Awake!

APRIL 8, 1979

What Is Your Concept Of GOD?

What does creation tell us about his qualities?

Awake!®

April 8, 1979
Vol. 60, Num. 7

FEATURE ARTICLES

Many people have no real idea as to God's personality. What about you? If someone asked you to describe your concept of God, what would you say? Could knowing some of his qualities draw you closer to God? These articles provide clear concepts from creation and the Bible

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WHY THIS MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED

"Awake!" is for the enlightenment of the entire family. 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 stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. It also shows how to cope with today's problems. Most importantly, "Awake!" builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new order within our generation.

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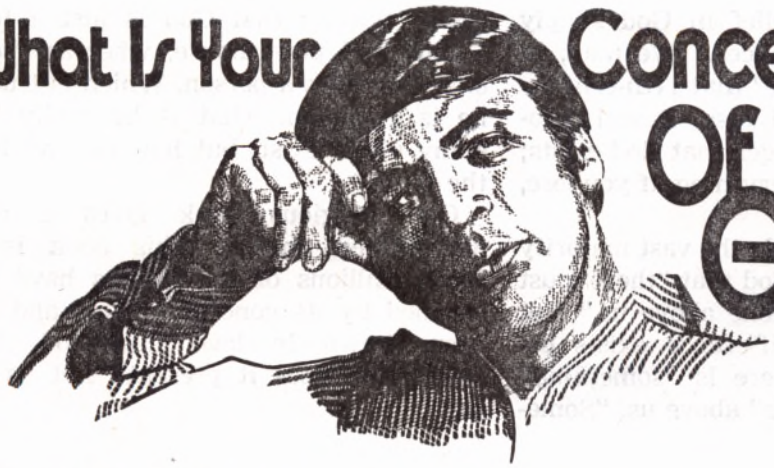
What Is Your Concept Of God?



ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD Janie was asked: "How do you think of God?" She excitedly answered: "God has long brown hair, covered by a nun's hood. He wears a black cloak and black slip-on shoes. He just loafs about in space, looking down on the world."

An unusual concept? You might be inclined to laugh it off as the lively imagination of youth. But what about the views of many of today's adults? How precise and well-founded are their ideas about God?

In his book *God for Men of Today,* religious author Jacques Duquesne writes: "When questioned for any length of time, most of these Christians end up by admitting that they are perplexed. They no longer know what they believe, what they should believe nor why they believe." Have you ever felt like this? Do you find it hard to put into words your own thoughts about God?

There are innumerable concepts about God. Little Janie's is just one. Hundreds of millions of persons believe in a God that predetermines the fate of every person, tormenting everlastingly those who are rejected. For still others, God is not a person, but, rather, an all-pervading power present throughout the universe. Some even associate God with the inanimate forces of nature.

What is your own concept of him? Is it clear-cut, or could it be that you, too, have vague ideas as to who God is and for what he stands? Or perhaps the picture that your religion has painted of God has alienated you from him, since you find it hard to conceive of a vengeful God who would torment pitilessly those whom he rejects.

Why is it so important that we have an accurate concept of God? Without such we lose the very heart of our worship. For instance, recently the leader of 60 million Anglican Christians dramatically said: "God forgive us. We would not admit to it; it would shock our congregations if we did. But we have stopped listening [to God], and our spiritual life has died on us, though we keep up appearances and go through the motions."* If God is not real to us, if our concept is blurry, we could find ourselves likewise merely 'keeping up appearances and going through the motions.'

Haziness in our view of God could cause

* The London *Daily Telegraph* reported on this speech of the archbishop of Canterbury, delivered on July 23, 1978, at the 11th Lambeth Conference to 400 bishops, under the following headline: "Dr. Coggan Warns Bishops over 'Lost Belief.' "

us to acknowledge belief in God simply so as to "take no chances." We may, in effect, make the "wager" that 17th-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal propounded, namely: "Wager that God exists; if you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose nothing."

Perhaps you feel as do the vast majority who profess belief in God that "there must be something or someone above us." Yet even here a great difference exists between feeling that there is "some*thing*" above us and "some*one*" above us. "Some*thing*" implies that God is just a force, a universal powerhouse, whereas "some*one*" describes a person. Which is true? If he is a person, what is he really like? Many views exist, but how can we know the truth?

One religious book gives a clear, well-defined answer. This book is the Bible. Millions of its readers have been warmed by its concept of God and have been drawn to love this God. What description does it present? Let us now see.

God as a Personality

WHAT IS GOD LIKE? Well, how does the Bible describe him? It does not picture him as an impersonal powerhouse or an abstract "higher principle," but as an intelligent Person with feelings, likes and dislikes. Such a description is in harmony with sound logic. Why?

Perhaps you have stood under the starry heavens on a clear night, like the persons pictured on the next page. Have you not been impressed by the heavens' grandeur and orderliness? Could you conclude that a mere impersonal force produced such *splendid* order by "blind chance"? Or is it the work of an intelligent mind?

A businessman's reply when asked why he believed in an intelligent Creator provides a reasonable answer:

> "It takes a girl in our factory about two days to learn how to put the 17 parts of a meat chopper together. It may be that these millions of worlds each with its separate orbit, all balanced so wonderfully in space—it may be that they just happened.
>
> "It may be that by a billion years of tumbling about they finally arranged themselves. I don't know, I am merely a plain manufacturer of cutlery. But this I do know, that you can shake the 17 parts of a meat chopper around in a washtub for the next 17 billion years and you'll never have a meat chopper."

Just as only a person with intelligence could arrange the parts of the meat chopper into a precision instrument, so, too, logic points to the conclusion that our highly organized universe could have been ordered only by an intelligent Person with awesome power at his disposal.

With this sensible conclusion, the Bible is in full agreement, for it says:

> "Raise your eyes high up and see. Who has created these things? It is the One who is bringing forth the army of them even by number, all of whom he calls even by name. Due to the abundance of dynamic energy, he also being vigorous in power, not one of them is missing."—Isa. 40:26.

So by examining the heavens we begin to appreciate the truth of another comment about God in the Bible: "His invisible qualities are clearly seen from the world's creation onward, because they are perceived by the things made, even his *eter-*

The heavens speak of a God whose wisdom is far greater than ours.

nal power and Godship, so that they are inexcusable."—Rom. 1: 20.

A God of "Eternal Power"

By studying the majestic universe, one becomes aware of staggering power. Our sun generates a prodigious amount of energy. Yet one of the stars in the magnificent night sky, Arcturus, has a diameter 24 times that of our sun, making its volume 25,600 times as great as that of our sun! Still another star has a diameter 560 times that of the sun! Think what power they contain. And what power the Creator of these must have!

Some pinpoints of light are not single stars but whole clusters of stars. So vast is this universe that measurements are made in light-years (the distance that light traveling at 186,000 miles [300,000 kilometers] a second covers in a year, or about 6,000,000,000,000 miles [10,000,000,000,000 kilometers]). Some stars are actually billions of light-years away! With such bewildering facts in mind, one can well appreciate the viewpoint about God expressed in the Bible at Psalm 8:3, 4:

> "When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have prepared, what is mortal man that you keep him in mind, and the son of earthling man that you take care of him?"

Yes, how small and comparatively insignificant we become! Truthfully, God's "eternal power" is "clearly seen from the world's creation onward." Yet, great power is not a personality trait that necessarily draws us to a person. But our perception of God's qualities does not end here.

A Happy and Generous Creator

When you observe the playful antics of baby kittens or watch otters zipping down a mud slide and splashing into a pond, do you not discern something about their Maker? He must be a happy Person. Certainly a God that created a monkey must himself have a sense of humor. Consider, too, the spontaneous squeal of delight as a child gazes at a tiny baby chick! Surely our observations agree with the Bible's description of the Creator as "the happy God."—1 Tim. 1:11.

And what do you learn from the fact that the earth produces thousands of varieties of both nourishing and delicious foods, each with its own special taste to tantalize our taste buds? Does not such an abundance give evidence of a generous Creator? Instead of providing only the bare necessities for man, God delighted in making variety, and he caused it to produce in abundance.

"But what about those places where people are starving? Where is his gener-

osity there?" some might ask. If a big-hearted father spread a luscious meal before all his children, with plenty for all, and several of the children grabbed most of the food, leaving the others with practically nothing, would the poor lot of these children be attributed to a lack of generosity on their father's part? Well, researchers today report that *one third* of the earth's population eats *two thirds* of the world's food production.

Would there be enough for all if it were evenly distributed? One report on the subject stated:

> "The world's increasingly serious nutritional problem arises from *uneven distribution* of the food supply among countries, within countries, and among families with different levels of income. Global statistical surveys, based upon total food produced per person, suggest that there is no worldwide shortage of food in terms of quantity (calories) or quality (protein) at the moment."—Report of the U.S. President's Science Advisory Committee, *The World Food Problem*.

When man tills the earth properly, using suitable irrigation and farming methods, he is astonished at the earth's ability to produce. Yes, this earth, including the seas, is just teeming with food of never-ending variety, besides the breath-taking beauty of countless types of flowers and blooming plants.

What does all of this testify to as to the Creator of these things? He is, indeed, a generous God, one who is, as the Bible says, able to "empty out upon [persons] a blessing until there is no more want." He can 'open his hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.' And remember that he does it, not to get something tangible in return, but merely out of the riches of his generosity.—Mal. 3:10; Ps. 145:16; 50:9-13.

An Approachable God

To some persons, of course, a heavenly God of such greatness might appear distant, making it difficult for them to form a personal relationship with him. However, the Bible says of God that, "in fact, he is not far off from each one of us."—Acts 17:27.

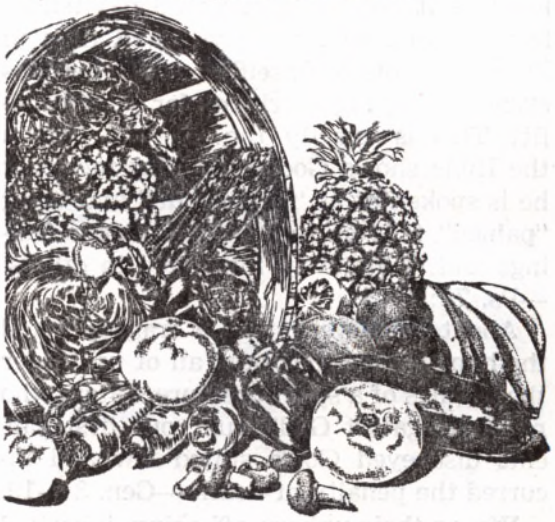
Rather than being a God hard to get close to, Jehovah God says: "I have let myself be searched for by those who had not asked for me. I have let myself be found by those who had not looked for me. I have said, 'Here I am, here I am!' to a nation that was not calling upon my name." How entreating! He wants us to approach him and get close to him.—Isa. 65:1.

Back in the time when the Bible was being written, faithful worshipers of God talked or bore witness to others about him, acquainting persons with God's name, Jehovah, and with his personality. (Isa. 43:12) God used such faithful ones to help other persons to approach him. He even dispatched his Son who came to earth and 'explained God.' The followers of this Son served as "substitutes for Christ" by talking to others about God, explaining what the Bible says of him. So today, Jehovah has his witnesses. They call on persons in their homes to talk to them about God. Rather than give their own philosophy, they show how the Bible depicts the Almighty. With their help sincere persons can really get to know God. —John 1:18; 2 Cor. 5:20.

They are helped to appreciate that the firm laws that govern the universe indicate that God is a precise Lawgiver. Such laws create order. The Bible reveals that Jehovah God has moral laws. (1 Cor. 6: 9, 10) He knows that these are for man's good and he could *force* man to live by them. But, to the contrary, he created man a free moral agent.

Rather than force his rules on us, God's

The productivity of the earth points to a generous God.



Word says: *"Choose for yourselves* today whom you will serve." "I have put life and death before you, the blessing and the malediction; and you must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you and your offspring, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him."—Josh. 24:15; Deut. 30:19, 20.

Notice the verb "choose." How could a person choose life if his fate is predestined, as some believe? Also, how could a person feel at ease approaching a God whom he conceives of as tormenting people eternally? But notice that the choice is between "life and death," not between life and eternal torment. Such an endearing God would never fiendishly torture someone eternally. Yet, out of concern for his loyal subjects, he will destroy those that refuse to live by his righteous principles. He lovingly provides help so that we can learn those principles and live by them. Yes, the Creator is genuinely approachable. How refreshing to know that we can approach him, not because we feel we *have* to, but because we *want* to!—Ps. 145:20.

A Lovable God

What kind of person do you grow to love? Is it not likely one who has tender feelings, one who loves you and tries to show it in many unselfish ways, perhaps even making big sacrifices for your benefit? This is exactly the type of Person the Bible shows God to be. The fact that he is spoken of as 'feeling hurt' and being "pained" tells us that he has tender feelings and is intensely interested in others. —Ps. 78:38-41.

About 6,000 years ago a tragedy befell the human race that hurt all of us. Under the urgings of a spirit creature, Satan, who rebelled against God's rule, our first parents disobeyed God's stated law and incurred the penalty of death.—Gen. 3:1-19.

We, as their unborn offspring, inherited imperfection and death. Our heavenly Father could have justly allowed the whole human family to remain in this situation, eventually to die off—and be gone forever. What made him choose to do differently? *Unselfish love!* But what a high price he paid in this!

His law required an equal sacrifice to compensate for something lost. (Deut. 19:21) A perfect life (Adam's) was lost. This necessitated that the life of someone not tainted by imperfection be sacrificed. Many spirit angels existed and any of these could have been asked, but not so. Because God loved us so much he sent "the one he was specially fond of," "his loved one," to the earth to become a man and then to die as the needed sacrifice to redeem mankind. (Prov. 8:30; Eph. 1:6) What a great sacrifice on God's part, and how beneficial for us! What a lovable personality!

> "He that does not love has not come to know God, because God is love. By this the love of God was made manifest in our case, because God sent forth his only-begotten Son into the world that we might gain life through him. The love is in this respect, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent forth his Son as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins." —1 John 4:8-10.

Certainly this is a God who deserves to be *worshiped out of love.* And that brings us back to Blaise Pascal's "wager," *mentioned* in the preceding article. That French thinker tried to convince skeptics by reasoning as follows: 'Believe in God; you have nothing to lose. If he exists, all your fondest hopes will be fulfilled; if he does not exist, you will have lost nothing.' But such is not the proper motive for serving God. Pascal's "wager" is based on self-interest. He maintained that belief in God is good speculation. What are a few years of sacrifice in exchange for an eternity of bliss? Although his *intentions* were no doubt honorable, Pascal unwittingly endorsed the argument used by God's chief enemy.

A case history recorded in the Bible (Job chapters 1 and 2) concerning a man of integrity in ancient times reveals that Satan contends that God's creatures serve him out of self-interest, not out of love. Thus, by implication, Satan claims that Jehovah buys support for his rulership or sovereignty and that the latter is therefore tainted with bribery.* But Satan is wrong on both counts. Jehovah rules by love and his true worshipers choose to serve him out of unselfish love. For those who do lovingly serve him, he purposes a delightful future.—Ps. 84:10, 11; 110:3; Jas. 1:12.

Your Personal Relationship with God

After considering this information, do you feel the need to readjust your own concept of God? The Bible portrays God as a happy, generous, lovable *Person.* Despite his awesome power, he is still approachable. In fact, he invites us to get close to him. Is this not the kind of God

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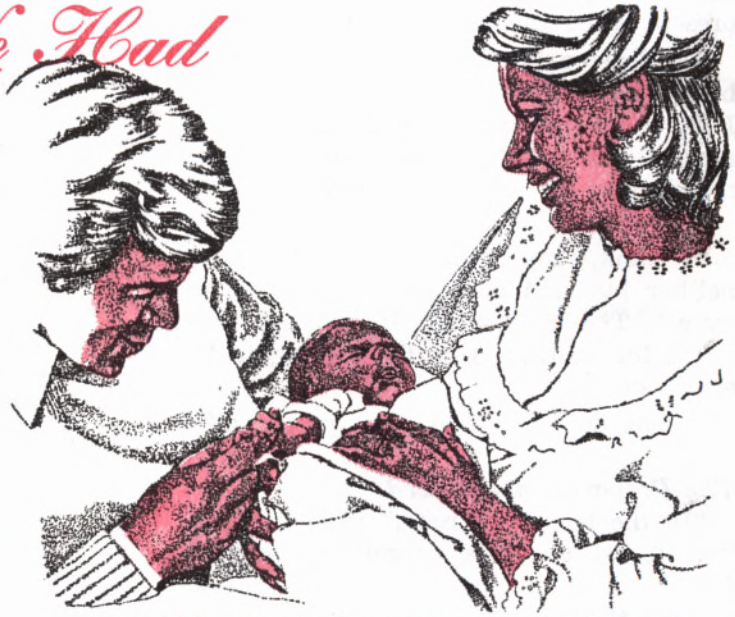
* For further information, see chapter 5, "Why Has God Allowed Suffering on Earth?" in the Watch Tower book *Life Does Have a Purpose.*

with whom you would like to become better acquainted? There is much more about him in the Bible, and Jehovah's Witnesses will be happy to point it out to you, free of charge.

Never worry about whether you are "good enough" to approach God. His Word says: "Jehovah is near to all those calling upon him, to all those who call upon him in trueness." (Ps. 145:18) By calling on him in sincerity through prayer and growing in accurate knowledge of the Bible, you can learn his requirements and have the joy of living by them. You can really get to know God and thereby entertain the prospect of spending an eternity under the loving care of this Great Personality. —John 17:3.

The Day We Had Our Baby!



As told to "Awake!" correspondent in Germany

LAST year an article in the German magazine *Stern* caught my attention. It described a hospital, the first of its kind in Germany, where mothers are allowed to keep their newborn babies in the same room with them right from birth. Some doctors are very vocal in praising the arrangement, commonly described as "rooming in." Others are equally outspoken in questioning its advisability.

The *Stern* article observed: "Fathers are requested to be present at the birth. Hassauer [one of the hospital's gynecologists] said: 'Over 50 percent of the men agree, and most of them are a big help. They are an encouragement to their wives during the period of bearing down; they hold their hands and comfort them. Not one has keeled over yet.' "—April 21, 1977.

As I read the article, it reminded me of a friend who had recently witnessed his daughter's birth. So I went to see him and his wife to get their impressions. With Jenny making soft gurgling sounds in the next room, we talked.

"Whose idea was it that you be present?" I inquired.

"Well, it was actually my wife's idea. Right from the beginning we planned for my being present at the birth. This planning was most important. We got many books dealing with natural childbirth."

"I really wanted a natural childbirth," his wife said. "I couldn't think of anything more natural than having my husband present."

"But isn't such an arrangement more

or less the exception, at least here in Germany?" I asked.

"From what we read," she replied, "there is a developing trend in some countries for fathers to be present, but it hasn't made much headway here in Germany as yet. There are hospitals that don't encourage it. We asked beforehand to make sure of the one that we were going to use."

"During your hospital stay, how many times did you hear of husbands' being present when their children were born?"

"At least a hundred babies must have been born while we were there. As far as I know, my husband was the only father present. One of the nurses later told me that fathers are seldom present."

"I wonder why."

"I think," my friend offered, "because neither husband nor wife know what to expect. They're fearful. If you get prepared for it, there's really nothing to be afraid of."

"What do you mean, 'Get prepared'?"

The Preparation Involved

"In the books we read," his wife said, "we found chapters especially designed for husbands, outlining what they can do to help their wives. The books also concentrated on breathing techniques and the rhythms of breathing that help to prevent the mother's body from cramping. This eases the delivery."

"Another thing that helped," her husband continued, "was our visiting the labor room together ahead of time. This is permitted if the husband is interested, and I certainly was. A nurse explained the whole procedure to me and answered all my questions."

"While I was preparing for the birth," his wife added, "I practiced my relaxation and breath-control exercises in front of my husband. So he was aware of what I would be doing when contractions started. He knew, for example, that he would be on my right side when I had the baby, and that he would have a soft moist sponge that he could wipe over my lips after each contraction. What a wonderful sensation that was! I was relaxed again. My lips were moist. I felt able to take the next contraction and breathe properly. If I'd been thirsty or my mouth or tongue had been dry, it would have been much more difficult to concentrate on doing what I had been practicing."

"Our books told us that when the contractions started I shouldn't talk to my wife. She shouldn't hold *my* hand either. You see, she would squeeze it and that would cause tension in her other muscles when they should be relaxed. Rather, I should hold *her* hand, squeezing it tightly so she wouldn't grab hold of the midwife or the blanket or the pillow or something else nearby. The effect on her was a relaxing one and helped her to work *with* her body, not *against* it."

"And the doctors and nurses didn't make you feel that you were in the way?" I wanted to know.

"No, not at all. I think that they were impressed. They appreciated the interest I showed. They appeared to accept me as part of the team. And it really was teamwork, believe me. I stood at her right hand, a nurse at the side of her leg, another nurse over on the other side and the doctor in the middle. When these strong pains came, the doctor would tell my wife: 'Bear down now, bear down.' One of the nurses would hold my wife's legs back, while the other would reach down and try to help the child's head to emerge. My job was to reach behind her and help her up to a sitting position so she could bear down better. When the contraction subsided, we would stop and talk until the next one came."

"After I had given birth," his wife said, "I spoke with a nurse from Taiwan who works here in Germany. She said that in Taiwan when a child was born at home a husband felt quite at ease. He was in his own surroundings, in charge, so to speak, as man of the house. The midwife would give him different chores, like boiling water and getting clean towels ready. She made him feel necessary. But that was 10 years ago. Now, with many Taiwanese children being born in hospitals, husbands are made to feel unwanted. But the Taiwanese women said that they tended to be more relaxed when their husbands were with them."

"I imagine most women would want their husbands present," I noted.

"I did. However, I found that not all women feel the same. Most young mothers in our hospital weren't prepared for giving birth. They were nervous. They didn't know how it was going to be or how they were going to react. Many were misinformed by stories that exaggerated the difficulties involved in childbirth. They didn't want their husbands to see them in pain, maybe crying and screaming. Too, without advance preparation, a husband would not know how to help his wife during labor, especially should it stretch out for many hours. For that reason many husbands prefer to be absent. They feel out of place, unneeded, even unwanted."

"But you think that with proper preparation they might feel otherwise?"

"Yes, I do. Some of the women seem to regret that they had not made better preparation and that their husbands had not been with them. When their husbands would come to visit, they would try to tell them how it had been. But you can't really tell a person something like that. Emotions are involved. You must experience it together. Here you've been waiting nine months to find out whether it will be a boy or a girl, whether it will be healthy or not, and you've been working so hard these last few contractions, working with your whole body. Then suddenly you hear your husband—not the doctor, not the nurse, but the voice of your own dear husband—saying, 'Honey, we have a little girl!' It can really bring you to tears."

"I can imagine. How does it make a father feel?"

"Wonderful! I saw how our daughter came out, how she was separated from her mother, how the nurses dried her off and then gave her to the mother. When I left the hospital and got into the car to drive home, I had an overwhelming feeling: a tremendous event had taken place. I had witnessed it. I had this sudden urge of wanting to stop everyone to tell them that my wife had had a baby. Well, it was more than just an urge to tell them. *I* had been there too. *I* had experienced it! WE had just had OUR baby!"

Lasting Effects

Something particularly impressed me in the *Stern* article. It said that a seven-year study of this "rooming in" method indicates that mothers and fathers who make preparations for the birth of their children

In Future Issues

- **The Amazing Dolphin**
- **Sin? What's That?**
- **Should "Biorhythms" Regulate Your Life?**

have a more intense feeling toward the children afterward than those who don't. I asked my friends what they thought.

"I feel that when the husband is standing there helping his wife at that critical time of birth it brings them closer together," the husband explained. "And there is no doubt that a good husband-wife relationship contributes to a good parent-child relationship later. I don't see how it could help but have a beneficial effect."

"And what would a mother say?"

"Oh, I agree completely," his wife responded. "For example, being so wrapped up in what I was doing, there were certain things that I was unable to observe the way my husband could. Filling one another in on the details helped us really to share the experience."

"Of course," her husband added, "a man can undeniably be a loving father and a devoted Christian without being present at his child's birth."

My friends had given me something to think about. There was obviously no lack of natural affection in their family. I wondered if mutual preparation and participation before and during the birth of a child might not go a long way in creating and preserving a good family atmosphere. It could be something for expectant parents to consider. But it obviously was something not to be done without knowledge and careful forethought.

I still remember my friend's closing words as little Jenny cooed in the background: "It's something wonderful to work together to have a baby. I'll never forget the day we had OURS."

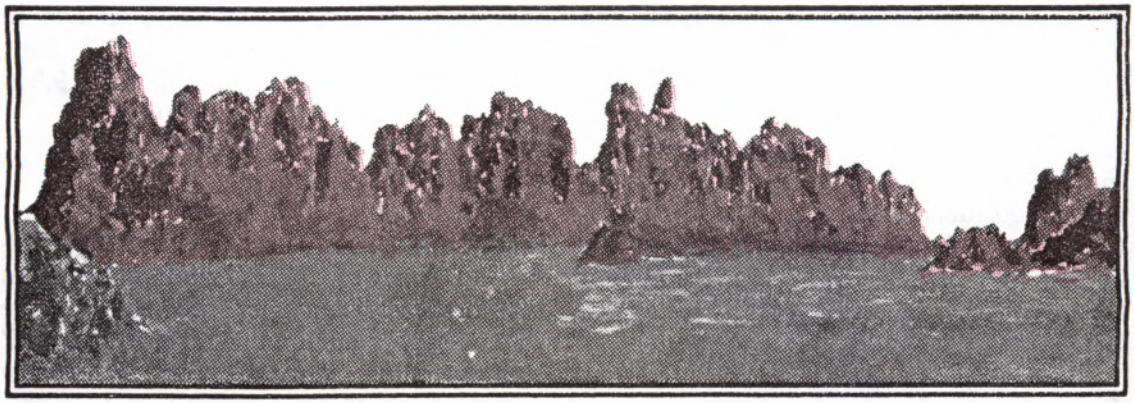
Tomorrow's Adults

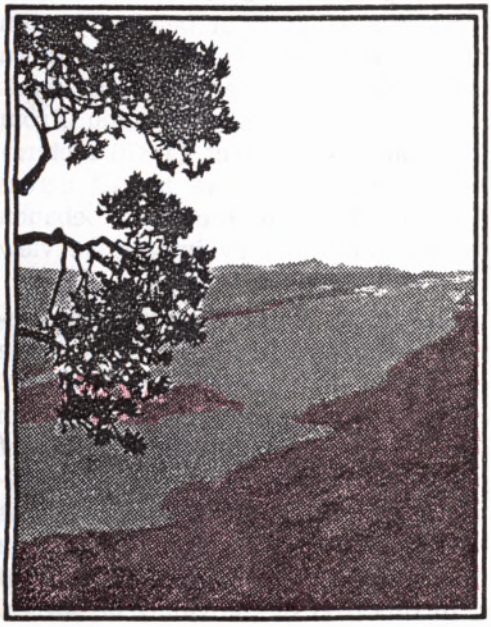
A six-year government-sponsored study of London schoolboys reveals that almost nine out of ten had engaged in some form of theft before leaving school. "These kids are our future," declared the concerned social psychologist who led the study of a cross section of thirteen- to sixteen-year-olds in London.

A student newspaper survey of teen-agers at a Madison, Wisconsin, high school indicated that nearly two thirds of them had shoplifted at least once. Only about a quarter of these shoplifters had been caught.

Of cheating, a tenth-grader at Walsh Jesuit High School in Akron, Ohio, told a *Beacon Journal* reporter: "They say you're cheating yourself, but you're really not. Everybody does it, so it doesn't make any difference." In similar vein, a student poll at Johns Hopkins University revealed that almost a third of the students had cheated by the time they were seniors. And a faculty report at the University of California says: "The present status of the honor spirit has been variously characterized as a 'joke,' as 'shaky,' as a 'farce,' or as 'dead.'"

A nationwide survey of U.S. teen-agers reveals that over a quarter of them are problem drinkers, having been drunk at least four times in the past year or in trouble over drinking at least twice.





By "Awake!" correspondent in Kenya

the scar that became a beauty spot

—THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY

THIS "scar" on earth's face has been photographed from the Apollo 17 spacecraft 90,000 miles (145,000 kilometers) out in space. It extends some 6,000 miles (9,700 kilometers) and varies in width from five to 50 miles (8 to 80 kilometers), but it is by no means a straight trench. Geological surveys show it to be complex and dendritic—having branches and offshoots. Undoubtedly it was caused by tremendous forces wrenching at earth's crust, resulting in huge subsidences to produce for our delight and wonder some of the most beautiful and unique scenic grandeur of our planet. It is the Great Rift Valley.

It was not until the latter part of the 19th century, with the opening up of East and Central Africa to exploration, that the full extent of this geological won-

der could be appreciated. After a visit to East Africa in 1893, J. W. Gregory, a Scotchman, reported to fellow geologists: "For this type of valley I suggest the name of Rift Valley, using the term rift in the sense of a relatively narrow space due to subsidence (sinking or settling) between parallel fractures. Such valleys are known in many parts of the world, but that of East Africa may justly be called the Great Rift Valley."

From Asia to the Indian Ocean

The East African portion may aspire to be the most glamorous section of this geological fault. The phenomenon commences its appearance between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains in Asia and continues southward through the Jordan Valley trench, including the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea and the Gulf of 'Aqaba. It proceeds through the Red Sea and enters Africa in Ethiopia opposite the confluence of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania the Rift Valley becomes more complex as it approaches the equator. The wider western branch of the Rift follows Lakes Mobutu (formerly Albert), Idi Amin (formerly Edward), Kivu, Tanganyika and Rukwa through Uganda, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. The eastern branch follows the line of Lakes Zwai, Shala, Abaya, Turkana (formerly Rudolph), Baringo, Nakuru, Naivasha, Natron and Eyasi through Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. Thus Lake Victoria is skirted on both sides, and the branches merge in southern Tanzania. The Rift proceeds from there through Lake Malawi into Mozambique and thence to the Indian Ocean.

Mighty forces have caused this giant rupture and decorated it with exalted snowcapped beauty in places. As evidence that violent subterranean powers were at work in the East African Rift Valley, we find some 30 active or semiactive volcanoes from the shores of the Red Sea in Ethiopia to Mounts Meru (14,979 feet; 4,566 meters) and Kilimanjaro (19,340 feet; 5,895 meters) in Tanzania.

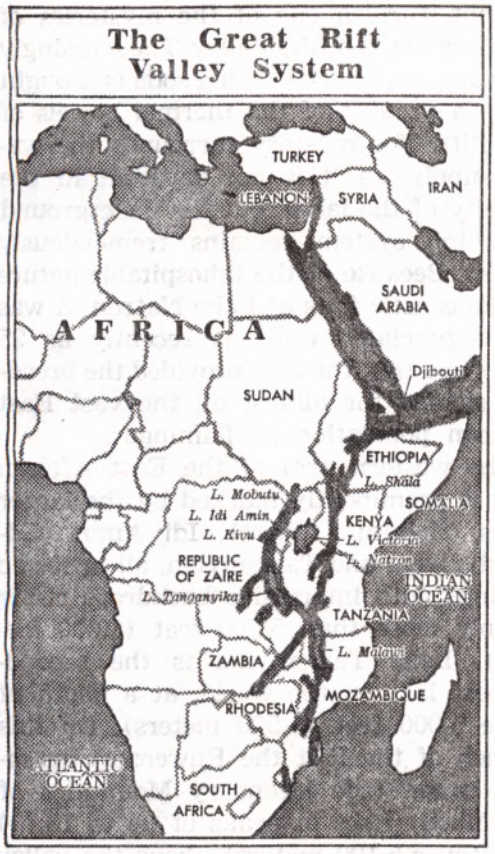
Breathtaking Grandeur

It was at its southernmost tip that my family and I first saw the Great Rift Valley. On a visit to the Inyanga Mountains in the northeastern area of Rhodesia we were able to approach an 'edge of the world' vantage point from which we could view a sheer drop of some 2,000 feet (610 meters) into the valley floor below. Then on another occasion at the Rift's northern extremity, we took the road that leads from Beirut to Baalbek in Lebanon. From an elevation of 4,500 feet (1,370 meters) on the Lebanon range we looked across the Bekáa Plain to the Anti-Lebanon mountains, another very impressive view of the Rift Valley.

For sheer Rift Valley beauty and grandeur there can be little to rival the scene to be enjoyed on the road from Nairobi to Nakuru in Kenya. Just before a person descends the escarpment in a series of hairpin bends he can gaze on a wide yellow plain stretching north and south as far as the eye can see, and bounded on the east and west by almost vertical cliff walls. In this part of the valley lie several lakes, including Naivasha and Nakuru, decorating the Rift with the finest aviary in the world.

Northern End of the Rift

Let us take an armchair trip through the Great Rift Valley from north to south. Although conspicuously narrower, the Jordan–Dead Sea rift lacks nothing in outstanding features and beauty. It was land in this general area that the Bible thus described in Deuteronomy 8:7-9: "Jehovah your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of torrent valleys of water, springs and watery deeps issuing forth in the val-



ley plain and in the mountainous region, a land of wheat and barley and figs and pomegranates, a land of oil olives and honey, a land in which you will not eat bread with scarcity, in which you will lack nothing." Standing as a sentinel overlooking this valley is the beautiful Mount Hermon (9,000 feet; 2,700 meters). Flowing through the Rift, the Jordan River traverses the Sea of Galilee and terminates in that lowest spot on earth, the Dead Sea. Here the surface water is measured at 1,292 feet (394 meters) below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. The water of the Dead Sea is about 25 percent solids, mostly common salt.

The eastern side of the Rift, extending from Mount Hermon through the Jebel Druze region, is a long line of volcanic peaks, extinct craters and great outflows of lava rising at the highest point to more than 3,000 feet (over 900 meters), giving witness to early eruptions. In this Bible land, earthquakes and volcanic activity have not been infrequent. Serious earthquakes have occurred in Palestine about every 50 years, minor tremors being more frequent. It is of these that rift valleys are born.

Through the Sea and On into Africa

As the Rift Valley continues into the Red Sea trench it enters an area unusual in its geology and ecology. This sea has a higher salinity than any other part of the oceans, and in contrast to the cold-water depths of most oceans, its abyssal waters can reach temperatures of 138 degrees Fahrenheit (59 degrees Celsius) in volcanic depths. It is described as a precipitous trench that is as much as a mile and a half deep down the middle of its entire length. The profusion of different corals and the richness of marine life make it one of the most glamorous "garden-aquariums" on the earth.

The Rift Valley system now takes a turn overland, roughly between Massawa, the Ethiopian Red Sea port, and a point in Somalia, southeast of Djibouti. Here at its widest point it soon enters the Danakil Depression, lying 400 feet (120 meters) below sea level. A string of some 14 active or semiactive volcanoes dots the map through this region, pointing up the violent subterranean forces still present in this giant fissure. In this area we find the Karum Salt Lake with its salt pinnacles and multicolored pools surrounding Mount Dallol, giving the region a prehistoric appearance and strange beauty. The sea-salt deposit at Lake Karum is 3,700 feet (1,128 meters) thick and the temperature of the surface rock in the Danakil gets as high as a sizzling 320 degrees Fahrenheit (160 degrees Celsius).

East African Branches

The thin edge of the valley wedge now is re-

duced to some 30 miles (50 kilometers) in width, which it uniformly keeps and continues throughout the system of branches in East Africa. After the display of volcanoes in the Danakil, the Rift Valley now puts on another show with a string of quiet but beautiful lakes from Zwai to Chew Bahir (formerly Stephanie). One of these, Lake Shala, which takes its name from the Galla (or, Oromo) people's word for "pelican," has only in recent years given up its secret as to why pelicans should breed there in thousands when this lake contains few fish suitable to the pelican diet. These beautiful fliers are now known to commute on thermal air currents over the mountain to Lake Abiata, which teams with *tilapia* (a fish), and to return in 24 hours with supplies to feed their brood in the seclusion of Lake Shala. Remote Lake Turkana (formerly, Rudolph), sometimes referred to as the Jade Sea, now embellishes the valley as it leaves Ethiopia and enters Kenya, and it is here that the eastern and western branches become evident.

The Great Rift Valley provides facilities to make it one of the most heavily traveled bird migration routes in the world. Some of the many beautiful lakes that glisten in the African sun are of fresh water, like Lakes Zwai, Awasa, Naivasha and Baringo. Others have only a slight soda content, so that they all provide excellent watering places for migratory stopovers. The towering walls of the Rift Valley provide hundreds of miles of air thermals that rise up the steep escarpments and keep the eagles, hawks and storks aloft. Smaller birds like swallows and wheatears fly through the Rift on their way to Europe and Russia.

The large lakes, Magadi and Natron, on the eastern branch, very high in soda content, furnish one of the mysteries of the East African Rift Valley. The seemingly unending supply of washing soda is thought to be a product of the thermal bowels of the Rift. The mystery surrounds the water supply, as it is not apparent in the vicinity of the lakes, but the underground plumbing system remains tremendously potent. Because of the inhospitable nature of the caustic flats at Lake Natron, it was not appreciated until as recently as 25 years ago that the lake provided the breeding ground for almost all the vast East African population of flamingos.

The western arm of the East African Rift is prominently marked by the larger lakes, Mobutu (Albert), Idi Amin (Edward), Kivu and Tanganyika, all in scenic settings with impressive backdrops rising steeply more than 5,300 feet (1,600 meters). Lake Tanganyika is the second-deepest lake in the world, at a depth of some 5,000 feet (1,500 meters). On this branch of the Rift the Ruwenzori mountain range (the legendary Mountains of the Moon) rises to peaks of up to 16,794 feet (over 5,100 meters) above the valley floor.

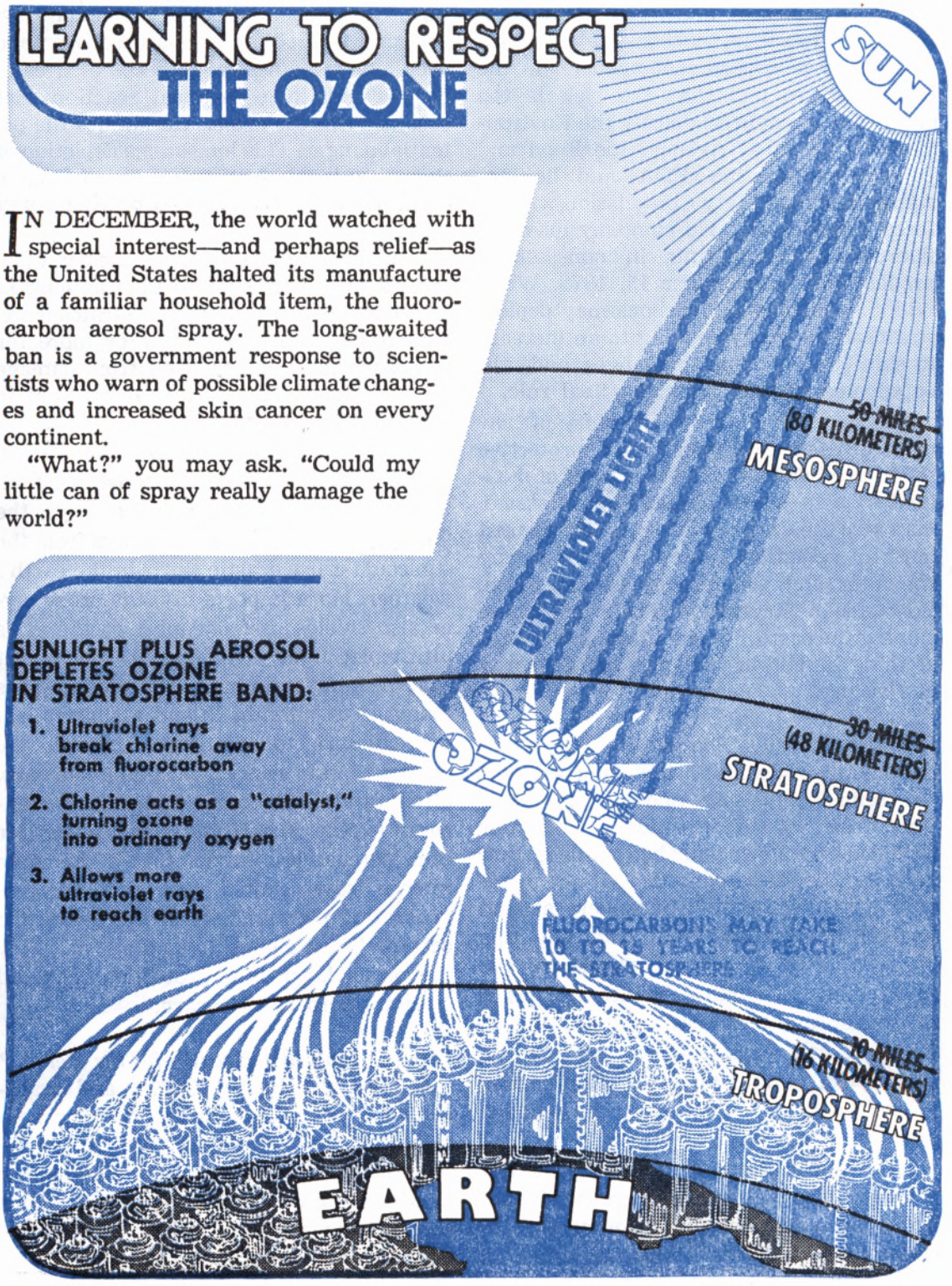
The eastern and western branches now appear to merge again and beautiful Lake Malawi becomes one of its distinctive features as it cleaves its way through Mozambique and into the Indian Ocean.

Although, in terms of both process and time, the development of the Great Rift Valley system may not be completely understood by geologists, these inspired words of the Bible explain its origin: "Mountains proceeded to ascend, valley plains proceeded to descend—to the place that you have founded for them." Only a loving Creator could transform such a scar into a beauty spot.—Ps. 104:8.

LEARNING TO RESPECT THE OZONE

IN DECEMBER, the world watched with special interest—and perhaps relief—as the United States halted its manufacture of a familiar household item, the fluorocarbon aerosol spray. The long-awaited ban is a government response to scientists who warn of possible climate changes and increased skin cancer on every continent.

"What?" you may ask. "Could my little can of spray really damage the world?"



Maybe or maybe not. But if your aerosol spray uses fluorocarbon gas as a propellant, three government agencies in the United States feel that the risk is too great to take chances. Jointly the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission will enforce a new ruling. No company may use fluorocarbon propellants in nonessential products after December 15, 1978. Why? "Because chlorofluorocarbons may deplete stratospheric ozone, leading to an increase in skin cancer, climatic changes, and other adverse effects," says the final rule.

Behind this ruling lies the story of how man learned to respect that protective shield overhead—the tenuous layer of modified oxygen called ozone. Simply stated, man sees the ozone as earth's filter against harmful radiation from the sun. Destroy the filter and you destroy life on earth. To read in Revelation 11:18 of "those ruining the earth," is one thing. It is another thing to hold in your own hand a spray can accused of such ruin.

Are the Aerosols Poison?

Generally speaking, the fluorocarbons are remarkably safe and nonpoisonous. They resist uniting chemically with your food, your water or your body tissues. But, because the fluorocarbons do not react with anything in the atmosphere around us, they linger a long time. Ironically, this property that makes the propellant gas so harmless at earth's surface enables it to persist and eventually reach a place where it can work against man. As the years pass, normal air circulation carries it up into the stratosphere, where things are quite different.

In the upper atmosphere, many scientists point out, the high-energy rays in the sunlight may well react with fluorocarbons to release free chlorine atoms. Chlorine, in turn, can change ozone into common oxygen, and free chlorine gets used over and over almost endlessly. It becomes a catalyst—a tool in a chemical reaction that breaks down the ozone. Herein lies the potential danger. This long-range depletion of the ozone is what scientists fear from the tiny puffs of millions of fluorocarbon spray cans.

Time is a big factor in this theory. Fluorocarbons are thought to take as long as 10 to 15 years to reach the stratosphere. And it may take a century or more for the ozone to replenish itself from damage already done. The threat, if real, is to future generations.

The natural layer of ozone 10 to 30 miles (16 to 48 kilometers) overhead filters out some of the sun's heat rays, the "infrared" light. Excess heat rays from the sun could cause drastic shifts in the earth's weather. More importantly, the ozone layer also shields us from most of the sun's ultraviolet light. The friendly ultraviolet that penetrates in normal sunlight gives many of us vitamin D and a suntan. But overexposure to the rays increases the danger of skin cancer, including the rare, often fatal, melanoma. Some cancer experts expect 2 percent more cancer for each percent less ozone. And if the more intense rays should kill tiny oxygen-generating plants adrift in the ocean, the oceanic "food chains" would suffer. Truly the ozone layer is a protection mankind cannot afford to disregard.

Why Haven't We Heard of This Before?

Synthesized in the 1930's and trade-named Freon, the nontoxic fluorocarbons raised no eyebrows until June 1974. Then scientists F. Sherwood Rowland and Mario S. Molina of the University of California sounded the warning. Others had devised mathematical descriptions ("models") of

THE OZONE DEPLETION THEORY

(IN THE CHEMIST'S SHORTHAND)

Scientists estimate that fluorocarbons—more correctly called chlorofluorocarbons—released from someone's spray can as long ago as 10 or 15 years are only now reaching the stratosphere.

THEY CALL IT "PHOTOLYSIS"

At altitudes above 15 miles (25 kilometers) sunlight has enough energy to tear chlorine free from fluorocarbons. "Photolysis," the scientists call this, when electromagnetic waves (such as light) decompose chemicals. To see how this works, suppose you used a deodorant a decade ago with the propellant Freon II ($CFCl_3$). Here in chemist's shorthand is what may be happening to that Freon in the sky:

$$h\nu + CFCl_3 \longrightarrow CFCl_2 + Cl$$

Here $h\nu$ is a photon, a bit of light energy. Striking a drifting molecule of your long-forgotten Freon II, it yields (shown by the arrow) a smaller molecule plus a free chlorine (Cl) atom. What happens next?

OZONE BECOMES PLAIN OXYGEN

Chlorine atoms decompose ozone molecules by stripping away one of their three oxygen atoms. The chemist writes it like this:

$$Cl + O_3 \longrightarrow ClO + O_2$$

Here Cl is free chlorine, O_3 is ozone and O_2 is plain oxygen. But the leftover chlorine oxide (ClO) does not last. It meets stray oxygen atoms, O, rather abundant up there.

AND NEXT:

$$ClO + O \longrightarrow Cl + O_2$$

Note, if you follow the arrows, that again we get plain oxygen (O_2). But the chlorine (Cl) is free to find its next O_3 victim. That makes free chlorine a catalyst. It does this over and over before it finds a rare chemical up there to take it out of circulation. Thus, the theory goes, a little aerosol may deplete a lot of ozone.

how gas diffuses through the air. But Rowland and Molina showed how fluorocarbons in the sky could alter the quality of life on earth. Soon the University of Michigan, Harvard University and the National Center for Atmospheric Research, using similar models, came to the same conclusion.

Thus you are not alone if you heard only lately of the environmental threat to the ozone. It is new to everyone. Suddenly in the mid-1970's man learned to respect the ozone.

Now came the agonizing problem. "Must we shut down a thriving industry due to a theoretical, though alarming, threat?" To find a substitute for Freon's original use, as a refrigerant, would be difficult. But each year 500 million pounds of U.S. Freon production also went for use in spray cans. Ninety percent of the sprays were personal products like cosmetics, deodorants and hairsprays—growing in popularity world wide. And the United States, which produced half of the world's fluorocarbons, was doubling its production every six years.

Deciding What to Do

With man's scanty knowledge of air currents and photochemistry in the upper atmosphere, it is hard to say just how accurately the models predict the ozone depletion. But if they are anywhere near correct, there is great risk, and that possibility had to be faced. New techniques were put to use for testing the ozone layer. Measuring ozone by satellite and rocket

supplemented the older "Umkehr" method of comparing two wavelengths of sunlight. Scientists had to interpret the results. Is there less ozone now, and does this correspond to the amounts of fluorocarbons released?

Early models of how fluorocarbons affect the ozone were one-dimensional. That is, they described mathematically what happens when the gas rises vertically to the stratosphere. The objection to this is that we live in a three-dimensional world. Winds blow, summer and winter storms come up, and no gas rises straight up. Besides, the natural ozone layer forms unevenly, more in summer and more toward the sunny equator. Moving steadily away from the equator, the ozone forms a denser blanket toward the poles. So researchers began suggesting two- and three-dimensional models considering season and latitude.

Gradually, as results came in, government agencies realized the need to act. A newspaper cartoon showed two creatures, not earthlings, in a spaceship. "Our instruments must be wrong," one said to the other. "They show that they're destroying their ozone with deodorants." The theory has not been conclusively "proved." But the risk seemed too great to wait any longer. The United States has ended its major use of fluorocarbons as spray propellants.

As the FDA announced the ban, the *Federal Register* said:

> "The agency has acted because the best estimates of the scientific community after careful examination are that chlorofluorocarbon release leads to a reduction of stratospheric ozone, that the ultimate consequences of ozone depletion at the estimated levels are unacceptable in the agency's judgment, and that it is indefinite when the remaining scientific questions will be conclusively resolved."

How Will It Affect Business—and My Pocketbook?

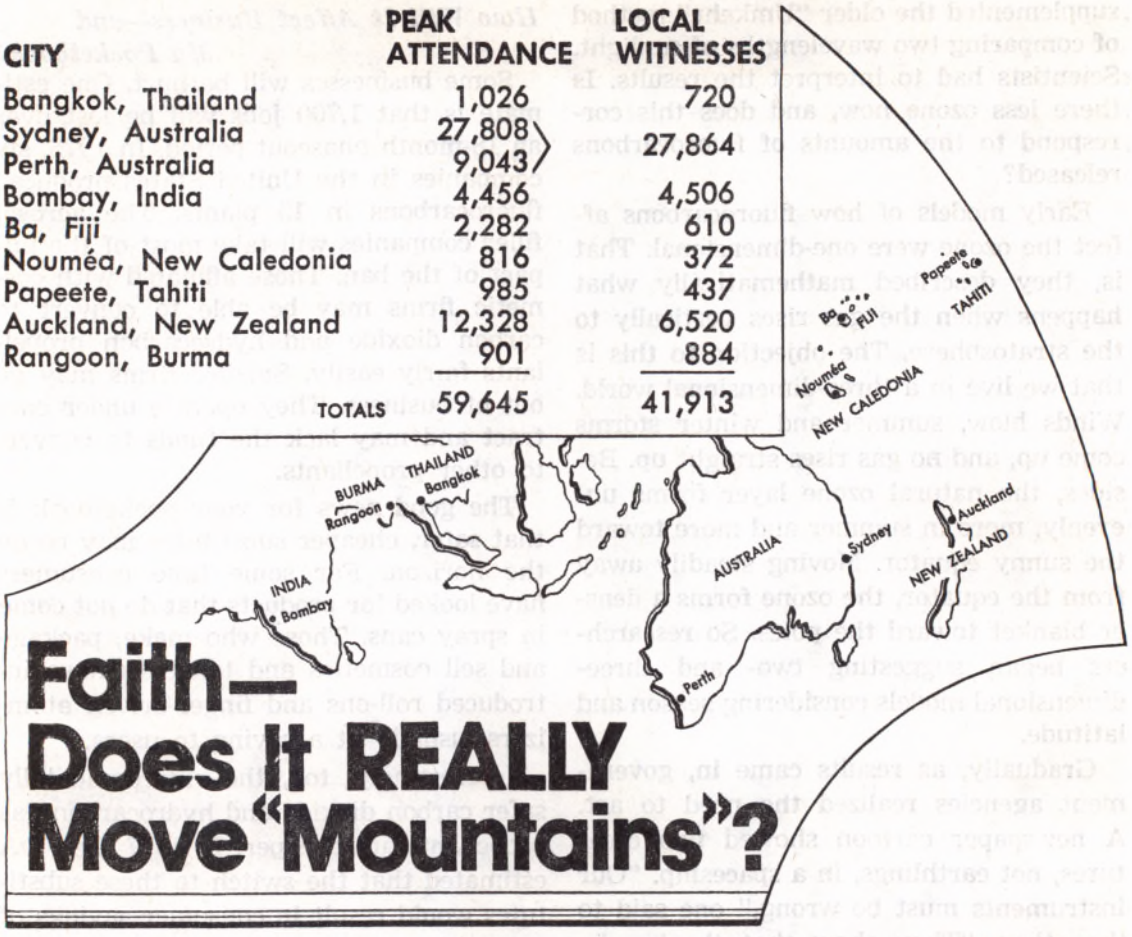
Some businesses will be hurt. One estimate is that 1,700 jobs will be lost over an 18-month phaseout period. In 1975, six companies in the United States produced fluorocarbons in 15 plants. The aerosol filler companies will take most of the impact of the ban. Those affiliated with cosmetic firms may be able to convert to carbon dioxide and hydrocarbon propellants fairly easily. Smaller firms may go out of business. They operate under contract and may lack the funds to convert to other propellants.

The good news for your pocketbook is that safer, cheaper substitutes may be on the horizon. For some time consumers have looked for products that do not come in spray cans. Those who make, package and sell cosmetics and toiletries have introduced roll-ons and finger-driven atomizers, usually at a saving to users.

Interestingly, too, the environmentally safer carbon dioxide and hydrocarbon gas propellants are cheaper. In 1977 the FDA estimated that the switch to these substitutes would result in consumer savings of from $58 million to $240 million (U.S.) annually. Time will tell how much of this reaches your pocketbook.

But far outweighing any financial considerations is the peril of a gradual catastrophe to mankind and all earthly life. The destruction of our natural filter against dangerous rays from the sun would surely rank as the greatest blunder that man had committed in his pursuit of technology. And how sickening would be the realization that irreparable damage had already been done, leaving us helpless to avert the consequences! The consensus is that man learned to respect the ozone just in time. Someday, looking back, we may realize that we had an appallingly narrow escape.

CITY	PEAK ATTENDANCE	LOCAL WITNESSES
Bangkok, Thailand	1,026	720
Sydney, Australia	27,808	27,864
Perth, Australia	9,043	
Bombay, India	4,456	4,506
Ba, Fiji	2,282	610
Nouméa, New Caledonia	816	372
Papeete, Tahiti	985	437
Auckland, New Zealand	12,328	6,520
Rangoon, Burma	901	884
TOTALS	59,645	41,913



Faith—Does It REALLY Move "Mountains"?

JUST how powerful is faith? Centuries ago Jesus Christ said: "If you have faith the size of a mustard grain, you will say to this mountain, 'Transfer from here to there,' and it will transfer, and nothing will be impossible for you."—Matt. 17:20.

He indicated that such faith was powerful enough that no mountainlike obstacle could prevent a person from performing his worship of God. But is this realistic? Are Jesus' words merely a 'nice-sounding philosophy'? Is solid evidence available that there exists among some the faith that can 'move mountains'?

We invite you to consider the following experiences. They are all actual cases that happened in connection with nine "Victorious Faith" International Conventions held during the fall and winter of 1978. These assemblies, which were held in the Far East and in the South Pacific, are important features of the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses. Consider some of the huge "mountains" that were faced by those involved.

Financial Problems

In the areas where the assemblies were held, there is much poverty among the common people. In some instances, to reach the nearest convention, many delegates had to travel hundreds of miles. Where would they get the money to pay for train and boat fare?

In Burma it was touching to hear experiences of how some sold most of their

reserves of rice, and many others sold their prized possessions, including, in some cases, their only cow to obtain the needed money. This may not seem much to some readers, but for them it represented the loss of their material security for the winter season. Their confidence was that the Creator would bless their own industrious efforts to provide for their future necessities.

One Christian woman in New Caledonia who had received a considerable amount of money from the government, because of the recent death of her husband, used part of it to attend the assembly. The part she used represented *three years of income,* but she was happy to make this special effort with her two children.

Among those in attendance at Bangkok, Thailand, were seven young fleshly brothers and sisters who paid their way from almost 700 miles (1,120 kilometers) away. To get the money, two of the girls saved the tiny scraps of raw rubber where they were employed and eventually sold them, as well as making and selling simple bracelets. They did this over a year's time, despite the efforts of their opposed mother to stop them from attending the assembly.

Determined faith was needed in scores of cases where employers refused to grant delegates a leave from their job. Many made the hard decision to attend the assembly regardless of the consequences. This matter became a blazing issue in Australia where the assemblies were scheduled in December, when the world's end-of-year retail activities would be at their peak. Yet, the Witnesses as a whole acted in faith and attended the fine assemblies. Among them was one Witness who was fired because of attending the convention. He prayerfully submitted an application for another job. The result? He was invited to begin work on December 18, three days after the assembly at Sydney ended!

Health Problems

A crippling disease can appear like a large mountain to hinder one from getting to an assembly. Especially would this be so with one Australian Witness who describes himself as "dead from the neck down." However, this quadriplegic (paralyzed in both arms and legs) acted in faith and appealed to the hospital where he was being treated. Special arrangements were made so that he and his two children could be flown to the assembly, where his example touched the hearts of many.

Even for a robust young man in good health, a 1,242-mile (2,000-kilometer) sleepless trip on a jostling train would be quite an ordeal. Well, one of the delegates to the Indian assembly, a 78-year-old man (see picture), traveled sitting up on a hard wood bench in a train for four days and three nights to reach the assembly! Neither his age nor failing health stopped him!

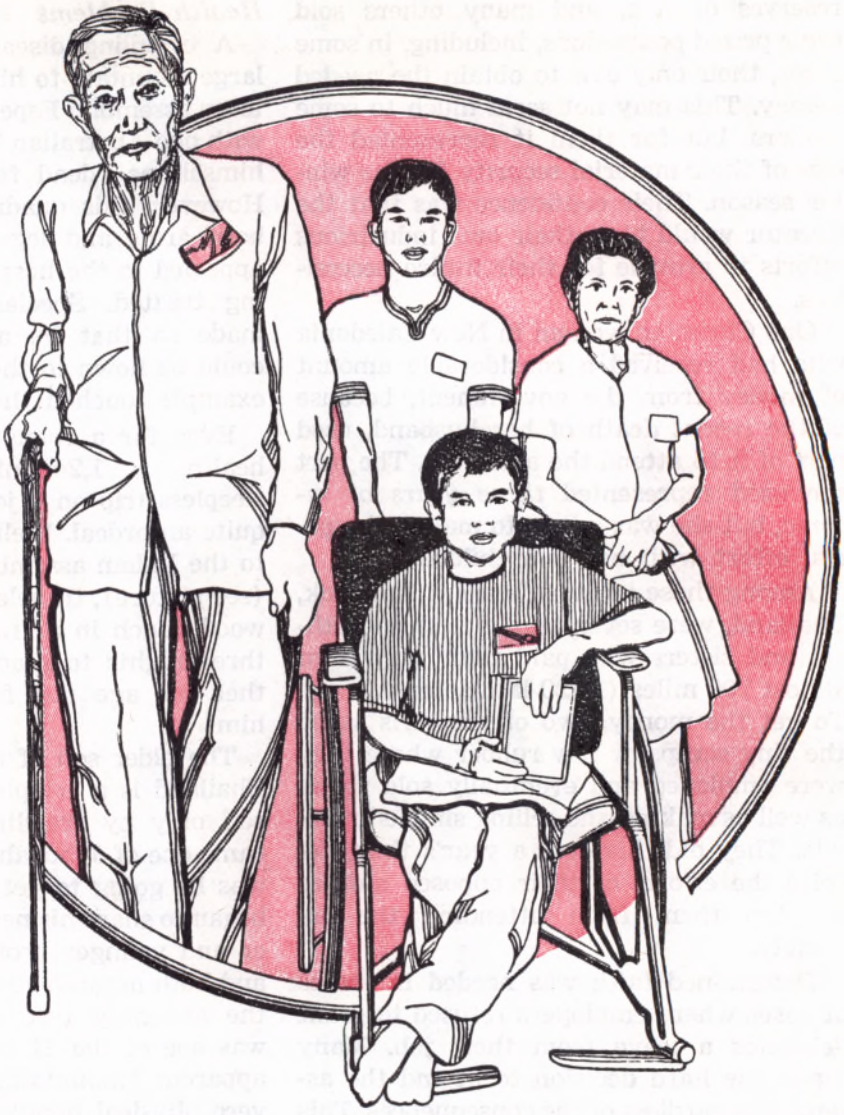
The older son of a very poor widow in Thailand is a cripple who can move himself only by crawling. Last year he became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. But how was he going to get to the assembly? He began to share his new faith with his mother and younger brother. They responded, and both accompanied and *assisted* him to the assembly (see picture). His brother was one of the 21 baptized there. Indeed, apparent "mountains" in the form of severe physical handicaps were victoriously overcome.

Natural and Man-made Upheavals

Several weeks before the assembly at Bombay, India, the country was saturated with severe flooding that left thousands dead and millions homeless. About 100 Witnesses were preparing to come from Calcutta, 1,300 miles (2,092 kilometers) away from the assembly city. Eighty percent of Calcutta was under water. One brother thus described his circumstance:

78-year-old delegate to Indian assembly

Crippled Thai delegate with his mother and brother



"The water gradually began to recede, but we had no food, no kerosene, no cooking fuel, and, to make matters worse, there was an earthquake scare that caused panic in the wet dirt-laden streets.

"Because of arthritis my wife is not able to walk. Out of despair she said: 'How can we think of going to the assembly under these circumstances with three children?' After prayerful consideration, I replied, 'If we cannot bear these pressures now, how will we stand the great tribulation?' So we managed to get to the station to board the train to Bombay for the assembly."

This family and others braved the dangerous traveling conditions to the train station only to discover that all trains had been canceled! Floodwaters had damaged the tracks. "Perhaps the railways will provide a special train just for you!" chided some onlookers. All appeared lost.

Several hours later the announcement was made that a test train would be sent out to Bombay to view the condition of the tracks. Soon the amazed Witnesses found themselves en route to the assembly!

Wearied after a 36-hour journey, they happily joined other delegates in Bombay and arrived at the convention hall. *It was locked!* They were greeted with the sour news that there might not be an assembly. This was just hours before the first scheduled session.

A man-made upheaval, a labor strike, by the maintenance workers had shut down the facility. Intense prayers and supplications ascended from the conventioners. A last-minute personal visit was made by

the Witnesses to the union leader. The point was made that these were peace-loving persons who wanted to use the hall merely for religious reasons.

After a tense hour of talk, the union leader, in a rare public appearance, went to the hall and instructed his strikers to allow the Witnesses to use the building without any disturbance. It soon became the largest assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses ever held in India.

Persecution

Because of misunderstanding and deep-rooted feelings, religious persecution can seem like an enormous "mountain," especially to those who are studying the Bible to become Witnesses.

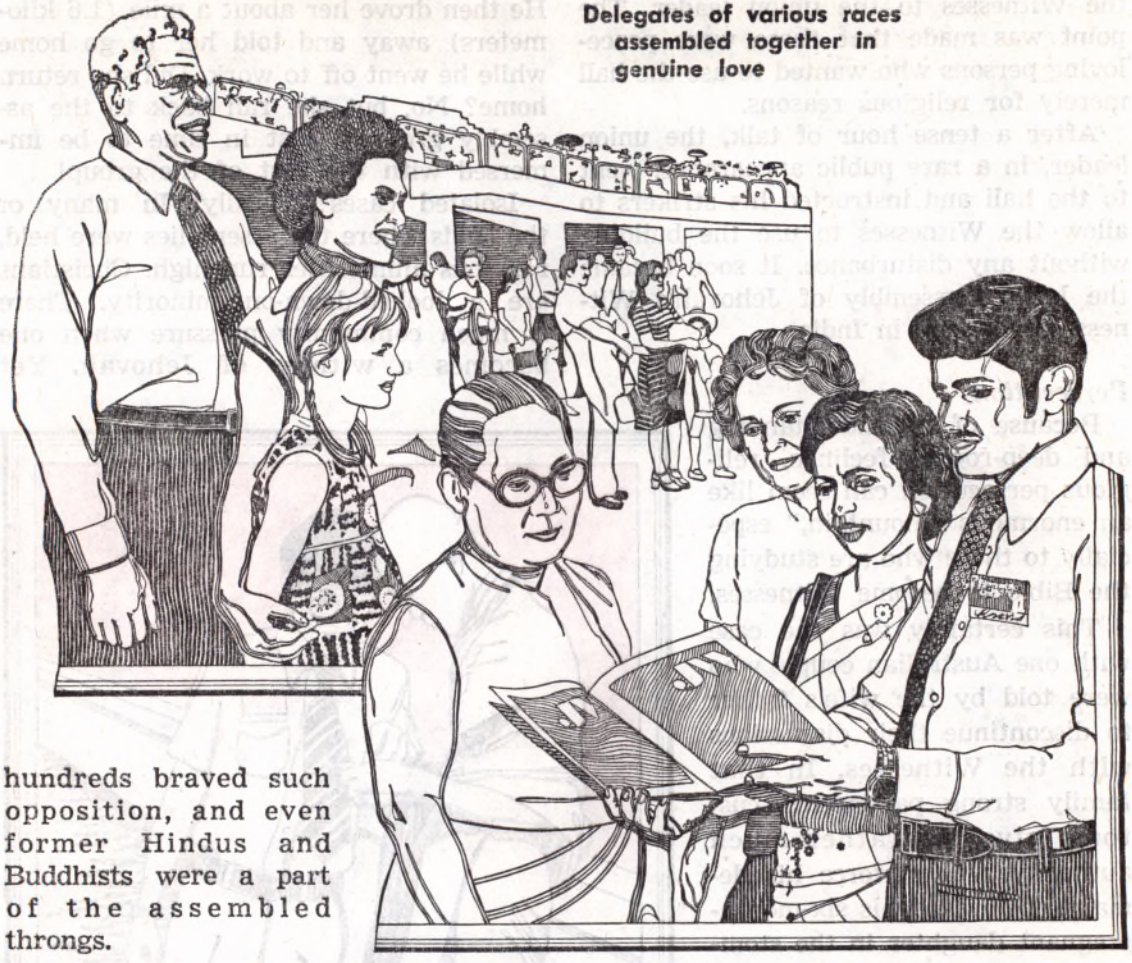
This certainly was the case with one Australian couple who were told by the wife's father to discontinue their discussions with the Witnesses. In that family strong patriarchal customs give the father much authority. To reinforce his demands he kicked his six-month-pregnant daughter in the stomach and with his fist broke her nose!

Did this stop the young couple from attending the assembly? Not at all! In fact, their determination so impressed the father that he softened and even kept their newborn baby while the couple with their three-year-old son enjoyed the assembly!

At the assembly in Fiji, all 25 candidates were preparing to be baptized. Suddenly the husband of one candidate entered and grabbed his wife, slapped her and dragged her to his car. He then drove her about a mile (1.6 kilometers) away and told her to go home while he went off to work. Did she return home? No, but she ran back to the assembly grounds, just in time to be immersed with the rest of the group!

Isolated cases? Hardly! In many of the lands where the assemblies were held, religious animosities run high. Christians are a looked-down-on minority. There is much community pressure when one becomes a witness of Jehovah. Yet

Delegate shares message with Buddhist monk despite flooded Bangkok streets



Delegates of various races assembled together in genuine love

hundreds braved such opposition, and even former Hindus and Buddhists were a part of the assembled throngs.

Racial and Ethnic Prejudice

Racial and cultural prejudices are rife in today's world. A recent poll taken in England, for example, suggested that one of every two Britons is concerned about race relations and feels that the government "should pay immigrants to return to their countries of origin, such as Pakistan, Jamaica, India, Kenya, and other former British possessions." Most religions have not helped the situation much, as a Canadian study found that 65 percent of Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians are either somewhat or very racist. Would such prejudices prove to be a mountainlike obstacle when visitors with different racial and cultural backgrounds would attend these international assemblies?

Hundreds of delegates from Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Venezuela and other countries attended these assemblies in the Far East and the South Pacific. But what a marked contrast! There was not even a trace of racism on their part, nor on the part of their hosts. Usually there was a warm welcome awaiting the foreign visitors at the airport. The Fijian Witnesses provided a typical greeting. One report states:

"On leaving the customs area the delegates were surprised to see a huge ban-

ner welcoming them and to be garlanded with aromatic frangipani leis by smiling Fijian brothers awaiting them. It was a thrilling reminder of the words of the apostle Peter when he referred to the 'association of brothers in the world.' (1 Pet. 5:9) Such a warm bond of love from persons who did not know them personally, but only by faith, will be remembered for a long time."

Soon the visitors found themselves fully involved in the customs of their warm hosts. Many visitors happily stayed in the modest homes of fellow Witnesses, rather than the more convenient hotels. This included some from the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York.

In New Caledonia the general populace was astounded to see Witnesses of different races working together. One woman who lived near the convention site warmly greeted the two Witnesses who called at her home, saying: "Are you Witnesses? Then I'll gladly take your booklet! Do you know that my apartment is close enough that I can see and hear all the assembly program? I am very impressed because of *so many nationalities!*"

One of the members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses visited Burma, where the humble people feel that "Westeners" look down on their culture and manner of dress. To the delight of the Burmese he wore a local *longi,* or skirt, that had been given to him. He even gave his lectures in the 'skirt.' Race and cultural differences could have been a divisive "mountain," but genuine faith removed it.

What Created Such Faith?

We have but scratched the surface of the many personal examples where faith moved a great obstacle. But how was such faith developed? This is illustrated by the following experience of one conventioner:

A man in Thailand was a drunk and also gambled away his money. He regularly beat his wife and children. Six months before the assembly he and his wife began to study the Bible with the Witnesses.

Immediately he began to apply the principles of the Bible and stopped his bad habits. He became a diligent worker and managed to save enough money for himself, his wife and six other family members to attend the assembly. From a drunken gambler to an industrious worker in just six months—all because of the Bible!

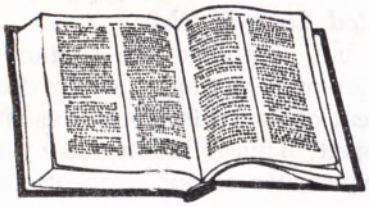
The same point was made in Fiji, where a special program was held for the English-speaking visitors. The chairman, a native Fijian, reflected on the former conduct of many of the Fijian Witnesses, saying: "We were headhunters and cannibals." He then dramatically held up the Bible and continued: "If it had not been for this book you visitors would probably be in our cooking pot!"

Yes, the Bible is the source of genuine faith. It can create in persons a genuine love for righteous principles. It is from this book that faith also can be built that is strong enough to 'move mountains.'

Japan's Largest Cherry Tree

An expedition into a national forest near Okuchi, Kagoshima, Japan, has verified reports that a huge cherry tree was growing there. It was discovered off a forest road at about 600 meters (1,968 feet) above sea level. Its size? It was 22.2 meters (72.8 feet) around at the base. At one meter above the ground it was 10.9 meters (nearly 36 feet) in circumference. The trunk was 24 meters (78.7 feet) in height, while the branches spread out about 28 meters (92 feet). Its age was estimated at 600 years. Until this discovery in 1977, Japan's largest known cherry tree was the "Jindai Sakura" in Mukawa, Yamanashi Prefecture. That tree is 13 meters high and has a trunk circumference of 10.6 meters. It measures 13 meters at the base. The age is estimated at 1,000 years.

The Bible's View



Jesus Christ as "the First-born of All Creation"

TO THE congregation at Colossae, Asia Minor, the apostle Paul wrote concerning Jesus Christ, according to the *Common Bible**: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."—Col. 1:15-17.

What did the apostle mean by calling Jesus Christ "the first-born of all creation"? Paul's further words enlarge on the matter: "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent."—Col. 1:18, *CB*.

Here we find that the Greek words for both "first-born" (*protótokos*) and "beginning" (*arkhé*) describe Jesus as the first one of a group or class, "the body, the church," and therefore he has preeminence in this respect. He also has preeminence in being the first one resurrected to endless life from among all the human dead.—1 Cor. 15:22, 23.

The same Greek words occur in the Greek *Septuagint* translation at Genesis 49:3: "Ruben, thou art my first-born [*protótokos*], thou my strength, and the first [*arkhé*, "beginning"] of my children." (Compare Deuteronomy 21:17, *Septuagint*.) From such Biblical statements it is reasonable to conclude that the Son of God is the firstborn of all creation in the sense of being the first of God's creatures. In fact, Jesus refers to himself as "the beginning [*arkhé*] of God's creation." (Rev. 3:14, *CB*) The *New World Translation* renders the phrase in this verse: "the beginning of the creation by God."

There are many who object to the idea of Jesus as being a created person. They argue that since "in him *all things* were created" (*CB*)—during his prehuman existence in heaven—Jesus himself could not be a creature. Such individuals believe that Jesus is himself Almighty God, the second person of a "trinity" of three coequal, coeternal persons in one "godhead."

Individuals of that persuasion interpret the Greek expression (at Revelation 3:14) for "the beginning of God's creation" as meaning "the origin (or 'primary source') of the creation of God." One who prefers this idea is the noted Greek scholar Henry Alford. Nevertheless, in his work *The Greek Testament*, Alford concedes: "The mere word *arkhé* would admit the meaning that Christ is the first created being: see Gen. xlix. 3; Deut. xxi. 17; and Prov. viii. 22. And so the Arians here take it, and some who have followed them: e.g. Castalio, 'chef d' œuvre:' 'omnium Dei operum excellentissimum atque primum:' [meaning "the first and most excellent of all God's works"] and so Ewald and Züllig."

According to *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, to understand Revelation 3:14 as meaning that Jesus is "the active source" of creation, rather than the first created person, one must interpret *arkhé* "as in Greek philosophy and [non-Biblical]

* The *Common Bible* is approved by both Catholic and Protestant authorities.

Jewish wisdom-literature, =*aitía* or origin." The inspired Bible writers, however, never borrowed ideas from Greek philosophy.

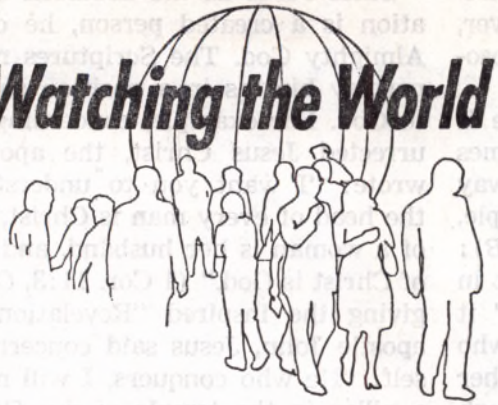
But how could Jesus be a creature if "in him all things were created"? At times the Bible uses the word "all" in a way that allows for exceptions. For example, we read at 1 Corinthians 15:27 (*CB*): "But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him [Jesus Christ],' it is plain that he [God] is excepted who put all things under him." As a further illustration the Bible states that "through one man," Adam, "death spread to all men." (Rom. 5:12, *CB*) Though Adam was not part of the "all men" to whom death "spread" (since previous to Adam there was no human who could have spread death to him), he was nonetheless a man. Similarly, though Jesus was not part of the "all things" that came into existence through him, he was, nevertheless, a created person, the very first creature of God. The Greek word *panta* in certain contexts means "all other," as in 1 Corinthians 15:24 and 6:18. (See *An American Translation, Moffatt, Common Bible.*) Hence, the *New World Translation* reads: "by means of him all *other* things were created . . . he is before all *other* things."—Col. 1:16, 17.

Jesus' being the firstborn of all creation involves the law of primogeniture, the right of the one born or produced first. From earliest times the real firstborn son enjoyed special privileges that included succeeding to headship of the household and inheriting a double portion of the father's property. (Deut. 21:15-17) Kingship and priesthood, too, were inherited by the firstborn son of a king or high priest in ancient Israel.—See 2 Chronicles 21:3.

Since Jesus as the firstborn of all creation is a created person, he cannot be Almighty God. The Scriptures repeatedly portray him as in a position subordinate to God. For example, concerning the resurrected Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul wrote: "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3, *CB*) When giving the inspired "Revelation" to the apostle John, Jesus said concerning himself: "He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name." (Rev. 3:12, *CB*) Did you note that four times in this verse alone Jesus refers to his Father, Jehovah, as "my God"?—Compare Philippians 2:5, 6, *CB*.

In no way is this meant to deny the exalted position that Jesus occupies next to God. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matt. 28:18, *CB*) It was appropriate for God to 'give' to his Son such authority, since the Son was the firstborn of all creatures. Right in line with primogenitureship, the apostle Paul could write concerning Jesus: "[God] raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church."—Eph. 1:20-23, *CB*.

Watching the World



"U.S. Catholic" Comments

◈ A recent article about Jehovah's Witnesses in *U.S. Catholic* magazine cites reasons why "a large percentage of Witnesses have come from Roman Catholic backgrounds." Among other things, it notes that "some people seem especially vulnerable to the use of Bible passages to support doctrinal positions." It says a "confident Witness citing Biblical chapter and verse . . . holds most of the cards in dealing with a person whose religious education since grade school has consisted of a series of badly prepared and delivered ten-minute Sunday homilies."

Why are the Witnesses "confident" in using the Bible? The magazine admits: "Any kingdom hall offers more adult education in a month than most Catholic parishes do all year. Prospective converts see a Witness with no more education than themselves expounding the Bible, preaching, finding fellowship in the congregation, claiming ministerial status, and carrying heavy responsibilities in the kingdom hall. [The Catholics'] own parishes may offer no model for this measure of dedication."

Pluto No Longer Ninth

◈ In late January, the place of planet Pluto as ninth and last in our solar system was taken over by the former eighth planet. For the next 20 years, Neptune will be farthest from the sun. This is because the 248-year orbit of Pluto is not circular; thus it falls inside the orbit of Neptune for 20 years each time around the sun. In mid-March 1999, Pluto will resume its role as the ninth planet.

Swedish War-Toy Ban

◈ After December 1, 1979, Swedish children will find it harder to play war games. Parliament and toymakers have agreed by common consent to ban the sale of toy soldiers and pistols after that date, on the grounds that they are too warlike. Some Swedish doctors and psychiatrists disagree, declaring that the little tots should have the means to work out their aggressive instincts in mock battles.

Club of Rome Update

◈ Over 10 years ago, the now-famous "Club of Rome" group warned of developing world crises in resources and population. Recently its president, Aurelio Peccei, was asked how his international group of intellectuals view mankind's situation now. "The world's situation has deteriorated on all fronts," he told a reporter for the Paris business magazine *Vision*. "There have of course been techno-scientific improvements, but they have been unsystematic, uncoordinated, and many of them have caused other problems . . . So altogether man is more confused today, more worried and less secure, than ten years ago." About the future, he said: "We issued a warning ten years ago, but looking back we feel it was so easy to do something then, and so difficult now. However, doing something now is much more necessary. We think that mankind has perhaps only ten years or less to choose a course different from the present one, which is bound to end in disaster."

Martian Caps Differ

◈ Latest information from America's Mariner space probes indicate that Mars' polar ice caps "come in two flavors," reports the New York *Times*. The north polar cap had been found to be mostly water ice during the summer when its covering of frozen carbon dioxide (dry ice) boils off. However, new evidence indicates that the south pole is covered only with dry ice. Scientists speculate that the slightly milder winters of the northern cap account for the difference.

New Cancer Fighter?

◈ Sprouts of wheat, mung beans and lentils are being considered by the Texas System Cancer Center as a possible protection against chemically induced cancer. Extracts from the sprouts were reported to reduce the potency of certain chemicals that are known to be factors in producing cancer. However, according to the findings, only those carcinogens that are activated by body enzymes are effectively inhibited by the extracts from the sprouts.

Bad Brew?

◈ The Heidelberg Cancer Research Center recently found that 111 of 158 European brands of beer contain nitrosamines, which have been found to cause cancer in experimental animals. In the Federal Republic of Germany,

where each person consumes an average of 39 gallons (148 liters) of beer annually, this was disheartening news. And in Bavaria, where annual consumption—55 gallons (208 liters)—is the greatest in the world, some considered the news a disaster. "Were it true," said a Munich restaurateur, "Bavaria would cease to exist." Brewers are working on getting rid of the offending substances.

Animal Acupuncture

◈ A Japanese veterinarian claims that he is using acupuncture to cure livestock of a variety of ailments. He asserts that among other things the four electrified needles that he uses help to reduce bleeding and neutralize pain in cows after stomach operations. According to the veterinarian, livestock owners pay 5,000 to 10,000 yen ($25, U.S. to $50, U.S.) less for the acupuncture treatment than for drug therapy.

TM—Religious or Secular?

◈ One doctor who formerly practiced transcendental meditation (TM) disagreed with suggestions that the government support the use of TM in health-care programs. Why? In a letter published in the *American Medical News*, he wrote: "I can assure you that there is enough religious ritual involved with this practice that it should be excluded on the basis of separation of church and state. I am opposed to this, not only for this reason, but because it absolutely is not effective."

Thin Ice

◈ The Soviet newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* recently reported a near disaster for 2,840 Russian fishermen. Ignoring posted warnings, the men were fishing through ice near Russky Island, south of Vladivostok, when the section they were on broke loose and began drifting out to sea. Helicopters and a ship rescued more than 1,200 fishermen before dark, but the rest had to remain on the ice floe overnight. The last of the men were rescued just before the ice broke up on the open sea. Unusually warm weather was responsible for the treacherous ice.