishing the gospel is to spread the certain message that the Bible offers us real hope for the future in spite of our present chaotic, unstable world.

The apostle Paul tells us that "everything that was written in the past [the Old Testament] was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4, NIV).

Jeremiah to the rescue

The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah lived in a moral and political climate not so different from our own. His nation was under constant threat from two ancient powers of the time, Babylon and Egypt. By that time the Assyrian Empire (which had previously conquered and taken the 10-tribe northern House of Israel into captivity) had begun to disintegrate somewhat.

Jeremiah's basic commission from God includ-

ed warning his nation of Judah about its demise and eventual captivity by a foreign power, King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon.

In the course of 40 years in a major prophetic office (626-587 B.C.), encompassing the reigns of five kings of Judah, Jeremiah learned certain hard-won lessons that 21st century man desperately needs to grasp and understand.

Prominent among them was his understanding of the limitations of mankind—that we cannot live proper and fulfilling lives without the continual guidance of Almighty God. One newspaper writer recently observed, "Nation states are failing to settle the world's differences, but a new kind of imperialism can do it" ("Dawn Chorus for the New Age of Empire" by Robert Cooper, *The Sunday Times*, October 28, 2001). Human hope springs eternal, but when based solely on mankind's limited resources, we are destined for disappointment.

The prophet said to God: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). The New International Version puts this profound observation in this way: "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps."

This basic biblical principle applies across the board—globally, regionally, locally and perhaps most of all, personally. It impacts our governments on every level. Purely human intelligence, wisdom and understanding are not sufficient. In fact, we are fatally flawed unless we learn to rely on a great unseen power apart from ourselves.

Jeremiah faithfully recorded God's thoughts about our impaired human condition. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure [humanly]. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind" (17:9-10, NIV throughout remainder of article).

This major prophet had already pressed the point. "This is what the LORD says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD'" (17:5).

Getting to know God

Called to his prophetic office even from the

womb, Jeremiah had a long-enduring, close relationship with God. Over time, he learned to trust the Creator with the positive outcome of his many sore trials. He once said to God: “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you” (32:17).

No matter what happens, God is in charge. He is sovereign. He is our Creator. He had said: “With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it” (27:5).

In an age when much of modern education is based on the theory of evolution, this is a hard lesson for modern man to learn. (If you would like to examine the evidence, please request our two free brochures, *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*)

Jeremiah recorded the following words, reflecting the fact that God saw him through all of his hardships in a time of terrible national crisis. “But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream” (17:7-8).

But what needs doing? How do we establish a relationship with God?

Needed: national and personal reformation

Make no mistake about it. During Jeremiah’s age it was said: “We hoped for peace, but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror” (8:15). This passage is reminiscent of our own modern age. We, too, live in a time of unusual tension and international anxiety.

Not everyone escaped with their lives during Judah’s severe national crisis. Only 4,600 citizens were removed from Judah to start a new life in the land of Babylon (52:28-30). Many of those who failed to follow God’s specific instructions through the prophet Jeremiah perished, whether they remained in Jerusalem or fled to Egypt.

Obedience to God is the master key to human survival. National calamity came upon Judah because of her many sins—transgressions of God’s spiritual

law. People ignored the Ten Commandments. Idolatry, adultery, lying and Sabbath breaking typified their conduct. God said: “They have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives and in my name have spoken lies” (29:23). Also: “The land is full of adulterers” (23:10).

Is anyone willing to venture the thought that these passages of Scripture do not aptly describe our Western world today? In truth we know that sexual immorality threatens to engulf and shatter the very fabric of Western society.

Few today take the Fourth Commandment to rest on the Sabbath day very seriously. They didn’t in Jeremiah’s day either. Maybe they thought that God had forgotten that He had rested on the first Sabbath day concluding creation week. Jeremiah soon set them straight. Read chapter 17, verses 19 through 27 for yourself. Our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset—God’s Sabbath Rest* shows how important the Sabbath day is to our Creator—and ought to be to us.

Perhaps Judah’s worst sin was their national idolatry which expressed itself in two basic ways. “My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living waters and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (2:13). If you’d like to understand the ways many are breaking the First Commandment today, please write for the free booklet entitled *The Ten Commandments*.

Gaining God’s favor

God didn’t enjoy punishing Judah for its national and personal sins. He sent His prophets to warn them first. “In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction” (2:30). So national captivity became a necessity.

Before the calamity Jeremiah preached national repentance to his contemporaries. “Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.... If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place” (7:3-7).

God said to His peoples of long ago: “Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed” (21:12). Today also, many seem much more concerned about the rights of criminals than the plight of their poor victims. The law has been turned upside down.

But even if our nations as a whole do not heed God’s loving warnings and really repent, you can develop a personal relationship with your Creator and turn your own life around. You will benefit enormously from His continuous guidance no matter how bad national conditions are allowed to become.

Jeremiah set a fine example. He said to God: “Correct me, LORD, but only with justice—not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing” (10:24). In an obvious attitude of repentance, the prophet sought God’s correction and guidance in his life. He knew God through constant prayer, and the Creator knew him in return. “Yet you know me, O LORD; you see me and test my thoughts” (12:3).

Behind the scenes, Jeremiah knew that God was in complete control of events. Many of his countrymen did not, and some of them continually contrived to undermine his messages that had come directly from the Creator. Yet God had said to Jeremiah: “I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled” (1:12). Our Creator has a definite plan and purpose for mankind. Few things in this world really make sense unless we grasp that fact.

To the remnant of Judah who obeyed Him in Jeremiah’s day, God promised to bless them and increase their numbers even during their Babylonian captivity. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (29:11).

It is no different today. God has not changed. He will respond to genuine repentance and a willingness to be corrected with His abundant blessings. Indeed He will guide His people into more and more truth.

“This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it—the LORD is his name: ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not [yet] know’” (33:2). ❖

In Brief...

World News Review

God Is Back?

Columnist Peggy Noonan wrote a piece for *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page of September 28 titled “God Is Back.” She was reacting to the many references to God by politicians and pundits, as well as high attendance figures for religious services since September 11. However, just the mention of or holding meetings in His name doesn’t mean that God is truly back in the hearts, minds—and consequently, reflected in the actions—of the Americans, British, Canadians, Australians, South Africans or other Western peoples.

Seeking to rally support for the U.S.-led war on international terrorism, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, “Whatever faults we have, Britain is a very moral nation with a strong sense of right and wrong. That moral fibre will defeat the fanaticism of these terrorists and their supporters” (“Blair Rallies Britain as War Nerves Fray,” *The Observer*, October 28, 2001, emphasis added throughout).

There is evidence to the contrary.

Less than a week before September 11, *The Times* of London ran this headline: “Christianity Almost Beaten Says Cardinal.” In the body of the article, religion correspondent Ruth Gledhill quoted the Archbishop of Westminster: “Christianity has almost been vanquished in Britain... Christ [is] being replaced by music, New Age beliefs, the environmental movement, the occult and the free-market economy” (September 6, 2001).

Is Britain “a very moral nation”? According to the leader of the 4.1 million Roman Catholics in England and Wales: “It does seem...that Christianity, as a sort of backdrop to people’s lives and moral decisions—and to the Government, the social life of the country—has now almost been vanquished” (ibid.).

Morality isn’t a quality that can be turned on or off at will. Neither is the requisite spiritual strength lying dormant within every citizen of the Western world, merely because our nations once respected and, more importantly, responded to God. Our nations do not have moral strength simply because they need to have it. Will our people rise to the critical occasion? Will they turn back to God and find His strength in this time of trouble?

The Paradox of Modern America: Both Strong and Vulnerable

Henry Kissinger’s latest book articulates the American dream very well. He begins the first chapter of *Does America*

Have a Foreign Policy? with the observation: “At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States is enjoying a preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empires of the past. From weaponry to entrepreneurship, from science to technology, from higher education to popular culture, America exercises an unparalleled ascendancy around the globe” (2001, p. 17).

But the awful atrocities in New York City, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania show that Dr. Kissinger’s evaluation is only a part of the overall picture. *The Spectator* in Britain adds: “There might seem to be no greater paradox in the history of civilization. America, the global colossus, leading the world in scientific mastery, the possessor of unlimited military capability—but unable to defend itself against a handful of fanatics armed with knives. The gap between mighty America and its puny adversaries is far smaller than an inventory of American power would suggest” (September 15).

Though the raw capability of the World Trade Center terrorists and their network was vastly underestimated in this account, the main point is well taken. *The Independent* (London) bluntly declared: “For half a century, the U.S. has basked in the certainty of its commercial and military invulnerability, [but] now the confidence of the post-war era has been blasted away for ever” (September 12).

In but about an hour and a half the same technology that enables us to telephone just about anywhere on the earth or board an aircraft to any point on the planet was turned into an agent of incredible destruction in downtown New York City. Global mobility provided the means.

Of course this whole story is yet to be played out with all the reactive forces of American power and intelligence ready to be unleashed. But in the meantime if you want to know about the often unrealized origins of U.S. influence, wealth and prosperity and where its precipitous decline in moral values is taking the nation, please request our free brochure, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

America’s Need to Rediscover Biblical Values

Outwardly one may certainly blame the tragic loss of so many lives on sheer complacency and a disturbing lack of airport security, but the behind-the-scenes culprit may be declining American values.

French political writer, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), once proclaimed that “America is great because America is good.” Historically, the strength of the United

States has been undergirded by its basic adherence to traditional biblical values. However, recent decades have witnessed a serious and substantial erosion of accepted standards even to the point that annual income from pornographic films now exceeds yearly commercial intake of conventional movies. And tragically, those who market blue films include corporations that are household names in America.

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger remarked that “without a moral compass you cannot find your way through the dilemmas that foreign policy throws up” (*The Sunday Times*, September 16). So no aspect of human life is exempt from adherence to moral standards, not even international relations. *Scotland on Sunday* pointed out that though “under attack externally, the U.S. is also undergoing an internal battle between traditional values and tinsel-town influences” (September 16).

In a sense two nations are simultaneously living under the auspices of the American flag. One is pioneering, patriotic, law-abiding, church-going and family-oriented. The other is politically correct, self-indulgent, believes in mollicoddling criminals and rejects traditional biblical values.

Revisiting the American Image Abroad

Sometimes perception can be as important as reality. This is especially so in the way Americans regularly portray themselves to other nations. In this regard the entertainment industry has a major responsibility. Regrettably restraint and common sense have not generally prevailed.

Wrote noted film critic Michael Medved: “Unfortunately this obsessive Hollywood fascination with the dark side of human nature has played a major role in shaping America’s ugly image in much of the world. In recent weeks it has become fashionable to ask, ‘Why do so many people in other countries hate us?’ Part of any honest response involves the movies, TV shows and popular music we export around the globe. It certainly didn’t come as a complete surprise when anti-American rioters in Quetta, Pakistan, targeted five movie theaters showing U.S. imports.”

Especially in developing nations, most foreigners will come no closer to visiting the United States than the onscreen images they see. Of course, Americans understand that film fantasies emphasizing excessive violence, illicit sex and various antisocial attitudes don’t really represent everyday life for most citizens (although there has been parallel growth in the intensity of these evils in society a few steps behind the films). But those living abroad don’t necessarily know this.

Clearly films like *Hannibal* (1 & 2), *Desperado* and *Natural-Born Killers* portray America, in Michael Medved’s words, as “a cruel, godless, brutal and vulgar society.” Yet, at least on the surface, the United States is the most religiously committed, church-going country in the West. However, many Hollywood movies consistently downplay or deny the best parts of American national life. Instead, decadence, deviance and dysfunction dominate many, if not most, American films aggressively marketed around the world.

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11, many instances of kindness, decency, patriotism and generosity emerged in many parts of America. Will Hollywood pick up this banner and begin to make many more decent movies?

Source: *USA Today*.

Bioterrorism: Americans Poorly Prepared

A broad range of health officials recently observed that America is poorly prepared to deal with bioterrorism attacks. Bioterrorism embraces the intentional release of lethal substances into air, water and food supplies.

Said Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee, “For bioterrorism the number one inadequacy, if you had to rank them, is the inadequacy of our public health infrastructure. That is a product of about 15 years of neglect.” Obvious lacks include doctors poorly trained to recognize symptoms which are sometimes similar to normal illnesses, and poorly equipped hospitals, sometimes even without fax machines to convey or receive vital information.

Perhaps since its inception the United States has gotten used to an intangible veil of protection that has somehow surrounded its national life and well being, the presence of which has enabled the nation to pursue its dreams with relative freedom from threats and worries. Increasing evidence indicates that this protection is gradually being withdrawn because of our declining standards and values (see Isaiah 5:4-5).

Source: *International Herald Tribune* [*New York Times* news service].

Pontiff Health Woes Signal Leadership Change

There has been great concern for some time now over the health problems of 81-year-old Pope John Paul II. A few years ago the Roman Catholic leader was struck by unusual fevers, stomach viruses and heavy cases of the flu, and many worried he might die suddenly.

The formerly athletic, but now ailing pontiff is showing the effects of Parkinson’s disease, and some feel he might slip into incapacitation and leave the Catholic Church in the hands of subordinates. Parkinson’s is a disease of the nervous system which causes uncontrollable shaking and cognitive problems.

Information from inside the Vatican walls hints that he travels the long corridors not by foot but by electric cart. When meetings prove too long for him, orders are issued from his quarters by aides who are coordinated by his personal secretary, Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz.

There exists no law or regulation within the church to prevent this, and for the moment, only resignation or death can end a papacy. This pope has made it clear he does not intend to resign.

Contributors: Cecil Maramville, John Ross Schroeder and Jim Tuck

“RUNNING,” (Continued from page 16)

We now know they all came back down, too soon, dead. Standing in the gap between life and death is not for the faint of heart or for those who wonder about their mission. Nearly 3,500 years ago, two men responded to the call of what we might say was the equivalent of a five-alarm fire. Numbers 16 tells us how the people of Israel had been turned against God by Korah and his associates. By their own actions and attitudes, the children of Israel had brought upon themselves the wrathful curse of God. He withdrew His blessings. People were dying in droves, and who knew exactly what was going to come next?

Numbers 16:44-48 is very telling about the inner values of two special men. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ And [Moses and Aaron] fell on their faces. So Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun.’ Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.”

These two heroes of the Bible stood their ground in the face of overwhelming opposition. For Aaron, it would have been so easy to run the other way. But he didn’t! While others assuredly “high-tailed” it out of there to save their own skins, these two men worked with a plan. The plan is all about being life preservers.

Courageous fear

Was Aaron afraid as he stepped forward? I’m sure he was, for courage is often just “fear moving forward, having said its prayers.” Nonetheless, on he went! How was he able to move forward in this time of crisis? His values were bigger than the moment. You see, we don’t discover our values in times of trial; we take them into the time of trial with us. Were the knees of the firemen shaking on September 11? I’m sure they were, but their goal was bigger than their “shakes,” as they, too, stood between life and death. Perhaps President Bush said it best a day later: “Adversity introduces us to ourselves.”

What do a deceased Irish-American firefighter from Queens, Moses and Aaron have in common with you and me? Just like the firemen of New York City, our challenge as Christians is to move toward the crisis ahead, not to run away from it. For indeed, when reality sets in, there really is no running away. Like Moses and Aaron, we should be willing to stand in the gap for people who have made wrong choices—the gap between life and death. We understand that troubles are going to come, because of this nation’s disobedience toward God. But we do not rejoice. Rather we hurt; we suffer at the loss of life. We, too, race down a canyon of destiny, not really knowing all of the demands that will be placed upon us. Revelation 12:11 describes Christians as those who “did not love their lives to the death.”

“The Christian fireman”

If you have never taken the opportunity to read through 2 Timothy 2, I suggest you give it a read. As you move through Paul’s encouragement to “endure hardship” found in verse 3, he goes on to describe the good Christian soldier, the Christian athlete and the Christian farmer. He then says, “consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things” (verse 7).

Paul challenges us to “consider” and build on his statements regarding examples of steadfastness and endurance. Well, I have come to understand that I, too, must more than ever endure hardship as the good Christian firefighter whose job is to set my focus on “running toward the flame” of adversity in a world that is smoldering in hatred. But not simply to endure, but to embrace the needs of others. And no, it will not necessarily be a five-alarm fire, or look like a skyscraper. I must recognize that the “ground zero” God has granted me to approach is within my orb of responsibility.

On September 11, I learned that the most important equipment that a fireman carries is not his hose or his ax or his ladder. The most important piece of equipment is his heart.

Without “the heart” of a fireman, all the other paraphernalia is meaningless. Without heart, the fireman is never able to go into the life-and-death combat of his daily routine. But

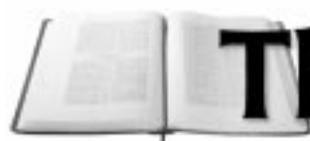


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On September 11, I learned that the most important equipment that a fireman carries is not his hose, but his heart.

with heart, all things are possible. Christ cut right to the heart of the matter long ago regarding the kind of person He was looking to recruit as a “Christian fireman.” He said in Mark 8:35, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

On September 11, the powerful message of Isaiah 30:21 came to me in a very real sense in the form of a Brooklyn accent out of the smoke of a darkened hallway saying, “This is the way, walk you in it.” It was the voice of a fireman. That voice is now silenced, but hopefully the thought still lives inside me as I move toward a different type of flame, knowing why and for whom I live. When the smoke clears from this particular tragedy, I must be prepared to move step by step in one direction. Up! ❖



This is the Way

ISAIAH 30:21

by Robin Webber

Running Toward the Flame

Presently, all of us are trying to gain a handle on the epic events which came crashing into our lives on September 11, 2001. We have come to understand this wasn't a Hollywood make-believe adventure flick. This was the worst-case scenario of every disaster movie ever to hit the wide screen.

Suddenly, oh so swiftly, the world became smaller and scarier for each of us. On a personal level, Americans have not been struck so deeply in their collective national psyche since the attack on Pearl Harbor nearly 60 years ago. It is the first time that the mainland of "fortress America" has been struck a formidable blow by a foreign foe since the War of 1812.

September 11 was a day of villains, victims and heroes. At times such as these, there is often a precariously thin line between death and survival. This thin line is often drawn by the actions of men and women who dare to step forward to make a difference.

Early on that Tuesday morning, 300 firefighters who marched into "terrorist hell" would not be walking out. They belonged to the family of firefighters that is often called "New York's finest." Because of the life and death adversity that lies around the corner for each of them, there is indeed a familial bond among them. Something understood. Something that is theirs alone.

On this morning of heroes, they raced through the glass and concrete canyons of Wall Street, knowing that they were going up against a "big one." Every fireman's worst nightmare is fire in a skyscraper. So much can happen so quickly, and it can happen to you! Yet on this morning, many a fireman coming off the night shift

willingly hopped on his company's fire engine.

Little did they know it would be their last shift.

But on they went! Why? You see, when your calling is to preserve life, you come to understand that not only does every moment count, but you truly are on call every moment. So down the narrow lanes of the financial district came this band of brothers hailing from Brooklyn and Queens, from the Bronx and Harlem, from the Lower East Side and Staten Island. Black and brown, Irish and Puerto Rican, Jew and Italian, these New Yorkers marched forward with one thing in mind—there was a job to do.

Simply going up!

I was struck by the comment of one official, who stated that the job of a fireman is "to run toward fire, while everyone else is running away." Amazingly, our exit trails in times of adversity are their entrance steps into what they have been trained and are willing to do. You see, firemen have a potentially "blind date" with death every day. Retired General Norman Schwarzkopf, no stranger to danger, once put it this way in speaking of combat: "death places the mind in a wondrous focus, and then, the training takes over!"

I couldn't help but be struck by a comment from a World Trade Center survivor. The older lady was sharing how she slowly made her way down the crowded stairway, only to find as she was going down, there were individuals climbing up the stairs. As she put it, "good-looking young men, strong and steady, with equipment on their backs, simply going up!"

(See "RUNNING," page 15)