

PROPHECY IN THE MAKING: POPE FURTHERS UNION OF WORLD RELIGIONS

By Robert Congdon

A "'turning point' in relations between Christianity and Islam" is how one commentator described Pope Benedict's recent four-day trip to Turkey.¹ Another saw it as a defining moment "in the papacy of Benedict XVI."² While the world's press concentrated on the Pope's attempts to reduce tension between the Muslim world and the Roman Church following his derogatory remarks made in Germany regarding Islam, three "defining" events of lesser note occurred: events that just possibly are forwarding the unification of major religions of the world. Bible prophecy indicates that this latter-day union will guide and direct a one-world government. This unification is symbolized in the book of Revelation by a woman riding a scarlet colored beast (Rev. 17:1-3).

The first defining event occurred when the Pope visited the ancient Biblical city of Ephesus. With the exception of Jerusalem, the New Testament mentions no other city more than Ephesus. It was here that the apostle John ministered to the local church and cared for Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:26, 27). As members of the Ephesian church, Aquila and Priscilla helped Apollos to acquire a more complete understanding of the Gospel (Acts 18:24-28); and here the Apostle Paul also ministered, emphasizing the Kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). In later years, Paul wrote to Timothy, the pastor of the church of Ephesus, stressing the need to teach all Scripture.

Paul's warning certainly included those prophecies regarding the Lord's appearing in the air for the Church at the Rapture followed by His Second Coming to earth to establish His future earthly kingdom. He said that in the last days "perilous times shall come." These times will be the days when people will turn to a false religion that offers not only a false hope but also "a form of godliness" while "denying the power thereof." In contrast, those individuals who "love His appearing," will be looking for the Rapture and the future crown of reward that is promised to all believers who "love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Sadly, a mere thirty years later, God warned the church at Ephesus that they had lost their first love, their zeal for the Lord and the anticipation of seeing Him. Apparently they had turned to false teachers who denied Christ's appearing at the Rapture (Rev. 2:4). This warning is strikingly appropriate today, as many churches are turning from the truths of prophecy.

The Pope's visit to Ephesus was not to emphasize the return of Christ, but to pay homage to the "holy site" where Mary traditionally lived out her last days. He also hoped to strengthen the bond that Roman Catholics share with Muslims regarding Mary, for although many are unaware of it, Islam holds the Virgin Mary in high esteem. It was from Ephesus that Mary supposedly ascended to heaven and here, too, she is

¹ "Pope Begins Landmark Turkey Visit." BBC Online News, 28 Nov. 2006.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6189962.stm?ls> 12/11/2006.

² David Wiley. "Turkey Trip 'Defines Benedict Papacy.'" BBC Online News, 1 Dec. 2006.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/europe/6199350.stm> 12/11/2006.

said to have appeared to a German nun. The shrine in Ephesus that was built to honor Mary sees "tens of thousands of Christians and Muslims" visiting it each year.³

Throughout the world, apparitions of the Roman Catholic Virgin Mary are increasing. Islam and Roman Catholicism are drawing closer together through her shrines and ongoing "appearances." The Marian shrine in Fatima, Portugal, is an ecumenical gathering place for religions from the East as well as the West. Fatima was Mohammad's favorite daughter and of her he said that she is the most honored of women after Mary.⁴ Over 4.5 million people of many faiths come to Fatima each year to share a common worship experience, centered upon the mother/child shrine to Mary. This response should not surprise us, for the Bible indicates that in the end times, the focus of the world's religions will be upon a female deity.

Revelation 17 labels this latter-day false goddess "Mystery Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." Many Bible students hold that the latter-day false religion will be based on a mother/child counterfeit of the promised woman and her seed described in Genesis 3:15. Historical records indicate that through Nimrod at Babel, Satan first introduced Semiramis and her son as the promised "seed." It was here that humanity first turned from the true God and sought to unite world government and religion (Gen. 11). From that day to this, worship of the mother-goddess, first called the "Queen of Heaven," has appeared in many cultures under many different names. The Samaritans worshipped her as Ishtar, the Egyptians as Isis, the Greeks as Artemis, and the Romans as Diana. Even Israel fell for the queen of heaven's allurements (Jeremiah 44:17-19, 25).

In Roman times, Ephesus was the center of Artemis/Diana worship.⁵ The Ephesians believed that it was here that the "mother goddess of the earth was born."⁶ Standing before the people of this city, the Apostle Paul confronted this false mother-goddess worship by using the power of the Word of God; and many turned to the true and living Savior, Jesus Christ (Acts 19:26). The spiritual conflict of that day has not ended, for in today's modern world many worship a Mary that is contrary to the Mary described in the Scriptures. This false Mary may become a new version of the mother-goddess, taking form as a "Global Mary." She may become the catalyst that unites the world's religions into a "supra," one-world religion that will eventually follow the Antichrist. In this role she would fulfill the prophecy regarding "Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth," found in Revelation 17.

The second defining event of the Pope's journey took place in Istanbul (Constantinople), former capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. It was here, on the holiest day of the Eastern Orthodox calendar, that he held a Mass with Patriarch Bartholomew, spiritual leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church. His declared purpose was to "patch an age-old rift between the churches."⁷ The split between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches occurred 1000 years ago. The reunification of these two religions would begin the process of re-establishing the "Christian" religion of the

³ "Pope Holds First Mass in Turkey" EuroNews, 29 Nov 2006

⁴ Dave Hunt. *A Woman Rides the Beast*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 458.

⁵ "Ephesus" Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary. Online Bible Edition, Ver. 2, 2005.

⁶ "Ephesus" ISBE Vol. 3.

⁷ "Pope Celebrates Mass with Patriarch" EuroNews 30 Nov 2006

ancient Roman Empire. Students of the Bible would recognize this unification as a significant step toward setting the stage for fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Summarizing the meeting, Bartholomew said: "We can truly say that this Thursday we lived a historic day...historic for ecumenical dialogue...historic for the relationship between cultures and religions."⁸

The third defining event occurred near Hagia Sofia, a 6th Century Eastern Roman Empire church that was converted to a mosque in 1453 and is now a museum. Only 500 yards from this historical landmark is the functioning Islamic Blue Mosque. Pope Benedict XVI furthered his cause for the reunion of faiths by entering the mosque where, alongside an imam, he boldly turned to face Mecca (the spiritual center of Islam) and prayed silently, thereby winning the praise of many Muslims. The Mufti of Istanbul noted that this two-minute prayer was "even more meaningful than an apology."⁹ This event is only the second time in history that a Roman Pope has entered a Muslim house of worship. These three defining events of his trip emphasize Pope Benedict XVI's desire to reconcile three major world religions, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam.

Lastly the Pope made a prophetically significant, though little noticed, statement when he urged the European Union to admit Turkey into EU membership. He described Turkey as being the bridge between Europe and Asia. After first stating that the Vatican has no political power to influence the EU, he urged "Turkey's integration into Europe."¹⁰ Although there may be no official connections between the Vatican and the EU, there are many unofficial ones. These comments by the Pope were intended to counter the EU's rejection of Turkey, based largely on the perceived fear of Islamic terrorism.

The Bible indicates that mankind's final kingdom will arise from the revived Roman Empire, which included the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea (Daniel 2:42). Hence, Turkey's admission would mark the first of many Middle East countries to join the European Union, possibly fulfilling this prophecy. The Vatican's approval could help to overcome the resistance to Turkey's membership. As the world moves toward a one-world government united with a one-world religion, it is important to realize that the details as to just how this union will be accomplished are insignificant when compared to the absolute promise of God that it will indeed happen, for His Word is truthful and trustworthy.

⁸ "Patriarch Bartholomew I on the Papal Visit." Catholic Online 2 Dec. 2006. <http://www.catholic.org/feared/headline.php?ID=3856> 12/11/2006.

⁹ David Wiley. "Turkey Trip 'Defines Benedict Papacy'"

¹⁰ Lucia Kubosova. "Turkey Claims Pope Supports its EU Membership Bid" EUobserver, 29 Nov 2006. <http://euobserver.com/?aid=22974> 11/29/06.