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Cartoon Controversy: Is a Clash of Civilizations Inevitable?

European newspapers showing cartoons of Muhammad provoked riots in a number of countries, leading to increasing talk of "a clash of civilizations" between the West and Islam.

by Melvin Rhodes

Could a cartoon trigger World War III? That's the question some have been asking since the publication (in a Danish newspaper) of cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad led to riots in many different countries. Demonstrators carried signs calling for the beheading of those responsible. Others threatened a repeat of the terrorist attacks on New York, London and Madrid.

It soon became apparent that there wouldn't be any dialogue between the two sides of this controversy, because neither can truly understand the position of the other.

The Western media have been making fun of Christians and Christianity for decades.

Letters to newspaper editors around the world question every aspect of Christian teaching. Some comments are deeply offensive to Christians, but people who have grown up in Western countries believe this is part of the price that has to be



Reuters/Abd Omar Qusini

Palestinian militants from al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade burn Denmark's national flag in Nablus Jan. 29 during a protest over Danish cartoons seen as offensive to the prophet Muhammad.

paid to live in a free society that also offers freedom of religion.

But these freedoms have not been a part of the Islamic tradition. Although Christians and Jews have often lived under Islamic rule, they have not

(See "CARTOON," page 3)



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Managing editor: Darris McNeely

Senior editors: Melvin Rhodes, Robin Webber

Contributing editor: John Ross Schroeder

Copy editors: Becky Bennett, Doug Johnson, Cecil E. Maranville

Layout/design: Mike Bennett, Peter W. Eddington

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"Whom heaven must receive until the times of

Restoration

of all things ... ACTS 3:21

A Small Port in a Larger Storm

As we go to press with this issue of WNP, the hot news item in the United States is the furor over the present administration's plan to allow the lease of the management of six American ports to a group called Dubai Ports World, a group owned in part by the government of Dubai, one of the United Arab Emirates.

The idea of having a company that is controlled by an Arab government involved in such a sensitive American business, while the country fights a war on terror based in that part of the world, has created a firestorm of protest.

On Feb. 26 DP World put a hold on its acquisition of the ports and asked for a 45-day investigation designed to ensure that its running of the ports would not be a threat to the security of America. I believe the deal will likely be approved and this issue will pass on.

America's relations with Dubai are very important to the conduct of the terror war. To slap them in the face with denial would cause embarrassment and possible rupture of a critical alliance in that part of the world. The Bush administration cannot let this happen.

The question of security at American ports is very real, and letting an Arab company be privy to the inner workings of this part of American commerce could lead to a security breach of very large proportions. But that concern seems to have been ignored or dismissed.

One of the arguments for approval of this deal is the globalization of the world. Free trade is the lifeblood of the world economy. America is at the heart of this global society and depends on its ties with all the key players, i.e., Arab oil states, China, India and others.

To deny this deal would send a signal to the world that could be seen as isolationist and xenophobic. "We want your trade and we need your oil and, by the way, we want you to continue turning a blind eye to our profligate deficit spending habits," is how some could interpret this. "Oh," they would reply, "but you don't want us in your front yard because we can't be trusted." And in a way, they might be right.

This is not the time to be sending mixed signals. The world is drifting into sectarian and religious strife. Sunnis attack Shias in Iraq, raising the threat of civil war. Danish cartoons incite violent Muslim protests and the burning of embassies. And in Nigeria, Muslims kill Christians and Christians kill Muslims. If any nation can prevent this toxic trend from getting out of control, it would have to be the United States, the world's lone superpower. What it does matters more than many realize.

Globalization is the religion of economics. Its proponents tell us good will, harmony and world peace can be fostered among nations by free trade. The nations that depend on each other for economic prosperity will not go to war.

This is what was behind the last period of globalization that lasted from the middle of the 19th century to 1914. During that period, the world reached a level of industrial output that set the stage for the 20th century of progress. In Europe, prior to 1914 you could go across borders without passports. Goods flowed in and out of world ports, creating a dynamism and world order that many thought would usher in a time of global peace. Unfortunately, this world, and its hope for peace, came to a fiery crash in the flames of World War I.

Today's global order is only the latest attempt to bring about world peace through human economic systems. It will likely give birth to one final world economic system the Bible calls "Babylon the great" (Revelation 18). This global power will create a "peace" that will bring the world to a crisis at the close of the age. Another human effort to achieve world peace without God will fail.

As we look at the tempest surrounding the Dubai ports deal, remember to keep it in the larger perspective. It is one small piece of a larger picture emerging on the world scene. Globalization may bring economic prosperity, but it will not bring world peace. For that, we must await the time of restoration of all things when Christ returns as King of Kings.

—Darris McNeely



Darris McNeely

“CARTOON,” (Continued from page 1)

been treated as equals, and they have not had the freedom to proselytize. In recent decades, even the freedom to worship has often been curtailed, and Christians have been leaving Islamic countries for the West.

It was clear from comments made during the cartoon controversy that many Muslims do not understand the West. When asked about freedom of speech by a BBC reporter present at a demonstration in London, one demonstrator said, “Yes, I agree with freedom of speech, but not when it comes to religion!”

It was also clear from comments made by demonstrators in other countries that there is no appreciation of differences between countries—in the minds of many, the United States was to blame for the Danish cartoons! Most Islamic countries are fairly recent political entities. Muslims still identify more with the concept of an Islamic community than they do with the Western idea of a nation state. This translates to seeing the West as one monolithic entity rather than as 30 or more different countries, each independently and separately governed.

It is these differences in perception and the larger cultural gap between the West and Islam that are now coming to the fore.

Cultural differences

For four decades now, Western countries have believed in multiculturalism, the idea that many different cultures can live peaceably side by side. Our ancestors did not believe this, but political correctness in the schools has taught the last two generations that our civilization had it all wrong for thousands of years, and that multiculturalism is now the way forward for our nations.

The result is that the United States has gone from a Muslim population of only 500,000 in the 1970 census to one estimated at 10 million today. During the same period the numbers of people professing Christianity in Islamic nations has declined due to persecution and subsequent emigration. This alone illustrates the great gulf in thinking between Islam and the West.



Reuters/Rahab Homavandi

Mohammadreza Zaeri, the publisher of Iran's best-selling newspaper Hamshahri, speaks to journalists during a news conference on the Holocaust cartoon competition in Tehran Feb. 14. Hamshahri launched a competition for the best cartoon about the Holocaust in retaliation for Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad.

Whereas the West believes all cultures and religions can live peaceably together in one multicultural entity, Islamic countries clearly believe the opposite—non-Muslims cannot move to Islamic countries, settle and become citizens.

Islamic nations are deeply convicted that they do not want non-Muslims moving to their countries! Nor are non-Muslims allowed to do missionary work in these countries. The penalty for Muslims changing religion is, in some countries, death.

The Western concept of freedom of religion is incomprehensible to the followers of Islam—though they are quick to take advantage of it when moving to the West.

It has often been said that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. During the Cold War, this was often the case, with terrorists in some countries receiving aid from other countries in the constant ideological struggle that lasted for over 40 years.

Only the countries have changed.

When U.S. President George W. Bush and other Western leaders announce victory over terrorists in Iraq or Afghanistan, many Muslims have a

different perspective. What they see is that the West is killing Muslims. Any victory for America and its coalition allies in Iraq or Afghanistan means the deaths of Muslims, killed by the West.

Introducing democracy into the Middle East hasn't helped either. As countries embrace democratic reforms, the religious extremists take the opportunity to increase their opposition. This has happened in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority in recent months.

Compromise is the nature of Western parliamentary democracies, which are built on a system of checks and balances. But no compromise is possible over the cartoon controversy. Those who believe in freedom of speech and freedom of the press insist that they are free to lampoon any and all religions, while Muslims feel very strongly that depicting Muhammad at all is against their religion.

The compromise suggested by U.S. President Bush and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw—that newspapers should exercise greater responsibility—would only lead to a double standard, enabling the press to continue to ridicule Christianity while



Palestinian supporters of the Islamic militant group Hamas protest over Danish cartoons of Muhammad Feb. 1.

giving special protected status to Islam. The only compromise acceptable to the Islamic world would mean the death of freedom of expression in the West!

Muslim demonstrators failed to see their own double standard when burning the Danish flag, which has as its emblem a cross, sacred to many of those claiming to follow Jesus Christ.

Is a clash of civilizations inevitable?

On a number of occasions throughout the last 14 centuries following the advent of Islam, Europe and Islam have clashed.

The Bible shows that another such clash is coming.

In a prophecy recorded in Daniel 11, we read of a coming clash “at the time of the end” between the king of the North and the king of the South. The biblical kings of the North and South were the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties, respectively. These were successors of the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great.

These two empires profoundly affected the Jewish people, who were often caught in the middle as they clashed. The Seleucid Empire lay to the north and east of Jerusalem, while the Ptolemies ruled from Alexandria in Egypt.

We believe that the most likely modern successors of these empires will be the 10-nation Beast power (a revival of the Holy Roman Empire)

to the north, and a militant Islamic power that will include a combine of countries in the south in the area of the Middle East. According to verse 40 “the king of the South shall attack” the king of the North. The king of the North will then “come against him like a whirlwind,” entering the Glorious Land (the Holy Land). “Many countries shall be overthrown” (verse 41).

But some countries in the region will escape (verse 41) as they may not be a part of the confederacy that threatens the revived Roman Empire (present indications are that this confederacy is Islamic). But “the land of Egypt shall not escape” (verse 42).

The cartoon controversy may itself die down, but the growing division between Europe and Islam is likely to continue as events lead inexorably toward prophesied biblical events. To understand more, please request our booklets *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. ♦

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A Place Called Megiddo, Part 2

In last month's article on Megiddo, we raised the question, "How could today's political leaders be deceived by spiritual powers to move armed forces to Jerusalem to fight Christ at His second coming?" Is there something at the site of Megiddo that can lead to an answer?

by Darris McNeely

Megiddo, an ancient city in northern Israel and site of one of the world's earliest battles, is mentioned in Revelation 16:16 as the gathering place for the armies of the kings of the earth prior to the return of Jesus Christ.

It will be a time of global struggle for world dominion involving the armies of the Beast power and armies from beyond the Euphrates River. They will move toward Jerusalem and the prophesied battle of the Great Day of God Almighty (Revelation 16:14).

How could this happen? What will bring the world to this day of battle and judgment? More importantly, how can you avoid the same deception that will grip our world, sending it careening into battle against God Himself and threatening to bring all life to an end (Matthew 24:22)? This will be a time unlike any we can imagine, and it is critical that you understand the times to avoid the trap of deception.

In Revelation 16:15, right at the peak of the narrative, Jesus Christ injects a warning. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

In Revelation 19:8 we are told the Bride of Christ, the Church, will "be arrayed in fine linen ... for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Before one can do righteous acts, one must be able to discern between righteousness and unrighteousness. On that point, we can return to the site of Megiddo and learn a lesson about how our world has developed.

A high altar

Archaeologists at Megiddo have uncovered a large sacrificial altar nearly nine meters (about 29 feet) around. Within the sacred precinct are the remains of a large temple, which indicates the importance of this part of the city. Large concentrations of animal bones and ashes have been found in the vicinity. Scholars also feel that this altar saw the most insidious form of sacrifice in the ancient world—human beings.

The chief deity worshipped on this altar would have been the Canaanite god called Baal, the ruler



Scott Ashley

Megiddo serves as a type of the age-old struggle between good and evil.

Archaeologists at Megiddo have uncovered a large sacrificial altar nearly nine meters (about 29 feet) around.

of the earth. His worship was connected to nature, especially rainfall. Baal supposedly controlled thunder and lightning, and his blessing on the land was essential for soil fertility and the successful growing of crops.

The inhabitants of Megiddo would have been addicted to the seductive forms of worship associated with Baal. The worship would have included animal sacrifice, ritualistic meals and licentious dancing. Sacred prostitutes lived in the temple buildings, and at prescribed times would perform licentious dances in front of assembled crowds.

To the beat of drums and other musical accompaniment, the chants of priests and the increasing cries of the enthralled citizens, these rituals would inflame the passions of all present and end in a mass orgy of sexual activity for everyone assembled. This was done in the belief it would ensure fertility for the crops and the well-being of the populace.

Asherah was the female consort of Baal. She and her colleagues dealt in sex and war, and her shrines were temples of legalized vice. In some manifesta-

tions she appears in fantastic bloody orgies of destruction, butchering people young and old, while wading ecstatically into human gore up to her knees. Versions of this goddess have been found throughout Canaan, and lead to the conclusion that human sacrifices were offered at places like Megiddo.

It is no wonder that God gave instruction to the Israelites to wipe every vestige of such religion from the land when He gave them their inheritance. Yet the story of ancient Israel reveals that they did not always obey God's every instruction. The gods of Canaan—Baal and Asherah—were a perpetual snare for the people. The extent to which Israel embraced the worship of Baal is seen in the dramatic clash between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18).

It is difficult to understand how a people could be led by religious and political fervor to carry an infant to an altar, hand the child to a priest and then stand by to watch it placed in the hot lap of a stone image and be sent sliding down into a blazing cauldron of fire—all in the name of a god.

Yet it happened at Megiddo as a routine part of life, accepted by everyone as necessary for the well-being of their society. The pagan idolatry reached its lowest form with this readiness of people to sacrifice their own children. The gods people worship determine the morals and values of those people.

The gods people create with their own minds and hands are a poor substitute for the God who revealed Himself to Abraham and Moses. Those pagan gods led the Canaanites and later the Israelites into destruction and captivity. History shows that any culture that practices child sacrifice to its gods of convenience eventually falls from power and is eclipsed.

Continuing struggle between good and evil

Megiddo serves as a type of the age-old struggle between good and evil. The struggle echoed in Elijah's stirring words, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). In our modern world not everyone bows down to gods of stone or wood. We are too sophisticated for that. We have fashioned gods of money, power, celebrity and status.

Instead of idolatry, which prophets like Elijah railed against, we have formed with

our own hands a neo-pagan worship called relativism. Instead of one God, there are many gods one may worship. Instead of one way, clearly defined by the one true God, the common belief today is that there are many ways to access a spiritual life and worship the deity. Instead of "traditional values," many subscribe to the philosophy of "different strokes for different folks." The great issue of our time is whether there is one God, one way and one law—not two or more.

In 45 years the West has gone from the idea that "God is dead," proclaimed loudly from the pages of a leading news-weekly, to the present where we have created the multicultural gods of diversity. There is no source of revealed truth to which we can appeal as a standard of righteousness. Every religion is as good as any other. Every culture is equal. Every man can decide for himself what is right and what is wrong. This falsely makes humans equal to God and is the essence of idolatry.

It is the problem God found with ancient Israel when He said through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as if with a cart rope; that say, 'Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it.' Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:18-20).

This describes not only ancient Israel but also our world today. We cannot distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, because we have forgotten God and abandoned His spiritual law. We are a people who do not want to admit that God has a sovereign claim on our lives and who are unwilling to submit to Him in obedience. What Paul wrote applies to us. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:28).

A culture is "debased" when it sacrifices its children and their future in the fires of idolatry. Our people do the same today when we "sacrifice" our children by abortion, thus offering them up to our self-made god of personal convenience (the reason for abortions over 90 percent of the time). When abortion on demand

is justified as a right and made possible by whatever human statute is legally required, we are seeing a society turned inside out, incapable of discerning righteous judgment.

It is little wonder that judgment has fled when the prime consideration in evaluating a candidate for a justice of America's highest court, the Supreme Court, is his or her willingness to uphold the "right" to abortion. That is a sad commentary on American culture, and unless we awaken to the gravity of this unconscionable tragedy, we will go the way of ancient Israel.

Back to Megiddo

Christ's statement in Revelation 16:15 shows a key to avoiding the end-time deception that inspires the armies of the world to gather in Megiddo. You will know how to discern righteousness based on the "commandments of God and ... the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). The deception that grips today's world prevents understanding the true gospel of the Kingdom of God. It also prevents the world from knowing Christ's real personality.

The image of Christ presented to today's world is not the Christ of the Gospels. He is not fully understood by religionists today, and that is why when He returns as King of Kings in full glory, He will not be recognized. Mankind's resistance to God will increase to the point they will fight to the death, not knowing they do the work of the god of this world.

The idolatry that shoves the true God out of the picture leads to a self-deification, where man decides what is right and wrong, something that is the prerogative of God alone. So it has been since the beginning of the human family. This idolatry of the self will find its final and supreme expression at a place called Megiddo, in the last battle of the great day of God Almighty.

Don't be too sure that you are clothed with the proper garments of righteousness. Examine your values in light of Christ's teachings and make sure you love His commands more than the spirit of this world. Only then can you be sure to escape the deception of the time of the end. Your eternal life depends on it. ❖

To view a video presentation, "A Place Called Megiddo," based on this article, go to www.wnponline.org/Longitudel/video/.

How Serious a Threat Could Iran Pose?

President Ahmadinejad has warned that the West would feel the consequences of pressing for sanctions against Iran much more than Iran would suffer. What could he have in mind? How could Iran strike at the West?

by Cecil E. Maranville

In the wake of the political tsunami his first Holocaust denial speech created in the West, Iranian President Ahmadinejad backed off from that ludicrous assertion, trading it for another. He told Europe and America that they should create a state within their territory for the Jews of Palestine, since Europe (read, "Nazis") drove the Jews out of its territory.

But Ahmadinejad shortly thereafter returned to his anti-Semitic rhetoric, calling for Israel's destruction, as he spoke to hundreds of thousands (according to state media) on the 27th anniversary of the Islamic revolution that overthrew the shah. His hate speech inspired the crowd to chant, "Death to America," "Death to Israel" and "Death to Denmark" (the country in which the infamous cartoons of Muhammad were created).

In the 1980s, Iran's military struggled for eight years against the forces of Saddam Hussein, which the American-led coalition knocked out in a matter of days. What harm could Iran possibly inflict upon the West?

Serious-minded people are alarmed. "The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) has passed a resolution noting that Iran's actions, including Ahmadinejad's statements, are *early warning signs of genocide*" (R. Blum, G. Stanton, E. Richter and I. Charney, "Ahmadinejad—Incitement Deserves Indictment," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 7, 2006, emphasis added throughout).



Reuters/Stringer

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (center) visits the Natanz uranium enrichment facility Feb. 15. Iran has defied the world by resuming uranium enrichment for nuclear fuel.

The principle difference between Ahmadinejad and Hitler is that the latter did not have a weapon by which he could exterminate millions of Jews instantly.

More frightening than Hitler

The principle difference between Ahmadinejad and Hitler is that the latter did not have a weapon by which he could exterminate millions of Jews instantly. Ahmadinejad either already has such a weapon (as we discuss below) or soon will have one.

"Historians have established that governmental incitement and use of hate language is a recognized predictor, initiator, promoter and catalyst of genocide" (ibid.).

Iran consistently denies that it has any intention of producing a nuclear weapon. Yet its procurement of P-2 centrifuges from



A Russian-made Iranian navy Kilo-class submarine takes part in Iranian naval exercises in the strategic Strait of Hormuz in 2000. Iran need only sink a supertanker in the two-mile wide shipping lane to close it off.

Pakistan's nefarious nuclear black marketeer Dr. A.Q. Khan is generally viewed as a clear indication that Iran plans to manufacture weapons. Con Coughlin, London's *Telegraph* defense and security editor, cited a senior Western intelligence official's assessment: "Iran's recent activity is a clear escalation of its attempts to enrich uranium to weapons grade. With the UN inspectors out of the way they are basically free to do as they please" ("Iran Plant 'Has Restarted Its Nuclear Bomb-Making Equipment,'" Feb. 2, 2006).

In mid-January, Iran gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors documents that describe how to shape weaponized uranium so it could fit into the warhead of a missile. Tehran said it turned over the documents as "a show of cooperation," but should we take comfort in that? Why would they even have this information, if not to produce weapons?

Brace for fuel price hike

In the short term, Iran can give itself a considerable raise in income, simply by Ahmadinejad's threatening rhetoric, which shoots the price of oil upward. Looking back in history, we see that the price of crude virtually doubled from the start of the Iranian revolution to its war with Iraq. Many market analysts warn of a \$100+ per barrel price in the face of a West versus Iran stand-off today, and perhaps as high as \$150 a barrel. That could conceivably rocket gasoline and heating oil prices to more than double today's levels. The ripple effect that would have on the world's economy is difficult to overstate.

Ahmadinejad traveled to Venezuela to cement a friendship with the avidly anti-American Hugo Chavez. Chavez would need little excuse to shut off the 1.5 million barrels of crude oil that Venezuela exports to the United States daily.

The airline industry alone would

threaten to sink Western economies, in light of rising operational costs. The U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) reports that airlines paid an average of about \$0.75 per gallon of aviation fuel in 2003. Last August, fuel was running at \$1.70 per gallon for scheduled flights—up about 47 percent from August 2004. Even before the hurricane-related price spikes, Andrew Clark wrote in *The Guardian*, "Fuel costs 'will push airlines to financial disaster'" (April 5, 2005).

The BTS reported the third quarter 2005 profit/loss margin for the 21 major U.S. carriers at a loss of \$445.2 million. Worldwide, airlines had to absorb a \$3 billion increase in operating costs.

Currently, transportation costs constitute about 10 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. The doubling of fuel prices would affect the price of almost everything.

Iran may already have nuclear weapons

Rafi Eitan told *The Jerusalem Post* that he is convinced Iran already has enough enriched uranium to manufacture two Hiroshima-type weapons. Now an elderly businessman, Eitan worked in the inner circles of Israeli intelligence for decades. He headed the team that tracked down Adolf Eichmann, and he participated in the operation to take out Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981.

The IAEA is not moving rapidly toward bringing Iran to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions. To do so would require that the IAEA "refer" Iran to the Security Council. As it stands now, the agency intends to discuss the Iranian situation in its March meeting and then "report"—not refer—Iran to the Security Council.

So, all the diplomatic pushing and shoving of the past several months has accomplished only one significant consequence: It enabled Iran to keep working on its nuclear program, which the country will continue doing while the Security Council members quibble over potential sanctions. China and Russia are already sending clear signals that they would veto any sanc-

tion proposal. Don't expect the UN to resolve this evolving nightmare.

A hammer blow to world's economy

If Iran were willing to play the role of spoiler, even sacrificing itself in the process, the world would take a huge economic hit. The United States does not import any Iranian oil, but Europe gets a third of its oil from Iran, and Japan gets 17 percent of its oil from there. Iran currently supplies 5 percent of the world's market—a market so tight that there is almost no possibility of making up the shortfall, if Iran should shut off its taps temporarily.

And, since Iran holds the second largest hydrocarbon (oil and gas) reserves in the world, it will play a leading role in the world's energy market for decades to come. Saudi Arabia has the largest hydrocarbon reserves, but it is currently producing at nearly the maximum sustainable rate. Iran, on the other hand, is barely tapping into its vast reserves. And it doesn't need to sell to the West. Asia is a hungry and eager market.

Iran could cause trouble another way. "Because Iran occupies a strategic location on the north side of the Persian Gulf, it is in a position to threaten oil fields in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates, which together possess more than half of the world's known oil reserves. Iran also sits athwart the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway through which, daily, 40% of the world's oil exports pass" (Michael T. Klare, "Oil, Geopolitics, and the Coming War With Iran," TomDispatch.com, April 11, 2005).

Iran need only sink a supertanker in the two-mile wide shipping lane of the Strait of Hormuz to close it off. And most of the blue-collar oil field workers in the Saudi Kingdom are Shiite Muslims, whose allegiance may well lay with Tehran. They could sabotage the east-west pipeline by which Saudi Arabia exports to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe.

So, if Iran does its worst, Europe would take a heavy hit. Japan's loss would be even greater, as it receives

nearly 80 percent of its oil imports from the Persian Gulf states. The U.S. economy would be hammered, in turn, in the current globalized world economy.

Asian connection

Tehran is acting as though it has calculated what it would lose should it drop Europe's business (at least, in the short term). Germany exports more than the other EU states to Iran, and it reports that Tehran has been cutting back significantly on orders. Several weeks ago, Iran began systematically withdrawing its investments from European banks.

Where do its future ties lie? Russia is trying hard to become a power broker with Tehran, but China is building even deeper ties. Ever since the United States demonstrated that it would intervene in Middle Eastern affairs preemptively, China has been urgent about securing its energy sources independent of U.S. control.

We could well be witnessing the beginning of a major geopolitical shift in which China becomes a rival power to America and the EU in the Middle East. Revelation 9 and 16 both speak of a significant Asian-Middle Eastern alliance, as we discuss in *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

In addition to reaching out to Hugo Chavez, Ahmadinejad visited Bashar Assad in Damascus, where he was warmly received. Allied with Iran, Syria could make life miserable for the American-led coalition in Iraq, by stepping up its support for foreign terrorists. The Euphrates River, which bisects Syria and Iraq, is a significant barrier to troop incursions from the Far East, but the prophecy of Revelation 9:13-16 shows it will literally become a gateway.

A collective suicide bomber?

Iran could contribute greatly to terrorism, not only in Iraq, but also in Europe and America. "A top Ahmadinejad officer, Brig. General Mohammad Kossari, who heads the political watchdog, or Security Bureau, of Iran's armed forces, recently taunted the U.S. when he bragged 'we have identified all the weak points of our enemies' and have

sufficient cannon fodder—i.e., suicide operation volunteers—'ready to strike at these sensitive locations.' Iranian television recently broadcast an animated film for Iranian children glorifying suicide bombers" (Arnaud de Borchgrave, "Later Than We Think," *The Washington Times*, Feb. 6, 2006).

Coupling such admissions with Ahmadinejad's inflammatory speeches, it is hard to take seriously the current Iranian nuclear negotiating policy, which in essence is, "Trust us. We would never produce a weapon of mass destruction. You have our word on it." Iran's hard-line clerics, for whom Ahmadinejad speaks, might actually welcome a military attack by America or Israel, relishing the chaos that would ensue.



A standoff with Iran could push oil as high as \$150 a barrel, pushing airlines to financial disaster.

Ahmadinejad and his backers anticipate the appearance of the "12th Imam," a sort of end-time "savior" whom they believe will come at a time of great upheaval in the world to rescue humanity. A nuclear war would presumably hasten that scenario, so Iran would not shy from a showdown.

Would Ahmadinejad and company be willing to turn their entire nation into a collective suicide operation? It is difficult to rule out that possibility! Certainly, no one should assume Iran would shrink from a nuclear shoot-out, based upon the Cold War MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) principle.

All things considered, Iran poses the greatest threat to the world's stability in decades. ♦

Where Are China and India Really Headed?

Western foreign policy increasingly has to take the Asian nations into account. As one astute observer recently put it, "The center of geostrategic gravity has shifted eastwards." So an important question lies before us: Is another Eastern axis power going to emerge on the world scene and dominate all of Asia just as Japan did during the Second World War?

by John Ross Schroeder

China is no longer an isolated power, and India has recently emerged as a world economic force to be reckoned with. Some financial experts believe that China could overtake America economically in another 25 years and India will be number three, just behind the United States.

How will the West react? Noted *Financial Times* writer Philip Stephens recently gave this assessment: "The questions that will vex Mr. Blair's successors [in Britain] will be about *if and how China, India and other rising powers can be peacefully accommodated in a new international order*; or whether we will see the return in Asia and elsewhere of the balance of power politics once familiar in Europe" (emphasis added throughout).

Diplomatic relations with these Eastern nations will gradually move from the margins of Western foreign policy to the center. There will be no other viable choice.

Two rising economic giants

Certainly both China and India will be having increasingly greater impact on the global economic order. Consider this important fact that we cannot ignore: In excess of a third of the world's population resides in these two Asian countries. Both are growing at substantially faster rates than any nations in the Western world.

Surprisingly, this growth is not exactly new in nature. According to Martin Sorrell, cochairman of the India Economic Summit, "If we go back to 1825, we would find that India and China represented the same propor-



China and India share a 3,500-kilometer (more than 2,000-mile) bitterly contested border. Recent agreements have eased tensions.

tion of worldwide GDP that they are forecast to represent in 2025. And this is a 200 year economic cycle that we are seeing" (World Economic Forum).

This rapid growth is occurring in spite of enormous social problems in both countries, particularly the AIDS epidemic in India. Still, some observers expect economic growth rates to reach double-digit figures before long.

A Sino-Indian accord

We should not forget that these two countries share a 3,500-kilometer (more than 2,000-mile) border. In 1962 in the Sikkim province of northeast India, a two-month armed conflict broke out between China and India. Serious tensions continued long after the truce.

As Dan McDougall of Scotsman.com news reported: "For the past 43 years both nations have bitterly contested their territories on the roof of the world." That is, until

United, these two Asian powers constitute a formidable force from the east. We also must not forget that both nations possess nuclear arms.

late last summer when the two countries signed a joint declaration with so-called “cartographic diplomacy” becoming the order of the day.

Both China and India compromised on key points soothing long-standing border disputes. But this was not all. Among the wide-ranging agreements were bilateral trade, joint petroleum, gas and space exploration and, perhaps much more disturbing, additional accords of joint cooperation between China’s 2.5-million-strong army and the 1.3-million-man Indian defense force.

What all this means is patently obvious. As long as there are serious tensions between China and India, the rest of the world might breathe a little easier. But united, these two Asian powers constitute a formidable force from the east. We also must not forget that both nations possess nuclear arms.

As the “World View” feature in *Newsweek* magazine recently stated: “Thirty years of lectures on nonproliferation and sanctions have done nothing to stop, slow down or make safer India’s nuclear program.”

Still, President Bush is currently trying to put a cap on the number of Indian nuclear weapons. According to *Asian Age*, “U.S. President George W. Bush has made it very clear that all ‘partners’ under his new \$250-million ‘Global Nuclear Energy Partnership’ proposal will have to agree to use nuclear power only for civilian purposes and forego uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities that can be used to develop nuclear weapons.”

Yet at the same time, France and India are currently strengthening nuclear ties and have recently forged a new bilateral defense agreement.

The “kings from the east”

Where are all these events taking us in the long run? Prophetically, the Bible speaks specifically of the “kings from the east.” It tells us that near the time of the very end of this age of man, the great Euphrates River will be dried up “so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (Revelation 16:12).



China and India reached wide-ranging agreements on bilateral trade, joint petroleum, gas and space exploration and, perhaps much more disturbing, additional accords of joint cooperation between China’s 2.5-million-strong army and the 1.3-million-man Indian defense force.

This passage is referring to the movements of massive armies that will attack the coming European-centered superpower not long before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

A giant Asian superpower is prophesied to emerge, perhaps comprised of several large nations supported by an array of small ones. This heavily populated power bloc will execute one of the key events that will bring this age of man to an abrupt end and ironically help pave the way for Christ’s coming millennial reign.

Trade and economic expansion will precede the main military effort. The armies of the east are currently nowhere near as large as they are biblically prophesied to become. Meanwhile the People’s Republic of China is gradually pulling those levers that will eventually put it in a position of undisputed leadership among the Asian nations (at the expense of the United States).

Where is this world headed?

It is enormously important for us to understand how these future events fit together in a coherent manner. Only the Bible gives us accurate information about the overall destiny

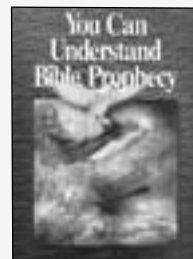
of nations. No other reliable source is available to humankind.

The United Church of God has published several key booklets about Bible prophecy. They draw these future events together, showing us the ultimate outcome of present world trends.

For starters, please request *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*, *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. All three are free for the asking. ♦

Recommended Reading

How do today’s trends and troubling events fit into the panorama of prophecy? *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* gives you a clear biblical framework. Also request *Are We Living in the Time of the End?* and *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*. All are free.



Contact any of our offices listed on page 15, or request or download them from our Web site at www.wnponline.org

In Brief...

World News Review

Leadership Versus Politics

“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried”—Winston Churchill.

As the United States leads the West in attempting to promote democracy around the world, news reports continue to give evidence that even the best form of human government is doomed to failure. Repeatedly, we witness confirmation of the fact that the world needs to be rescued by the leadership of Jesus Christ through the government of God.

Review the philosophy by which He will govern: “Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

“He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will never judge by appearance, false evidence, or hearsay. He will defend the poor and the exploited. He will rule against the wicked and destroy them with the breath of his mouth. He will be clothed with fairness and truth” (Isaiah 11:1-5, New Living Translation).

Consider that against the backdrop of the Abramoff scandal in the American Congress, Christ will not rule via lobbyist influence.

As we go to press, Thailand’s Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declared a snap election in an attempt to fend off a national uprising over perceptions of his misrule and shady business dealings by his family.

The Philippines suffered an attempted coup d’état a few weeks ago, when a group of military officers attempted to overthrow President Gloria Arroyo.

She has been embroiled in controversy ever since she succeeded the corrupt Joseph Estrada in 2001. Having said she would not be a candidate for the presidency in the scheduled 2004 election, she changed her mind and won the contest, which was later challenged on legal grounds. Her campaign was accused of using taxpayer funds, and she was personally accused of interfering with election officials.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone has been suspended from office for the entire month of March, as a disciplinary measure over his comparing a Jewish reporter to a Nazi concentration camp guard.

Iran’s “democratically” elected leaders—more interested in stirring resentment toward the West than leading their people in productive and positive ways—are inciting riots around the world over the publication of a series of editorial cartoons that feature Muhammad.

On the opposite side of the issue are people claiming the democratic “right” to publish offensive material, in the name of the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion.

Radical Islamics who decry the publication of anything critical of their faith also readily embrace the freedom of religion that democracy affords Muslims in Western countries. They

also frequently lampoon Christianity and Judaism in their press.

The underpinning philosophy of democracy is that people rule themselves and that they possess the judgment, insight and wisdom to select leaders who will govern them well. Yet the Palestinians selected a self-proclaimed terrorist group as their leaders in a democratic election, leaving the world’s democracies scrambling to figure out whether to deal with Hamas at all and, if so, how.

Democracy affords many wonderful benefits, but because it is government by people, it will eventually break down with scandal and self-interest. No human being has the qualifications listed in that messianic prophecy. That is why Jesus Christ came to proclaim the good news (“the gospel”) that He would return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, administering it fairly, justly, efficiently, without bias and without corruption. Only then will the world actually experience government for the people.

Please take advantage of our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* to familiarize yourself with this central message of the New Testament Church of God. This is the message the United Church of God declares today.

Contributor: Cecil E. Maranville

World News and Prophecy Seminars

People are often heard to say, “What in the world is going on?” The editorial staff of this publication is dedicated to making sense of today’s news within the framework of biblical understanding and prophecies that God’s Word indicates are yet to occur. If you appreciate what you are reading in this publication, then you may desire to attend a weekend *World News and Prophecy* seminar.

If you would like to experience the pages of this publication live and in person, please contact Darris McNeely at Darris_McNeely@ucg.org.

Upcoming Seminars

• Indianapolis, Indiana, June 17

• Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 18



A Page on the World

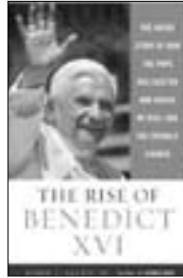
Reviews of books that count, endure and light the path ahead

The Rise of Benedict XVI

Subtitled: The Inside Story of How the Pope Was Elected and Where He Will Take the Catholic Church. By John L. Allen Jr., Doubleday, 2005, ISBN: 0385513208.

Reviewed by Darris McNeely

Since his election as Pope Benedict XVI last April, the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has been watched very closely to see how he would lead the Roman Catholic Church after the long reign of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. John Allen's book *The Rise of Benedict XVI* gives a solid background to the life of this eminent theologian turned pope. As the subtitle of the book says, it gives *The Inside Story of How the Pope Was Elected and Where He Will Take the Catholic Church*.



promises of hedonism and secularism have been exposed.

This helps explain the choice of the name Benedict as his title. Ratzinger's explanation for his choice of name is, "Benedict lived at a time when the Roman Empire was collapsing, and he saw the role of the church as to preserve the best in human culture throughout the centuries. The whole world was crumbling, and Benedict helped ensure that human civilization survived" (p. 169). The last pope to use the title Benedict reigned during World War I. Benedict XV

worked tirelessly to prevent the European powers from going to war and destroying European civilization. Cardinal Ratzinger's choice of this title says a great deal about his priorities.

In his first general audience, on April 27, the pope said of St. Benedict: "He constitutes a fundamental point of reference for the unity of Europe, and a powerful call to the irrefutable Christian roots of European culture and civilization" (p. 169).

Europe faces a grave threat from radical Islamic forces. The identity of Europe as a culture is under attack from several quarters, evidenced by last autumn's riots in France and this winter's episode with the cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammad in European newspapers. The EU has begun talks to admit Turkey, a Muslim nation, into the European Union. Pope Benedict has gone on record as being against this move on cultural grounds. In an interview in August 2004, Ratzinger said, "Throughout history Turkey has always represented a different continent, always in contrast with Europe" (p. 188).

The latest Muslim riots against embassies will reinforce that view. Look for the pope to lead a movement to revitalize the Christian roots of Europe and remind Europeans of their historical and cultural identity.

Allen feels the frontline of Benedict XVI's work to turn the tide of relativism will be in Europe. It is felt that Europe is historically the cradle of Christian culture and "Europe is too big to fail."

The pope has a vision of Europe that stretches back to Charlemagne and is still important for the future of culture. In a 2004 book titled *Europe: Its Foundations Today and Tomorrow*, the pope spelled out his clear conviction that "Europe" is a cultural and historical concept before a geographic one. In the era of Charlemagne, the pope writes, the word *Europe* expressed both a political reality, meaning a group of states that formed a new Roman Empire, but also a mission—preserving the best of antique culture, and carrying it forward into history (p. 189).

Pope Benedict XVI heads the Roman Catholic Church at a critical time in Western civilization. The rising clash between the Islamic world and the West will present unexpected challenges for Europe's leaders. Understanding the thinking of the Roman pontiff is a key to knowing how the church will react. John Allen's book is a good place to start. ❖

Cardinal Ratzinger had served as the prefect of the church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since 1980, when he came to Rome at the behest of John Paul II. As the church's chief doctrinal cleric, he was in a unique position to become the new pope. No other cardinal had such an "up close and personal" view of the church and what it takes to lead such a large worldwide body.

Even though he was a leading candidate, I remember the gasp of amazement from the reporters when we watched his introduction to the world that day in St. Peter's Square. The first words out of the reporters' mouths were that the new pope would need to turn his attention to the problem of a secularized Europe and the challenges to the church in its own backyard. Allen's book offers some insight into what this means.

Ecclesiastical winter in Europe

In recent months the church has lost a bitter fight to have the preamble to the now-failed European Constitution include a reference to God and the Christian roots of Europe. Spain has passed laws permitting homosexual marriages, in direct defiance of church teaching.

Allen lists several trends pointing to the lack of influence for the church in Europe.

- Low attendance rates at mass, in some cases in the single digits in northern European countries.
- Declining fertility rates, with the lowest recorded in traditional Catholic strongholds such as Spain and Italy.
- Declining cultural influence; for example, 12 nations have regularized same-sex unions, and three have granted full marriage rights to same-sex couples.

These trends created divergent opinions among the cardinals as they sat in conclave last April. Ratzinger seems to be among the group who believe that in the present moment Europe is post-Christian and is to some extent beyond evangelization. Ratzinger feels the church should encourage a "creative minority" who can defend church teaching rather than watering down doctrine to make it acceptable in a hostile culture. A new generation should be formed, one that is excited about the faith, which can emerge at a future time when the false

“CONSEQUENCES,” (Continued from page 16)
reign supreme, and not the whims of a man.

Our American audience has grown up with many stories of George Washington. But I would like to share other stories of why this man became so special to succeeding generations. Such stories guide us to a pivotal understanding: We don’t find our values in times of trial, but we take our values into the fiery trial.

Preparing for the future

At the age of 15, Washington chose to organize a listing of social graces that had migrated across the ocean from France. While his thoughts were not original, he did organize and put to pen these principles in a composition titled, “Rules of Civility.” While we think of Washington as the wealthy landholder of Mt. Vernon, he didn’t start that way. His family was at the lower rung of the Virginia gentry. From an early age, he understood that any social advancement would be done by developing the quality of virtue.

These wide-ranging rules of human engagement were designed to cultivate leadership in a man and set him apart to serve others. They covered almost every action in life, including the very practical ones, such as Rule #7: “Spit not in the fire, nor stoop low before it, neither put your hands into the flames to warm them, nor set your feet upon the fire especially if there be meat thereat.”

But it’s Rules #1 and #2 that laid the foundation and captured my attention. Rule #1: “Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect, to those that are present.” Rule #2: “Undertake not what you cannot perform, but be careful to keep your promises.” These virtues would play out during the molding experience of the War for Independence and the founding of a new nation.

Doing the heavy lifting

One day, as was his custom, General Washington was visiting his troops in the field. It had just rained several inches and there was mud everywhere. As he and another officer were walking down a narrow boardwalk, they encountered a soldier bearing a large and obviously heavy box on his shoulders. Washington

promptly stepped off the walk to allow the soldier by, and his shiny boots sank down deeply into the black mud.

After the man had passed, the officer with him asked, “Why did you do that? Now look at your boots. You out-ranked the man. Why didn’t you make him step off?” You see, had Washington required that man to step off in the mud with such an awkward burden, he would no doubt have fallen. But Washington was practicing Rule #1.

On another occasion, Washington was starting out from headquarters and drew on his great coat, turned up the collar and pulled his hat down to shield his face from the biting wind. As he walked down the road to where the soldiers were fortifying a camp, no one would have known the tall, muffled figure was the commander-in-chief of the Army.

As he came near the camp, he stopped to watch a small company of soldiers, under the command of a corporal, building a breastwork of logs. The men were tugging at a heavy log. The corporal, important and superior, stood at one side giving orders. He cried, “Up with it! Now altogether! Push! I say!” But every time the men almost had the log in place, it would roll back down. Each time the corporal would only

yell from the sidelines—“1-2-3, mush!”

Finally, on the exhaustive third push the log was once again about to roll back when the man with the great coat came forward and pushed along with everyone else. The log stayed in place. While everyone gathered around to thank the man, the hero of the moment turned to the corporal and asked, “Why don’t you help your men with the heavy lifting, when they needed another hand?”

“Why don’t I?” snorted the corporal. “Don’t you see I’m a corporal?”



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Washington's Rules of Civility #1 and #2 captured my attention: Rule #1: “Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect, to those that are present.” Rule #2: “Undertake not what you cannot perform, but be careful to keep your promises.”

“Indeed,” replied the tall stranger as he unfurled his great coat and showed his uniform. “I’m only the commander-in-chief. Next time you have a log too heavy for your men to lift, send for me.”

An eye to the future

Early in the war, Washington told his troops “The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army ... We have, therefore, to resolve to conquer or die.”

The heavy lifting would continue even after the war, as the real battle of establishing a new form of government with a new kind of head of state called a “president” would ensue. In all his actions, Washington was acutely aware that he was setting precedents as the first chief executive of the land for those that would follow him in office.



“Many things which appear of little importance in themselves at the beginning may have great and durable consequences...”

He said, “Many things which appear of little importance in themselves at the beginning may have great and durable consequences from their having been established at the commencement of a new government. It will be much easier to commence the administration, upon a well-adjusted system, built on tenable grounds, than to correct errors or alter inconveniences after they shall be confirmed by habit.”

Life was never easy even for this

man, but his sheer force of will carried a faltering American Revolution to the sure conclusion of victory. And while in later years he wished to escape the clutches of burdensome office, nonetheless, as president, he took each calculated step along the way with an eye to the future.

His second Rule of Civility, “Undertake not what you cannot perform, but be careful to keep your promises,” remained a constant guide. He kept those promises both in war and peace, and after two terms as president, retired from total power.

Start preparing now

By the way, Washington is still staring over my shoulder. His presence reminds me that a life that can be used by God is a life that is prepared. Yes, God is prepared to use us, but in turn we need to be prepared and circumspect with how we equip ourselves. Do you realize there is a time in the works in which God’s Word prophesies that He wants to make those who are diligently preparing now “kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10)?

Imagine! I’m not speaking of just another new and improved earthly institution, but holding office in the government of God!

World News and Prophecy is not simply a magazine directed toward describing a world awash in global calamities, but is purposefully directed to encourage those who will heed God’s call to start preparing now for a time ahead that is going to be totally unlike anything the world has ever experienced. It’s called the Kingdom of God.

There’s some heavy lifting along the way between now and then. But perhaps the theme of Isaiah 30:21, “this is the way, walk in it,” is best echoed by the words of Washington: “Many things which appear of little importance in themselves at the beginning have great and durable consequences...”

Step carefully, for we are moving toward a wonderful future! Never underestimate God and never underestimate how God might use you. ✧



Robin Webber

How to Contact Us

AFRICA (except as listed below): United Church of God, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A. E-mail: info@ucg.org

AUSTRALIA: United Church of God—Australia, GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia. Phone: 0755 202-111 Fax: 0755 202-122

BAHAMAS: United Church of God, P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas. Phone: (242) 324-3169 Fax: (242) 364-5566

BRITISH ISLES: P.O. Box 705, Watford, Herts. WD19 6FZ England. Phone: 020 8386 8467 Fax: 020 8386 1999

CANADA: United Church of God—Canada, P.O. Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada. Phone: (905) 876-9966, (800) 338-7779 Fax: (905) 876-0569 E-mail: info@ucg.ca

EAST AFRICA (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda): United Church of God, Kenya, P.O. Box 75261, Nairobi 00200 Kenya. E-mail: kenya@ucg.org

FIJI: United Church of God, P.O. Box 11081, Laucala Beach Estate, Suva

FRENCH-SPEAKING AREAS: Église de Dieu Unie—France, 127 rue Amelot, 75011 Paris, France

GERMANY: Vereinte Kirche Gottes, Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany. Phone: 0228 - 9454636 Fax: 0228 - 9454637 E-mail: info@gutenachrichten.org

ITALY: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita, Casella Postale 187, 24121 Bergamo Centro, Italy. Phone/Fax: (+39) 035-4523573 E-mail: info@labuonanotizia.org

MALAWI: P.O. Box 32257, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi. E-mail: malawi@ucg.org

MAURITIUS: P.O. Box 53, Quatre Bornes. E-mail: mauritius@ucg.org

The NETHERLANDS: United Church of God Holland, P.O. Box 93, 2800 AB Gouda, The Netherlands

NEW ZEALAND: United Church of God, P.O. Box 22, Auckland, 1015, New Zealand. Phone: 0508-463-763

NIGERIA: United Church of God, P.O. Box 2265, Shomolu, Lagos, Nigeria. Phone: 01-8113644 E-mail: nigeria@ucg.org

PHILIPPINES: United Church of God, P.O. Box 81840, DCCPO, 8000 Davao City, Philippines. Phone: (+63) 82 224-4444 Cell/Text: (+63) 918-904-4444

SCANDINAVIA: Guds Enade Kyrka, P.O. Box 3535, 111 74, Stockholm, Sweden E-mail: sverige@ucg.org

SOUTH AFRICA (and Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland only): United Church of God, Southern Africa, P.O. Box 2209, Beacon Bay, East London 5205. Phone/Fax: 043 748-1694

SPANISH-SPEAKING AREAS: Iglesia de Dios Unida, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027, U.S.A. Phone: (513) 576-9796

TONGA: United Church of God—Tonga, P.O. Box 2617, Nuku’alofa, Tonga

UNITED STATES: *World News and Prophecy*, P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027. Phone (513) 576-9796. E-mail info@ucg.org

ZAMBIA: United Church of God, P.O. Box 23076, Kitwe, Zambia. Phone: (02) 226076. E-mail: zambia@ucg.org

ZIMBABWE: United Church of God, Zimbabwe, P.O. Box 928, Causeway, Harare. Cell Phone: 011716273 E-mail: zimbabwe@ucg.org

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by Robin Webber

Great and Durable Consequences

As I sit in my office on President's Day 2006, I am not alone. Happily, I never suffer for companions in this place where I come to think, renew my spirit and share my thoughts with others. I like company, good company, and over the years, I've been blessed to find it. I normally find myself in the presence of two special people when I take a seat, kick up my feet and ponder life.

All around me are the books and words that reflect the life of the Man from Galilee. The One who delivered a revolutionary message regarding a truth that "shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Someone's watching over my shoulder

But while surrounded with the liberating truths of the Nazarene, there is always someone else watching over my shoulder. I know he is always there. I sometimes feel his steady gaze bearing down on me. I know right where he lodges in the midst of my library shelves. The chiseled and noble face of this Virginian is caught in the work of a Grecian bust.

As your gaze follows mine, you might have to look twice, because this isn't the aged likeness imprinted on the U.S. dollar bill, but rather the determined and vigorous bearing of a younger man filled with purpose and conviction. Yes, my other friend's name is George Washington. In fact, I just looked over, and yes, he is still staring.

But I don't mind, because his constant presence reminds me of some very basic truths when it comes to how God chooses to intervene in human affairs. Yes, it is God that shapes the headlines of the day and brings His prophetic promises to the fore.

You see, I tend to be old-fashioned, with a notion that God places rulers and leaders at certain pivotal points of world events, right where He wants them in order to serve His purpose. The prophet Daniel describes this by proclaiming, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:20-21). God understands the times and how to use them toward His glory.

A change of times and seasons

If ever there was a change of time and seasons that blew across the North American continent, it was 230 years ago. A single document shattered the quiet of the historical norm and elegantly declared, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary..."

The rest would be history, but not without a struggle. There had not been such a republican form of governance since the time of ancient Rome. As the revolution unfolded, it would be a day-by-day drama.

A new creature had to be molded

But one man would make a difference! While Jefferson, Adams and Franklin would deliberate and put to pen the thoughts of liberty, a new creature had to be molded on the battlefield—the American man. No longer an Englishman, Yankee, Southerner, Dutchman from the Hudson River Valley or Scot-Irish from the backwoods, but a new person fighting for a principle that all men are created equal and that in this New World, the law would

(See "CONSEQUENCES," page 14)