



Ken & Jeanie Morris

P.O. Box 832241

Richardson, TX 75083-2241

www.kenmorris.org

972 223 7241

214 235 9347

February 2006

Post-Christian Europe!

This past January, a couple of articles from the USA TODAY caught my attention!

- **January 9th** "Is God Dead in Europe: and what that might mean for America"
- **January 31st** "Italian Atheist Sues Priest Over Jesus' Existence"

Maybe you thought most European missionaries were speaking in hyperboles... think again!

You might have slept right through this one! In January, USA TODAY ran an article which provides a perfect snapshot of the mentality of post-Christian Europe... The headline read, **"Italian Atheist Sues Priest Over Jesus' Existence...lawsuit accuses parish of making profit off 'fable'"**. Since this article ran, I have learned that the case has been dismissed. But it gives a perfect example of the climate that most missionaries are working under in Western Europe. Allow me to make a few quotes from the article.

"An Italian atheist is suing a parish priest for saying Jesus Christ existed. The case has opened debate here over whether its appropriate for a civil court to decide matters of religious faith... The plaintiff filed

Italian atheist sues priest over Jesus' existence

Lawsuit accuses parish of making profit off 'fable'

By Eric L. Lyman
Special for USA TODAY

ROME — An Italian atheist is suing a parish priest for saying Jesus Christ existed.

The hearing in a court in Viterbo, a city located in a valley 25 miles northwest of Rome, opened Friday and could take weeks to decide. Luigi Cascioli, 72, a lifelong atheist, is suing the Rev. Enrico Righi, 75, a local parish priest.

The case has opened debate here over whether it's appropriate for a civil court to decide matters of religious faith.

"In some Italian, the case is a sign of growing secularism in their society. I don't think this belongs in the court, and it never would have got there if the church was held in high esteem, as it used to be," retired Roman teacher Lana Napoli, 62, says.

"I don't think I would want the church deciding on taxes or foreign policy," said Federico Massimo, 35, a city worker in

Rome. "Why should the court worry about a religious topic?" Cascioli filed a civil suit against Righi in 2002 citing an Italian anti-fraud law designed to target advertisements that make unrealistic health or beauty claims. Righi wrote in a church newsletter that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to a couple named Mary and Joseph and that he lived in Nazareth. Cascioli's lawsuit claims the statement was an "abuse of popular belief."

Wider implications

"The court will have to decide whether the statements Father Righi made were indeed fraudulent to decide whether the case has merit," says Antonio Schepatti, a retired director of the law faculty at the University of Rome and a legal consultant. "It has to make a judgment about the existence of Christ. As far as I know, no court has ever been required to do such a thing."

In a telephone interview, Cascioli says he chose to name Righi in his suit because he was local, but his case has a wider target. "If Father Enrico Righi is found guilty of all this, it will



Outside court: Luigi Cascioli, 72, has accused a priest of misleading the public by presenting Jesus as a historical figure.

have clear implications on all levels of the church," he says. "The question isn't who is guilty because if one person is, then many, many people are. The question is whether the case can be proved."

Schepatti says that if Cascioli is successful, the church will be forced to use conditional language when writing about some faith-related issues for the public. Even if the suit fails, it may damage the Catholic church's reputation. "This is allowing the church to be sued in court the same way someone who borrows money and doesn't pay it back is sued," Schepatti says.

Cascioli's suit is based on several complaints. Among them: "That Righi's parish has profited financially from promoting what Cascioli calls 'the fable of Christ's life.'"

► That the church is guilty of

a civil suit against the priest citing an Italian anti-fraud law designed to target advertisements that make unrealistic health or beauty claims. The priest simple wrote in a church newsletter that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to a couple named Mary and Joseph and that he lived in Nazareth."

First of all, this really gives a new spin on the old line, "If you were accused for being a Christian,

would there be enough evidence to convict you?" How basic, generic, and safe is it to say that Jesus Christ was indeed a historical figure? How easily we assume its broad, almost universal acceptance. I know what many of you are thinking... "The existence of Jesus Christ; his life, death even resurrection has been verified by the historical and secular sources... haven't you ever read Josh McDowell or Lee Strobel?"

My point... YOU may have read Josh and Lee... but Europe could care less!

Second, imagine your pastor getting dragged into court over false advertisement! How embarrassing! And to heighten the insult, lump him in the mix of wacko ads which boast of unrealistic health and beauty claims... weight loss, sexual potency etc...

"Cascioli says that Christ never existed. If he (Cascioli) doesn't see the sun at midday, he shouldn't denounce me just because I do see it."

— The Rev. Enrico Righi, parish priest

member, wrote an article in his parish bulletin that pointed out some of the historical evidence that supports the existence of Jesus. He cites Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote in 93 A.D. that 31 years earlier, there was an execution of "the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, who was called James by name." In the second century, Roman philosophers Pliny the Younger and Lucian mentioned Jesus' execution.

"Cascioli says that Christ never existed," Righi wrote. "If he (Cascioli) doesn't see the sun at midday, he shouldn't denounce me just because I do see it."

Cascioli admits he doesn't believe he will win his case at the local level. "I am smart enough to know that a court in a country that is 95% Catholic is never going to rule that Jesus did not exist. It would take a miracle," he jokes. "But maybe this will make people think about the contradictions of what they believe."

If he loses, Cascioli says, he will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, where he feels he has a better chance. He says the church has less power on a European level.

"impersonation" by confusing the persona of Jesus with another man named John of Gama, said to have lived in Israel around the time of Jesus.

► That the four Gospels are filled with conflicting and inaccurate evidence about Jesus.

Burden of proof

The burden is on Cascioli to prove Jesus is a fabrication. Magistrates tried to have the case thrown out on the grounds that no damages could be proved and that there was not enough empirical evidence of Jesus' existence. Cascioli repeatedly challenged that conclusion until Judge Gaetano Mautone in Viterbo agreed to set a court date of Jan. 27.

The Vatican has not commented on the case. Righi has declined to be interviewed on the advice of his lawyers. In De-

While I agree that the transformation made in the life of anyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ will be evidenced in both health and beauty, it is shocking and angering to imagine the Church being lumped in with the fraudulent hucksters that appear on late-night TV shopping channels! I suppose my point is, in terms of real credibility in Western Europe, Christianity has been removed from the top-shelf! Let's continue with the article...

"The court will have to decide whether the statements were indeed fraudulent... One retired professor commented, 'The court will have to make a judgment about the existence of Christ. As far as I know, no court has ever been required to do such a thing.'"

Of course they haven't, that's because we safely have assumed its universal acceptance and we have a nice clause of freedom of religion and separation between church and state... In other words, the government will not interfere with the right to worship... This really puts a new insight to the Gospel of John chapter 9 where the blind man is healed by Jesus and subsequently brought before the Pharisees!

"How were your eyes opened?"

"How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?"

"What did he do to you, how did he open your eyes?"

The whole climate of the text is one of trying to disprove, discredit what had clearly and openly been a miracle! May God help us to turn the climate of the court room of this world around – With overwhelming and unsettling evidence that Jesus Christ is alive, victorious, and actively performing miracles of all variety today! But let's continue with the article...

"One official noted, if the plaintiff is successful, the church will be forced to use conditional language when writing about faith-based issues for the public."

Well, this is almost too obvious to comment on... Here in Texas, we're struggling for the right to keep manger scenes on the court house lawn or a nativity

play at our local schools... In Europe, we must be careful to use "conditional language". What is "conditional language"? Language that is vague and generic. Sermons that are politically correct, tolerant, and neutral. Useless! Again, can you imagine the dressing down Peter and John received from the authorities in Acts 4 after a known cripple had been miraculously healed?

"By what power, or by what name, have you done this?"

If ever there was an antithesis to "conditional language" read Peter's reply... Peter, filled with a boldness that can only be attested to the Holy Spirit, gave a reply that is so far removed from vague and generic! "Be it known unto you...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..." Wouldn't you have hated to be the opposition to Peter and John that day? They must have been cringing! Vs. 15 states that they commanded them to go outside while they conferred among themselves... Of course they did! They were reeling from the boldness of speech and the glaring evidence of proof that was before their eyes! They

had to secretly regroup from the lack of "conditional language" used by these men. I'm preaching now...so I'll stop!

My point is, George Barna claims that 87% of Americans believe God created the universe. We take this for granted. Membership in the Atheist Society is dwindling! But in European context, nothing is taken for granted! Everything is held up for objection and proof! To some this may appear intimidating! What if God doesn't show up? Most can already picture a Elijah vs. Prophets of Baal showdown coming... And in a sense this is exactly what is needed in Western Europe! Either God is real and ready to show Himself strong... or let's fold and join the prophets of Baal!

Allow me to close with a quote from Greg Mundis, the European Regional Director. "Despite its affluence, sophistication and culture, Europe today is post-Christian. For 200 years, godless ideologies have impacted Europe's ancient religious context. While there was a time when "Christian" and "European" were almost synonymous, the "isms" of

USA TODAY, MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2006/11A

The Forum

Is God dead in Europe?

(And what might that mean for America?)

By James P. Cannon

Two sculptures from a recent tourist trip to Europe. We are in Prague, the lively and lively capital of the Czech Republic, where the bars and cafes are full, the gilded crystal and art shops are busy, and the dozens of historic, cathedral-like churches are largely empty — except for growing numbers of empty pews in the Prague First, an English-language weekly newspaper, a fringe-page article reports, in a chilling detail, how the city has become Europe's new capital for demographic forecasting, while an op-ed examines why only 1.2 children per woman are being born in the country to have the next generation.

Change the scene to Rome. We are at the Vatican, swarming with a sea of 150,000 people waiting in St. Peter's Square for Pope Benedict XVI to appear at a special celebration for Catholic children who have made their first communion in the past year. Rock bands and kids cheer, extolling the faith and a roar sweeps through the crowd at the first sighting of the "Pope-mobile," carrying the waving, white-robed Benedict down hand-drawn lanes through the throng. The crowds are wild.

It's an American Catholic voter. Europe is a beautiful and sometimes disconcerting place these days. Is God dead here? Many signs suggest that Europeans think so.

Decline in attendance

Common wisdom has it that alcoholics outnumber practicing Christians and that more Catholics believe in UFOs than believe in God — and that's not even counting the "atheists" who do see the emergence of a post-Christian era in Europe that has profound consequences for the continent and perhaps for the U.S.

Sundays and the letter don't, Vogel writes. "But it would also be a grave mistake to think that the dramatic decline in church attendance is the only sign of a secular political system, where religion does not play an important role."

"Demographic suicide"

Among the consequences of Europe's abandonment of its religious roots and the moral code that derives therefrom is a plunge in its birth rates to below the replacement level. Abortion, both correct, acceptance of gay marriage and casual sex are driving the trend. Europe is "committing demographic suicide," systematically depopulating itself, according to Vogel.

United Nations population statistics back him up.

Not a single Western European country has a fertility rate sufficient to replace the current population, which demographers say requires 2.1 children per family. Germany, Russia, Spain, Poland and Italy all have rates of about 1.3 children, according to the UN. The Czech Republic is at 1.2, and even Roman Catholic Ireland is at 1.5 children. The U.S. rate, which has remained stable, is slightly more than 2 children per woman.

Children, mostly located in Southern and Eastern Europe, have reached levels of fertility unprecedented in human history, according to the UN's World Population Prospects 2004 revision.

As children grow scarce and longevity increases in Europe, the continent is becoming one vast Leisure World. By 2050, the UN projects, more than half of the people in Italy will be 60 or older. By mid-century, populations in 23 European nations will be lower than they are now. Russia will lose 31 million people, Italy 17.7 million. Poland 6.6 million and Germany

By Paul Peters, USA Today

Marxism, Communism, nihilism, atheism and materialism have had a devastating influence. Most of today's generation in Europe does not know Christ. Europeans not only need another Reformation... they need re-evangelization. Many recognize Jesus as a historical figure, but few look to him for spiritual guidance. The two world wars, post-modernism and Enlightenment have devastated their faith. Today, many Europeans are moving beyond indifference to an openly recognizable spiritual hunger..."

Please join with us in prayer for all our European missionaries! Many are working in countries which are openly hostile to the Christian message. None of these things should move us from our firm belief that God is a God Who answers by fire! A fresh move of the Spirit of God could quickly ignite the dry, barren fields of Europe again. It is our prayer that God would continue to speak to people all across the church to *pray - give - go* back into the fields of Europe! Let's see the "waste places" of old Christian Europe become once again "watered garden". (Isaiah 58)

Website Under Redevelopment!

Many have long given up on getting anything new off our old website... I think the only "hits" we were getting were those looking for pictures of what Ken and Jeanie looked like 10 years ago! Well, all that is about to change! We are currently working hard to give kenmorris.org a major renovation making it much more current and interactive... Thanks for clicking by!

Missionary Miracle Mode!

We have officially entered into the Missionary Miracle Mode! This is that wonderful - comfortable position of being up against the wall concerning our budget! The only escape being God once again stepping in and providing a miracle!

Jeanie and I currently live in the "missionary compound" located here in Desoto. These are homes provided for North Texas District missionaries when they arrive home for furlough. They are fully furnished and the rent is cheap! Currently, every duplex is filled with a missionary family... and every missionary family needs about \$3,000 - \$4,000 in additional monthly pledges to return to their field of labor! You're asking the question, 'Is missions work getting more expensive?' The answer is YES! But the alternative is not an option for the Church. One man put it this way, 'We don't have a money

problem... there is plenty out there... we have a time problem! The time it takes to get our missionaries back into their fields of labor.'

- **Our cash budget has been set for us at \$40,000!**

Wow...that's a lot of money. In short, we have to raise 4 years worth of expenses up front.

- **Our monthly pledge budget has increased by \$3,000!**

This is due to the high cost of living, exchange rate and increased work budget which will enable us to plant our second church.

When we say it is a miracle moment, we mean that even if we booked every Sunday & Wednesday night from now until June and received offerings of excess of \$2,000 each, we would still fall short! **God has got to come through!** Please join us in prayer! We told a young congregation back in Scotland we would be back by June! The interim pastor will be leaving in June! If I did not believe in the God Who supplies all our needs according to His riches in glory... I would be a very nervous missionary. Your prayer and consideration are appreciated!



Thank you for praying for the Morris'

www.kenmorris.org www.harvestonline.co.uk

Ken & Jeanie Morris

P.O. Box 832241

Richardson, TX 75083-2241

972 223 7241 214 235 9347