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## The Canada Post

### Shapiro may be remarkably prescient

IN the odd chill that has marked the summer of 2009, an apocalyptic novel may seem a more suitable holiday diversion than, say, Agatha Christie. Which may be what Frank Shapiro, a historian living in Israel, had in mind with this his first novel which posits an End Times scenario that centres around the whereabouts of the treasures from the Second Jewish Temple destroyed in 70AD and their potential impact on 21st century politics.

The year is 2010 and Chief Rabbi Levi of Israel believes the temple treasures, which include a giant gold menorah, can not only be recovered but are essential to building a new temple in Jerusalem, the fabled Third Temple. He also believes these treasures have, since the first century, been located in ancient catacombs in Rome and that the new pope, Urban IX, named after Urban II who initiated the First Crusade, knows exactly where they are.

Still more astonishing is the fact that the Pope is pondering how the possible return of the Temple Treasures might affect the course of Israel's history. Would the Third Temple be built? And why is the Catholic Church so interested anyway? Moreover, with so many disparate groups competing for and against building a new temple, the unearthing of such historic treasures could only mean war ... and not just war but Armageddon and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ of biblical prophecy.

Shapiro's plot is certainly intriguing. Yet his characters are inadequately drawn and the dialogue laboured, suggesting his book might have been better served with rigorous editing. How else to explain two different spellings of the surname of a central character?

Nevertheless, Shapiro may be remarkably prescient. Mere weeks after his novel was published this spring came news that Pope Benedict XVI has created an archeological superintendent of the Roman catacombs -- a post that did not previously exist.

Under the headline "Great Discoveries" awaiting in the Catacombs, Zenit, the Vatican's news service, reported that Fabrizio Bisconti has been named archeological superintendent of this subterranean network of tunnels used by early Christians during their Roman persecution. According to Zenit, Bisconti is "a figure of unquestioned importance at the international level" with many accomplishments to his credit, the latest being the discovery in June of the most ancient icon of St. Paul in the catacombs of St. Thecla.

"Great discoveries await us," proclaimed Archbishop Ravasi. "We do not exclude the possibility of finding surprises."

Might Shapiro's fictional menorah be among them? And if so, might such a revelation not spark yet another international crisis? Shapiro will also have noted that Chief Palestinian justice Sheik Taysir Tamimi has been claiming that Jewish temples dating back to King Solomon in 10th century BC never existed and that Jews have no historic tie to Jerusalem. Recent IsraelNN.com reports that The Temple Institute has already begun work on the sacrificial altar for the predicted Third Temple will also not have escaped his authorial radar. "Jerusalem is an Arab and Islamic city and it always has been so," Sheik Tamimi said in late August. Contradicting finds from scores of archeological digs, Tamimi claims all of Israel's archeological work since 1967 has not proven "that Jews ever had a history or presence in Jerusalem, or that their ostensible temple had ever existed." Considered the second most important Palestinian cleric after the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Tamimi was also reported to have asserted that the Al Aqsa Mosque was built by angels, and Abraham, Moses and Jesus were prophets for Islam.

Grist for a Shapiro sequel perhaps? *Heather Harrington*