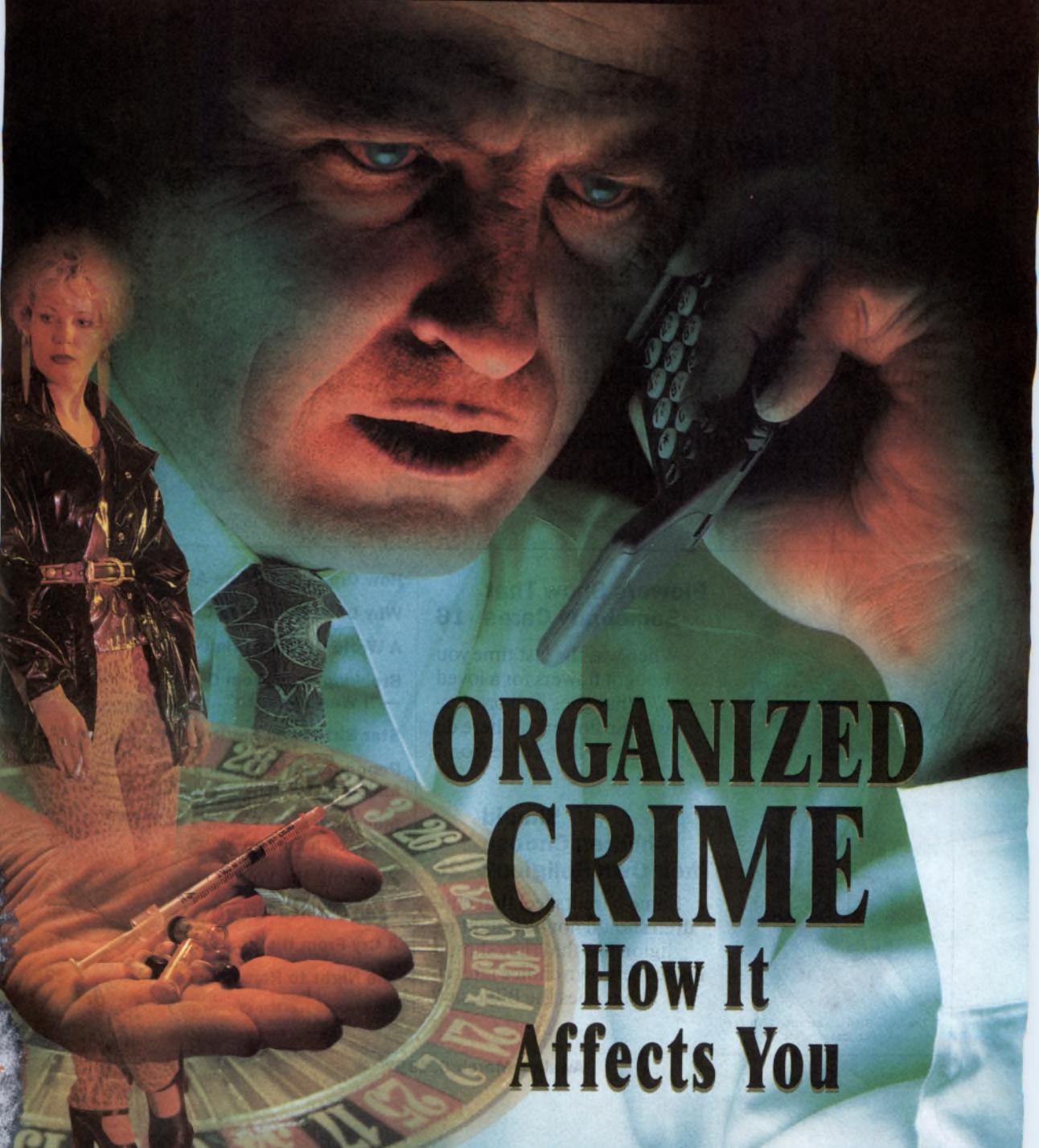


# **Awake!**

March 8, 1997



## **ORGANIZED CRIME**

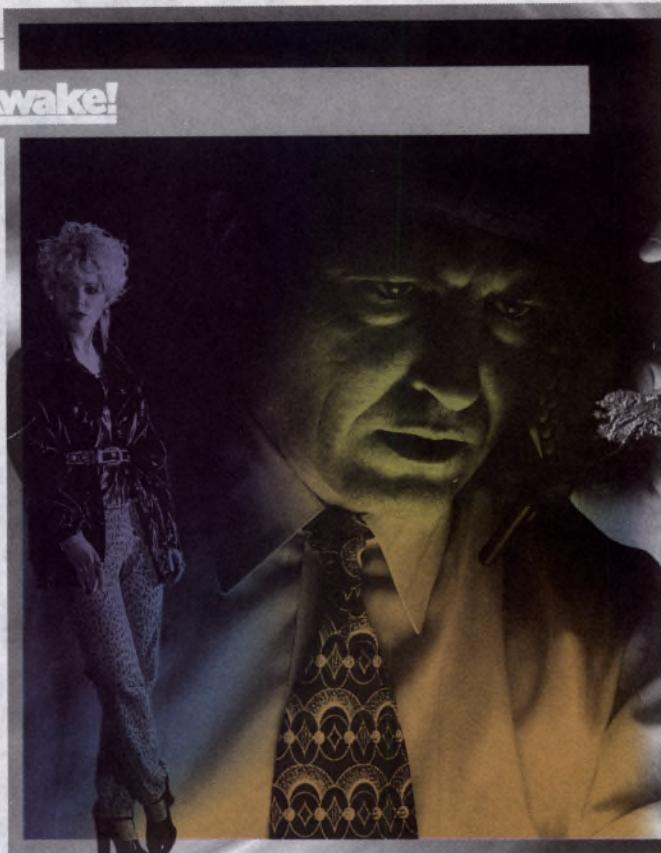
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Average Printing 18,350,000  
Published in 81 Languages

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Transnational crime affects everybody. Costs are higher for everything—from garbage collection to jewelry, from clothing to cement. Criminals terrorize and corrupt judges, police, and politicians.

Is there a solution?



*The Doré Bible Illustrations/Dover Publications, Inc.*

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Some parents feel that children should not be taught religion but that they should make their own choice later in life. What does the Bible say?

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# HOW ORGANIZED CRIME AFFECTS YOU

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN JAPAN

The don (leader) of a Mafia family pricks a finger of the novice. Blood drips onto the picture of a "saint." Next, fire consumes the picture. 'Should you divulge any of the secrets of the organization, your soul will burn like this saint,' the don tells the young man.

THE code of silence—in Italian, *omertà*—kept organized crime pretty much underground for many years. Today, however, criminal gangs are making headlines everywhere as some mobsters turn informer. The most prominent figure to be accused by these *pentiti*, or Mafia turncoats, was Giulio Andreotti, who was Italy's prime minister seven times and is now being tried for his Mafia connections.

Criminal organizations everywhere have spread their tentacles into all walks of life: the Mafia in Italy and in the United States, where it is also called the *Cosa Nostra*; the drug cartels in South America; the Triads of China; the *yakuza* in Japan. Their evil activities affect all of us and make life more expensive.

In the United States, it is said, the Mafia divides the city of New York among five families, making billions through extortion,

protection rackets, loan-sharking, gambling, drug dealing, and prostitution. It is alleged that the Mafia families have a tight grip on labor unions in garbage-hauling businesses, trucking, construction, food distribution, and textiles. With the power they have over the labor unions, they can iron out labor disputes or they can sabotage a project. On a construction site, for instance, one day a bulldozer will not move, another day the brakes on a backhoe fail, and operating engineers "slow walk" the project—these incidents and more persist until the builder agrees to bend to the mob's demands, whether they be payoffs or work contracts. In fact, "payoffs to the Mob can assure businessmen of prompt deliveries, labor peace and the ability to use cheaper workers," reports *Time* magazine.

In Colombia two drug cartels competed with each other until Pablo Escobar, the head of the Medellin cartel, was shot in 1993. After that, the Cali cartel monopolized the world's cocaine traffic. Grossing \$7 billion in 1994 in the United States alone, it became probably the biggest organized-crime syndicate in the world. But the arrest in 1995 of its mastermind, José Santacruz Londoño, struck a blow against the cartel. There is, however, always an eager successor waiting to take over as the next boss.

With the Iron Curtain rent asunder, the Russian Mafia made its debut on the international stage. As a result, "every business in Russia has to deal with the mafia," says a banker quoted in *Newsweek*. Even in Brighton

Beach, New York, the Russian Mafia are reported to be raking in the profits from complicated fraud schemes involving gasoline. Car owners end up paying the tab, and the government loses taxes. The Russian gangs also run prostitution rings in Eastern Europe. They get away with most of their crimes scot-free. Who dares to face up to heavily armed former athletes and veterans from the Afghan war?

The situation is no different in the Orient. In Japan those in show business have to expect all sorts of trouble unless they honor the local *yakuza* group and pay tribute to them. Here too protection money is demanded from bars and even from streetwalkers. In addition, the *yakuza* have worked their way deep into the Japanese economy by organizing their own companies, extorting money from big business, and linking up with crime syndicates abroad.

Criminal organizations based in Hong Kong and Taiwan are also spreading a web over the whole world. Except for their name, Triads, little is known about how they are organized. Their history dates back to the 17th century, when Chinese monks banded together against the Manchurians who took over China. Although their members number into the tens of thousands, it is said that the Triads in Hong Kong form temporary syndicates for a specific crime or a series of crimes, making it difficult for the police to trace their identity. They make billions of dollars by trafficking in heroin and have

### **Awake!**

**Why Awake! Is Published** *Awake!* is for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

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turned Hong Kong into a credit-card forging center.

In his book *The New Ethnic Mobs*, William Kleinknecht writes about crime in the United States: "In the new world of organized crime, no ethnic gangsters have a bigger future than the Chinese. . . . Chinese crime groups are rapidly gaining power in cities around the country. . . . They are second only to the Mafia in New York."

Regarding another form of illegal trafficking emanating from Hong Kong, a U.S. Justice Department official says: "Alien smuggling is a manifestation of organized crime." Some officials estimate that 100,000 Chinese enter the United States illegally each year. The typical smuggled immigrant has to pay at least \$15,000 for his ride to an affluent nation, most of which he pays off after he reaches his destination. Thus, for many immigrants life in the land of their dreams becomes a nightmare of forced labor in sweatshops and brothels.

Because you do not get involved in criminal activities, you may feel that you are not affected by organized crime. But is that really so? Many drug addicts, living on several continents, turn to crime to pay for drugs supplied by South American drug cartels. Organized crime makes sure that contracts for public services are assigned to companies that are tied to it; as a result, citizens pay more. The President's Commission on Organized Crime once stated that in the United States, "organized crime distorts

## The Mafia—Its Origins

"The Mafia arose in Sicily during the late Middle Ages, where it possibly began as a secret organization dedicated to overthrowing the rule of the various foreign conquerors of the island—e.g., Saracens, Normans, and Spaniards. The Mafia owed its origins and drew its members from the many small private armies, or *mafie*, that were hired by absentee landlords to protect their landed estates from bandits in the lawless conditions that prevailed over much of Sicily through the centuries. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the energetic ruffians in these private armies organized themselves and grew so powerful that they turned against the landowners and became the sole law on many of the estates, extorting money from the landowners in return for protecting the latter's crops." (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*) Extorting protection money became their modus operandi. They took their methods to the United States, where they moved into gambling, labor racketeering, loan-sharking, drug trafficking, and prostitution.

costs through theft, extortion, bribery, price fixing and restraint of trade" and that consumers are forced to pay "what amounts to a surcharge" to the Mafia. So, no one escapes the effects of crime. All of us pay the bill.

But why does organized crime prosper today?

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# WHY DOES ORGANIZED CRIME PROSPER?

**A**L CAPONE, the infamous gangster of the U.S. Prohibition Era (1920-33), claimed that he was just a businessman catering to the law—the law of supply and demand. A lawyer for the biggest *yakuza* syndicate in Japan said: “You cannot deny that there is a strong demand for [sex, drug, and gambling] activities.” That demand nurtures organized crime. Although no one wants to be a victim of crime, some may turn to criminal organizations and avail themselves of their services.

Take, for example, the protection rackets that mobsters in many countries use as a source of income. Although they, at times, target honest shop owners, they usually prey on those who operate shady businesses. A casino owner in Shinjuku, Tokyo, who operates his business under the cover of a game parlor, said: “A clerk was stabbed with a knife, and robbed of 2 million [yen (\$20,000)]. But we wouldn’t call the police.” Why not? “Since we engage in an illegal activity (gambling), we don’t want to have anything to do with the police. When a customer gets rough in our store, we call the *yakuza*.” This casino operator pays \$4,000 a month to the *yakuza*, a small fee when compared with the profit of \$300,000 that he rakes in through his illegal operation during that time. Where does that money come from? From the pockets of those enjoying illegal gambling.

The same is true of respectable businesses that want to avoid problems. A New York

authority estimated that a \$15-million-a-year painting contractor saved \$3.8 million by paying off gangsters. This allowed the contractor to use low-wage labor and avoid confrontation with the mob-controlled union. In Japan, during a period of economic prosperity, financiers poured their money into real estate and demolished old houses and stores to make way for extravagant buildings. When residents would not move or sell their land, investors called in the *jiageya*, mostly *yakuza*-related companies, to evict them.

When the *yakuza* saw how easy it was to borrow and make money during the 80’s, they formed companies and plunged into real-estate and stock speculation. Banks and financial institutions poured money into these companies, obviously intent on their own profits. But when the bubble finally burst, the banks found it very hard to recover their money. Talking about the lingering recession in Japan, a former police official said, in *Newsweek*: “The real reason why the bad-loan problems cannot be solved quickly is that a significant portion of them are connected with organized crime.”

Indeed, organized crime takes root and thrives where people are eager to satisfy their lusts, regardless of the means. Greed for pleasure, sex, and money provides a breeding ground for drug pushing, prostitution, gambling, and loan-sharking. Getting involved in such activities usually means feeding and fattening the mob. How true it is that organized crime caters to the demands of those

## How to Protect Your Family

LACK of a warm, united family atmosphere can make young ones easy prey for criminal syndicates. In the United States, it is reported, the majority of the youngsters who get involved in gang murders are from less fortunate or broken families. "Being underprivileged," says an official of a detention center in North Carolina, "they are easily moved by the strong bond between the boss and the henchmen and the feeling of oneness as a member of an organization, which they experience for the first time in their lives."

Similarly, in the Orient a young *yakuza* who is willing to be a living shield for his boss says: "At home I was alone all the time. Although we were a family, I never felt that we could have a heart-to-heart talk. . . . But now I can talk heart-to-heart with the guys." Lonely youths feel grateful to members of a criminal organization who draw them into a family-like system.

"The *yakuza* people are very, very caring," says the leader of a group of biker girls in Okinawa. "Maybe that's their trick; but, you see, since we've never been treated gently, this moves us." The superintendent of a facility for delinquent girls confirms that gangsters are "really good at captivating the hearts of girls." When lonely girls call them in the middle of the night, gangsters rush to them and listen to what they have to say, without necessarily making any sexual advances.

Their caring attitude lasts only until they have fully captivated the youngsters on whom they are preying. Once the youths are trapped, they are bled dry—girls in prostitution rings and boys in the crime machine.

### How Can You Protect Your Loved Ones?

"You fathers, do not be exasperating your children, so that they do not become downhearted," admonishes the Bible. (Colossians 3:21) This is not encouraging parents to be permissive. Says a Bible proverb: "A boy let on the loose will be causing his mother shame." (Proverbs 29:15) Rather, the Bible encourages fathers—and mothers too—to be reasonable in dealing with their children, to listen to them, and to have an open line of communication with them. Then, the children will be motivated to confide in their parents when they find themselves in sore straits.

In addition to having open communication, parents need to give their children standards in life. Where can a father find such guidelines? The Bible says: "You, fathers, do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah." (Ephesians 6:4) Take time to consider the Bible with your children by means of family Bible study sessions. And implant in their hearts a healthy fear of Jehovah so that they will always follow Jehovah's guidance to their own benefit.—Isaiah 48:17.



who are bent on satisfying their own carnal desires!

### Mock Family System

In addition to the demand for illicit operations, there is another need today on which organized crime thrives. The late head of one of the biggest *yakuza* syndicates in Japan insisted that he was taking in the outlaws and caring for them and thereby preventing them from going bad. He claimed that he was a father to the gang members. Most criminal syndicates, regardless of nationality, build their organizations on such mock family relationships.

Take, for example, Chi Sun,\* who came from a poor family in Hong Kong. His father often beat him violently for trivial reasons. Young Chi Sun turned rebellious and ended up joining the notorious Triads at the age of 12. In the criminal organization, he found a place where he felt he "belonged." Because of his bravery in armed fighting, he was soon promoted to a position where he had several men under him. Finally, when he was only 17 years old, he was sent to jail.

Many like Chi Sun turn to criminal organizations to find the family bond that was absent at home. The members claim to be caring, but younger ones are often disappointed when they find that each member is mainly interested in himself.

### Angel of Light

When the biggest crime syndicate in Japan was designated as a violent group under a new antigang law in 1992, one of its leaders maintained that the group considered themselves "chivalrous," battling against evil. When the terrible earthquake hit Kobe in 1995, the same gang distributed food, water, and other emergency goods to their neighbors. "Such generosity," reported *Asahi Evening News*, "is bound to reinforce the *yakuza*'s enduring image in Japan as outlaws with honor."

\* Some names have been changed for the safety of those involved.

Bosses of criminal syndicates have often tried to maintain a benevolent front. Pablo Escobar, the notorious head of Colombia's Medellin drug cartel, was to the slum dwellers of his city "a mythic figure—part Messiah, part Robin Hood, part Godfather in the almost feudal sense of the *patrón*, the boss," wrote Ana Carrigan in *Newsweek*. He built skating rinks for children and decent houses for the poor, and he gave jobs to street kids. He was a hero to those who benefited from his largess.

Criminals who apparently hide securely behind their syndicates, though, are only pawns of a universal master criminal. The Bible reveals who that one is. "Satan himself keeps transforming himself into an angel of light. It is therefore nothing great if his ministers also keep transforming themselves into ministers of righteousness. But their end shall be according to their works." (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15) Today, most people do not believe that Satan is a real person. A 19th-century French poet said: "The Devil's cleverest ploy is to persuade you that he doesn't exist." He lurks offstage and manipulates what is going on, not just in criminal syndicates but throughout the world. "The whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one," explains the Bible. Jesus described Satan as "a manslayer when he began, . . . a liar and the father of the lie."—1 John 5:19; John 8:44.

Bible prophecies reveal that Satan the Devil has been especially active since 1914. From that year on, he has been mobilizing his hordes in an all-out war against God's people. He is sucking mankind into a whirlpool of chaos. He is the foremost reason why crime and criminal organizations thrive today.—Revelation 12:9-12.

Will the mastermind behind earth's criminal organizations ever be put away? Will mankind ever enjoy peace and order? Can you break free from the evil empire that Satan has built up on earth today?

# A WORLD WITHOUT CRIME HOW?

THE fight against organized crime is on worldwide. "There has been remarkable progress against the Mafia in a very short time," declared *U.S. News & World Report*, "due largely to one law, the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO." It allows for conviction of criminal organizations on the basis of a pattern of racketeering activity, not just individual acts. This together with information gained through wiretaps and from informant gang members seeking leniency has played a part in the success of the battle against the Mafia in the United States.

In Italy too the authorities are coming down hard on gangs. In areas such as Sicily, Sardinia, and Calabria, where organized crime is strong, army units have been dispatched to patrol public buildings and important areas to prevent attacks by criminal elements. The government views this as being much like a civil war. With notorious heads of criminal syndicates in prison and a former prime minister indicted for his alleged Mafia connections, Italy is seeing some results.

In Japan the government clamped down on the *yakuza* when it put into effect the Anti-Organized Crime Law on March 1, 1992. Under this law, once a gangster organization is designated as such, it is prohibited from 11 acts of violent coercion, including the demanding of hush money, participation in protection rackets, and intervention in settling disputes for a fee. By enforcing this law,

the government aims to stem all sources of mob income. The law has hit criminal organizations hard. Some groups have disbanded, and a crime boss committed suicide—apparently because of strict enforcement of the law.

Indeed, governments and law-enforcement agencies are putting up a hard fight against organized crime. Still, the *Mainichi Daily News*, when reporting on a conference of judges and police officials from around the world that was held in 1994, said: "Organized crime grows stronger and richer in virtually every part of the world, amassing as much as 1 trillion dollars a year in revenue." Regrettably, human efforts at eradicating criminal syndicates from the face of the earth are limited. One reason for this is that in many cases justice is not swift and sure. To many people, laws often seem to be weighted in favor of the criminal, not the victim. The Bible stated some 3,000 years ago: "Because sentence against a bad work has not been executed speedily, that is why the heart of the sons of men has become fully set in them to do bad."—Ecclesiastes 8:11.

## Getting Out of Criminal Organizations

In addition to cracking down on organized crime from the outside, governments have attempted to help those on the inside get out of crime syndicates. Such a move is not easy. According to an old saying, "the only way to leave the Mafia is in a coffin." For a mobster to quit a *yakuza* organization, he is required to pay a large sum of money or have his little

finger or part of it cut off. To add to the fear involved in breaking ties with the underworld, a former gangster has to face the reality of living a straight life. His job applications will often be rejected. In some countries, however, there are police hot lines to help gangsters who are trying to break free and are having a hard time finding decent jobs.

To face pressures from the gang family and the prejudice of society, a mobster needs strong motivation to go straight. What could move him? It could be love for his family, a longing for a peaceful life, or a desire to do what is right. The strongest motivation, however, is illustrated well by the story of Yasuo Kataoka in the following article.

Yasuo Kataoka is typical of hundreds who have completely changed their lives. Beastlike qualities they previously displayed have been replaced by the new personality "created according to God's will in true righteousness and loyalty." (Ephesians 4:24) Now, people who were like wolves are residing peacefully among mild-tempered, lamblike citizens, and they are even helping others! —Isaiah 11:6.

### **Break Free From the Spirit of the World**

As mentioned in the preceding article, not only are all criminal syndicates under the one

*In God's new world, all  
will enjoy the work of their hands*



invisible authority of Satan the Devil but the whole world is. People do not even realize it, but Satan has organized the world to serve his criminal ends. Just as the crime syndicates provide wealth and pseudo family systems, he plays the role of a benevolent master by providing people with riches, pleasures, and a feeling of togetherness. Although you may not realize it, you may have been taken in by his evil schemes. (Romans 1:28-32) The Bible tells us that "friendship with the world is enmity with God." (James 4:4) It is not safe to cozy up to this world, which is under satanic influence. The Creator of the universe has an army of angels under Jesus Christ ready to round up Satan and his demons in order to cleanse the world of their wicked influence.—Revelation 11:18; 16:14, 16; 20:1-3.

How then can you come out from under the influence of Satan's world? Not by living the life of a recluse but by breaking free from attitudes and thinking patterns that dominate the world today. To do so, you will have to fight Satan's scare tactics and resist the incentives he offers to keep people in his grip. (Ephesians 6:11, 12) This will involve sacrifices, but you can break free just as others have if you are determined and if you avail yourself of the help Jehovah's Witnesses offer.

What will follow God's act of cleansing this chaotic world of crime? "As for the offspring of the wicked ones, they will indeed be cut off," says the Bible, and it continues: "The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it." (Psalm 37:28, 29) Then, there will be no reason to tremble at those who had beastlike qualities, for they will have been transformed by "the knowledge of Jehovah," which will fill the earth.—Isaiah 11:9; Ezekiel 34:28.

Today such transformation has already become a reality, as the following life story of a former *yakuza* member in Japan shows.

# BREAKING FREE FROM ORGANIZED CRIME

## "I WAS A YAKUZA"

**P**APA, when you come home, let's go to the meetings together. Promise me, won't you?" I received this letter from my second daughter while I was in prison for the third time. She was regularly attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses with my wife. As the letters from my family were my only source of comfort, I promised her that I would do as she asked.

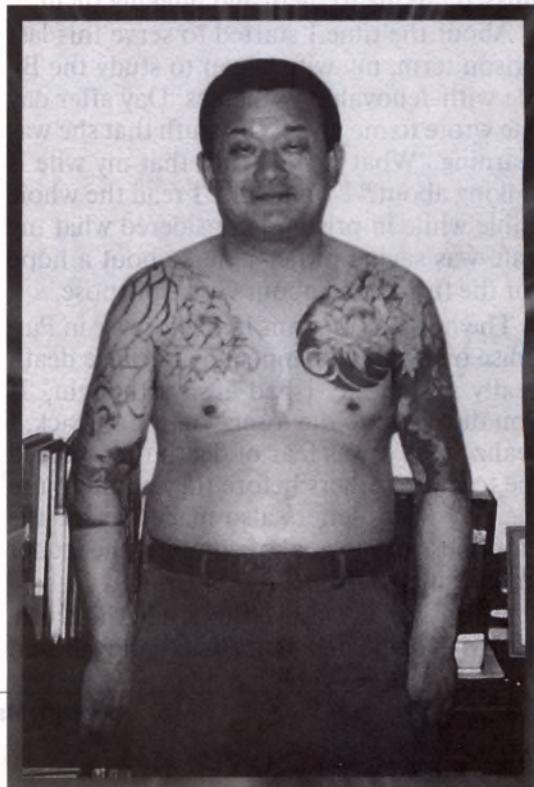
"Why am I leading a life of crime that takes me away from my family?" I thought to myself. I recalled the days when I was very young. Father died when I was only 18 months old, so I do not even remember his face. Mother remarried twice after that. Such family circumstances affected me deeply, and in high school I began to associate with hoodlums. I became violent and often got involved in fights outside the school. When I was in my second year of high school, I organized a group of students to fight with another group. As a result, I was arrested and sent to a correctional institution for a while.

I was like a ball rolling downhill toward a life of violence. Soon I formed a band of delinquents, and we would hang around the office of a *yakuza* group. At 18, I became a full-fledged member of that group. When I was 20, I was arrested for various acts of violence and was sentenced to three years in prison. First, I served time in the Nara Juvenile Prison, but my behavior did not im-

prove. So I was sent to another prison, one for adults. But I got worse and finally ended up in Kyoto in a prison for hardened criminals.

'Why do I keep committing such crimes?' I asked myself. As I look back, I realize that it was due to my foolish reasoning. At the time, I thought that such behavior was macho, proof of my masculinity. When I was released from prison at the age of 25, fellow

*I long for the day when  
my tattoos will be blotted out*



mobsters looked up to me as a somebody. Now the way was open for me to go up the ladder in the criminal world.

### **My Family's Reactions**

I got married about that time, and soon my wife and I had two daughters. My life did not change, though. I kept going back and forth between my home and the police—I was beating people up and practicing extortion. Each incident helped me win the respect of my fellow gangsters and the trust of the boss. Finally, my older *yakuza* "brother" made it to the top of the gang and became the boss. I was elated at becoming the number two man.

'How do my wife and daughters feel about my way of life?' I thought to myself. They must have been embarrassed to have a criminal for a husband and a father. I was imprisoned again at the age of 30 and then again when I was 32. This time, the three-year term in prison was really hard on me. My daughters were not allowed to come and visit me. I missed talking to them and hugging them.

About the time I started to serve this last prison term, my wife began to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. Day after day she wrote to me about the truth that she was learning. 'What is this truth that my wife is talking about?' I wondered. I read the whole Bible while in prison. I considered what my wife was saying in her letters about a hope for the future and about God's purpose.

The hope of humans living forever in Paradise on earth was appealing because death really scared me. I had always thought, 'If you die, you are the loser.' As I look back, I realize that it was fear of death that pushed me to injure others before they could injure me. My wife's letters also made me see the emptiness of my goal of climbing the ladder in the gang world.

Still, I was not moved to study the truth. My wife dedicated herself to Jehovah and

became one of his baptized Witnesses. Although in my letter I had agreed to go to their meetings, I was not thinking of becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I felt as though my wife and daughters had gone far away from me, leaving me behind.

### **Getting Out of Prison**

The day finally came for me to go free. At the Nagoya Prison gate, many gangsters lined up to welcome me. In the large crowd of people, however, I was looking only for my wife and my daughters. Seeing my daughters, who had grown considerably in three years and six months' time, I was moved to tears.

Two days after going home, I kept my promise to my second daughter and attended a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses. I was surprised to see the cheerful attitude of all in attendance. The Witnesses warmly welcomed me, but I felt out of place. When I later learned that those who had greeted me knew of my criminal background, I was puzzled. I felt their warmth, though, and was attracted by the Bible-based talk that was given. It was about people living forever in Paradise on earth.

The thought of my wife and daughters surviving into Paradise and of me being destroyed distressed me very much. I meditated seriously on what I would have to do to live forever with my family. I began to consider breaking free from my life as a gangster, and I started to study the Bible.

### **Breaking Free From My Criminal Life**

I stopped attending gang meetings and quit associating with the *yakuza*. It was not easy to change my way of thinking. I drove around in a big imported car for the sheer enjoyment of it—it was an ego trip. It took three years for me to trade my car for a modest model. I also had a tendency to seek an easy way out of things. As I learned the truth, however, I could see that I had

to change. But as Jeremiah 17:9 says, "the heart is more treacherous than anything else and is desperate." I could say what was right but had a hard time applying what I was learning. The problems I faced seemed like a big mountain. I became troubled, and many times I thought of quitting the study and giving up the idea of becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Then, my Bible study conductor invited a traveling overseer who came from a background similar to mine to give a public talk in our congregation. From Akita, 400 miles away, he came all the way to Suzuka to encourage me. After that, whenever I became tired out and thought of quitting, I would receive a letter from him, asking me whether I was steadily walking in the way of the Lord.

I kept praying to Jehovah to help me break free from all my *yakuza* ties. I had confidence that Jehovah would answer my prayer. In April 1987, I was finally able to withdraw from the *yakuza* organization. As my own business took me overseas every month, away from my family, I changed my job to janitorial work. This left my afternoons free for spiritual activities. For the first time, I received a pay envelope. It was light, but it made me very happy.

When I was the number two man in a *yakuza* organization, I was materially well-off, but now I have spiritual riches that do not fade away. I know Jehovah. I know his purposes. I have principles to live by. I have true friends who care. In the *yakuza* world, gangsters were caring on the surface, but no

*yakuza* I knew, not even one, would sacrifice himself for the sake of others.

In August 1988, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah by water baptism, and the following month, I began spending at least 60 hours a month telling others about the good news that had changed my life. I have been serving as a full-time minister since March 1989 and have now been given the privilege of serving as a ministerial servant in the congregation.

I was able to rid myself of most of the relics of my *yakuza* life. There is one that remains, though. It is the tattoo on my body that reminds me, as well as my family and others, of my *yakuza* past. Once, my oldest daughter came home from school crying, saying that she wouldn't go to school anymore because her friends told her that I was a *yakuza* and had tattoos. I was able to talk the matter out with my daughters, and they came to understand the situation. I am looking forward to the day when the earth will be a paradise and my flesh will become "fresher than in youth." Then my tattoos and memories of 20 years of *yakuza* life will be things of the past. (Job 33:25; Revelation 21:4)—*As told by Yasuo Kataoka.*

**At the Kingdom Hall  
with my family**



# •STAR•BIRTH• IN AN EAGLE'S "NEST"

- HOW are stars born? Why are some larger and brighter than others? In spectacular fashion a set of photographs taken by the Hubble Space Telescope may reveal star formation in action. This unique activity is occurring in the midst of the Eagle Nebula, a cloud of gas and dust in our Milky Way galaxy.

To stargazers on earth, the Eagle Nebula has the appearance of a bird with outstretched wings and talons bared. Astronomer Jeff Hester and his colleagues at Arizona State University were interested in photographing the area of the talons, which individually form pillarlike columns that resemble elephant trunks. There, ultraviolet radiation has been ionizing hydrogen molecules—that is, stripping away their electrons.

The mosaic of Hubble photographs reveals dozens of small fingers protruding from the ends of the pillars. At the fingertips, condensing gas forms spherical globules in which stars and, according to some astronomers, perhaps even planets may be developing. However, growth of these objects is being arrested by strong stellar winds from about a hundred infant stars that formed from the nebula earlier. The brightest of these stars may be 100,000 times as bright as, and more than eight times as hot as, our sun. Their radiation has already apparently eroded thinner parts of the nebula. This process, called photoevaporation, may stall star formation by removing material that otherwise would be swallowed up by embryonic stars. In the photographs the evaporating gas looks like steam rising from the gas-and-dust columns.

For one of these gaseous globules to begin shining, it must be massive enough to generate nuclear reactions. Scientists estimate that

its size has to be at least 8 percent of that of the sun. In addition, enough of the surrounding dust needs to be removed for light to escape. However, if the globule does not become large enough to shine, it may simply become a dark gas ball known as a brown dwarf. Recently, astronomers discovered their first identifiable brown dwarf.

The resemblance of the dust clouds in the Eagle Nebula to immense thunderclouds seen on stormy days may fool you into thinking that the dust clouds are not very large. In actuality, each cloud pillar is so long that a flash of light originating at one end must travel for nearly a year to reach the other end. Also, each "tiny" globule in the image is about the size of our solar system. Moreover, the nebula is so far away that light from it took about 7,000 years to reach us—traveling at a speed of 186,282 miles per second. This means that we are viewing the Eagle Nebula as it looked before man walked the earth.

Astronomers observe that star formation seems to occur in other nebulas as well, such as the Orion Nebula. However, the viewing angle for these other examples prevents clear observation of the process. Stars may also die by simply burning out, by exploding violently in a supernova, or by collapsing under the force of gravity and becoming a black hole. The Creator of the universe, Jehovah God, keeps an accounting of the stars, for they are all numbered and named by him. (Isaiah 40:26) The stellar eagle's "nest" may demonstrate some of the ways in which God has been "forming light" and producing stars that differ in glory.—Isaiah 45:7; 1 Corinthians 15:41.—Contributed.





# FLOWERS SHOW THAT SOMEBODY CARES

BY AWAKE! CORRESPONDENT IN COLOMBIA

A fascinated toddler gathers a bunch of buttercups into her chubby fist and runs to Mommy with her precious find. At a roadside stand, a loving husband picks out a dozen roses for his wife, to show her how much he cares. An appreciative son phones the neighborhood florist for freshly cut pompons to brighten his mother's day. A devoted housewife places a multicolored bouquet of carnations atop her supermarket shopping cart. They will add the final touch to her tastefully decorated home.

FLOWERS warm the hearts of young and old alike. They are a splendid means of conveying the sentiment "Somebody cares." A Spanish proverb states: "Whoever is not grateful for a rose will not be grateful for anything." (*Quien no agradece una rosa, no agradecerá ninguna cosa.*)

Flower sales are booming as never before. In this age of rapid air transport, flowers can now be grown far from the shops, supermarkets, and roadside stands where they captivate the eyes of passers-by. *Time* magazine stated that the flower industry is "growing fast and changing even faster: more and more of the production is coming from the southern hemisphere—largely from Colombia, which has become the second largest exporter after Holland."

#### **Plastic-Covered Greenhouses and Artificial Lakes**

With over 25 years in the business, Colombia leads the world in the export of carnations, while rating second in overall flower sales.

In 1964 a university student in California, U.S.A., made a computer study to determine locations with the optimum environ-





ment for year-round flower cultivation. He found that the climate and altitude of the upland basin on which Bogotá is situated, just north of the equator and nearly 9,000 feet up in the Andes Mountains, had ideal conditions.

The surprisingly green savanna of Santa Fe de Bogotá, where 92 percent of Colombia's export floriculture is located, is peppered with artificial lakes and plastic-covered greenhouses. Inside these wood- or metal-framed structures, a carefully controlled springtime environment nurtures millions of carnations, pompons, roses, chrysanthemums, alstroemerias, and many other varieties, soon to be cut and packed for shipment to North America, Europe, and Asia.

The ideal temperature for the cultivation of flowers ranges between 65 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit, the usual year-round daytime temperature on the savanna. Here, rainwater abounds, the soil is rich, and low-paid manual labor is available. During the night, temperatures may drop to near freezing and occasionally to a frosty 29 degrees Fahrenheit. Smudge pots, high-wattage light bulbs, or sprinklers protect against the cold. The light bulbs also serve to extend daylight hours, thus keeping certain plants awake and hastening their growth.

#### **Production Programmed Well in Advance**

Over 120,000 workers in Colombia are involved in some phase of the flower industry. Among them are many of Jehovah's Witnesses who live in communities scattered over the savanna. Benito Quintana, a Christian el-

der in one of the congregations at Facatativá, works as production supervisor at a nursery. He explains: "Months in advance, we have to program production to meet seasonal demands of the market. Mother plants for carnations are imported from Holland or Italy, pompons from Florida. Women cut the little shoots carefully,

#### **To Make Flowers Last Longer**

- Cut the stems on a slant under water before placing flowers in a vase. Drops of water adhering to the tips of the stems will keep air from entering and thus blocking future intake of water and nutrients.
- GeoMundo magazine quotes Colombian horticulturists as saying that an aspirin tablet, a teaspoonful of sugar, or a little cola added to the water will keep flowers fresh longer. Change the water every two or three days, using fresh water that is room temperature, although warm water can be used to make buds open more quickly.
- Slightly wilted blooms can often be revived by submerging the stems in hot water for ten minutes while sprinkling the petals with cool water. Keep flowers away from sources of heat, away from drafts, and out of direct sunlight.



planting them in banked rows in a warm greenhouse where they are watered by a cloudlike mist until they take root. Pompons take 12 days at 20 to 35 degrees Celsius (68° to 95°F), with two extra hours of light during the night. Carnations take 23 days at a temperature of between 15 and 25 degrees Celsius (59° to 77°F), with no light at night. Then we transfer the little plants to beds in other greenhouses where they are enriched with nutrients, fumigated, and watered till they flower, six months later for carnations and three months for pompons."

### Hard Work in High Season

When cutting time arrives, it is the women who do the work best, preferably without gloves and with thoroughly clean hands. Machines are not capable of judging the degree the buds have opened or the straightness of the stems, factors that determine the quality of the flower.

Judith Corredor, from Facatativá, explains: "Women have the patience and the tender touch as well as the speed and the skill that are required. When we enter the greenhouses at daybreak," Judith continues, "the savanna is often covered with fog; it can be very cold, even down to freezing. Many of the girls wear scarves. During the day it warms up, sometimes getting into the 90's. It is hard work, especially in high season when we are rushed and have to work overtime."

### A Colorful and Fragrant Message

After being cut, the flowers are taken to a special room where there is plenty of air and light. Here, women select and classify them according to the quality of the blooms and the straightness, thickness, and length of the stems. Then the flowers are wrapped in clear plastic, 25 to the bunch, ready for packing. Only the best are chosen for export.

Men pack the flowers in special corrugated cardboard boxes bearing the nursery's

name—carnations, 24 bunches to the box. Benito's brother, Alejandro Quintana, who works in packing, says: "We have to work fast, since flowers are among the most perishable of all crops. Our company has two pumps that suck the warm air out of the boxes, 112 boxes at a time, while forcing cold air in for two hours, thus lowering the temperature of the flowers to a few degrees above freezing. Then the holes in the boxes are sealed, and the flowers are kept in cold storage until they are loaded into trucks for transport to the airport."

At Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport, the flowers go through export inspections and are then placed in cold-storage facilities for a few hours until the merchandise is loaded on big jet planes to be transported to distribution points overseas. Within just a few days, these flowers will be opening their petals in homes, offices, sick-rooms, and elsewhere, conveying the colorful and fragrant message that somebody cares.

### One Who Really Cares

Nearly everywhere we go on earth, we find flowers for our enjoyment. They are found high in the mountains at the edges of snowfields and glaciers, in the woods and meadows, alongside streams and rivers, down by the seashore, and even in hot, dry deserts. Flowers have been here since long before man made his appearance on earth. Botanists assert that 'flowering plants are the basis for all animal and human life. Without them, animals and man could not exist.'

With insight, King Solomon declared: 'God has made everything pretty in its time.' (Ecclesiastes 3:11) This includes God's gift of flowers in all their variety and splendor. From time immemorial they have warmed the hearts of young and old alike. Indeed, God really cares!

# POPOCATEPETL

## Mexico's Majestic, Menacing Volcano

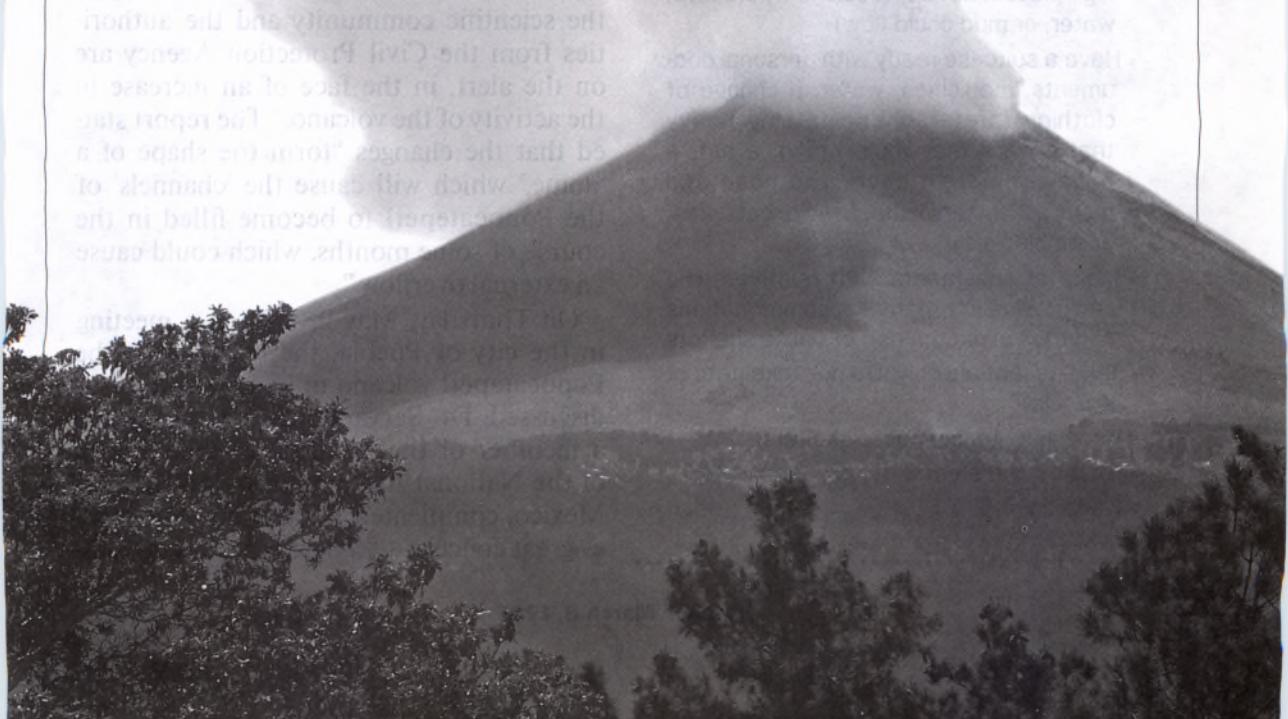
**H**OW would you like to live alongside a beautiful yet threatening volcano? Perhaps you would think twice about that. Nevertheless, this is the real situation for thousands of people who dwell in the towns around the majestic volcano Popocatépetl, in Mexico.

### History of the Volcano

Its name in Nahuatl means "Mount" or "Hill That Smokes." It is 17,887 feet high and is located in the Sierra Nevada mountains, in the state of Puebla, near the borders of the states of Mexico and Morelos. It has a beautiful and majestic conical form with snow on top year-round. In the course

of the years, this impressive volcano has disrupted the lives of the rural inhabitants of the zone by erupting some 16 times between 1347 and 1927. However, none of these eruptions were significant.

The volcano is situated between two large urban areas: the city of Puebla, located 27 miles to the east and the city of Mexico, located some 40 miles to the northwest. In addition, in the state of Puebla, there are 307 towns, with a total population of 400,000, that are near the volcano. Although it is true that not all of these people are located in areas of high risk, the economic and social impact that a major



eruption of Popocatepetl would have on them would be extremely bad for the area.

At the end of 1994, there was a considerable increase in the activity of the volcano—to such a degree that an alarm was raised and people began to be evacuated immediately. On December 21, 1994, at least three openings appeared at the base of the crater, through which gas and steam came out. The ashfall, which extended all the way to the city of Puebla, amounted to about 5,000 tons. The government then implemented a program to evacuate some 50,000 people, 30,000 of whom were accommodated in shelters.

Jehovah's Witnesses also responded by providing housing for those in need. (Com-

### Recommendations in Case of Disaster

The National Center for the Prevention of Disasters has provided a list of steps that should be taken before a disaster arises:

- Know your evacuation route. (Look for high places, not depressions where lava, water, or mud could flow)
- Have a suitcase ready with personal documents, medicines, water, a change of clothing (preferably something heavy that covers the whole body), a hat, a handkerchief to cover the nose and mouth, a battery lamp, a radio, batteries, and a blanket
- Make arrangements with relatives who can provide alternative accommodations and thus avoid the use of public shelters
- Take essentials only. Do not take pets or animals
- Know how to find public shelters
- Shut off the electricity, gas, and water
- Keep calm

pare Acts 4:32-35.) The report from the Witness relief committee says: "Despite the hour and the urgency of the situation, the response of the brothers of the city of Puebla and its vicinity was outstanding. Arrangements were made to accommodate over 600 people. A television station commented: 'Jehovah's Witnesses acted with all promptness. They evacuated their brothers from the danger zone immediately.'"

### The Volcano Awakens

According to official information, on Tuesday, March 5, 1996, at 3:50 a.m., a sudden increase was noted in the seismic activity of the volcano, probably associated with the uncovering of great channels opened by the gas and steam from the activity of December 21, 1994. The photographs and information obtained confirmed that these channels had been obstructed by ash, which caused an increase in the internal pressure of the volcano. This pressure, in turn, finally reopened the channels.

The newspaper *El Universal*, of Tuesday, April 9, 1996, commented: "The Popocatepetl had a flow of lava in the crater, so the scientific community and the authorities from the Civil Protection Agency are on the alert, in the face of an increase in the activity of the volcano." The report stated that the changes "form the shape of a 'dome,' which will cause the 'channels' of the Popocatepetl to become filled in the course of some months, which could cause an external overflow."

On Thursday, May 2, 1996, at a meeting in the city of Puebla, the behavior of the Popocatepetl volcano in its new phase was discussed. Dr. Servando de la Cruz Reyna, a member of the Institute of Geophysics of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, commented: "Naturally, this causes great concern . . . There is always the pos-



sibility that the volcano will evolve into a more explosive phase. This can happen, and we do not deny it for a moment."

Criticism has been voiced that even though the government talks about housing programs and evacuation and holds meetings to give direction to the populace, the reality is that the people who live in the region feel that they have not received clear guidance as to how to proceed in case the volcano does erupt. For instance, at the aforementioned meeting, various representatives from towns that are close to the volcano protested that they did not know which shelter or shelters to go to in case of a disaster.

The warnings that the volcano has been sending out should be taken seriously. Prudent people will undoubtedly do whatever is possible to protect their lives, even at the expense of material things. Jehovah's Witness-

es living in that zone have been preparing to evacuate the region if the need arises. A relief committee has been assigned to visit the Witnesses in the zone regularly, guiding them as to what they can do in case of a disaster. Some who live closer to the danger zone have been encouraged to abandon that region while there is still time, since the volcanologists have clearly warned that the volcano is an imminent danger. Obviously, that decision is left to each family.

For now, people who live in the neighborhood of the volcano live normal lives. However, common sense dictates that the population stay alert to any warning from the volcano or from the authorities that might indicate an emergency situation. It is not wise to remain indifferent to the warnings of the majestic but menacing volcano Popocatépetl.

# MESSENGERS OF PEACE IN EASTERN EUROPE

**T**HE deaf were hearing! Prisoners were gaining freedom! The police had almost nothing to do! What are we talking about? We are referring to what took place at the recent international conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses held in Eastern Europe during July and August of last year.

"Messengers of Godly Peace" was the theme of the program, and many people saw that in spite of trouble stirred up by the clergy in Romania,\* Jehovah's Witnesses do have the peace that comes from knowing God and Christ Jesus.—Isaiah 26:2, 3; Philippians 4:7.

Conventions were held in Prague, Czech Republic; Budapest, Hungary; Warsaw and Lodz, Poland; Tallinn, Estonia; and Brasov and Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Delegations from many foreign lands attended these conventions and lent a truly international flavor to the events. In Prague there were large groups from Germany, Japan, Poland, and the United States. A report from the Czechia branch office of the Watch Tower Society stated: "We were greatly encouraged by so many integrity-keeping worshipers of Jehovah God from other lands. For example, most of the Japanese delegates were pioneers, and their neat dress and orderliness visibly adorned their section of the

stadium. We also noticed the warmheartedness of the Polish delegation, the gratitude of the Slovakian brothers, the generosity of the Germans, and the wide-open hearts of the Americans. They all served as a lesson for us."

How were newly associated ones affected by the conventions? An 85-year-old scholar, author, and linguist attended, in spite of suffering from diabetes and a disease of the leg. He had been studying the Bible with the aid of the *Knowledge* book for some six months. During the program, he was focusing, not on linguistic and grammatical aspects of the talks, but on something else. "It was marvelous!" he exclaimed. "The love and consideration that you have among yourselves speaks louder than words."—John 13:34, 35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

The foreign visitors to Prague had an enjoyable time visiting the historical sites and giving an informal witness on every occasion. At a castle south of Prague, one American Witness, a lawyer's wife, was waiting at the top of the castle tower to give out tracts in Czech to all of those who climbed the steps. Others handed out tracts when they met a group of schoolgirls visiting the old Jewish cemetery. And, of course, all the professional tour guides and bus drivers received literature.—1 Peter 3:15.

One guide who expressed appreciation for the Witnesses and their conduct wrote: "I have never before met so many friendly and warmhearted people in all my life. Even

\* For detailed information on the conventions in Romania, see the article "Romanian Conventions Held Despite Opposition," in *Awake!* of February 22, 1997. For information on the program that was presented, see the article "Messengers of Godly Peace Assemble," in *The Watchtower* of January 15, 1997.

though I am Catholic, I was fascinated by your spiritual attitude. All of you gave me some hope that the world is not yet lost. Let me thank you for your kindness. God bless you!"

Even though heavy rain fell on Friday at Prague, families sat outdoors in the stadium, taking in the spiritual food delivered by local and foreign speakers. So many babies were there that in order to avoid accidents in the aisles, a special stroller, or baby carriage, parking area was set up outside the stadium.

The Prague convention was attended by over 22,000, and 432 newly dedicated Witnesses were baptized, including two persons in wheelchairs as well as five others who are physically disabled.

### The Deaf "Hear" in Budapest

Sitting astride the Danube River is the beautiful city of Budapest, which became the host city for an international convention in July. A peak of 23,893 attended, including 3,341 delegates from 11 countries besides Hungary.

In a tent close to the stage, the whole program was interpreted for deaf people, with about 100 in attendance. In the words of welcome to all the delegates using languages other than Hungarian, the deaf were especially welcomed, with the words: "One language we do not want to forget to mention into which the entire program will be interpreted is sign language. We are grateful to have the deaf with us."

### Sharing the Truth With Others

At these conventions new Bible literature was released, including the book *The Secret of Family Happiness*. After receiving this publication, a French delegation boarded a bus to return to their hotel. On the way they saw a bride and groom with their wedding guests. The brothers asked the driver to stop the bus. One of the Witnesses stepped out and handed a copy of the new book in



**In spite of the rain, families paid close attention to the program**

Hungarian to the couple. They accepted it gratefully and immediately started to look through the book. That was probably one of the first copies to be placed after its release!

### From Catholic to Communist to Witness

The 510 baptized at this convention represented over 2 percent of the attendance. Three of these new Witnesses are still in prison, serving time for crimes they committed prior to learning Bible truth. Local brothers visit them regularly and conduct Bible studies with others. In one prison in Budapest, about 50 Bible studies are being conducted with inmates.

One man who was raised in a Benedictine Catholic school lost his faith in the Catholic Church and, at the age of 20, became a member of the Communist Party. Later, he joined the army and rose to the rank of lieutenant. As a member of the Workers' Militia, he taught Marxism-Leninism at the university. He was intrigued by the Communist slogan "freedom, brotherhood, equality." However, the misuse by those in authority of the slogan "government of the people" made him have second thoughts about Communism. He felt that something was missing. Eventually, he retired. When

Witnesses knocked at his door, he was ready to listen. He reports: "During my first visit to the Kingdom Hall, I became convinced that finally here was true brotherhood. I was surrounded by the love of true followers of Christ. My metamorphosis from a Communist to a Witness took four years. But I have chosen the truth." He was baptized at the convention.

For the police, working at a convention is usually a change of pace. One policeman assigned to work in front of the stadium said that duty at Witness conventions is very difficult. Why? Because everything runs so smoothly that the police have a hard time staying awake!

### Favorable Press Reports in Poland

Two international conventions were held in Poland, with over 20,000 in attendance in Warsaw, the capital city, and nearly 12,000 in Lodz, Poland's second-largest city.

Warsaw's leading newspaper, *Życie Warszawy*, carried the following item: "There is good news to be proclaimed! It is news of peace, real peace. Our love for Jehovah and for our neighbor moves us to continue to preach without letup until God says that the work is done," stated Carey Barber, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Happy Polish Witnesses with their new releases**



A writer for the paper *Sztandar Młodych* said: "For two days 12,000 or so of Jehovah's Witnesses were gathered at a religious assembly at the Legia Stadium, in Warsaw. Exemplary order prevailed, and even though I looked carefully, I noticed no police cars or monitoring squads."

"Poland is, they assure us, an almost entirely Catholic country. But when our Catholic youths gather at the same stadium, a large police force is always present, ready for action."

"It is certainly alarming that renegades from Catholicism, sectarians, or whatever you call them [Jehovah's Witnesses] are able to assemble in enormous crowds and cause no danger to the public order and security, whereas our Catholic youths when in a crowd become dangerous, and police protection against their juvenile excesses is necessary. There is a lot to think about."

Baptisms of new believers took place here too, with 462 baptized in Warsaw and 278 in Lodz. One of these was 19-year-old Sylwia, who was prejudiced against the Witnesses. One rainy day she was approached by a Witness on the street. "I managed to drive her off, and I walked away. But I took under my umbrella a girl who was getting wet. She also turned out to be a Witness! She offered to bring me the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*. Out of courtesy I gave her my address, and . . . I was baptized today!"

### Little Estonia Gets a Big Witness

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania constitute the Baltic States. The population of Estonia is only about 1.5 million, and the capital city has about 450,000 inhabitants. Two conventions were held there in August 1996.

The impact of these large meetings was such that one newspaper said: "Tallinn is literally filled with the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses. Their convention held in Linna-hall is said to have gathered the biggest audi-

ence of all religions ever held in Estonia." All the hotels were booked by Witnesses.

Brother Carey Barber later gave a report in which he stated: "It is little wonder that the Finnish brothers and others assigned to Estonia love being there. This small but beautiful country has been overrun and trampled down by greater nations and has endured much suffering. Now the Estonians . . . look forward so much to having a future of permanent peace and security from Jehovah." There are over 3,100 Witnesses active in Estonia, half of whom speak Russian.

The conventions served Estonians, Russian-speaking Estonians and Latvians, Lithuanians, and visiting delegates from 15 countries, including 155 from Britain and 300 from Finland.

### Deaf Also "Hear" in Estonia

Three years ago a deaf elder from Finland went to Tallinn, Estonia, to see what he might do for the deaf in that country. He did not know one single deaf person there, so he went to the meeting house of the deaf in Tallinn, with piles of *Watchtower* magazines and other literature. The Estonian deaf welcomed him and were curious to see what he had with him. He placed all the literature during his first visit and wrote down the names and addresses of the interested ones, altogether 70 names.

Almost all wanted to have a Bible study, and the brother realized that he could not handle all those studies. So he had to pick the people who were most interested. Soon after his first visit to Estonia, he had 30 Bible studies and a waiting list of 40 prospects! There are now four sign-language interpreters for the deaf in Tallinn.

### "A New Episode in the Drama of the New Testament"

A Witness was working in the ferry terminal greeting convention delegates. She



**Joyful Estonian Witnesses  
in typical folk dress**

approached an Estonian travel guide and asked her what she thought about this great convention event. The guide told her that she had led several groups of Witnesses from various European countries and had noticed that the Witnesses are always well-behaved, good people. She had been invited to see the Watch Tower Society's office on Puhangu Street, and she was surprised to see the good order and the kind and happy young people. She could not understand why the Witnesses face fierce opposition and false accusations when the facts prove the accusations to be untrue. She said: "In my mind your work, your service, is like a new episode in the drama of the New Testament."

Certainly, as messengers of godly peace, Jehovah's Witnesses expect to establish a good reputation worldwide for their respectful conduct and their kindness to strangers. (1 Peter 3:16) These conventions in Eastern Europe show that in spite of slander and libel from religious enemies and apostates, Jehovah's Witnesses have God's blessing as they proclaim the message of peace that our war-torn, hate-filled world needs so badly.—Isaiah 2:2-4; Mark 13:10.

# Should Children Choose Their Own Religion?

**F**ROM the moment a child is born and through his adolescence, parents make choices for their child. At the same time, a wise parent knows when to be flexible, considering whenever possible what the child would prefer.

Yet, how much freedom of choice to give a child may present a challenge to parents. While it is true that children can make right choices and benefit from a measure of independence, it is likewise true that they can make wrong choices, which can result in tragedy.—2 Kings 2:23-25; Ephesians 6:1-3.

For example, children will often choose junk food over nutritious food. Why? Because at an early age, they are unable to make sound judgments on their own. Would it be wise for parents simply to allow their children free rein in the matter, hoping that eventually they will choose nutritious food? No. Rather, parents must make choices for their children with their offspring's long-term interests at heart.

Therefore, parents rightly make choices for their children regarding food, clothing, grooming, and morality. But what about religion? Should parents make that choice as well?

## The Choice

Some would argue that parents should not force their

religious convictions on their children. In fact, over 160 years ago, some who professed Christian beliefs advanced the idea that "children ought not to be taught religion for fear of having their minds biased to some particular creed, but they should be left to themselves till they are capable of making a choice, and *choose* to make one."

However, this idea does not harmonize with the Bible's viewpoint. The Bible emphasizes the importance of instilling religious beliefs in children from birth. Proverbs 22:6 says: "Train up a boy according to the way for him; even when he grows old he will not turn aside from it."

The Hebrew word translated "boy" embraces the age from infancy to adolescence. Regarding the importance of early learning, Dr. Joseph M. Hunt, of the University of Illinois, U.S.A., said: "It is during the first four or five years of life that a child's development is most rapid and most subject to modification. . . . Perhaps 20 percent of [his] basic abilities are developed before his first birthday, perhaps half before he reaches four." This merely underlines the Bible's inspired counsel that it is vital for parents to give wise direction early in a child's life,



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training him in God's ways.—Deuteronomy 11:18-21.

Outstandingly, the Scriptures direct God-fearing parents to instill in their children a love for Jehovah. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 says: "You must love Jehovah your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your vital force. And these words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must *inculcate* them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up." The Hebrew verb translated "inculcate" carries the idea of sharpening an instrument, as on a whetstone. This cannot be accomplished with a few strokes but must be done diligently, again and again. *The New English Bible* renders the Hebrew verb "repeat." Plainly, "inculcating" implies leaving a lasting impression.—Compare Proverbs 27:17.

Hence, true Christian parents ought to take seriously their obligation to impress their religious convictions upon their children. They cannot rightly abdicate this responsibility by allowing their children to choose for themselves. This would include taking their "little ones" to meetings. There the parents can sit alongside them and help them to appreciate the spiritual benefit that a united family can gain through paying attention to Scriptural discussions and participating therein.—Deuteronomy 31:12, 13; Isaiah 48:17-19; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15.

#### **The Parental Responsibility**

Simply telling a child to eat something because it is nutritious does not mean that the child will enjoy it. Thus, a wise mother knows how to make these essential foods as appetizing as possible in order to appeal to the child's taste. And, of course, she prepares food in a manner that conforms to the child's ability to digest it.

Similarly, a child may at first balk at re-

ligious instruction, and a parent may find that trying to reason on the matter does not work. However, the direction from the Bible is clear—parents must do their best to train their children from infancy. Therefore, wise parents make religious instruction palatable by presenting it in a way that appeals to the child, taking into consideration his ability to absorb it.

Loving parents feel keenly the obligation to provide the necessities of life for their children, and in most cases no one knows a child's needs better than the parents. In harmony with this, the Bible confers the primary obligation of providing physically as well as spiritually on the shoulders of the parents—the father in particular. (Ephesians 6:4) Thus, parents are not to shirk their responsibility by seeking to shift the obligation to someone else. Although they may take advantage of assistance offered, this would supplement, not replace, the religious education from the parents.—1 Timothy 5:8.

At some point in life, each individual decides what religious beliefs he will observe, if any. If Christian parents take personal responsibility for giving their children religious instruction from an early age and if they use this time instructing them to reason on the basis of sound principles, the choice the offspring make later in life will more than likely be the right one.—2 Chronicles 34:1, 2; Proverbs 2:1-9.

#### **IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

**Jehovah's Witnesses  
Vindicated in Greece**

**Bullying—What's the Harm?**

**High-Tide Rush Hour**

## WATCHING THE WORLD

### Prescription Drugs Misused

In the state of Victoria, Australia, Melbourne's newspaper the *Herald Sun* reports that "Australians spend \$3 billion a year on medicines and are increasingly becoming hooked on prescription painkillers." Victoria's minister for health warned that "abuse of prescription drugs is sneaking up on us and can be just as toxic to health and lifestyle as illicit drugs." He also expressed concern about reports that more and more people are now 'doctor-shopping' to obtain multiple prescriptions. Some tablets are saved up, then crushed and injected into the bloodstream. According to one survey, the percentage of people taking painkilling drugs for other than legitimate medical use jumped from 3 percent in 1993 to 12 percent in 1995.

### Innocent Victims in Rwanda

During the recent carnage in Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of women were raped and some were even kept as sexual slaves. In many cases the rapists were the very men who brutally killed the women's husbands and relatives. About 35 percent of the rape victims became pregnant. Some women chose abortion or infanticide as a way to resolve their dilemma; others abandoned the babies or gave them up for adoption. Still, "by conservative estimates, there are 2,000 to 5,000 unwanted children in Rwanda whose mothers were raped during the civil war," reports *The New York Times*. A large number of widows and their children have become outcasts in their communities. The *Times* notes that "many wom-

en have found it impossible to find new husbands or to begin a new life." Some mothers see in their children a constant reminder of their shame and the violent death of loved ones. Because of these painful memories, some mothers find it hard to show affection for their babies.

### Foot Problems

According to estimates made by the Health Service of the Federal Association of Physicians in Germany, half the citizens of that country have trouble with their feet. "Many people neglect taking care of their feet or abuse their feet by



wearing shoes that are too tight or are otherwise detrimental to their health," reports the newspaper *Nassauische Neue Presse*. Regularly wearing high heels or badly fitting shoes can result in pain in the knees, hips, or back. Diseases caused by fungi, such as athlete's foot and mycosis, are also becoming more widespread. A preventive measure the Federal Association of Physicians recommends is "rinsing away all soap and carefully drying between the toes."

### Shopping Addiction

In Ireland compulsive shopping "is now recognised as an

addiction and joins alcohol, drug, gambling and food disorders as a serious emotional and mental obsession which requires professional help," says *The Irish Times*. Victims of this obsession may spend small fortunes buying items they do not need. The report explains: "The frisson of a clothes shopping adventure stimulates dopamine and serotonin secretions in the body, which then produce a sense of well-being." For the compulsive shopper, as for the drug addict, the highs become more and more difficult to obtain.

### "An Army of Budding TV Viewers"

A survey of 21,000 families in Italy has revealed that the vast majority of Italian children are TV dependent. The newspaper *La Repubblica* noted that "an army of budding TV viewers" is accustomed to using the remote control from the first year of life. More than four million Italian children between the ages of three and ten stay in front of the TV, almost mesmerized for more than two and a half hours a day. Mental-health experts are concerned over the fact that many children as young as six to eight months old are already avid TV watchers.

### Women and Suicide

"There are 4,500 suicides in Britain each year: five men to each woman," reports *The Times* of London. But the number of suicides of young women between 15 and 24 years of age has increased significantly in the past four years. A professor at the University of Southampton

explained one of the possible causes: "Young women want to be good at their jobs and still take on the pressures of running the family. Young middle-class mums [mothers] are employing childminders so they can hold down their jobs. Then they grieve and feel guilt. Their bodies are telling them to be mums and their minds are telling them to go out and be breadwinners." The professor believes that the accumulation of all these stresses and pressures may be leading more to commit suicide.

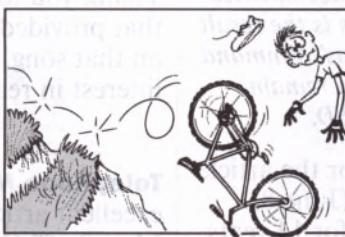
#### "Global Epicentre" of AIDS

India is like "an express train hurtling down the tracks into the whirlwind" and is fast becoming "the global epicentre of one of the most savage plagues ever visited on mankind," says a new study carried out by the Thames Valley University, in London. Similarly, Dr. Peter Piot, head of the United Nations AIDS program, told the 11th international meeting on AIDS that India has suddenly emerged as the nation with the largest number of people infected with the AIDS virus—over 3 million of its 950 million population. According to the *Indian Express* newspaper, a study estimates that prostitutes are regularly visited by 10 percent of the more than 223 million sexually active men in India. Prostitutes who are working in large urban areas and who are found to be infected are usually sent back to their home villages where ignorance of the disease and medical facilities that are poorer than those in the cities are causing rapid acceleration of the spread of the disease. It is estimated that by the year 2000, India will have five mil-

lion to eight million people who are HIV-positive and at least a million full-blown AIDS cases.

#### Sports Injuries

- "Mountain biking is growing by leaps and bounds, and riders are hitting the hospital," reports Canada's *Vancouver Sun*. Between 1987 and 1994, the newspaper reports, the number of people mountain biking in the United States grew by 512 percent, from 1.5 million to 9.2 million. Overzealous beginners who ride above their level of ability on back roads and trails get tossed off their bikes and sustain not only cuts and



abrasions but also acute injuries to ankles, wrists, shoulders, and collarbones. Some injuries, though not life-threatening, can have serious long-term consequences. Dr. Rui Avelar, who specializes in sports medicine, believes that a fracture to one of the eight tiny wrist bones can easily be missed in X rays. He cautions: "If you fall on an outstretched hand, take it seriously." A person could end up with an osteoarthritic wrist and permanent damage.

- "In Germany, between 1.2 million and 1.5 million sports accidents occur each year," reports the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Medical personnel at the University of Bochum have analyzed 85,000 recreation and sports injuries in an effort to

gather accurate, detailed information about them. Soccer players experienced almost 50 percent of all injuries. However, when taking into account the number of participants in various sports, the researchers found that soccer, handball, and basketball all have similar rates of injuries. About 1 out of 3 sports accidents is to the ankle, followed by 1 out of 5 to the knee.

#### Watch Out for E. Coli O157:H7

"Outbreaks of food poisoning caused by a fierce strain of *E. coli* bacteria . . . have been growing around the world," warns *The New York Times*. "The number of bacteria which can carry the toxin is increasing, as is the number of infections and deaths worldwide." The bacterial strain, type O157:H7, was first recognized as a problem in 1982. However, since then it has borrowed a new gene to make Shiga toxin, which causes *Shigella* dysentery. If not treated promptly, the diarrhea can result in hemorrhaging, kidney damage, and death. In 1993, in the northwestern United States, 4 people died and 700 became ill after eating undercooked hamburgers in a popular restaurant chain. In recent years outbreaks have also occurred in Africa, Australia, Europe, and Japan. In the United States alone, *E. coli* O157:H7 may be responsible for 20,000 illnesses each year and from 250 to 500 deaths. "Consumers can improve their odds of not becoming infected by being sure to cook meats, especially ground meats, so that the temperature on the inside reaches 155 degrees Fahrenheit, which is warm enough to eliminate all the pinkness," says the *Times*.

## FROM OUR READERS

**Orthodox Church** As an Orthodox Christian, I was intrigued by your article "The Greek Orthodox Church—A Religion Divided." (January 8, 1996) The next time you denigrate Orthodoxy, have the honesty to discuss its contributions, such as how it preserved Christianity during Islamic persecution and Soviet rule. Besides, separation of Church and State is not Biblical. Were King David's or Solomon's governments separate from the Church?

M. F., United States

*We focused on the crisis currently facing the Orthodox Church—a matter well documented by the media in Greece. This crisis is the result of the church's failure to obey Jesus' command to be "no part of the world" and to remain neutral politically. (John 17:16)—ED.*

**Panic Attacks** Thank you for the article "Coping With Panic Attacks." (June 8, 1996) I have had these attacks for 14 years and thought I was the only one with this problem. Sometimes the feelings even come over me at the Kingdom Hall. Although my problems may not go away, this article has really helped me.

C. C., Spain

It was with a flood of tears that I read the article on panic attacks. It will help me the next time that panic tries to pick a fight. I feel the article is an answer to my prayers.

M. B., Scotland

For almost 30 years, I've been unable to ride trains or buses or be surrounded by people. Meetings at the Kingdom Hall and conventions have been big challenges. So you can understand how this article has been a source of great encouragement and comfort to me. Thank you from the bot-

tom of my heart for writing about this ailment in an upbuilding and comforting way.

Y. T., Japan

I am a full-time evangelizer, and I have had these terrible attacks since 1994. I lost my joy and did not want to leave my house. I thought these feelings were due to a lack of faith, but now I know that I am not the only Christian going through this.

S. A., Brazil

**Waltzing Matilda** The song "Waltzing Matilda" brings back fond memories to me. Thank you for the article (June 8, 1996) that provided the background information on that song. Reading it has rekindled my interest in reading *all* the articles in *Awake!*

J. M., Germany

**Telephone Manners** Thank you for the excellent article "How Are Your Telephone Manners?" (June 8, 1996) I work for a bank that provides client services by phone. I gave the article to my supervisor, and he told me that he found the article to be beneficial, timely, and practical. He asked me to have the article circulated among all 32 of our telephone operators.

N. J. S., Brazil

Having had difficulties in the past with unwanted callers who had criminal motives, we have long followed the telephone company's recommendation to hang up if a caller refuses to identify himself after three polite requests. This has resulted in hurt feelings a few times when a friend has called and played the guess-who game mentioned in the article. Articles like this promote kindness and understanding even in such seemingly small areas.

G. A., United States



# A CRY FROM THE HEART

THE Awake! of May 8, 1996, carried a series of articles on the subject of adoption. We have been pleasantly surprised to see the reader response that we received from all over the world. The following letter was especially touching.

"I feel compelled to point out that many of us who gave up our children really wanted to keep them. I was an unmarried teenager, still in school. As soon as my parents learned that I was pregnant, they informed me that I should put the welfare of the child before my own and give it up for adoption. I was told that 'a baby needs both a mother and a father,' which I could not provide. My parents did not want me to keep the baby—there was no place in their home for me if I had a baby. What could I do? They argued: 'You will resent your baby for taking away your freedom.'

"As soon as my pregnancy began to show, I was taken out of school and sent away to live with a relative. When I left home, I knew that I would not be welcome there until my pregnancy was over and I had given up the baby.

"I was sent to a home for unwed mothers. When the social worker asked me if I was sure of my decision to give the baby up for adoption, I knew that she didn't realize that I had no other choice. I WANTED TO KEEP MY BABY! I have always longed to see him laughing and happy. Your readers need to know that many birth mothers feel as I did.

"I was not given any real option. So I did what I was told was in the 'best interests' of the child. And I have lived with a deep wound ever since. I worry that my son might think that I never cared and that I did not want him.

"Now, as a Christian, I always appreciate the Bible's counsel on the more difficult situations that we bring upon ourselves because of not applying God's Word in our lives. It shows the painful and far-reaching effects of worldly reasoning. But adopted people need to know that just because they were given up for adoption, it does not mean that they were not wanted. Please let them know!"

# *The Night to Remember*

## SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 1997

ON THE NIGHT before he died, Jesus Christ instituted with his apostles the Memorial of his death. At a simple meal in which he used wine and unleavened bread as symbols, Jesus commanded: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me."—Luke 22:19.

Jehovah's Witnesses warmly invite you to share with them in remembering this annual Memorial. This year it will be held after sundown on Sunday, March 23, the date that corresponds to Nisan 14 on the Bible's lunar calendar. Please check with Jehovah's Witnesses locally for the exact meeting place and time.

