

WORLD NEWS *and* PROPHECY

Biblical Perspectives on Current Events

January 1999

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The Message of Mitch

A tragic example of the poor's vulnerability to natural disasters

by Darris McNeely

During His ministry Christ once stated that the poor shall always be with you. Nearly two thousand years later we know this to be true. Today we continually ask, "Why are the poor always with us?"

Hurricane Mitch, which ravaged Central America last November, left a tragic example of the modern poor and how vulnerable they are to natural disasters.

Mitch killed more than 10,500 people, 60 percent of them in Honduras. There are some 13,000 people missing. The two hardest hit nations, Honduras and Nicaragua, buried their dead in mass graves to head off the threat of disease epidemics. The economic damage is in the billions of dollars as the staple crops of bananas and coffee, the major sources of hard currency, were severely damaged. It will take years to recover the economic loss.

Disaster is not unknown to these small third world countries. In 1972 a major earthquake jolted Nicaragua leaving many thousands dead. Add to this the chronic political instability of the region and it presents an unpleasant picture.

We Ask Why?

Such a disaster is incomprehensible in the United States where the eastern and southern coasts are routinely wracked by hurricanes. What is the difference? Why the massive damage and loss of life in such countries? The television pictures that came in from the scene told part of the story. In Nicaragua more than 2,000 died from a mudslide of a collapsed volcano. They were peasants living in shacks on the sides of the volcano, eking out a meager living. The conditions are feudal in nature. The poor cannot afford to live in the safest

regions of a land. They must live on land that is in a flood plain and of little economic value. The better land is often taken by their wealthier and more fortunate neighbors.

Another reason for such loss is the poor infrastructure of these countries. The governments have not invested in the transportation and communication facilities that would allow many to escape the path of an oncoming storm. Of course, these poor people would not have private vehicles to use in the first place. One look at the flimsy homes many of them inhabit also tells a part of the story. Poor people bear the brunt of misery in our modern sophisticated world and there seems no end to it.

Much has been done to alleviate the suffering. Churches, relief organizations, and other nations have poured in the badly

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The mission of *World News and Prophecy* (WNP) is to provide our membership and interested persons with commentary and analysis of selected world news topics in the light of Bible prophecy.

Its purpose is to help readers discern the times and increase their awareness and understanding of the answers Christ gave to His disciples' questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

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

“MITCH” (Continued from page 1)

needed food, medicine, and clothing. The United States’ military has gone in and rebuilt roads and bridges to facilitate the movement of material and people. Many of the multi-national companies such as Chiquita Banana and Dole, with large economic interests in the region, have been more effective in providing aid than anyone else. They also have an urgent need to restore order to protect their large investments.

Only A Band-Aid

A recent Wall Street Journal article had this to say. “The average person, watching the devastation on TV, instinctively cries out, ‘Do something.’ In point of fact, much has been ‘done’ for decades, in the form of foreign aid intended to alleviate the hemisphere’s poverty. It obviously hasn’t worked. Among other things, aid often unintentionally absolves irresponsible governments in the region of blame for their own ruinous policies; so the poverty persists.

“If Washington were a truly serious place, its policy makers and its international institutions would use Mitch as an opportunity to rethink the way countries such as the U.S. have traditionally tried to help Central America. For example, the post-Mitch consensus in Washington seems to be that Central America’s debt should be forgiven. This might provide relief but it will do *nothing* to raise the incomes of the people struggling in the mud and ruin on our TV screens or to protect them in the next storm. Nor, for that matter, will the recently announced \$200 million World Bank package, targeted at hurricane cleanup and rebuilding” (*Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 1998).

This article goes on to suggest economic solutions to the regional poverty. Open and free trade that would integrate them into the larger free market economies is advocated. A more equitable relationship with NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Association, would require a change in the protectionist trade policies of these Central American nations. But much more would be required. Government reform would also need to take place. For decades these countries have suffered from ruinous policies of ineffective governments which have not had the best interests of the people in mind.

An Ancient Problem

The herdsman-turned-prophet Amos saw the same kind of social injustice in eighth century B.C. Israel. The words he spoke then apply to any modern system of social inequity that eats away the hope of a people. His prophecy describes a land of extreme contrasts between the rich and poor. The small farmer found himself

subject to the uncertainties of weather calamity or poor government policy (Amos 4:1–9). This situation was exacerbated by the greed of the wealthy who kept a tight control over the social order (Amos 2:6, 7; 8:4, 5, 6; 5:11, 12). For this Israel would suffer decline and punishment.

This fails to rectify the fundamental problems of injustice caused by greed and error. The problems here cry out for real justice—the kind that will turn around the systemic plagues of a culture.

Before our attention span is diverted by the next crisis *du jour* we should examine a different solution that is more enduring. There is a reason we have “the poor with us always.” God did not intend that society always have a sub-class of people who perpetually exist in generational poverty.

The Jubilee

To ancient Israel God gave a system of laws and statutes meant to produce social justice. The system was meant to work

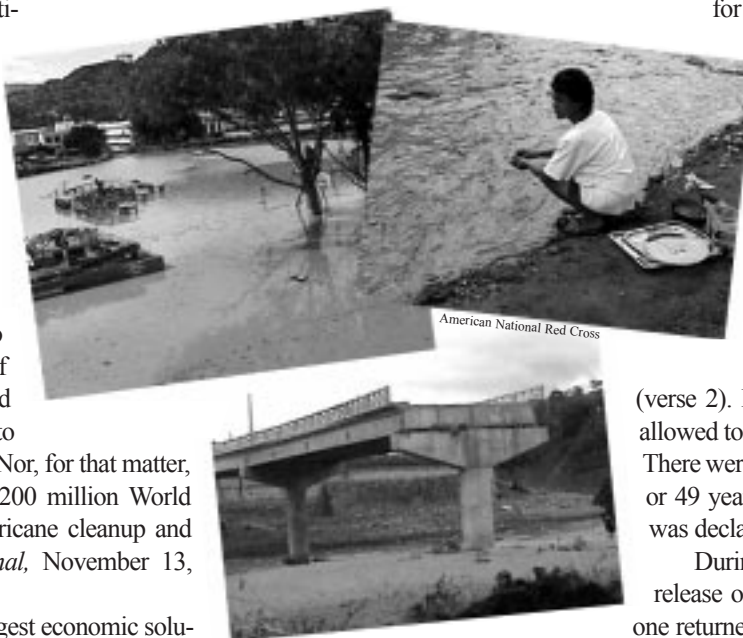
for everyone, providing opportunity and avoiding an unfair economic structure. At the heart of this system was a cycle of land rests and debt restructuring that culminated every fifty years in the Jubilee.

Leviticus 25 lays out how this system worked. When Israel entered the land of promise they were told to set up a series of “land sabbaths” (verse 2). Every seven years the land was allowed to rest from a planting and harvest. There were seven cycles of these land rests, or 49 years. On the fiftieth year a Jubilee was declared (verses 8, 9).

During this fiftieth year, a general release of all debt took place and everyone returned to his or her possession (verse 10). By this returning, God meant there was a general land redistribution where all the land reverted to the family that originally owned the land. If a man had “bought “ a piece of land during this fifty year period he saw it go back to the original owner in the Jubilee. The price of land was determined by how many years there were to the next Jubilee. If there were 25 years remaining, the price of land was more than if there were only seven years to go. In other words, the land was never sold forever. It was only leased for the value of the crops that could be raised upon it. Verse 23 says, “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me”. God owned the land. Everyone else was considered a steward.

Far Reaching Impact

The teaching of the Jubilee goes on to prescribe specific reg-
(See “MITCH,” page 7)



Global War Will Strike Again

Wars have been the sad reality of human history, just as predicted by Jesus.

by Rod Hall

Because of the relative peace this generation has experienced over the past fifty years it is often hard to imagine another world conflict erupting in our lifetime. It is more comfortable to imagine our modern world gradually evolving with no cataclysmic upsets striking our enlightened age. However, wars have been the sad reality in every period of human history just as Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:7). The ghoulish red horseman of the apocalypse has successfully ridden down through time bringing death and destruction wherever he rides. The Apostle John's graphic vision reveals: "Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword" (Revelation 6:4).

Cycles of War

The influence of the red horseman has been felt by every generation of mankind. It will be particularly punishing during the crises at the close of our age. The cycle of war appears unbreakable. The Norwegian Academy of Science and the World Organization for the Protection of Humanity have calculated that, in the last 5,600 years of man's written history, armies have fought 14,531 wars. Over the 5,600 years, they estimate only 292 years of peace. That means that 94 percent of the time, or 5,208 of those years, saw war. The same organizations figure that deaths caused by war have totaled 3.4 billion, or more than half the world's present population.

War, on average, results in about 700,000 deaths every year, or 70 million per century. The most bloody century in history, the 20th century, produced some 150 million deaths from armed conflicts. That is more than half the present population of the United States. Over a decade ago,

James Reston of *The New York Times* wrote that in the past century alone history has recorded 207 wars.

World Wars

Almost thirty nations took part in World War I. Peter Young, professor at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, England, points out, it "took the lives of twice as many men as all the major wars from 1790 to 1913 put together." The total number of military and civilian personnel killed or missing was about 14,000,000. The displacement of millions of refugees and destruction to industrial and community life were unparalleled.

Theodore Ropp, author of *War in the Modern World*, graphically states "World War II killed more persons, cost more money, damaged more property, affected more people, and probably caused more far-reaching changes than any other war in history." More than any previous war, it involved the commitment of nations' entire human and economic resources, blurring the distinction between combatant and noncombatant. The expansion of the battlefield included all of the enemy's territory. In the last stages of the war, two radically new weapons were introduced: the long-range rocket and the atomic bomb.

The cost in human life and economic resources was horrific, making it by far the greatest war in history in terms of human and material resources expended. Taking part were 61 countries with 1.7 billion people, three-fourths of the world's population. A total of 110 million persons were mobilized for military service. Over 55 million civilian and military persons died because of the conflict. Total money spent on the war has been set at more than \$1 trillion, which makes it more expensive than all other wars combined.

The cycle of war appears unbreakable.

In the last 5,600 years of man's written history, armies have fought 14,531 wars.

World War III?

Are the two world wars witnessed in the 20th century a prelude to another worldwide conflict, leading to the final battle before Christ returns (Revelation 16:14-16)? Some reject such a prospect. They view the over 50 years of relative peace that have passed since the end of World War II, as an indication that humankind has learned a lesson from the past and will not engage in another worldwide conflict.

It is difficult to share this optimism for at least four important reasons. First, world wars have not eradicated war. Second, technological advances make war more deadly than ever before. Third, there is a major readjusting of world power and influence which naturally leads to more infighting and conflict. And fourth, the root cause of war has not changed.

World Wars Did Not End War

Neither world war proved to be the war to end all wars. Since the end of World War II there have been more than 150 conflicts in which an estimated ten million people have died. Even today, at any given time, about a fourth of the nations around the globe are caught up in some form of armed conflict. In the light of the present proliferation of national, ethnic and revolutionary wars, it is hard to discount the possibility of a new world conflict breaking out sometime in the future.

Samuel Huntington in his book, *The Clash of Civilization*, summarizes it this way: "The illusion of harmony at the end of that Cold War was soon dissipated by the multiplication of ethnic conflicts and ethnic cleansing...the breakdown of law and order, the emergence of new patterns of alliance and conflict among states." He indicates that "the one harmonious world paradigm is clearly far too divorced from reality to be a useful guide to the post-cold War world" (page 32).

Sophisticated Weaponry

Growing technological sophistication of modern implements of war make

future wars more frightening. In addition to "smart bombs" and other sophisticated weapons delivery systems, the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons around the globe is a major concern.

Nevertheless, some feel encouraged by the prospect of world peace. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the fragmentation of the Soviet Empire has lessened international tensions. However, consider the frightening figures. *Newsweek* reported recently that, from a Cold War high of 13,000 strategic warheads, the United States has 8,500. Russia's has decreased to about 10,000. France had 482, China 284, and Britain 234. Israel was estimated to have 50 to 100, India had the capability for 80, and Pakistan owned 15 to 25. North Korea is believed to have had enough material for two to three bombs. Authorities think Iran is actively pursuing a secret program that would make it a nuclear power before long.

It does not devastate the landscape or kill opponents. The torment that grips victims is more agonizing than death itself.

Iraq also has tried to develop chemical, biological and possibly nuclear capabilities.

The leaders of these nations are candid in explaining that any cutting back on the number of nuclear weapons was more a result of the collapse of the Soviet empire than any desire to disarm the world.

In a way, the world is in more danger now than before the end of the Cold War. These modern nuclear devices are now in danger of passing far more easily to unstable rogue nations and terrorist groups. If enough material for just one bomb is collected, blackmail or attack could be the result. Some sophisticated devices are small enough to be packed inside a suitcase and left nearly anywhere.

Biblical Predictions

Sophisticated weapons of mass

destruction are not divorced from the Bible. It is as up to date as tomorrow's news. Prophecies specifically warn of an unprecedented time of universal distress and earth-jarring developments that will descend on planet earth.

Daniel reveals "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" (Daniel 12:1). The prophet Jeremiah describes how awful and unprecedented is the day of destruction (Jeremiah 30:6-7).

The Apostle John saw in vision an end-time weapon like a futuristic chemical or biological weapon. It does not devastate the landscape or kill opponents. The torment that grips victims is more agonizing than death itself. A sophisticated delivery system is described in terms familiar to John. "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle" (Revelation 9:4-10). He saw iron breastplates, a gold crown, a manlike face and teeth like a lion.

Coming from it was what appeared as streaks of long flowing hair. He heard sounds like chariots or horses rushing to battle. Its long tail carried a sharp sting like a scorpion.

John also records a military exchange that will occur just before Christ's intervention that involves weapons of mass destruction. From the mouth of breastplated implements of war a third of humankind will be killed (Revelation 9:14-19).

Until the mid-20th century we could not have grasped the horrendous portent of these words. Yet they are rendered more ominous by warnings of Jesus Christ that total cosmocide would result unless He intervened (Matthew 24:21-22).

Changing Balance of Power

As the world balance of power shifts and old alliances break down, the world becomes a less stable place. Small skirmishes are more likely to mushroom into regional or even world war. Europe is acting more independently of the United States. Russia is a wounded nation with much economic and political instability, leaving an enormously powerful nuclear arsenal in unstable hands. Economic problems rock many Asian countries. In spite of peace efforts, the Middle East appears

in perpetual conflict. World terrorism is growing.

The world appears headed for more chaotic times. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington summarizes the growing instability including, “the breakdown of governmental authority; the breakup of states; the intensification of tribal, ethnic, and religious conflict; the emergence of international criminal Mafia’s; refugees multiplying into the tens of millions; the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; the spread of terrorism; [and] the prevalence of massacres and ethnic cleansing” (page 35). This picture of a world in chaos was convincingly set forth and summed up in two penetrating works: *Out of Control* by Zbigniew Brezinski and *Pandemonium* by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

Henry Kissinger’s book, *Diplomacy*, summarizes the changing alignment of world powers. Although every world order appears permanent, they are in constant flux. “Never before have the components of world order, their capacity to interact, and their goals all changed quite so rapidly, so deeply, or so globally.

“Whenever the entities constituting the international system change their character, a period of turmoil inevitably follows” (page 806). “Vast global forces are at work that, over the course of time, will render the United States less exceptional.” Economic competition will come from “...other power centers—in Western Europe, Japan, and China (pages 809–810).

“In the years ahead, all the traditional Atlantic relationships will change. Europe will not feel the previous need for American protection and will pursue its economic self-interest much more aggressively. Americans will not be willing to sacrifice as much

for European security and will be tempted by isolationism in various guises; in due course, Germany will insist on the political influence to which its military and economic power entitle it.” (page 821).

Bible prophecy indicates that a major end time world war will threaten the existence of the human race. Major power centers from Europe, Asia and the Middle East will be sucked into the vortex of a cataclysmic conflict the likes of which the world has never seen. Jerusalem and the Middle East will be the center of the controversy that will lead to the end time battle popularly referred to as Armageddon (Revelation 16:14–16).

Heart of the Problem

The root cause of war has not changed. Human nature is a warring nature. “What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn’t it because there is a whole army of evil desires within you? You want what you don’t have, so you kill to get it. You long for what others have, and can’t afford it, so you start a fight to take it away from them” (James 4:1–3 The Living Bible). When people and nations fail to fill their self indulgent agendas through deceit and manipulation, they often turn to violence. Full-blown war follows.

Do not be lulled to sleep. A major world war is on the way. The harsh realities of our world reveal world wars have not eradicated war. Technological advances make war more deadly than ever before. A major readjusting of world power and influence leads to more infighting and conflict. And the root cause of war, human nature, has not changed. ❖

• *Rod Hall is a United Church of God member in Spokane, Washington.*

“DEBT,” (Continued from page 8)

she stood her ground against the most powerful men in the world—the leaders of Catholic Spain, France and the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the pope himself. The Bishop of Rome had ordered her death—saying that killing her would be doing God a service. He had also told the leaders of Europe that invading England would have his blessing. Anything to get back control. The Vatican was losing its control of the European continent after over 1,200 years of keeping the people in darkness. It was essential that England be crushed and that necessitated Elizabeth’s death.

Attempts were made on her life. She survived. All those who threatened her were arrested, tried and in most cases executed for treason. She paid a great personal price, never trusting any man to get close enough to marry her. She was the famed Virgin Queen.

After consolidating her power, she was then able to turn the country into one of the most progressive and prosperous nations of all time and lay the foundation for England’s future greatness.

After defeating the Spanish Armada her navy became the most powerful in the world. Her subjects laid the foundation for the future multitude of nations that would be the free world’s first line of defense for 400 years. By settling the colony of Virginia (named for her), they laid a foundation of religious freedom in North America. Indeed, it has been noted by historians that nobody in history contributed more to America being what it is today than Elizabeth I—without her the United States would not exist as American territory (it would have been Spanish), English would not be spoken in this part of the world, and religious freedom would be an alien concept.

Cecil B. DeMille dedicated his version of *The Ten Commandments* to those struggling for freedom, the same struggle the Israelites went through in coming out of Egypt. It would be a shame if Christians failed to realize that God not only used Moses to deliver His people out of slavery, but undoubtedly used Queen Elizabeth to further the cause of religious freedom, thus making possible the work of God’s church. ❖

“MITCH,” (Continued from page 3)

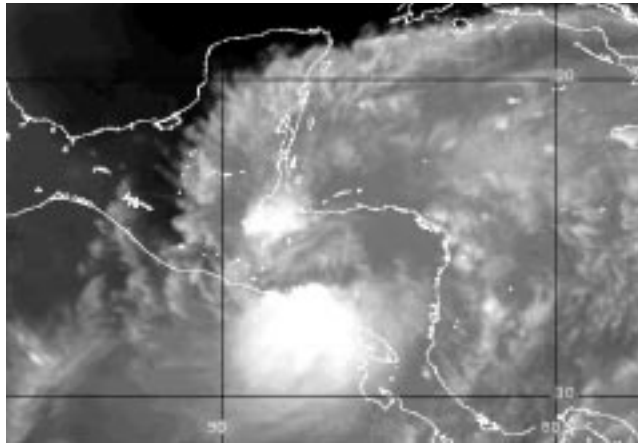
ulations that apply to cases of bankruptcy, property ownership, and employment. The guidelines have far reaching effects upon all society. When studied in the larger context of God's law it can be shown how adherence to this Jubilee structure would ensure a society that was just and equitable for all. Many social problems that affect every modern developed nation are impacted by this law. The solution to the problems of labor strife, family breakup, crime, poverty, and racial strife are found within the safeguards provided by the Jubilee. It is a remarkable chapter that can be seen as a prophecy of how physical nations will be run during the millennial reign of Christ on earth. Acts 3:21 speaks of the “times of restoration of all things.” Could Leviticus 25 and the Jubilee structure be the means by which Christ will restore His way to the earth?

Land reform is the first step to building a viable economy. When the land is controlled by the few then the many, usually the poor, are denied the means of a stable life within the country's economy. Property ownership is a key to God's economic plan (Zechariah 3:10). When a man has title to property there is the incentive to work hard to make a living and preserve the land for posterity. There is pride in ownership. A family that can stay on its land for generations builds stability into a community that positively impacts everyone. The old are cared for by the younger and the children grow up in a nuclear family with a sense of place. No one is forgotten.

Further safeguards for the family structure were built into the Jubilee. The law guaranteed to the family the means of self-sufficiency. Even if poverty or bad management forced people into bankruptcy, a form of economic slavery, there was always the hope of the fiftieth year release from debt. Poverty would not be passed on to each generation. One generation could learn from the mistakes of the previous one and obtain a new start.

Under God's system a nation would own and control its own land. They would not import large numbers of foreigners to work their land, thus creating the conditions for the racial and ethnic strife we see in many areas of the world today. Nor would a nation see its prime land and cash crops bought and controlled by large multi-national companies, controlled by directors who do not live in the country nor have the same concern for the long term social and economic development of the peoples.

It will take more than open free trade policies with other countries to solve the poverty of the Central American nations. Neither NAFTA, the World Bank, nor massive relief aid will bring a permanent solution. Utopia is not found in any humanly devised economic system. It also takes the principles found in the word of God, faithfully taught and followed, to create a system of lasting prosperity and justice.



A Papal Solution?

The problems of economic injustice in the developing third world nations have not escaped the attention of Pope John Paul II. Seeing that economic globalization and financial fluctuations have hurt many of the world's poor, the pontiff has called for a new world vision to deal with the downside of free markets.

In a message intended to coincide with the Roman Catholic Church's World Day of Peace (January 1, 2000), the 78-year old Pontiff also repeated an appeal to rich nations to see the year 2000 as an ideal moral opportunity to help developing countries extricate themselves from the quicksand of international debt. Ironically, the year 2000 is also a year of jubilee as proclaimed by that Church.

In what has been considered one of his strongest political statements ever, the Pope was quoted as saying: “The rapid advance towards globalization of economic and financial systems illustrates the need to establish who is responsible for guaranteeing the global common good and exercising social rights.” He then went on to say: “The free market by itself cannot do this because there are many human needs which have no place in the market.”

The Pope's message, contained in a 20-page document called *Respect For Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace*, has been well received by other religious organizations, including several Protestant churches. The document will soon be sent to heads of state around the world (Reuters, December 1998).

Could this be a step closer to the time when a powerful religious figure will offer a church/state solution to the economic woes of the world, thereby monopolizing control of those who will buy and sell? “And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” (Revelation 13:16, 17).

The endemic poverty of many third world nations, like those of Central America, cries out for a solution. The enduring solution will come with the return of Christ. The poignant message of Hurricane Mitch is drawn from the prayers of believers who cry out, “thy kingdom come.” ❖

Additional Information About Y2K Article

Some have contacted me because they could not find the Web site on disaster relief mentioned in the Y2K article in the December, 1998, issue of *World News and Prophecy*.

You can access the site by going to <http://www.disasterrelief.org>. Click on “library”; then go to whatever article interests you.

Cecil Maranville

The Debt We Owe to Elizabeth

Her Cause for Religious Freedom

by Melvin Rhodes

If not for Elizabeth I and God working through her, we may never have gained the religious freedoms we have today.



Millions of professing Christians will be taking their families to the movies to see *The Prince of Egypt* during the coming months. This animated movie retells the story of Moses. It's already being described as the "most politically correct film of all time," the reason being that the movie's makers consulted 450 theologians from the Vatican to the Religious Right with a number of rabbis in between while making the film. Hopefully, the movie will be worth it, but Hollywood's track record is not good when it comes to Biblical themes.

Rather fewer people will be going to see the movie *Elizabeth*, which my wife and I saw over Thanksgiving weekend. The irony though is that if it weren't for Elizabeth it's doubtful that the *Prince of Egypt* or any other movies would ever have been made. I cannot think of any woman in history who changed the world more. If not for Elizabeth I and God working through her, we may never have gained the religious freedoms we have today.

Elizabeth is the story of England's last queen (the country became Great Britain after her death when she was succeeded by the Scottish King James of KJV fame). She reigned from 1558–1603. The movie focuses on the nine years between 1554 and 1563, years during which she secured the throne. When the story opens, Elizabeth's half sister, Mary, is queen (1553–58), having succeeded their half brother Edward VI who died at the age of 16 after six years as king. All three children were the offspring of Henry VIII and his various wives.

Henry, you will remember, in wanting a divorce from his first wife (Mary's mother), broke from the Roman Church because the pope refused to grant his wish. He then married Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother. When he tired of her he had her beheaded, leaving a very vulnerable young princess, Elizabeth, behind. She was only two years of age at the time of her mother's execution.

Mary and Elizabeth had very little in common. Mary's loyalty to her mother made her a devout Catholic, while Elizabeth was much influenced by the new Protestant movement. Mary looked to the church, while Elizabeth looked to the Bible, which had only fairly recently become available through the invention of the printing press. Her tutors were followers of the new religion and influenced her greatly.

Seeing an opportunity to reverse their misfortune in England, the Catholic church persuaded Mary to cleanse the country of "heretics" (Protestants). Over 300 were burned at the stake under Mary's authority, earning her the name "Bloody Mary," a term passed down to this day. The church persuaded her to marry King Philip II of Spain, who vowed to bring England back under the domain of mother church. The church also tried to persuade Mary to have Elizabeth put to death, fearing Protestant domination if she succeeded to the throne. Mary had Elizabeth arrested and placed in the infamous Tower of London to await execution. Elizabeth was found to be above reproach—nothing against her could be proved and she was spared. Mary constantly put her sister down, referring to her as her "bastard" sister, the daughter of a "whore."

We should all be thankful that Elizabeth survived to become queen. We should be even more thankful to Elizabeth for her role in reversing the power of the church and laying the foundation for religious freedom in the English speaking world. Arguably, nobody in history contributed more to the cause of religious freedom (Elizabeth, incidentally, was the first known monarch in world history not to censor any literary work).

She did this by standing up to the continental European powers and the Vatican. At a time when women were generally considered the weaker sex,

(See "DEBT," page 6)

Oskar Lafontaine

Radical reforms: a personality to watch

by John R. Schroeder



Oskar Lafontaine, German Finance Minister

In recent months a face has risen to new prominence on the European political scene—Germany’s new federal minister of finance, Oskar Lafontaine. Only a few months ago the average man in Europe had probably never heard of him. Now his face is well known on the continent and in Britain.

The British press has had a veritable field day, lambasting his radical tax pronouncements. But the coverage has apparently backfired. As Roger Boyes, *The Times* correspondent in Germany, reported: “Britain’s demonisation of Oscar Lafontaine has done him no harm. It has boosted his standing in France, extracted a declaration of support from Gerhard Schröder, the [German] Chancellor, drawn attention to the British sense of Euro-exclusion and distracted the gaze from some of the minister’s stranger economic announcements” (December 7, 1998).

Herr Lafontaine’s ideas on tax harmonization have frightened the British the most, simply because overall the average citizen in the United Kingdom has one of the lowest tax bills in Europe. Harmonization means one thing to most Britons: a big increase in their annual taxes. But Lafontaine is interested in far more than just radical tax reform.

Roger Boyes summed up some of his

recent activities in another *Times* report: “Within days of taking over power the finance minister declared war on the Bundesbank, shot across the bow of the European Central Bank, turned economic orthodoxies on their head, irritated [the German] cabinet...and boxed Gerhard Schröder into a corner.

“Within weeks he turned his fixed gaze on Europe. Plans for tax harmonisation, extended majority voting [in the EU], tighter political integration...and more, [are] to be in place by the end of Germany’s [EU] presidency next summer” (December 3, 1998).

The British media has clearly taken Oskar Lafontaine very seriously. Tony Paterson filed a report to *The European* directly from Berlin: “The only clear message is that Lafontaine’s rise appears unstoppable. In the few weeks since he was appointed, he has managed to eclipse [Chancellor] Schröder by accumulating more power than any other German minister since the second world war. His finance ministry has taken over Germany’s Europe policy... It is now the dominant political force behind the nation’s, if not Europe’s economy.

“With Germany taking over the European Union Presidency on 1 January, Lafontaine is poised to have an influence

on Europe that two years ago would have been beyond his wildest dreams. He is said to harbour aspirations of becoming the next President of the European Commission” (December 14–20, 1998).

The sudden

emergence

of Oskar Lafontaine must be understood in the light of its concurrence with three important factors on the German and European scene:

- A single currency among most nations in the European Union commencing on the 1st of January, 1999 (Britain being one notable exception). One long-time observer described this momentous event as a new era for Europe. He further stated: “On that date, 11 nations of the 15-member European Union will enter into a currency union that will, by mid-2002 at the latest, consign their national currencies to history.”
- The German assumption on the 1st of January of the rotating six month European Presidency of the E.U.
- The movement of the German capital city from Bonn to Berlin. The presidency of the federal republic has already moved office, and many more roles and functions are slated to follow in 1999.

These three factors may figure heavily in Lafontaine’s future plans. He is said to be “the only man [politician] in Europe to believe in anything.” He and his wife Christa have articulated their basic beliefs in a book titled *Don’t Be Afraid of Globalization*, “which sets out the [socialist] programme that is now steadily being put into place” (*The Times*, December 3, 1998).

Oskar Lafontaine certainly appears to be one man to watch in 1999. However, it is still early days yet and this should cause us to be somewhat cautious in our judgments as one never knows how personal political fortunes will develop in the long run. ❖

OSKAR LAFONTAINE IN BRIEF

1943	Born on September 16 in Saarlouis
1962-1969	Studied physics at Bonn and Saarbrücken, gaining a diploma
1966	Joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)
1974-1976	Deputy Mayor of Saarbrücken
Since 1979	Member of the Federal Executive of the SPD
1987-1995	Deputy Federal Chairman of the SPD
Since 1995	Federal Chairman of the SPD
Since Oct. 1998	Federal Minister of Finance

Source: Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany (in London).

In Brief...

World News Review

Pope Offers Shortcut to Salvation

ROME: (*New York Times*/Special Report) — For many Roman Catholics the year 2000 offers early salvation. Pope John Paul II has announced that throughout the millennium celebration, those who do charitable deeds, or give up cigarettes or alcohol for one day can earn “indulgence” that will eliminate time in purgatory. Indulgences are an ancient form of church-granted amnesty that release penitents from certain forms of punishment. In fact the medieval church sold indulgences, a practice that drove Martin Luther to rebel, finally leading to the Reformation, from which many Protestant churches trace their beginnings. Some liberal Catholics are embarrassed by a practice that seems to offer such a simplistic shortcut to salvation.

In a papal document just released entitled *Incarnations Mysterium* (The Mystery of Incarnation), John Paul formally proclaimed the year 2000 a Holy Year. The edict will also in many ways serve as a practical guide to spiritual salvation during the millennium period. John Paul decreed that the jubilee would begin on Christmas Day 1999, and end on the Feast of Epiphany January 6, 2001.

The pope says individual sinners will be granted “plenary indulgences,” a full pardon for sins as opposed to a shortening of time spent in purgatory. In Catholic theology, souls in purgatory are purifying themselves before entry into heaven.

The pope’s decision to expand the use of indulgences during the millennium celebration is not entirely surprising. In 1985 the pope allowed Catholics to receive indulgences via television. But indulgences (which began in early times of the church) have not always been viewed favorably. In the 16th century Pope Julius II offered indulgences in exchange for contributions to the construction of St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Martin Luther protested and was excommunicated in 1521.

Only God can forgive sin! Any religious organization that suggests we can receive a form of forgiveness, regardless of what it is called,..is an organization that has: “a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof:...from such turn away.” (2 Timothy 3:5 paraphrased)

If “wisdom is the principal thing” (Proverbs 4:7), then we might be wise to pay close attention to the words of the Apostle Paul. “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exal-

teth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

World Education Crises

LONDON: (U.N. Report) — The United Nations’ children’s agency says millions of children are growing up unequipped to build decent lives because they can’t read, write or even count. In developing countries, forty percent of elementary school-age children never enter school, or drop out before they receive even a basic education. In many industrialized countries (including Canada and the U.S.), 15–20 percent of children leave school without the skills necessary to find or keep a job.

The U.N. report says nearly one-sixth of humanity..almost one-billion people will enter the 21st century (year 2001) unable to read a book, or even sign their names, much less operate a computer or understand a simple application form.

If, as so many of our leaders like to say, children are the future of our world, then our world is in serious trouble. “In ancient Israel God admonished His people to “Teach children the ways of the Lord” (Exodus 12:26). Solomon wrote: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right” (Proverbs 22:11). “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). Through the prophet Isaiah, God also delivers a dire warning: “As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths” (Isaiah 3:12) .

Here’s one of the many examples of the latter portion of that statement “they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.”

Tensions Create Possible Splits at Christian Assembly

HARARE, Zimbabwe: (Associated Press) — A Russian Orthodox Church official has complained that a council representing hundreds of millions of Christians is dominated by liberal Westerners, and said his church was being isolated.

The Rev. Hilarion Alfeyev, who leads a five-person Russian delegation at the World Council of Churches assembly in Zimbabwe's capital, said the possibility of Orthodox Church delegates walking out was not a threat, but "an outcry of pain."

"We do not want to leave, but we want the WCC radically transformed," he said.

The Orthodox churches of Bulgaria and the Georgian republic have already quit the council, and senior Russian Orthodox Church officials did not attend the assembly, which met in early December.

The council has a total constituency of 350 to 450 million non-Catholic Christians. The assembly, with 960 delegates from 112 countries, is the WCC's highest deliberative body.

Alfeyev said his church is the largest in the WCC, putting its membership at more than 100 million. "Many Protestant churches have adopted the tendencies of liberal western society," Alfeyev said. "The WCC agenda is dominated by a western Protestant ethos.... We are becoming more and more isolated."

Orthodox leaders have said many on the council take too liberal a stance on key issues including homosexuality and the inclusion of women in the clergy.

The Orthodox pleas drew a testy response from several Protestants at the assembly, including a bishop from Germany who expressed irritation that the Russian had cited his church's size.

In remarks that drew the day's warmest applause, one of the first generation of women priests in the Church of England, Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin, also complained about the threatened walk-outs.

"You say I'm bigger than you are, or we have this great tradition. This is all about power," she said. "Let's not wrap it up in theological language."

"We live a strange world. On one hand modern technology has created a global community, yet it seems everywhere we look we see anything but harmony. Instead envy, strife, hatred and even war, almost as though there was a hidden desire within the human race toward the 'clan mentality,' the my country, my race, my religion syndrome. It has permeated nearly all aspects of our world, no matter where we live."

The lone area where one would think we might find some degree of harmony would be in modern so-called Christianity. After all, Jesus taught that God is love. In fact, on the night before He died He made it clear that we can tell who His disciples are by the love they share for one another. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Yet what we see is a different pattern—one of splits and divisions—and a parting of the ways. It will take the return of Christ to put it all back together.

New Era of European Defense

SAINT MALO, France, Dec 4 (AFP) — Britain and France took a step toward "a new era" of European defense

without America by signing a bilateral accord Friday to allow joint operations outside their territories and those of their NATO allies. The accord is seen as an example of the new bonding between Britain and France on the need to build a European defense arm.

In a symbolic highlighting of the event, the accord was signed on board a British destroyer, anchored alongside a French frigate off the picturesque walled city of Saint Malo on the western Brittany coast.

The signing took place during a two-day Franco-British summit during which Prime Minister Tony Blair and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac are expected to issue a statement of principle underlining their commitment to forging a new European security architecture.

Friday's letter of intent on cooperation in crisis management and operations states that the deal should "improve the operational capabilities which might be available in support of, and contribute to, the developing European Defense Identity."

"As we stand here today on the deck of HMS Birmingham we start a new era in British-French military relations," said British Defense Secretary George Robertson. "It is a significant day for both countries."

Robertson and his French counterpart Alain Richard said the accord marked a major and practical step toward strengthening Europe's defense capability. The agreement, said Richard, would allow "joint action when it is necessary in outside terrain."

The two defense ministers, at the heart of what is shaping up as a new partnership to give the European Union added muscle, stressed that cooperation in the field was "more than just words."

A visible sign of mutual defense cooperation is to emerge this month when troops from the two nations engage in Macedonia, at the head of a force also including German and Dutch soldiers. The so-called "extraction force" will be on standby, in the event of need, to rescue the 2,000 monitors in Kosovo working for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

It will be the first NATO operation to be commanded by France. "We Europeans need to play, and can play, a fuller role in contributing to our own security," Robertson said this week.

The letter of intent provides for the mounting of joint operations and cooperation in logistics, intelligence, civil/military affairs, personnel exchanges and media handling. It comes after Britain—in a significant shift last October—reversed its previous opposition to a "European defense identity."

A move in the direction of a joint defense arm would end years of frustrated efforts by the European powers to speak with a joint voice in military affairs and comes as the 15-nation E.U. prepares to launch its single currency in January.

At the center of the plan is a bid to enable Europeans to take action in regional crises, or missions in other parts of the

world, where Washington is unwilling to commit troops. E.U. leaders have insisted the plan would in no way affect ties with NATO. But there is talk, on the other hand, of coming change for Europe's sole current defense arm, the 10-member Western European Union (WEU), long viewed as ineffective.

Talks earlier this month between 28 foreign and defense ministers from WEU, E.U. and NATO countries left unresolved a long-running debate over the institutional framework for a European defense arm.

Britain for one has insisted that European nations first tackle the nitty-gritty issues of building a proper European military capability before worrying about the institutional arrangements.

Addressing the WEU this week, Robertson stressed that European forces would not have had the military muscle to take on Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo because of the lack of European airpower. "We need a defense capability that is fit for today's world," he said. "For all of us this means tough choices. Together we need to address questions of investment, prioritisation and the restructuring of our defense industries."

Russia Looks East

The News Channel, 12/21/98; MOSCOW: (Agencies) — On Monday, December 21, Russia called for a strategic triangle with India and China, and its defense minister urged closer military cooperation between former Soviet republics after U.S.-British air attacks on Iraq.

U.S. and British air strikes against Iraq have dealt a new humiliating blow to Russia's superpower ambitions, exposing Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov to pressure at home to review Moscow's entire foreign policy.

But many political analysts say that the Russian economic crisis, a lack of political consolidation at home and Moscow's declining role in world affairs strongly limit its ability to force any major shift in international priorities.

Primakov, visiting India, and Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev took a firm line after Russia's bitter criticism of the four-day blitz by bombs and missiles.

But another leading general said that while military cooperation with London and Washington could be affected, Moscow did not expect relations with the NATO military alliance as a whole to be soured.

Primakov made clear Russia would not back down from its condemnation of the strikes, and would be equally critical of any new offensive against Baghdad in the future.

"We will never change our position. We are very negative about the use of force bypassing the Security Council," he said in comments during a visit to New Delhi. He said Russia, China and India should form a "strategic triangle" as a counterweight to U.S. influence in the world.

The decision by the United States and Britain to launch air raids without seeking approval from the U.N.

Security Council infuriated Russia, which jealously guards its position as a permanent Security Council member. After the bombing ended on Saturday, President Boris Yeltsin said common sense had prevailed but added that a profound review of international relations was now necessary.

Russia recalled its ambassadors to London and Washington for consultations as a sign of protest last week. The gesture was considered bold but largely symbolic.

Unfortunate Rise in Anglo/American Unmarried Couples

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that more than four million American households consist of unmarried couples living together. In 1970 there was one unmarried couple for every 100 households. Now that number is eight, based on 1997 figures. Further research shows that up to 50 percent of American women in their early 30s have lived with a man outside the marriage bonds.

The overall climate in Britain is very similar. Noted British author Paul Johnson has lamented: "The powers-that-be in our confused society seem to be ganging up together in a direct assault on the institution of marriage. A majority of the Anglican bishops, a body of men always inclined to side with sin if it's fashionable, say that cohabiting couples are just as worthy in God's eyes as unmarried ones." For instance, the Bishop of Hereford has urged Christian people to recognize the reality of this social change, and his view is all too common.

But Paul Johnson minces no words in his conclusion: "For those who lay down the moral, or immoral, laws to us today nearly all come from stable backgrounds themselves. That is what got them the positions they hold. That is what makes their advocacy of the liberal—perhaps one should say libertine—approach so irresponsible and cruel. It is to deny to others, who are still children or yet unborn, the advantages we take for granted."

Back across the Atlantic nationally syndicated columnist William Murchison observed: "A sad likelihood is that many of today's cohabiters fear and shrink from commitment. Since 1960, the culture has worked overtime pitching instant gratification to the customers.... Well, yes, marriage restricts and restrains; it does so in order to liberate. Cohabiters confuse license with true freedom, which flourishes only in a structured environment where rights and duties play off each other, endlessly and elegantly."

Sources: *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily Mail* (Britain), *The Washington Times*

Contributors:

Peter Eddington, David Palmer,

John R Schroeder

The Panama Canal: A Sea Gate Changes Hands

by Fred Nance

On December 31, 1999, the world's richest nation, the United States of America, will transfer ownership of the Panama Canal into the hands of a small, relatively poor country, Panama, after a presence of more than 90 years. The Carter-Torrijos treaties (1978), ratified in the U.S. senate by a single vote, will give Panama possession of all of its territory, including several billion dollars worth of land, buildings, and equipment that were once part of the canal zone.



Just how important is the canal? According to figures from *Latin Trade* magazine, around 13,000 ships pass through the canal each year, carrying an estimated four percent of the world's goods around the globe. More importantly, about seventy percent of all the trade through the canal is coming from or headed to the United States. This valuable artery of shipping is vital to the flow of goods to and from U.S. factories. And according to *Latin Trade*, a one billion dollar improvement program is well under way that includes a widening of the narrow Gaillard Cut, and is due for completion by 2002. Single file traffic will be converted to two-way traffic allowing even the largest ships to pass (delays have increased in numbers since an increase in traffic rose during the years 1995-1996). Says Alberto Aleman, the Panama Canal

Commissions senior administrator, "Panama has much to offer," describing it as, "the only port in the world that has two oceans plus a canal that runs through it. You can look at it as one big port." Moreover, there exist many "dry canal system schemes" on the drawing board. A dry canal system would include new ports where containers are unloaded and rushed across land to ships waiting on the other side.

A Sea Gate Changes Hands

For over 90 years the United States has possessed this vital gate of world commerce. God told Abraham in the book of Genesis that He would make a great nation of some of his descendants, and that these peoples would possess "the gates of their enemies" (Genesis 22:16). This prophecy was repeated in Genesis 24:60: "And they blessed Rebekah and said to her: Our sister may you become the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them." Later in the book of Leviticus, God warned the Israelites (Leviticus 26:19), "I will break the pride of your power." According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, one of the definitions of "pride" is: "delight or elation arising from some act, possession, or relationship." Certainly then, losing possession of a vital gate of world trade qualifies as pride being broken.

U.S. Prepares to Withdraw

According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal* titled "Let Panama Try Life Without a U.S. Presence," the author points out that as the date of U.S.



A.K. Ashway

withdrawal approaches, both sides are having second thoughts. A turnaround in Panamanian opinion since the 1978 treaty is striking. Sixty-seven percent of the people approved of the Carter-Torrijos treaty in a referendum in 1978. In the last few years, however, some surveys indicate that as high as 70 percent want continued U.S. military presence in their country. Some Panamanians would even like to see the U.S. stay in charge of the canal, or at least have a hand in its operation. Perhaps factors influencing the change are that the U.S. military poured \$300 million or more into the local economy each year, provided fresh drinking water, protected forest lands near the canal, and constructed many roads and schools that would not have existed without the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In the United States, there remains uncertainty about withdrawal from the canal zone as well. Over the past 20 years, many members of Congress, as the *Wall Street Journal* article points out, have called for revision of the treaty. Some ideas and packages have been proposed by members of Congress to keep a U.S. presence in the canal zone.

Despite opinions on both sides of the issue, the date of December 31, 1999, draws closer, a date when the country of Panama will take control of the canal. The United States will lose a valuable sea gate. ❖

• Fred Nance is a United Church of God member in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

“TREES,” (Continued from page 16)

wealth of living things. Suriname’s is the least troubled rain forest in existence, harboring 200 known mammal species (including monkeys in trees), 674 bird species, 99 amphibian species, more than 5,000 plant species, rivers, rocks, heat, darkness and a silence as deep as stars.”

Sensory Overload

Reading such an account almost makes one feel as if he or she is walking with Adam and Eve the very first time they explored Eden and all of its fullness. Through Mr. Rosenblatt’s words we begin to conjure the sensual rush that must have been. As we weave through this introductory paragraph with its overpowering and haunting statistics we gain a sense of God’s answer to Job when He said, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4).

Laying out this colorful entry of thought, Mr. Rosenblatt continues, “that is the way Russell Mittermeier would like to keep this forest, and all the other forested areas of the world. The president of Conservation International, who is also a first-rate primatologist (A.V. Dartmouth, summa; Ph.D. Harvard), is part scientist, part activist, part barker and part kid. He and Peter A. Seligmann, CI’s founder and chief executive, have gained an enormous amount of money, respect and attention for their 11-year-old organization, based in Washington. Mittermeier, the scientist, is all seriousness and wonder. He has written or co-written several books, including a gorgeous monster-size photographic work called ‘Megadiversity,’ and hundreds of monographs of his beloved monkeys.

“All his traits fuse with the activist to create a formidable force for the preservation of forest life, which needs protectors. Nearly 60 percent of the world’s tropical rain forests have been lost, and what remains is under extreme pressure from logging and human population growth. More than 90 percent of the forests in the U.S. have been logged at least once. And once a forest is cut down, many of the living things it has harbored will be driven into extinction.”

Here is a man who is in alignment with “the first job,” who has a full grasp of the “dominion” over the earth that God granted man from the beginning—a dominion of constructive stewardship that would be creative and preservationist in scope. Preservation of an entire episode of creation called the “Third Day” when God “brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit.... And God saw that it was good.” Yes, we begin to understand “seeing through the trees.”

Out of Step With God

Today, we see the result of countless factors coming into play that are affecting the “lungs of the earth,” the anchor to our soil, the home to countless living entities created by God. Greed, ignorance, neglect, nationalism, and a lack of imagination or foresight have all come into play. Any student of bible prophe-

cy knows that what we see rapidly occurring at the close of the twentieth century will be but a “pittance” in comparison to what the prophecies of Revelation bear out.

Revelation 7:1–3 describes the decimation of our ecosystem brought about by humanity’s unwillingness to cooperate with God. Notice how God shares a different vision than Mr. Rosenblatt’s Suriname experience when he brings the future forward to us stating in Revelation 7:1–3:

“After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and sea, saying, Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

Once that is accomplished, Revelation 8:7 gives us a dramatic picture: “And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.” What a contrast between the lushness and vitality of life as depicted by Mr. Rosenblatt and the momentary bleak future view of desolation that lies ahead because of humanity as a whole being out of step with the Creator.

A Seal of Belief

Out of this dismal panorama of destruction springs hope! The beginning of a Second Eden, but only a beginning. Isaiah 35:1–2 describes a world once again in bud and bloom: “The wilderness and a wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose: It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing, the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.”

God speaks of a time in Isaiah 41:19 when “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine, and the box tree together.” But why this reforestation? Does it serve any purpose beyond eco-management? Notice verse 20: “That they may see and know, And consider and understand together, That the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.” God is granting humanity an opportunity “to see through the trees” to fully understand and appreciate Him as creator and sustainer. He asks man to learn the lesson of sustaining that which has been given. Sustaining the creation is a seal of our belief in someone greater than ourselves.

The people of this future time, the Millennium, are going to have a second opportunity to fulfill the godly command “to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.” The term “replenish” means to fill, to make full, or to finish, to complete. In a sense this is describing that God has made creation and now we have the opportunity to “put on the icing” in perfect balance to what God has started.

Like the book of Ecclesiastes states in its appraisal of all

life, “there is a time to reap and a time to sow.” But, to do this will take a new mind, a new vision, and effort to sustain it. Anybody can be offered something, but it’s another thing to keep it good and pass it on to someone else.

Sowing For the Future

There is the story of a man who was watching his eighty-year-old neighbor planting a small peach tree. He asked him: “You don’t expect to eat peaches from that tree, do you?” The old man rested on his spade. He said, “No, not at my age. I know I won’t. But all my life I’ve enjoyed peaches—never from a tree I planted myself. I’m just trying to pay the other fellows who planted the trees for me.” This story is very reminiscent of the true undertaking of America’s “Johnny Appleseed” who wandered through the Midwest of the last century planting orchards wherever he went.

That’s truly a novel concept. It is in a sense the “new mind” that Isaiah shares throughout his writings. That God works with a plan that works. It is the vision of Russell Mittermeier which moves beyond a single peach or apple tree to an entire world. Correspondent Rosenblatt continues, “Realizing that it’s impossible to guard every tree in every place, Mittermeier and CI advocate a focused two-sided strategy. One priority, based on the ideas of British conservationist Norman Myers, is to protect the world’s ‘hot spots,’ areas that are disturbed by human activity but still exceptionally rich in animal and plant species found nowhere else. CI has identified 25 hot spots where preservation efforts could have maximum benefit, such as the island of Madagascar and the Atlantic forest region of eastern Brazil.

“The other priority is to watch over tropical wilderness areas relatively untouched by people, including the upper Amazon region of South America and the Congo basin in Central Africa. In both hot spots and wilderness regions, CI pushes for the demarcation of key reserves that will forever be off limits to agriculture and industry. But just as important is the nurturing of other territories where healthy forests and human enterprise can coexist. CI has a simple message for developing countries: Your forests are more valuable intact and alive than they are chopped down and dead.

“Profits could come, for example, from the marketing of exotic foods, chemicals and medicines found only in the rain forests and from the largely untapped potential of ecotourism. No place is wilder or more worth saving than Suriname, a country with only 400,000 people in a territory the size of New England. Mittermeier holds a special affection for this remote wedge-shaped corner of South America. Last spring, at CI’s urging, the government decided to create the Nature Reserve—about one-tenth of the entire country.”

It is interesting to note Mr. Mittermeier’s intention to not only “isolate creation,” but to responsibly teach and integrate the human creation towards harmony with the world around. Can we begin to “see through the trees” and understand the “millennial call” is not only “don’t touch,” but equally “how to handle.”

An Inter-dependent World

For a moment let’s appreciate why God said “It is good” after the third day. Let’s peek into “Eden.” Mr. Rosenblatt paints a fascinating world of complexity and interdependence.

“Here alone are 300 species of trees. They are at once the pillars and the superintendents of the rain forests, the frame of the house and its chief occupants. The spiny understory palm trees make baskets from branches growing out of their trunks, which become compost machines for falling leaves, which in turn sustain the trees. Since the soil is not deep enough for roots to penetrate, the larger trees like a ceiba have buttresses that lie flat on the platform of the forest; some of the narrower trees are supported by stilt-roots at the base that look like whisk brooms.

“The Parkia tree rises to the sun and spreads a flat umbrella over the others. There is full employment. Trees support lizards and insects, which themselves support birds and monkeys. Army ants bivouac and hang from tree limbs in living nests, with their pupae asleep in the center. Sometimes the trees become food; they can be devoured by strangler figs, which grow from seeds dropped by birds, then rise and surround a tree like a parasite vine, swallow it whole and take its place.”

Sometimes, the task before us can seem overwhelming and we simply don’t know where to start. Russell Mittermeier could just throw in the towel or better still throw away the seed. We, ourselves, could be inclined to just wait for Isaiah to become reality rather than prophecy.

But let’s always remember that we are to “live the World Tomorrow, today!” Let’s face it, at least Mittermeier is making a difference. His actions are pointing to a time when men and women, and all people of good will shall come into a full and responsible relationship with all living things. So what are we planting or preserving in our lives? It may not be a jungle, it may not even be a “woods.” Better still it might seem like a jungle, because there simply doesn’t seem to be a solution to get through the thick undergrowth of the concerns of the past, present or the future. The answers aren’t forthcoming and even if we see them they are seemingly out of reach.

Imagine the wonderful World Tomorrow as nations are not only given new opportunities to “dress the garden, but once and for all are going to be taught how to “keep it.” Ultimately, it comes down to the reality of the most important tree of all—the Tree of Life. It is from this tree God intended humanity to partake of and preserve, from the beginning. A tree whose fruits would allow humanity not only a proper relationship with its maker, but a lasting and proper relationship with fellow man and the environment God offered for stewardship.

But for now, there is one man in the jungle of Suriname who is working with a plan that involves trees, monkeys, bugs, roots and vines. Who is not too close to the trees to truly see the forest; and beyond the forest to future generations. Perhaps, if there was a sign posted outside this reserve in Suriname giving directions it would simply say, “This is the way, walk you in it.” ❖

This Is the Way... Seeing Through the Trees

by Robin Webber

Over a century ago as America was embarking forward into the global phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution, a young man from New England ventured into the nearby woods to learn a lesson of personal worth that he felt might soon be lost in an ever increasing complex society. At stake was man's ability to access his proper role within the Creation.

He recorded in "Walden" a brief but famous entry stating his mission as, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach..." Thoreau is long dead, but the call, the "echo of God's voice" within the creation is still there today that we might learn a valuable truth. The call goes back to the beginning of creation when God placed Adam in the garden and instructed the first human "to dress and keep it." This job description is recorded in Genesis 2:15. Adam's job was humanity's first assignment, even before naming the animals, or "multiplying and replenishing the earth." The job was twofold in nature. One was to dress the garden which denotes an action of creative effort, but notice the other side of the commission which has a visionary "beyond the moment" aspect—"to keep it." From the beginning *preservation* was a demand within the relationship between God and man.

The First Job

Recently a reporter named Roger Rosenblatt went one better than Thoreau. He traversed the jungles of South America to record the life work of Russell Mittermeier—one man who is succeeding for the moment in responding to the "first job." In his article "Into the Woods," which appeared in the December 14 issue of *Time*, Mr. Rosenblatt begins by stating his own wilderness encounter. "It takes a moment to realize what I am seeing: A monkey in a tree. To be specific, it is a black spider monkey swinging through the topmost branches of a ceiba tree in the rain forest in Suriname, the former Dutch Guyana, north of Brazil.

"Thick-furred, with a red face, the monkey moves by sprawling out and brachiating from branch to branch through the high forest canopy.... But then the thought comes to me that this is the wilderness, not a zoo; the monkey is wild; the ceiba tree spreads its lush green cover in a vast tract of 4 million untrodden acres that constitutes the Central Suriname Nature Reserve. Except for the few of us in the camp, there are not any people within a radius of 50 miles, nor is it likely that any people have even set foot in most of this land within the past thousand years. There are plenty of other species in evidence: rain forests contain a disproportionate share of the world's

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