

This week has seen the pope lurch into the headlines in ways that are disconcerting to many. The most interesting aspect of the stories is the fact that he has been openly criticized by Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel and advised to "step down" by a prominent Catholic theologian in Germany.

The pope set off a stormy reaction early in the week when he saw fit to "rehabilitate" a British bishop who was previously excommunicated for his denial of the Holocaust. The bishop actually went so far as to say that no Jews were gassed to death at the hands of the Nazis. Holocaust denial is the equivalent of a felony in Germany, a crime that carries a guaranteed jail term. Emotions still run high on this subject, as illustrated by Rabbis severing ties with the Vatican and the highly unusual "rebuke" by the German Chancellor.

As for the call for the pope to "step down," no such thing has ever happened since the fourteen hundreds, and even then it was not a case of simple resignation.

The other news on this front concerned the Vatican's assertion that it will not be bound by Italian law. This seems something of a formality, in that the Vatican has long operated as a sovereign entity. Does it mean that the Vatican will attempt to assert legal authority elsewhere in Europe as some have suggested? We'll be watching.

In the Middle East, Iran apparently successfully launched its own satellite into orbit this week. The gravest concern about the event revolves around the three stage solid booster rocket used to transport the satellite into space. It illustrates beyond dispute that Iran already has intercontinental capability with rockets able to deliver nuclear warheads. The head of the UN's nuclear regulatory agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency, responded by opining that Iran may still be two to five years away from completing work on a nuclear warhead and urging the West to continue the diplomatic approach.

Our new administration has reportedly already been pursuing the diplomatic approach, which is said to have begun through back channels even before the inauguration.

Israel is scheduled to hold national elections next week, and Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to be Israel's next Prime Minister, though the outcome is not assured. He may be less inclined to bet Israel's survival on the good will and honesty of Iran's Shia theocracy. In a statement this week Netanyahu pronounced, "Iran will not acquire nuclear arms, period. We will resort to whatever means it takes to prevent this happening."

Here in the U.S., "change" is on the march. National support has reportedly slipped precipitously for the trillion-dollar "stimulus" plan currently awaiting a vote in the Senate as details of the enormous expenditures trickle out through the alternative media. And sure enough, dozens of the items funded in this monstrosity are nothing short of outrageous. Particularly when viewed in the light of the "emergency – we have to do it right now" rhetoric. "We may never recover..." the new president intoned, unless massive expenditures are requisitioned immediately for a host of projects that are anything but urgent. Murray Allat in Sydney tells me they just pulled this stunt in

Australia, spending an amount that may even supercede U.S. proposals when viewed on a per-capita basis. Last I heard, that “stimulus—rescue plan” is also awaiting Senate action Down Under.

Economists seem to agree that aggressive action is needed to deter a deep recession in the United States. But there is serious concern over the incomprehensible sums being thrown around by the politicians and the list of many bizarre projects in the proposal that can only be described as frivolous, and certainly not critical to the national economy. The party in power has made it abundantly clear that they intend to force through the potentially ruinous expenditures, rapidly, maybe over the weekend.

Certain commentators, not just on talk radio, are beginning to use language such as, “The country is slipping away.” And they’re right. But the slide began long ago. It’s been made possible, actually inevitable, by decades of secular indoctrination through our educational institutions and through the mainstream media. Polls are beginning to show that a growing percentage of Americans are worried about what the future may hold. And with the rhetoric of impending “economic catastrophe,” “environmental catastrophe” its no wonder. The problem is our Government wants to play “god” on every imaginable subject. It may not be long before a great many begin to look elsewhere for their salvation. We can only hope, pray, and continue to expose the alternative of repentance and obedience to God’s laws at a time when man’s laws increasingly contradict them.

The Garner Ted Armstrong program this week offered material on the observance of the Sabbath, and brought 334 requests with one hundred thirty one first time contacts. Please remember Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gulley in your prayers. She had a serious stroke during the Feast of Tabernacles, and has improved considerably, but is still in rehab and not yet able to get up and around. Mr. and Mrs. Gulley have been a huge help to all of us, and we all hope and pray that they’ll be able to resume normal life soon. Also Mr. Tree Austin has been in the hospital, and needs prayers.

Mr. Dennis Shifflet died Tuesday. He was a big help to Mr. David Overstreet, Sr. in Richmond, VA and a reliable presence at the Feast. I’m sure his wife Cathy would appreciate our prayers as well.

Until next week,

Mark Armstrong