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REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

HURRICANE SANDY

Why Another "100-year" Storm?

THE REAL TRUTH

A MAGAZINE RESTORING PLAIN UNDERSTANDING

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ARTICLES

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■ **SHOW OF SUPPORT:** German President Christian Wulff (to the right of the aisle, in the front row) chats with German Chancellor Angela Merkel ahead of an ecumenical service at the Erfurt protestant monastery of St. Augustin, on the second day of Pope Benedict XVI's first official visit to his native Germany (Sept. 23, 2011).

PHOTO: NORBERT NEETZ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Germany and the Catholic Church

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PHOTO: MARIO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

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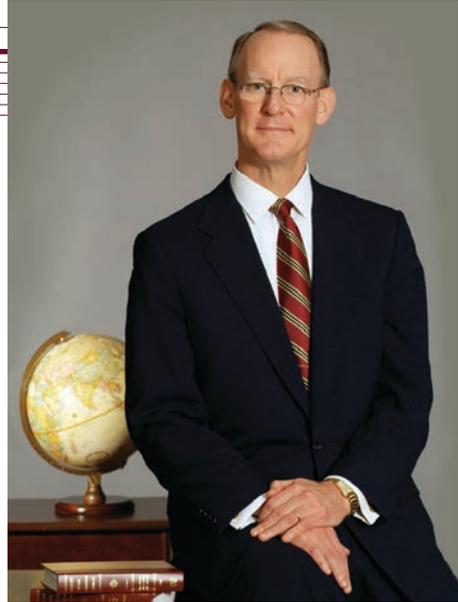
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PERSONAL FROM

David C. Fack



Is 2012 the End?

THE 2012 phenomenon has reached fever pitch. Alarm has spread like wildfire. Uncertainty, anxiety—and FEAR—have gripped many people. Literally, *millions* are panicking, wondering whether 2012 will be their last year.

The end date is supposedly either December 21 or 23, 2012. Doomsday authors point to December 21, the winter solstice. But the Mayan calendar, on which the end-of-days theory is based, ends December 23.

Like the Y2K panic of 1999 about the year 2000, 2012 hysteria is all over the Internet—in endless books—and in a \$200 million movie, filled with the usual sensational Hollywood graphics. And so-called prophecy experts are weighing in on the subject.

People of all ages are asking if cataclysmic events will occur in late 2012 and bring the end of the world. Some are deeply concerned—truly frightened!—that they will not live into their teen years or enter adulthood. They desperately want lives beyond 2012—but fear this will not happen.

Incredibly, some teenagers, and even younger children, have asked if they should *end their own lives*—and some mothers have expressed thoughts of killing their children—and then themselves—rather than enduring “Earth ending” events!

No one predicts exactly what will happen in 2012, but according to some, it will be “*big!*”—“*Earth shattering!*”—and “*civilization ending!*” There are concerns that the entire earth will be flooded, or burned up by solar

flares. The North and South poles may suddenly reverse, wreaking untold havoc on electrical systems. Catastrophic earthquakes may rock the planet, destroying all buildings and opening huge holes in the earth’s crust. Chaos will reign. Mankind will come to the *brink* of annihilation... and on and on go the theories.

Source of Belief

The Mayan “Long Count” calendar tracks “Great Cycles” of time, and is one of at least three calendars that the ancient Mayans used. It is important to note that one particular calendar indicates that December 23, 2012, is the end of the current *cycle of time*—which began August 13, 3114 BC, on the Gregorian calendar. The Mayan calendar itself states *nothing* of the world coming to an end, or of *any* cataclysmic events occurring. It states only that the current *time cycle* will end.

Many of the fantastic stories and much of the hype come from various *archaeological* and *astronomical* speculation, as well as mythology and numerological interpretation. Predictions of impending doom and destruction are *nowhere* to be found in Mayan accounts or in the Long Count calendar itself. To the modern Mayans, including those who study the ancient calendar, 2012 is actually inconsequential.

If you were to travel to any of the many present-day Mayan communities and ask about 2012, and the end of civilization, you would see looks of *bewilderment*. Modern Mayan sources explain that this calendar was *never* intended to suggest the world would end in 2012, or at any other time. They will also tell you that

professing Christians have deliberately twisted their calendar to suit their own prophetic theories and timelines. Yet millions, with little or no understanding of the Mayan culture, attach civilization-ending significance to 2012. All but two ancient Mayan inscriptions are strictly historical. They make no prophetic declarations whatsoever. The two that supposedly do are unclear at best, and open to a wide array of speculation and interpretation.

Regardless of what the ancient Mayans *actually* predicted (the mere end of a time cycle!)—wild ideas about 2012 abound. The frenzy is worldwide and picking up steam, with no slowdown in sight. 2012 has also become big business, and many are cashing in on the uncertainty!

Will either the planet or civilization come to a *violent end* on December 21, 2012, as so many believe? Could the speculation still somehow be *true*? What does the Bible say? Does it in any way validate 2012 as the “end of all things”?

You will soon have no doubt of the correct answers. It is time to *prove* whether late December 2012 is the end.

Endless Speculation

The idea of the end of the world has been a subject of great speculation, ridicule, general discussion, fascination and fancy for 2,000 years—ever since Jesus Christ announced He would return to Earth. With opinions everywhere, there has been an *explosion* of literature presenting popular scenarios, ideas, theories, suppositions and interpretations of what will occur just before Christ’s Return.

For Christians, the 2012 question begins with what Jesus said about His Return: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes” (Matt. 25:13).

If people were reading even such basic verses, they would *never* worry about December 21 or 23, 2012, because no man knows the day of Christ’s Return. What a tragic commentary on the state of people who profess to be Christians—but cannot logically compute such rudimentary understanding. But then, most who profess to follow Christ study little or nothing of what He said.

Get this! Just this passage, and other similar ones, rule out this date—or *any* specific date—that might be suggested for Christ’s Return, or even for the end of all things.

Next read Jesus’ Olivet prophecy: “The disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the *end of the world* [age]?” (Matt. 24:3). We saw His long answer began with: “Take heed that no man deceive you” (vs. 4).

Jesus goes straight to the biggest problem that would exist at the end. There is an unending and growing number of deceivers at work today. Are their followers taking

heed? Ask again: how many are doing their own research regarding men postulating prophetic scenarios, such as 2012? This is only one theory. There are many others, and more appearing all the time.

2012 Impossibility

Now let’s examine whether it is even *possible*—prophetically—for 2012 to be the end. Follow carefully. We have to establish the *timing* of certain events.

Many are familiar with the term “Tribulation” or “Great Tribulation.” The Bible speaks of this event as one of terrible trouble and indescribable horror. Jesus referred to this time as unparalleled in history: “For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21). The prophet Daniel also speaks of this period in Daniel 12:1. Jeremiah references it in a similar way in chapter 30, verse 7.

The Bible reveals that a certain very specific amount of time must elapse between the start of the Great Tribulation and the Return of Jesus Christ—or “the end of the age.” So understand. If it can be proven that there are not enough years in God’s plainly revealed timeline for 2012 to be the end, then all the hysteria is for nothing!

Numerous passages explain that the Tribulation lasts 2½ years, followed by the year-long Day of the Lord. Together, these events last 3½ years, fulfilling 1,260 days before Christ’s Return.

Let’s understand the implications! If the Great Tribulation were to begin today, then there would not be enough time for December 21, 2012, to be the end. But it is also important to realize that certain *biblically described preconditions* that must lead up to the Tribulation are not, however close they now are, yet here.

So then, just the 1,260 days—again, were it to begin today—would greatly overshoot December 21, 2012. It is therefore ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE for this date to be the end of the world! All fear of it can disappear! None need be afraid of this fictional doomsday!

It is possible, however, that something of significance could happen in late 2012 because the demon world has a general idea of prophecy, and it does everything in its power to thwart God’s Master Purpose for mankind. It could pull some trick or stunt to confuse the gullible.

Will the World End?

But what about the Return of Christ? Will this usher in the end of planet Earth sometime *after* 2012? In other words, will *all people* alive today die in the fulfillment of end-time prophecies—as so many seem to almost assume? The answer is a resounding NO! And here is proof.

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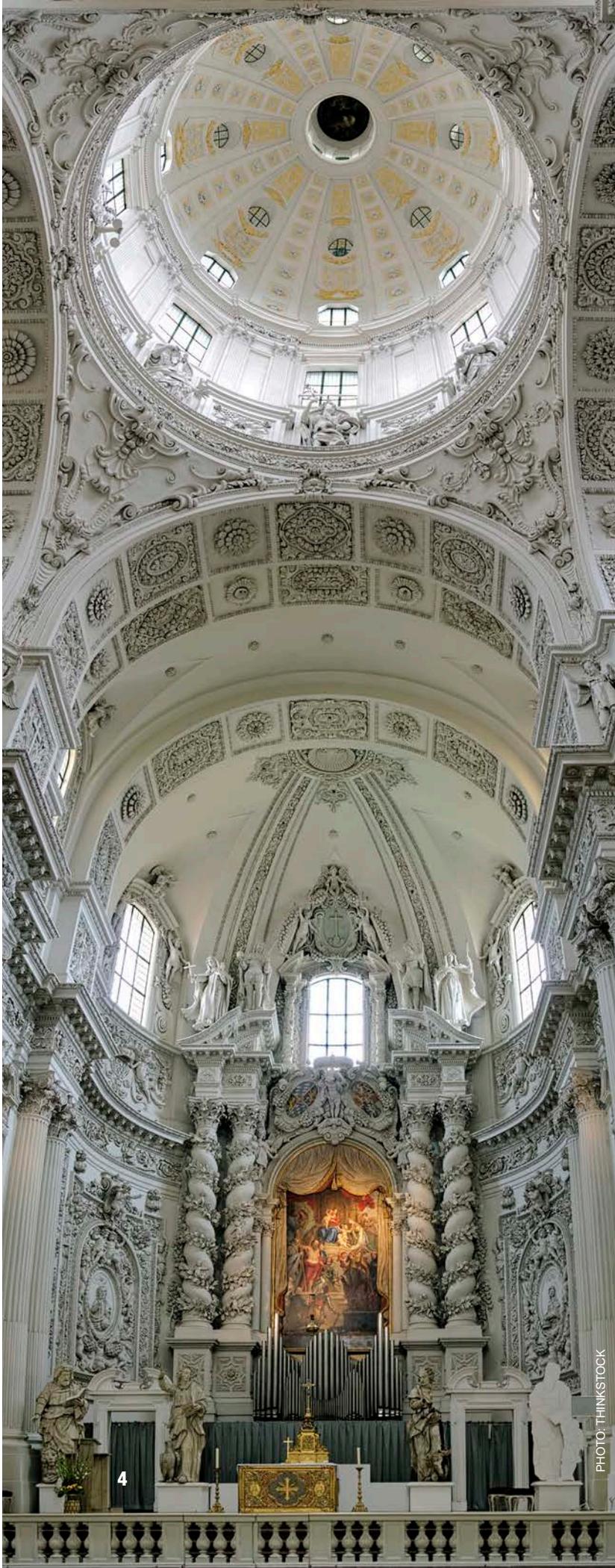
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GERMANY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The number of parishioners in the nation has been dwindling. Will the church's presence eventually be lost?

BY JEFFREY R. AMBROSE

HEARING THE WORDS “Germany” and “Christianity,” many think first of the Lutheran Church. After all, the denomination’s founder, Martin Luther—prime mover in Europe’s 16th-century Protestant Reformation, which ended centuries of Catholic domination there—hailed from what is now the German state of Saxony-Anhalt.

But recent polls show that the numbers of German Protestants and Catholics are about even, each at around a third of its population of about 82 million. A fifth of Germans claim no religious affiliation, and five percent are Muslim (many of these are Turkish immigrants).

Still, as is the case in many affluent Western nations, Catholic numbers have been declining there for years. And a subgroup that identifies itself as Catholic is better described as “nominal Catholics”—meaning they are generally not observant of the church’s traditions and teachings, and rarely, if ever, attend mass.

In this climate of shrinking dioceses, a new church ruling shocked many both inside and outside the church: *Reuters* reported, “Germany’s Roman Catholic bishops have decreed that people who opt out of a ‘church tax’ should not be given sacraments and religious burials, getting tougher on worshippers who choose not to pay.

“Alarmed by a wave of dissenting Catholics quitting the faith, the bishops issued a decree...declaring such defection ‘a serious lapse’ and listed a wide range of church activities from which they must be excluded.

“Germans officially registered as Catholics, Protestants or Jews pay a religious tax of 8 or 9 percent of their annual tax bill. They can avoid this by declaring to their local tax office that they are leaving their faith community.

“The annual total of church leavers, usually around 120,000, rocketed to 181,193 two years ago as revelations about decades of sexual abuse of children by priests shamed the hierarchy and prompted an apology from German-born Pope Benedict.

“‘This decree makes clear that one cannot partly leave the Church,’ a statement from the bishops conference said. ‘It is not possible to separate the spiritual community of the Church from the institutional Church.’”

In other words, nominal Catholics cannot expect to receive the benefits of church membership without a full commitment—and one cannot be an “independent Catholic” apart from the organized church hierarchy.

An *NPR* report added, “In increasingly secular Europe, Germany is one of the few countries where the state collects a special levy from tax-registered believers and hands it over to three organized faiths.

“In issuing the stringent new decree, Archbishop Robert Zollitsch, the president of the German bishops’ conference, said that not paying taxes for the church is a grave offense, and that sacraments will be banned for those who distance themselves from the church.

“‘In Germany, the church is a community of faith which coexists alongside the legal system,’ Zollitsch said. ‘The two cannot be separated.’”

Put another way, church leaders recognize no separation of church and state for officially recognized denominations.

Many Germans were angered by this move, viewing it as heavy-handed. On the surface, it seems that this will

only accelerate the exodus from the Catholic fold.

What does the future hold for the German Catholic Church? Is it destined to collapse? Is this a matter of pure speculation—or can the answer be known with absolute certainty?

Catholic Germania

Since “past is prologue,” an overview of history helps to frame these questions.

According to church tradition, Catholicism was brought to the Germans in the eighth century by Wynfrid, a missionary from a noble family in England, whose name was changed to Boniface (“fortunate”) by Pope Gregory II.

A famous account from German history has a dynamic, strong-willed Boniface taking an ax to a tree dedicated to the god Thor, which stood in Geismar. When the pagan onlookers saw that their god of war did not immediately strike Boniface with death from above, he earned their reverence as a man with otherworldly powers. His status was also helped by a pledge of protection from Charles Martel, ruler of the Germanic kingdom of the Franks—a favor solicited by the pope.

For the next eight centuries, Christianity became the dominant religion in Germanic-controlled lands across the Continent, spread by missionaries as well as religious/military groups such as the Teutonic Order.

The line between church and state was blurred: “The authority of the various barbarian kings was seldom sufficient to keep their realms in order. There were always many powerful landholders scattered throughout the kingdom who did pretty much what they pleased and settled their grudges against their fellows by neighborhood wars. Fighting was the main business as well as the chief amusement of this class.

“Under these circumstances it naturally fell to the Church to keep order, when it could, by either threats or persuasion; to see that contracts were kept, the wills of the dead carried out, and marriage obligations observed...

These conditions serve to explain why the Church...undertook duties which seem to us to belong to the State rather than a religious organization” (*History of Europe, Ancient and Medieval*).

Holy Roman Empire

A turning point for the Catholic church in Europe was the Roman Empire’s transformation into the Holy Roman Empire, accomplished through a Roman pope and a German emperor. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Real German history begins with Charlemagne (768-814).”

This source describes how this emperor viewed himself and his reign: “The Frankish king desired like Solomon to be a great ecclesiastical and secular potentate, a royal priest... his conception of his position [was] as the head of the Kingdom of God...[he was] crowned emperor by the Pope on Christmas Day, 800. On this day the Germanic idea of the Kingdom of God, of which Charlemagne was the representative, bowed to the Roman idea, which regards Rome as its centre, Rome the seat of the old empire and the most sacred place of the Christian world. Charlemagne when emperor still regarded himself as the real leader of the Church...He even interfered in dogmatic [doctrinal] questions.

“Charlemagne...regarded his possession of the empire as resulting solely from his own power...Yet on the other hand he looked upon his empire only as a Christian one, whose most noble calling it was to train up the various races within its borders to the service of God and thus to unify them.”

By the time a later German king, Otto the Great, was crowned as Holy Roman Emperor in 962, the balance of power had been clarified: “...the German king recognized that it was the pope and only the pope who could confer the imperial title” (*A History of the Church in the Middle Ages*).

The church became the primary institution in Europe, transcending all of its local and regional monarchs, to the point that the continent took on an alternate name: “Christendom.” The Holy

Roman Emperor became the world's most powerful civil ruler, crowned by its most powerful religious figure.

Martin Luther's Impact

When Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on a door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517, it was an unprecedented challenge to the Roman church. While it was not the first step in the Protestant Reformation, it was the boldest.

The new church he established presented an alternative to many German nobles and landholders, many of whom agreed with Luther's view that the established church had become a moneymaking enterprise rather than a spiritual body. The Lutheran movement allowed them to get out from under Rome's thumb, while assuring them that they could still receive salvation. Further, Luther's motto of *sola scriptura*—"scripture alone"—gave these new converts a sense of righteous justification in what Catholic loyalists considered rebellion.

Hostilities soon broke out between the kings of various German territories, Lutheran versus Catholic. In 1555, the Peace of Augsburg led to a lull in the fighting and established the Lutheran church as a legitimate, state-sanctioned church. This treaty's terms stated that subjects within a king's territory must conform to his church affiliation, or else relocate. This ruling effectively redrew the German map. Catholics became predominant in south and west Germany, Protestants in the north and east—a pattern that largely holds today.

In the realm of European religion, the floodgates had been opened, with effects spreading far beyond Germany. The survival and success of Martin Luther and his namesake church emboldened followers of other reformers such as John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Hus.

When Bohemian King Ferdinand II (later to become a Holy Roman Emperor) mandated Catholicism for all in his territory, it sparked a revolt that spread, becoming the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). This pitted

Catholic strongholds such as France, Spain and Poland against Protestant-aligned nations including Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. By its end, through treaties called the Peace of Westphalia, the borders and power balance across Europe had changed. As summarized by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "The ancient notion of a Roman Catholic empire of Europe, headed spiritually by a pope and temporally by an emperor, was permanently abandoned, and the essential structure of modern Europe as a community of sovereign states was established."

Reich Concordat

A later crossing of paths for Rome and Berlin has been a source of controversy that continues in modern times.

As Adolf Hitler's National Socialist party rose to power, tension rose between it and the Catholic church, in part due to the latter's record of being outspoken on political issues, as well as church ties to organized labor. Nazi operatives were known for regularly harassing clergymen and Catholic politicians, sometimes to the point of violence.

Hitler wrote and spoke openly of his contempt for Christianity's servant mindset and its historical connection to the Jewish people. However, he later made a pragmatic decision to formalize relations with the Vatican to promote German unity under his leadership: "When the Concordat [formal agreement] between the Holy See and the German Reich under Hitler was concluded on July 20, 1933, the event was acclaimed as marking the end of the long Church-State struggles in Germany... both parties to the Concordat had reason to believe that they had gained greatly by its conclusion. The Roman Catholic Church, on one hand, beheld its rights and influence in the Third Reich safeguarded by means of a solemn and formal convention...while the Nazi government, on the other, saw itself gaining an invaluable hold on the allegiance of 20,000,000 [German Catholics]"(*The Catholic Historical Review*).

In the ensuing world war, Rome and Berlin joined forces as the Axis

powers through a "Pact of Steel." Pope Pius XII assumed the papacy in March 1939, less than six months before the war began with Hitler's invasion of Poland.

By January 1940, the site for the Auschwitz concentration camp had been chosen. That same month, an article in the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* warned, "The time is near when a machine will go into motion which is going to prepare a grave for the world's criminal—Judah—from which there will be no resurrection."

Much of what allowed Nazis to wreak such terrible destruction was silence and appeasement. History has not been kind to Pius, who is seen as remaining nearly mute about the Final Solution that unfolded on his watch.

A German Pope

As could be expected, the vast majority of popes have been of Italian descent. But a number of Germans have held this office, starting with Gregory V (996-999). Another German, Adrian VI (1522-1523), was the last non-Italian pope before John Paul II (1978-2005), and the last German before the current pope, Benedict XVI.

A review of Benedict's 2011 visit to his homeland gives context to the recent hard-line stance from German bishops. In contrast to the warm reception and mutual admiration that defined John Paul II's visits to his native Poland, Benedict faced protests and brought an urgent message: "Addressing about 100,000 people during mass at a small airport near the southwestern city of Freiburg, [Benedict] said the sometimes fractious Church needed to unite around him and the German bishops.

"'The Church in Germany will continue to be a blessing for the entire Catholic world if she remains faithfully united with the successor of St Peter,' he said, referring to himself.

"His third trip as pope to his native country has been his toughest, met by protest over sex abuse scandals,

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GANGS IN AMERICA

A Deadly Game

The reason for the prevalence of gangs—and associated violence—is more complex than most realize.

BY JAMES F. PASTOR, PH.D., J.D., AND NESTOR A. TORO

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: DARNITRA D. JACKSON

IN A SOUTH-SIDE Chicago neighborhood, it starts as mere child's play. A toddler's tiny hands grow into tattoo-marked fingers depicting gang signs—such as an upside-down pitchfork or a “K” for killer. A lullaby morphs into vulgar “gangsta” rap about sex, drugs and guns. Learning ABCs changes into mastering special slang words with hidden messages. Childish scribbles hanging on a refrigerator become city walls covered in lewd graffiti.

Soon the game turns more dangerous. A secret invitation leads to a brutal initiation beating, and selling candy for school to trafficking crack. School buddies grow into drive-by partners inside a car with tinted windows, automatic rifles in hand.

Before the young player knows it, he is growing up too soon, trapped in a world of hustling, criminality, secretive behavior, aggression, lies, guns, drugs, violence, anger, hatred, distrust, joblessness and abuse, where one's “respect” is all that matters—and disrespect results in death. It is as though he is caught in a virtual game in which

“bad guys” become “good guys,” and the only way of escape is to kill those around him.

While such a violent real-life “game” is incomprehensible to most, for the 1.4 million men and women in America's 33,000 gangs, it is the ultimate test of survival.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than on the streets of Chicago. By October 27, 2012, the Windy City had registered 436 murders, largely a result of gang violence—surpassing 2011's homicide total.

“A splintering of traditional gangs into smaller factions—known as crews or cliques—with ever-younger mem-

bers desperate to prove their tough-guy credentials is fuelling a murder rate that makes swathes of Chicago more lethal than Afghanistan,” *The Telegraph* stated.

“Even as violent crime has decreased in cities such as New York and Los Angeles, the murder rate soared here by 38 per cent in the first six months of the year. There were 259 murders in that period, with another 18 so far in July.

“This is a block-to-block war here, a different dynasty on every street,’ said a dreadlocked young man heavily inked in gang tattoos who calls himself ‘Killer’.”

CBS News stated that in Chicago it is “like Beirut was in the 70s...It’s war.” *Fox News* called it a “city under siege.” *ABC News* called it a “war zone.”

According to *NBC Chicago*, among what are considered first-world cities, Chicago has the highest murder rate in the world. It has a 19.4 murder rate per 100,000 people, making it rank higher than even the metropolises of Mexico City and Sao Paolo.

Today, over 100,000 “gangbangers” roam Chicago’s streets in 625 different groups. Police report that currently around 223 ongoing gang conflicts exist. Due to a “no snitching” culture, over 70 percent go unsolved.

Yet the Windy City is just a microcosm of America’s growing gang problem. Across the nation, hundreds of thousands of young men and women are caught up in gangs. In some areas, this lethal game is the only world they know.

Authorities and those involved often blame poor education, a bad economy, poverty, joblessness, distrust of the government, and lack of opportunity to explain why gangs are becoming more prevalent. But the root cause and ultimate solution to this multifaceted problem comes back to something much more fundamental.

Culture of Violence

ABC News produced a series called “Hidden America: Don’t Shoot, I Want to Grow Up.” It featured segments

addressing the growing violence in Chicago and focused on talking to gang members about the causes of it and how to reduce it.

Many of those involved were young repeat offenders who had committed terrible crimes, but all shared one commonality: how they were shaped by early influences, as the series showed.

“With stitches, staples, screws and a metal rod in his leg, 28-year-old Damien is lucky to be alive.

“Since he was just 9 years old, Damien has been involved with the Chicago Two-Six gang. He knows all too well the motto, ‘Live by the gun, die by the gun,’ after being shot six times four weeks ago after leaving a party in a rival gang neighborhood.

“Damien, known to his friends as Pacman, has been arrested more than 50 times. His most serious offenses occurred in 2001, for battery with a weapon, in 2002, for aggravated assault with a weapon and possession of a firearm, and in 2005, for receipt of a stolen possession.

“‘If you ain’t got no job, you ain’t got nowhere to go,’ he said. ‘After that, well, you’re going to turn to the streets. The streets is calling you.’”

“I had nothing to do, I had no guidance,” he continued. “So I was raised to be knocked on the streets, running around, looking at the older guys, what they had that I didn’t have, and I wanted that.”

In such neighborhoods, gangs are a powerful, attractive and lucrative way to protect oneself. Each is organized and governed from the top down with various degrees of membership and status.

Another *ABC* segment stated, “Michael, known to his friends as Puppet, was initiated into the Two-Six gang when he was 13 years old.

“For initiation, Michael was beaten up by his fellow gang members but, he said, afterward, ‘everybody gives you a hug and welcomes you to the family.’

“Michael grew up with his older brother and sister and his mother. He said he ‘didn’t have a father really,’ and his mother was always working. He chose to join the gang because all

of his friends who he went to school with and played sports with in the neighborhood were getting involved. Michael’s mother tried to get him involved with camps instead but, he said, he would always make his way back to his gang.”

“Today, Michael lives with his mother and sister but, he said, the gang is as much a part of his family as they are.

“‘I thought about leaving the gang before but I really can’t because this is a part of my family, too,’ he said. ‘Even though I have a good, loving family at home, this is one of my families that I’m with all the time, too. I spent Christmas with them, Thanksgivings with them. This is my family, too. I’m not going to leave on my family.’”

Both of the men interviewed cited different reasons for being in gangs, but each came down to wanting to belong and fit in to the environment around them.

In a sense, the gangs they joined became a type of replacement family.

Young to Old

Author Jorja Leap paints a vivid picture of how the gang world surrounds large numbers of America’s boys and girls and pulls them into living a certain lifestyle in her book *Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption*.

“Children play in the street, and even though it is summer and school is out, I keep wondering, *What are those kids doing up? They should be in bed; they should be asleep*, until I realize how idiotic this all sounds given the level of noise and confusion rising up from the street. I am struck by how strange it is that they are playing in the middle of all this, and I wonder if it’s nothing out of the ordinary, just another summer night. Just another crime scene. A police helicopter flies noisily overhead. Four black-and-white patrol cars are parked at varying angles in the middle of the street, their headlights outlining three teenage boys lined up against

a chain-link fence with their hands cuffed. The three adolescents appear so young, it looks like they haven't even started shaving yet. There is another boy. He resembles the other three children in every way except one. He is lying in a pool of blood and his body is being photographed and probed by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. He is nameless, unknown, and he is dead. I cannot stop staring at the body as the blood slowly spreads on the pavement. It is impossible to turn away. My heart is beating and I am thinking, Whose baby is this? Whose brother? Whose grandson? He is frozen... dead. I am trying not to cry."

While soaking in the above scene, remember the author's words, "Children play in the street." They are the ones seeing their fathers sell "white stuff" to make money. They see the guns that circulate in their homes and may even witness acts of violence committed by their parents. Such images have a way of sticking in young minds.

Children naturally look up to and respect the friends of their parents. In gang-prone neighborhoods, youngsters watch adults whom they consider family participate in criminal behavior that they themselves learned from their own parents—many of whom were also involved in gangs.

Due to this ongoing history, a number of gang rivalries have continued for decades. This means some members were not yet born when these feuds began and do not even know why they did. The result is intergroup warfare simply because "that's the way it is."

If a gang member with a child is sent to prison when his son or daughter is young, the child may grow up fatherless, making him more susceptible to seeking out the "thug" lifestyle. In turn, the boy himself may be killed or incarcerated when his own children are young.

When one or more parents are not in the picture, gangs provide a sense of purpose, with a certain reputation, plus attractive benefits such as protec-

tion, "job security" regardless of the economy, and even access to revenge.

In an environment in which relatives and close friends are routinely targeted, gangs promise an attractive combination of things no other organization, including their own families, can offer. Gangs, it seems, are above the law. As one infamous Chicago gang founder described it, since society had rejected him, he had rejected it, and instead created his own society.

How can you heal an environment built upon *multiple* generations of gang membership—and broken homes? How can you diffuse hatred when some do not know why they are fighting?

As each decade passes, the problems only worsen, becoming a veritable self-fulfilling prophecy with no easy solution.

Those living in violent neighborhoods would never say they enjoy constantly fearing for their lives. Beyond the bleak outlook, they still long for peace. The *ABC* series interviewed a female gang member who shared her dream for a city free of guns.

Why cannot mankind stop the hurt—and save future generations from experiencing the pain that a gang lifestyle often brings?

Evolving Climate

While the underlying motives remain the same, today's gangs are worse—much worse—than they were in previous decades.

Consider "flash mobs," also known as "wilding." Large groups of youths enter stores, taking anything and everything they desire. Multiple hundreds of these instances have occurred over the past three years.

This phenomena is a classic "in your face" move from young thugs to the larger society. The implicit message is "this is our store, this is our street, we will take whatever we want—and you cannot stop us." It is one of the most blatant forms of lawlessness seen in "civilized" society.

In addition to such violence within gangs, increasingly bolder, more brazen criminals are breaking the "thin

blue line" that separates civilized society from anarchy. Of course, this thin blue line is the police. As the most visible representation of government, they are the proverbial "canary in the coal mine."

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, firearms-related fatalities of police officers increased 70 percent from 2008 to 2011. While such deaths are not unprecedented, they are an indication of things to come. Brash gang members armed with assault weapons are shaping the criminal landscape of the future.

For example, in June 2009, an operation targeting "Sureno" gang members resulted in 36 arrests and 69 confiscated firearms. Authorities seized 14 assault rifles, 22 handguns, 16 shotguns and 17 rifles, including a Barrett .50-caliber sniper rifle.

The lethality of these weapons is telling. The National Gang Threat Assessment warned: "Gang members are acquiring high-powered, military style weapons and equipment which poses a significant threat because of the potential to engage in lethal encounters with law enforcement and civilians."

Combating brazen and bold gang members will result in much more "militarized" policing—meaning officers have to fight back using armored vehicles and assault weapons!

Heavier, more lethal weapons by gangs result in an "arms race with criminals." Police will literally be forced to "arm up."

Truly, it has become an all-out war.

Seemingly Unreachable Solutions

Law enforcement officials know that simply supplying officers with better weaponry and adding more boots on the ground cannot ultimately fix the gang situation.

"There is no one solution," Chicago Police Superintendent Gary McCarthy told *ABC News*. "There is no way to reinvent the family structure that doesn't exist so that you don't have 13-year-olds in the street engaged in a gun battle."

This notion was echoed by Mr. McCarthy in a *USA Today* article when he explained, “It’s really troubling when parents are not in control of their children...The problem is much bigger than just law enforcement. We accept our responsibility, but curing it is going to take...a lot more than just police work.”

Other people have their own ideas for solutions to the problem, as they expressed in the same article.

A 75-year-old man said young fathers must be more involved in their families. “I’m very intolerant of fathers who do not come out and participate,” he said.

Another elderly man, who volunteers with a non-profit group that helps young children learn to read, concluded, “If a child is successful in school, they have a chance to be successful in life...If they have not been taught by their parents, who may or may not be able to read themselves, what can they do?”

Andre Thurmon, pastor of St. Mark International Christian Church, who conducted the funeral of Heaven Sutton, a seven-year-old girl killed at a candy stand during gang crossfire, stated that using violence is not the answer. “We need more community caring, more involvement, sterner rules,” Thurmon says.

The common solutions always involve revamping of huge building blocks of society: family, education, economy and government.

Yet none of these *completely* addresses the entire problem.

Larger Scope

While thousands feel trapped in gang life, mankind as a whole is burdened by a myriad of insoluble problems.

Historically, trying to tackle *just one* of the core issues of the gang problem has proven impossible for humanity. Trying to solve the education crisis, family breakdown, and increasing crime rates *simultaneously* has proven impossible—especially when one takes into account that the world is grappling with the worst

economic downturn it has ever seen. There is simply not enough money to effect change.

Looking beyond the U.S. around the globe, mankind’s track record is clear. Famine is worse than ever, with veritable permanent pockets of chronic hunger in Ethiopia and Sudan. Diseases long thought gone are coming back, now drug resistant and more virulent. And war continues to vex the planet, with weapons more sophisticated, deadly and dastardly than ever before.

For thousands of years, these issues have festered and worsened. Gangs are just one example of this. While violence fills the streets of Chicago, it is also brimming in Los Angeles, Mexico City, London—EVERYWHERE.

For this reason, many are pushed into a world of, “Live by the gun, die by the gun.”

Oddly, this phrase is a corruption of the words of Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew 26 records a passage in which Christ condemns violence: “...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (vs. 52). Yet gang members see no other way. They believe they *must* “live by the gun.”

The Bible also foretold what would be the end result of man ruling himself. Passages in Matthew 24:37 and Genesis 6:11 reveal that after thousands of years under the governments of mankind, the entire earth would be “filled with violence.”

Obviously, this is coming to pass. The earth is becoming FILLED with violence!

An oft-overlooked passage adds to the picture: “...the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is *no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land*. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and *blood touches blood*” (Hos. 4:1-2).

In fact, according to the 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment, upwards of 85 percent of homicides are committed by gang members. In

some jurisdictions, they are responsible for up to 90 percent of *all* violent crimes!

Hosea 4:6 states, “My people are destroyed for *lack of knowledge*...” Yes, gangs are a problem. They are often the ones pulling the trigger to the point that “blood touches blood,” but the *root cause* hidden behind a multitude of sub-causes is this: mankind lacks the true knowledge of how to live—including knowledge on how to develop properly functioning families.

Most refuse to believe that manmade governments are incapable of bringing *actual* solutions. They refuse to see that *their own* human nature gets in the way of true progress toward peace. Instead, most conveniently place the blame on easy targets like gang members.

But read carefully this blunt picture of the human nature in all of us: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear.

“*For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness. None calls for justice, nor any pleads for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity...their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.*

“*The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace*” (Isa. 59:1-8).

God is plain. The blame is on *all of* mankind. NONE calls for peace. NONE pleads for the truth. NONE knows the “way of peace.”

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U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION GRIDLOCK AS USUAL?

The nationwide vote revealed the divide between liberals and conservatives in America has never been greater.

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENT Barack Obama was re-elected during one of the most hotly debated races in the history of the United States. The fierce multibillion-dollar campaigns full of scare tactics, name-calling and in-your-face ads concluded with Republican challenger Mitt Romney making a concession speech at 12:55 a.m., after almost all votes had been counted.

Approximately an hour later, Mr. Obama appeared in front of thousands of cheering spectators, many wearing T-shirts bearing his image or waving supportive placards.

“A long campaign is over,” he stated in his acceptance speech.

The relentless battle between the two candidates’ themes of “Moving Forward” and “Getting America Back on Track” may have concluded, but there is a problem—the divide between these two mindsets has never been greater.

This was evidenced through the popular vote. By the end of the night when ballots had been tallied, *The Associated Press* reported that 62,285,005 had come in for Mr. Obama and 58,907,640 for Mr. Romney—meaning that the president-elect gained 50.6 percent

of the popular vote and his opponent gained 47.9 percent.

“Not in the past century has the country gone so long without giving a firm hold on power to one party,” *USA Today* reported in the article “A nation moving further apart.”

“Consider the narrow margins in the presidential race. Since 1920, when women got to vote, there hadn’t been more than three elections in a row without a candidate winning the White House by more than 10 [percentage] points. But in the seven elections since 1984, not a single candidate managed to win by double digits.

“Tuesday’s election was likely to be the third time in the past four elections that the race was decided by fewer than four points. Before that, only four elections in the past 100 years had been decided by such a narrow edge.

“The House and Senate also have been more closely divided over the past two decades than at any point since 1920. In eight of the past nine elections, the minority party was able to garner at least 190 seats in the 435-seat House. In the previous 40 elections, that sort of strong standing for the opposition was the exception, occurring only 13 times.”

Votes from women and minorities were a deciding factor. The women’s vote was considered one of the most important target segments for each

campaign. Stump speeches and debates geared toward females were designed to activate this demographic. As a result of the push, an overwhelming 55 percent of women voted for Mr. Obama and 44 percent for Mr. Romney, according to *MSNBC* exit polls.

Across the country, 93 percent of blacks, 71 percent of Hispanics, and 60 percent of those 18 to 29 voted for Mr. Obama.

Strikingly, the poll numbers revealed a deep chasm between modern ideals and traditional values. Among unmarried women, 67 percent voted for Mr. Obama, with 53 percent of married women voting for Mr. Romney. For those who identified themselves as “gay, lesbian or bisexual,” 76 percent voted for the incumbent and 22 percent for the challenger. Among those who attend religious services once a week, including conservative Catholics and evangelical Christians, 58 percent chose Mr. Romney and 41 percent Mr. Obama.

An editorial in *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution* showed that hot-button social issues passed across the nation, stating that “voters in Maine and Maryland approved measures legalizing gay marriage. In Washington, a measure to legalize gay marriage also appears to have passed. In Minnesota,

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HURRICANE SANDY

Why Another “100-year” Storm?

The historic cyclone resulted in more than 150 deaths, caused up to \$70 billion in losses, destroyed homes, ruptured power plants, and damaged critical infrastructure. It became one more item on a troubling list of compounding crises for America—and the world.

MORE THAN 150 people died as Hurricane Sandy carved a path through the Caribbean and made landfall in the United States. The so-called “Frankenstorm” combined a number of elements, including a hurricane, two cold fronts from the north and west, and high tide conditions, resulting in an unprecedented weather event. Although it was downgraded to a tropical storm as it came ashore, its destructive effects were not lessened.

Warnings included 75-mile-per-hour winds, several feet of snow in higher altitude areas such as West

Virginia (at a time when leaves were not fully fallen, increasing the danger of downed trees), eight-foot-tall storm surges (when tides were already higher than usual due to a full moon), and severe flash flooding.

“Normally, when hurricanes approach the East Coast from Sandy’s angle, they are pulled safely out to sea by a semi-permanent low-pressure center near Iceland,” *MarketWatch* reported ahead of the storm. “This time around, that low pressure isn’t there. In fact, it’s been replaced by a high pressure so intense it only occurs approximately 0.2% of the time on average.

“The coincidence of that strong of a high pressure ‘block’ being in place just when a hurricane is passing by—in

and of itself a very rare occurrence—is just mind bogglingly rare. It’s the kind of stuff that’s important enough to rewrite meteorological textbooks. The result: Instead of heading out to sea Sandy’s full force will be turned back against the grain and directed squarely at the East Coast.”

A grave weather report on *Fox News* before the storm’s landfall used phrases such as “rewriting the coastline,” and “major event that we have not seen in this lifetime,” stressing that Sandy was the biggest storm ever seen in the Atlantic basin, and held the lowest barometric pressure ever recorded so far north.

A somber meteorologist predicted that waves could reach as much as 30



■ **WASHED AWAY:** Damage is viewed in the Rockaway neighborhood where a historic boardwalk was washed away during Hurricane Sandy in the Queens borough of New York City (Oct. 31, 2012).

PHOTO: SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

feet above storm surge water levels. She concluded by warning those on the New York/New Jersey coast, “If you’re not already in your safe place... you’re in trouble.”

Authorities were convinced Hurricane Sandy would be one of the largest systems to roll through the area—a storm on steroids. *NBC News* reported that “the cleanup and power outage restoration” could easily continue until November 6, the day of U.S. elections.

In that regard, Sandy did not disappoint.

Overcome Cities

As Hurricane Sandy neared landfall, the northeastern U.S. was virtually shut down. Millions were ordered to

evacuate as government officials eyed satellite images of a swirling behemoth, its extending cloud bands drenching a quarter of the country.

With a record 14-foot storm surge, Sandy crashed onto the shores of New Jersey and New York with unprecedented force, demolishing more than half of the boardwalk in Atlantic City and sweeping away dozens of homes. More than 30 were killed in New York City alone.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the morning following the cyclone’s arrival, “Floods and fires, seawater surges and electrical outages, fierce rains and lashing winds continued to pummel parts of the Northeast as Sandy continued its destructive march...

“From Chicago to the Atlantic Ocean, through major cities including New York, Philadelphia and Washington, the impact of the storm continued to grow.”

“Sandy continued to generate wind gusts up to 80 mph and dump up to a foot of rain and as much as 2 feet of snow in some areas. Many residents in coastal areas woke to both nasty winds and flash flooding from record surges pushed by the winds, high tides and a full moon.”

“Roughly six million people, including many in a large swath of Manhattan, were without electricity,” *The New York Times* stated. “Streets were littered with debris and buildings damaged. Seven subway tunnels under the East River were flooded. While several bridges over the East River were set to reopen, other mass transit service, including commuter rails, was still suspended.”

Referring to the flooded tunnels under the East River, *The Associated Press* reported that “Joseph Lhota, chairman of the regional Metropolitan Transportation Authority, said the damage was the worst in the 108-year history of the New York subway.”

“Lower Manhattan, the financial center of the U.S., was among the hardest-hit areas after the storm sent a nearly 14-foot surge of seawater, a record, coursing over its seawalls and

highways and into low-lying streets” (ibid.).

“Water cascaded into the gaping, unfinished construction pit at the World Trade Center, and the New York Stock Exchange was closed for a second day, the first time that has happened because of weather in more than a century.”

By Tuesday, October 30, over 19,000 airline flights had been canceled, including those flying out of Chicago, as the city faced high wind and flood warnings. In West Virginia, communities were buried under three feet of snow. Up to a foot had fallen in western North Carolina.

Complicating the situation, Sandy slowed early voting for the upcoming U.S. presidential election, with some calling for it to be postponed.

“Region-wide, the economic costs of the storm could total \$50 billion to \$70 billion, according to IHS Global Insight,” *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

This includes some of the financial losses incurred as a result of looters, who took advantage of the situation and proudly boasted about what they stole via social media.

The New York Daily News reported that Coney Island, a popular recreational area, was targeted. One witness said: “‘People were running in and out of Rent-A-Center carrying these big flat screens...I couldn’t understand how someone could steal a big TV in broad daylight, but no one cared.’”

“‘Look, they’ve been looting our wallets for too long,’ said a young male who claimed he helped himself to a TV at the Rent-A-Center.”

An angry store owner told the media outlet that “between the flooding and the plundering, his losses were too high to easily calculate. He said he’s not sure when he’ll reopen.

“‘We are supposed to come together as a community during times of crisis, not pick at each other like vultures,’ he said. ‘Next time I’m getting a gun.’”

Another shop employee who watched the looting of her own store stated, “They were literally walking out with shopping carts full of mer-

chandise. They didn't even look worried...I saw an elderly lady walking away with batteries and a bag of Kit Kats" (ibid.).

Consider: the largest-ever Atlantic storm—arriving with the full moon's high tide—in one of the most populous regions of the leading Western superpower—and hammering a quarter of its citizens right before the most bitterly contested election in generations—and the resulting lawlessness that has occurred.

Yet for the world, the storm was just one more item on a sprawling list of compounding disasters that seem never-ending.

One Upon Another

Think about what such a situation signifies for a heavily populated coast with an already-struggling economy: flights cancelled mean tourism dollars lost, trains stopped result in people not being able to work, businesses shuttered and then looted hit the pocket-books of local entrepreneurs, flooded homes result in high insurance payouts, and on and on it goes.

On top of this is the frustration that results from such a large-scale disaster. This leads to an increased level of desperation among those affected, sometimes causing increased crime (as with New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck).

Reuters reported that gas ran out in more than half of all service stations in the New York/New Jersey area: "Tempers flared as a queue of at least 30 cars spilled down the street, with drivers blaring horns, shouting and getting out of their cars. Pump attendant Nadim Amid said the station had already run out of regular gasoline and only had a tiny amount of super unleaded and diesel left."

Storms also leave a trail of environmental destruction. Floodwater contaminated with harmful pathogens can result in more instances of disease in a given area. In the case of Hurricane Sandy, scientists have discovered that the water contains a noxious mix of gasoline, bacteria and sewage: "Public health officials caution that stagnant

water from floods can pose significant health risks, many of which can worsen with time," *National Geographic* reported.

The magazine later stated, "Even without directly drinking the brackish water, contaminants can make their way into human bodies, through the air, or even through the faucet. Just walking through open water can infect people with open cuts. Rubbing eyes after touching water can increase one's risk of infection as well."

Another concern is New York City's rat population: "No one knows exactly how many rats live in New York City, but [Rick Ostfeld of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies] suspects that there are at least as many rats as humans...The displacement of rats caused by Hurricane Sandy—a dispersal of rats that is likely unprecedented for the city in terms of numbers—has Ostfeld concerned about a possible increased spread of rat-borne diseases. 'You get infected individuals mixing with uninfected individuals and that's a recipe for an outbreak,' says Ostfeld."

Compounding Crises

Such storms force Washington to pay a hefty bill—usually in the tens of billions of dollars in damages—and cost local, state and federal economies billions more. Yet the damage that was incurred from the so-called "Frankenstorm" does not take into account that the country is still reeling from a series of disasters—at least 10 "billion-dollar" ones to be exact—that occurred in 2011.

The state of Vermont, which suffered some of the worst damage during Hurricane Irene, was still struggling to recover when Hurricane Sandy bore down on it.

"The fact that people are still hurting [from Irene] is obvious at businesses such as the White River Valley Campground in Stockbridge, where owners Rebecca and Drew Smith say they're still overwhelmed by all the work needed to get the place back open," *The Associated Press* reported.

North Carolina's Outer Banks region also continued to cope with Irene's destruction—all while preparing for Hurricane Sandy, another *AP* article showed: "Gov. Beverly Purdue declared a state of emergency for some coastal areas, and a steady stream of campers and other vehicles hauling boats left the low-lying islands for the mainland. Residents feared a temporary bridge built after Irene last year poked a new inlet through the island could be washed out again, severing the only road off Hatteras Island."

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, more than 22 states are confronting active disasters, including wildfires, flooding, mudslides, severe storms, hurricanes and tornadoes. Just this year, 88 areas declared some sort of emergency. In 2011, 242 did.

Many effects from previous disasters are long reaching. For example, several southern states are still cleaning up from 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which was followed by Rita, Tropical Storm Lee, and then Isaac, which hit in August 2012.

In Louisiana, Isaac's "tidal surge and waves hit the Mandeville-area park where it hurt the most: tearing up the beach, sending water into the 12 hugely popular vacation cabins perched above the lake, and flooding the visitors' center," *The Times-Picayune* reported. "The damage estimate: \$3.6 million."

And this was just *one park* after *one storm!* Think of the other areas affected in the past *few* years that have been affected by the nation's wild weather, which has been some of the worst on record.

All too often, residents do not finish cleaning up one storm before another one plows through.

Perfect Storm

With storm after storm and disaster upon disaster, it seems impossible to keep up. Each impending catastrophe wipes a previous one from society's collective memory. In the very least, it is not viable to keep *every* calamity in mind.

Remember the Western wildfires last summer? The drought across a third of the country? What about the last few years that hosted a slew of 500-plus tornadoes, an earthquake in Washington, D.C., a devastating oil spill, and many more such events? On the economic front, Americans lost 40 percent of their wealth from 2007-2010.

And this is all just in the United States!

Elsewhere, Mexico remains vexed by its never-ending drug-war nightmare. Europe is at the brink of collapse—with 40 percent unemployment in Spain and discontent *everywhere*. According to *BBC News*, scientists are calling the United Kingdom's summer of both severe rain and drought the "weirdest" weather on record. The word to define the Middle East is uncertainty: Iran and Israel may soon come to blows, and there is no easy solution to Syria's civil war.

Keeping in mind all these current events seems to crowd out previous calamities. Remember Japan's 2011 tsunami and nuclear meltdown aftermath? Remember the 1,200 dead from a typhoon in the Philippines that same year? Remember the more than 250,000 dead from Haiti's 2010 quake?

What about as far back as 2004? Over 230,000 died as a result of the Indonesian tsunami. Relief efforts are still ongoing.

Then there are the numbers silently ticking up across the globe. Millions dead from infectious disease. Thousands more from resurfacing maladies such as measles, whooping cough, and bubonic plague—now all drug resistant.

With all these things in mind, the global forecast seems bleak—a perfect storm of horrendous disasters.

Greater Significance

This ghastly worldwide picture can seem overwhelming. Each new calamity only compounds the situation. How many more natural disasters, disease pandemics, and international conflicts can mankind sustain?

Seeing such things understandably elicits the question: why? Yet this query is often shoved out of mind for those grappling with real crises in their own lives. When one is unemployed, starving, gravely ill—or struggling to recover from a storm surge that destroyed a family home—the question of *why* the world is in turmoil is understandably forgotten. Even attempting to keep up with piling bills pushes "why" out of the way. Due to this, those beset with problems instead tend to ask, "What does my future hold?"

Most naturally desire to know what is coming. They look to meteorologists for weather forecasts, seismologists for an idea of when an earthquake will happen, and economists for their financial futures. They turn to newscasters to make sense of current events and historians to understand what has already happened. Yet there is one source that recorded what would occur *before* it happened—in effect, history written in advance.

Notice: "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars...For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places."

Rumors of wars. Nation against nation. Famine. Pestilence. Earthquakes across the globe. All these words could be ripped from today's headlines. Yet this is a quote from the Bible recorded 2,000 years ago in Matthew 24:6-7.

This passage is part of what is known as Jesus Christ's Olivet prophecy. It is an extended answer to His disciples asking what world conditions would be like at the end of the age.

A parallel account in Mark 13 provides additional details. Notice verse 8: "...and there shall be famines and troubles..."

The original Greek word for troubles is *tarache*, which *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* defines as "disturbance, that is, (of water) roiling, or of (a mob) sedition."

Violent mobs and riots have certainly reappeared over the last decade, but so too has "roiling" water—hurricanes, tsunamis, flooding and violent thunderstorms.

All of these conditions have always been here, but it is clear they are worsening. Yet because such weather events have been occurring for thousands of years, the only thing that Christ could have meant was that they would *worsen* in the end times. He foretold that they would create a compounding *series* of disasters.

While these passages seem to support the common viewpoint that the Bible is a book of "doom and gloom," alongside them is supreme good news that most overlook.

Mark 13 continues, "And the gospel must first be published among all nations" (vs. 10). This gospel, meaning "good news," tells of a coming time when the world will experience a complete change in governance that will bring peace, prosperity, protection, health and abundance—even good weather.

Unknown to most, this is the overall message of the Bible!

But if this is the case, why does God's Word foretell the current tumultuous outlook? Most do not realize that these conditions are designed to get people's attention. They set the table for events outlined in the Bible that will come to pass in coming years and provide powerful proof of the Book's validity.

For more about this exciting time, read the comprehensive and informative book *The Bible's Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out* by David C. Pack. Available at rcg.org/tbgpu in various e-book formats, this volume explains the reason for compounding disasters—and will change your view of world events forever!

Also, to understand more of the WHY behind Hurricane Sandy, watch parts one and two of *The World to Come™ with David C. Pack* broadcast "Extreme Weather—What the Bible Reveals!" at worldtocome.org/ewwtbr. □

GERMANY

Continued from page 6

reform calls from Catholics who view his conservative stand as outdated and hopes from Protestants for closer ecumenical cooperation.

“Benedict has closed the door on changes to the Church’s opposition to gay marriage, married clergy or women priests, and has indicated he will not ease restrictions on divorced Catholics who have remarried outside the Church.

“From highly secular Berlin to former communist Erfurt to Catholic Freiburg during this four-day trip, he has hammered home his view that the Church cannot change merely to suit the whims of the times.

“Polls say many German Catholics disagree” (*Reuters*).

A *Time* report added that at the pontiff’s welcome ceremony, “German President Christian Wulff praised the Church’s role in backing German reunification more than 20 years ago. But he stopped far short of praising the Pope’s notoriously conservative agenda—and even made reference to his own struggles in the Catholic Church as a remarried divorcé.” It also cited a poll which “found that 76% of Germans said it wasn’t important what the Pope would say during his trip. And the majority of Catholics, 58%, were equally unenthusiastic.”

The Future

The Vatican currently oversees a shrinking, dissenting group of congregants in a number of countries. In some respects, this is offset by growth in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

At a point, this church-nation-state will likely distance itself from some of the most wayward nations. Yet to

do this with a country at the center of Christendom’s history and geography would be unthinkable.

A theme of Benedict’s papacy has been “re-evangelizing” Europe, including Germany—fighting the tide of indifference toward religion, challenging citizens to rediscover their common spiritual heritage.

But progress has been either slow or non-existent. Germany lacks a modern-day Boniface to hack apart the “gods” of secularism and materialism. Recall that Boniface himself was not German, yet was given great deference for his bold displays of power.

It is also missing a counterpart of Charlemagne—a central civil authority figure able to unify both Germany and the rest of the surrounding nations.

In the midst of an economic crisis, an ever-growing number of Europeans are calling for someone who fits that profile. Looking at Greece and Spain, they see their way of life in jeopardy—and want someone to *do something* about it! The slow-moving bureaucracy of the European Union offers little hope for a timely solution.

But remember the pattern of history. A sovereign over all of Europe—which was divided among very different peoples—needed the authority of its largest common religion as the glue to bind these nations together.

Many believe that Europe will never be a superpower again. In light of its role over the past seven decades, not to mention its current financial mess, this seems to be a reasonable conclusion.

But there is one unexpected source that has a perfect record of foretelling the rise and fall of great empires: the Bible. This Book makes clear that two powerful figures—one political and one religious—will arise in Europe, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. The civil leader will harness the Continent’s massive population, as well as resources from other places around the globe, to build a stunning superpower, overshadowing all others. At the same time, there *will* be a resurgence in the universal church centered there. The German church will expand at its fastest-ever rate.

You can learn much more about the details of what is coming for Europe. The one-of-a-kind book by David C. Pack, *The Bible’s Greatest Prophecies Unlocked! – A Voice Cries Out*, lays out in great detail the picture painted by the Bible. It is like no other you have ever read, and is available in several popular e-book formats. Download your free copy today (rcg.org/tbgpu)—and be among those who know what lies ahead! □



■ **AGAINST THE CHURCH:** Demonstrators posing as clergy ride a truck’s flatbed during a march against the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in Berlin, Germany (Sept. 22, 2011).

PHOTO: SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

GANGS

Continued from page 10

Due to this, humanity is separated—cut off!—from godly knowledge.

Where to Begin

When one backtracks to the core issues of the gang problem, a recurring theme appears: the importance of a proper family structure.

Broken homes fuel the gang problem. Therefore, to bring actual change, children must be correctly educated in the home by parents.

Yet fathers and mothers must have *godly* knowledge to do this—mere education and trying to put right behavior into practice will not miraculously solve the mountain of other problems already discussed.

Long-term manmade problems have been allowed to evolve and grow to the point that there is no simple solution. Therefore, the entire system necessarily needs to be removed and replaced with one founded on knowledge revealed by God.

Most feel the Bible's sole purpose is to broadcast a message about salvation through Jesus Christ. While this is crucial, it misses the message Christ Himself brought constantly, found throughout the entire Book—that of "the kingdom of God."

Kingdoms are traditionally ruled by kings and queens, which pass on the crown through lineage—through family. It should not be a surprise that the same is true of God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ, known as the Son of God, will soon return to rule over the entire earth. He will remove the governments and systems of this world and replace them with ones based on the knowledge of the correct way to live.

In the context of these modern times, Daniel 2 states, "the God of heaven [will] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all [manmade govern-

ments], and it shall stand for ever" (vs. 44).

Where does family come into play?

God wants all of humanity to learn to be like Him. As a Father, He wants all people to build His holy, righteous character—gain godly knowledge—and become His sons and daughters. Notice: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God [as true Christians], and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2).

These "sons of God" are to "possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" (Dan. 7:18)—will "inherit the earth" (Psa. 37:11)—and shall be "kings and priests" (Rev. 5:10).

Together this God Family will teach true knowledge to all nations. In turn, mothers and fathers across the globe will teach their children the Creator's way to happiness and peace.

"As the waters cover the sea"

Without God's intervention, there is no hope. Lacking divinely inspired knowledge and acting contrary to His commands leaves a person hopeless against the violent game of gangs: "...Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, *There is no hope*: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:11-12).

Yet hope for a city—and an entire world—without guns *does* remain for those who believe God's words!

For now, the Creator is allowing mankind to try its own ways, so it can understand that without the proper knowledge of God's Law, it is incapable of finding peace. Notice: "There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

The soon-coming SUPERGOVERNMENT ruled by the Family of God will usher in peace and replace all "ways of death"—such as gang life.

Under this soon-coming system:

■ Illegal weapons will be gone.

"And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither *shall they learn war any more*" (Isa. 2:4).

■ **All will be given proper guidance.** "And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left" (Isa. 30:21).

■ **There will be long life and safe streets.** "Thus says the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:4-5).

■ **All grief will ultimately be taken away.** "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Today, the earth *is* "FILLED with violence" and mankind *is* "destroyed for lack of knowledge." Yet under the kingdom of God, all nations "shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be *full of the knowledge of the LORD*, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

At that time, man's most dangerous game of gangs will be over.

To learn more about these awesome prophecies and how violence will be done away, order a free copy of David C. Pack's *Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!* at rcg.org/tww. This inspiring book explains how a perfect government—one not left to the devices, machinations and confusion of men—is coming. It will usher in peace, happiness, unity, abundance and prosperity for every human being and every country on Earth. While such a vision may seem impossible, it will happen—and in your lifetime.

A world without gangs will soon be a reality! □

MAGIC, HORROR AND THE OCCULT

Why the Attraction?

Dark-themed entertainment is wildly popular. Yet most never consider the source of this fascination.

BY SAMUEL C. BAXTER

A TV SHOW about a serial killer who obsessively targets other serial killers has aired for seven seasons. A wildly popular film series about a teenage wizard netted \$7.7 billion in total box office receipts. Cable television stations continuously churn out “real life” ghost specials, with titles such as *Psychic Kids* and *Paranormal Witness*. A horror film about a killer who takes sadistic pleasure in meticulously torturing his victims spawned six sequels and countless imitations.

Dark-themed entertainment, in the form of movies, books, television shows, and video games, is here to stay.

Publishing houses and film studios have turned this pop-culture phenomenon into a multibillion-dollar industry. Take vampires, for example. *Daily Finance* estimates that movies, television series, books, magazines and costumes for fanged “creatures of the night” constitute at least a \$10 billion industry in the United States. For audiences

worldwide, this sort of entertainment has an unmistakable draw.

A common reason for the interest in “dark” storylines appears innocent on its face: “It’s entertaining.” Other factors include the pull of romance, endearing characters, or “the thrill of the chase.”

Yet the draw for the horror genre is more difficult to explain. McGraw-Hill’s *AccessScience* attempts to bring a psychological answer to why audiences enjoy watching gruesome events unfold: “Researchers have identified various motives for viewing horror films, including the need for excitement, the desire to feel intense emotions, and distraction from everyday concerns. Although dramatic films can fulfill some of these needs, movies depicting violence and horror have features that other forms of drama do not, including the violation of social norms and the portrayal of events seldom seen in real life.

“People rarely view horror films alone...For many young people and adults, horror films are a topic of conversation, a source of shared experience, and a means of self-presentation. Not everyone will like the blood and gore, but many may continue to watch because of other goals, such as demon-

strating their ability to tolerate it, or the desire to master the threatening images.”

Scientists call this the “horror paradox”: while fear and disgust are *negative* emotions, moviegoers flock to theaters for the latest “slasher” flick, skin-crawling ghost story, or paranormal monster tale.

Stop and think. Why do so many willingly watch grotesque killings? Why are vampires and zombies so interesting? What motivates the desire to sit through 90-plus minutes of macabre images?

A connection runs through these plot lines—the occult. *Collins English Dictionary* defines “occult” as “of or characteristic of magical, mystical, or supernatural arts, phenomena, or influences,” “beyond ordinary human understanding,” and “secret or esoteric.”

The few stories that do not involve mysticism or the supernatural exhibit the darkest sides of human nature, such as the inner workings of a psychopathic killer’s mind.

This sort of entertainment demonstrates an innate human attraction to the mysterious, secret and unknown. It reveals a deep desire to have knowledge “beyond ordinary human understanding.” But WHY?

Nothing New

Looking through history, this is not a passing fad. The Brothers Grimm recorded extremely dark folk tales in the 1800s. Edgar Allen Poe penned paranormal short stories and poems around the same time.

These themes often have ties to religion. Greek mythology is chock full of magical beasts, such as centaurs, the Minotaur, and the snake-haired Medusa. In Japan, a shape-shifting fox-like trickster, known as *kitsune*, permeates folklore, as do stories of ghosts and demons. The voodoo religion also claims interaction with supernatural powers.

Many other ancient pagan religions went to great lengths for connections with the “spirit realm.” For example, classic-era Maya royalty used blood-letting, drugs and human sacrifice to attempt to “commune” with the universe. Similar accounts of going to extremes can be found in nearly every major culture: Rome, Babylon, Egypt, etc.

This desire to understand the “unknown” can be found throughout the historical record of the Bible as well. The prophets of Baal attempted to reach their god through bloodletting (I Kgs. 18:28). Israel’s King Saul visited a witch at Endor in an attempt to summon the dead (I Sam. 28:7). King Manasseh of Judah sacrificed his son to the god Molech (II Kgs. 21:6). Also, Pharaoh’s court magicians used their sorcery during the 10 plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7).

The early apostles ran into a man who was involved with witchcraft in the New Testament book of Acts: “But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries” (Acts 8:9-11).

All of the above practices had roots in an ancient Babylonish mystery reli-

gion described in Revelation 17:5. And this same belief system was practiced by Simon the sorcerer. Adherents to it claimed that they had secret knowledge and spiritual power—often brought about by “dark” practices.

In the West today, actual blood-letting and human sacrifice seem to be barbaric acts. Yet many eagerly enjoy watching such practices in the form of motion pictures and fiction books.

Mind Versus Brain

This innate human desire to understand the “unknown” still manifests itself through modern religions, but also through occult- and paranormal-themed entertainment.

Unknown to almost all, the Bible provides a meticulously detailed map of human nature and explains exactly *why* mankind has an intense interest in spiritual things. The beginnings of an answer come from the book of Job: “But *there is a spirit in man*: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:8).

Many jump on this passage as a “proof-text” for their argument of the immortal soul belief. Yet this is simply not the case. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “soul” is *nepesh*, which simply denotes a living, breathing being. Every animal labeled a “living creature” in Genesis 1 uses the same Hebrew word. So man does not have a soul, he *is* one.

It is due to this “spirit in man” that the human mind is so vastly superior to animals in intellect and ingenuity, providing near-limitless creative power.

When one understands that the human brain *contains* a spirit, mankind’s intense desire to seek out and understand the supernatural begins to make sense.

Conflicting Wavelengths

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, further explains the spiritual component of the human mind. Adam and Eve were given a choice between two trees (Gen. 2:9): “the tree of life,” representing access to the Spirit of God—and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

Most consider this story the stuff of Hebrew myth and folklore. But it

helps provide the *only* full explanation for the attraction of dark-themed entertainment.

The first man and woman did not choose “the tree of life”: “Now the serpent [Satan] was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yes, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

“And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die: for God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:1-8).

Due to this choice, Adam and Eve were cut off from God’s Spirit working with the “spirit in man” (vs. 24).

By reading I Corinthians 2, this fact takes on further significance for all of mankind: “For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?”—the spirit of man allows for self awareness and creative genius—“even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God” (vs. 11).

Take this verse at face value: man cannot know godly spiritual knowledge without “the Spirit of God.” The human mind was created to have a grander spiritual connection. The Creator intended each individual to have the Holy Spirit *working with* the spirit of man, to achieve his fullest potential.

When God’s Spirit works within the human mind, it brings forth the fruit of good character listed in Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (5:22-23).

Yet remember the decision in the Garden of Eden. There was a choice between two paths. If Adam and Eve rejected one spiritual connection, they would necessarily have to have chosen a different wavelength—a different spirit—since there are only two options: “Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the POWER of the air* [Satan], the *spirit* that now works in the *children of disobedience*” (Eph. 2:2).

The “spirit of man” is either influenced by the Holy Spirit or Satan’s “spirit that *now works in the children of disobedience*.”

Being tuned into Satan’s wavelength has a profound effect on human nature: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, *witchcraft*, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, *murders*, drunkenness, revelings, and such like...” (Gal. 5:19-21).

This is a list of characteristics that are part of human *nature*—“the works of the flesh.” This means people are *naturally* drawn to these works, including witchcraft and murder. This is what makes horror novels, movies about serial killers, and occult-heavy video games so attractive.

Human nature also:

■ **Tends toward extremes.** Look at the horror genre. What used to be based almost solely on suspense and the thrill of the chase, now includes graphic depictions of madmen methodically torturing their victims. Of course, this is always brimming with extreme close-ups showing each tear of flesh and squirt of blood. Many of these titles feature scenes that are unspeakable (Eph. 5:12).

As time goes on, these titles must necessarily become *increasingly* explicit and *more* depraved. Each subsequent movie *must* outdo the one before it in scares and gore.

■ **Exchanges darkness for light.** Over the past decade there has been a substantial push by the entertainment industry to depict the villains and fringe mindsets in normal, everyday situations. The audience is put in

the shoes of a “likable” serial killer. Vampires are no longer evil—they are the “good kind” that only drink animal blood. Witches and wizards are now just awkward teenagers growing up. The intent is to turn the *paranormal* into normal. The villain into the hero. Darkness into light.

The Bible condemns this thinking: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that *put darkness for light, and light for darkness*; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20).

■ **Seeks after the twisted and bizarre.** This fact can be seen throughout dark-themed entertainment, with authors and filmmakers pushing themselves to come up with the most macabre and warped images imaginable.

Incredible Alternative

Satan counterfeits all Bible truths, including how God intends to work with the spirit in man. Humans were created in the “image and likeness” (Gen. 1:26) of a *Creator* that deemed everything He made as “very good” (vs. 31). Unlike any animal, mankind has taken on this trait—the ability to *create*.

God wants all of mankind to be endowed with His Holy Spirit, build His character, and use the human mind to invent, build and construct things that are “very good”—including right forms of entertainment. He always pushes for excellence and the highest quality.

Satan, on the other hand, instigates artists to always *push* the envelope, to be *more* extreme, and *delve deeply* into chaos, disorder, twisted spiritism—and all things “dark.”

God also designed man to have a connection with His Spirit and to be taught right knowledge through it. References to His “mysteries” are found throughout the Bible. Matthew 13:11 and I Corinthians 4:1 mention the “mysteries of the kingdom.” Romans 16 states, “Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to *the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began...*” (vs. 25).

In contrast, the devil has counterfeited this interest in a “mysterious” spirit

realm through occult-themed entertainment and *mystery* religions demanding ignorant blind faith.

There is a huge difference between Satan’s counterfeits and God’s truth. The Creator always explains His truths in clear language and logic. In the end, His spiritual knowledge is both incredibly exciting and **PLAINLY** understood. Not one doctrine within the Bible’s pages is inexplicable or needs to be irrationally believed. Notice Daniel 2: “He [God] *reveals the deep and secret things*: He knows what is in the darkness, and the *light dwells with Him*” (vs. 22).

The pinnacle of God’s “mysteries” is the purpose for mankind. David C. Pack sets up this topic in the introduction to his book *The Awesome Potential of Man*: “The very greatest question is ‘Does God have a **MASTER PLAN?**’, and if so, what is it? The answer is that He does, and it carries many exciting details—all of which **YOU** can know. You will learn that God’s purpose is immutable, that it cannot be overthrown or defeated.

“You can also know of *your place* within it. In fact, if you read this entire book, you soon will.

“This volume answers every one of the most important questions that should be on your mind, including many others you would not know to ask—but need to understand. None of the answers are what you expect. Neither are they what ‘educated’ so-called ‘scholars and theologians’ teach, because none can teach what *they* were never taught—what they never learned.

“You were put on Earth to fulfill an **ASTONISHING PURPOSE**—you hold a potential far surpassing your very *greatest expectations*. Prepare now to be **SHOCKED** at what it is—and **INSPIRED** beyond your wildest imagination!”

Read the rest of *The Awesome Potential of Man* at rcg.org/tapom to understand your incredible human purpose. Within its pages, it shows how God “reveals the deep and secret things” throughout the Bible, and proves He wants “the **LIGHT** that dwells with Him” to also dwell within you. □

ELECTION

Continued from page 11

voters rejected a measure that would ban gay marriage. In Wisconsin, voters elected the nation's first openly gay person to the Senate. And in Colorado and Washington, voters easily approved the recreational use of marijuana."

Yet the nation elected more conservative governors and kept the Republican majority for the House of Representatives.

Despite the near 50/50 split between the two sides of the country, President Obama confidently stated in his acceptance speech that such differences would be overcome.

"I believe we can seize this future together because we are not as divided as our politics suggests. We're not as cynical as the pundits believe. We are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions, and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and forever will be the United States of America."

Mr. Romney feels similarly, as he stated in his concession speech: "...we look to Democrats and Republicans in government at all levels to put the people before the politics. I believe in America. I believe in the people of America."

Before the election, the United States desperately hoped that it could achieve true unity—and rally citizens behind one vision for the future. Instead of a *decisive* victory for either side, however, the vote only brought a continuation of America's *divisive* political landscape.

Nation of Disagreement

With all ballots counted, a pattern emerged. *Reuters* stated: "Americans chose to preserve the status quo of divided government in Washington. Obama's fellow Democrats retained control of the Senate and Republicans kept their majority in the House of Representatives, giving them power to curb the president's legislative ambitions on everything from taxes to immigration reform."

The Washington Post wrote: "The irony is that the most expensive election in American history produced a status-quo outcome. Now the question is whether it will change the status quo that has governed Washington not just during Obama's presidency but for most of the past decade.

"Obama will confront a daunting agenda, from an economy that is still far less robust than he had promised it would be to the looming problem of debt, deficits and the growth of federal entitlement programs that produced an ugly battle during his first term. The 'fiscal cliff' looms in December, which either will force action and agreement or define a new landscape of disagreement."

A *Christian Science Monitor* headline read, "Obama wins, but has anything changed?"

The same problems trouble the nation: economic woes, high unemployment rates, terrorism threats, and immigration concerns, among others.

In the past, when the United States faced such monumental challenges, it faced them together. World War II is the perfect example. Citizens united, living on rationed supplies of sugar, butter and meat—even saving bacon grease to be used in munitions factories. In addition, the nation bought about \$2.35 *trillion* (in today's dollars) worth of bonds to support the war effort!

This is the kind of unity sorely lacking today.

Inside Out

The United States must take a long hard look at itself in the mirror—both liberals *and* conservatives.

Before becoming the 16th president, Abraham Lincoln warned that the kind of partisanship thinking from within being witnessed today can start a nation down a path of becoming weakened to the point of total collapse.

In a lecture in Springfield, Illinois, in 1838 he stated, "All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from

the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

"At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide" (*Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*).

Summed up, Lincoln said the only way such a superpower as America with democratic ideals and processes could be destroyed was if it happened by those inside the nation—by its own citizens.

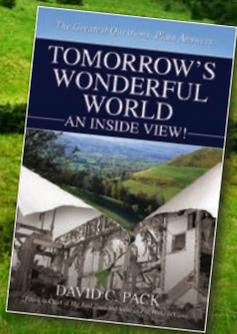
During Lincoln's time, this almost occurred. Today, his words echo the need for Americans to once again realize the dangerous territory they are entering. After the election, 72,441 signed a petition to, "Peacefully grant the State of Texas to withdraw from the United States of America and create its own NEW government." Just a week later, the total number of states with citizens who had signed similar petitions for secession totaled 19.

Examining current trends reveals a United States on the decline, confronting an overextension of its waning military, a weakening of its foreign influence, and the worst economic downturn in almost a century—in part because of its own inability to work together and turn to the only Source who would have provided them with the prosperity they desire.

As a result, the country's future and that of its people are at a crossroads.

Yet while the election cannot bring both sides of the country together, a roadmap to *true* unity for Americans—and a path to regain national prominence—is found within the pages of the Bible.

For a clear and thorough explanation of what God's Word says about the future of the United States—including how the country can obtain true unity—request a free copy of David C. Pack's eye-opening and inspiring book *America and Britain in Prophecy*. □



Tomorrow's Wonderful World – An Inside View!

Is there hope for a different—and truly better—world?
To learn what lies ahead, order your free book at rcg.org/tww.

PERSONAL

Continued from page 2

When Jesus described world conditions leading to His Return, He stated, “Except those days should be shortened [cut short], there should no flesh be saved...” (Matt. 24:22).

Some religionists believe the phrase “no flesh be saved” refers to *spiritual salvation*. But that is *not* what Jesus is talking about. Rather, that unless God cuts the Tribulation short, no human beings—“no *flesh*”—would survive. The human race would become extinct *if* Christ did not return. The implication is that He will return *before* this happens. For those who believe God, this is further proof that 2012 could not possibly end human existence.

Other prophecy writers speak of the “end of the world”—that the earth itself will supposedly be destroyed. This could not be further from the truth. This idea often stems from a misunderstanding of Christ’s disciples asking Him for

a sign of the “end of the world.” The Greek word translated *world* means “age.” The disciples were asking when the period of man’s rule would end—and the kingdom of God would be established. They well understood the many Old Testament prophecies that speak of the Messiah setting up the kingdom of God on Earth.

But beyond all the bad news is the very greatest possible *good news!* Yet few speak of this! Most talk only about disaster, calamity and the possible annihilation of all people. This is because they are largely unaware of the most positive elements of prophecy—and of the *true* gospel!

Unraveling the Myth

God’s servants understand the basic framework of His overall prophetic timetable and plan. They are not confused about “what happens next,” once certain prophecies begin to take place. Many prophecies involve a tremendous amount of understanding that God makes available, and with all neces-

sary details. They understand exactly what lies ahead for all mankind, and for themselves—if they are faithful. Those of Christ’s one Church—the one He promised to build (Matt. 16:18) almost 2,000 years ago—have heeded the Bible’s many warnings about what lies ahead.

December 21, 2012, is NOT the end! Do not fear this date! Human beings will never be wiped out. All the hysteria is for NOTHING! In fact, at a certain point this Personal will be available *after* 2012 has come and gone!

Countless verses could have been cited to disprove the 2012 deception. Scripture makes plain that 2012 does *not* mark the “end of the world,” and that such ideas are preposterous to the point of almost humorous—were it not for the fear and confusion they spawn.

But whether we are in the last days *is* a big question. To learn more about the end times, request a free copy of my booklet *Are These the Last Days?* at rcg.org/atlld. □

EUROPE

Tony Blair: An Elected President Key to Solving EU Crisis



■ **FOREIGN RELATIONS:** In this archive photo, (from left to right) Indian President Manmohan Singh, former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso talk together in Heiligendamm, Germany (June 8, 2007). Mr. Blair and Mr. Barroso have called for a revamped design of the union to solve division in the eurozone.

PHOTO: JOHN THYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Britain's former Prime Minister Tony Blair emphasized the need for a democratically elected European Union president, with expanded powers, as a means to solve the Continent's economic crisis during a keynote speech in Berlin, Germany.

"In a move interpreted by some as a job application, the former prime minister said the EU could do with a strong leader approved by the people," *The Telegraph* reported.

"He also warned that too deep a political divide between Britain and the core eurozone countries could lead towards a break-up.

"Out of this European crisis can come the opportunity finally to achieve a model of European integration that is sustainable," said Mr Blair. 'A Europe-wide election for the presidency...is the most direct way to involve the public.'"

Later in the article, the media outlet quoted Mr. Blair as stating, "I would give a stark warning: if eurozone structures end up with a Europe that is fundamentally divided politically as well as economically; rather than a Europe with one political settlement that accommodates different levels of integration within it, the EU as we know it will be on a path to break up."

Mr. Blair also called on the United Kingdom to examine its position on the European power bloc.

The Guardian reported, "In one of his most important speeches on the EU since leaving office, he told the Council for the Future of Europe in Berlin: 'It is massively in Britain's interest not to play short-term politics with this issue. Personally I would like to see the UK take a constructive role in shaping this new union.'"

Mr. Blair is not the first European leader to float the idea of altering the current union.

During his State of the Union 2012 address in September, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso also called for greater integration in what he called a "decisive deal for Europe."

"If we want economic and monetary union to succeed, we need to combine ambition and proper sequencing. We need to take concrete steps now, with a political union as a horizon...We cannot continue trying to solve European problems just with national solutions."

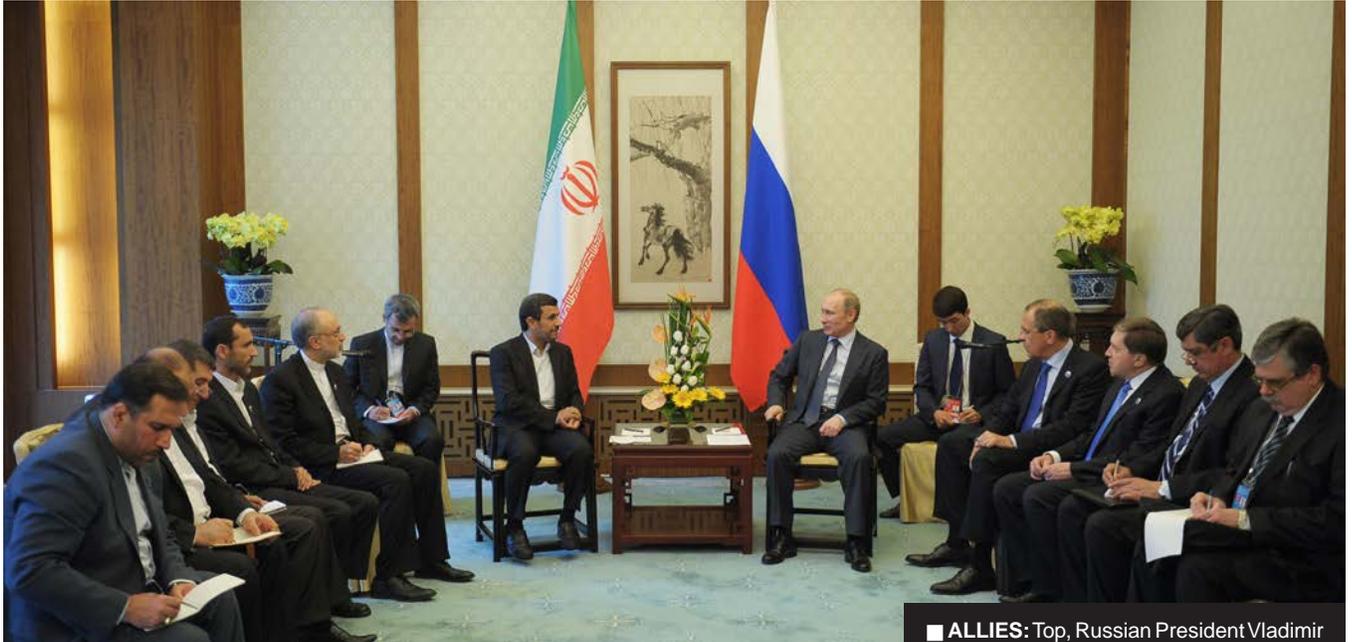
He added, "The world needs a Europe that is capable of deploying military missions to help stabilize the situation in crisis areas. We need to launch a comprehensive review of European capabilities and begin truly collective defense planning... A deep and genuine economic and monetary union, a political union, with a coherent foreign and defence policy, means ultimately that the present European Union must evolve."

In an article by *The Christian Science Monitor* titled "Europe needs a central government to manage its debt crisis," former Polish Prime Minister Marek Belka also stated that the EU needs a central leader.

"An obvious way to solve the problem of legitimacy in the EU is for the direct selection of executives for EU institutions by popular elections. That would give all citizens a chance to participate in political communication and influence decision-making processes. For this, a pan-European public opinion—a European *demos*—is necessary. Only from such a *demos* can a pan-European agenda be developed that defines the interests that can unify people from different countries." □

MIDDLE EAST

Russia Asserts Presence in the Middle East



As instability in the Middle East grows, Russia continues to maintain a visible presence in the region. Despite the controversy public association with Iran and Syria might bring, the country is showing no sign of abandoning these two allies.

According to *The National*, which quoted an editorial in pan-Arab newspaper *Al Quds Al Arabi*, Moscow is questioning the West's true motives in the region and is now "...waking up from a period of hibernation and is coming back strongly in the region to protect its interests."

While initially joining the West in favor of certain actions being taken in the region, such as deposing Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Russia has publicly declared support of Syria and Iran in their respective conflicts. And, the piece continued, Russia "is now determined to counter forcefully any US attempts to topple the Syrian and Iranian regimes" and "not let down its Syrian and Iranian allies" (ibid.).

Damascus and Tehran consider the Kremlin a trustworthy partner and a key factor in ensuring geopolitical balance in the Middle East. The feeling is certainly mutual as Russia's



■ **ALLIES:** Top, Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) speaks with his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left) as they meet in Beijing (June 7, 2012). Bottom, demonstrators hold signs and wear T-shirts to show their support of Syria's President Bashar Assad, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi during a protest in front of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Russia (Oct. 19, 2012).

PHOTOS: ALEXEY DRUZHININ/AFP/ (TOP); ANDREY SMIRNOV/AFP/ (BOTTOM) GETTY IMAGES

Minister of Foreign Affairs declared in a recent *Pravda* article that his nation would do "everything possible to prevent the development of possible military intervention in Iran."

Russia is not alone in its support of certain countries in the region. China will not easily give up its abundance of natural resources from the Middle East or jeopardize relationships so vital to its economic well-being.

"China relies on the Middle East and North Africa for almost half its oil imports, in contrast to the United States, which sources most crude and condensate from other countries in the western hemisphere, with extra supplies from West Africa," John Kemp, a *Reuters* market analyst, wrote in an article titled "China's Growing Strategic Stakes in the Middle East."

"The increasingly important commercial ties between China and major suppliers in the Middle East and Africa have been widely analysed. But China's growing import dependence also has a security dimension as it seeks to increase its influence in the region, which will undoubtedly lead to increased competition with the United States" (ibid.).

A recent *Jerusalem Post* article speculated that Russia and China have gone so far as to partner with Iran and Syria to conduct "joint military exercises" on Syrian soil and waters. The article called the event the "Middle East's largest ever military exercise."

The exercises, which involve ground troops, air and naval forces, make a bold statement to the world where the Kremlin's allegiances rest. □

Fungal Meningitis Outbreak in U.S. Blindsides Physicians

A fungal meningitis outbreak, brought on by black mold in contaminated injections for back pain, has taken the lives of 28 individuals and is affecting more than 300 people across 19 states. The infection is also responsible for multiple stroke cases, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Never before has this particular fungus been found to cause meningitis,” *The Associated Press* reported. “It’s incredibly hard to diagnose, and to kill—requiring at least three months of a treatment that can cause hallucinations. There’s no good way to predict survival, or when it’s safe to stop treating, or exactly how to monitor those who fear the fungus may be festering silently in their bodies.”

“‘What we’re dealing with here is fundamentally different’ from a typical fungal infection, [fungal disease specialist at New York’s Albert Einstein College of Medicine Arturo Casadevall] said. ‘This is a bug that most of us don’t know much about’” (ibid.).

The black mold responsible for the outbreak is called *Exserohilum rostratum*, which is common in grass, plants and dirt. Until now, it has not been known to cause fungal meningitis.

Meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms include severe headaches, fever, neck stiffness, and slurred speech. Although fungal meningitis is not contagious, it is difficult to diagnose and treat due to the fact that symptoms can be slow to

develop and the incubation period for the infection can be up to six weeks.

Dr. Robert Latham, chief of medicine at Saint Thomas Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee, told the *Boston Globe* that physicians were initially confused and frustrated because they could not identify the culprit for these life-threatening infections. They even compared it to AIDS before HIV was known as its cause.

“Doctors are beginning to detail in medical journals the first deaths in this outbreak, and the grim autopsy findings make clear that treating early is crucial, before the fungus becomes entrenched. In one case, a woman died in Maryland after the fungus pierced blood vessels in her brain, leading to severe damage.” □

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Mutant Rodents Plague Britain

More than 70 percent of rats in western England have developed “mutant” DNA, making them resistant to conventional poisons, research by University of Huddersfield’s School of Applied Sciences has found.

The study’s main objective was locating the areas of the country with the largest number of genetically altered rodents immune to the most commonly used poisons.

ScienceDaily reported, “The highest prevalence has so far been found in certain areas of South of England and West Country where greater than 70% [of] the animals tested are of the ‘super’ rat type.”

Lead researcher Dr. Dougie Clarke told *BBC News*, “Some pest control companies are still using the same rodenticides—Bromadiolone and Difenacoum—in areas where there are resistant rats and things need to change. We’re wiping out the normal susceptible rats and we’re going to be left with resistant rats only in this area so alternatives have to be found so we’re not using these poisons.”

The rats have developed this immunity due to incorrect, or insufficient, application of the poisons. If a correct lethal dose is not administered, rodents survive and develop immunity.



PHOTO: CANSTOCKPHOTO

According to *ScienceDaily*, only one solution remains: stronger poisons.

“In order to combat the problem there are stronger poisons—such as brodifacoum and flocoumafen—that can be used and they have proved to be effective, even against the so-called super rats. But these rodenticides have to be used in strictly controlled conditions, under licence from the Health and Safety Executive.” □

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What Few Understand About Sex

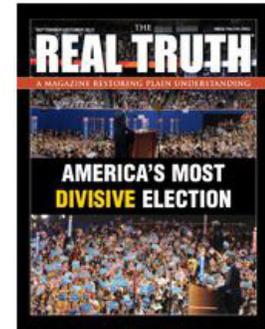
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