

Awake!

March 8, 1989



**MIRACLES
AND VISIONS**
SIGNS FROM GOD?



Millions of sincere people believe in miracles, apparitions, and visions. They flock to shrines such as the one shown here in Fátima, Portugal, with the hope of obtaining or seeing a miraculous cure. Some of the devout will go on their knees to the sanctuary. Many believe that they have been healed. But other sincere people ask, Are these miracles and apparitions really from God? Is there any other explanation?

Miracles and Apparitions Past and Present

By "Awake!" correspondent in France

GUADALUPE, Fátima, and Lourdes—what do those names mean to you? For many they are just towns in Mexico, Portugal, and France. But for millions of sincere Catholics, they are sanctuaries, three of the most famous Marian shrines in the world. Catholic devotion to such places is far from waning in this 20th century. For instance, in 1982 some 4,500,000 visitors poured into Lourdes, while even greater throngs crowded Guadalupe.

For the Catholic Church, these shrines are places of alleged miraculous cures. This is particularly so in the case of Lourdes, described by Pope Pius X as "the center of Marian worship and the throne of Eucharistic mystery, seemingly surpassing in glory all similar centers throughout the Catholic world." Thousands of people have claimed to have been cured during or after a pilgrimage to Lourdes. However, the church has recognized only 65 "miracles" to date.

Whether you believe in God or not, you have a right to ask questions. What about these apparitions, mainly of Mary, around the world? Are the miraculous cures and other events associated with them proof of divine approval? At a conference held in Lourdes in 1986, the bishop of Tours encouraged his

hearers to 'meditate on the meaning of the apparitions' so as to 'establish the important distinctions between false and true apparitions.' If you are a Catholic, you too might be interested in taking a closer look at the subject.

Apparitions—True or False?

The Roman Catholic Church does not officially commit itself regarding such apparitions, nor does it oblige its members to believe in them. But what are sincere Catholics to conclude when they see Pope John Paul II drinking water from the Lourdes grotto or talking with Lucie, the only person alive to have seen the apparition of Fátima? Is this not a clear demonstration of his (and the church's) official approval? Moreover, during his travels, the pope never fails to visit Marian sanctuaries, such as the shrine of the Black Virgin of Czestochowa in Poland.

Other more modest shrines have been approved by the church, such as Beauraing and Banneux in Belgium. Sometimes worship is permitted only on a local level, as is the case in Tre Fontane, Italy, and Marienfried, Germany.

Since the end of the 19th century, however, many have laid claim to seeing apparitions. The book *Vraies et fausses apparitions dans l'Église* (True and False Apparitions in the

Church) estimates that there were over 200 cases from 1930 to 1976. Why were so few officially recognized when, according to the author, "the messages, apart from a few exceptions, were not absurd and, upon examination, turned out to be practically identical"?

The French magazine *L'Histoire* offers an explanation in an article dealing with 19th-century apparitions of Mary in the Loire area of east central France. According to the author, the church did not investigate these occurrences and left them in obscurity in order to avoid "competition" with already recognized shrines.

Today, some are of the opinion that the church's present reserve is due to its recent concern for "scientific" exactitude. René Laurentin, a French Catholic authority on these matters, even says that apparitions like those at Lourdes would have little chance of being officially recognized today. But should not signs—if authentically from God—be accepted as such at any time in history?

More Modern Apparitions

Apparitions are still taking place. At San Damiano, Italy, crowds of pilgrims throng to the place where Mamma Rosa (who died in 1981) claimed she had seen "the Virgin." The church remains reserved on

the subject, but some of the faithful hope for a change in attitude following the conversions supposed to have taken place there.

In the little village of Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, children and teenagers recently reported over a thousand apparitions of the "Virgin." Here again, in spite of the church's discretion, certain groups fight for official recognition of the phenomena. Catholics, however, may well wonder what attitude to adopt while awaiting the decision of the ecclesiastical authorities. In the meantime, should they put faith in such testimonials?

To complete the picture, there are also apparitions rejected by the church, such as those at Palmar de Troya, Spain. Concerning the latter, the bishop of Seville warned the faithful not to "nourish public credulity as concerns phenomena that the church does not recognize and even condemns." Despite the warning, a division nevertheless occurred, leading to the excommunication of an archbishop and several priests, who, in defiance of the church, maintained that the apparitions were authentic.

How is it possible to decide whether apparitions are authentic or not? The following article will deal with that question in detail.

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 importantly, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away.

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Miracles and Apparitions Signs From God?

MIRACLES today are still taken to be . . . a sort of letter of recommendation, a guarantee of God's authentic message, his almighty seal on a mission or word coming from him." The miracles here referred to by Joseph Vandrisse, correspondent at the Vatican for the French daily *Le Figaro*, are naturally those approved by the Catholic Church. But what are the church's criteria for determining whether a miracle or an apparition truly comes from God?

Should the Church Judge Its Own Case?

According to Catholic authorities, apparitions must satisfy two conditions. First, they must be in harmony with the church's teachings. A striking example is the apparition at Lourdes, where the "Virgin" presented herself as "The Im-

maculate Conception." Interestingly, a few years before this, Pope Pius IX had decreed that at conception Mary was preserved free from original sin. In 1933 the future Pius XII expressed his opinion that the two events were linked, stating: "The Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God and blessed among women, wished to confirm with her own lips that which was defined in Rome by her infallible Supreme Pontiff. This she did soon afterward in a famous apparition at the Massabielle Grotto [Lourdes]."

Second, the conduct of the one who saw the apparition must be considered. As the bishop of Tours stated: "The church . . . believed in the apparitions [at Lourdes] because of Bernadette's holiness." And the ecclesiastical authorities consider that both Bernadette and Lucie, who claimed to have seen Mary at

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Guadalupe

Lourdes and Fátima respectively, met this condition by later becoming nuns.

The messages transmitted were in agreement with Catholic teaching. The visionaries' lives were in harmony with the model established by the church. In these cases, it is hardly surprising that the apparitions recognized by the Catholic Church confirm her own traditions and doctrines exclusively, even the most recent ones, such as the Immaculate Conception.

But are miracles and apparitions actually signs from heaven that prove the veracity of the church's teachings? J. Bricout, editor of the *Dictionnaire pratique des connaissances religieuses* (Dictionary of Religious Knowledge), quoted another Catholic author, P. Buysse, who wrote: "As the miracles of Lourdes have a specific connection with 'beliefs peculiar to the Catholic Church' (the Immaculate Conception, the definition of this dogma by pontifical authority, veneration of the Blessed Sacra-

December 9, 1531.

A Mexican Indian, named Juan Diego, was hurrying along to Mass in Mexico City. On the way he encountered a lady who sent him to ask the bishop of Mexico City to build a church on the very ground where she stood. The bishop was somewhat skeptical about the Indian's message.

At a following apparition, she introduced herself as the mother of the true God and a little later as "Holy Mary of Guadalupe." In order to provide him with a sign, she told Juan Diego to gather some roses, although it was neither the season nor the place for such flowers. Nevertheless, he found some and wrapped them up in his cloak. While he was presenting them to the bishop, a life-sized figure of the "Virgin" appeared on his cloak.

A portrait of the scene is on display today in Guadalupe Basilica, near Mexico City.

ment, veneration of the Virgin Mary, and so forth), one may, rather, one must recognize that 'the doctrines of the church bear the seal of God's approval.'"

However, the Catholic Church cannot rightfully claim such a divine warrant. By taking upon itself the authority to decide whether apparitions (and associated miracles) come from God or not, it is setting itself up as judge of its own case.

Many other religions allege evidence of miracles and claim to have God's support. Is God behind the miracles performed in the charismatic movements (including non-Catholic ones) or even in non-Christian religions? It is difficult to believe that he is, for the Bible tells us that God is "a God, not of disorder, but of peace." —1 Corinthians 14:33.

What is the correct basis for judging? The book *Les signes de crédibilité de la révélation chrétienne* (Signs of Credibility of the Christian Revelation) explained that



Lourdes

the criteria for considering a miracle to be authentic are principally moral and religious.

True to the Revelation?

According to various Catholic authors, "the First requirement is that the message transmitted be true to the revelation of the Gospel and doctrinal tradition of the church." "No new revelation can modify the initial revelation." Also, Pope John Paul II explained that "the message that was given at Fátima in 1917 contains the whole truth of the Gospel." All of this means that above all, the message given by such apparitions must conform to the "revelation," the Holy Scriptures. Does this really prove to be the case?

What conclusions can be drawn from the visions of a fiery hell given to the shepherds in Fátima? The Scriptures clearly show that sinners are not punished in this way when they die. Jesus himself stated

February 11, 1858.

A 14-year-old French girl named Bernadette Soubirous, her sister, and a friend were out gathering firewood near Lourdes, a town in southwest France near the Spanish border. Just as Bernadette was going to cross a stream, a "lady" appeared to her in a grotto. On other occasions, the same "lady" asked for a chapel to be built on that very spot and appealed to all mankind to repent.

Encountering yet another apparition, Bernadette heard the "lady" say in the local dialect: "I am the Immaculate Conception." Alone against civil and even religious authorities, Bernadette Soubirous maintained that her declarations were true. Finally, the Catholic Church officially recognized the apparitions of the "Virgin." The sanctuary at Lourdes is the result.

that we should be in fear of the One that can *destroy* both soul and body, thus showing that the soul can die. Other Bible texts clearly teach that there is no consciousness in death and that the hope of living again is based on the Bible promise of a future resurrection.—Matthew 10:28; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; John 5:28, 29.

And what about the "Immaculate Conception" that Bernadette spoke about? This again is a flagrant contradiction of Bible teaching. The Scriptures show that Mary, like all of Adam's descendants, was 'conceived in sin' and inherited death. (Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:23) If Mary was conceived without sin, why did she present a sin offering after the birth of Jesus? (Leviticus 12:6; Luke 2:22-24) Moreover, there is not a single Bible text to support the Catholic doctrine that says that she was preserved from original sin by special grace. Since the worship of Mary has no Scriptural foundation, it is quite logical to



Fátima

raise questions as to whether her apparitions are from God.

Could They Be From Another Source?

Of course, Bible scholars know that miraculous signs do not all stem from God. After citing the miracles accomplished by the Egyptian magicians before Pharaoh and Moses, the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, edited by F. Vigouroux, mentions that "in the final days, false prophets and false Christs, all agents of the Devil, will work many miracles to the point of deceiving the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ themselves, if that were possible."—Matthew 24:24; Exodus 7:8-13.

But what if, as was the case at Fátima, the apparition invites mankind to repent and asks believers to pray for the conversion of sinners? Interestingly, a book in favor of apparitions, entitled *Fátima—Merveille du XX^e siècle* (Fátima—Marvel of the 20th Century), quotes the priest, who was at that time in Fátima, as expressing his doubts

May 13, 1917.

A young shepherd and two shepherdesses were guarding their flocks at Fátima, in central Portugal, where they saw their first apparition of the "Virgin." During a later apparition, people hurried to the spot in hopes of receiving a sign. They claimed to have seen the sun dancing in the heavens and then fall to earth.

The children also received "secrets." They had a vision of hell, where they saw sinners suffering horribly in terrible flames. The "Virgin" also asked for Russia to be consecrated to her "immaculate heart." Later popes fulfilled her wish. A last "secret" is guarded by the highest authorities of the Catholic Church, who refuse to make it known to the public at present.

about the origin of these messages in spite of their content. He stated: "It could well be demonic trickery." Indeed, the Bible shows that Satan "goes disguised as an angel of light" and that "his servants, too, disguise themselves as the servants of righteousness." (2 Corinthians 11:14, 15, *The Jerusalem Bible*) A plausible message is therefore no proof that an apparition really comes from God.

This is also the conclusion drawn by Calmet's [Catholic] *Dictionnaire historique de la Bible*, which states: "Miracles and wonders are not always a sure sign that those performing them are holy or that their doctrine is correct, nor are they sure testimony of the visionaries' having received a mission."

In contrast, Christ performed many miracles while on earth. What was his purpose, and what light do they shed on today's miracles and wonders? These questions will be answered in the following article.

Miracles and Apparitions

Why Not Needed

WHEN on earth, Jesus performed many miracles. He changed water into wine, provided food for crowds of people, healed the sick, and expelled demons. Jesus' teaching and the fact that he fulfilled the Bible prophecies concerning the Messiah convinced many of his contemporaries. Others reasoned as follows: "When the Christ arrives, he will not perform more signs than this man [Jesus] has performed, will he?"—John 7:31.

The Purpose of Miracles

What was the purpose of the miracles that Jesus performed? The Bible explains that Jesus was to be 'a prophet like Moses.' (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18) Jehovah God gave Moses the power to perform certain miracles to prove that he was the leader chosen to liberate the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. (Exodus 4:1-9, 30, 31) Just 'like Moses,' Jesus performed miracles to identify himself as the Messiah, as the promised Liberator of the Jews.—Acts 3:22.

But Jesus' miracles also proved that he had received special power from God. When God's Kingdom rules the earth unopposed, Jesus will use to the full the power that he demonstrated on a small scale while on earth. To illustrate, let us take the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. (Luke 9:12-17) In God's new world, Jesus will see to it that

all mankind have enough to eat. (Psalm 72:16) He will also cure all sickness and disease, thus enabling obedient humans to live forever. (Revelation 21:4) By performing three recorded resurrections, he proved his ability to raise millions from the dead.—Luke 7:11-17; 8:40-56; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-44.

A Means of Identification

Another reason why Jehovah performed miracles on behalf of Israel was to prove beyond any doubt that they were his chosen people. (Deuteronomy 4:32-34) The beneficiaries were an entire people, not a few privileged individuals.

Similarly, first-century miracles were one of the proofs that Jehovah had transferred his favor from fleshly Israel to the early Christian congregation. (Matthew 21:43; 27:51; Romans 9:6; 11:7) The many miracles performed by the apostles were evidence of God's approval of the congregation under the leadership of God's Son, Jesus Christ.—Acts 2:22, 43; 4:29, 30; Hebrews 2:3, 4.

Furthermore, in those days, people would lay the sick ones in places where merely Peter's shadow might fall on them, and the Bible states that those brought to him "would *one and all* be cured." (Acts 5:15, 16) Why, then, are *all* those who today go with faith to shrines not cured?

Apparitions Not Needed

The primary reason is that signs and miracles are no longer needed to prove that God has transferred his favor from fleshly Israel to the true Christian congregation. In a letter to his Christian companions, the apostle Paul clearly explained that miraculous gifts would eventually be done away with. The time would come when they would no longer be a means of identifying true Christians.—1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

Even calling on Jesus' name would not prove that a person was a true Christian. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus foretold that he would reject certain ones who claimed: "Lord, Lord, did we not . . . work many miracles in your name?" For what reason would Jesus reject these miracle workers? He answers: "I have never known you; away from me, you evil men!" Evidently, some would work miracles in Christ's name, but in fact they would be impostors.—Matthew 7:22, 23, *The Jerusalem Bible*.

The Real Criterion

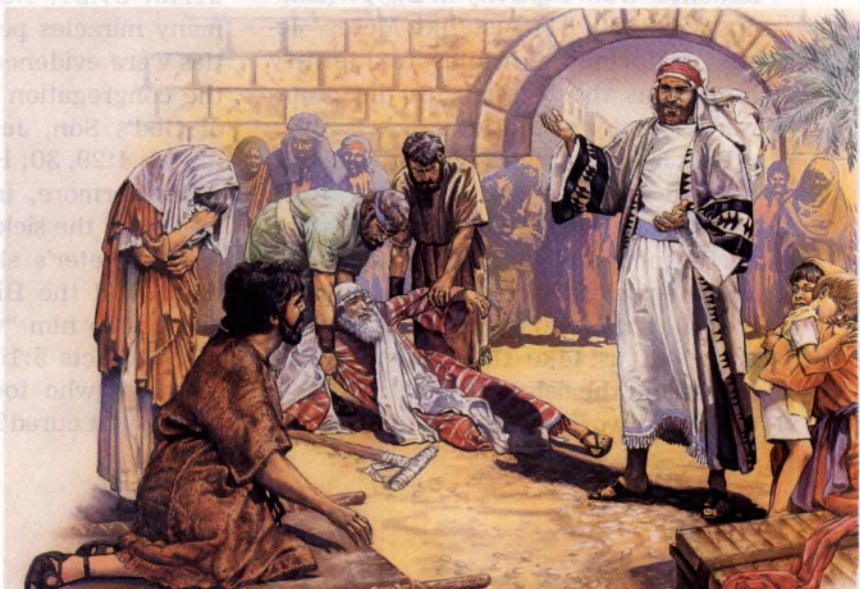
In view of the foregoing, how is it possible to identify true Christians today? Jesus provided a criterion when he declared: "A good tree cannot bear worthless fruit . . . Really, then, by their fruits you will recognize those men." The day before his death, Jesus reminded his apostles: "By this all will know that you

Miracles of healing are no longer needed to identify the true Christian congregation

are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves." It follows that performing miracles would not be the criterion forever. But all would have to prove themselves Christ's disciples by their true love.—Matthew 7:18-20; John 13:34, 35.

So should your faith be founded, even partially, on "miracles" performed today in Christ's name? Or should it be founded entirely on the truth found in God's Word, the Bible? It is essential to examine in the light of God's Word the conduct of those claiming to be God's servants.

Around the world today, who are making known God's Word and who endeavor to live in harmony with it? Who are known worldwide for their unity? Who have no national, political, racial, or religious barriers among them? Who zealously preach the good news of God's Kingdom? If as a sincere person you have more questions, Jehovah's Witnesses will be happy to provide you with the facts you need in order to judge for yourself. Please feel free to contact the Witnesses in your neighborhood or at their local Kingdom Hall. They will help you place your trust in Jehovah and Jesus Christ, his Son, for "there is no salvation in anyone else."—Acts 4:12.



Young People Ask... .



Am I Ready to Drive?

"**A** TEENAGER without a [driver's] license is just not a teenager." No doubt many youths share the sentiments expressed by this teenage boy. To put it mildly, in many countries they can hardly wait to get behind the wheel of a car.

For many youths a driver's license is a symbol of status and maturity. Being able to drive means freedom, a loosening of parental supervision. It means mobility, no longer having to depend on parents or older brothers and sisters for transportation. Admittedly, not all youths have sound motives for wanting to drive. Some, for example, want to drive because of the romantic possibilities it opens up with the opposite sex. And as Dr. Haim G. Ginott observed in his book *Between Parent & Teenager*, for some youths a car "represents . . . power, speed and excitement."

Nevertheless, driven in a mature, responsible way, a car can be a real asset. Many young witnesses of Jehovah, for example, put cars to good use in their public ministry. A car also allows a youth to run helpful errands for others and to assist those who need transportation to Christian meetings.

Let's assume, then, that you are of legal driving age. You have taken driver's education courses in school and have carefully studied the rules of the road. Under your parents' (or the school's) direction, you

have even obtained some behind-the-wheel experience. You may have passed a driver's test and obtained a license! Does all of this mean that you are now ready to drive? Not necessarily.

Teenage Drivers: The Record Speaks

Dr. Ginott observed: "There are sixteen-year-olds who handle a car with skill and confidence; they drive better than their parents. In contrast, there are eighteen-year-olds so immature that it would be irresponsible to allow them to take the wheel."

The facts bear out the truthfulness of this charge. The *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1988* shows that drivers 21 years of age and under make up only about 10 percent of the driving population. Yet, they make up a grim 20 percent of the drivers involved in fatal car accidents. Furthermore, according to the book *Driving High: The Hazards of Driving, Drinking, and Drugs*, U.S. automobile accidents are the leading cause of death among young people 16 to 19! Additional thousands of youths have been scarred and maimed for life in auto mishaps.

Many of those injuries could have been prevented if young drivers had taken the simple precaution of wearing seatbelts. Dr. David Hochberg, however, laments the fact that many youths insist on their "right" to drive unencumbered by lifesaving restraints. Speaking directly to youths,

Hochberg says: "I stand by the stretcher of those who survive, assess your injuries and plan needed repairs. I ask a question I've asked a hundred times: 'How come you weren't wearing your seat belt . . . ?' Briefly, the bravado and the bluff return: 'I've got my rights, Doc.'"

All too often, though, youthful "rights" collide with the rights of others to health and happiness. An article published in *Car and Driver* magazine reported on a study that showed that "teenage drivers kill other people more often than themselves. More than half of all people killed in crashes for which a teenager was responsible were either the teen-ager's passengers or occupants of the 'nonresponsible' vehicle." The article concluded that "simply put, teen-age drivers can be reasonably viewed as nothing less than a menace."

A car is a symbol of prestige, power, and excitement



This dismal driving record exists despite the fact that young drivers have quicker reflexes, sharper vision, better hearing, greater manual dexterity, and often a better understanding of the mechanics of automobiles than their elders. Obviously, skill alone does not make a competent driver, nor does the fact that one is of legal age and possesses the knowledge necessary to pass a driver's test.*

Why Many Youths Make Poor Drivers

Says *The Family Handbook of Adolescence*: "Physical prowess is a relatively minor issue for driving. . . . Physical ability almost always precedes emotional capability." Yes, part of the problem with young drivers is the nature of youth itself. Solomon said that "the beauty of young men is their power," that is, youths may abound in strength and ability. (Proverbs 20:29) However, they are often sadly lacking in good judgment. Indeed, by their reckless driving, some youths have shown that foolishness is still very much 'tied up with their hearts.'—Proverbs 22:15.

Some are thus prone to be careless, to use a car for thrills and excitement, to dare and be dared. In the hands of such youths, a car is a potential murder weapon; a driver's license, a license to kill. Consider, for example, an accident that took place involving a 17-year-old high school football player named Harvey. On his first night out alone with a car, Harvey made a sudden start at a crosswalk—and ran down a mother and child.

Harvey's athletic coach pointed to the cause of this tragedy: "If they had asked me, I could have told them Harvey wasn't

* While some countries, such as Japan, have rigorous standards, driver's licenses are handed out quite routinely in the United States. Testing procedures there have thus been criticized as being grossly inadequate.

**Improperly or
carelessly driven,
a car becomes a
potential murder
weapon**

ready emotionally to drive. He has a bad temper in the locker room and needles other players. He is a flashy performer and carries a chip on his shoulder. His mental attitude showed itself in his driving as soon as he was unsupervised. The boy just had to be first away when the light turned green."

Sad to say, many license-bearing youths are equally 'not emotionally ready to drive.' In his book *Licensed to Kill*, Ronald M. Weiers quoted a study done on teenage drivers by a major U.S. insurance company. The study pointed to "the carelessness, exuberance and tendency to 'show off' of the teen years" as a major factor in many auto accidents involving teenage drivers.

Of particular concern is the fact that so many youths take to the road under the influence of alcohol. The most recent statistics in the United States show that drivers under 21 made up almost a quarter of the alcohol-influenced drivers who were involved in fatal accidents. Explain the authors of *How to Survive Your Adolescent's Adolescence*: "Driving while intoxicated is particularly common in teens for three reasons: (1) they are inexperienced in handling both drinking and driving, and thus have less of an experiential base to draw on in making judgments about either activity; (2) they're trying to impress their friends by how 'mature' they are; and (3) they don't think that getting arrested for



drunken driving or having an accident could happen to *them*, only to someone else. But statistics from the last decade have shown quite decisively that up to 60 percent of those killed in drunk driving accidents are teenagers."

'No! You Cannot Drive!'

In view of all these facts, it is little wonder that some have called for governments to impose higher age requirements for driver's licenses, even calling for driving curfews. More pertinent, though, may be the reaction of your parents.

Knowing well the hazards of teenage driving, some parents refuse to allow their children to drive even when they have reached the legal driving age. One parent said: "We don't allow our sixteen-year-old son to drive. We read the papers and know what can happen. I'm not going to worry myself to death every time he is out driving."

Such a position may seem unjust and unreasonable to you. After all, you may be a serious, conscientious youth, not at all prone to take chances with your life or the lives of others. The problem is, How do you convince your folks of this? Our next issue will discuss this question.

I Climbed a Mighty Monolith

By *Awake!* correspondent
in Australia

FAR surpassing all I had read and the countless pictures I had seen, there it stood, majestically, in all its splendor, in the halo of the setting sun. These were the few minutes we had waited for. As we watched spellbound, the massive bulk quietly turned a delicate pink, then a rich purple, and finally a deep red. This was the color I especially wanted. Click went my camera for the last time.

Around me hundreds of other cameras clicked as excited people from many parts of the world ended their vigil that evening and captured a scene that knows few parallels. For we were at Ayers Rock—the world's most famous monolith, or single rock formation—situated at the geographical center of Australia. Yes, I was finally seeing firsthand this awe-inspiring handiwork of God.

Why So Spectacular?

John Ross, in his book *Beautiful Australia In Colour*, describes Ayers Rock as "the supreme tourist attraction in a country full of them, a life

sustaining force in an ancient and barren land."

Of course, the immense size of Ayers Rock is spectacular in itself, but the changing colors are what bring sighs and gasps to sightseers' lips. This monolithic sandstone giant rises 1,143 feet above the desert floor, stretches in length for two and a quarter miles and is one and a quarter miles wide. As if the kaleidoscope of color caused by the changing position of the sun is not enough, another breathtaking sight is the brilliant silver sheen that bathes the monolith after a sudden desert downpour.

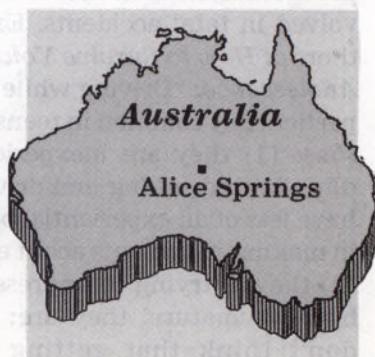
The Rock is located 290 miles southwest of central Australia's main city, Alice Springs. It got its name from one of South Australia's chief secretaries, Sir Henry Ayers, but has been known to the Australian Aboriginal people for centuries as Uluru, the meaning of which is now uncertain.

The Urge to Climb

All who see Ayers Rock for the first time seem to get an irrepressible urge to examine the intriguing phenomenon at close quarters. Some can afford to do this from the air,

while others circumnavigate the base by car—a distance of about six miles. In my case, it was a *must* to climb it. Would you like to come with me?

The shape of what we are to climb is best likened to the round back of a sleeping hippopotamus. We commence our climb about two thirds of the way along the hippo's body from his tail. Notice the series of posts cut into the rock face, with a chain attached for us to grasp as we climb. We are glad of that, for the path is just a narrow ridge with the rock face falling away on both sides. Apparently many an unwary or overconfident climber ignored this chain, inviting disaster. Now we remember more vividly the plaque our guide showed us as we began our climb. It listed the most recent fatal falls, involving people from several countries. Sudden wind blasts are the danger. Without warning, these gusts can send a climber reeling. So hold on to the chain. It might mean your life!



Like most inexperienced climbers, we commence with a flourish of enthusiasm that lasts about ten minutes but soon settle down to a slow, steady, uphill plod. Before long, our tourist coach down below looks quite tiny. Twenty minutes into the climb, it is obvious that we are not in as good physical shape as we might be. We feel the need for periodic pauses. But what awe-inspiring views there are to compensate for these rest breaks as we take in the panorama that stretches steadily wider as we ascend! To our left loom the gigantic Olgas, a cluster of massive rocks that seem to have been bunched together by some giant hand. The tallest of these is Mount Olga, which rises 1,790 feet above the valley floor. Then, as our eyes sweep to the right, we see the multimillion-dollar tourist hotel and complex in the distance, served by a busy tourist-inspired airport. Beyond this and as far as the eye can see is flat, featureless desert, so characteristic of the outback center of Australia.

I remember standing beside our coach and gazing upward at what seemed like hundreds of busy ants coming and going from some nest in the ground to a food supply on the summit. This must be what we now look like from the ground.

Will We Make It?

On up we go, ever upward. Why do our calf muscles ache so? We soon forget them as we are intrigued by the tiny pools of water in the rock face. Why, each pool has living organisms swimming in it—small shield shrimps! But that is the only life there is on the otherwise massive, arid, nude rock face.

What's that our guide is saying? We are now halfway up. Is that all? Oh, well, at

least the steepest part is now over, and the safety chain is no longer needed. From here on, the climb is more gradual, with just a painted centerline to mark out our path. We wind among obstacles, up and down smaller curves in the rock face. We begin to wonder whether we will ever reach the summit.

But suddenly we are there. Now we can see over the top of the Rock and down the other side. More rewarding



**The steep climb
up Ayers Rock**



scenes. Constant changes of contour, with a sculptured appearance of fantastic designs. Here at the summit, we find a cairn, a directional indicator, and a place for our signature, indicating that we have made it to the top.

What About the Descent?

But what about getting back down? Like most people, I assumed that the walk down would be just a stroll, simply a matter of letting gravity propel me down with little or

no effort. How wrong I was! A few minutes into our descent and I notice how those calf muscles now seem to cry out for relief. Each step seems more painful than the last. Quite a few rest stops later,



we eventually reach the bottom.

And then it seems a herculean effort to walk the short, flat distance to the coach. But we finally make it, and so here we are, looking upward again at this desert

giant, with scores of human "ants" still scurrying up and down its amazing surface.

It has been exciting and fascinating to be so close to another wonder of God's endless creations. It has been physically tiring but

so mentally and emotionally stimulating. Speaking for myself, I cannot repress a small prayer of thanks to Jehovah for my having the strength at 61 years of age to climb the world's most famous monolith.

Is Ancestor Worship for Christians?

MOST people know that ancestor worship plays a major role in the lives of millions of people, especially Confucianists, Buddhists, and Shintoists. But were you aware that ancestor worship is woven into the fabric of African life too? As a matter of fact, the threads of ancestor worship can be seen in almost all religions, maybe even yours. It is "a universal phenomenon," says a Nigerian professor of religious studies.

What is ancestor worship? Perhaps your understanding of it agrees with this definition: "Ritualized propitiation and invocation of dead kin, based on the belief that spirits [of the dead] influence the fate of the living."—*The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*.

Thus, in the home of a devotee of ancestor worship—a Buddhist living in Southeast Asia,

"As for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all."
—Ecclesiastes 9:5

for example—you may see a small altar on which a picture of the deceased relative is prominently displayed. Here too you may also smell the burning of incense or hear the chanting of prayers and the clapping of hands. Frequently, the devout place food or arrange

flowers on the altar for the benefit of their dead relative.

Move to another continent, and you will find that many African people "live with their dead." In sub-Saharan Africa the general belief is that communion and communication are possible between those who are alive and the deceased. "All of us Africans feel that our deceased parents and other ancestors are close to us," says a leading African theologian of the Protestant faith.

In much of Africa, dead ancestors are still regarded as heads of the families or communities to which they belonged while they were living. They remain "spiritual superintendents of family affairs," says Professor E. Bolaji Idowu, in his book *African Traditional Religion—A Definition*. There is almost nothing that an ancestral spirit may not be called upon to grant or avert. Thus, the ancestors are regarded as "factors of cohesion in African society," and according to *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, veneration of them promotes "familial solidarity."

In Western lands—such as France or Canada—churches, chapels, or shrines are dedicated to saints, who could be called hero-ancestors. Prayers from the lips of the devoted are recited before silent statues. Or on bended knees with outstretched hands, devotees offer gifts to gilt icons. True, adherents of the

religions of Christendom would bristle at the idea that their display of devotion is ancestor worship; but the Buddhist, the Shintoist, or the devout African smiles. He knows that the veneration shown by these "Christians" is not much different from his own acts of adoration.

On What Is Ancestor Worship Based?

The core of ancestor worship is the belief in the continuing existence of the dead through a surviving element of the human person. It is "faith in the immortality of the soul," according to the Ugandan Catholic writer Damian Lwasa. How solid is the basis for such faith? Sierra Leonian theologian Harry Sawyerr admits that Africans who claim "that their ancestors are alive in the spirit do so without any concrete evidence."

Actually, according to the Bible, there is no spiritual part of a person that survives the death of the body. The Creator himself says: "Look! All the souls—to me they belong. As the soul of the father so likewise the soul of the son—to me they belong. The soul that is sinning—*it itself will die.*" (Ezekiel 18:4) Scientists and medical personnel have found no evidence of any conscious, living part of humans that survives the death of the body.

Long before Confucius or Buddha, a wise man of pre-Christian times wrote: "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all." (Ecclesiastes 9:5) Earlier, Job said: "An earthling man expires, and where is he? His sons get honored, but he does not know it." (Job 14: 10, 21) Thus, the dead cannot serve as 'spiritual superintendents of family affairs.' At death one "cannot take along anything at all." —Psalm 49:10, 17-19.

Think of this: Do dead ancestors eat the good food offered them? Does not the fact that the food is left untouched indicate that

the dead are powerless? Furthermore, dead ancestors cannot be aware of veneration or sacrifices performed by living descendants. Being nonexistent, they cannot be interested in their former family or intervene in its affairs. The Bible says: "They have no portion anymore to time indefinite in anything that has to be done under the sun."—Ecclesiastes 9:6.

What Hope for Dead Ancestors?

Does this mean, then, that there is no hope of being reunited with dead loved ones? Not at all! People long ago separated by death will be united again when they are brought to life in the resurrection. "The hour is coming," Jesus promises in the Bible, "in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice and come out."—John 5:28, 29.

This hope of a resurrection helped reshape the life of an Okinawan woman who worshiped her ancestors. She explains: 'My outlook on life changed. Becoming a follower of Jesus Christ has helped me to be more loving to my living relatives and to others.' Is not love for *living* parents far more reasonable than veneration of *dead* ancestors? (Ephesians 6: 2, 3) She continues: 'When I observe the loneliness of aging parents and grandparents today, I am very thankful that I learned to show real love and respect for my parents while they were still alive.'

In addition, for Christians the most serious objection to ancestor worship is that it represents a course of rebellion against God's plain command: "You must not have any other gods against my face . . . because I Jehovah your God am a God exacting exclusive devotion." (Exodus 20:3, 5) So instead of worshiping dead relatives, heed the Bible's counsel to worship Jehovah, the One alone who can make possible a joyous reunion with dead relatives. —Revelation 20:12, 13.



Athena, goddess of war and wisdom—statue at city gate, Wesel, Germany

RELIGION'S FUTURE IN VIEW OF ITS PAST

Part 5: c. 1000-31 B.C.E.

Mythical Gods Without Merit

"Every religion has its origin in Asia."
Japanese proverb

THE Japanese are right. The roots of religion are traceable to Asia. More specifically, basic religious teachings and practices found in the world's religions issued from ancient Babylon, located in Asia.

In confirmation, the book *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* says: "Egypt, Persia, and Greece felt the influence of the Babylonian religion . . . The strong admixture of Semitic elements both in early Greek mythology and in Grecian cults is now so generally admitted by scholars as to require no further comment. These Semitic elements are to a large extent more specifically Babylonian."

The Babylonian elements of Greek mythology were easily absorbed into early Greek religion, which, according to *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, had "no sacred book in which the truth was fixed once and for all . . . It sufficed for a person performing rites

to give credence to a vast repertory of stories learned in childhood. Each of these stories existed in many versions, allowing a wide margin of interpretation."

Typical of such stories were the ones told in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, the renowned Greek poet probably of the eighth or ninth century B.C.E. His works, highlighting the relations between the mythical gods of Mount Olympus and humans, including intermediate godlike mortals venerated as heroes, became a ready source from which Greek religion could draw. That is why, explains writer G. S. Kirk, "myth and religion overlap."

Greek religion drew also from other sources. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* points out that "the Hellenistic world, which favoured mystery religions with special zeal, adopted [from Egypt] the cults of Osiris, Isis, and Horus." From there "they were spread over the entire Roman Empire." How did this happen?

Greek Mythology Takes Rome Captive

Early ancestors of the Romans practiced a simple religion that held the gods to be impersonal spirits residing in material forms of all kinds. It was a religion of superstition that recognized omens and the magical properties of plants or animals. It held annual festivals, like the Saturnalia in December, at which time people exchanged gifts. The book *Imperial Rome* describes it as "a religion of form, of ritual, with little emphasis on the spiritual. The Roman made a compact with his gods —you do something for me and I will do something for you—and his religion was largely a meticulous observance of that bargain." This made for a spiritually barren religion, causing the Romans to seek spiritual sustenance elsewhere.

More elaborate religious observances, as

well as the use of temples, statues, and images, were later introduced by the Etruscans.* The same book says that they were also the ones "who gave Rome its earliest significant contact with the Greek gods and goddesses, many of whom the Romans eventually absorbed virtually unchanged." Before long it could be said that "religion in Rome wore many faces and had many names: each new people the Romans encountered through conquest or trade seems to have added to the Roman pantheon."

The early Roman clergy were not expected to be spiritual or moral leaders. It sufficed, says *Imperial Rome*, for them to know "the proper forms of addressing the god, the taboos associated with his worship, and the complicated liturgy." In contrast with the common people, known as plebeians and ineligible to hold high office, leading clergymen were able to acquire impressive political and social powers.

Thus, for about a thousand years, from Homer's time onward, Greek mythology so strongly influenced the religions of both Greece and Rome that *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* says: "The importance of Greek mythology in the intellectual, artistic, and emotional history of Western man can hardly be overestimated." At least religiously speaking, Horace, a Latin poet of the first century B.C.E., was correct when he said: "Captive Greece took Rome captive."

A Greek God on the March

Alexander III was born in 356 B.C.E. at Pella in Macedonia. Reared in royal surroundings, he enjoyed the tutorship of

* The origin of the Etruscans is controversial, but the theory most widely supported is that they migrated to Italy from the Aegeo-Asian area in the eighth or seventh century B.C.E., bringing along an Asian culture and religion.

famed Greek philosopher Aristotle, who helped him develop an interest in philosophy, medicine, and science. The extent to which Aristotle's philosophical teachings shaped Alexander's way of thinking is a matter of debate. But there is little doubt about Homer's effect on him, for Alexander, an avid reader, had a special passion for Homer's mythological writings. In fact, it is claimed he learned the *Iliad* by heart, no small feat, since this entailed memorizing 15,693 lines of poetry.

At 20, after his father was assassinated, Alexander succeeded to the Macedonian throne. He at once embarked upon a campaign of conquest that eventually earned him the title Alexander the Great. Generally recognized as one of the greatest military men of all time, his greatness elevated him to godship. Both before and after his death, divinity was attributed to him.

Alexander drove the Persians from Egypt, where he was hailed as a deliverer. The book *Man, Myth & Magic* says: "He was accepted as Pharaoh and when he visited the oracle of the god Ammon . . . he was formally hailed by the priest as 'son of Ammon.'" This incident evidently accounts for the story that he was the son of Zeus, chief god of the Grecian pantheon.

Alexander pushed eastward, finally reaching parts of India. On the way he conquered Babylon, from which had come many of the ideas found in the mythology and religion of his homeland. It was therefore appropriate that he planned to make it the capital of his empire. But on June 13, 323 B.C.E., after having reigned for a little more than 12 years, the great Greek god faltered—dead at 32!

A Revered Roman God

The city of Rome had been founded on the neighboring peninsula of Italy in the

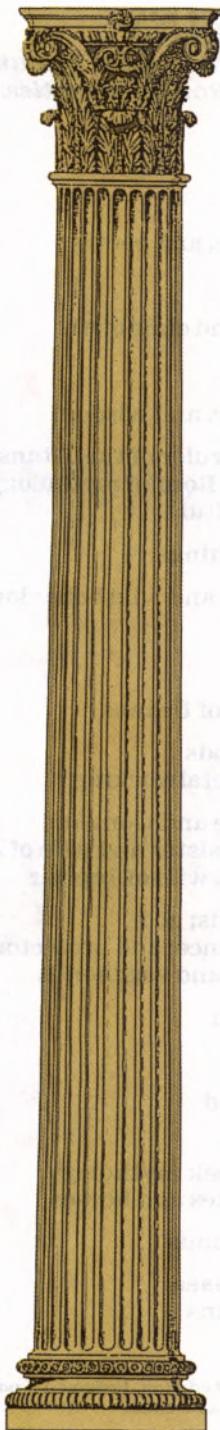
middle of the eighth century B.C.E., centuries before Greece reached its pinnacle of world dominance under Alexander. After Alexander's death, world power slowly shifted in Rome's direction. General Julius Caesar, head of the Roman state, was assassinated in 44 B.C.E., and after some 13 years of unrest, his adopted son Octavian defeated his rivals and went ahead to establish the Roman Empire in 31 B.C.E.

Imperial Rome calls Octavian the "greatest of Rome's many emperors," saying that the "Romans called him Augustus, meaning 'the revered', and provincials hailed him as a god." As if to confirm these opinions, Augustus had signet rings made bearing the likenesses of him and Alexander, who had gone before him. Augustus was later deified by the Roman Senate, and shrines were built throughout the empire in his honor.

Did They Merit the Name?

Today, no one would place his hopes for world peace and security in the hands of Roman or Greek gods—not in the mythical ones that ruled from Mount Olympus, nor in the real human ones that ruled from political thrones. And yet, from their Asiatic origins down to this very day, false religions continue to mislead people into placing their trust in mythical gods that bear the name but lack the merit. Fittingly, Alexander's beloved Homer wrote in the *Iliad*: "How vain, without the merit, is the name."

It has been said that ancient Greeks viewed the *Iliad* "as a source of moral, and even practical, instruction." Today, there are many other writings that are considered in a similar way. How properly to evaluate such religious best-sellers will be the subject of our article in the March 22 issue.



Pervasive Greek Piety

The ancient Greeks had no specific word for religion itself. They used the term *eu·se'bei·a*, which can be translated as "piety," "right conduct in regard to the gods," "revering well," and "godly devotion."*

The New Encyclopædia Britannica states: "Greek religion, in its developed form, lasted for more than a thousand years, from the time of Homer (probably 9th or 8th century BC) to the reign of the emperor Julian (4th century AD), though its origins may be traced to the remotest eras. During that period its influence spread as far west as Spain, east to the Indus, and throughout the Mediterranean world. Its effect was most marked on the Romans, who identified their deities with the Greek. Under Christianity, Greek heroes and even deities survived as saints, while the rival madonnas of southern European com-

* See 1 Timothy 4:7, 8 in *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

munities reflected the independence of local cults."

The early Christians had to face the worshippers of Greek and Roman false gods. The Bible account tells us: "And the crowds, seeing what Paul had done, raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian tongue: 'The gods have become like humans and have come down to us!' And they went calling Barnabas Zeus [presiding god of Greek pantheon], but Paul Hermes [god who served as messenger for other gods], since he was the one taking the lead in speaking. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was before the city, brought bulls and garlands to the gates and was desiring to offer sacrifices with the crowds. However, when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they ripped their outer garments and leaped out into the crowd, crying out and saying: 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are humans having the same infirmities as you do, and are declaring the good news to you, for you to turn from these vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them.'" —Acts 14:11-15.

GREEK AND ROMAN DIVINITIES

Many gods and goddesses of Greek mythology held similar positions in Roman mythology. The table below lists some important Greek and Roman divinities.



Hermes



Diana



Asclepius



Jupiter

Greek	Roman	Position
Aphrodite	Venus	Goddess of love
Apollo	Apollo	God of light, medicine, and poetry
Ares	Mars	God of war
Artemis	Diana	Goddess of hunting and childbirth
Asclepius	Aesculapius	God of healing
Athena	Minerva	Goddess of crafts, war, and wisdom
Cronus	Saturn	In Greek mythology, ruler of the Titans and father of Zeus; in Roman mythology, also the god of agriculture
Demeter	Ceres	Goddess of growing things
Dionysus	Bacchus	God of wine, fertility, and wild behavior
Eros	Cupid	God of love
Gaea	Terra	Symbol of the earth, and mother and wife of Uranus
Hephaestus	Vulcan	Blacksmith for the gods and god of fire and metalworking
Hera	Juno	Protector of marriage and women. In Greek mythology, sister and wife of Zeus; in Roman mythology, wife of Jupiter
Hermes	Mercury	Messenger for the gods; god of commerce and science; and protector of travelers, thieves, and vagabonds
Hestia	Vesta	Goddess of the hearth
Hypnos	Somnus	God of sleep
Pluto, or Hades	Pluto	God of the underworld
Poseidon	Neptune	God of the sea. In Greek mythology, also god of earthquakes and horses
Rhea	Ops	Wife and sister of Cronus
Uranus	Uranus	Son and husband of Gaea and father of the Titans
Zeus	Jupiter	Ruler of the gods

Source: "The World Book Encyclopedia," 1987 edition, Volume 13, page 820

Photo Sources: Hermes, Diana, and Jupiter—Courtesy of British Museum, London
Asclepius—National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece

FIRE and flame have intrigued man from the very beginning of history. The first humans must have looked with fear upon "the flaming blade of a sword" preventing entrance to the garden of Eden. (Genesis 3:24) Yet, another flame, the Olympic flame, has ignited warm emotions in the hearts of many.

Some may recall how this flame successfully crossed oceans and continents by various modes of transportation from Olympia, Greece, until it reached Calgary, Canada, or Seoul, Republic of Korea, to open the 1988 XV Olympic Winter Games and the XXIV Olympic Summer Games. As the flame was carried by people on foot, in wheelchairs, snowmobiles, and dogsleds mile by mile across Canada, emotions reached such a peak that *Maclean's* magazine was prompted to headline an article "Flame of Passion."

Others, though, when probing the source of the Olympic flame, see things differently. To them the flame casts a disturbing shadow.

The Flame Resurrected

For the most part, legends of early peoples have it that fire was sent down from the heavens as a divine gift. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from the gods at Mount Olympus and gave it to humans. Fire was so important that in some societies a perpetual flame was kept burning. In Greece many houses had a sacred hearth, which represented the life, or spirit, of the people. In

The Olympic flame arriving at the Calgary, Canada, Winter Olympics in 1988

the same way, the Greeks had a hearth in their homes. This was a symbol of the family unit, and the hearth was a place where the entire family gathered to eat, to work, to sing, and to pray. The hearth was also a place where the family gathered to burn out of doors materials that were no longer needed.

The Olympic Flame Casts a Shadow

By Awake! correspondent in Canada



Rome a temple was dedicated to the worship of Vesta, goddess of the hearth.

During the first Olympic Games in 776 B.C.E., there was a sacrifice of a hundred oxen to Zeus, and a priest stood at the end of the stadium holding a torch. The athletes raced to the end of the stadium toward the priest. The victor had the privilege of taking the torch and lighting the fire at the altar for the sacrifices. The flame burned symbolically during the games in honor of this sacrifice to Zeus.

There does not appear to be any record of the presence of a flame when Baron Pierre de Coubertin reinstated the games in 1896. However, it was reported that an Olympic flame burned at the 1928 games in Amsterdam and at the 1932 games in Los Angeles.

But when did the torchbearer idea of modern times have its beginning? *Maclean's* magazine reports that in 1936 the Nazi Party, sponsor of the Berlin Summer Games, organized a 12-day run from Olympia, Greece, to Germany, using three thousand torchbearers. The leaders of the Third Reich were experts at drawing the maximum response from the populace. *Maclean's* goes on: "The flame's arrival infused the Games' opening ceremony with unprecedented drama, and the idea stuck."

Greek author Xenophon Messinesi states: "Nothing of all the ceremonies seems to create such an impression as the Flame which comes from Olympia, sometimes as much as two months on its way. It links the Games about to be held with the religious expression sanctified over the centuries."

The Games Revived

The original Olympics were designed to fan the flames of worship. They were born as a religious festival to honor Zeus, supreme among the Olympian gods. These games were held every four years, from

776 B.C.E. until 394 C.E., when the "Christianized" Roman emperor Theodosius "decreed that 'pagan festivities' should cease." Then part of the Roman Empire, Greece complied.

So unyielding was this Roman decree that over the centuries the original location of the Olympic Games was lost sight of and remained unknown until the 1800's. Then "its rediscovery prompted a desire to revive the Olympic tradition so, in 1896, the first modern Olympic Games were held" in Athens, reports *The Toronto Star*.

The modern Olympic movement has a high goal: the pursuit of better social values. Bruce Kidd, writing in the *Calgary Herald*, stated: "Founder Pierre de Coubertin established the modern Games as the focal point for a social movement that would help make the world a better place by propagating the humanitarian philosophy of Olympism and broad educational practices." Have the games achieved this exalted goal? Kidd, chairman of the Olympic Academy of Canada and former Olympian, also stated that "the Olympic Movement claims to be a secular religion" and that "the Olympic Movement has generally been a force for good, but it falls short of its most deeply held aspirations."

Perhaps it misses its noble mark because social improvement is very difficult in the context of highly competitive sports. In addition, this type of competitiveness has further compromised the ideals behind the modern Olympic flame.

Win at All Costs

The inordinate desire to excel on a national and an individual level, at any cost, has contributed in no small way to the widespread use of performance-enhancing drugs. This usage can lead to mental problems ranging from deep depression to out-

bursts of violent rage. In the *Calgary Herald*, Dr. Harrison Pope was quoted as saying: "There is a far higher incidence of psychiatric symptoms attributable to anabolic steroids than any of us previously thought." A doctor attached to the U.S. Olympic team said: "You cannot be competitive now in international sport without using anabolic steroids."

"We're using bioengineering to make these people bigger, faster, stronger," adds an Olympic team doctor. "And it's going to get more barbaric. People will go to almost any length to enhance their performance." This is known as the "win-at-all-costs syndrome" and, more disturbingly, the "Frankenstein syndrome." Coubertin's motto, "The most important thing is less to win than to take part," seems totally irrelevant in a society that rationalizes all efforts in the quest for "gold"—victory and subsequent advertising endorsements and fees.

Blood doping, human growth hormones, artificial insemination followed by abortion, and urine replacement are all part of a scheme used by some Olympic athletes to beat the drug testing and to enhance their performance at the games. According to *The Toronto Star*, some female athletes "are artificially inseminated before aborting the fetus after two or three months to take advantage of a perceived hormone boost." Other athletes are "catheterizing themselves with someone else's 'clean' or drug-free urine after flushing as much of their own doped urine out. . . . The 'clean' urine is pumped into the bladder prior to competition so an athlete could test drug free if required." Blood doping is a process by which the athlete removes some red blood cells, which the body naturally replaces, and then prior to competition replaces the withdrawn blood to give the muscles an extra boost of oxygen.

As to understanding one another better in a form of intercultural learning, the competing national camps tend to stay to themselves, and each media group concentrates on its own country and teams. So the "sacred flame" does little to help in any measurable way to break down nationalistic barriers. As one writer saw it: "What will transpire . . . at the Winter Olympics in Calgary, followed by the summertime equivalent in Seoul, is nothing more than a showcase for a country to compete for international recognition of their respective systems' superiority." How true this proved to be! The chief medical officer of one Olympic team added that athletes "are soldiers. If they win, our culture is perceived as being the superior culture." And the final medals count is the measuring rod.

The Olympic flame and the noble aspirations that it stood for have been quenched by politics, commercialism, and now drug abuse. After the big drug scandal of the Seoul Olympic Games, in which Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson and others were stripped of their medals, one is bound to ask, What further price will be paid to achieve fleeting glory?

In Our Next Issue

- What Has Happened to Values?
- Steroids—What They Do for You and to You
- How Can I Convince My Parents That I'm Ready to Drive?

From Our Readers

Sweet Mesquite

Had it not been for "The Mesquite . . ." (July 22, 1988), I would surely not have noticed it at the local shop and would certainly have missed out on this wonderful delicacy. I am bound to agree that mesquite honey is especially mild but at the same time very tasty. How grateful I am to our Creator for this remarkable plant and for the variety that he bestows upon us! Many thanks.

S. B., Federal Republic of Germany

AIDS

As a physician, I can certainly agree with the statements in your magazine on AIDS (October 8, 1988). I am the founder of the Blood-Free Surgical and Medical Center. Since we provide a service that has virtually no risk of AIDS, these articles are very helpful to me, my staff, and my patients. Please send me one hundred magazines, as I would like to see that all my colleagues receive a copy.

F. G., Medical Director of O.R.,
United States

Just a card of thanks—for the very scientific AIDS articles in an *Awake!* I found on the street, muddy and dirty. I have not gotten so much on AIDS and its scope from anyone before. I recently had two blood transfusions and hope I haven't AIDS "sleeping" somewhere in tissues or cells.

G. T., United States

The article was interesting to say the least (and that despite having heard/read so much on the subject already). One comment though. The inference is made that if we accept "the Creator's standards for human behavior," we should be exempt from the AIDS virus. However, on a news program, it was stated that where

population density and number of persons carrying the AIDS virus is sufficient, mosquito-transmitted AIDS is "probable." Hence, for a few individuals to expect to remain free from a disease rampant in human society around them may NOT be reasonable. Ultimately, the only way to be absolutely safe from AIDS will be for EVERYONE to accept and live by "the Creator's standards."

D. B. S., United States

We agree with D.B.S. We did not intend to imply that the Creator's standards would totally exempt one from AIDS now. We do say that such behavior is the best way of avoiding it.—ED.

Courage to Face Handicaps

My father has been fighting Parkinson's disease for 20 years. "Living With Parkinson's Disease" (January 8, 1988) provided great encouragement. His ability to walk is deteriorating. He does things like rushing forward, head first, into glass window-walls. A few months ago, he developed a negative attitude toward living, but the report in *Awake!* gave him the courage he lacked.

T. N., Japan

When I read "The Body—Wonderfully Made . . ." (June 8, 1988), I just had to thank you. I am handicapped in my right hand and leg due to cerebral infantile paralysis, and I have allowed myself to dwell on this and to use it as my reason for getting depressed. Of course, I do feel inconvenienced to some extent at times, but from now on, instead of letting myself get depressed, I want to change my way of thinking and express gratitude to the One who created me.

T. T., Japan

Watching the World

"Toxic" Blood

AIDS-contaminated blood is a toxic substance, ruled a Supreme Court judge in Brooklyn, New York. The unprecedented ruling opened the way for a doctor who contracted the AIDS virus from a carelessly discarded syringe to file a \$175 million lawsuit. The doctor, a 30-year-old woman, is too sick to work anymore and so will "seek a speedy trial," her lawyer told *The New York Times*.

• A report entitled *Autologous and Directed Blood Programs*, published by the American Association of Blood Banks, made this comment on AIDS-contaminated blood: "This was the most bitter of all medical ironies; that the precious life-giving gift of blood could turn out to be an instrument of death."

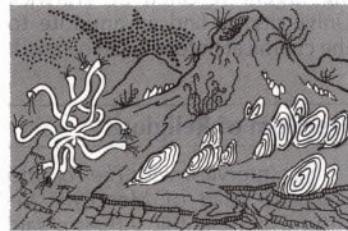
Did the Vatican Know?

The Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* recently addressed the question of whether the Vatican was aware of the Nazi Holocaust while it was in progress. The article lists many authoritative eyewitnesses who reported on the genocide of the Jews and others directly to the Vatican. For instance, one chaplain who had been on a hospital train "tearfully told the pope: 'The slaughter of the handicapped and of Jews continues. The poor Jews do not even have ration cards to

buy food with, so that they die of hunger.'" Among those listed by the article as having informed the Vatican of the Holocaust were: the apostolic delegate from Berlin, the archbishops of Münster and Vienna, the papal ambassador to the German command, and the Reich's ambassador to the Holy See. The article's conclusion? "The Vatican knew."

Another Theory Squashed

A theory that life on earth began at hydrothermal (hot water) vents in the ocean floor has been proved false by recent experiments. "This is probably the most



unlikely area for the origin of life to occur," said chemist Jeffrey L. Bada of the University of California. The theory had been advanced after the discovery of thriving bacteria and other organisms, such as giant clams and worms, around the hydrothermal vents. Simulating the temperatures and pressures of the vents, Bada and his colleague, Stanley L. Miller, found that amino acids,

the building blocks of life, decomposed rapidly under such conditions. "The combination of amino acids into larger peptide molecules, known as polymerization, was found to be impossible in the presence of water at any temperature," notes *The New York Times*. "And more complex molecules carrying the genetic code, a requirement for living organisms, did not last long in the extreme heat." According to the *Times*, the researchers concluded "that the hot waters in the primitive oceans would have destroyed rather than created organic compounds in the primitive oceans."

Who Is a Jew?

That question has recently stirred up a heated debate that affects millions of Jews, especially in Israel and the United States. The leaders of Israel's 400,000 Orthodox Jews have long sought to change the "Law of Return," which lets any immigrant Jew become an Israeli citizen, so that it would exclude those who were converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis, such as those of the Conservative and Reform branches. An outcry has arisen against such strict views of "who is a Jew," especially from Conservative and Reform Jews in the United States. According to *The Jerusalem Post*, Israeli diplomat Abba Eban "criticized attempts to disqualify 'a majority of

the Jewish congregations, rabbis, temples and ceremonials in the world from the pride of their Jewish identity." Orthodox Jews make up less than 10 percent of Israel's population.

Memories Stirred

The Japan Teachers' Union has taken issue with Japan's education ministry. *The Economist* reports that this union "dislikes what it sees as the ministry's growing support for nationalism in the classroom" and comments that in Japan "the flag and anthem still stir memories of the 1930s." Japanese witnesses of Jehovah who were incarcerated in Japan in the 1930's because of their Christian neutrality have vivid memories of the nationalism of those days.

Hurricane's Costly Aftermath

Southern England is still cleaning up the mess left behind by the battering hurricane winds of over a year ago. The storm's enduring legacy: 15 million felled trees, many of which are still lying rotting on the ground. According to the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, the storm claimed "nearly 10 million conifers, two million oaks, 1.75 million beech and 1.25 million other broadleaves." The paper adds: "In all, 5,333 'ancient semi-natural woodlands' were badly damaged." Only about half of the fallen softwoods and 20 percent of the hardwoods had been cleared a year after the storm. Why? Clearance of debris is very expensive. Though the planting of as many as five million new trees is underway, some of the damaged woodlands will be converted into farmland. One consolation: While many good trees were lost in the storm, it also eliminated a lot of decaying ones.

Sniffer Dogs

Sniffing out explosives and drugs has become routine for highly trained dogs, so the chance discovery by American scientists of a colorless and odorless chemical that can neutralize a dog's sense of smell for up to two years has raised much concern. So powerful is the chemical, reports *The Times* of London, that "one or two drops in the air can have the desired effect." It is feared that if this chemical got into the hands of terrorists or drug dealers, law en-



forcement officers could be lulled into a false sense of security if they failed to notice that a dog had lost its sense of smell. Britain's Ministry of Defence and Customs is financing urgent research at Warwick University to find an antidote to the chemical before it can be used.

Freedom of Religion?

In an interview with *The Toronto Star*, the head of Moscow's Institute for Scientific Atheism said that the Soviet people will have more religious freedom in the future. He said that Bibles are not available locally, but since Soviet leader Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) policy, a hundred thousand Bibles have been shipped into that land. The official news agency Tass reported recently that the Soviet Human Rights Commission has even recommended the pardoning of all religious prisoners.

Whales on Ice

Last October the superpowers cooperated to rescue two California gray whales trapped under Arctic ice off the coast of Alaska. While Inuit natives toiled to cut breathing holes for the mammals, two Soviet icebreakers "smashed through a ridge of ice big enough to contain chunks the size of houses," according to *The Toronto Star*. The massive \$1 million American-Soviet rescue effort finally freed the whales, although one Inuit critic of the rescue felt that the sensible thing would have been to have the whales for dinner. However, U.S. President Reagan declared: "The humane persistence . . . shows mankind's concern for the environment." A Kremlin spokesman added: "It would be good if the United States and the Soviet Union acted in such a concerted way when what's involved is the saving of human life."

Counterweights for Earthquakes

An 11-story building under construction in Tokyo, Japan, will employ a new earthquake-protection concept. The system, called the Active Mass Driver, counteracts sway by moving two heavy weights on the roof in a direction opposite to the force of the quake. The weights, one of four tons and the other of one ton, help dampen the force of the earthquake by moving on tracks at a speed of up to 132 feet per second. When one of the sensors placed on various floors detects vibration, a computerized control system sets the weights in motion. The company that designed the system claims that it will "reduce the effects of a moderate quake by about 50 percent," reports *Asahi Evening News*. How effective will it prove to be? Only the next earthquake will tell.

I stopped in my tracks on a main shopping street of Cheltenham, England. Was I seeing things? Was that lady wearing a fox collar? Or was it really a live fox?

My double take was justified. There she was, in front of a flower stall, cool as a cucumber, wearing a real live fox around her neck! Overcome by curiosity, I

asked her how she had tamed the furry creature to be so quiet and calm on a busy street with people and traffic everywhere. She explained that one day her dog had caught this fox puppy. She took it in and nurtured it, and it became a family pet. I could not resist the photo opportunity.

But it also made me think that most people

yearn to have a harmonious relationship with the animals. And according to Bible prophecy, that day will come when “the wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them.”—Isaiah 11:6, *The New English Bible*.—Contributed.

A LIVING FOX COLLAR?





The Most Important Event in History

The event was the death of Jesus Christ. Why so?

It served to vindicate God's righteousness, proving that a human could keep perfect integrity to God.

It opened to mankind the prospect of attaining everlasting life in an earthly Paradise.

Jesus himself instituted the memorial of his death on the night before he died. It was a simple ceremony. During it, Jesus told his disciples: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me." —Luke 22:19, 20.

Will you remember?

Jehovah's Witnesses invite you to join them in observing this most important event in history. This year the date is Wednesday, March 22, after sundown. Please check at your local Kingdom Hall for the exact time and place. No collections will be taken, and visitors are welcomed to listen to an instructive talk and observe the simple proceedings.