

Will Europe Ever Unite?

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Before spending a week in Belgium, Holland, France and Germany recently, I was only academically aware of the problems involved in the creation of a United Europe. Membership in God's church has given me a natural interest in the formation of this future colossus, but I have been disappointed with how slowly events seem to be moving. The proverbial molasses running uphill in January appears speedy in comparison. Seeing firsthand some of the factors involved in European unity, I have enhanced my understanding of the problems.

It is easy to see how we can become frustrated by this ponderous process. Before World War II, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong preached about Europe uniting under a coming world dictator, and when the Axis Powers fell to the Allies in 1945, he proclaimed that a United States of Europe would rise from the ashes of the devastated continent. Now, 51 years later, we continue to preach the same message, and its fulfillment still seems years away.

How long, O Lord?

Granted, much has been accomplished over the past five decades. The nations of Europe have formed an economic union that has opened borders from Scandinavia to Spain and from Britain to Austria. A European Parliament, composed of representatives from all member states, meets in Brussels, Belgium. Measures have been taken to integrate the armed forces into a common army. In 1999 the nations of the European Union (EU) are scheduled to drop their national currencies in favor of the euro. These are *major* strides in bringing sovereign nations under one banner.

Luigi Barzini, in his 1983 book, *The Europeans*, concludes that European unity has come a long way, but that it has a long way to go:

We must admit that in a modest way the dream of European unity has been a success. It was really conceived to prevent a recurrence of the wars of 1870, 1914, and 1939 between France and Germany. This it has done. It has also established a shopkeepers' ideal continental market of sorts, which has encouraged exchanges and production. It cannot go any further. There cannot be a really united Europe without a common currency and a common foreign policy, but above all, a common defense policy. This, in the twentieth century, means nuclear weapons and space defenses. It entails a tangle of insoluble political problems among the member nations and the superpowers. (pp. 265-266)

His pessimism should be tempered by Herbert Armstrong's assessment. In his last sermon, *Trumpets* 1985, he warned us—as he so often did—that Europe could suddenly unite. We could awake one morning, he said, to find that the nations had for the sake of expedience put aside all their differences and chosen a man, the Beast, to lead them. It could occur that quickly!

As we have plodded through the last eleven years, that scenario has seemed less and less likely. As Barzini intimated, the nations of Europe cannot agree on much. They constantly regurgitate petty quarrels among themselves and savagely protect their own interests, industries and cultural distinctions. They can enumerate a million reasons why union is not feasible within the next 25 years.

However, we know it will happen! The Bible guarantees it!

Babel at Work

What are the problems facing European unity? A primary one is language. How many languages and dialects people speak within the borders of the EU is hard to gauge, but "dozens" is a conservative estimate. Many Europeans are bi- or tri-lingual, knowing English, French or German as their second and third tongues. But even this is not enough.

Road signs, menus, television programs and operating instructions often come in two or three languages. Even cities are called by different names depending on what language is being spoken! Aachen in German is Aken in Dutch and Aix-la-Chapelle in French. A word in one language probably does not mean the same thing as a word spelled exactly the same in another. Idioms, slang and loan-words from other languages help to muddy the waters further.

The origin of this confusion is Babel, of course. For the past 4,000 years, the language barrier has successfully kept man from uniting for any length of time to accomplish his goals. God acknowledges that if men could communicate freely with each other, no frontier would be unreachable:

And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now *nothing* that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." (Genesis 11:6-7)

The result of dividing man's languages was separation (verse 8). People of the same language found each other and migrated away from Babel to avoid the conflicts and confusion that many tongues produce. The same conflict and confusion exist today in Europe. Because this obstacle is so difficult to surmount, God's original reason for confusing the languages is still in effect!

English-speaking peoples are much more likely to ally with each other than with French or German speakers because communication is so much easier. Alliances between peoples of different languages are usually short-lived because of the difficulties involved. It is truly a wonder that the EU has agreed upon as much as they have!

The Scriptures show that this division of mankind into language groups would reach into the end time as well: "And authority was given him [the Beast] over every tribe, *tongue*, and nation" (Revelation 13:7). The unspoken reason that the Beast is given authority is that he would be unable to unite these groups unless he were allowed to do so. The prejudices that arise between differing language groups are just too strong to overcome humanly.

This fact screams its veracity throughout Europe. The Europeans muddle through with translators and halting attempts at the other's language, or they resort to using a common third language, often

English, to come to an understanding. But without outside—spiritual—help, a complete understanding leading to unity is impossible.

Genes and Beliefs

Two other factors play vital roles in keeping Europe disunited: race and religion. One may say, "Aren't most Europeans white?" Yes, they are, but the races are made up of many "nations, tribes, peoples" (Revelation 7:9). The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 shows very clearly that nations are merely families grown large, each with its own culture, idiosyncrasies, strengths, weaknesses and ideas.

This is evident every day in Europe. The Dutch are markedly different from the French, Germans, Belgians, Swiss, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, Greeks, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, Poles, Austrians, English, Scots, Irish, Welsh, etc. Each of these is distinct from any of the others, and everyone knows it.

It is common knowledge that Italians are good designers, the Germans are good engineers, the Dutch are good sailors, the Swiss are good bankers, the French are good chefs, the Belgians are good artisans, and so on. True, these are generalities, but they are based on generations of observation. Often, other peoples caricature and warp these qualities, and this leads to misunderstanding, friction and further separation. Over time, hatreds and resentments become traditional and sacred and virtually impossible to eradicate.

The Germans and the French are so suspicious of each other that the other nations of Europe use their animosity to check each other's power. The Belgians are really two peoples, the Flemish and the Walloons, and they are so divided that the two groups rarely, if ever, intermingle geographically, socially or politically. Never put a Scot and an Irishman in the same room together and ask who makes the best whiskey! Similar racial animosity can be found in each country of the EU.

Then, of course, there is religion. Religion has divided more people on this earth than any other cause, and more blood has been spilled in its name than any other. Spiritual beliefs, because they involve personalities greater and stronger than mere humans, drive men to acts they would never imagine doing for any other reason. Unspeakable atrocities become honorable deeds when "God" is involved.

In Europe, Protestants and Catholics coexist peacefully now, except in Ireland. This does not mean that the enmity between them has passed; it is simply simmering under the surface until the right moment. The nations of the EU are still either Protestant or Catholic in all but name. When we add Judaism, a growing Islamic minority and atheism, Europe is not far from a religious explosion.

We should also not forget that all of these religions are further divided among themselves. Lutherans, Pentecostals, Calvinists, Anglicans and others make up the Protestant camp. Catholics come in Traditionalist and Liberal stripes. Jews are Orthodox or Reformed or secular. Muslims can be Sunni or Shiite. Even atheists are divided between humanism and nihilism! And scattered thinly among these countries are a handful of God's chosen people.

As in the United States, people in Europe are becoming more distrustful, skeptical and independent. Fewer and fewer attend worship services of any kind. The denominations, churches and leadership have less control and influence than at any time in history. Among the nations of Europe, religion is

dividing more than uniting; in fact, it seems to be splintering religious groups in much the same way as the church of God is being shattered.

Coming—a United Europe!

Given these factors, the prospect of European unity seems pretty bleak. How can 300 million people, speaking dozens of different tongues, with radically different cultures, beliefs and aims, ever agree on anything? They cannot! Human nature dictates that such a unity would be impossible to achieve.

Jesus says, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). This is the answer to the question, "How can Europe unite?" If it were a purely human endeavor, European unity would never occur. It would most likely be cut short by war over some point of national, cultural or religious self-interest. With God's intervention, however, A UNITED EUROPE IS A CERTAINTY!

We have already seen that the Beast is given authority "over every tribe, tongue, nation" (Revelation 13:7). This does not reveal who gives him this authority, nor does it say why this occurs. God reveals the answer to both these questions in Revelation 17:17:

For **God** has put it into their [the ten horns, ten kings (verse 12)] hearts TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, UNTIL THE WORDS OF GOD ARE FULFILLED.

This is a very vital part of God's plan, and it **will** come to pass! God says,

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; . . . declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure," calling a bird of prey [like the Beast] from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11)

God Almighty Himself moves to unite Europe under the Beast! Why? He does it to fulfill His purpose and fulfill the prophecies of His Word! His plan is moving inexorably toward its culmination, and nothing can make God deviate from it. To bring all conditions into a proper alignment for His Son's return to establish His Kingdom, God must force the ten kings to surrender their sovereignty to the Beast.

Yet even with God's intervention, the unity of Europe will be brief and fragile. Revelation 17:10-12 show that the Beast reigns only "a short time," and the kings rule with him "one hour." The parallel prophecy in Daniel 2:41-43 emphasizes the union's brittle nature:

Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

We know these things will happen. We know united Europe will exist for about 3½ years (Revelation 11:2), and it will be strong but unstable. But when? How long, O Lord?

We cannot answer this with any certainty. Jesus tells us, "But of that day and hour no one knows, no not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). He does tell us what to expect, however:

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. . . . Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. . . . Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him. (verses 37, 42, 44)

Paul echoes this in I Thessalonians 5:1-2, 4, 6:

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. . . . But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. . . . Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

What we can be certain about is that the time is near. We are living in the time of the end. Conditions are like those describing Noah's day. The "perilous times" of II Timothy 3:1 are upon us. Now we must watch soberly, preparing ourselves for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ by putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18) and cleansing ourselves unto holiness (II Corinthians 7:1).

Is Europe ever going to unite? As bleak as it looks on the surface, it will unite. Yes, indeed, and very soon!