

MARCH-APRIL 2020

THE

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REAL TRUTH™

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

THE BLIND TO SEE

*Humanity's Fight
to Cure Blindness*

**Why Britain Never
Fit in the EU**

**The Pope: "Christendom
No Longer Exists"**

**Russia on the
Brink of War?**

**Coronavirus: Anatomy of
a Global Outbreak**

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REAL TRUTH[™]
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VOL. XVIII | NO. 2 | MARCH-APRIL 2020

A R T I C L E S

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■ The pope delivers a message during the traditional exchange of New Year greetings at the Vatican (Jan. 9, 2020).

PHOTO: REMO CASILLI/POOL PHOTO VIA AP

The Pope: “Christendom No Longer Exists”

The Catholic Church—along with Protestant Christianity—is in the midst of a culture war pitting traditionalists against progressives. For average parishioners, the conflict should elicit important questions.

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FRONT COVER: A man with cataracts sits outside a building in Oman (Feb. 5, 2019).

PHOTO: LIA MARMELESTEIN/EYE CARE FOUNDATION

CREDITS: All photos from Getty Images unless otherwise noted. Articles on pages 16-24 contain information from The Associated Press.

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The Real Truth

1000 Ambassador Drive
Wadsworth, OH 44281
rcg.org/realtruth

PUBLISHER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
DAVID C. PACK

MANAGING EDITOR
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

SENIOR EDITOR
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
SAMUEL C. BAXTER

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

DAVID C. PACK
SAMUEL C. BAXTER
WULPHERT DE GRAAF
ANDREW J. HOLCOMBE
GREGORY E. KAIDANNEK
DAVID J. LITAVSKY
FRANK LYDICK
KENNETH M. OREL
GARRICK R. OXLEY
JAMES F. PASTOR
TIMOTHY D. RANNEY
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
NESTOR A. TORO
F. JACO VILJOEN
VIDAL N. WACHUKU
EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
MELISSA M. HOLCOMBE
DAVID J. LITAVSKY

ART/GRAPHICS
JODY E. LYDICK
PAULA C. RONDEAU
SARAH O. VIDAL
EILEEN M. WILLARD

WEBSITE SERVICES
BRADFORD G. SCHLEIFER
ANGELA K. BAXTER
AMANDA B. DODD
SARAH A. PERKINS

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
TIMOTHY C. WILLARD

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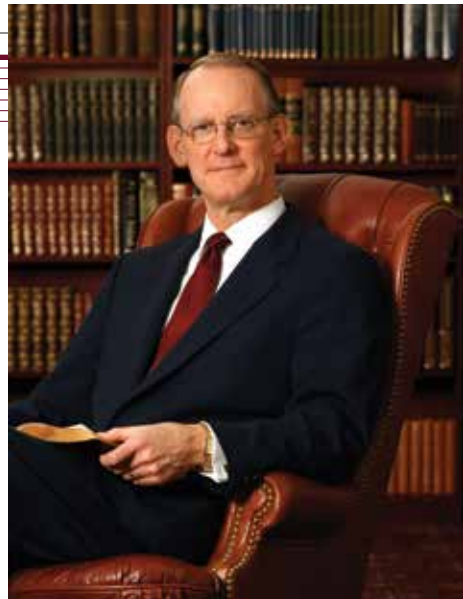
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Easter's Ancient Origins

EASTER IS A worldwide tradition involving many customs that people believe to be Christian.

What is the origin of Lent and sunrise services? How did rabbits, eggs and hot-cross buns become associated with Christ's Resurrection? Is Easter mentioned in the Bible? Did the apostles and early Church keep it? The answers will shock you!

Most people follow along as they have been taught, assuming that what they believe and do is right. They take their beliefs for granted. Most do not take time to *prove* why they do the things that they do.

Why do you believe what you believe? *Where* did you get your beliefs? Is the source of your religious beliefs the Bible—or some other authority? If you say the Bible, are you sure?

What about Easter? Since hundreds of millions keep it, supposedly in honor of Jesus Christ's Resurrection, then certainly the Bible must have much to say about it. Surely there are numerous verses mentioning rabbits, eggs and egg hunts, baskets of candy, hot-cross buns, Lent, Good Friday, and sunrise services—not to mention Easter itself.

Do not be so sure. Easter requires close scrutiny and this Personal examines it carefully.

Bible Authority for Easter?

The Bible is the source for all things Christian. Does it mention Easter? Yes.

Notice Acts 12:1. King Herod began to persecute the Church, culminating in the brutal death of the apostle James by sword. This pleased the Jews so much that the apostle Peter was also taken prisoner by Herod. The plan was to later deliver him to the Jews. Verse 3 says, "Then were the *days of unleavened bread*." The New Testament Church was observing these feast days described in Leviticus 23. Now read Acts 12:4: "And when he [Herod] had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to [sixteen] soldiers to keep him; intending after *Easter* to bring him forth to the people."

Is this Bible authority for Easter?

This passage is *not* talking about Easter. How do we know? The word translated Easter is the Greek word *pascha* (derived from the Hebrew word *pesach*; there is no original Greek word for Passover), and it has only one meaning. It *always* means Passover—it can *never* mean Easter! For this reason, we find a Hebrew word used in the Greek New Testament. Once again, this Hebrew word can *only* refer to Passover. Other translations, including the *Revised Standard*

Version, correctly render this word Passover.

Instead of endorsing Easter, this verse really proves that the Church was still observing the supposedly Jewish Passover 10 years *after* the death of Christ!

Now let's go to the *other* scriptures authorizing Easter. This presents a problem. *There are NONE!* There are absolutely *no* verses, anywhere in the Bible, that authorize or endorse the keeping of Easter! The Bible says nothing about Lent, eggs and egg hunts, baskets of candy, etc., although it does mention hot-cross buns and sunrise services as abominations, which God condemns. We will examine them and learn why.

The mistranslation of Acts 12:4 is a not-so-subtle attempt to insert a pagan festival into Scripture for the purpose of authorizing it.

When Easter Came to America

Easter has long been known to be a pagan festival. America's founders knew this! A children's book about the holiday *Easter Parade: Welcome Sweet Spring Time!* by Steve Englehart, states: "When the Puritans came to North America, they regarded the celebration of Easter—and the celebration of Christmas—with suspicion. They knew that pagans had celebrated the return of spring long before Christians celebrated Easter... for the first two hundred years of European life in North America, only a few states, mostly in the South, paid much attention to Easter."

Not until after the Civil War did Americans begin celebrating this holiday: "Easter first became an American tradition in the 1870s" (*ibid.*).

Remarkable! The original 13 colonies of America began as a "Christian" nation, but did not observe Easter within an entire century of its founding. What happened to change this?

Where Did Easter Come From?

Does the following sound familiar? Spring is in the air! Flowers and bunnies decorate the home. Father helps the children paint beautiful designs

on eggs dyed in various colors. These eggs, which will later be hidden and searched for, are placed into lovely, seasonal baskets. The wonderful aroma of the hot-cross buns mother is baking in the oven waft through the house. Forty days of abstaining from special foods will finally end the next day. The whole family picks out their Sunday best to wear to the next morning's sunrise worship service to celebrate the savior's resurrection and the renewal of life. Everyone looks forward to a succulent ham with all the trimmings. It will be a thrilling day. After all, it is one of the most important religious holidays of the year.

Easter, right? No! This is a description of an ancient Babylonian family—2,000 years before Christ—honoring the resurrection of their god, Tammuz, who was brought back from the underworld by his mother/wife, Ishtar (after whom the festival was named). As Ishtar was actually pronounced "Easter" in most Semitic dialects, it could be said that the event portrayed here is, in a sense, Easter. Of course, the occasion could easily have been a Phrygian family honoring Attis and Cybele, or perhaps a Phoenician family worshipping Adonis and Astarte. Also fitting the description well would be a heretic Israelite family honoring the Canaanite Baal and Ashtoreth. Or this depiction could just as easily represent any number of other immoral, pagan fertility celebrations of death and resurrection—including the modern Easter celebration as it has come to us through the Anglo-Saxon fertility rites of the goddess Eostre or Ostara. These are all the same festivals, separated only by time and culture.

If Easter is not found in the Bible, then where did it come from? The vast majority of ecclesiastical and secular historians agree that the name Easter and the traditions surrounding it are deeply rooted in pagan religion.

Notice the following powerful quotes that demonstrate more about the *true* origin of how the modern Easter celebration got its name (emphasis added throughout article): "Since Bede

the Venerable...the origin of the term for the feast of Christ's Resurrection has been popularly considered to be from the Anglo-Saxon Eastre, a goddess of spring...the Old High German plural for dawn, *eostarun*; whence has come the German *Ostern*, and our English Easter" (*The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967).

"The fact that vernal festivals were general among pagan peoples no doubt had much to do with the form assumed by the Eastern festival in the Christian churches. The English term Easter is of *pagan origin*" (Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*).

"On this greatest of Christian festivals, several survivals occur of ancient heathen ceremonies. To begin with, the name itself is not Christian but *pagan*. Ostara was the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of Spring" (Ethel L. Urline, *Festival, Holy Days, and Saints Days*).

"Easter—the name Easter comes to us from Ostera or Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, for whom a spring festival was held annually, as it is from this *pagan festival* that some of our Easter customs have come" (Mary Hazeltine, *Anniversaries and Holidays: A Calendar of Days and How to Observe Them*).

"In Babylonia...the goddess of spring was called Ishtar. She was identified with the planet Venus, which, because...[it] rises before the Sun... or sets after it...appears to love the light [this means Venus loves the sun-god]...In Phoenecia, she became Astarte; in Greece, Eostre [related to the Greek word *Eos*: "dawn"], and in Germany, Ostara [this comes from the German word *Ost*: "east," which is the direction of dawn]" (Englehart, *Easter Parade*).

As we have seen, many names are interchangeable for the more well-known *Easter*. Pagans typically used many different names for the same god or goddess. Nimrod, the Bible figure who built the city of Babylon (Gen. 10:8-10), is an example. He was worshipped as Saturn, Vulcan,

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Why BRITAIN Never Fit in the EU

The United Kingdom's departure from the multinational bloc was inevitable from the start.

BY NESTOR A. TORO

FROM THE moment the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community (the European Union's predecessor) in 1973, the countdown clock to Brexit had already begun ticking. It was just no one knew January 31, 2020, would be the day the bell rang, TIME'S UP!

Throughout its 47 years of membership, it was clear Britain was never quite happy with its position in the bloc. Though a full member, it continued to use its own currency and opted out of the Schengen Agreement, which promotes open borders among member nations. The UK also chose not to participate in a program for joint EU military operations.

Yet the concessions were not enough. Contention over EU membership boiled over until a 52-percent majority of citizens voted to leave in June 2016.

Many reasons have been cited for the complex relationship: Britain's imperial past casting a cloud over its membership—the strip of water separating the country from what is often referred to as the Continent—and wariness of the shifting alliances that have played out in Europe since the Norman conquest of 1066.

Some even say the Brexit referendum results would have shown more support for departure if done earlier.

British approval “of membership has only briefly been above 50%, and by 2010 was dipping below 30%,” *Financial News* reported. “A referendum back then most likely would have resulted in an even bigger majority for leaving.”

The UK was hesitant to join the bloc in the first place. While a member, it often grumbled about many of the integration suggestions that came up. Words like “awkward” or “semi-detached” were common descriptions of Britain's membership.

Though still a work in progress, many in the nation seem to be breath-

ing a sigh of relief for having finally quit the bloc. “We are at the end of a very long road,” said Martin Callanan, a Conservative minister, as Brexit day approached.

Why has Britain been so at odds with its mainland partners?

Tough Path Ahead

Even though the UK has officially left the EU, the two parties will continue to squabble over Brexit details. Until the end of 2020, Britain will remain within the EU's economic arrangements, including the tariff-free single market and the customs union, during which time Prime Minister Boris Johnson hopes to conclude a wide-ranging trade agreement for the EU. Both sides face challenges as they define their post-Brexit stances.

Three weeks before Britain was due to leave the European Union, the president of the European Commission warned that the UK will not get the “highest quality access” to the EU's market after Brexit unless it makes major concessions.



In a friendly but frank message to the UK, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said negotiating a new UK-EU trade deal will be tough. She also said the end-of-2020 deadline that the British prime minister has imposed on negotiations makes it “basically impossible” to strike a comprehensive new agreement in time.

International trade agreements typically take years to complete. Though Britain has a one-off option to request an extension to this so-called transition period for a further two years, Mr. Johnson has insisted he will not be taking that up. This means discussions over the future relationship on an array of issues, including trade and security, will have to be completed this year.

If no agreement is reached and Mr. Johnson refuses to take up the option of the extension, then tariffs and other impediments on trade between the two sides will have to be put in place.

Prime Minister Johnson also said the UK is seeking a wide-ranging free trade deal but does not want to agree to keep all EU rules and standards.

This is a thorny issue. Speaking at the London School of Economics before her meeting with Mr. Johnson, Ms. von der Leyen warned that “without a level playing field on environment, labor, taxation and state aid, you cannot have the highest quality access to the world’s largest single market.”

“With every choice comes a consequence. With every decision comes a trade-off,” she warned.

The EU worries that Britain plans to cut environmental and employment standards in order to position itself as a low-regulation, low-tax competitor to the bloc.

Mr. Johnson sought to allay those fears, telling Ms. von der Leyen the UK would continue to maintain high standards “in areas like workers’ rights, animal welfare, agriculture and the environment.”

In short, both sides have many wrinkles to iron, kinks to straighten, and jagged-edged rips to sew up.

Land-apart Mindset

Mr. Johnson’s demandingness over future-deal terms gives a taste of how

Britain has always perceived itself as a land apart—a significant reason why it could never quite fit in the EU.

Just as the United Kingdom is geographically disconnected from mainland Europe, it is also disconnected socially, economically, militarily and politically from Europe-at-large. The man- and woman-on-the-street in the UK is British, first and foremost, and then European (that is, if it is convenient, practical and does not interfere with being British).

Britain has long held an island-nation mentality, as the country is physically separated from Europe. It tends to favor its own interests above the collective mindset of the Continent.

Ironically, it was Winston Churchill who called for a “kind of United States of Europe” in the grim aftermath of World War II.

In a speech in Zurich in 1946, Churchill outlined his vision for post-war Europe. Peace and prosperity, he said, could only come if France and Germany put aside their centuries of mistrust and start operating as partners.

“The structure of the United States of Europe, if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single state less important,” he said. “Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by their contribution to the common cause.”

Churchill, notably, DID NOT envision Britain being part of this grand endeavor. Its role, like that of “mighty America” and even of Soviet Russia, would be to act as “friends and sponsors of the new Europe.”

That perception about Britain’s role provides one explanation to its ambiguous relationship with Europe in the decades since.

Critical Past

Though the UK-EU partnership seemed to work for a little while, their path into the future was fraught with roadblocks, bumps and chaotic turns that seemed to detour into uncertainty.

But with fundamental differences between them, separation was inevi-

table. There were too many disagreements, too many misunderstandings.

What ultimately went wrong?

Had Britain grown tired of European technocrats overruling British lawmakers and telling the UK what laws Europe would allow to go unchecked? Was it Europe's insistence that the UK accept any and all immigrants into its fold, regardless of UK immigration laws or how it would affect Britain economically, socially, politically?

The answer: *all* the above.

There was, nonetheless, one additional looming issue. In any agreement, particularly marriage agreements, two parties must fully come to terms with and even disclose their history to one another in order to reach mutual understanding. If this step is omitted, one of the sides could potentially accuse the other of fraud, should some previously undisclosed inconvenience come to light.

Unwittingly, there could have never been full disclosure on the part of Britain—it is *not fully aware of its own ancient past!* Had it known it and disclosed it, both parties may have

opted to steer clear of a partnership in the first place.

A look at Britain's history reveals an additional reason behind its untamable spirit and estranged EU relationship. The relatively tiny island nation, once the seat of a world-leading global empire, has spawned a long line of royal leaders who helped influence and shape the policies of entire nations.

Its ancient past holds the key to why the island nation of the British peoples always had a mind of its own—why it ruled or directly influenced one-quarter of the Earth, giving rise to the once-popular saying, "The sun never sets on the British Empire."

Something about its past explains why, at its zenith, the British Empire managed to stretch across the planet, including Ireland, Canada, the original 13 colonies of America, Bermuda, Jamaica, South Africa, Egypt, Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, India, Iraq, Burma (today's Myanmar), Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, to name a few.

Britain's distinctive precedent explains why it has grown used to ruling on its own and charting its own course into the future. To understand

this detail from Britain's origin is to understand why, naturally, it has bristled whenever bureaucrats approve EU restrictions over British laws.

Brexit merely confirms it further.

Greatness Fulfilled

As Britain was striving to enter the EEC in the 1960s, then-president of France Charles de Gaulle accused London of a "deep seated hostility" toward European construction and of "being more interested in links with the US." (It is interesting to note that Prime Minister Johnson himself was born in New York, and only renounced his American citizenship in 2016.)

The entire world remains in blissful ignorance of the startling beginnings of the world's greatest nations, especially the unique link between Britain and the United States.

The connection between these two nations goes way back, to much earlier than the times of the EEC. Further even than the American Revolutionary War.

To truly understand those national links, one must go to where they are first mentioned.

■ Guests celebrate the moment Britain leaves the EU during a Brexit party in Warrington, United Kingdom (Jan. 31, 2020).

PHOTO: ANTHONY DEVLIN/GETTY IMAGES



In early biblical times, a unique blessing was passed down from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob (who was renamed Israel), ultimately to Joseph—namely to his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. The blessing involved a promise that someday the descendants of the older brother, Manasseh, would “become a people, and he also shall be great.” Additionally, the younger brother Ephraim “shall become a multitude of nations” (Gen. 48:19).

The book *America and Britain in Prophecy*, written by this magazine’s publisher and editor-in-chief David C. Pack, presents proof after proof of how these blessings have been poured out on the *modern descendants* of these two brother nations.

No other nations in history come close to fitting the bill. Indisputably, only America can historically qualify as the “great” nation and Britain as the “multitude of nations.”

Only with this understanding can all Bible prophecies directed to the people of EPHRAIM—meaning Britain and the peoples still linked to its “multitude of nations”—be unlocked!

Beyond Brexit

One of these prophecies is in Hosea 7: “Ephraim, he has mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knows it not... and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek Him for all this. Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” (vs. 8-11).

While this prophecy speaks of a time soon to come, note that it highlights Britain’s proclivity to “mix” itself among certain groups of people, and to be “a cake not turned”—God’s words.

Not sure? Go get a Bible and read it! Then think of its “half baked” dealings with other nations.

Notice too that the Creator compares it to a “dove.” This is a fascinating symbol, especially considering that doves are known to mate for life. Make note that God likens it to not



■ British Prime Minister Boris Johnson meets EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at 10 Downing Street in London, England (Jan. 8, 2020).

PHOTO: PETER SUMMERS/GETTY IMAGES

any normal dove, but to “a *silly* dove without heart.”

Beyond Brexit, this nation is foretold to again get tangled in regrettable international affairs, until it finally learns an important lesson: It must “return to the LORD their God” and “seek Him.”

People in Britain and America, along with Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other English-speaking nations, do not know what is set to occur for their peoples because they do not know how to identify their origins in Scripture.

No wonder God lamented in the book of Isaiah: “The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider” (1:3).

Note that God is specifically addressing the modern descendants of Israel. Awe-inspiring prophecies regarding history’s great nations have yet to be fulfilled. Roughly one-third of the Bible is prophecy, which is history written in advance by inspiration of God.

Consider the following excerpt from *America and Britain in Prophecy*: “God’s Holy Word clearly reveals that

His entire plan of salvation is inseparable from, and relates to, the nation of Israel. Notice: ‘Who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises...’ (Rom. 9:4).”

The book continues: “Now ask yourself: Why is it then that the English-speaking peoples most profess to believe in the Bible and the God it describes? Why is it that all peoples of the world professing worship of the God of the Bible, were at one time taught by these English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon people? Why is it that these same people have done more to preserve the Bible than any other? Is it not also strange that these nations have proliferated the Bible around the world far more than all other nations put together?”

If you would like to learn more about America and Britain’s biblical origins—and why they are such uniquely blessed and prosperous peoples—read *America and Britain in Prophecy* at rcg.org/aabibp.

The future no longer needs to remain shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. □



THE BLIND TO SEE

Humanity's Fight to Cure Blindness

Numerous humanitarian organizations and charitable groups are resolved to eradicate a debilitating eye disease. Their work points to an even greater purpose.

BY EDWARD L. WINKFIELD

THOSE OF US who can see clearly (even with the help of glasses or contacts) sometimes take it for granted. Yet a look at conditions in another part of the globe can provide a fresh perspective.

Cataracts are the chief cause of blindness on the planet. Groups such as the Himalayan Cataract Project (HCP)—with its pioneering work in eliminating cataract disease in Nepal, Ethiopia, Myanmar and other devel-

oping nations—have opened the eyes of the masses (both literally and figuratively).

A former leper colony in Ethiopia was the site for one of HCP's recent cataract surgery campaigns.

Dr. Matt Oliva, one of four surgeons on the team, described the situation to *Vice News*: "Blindness in Ethiopia is a death sentence, it's a social problem, it's a human suffering problem, and it's an economic problem." Another ophthalmologist on the team added, "In a society where you don't have social security or things like that, these people

are dependent on their family to whom they become a burden."

Those suffering from cataracts, which is a clouding of the eye lens, in developing nations discover that life as they knew it is essentially over. One woman, blind from the condition, said: "My little children look after me, I can't even visit my friends. I just stay at home" (*ibid.*).

■ A child with cataracts in both eyes awaits surgery in Basankusu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (April 9, 2019).

PHOTO: ANDRAS D. HAJDU/OWW AND FOUNDATION OF DOCTOR RICHARD FOR CONGOLESE PATIENTS



An elderly man with milky white eyes due to the disease painted a similarly grim picture: “I’m a farmer and I used to grow khat and sorghum. But now I can’t do it anymore. So, I have become a beggar and now I beg every day.”

The HCP mission is seeking to change it all by eradicating as much unnecessary blindness as possible. According to its website, *cureblindness.org*, since 1995 it and partners have screened and treated over 7.3 million people, provided more than 900,000 sight-restoring surgeries, and trained hundreds of doctors to do the same.

Over the course of one week, using what can best be described as a human assembly line, the HCP team of four eye surgeons in Ethiopia restored sight to 700 patients. This surprisingly large number is contrasted by a surprisingly small one—25. This is the number of dollars it costs to purchase the kit used to help repair the sight of a cataract patient. Put another way, the amount a person living in a developed nation would spend on a restaurant meal is more than enough to help a blind person see again. SHOCKING.

Watching young and old in jubilation as their vision is restored changes you. One by one, as doctors remove the surgical bandages a mere 24 hours following the procedure, patients scream, squeal and dance as their brains expe-

■ Left, a man is overjoyed after his surgery screening at a clinic in Ethiopia (Oct. 8, 2019). Right, an examiner explains vision testing to an elderly woman during a village screening in Papua New Guinea (Sept. 13, 2019).

PHOTO: ULRICH EIGNER/LIGHT FOR THE WORLD (LEFT); THERESA GENDE/FRED HOLLOWES FOUNDATION PNG (RIGHT)

rience a sense that many patients had long given up on—sight.

The pure happiness on display, genuine embraces, and overwhelming emotions are heartwarming. They demonstrate, in a most graphic way, the one-of-a-kind joy of being made whole.

One Man’s Vision

The Himalayan Cataract Project was co-founded by Dr. Sanduk Ruit, a 65-year-old ophthalmologist from Nepal.

Following his studies in India, the Netherlands and the United States, Dr. Ruit pioneered a simple, stitch-free surgical technique to cure cataracts. The procedure was so effective it began to be called a Ruitectomy.

Instead of relying heavily on machines, Dr. Ruit’s manual surgical technique involves making a small incision on the surface of the eye just below the iris. Guided by a highly magnified image, the surgeon inserts a small tool resembling tweezers into the incision and pulls out the damaged lens. The doctor then replaces the old lens with an artificial one by pushing it into the same opening.

Though slicing into the surface of the eye and poking and prodding around may sound gory, it remarkably is not. The procedure requires no stitches and there is little to no blood involved.

The surgery is completed within 10 minutes, and the doctors apply thick eye patches with bandages in the hope that the patient’s vision will be restored following a day of recovery.

Family and friends witnessing the removal of the bandages are usually just as excited in anticipation of the patient once again recognizing them, sometimes after years of being unable to. When the patches are removed, it takes a couple of seconds for the brain of the former cataract sufferer to adjust to what is being seen. Moments later there is an unbelievable smile, demonstrating that the surgery was a success. Ninety percent of patients will see well enough to pass a U.S. driver’s license test.

The ease and manual nature of the surgery, the assembly line approach, and Dr. Ruit’s innovative \$3-per artificial lens is how \$25 of supplies and 10 minutes can help a person see again.

Greater Impact

Organizations besides HCP are also taking on the task of doing all they can to cure blindness. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness lists other partners such as Orbis International, SightLife and Eye Bank of Ethiopia. The primary focus of all these groups is on the blind in the developing world.

Their work was initially shunned in ophthalmology circles. Many took issue with the unconventional research and work in environments considered squalid by Western standards. Yet groups stuck to the belief that excellent care could be delivered to the poor.

Not only do the majority of these programs waive surgery fees for those unable to pay, they also utilize mobile eye camps to take their services directly to people in hard-to-reach places. For instance, those doing work in and around the Himalayan region transport their equipment by vehicle as far as possible, then complete the journey by foot through mountainous terrain.

Once these mobile care teams get to a village, they immediately begin the work of transforming any available space into a sterile location for surgery. The location must be accessible and able to handle a large volume of patients who travel from miles around seeking to be cured. In a matter of hours, the team converts a dusty room into an operating area nearly equivalent to a clinic in the developed world.

Through this and other similar efforts, experts have made a positive impact on the world's blindness problem. In Nepal, for instance, doctors have managed to reverse the rate of blindness from 1 per 100 out of a population of 26.4 million to about 1 per 400. Other places are experiencing similar benefits.

While the work of all these organizations is admirable, millions are still suffering from cataracts and awaiting care.

This reality drives efforts to pass along blindness prevention knowledge to other doctors. The HCP alone has helped train more than 19,381 eye-

care personnel from 43 countries, of which 493 are doctors. They have built hospitals in Ghana, Ethiopia, India and China. They have also worked in North Korea, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

These individuals are some of the many in the blindness prevention community hoping to bring the joy of sight to hundreds, thousands and eventually millions.

Miracle of Sight

Helping people see again is inspiring. In our world dominated by misery and despair, it is encouraging to witness uplifting accounts of people having their vision restored.

In a section on the *cureblindness.org* website titled "Grateful" are several quotes summarizing the impact of the charity's work. One statement stood out: "It's an amazing moment to watch [patients] realize that they can see, and to watch everything come into focus, it feels like a miracle."

The work of the HCP *does* feel miraculous. Though cataract surgery may not fit the exact definition of a miracle, it is nevertheless hard to explain it any other way.

Miracles grab and hold our attention.

Jesus Christ knew this very fact. He even explained it to a high-ranking official who, despite his status, was unable to find a cure to his son's terminal illness. He was left with no other option but to seek Christ and beg Him to heal his dying son (John 4:46-47). Christ's response alluded to His important purpose for healing people: "Except you see SIGNS and wonders, you will not believe" (vs. 48). He then healed the official's son. This irrefutable sign made the man and his entire household believers in Christ and His ministry (vs. 53).

The Greek word translated "signs" means an indication, especially supernatural (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*). This term is many times translated "miracle." A true miracle is an event inexplicable by natural or scientific laws. It is solely of divine origin.

Jesus' first official miracle was changing water to wine at a wedding, which also helped people to believe in His divine authority (John 2:11). This act caught the attention of those of a certain status. However, Christ's most numerous and arguably impactful miracles were those through which He brought or restored health to others, many of them poor. John 6:2 records, "A great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased." Christ's divine healing of the masses could not be explained away by nature or science.

Blindness was just one of the myriad diseases Jesus addressed: "And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, *blind*, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, *and the blind to see*: and they glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. 15:30-31).

People brought their loved ones with the hopes of them being made whole. Many who had all but given up hope had their lives forever changed. When the healing came, it brought tremendous joy and exuberance (Luke 17:15-16).

Yet the question remains: What did the divine healings *signal* or indicate? Yes, people were made to feel better, but to what did it all point? What was the purpose of Christ's ministry?

Read His own words: "Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John [the Baptist] what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor *the gospel is preached*" (Luke 7:22).

Christ wrapped His greater message—that of the gospel—in the healing of the sick. Helping people see, hear, walk and in some cases live again got their attention and the attention of witnesses.

Please see **BLIND TO SEE**, page 31

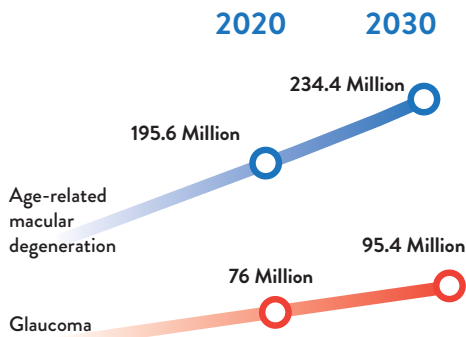
WORLD REPORT ON VISION



■ A woman awaits her first visual exam at the free Cataract Surgery Camp at Nakuru County Referral Hospital in Kenya (May 30, 2019).

PHOTO: SERGIO CARMONA AND SILVIA TABLADA/VISIO SENSE FRONTERES

Projected number of people estimated to have age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma, 2020-2030.



Eye conditions are projected to increase due to a variety of factors, including aging population and lifestyle.



■ Left, a woman learns the alphabet with her great granddaughter after her cataract surgery in Kolkata, India (Oct. 8, 2018). Right, a patient expresses his joy after cataract surgery (Aug. 28, 2019).

PHOTOS: AVIJIT GHOSH (LEFT); SHYAM VYAS/TILGANGA INSTITUTE OF OPHTHALMOLOGY (RIGHT)



■ A couple sits in the operating room after bilateral cataract surgery in Timor-Leste (Aug. 22, 2019).

PHOTO: FRENKY DE JESUS/HNGV



Everyone, if they live long enough, will experience at least one eye condition in their lifetime.



Refractive Error



Cataract



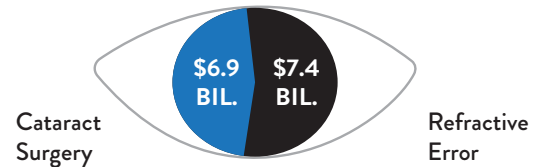
Macular Degeneration



Glaucoma

\$14.3 BILLION

The investment needed globally to treat existing unaddressed cases of refractive error and cataracts.



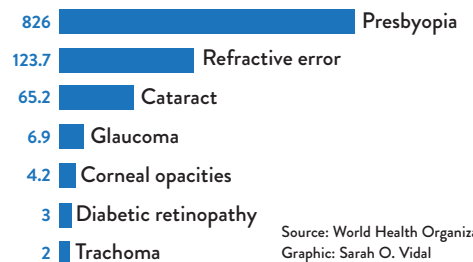
2.2 BILLION

Estimated number of people living with vision impairment.

1 BILLION


Number of cases in which vision impairment could have been prevented or has yet to be addressed.

Unaddressed vision impairment (in millions):



Source: World Health Organization
Graphic: Sarah O. Vidal

RUSSIA ON THE BRINK OF WAR?



A series of domestic and international shake-ups from Moscow have experts worried it is ramping up for renewed conflict with the West.

BY DAVID J. LITAVSKY

AS THE 2020s dawn, a third of a century since the end of the Cold War, Moscow has Washington on its heels. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that his nation has become the only country in the world to deploy hypersonic weapons.

“Now we have a situation that is unique in modern history when they are trying to catch up to us,” the Kremlin leader said at a meeting with top military brass in December.

The Avangard missile, as it has been named, can reportedly fly 27 times faster than the speed of sound—over 20,000 miles per hour—and has left

the U.S. military pondering defense strategies. Unlike a regular missile warhead that follows a predictable path, this new intercontinental ballistic missile can make sharp maneuvers in

■ Russian President Vladimir Putin watches a navy exercise from the Marshal Ustinov missile cruiser in the Black Sea in Crimea (Jan. 9, 2020).

PHOTO: ALEXEI DRUZHININ/SPUTNIK/KREMLIN POOL PHOTO VIA AP



the atmosphere en route to the target, making it much harder to intercept.

“No existing defenses, in the United States or elsewhere, can intercept a missile that can move so fast while maneuvering unpredictably,” think tank Quincy Institute analyst Steven Simon stated in *The New York Times*. If such a weapon were launched from mainland Russia toward New York City, U.S. defense forces would have *at best* 15 minutes to decide how to respond.

While the Pentagon has been chasing hypersonic weapons technology, it will be “a couple of years” before the U.S. could match the Avangard, Defense Secretary Mark Esper stated.

Shortly following Russia’s weapons announcement, Moscow had its largest shake-up in recent memory. In mid-January, Mr. Putin announced plans for reforms. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev resigned—and the entire government was dismissed. “It came out of nowhere. Even ministers in the Russian government apparently did not see their departure coming,” *BBC* reported.

Critics have described Mr. Putin’s plans as an attempt to secure his rule over Russia for life.

“One of the standout proposals is making the State Council a formal government agency enshrined in the constitution,” *BBC* continued. “At the moment

it is an advisory body packed with 85 regional governors and other officials including political party leaders. It is so large that when it meets it fills a hall in the Kremlin.

“But Mr. Putin clearly has designs on its future. One theory is that he could become a new, powerful leader of the State Council.”

During an annual speech to top Russian officials, Mr. Putin stated that

“our society is clearly demonstrating a demand for change,” and cited a “need to expedite achievement of the large-scale social, economic and technological challenges our country faces” to justify the changes.

Add to this Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, and its reported support of military groups in eastern Ukraine.

Silently amassing political power. Government officials being flushed out. Touting superior nuclear missiles. To the West, this all sounds *distinctly Russian*.

Yet understanding the giant nation’s motives has always been a challenge for western Europe and the United States.

Guns and Government

The Kremlin has made military modernization a top priority amid the tensions that followed the annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea. In January, Mr. Putin described a buildup of NATO’s forces near Russia’s western borders and the U.S. withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty among top security threats.

The leader argued that Russia must have the best weapons in the world.

“It’s not a chess game where it’s OK to play to a draw,” he said. “Our technology must be better. We can achieve that in key areas and we will.”

Regarding the political shake-up, President Putin has not explained why he hastily moved to amend the constitution now, four years before the end of his term. The move drew suggestions it could herald a plan to call an early parliamentary or presidential election.

The amendments give parliament the right to appoint cabinet members, but they are focused primarily on preserving and even strengthening the powers of the presidency. The Kremlin-controlled lower house of parliament, the State Duma, rubber-stamped the amendments by a unanimous vote in the first of three required readings.

“A similar move was made by Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev

before he stepped down last year after nearly three decades in power in the former Soviet country,” *Reuters* explained.

“Before leaving office, the 79-year-old Kazakh president boosted the powers of his Security Council and made himself its chairman for life, allowing him to retain a central role in the country’s leadership after stepping down.

“Bestowed by parliament with the official title of ‘The Leader of the Nation,’ Nazarbayev also retains his role as the leader of the ruling party.

“A role in a super-charged parliament could be an appealing option for Putin. Some analysts have said he could consider becoming the speaker of the reformed legislative body, a role that would also allow him to perpetuate his influence.”

Mr. Putin’s exact motives are characteristically hazy. The 67-year-old former KGB officer, who has led Russia for more than 20 years—the longest since Soviet leader Joseph Stalin—likes to keep his plans secret until the last moment.

Not much has changed since 1939, when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously called Russia “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma” as war with Germany was breaking out.

Cracking the Enigma

From the top down, Russians want to be and have the best.

“We always aimed to be number one in the world, and Putin understands that,” Ruslan Parshutin, 35, said to *NPR*. He said the return of Russia to the world stage is “important to us because we remember our roots from Soviet times. Patriotism is in our blood.”

Not all feel this way. Most 18-to-24-year-old Russians want to leave the country permanently.

Yet for “Russians like [Mr. Parshutin] who lived through the poverty, crime and chaos of the 1990s, Putin represents a return not just to stability but to national greatness. Even after two decades in power,

Putin consistently enjoys approval ratings around 70%.”

When looking at its roots, the general populace wants to see the country move in the direction the president is leading: prosperity, global influence and greatness.

A clue to understanding Russia is knowing how it views its own history.

A *Conversation* article called “Why Russia Thinks It’s Exceptional” stated: “America is not alone in projecting itself as an exceptional power and indispensable force for good in the world. Russia makes the same claim.”

Centuries of fending off large-scale invasions—each devastating to the population, land and economy—contributes to this sense of exceptionalism.

It began in the 13th century when the Mongols first under Genghis Khan swept across Asia. “God’s scourge,” as he called his hordes, advanced until being stopped by Russians, who now claim they had “shed their blood to protect the rest of Europe from this dire threat” (*ibid.*).

A loose pattern of invasion continued practically every 100 years. The Crimean Tartars destroyed Moscow in the 16th century. In the 17th century, Poles deposed the czar and murdered the head of the Russian Church. In the 18th century, Swedes invaded but were defeated by Peter the Great.

The defeat of Napoleon’s army cemented the idea that Russia was destined for greatness.

“After the Napoleonic Wars, a volcano of patriotism erupted across Russian society,” *The Conversation* continued. “At its center was the widely shared belief that Russia had saved Europe. Moreover, no other country on its own had repelled an invasion by Napoleon or crushed his army, which had once seemed invincible. Commonly disparaged by Western Europeans as savages or barbarians, Russians could now turn their reputation on its head.”

This fervor was enhanced by a costly victory against Nazi Germany in 1945. Even today, May 9—Victory Day commemorating the end of the

war for the Soviet Union—is considered Russia’s most important holiday of the year.

American involvement in post-war Europe further solidified a Soviet sense of superiority.

Foreign Policy explained: “Stalin, whose country was struggling to recover from Nazi devastation, fell back on defense. His aim now would be to hold the new security zone in Eastern Europe and to prevent the United States from controlling Russia’s mortal enemy: Germany.”

In 1947, the United States announced its Marshall Plan, which

“In a sense, Russia sees itself as a kind of sacrificial lamb, having shed its own blood to save Europe—and the world—from seemingly impossible-to-defeat foes.”

provided aid to reconstruct war-torn Europe. The initiative was mostly intended to secure democratic interests in Europe.

“Stalin denounced the plan as a vicious American plot to buy political and military domination of Europe,” *Foreign Policy* continued. “He feared losing control not just of Germany but of Eastern Europe, too. Prior to the launch of the Marshall Plan, Stalin had never been dogmatic about the forms of socialism pursued by countries within the Soviet sphere. Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania were all allowed to form coalition governments of one sort or another. His demand had merely been fealty to Moscow on foreign policy. That would soon change. By

the end of 1948, Stalin had fully co-opted or crushed the remaining non-Communist elements in the governments of Eastern Europe.”

National Code

Boiled down, warfare has shaped how Russians—from government to citizens—see themselves. Viewing history from their perspective helps uncover the motives for their actions:

■ The nation feels it has never acted as an aggressor, only a defender of itself and disenfranchised nations. Even its campaigns of conquest (including the annexation of Crimea) are usually performed under the guise of “protecting Russians” or eliminating potential threats before they advance.

■ Russia has historical reason to be suspicious of the West and maintain an arms race with it.

■ For Moscow, coalitions are not to be trusted. Historically, Russia stood alone against allied armies: Napoleon’s forces included Poles, Italians and Germans, while Hitler had Hungary, Romania and Finland on its side. Today, NATO is viewed with caution.

In fact, a popular refrain in state-sponsored advertisements today is Czar Alexander III’s joke, “How many allies does Russia have? Two: its Army and its Navy.”

■ Russia favors centralized power and political opposition is often viewed as an existential threat. According to this thinking, the state’s survival is only possible when citizens abdicate personal freedoms.

“Nothing but war teaches Russians better that, while at the center of world-shaking events, they are on the side of the good and always come out on top,” *The Conversation* summed up. “Nothing raises the ideological scaffolding higher than seeking to make Russia great again following the breakup of the Soviet Union.”

In a sense, Russia sees itself as a kind of sacrificial lamb, having shed its own blood to save Europe—and the world—from seemingly impossible-to-defeat foes.



■ President Putin visits the National Defense Control Center in Moscow to oversee the test launch of the Avangard hypersonic missile (Dec. 26, 2018).

PHOTO: MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV/SPUTNIK/AFP

History Reveals Future

While there are marked differences between the U.S. and Russia, their *similarities* are what cause the most friction. Think. They both have a desire to fix the world—yet with completely incompatible methods. In the 20th century, this clash threatened to heat up Cold War into World War III. In its worst-case scenario, this would have been a war in which the world’s greatest military powers threw in all their resources in a desperate bid to “save the world” (a move that would have inevitably destroyed it).

The same tensions are simmering in the 21st century. Should we be concerned it could happen?

No historian, philosopher or pundit can answer this for certain. Yet Bible prophecy can. In order to see what the future has in store, we must first peer further back into history.

The modern-day nation of Georgia, which borders Russia’s North Ossetia region, claims ties to the Meskhetians—who also historically lived between the Black and Caspian seas. This people

has been variously called Meskhi or Moschi throughout history.

What does this have to do with Scripture?

In the Bible, nations—which are merely families grown large—are often named after their ancestors. Notice Genesis 10: “The sons of Japheth [one of Noah’s three sons]: Gomer, and Magog, and *Madai*, and Javan, and Tubal, and *Meshech*, and Tiras” (vs. 2).

The Meskhetians or Meskhi claim ties to Meshech in the Bible. Also, note that Madai gave rise to the Medes. Interestingly, Tubal (sometimes spelled Tabal) and Meshech (Moschi) are phonetically similar to the modern-day Russian cities of Tobolsk and Moscow.

Put together: When Meshech or the Medes are mentioned in Bible prophecy—events that have not yet occurred—you should think Russia!

A number of Old Testament prophecies point to the modern Medes being used for important purposes. Ezekiel 38-39 shows that Russia and its allies will amass a gigantic mili-

tary force to play a key part in God’s Plan for mankind.

Yet Russia is not the only nation mentioned in the Bible. America, Britain, Germany and many other peoples have crucial roles to play in the very near future.

Here is a main reason God has for all of this: So the nations “shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel” (Ezek. 39:7). God plans out events so He can prove to human beings that He is in control. Also, He does not respect persons (Rom. 2:11) and has no pleasure in death (Ezek. 18:32). He wants ALL to come to see Him as Creator and to repent of their own ways and sense of superiority (II Pet. 3:9).

When all peoples come to recognize this—Russians, Americans and everyone else alike—all will be able to enjoy the good things God promises under His world-ruling government.

To learn more about this soon-coming, benevolent leadership structure headed by God Himself, read *What Is the Kingdom of God?* at rcg.org/witkog. □

The Catholic Church—along with Protestant Christianity—is in the midst of a culture war pitting traditionalists against progressives. For average parishioners, the conflict should elicit important questions.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

THE PO

“Christendom No Longer Exists”

EVER SINCE Benedict XVI announced he would become the first pope in 600 years to resign, Catholic theologians, canon lawyers and others warned of the potential confusion in having two popes living side by side in the Vatican, one reigning, the other retired but calling himself “emeritus pope” and still wearing the white cassock of the papacy.

Their fears came true in January—in an event that laid bare a growing rift in the church.

In a saga befitting the Oscar-nominated movie “The Two Popes,” Benedict co-wrote a book reaffirming the “necessity” of a celibate priesthood. There was nothing novel with his position, but the book came out at the same time Pope Francis was weighing whether to ordain married men in the Amazon because of a priest shortage there.

The potential implications of Benedict’s intervention were serious since the issue of priestly celibacy is perhaps the most consequential and controversial decision on the current pope’s agenda. It raised the specter of a

parallel magisterium, or official church teaching, at a time when the church is already polarized between conservatives longing for the orthodox purity of Benedict’s reign and progressives cheering Francis’ liberalizing reforms.

Benedict and Francis represent old and new, conservative and progressive, past and future. Their positions reveal a religious institution in the midst of its most significant shift perhaps since the Protestant Reformation.

“It’s one thing to publish, as a private citizen, a book about Jesus as Benedict did before he resigned,” Jean-Francois Chiron, a theologian at the University of Lyon, wrote in the French Catholic daily *La Croix*. “It’s another thing to take sides in important, current questions facing the universal church.”

Ultimately, Benedict distanced himself from the publication and asked to be removed as the co-author of the book, *From the Depths of Our Hearts*. The pope emeritus’ longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, said that there had been a “misunderstanding” with his co-author, Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea, and that while Benedict contributed an essay to the book, he never intended to be listed as the co-author.

Benedict’s association with the book was surprising, given that he had vowed to live “hidden from the world” when he stepped down in 2013, precisely to avoid any suggestion that he still wielded papal authority.

Cardinal Sarah, for his part, denied allegations that he had manipulated the 92-year-old Benedict. Yet the cardinal—a hero to purists and conservatives and a quiet critic of Francis—also admitted that he knew a Benedict-written text on priestly celibacy would create a clamor, and that he persuaded the pope emeritus it was worth it.

Again, historical tradition pitted against modernity.

Francis’ approach is well-known. *The New York Times* summarized his agenda: “Unlike his predecessors, who cracked down on dissent and promoted bishops and cardinals who emphasized fealty to church doctrine, Francis wants an inclusive church that welcomes back into the fold Catholics who felt geographically, pastorally and ideologically alienated. That mission has earned him the enmity of church conservatives, especially in the United States, who feel he is diluting the church’s teaching for the sake of a cheap embrace.”

For Francis, the world has changed so much that he even declared that

PE



PHOTO: FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



■ Left, Pope Francis delivers Christmas Eve Mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City (Dec. 24, 2019). Right, Pope Francis greets Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI as he arrives at St. Peter's Basilica during a celebration for grandparents and the elderly in Vatican City (Sept. 28, 2014).

PHOTOS: FRANCO ORIGLIA/GETTY IMAGES

“Christendom no longer exists,” during his annual Christmas greetings to the cardinals, bishops and priests who work in the Holy See.

Consider those words: “Christendom no longer exists.” By this Francis means there is no longer a bloc of Christian nations that can work together to evangelize non-Christian ones. He feels the world view and standard operating procedures for the Vatican are woefully out of date. To him, change is a necessity.

Yet the conservative block of the Catholic Church will not go down without a fight.

Regardless, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity are both in decline, the road forward obscured. These religious institutions are fighting over whether to stay the same or adapt to societal trends.

The rapidly shifting societal and religious landscape can make those who identify as Christians feel unmoored. Because the Catholic

Church has 1.3 billion adherents worldwide—over double the rest of Christianity put together—it becomes the case study to examine the situation.

As you read, ask yourself: “With modern Christianity in flux, where can I turn to shore up my faith?”

200 Years Behind?

During Pope Francis’ speech when he declared Christendom dead, he warned that “rigidity” in living out the Christian faith is creating a “minefield” of hatred and misunderstanding. He called for Vatican bureaucrats to instead embrace change.

Francis’ message appeared aimed at conservative and traditionalist Catholic leaders who have voiced increasing opposition to his progressive-minded papacy. Their criticisms have accelerated over the past year, amid Vatican financial and sex abuse scandals that may have predated Francis’ papacy but are nevertheless coming to light now.

The pontiff issued a stark reality check to the men in the Sala Clementina of the Apostolic Palace, acknowledging that Christianity no longer holds the commanding presence and influence in society that it once did. He cited the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, a leader of the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, who lamented in 2012 that the church found itself “200 years behind” because of its inbred fear of change.

“Today we are no longer the only ones that produce culture, no longer the first nor the most listened to,” Francis told the prelates. “The faith in Europe and in much of the West is no longer an obvious presumption but is often denied, derided, marginalized and ridiculed.”

The mainstays of Catholicism are in decline. In the U.S., the church has seen an 8 percent dip in membership from 1965-2010. Mexico had an 11 percent drop during the same period. It was even worse in Honduras, 39 percent, and Brazil, 33 percent. All nations in the Western Hemisphere reported negative numbers.

What about Europe? Spain was down 22 percent, France 18 percent,



and Austria 21 percent. Even Italy, home to the Vatican itself, saw a drop of 11 percent.

Overall, numbers of Catholics worldwide continue to increase, due to surges of numbers in Africa and Asia. But the church's landscape is quickly shifting.

As a result, the pope urged the Catholic hierarchy during his speech to embrace the necessary pastoral reforms and outlook that will make the church attractive so that it can fulfill its mission to spread the faith.

"Here we have to beware of the temptation of assuming a rigid outlook," Francis said. "Rigidity that is born from fear of change and ends up disseminating stakes and obstacles in the ground of the common good, turning it into a minefield of misunderstanding and hatred."

He recalled, as he has in the past, that people who take rigid positions are usually using them to mask their own problems, scandals or "imbalances."

"Rigidity and imbalance fuel one another in a vicious circle," he said. "And these days, the temptation to rigidity has become so apparent."

Traditionalist Catholics have denounced Francis' emphasis on mercy and openness to doctrinal wiggle room on issues such as sacraments for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics. They also sharply criticized his recent synod on the Amazon, which called for the ordination of married men as priests, and what they considered pagan worship of an Amazonian statue of a pregnant woman that was featured during the meeting.

Francis has defended his outlook and priorities as a reflection of the gospel, and the axiom that the true tradition of the church is one of a continuous, discerned path of change.

"Tradition is not static, it's dynamic," he said.

In a tangible sign of change, Francis then issued a decree limiting the term of the dean of the College of Cardinals, an influential job that had previously been held for life. Francis accepted the resignation of the current dean and decreed that going forward the future top cardinal would only have a five-year renewable term.

The outgoing dean had been the powerful secretary of state under Pope

John Paul II, and was blamed in part for the Vatican's refusal to crack down on pedophile priests. The outgoing dean, who is now 92, continued to wield behind-the-scenes influence in the two papacies that followed, acting most recently as something of a beacon for conservative opposition to Francis.

His ouster is another sign the traditionalist bloc is losing power.

Francis, who is now 83, has worked feverishly during the first six years of his papacy. *The New York Times* stated that "his effect within the church may be lasting."

"By appointing cardinals and more than a thousand bishops on the front lines of the faith, Francis is reconstituting a church in his image. It is one that decentralizes power from Rome to the bishops around the world, that is willing to work through the challenges of the modern world together with other faiths, and with atheists."

Record of Change

A major reason conservatives are losing ground in the Catholic Church is that the Vatican has a long history of reversals and changes. Once ironclad

rules have often been tossed out or softened.

A *Foreign Policy* article detailed a number of major reversals that have come from the Vatican over the years.

■ Original rule about usury: “Lend freely, hoping nothing thereby, the Bible teaches. Interpreted literally, this prohibition against profiting on loans played a major role in the creation of the European credit markets during the Middle Ages. Bankers had to devise methods of profiting from moneylending without directly charging interest.”

This rule fell by the wayside during the Renaissance when European capitalism took over—as charging interest is a mainstay of the modern financial system.

■ Original rule on slavery: “No less an authority than St. Augustine said that Jesus Christ did not make men free from being slaves. As late as 1860, the church taught that it was not a sin to own another human being so long as the slave was treated humanely.”

The church did not take a firm stance against slavery until it was largely forbidden in the West. While Pope Gregory XVI first criticized the practice in 1839, it was not until Leo XIII, the first 20th-century pope, that the Vatican declared slavery a moral outrage.

■ Original rule about Mass: “Traditionally, Catholic Mass was celebrated in the original Latin, with priests facing away from congregants. More generally, the institutions of the church maintained a level of distance from both followers and the modern world as a whole.”

During the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, it was decided to allow Mass to be celebrated in local languages. The council also began a number of initiatives including greater dialogue with other faiths and more decentralization of authority from the Vatican to local districts.

■ Original rule on limbo: “In traditional Catholic theology, limbo is the halfway point between heaven and hell where the unbaptized, including infants, go after death. Even though they had committed no sins, such peo-

ple had not been cleansed of the original sin through baptism.”

Parishioners never really latched onto the idea of limbo and it was rarely discussed from the pulpit. *Foreign Policy* wrote: “In 2004, John Paul II formed a commission to come up with a more coherent and enlightened way of describing what happens to infants who die. In 2007, Benedict signed a report recommending the concept be dropped. Instead of going to limbo, unbaptized babies would enjoy eternal happiness after death, but would not achieve communion with God.”

What Everyone Misses

This all brings out important questions: Should Christianity change with the times? Using modern technology and equipment is a given. Yet what about doctrines? Should those adapt as well?

In the culture war of modern Christianity, there is one thing rarely mentioned—if at all. That is what the Bible *actually* says.

Every churchgoer owes it to themselves to stop and look at God’s Word. Then, they should take a long hard look at the churches of today. Do these “houses of worship” and their leadership match up to what the Bible says?

Look at what Jesus Christ declared: “But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines *the commandments of men*” (Matt. 15:9). Mark 7:7 says the same thing.

A lot of the arguments among modern church leaders are over this: the commandments of men. These are ideas that have no biblical backing.

The celibate priesthood is one example. Notice what I Timothy 3:2 states: “A bishop then must be blameless, *the husband of one wife*, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”

For emphasis, read Titus 1:6, which also states ordained men must be “the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.”

Do not overcomplicate this. While some ministers may be single, the apostle Paul—inspired by God—clearly stated they can marry and have children.

Another example of “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” is taking days with pagan origins and adopting them for “Christian” worship. Jeremiah 10 is clear: “Thus says the LORD, *Learn not the way of the heathen*, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them” (vs. 2).

The pagan roots of Christmas and Easter are well known. Ask: Would God allow these heathen days—even if they are repurposed—especially when the days He commands are swept aside?

Note that God commanded His weekly Sabbath day and annual Holy Days to be “a perpetual covenant” (Ex. 31:16; 12:20, 24).

Read what God says in Exodus 31: “It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel FOREVER: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (vs. 17).

While the leaders of modern Christianity squabble over the future of their churches, you should focus instead on what your Creator wants. Ignore the political wrangling and petty arguments over tradition!

You need to prove to yourself the Bible is God’s Word. Make I Thessalonians 5:21 your guiding light: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

While society is well into a “post-Christian era,” the Bible remains as relevant as ever: “But the word of the Lord endures FOREVER” (I Pet. 1:25).

In addition, God declares, “I change not” in Malachi 3:6, and Hebrews 13:8 states that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (NKJV).

Read *Bible Authority... Can It Be Proven?* at rcg.org to begin to understand what God wants for your life. □



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WHEN NEWS broke that China built and completed a brand-new hospital in 10 days, it was clear the coronavirus outbreak was no ordinary epidemic. Authorities ordered the construction of a prefabricated, 1,000-bed hospital in Wuhan, the epicenter of the latest outbreak. The 11-million strong city is known as the Chicago of China given its central location and large car manufacturing industry.

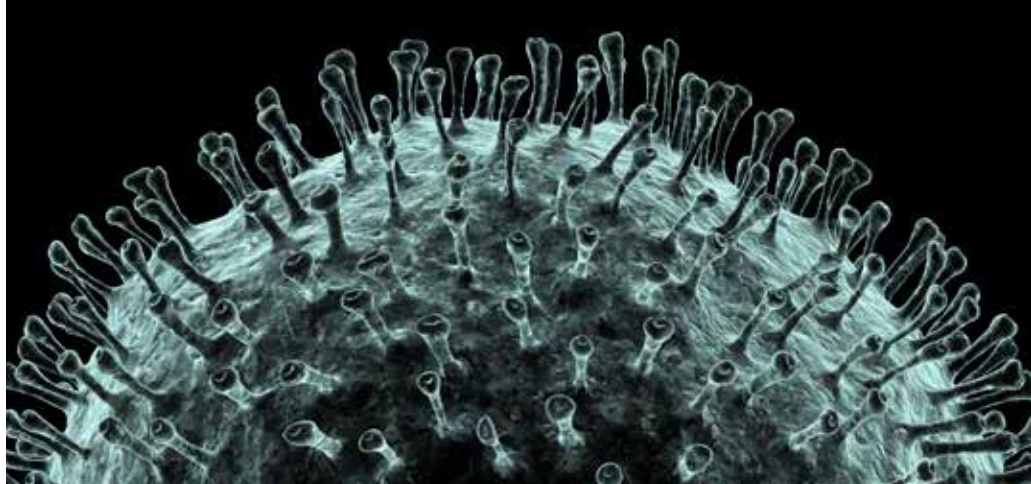
According to *The Washington Post*, dozens of other facilities “have been built from scratch or refashioned from existing hospital wards.”

The last time Beijing slapped a hospital together in a matter of days was during the SARS virus crisis. That epidemic killed 800 in 2002-2003.

Fearing the worst with coronavirus, government officials shut down Wuhan and several other major cities where infections had spread—putting an unprecedented 50 million people on lockdown. As *The Real Truth* goes to print, the total number of cases in mainland China reached 52,526 and the death toll hit 1,367. Three people died elsewhere, one in Hong Kong, one in the Philippines and one in Japan.

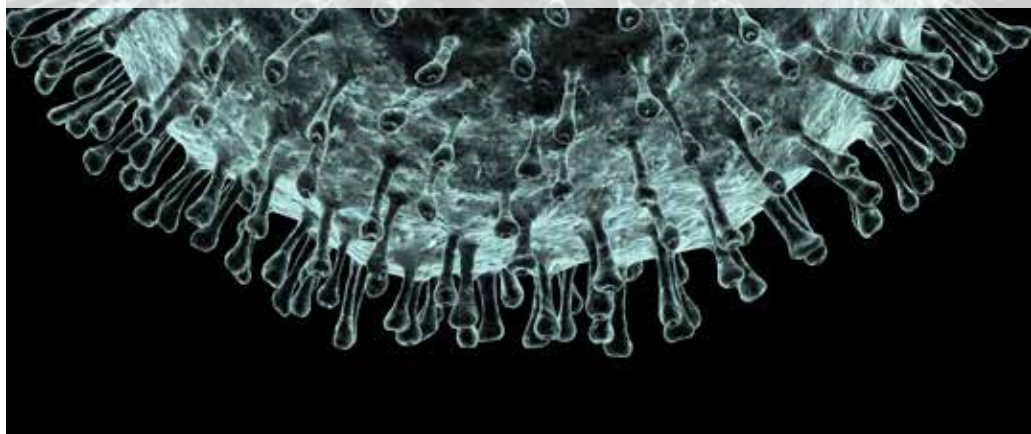
Scientists identified the virus as a novel (or new) coronavirus. The name comes from the Latin word for crowns or halos, which coronaviruses resemble under a microscope. The coronavirus family has many types that affect people. Some cause the common cold while others originating in bats, camels and other animals have evolved into more severe illnesses such as SARS—severe acute respiratory syndrome—or MERS—Middle East respiratory syndrome. The novel strain is called COVID-19.

With tens of millions of Chinese ordered to stay put and many others avoiding travel, tourism around the globe is taking a heavy hit. The outbreak coincided with China’s busiest travel season as people visited their



CORONAVIRUS

Anatomy of a Global Outbreak



families or went abroad for the Lunar New Year holiday.

“Not only has the outbreak hit during the Chinese new year, when people make billions of trips to visit family, but it comes as the country is reporting its lowest rate of economic growth in nearly 30 years,” *Financial Times* reported.

What started with a few people catching the virus from a market in Wuhan caused rippling global effects.

Financial Downturn

The world’s economy turns heavily on China’s markets. It represents one-fifth of the global GDP and is the world’s second biggest economy.

“Companies in other countries dependent on Chinese supply chains

are already facing a slowdown: Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Italy and the U.S. have all imposed travel restrictions,” *Time* magazine reported as the number of cases continued to increase.

Oil prices fell 20 percent in January because of a drop in China’s demand, leaving OPEC countries debating whether to cut oil production.

But perhaps the greatest cost will come to “China’s reputation as a reliable trade partner,” *Time* continued. “In the process, China creates the impression that it has learned little since the SARS crisis, giving the rest of the world reason to try to reduce its dependence on China for growth and production.”

“We’re moving closer to the day when it is China’s increasingly hefty economy, not America’s, that’s most to blame for a global recession.”

The interconnected global economy means U.S. companies have plenty of customers and suppliers in China. Its economy accounts for 6 percent of all revenue for S&P 500 companies over the last 12 months. That is nearly double any other country besides the United States, according to FactSet.

“Markets hate uncertainty, and the coronavirus is the ultimate uncertainty in that no one knows how badly it will impact the global economy,” Alec Young, managing director of global markets research at FTSE Russell, said to *The Associated Press*.

Struggle to Quarantine

The outbreak also revealed the weak points in individual nations’ healthcare systems. Those efforts have not always been smooth, with violent protests near quarantine centers, banishment to remote islands, and some citizens allowed to leave quarantine early.

Hong Kong quarantined 3,600 people on board a cruise ship for multiple days until health checks were com-

pleted. The ship was refused entry at Kaohsiung port after three passengers on an earlier voyage later tested positive for the virus.

The British government declared the virus a “serious and imminent threat to public health,” which it said gives authorities powers to forcibly detain infected people if necessary. The change comes after a British man who caught COVID-19 in Singapore appeared to be linked to at least seven other confirmed cases in Europe.

Five Britons, including a 9-year-old boy, contracted the virus in the French Alpine ski town of Contamines-Montjoie after staying in the same chalet as the British man.

In South Korea, officials acknowledged missteps in monitoring visitors from China as 23 cases of the infection were confirmed. Residents threw eggs and other objects at government officials over plans to quarantine about 700 evacuees from Wuhan at facilities in their neighborhoods.

Australia has been criticized over its decision to quarantine about 300 Wuhan evacuees on a remote island used in the past to banish asylum seekers and convicts. Some inhabitants of the island say

the government is turning their home into a “leper colony.”

As of this writing, the virus has yet to be confirmed in Africa, but global health authorities are increasingly worried about the threat to the continent, where an estimated one million Chinese now live, as some health workers warn they are not ready to handle an outbreak.

The continent is racing to take precautions as hundreds of travelers arrive from China every day. Safeguards include stronger surveillance at ports of entry and improved quarantine and testing measures across Africa, home to 1.2 billion people and some of the world’s weakest systems for detecting and treating disease.

But the effort has been complicated by a critical shortage of testing kits and numerous illnesses that display symptoms similar to the flu-like virus.

“The problem is, even if it’s mild, it can paralyze the whole community,” said Dr. Michel Yao, emergency operations manager in Africa for the World Health Organization.

Challenge to Authority

While the coronavirus outbreak is, at its core, a humanitarian issue, it is also political. China’s ruling Communist Party has faced criticism of its heavy-handed censorship, on display during the outbreak, and other social controls under President Xi Jinping, who took power in 2012 and has accrued more political power than any Chinese leader since Mao Zedong.

There is no indication Mr. Xi faces any serious challenge to his position, but public anger could give opponents in the ruling party ammunition to push back against his autocratic rule.

“In the long term, I think it will damage him,” said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

But for now, even party figures who might be quite happy to see Mr. Xi weakened feel obligated to rally around him, Mr. Tsang said. “They will not risk allowing a crisis like this to destroy the credibility of the Communist Party itself,” he said.

■ Security guards hold the curtain for a cyclist to pass through a disinfectant spray in order to return home to a residential complex (Feb. 11, 2020).

PHOTO: CHINATOPIX VIA AP



The party has also faced an outburst of public anger following the death of Li Wenliang, a physician in Wuhan who was reprimanded in December for warning about the virus. Local authorities were accused of discouraging doctors from talking about the outbreak to avoid overshadowing Hubei province's major political event, a legislative meeting in preparation for the National People's Congress.

Comments left on Dr. Li's microbiology account accused Wuhan authorities of valuing politics over public safety. Party leaders have tried to divert anger by allowing state media and social media users to criticize local Wuhan officials.

No Vaccine?

Researchers worldwide are scrambling to find a vaccine against the surprise health threat, but there is no guarantee one will arrive in time.

Just days after Chinese scientists shared the genetic map of the culprit coronavirus, researchers at the U.S. National Institutes of Health had engineered a possible key ingredient for a vaccine they hope to begin testing by April.

Scientists from Australia to France, along with a list of biotech and vaccine companies, jumped in the race, pursuing different types of inoculations.

Texas researchers froze an experimental vaccine developed too late to fight SARS but are pushing U.S. and Chinese authorities to give it a try this time around.

All that work is coming at lightning speed compared to past outbreaks. Yet many experts agree it still may take a year—if every step along the way goes well—for any vaccine to be ready for widespread use.

The Animal Connection

Government organizations, healthcare providers and doctors have poured all their resources into stopping the spread of COVID-19. They want to avoid an all-out pandemic.

Yet disease outbreaks keep coming. Why can we not address *the causes* of these outbreaks?



■ Shoppers wear face masks at a supermarket in Wuhan, China (Jan. 25, 2020).

PHOTO: CHINATOPIX VIA AP

Review any list of history's deadliest diseases and note the common thread throughout.

Bubonic plague: The bacteria known as the Black Death killed nearly 25 million in the 14th century—one-third of the world's population at the time. It originated as ordinary bacteria in the digestive tracts of certain mammals, mostly rodents, that was transferred from host to host by fleas.

Spanish flu: The deadly influenza that infected more than half a billion people in just under two years (January 1918 to December 1920) is believed to have started in birds, transferred to pigs, and then passed to humans.

HIV/AIDS: This virus is believed to have originated from chimpanzee blood to human blood sometime in the late 19th century to early 20th century. It is estimated that up to 44 million people globally were living with HIV by the end of 2018, and 770,000 died from AIDS that year.

Yellow fever: Believed to have originated in primates, the main vector of this disease is mosquitos. Yellow fever virus is estimated to cause

200,000 cases and 30,000 deaths each year, 90 percent of which occur in Africa.

What is not debatable about each of these is that animals were the source of the illness—whether humans ingested tainted meat or came in contact with a creature carrying the pathogen.

Some of the most extreme diseases are zoonotic, which means they derive from animals. COVID-19 falls in this category. A study in the *Journal of Medical Virology* pinpointed bats as the origin of this respiratory illness, which mutated and was passed onto snakes that likely ate the infected bats.

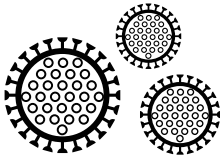
CNN reported: "In the case of this 2019 coronavirus outbreak, reports state that most of the first group of patients hospitalized were workers or customers at a local seafood wholesale market [in Wuhan] which also sold processed meats and live consumable animals including poultry, donkeys, sheep, pigs, camels, foxes, badgers, bamboo rats, hedgehogs and reptiles."

Other reports indicate that snakes were sold at the market, which is now

What to know about the virus

WHAT IS IT?

• The coronavirus family has many types that affect people.



Some cause the common cold while others originating in bats, camels and other animals have evolved into more severe illnesses such as SARS.

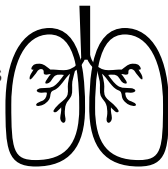
WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

• First cases appeared in December in Wuhan, a city in central China's Hubei province.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

• Symptoms of the coronavirus include fever, cough, tightness of the chest and shortness of breath.



In serious cases, the virus can cause pneumonia and death.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

• There is a test to identify the virus, but no vaccine to prevent an infection.



The symptoms are treated with pain and fever medication.

HOW IS IT SPREADING?

• Many coronaviruses can spread through coughing or sneezing, or by touching an infected person.



Source: AP
Graphic: Staff, TNS

closed, where the virus likely jumped to humans.

This is not the first time China has been walloped by a zoonotic disease—the outbreaks SARS and MERS both originated from bats.

Preventing Disease

People will never stop using animals for food and other domestic purposes. Does that make it impossible to prevent zoonotic disease from ever spreading?

Consider this point before we address the answer: For the most part, people know not to eat something that is proven to be poisonous. Plants, for instance, are known to be good or bad for consumption. Most everyone knows not to touch poison ivy, or that certain mushrooms are safe to eat and others are deadly if ingested.

Yet few know there are also parameters for what animals are good for food. That is because the consequences are more subtle.

Therefore God, who made all flesh, outlined these rules in His Word. Though many meats are edible, not all were made “clean.” Ingesting food deemed “unclean” puts one on the path for health problems—disease, physical or mental deterioration, or even genetic disorders.

Leviticus 11 lists qualifications for animals—land, sea and air—that are allowable to eat and others that are considered an “abomination”—filthy, polluted—and thus unfit for human beings’ digestive systems. Among these unclean kinds of flesh are snakes and bats.

Of course, this does not mean clean meats are guaranteed to result in perfect health—mad cow disease and salmonella prove this.

But the human record shows those meats God identified as unclean have brought the worst consequences—long-term and short-term.

To learn more about this and other biblical principles whereby you can improve your health, read our booklet *God's Principles of Healthful Living* at rcg.org/glohl.

Pestilences Foretold

As long as these instructions from God are hidden or outright disregarded, diseases with animal origins will continue to spread. In fact, it will become a bigger concern as the world enters a time Jesus Christ prophesied as having increased disease outbreaks.

When asked, Jesus told the disciples exactly what would occur and what to look for leading up to His Return to Earth. Included in the “signs” or indications of the end was *increased* “pestilences” or plagues and disease epidemics (Matt. 24:3, 7).

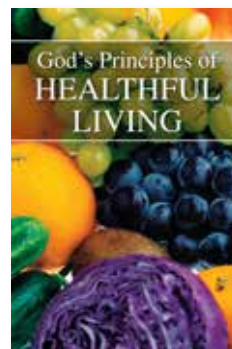
The key is that there would be an *upsurge* in disease. This is obvious because disease is an age-old problem. Its proliferation, though, is an indication of what the Bible refers to as the “end of the age.”

The coronavirus outbreak represents just a fraction of pestilences raging across the planet. Consider the worst outbreaks of 2019: Ebola continues to plague central Africa, dengue fever took 622 lives in the Philippines, some 28,000 cases of person-to-person Hepatitis A were recorded in the U.S., and measles made a large comeback in America and abroad.

As these continue to get worse, it is a sign the “end” is nearing. This end is a culmination of man’s rule on Earth, where he has had millennia to try his own forms of government and solutions to problems. Look at history—mankind’s solutions do not work! Soon, a loving God will help all alive

to learn this lesson and to teach them His way of life. This includes how to avoid disease pandemics.

Our book *Why Man Cannot Solve His Problems* (rcg.org/uun) explains more why humans have not been able to conquer illness, along with all of their age-old problems—crime, war, starvation, illiteracy and needless suffering—as well as how they *can* and WILL be fixed. □



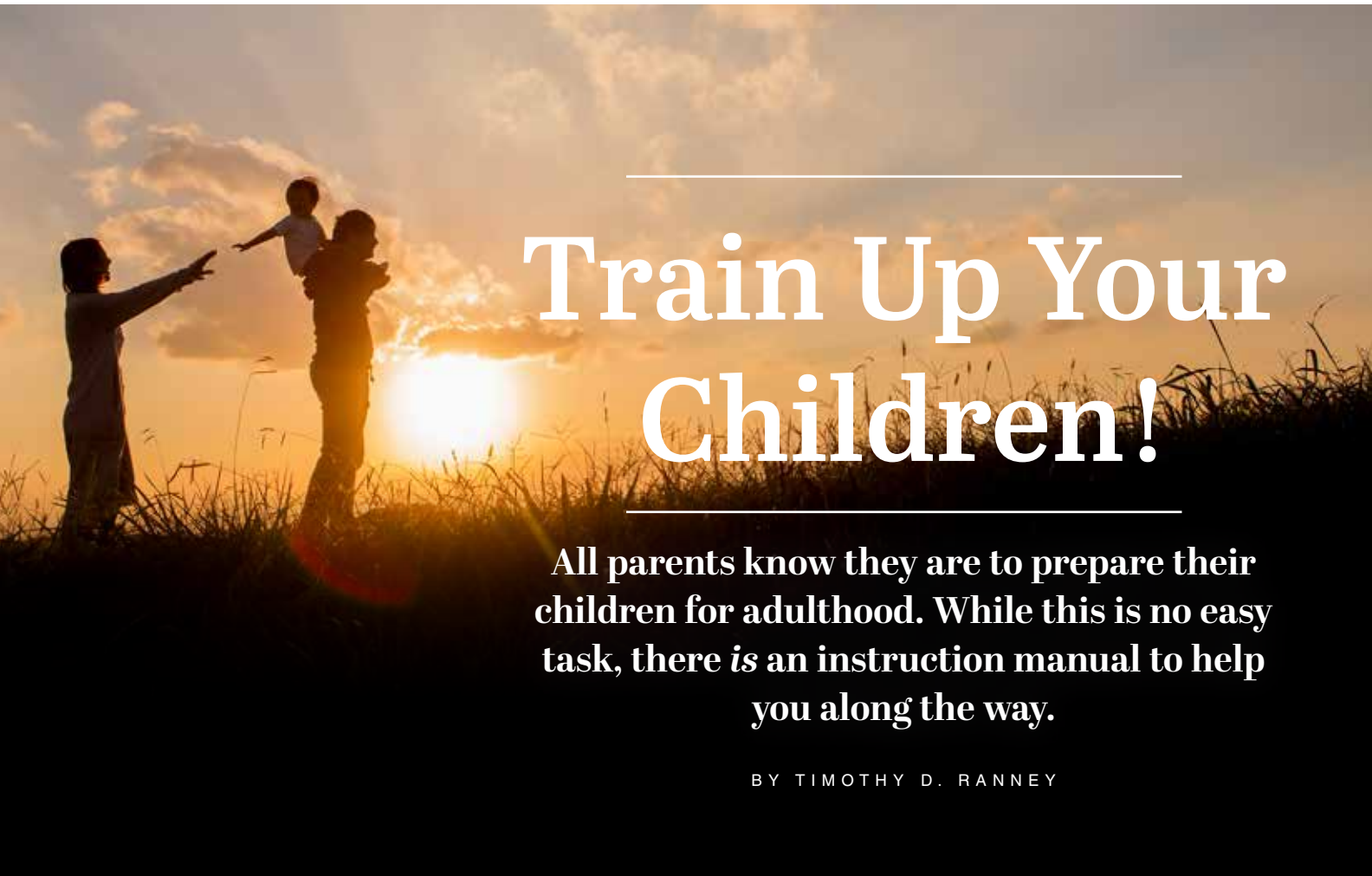
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Train Up Your Children!

All parents know they are to prepare their children for adulthood. While this is no easy task, there *is* an instruction manual to help you along the way.

BY TIMOTHY D. RANNEY

THINK ABOUT a time you sat in a public place, perhaps a restaurant, waiting for a bus or a train, at a movie, or maybe on a plane. You were trying to read a book, check your email or just sit quietly and think about your day. Suddenly, you are interrupted by a screaming child nearby!

Perhaps being a mother or father yourself, your heart goes out to the parents and even more to that frustrated child. However, this may not have been your immediate reaction.

In such instances, the parent or adult responsible appears to have completely lost control. He or she seems to have little or no influence over the child's behavior. Granted, the child may be tired or frustrated by some unavoidable nuisance, nev-

ertheless the screams impact you and everyone around!

The episode is just as frustrating for the parents. It is a scene filled with confusion and embarrassment about the inability to control their child's behavior in public.

Do these parents love their children? The parents would respond with yes and almost certainly be offended by the question. In nearly every case parents say and feel that their childrearing habits are guided by a love for their children. They want what is best for them. They do not want them in pain or discomfort. They know that parental love is one of the most important things they can offer.

The word "love" is often confused by those in today's society. It can begin to mean whatever we want or think it to mean. We should therefore ask about love for our children in a slightly

different way: Is avoiding teaching a child proper behavior demonstrating love?

The answer to this question from God's perspective is easy to find. His principles regarding teaching our children are clearly spelled out in the Bible.

A Command from God!

Both the Old and New Testaments *command* children to obey their parents. Ephesians 6:1-3 states this in clear terms: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor your father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth."

Exodus 20:12 adds more about the promise: "Honor your father and your mother: *that your days may be long*

upon the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

What parents would not want to ensure the blessing of long life for their children?

Yet note this: The responsibility for the child keeping this command from God *begins* with the parents!

Read Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is the other side of God’s command to children! It is required that we as parents train—TEACH—our children if we want them to experience a long, prosperous life. But how?

Frankly, our society is generally lost on the answer to this question. Experts abound. Yet their counsel is often critical of and in direct opposition to God’s own instructions.

Add to this the fact parents today are forced to raise children in a world immoral and twisted in character and the task can seem overwhelming. Yet parents must ask themselves, *what* should my child be taught? And *how*? Further, how do I make it “stick” so that my child will continue in what I have instructed?

Start Early

Teaching must begin at an early age. Even small children can learn right from wrong. Social smiles begin in babies between 6 and 8 weeks of age. Less than 2 months old! It is endearing to see parents and their friends play games such as peek-a-boo to coax a smile out of a baby. You are likely smiling as you read this.

The point here is that the parent is already teaching in this moment! Fathers and mothers both are trying to teach a small infant to use a smile socially, to help a baby appropriately interact with others. The playing associated with peek-a-boo is a way to teach children when and how to smile as they watch and learn from you. These are examples of teaching them proper or correct behavior.

No one would argue that physical discipline is inappropriate for the very youngest of children. However, we

can show our displeasure with certain facial expressions and our tone of voice. These can be very effective ways of letting children know we are not pleased with their behavior. Rewarding and not rewarding certain behaviors can be effective as well. The goal in both cases is to make clear there are rewards or consequences for the child’s actions.

When it comes to the “when” of teaching our children, many well-meaning parents tend to procrastinate: “Just wait until the terrible twos,” or, “Just wait until they start school,” or, “Just wait until they’re a teenager”! This reveals a tendency to underestimate how capable a child is of learning.

Yes, children do grow and develop in their ability to understand and retain certain concepts as they get older, but they know and understand more than what we give them credit for. Start to teach right and wrong as early as possible.

Most parents can recall being very excited upon the news that a child is coming. It would benefit all parents in this position to know that teaching and rearing a child should begin early—but also should be fun.

How to Teach

So *how* does a parent go about teaching a child? If some time has already passed and your child is a little older, this is an even more important question. For instance, some parents are already in the midst of their children’s “terrible twos.” Is it too late?

A quote from David C. Pack’s book *Train Your Children God’s Way* helps explain the way to approach this situation by pointing back to the scene mentioned at the beginning of this article: “...for those who need their very small children to be quiet in public places or at church services, it is crucial that you teach them when to ‘hush.’ While it is wonderful to watch tiny children ‘discover’ their voices, they must understand that there is a time and place for this. Be sure you are regularly teaching your children the importance of ‘quiet time.’”

Notice this advice expands on teaching your child the concept of right and wrong—showing right behavior at the right time and avoiding wrong behavior.

Another quote from the book includes some all-important instruction on *how* to teach right and wrong concerning behavior in public places to very small children so their behavior is appropriate: “This means making them practice at home. Your children need to understand that at naptime, or at any other time you want them to do this, they must respond to the meaning of ‘head down.’ It is a good idea to try to coordinate your little children’s naptime to the time you need them to be quiet, such as during church services. But this also applies to them being quiet when awake in a public place, such as a restaurant.”

This is just one simple example, however, implementing it properly can go a long way to ending the heartache and grief so often associated with parents dealing with their children in public.

It is cruel of parents to tolerate or even encourage “cute” behaviors, habits really, that later must be broken. In truth, parents must teach their children the behavior they want them to demonstrate. They cannot expect children to simply figure it out on their own.

Though such actions on the part of the parents take work, doing so will help them and children reap success.

Teaching Is Intentional

Children should not amble through life until they reach the “adult age” of 18-20 years, and then suddenly be expected to behave and act as adults. We must teach them early. But there is more to understand. Teaching children proactively and consistently is also a crucial part of the equation.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 confirms this: “And these words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: and you shall *teach* them *diligently* unto your children, and shall *talk* of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.” With the

Bible as a guide, use the opportunities of daily life to diligently teach your children. Your instruction should literally be morning, noon and night!

This passage reinforces that we are to teach our children as soon and as early as possible. Naturally, as the problems and solutions in the life of our children become more complex, our parental responsibility grows. Lessons learned at age 2 will greatly differ from those learned at 12 and beyond.

The main point: We must teach, teach, TEACH all the time. We have a God-given responsibility to instruct them. God not only gives parents this responsibility, He also lays out the values to pass along. This allows the discerning parent to encourage and enforce behaviors children need for success.

Lessons can start with teaching appropriate times to be quiet. It can grow into teaching times to lay down for a nap, avoiding electrical outlets, or when to stay close to a parent. Later it can be not taking what does not belong to you, avoiding strangers, the importance of being where you say you will be, and coming home on time from playing outside. Finally, there are the more advanced lessons of being honest, having integrity, and fairness. These values and many others all become important for a child's overall health and future.

In raising our children this way, we help them show a respect and maturity that their peers lack. These increasingly rare qualities help the child to listen to teachers in school and later bosses at work. So few children and young adults today seem to grasp these all-important lessons.

Discipline

Childrearing is basically about caring for and teaching your offspring. There are myriad opinions available from a near innumerable number of experts. But our Creator is the ultimate expert on humans since He designed us! So these basics on childrearing are not just human opinion. They are based upon God's instructions.

Any information on how to raise children must include what to do when a child does not properly heed instruction.

We have two basic extremes in society today, both of which are ditch-ees to avoid. First, there are parents who discipline to the point of child abuse. The numbers who do this every year are staggering. Child abuse in some cases is a matter of parents ignorant of the proper way to discipline their children. In other cases it is a reflection of parents taking their own dissatisfactions and frustrations out on little children. Whatever the reason, child abuse, verbal or otherwise, is wrong.

But many appalled by such abuse end up falling into the opposite extreme—they discipline little *or not at all*. Children without discipline inevitably become undisciplined adults. They must understand that life and specifically their decisions have consequences. Just like there are rewards for doing the right things, there are also penalties for doing the wrong things. Failing to teach this can lead to catastrophic results when they get older and more is at stake.

Put simply, discipline is an important element of instruction. It should always be delivered in a controlled, intentional manner and for the good of the child.

This correction can often be quiet yet stern verbal direction. It can be guiding children through a crowd holding their hands, or with a hand on their shoulders as a consequence for them choosing to run off. It can be forbidding them to go outside to play or watch television. Examples can go on and on. However, there are times when more is required.

Corporal Punishment

In a February 2019 opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, Dr. Robert C. Hamilton, a pediatrician practicing in Santa Monica, California, summarized the subject of physical discipline of a child: "Disciplining children is time-consuming and unpleasant. But parents who do so consistently and conscientiously find that spanking

becomes rare because their children learn to respect them and obey their words.

"The rejection of spanking flies in the face of multiple biblical injunctions regarding child discipline. It's unreasonable to demand that believing Jews and Christians dismiss clear teachings like the one in Proverbs 22:15: 'Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away.'

"The ancient rabbis weren't fools. They understood human nature and recognized that children are born with wills that need to be quelled."

The author's point is sound, yet the verse in Proverbs was not from ancient rabbis, but God Himself! HE knows what is best when it comes to discipline in childrearing. Read it again in the *King James Version*: "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

Also notice another proverb on the subject: "He that spares his rod hates his son; but he that loves him chastens him [diligently]" (Prov. 13:24).

The Wall Street Journal editorial concluded with an important point: "It [spanking] should continue to be an option for loving parents to employ when disciplining their children."

Notice the words "option" and "loving parents." This is not describing frustrated moms and dads who abuse or berate their children or think that physical discipline is their only recourse. Loving parents understand that including proper and age-appropriate physical discipline in their teaching repertoire can be effective.

Every parent is frustrated from time to time. During these moments, parents must remember that the love they have for their children should guide them to demonstrate proper behavior. Little ones see how their parents behave and they subsequently adjust. Parents, like it or not, set the tone.

Also, moms and dads must remember that they are adults and children are children. Frustration-fueled abuse by a much bigger person can leave a

much smaller child with physical and emotional scars for life.

Proper spanking, when necessary, is meant to be a deterrent. When done early and consistently—and most parents who have done it effectively will tell you this—children rarely if ever continue to need spanking. This is the ultimate goal.

Teach: Leave Nothing Out

Remember we need to teach, teach and teach again. This includes training that incorporates the practical aspects of learning. The “doing.” The attitude, actions and behavior of the parent matters. Our example goes a long way! It is arguably more impactful than anything we say.

A simple example points this out. Many studies have found that in households where parents exercise, the children are much more likely to do the same. The same can be said of sons and daughters of parents who do not exercise. Children tend to do what their parents do.

Being raised in a family that exercised regularly, my adult children have continued to do so and as a result are experiencing fuller and better lives. This has also led to many other positive benefits such as improved self-discipline and motivation.

When considering ways to show the proper example, keep your child’s future adulthood in mind. Someday, they will be in the same position you are and faced with the exact same decisions. A few lessons to pass along: “Eat right—you’ll be healthy.” “Exercise—you’ll be strong, clearer minded and have better health.” “Get enough sleep—rest restores our bodies and keeps the mind sharp.” “Control excessive indulgences in all things—you’ll be more balanced, healthy and productive.”

A few more: “Be polite and respectful of others—you’ll go further in life.” “Live within your means and create a budget—you’ll be happier and reduce stress.” “Use proper language (this includes avoiding swearing)—you’ll be articulate and able to convince others.”

This list can go on and on, but it is an example of the deeper and more meaningful life lessons that will prepare your children for their future.

Remember, teaching must be constant. It must be persistent. It must be thoughtful. Do your best to leave nothing out and repeatedly emphasize the most important things. You are the adult in the relationship and, more important, you are the parent.

What Does Love Look Like?

We ask again: “Is avoiding teaching proper behavior to a child demonstrating love?” The answer is clearly no. True love of our children includes taking the opportunity to teach them proper behavior. Doing so will help them avoid many problems common in society and become successful adults.

Another illustration from my now adult children. They have often said that although they considered their parents “strict” by society’s standards, they also never doubted that they were loved, unlike many of their friends. To them, love from my wife and me was proven by our actions—caring enough to make sure God’s principles were taught and expected to be followed. You too can apply the very same principle toward your children.

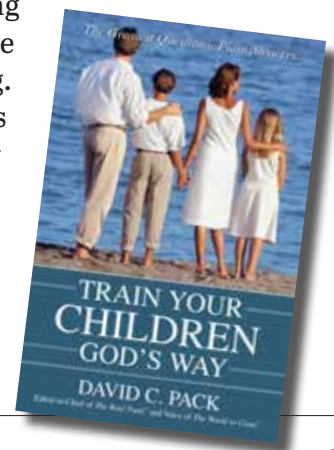
A good place to find more detailed information is in *Train Your Children God’s Way* available at rcg.org/tuyc. In it, you will find practical guidelines for teaching your children. Take the time to download this free book today and help prepare your child for a profitable future. □

Children *Do* Have an Instruction Manual!

The world brims with ideas on how to rear children. Each year, 3,000 parenting books are published in the United States and there are half a million available on the internet library Google Books. These guides can be difficult to interpret, as they offer a wide range of competing childrearing “rules.” They may contain interesting facts, quotes and points, but none bring the solutions that parents long for—and desperately need.

Man has not known that there is an INSTRUCTION MANUAL that contains all the information necessary to rear children the right way. This inspired Book—the Bible—strips away the confusion, division, competing traditions, and ignorance that have shrouded the truth about childrearing.

To learn what God’s Word says about parenting, order a free copy of *Train Your Children God’s Way* at rcg.org/tuyc today. It pieces together principles from God’s Instruction Manual and provides the keys to successfully rearing children.



PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

Kronos, Baal, Tammuz, Molech and others, but he was always the same god—the fire or sun god universally worshipped in nearly every ancient culture. (Read our booklet *The True Origin of Christmas* to learn more about this holiday and Nimrod's part in it.)

The goddess Easter was no different. She was *one* goddess with *many* names—the goddess of fertility, worshipped in spring when all life was being renewed.

The widely known historian Will Durant, in his famous and respected work *Story of Civilization*, writes, “Ishtar [Astarte to the Greeks, Ashtoreth to the Jews], interests us not only as analogue of the Egyptian Isis and prototype of the Grecian Aphrodite and the Roman Venus, but as the formal beneficiary of one of the strangest of Babylonian customs...known to us chiefly from a famous page in Herodotus: Every native woman is obliged, once in her life, to sit in the temple of Venus [Easter], and have intercourse with some stranger.” Is it any wonder that the Bible speaks of the religious system that has descended from that ancient city as, “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev. 17:5)?

We must now look closer at the origin of other customs associated with the modern Easter celebration.

Origin of Lent

According to Johannes Cassianus, who wrote in the fifth century, “Howbeit you should know, that as long as the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, this observance of Lent did not exist” (*First Conference Abbot Theonas*). There is neither biblical nor historical record of Christ, the apostles, or the early Church participating in the Lenten season.

Since there is *no* instruction to observe Lent in the Bible, where did it come from? A 40-day abstinence period was anciently observed in honor of the pagan gods Osiris, Adonis and

Tammuz (John Landseer, *Sabaeen Researches*). Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons* says this of the origin of Lent: “The forty days abstinence of Lent was directly borrowed from the worshippers of the Babylonian goddess. Such a Lent of forty days, in the spring of the year, is still observed by the Yezidis or Pagan Devil-worshippers of Koordistan, who have inherited it from their early masters, the Babylonians. Such a Lent of forty days was held in spring by the Pagan Mexicans...Such a Lent of forty days was observed in Egypt...”

Lent came from paganism, not from the Bible! (To learn more about the Lenten season, read the article “The True Meaning of Lent.”)

Eggs and Easter

Eggs have always been associated with the Easter celebration. Nearly every culture in the modern world has a long tradition of coloring eggs in beautiful and different ways. I once examined a traveling display of many kinds of beautifully decorated egg designs that represented the styles and traditions of virtually every country of modern Europe.

Notice the following: “The origin of the Easter egg is based on the fertility lore of the Indo-European races...The egg to them was a *symbol of spring*...In Christian times the egg had bestowed upon it a religious interpretation, becoming a symbol of the rock tomb out of which Christ emerged to the new life of His resurrection” (Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*). This is a direct example of exactly how pagan symbols and customs are “Christianized,” i.e., Christian-sounding names are superimposed over pagan customs. This is done to deceive—as well as make people feel better about why they are following a custom that is not in the Bible.

Notice: “Around the Christian observance of Easter...folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial...symbolism of European and Middle Eastern *pagan spring* festivals...for example, *eggs*...

have been very prominent as symbols of *new life* and resurrection” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1991).

Finally, the following comes from *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought* by James Bonwick: “Eggs were hung up in the Egyptian temples. [German scholar Christian Charles Josias von] Bunsen calls attention to the mundane egg, the emblem of generative life, proceeding from the mouth of the great god of Egypt. The mystic egg of Babylon, hatching the Venus Ishtar, fell from heaven to the Euphrates. Dyed eggs were sacred Easter offerings in Egypt, as they are still in China and Europe. Easter, or spring, was the season of birth, terrestrial and celestial.”

What could be more plain in showing the true origin of the “Easter egg”? An Easter egg is just an egg that pertains to Easter. God never authorized Passover eggs or Days of Unleavened Bread eggs, but there have been Easter eggs for thousands of years!

It naturally progressed that the egg, representing spring and fertility, would be merged into an already pagan springtime festival. Connecting this symbol to Christ's Resurrection in the spring required much creativity and human reasoning!

Additional points regarding Easter observance could be covered. To learn more, read my booklet *The True Origin of Easter*. Along with what has been presented here, it delves deeper into the origin of Easter observance, what the scriptures say about sunrise services, and how Jesus Christ as Savior relates to the subject. You will be surprised by what you read.

Avoiding the observance of Easter and other worldly holidays steeped in pagan tradition is important for building a proper relationship with God, who commands true Christians to keep His Holy Days instead. To learn more about these days and how you can keep them, read *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?*

Do not believe that God will accept the celebration of traditions He did not establish. Always seek Him on His terms as outlined in His Word. □

BLIND TO SEE

Continued from page 10

Making people whole became the catalyst or means by which Christ spread the gospel. The word gospel appears in the Bible over 100 times. It is an Old English word meaning “god spell” or good news. The word kingdom is also an Old English term that means “government.”

Therefore, it is proper to say that Jesus Christ came as a divine newscaster bringing the gospel or good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). Do not be fooled or misled by those who claim the gospel is about the person of Christ or various misnomers such as the “gospel of salvation,” “gospel of grace,” “gospel of foods,” “gospel of faith” or a “social gospel.” These are UNBIBLICAL!

Jesus Christ, who plays a central role in Christianity and salvation, brought the only true gospel the Bible speaks of—the *good news of God’s Kingdom coming to Earth*. He also tied it to the joy and elation of being healed.

The government of God coming to Earth is God’s overarching message to mankind. Under this divine rulership, all of mankind will have access to its Creator and will learn to live *His* way of life. One of the benefits of this way is good health. This is a major reason Christ focused on this during His 3.5-year ministry.

Healing the sick on the spot helped people recognize Christ’s credibility and believe His seemingly unbelievable statements. Making them whole also became the chief reason to believe He was the Son of God who brought a message to mankind (John 7:31).

The happiness that comes with being healed made Christ’s words live, just as they do today.

Coming Good News

Good news *is* coming. God promised it would. He said plainly that we should repent (change) and *believe the gospel* (Mark 1:15). The reader

is therefore left with the same question presented to the throngs that followed the living Jesus Christ. Will you believe?

The Real Truth and The Restored Church of God are committed to obeying Christ’s command to “preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18).

The articles we present bring a clearer understanding to the problems of today’s world. More importantly, they reveal the *lasting* solutions, in the same spirit of the good work being done by organizations committed to curing blindness, but with more far-reaching effect.

In God’s Kingdom, people will be healed and made whole. They will find permanent solutions to what ails them, physically, emotionally and spiritually. They will also experience the exuberance that comes along with it.

For more on what the gospel is and *is not*, according to the Bible, order our free booklet titled *Which Is the True Gospel?* (rcg.org/witrg). It will give you a much clearer understanding of the central message Christ delivered, and paints a picture of the awesome environment in which ALL will soon be made whole. □



■ Top, a mother looks at her son for the first time after cataract surgery in Peru (July 23, 2019). Bottom, a doctor working with a volunteer cataract surgery caravan in Binh Long, Vietnam, shares the excitement of a patient able to see after surgery (Dec. 29, 2018).

PHOTOS: GIOCONDA ARMAS/OPHTHALMOLOGICAL CLINIC SELVA (TOP); ULRICH EIGNER/LIGHT FOR THE WORLD (BOTTOM)

EUROPE

Auschwitz Survivors Warn of Rising Anti-Semitism 75 Years On



■ Polish President Andrzej Duda walks along with Holocaust survivors through the gates of the Auschwitz Nazi concentration camp during the 75th anniversary of its liberation in Oswiecim, Poland (Jan. 27, 2020).

PHOTO: AP PHOTO/CZAREK SOKOLOWSKI

Oswiecim, Poland (AP) – Survivors of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp prayed and wept as they marked the 75th anniversary of its liberation, returning on January 27 to the place where they lost entire families and warning about the ominous growth of anti-Semitism and hatred in the world.

“We have with us the last living survivors, the last among those who saw the Holocaust with their own eyes,” Polish President Andrzej Duda told those at the commemoration, which included the German president as well as Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders.

“The magnitude of the crime perpetrated in this place is terrifying, but we must not look away from it and we must never forget it,” Mr. Duda said.

About 200 camp survivors attended, many of them elderly Jews and non-Jews who traveled from Israel, the United States, Australia, Peru, Russia, Slovenia and elsewhere. Many lost parents and grandparents in Auschwitz or other Nazi death camps during World War II, but were joined by children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren.

They gathered under an enormous, heated tent straddling the train tracks that had transported people to Birkenau, the part of the vast complex where most of the murdered Jews were killed in gas chambers and then cremated. Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviet army on January 27, 1945.

Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, brought the crowd to tears with the story of a survivor who was separated from his family: The man watched his young daughter, in a red coat, walk to her death, turning into a small red dot in the distance before disappearing forever.

After the end of the war, when “the world finally saw pictures of gas chambers, nobody in their right mind wanted to be associated with the Nazis,” he recalled. “But now I see something I never thought I would see in my lifetime, the open and brazen spread of anti-Jewish hatred.”

“Do not be silent! Do not be complacent! Do not let this ever happen again—to any people!” Mr. Lauder said.

Marian Turski, a 93-year-old Polish Jewish survivor, said he did

not expect to make it to the next commemoration and wanted to transmit a message to his grandchildren’s generation: That the destruction of the Jews began with small steps that were tolerated. What began with banning Jews from sitting on benches in Berlin evolved in incremental steps to ghettos and death camps.

“Auschwitz did not descend from the sky,” he said, crediting those words to Austrian President Alexander van der Bellen, among those present. Calling for people to not be indifferent, he said: “Because if you are indifferent, you will not even notice it when upon your own heads, and upon the heads of your descendants, another Auschwitz descends from the sky.”

In Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron paid his respects at the city’s Shoah Memorial and warned about rising hate crimes in the country, which increased 27 percent last year.

“That anti-Semitism is coming back is not the Jewish people’s problem: It’s all our problem—it’s the nation’s problem,” Mr. Macron said.

Hundreds of diplomats and guests along with several Holocaust survivors joined UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and General Assembly President Tijjani Muhammad-Bande for a ceremony at the United Nations in New York.

“May we make a pledge: We stand united against hate,” said Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a Holocaust survivor. “We stand united against anti-Semitism. We stand united against xenophobia and racism and any form of bigotry.”

Mr. Guterres said that “solidarity in the face of hatred is needed today more than ever,” and that the UN “will stand firm every day and everywhere against anti-Semitism, bigotry and hatred of all kinds.” □

ISIS Tries to Stage Comeback amid Rising U.S.-Iran Tensions

Beirut (AP) – The Islamic State group’s self-styled “caliphate” across parts of Iraq and Syria seemed largely defeated last year, with the loss of its territory, the killing of its founder in a U.S. raid and an unprecedented crackdown on its social media propaganda machine.

But tensions between the United States and Iran and the resulting clash over the U.S. military presence in the region provide a comeback opportunity for the extremist group, whose remnants have been gradually building up a guerrilla campaign over the past year, experts say.

American troops in Iraq had to pause their operations against ISIS for nearly two weeks amid the tensions. From the other side, Iranian-backed Iraqi militiamen who once focused on fighting the militants have turned their attention to evicting U.S. troops from the Middle East.

In the meantime, Islamic State group sleeper cells intensified ambushes in Iraq and Syria in the past few weeks, killing and wounding dozens of their opponents in both countries. Activists and residents say the attacks have intensified since the U.S. killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a January 3 drone strike at Baghdad’s airport.

It is not clear whether the uptick is related to the repercussions that followed from the strike, and it is possible some of the attacks had been planned before Soleimani’s killing. U.S. officials deny seeing any particular increase in ISIS activities. “They haven’t taken advantage of it, as far as we can see,” said James Jeffrey, the State Department envoy to the international coalition fighting the Islamic State.

Mervan Qamishlo, a spokesman for Syria’s U.S.-backed Kurdish-led force, said the intensification of ISIS attacks began even earlier, since

October, when Turkey began a military operation against Kurdish fighters in northern Syria.

Still, the militants clearly gained at least temporary breathing room as the killing of Soleimani, along with a senior Iraqi militia leader, brought Iran and the U.S. to the brink of war and outraged Iraqis, who considered the strike a flagrant breach of sovereignty.

On January 5, Iraq’s parliament called for the expulsion of the 5,200 U.S. troops from the country who have been there since 2014 on a mission to train Iraqi forces and assist in the fight against ISIS. The U.S.-led coalition then put the fight against ISIS on hold to focus on protecting its troops and bases. It had resumed those operations after a 10-day halt.

“This tension will for sure help Daesh, as all forces fighting it become busy with other matters,” warned Abdullah Suleiman Ali, a Syrian researcher who focuses on jihadi groups, using the Arabic acronym for ISIS.

Among other things, he said Iran-U.S. tensions help give ISIS the opportunity to restructure as its new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, strengthens his grip. Mr. Qurayshi was announced in the post after longtime leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed by a U.S. raid in Syria in October.

“The day the American-Iranian clash began, Daesh started intensifying its attacks,” said Rami Aburrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor.

On January 14, ISIS launched a cross border attack from Syria into Iraq, killing an Iraqi officer. A day later, ISIS fighters attacked an Iraqi force in the central Salaheddine region, killing two soldiers and wounding five. Two days later, an

Iraqi intelligence major was killed in a car bomb north of Baghdad.

One of the deadliest attacks occurred in Syria on January 14, when ISIS fighters stole some 2,000 cattle from a village near the eastern town of Mayadeen. One of the four shepherds that own the cattle informed authorities, and a Syrian government military force was sent to the area, where they were met by ISIS fire.

As the forces returned to their base, ISIS gunmen laid an ambush, killing 11 troops and pro-government fighters as well as two shepherds.

ISIS published photos showing bodies of soldiers said to have been killed in the attack, along with a destroyed armored vehicle and an overturned truck.

On the same day, seven shepherds were found shot dead west of the eastern city of Deir el-Zour. On January 4, 21 shepherds were found shot in the back of their heads, their hands were tied behind their backs.

Dozens of members of the U.S.-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces have been killed over the past months in attacks claimed by ISIS as well.

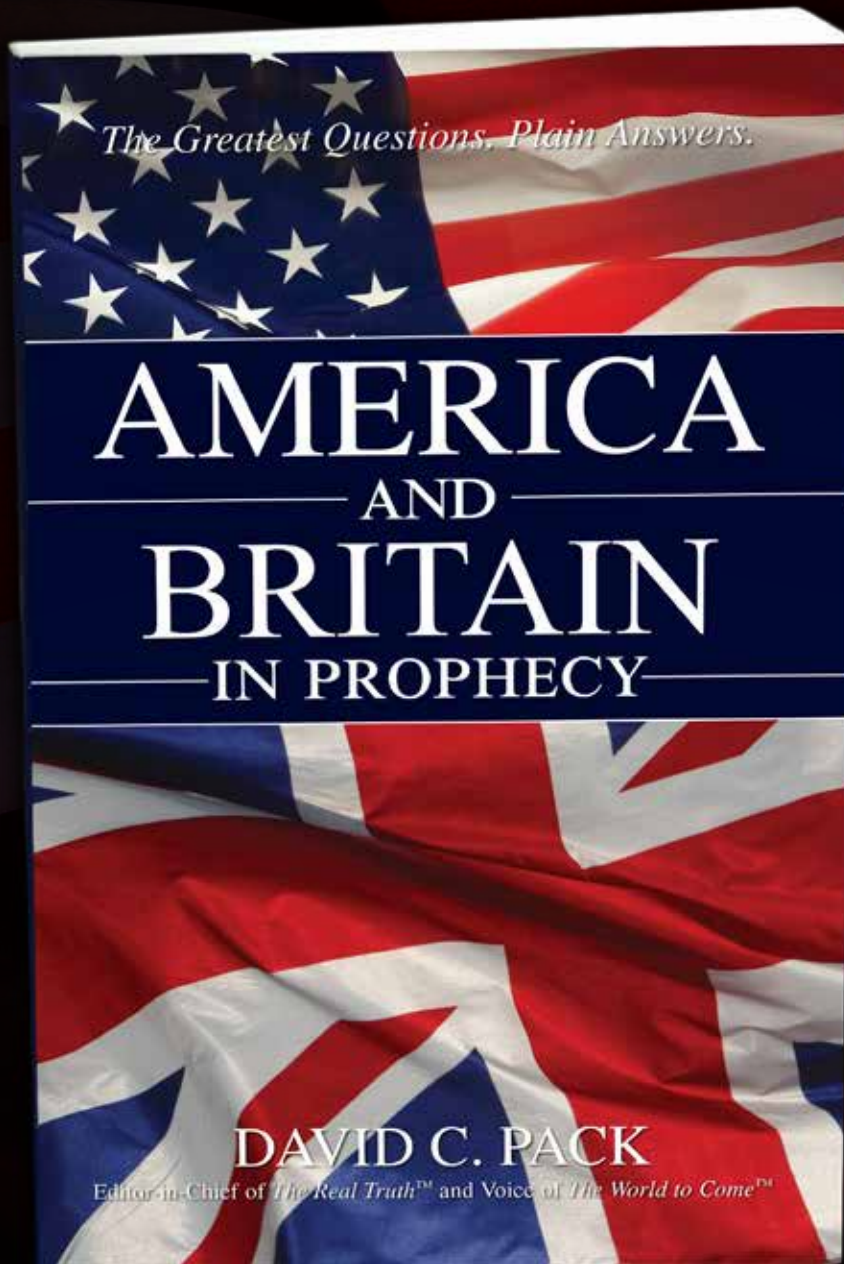
With the painful strikes, ISIS is “taking advantage to boost its influence” and send a message to their supporters that they are still strong, said Omar Abu Laila, an activist from Deir el-Zour now based in Europe.

“Some civilians don’t dare leave their homes after sunset because of fear of Daesh,” Mr. Abu Laila said.

The group is also trying to restore its presence on social media and the internet—a key component to its ability to raise financial support from abroad and recruit new fighters.

So far, those efforts have not been very successful as international authorities work to chase them down on those outlets as well. □

What Does the Future Hold?



The most prosperous and influential civilizations have come and gone with no exceptions. Will America and Britain's future be the same? The answer to this question is key to understanding what the world will look like in just the next few years.

Unknown to most, the Bible speaks volumes about these two nations. Using history and prophecy as a guide, the book *America and Britain in Prophecy* explains exactly what is in store for these two superpowers. Order your free copy at rcg.org/aabibp.