

NOVEMBER 2007

THE

WWW.REALTRUTH.ORG

REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

What Next for FRANCE?



THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

VOL. V | NO. 9 | NOVEMBER 2007

A R T I C L E S

WWW.REALTRUTH.ORG



PHOTO: MCT

The Pursuit of Happiness ...in a Second Life

Millions are attempting to escape their daily lives through virtual worlds, but are left unsatisfied. Here's why.

Page 15

Inside Myanmar: Cycle of Failure (Part One)

How did the crisis in Myanmar rise to a boil—how are the world's leading nations responding to the situation—and how will this nation's cycle of failure end?

Page 3

Tips for a Happy Marriage

Marriages fail each day. Do not become another statistic!

Page 7

The Book of Revelation—the Untold Good News!

Cataclysmic environmental changes—a nuclear World War—the rise and fall of governments—food shortages and pestilences run amok! These and other nightmarish events are foretold in the final book of the Bible. Yet few understand the good news contained within it.

Page 9

France: A Singular Nation, A Fateful Future

As Europe continues to search for its role on the world stage in the 21st century, what kinds of decisions will face *la grande nation*?

Page 12

F E A T U R E S

Personal from David C. Pack	1
Q&A	20
Reader Comments	20
World News Desk	22

ABOUT OUR COVER: With a new president and a new direction, what lies in France's future?

PHOTO: MCT

PHOTO CREDITS: All photographs courtesy of ArtToday, Inc., unless noted otherwise.

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DAVID C. PACK

SENIOR EDITORS
JEFFREY R. AMBROSE
JAMES F. TURCK
GEORGE C. ROGERS

PUBLISHING
KEVIN D. DENEEN

MANAGING EDITOR
BRUCE A. RITTER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

DAVID C. PACK
JEFFREY R. AMBROSE
JEFFREY D. DAVIS
KEVIN D. DENEEN
MARK P. DENEEN
RYAN P. DENEEN
ROBERT R. FARRELL
GABRIEL N. LISCHAK
LARRY J. MCELROY
ROBERT W. PACK
JUSTIN T. PALM
BRUCE A. RITTER
GEORGE C. ROGERS
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
JAMES F. TURCK

COPY EDITORS

SAMUEL C. BAXTER
JUSTIN T. PALM
STACEY L. CASWELL

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

VERNIA I. ANSTEY
JENNIFER L. DENEEN
JESSICA A. DENEEN
DAVINA L. LISCHAK
ROSLYN D. MCFARLAND
GINGER M. SCHLEIFER
DEBORAH A. TUCKER

ART/GRAPHICS

JAMES T. BOYLE
DARNITRA D. MAIDEN
PAULA C. RONDEAU

INFORMATION SERVICES

BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
JEFFREY D. DAVIS
ANGELA K. ECHELBERGER

The **REAL TRUTH** magazine is provided free of charge. This is made possible by the voluntary, freely given tithes and offerings of the members of The Restored Church of God, and by the offerings and donations of co-workers and donors. Contributions are gratefully welcomed and are tax-deductible in the U.S. and Canada. Those who wish to voluntarily aid and support the Work of God in preaching and publishing the gospel to all nations are gladly welcomed as co-workers. Contributions should be sent to the address below.

The preparation and production of this magazine involved the work of editors, proofreaders, graphic artists, illustrators, writers, researchers and those who support the Work of God.

Copyright © 2007, The Restored Church of God. Printed in the USA. All rights reserved.

The Restored Church of God is not responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photos.

Scriptures are quoted from the King James (or Authorized) Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

Contact The REAL TRUTH:

P.O. Box 23295
Wadsworth, OH 44282
www.RealTruth.org
info@RealTruth.org

Published monthly (except March-April and September-October issues).

PERSONAL FROM

David C. Pack



Have You Committed the Unforgiveable Sin?

MILLIONS PROFESS TO practice Christianity, but very few understand how the Bible's teachings apply in their own lives. One of the saddest ways people become confused is ignorance regarding the "unpardonable sin," thinking they have committed it in their lives.

Jesus *did* speak of a sin that "shall not be forgiven...neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:31-32). This sin is most often referred to as "the unpardonable sin."

Widespread confusion surrounds this subject. So many people worry that they *may have* committed, or *did* commit, the unpardonable sin. Yet most have not known how to *recognize* the sin that "shall not be forgiven."

As a longtime pastor who has worked with many thousands, I have counseled scores of people who were racked with fear, anxiety and concern that they were guilty of this sin. It was often very painful to watch confusion, misunderstanding and guilt unnecessarily grip people who still sincerely wanted to serve God, *after* believing they had committed this unforgiveable sin. In many cases, they were absolutely *certain* that they were guilty of it. Invariably, after counseling with them, it was clear that they were not. But convincing them of this was sometimes not easy.

I have often had to explain that the very act of *being concerned* is its own proof that one has not gone far

enough to be guilty of this sin. Still, many continued to agonize that they had been condemned by God—with no hope of being restored to the Christian path. It often took long hours—*much* counsel and explanation—to reassure them that they had not committed the unpardonable sin! I was not always able to convince them. Some still *gave up* seeking and obeying God because they had lost hope!

What then is this sin? Can one *know* if he has committed it—or *know* that there is still hope because he has not? These are vitally important questions—and they require clear, PLAIN answers!

Mass Deception

Almost two billion people profess to be Christians. While they have slight differences in doctrine, they share generally similar beliefs.

The truth is, most never truly *study* the Bible. Many others never even open it. Most professing Christians have *no idea* what it teaches—on almost any subject. Their beliefs are derived from ASSUMPTIONS based on what they have been TOLD the Bible says.

This is perhaps most true about *what a Christian is*. Before the subject of the unpardonable sin can be understood, the definition of a Christian must be established.

Again, billions believe—PROFESS—that they are Christians. They can also readily give *their* definition

of a Christian, but cannot give the *Bible* definition.

Certainly ALL who profess to be Christians want to be saved! This goal cannot be separated from either the question of what is a Christian or that of what is the unpardonable sin.

Pause a moment to consider these points: If one is not a *true* Christian, then the issue of the unpardonable sin may be largely irrelevant. This is something we will clarify later.

On the other hand, if one *is* a true Christian, but commits the unpardonable sin, however it is defined, he will *not* be saved. This much is not hard to understand—but it is very important.

So, understanding the sin that “shall not be forgiven” most certainly *is* relevant to the real Christian! *He* must be very careful not to commit this sin.

First, consider salvation from another viewpoint. If one *desires* to be saved, learns what he must be saved *from*, understands that salvation is a *gift*, but does not know *how* to receive it, what good does God’s offer do him? All of this has everything to do with what a Christian is. Do not be too sure you know the answer.

Surely no sincere person who understands even the most basic teachings of God thinks that He will save those who are *not* Christians (Acts 4:12). Yet almost no one understands the Bible definition of a Christian!

Since only *true* Christians will be saved, then we must know what IS a true Christian. As with any doctrine, we must examine what God’s Word teaches. Then we will be prepared to discuss the unpardonable sin.

So let’s understand how *God* defines a Christian.

What is a Christian?

Is there a single verse to which we can turn that defines a Christian?

There is! But it is not the popular idea taught in the so-called “Christian” world.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For as many as are *led by the Spirit of God*, THEY are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). A Christian is one who has the Holy Spirit leading him. But is having God’s Spirit absolutely *essential* to being a Christian? A few verses earlier, Paul said, “But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, *he is none of His*” (vs. 9)!

It is that simple! One either has the Spirit of God, and *is* a Christian, or does *not* have it, and is *not* a Christian—is “none of His.” All those who are truly converted must have the Holy Spirit in them.

But what does this *mean*? And is this all there is to Christianity and conversion, with nothing more to understand?

Human beings do not have life inherent within them. They are not born with an immortal soul (Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 18:4, 20; Matt. 10:28). Since you are not immortal, your life will span a certain allotted time, after which you will die. That is absolute (Heb. 9:27). Unless God intervenes in your life, you have no future—no hope—beyond a limited time of about 70-80 years.

You *must* receive the Holy Spirit. But *how*?

Most believe that there are no requirements—no *conditions*—to being saved. This is not true. The following verses prove that there are *three pre-conditions* that must be met just to receive the Holy Spirit.

On the day that Christ established the New Testament Church, the Apostle Peter gave a powerful sermon. It was so convicting that 3,000 were baptized. Before baptism, many had asked Peter, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). His instruction was, “*Repent, and be baptized every one*

of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This is God’s plain command to: (1) *Repent* and (2) *be baptized*—in this order—to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit! Mark 1:14-15 adds that Christ taught one must also (3) *believe the gospel* of the kingdom of God.

From baptism onward, the new convert is led by the Holy Spirit. Once we are ready to discuss the unpardonable sin, this will be critically important to remember.

What Repentance Means

To *repent* means to CHANGE. The repentant mind reflects a completely different, CHANGED attitude. It has gone from the way of pleasing the *self*, to seeking to please *God*. It wants to submit to God and His way!

Human nature is vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy, resentment, foolishness and more. It is the way of grasping for self—looking out for self. Notice: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

This verse reveals that receiving God’s Spirit is crucial if one hopes to please God. Verse 6 had said, “For to be carnally minded is *death*; but to be SPIRITUALLY minded is *life and peace*.” The spiritually minded have the Holy Spirit. Christ called God’s Spirit the “Spirit of truth” (John 15:26; 16:13). He said it would *lead* the convert “into all truth.”

Perhaps the most important truth that a Christian can be led to see is a proper understanding of himself—and the forces at work within his human nature. Ephesians 2:2 reveals that Satan is the “prince of the power of the air.” As the “god of this world”

Please see PERSONAL, page 21

How did the crisis in Myanmar rise to a boil—how are the world’s leading nations responding to the situation—and how will this nation’s cycle of failure end?



PHOTO: MCT

INSIDE
MYANMAR
CYCLE OF FAILURE

PART ONE

BY ROBERT W. PACK

A BRITISH COLONY for 62 years, the Union of Burma gained its independence in 1948. Looking forward to a peaceful and successful future, the people of Burma organized a fledgling democratic government in the capital city of Rangoon.

However, despite initial hopeful intentions, attempts to organize dozens of minority interests, ethnic groups and political factions—all of which spoke different languages and dialects—into a cohesive and productive unit of government proved utterly unworkable.

Leaders of minority groups such as the Shan, Kachin, Rohanis and Karen were given autonomous authority within the new government—and each quickly began to position and maneuver for wealth, power, influence and status for their own faction, group or geographical region. This focus on personal gain—as opposed to stabilizing the new collective country for the people and common good—led to a disastrous splintering of the government. Burma descended into chaos overnight.

Although many still blame the British for the confusion left in their departure, the land and its peoples had problems before, during and after British colonial rule. The region had been an area of violent conflict for centuries. Absent of the relative peace and organization found under the British rule, Burma quickly found itself under the control of power-hungry military leaders, each scrambling to finance his own guerrilla army to accumulate power. Citizens were caught in the crossfire, as aspirations for peace and prosperity were replaced with doubt, fear and an uncertain future.

During the mid-20th century, Burma was the wealthiest nation in Southeast Asia, due to its immense natural resources. The country was blanketed with millions of acres of forest containing valuable timber such as teakwood. In addition, Burma’s “Valley

of Rubies” supplied over 90% of the world’s rubies. Vast and seemingly limitless pools of oil and collections of natural gas lay underground waiting to be collected and distributed around the world.

However, instead of these natural resources being utilized to pursue economic development, these were used to finance the oppression of the very people to whom the resources belonged.

For decades, the Burmese have continued to strain under this oppression, and in recent years nothing has changed. Since 1988, a military junta called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has controlled the nation. First led by General Ne Win, the junta seized control and renamed the country Myanmar.

Rumors began to circulate of violent “ethnic cleansing” and brutal suppression of opposition voices in the remote northern jungles and along the border with Thailand. No matter how peaceful the dissent of the Burmese citizens, the junta imprisoned and sometimes executed them, under the guise of restoring order in a state of tumult.

The junta’s tactics went largely unnoticed, or at least unaddressed, by neighboring countries and international powers—leading the government to further silence opposition by interrogating and imprisoning thousands more. Eventually it arrested the most adamant voice for freedom in the country, Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the Burmese National League for Democracy. Dr. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Finally, to calm internal uprisings and restore confidence on the world stage that the junta’s ultimate intentions were to return democratic power to the people, the SLORC allowed national elections in 1990. This resulted in a landslide mandate that elected the National League for Democracy. There was a feeling of hope among the citizenry that the winds of change were finally beginning to blow.

However, the junta maintained control as if the elections had never occurred. In fact, it used the elections as a tool to identify leading democratic

voices, and then carry out systematic reprisals against them.

Although Dr. Suu Kyi was released due to international pressure, the country has been in a frenzied free-fall since the failed elections. In the wake of the junta’s refusal to honor election results, governments around the world bickered, held summits and “talked” for almost 20 years. All efforts failed to find a consensus in determining the steps needed to bring peace and security to Myanmar.

The reason there has been no harmony in solving Myanmar’s situation is easily seen when the driving force behind each government’s actions are identified for what they truly are: sheer, unadulterated greed and self-interest. Providing peace and stability in Myanmar because it is the right thing to do has been tacitly reduced to an ancillary benefit by every nation involved. Of course, no government would admit this, however, world governments fall into two basic categories with regard to Myanmar: (1) those with economic ties to the junta; (2) those who worry that a well-armed military in Myanmar could threaten their own national security or international interests.

Instead of focusing on the absolute urgency to find a solution now, governments continue to hold summits and posture on the world stage to ensure they appear sufficiently distraught as they carry on “business as usual.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands in Myanmar seek refuge in neighboring countries, as a humanitarian nightmare of epic proportions continues to unfold.

Just how bad have the current conditions in Myanmar become? Can the existing totalitarian rule guide its people to economic and social prosperity? Where does the real solution lie?

Greed, Self-Interest and Destruction From Within

Disturbing reports of Myanmar’s alarming descent into chaos have taken center stage in the daily news media and have finally captured the world’s attention.

The recent arrests and increased violence toward pro-democracy pro-

testors under the guise of restoring peace and order is nothing new to other countries, especially those in the region. With vivid images of students and peaceful monks being met with unprecedented government force in Rangoon, nations around the world can no longer turn a blind eye to Myanmar’s troubles.

Yet the shocking imagery and stories reported in news publications and nightly television news sound bites are only the tip of the iceberg of the real horrors taking place.

Before the effects can be examined, the cause of the unfolding crisis must be clearly identified for what it is: greed fueling hunger for continued power and control.

How have the oppressive tactics affected the lives of 55 million citizens? What has been the human toll of government leaders holding on to power at all cost?

Beginning in 1996, the Burmese army launched a systematic plan to root out armed rebels and all other resistance to governmental control. The plan, known as the “four cuts,” was aimed largely at the ethnic minority Karen and Shan peoples in the north. The goal was simple: Cut off food, money, intelligence and eliminate potential new recruits for the pro-democracy movement.

The results have been decisive and the human toll devastating.

Over the course of the past decade, junta-led soldiers have destroyed more than 2,500 villages in Myanmar. According to the Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, a non-governmental agency that works closely with the United Nations, over 200,000 refugees are living in ten separate camps inside Thailand alone. Shockingly, some estimates indicate that ten times this number have found refuge there illegally. Millions more are estimated to have sought shelter in neighboring Bangladesh, China and India.

Having managed to escape to the camps, refugees are relatively safe, and provided with basic necessities such as food, shelter in small huts and education for their children.

Nevertheless, this is by no means a “life,” especially compared to the standard of living enjoyed in the prosperous nations of the West. Some refugees have spent as long as ten years in the camps, originally intended to provide only a temporary solution. Furthermore, camp residents are often allowed only one short visit per year outside the barbed wire fences. Although a safe haven, the camps are more like prisons. Thousands exist in these ongoing miserable conditions, wondering if a permanent solution will ever be found.

The current chaos in Myanmar has proved to be fertile ground for a burgeoning practice: human trafficking. Up to 300,000 women and children per year are kidnapped in Southeast Asia and shipped to large cities, where more than 60% are forced to work as “sex workers.” The most susceptible targets are young women from the poorest Southeast Asian nations, such as Myanmar and Vietnam.

Due to the internal violence-induced confusion, certain “industries” in Myanmar are booming economically. An October 2007 United Nations report stated that the country’s share of the world opium market collapsed from 63% to 6% between 1998 and 2006. Yet, in the last 18 months, there has been an “alarming” resurgence in the cultivation of opium in the nation.

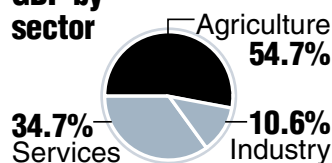
According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Myanmar once again accounts for over 80% of the entire heroin grown and distributed in Southeast Asia, “...entrench[ing] Myanmar’s position as, by far, the world’s second largest opium producer,” the UN report noted.

The World Health Organization has reported that diseases such as Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are increasing at a frightening rate within Myanmar. In conjunction with these findings, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has noticed a marked increase—and a clear connection—between the drug trade routes running into and out of Myanmar and an increased incidence of HIV/AIDS cases due to the rapidly expanding narcotics trade.

Myanmar Trade

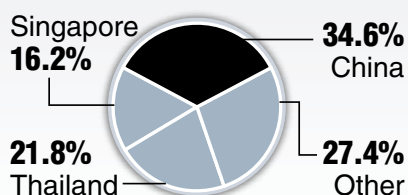
Myanmar, one of the poorest nations in the world, has an annual GDP of only \$1,800 per person.

GDP by sector



Imports \$2.28 billion

Top partners

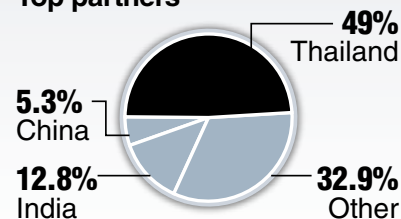


Goods: Fabric, plastics, crude oil, petroleum products

Source: CIA World Factbook

Exports \$5.32 billion

Top partners



Goods: Clothing, gas, wood products, rice, beans, fish, gems

© 2007 MCT

Many refugees have said the Myanmar military has gone to great lengths to persecute Christians, often raping Christian women and destroying churches.

The list of ongoing oppression, misery and despair continues to grow. Perhaps most telling is human rights organizations estimate that since Burma gained its independence in 1948, ethnic conflicts and genocide have claimed approximately 600,000 lives.

Despite failing to find solutions, the junta continues to decry any indication that the international community should intercede, emphatically stating the government’s continued determination to carry out its seven-step “road map” toward establishing a future democracy. However, it has been ten years since the launch of this plan—and only the first step (drawing guidelines for a future constitution) has been completed.

This lack of any real efforts toward establishing a democracy has drawn the ire of most commentators, who view the junta’s actions as a ruse to remain in power. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: The junta insists that pro-democracy demonstrations, which have “forced” the government

to arrest and detain thousands, are the real reason behind the seven-step plan’s lack of progress.

As all efforts to find peace from within seem destined to fail, hope for the people of Myanmar lies outside its borders. Will it be found in the disagreeing governments throughout the international community? Can others come to a consensus after decades of unproductive “summits” and bickering?

The Driving Force Behind International Response

Special UN Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari traveled to Southeast Asia on a six-nation tour to guide the region to a resolution. First, he met with Myanmar’s junta leader, General Than Shwe, to express the world’s indignation toward recent events, specifically the government’s violent response to demonstrators and Buddhist monks. Next, he traveled to Malaysia, urging the ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations to be more proactive in stopping the violence.

Vocal ire from diplomats around the world regarding Myanmar’s state of affairs is nothing new. The question remains: Will any government take definitive action to resolve the

“Myanmar problem?” Or will the international community maintain the status quo?

Failed attempts in the past at securing peace are possibly the best indicator for what the future holds.

The powerful nations of the region and world have the ability militarily, economically and diplomatically to pressure the junta into reform—if they are unified under one banner. However, each country and organization is motivated by a different set of priorities primarily driven by the same things—greed and self-interest!

For instance, neighboring China has witnessed firsthand Myanmar’s unfolding crisis. Yet Beijing refuses to speak against the junta for its brutal reprisals, and vehemently opposes economic sanctions.

Simply put, China’s government sees Myanmar as a financial windfall for reaping enormous economic benefits. For example, China has negotiated with the junta for future favored treatment involving access to Myanmar’s oil and gas reserves. *Ankara News* recently reported that China is the leading partner in a new natural gas pipeline project that will net the junta \$83 million.

In addition, Beijing provides a steady flow of its outdated tanks and fighter jets to Myanmar’s military regime—which in turn grants China access to ports and listening posts along Myanmar’s coast.

Each year Myanmar’s forests are stripped of tens of thousands of tons of valuable timber to fuel China’s forest export industry (worth \$17.2 billion in 2005). The ancient jungles have been so over-harvested over the last 20 years that it has become difficult for Chinese loggers to locate available forest for harvesting.

Like China, Russia has also had a tremendous impact on Myanmar. A Russian foreign minister recently stated, “Urgent steps must be taken to prevent the escalation of tensions,” resulting from the increasingly aggressive demonstrations in Rangoon, which have begun to spill across Myanmar.

Yet Russian condemnation of Myanmar’s internal violence rings hollow, considering Moscow’s aggressive pursuit of arming the junta with new military technology and hardware. In 2001, Moscow sold 15 Mig-29 Fulcrum Fighters to Myanmar for \$150 million. Rosoboronexport, Russia’s state-controlled arms exporter, is in the final stages of negotiating the sale of its technologically advanced Tor-M1 and Buk-M1-2 missile defense systems.

Myanmar has become a “gold mine” for Russia’s government and its private enterprise—and, not surprisingly, Moscow opposes even the most limited economic sanctions against the former Burma.

And then there is India, which is also competing for access to Myanmar’s natural resources. India has quietly become Myanmar’s fourth-largest military partner, supplying the junta with tanks, light artillery, aircraft and small arms.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh recently stated, “Violence and suppression of human rights is something that hurts us. Having said that, we have to recognize that Myanmar is our next door neighbor and sometimes it does not serve the objective you have in mind by going public with condemnations.”

The prime minister’s statement reflects India’s balancing act of trying to embrace the value of democracy in the region while capitalizing on the economic benefits of maintaining a good relationship with Myanmar’s military regime—two positions simply not in accord.

In recent years, Japan has sought to distance itself from an unsavory past of wartime atrocities. Seeking to make the most of an opportunity to reiterate its commitment to democracy and human rights, Tokyo is quite vocal in opposing the Myanmar government’s actions. Japan has limited economic ties with Myanmar.

Other Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia and the Philippines have become more active in advocating liberty, freedom and democratic rights. However, they lack the diplomatic or

economic weight to exact any real change.

Meantime, the junta looks to the example set by North Korea, taking preliminary steps toward “going nuclear.” The military regime is seeking to persuade Russia and China that it can be trusted with nuclear technology for producing inexpensive and cleaner power for the Myanmar people—even though Myanmar possesses rich fossil fuel reserves. Despite the junta’s record, odds are in its favor that it will eventually achieve its objective.

Although Western intelligence has confirmed the government’s goal of developing ballistic missiles, American efforts to economically isolate Myanmar, as with North Korea and Iran, has had limited effects due to lack of cooperation from Myanmar’s neighbors.

Elsewhere, the 27 member-states of the European Union are incapable of agreeing on how best to move forward. Consequently, the EU—lacking a strong leader at its helm—has taken no significant action, other than condemning the junta and “calling for change.” Will future national crises similar to Myanmar’s stir Europe to unify under a strongman?

There is one policy upon which each nation, government, association and union seems to agree: the pursuit of self-interest, individual organizations and governmental body working toward its own end!

As governments around the world position and maneuver for gain, power and influence in Myanmar, there is no real hope that security and prosperity will find its way to the citizens of this crumbling nation—not unless there is a sea change in thinking. Put more simply, each nation’s focus on what it can get from Myanmar—as opposed to what each can give—undermines any possibility for lasting peace and harmony in the region.

If democracy does somehow miraculously emerge from the internal confusion, will Myanmar’s cycle of failure and oppression end? Or will a powerful force from elsewhere be needed to end the cycle? *(To be continued...)* □



Tips for a Happy Marriage

Marriages fail each day.
Do not become another statistic!

BY RYAN P. DENEE

IMAGINE A POLL with the question “Would you want a happy marriage?” No matter the age, gender, background or financial status the vast majority would answer a resounding “Yes!”

Consider this modern age, a time of pursuing endless pleasures. A whole generation practices the motto “Work hard, play harder.” Many have decided to neglect the attention the marriage institution requires. Sadly, married couples are becoming outnumbered by common-law partners and single-mother households. This shows that even though happy, successful marriages are desirable, they remain elusive.

Why? Is a *happy* marriage even possible?

Of course it is possible! The following are helpful and practical points for those who desire to develop a happy marriage.

Foundational Points

For anything to succeed, a correct foundation and structure are necessary. For example, a house built without a foundation will eventually collapse. A bridge without sufficient support will ultimately fail. The same is true for marriage—a

proper foundation and structure must exist, else it will crumble and fail.

Most newlyweds begin marriage with the concept of each contributing 50%. But would a small business be successful if each partner gave only a 50% effort? Whether it is a business or marriage, a 50/50 venture will fail.

The first step in a successful marriage is for both husband and wife to put all their effort into the relationship—*each* giving 100%!

Marriage is between the husband and wife, and no one else. Yet some, in effect, bring other family members into the marriage. This can be done in a variety of ways. Some choose to live at home with in-laws to save money. Others bring overbearing parents into marital matters. In either case, this can cause problems for newlyweds. Both husband and wife must be completely focused on each other—on the *new* family they are building together.

Proper Roles

Husbands and wives must *fully* cooperate in all aspects of marriage. In pairs figure skating, each partner must depend on the other to successfully perform their routine. Intricately planned moves demand clearly defined roles. One must lead and one must follow. If one skater changes roles mid-

stream, the routine will end in disaster. Likewise, marriage has visibly defined roles. If these are not followed, the marriage will experience hardship—and most likely end in failure.

Every successful team has a coach, every corporation a CEO, and every country a head of state. So must every marriage have a leader, and this is the husband's responsibility. This does *not* mean the husband is better than the wife, or that the wife is inferior. This role does *not* entitle him to rule his family like a dictator. On the other hand, his leadership role is not a minor formality. God created the institution of marriage in a specific way, with strengths and skills that fit this structure endowed to both sexes.

But how does a husband properly lead? He *gives* himself to his wife, loves her and ensures that all her needs are provided. This gives his wife a comfort and confidence that strengthens the entire relationship. Real leaders make every effort to allow those under

her example; she works to uplift the environment of her home; every word she speaks is kind and thoughtful; her family respects her and holds her in high regard.

Much more could be said about the specific roles of men and women. Both must work hard to learn and practice their roles to have a successful and happy marriage.

Communication

Communication is one of the most important keys to success. Before marriage, couples often find themselves talking a lot—but this soon diminishes after the wedding day. Communication must continue throughout the marriage. The couple must continue to learn from one another, taking time to share their thoughts and feelings.

Most marriages fail because of a lack of or wrong communication. Seemingly the only type of dialog in many marriages is arguing and fighting. This is not communication! Nothing produc-

A good husband and confident leader will not be afraid to ask his closest friend and confidant—his wife—what he can do to improve. She may see things he does not. Her advice should be sought when making decisions as well.

Husbands and wives should avoid nagging or criticizing. They know each other's "boiling points" better than anyone else. Use kind words—be supportive and interested—motivate each other to succeed in all aspects of life.

Wives and husbands should be a *team*!

Spend Time Together

Similar to conversation, time spent together also drops rapidly after the honeymoon. Life becomes busy: Bills need to be paid; the home must be maintained; children require attention. But all of life's demands should not be at the expense of spending quality time together.

Schedule outings as if you were dating again. Do not allow months to pass without spending at least several hours together on a date.

Daily set aside time to discuss the day's events. Sitting together and watching television is not spending quality time developing your marriage. If you have children, once they are put to bed, take a moment to sit together and talk. Make it part of your routine.

Another reason marriages fail is a lack of intimacy. Due to a host of reasons, people will often disregard sexual relations. This is another area in which you must make time for each other. Doing so will strengthen the bond of marriage. (To learn more, read *SEX – Its Unknown Dimension*.)

A Happy Marriage IS Possible!

Do not let a day pass in which you have not given significant time to your spouse—continually build the relationship with your best friend.

By starting with these points, you can begin to ensure a happy marriage. To learn much more about how to have a truly successful and satisfying relationship, read *You Can Build a Happy MARRIAGE*. □

“Do not let a day pass in which you have not given significant time to your spouse—continually build the relationship with your best friend.”

them to flourish. Through many hours of encouragement, support and teaching, a real husband will take the time to help his wife succeed.

Wives also have a vital role. They build and support the family in a variety of important ways. Yet most do not understand the scope of the wife's role.

Consider the Bible's definition of a wife, found in Proverbs 31. It describes a woman who is the ultimate help-mate, one who supports her husband and children. She demonstrates sound judgment; she cares for the family; she willingly works hard; she provides a balanced menu for her household; she is frugal and can manage finances, under the husband's guidance; she strives for quality; she gains a good reputation because of

tive ever comes from this, and it should be avoided at all costs. If the discussion escalates, both must make a point to apologize immediately.

Husbands and wives should speak pleasantly to each other. Husbands should be extra careful of their tone, as wives can be sensitive in this manner. Depending on the tone, a question can be taken very differently, which could lead to unnecessary misunderstandings.

For the marriage to move forward in unity, productivity and harmony, both must know what the other is thinking. Issues should never remain bottled up. Each should take the time to listen, attempting to discern each other's needs and concerns. Sincere compliments should also be a part of regular communication.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

the Untold Good News!



Cataclysmic environmental changes—a nuclear World War—the rise and fall of governments—food shortages and pestilences run amok! These and other nightmarish events are foretold in the final book of the Bible. Yet few understand the good news contained within it.

BY BRUCE A. RITTER

IMAGINE THE typical Hollywood “doomsday” film: The hero awakens to a post-World War III apocalyptic nightmare of decimated cities, defunct governments and tiny pockets of desperate survivors struggling to stay alive.

Millions view the book of Revelation the same way. Even those who have never read Revelation are, to varying degrees, aware of the horrific future it depicts.

Many read about the “four horsemen” (Rev. 6:2-8) and speculate as to what these symbols represent. They take note of prophetic descriptions such as the sun becoming “black as sackcloth” and the moon red “as blood” (vs. 12) and the “stars of heaven” falling to the earth (vs. 13), and wonder what these heavenly signs mean. They are taken aback at the depiction of future war machinery, described as “locusts...like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men,” with “hair as the hair of women” and “teeth...as the teeth of lions,” protected with “breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running

to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months” (9:7-10).

The symbols and timing of events detailed in this mysterious book are confusing. Down through the centuries, religionists and other thinkers have promoted their personal ideas and biblical interpretations—all in vain! The Bible interprets itself: “No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (II Peter 1:20).

Like a giant jigsaw puzzle, the teachings and prophecies of God’s Word on any one subject are scattered throughout Scripture. Notice: “Whom shall He teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand doctrine [teachings]?...For precept must be upon precept, *precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*” (Isa. 28:9-10).

Verses must be carefully “pieced together” to grasp the full picture of spiritual understanding regarding any biblical topic. This includes the symbolic imagery and prophetic chronology described in the book of Revelation.

As with all Scripture, this prophetic book has long been hidden under a mysterious fog, clouding the thinking

of most—especially when it comes to the GOOD NEWS it announces.

Dispelling Misconceptions

Centuries of speculation have generated common misconceptions regarding the contents of Revelation. Here are just a few:

■ **“Revelation shrouds the meaning of prophetic events”:** Just the opposite! The very title, “Revelation,” which is *apokalupsis* in the original Greek, means “appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation” and “laying bare, a disclosure of truth, instruction, concerning things before unknown” (*Thayer’s Lexicon*).

The purpose of this prophetic book is to *reveal* knowledge of the future, not hide it! Notice the first verse in the book: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to *show unto His servants* things which must shortly come to pass” (1:1).

This is the same Jesus who says to His disciples, “You are My friends, *if you do whatsoever I command you*. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father *I have made known unto you*.” (John 15:14-15).

To understand Revelation, one must serve—OBEY—God: “Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, *and keep those things which are written therein*” (vs. 3).

Psalm 111:10 states, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a *good understanding* have all they that DO HIS COMMANDMENTS.”

■ **“The book foretells the end of the world (the earth) and mankind”:** Revelation and other prophetic passages in the Bible speak of the end of this *age*, NOT the earth and all its inhabitants. While human beings will witness worldwide suffering as never before seen, mankind will not wipe itself from existence—in fact, God will not allow it! (More on this later.)

■ **“Armageddon will be an apocalyptic showdown between East and West”:** People have long believed that a future World War III will arrive that will be a “winner take all” face-off between the U.S.-led democratic nations of the West (including Europe) and communist Russia, and perhaps China, all ending in “Armageddon”—the end of civilization.

But Armageddon is not a battle. Rather, it is a place—the Valley of Megiddo—where forces from the East will gather to clash with the military might of the North (Rev. 9:16; Dan. 11:44).

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible generally focuses on the nations of Israel—ancient, modern and future—with the city of Jerusalem being its main focal point. God’s Word gives past and prophetic descriptions of other nations in relation to the area of Israel and Jerusalem. The Bible describes future military campaigns and conquests of the nations of the East, North and South (from Jerusalem’s standpoint)—but not of the West. Why?

Numerous passages throughout the Bible show that the nations of the West—largely the British and American peoples—will already have been removed from the scene. (To discover what will happen to them, read our crucial and fascinating book *AMERICA AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY*, freely available at www.thercg.org.)

First, the Bad News...

A time of global upheaval will come upon all nations, described in the first three books of the New Testament—Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. In these chapters, the disciples privately asked Jesus Christ about “the sign of [His] coming, and of the end of the world [age]” (Matt. 24:3).

Jesus warned that false religious leaders would claim to represent Him, “and shall deceive many” (vs. 4-5), through “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (II Cor. 11:13)—religionists who “pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7-9) by preaching “*another gospel*” (II Cor. 11:4).

Jesus also spoke of “wars and rumors of wars,” escalating between and with-

in nations, along with acts of terrorism, increasing national insecurity and fear (Matt. 24:6-8). Christ foretold religious persecution, famines, various disease outbreaks and pandemics, earthquakes and other environmental disasters. All these events would increase over the next 2,000 years until our time now.

And as the world continues to degenerate socially and morally, and day-to-day events threaten to spiral out of control, “This gospel,” Christ declared, “of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).

Christ’s true gospel IS being preached—and published (Mark 13:10)—to every nation and territory on earth, via *The REAL TRUTH* (archived at www.realtruth.org) and

TROUBLESOME EVENTS TO INCREASE: (Clockwise from top left) A baby is weighed at a clinic set up by Doctors Without Borders near Maradi, Niger. A microbiologist injects live eggs with serum to test for the Avian Flu. A Los Angeles county firefighter sprays water on trees in front of a home engulfed in flames in Running Springs, California. An earthquake creates a large crack in the Hokuriku Expressway, in Niigata, Japan.



The WORLD TO COME program, presented by David C. Pack, publisher/editor-in-chief of this magazine.

But with billions claiming to be Christians today, why would Christ need to warn about religious deception?

Because this world—its cities, nations, economies, governments, educational systems, entertainment, politics and international affairs—do not belong to God. On the contrary, they belong to “the god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), whom the Bible also calls “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2) through broadcasting wrong thoughts, attitudes and motives. This great being, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan... deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

Of course, to the secular mind the existence of Satan is preposterous. *Only the ignorant masses would believe there is a devil*, secularists—and even some professing Christians—conclude.

Yet, if a being is so masterful at his craft that he is able to “deceive the whole world,” would not his grand deception include deceiving “intelligent” people of his very existence? (To understand more on this subject, you may wish to read the booklet *Who is the DEVIL?*)

Even those who have yet to blow the dust off their Bibles have heard of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Matthew 4 and Luke 4 describe a titanic battle of wills between Christ and the devil, in which Jesus overcomes His adversary—and thus qualifies for world rulership over the kingdoms and governments of men, which actually belong to Satan.

The book of Revelation, along with other passages, foretells Christ’s Second Coming—a time when the nations of the world are on the brink of committing global genocide: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And *except those days should be shortened*, there should NO FLESH BE SAVED [alive]: but for

the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matt. 24:21-22).

“Shortened” by the Return of Jesus Christ!

...Followed by the Good News!

Think of the troubles, evils and degenerating conditions assaulting mankind. Then envision all these ills being erased by an unprecedented utopia soon to come.

Gone are all forms of war and armed conflict—border skirmishes, civil unrest, government take-overs, terrorism (religious or otherwise). With the disappearance of war and terrorism will come economic security; financial upheavals will become a thing of the past. Also, no more crime. All theft, robbery, fraud, deceit or assaults of any kind—non-existent! Language barriers and the resulting confusion and misunderstandings, brought down and swept away, replaced by a single “pure language,” as foretold in Zephaniah 3:9. The endless cycle of poverty from generation to generation wiped clean. The environment and its natural resources properly used and conserved. No more religious deception and confusion. No more unwanted pregnancies, or government corruption and bureaucratic absurdities, or environmental waste and destruction.

When Christ returns, He will establish ONE government, one religion, one way of life—that of selfless, outgoing concern for neighbor—all administered from Jerusalem, the future worldwide capital of God’s SUPERGOVERNMENT.

But why doesn’t Jesus Christ return *today*—at this very moment—to set up the government of God?

“Because”—as influenced by the “prince of the power of the air”—“the carnal mind [human nature] is ENMITY [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

You can see mankind’s natural hostility toward law and order: rioting, police killings, road rage, etc. And this

increasing hostility is even worse when it comes to the Law of God!

Human beings want to be happy. They want to enjoy success and prosperity. Yet “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Of himself, man is incapable of discovering the true purpose for life and achieving lasting joy. He needs help from his Maker.

For example, a man can excel at physical tasks, such as starting a business and turning it into a Fortune 500 company—all while suffering through the agony of divorce, triggered by adultery. A marriage is shattered. Parents and children are split apart. And the family unit—the essential building block of every thriving society—crumbles.

Human beings know about cause and effect in relation to the physical laws of nature, such as gravity—but are utterly ignorant of the spiritual causes that produce horrific effects when spiritual laws are broken.

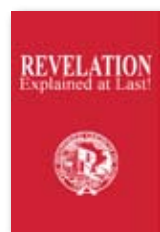
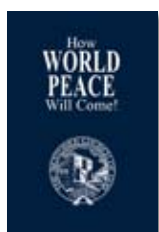
Yet the average person is convinced he can “find his own way” through life. He “doesn’t need help from his Creator” to distinguish right from wrong. “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes” (Prov. 16:2), and he does not want the God of the Bible to tell him otherwise.

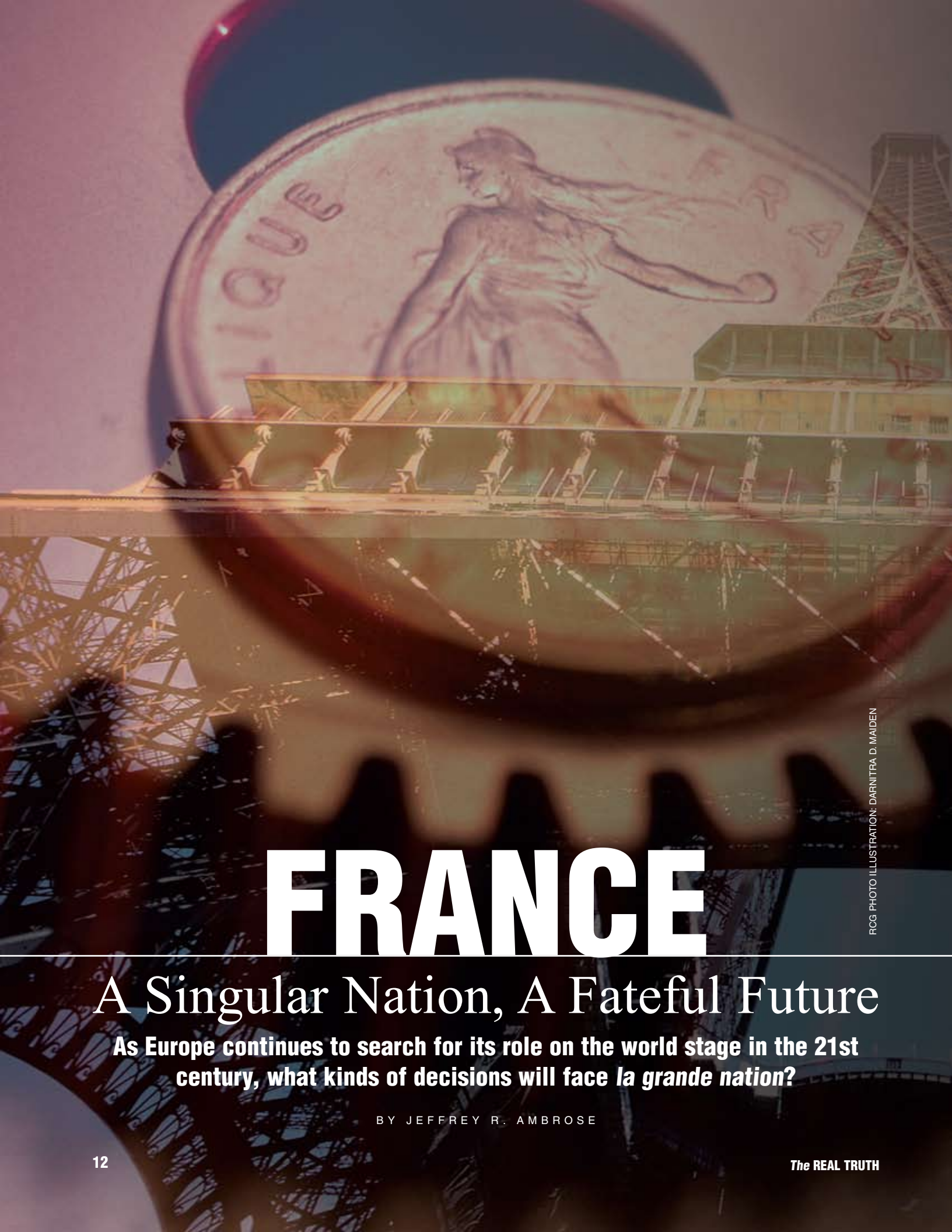
Man is not ready to admit he cannot direct his life. He is not prepared to submit to God’s rule—at least not yet.

The governments and societies of men are like a condemned building waiting to be knocked down. While people scramble to save it with charity drives, peace summits, coalitions, treaties and such, this “building”—the culmination of 6,000 years of men ruling themselves—vibrates and sways back and forth by the “winds” of increasing poverty, economic insecurity and the growing threat of mutually-assured mass destruction.

Yet the “building” will collapse and be replaced by the government of God—bringing lasting peace (Isa. 9:6-7).

This is the untold *good news* of the book of Revelation! □





RCG PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: DARNITRA D. MAIDEN

FRANCE

A Singular Nation, A Fateful Future

As Europe continues to search for its role on the world stage in the 21st century, what kinds of decisions will face *la grande nation*?

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

WHILE EVERY NATION on earth has its own history, heritage and defining characteristics, France stands out, even on a continent with an abundance of distinctive and ancient states. Its development has paralleled other nations of the West, particularly the United States, but on a decidedly different track.

The French are typically characterized as being passionate, sophisticated, globally-minded, whimsical, diplomatic, stylish, proud, impractical and refined. One of France's national symbols—the strutting, preening rooster—evokes the country's grandiose showiness and sense of self-importance.

The people who gave the world the terms *gourmet* and *connoisseur* have long been known for their enjoyment of life's finer things. French cuisine, wines, cheeses, agricultural products, and fashions are coveted the world over; together they form a celebrated culture that has been the nation's signature export.

Italian journalist Luigi Barzini, in his 1983 book *The Europeans*, chose “quarrelsome” as the word that best described the French character (as compared to the “Careful Dutch,” “Imperturbable British,” “Baffling Americans” and others).

Of the nation's unpredictable, contrarian slant, Barzini wrote, “The French were at first among the earliest and most determined champions of European unification. They saw in it...a way to solve most of their national problems at one fell swoop...Only a few years later...the same French turned into the most implacable opponents of the European idea. They managed to block all progress by skillful maneuvers and stubborn opposition” (p. 117).

This love-hate relationship with the idea of a unified Europe came to the world's attention again in 2005, when a French referendum halted progress toward ratification of the European Constitution with a resounding “*Non!*”

This almost reflexive disagreement has been called “*l'exception française.*”

The High Cost of Being French

By and large, France's citizens have enjoyed an enviable lifestyle: a map dotted by beautiful historic sites, picturesque villages and abundant, varied natural beauty; the most extensive road system in Europe (nearly one million kilometers); almost universal literacy; a virtually tuition-free university system; five weeks of vacation per year; and generous social entitlement programs.

But all of this comes with a price tag. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the French have the fourth-highest tax burden in the world, with government revenues absorbing around 44% of GDP.

This high overhead has also contributed to years of slow economic growth, a factor in citizens' fear that their nation is falling too far behind the rest of the EU.

A New Direction in Leadership

A yearning for change was evident in France during the run-up to the May 2007 presidential election. After a dozen years under the left-leaning Jacques Chirac, the French people voted accordingly. Over 75% of regis-

tered voters went to the polls, electing center-rightist Nicolas Sarkozy.

He had campaigned on a promise to overhaul the French economy, intent on tackling its high unemployment, loosening restrictive labor laws, and mulling reform of France's pension privileges. His platform also stressed the need to reestablish fading French influence on the continent and abroad.

Mr. Sarkozy has brought a notably firmer foreign policy stance and tough talk in a nation better known for emphasis on diplomacy and soft power. Just before a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the French president told an audience in Bulgaria that Russia is “a country that complicates the resolving of the world's major issues” instead of a “facilitator” (*Le Figaro*).

He has also supported sanctions against Iran as an incentive for Tehran to end its nuclear program, asserting in an interview that “all efforts must be made to avoid being limited by a catastrophic alternative of an Iranian bomb, or the [nuclear] bombing of Iran” (*Voice of America*).

In his first speech before the UN General Assembly, Mr. Sarkozy stated, “If we allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, we would incur an unacceptable risk to stability in the region and the world,” later adding, “Weakness and renunciation do not lead to peace. They lead to war” (*Reuters*).

Identity in Crisis

The traditions of French culture and identity are facing challenges on two fronts. One is the difficulty of integrating non-European immigrants (especially Muslims) into a thoroughly European (and heavily Catholic) nation: “Europeans largely advocate tolerance and multicultural values. Even many immigrants say they understand the apprehension felt by traditional white populations over their rising numbers. But...restrictions targeted at Africans and Arab Muslims are coming, experts say.

“In Paris, the new immigration law, now ready for the French Assembly,

will require language tests and behavior guarantees by parents for children. The law, which includes a DNA test for mothers and kids, is backed by 56 percent of French, according to a *Le Figaro* poll, and is expected to be swiftly passed...

“Immigration issues remain divisive even within the center-right government of Nicolas Sarkozy...Sorbonne historian Patrick Weil resigned from [an] advisory panel over the direction of Sarkozy’s race politics, including the creation of a new Ministry of Immigration and National Identity. He says the new president is alienating the 25 percent of French who come from nontraditional backgrounds” (*Christian Science Monitor*).

The second challenge, the wholesale import of American and other non-French traditions into the fabric of daily life, is a side-effect of globalization: “France is supposed to be the country which says *non*. France is supposed to refuse all cultural imperialism, except its own. France is supposed to be the country of...refusal

to be swamped by...Hollywood, *la malbouffe* [fast food], Japanese cars, Chinese bras or the English language.

“France is supposed to be the country of Astérix, the small village which refuses to bow to the invader; the country of José Bové, the man who bulldozed a McDonald’s to preserve his right to wear a droopy moustache and make stinky (but wonderful) cheeses. All this huffing and puffing seems to have depressingly little effect...” (*The Independent*).

From food to films to fashion, French staples are giving way to foreign intruders: cheeseburgers and fried chicken, James Cameron’s *Titanic* (now the nation’s most popular movie), baseball caps and baggy blue jeans.

Franco-American Relations

Mr. Sarkozy has also found common ground with the right-leaning president of another nation. Closer ties with the United States were symbolized by his choice to vacation in New Hampshire—unheard of for a leader

of France, proud of its status as the world’s top tourism destination.

The relationship between America and France has long been hot and cold. The two nations share some striking similarities (both in their current state were born of revolution in the late 18th century) and an intertwined history (Benjamin Franklin’s statesmanship in Paris, Thomas Jefferson’s invitation to France’s National Assembly for the drafting of the French constitution, alliance in two world wars). Yet, before the Sarkozy era began, France’s politicians routinely won with a “keeping the U.S. in check” ideology.

A hint of jealousy tinges France’s anti-Americanism. While undoubtedly a first-world country, industrialized and prosperous, with colonial outposts across the globe, it has never been considered a superpower in modern times. France looked on as America helped rebuild Europe after victory in World War II, planted its flag on the moon and took part in the Cold War arms race.

Please see **FRANCE**, page 19

Sarkozy’s New France

What the new French President Nicolas Sarkozy wants to change:



Labor

- Goal of full employment by 2012; easing of 35-hour work week (overtime hours tax-free)



Taxes

- Maximum income tax of 50%



President: Nicolas Sarkozy



Public service

- Reduce number of civil servants; agreement on minimum attendance



Crime rate

- Penalties for repeat offenders; juvenile criminal law will not apply for repeaters age 16 and older



European Union

- Proposal for a modified EU constitution



Government

- Reduce number of ministers from 29 to 15; annual evaluation of ministers to be introduced



Environment

- Nuclear power to remain France’s top energy source; alternatives sources strengthened



Immigration

- Immigrants must be fluent in French language ahead of arrival

MCT / Source: AFP, MCT Photo Service

The Pursuit of Happiness



...in a **SECOND LIFE**

Millions are attempting to escape their daily lives through virtual worlds, but are left unsatisfied. Here's why.

BY KEVIN D. DENEÉ

Some years ago, the concept of “virtual reality” captured the imagination and attention of society. People were excited and intrigued about the idea of exploring a digital world that looked and sounded real.

A decade ago, one could walk through an amusement park and see a booth that offered this virtual reality experience, with large goggles, ear equipment and numerous wires connected to gloves—all at a relatively expensive cost.

In the end, despite the hype, technology was not advanced enough. It

became clear that, in many regards, this could not become a viable form of entertainment for the everyday consumer.

Virtual reality did, however, become a hit in movies and television shows. Various plots have been based on characters who are trapped in a virtual world and cannot escape. Among the most popular of these movies is *The Matrix* trilogy.

Virtual reality, even today, is still ahead of its time, and is largely left to human imagination.

Meanwhile, the Internet and personal computing capability has since flourished and brought the advent of

other fanciful technological concepts and ideas. The Internet itself is causing knowledge and information to expand in new ways.

Today, over 1.1 billion people now have access to the Internet. People around the world can communicate nearly at the speed of light. Chat rooms are “buzzing” with people talking to each other from every corner of the earth. News from one hemisphere is instantly read by people in the other. Street video cameras in the cities of Japan can be viewed live by someone in Canada, and vice versa.

At the same time, video games have become popular. Beginning on personal computers in the late 1970s and 80s, they quickly made use of the Internet in the 1990s, which allows for real-time multi-player games. As

SECOND LIFE?: (Above) A software developer poses with the image he created on *Second Life*.

PHOTO: MCT



IS BLOGGING A NEW PASTIME?: Many online users have resorted to blogging as one of their primary means of communication.

PHOTO: MCT

technology advanced, so did the detail, reality and complexity of these games.

The combination of video games and the Internet has led to another virtual concept—that of virtual worlds.

Exploring Virtual Worlds

The virtual world that has received the most attention, and may be the most advanced, is *Second Life*. Created in 2003 by San Francisco-based Linden Labs, this program offers people all over the world the opportunity to live another life online, interacting with other real human beings.

Second Life offers a world in which you can buy property and do whatever you want with it. You can create an “avatar”—a user’s virtual alter ego. You can start a business and sell goods and services to other online citizens, such as open a nightclub and throw parties with live musicians. If you are an artist, you can open an art studio and allow other avatars to visit, browse around and buy your artwork.

The opportunities are almost endless: Build a dream house, with a beautiful beachside view, if you wish. Drive through the streets of online cit-

ies. Socialize with other people, who themselves have their own character or avatar. Get a tan, play games, ride a dolphin—almost whatever you desire.

In fact, *Second Life* and other virtual community programs seem to offer even more than reality can provide. You can design your avatar to look like whatever you want, including animals or fictional characters. You can be as beautiful or handsome as you want, wearing as much or as little clothing as you wish. You can defy gravity and fly without a plane or helicopter. You can start online relationships (even including graphic acts!) with whomever you want, whenever you want.

It is literally a second life in a virtual world, and many prominent figures and institutions are taking it seriously. U.S. Presidential candidates are beginning campaigns in *Second Life*. Worldwide news provider *Reuters* operates a bureau there, with online/avatar journalists. Catholic Missionaries have entered this world to further their cause. The tiny country of Maldives has set up an embassy. A host of universities are using the world of *Second Life* for virtual classrooms.

This world even has an entire economy, with its own currency: Linden Dollars. Approximately 270 Linden Dollars equals one U.S. dollar. Certain individuals earn real money by buying and selling digital property. Others earn money by opening a business in *Second Life*. At the writing of this article, \$1.2 million (USD) were spent in *Second Life* in just 24 hours! (As a side point, \$115,000 was raised in a fundraiser in *Second Life* for the American Cancer Society.)

The point is that these are real, developing and popular virtual worlds—not some science fiction idea gone awry. Not only are these virtual societies complex and advanced, but millions are “living,” to one degree or another, in these worlds—called “metaverses.” Over nine million people have accounts in *Second Life* alone!

This is not a passing fad. There are a number of other online services and virtual worlds that are growing in popularity. There are indications that Google

and Microsoft may also be releasing their own virtual worlds to rival *Second Life*. And it is reported that \$1 billion has been spent on the development of 35 different virtual worlds in just the past year. Additionally, \$15 million has been spent on advertising within these programs in 2006, with this figure projected to be \$150 million by 2012.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reports, “Technology research firm Gartner forecast this year that by 2011, 80 percent of active Internet users will have a ‘second life’ in some sort of virtual world.”

The research company *eMarket-er* reports that almost one quarter of American children ages 3 to 18 (over 8 million) will use virtual worlds on a monthly basis this year. To really understand the growth of this trend, it is important to note that over half will make virtual worlds a part of their lives by 2011. This would equate to 20 million children!

Other companies are also beginning to use the concept of virtual worlds, such as for meetings with employees who are not in the same geographic location. The U.S. military uses a type of virtual world for training.

The Quest for Another Life

Where is all of this leading?

Virtual worlds of and by themselves are not wrong, and this article is not intended, in any way, to attack or malign the concept or software. Certainly, there are good intentions that can be fulfilled in such environments—bringing people together to learn in a classroom while they may not have the physical ability to do so, or raise money for a cause, among others.

Nevertheless, questions must be asked. Some analysis of human behavior in the 21st century cannot be avoided. It has been said that there is nothing new under the sun. The technology of virtual worlds is new—but the human conduct surrounding it is not.

First, as more and more people enter these digital communities, what are they leaving behind? If you spend an hour in a virtual world, you have automatically given up an hour in your real life. Spending an hour building a virtual

house is one less hour a parent could have used to rear and teach a child.

The move toward virtual worlds is just another example of how people tend to avoid—escape—from everyday life. Some become workaholics, overly focusing on their careers. This can produce long-term adverse effects. People also escape through drugs or medication, trying to numb the mind, numb their existence. Others escape their lives by starting a second one with an adulterous affair. The list could go on, but these online societies are quickly becoming a new form of escapism.

This is not to say that every time a person logs on to a virtual world he is trying to escape life's pressures. That would be as ridiculous as saying working overtime one day automatically equates to being a workaholic. Nonetheless, the general trend and direction of society holds true.

Let's flip the coin over: What motivates someone to spend hours behind a computer screen instead of doing other things more important and productive? The answer is that the computer screen offers an instant "comfort zone." Otherwise, the individual would not waste hour upon hour on the computer.

Virtual worlds are becoming the latest instrument that people are using to run away from life's most important issues—building character, rearing children, loving a spouse, exercising, etc. People are literally leaving reality behind and living in a fantasy world.

Again, 80% of Internet users will be involved in virtual worlds within a few years. What will be the effect? What children and spouses will they be neglecting? The 21st century is producing an *adult* generation that grew up on video games. Now we have video *lives*, not just games.

If eight of every ten people spend countless hours creating virtual lives, what will happen to society? The unreal will slowly become the real, and reality will slowly become *unreality*.

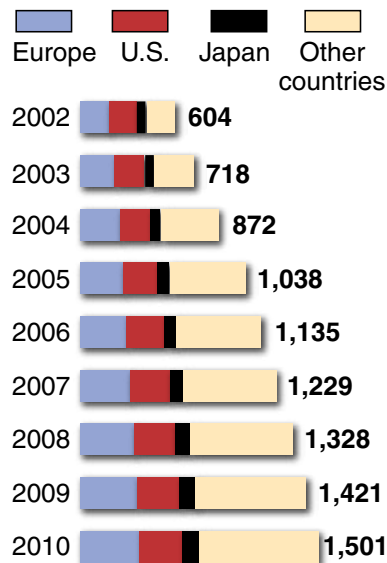
Dissatisfied

Every human being on earth wants to be happy. A lifetime is made up of days, and each of those days people

Online Users

Every fifth person in the world is online; trend continues to rise.

Number of users by fixed network, in millions:



© 2007 MCT
Source: Bitcom

NOTE:
2007-2010,
estimates

make decisions in attempt to please themselves, often making day-to-day decisions based on feelings and human reasoning.

The excessive pursuit of virtual worlds is another example that people are dissatisfied with their *existing* lives. People are not content with their looks, so they turn to a virtual life in which

they can look "sexy," never getting sick or aging.

Some experts say that such worlds can fill emotional needs. It is certainly true that human beings have these types of needs—but they generally look in the wrong places. They address the *effect*, not the *CAUSE*. They turn to the works of their own hands and imaginations to fill needs rather than turning to the Creator of the universe, who created man, physical laws of nature, and so much more.

Human Nature Always Surfaces

Regardless of religious belief, including whether or not God exists, almost everyone would say there are elements of what human beings do to each other that should not happen. Watching the news can cause you to become sick to your stomach upon hearing the debase acts human beings do to each other. For example, most would cringe and be terribly upset at the fact that cases of rapes against small children are rising in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

There are few who would think that corruption of institutions, which can include taking money from those who need it and giving it to a choice few, is tolerable. Take, for instance, the oil-for-food scandal in which Saddam Hussein was involved. His regime took money and food that should have benefited the Iraqi people.



A FAMILY AFFAIR: The family above plays video games together to bond with their children and as a means of escaping everyday life.

PHOTO: MCT



MILITARY TRAINING: In profile (at left), a video game expert checks an image from a computer game used to train Army Special Forces officers preparing to go to Iraq. (Top right) A heavily armored, simulated Humvee, prepares to enter a mock Iraqi village in a computer game training project developed for the U.S. Army. (Bottom right) A teenager plays the computer game *The Sims Unleashed*, which has taken a backseat to the new virtual world of *Second Life*.

PHOTOS: MCT

Human nature can be ugly, and exists wherever there are people. (To learn more, read “Human Nature – Exposed!”, archived online.)

Hundreds of years ago, people came to the New World, bringing with them ideas for a better world. But in the end, human nature followed. It does not matter where you look on earth, you will find the selfish effects of man’s nature—human beings not treating each other as they would like to be treated.

The same is true with virtual worlds. Carnal nature enters with human beings. Take for example the popular online game *The Sims*. Originally designed to be crime free, human nature circumvented the game’s limitations, leading to corrupt behavior, including extortion.

The virtual world of *Second Life* is also experiencing its dose of human nature. It has PG-rated islands as well as “Mature” islands, where pornography and sex clubs exist. Gambling was allowed, until the summer of 2007. The digital world has what is called “griefers,” those who cause trouble

for others, trying to make their lives unpleasant through vandalism, trapping or even killing. A CEO for an IT company stated, “It’s got the chaos of people doing anything you can imagine.”

The *BBC* even reported that there is an investigation regarding virtual child abuse as well as the exchange of real child pornography!

It is also evident that when there is more anonymity, people will “push the envelope” in their words and actions. Many virtual world developers are taking steps to ensure people can be identified.

Ultimately, the carnal nature of man, in all its component parts, always surfaces.

Cannot Direct One’s Steps

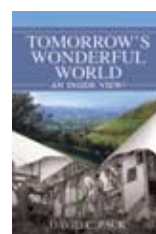
It does not matter where human beings live—in a virtual world or in the real world. One thing has stood true through the ages: “It is not in man...to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Where people are a law unto themselves, the ugliness of human nature

always prevails. Carnality is real and exists wherever there are people.

It is natural for men and women to seek happiness and emotional fulfillment, while trying to avoid the terrible things people do to each other. However, creating other worlds to enter and live in will not solve mankind’s greatest problems.

Man will continue to look for a better world—but he is looking in the wrong place. A seemingly unreal scenario will occur in the very near future. The God that created 10 billion trillion stars has a plan for humanity. He has prepared a new world that will provide happiness and fill emotional needs. He has a set of rules and guidelines regulating behavior that will bring about prosperity. Goodwill and kind deeds will take place between human beings.

You do not want to miss the knowledge of this wonderful world to come—a world that will not be virtual, but very, very REAL. Read our book *TOMORROW’S WONDERFUL WORLD – An Inside View!* □



FRANCE

Continued from page 14

Some would argue that France is known more for its style than substance when compared to the pragmatic and once-overachieving U.S. This has led to what could be called sibling rivalry—or more accurately, half-brother rivalry!

France in the Bible?

As regular readers of this magazine understand, the modern nations of the West are descendents of the biblical patriarch Jacob, later renamed Israel. Israel's firstborn son, Reuben, began the family that grew into the French peoples. Reuben's half-brother, Joseph, received the birthright blessings for which Reuben had disqualified himself through sin: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: unstable as water, you shall not excel; because you went up

especially northeastern France—is heavily represented by the Ribuari Franks, as bearers of the ensign of Reuben (*The Tribes*, Davidy, p. 158).

"In verse 3, Jacob referred to Reuben as 'my might' and 'the excellency of dignity.' France has portrayed these characteristics to the world. In the past, she was the greatest colonial power behind Britain and called the 'queen of culture.'

"*The Encyclopedia Americana* notes that, 'during the 70 years of the third republic [1875-1945]...more than a hundred cabinets succeeded one another, in France, with an average tenure in office of less than eight months. The main cause of this ministerial instability was the lack of disciplined parties...' This 'unstable' and fickle French political system has also produced eleven constitutions since 1791!

"Jacob also goes on to say of Reuben that, 'you shall not excel; because you went up to your father's bed; then defiled you it: he went up to my couch' (vs. 4). It is interest-

foreshadowed the national dominance his descendents would experience: "And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer comes. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast has devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

"And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him. And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again. And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him; and they took him, and cast him into a pit" (Gen. 37:21-24).

"Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. and he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, where shall I go?" (Gen. 37:28-30).

In this account, Reuben attempted to play the conciliator between Joseph and the rest of his brothers. While he succeeded in convincing them to spare his life, he was not able to save Joseph from slavery, since he chose a covert plan of later returning to liberate him, unbeknownst to the angry siblings.

In the years ahead, France will be forced to choose between loyalty to natural allies and kin—the Americans and British—or the rising power of a United Europe, with Germany as its engine. France's onetime president Charles de Gaulle is reported to have said, "The unification of Europe will be performed by France and Germany, France being the coachman and Germany the horse" (*The Europeans*, p. 150).

What will the French choose? □



"In the years ahead, France will be forced to choose between loyalty to natural allies and kin—the Americans and British—or the rising power of a United Europe, with Germany as its engine."

to your father's bed; then defiled you it" (Gen. 49:3-4).

The following excerpt from David C. Pack's book *AMERICA AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY* sheds more light on the forefather of the Gallic people: "Reuben's primary emblem was a man, representing the 'excellency of power.' His secondary emblem is recorded as being wavy lines, representing unstable waters (*Symbols of Our Celto-Saxon Heritage*, Bennet, 1976).

"Reuben dominates the Israelite element in France. Therefore, France—

ing to note that kings and leaders of France usually have their own mistress—"concubine"—a pattern that has nearly become part of the national psyche."

This verse bears witness to the continued dalliances of many high French officials today!

The Past...and Future?

The book of Genesis records the resentment that the other sons of Israel felt toward Israel's favorite son, Joseph, which was magnified after a dream that

READER COMMENTS

From online subscribers of our weekly news updates

AFGHANISTAN

■ “I want to know more about the Bible. I’m a Christian Catholic living in a fanatic/radical Muslim country and I need to stay more in contact with my religion, which is very difficult to find in a 100% Islamic country.”

FIJI

■ “I really enjoyed your articles and I am looking forward to reading more.”

INDIA

■ “I read an article on ‘India—A Superpower in the Making?’ I liked the article and its application to the Bible.”

■ “I find a lot of in-depth study in your articles giving vivid views on many items pertinent to the present day world. As a freelance journalist, I have lot of material to delve into for analytical studies.”

■ “I am a preacher. I would like to know more about the trinity.” **[Editor’s note: Our comprehensive book *The TRINITY – Is God three-in-one? examines the facts and origin of this popular doctrine in detail.*]**

■ “I am interested in happenings of any sort of international development around especially positive and constructive development. I am also interested to know the latest political, economic and social development, especially in developing countries like India, China and Russia and their neighboring small countries.”

NIGERIA

■ “I really appreciate the kind of issues you are disclosing to the whole world.”

PHILIPPINES

■ “The magazine reminds me of the *Plain Truth* magazine. It’s simply inspiring and news worthy.”

■ “I was once a regular subscriber of the *Plain Truth* magazine until it was discontinued.” **[Editor’s note: *The Plain Truth* is the predecessor to *The REAL TRUTH*.]**

SIERRA LEONE

■ “The magazine is very valuable and useful to me as a Post-Graduate student of Development Studies.”

SOUTH AFRICA

■ “So far, what I’ve read seems well written and enjoyable.”

■ “I always read your articles and I have found them to be very interesting and educational. My spiritual knowledge has really grown.”

■ “I’ll appreciate it if I could be sent breaking news on issues relating to security (e.g., conflicts, military, etc.) in the following areas and in order of priority: Africa – Great Lakes Region (DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda), Somalia, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Chad and Central Africa Republic.”

■ “I have found your material on *Building a Happy Marriage*, which I discovered at the right time since my marriage was in its highest level of unhappiness and distress.”

■ “I love your website. I find it an awesome resource for my Bible study!!!! Thank You!”

■ “I would like to know about what’s going on around the world.”

■ “I find your website very interesting. I just wish I knew HOW to put into practice about being debt free. We have so much debt due to me having to close my business. I pray all day for a miracle, but nothing ever happens.”

[Editor’s note: Our booklets *End All Your FINANCIAL WORRIES* and *Taking Charge of Your FINANCES* address this topic.]

■ “Keep up the good work.”

UNITED KINGDOM

■ “I went through a divorce and I feel strongly that God will never forgive me. Please tell me what I can do to regain God’s mercy. I will be grateful for your answer.” **[Editor’s note: You may wish to read the “Personal” of this magazine issue: “Have You Committed the Unforgivable Sin?”]**

■ “I am a theologian and I have a great deal of interest to read all your topics. I will be very interested if you can send me as much as you have available for me to read.”

UNITED STATES

■ “I have not found so complete information on current events as I have found on your site. Thanks a million.”

Q&A

Please explain Revelation 6:9-11 and the “souls under the altar.”

Some have cited these verses to validate the immortal soul doctrine and the belief that, upon death, people go to heaven. However, this description is not literal, but rather is entirely symbolic. The Bible plainly teaches that souls are mortal.

In vision, the apostle John saw before him a book or scroll sealed with seven seals. As Christ opened each seal (Rev. 5:5), John was shown a preview of an event that would happen in the future (“hereafter” [4:1]). Since John was “in the spirit” as the seven seals were opened (vs. 2), the events he witnessed were not actually occurring at that time. They were heavenly previews of things that would happen later on earth.

Upon the opening of the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9), John “saw under [at the base of] the altar the souls of them that were slain.” Christ had shown the meaning of the seven seals when He was on earth. He explained that the fifth seal symbolizes the coming time of Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:9-28), an event that will occur on earth.

In this vision, John was shown the future, this modern age, a time when one martyrdom has already taken place (during the Middle Ages) and a greater one (the Great Tribulation) is yet to happen. The souls who were “slain” (martyred Christian throughout the ages) were told, in Revelation 6:11, to “rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” Those who have died will continue to “rest” (remain “asleep [Eph. 5:14; I Cor. 11:30]” in their graves), until others are also martyred as they were.

The “souls” (dead saints) crying “avenge our blood” (vs. 10) is akin to Abel’s blood (his life [note Lev. 17:14]) crying to God from the earth (Gen. 4:10). Since blood does not talk and neither do the dead (Psa. 115:17; Ecc. 9:5, 10), we understand the meaning to be symbolic, not literal. Therefore, the “souls under the altar” represent those awaiting the future martyrdom of saints. □

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

(II Cor. 4:4), he broadcasts a “spirit of disobedience” into the masses around the world. His way is *opposite* to the way of God. He broadcasts a *spirit* of hostility and rebellion against all things that are of God. Satan teaches the way of “get,” instead of the way of “give” (Acts 20:35).

The converted, *spirit-led mind* resists this broadcast (I Pet. 5:9; Jms. 4:7). It is a mind that wants to grow. It exalts God, humbles itself and seeks to please God in *every* possible way. Such a mind wants to draw near to God through prayer, study, fasting, meditation and regularly exercising God’s Spirit—the five TOOLS of Christian growth! It abhors itself (Job 42:5-6) and sees itself as a vile piece of fleshly junk not worthy of God’s marvelous grace and mercy. Repentance is an ongoing, continuous ATTITUDE of wanting to change, of wanting to do better—to *grow, overcome* and become more like Christ on a daily basis.

The repentant mind “hungers and thirsts” after God’s righteousness (Matt. 5:6). It believes, through the practice of using *Christ’s own faith* (Eph. 2:8; Rev. 14:12), that Jesus is his personal Savior and that He has paid the death penalty (Rom. 6:23) for the new child of God, now no longer condemned.

The one who has just received God’s Spirit has been given a tiny bit of the MIND OF CHRIST and the *power* and *nature* of God. Peter wrote that Christians are “partakers of the DIVINE NATURE” (II Pet. 1:4), which is God’s. Human nature, once the sole custodian of the mind, is to be slowly *replaced* by God’s *divine nature* through the presence and growth of the Holy Spirit within us. Receiving God’s Spirit does not mean that one has suddenly lost human nature. That nature remains *present* and *ACTIVE*—in opposition to God’s nature. It is critical that we come to understand this ongoing battle within the converted mind—and how some

misunderstand it and fall into believing that they can no longer be forgiven. (Read our free booklet *Did God Create HUMAN NATURE?*)

But some other important instructions from Christ must first be clarified.

Christians Obey God

Hundreds of millions of “Christians” assume that they will be saved at death, simply because they have “accepted Jesus” as Savior. This is not what the Bible says! As James 2:20 states, “FAITH [belief] without works is *dead*.”

Many who teach that there are no conditions for salvation often quote Romans 10. Verse 9 states, “That if you shall *confess* with your mouth *the Lord Jesus*, and shall *believe in your heart* that God has raised Him from the dead, *you shall be saved*.” Verse 13 *appears* to make it even easier: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What could be simpler for would-be Christians? And how often have you heard that all you must do is “believe in your heart”?

But there is much more to these verses than meets the eye!

Notice: “*Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven* [“of,” not “in,” heaven]; but he that *DOES the will of My Father* which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Paul wrote, “the *DOERS* of the law [God’s] shall be *justified*” (Rom. 2:13). Professing “the Lord Jesus” is not enough to be justified. Besides, *professing* is very different than *confessing* Him.

Jesus never taught that people should just “believe on Him” to receive salvation. When a young man asked Christ what he must do to have “eternal life”—receive salvation—Christ told him, “If you will enter into life, *KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS*.” Hearing

this, and knowing that the man was rich, the disciples were shocked. They did not understand how obedience was possible and asked, “Who then can be saved?” Christ answered, “With

men this is impossible; *but with God all things are possible*” (Matt. 19:17, 25-26).

Christians are required to obey God’s laws. That is the *truth* from His Word!

The false teachers and deceivers of this world’s Christianity will tell you that you *need not* keep God’s Law. They will tell you that it *cannot be done*—that it is *impossible*—and that you should not even try. Matthew 19:26 plainly says otherwise!

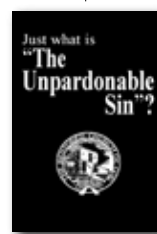
These “ministers” are basically saying, “Go right on sinning. It’s okay! God does not care, because He knows His law is too harsh for you to keep. And besides, Christ kept it *for* you. You are *already* justified, sanctified and spiritually perfect—because of what Jesus did.”

This reasoning is ludicrous and mocks Christ’s sacrifice. It attempts to prove that salvation is complete upon merely “accepting Jesus.” Far more people should be concerned with whether Christ *accepts them*. (Read our free booklets *What do you mean WATER BAPTISM?* and *What is true CONVERSION?* to understand the calling, repentance, baptism and conversion process.)

The book of Acts speaks of “the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to them that *OBEY Him*” (Acts 5:32). God only gives His Spirit to those who practice His commands. Obedience to God is not only a *qualifier* for receiving eternal life, it is also absolutely essential to both receiving and *continuing to receive* the Spirit of God.

What sin is must also be established, for sin is the *opposite* of obedience. The apostle John wrote, “Sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4). But, on the other hand, Psalm 119:172 states, “...for all Your commandments are righteousness.”

We have seen that receiving God’s Spirit is preceded by repentance of having broken God’s Law, and baptism (Acts 2:38). At this point, a new spirit-begotten life begins. The newly-begotten child of God is now an “*heir* of God, and *joint heir* with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). □



WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SET ABLAZE



PHOTOS: MCT

Five days of wildfires driven by intense desert winds and feeding on drought-parched terrain forced over 500,000 Southern Californians from their homes.

More than 20 separate blazes, from Santa Barbara to the Mexican border, consumed over 700 square miles of land, and destroyed or damaged at least 1,700 homes and businesses. Scores of injuries were reported, with at least three deaths from fire-related causes.

More than 12,000 firefighters and 1,500 National Guardsmen stretched their resources thin trying to battle the raging flames, which were fueled by Santa Ana winds reaching over 100 mph in some locations.

California Governor Arnold

Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency for seven counties, including San Diego, Los Angeles and Orange.

U.S. President George W. Bush later declared the same counties a major disaster area, allowing assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The president toured California to witness the fire and destruction firsthand.

Authorities estimated that the devastation had caused more than \$1 billion dollars in damage in the San Diego area alone.

Those who had been forced to flee their homes found shelter in sports stadiums, schools, libraries, community centers, fairgrounds and other locations. Many whose homes had burned

to the ground were left wondering where they would live.

The Qualcomm Stadium, home to the San Diego Chargers football team, was used as makeshift housing for evacuees. Small cots and one-man tents lined the outside walls of the stadium, and evacuees huddled together on blankets strewn across the field, clinging to the only belongings they could grab before they left their homes. Although over 10,000 evacuees reportedly took shelter at the stadium at the beginning of the week, officials report that only 2,500 have remained there.

According to authorities, there were enough supplies and food for all of the evacuees, and clothing was donated for those who have lost everything. In



addition, National Guardsmen paced the stadium to maintain order.

To authorities' surprise, the atmosphere in the stadium was festive, despite the grim circumstances. Rock bands, and clowns for children, entertained the evacuees, and free massages and gourmet buffets were made available.

Given the overabundance of items donated by local volunteers, there was only one incident of disorder. U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested six undocumented immigrants after they were caught stealing food and water designated for evacuees.

However, health authorities reported mounting stress levels among the evacuees. Along with nausea induced from smoke inhalation, people were

increasingly anxious about what they would return home to, or grief-stricken about the realization that they had lost everything.

One stadium refugee shakily described pictures of the charred ruins of her home to a television news reporter, pointing out her daughter's first bicycle, and parts of her living room, which were consumed in flames. No longer able to hold back her emotions, she cried as she detailed where the barn was located that had housed her husband's woodworking shop and her photography equipment. She said she did not have time to grab anything from her home, except for a box of several family albums.

Another family sorrowfully described how they escaped the fire

with just four cats, but had to leave behind their other 50 pets, including chinchillas, toads, finches and lizards.

Even while reporting live from the scene of the fires, a well-known San Diego reporter discovered his own home had become part of the 1,700 that had already turned to ashes. Struggling to keep his composure, he watched helplessly as his home and belongings for the past 25 years were consumed by the unrelenting flames of the crackling fire.

Evacuees and those in the surrounding areas tried to cope by turning to news site weblogs and posting their stories or offering help to those in need, along with using them to assure their friends and families that they were alive and safe. □

HEALTH ISSUES

Juvenile Bipolar Disorder Skyrockets

Adrastic number of U.S. children are being treated for bipolar disorder, according to a recent study released in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*.

From 1994 to 2003, there were 800,000 cases of children taking cocktails of powerful psychiatric drugs, despite limited available information regarding the long-term effects.

Once considered by many to be an adult disease, bipolar disorder (previously known as manic depression) is characterized by irritability, mood swings, aggressive behavior and phases of “mania.”

As experts weigh in on the cause of the 40-fold increase, there are conflicting opinions as to whether this is simply a case of overdiagnosis in the present, underdiagnosis in the past—or a combination of both. Regardless, it is evident there is either an epidemic of severe mental disorder among youths or an epidemic of over-diagnosis among this country’s physicians.

Dr. David Axelson, director of the Child and Adolescent Bipolar Services Clinic at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, calls bipolar disorder “difficult to pin down” because there is no specific diagnostic test to confirm its incidence.

Yet physicians such as Dr. Glenn Hirsh, medical director for the New York University Child Study Center, believe that the disorder has been highly underdiagnosed and that many adults who have it report their symptoms began early in life.

Dr. Hirsch also stated that feelings of anger and irritability alone can be clear signs of bipolar disorder.

With widespread disagreement about the nature of the condition and inconclusive evidence as to what exactly constitutes bipolar disorder—or more importantly, what does not!—symptoms as minor as irritabil-



IS MEDICATING A PROBLEM?: This 14-year-old controlled her bipolar disorder with a drug that also caused her to gain weight.

PHOTO: MCT

ity and distracted behavior can lead youngsters to a lifetime of swallowing cocktails of powerful mood-stabilizers and anticonvulsants.

Though a small minority do experience mental disorders, the environment of prescribing medication—when people simply fail to control their emotions, show mental discipline or deal with the everyday stress of life—has led to a drastically overly-medicated nation, now including children. □

WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

U.S. Southeast Drought Grows Worse

Severe drought has tightened its grip on regions in the Southeast ranging from North Carolina to Georgia. Recent population explosions, which have heavily taxed area water supplies, are bearing much of the blame. Reservoirs and lakes supplying freshwater in the South are expected to have an average of only 80-121 days of water left.

The drought has been so severe that it is making an impact on local businesses. With regulators imposing new water restrictions, even serving a complimentary glass of water at restaurants has been eliminated. Instead, restaurants and other eateries have been forced to sell bottled water to cover the heightened cost of water usage.

Some business owners theorize that the drought will soon lift, considering the Southeast’s typical reoccurring pat-

tern of heavy rainfall. While over 50 trillion gallons usually drench Georgia, only 1.2 trillion gallons are used statewide to support its population. Because of this factor, some have called for the construction of new reservoir systems. However, neither construction nor rainfall has yet happened.

Naturally, the drought has panicked residents, who are angered at the government’s lack of foresight in planning for this situation. As the population grew, correct measures were not taken to ensure water supplies could support the increase. Residents who now live under a water ban are no longer permitted to use water for recreational uses, such as watering lawns and washing cars.

Lake Sidney Lanier, the reservoir for Atlanta, Georgia, has been over-

taxed for years and is expected to be depleted within the next few months.

Many were expecting this year’s hurricane season to replenish water levels. The drought has been surprising for an area that is usually preoccupied with hurricane preparations. Every water measurement record in Georgia’s history has been broken, with conditions such as inches of rain, soil moisture and stream flow rate at all-time lows.

C.H. Guernsey, an Atlanta-based consultant who has been working on this situation with an engineering firm, remarked, “We’re in a very stressful situation now...but come next spring, if we don’t have substantial rainfall this winter, these reservoirs are not going to refill” (*The New York Times*). □

AFRICA

Armed Conflict Costs Africa \$18 Billion Each Year

During the past 15 years, almost \$300 billion has been squandered on armed conflict in Africa, capital that could have been used to lift the continent out of extreme poverty and to prevent continued disease epidemics, a new study revealed.

The estimated \$18 billion per year “is a massive waste of resources—roughly equivalent to total international aid to Africa from major donors during the same period. It is also roughly equivalent to the additional funds estimated to be necessary to address the problems of HIV and AIDS in Africa, or to address Africa’s needs in education, clean water and sanitation,” the report stated.

Produced by the International Action Network on Small Arms, Saferworld and Oxfam International, the report said that between 1990 and 2005, 23 African nations have been involved in armed conflict. The list includes Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan and Uganda.

In effect, 38% of the world’s armed confrontations take place on African soil.

In addition, the report highlighted that “the average annual loss of 15 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) represents an enormous economic burden—this is one and a half times average African spending on health and education combined.”

“This is money Africa can ill afford to lose,” Liberia’s President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf stated in the introduction of the report.

“The sums are appalling; the price that Africa is paying could cover the cost of solving the HIV and AIDS crisis in Africa, or provide education, water and prevention and treatment for TB and malaria. Literally thousands of

hospitals, schools, and roads could have been built, positively affecting millions of people. Not only do the people of Africa suffer the physical horrors of violence, armed conflict undermines their efforts to escape poverty.”

President Johnson-Sirleaf understands the huge loss it represents for the continent, including her own country. Since 1991, Liberia has been one of the African nations that has been the target of armed combat and widespread civil strife. Although conditions for peace in the country were established in 2003 after President Charles Taylor left office, Liberia continues to experience political and economic perils, including the challenge of accommodating thousands of Liberian refugees who have returned to their homeland since the war ended.

However, it is not only robbed human lives and financial resources stolen in conflict that continue to cause the most damage to the continent, but the intangible daily mental and physical effects felt by the people themselves—and in some cases, other nations around them not directly involved in the conflict itself.

According to the report, African countries involved in conflict have, on average, “50 per cent more infant deaths, 15 percent more undernourished people, life expectancy reduced by five years, 20 percent more adult

illiteracy, 2.5 times fewer doctors per patient, and 12.4 per cent less food per person.”

In the report, experts conclude that the majority of the problem lies in poor regulation of arms movement across borders—approximately “95 per cent of Africa’s most commonly used conflict weapons come from outside the continent.” These include the Kalashnikov assault rifle, more commonly known as the AK-47.

Also of primary concern is the tendency for regionalized conflicts to be magnified into international ones. According to the report, the situation in Darfur has already “drawn in neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic,” and other clashes in the area have caused similar situations.

Additionally, the economies of countries in armed skirmishes become intertwined.

“In 2002, when fighting in Cote d’Ivoire made access to the key Ivorian seaport of Abidjan virtually impossible, foreign trade was disrupted in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger,” the report stated.

And in Somaliland and Mozambique, “informal economies that provided a basic means of survival in wartime have been partly responsible for the collapse of formal rural market networks and have been an obstacle to post-conflict resolution,” the report said. □

The Cost of War in Africa

Wars have cost the economies in 23 African countries \$284 billion since 1990, according to a new study.

Countries with conflicts

■ Between 1990 and 2005



Losses in selected countries

	Years of conflict	Annual projected growth	Annual actual growth	GDP loss, in billions
Burundi	13	5.5%	-1.1%	-\$5.7
Rwanda	12	4.5%	2.8%	-\$8.4
Dem. Rep. Congo	10	5.4%	0.1%	-\$18.0
Eritrea	3	4.8%	-3.8%	-\$0.3
Rep. of Congo	3	3.3%	0.03%	-\$0.7
South Africa	7	1.2%	1.2%	-\$22.0

Source: Africa’s Missing Billions, International Action Network on Small Arms, Oxfam, Safer World © 2007 MCT

