

Correspondence

Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.

From the Editor's postbag

Comments on items received from readers

The importance of gas

A reader has passed to me an advertising supplement to the *Sunday Telegraph* of 2 February about the natural gas industry. We are well aware of the significance of oil to the economies of the world, and the part it may well play in drawing the nations into the Middle East, but the potential significance of natural gas has received very little attention.

The introductory article begins: "Natural gas looks set to rival oil as the energy source of choice for consumer nations. The volatility of oil prices and dwindling crude reserves mean the search is on for alternative fuels to supply the voracious markets of Europe, North America and beyond. A more environmentally friendly fuel source than oil or coal, natural gas is already being used extensively for power generation, and industrial and household consumption, as well as for advanced derivative products and petrochemicals. It is the fastest growing form of energy in the world". The article goes on to give various facts and figures, such as the fact that annual consumption of natural gas is expected to double by 2020, with the EU being the most significant area of growth.

By far the greatest reserves of natural gas are to be found in Russia and the Middle East, with the USA's reserves almost exhausted and Europe's reserves

small in comparison. An earlier 'Editor's Postbag' referred to Gazprom, the enormous Russian company that extracts and markets Russia's natural gas ([Aug. 2001, p. 325](#)). According to the newspaper supplement we are considering, Gazprom is now the EU's largest supplier of gas, and the article in which this is stated is headed, "Aggressive expansion fuels economic growth". Russia, after suffering economic collapse five years ago, now has a rapidly growing economy, thanks to its ability to fulfil Europe's growing fuel needs. There is, of course, a twofold significance here: firstly Russia's growing might, and secondly her economic links with Europe.

Britain's supplies of natural gas are rapidly dwindling, but, according to the supplement, at present Russia's sales of gas to Britain are "limited". The largest gas producer in Western Europe is Norway, and the supplement suggests Norway is likely to become particularly significant as a supplier of gas to Britain, because the two countries are situated either side of the North Sea where the gas supplies are to be found. There is already a well-established pipeline infrastructure linking the two countries. Significantly, Norway is outside the EU, and, should Britain's ties with the EU be broken, as we expect, one can see that Britain would want to turn to Norway to supplement its own

gas supplies, rather than rely on Russian gas coming via Germany.

The only area to rival Russia for gas reserves is the Middle East and North Africa, where large reserves exist in countries ranging from Algeria in the west to Iran in the east. The growing importance of Libya as a supplier of gas as well as oil to Europe has already been referred to in these pages ([April 2002, p. 123](#)). Huge reserves are found in the Gulf area, especially Qatar, and these reserves are of particular importance to the USA, ensuring that this region will continue to have immense strategic significance to the Americans.

The pope clamps down on Protestants taking communion

On the question of Britain and Europe, the coming into office in 1997 of a prime minister with a Roman Catholic wife seemed likely to strengthen rather than weaken links between Britain and the EU, especially as Tony Blair usually attends mass with his family on a Sunday. However, God moves in mysterious ways, and last spring (according to a short article in *The Times* sent by a reader) Mr. Blair received a significant rebuff from the pope. During the course of a visit to Italy, the Blair family visited the Vatican, but, when they went to take communion with the pope, Mr. Blair was not

permitted to take it because he is still an Anglican. To make matters worse, the aged pontiff made clear to Mr. Blair his strong opposition to the joint British and American attack on Iraq. John Paul II then issued an encyclical expressly forbidding non-Catholics like Mr. Blair from taking communion in a Catholic Church. Pressures in all sorts of ways seem to be pushing Britain away from Europe.

Significantly, the greatest unhappiness with the way the EU is heading is coming from the largely Protestant Scandinavian countries (plus Britain, of course), and one wonders whether all these countries will break away from the EU, basing their development on non-EU Norway's gas supplies ([see above](#)). Certainly, any attempt to take Britain into the EU single currency seems to be far off, with Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and some of his Cabinet colleagues apparently not keen, and Mr Blair not prepared to risk losing a referendum, especially now that the Swedes have voted against joining.

Biography of a sixteenth-century heretic

There were many cases of people being put to death in the sixteenth century for their unorthodox beliefs, and one of the most interesting was Michael Servetus, burned at the stake in Geneva in 1553. A reader has sent me a copy of a review in the *Mail on Sunday* of a new book about Servetus (*Out of the Flames*, Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, Century). His particular heresy was that he denied the doctrine of the Trinity, and he was put to death, not by Roman Catholics, but by John Calvin, founder of one of the

main branches of Protestantism, after escaping from imprisonment by the Catholic Inquisition in France. In 1962 a series of eight articles by Brother Edmund Green entitled simply "Servetus" appeared in *The Christadelphian*. Servetus accepted many of the doctrines which Christadelphians believe to be true, though not all.

New Exodus theory

The Miracles of Exodus (published by Continuum) is a new book by a Cambridge University physicist, Professor Colin Humphreys, defending the truth of the events to do with the Exodus from Egypt from a scientific point of view. In an article in *The Times* of 13 June, passed to me by a reader, Professor Humphreys writes specifically about the crossing of the Red Sea. He takes the view that the crossing of the Red Sea took place, not at the head of the Gulf of Suez, as is usually supposed, but at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. The idea that the Gulf of Aqaba was the location of the crossing was one which I considered at some length, and concluded was unconvincing, in a two-part article, "Where is Mount Sinai?" (Apr. 1997, p. 125; May 1997, p. 170). Humphreys bases what he says on the work of two Israeli scientists, Professor Doron Nof and Professor Nathan Paldor, who advance a naturally occurring mechanism to explain the crossing of the Gulf of Suez by the Israelites.

According to Exodus 14:21, "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided". There is a phenomenon known

as 'wind setdown', whereby a strong wind blowing across a body of water drives water in front of it. The water gradually piles up over a number of hours until it reaches what is known as a 'steady state', when it can pile up no higher. It is noteworthy that the Scriptural record is that the wind blew all night before the Israelites could cross on dry land.

The Song of Moses in Exodus 15 refers to the crossing of the Red Sea as follows: "And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea" (v. 8); and the prose record in Exodus 14 says: "the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (v. 29). When the point known as a 'steady state' is reached, the waters then form a wall, just as Exodus says.

But what of the fact that the waters were a wall on both sides of the Israelites? The argument is that this would occur if there was an underwater ridge; the ridge would be dry and there would be water on either side. This is somewhat unconvincing to me, however, for the water on the side of the ridge from which the wind was blowing would surely not be like a wall.

Another difficulty is that, for an east wind to bring about the piling up of the waters in the manner stated, the body of water would need to run east-west, whereas the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba run more or less north-south. Humphreys argues that the ancient Hebrews referred only to the four points of the compass, and did not use more precise terms like 'north-

east'. The Gulf of Aqaba in fact runs from northeast to southwest, and the wind would have been a northeasterly. This is not very convincing, since a look at a map shows that the Gulf varies only a little from due north-south, and the matter remains a problem wherever you place the Exodus.

The Exodus narrative also refers to the fact that, when the Egyptians attempted to cross after the Israelites, "the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them" (14:28). Normally a strong wind dies away gradually, and in these circumstances the water would return only slowly. However, the two Israeli scientists referred to above calculated that, if the wind suddenly ceased, then the water would return rapidly, quickly enough to drown the Egyptians before they could escape.

Some readers might take the view that there is no need to provide a natural explanation for what happened at the Red Sea. However, the explanation offered above still involves the miraculous, for the timing and severity of the phenomenon must have been just right to achieve the desired effect, and it is a strain on one's credulity to suppose that it could have been just a coincidence. God has often used natural phenomena to achieve His purpose, and the reference in Exodus to the "strong east wind" indicates that He did so when Israel left Egypt. Whether what happened can be explained as 'wind setdown' is another matter.

America's murky machinations

God works through various means to achieve His purpose,

and we are often unable to see how developments in the world fit what we believe to be that purpose. An article in the *Financial Times Magazine*, copied to me by a reader, refers to the way two of the most significant features of world events in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the collapse of Communism and the growth of militant Islam, came together in Afghanistan, and the part a Texan congressman played in this.

In 1980 the Russians invaded and conquered Afghanistan. However, the Afghans refused to accept the conquest, and successfully fought back in guerilla warfare against the Soviet occupiers. In February 1989 the Russians finally withdrew, having experienced heavy losses. Their humiliation helped trigger the collapse of the Soviet Empire, which began later that same year. The deciding factor in Russia's defeat was secret American backing for the mujahideen, the name given to the Muslim guerillas who fought so determinedly against the Russian occupying forces. And it was the Texan congressman Charlie Wilson who was chiefly instrumental in getting the US government to channel funds and weapons via the CIA to these guerillas.

But the conflict did not end there. The Russians continued to pump money into Afghanistan to prop up a régime favourable to them, so, again after much pressure from Wilson, money and weapons were channelled to the mujahideen to assist them in overthrowing this régime. The conflict continued well into the nineties, despite the fact that elsewhere in the world the Cold War was effectively over, with the mujahideen continuing to receive American support at Wil-

son's instigation, despite the atrocities they carried out. The Russian-supported régime was overthrown, and the country was plunged into years of civil war amongst rival factions.

America in general, and Charlie Wilson in particular, congratulated itself on the way it had stood up to the Soviet Union's attempt to control Afghanistan. There was talk in the early 1990s of peace being assured for the world. But things were to change. The outcome of the years of civil war was the coming into power in Afghanistan in 1997 of the fanatical Islamic régime known as the Taliban. The country became a centre of Islamic extremism, and the outcome was that terrible event that has become known simply as 9/11. America's covert policy to encourage Islamic extremists in Afghanistan had backfired on them in spectacular fashion. The article concludes as follows:

"The story of Charlie Wilson and the CIA's secret war in Afghanistan is an important, missing chapter of our recent past. Ironically, neither the United States government nor the forces of Islam will want this history to be known. But the full story of America's central role in the Afghan jihad needs to be told and understood for any number of reasons. Clearly it's not helpful for the world of militant Islam to believe that its power is so great that nothing can stop it. But the danger exists for us as well. It may not be welcomed by a government that prefers to see the rising tide of Islamic militancy as having no connection to our policies or our actions. But the terrible truth is that the group of sleeping lions that the United States

roused may well have inspired an entire generation of militant young Muslims to believe that the moment is theirs”.

Militant Islam has put the world in fear of new atrocities. It has united Britain and America and caused a rift between Britain and America on the one hand and France and Germany on the other. It keeps attention continually on the Middle East, and Israel in particular. And all because an American congressman, disturbed by reports of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, determined to do all he could to help those who were resisting it. Truly God works out His purpose in many different ways.

An effect of the Iraq War

Although Saddam Hussein’s régime in Iraq was not an extreme Islamic one, the combined attack by the USA and Britain to overthrow that régime was certainly an outcome of the 11 September attack, even though George Bush’s underlying motives are a matter of continuing dispute. The resultant rift between the English-speaking nations and the main European powers referred to above is something we have expected to occur to fulfil Bible prophecy. On this topic one reader has written:

“The 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq has had other repercussions which appear to jibe directly with Scripture prophecy. Aside from further drawing into position the American ‘king of the south’, his ‘pushiness’ in the face of opposition from the most powerful European Union members and Russia has spurred the EU into considering a far more centralised governmental system

to enable it successfully to stand up to the Americans with a united front; the unilateral actions of the British will not be tolerated in the future. (The pro-American support of some of the smaller or weaker Eastern European states has really been quite negligible.) . . . It is possible that further American escapades in the region may be anticipated to further galvanise the EU into either expansion or greater consolidation”.

High temperatures bring water worries

After a summer of heat wave and drought in many parts of the world, concern is rising at the prospect of major water shortages and resultant wars, as highlighted in an article, “Coming soon: a thirsty years war”, in *The Times* of 31 July. The prospect is indeed alarming, as the following quotations from the article indicate:

“. . . a crisis that is slowly engulfing . . . much of the developing world—and even parts of the developed world. Rising populations, changing weather patterns and increasing industrialisation are making water shortages increasingly common”.

“Of all the social and natural crises we face, the water crisis is the one that lies at the heart of our survival and that of our planet. No region will be spared from the impact of this crisis, which touches every facet of life, from the health of children to the ability of nations to secure food” (quoting Koichoro Matsuura, director-general of Unesco). “[The world is] facing a serious water crisis. All the signs suggest that it is getting

worse and will continue to do so” (quoting from the *World Water Development Report*).

The facts and figures are devastating:

- Disease resulting from poor-quality water is the world’s biggest killer, causing over two million deaths a year
- In the worst-case scenario, by the middle of the century seven billion people could face water shortages
- Fifteen per cent of world agriculture depends on irrigation, with the proportion rapidly rising
- The amount of water available per person will drop by a third by 2029
- In the past fifty years there have been 507 disputes between nations over water, twenty-one of which have led to military action
- There are 263 river basins shared between two or more countries, each with the potential for causing disputes.

As usual, the problem lies with man’s mismanagement. There is plenty of water available, and techniques exist for using it properly and getting clean water to the right places in the right quantity. It is political commitment to deal with the problem that is lacking. The article concludes: “The United Nations is trying—so far in vain—to persuade governments around the world to tackle the global water crisis before it, too, spirals out of control”. In the water crisis we have yet another problem which highlights man’s inability to rule himself properly, and one which may yet be a cause of significant wars, notably between Israel and surrounding nations, where water has long been a cause of contention.

The end of the world is not very nigh

When one considers the vastness of the universe, it is surprising how confident physicists and astronomers are when it comes to calculating the age of the universe and the time it will last. This was brought home to me on reading a cutting from the *Daily Mail* of 22 August sent to me by a reader. It consisted of an article entitled, "How the universe will end", and it made the following statement at the beginning: "It is a modern paradox that although no one is able to forecast the weather for more than a week ahead, the laws of physics allow astronomers to peer into the almost unimaginable depths of future time and predict when, and how, the universe will die".

According to scientists, the solar system, of which Earth is a part, came into being about

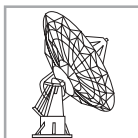
five billion years ago, an unfathomable length of time compared with the 4,000 years or so of man's recorded history. In about 800 million years' time the sun will have become so hot that all life will have perished from the earth. Eventually, however, so it is calculated, the stars, of which the sun is one, will all go out, and matter itself will gradually destruct, leaving only a void, but only after the universe has been in existence for a period of one-followed-by-a-hundred-noughts years.

Such lengths of time are surely meaningless to us puny, mortal humans, whose lifespans are at best limited to a hundred years or so. In truth we cannot begin to fathom either the immense distances involved in the universe or the immense periods of time involved in its history, even supposing that the calculations of scientists are cor-

rect. It is noteworthy that, though God is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 90:2), and though His purpose is that we might come to share His immortality, His revelation to us about our future is limited in practical terms to the thousand years of His millennial Kingdom. This is surely because we cannot in our present state of mortality comprehend what it will be like beyond that time, when sin and death are no more, and God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). No doubt when we are made immortal we will have the capacity to receive instruction about what lies beyond the Millennium.

In the meantime, we can ignore the pointless theorising of men, in the sure and certain knowledge that God will not permit His universe to finish up as a cold, dark void.

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Science

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Irreducible complexity

Alan Fowler

IT IS GENERALLY agreed that Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' is the only feasible mechanism for evolution, and random genetic mutations are the only inheritable sources of increased fitness. So those who believe the giraffe's long neck was acquired through evolution argue that this happened because every mutation that resulted in a longer than average neck conferred a survival advantage and was therefore passed on to the next generation. In a similar way, evolutionists maintain that our exceedingly complex eyes could have evolved by natural selection because even a very small increase in the percep-

tion of light would confer an advantage, and they postulate a series of advantageous mutations leading to the formation of the human eye.

In chapter 6 of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin dealt with "Organs of extreme Perfection and Complication". He wrote: "To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances . . . could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd to the highest degree". Darwin then proceeded to look at examples of increasing degrees of sophistication of eyes across the animal kingdom, and suggested that these represented the stages by which the human eye