

Awake!

December 22, 1992



Something Better Than
Christmas Giving



Something Better Than Christmas Giving 3-12

Millions of people enjoy giving. Yet, at Christmastime, when hundreds of millions give more than at any other time of the year, many do not find happiness in giving. Why? What can be done?



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GIVING A Source of Joy

By Awake! correspondent in Germany

WHOMO does not enjoy receiving a lovely gift? How heartwarming to know that somebody cares! Similarly gratifying, however, is the joy of giving. In fact, according to Jesus, the founder of Christianity, "there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

The Bible reports on many instances of giving, sometimes lavish giving at that. When the queen of Sheba experienced firsthand King Solomon's wisdom, "she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold and a very great deal of balsam oil and precious stones." (1 Kings 10:10) Just the gold itself would be worth over 46 million dollars in modern values! And Pharaoh of Egypt once presented one of his daughters with the gift of an entire city!—1 Kings 9:16.

But gifts do not have to be extravagant to be a source of joy. You may remember the kind Samaritan in Jesus' illustration, who spontaneously helped a fellow human in need. (Luke 10:30-37) Or the Christian congregation in Corinth that sent their needy brothers in Jerusalem a "kind gift."—1 Corinthians 16:3.

Probably the best-known example of giving mentioned in the Bible, however, is that of the astrologers—commonly known as the wise men—who brought gifts to the child Jesus. Many people base their custom of giving gifts at Christmastime on this event.—Matthew 2:2-11.

What About Christmas Giving?

Undeniably, many sincerely enjoy getting into what they call the Christmas spirit—the spirit of giving. Some of them plan well in advance, taking pride in finding unusual gifts and seeking out appropriate cards. The latter, by the way, appeared for the first time during the 1840's in England, although exactly who introduced them is a matter of dispute. But be it a gift or a card, many find real joy in discovering that special something for that special someone.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that many Christmas givers do not fall into this category. A German store owner observed regarding Christmas shoppers: "The closer we get to Christmas Eve, the more nervous people get. Eventually, they simply settle for anything they can find."

Pushing through overcrowded department stores in a time-consuming search for suitable gifts causes some shoppers to grumble about the stress, the rush, and the pressure. According to an Austrian newspaper, every third customer complains about "the hectic pace," saying he will be relieved "once the hurry-scurry is all over." And German teenagers, when asked how they felt about Christmas, responded with such comments as, "It gets on my nerves," "You never know what to give," and, "It's all so expensive."

Obviously not everyone is experiencing the

greater "happiness in giving" of which Jesus spoke. No doubt this is largely because Christmas has been so commercialized, long a thorn of irritation for many. According to *The World Book Encyclopedia*, "as much as a fourth of the yearly sales of many stores come at Christmastime." Evidently the "Jingle Bells" the world of commerce loves to hear the most

is played by the jingling bells of its cash registers.

Clearly, Christmas giving often fails to produce the joy that giving should bring. "I dread Christmas," confessed a Catholic woman.

No wonder the propriety of Christmas giving is being questioned. Does it really make sense?

Does Christmas Giving Make Sense?

MOST Christmas spending is done because giving gifts at that time of year is the expected thing to do. If one doesn't give, one has violated an entrenched custom. But economist James S. Henry, writing in *The New Republic*, criticizes such "forced giving" as joy-killing and wasteful.

"Mistargeted giving is one indication of this waste," he explains. "According to New York department stores, each year about 15 percent of all retail dollar purchases at Christmas are returned. Allowing for the fact that many misdirected gifts are retained . . . up to a third of purchases may be ill-suited to their recipients."

Really, does it make sense to save all year to buy gifts that others may not need or want? And does it make sense to try to impress others with expensive gifts?

"One particularly noxious aspect of Christmas consumption is 'conspicuous giving,'" claims Henry. "Luxury gifts," he says, "are designed precisely for those who are least in need of any present at all ('the person who has everything'). Most such high-priced gifts are given at Christmas; the fourth quarter, according to a sampling of New York department stores, provides more than half the year's diamond, watch, and fur sales."

Awake!

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However, even expensive gifts don't often make the recipients happy, especially when they are given to paper over a troubled relationship. According to Canadian doctor Richard Allon, "if you can't be nice to one another all year, you won't make up for it by an expensive gift. You won't expiate your own guilt, and you'll probably give some to the other person."

Sadly, millions of people in developing lands lack the most basic necessities of life, yet those in industrial nations often seem to lack only in appreciation of their abundance. Christmas gifts are received with indifference—"what should I do with it?"—or with annoyance—"I certainly didn't want *this*"—or possibly even with anger—"the gift I gave cost at least twice as much!" No wonder a German child-protection group concluded that at Christmas too much is given and often too thoughtlessly.

Moreover, Christmas magnifies human inequities, causing tremendous pressures and unhappiness. Some do not have enough money to buy gifts, and in the United States, this apparently leads to more robberies during the Christmas season than at any other time of the year. Economist Henry reported: "Police suspect that all this property crime is because criminals too are propelled by the need to fill their family stockings."

Many will agree with columnist Tom Harpur, who wrote in the Toronto, Canada, *Sun-*

day Star: "Underneath all the forced merriment, I know Christmas is increasingly a time of deep unease, dissatisfaction, guilt and sheer exhaustion to millions in our society."

'But the troubles are worth it for the sake of the children,' someone may argue. Yet, is Christmas giving really beneficial to children?

What It Does to Children

"Although this is supposed to be a 'happy' time of year," observed school counselor Betty Poloway, "there are a lot of unhappy children." Why? How could Christmas giving be harmful to children?

Susan James, mother of three young children, reported: "I watched my children tear apart their presents, one after the other. When the end came, they stood in this mess asking for more! They are not greedy children and yet all of the gifts, all of the buildup, so overwhelmed them that they became greedy."

Karen Andersson, chief of pediatric psychology at a hospital in Connecticut, U.S.A., described the problem: "It's too much to walk down Christmas morning and see all these goodies. They frantically open each and every toy and don't have a chance to focus on any item. For the child who might be hyperactive or impulsive, or who's easily overexcited even during the calmest of situations, Christmas can be devastating."

"Gifts don't bring the happiness they once did," noted a German newspaper in an article

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about Christmas. One woman lamented: "It used to be that children were satisfied with getting a good book, a pair of gloves, or some other small item. But my grandchild now tells me: 'Grandma, this year I want a computer!'"

Yes, Christmas giving cultivates greed and selfishness. "One has only to visit any [toy store] at this time of year," economist Henry pointed out, "to see the impact of this season's extraordinary pressures on child-parent relations: distraught mothers dragging tiny toy addicts kicking and screaming away from the latest high-priced, cheesy offerings."

But there are even more serious problems associated with Christmas giving.

Christmas Gifts and Truth

Ask a young child where his gifts came from, and what will he most likely answer? According to a *New York Times* poll, 87 percent of American children between the ages of three and ten believe in Santa Claus. Many parents perpetuate this belief, asking: "What do you want Santa to bring you this year?" Yet, what are the consequences?

The experience of Cynthia Keeler, reported in New York's *Daily News*, illustrates. "Mom," asked her seven-year-old son, Britton, "is there really a Santa Claus?"

Cynthia was evasive, as many parents are when asked that question. "What do you think?" she asked.

Britton said that his friends told him that there isn't one, but that he wasn't sure. Then he started to cry. "I got to know, Mom," he said between the tears.

"If he wouldn't have cried, I probably wouldn't have told him," Cynthia said. "But it was a matter of life and death for him. He just needed to have the answer. I told him there wasn't a real Santa."

The *Daily News* reported: "Still crying, Britton Keeler confronted his mother with the accusation all parents fear when the jig is

up and Santa Claus has been demasked: 'Why did you lie about it?'"

The consequences of parental deception are often devastating, as Bruce Roscoe, professor of family studies at Central Michigan University, U.S.A., said: "The child finds out mom lied and all the other children were right." As a result, Professor Roscoe explained, the child often questions other things his parents have told him.

Fred Koenig, professor of social psychology at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.A., emphasized: "When they do find out, it really hurts the credibility of parents." He added: "It throws doubt onto a lot of things." The child might think that "maybe the whole religion thing is just claptrap."

Surely, it does not make good sense to perpetuate a lie by telling children that some mythical character provides gifts for them. Yet, didn't visitors bring gifts to the babe Jesus on his birthday? So wouldn't he approve of giving gifts at Christmas today?

A Christian Practice?

The Bible does say that wise men, or astrologers, brought gifts to Jesus. However, Christmas giving is not patterned after their example because they *did not exchange gifts with one another*. More important, they did not give their gifts at Jesus' birth but at a later time. Their actions were in harmony with the ancient custom of honoring rulers. Note that the Bible record says that when they arrived Jesus was no longer in a manger but was living in a house. That is why Herod, based on what they had told him, decreed that all boys two years of age and under be killed.—Matthew 2:1-18.

Also consider: Isn't it strange that on the supposed birthday of Jesus, he himself receives nothing? He may not even be given the

slightest consideration! Really, where did the custom of Christmas giving originate?

Writing in the Los Angeles *Independent*, Diane Bailey explained: "Exchanging gifts dates back to ancient Rome, when the people would trade simple token gifts during ceremonies of sun worship and the new year."

Under the headline "Unwrapping Yule Traditions," Anita Sama wrote in a Gannett News Service story: "Long before Christian observances, exchanging presents was part of the winter celebrations. The Romans gave each other branches from a holy grove of trees, then moved to more elaborate items

symbolizing good wishes for the coming year—silver, gold and honeyed treats."

The truth is, Christmas is a pagan celebration that was adopted by Christendom. December 25 is, not the birth date of Jesus Christ, but a date linked with ancient licentious pagan feasting that early Christians avoided.—See box, "What Is the Real Origin of Christmas?" on the following pages.

If Jesus Christ were on earth today, how would he feel about Christmas giving?

How Jesus Views Giving

Jesus certainly does not condemn giving. On the contrary, always being willing to give unselfishly of himself in the service of others, he taught his disciples: "Practice giving." And showing that giving would result in the givers themselves being blessed, he added: "And people will give to you."—Luke 6:38.

However, Jesus was not here referring to the exchanging of gifts. Rather, he was pointing out the universal truth that unselfish giving is generally reciprocated. This is especially true when the one



Does it make sense to deceive children by telling them that Santa Claus brings them presents?

giving has a proper motive and loves another "intensely from the heart."—1 Peter 1:22.

Love does not demand payment for its services, so Jesus recommended: "When making gifts of mercy, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, that your gifts of mercy may be in secret." The giver properly does not call attention to himself or his gift,

yet he will not go unrewarded. Jesus showed this when he added: "Your Father who is looking on in secret will repay you." (Matthew 6:3, 4) Further, the giver must, as the Bible says, "do just as he has resolved in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."—2 Corinthians 9:7.

What Is the Real Origin of Christmas?

INFORMED people realize that December 25 is not the day Jesus Christ was born. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledges: "The date of Christ's birth is not known. The Gospels indicate neither the day nor the month."

Further, it is well documented that Christmas and its customs were adopted from non-Christian sources. *U.S. Catholic*, in fact, said: "It is impossible to separate Christmas from its pagan origins."

The Encyclopedia Americana explained: "Most of the customs now associated with Christmas were not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church. Saturnalia, a Roman feast celebrated in mid-December, provided the model for many of the merry-making customs of Christmas. From this celebration, for example, were derived the elaborate feasting, the giving of gifts, and the burning of candles."

Regarding the custom of gift giving, the journal *History Today* noted: "The giving of

presents at the midwinter feast almost certainly began as a magical more than as merely a social custom. Saturnalia presents included wax dolls, given to children. A charming custom, no doubt, by times of record, but with a macabre past: even contemporaries thought this probably a vestige of human sacrifice, of children, to aid the sowing."

The New York Times of December 24, 1991, featured an article on the origins of Christmas customs, including gift giving. Simon Schama, professor of history at Harvard University, wrote: "Christmas itself was superimposed over the ancient festivals that celebrated the winter solstice . . . In the third century, when sun cults like the Mithraic religion of Persia found their way to Rome, days in December were given over to celebrate the rebirth of Sol Invictus: the invincible sun. . . .

"The early Church in Rome had a particularly hard battle against two other great pagan festivals, the week-long Saturnalia, which be-



So the giving that pleases Christ is motivated by love, is practiced without expecting anything in return, and is not done grudgingly or under compulsion. How different such giving is from so much of the giving done at Christmas!

Giving that is a source of joy, therefore, is not dependent upon the calendar or upon customs. It also reveals nothing about the size

of a giver's pocketbook, only something about the size of his heart. Indeed, Christmas has misled millions into giving the wrong things, often for the wrong reasons. Why not, then, try something better than Christmas giving? Try the kind of giving that brings rich blessings and real joy, which is the subject of the next article.

gan Dec. 17, and the Kalends, which greeted the New Year. The first festival was a time of licensed misrule, often presided over by a lord of merriment, not so much Santa as fat Saturn himself, the orgiast of eating, drinking and other kinds of naughtiness. It was during Kalends, when the year changed, however, that gifts were ritually exchanged, often tied to the boughs of greenery that decorated houses during the festivities.

"The attitude of the early church toward all this indecent jollity was predictably frosty. Its fathers, notably the fulminating St. John Chrysostom, urged no compromise with heathen abominations. . . . Since there was no general agreement about the exact date of the birth of Jesus . . . , it must have seemed helpful to have it supersede the Saturnalia . . . So the rebirth of the sun became instead the birth of the Son of God

"In the same way, the Kalends were replaced by the Feast of the Epiphany, and the gifts and trinkets that pagan Romans had given each other became instead the homage paid by the three kings to the new King of the World. By the middle of the fourth century, the basic features of the Christmas calendar were set for good."

While informed people readily acknowledge the pagan origin of Christmas and its customs, many argue that such origin really does not matter. Responding to Professor Schama's article, early this year a retired rabbi wrote in a letter to the *Times* editor: "The origins of an institution have nothing to do with its value to-

day." Regarding Christmas and other such celebrations, he claimed: "Their celebrants endow them with a new meaning that gives purpose to their own lives and lifts their spirits in exultation."

Yet, do Christmas celebrations lift spirits in exultation and produce fine Christian fruitage? Frankly, as readily acknowledged, the fruitage is commonly bad, not good. Moreover, should Christians borrow from pagan religious celebrations? The Bible urges: "Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness? Further, what harmony is there between Christ and Belial? . . . Therefore get out from among them, and separate yourselves," says Jehovah, "and quit touching the unclean thing."—2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

Remember, too, what Jesus said about worship of Almighty God: "Those worshiping him must worship with spirit and truth." (John 4:24) Thus, if our worship is to be acceptable to God, it must be based on truth. Yet, Christmas is promoted as the birthday of Jesus Christ even though it is not. And what about the supposed magical gift-bringers of Christmas, such as Santa Claus? When children are led to believe that gifts are received from such ones, does this not actually deceive the children?

If you really care about God, you will obey his command to quit participating in that which is religiously unclean. Do you care enough about truth to shun a holiday that features lies?

Something Better Than Christmas Giving



A beautiful gift—your time!

SI X-YEAR old Christopher told me, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that at Christmas he gets 'nothing at all.' But he spoke with no trace of disappointment. Alexander (8) expressed himself similarly, saying: 'We are Jehovah's Witnesses.'

Thus the German newspaper *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* began an article about a family that the paper says "ignores Christmas because it is not the date of Jesus' birth and because it has

pagan roots." But aren't Christopher and Alexander to be pitied? Not at all, since, as the article pointed out, the boys' toy shelves bear no evidence of parental neglect.

However, some parents attending a parent-teacher discussion in southern Germany charged that the failure of Jehovah's Witnesses to give Christmas gifts to their children makes them feel insecure. Yet, this isn't true, as their teacher noted. She said that the "children of Jehovah's Witnesses express themselves freely, are well balanced, and are fully able to explain their faith, something other children cannot do."

Indeed, tens of thousands of families throughout the world have replaced Christmas giving with something better, making it a point to bring their children gifts year-round. This has proved to be a source of joy for all.

One advantage is that it makes for many happy occasions in the year, and the children can appreciate each individual gift more. Another advantage is that the children know that it is their parents who are giving the gifts out of love, and their appreciation goes to them. The parents are not pouring out money and effort only to have their children's gratitude go to some imaginary Santa Claus or to have them become ingrates, feeling that it is Santa's job to bring presents and that no thanks are due.

The Gift of Excelling Value

Often Dominik, age ten, and Tina, age six, find small surprises from their parents—a piece of chocolate on the pillow, a pen or notebook they can use at school, or an appropriate toy to keep them occupied during the winter months. But what do they appreciate the most? Their parents answer: "When we spend time with them—for example, playing in the snow."

Many other parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses concur. "In this hectic world," Edelgard explains, "time is the most important thing I can give my children." And young ones agree! Ursula says her children rank time spent together on family outings as being "the best gift of all." Even the chairman of a teachers' union in Germany recently said that the finest Christmas gifts parents can give their children are time and patience.

No doubt about it, the giving of oneself—one's time, concern, and attention—whether it be to one's family or to one's friends, is a gift of truly excelling value. That such gifts need not be confined to certain days of the year should be obvious.

Joyful Giving That Satisfies

Consider examples of Jehovah's Witnesses who share in something better than Christmas giving. Wilfried and Inge in Germany said: "We generally give gifts spontaneously, although we do plan larger ones." Similarly, Dieter and Debora make a conscious effort to provide gifts for their young son throughout the year. They explain that "the size or the value of the gift is secondary, and large or expensive gifts are rare."

Many children *expect* gifts at Christmastime, so the element of surprise is lost. Helga says her "children are more joyful when they get unexpected gifts than they are when they get things on occasions when gifts are expected." Natascha, a 15-year-old, agrees that "it's nicer to receive a surprise gift that comes from the heart than one given at a fixed time because custom demands."

Similarly, it is important to be alert to the kind of gifts that children enjoy. Regarding this, Fortunato, who also lives in Germany, reports: "The gifts we provide are mostly things the children have indicated they would like to have. But we try to provide them at an

But Won't the Children Miss It?

Rebecca, 16: "I don't miss Christmas, since I get gifts all year round. I enjoy a surprise gift far more than I do a forced one."

Tina, 12: "I really enjoy getting *suitable* gifts, not at a set time, but at any time during the year—and not gifts for which I have to say thank you and yet really do not even want."

Birgit, 15: "All the gifts in the world are worthless if there are problems in the family. That is why we do many things together as a family."

Janosch, 12: "We children love our parents even when they don't give us any presents. Their love is a grand gift in itself."



unexpected moment. You should see their joy!"

Parents also find that giving children a gift when they are at home sick in bed cheers them up. Others provide gifts before school vacation to help keep the children occupied. For example, before vacation, Stefan was given a microscope. "It came as a total surprise," his father reports, "and he literally jumped for joy." Indeed, spontaneous, uncomelled giving brings great happiness both to the giver and to the receiver.

True, children have wishes of their own. Jörg and Ursula explain: "When our daughter tells us what she would like, we talk to her about it. Is her wish reasonable? Is the item

appropriate to her age? Do we have room for it? If we cannot satisfy her wish immediately, we at least keep it in mind and try to comply at an appropriate occasion later on." Of course, it is wise not to spoil children by satisfying their every whim, which would deprive them of the joy that receiving gifts can bring.

Parents who practice giving pass on to their children a spirit that will be joyfully reflected. Says ten-year-old Sebastian: "I don't have to wait for holidays to make my parents or sisters happy. I just need to be in a good mood and have a few coins in my pocket."

Families of Jehovah's Witnesses find that gifts of another kind, too, are much better than Christmas giving. These are planned trips or excursions, say to a zoo, a museum, an exhibition, or a place in the country. These gifts are both educational and truly enjoyable for young ones.

The Blessings of Joyful Giving

By applying Bible principles in giving, we will avoid the pressure and frustration that go with Christmas giving. And remember, giving of our time and abilities to edify and build others up mentally and spiritually is a gift more valuable than material presents. This superior giving strengthens family ties, cements friendships, and brings true joy all year long not only to the receiver but especially to the giver.—Acts 20:35.

So instead of the customary forced giving at Christmastime this year, why not try a different approach? Why not try a better way?

How Quake Victims Were Helped

ON MAY 23, 1992, the Palm Springs, California, U.S.A., *Desert Sun* reported "what the fearsome jolt of a 7.5 quake could do to the Coachella Valley." It said: "The damage could be catastrophic. In one worst-case scenario prepared for a government study, the quake:

- Kills 5,000 people
- Injures another 15,000
- Renders 50,000 homeless."

Astoundingly, on Sunday, June 28—only a few weeks later—a quake registering 7.5 on the Richter scale rocked the area! But it was centered near the small desert towns of Landers and Yucca Valley, some 40 to 60 miles from the larger towns of the Coachella Valley. No earthquake during the year had been more powerful anywhere in the world. And in California, a state known for its earthquakes, only three during this century had been stronger.

Less powerful quakes have killed thousands. In Armenia, 55,000 died in a 6.8 earthquake in 1988, and one of 6.2 magnitude devastated Nicaragua's capital, Managua, in 1972, killing over 5,000. California's quake was many times more powerful, since each number on the Richter scale represents an earthquake ten times as strong as one of the next lower magnitude. Thus, an earthquake of 7.5 magnitude is ten times as strong as one of 6.5.

What casualties and damage did California's big quake cause? How were victims affected, and how were they helped?

A Morning of Terror

On Saturday night, June 27, the rumbling earth caused some residents around Landers to sleep outdoors. The earthquakes so frightened seven-year-old Kelsey Tharp and her four-year-old brother that they were permitted to sleep in their parents' room. "Sunday, at 4:58 a.m." said their mother, "a sound like that of a freight train roared through our home. I was hit on the head by our falling lamp; my husband was tossed out of bed. It was as if our home were in a giant popcorn popper. Everything was bouncing."

Roger Terfehr, who lives a few miles away, explained: "It seemed as if a giant monster were under our house and had grabbed the foundation, shaking it violently. The entire house creaked and swayed. Everything was crashing around us! The shaking seemed to last forever, although later we were told the main quake lasted only 32 seconds."

Before dawn that Sunday morning, Terry Bogart was on the road to help with construction work on an Assembly Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. "First I thought that something

was wrong with my truck. When I stopped, the truck was literally bouncing. Power lines were swaying, and transformers were exploding.

"I knew I had to get back to my wife and daughters. On Highway 247, I came to places where the road had buckled up several feet. When I stopped to set up flares, a lady with her baby drove up. She asked about road conditions ahead. Dressed only in a housecoat, she appeared to be in shock. I suggested that she follow me home where my wife gave her some clothes and formula for her baby."

Fritz Grainer, an overseer of Jehovah's Witnesses, notes: "Everyone was outside when the second quake hit, only about three hours after the first one. It centered near Big Bear, over 30 miles to the west. Some of us were at the Bogarts' home by then. The ground moved in waves under our feet. Later the effect was humorously given the name land surfing." That quake measured 6.6.

At that moment, Warren and Ernestine Stoker, residents of Yucca Valley, were in St. Petersburg, Russia, where it was late afternoon. They had just returned to their hotel after having attended the final sessions of the convention of Jehovah's Witnesses when they learned about the quake. They immediately turned on the TV and saw pictures of the destruction that had occurred about a mile from the office building where they work in Yucca Valley.

"While we were watching the telecast," Ernestine explained, "the Big Bear quake hit. The reporter asked someone off-camera, 'Do I get under my desk now? Can I go ahead and continue with the [Landers/Yucca Valley] earthquake?'" Understandably, the couple were anxious about the welfare of their family and friends and about their property back home.

Not a Worst-Case Scenario

Almost a thousand miles away—in Denver, Colorado, and Boise, Idaho—motion of the water in swimming pools was reported. Over half a million people were affected by a black-out. Buildings collapsed, chimneys toppled, landslides blocked highways, and the earth split open. One family's swimming pool was sucked into the ground. It looked like a bomb crater.

Yet, remarkably, only one person was killed in the quakes, a three-year-old boy who was struck by debris from a collapsing fireplace at a Yucca Valley home. But over 400 suffered injuries, and property damage was about \$100 million. A total of 6,321 homes were damaged, including 595 that were destroyed and 2,119 that suffered major damage. In the Landers Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, the homes of ten families were so badly damaged that they couldn't live in them. Some had travel trailers to move into, and others were invited to stay with fellow Witnesses.

What explains the amazingly low death toll? "The main thing," noted John Hall, an engineer at the California Institute of Technology, "is that it happened in the middle of nowhere." And Caltech seismologist Egill Hauksson said: "When you think about it, earthquakes don't kill people. Buildings do. And there are few heavy, big buildings out there."

Another important reason is that houses in the area are of wood-frame construction. They move and flex in an earthquake and don't easily collapse, as have other types of buildings even in less severe earthquakes. Also, the building codes in California are strict, requiring, for example, that homes be bolted to their foundations.

Nevertheless, the quakes left hundreds homeless and thousands without water. Nearly a week later, up to 10,000 persons still



A three-foot rise in the earth occurred just below the house on a hill in Landers, California. Quake forces lifted and ripped apart solid granite

had no running water. What was done to help the victims?

What Jehovah's Witnesses Did

Immediately, as it was becoming light, congregation overseers of Jehovah's Witnesses were out checking on the welfare of others. Within the hour all in the congregations were accounted for. No one was seriously hurt. The two Kingdom Halls in the area were damaged but were structurally sound.

By midmorning, arrangements had been made to bring in bottled drinking water. The rest of the day was spent making emergency repairs on broken gas lines and determining who was homeless. Yet, even some with structurally sound homes slept outdoors during the nights following the quake.

By noon Monday, 6,000 gallons of water in a water truck was on site at the Landers Kingdom Hall, as well as 1,000 gallons of bottled drinking water. The rest of the day was spent delivering water to those in need. It was determined that 47 homes of the Witnesses were damaged—32 in Landers, 10 in Yucca Valley,

and 5 in Joshua Tree. During the week, plans were made to repair these.

Saturday, July 4, was the date set for the work, and congregations in the surrounding area were notified. Local Witnesses made preparations to feed the workers. The police were notified, since roads were still closed. So when Saturday came, the police waved the Witnesses through the roadblocks.

Over 500 volunteers showed up at the Landers and Yucca Valley Kingdom Halls early Saturday morning. There they received work assignments that included electrical repairs, plumbing, cleanup of damage, and the leveling of mobile homes on their foundations.

The following day the front page of the San Bernardino *Sun* said: "Around Landers, population roughly 4,000, the Jehovah's Witnesses took the lead in rebuilding." Reporting on one of the repair projects, the paper said: "Work on the University Boulevard home looked like construction-on-the-run. Two



Quake-jolted house located two miles from epicenter in Yucca Valley, California

dozen workers speedily straightened walls, built doorways and applied new paneling. All for a congregation family few of the volunteers knew. No matter. The walls went up and the paneling went on."

When the crews returned to the Kingdom Halls at noon for lunch, it was determined that most of the work on the Witnesses' homes had been completed. So radio stations KCDC and KROR were contacted, and they began making announcements that anyone needing assistance could call in, and Jehovah's Witnesses would repair earthquake damage free of charge.

Many requested assistance. One man needed help to straighten out his storage shed and woodpile. About a dozen Witnesses responded. They took everything out of the shed, cleaned it, and neatly replaced everything. The man was so impressed that a couple of days later on a radio talk show, he praised the Witnesses for their help.

A Witness couple, Jim and Debbie Venoble, noted: "In a disaster, people help you at first, and then you are soon forgotten, but that's not the case with our Christian brothers and sisters. It has been three weeks now, and they still come by to see if there is anything we need. We learned from this experience that the material things we lost don't mean very much."

Steve Porto observed: "We've learned a lot from this earthquake and the events that took place after it. The love that has been shown by our fellow Witnesses who came to our aid is proof that we are indeed a worldwide brotherhood."—John 13:34, 35.

Stressful Aftershocks

For weeks afterward the earth in the area shook repeatedly and at times violently. Within three weeks, more than 5,000 quakes had been detected; one measured over 6 on the Richter scale, 11 between 5.0 and 5.9, and more than 80 at least 4.0.

A 5.4 aftershock on July 8 reportedly shook 50 homes off their foundations. "It's pretty stressful," said construction worker Rick Erickson. "It's hard to sleep. You don't know whether the house is going to collapse on you or not." A few days after the big quake, Billie Bolton said: "I may never go in the house again." Indeed, a month after the big quake, some were still living in tents, afraid to stay indoors.

Christians recognize earthquakes as part of the sign that Jesus foretold would mark the conclusion of the system of things. So when they see these, along with the many other calamities that were foretold, they do as Jesus instructed: "Raise yourselves erect and lift your heads up, because your deliverance is getting near."—Luke 21:28.

"THE AGE OF DISCOVERIES" At What Price?

By Awake! correspondent in Spain

LOOK what I've found!" cries the little girl, holding a beautiful butterfly. Grown-ups also like to show off their most recent discoveries.

And where better to do that than at a universal exposition, or world's fair? From April 20 to October 12, 1992, Seville, in southern Spain, hosted the last and the largest world's fair of this century, dubbed Expo '92.

The theme of Expo '92 was "The Age of Discoveries," so the participants endeavored to portray their role in mankind's discoveries both past and present. The visitor was afforded a unique opportunity to discover the cuisine, the folk-



Seville's famous 13th-century Torre del Oro (Tower of Gold)

lore, the architecture, and the technology of 111 countries of the world.

In recent years, however, a darker side to discovery has emerged. An unpleasant by-product of many discoveries has been the devastation of earth's fragile environment. Just as a little girl may damage the delicate wings of a butterfly, so the irresponsible use of technology may do irreparable damage to our planet.

Thus, as the *Expo'92 Official Guide* explained, the goal was not merely to offer "a tribute to Mankind's capacity for discovery" but also to promote the international solidarity needed in order to protect our fragile planet.



"The World on an Island"

Seville, the host city, grew rich in the golden age of discovery. Christopher Columbus sailed from Seville on his second great voyage of discovery. During the 16th century, most of the gold and silver from the Americas was shipped by Spanish galleons to Seville. The bullion—the main incentive for many early explorers—was unloaded at the Torre del Oro (Tower of Gold), one of the city's famous landmarks.

Recently, however, money has been flowing out rather than pouring in. In the last five years, ten billion dollars has been spent preparing the Andalusian metropolis for Expo '92. What has all that cash created?

La Cartuja, an alluvial island created by the Guadalquivir River on the outskirts of Seville, was the site of an old monastery and a run-down porcelain factory. It was transformed into an enormous theme park, complete with tree-lined avenues, gardens, canals, covered walkways, and shiny pavilions, all of which have been linked to the city by several

The Moroccan Pavilion echoes the style of a Moorish palace

Water lilies vie for space with a communications satellite exhibit

graceful bridges. The king of Spain, Juan Carlos I, described the new La Cartuja as "the world on an island, and an island for the world." What sort of world did visitors to Expo '92 discover?

Expo '92 seemed to emphasize culture, cuisine, and entertainment as much as technological wizardry. Writer César Alonso observed: "In Expo'92, we have moved on from an optimistic cult of Progress towards a watchful wariness about mere scientific or technical achievements." Furthermore, the participation of a record number of smaller countries also gave the exhibition a human rather than a technological face.

The diverse pavilions offered those who may never have the chance to visit faraway countries a glimpse of such countries' beauty, people, and history. Dramatic tribal dances from New Zealand and Papua New Guinea competed with lively Russian folk dancing, Spanish *sevillanas*, and graceful Indonesian rhythms for the visitors' attention. Operatic productions, fireworks displays, and street entertainers added a further colorful note.



Discoveries Past and Present

The visitor could see how much the world has changed in the last five centuries. An exhibition in La Cartuja's restored monastery showed what life was like in 1492—not just in Europe but also in the Americas, the Orient, and the Islamic world. At that time those four regions were like enormous islands cut off from one another by oceans, deserts, or distrust.

But above all, Expo '92 aimed to be environment friendly. For the first time at an international exposition, conservation was high on the agenda. A three-dimensional documentary film explained how recent discoveries—such as the hole in the ozone layer—have highlighted man-made threats to our planet. The Pavilion of the Environment analyzed the problem of balancing economic growth with conservation, and the Pavilion of Nature, which housed a small-scale model of the Amazon rain forest, stressed the vulnerability of this priceless heritage.

In one of Europe's major gardening projects, 30,000 trees and 300,000 shrubs were planted on La Cartuja Island. The goal was to beautify the exhibition site and to communicate the message that discovery should not lead to destruction of our environment. Red and yellow water lilies vied for space with a sophisticated communications satellite, while jacaranda trees blossomed beneath the inevitable monorail, and spacious green lawns masked a complex fiber-optic communications system.

Many pavilions evoked traditional architecture and were striking, either in form or in construction material. The Japanese pavilion was claimed to be the world's largest wooden building, while the Swiss built an airy tower out of paper. Morocco constructed an Arabian palace, and the United Arab Emirates a minicastle. The facade of New Zealand's pavilion was a rocky cliff complete with a wa-

terfall and a realistic-looking colony of squawking sea birds, while India's wooden pavilion was crowned with an enormous peacock's tail.

Keeping cool is always a problem during the sultry Sevillian summer. The Expo organizers sought to remedy the problem the natural way, using the time-honored methods of the Moors who inhabited Seville centuries ago. Numerous fountains and artificial clouds of water droplets combined with trees, shrubs, and shaded walkways to make the heat more tolerable.

"The Greatest Discovery of Our Time"

Before Columbus set out on his first voyage, he stayed in the old monastery on La Cartuja. His voyage heralded the age of discovery that the exposition celebrated. But despite five centuries of progress in many fields, mankind looks to the future with growing concern. King Juan Carlos I pointed out that "collective aspirations and optimism depend fundamentally on dialogue among nations, mutual understanding."

For that reason Expo '92 sought to "extend a message of peace, good neighbourliness and solidarity to all the inhabitants of our . . . planet Earth"—not an easy goal in view of the chronically divided world. As the *Official Guide* recognized, "a new world order based on these principles would, indeed, be the greatest discovery of our time."

In Our Next Issue

Our Changing World—Where Are We Headed?

Can Drinking Really Get Me Hooked?

Things Hurricane Andrew Could Not Destroy



Will I Turn Out Like My Brother?

“YOU'RE going to turn out just like your brother! Be careful, or you'll end up just like him!"

If you have a brother or a sister who went astray—who perhaps was put out of your parents' home, thrown in jail, or expelled from the Christian congregation—these hurtful words may not be new to your ears. Parents, teachers, well-meaning relatives, and even some of your peers may repeat them again and again. You may sometimes get the feeling that some friends are avoiding you.

Of course, having a sibling pursue a wayward course is a painful experience in itself. A girl named Carol, whose brother was disfellowshipped (expelled) from the Christian congregation, recalls: "I was closer to my brother than to anyone else. When he quit being a Christian, it affected me very deeply."* Becky, who was 15 years old when her sister was disfellowshipped, likewise recalls: "I can still remember the day she told me she was being expelled. I felt so much pain and was very hurt. I felt betrayed. How could she do this to us?"

It is also painful to lose the free communication one enjoyed with an older sibling. Becky laments: "We were so close. I missed being able to talk to her and do things with her." Add to that loss the disappointment of seeing the failure of someone you have looked up to as an example. A youth named Marvin says regarding his older brother: "We looked up to him. But now we didn't have him anymore."

The most painful part of it all, though, may be the lingering fear that you may be destined to turn out the same way.

Follow the Leader?

In one survey, 64.9 percent of youths admitted to being strongly influenced by an older sibling. Said one girl: "My older brother . . . was very influential on my life. He always showed a special interest in me. He took me places with his friends, taught me how to write, tie my shoes, and was always there if I had the slightest problem."—*Adolescents and Youth*, by Dorothy Rogers.

So when an esteemed sibling suddenly rebels, "teenagers are likely to do a tailspin," according to writer Joy P. Gage. She relates the story of a girl named Linda who looked up to her older brother. When he suddenly

* Names have been changed.

left his wife, Linda's cherished model "disappeared." Says Joy Gage: "This brother whom she had felt so obligated to emulate was no longer worth emulating." As a result, "Linda was angry. She was even panic-stricken." Linda began experimenting with alcohol.

—*When Parents Cry*.

Such an overreaction is not unusual. In fact, the book *How to Survive Your Child's Rebellious Teens*, by Myron Brenton, notes that "to a greater or lesser degree, the other children in the family are always affected by a sibling's rebellious behavior." Brenton explains that sometimes the remaining youths in the family "feel threatened. Apprehensively they wonder: 'Can this happen to me? Will I ever act this crazy? Do I have that kind of craziness in me?'"

Choose a Different Path

Does any of this mean, though, that *you* are destined to follow your sibling's bad example? Not at all. You have the power to choose for yourself what course you will take. (Compare Joshua 24:15.) Many God-fearing youths in Bible times did just that.

Consider young Jacob, for example. His twin brother, Esau, was one "not appreciating sacred things." (Hebrews 12:16) Jacob, however, became a blameless man of faith. (Genesis 25:27; Hebrews 11:21) Eleazar and Ithamar, the two younger sons of Aaron, remained faithful in Jehovah's service when their older

brothers, Nadab and Abihu, were executed by Jehovah. These older brothers were apparently put to death for overstepping their priestly duties while under the influence of alcohol. But neither Eleazar nor Ithamar imitated their brothers, and both got to enjoy privileges as priests of Jehovah God.—Leviticus 10:1-11.

You too can choose a godly course of conduct and avoid bringing heartbreak to yourself and to your parents.

'They're Avoiding Me'

Nevertheless, Carol complains: "Everyone is waiting for me to make a mistake. Some parents even think that I will be a bad influence on their children." Perhaps you sometimes feel that way yourself. But what may appear to be merciless scrutiny often turns out to be well-motivated concern. However, as they see you consistently maintain good behavior, their worries will usually diminish.

—Compare 1 Peter 2:12.

Why, though, have some friends suddenly become distant? Probably this is, not so much



**You do not have to join
your brother in
rebellion**

because they mistrust you, but because they simply do not know what to say. They may feel awkward approaching you, realizing that you and your family have experienced a great deal of hurt; maybe they fear they'll say the wrong thing. Why not do what you can to break the ice by initiating conversations? Try to be calm and gracious if others ask touchy questions, such as, "What happened to your brother?"

Admittedly, some may seem to shun you. And when people treat you as if you're a bad person, it is tempting to feel that you may just as well go ahead and do bad things. Always remember, though, the words of Galatians 6:9: "Let us not give up in doing what is fine, for in due season we shall reap if we do not tire out."

Usually, the initial period of awkwardness soon passes. Says young Becky: "In time people began to treat me as they had in the past." She adds: "The fact that all my friends did not shun me was a big help. They were there for me." Most of your fellow Christians will be there for you too. They can do much to help you "keep making straight paths for your feet."—Hebrews 12:13.

Talk Things Out

True, at times you may feel like a young man named Fred whose brother was disfellowshipped. "I would just keep to myself," he confesses. "But I realized that it didn't help me or my parents to keep things inside." Yes, avoid isolating yourself, especially from your parents. (Proverbs 18:1) Marvin gives good advice when he says: "Talk it out with somebody. You have to!"

For example, do some in the congregation appear to be treating you coolly? Your parents may be able to help if you alert them to the problem. Or perhaps you are frustrated because your parents are focusing all their attention on your wayward sibling and ignoring

your needs. Don't misbehave to attract their attention. Instead, have a heart-to-heart talk with them, and let them know how you feel.

Fred used to take advantage of his family Bible study to do this. "If I had a problem, I would use that opportunity to talk the matter over with Dad and Mom." By such discussions you may be helped to appreciate how devastating the situation has been to your parents too. At the same time, they will better understand your feelings and will probably arrange to give you more personal attention.

Of course, not all youths have God-fearing parents. If such is the case, try talking things out with a mature Christian. (Proverbs 17:17) It also helps to stay busy in spiritual activities. "You've got to show that you really don't want to turn out bad," says Marvin. "And when you stay active and show you really want the truth, your Christian brothers are more likely to be there to support you."

In any event, you always have the support of your heavenly Father. (Psalm 27:10) "Before him pour out your heart," says Psalm 62:8. He can serve as a real refuge for you. He truly understands what you are inside, even when others misunderstand or misjudge you.

—1 Samuel 16:7.

You Can Be Different

A Bible proverb says: "Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself." (Proverbs 22:3) Yes, if ever tempted to follow your sibling, reflect on the fruitage of his or her bad course. Says Becky: "Seeing the results of my sister's actions helped me avoid getting into trouble myself."

Fred, Marvin, and Becky—quoted in this article—turned out differently from their wayward siblings; each pursued a career in the Christian ministry. What about you? You may always love your sibling. But you do not have to *live* like him or her. You can make your own choices. You can be different.

Russia's First International Convention of Jehovah's Witnesses



ST. PETERSBURG, Russia, is widely known for what residents there term "white nights"—a period of about three weeks in June when the sky is never completely dark. But June 26 to 28 of 1992 was special.

On those days, Jehovah's Witnesses held a convention that called attention, not to the literal light bathing the city of St. Petersburg around the clock, but to the spiritual light that true Christians reflect. Hence the theme for the convention: "Light Bearers."

This was the first international convention of the Witnesses in the former Soviet Union.

There were delegates from about 30 countries around the world, including Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

In addition, about 29,000 Witnesses from the former Soviet Union were present. Some came from Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine. The turnout was remarkable considering that Russia was experiencing difficult economic adjustments. Outstanding was the presence of Russian delegates who traveled some 5,000 miles



Billboards advertised the convention

from Vladivostok and other places on the eastern coast of Russia.

The largest foreign delegation came from nearby Finland, with more than 10,000 representatives. The stadium was divided into two sections—the Russian-speaking and the Finnish-speaking, each with its own platform from which the program was delivered.

Preparations

The convention site was the 42-year-old Kirov Stadium, located on the isle of Krestovsky, just a few miles from the center of St. Petersburg. It seats about 60,000 and is the second largest stadium in the former Soviet Union. In the background the waters of the Neva River could be seen where they empty into the Gulf of Finland.

However, the stadium was in need of repair. Sewer pipes were cleaned out, and supplemental toilet facilities were built. Some 20 miles of the stadium's tiered seating area had to be painted. Additionally, bushes around the stadium were trimmed, and the grass was cut. It took many weeks to complete this work.

Travel and Accommodations

With some 17,000 foreign delegates invited, travel and accommodations arrangements proved to be a monumental task. The Russian authorities were very cooperative not only at the various consulates but also at border points and at the international airport in St. Petersburg.

Arrangements were made with 32 hotels to house most of the 17,000 foreign delegates. The 29,000 delegates from various parts of the former Soviet Union were accommodated in 132 schools and day-care centers. The delegates also needed transportation each day to the convention grounds, and some 390 buses were hired for this.

Many foreign delegates had meals at their hotels. However, several months before the convention, the authorities in St. Petersburg expressed concern over the problem of feeding the many thousands of delegates coming from various parts of the former Soviet Union. They stated that there would not be enough food in the city and that the Witnesses would have to bring the food from elsewhere.

And that is exactly what they did. Several branches of the Watch Tower Society contributed large shipments of food. The Finnish branch alone donated 200 tons of food for the convention! Additionally, most of the foreign delegates brought in small parcels of canned meat, dried fruits and nuts, bread, and other staples. On the last day of the convention, truckloads of food boxes were distributed at the stadium to delegates from the former Soviet Union so that they could have food for their trip home.

Full-Scale Advertising Campaign

St. Petersburg is the second-largest city in Russia, with some five million inhabitants. For the first time ever, Jehovah's Witnesses

in Russia were permitted to launch a full-scale advertising campaign.

This unprecedented campaign started several weeks before the convention. About a million handbills were printed in Russian and distributed. On the front of the handbill was an invitation to the public talk on Saturday afternoon. On the back, there was a description of Sunday's program. In addition, nearly 750,000 copies of the tract *What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?* were distributed to the residents of St. Petersburg. This

acquainted them with the teachings of the Witnesses.

Most of the delegates arrived in St. Petersburg between one and four days prior to the convention. During those days, thousands of delegates were on the streets distributing handbills and offering tracts and other literature in Russian. In addition, several large billboards were prepared and placed along the busiest streets of downtown St. Petersburg. They were about ten feet tall and five feet wide, with a colorful invitation to



A Russian delegate receives her own copy of the Bible

Special song brochures were used

the public talk on both front and back. Some were installed right at the entrances of the most active subway stations.

The Program

Finally, the first day of the convention arrived, with an attendance of more than 45,000! The program was modified for the benefit of the many delegates who did not speak Russian or Finnish. For example, several talks were delivered in English and interpreted into Finnish and Russian. Seven members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses delivered a number of these talks.

Every day of the convention, there were reports and experiences from other countries highlighting how Jehovah is blessing the preaching work in those lands. These reports, along with many experiences, were likewise delivered in English and interpreted into Russian and Finnish.

The public talk for the Russian section dealt with a question of great concern to many Russians today. The title was "Does God Really Care About Us?" After the talk the delegates were delighted to receive the new brochure *Does God Really Care About Us?* in Russian and Finnish.

The songbook used by Jehovah's Witnesses at their meetings is not yet available in Russian. Hence, the Watch Tower Society prepared a special brochure containing the words of all the songs to be sung during the convention. Russian delegates obtained their personal copies as they entered the stadium. How thrilling it was to listen to 46,000 people from some 30 different countries singing



An impressive 3,256 were baptized

praises to Jehovah God in their respective languages, including Russian!

For decades the theory of evolution has been taught in many parts of the world, including territories of the former Soviet Union. Jehovah's Witnesses in these lands are now better equipped to expose the fallacies of this theory and to spread the truth about the Creator of life. How excited the delegates were at the conclusion of the Sunday morning session when a member of the Governing Body released the book *Life—How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by*

Creation? in the Russian language! A gift copy was made available to all.

Foreign delegates were informed beforehand that many of the Witnesses in Russia do not have Bibles. So thousands of Bibles in Russian were brought in as gifts. The Bibles were gathered at a main collection point to be taken later to congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses and distributed to those needing a copy.

They Were Amazed!

On Saturday, throughout the morning and early afternoon, there was a constant flow of non-Witness visitors coming into the stadium. They were curious and wanted to see

with their own eyes what was going on. Many were amazed. Most of them had never heard about Jehovah's Witnesses before receiving an invitation to the public talk. Some heard about the convention through television news coverage. The peak attendance for the convention was 46,214.

One young woman who belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church commented: "I am very much impressed with the Witnesses. They are peaceful, polite, and dignified people." Another visitor said: "We hope that Jehovah's Witnesses have many more conventions here in St. Petersburg." A senior sergeant of the Russian police, or militia, who was assigned to work at the convention

Other Conventions

Altogether, six conventions were held this past summer throughout the former Soviet Union. A total of 91,673 attended, and 8,562 were baptized. This means that 9.3 percent of the number in attendance were baptized at these conventions. Of course, this percentage would have been even higher had not some 17,000 foreign delegates been present at the international gathering in St. Petersburg.

Visoki Zamok, published in Lviv (formerly Lvov), observed: "Kindness and sincerity have truly reigned at the stadium during the three days of the convention. Despite such a large

attendance, the grounds are still as clean as they were before the convention. Exemplary order and peace were to be found everywhere."

Now that Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy freedom to worship God openly in the former Soviet Union, many there have opportunity firsthand to see what the Witnesses are really like. *Krasnoyarskii Komsomolets*, a Russian newspaper, said: "They are an attractive, very friendly, and completely apolitical people; they encourage diligence, not the running after of 'easy money.'"

Conventions in the Former Soviet Union

DATE	CITY	PEAK ATTENDANCE	BAPTISM
June 26-28	St. Petersburg, Russia	46,214	3,256
July 10-12	Lviv, Ukraine	15,011	1,326
	Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan	6,605	829
July 17-19	Kharkov, Ukraine	17,425	2,577
	Irkutsk, Siberia	5,051	536
	Tallinn, Estonia	1,367	38
	TOTAL	91,673	8,562

site said that it was "thrilling to be here at the convention."

A local official commented that 'Jehovah's Witnesses are viewed by some as a kind of underground sect sitting in the darkness and mistreating children and themselves. But I see normal, smiling people, even better than many people I know. They are peaceful and calm, and they love one another very much.' He added: "I really do not understand why people tell such lies about you."

On Saturday afternoon some opposers attempted to disrupt the convention. They carried large banners with false accusations against the Witnesses. As the crowd of protesters became larger and louder, the police called in back-up forces to protect the convention delegates. The protesters never made it past the front gates. At the end of the day, they simply left, frustrated.

One of the convention delegates who saw what took place was especially impressed with the cooperative spirit of the militia. "I can't believe my eyes when I see the militia going out of their way to protect us. Just a couple of years ago, Jehovah's Witnesses were considered enemies of the State. But now the militia is actually protecting us!" A militia officer candidly expressed his feelings when he told a number of delegates: "We don't want you to be afraid of us. We are here to protect you and to make sure that everything goes well."

Everything did go well. Even the weather was ideal. Every day of the convention, the weather was dry, warm, and very clear.

Thousands Get Baptized

For many the highlight of the convention was the baptism of thousands. One congregation in St. Petersburg, with 254 publishers, reported 108 baptized! It is difficult to put into words the stirring emotions experienced by the delegates when they saw 3,256 baptis-

mal candidates stand up. The speaker asked two questions regarding their dedication to Jehovah, and they replied with a thundering "da" (yes).

After a prayer, the female candidates were directed one way to their changing rooms, and the male candidates another way to their changing rooms. As hundreds of them left the arena, they and the audience greeted one another by waving their hands.

Many in the audience wept for joy. Others applauded intermittently for more than 45 minutes. One Finnish delegate could not control his emotions and began to cry. He explains: "In 1943, I was recruited into the Finnish army to fight against the Russians. It was a terrible war. And now, at this convention, I saw thousands of Russians dedicating their lives to Jehovah! When I saw some of them in wheelchairs and others limping, I cried. I asked myself: 'Were they also war veterans? Were they wounded by Finnish soldiers?' Perhaps Jehovah can help me now to be of assistance to my Russian brothers."

Did the Russian-speaking brothers appreciate Jehovah's provision of this three-day spiritual feast prepared for them, this first big convention in St. Petersburg? When the last speaker was making his final remarks, he said: "Above all we thank Jehovah God for this marvelous convention." The audience rose to their feet and applauded enthusiastically for more than five minutes. It was a standing ovation for Jehovah!

Jehovah God, the Source of light, is indeed backing the thousands of light bearers in these lands that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. After more than 70 years of restrictions and persecution, it now becomes clear that all along Jehovah was fulfilling his promise of Isaiah 60:22, where he says: "The little one himself will become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation. I myself, Jehovah, shall speed it up in its own time."

Watching the World

A Dangerous Life-Style

The AHA (American Heart Association) has listed a number of factors that contribute to cardiovascular disease. There is also a list of risk factors that are more serious. Until recently, physical inactivity was listed among the less dangerous "contributing factors." However, according to the *University of California at Berkeley Wellness Letter*, the AHA has "upgraded physical inactivity from its list of 'contributing factors' for cardiovascular disease to the stronger category of 'risk factor.'" The *Wellness Letter* adds that this "places a sedentary life-style on par with high blood pressure, smoking, and high blood cholesterol."

Dirty Hands

A recent study revealed that the majority of health-care workers in the United States neglect to wash their hands before examining their patients. Also, according to *The Washington Post*, "other studies have suggested that doctors do not change their gloves when they should." This problem has undoubtedly contributed to the spread of disease. The *Post* reports that according to *The New England Journal of Medicine*, unwashed hands among doctors and nurses "may help explain why hospital patients develop infections that cost up to \$10 billion a year to cure."

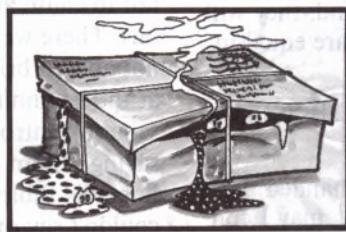
Heart Disease Toll

Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the biggest killers of mankind,

causing about one quarter of all deaths worldwide. So states the *1991 World Health Statistics Annual*, published in 1992 by WHO (World Health Organization). In developed nations, such as Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United States, CVD cause about half of all deaths, though the 1980's saw a marked decrease. In developing nations, only 16 percent of all deaths are due to CVD. However, according to WHO, "there are signs of an emerging epidemic . . . CVD are on the rise across the width and breadth of the developing world."

Leaks in the Mail

Laboratories the world over are using the postal systems to mail live microorganisms. There is growing concern over this practice because "potentially dangerous bacteria are regularly sent from one laboratory to another," according to *New Scientist* magazine. Dutch researchers warn that



damaged parcels could leak organisms into the environment. Recently, a group of scientists examined several parcels from laboratories in Australia, the Netherlands, Singapore, and the United States. They found that none of the packages conformed

to the rules set out by the UN Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. One Dutch laboratory, which receives a thousand samples yearly, has taken special precautions to prevent such accidents. Yet, it "still receives about five broken culture vials in the post each year," says *New Scientist*.

Suicides in Argentina

Argentina has the highest suicide rate in the Americas. The newspaper *La Nación* notes that 'according to official reports, close to 10 percent of all reported suicides in the country involve adolescents and young adults between the ages of 10 and 22, and most are males.' The Ministry of Health says that every 30 hours one adolescent commits suicide in Argentina.

Poor Children in America

The United States, one of the richest countries in the world, is also home to some of the poorest children. According to *The New York Times*, a study conducted by the Children's Defense Fund found that "the number of American children living in poverty grew by more than 1 million during the 1980's, with rates rising in 33 states." In 1989 over 25 percent of the children in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, and West Virginia lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty line. The state of Mississippi had the highest rate, with 33.5 percent of all children living in poverty.

From Our Readers

Dealing With Death Last year, my dear brother, who was only 18 years old, died in a road accident. You can imagine how much I appreciated the series of articles "When a Loved One Dies." (July 22, 1992) I particularly appreciated the thought that one who does not exhibit intense distress is not necessarily cold or unloving. Because of my cheerful disposition, I tend not to express my grief openly. Others have thus drawn the wrong conclusions about me. Even though Christians have the hope of the resurrection, they still need to feel the loving understanding of those around them.

L. R., Italy

Aliens I have always appreciated the beautiful, striking artwork on your covers. I was particularly moved, though, by the cover of the May 8, 1992, issue, "Help! We Are Aliens." While growing up, I often saw prejudice toward foreigners—racial slurs and violence. I can even remember someone saying to my father that he should go back to where he came from. The irony is, we're North American Indians and were the very first ones to live here! Where are we to go? I hope that when people read this article with an open mind, they will come to appreciate that all men are equal in God's eyes.

T. B., Canada

Left-Handedness As a left-handed person and an avid reader of *Awake!*, may I congratulate you for the excellent way the subject was handled in your article "Left-Handedness—Disadvantage or Advantage?" (June 8, 1992). Could you enlighten me, though, as to why the Bible often equates "left" with disfavor?

S. J. M., New Zealand

"God is not partial," so he certainly has no bias toward left-handed people. (Acts 10:34)

The Bible's use of the right as the side of favor seems to be rooted in the fact that the vast majority of people are right-handed. The right hand thus serves as a fitting symbol of applied power or favor. Logically, the left hand would refer to the opposite. However, this is done only in a figurative sense and is not intended to demean left-handed people.—ED.

Being Different I really want to thank you for the article "How Can I Have Courage to Be Different?" (June 22, 1992) The students in my class throw a lot of parties and are very fashion conscious. Their association is bad for me. I was under such pressure that I never had the courage to speak up. The article helped me to overcome my fear. With the help of Jehovah, at the next opportunity, I was able to explain my point of view. Now the pressure has eased off. Many thanks.

M. E., Germany

This article was just what those of us going to school need. For a long time, I tried hard not to cause any waves, not to be conspicuous. There were many temptations, and I was not able to bring myself to give a witness. But at the beginning of my second year in high school, I introduced myself to the class by saying: "I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses. My hobby is Bible study." Having said that, I couldn't say or do things that were questionable. It was still a real trial for me to witness to school friends, and I hated being different. But one day a girl said she was envious of my way of life and my conviction. This caused my thinking to change. Now I realize that I am not the one who is different—other people are. Serving God is normal!

M. A., Japan

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"It Draws You Close to Christ"



THAT is what many have said about a book recently published by Jehovah's Witnesses, *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*. A woman from France observed: "Although I have always greatly appreciated the Watch Tower Society's publications, never has a book had such an effect on me." In a letter to the Society's branch office in France, she explained:

"This comprehensive biography of Christ made me come to love his appealing personality even more. I also discovered important aspects of his life, even though I have already read the Gospel accounts several times. Throughout the pages of the book, we live the intense moments Christ lived, finding him compassionate and gentle, but also manly and firm.

"The final chapters are particularly touching. I got to the point where I could not hold back my tears while considering that the most important creation in the entire universe willingly suffered at the hands of the Devil's vile agents. What a powerful example! I must say that I now feel much closer to our 'Eternal Father,' yes, our reigning King."

—Isaiah 9:6.

Jehovah's Witnesses are an international organization of over four million Bible students, all of whom are convinced that Jesus Christ is not only the greatest man who ever lived but also the only means by which humans can receive everlasting life.—Acts 4:12.