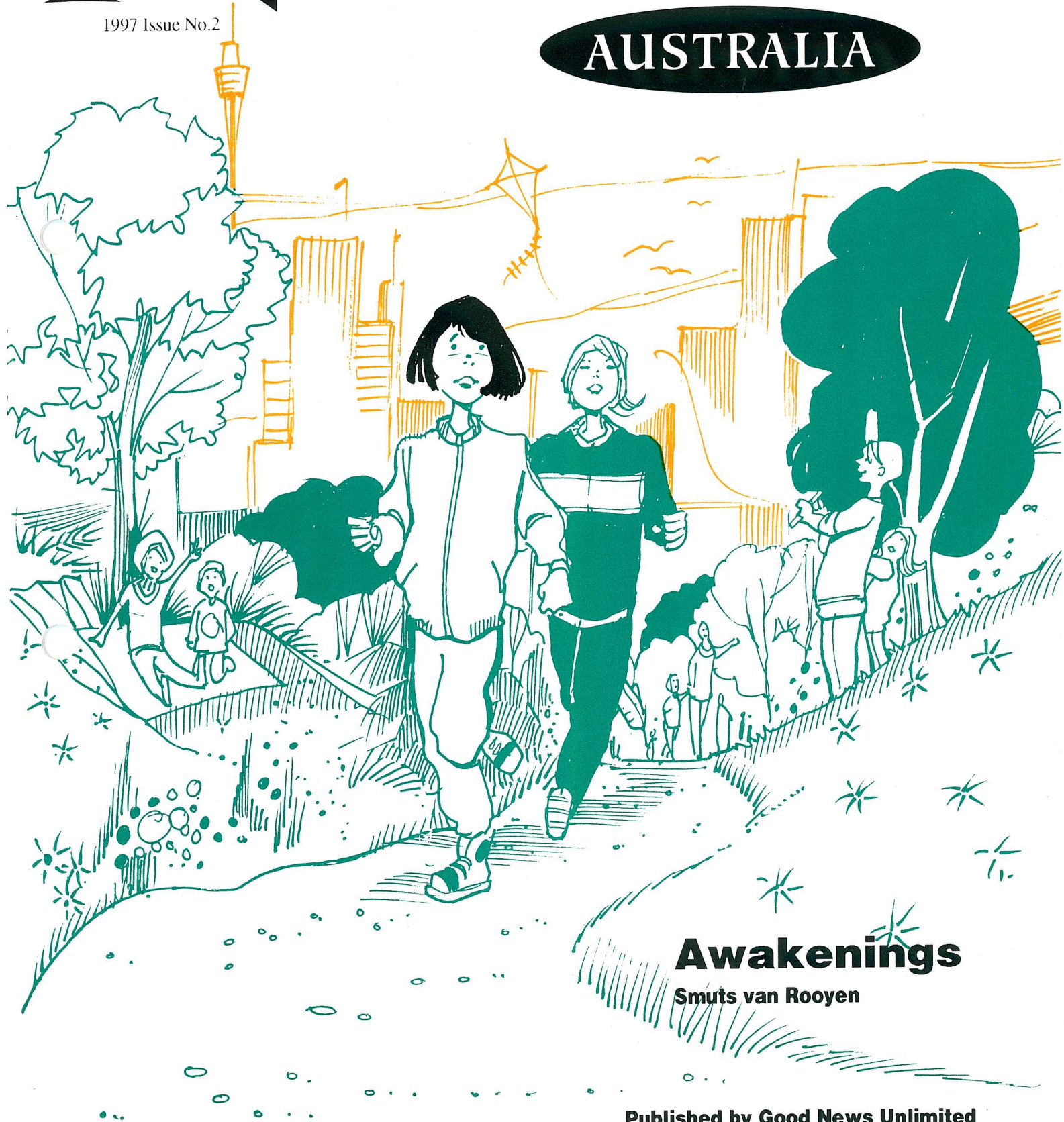


# Good News

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AUSTRALIA



**Awakenings**

Smuts van Rooyen

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**Editorial**

**Ron Allen**

**W**e live in a time where there is immediate access to information about events as they occur almost anywhere in the world. We are now able to watch our fellow human beings endure calamities of every kind. There is a risk of our becoming desensitized. But now and then we hear of something that shocks us and freshens our awareness of the troubled and confusing nature of existence.

Some time ago a couple in Maine, USA, shut their four year old daughter in an oven and cooked her to death. The neighbours were alarmed by her cries and the smell of burning hair. When law enforcement arrived, the murderous parents calmly reported that they had been 'executing Lucifer'. Worse still, the act had been done to the accompaniment of Christian music.

Small wonder that many are asking, Where is God? Why doesn't he act? Is he a monster that has pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures? Such questions are understandable in the face of the enormous misery in the world. If men and women come from God it is natural for them to expect God to do something about rampant evil.

Remember Martha; complaining to Jesus: 'If you had only been here my brother would not have died.' Jesus hadn't come when they had called. He had apparently failed the family in their time of crisis. Contrary to appearances, though, Jesus was concerned

and in control of the situation. His late arrival was deliberate. He even said when he finally arrived: 'I am glad for your sakes, I was not here.' Then Jesus made his way to the tomb and called the dead back to life. His final act in the drama showed those present that they need not have been in anguish after all.

The Christian continues to trust God even though many things call God into question. Amid the world's darkness he knows that God has come near through a Cross. According to the New Testament the Cross followed by the Resurrection, is that point in history where God has acted finally and decisively. The Resurrection informs faith as to how things will pan out in the end. Good will conquer evil. Life will reign over death. In Christ the darkness is pierced; the love of God shines through.

The Easter message reminds us that God has not forgotten us. We cannot let go of the testimony of Jesus' sufferings and his rising again on the third day. There is hardship and trouble, but there is love. There is pain and death, but there is life. There is injustice, but there is hope. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ .



- Pr R J Allen  
 Executive Editor

# Rejoice Evermore

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## Desmond Ford

Only Christianity offers firm grounds for hope in the face of death. Without the fact of Christ's victory over death, our own death would be swathed in gloom, and therefore our life as well. We look to the end of a thing to find its meaning. If our end is dust forever, then life has been a farce. But none can find the skeleton of Christ. His worst enemies could not find it nineteen hundred years ago. In the very place where he was executed as a malefactor, his resurrection was proclaimed and believed in. And it is that resurrection that makes our own certain.

The existence of the Christian church testifies to the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing else could have transformed those broken men and women and filled them with radiant power—a power that did not diminish before the threat of martyrdom. Read the resurrection accounts in the four Gospels. They differ in details, for there has been no attempt to forge a lie. They all have the ring of truth. Hundreds who had seen the risen Christ were still alive when the first letter to the Corinthians was written (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Paul declared that Christ's resurrection was a fulfilment of the ancient Scriptures (see 1 Corinthians 15:4). On the first, and third day of history, the earth had risen from the waters. On the third day of his death

sentence, Isaac was delivered, as in resurrection. For long centuries, Israel reaped on the third day after the Passover the first fruits of the harvest, pledge of the great ingathering to follow. Jonah had been resurrected from the watery abyss on the third day. After Aaron's rod had lain in the darkness, Moses found that it had budded—life from the dead! When Israel crossed Jordan, they took from thence twelve stones and placed them as memorials in the new land—emblems of the resurrection of their nation from the death of slavery.

Prophets also had foretold the resurrection of the Messiah. While Isaiah sadly portrayed the 'cutting off' of the Servant of the Lord, he also wrote that he would 'see his seed' (Isaiah 53:8-10).

Psalm twenty two divides into two sections. Verses 1-21 are filled with sorrow and death, but then verses 22-31, which speak of One who lives to give his testimony before his brethren and before whom all the dead shall one day bow (see also Psalm 16). Because the Messiah would conquer death, the Old Testament foretells the resurrection of good and evil alike (Daniel 12:2).

In John 19:41 we read, 'Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.'

A garden is the symbol of

life and death, of life after death. It is the place of seeds which in winter seem dead but which burst forth in spring to gladden the Earth. Adam had sinned in a garden, thus bringing death, and turning that garden into a wilderness. The second Adam came to that wilderness, lived and died obediently and turned the wilderness into a garden.

For us in this life, there is no garden without a sepulchre. The shadow of death attends all things beautiful. In the days when tuberculosis was much more widespread than in our own, the signs of abnormal beauty and brilliance were often the indications of coming death. The universal phenomenon is the sign of universal sin. 'Death passed upon all men for all have sinned' (Romans 5:12). Even nature by its rhythm, testifies. Day is followed by night, summer by autumn and winter. Weariness, weakness, presage, the oncoming end-death, and every sickness is a mini death.

But the good news of the Gospel is, that Christ has sanctified the grave and plucked the sting from death. The grim reaper has himself been reaped by the Lord of the harvest. For 'Now is Christ risen from the dead' (1 Corinthians 15:20). His resurrection is the seal on his finished work. It testifies that all men have been legally justified, for Christ 'was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Romans 4:25).

*(Continued Page 4)*

That is, his death was the result of our trespasses, and his resurrection was the result of the justification of the human race, which he had achieved. Thus, Scripture affirms that Christ has 'abolished death' and turned it into a mere sleep (2 Timothy 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Now we know that God does not despise mankind and leave it in the grave. Had he done so, would not we despise others and not reckon their death a matter of significance? If, in the providence of God, we ultimately become refuse, what is there to stop us treating each other as refuse now?

But to us has been given the assurance that to die is no more a venturing along a lonely path. Christ has travelled it before us and trodden down every thorn. The sepulchre of every

believer is illuminated by his presence.

Let none tell you religion is irrelevant. It is the most relevant thing in the world, if it is the genuine article and not that parasitic growth which attaches itself, fungus-like, to all things living. Plato was right, when he wrote that 'men are in danger of forgetting that they who rightly practice philosophy, study nothing else than dying and death. Death is the iron ring around existence, and our earthly pilgrimage has been described as but a torso—a watch, or a vision between a sleep and a sleep.'

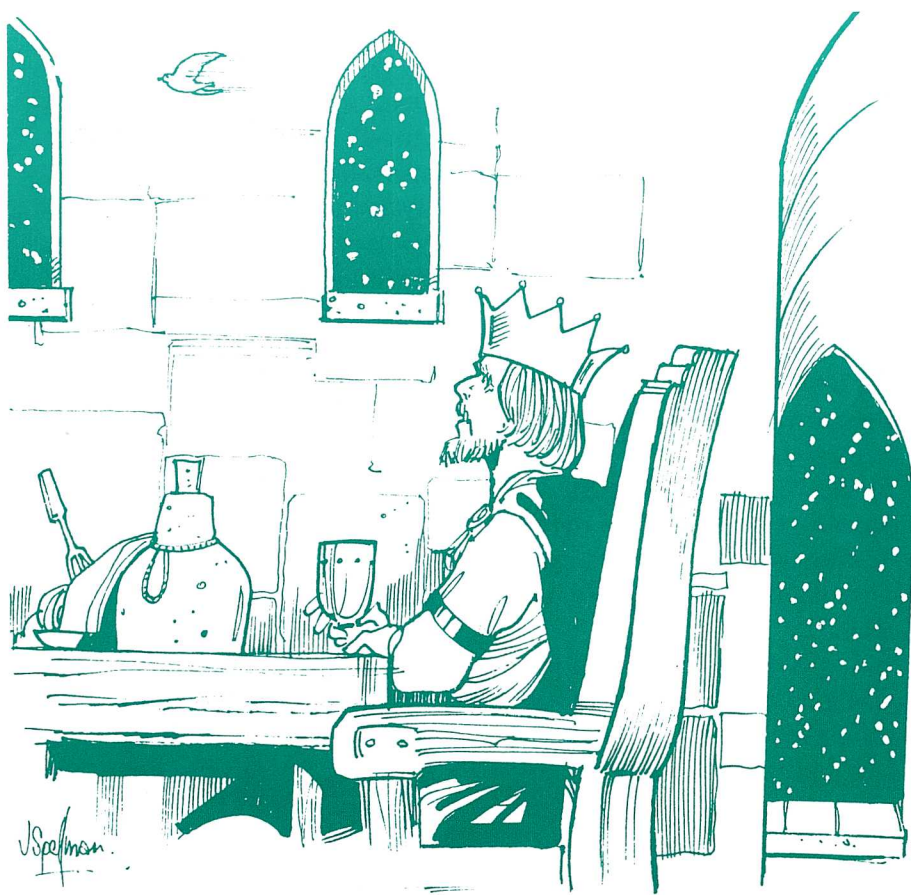
Nearly 1400 years ago, Edwin, King of Northumbria, was visited by a Christian monk endeavouring to persuade him to accept Christ. One of the warriors addressed the king in

words recorded by the venerable Bede.

'The present life of man upon earth, O King, seems to me, in comparison to the time which is unknown to us, like the swift flight of a sparrow through that house wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your ealdormen and thegns, while the fire blazes in the midst and the hall is warmed, but the wintry storms of rain or snow are raging abroad without. The sparrow, flying in at one door and out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry tempest; but after a short space of fair weather he immediately vanishes out of your sight, passing from winter into winter again. So this life of man appears for a little while, but of what is to follow or what went before, we know nothing at all. If, therefore, this doctrine tells us something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.'

And Edwin built the first York Cathedral pointing to the heavens as man's destiny. Christ is risen! We need despair of nothing—pain, tragedy, guilt, death. He changes all. He uses all. Nothing is impossible to him who lives this very day, making intercession for us. We are not alone, and we are loved. Death has been interrupted in its scything. One has come who has destroyed death and who enables believers to reign over it. We enter a 'new creation' crowned with life everlasting as we see the significance of the death of the Son of God. Reconciliation, peace and life replace alienation, enmity and death. Rejoice evermore!

*(Kaleidoscope of Diamonds v2. pp71-74 Desmond Ford Publications 1986. Used by permission.)*



# God's Wisdom and God's Power

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Sean Erikson

**N**atural sense says that death reduces the value of persons. Suicide is not considered a good thing by most, because it holds life in contempt. Humans should live and not die. Death is not usually seen as a worthwhile goal for human effort.

It is therefore remarkable to observe that Jesus Christ appears to have deliberately set for himself a course, that he knew would end in death.

'... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to **give** his life a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:28).

Death is a truth to which we all bow because we must. But for Jesus there seems to have been a choice. 'I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' 'No one takes it from me. But I lay it down of my own accord.' (John 10: verses 11&18).

These words are not spoken with an air of resignation to the inevitability of death. Rather, they refer to a death anticipated, chosen, and planned for.

Service is a beautiful thing. There have always been those who have distinguished themselves in the human family because they served their fellows well. Poets, thinkers, musicians, doctors, architects. These have all offered much to their brethren. And when death came to them it was seen as an

unfortunate termination of a life fruitful endeavour.

But Jesus spoke of his death as the service which he would render to the world. '... this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world' (John 6:51).

There is no evidence that Jesus saw his death as a regrettable shortening of his life. Instead, he appeared to view it as the pinnacle achievement of his career.

During an interview with Nicodemus Jesus informed his evening visitor that he **must** be born again. Then Jesus went on to announce that 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man **must** be lifted up.' There was an equal and related necessity for the rebirth of Nicodemus, and Jesus' Cross.

Christ spoke of his being lifted up in other places. '... when you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I am he.' (John 8:28). 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.' (John 12:32). In both of these passages Jesus was speaking of his expected death.

From an early age, Jesus knew what his destiny would be. The knowledge of an awful and untimely dying was with him every day. There were times when the thought of it overwhelmed him. 'My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?

No, it was for this reason that I came to this hour' (John 12:27).

In John's Gospel the **hour** is ominous and ghastly, but Christ has been preparing for it all along. The **hour** was to be the moment when God's name would be glorified. The **hour** was the time for the fulfilment of the Father's will. Jesus had planned his life with this **hour** in mind.

Christ moved toward the Cross intelligently and wilfully. This gave his dying a quality missing from other deaths. His death was an act of perfect obedience to God. His innocence made it holy and sacramental; significant for others.

A prisoner was due to be executed in San Quentin prison. He did not go willingly. His death was inflicted on him. Lawyers worked earnestly to procure his survival. He was taken to the gas chamber and strapped in place. Gas flooded the chamber and he died. He was put to death. His death was orchestrated by the State.

There are aspects of this criminal's death that correspond to the death of Christ. Christ's death was managed by a coalition of state and church authorities. His death was perpetrated by enemies. But there is a dimension to Jesus' dying that does not belong to the prisoner at San Quentin. The criminal's death was not his intention.  
*(Continued Page 10)*

# Gethsemane

Allan Page-Dhu

This midnight and the moon is high,  
while soft winds whisper through  
the trees of ancient olive bows.  
The city walls loom high above,  
and silently Jerusalem  
sleeps through the midnight hours.

Then, from the shadows comes alone  
a Man. His steps are resolute,  
His head is lifted high,  
as if some purpose in His heart  
has moved Him on some urgent quest  
beneath the lonely sky.

Behind Him in a glade He leaves  
His little band of followers,  
and wearied now they sleep.  
But sleep is far away from He  
who makes His way in solitude,  
a hallowed tryst to keep.

He stops and kneels, and speaks aloud  
as if conversing with a friend  
though none in form appears.  
He talks of things unspeakable,  
in worlds where once His dwellings were  
beyond the solar spheres.

'My Father', is the word that sounds  
above the whisper of the breeze  
upon the mountainside.  
'My Father, now the time has come  
to take me to yourself again  
forever to abide.

But O the cup that I must drink,  
before this fateful night has fled  
away before the sun.  
The cup of earth's iniquities,  
the guilt of all the ages past,  
and sins as yet undone.

My father keep me from this curse,  
no taste of sin has passed my lips,  
no guilt has fouled your Son.  
O let this cup pass from me now,  
but if it be your sovereign will,  
your sovereign will be done.'

He falters now beneath the load,  
a darkness as of blackest night  
is closing all about.  
The dogs of hell are at His heels,  
foul demons whisper in His ears  
their fiendish word of doubt.

He takes the cup, but in his hands  
it burns like fire from Sodom's pits;  
it sears His spotless soul.  
The darkness hides His Father's face,  
hell's abyss opens at His feet,  
perdition's thunders roll.

Behold, O Adam! Adam's race!  
You fugitives from Yahweh's wrath,  
Gethsemane's travail.  
See, God has sent His only Son  
to stand where you were once condemned  
beyond fair Eden's pale.

See how the pure Redeemer yields  
His spotless soul to take your sins;  
to die for me and you.  
See how the sacred blood drops down  
like sweat, it bathes His stricken form  
and stains the fallen dew.

It is a symbol of the life  
forced from the tortured form of Him  
who gave it to redeem:  
to buy us back, a priceless gift,  
a ransom that none else could give,  
a sacrifice supreme.

He cannot see across the gulf,  
exceeding sorrow overwhelms  
the Man of Nazareth.

Into the pit He sinks alone,  
no friend to help or ease the pain  
of sorrow unto death.

Is this the end? Has human hope  
sunk to irrevocable ruin  
with this its Lord?  
No! Death could never bind with chains  
the Prince of life, who lifeless lies  
upon the bloodstained sward.

The heavens leap with searing flame,  
a splendour shines and glows and bursts  
upon the midnight air.  
No lightning ever filled the earth  
with purer, fairer, jets of fire  
than flamed intensely there.

The brightness bathed the ancient trees  
with golden light enfolding light,  
like heaven's gates ajar.  
The very air with splendour burned  
and trembled, as with living fire,  
each dewdrop blazed: a star.

Then, from the radiant sky above  
the beat of mighty wings is heard,  
as, with resplendent grace,  
and loveliness still fragrant with  
exquisite scents of paradise,  
and glory in his face,

A mighty angel touches earth,  
and where he steps the stones flash fire,  
and, when he speaks, the air  
is filled with music, like the sound  
of many waters falling free;  
sweet sound beyond compare.

Then from his robe a golden cup  
he draws, and holds it to the lips  
of earth's redeeming Gaal.

With tender love-stressed words he speaks,  
And lifting up the drooping head  
he says 'Redeemer hail.

The ransom's paid. Suppliant Ruth  
the alienated deeds of Paradise  
receives, full and complete,  
the patrimony, lost to Adam's race,  
bought back by virtue of a sinless life  
I lay now at your feet.

Go, Conqueror! The thorny path of hell  
lies yet before you ere the task is done.  
Drink deeply of the cup  
the Father sends you from the throne above,  
and through the darkness of the road ahead  
His power will bear you up.'

And then the splendid vision fades,  
and suddenly as he had come  
the angel speeds away.  
The world's Redeemer, strengthened now,  
and resolute, calls to His friends,  
'Awake! Soon comes the day.

The day of shame, the darkest day  
the world, the universe, has seen,  
nor yet will ever see.  
The traitor comes, put up your swords  
already on a stony hill  
someone has felled a tree.'

This poem by Allan Page-Dhu, comes from a book of his poems. The book is entitled *Treasured Memories In Verse* Copyright 1994. Allan writes from his experiences as a bushman and friend of tribal aborigines; his time spent in New Guinea; his own personal joys and sorrows and his rich background as a Christian minister and student of the Scriptures. The above poem is reprinted by permission. To obtain copies of Allan's book of poems contact *Good News Unlimited* 2/54-60 Industry Dr., Tweed Heads Sth. NSW 2486

# Awakenings

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## Smuts van Rooyen

I want you to read an old Christian Hymn. It was a short three line song that existed even before Paul wrote. He referred to this little hymn in the letter to the Ephesians. Here it is:

'Wake up O sleeper. Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you!' Isn't that wonderful? Paul fears that the people in Ephesus will be like the Gentiles who are living in futility. They have not grasped God and his presence; his revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. They have a sense of hopelessness. Paul is afraid that the Ephesians will have futile thinking that will lead to 'deeds of darkness.'

Deeds have consequences. What we think affects the way we live, and when life is futile you begin to live in a sort of moral depression with deeds of greed and immorality. So, above all, Paul is afraid that the Ephesians will not claim the central truth of Christianity, which is that **Christ is risen**, and **we are risen**.

The heart of Christianity is not simply a theology that says Jesus rose from the dead. It is more. Christianity says that Jesus rose from the dead - and so have I! This is what the old hymn expresses. It says, Wake up! Stop sleeping! Rise from the dead! Claim what is yours. And what will be the result? Christ will shine on you. Paul goes on to say, we are children of the Light.

In 1969, there was an awakening of geological proportions at Mt. Carmel Hospital in New York city. Eighty patients in that hospital had suffered an infection of the brain, called, *Encephalitis Lethargica*. The disease had caused the brains of these people to freeze in a catatonic state. Their limbs became rigid and their faces blank. Many of them had lain in this condition from 1917 to 1969.

Oliver Saachs was a psychiatrist working at Mt. Carmel hospital. He decided to try a new miracle drug on these patients. The first patient he attempted to help was a man called Leonard. Leonard had been a brilliant young child. At age fifteen he noticed he was losing control of his right hand. He became more irritable and withdrawn. Finally his hand froze and became totally useless to him. But Leonard pressed on. He went to Harvard University. By the time he was twenty six he had finished a PHD in literature. In spite of his brilliance, his twenty sixth year was his last year of total awakesness. He fell into a terrible sleep. His face was blank.

Leonard's mother came to the hospital every day and spent ten hours with him. She fed him and changed his diaper. When she did this he had an expression on his face as if he knew what she was doing. He was tolerating it; appreciating it but he was hurt by his terrible help-

lessness.

In his good moments, Leonard could sit in a wheel chair at a desk and read. He would read page after page, though someone would have to turn the pages for him. He had a little board mechanism on which he could spell words and communicate with people, in his better moments. During one of those times, Oliver Saachs said to him: 'Leonard, what is it like? What are you experiencing?' And on his little board Leonard wrote, *Rilke's panther*.

Rilke was a German poet. He wrote a poem of a panther in a cage who looked out through the bars. As he looked through the bars, the bars increased until finally there were so many bars that he could not see out at all. That was the experience that Leonard spoke of. Also, when he was asked 'What is going on for you?' Leonard replied, 'There is a great presence and there is a great absence.' By the great presence he meant that his life was not his own. He was being pushed around, shoved and moved. By the great absence, he meant that he was experiencing a deep loneliness; an unbearable silence.

Oliver Saachs began to administer the drug to Leonard. One night Leonard woke up and his limbs were free. He got up out of bed. He spoke for the first time in 25 years. He smiled. His face returned to normal. A miracle was occurring for



miracle was occurring for Leonard. He was waking up. Within weeks he was walking around the hospital gardens. He was an absolutely overjoyed person. He examined the flowers and touched the leaves. He looked at the skyline of New York city and thought it was the New Jerusalem. The world looked beautiful to him. He was awake—not simply alive.

Success in Leonard's case, led the doctor to give the drug to others. Unbelievable miracles began to occur for others too. The dead began walking around, making friends and seeing life.

But it was all to be short lived. Leonard became more and more grandiose. He became voracious in his eating and in his sexual appetites. He began to clap his hands. He clapped them more and more furiously until finally his clap-

ping froze. His hands could no longer move. His smile froze. Leonard and the other patients began to slip back into their former state.

When I read this remarkable story of Oliver Saachs and his patients, I had to ask myself: Smuts, how alive are you? You see, a tree is alive, but it is not conscious. A dog is alive and conscious, but a dog is not self-aware. Human beings are self aware. We know about our thinking. We know that we know.

I want to hear what Paul says right here. 'Wake up O sleeper. Rise from the dead, Christ will shine on you.' I want to see myself as someone risen from the dead; who has seen the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ; who has seen the resurrection of Jesus, as being the death of my death, the hell of my hell. I want to see the resurrection of Jesus as the life of my

life, and to live with that consciousness.

When I am at the supermarket and about to go through the check-out, I want to enjoy the transaction. I want to speak to the check-out person. I do not want to just stand there and say nothing, give my money and leave. I will have lost an opportunity to interact; to get to know someone.

I want to become more purposive. Life is not meaningless. I want to go after things a little more aggressively. I want to be more courageous when entering the pain of others. I want to be alive enough to enter into the pain of others. I want to be tolerant of different ideas. The world is full of beautiful things to think about. I want to open my mind to more ideas. I want to wake up. I want to spend my days with Christ shining on me.

\* \* \*





# Book Review

Reviewed by  
Calvin W. Edwards

## Jesus: The Man Who Lives

**Jesus: The Man Who Lives - Malcom Muggeridge, published by Fontana/Collins, London, 1975. 190 pp.**

There is always something attractive and appealing about a literary work on the life of Christ.

To have recreated before one the scenes from the life of our Saviour, is a rewarding and enriching experience. And while Muggeridge's book is far more than the story retold with a few embellishments, it will reward those of us who like to contemplate again the story of Jesus.

Muggeridge is perhaps the best known journalist and radio commentator in England. Educated at Cambridge, he has served distinguished roles as journalist for such noted publications as the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Telegraph*, also as editor of the famed *Punch*.

So, apart from the value of the book for what it says about the person of Jesus, it is also a testimony to the faith of one of the world's most esteemed thinkers and writers. The birth of this faith and the conversion of this one time cynical secularist, is told in Muggeridge's earlier book.

### Jesus Rediscovered

Muggeridge has written much more than the 'mere' story of Jesus. He has brought his brilliant mind and lucid pen to bear on his topic and constantly delights the reader with the depth of his insights and the profundity of his wisdom. For example, when he tells the story of Lazarus, he takes it as an opportunity to discuss the Christian view of death. 'Death had haunted the pagan world; as something to be dreaded, stoically faced; put out of mind and despairingly embraced. At best, in the manner of Socrates, greeted with noble resignation: 'The

hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, you to live. Which is better? Only God knows.'

Jesus audaciously abolished death, as Bonhoeffer joyously said on his way to be executed 'For a Christian, a beginning not an end. It was the key to life, to die was to live.'

*Jesus: The Man Who Lives* is a book where many readers will want to underline the underlining! One of its joys is that it is so masterfully written. The book is full of gems.

'It has become abundantly clear in the second half of the Twentieth Century that Western Man has decided to abolish himself. Having wearied of the struggle to be himself, he has created his own boredom out of his own affluence; his own impotence out of his erotomania also his own vulnerability out of his own strength—himself blowing the trumpet that brings the walls of his own city tumbling down, and, in a process of autogenocide, convincing himself that he is too numerous, and labouring accordingly with pill, scalpel and syringe to make himself fewer, in order to be an easier prey for his enemies. Until at last, having educated himself into imbecility, polluted and drugged himself into stupefaction, he keels over, a weary, battered old brontosaurus, and becomes extinct.' (pp. 34-35)

The book is divided into three sections. The first deals with the advent of Christ, the second with his mission and message and the final one with his death, particularly his resurrection. Not every detail of His sacred life is dealt with, but there is certainly a careful treatment of selected episodes, which serves well to tell the story of the person and work of Jesus Christ and

as the basis for the author's digressions into Christian theology.

Muggeridge is sensitive to the cynical attitudes toward religion in the modern world. He extracts the essential theological core from the concepts that modern skeptics may wish to disregard and faithfully and faithfully urges his readers to accept them. When discussing Christ's reconciliation of those whom Adam has estranged, he comments, 'even today, when Adam is considered to have disappeared without trace on Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, the symbolism remains valid.' (p.58) Having made this concession to those who doubt the historicity of the Genesis record, he promptly goes on to retain the Adam-Christ, Old Man-New Man terminology. This tough-nosed journalist is not bullied by critics.

Perhaps most impressive of all is the author's ruthless honesty. His words here express a baring of his soul—words with which most of us can identify, but which few of us can confess to having uttered: 'I have often myself, sat in darkness and cried aloud for the Holy Spirit to deliver me from the fantasies that gather round a parched soul like flies round a rotten carcass in the desert. Likewise, sat tongue-tied, crying out to be given utterance and delivered from the apprehensions which afflict the earthbound. And never, ultimately, in vain ... the Comforter needs only to be summoned.'

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(Continued from page 5)

### God's Wisdom and God's Power

ion. It was not a service. It was not a willing deed, offered in obedience to God's plan.

Jesus' death was his own act. It was an event that he controlled. This lifts the Cross up above other deaths. It was not just another tragedy; not just another awful example of human depravity. It was not something done to Jesus, but something done by God. Not just human foolishness, but the wisdom of God—and his power.

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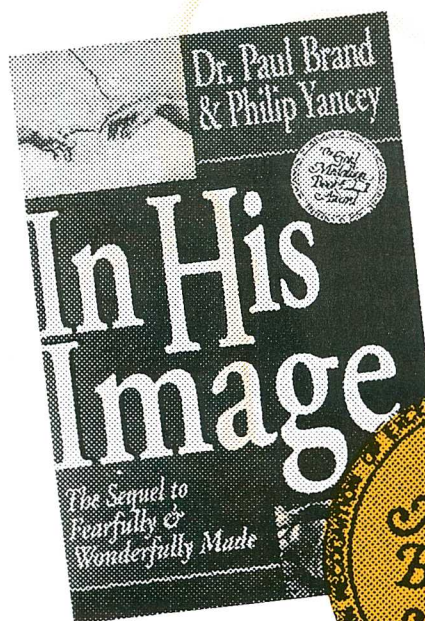
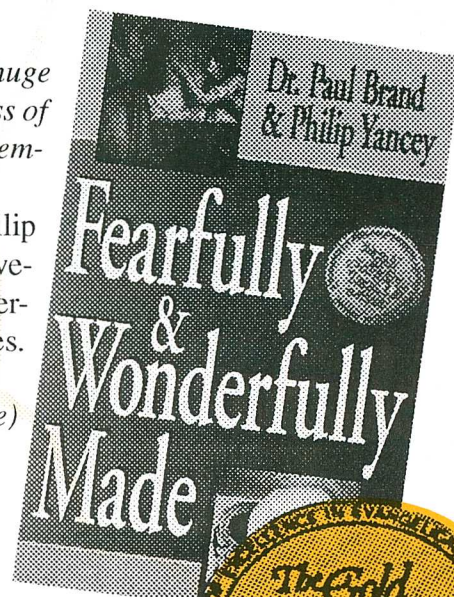
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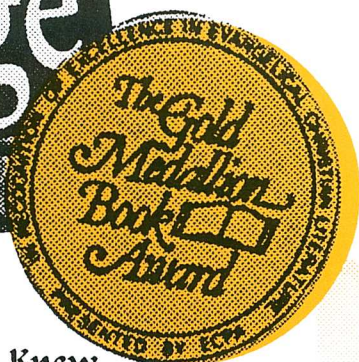
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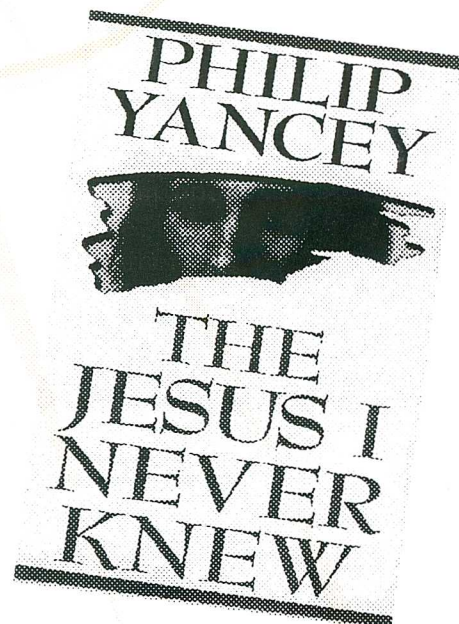
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# Good News Liftout Series

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NUMBER seven

## Why Believe?

The Miracle of  
the Book (2 & 3)

Dr Desmond Ford

**T**he Bible is not very interested in the things that interest historians. Even though it covers the times of the great empires, it never mentions them unless they are connected with the plan of salvation.

It is not interested in material things either. The writers of the Bible knew that everything is transient. Everything that you and I see is temporary—including what you see when you look in the mirror. And the Bible doesn't give much attention to transient things. It has a unity of theme.

Consider the marvellous arrangement in Genesis. Two chapters only are given to the creation. It's all summarised in about eight hundred words in the first chapter with its little parable of God as the creator. The fall is given just one chapter, Genesis three. But at the end of the book we

find twelve chapters about one man! Now, that seems disproportionate. Let me tell you though: In those chapters you have the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

In the story of Joseph you can even find words of the Gospels. 'Come unto me' (Matthew 11:28). That's not first found in Matthew. That's found in the last chapters of Genesis. Joseph (speaking for the Pharaoh) says, 'Come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt' (Genesis 45:18).

Joseph is elevated to power by Pharaoh and 'he made him (Joseph) to ride in the second chariot which he had, and

they cried before him, "Bow the knee"' (Genesis 41:43). Sound familiar? Try this verse: 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth' (Philippians 2:10).

In Bible manuscripts that belong to centuries before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, everything that was to happen after Bethlehem was put in miniature in the story of Joseph. That's why the book of Genesis despatches with the creation story so quickly. Genesis is not trying to explain to us the science of creation. It wants to tell us that the world didn't come about by chance—it has a Maker. Yet it only gives a couple of chapters to the topic. It prefers to give twelve chapters to Joseph, because that account has Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in it. Joseph's story prefigures the story in the Gospels.

The Bible has a marvellous doctrinal unity. It is unified in its view of the nature of God. Some people say, 'How do you reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New Testament?' Simple. The two testaments agree on their view of God. It is the same God.

Often our lack of information gives us problems. The oldest books in the Bible are a long way from us in time, place and culture. We don't always know the circumstances surrounding some of the Bible stories. Thus, we don't always understand God's actions in the Old Testament. But it is quite clear from the oldest books of Scripture,

that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. It is God in Christ. It is Christ in God.

'And the Lord passes by before him (Moses), and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exodus 34:6-7).

That's not a bad picture of God from way back at the beginning of Holy Writ. Some people say, 'What about the destruction of the Canaanites? Women and babies were wiped out as well as men.'

Ah, my friends, we know more about that today because of archeology. Archeologists have discovered how the ancient Canaanites put new-born babies under the foundation of a new house. They just wiped out the children. They cremated their living children in sacrifice to the God Molech. They caused their children to 'pass through the fire' (Leviticus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 18:10).

The reason God wiped out the Canaanites was that they were so hopelessly depraved. Had they remained, they would have been like a gangrenous limb that threatens the whole body. They could have corrupted and destroyed all civilized humanity. Strange, but critics who raise this question, apparently haven't noticed that Leviticus also warns God's people, 'If you do what these Canaanites do, I will wipe you out too' (Leviticus 18:28-30).

In the Old Testament God is a very wonderful Deity. For example, Jonah is sent by God to warn Nineveh. Jonah predicts Nineveh's destruction. But Jonah's prophetic and evangelistic reputation is smashed when Nineveh repents and isn't destroyed.

Jonah sits in a shelter in a fit of funk. The sun shines on him. The Lord sends up a vine to protect him from the sun with its shade. Jonah is exceedingly glad for the vine. The Lord wants Jonah to think a little more clearly, so he sends a little worm to gnaw the vine until it wilts away. Now Jonah complains again. The sun is on him again. His only protection is gone. Then the Lord says to him: 'You are concerned about a vine that you did not plant or take care of. A vine that grew up in one night and died the next. In that city of Nineveh, there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell right from wrong, and many cattle are also there. Do you think I should be concerned about that big city?' (Jonah 4:10-11).

God is saying, 'Aren't you a little inconsistent Mr Jonah? You're upset because I preserved this big city, with its scores of thousands of people, its women and children and much cattle. And here you're moaning because you got a little extra sunshine when a shrub dies off in a hurry. You're upset this little tree has withered, and care nothing for the city!'

You know, I think I would have been tempted to put Jonah over my knee and thrash some

good sense into him. But God deals with him much more lovingly.

Think of the way God dealt with Elijah. The great prophet Elijah is depressed and discouraged. He has been threatened by a woman—Jezebel. Normally he could cope with such threats, but this time he's disheartened.

The real problem is that Elijah is worn out. He is tired. It is very unwise to get run-down physically, because if you do, your spiritual reserves soon become zero. Whatever effects the body effects the mind and soul. That is why we should care for our body, as we would care for a holy temple belonging to God. But Elijah is run down. Normally, he would have stood up to Jezebel when she threatened, 'May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them' (1 Kings 19:2).

But now he runs. And runs and runs and runs, until he's exhausted. He's running the opposite way from where God told him to run. Exhausted, Elijah falls asleep. When he awakes, there's a cook on the premises, saying, 'Listen, if you are going to keep, running from God you should eat and get some nourishment.' It is an angel.

A little later, God tells Elijah a parable about a terrible fire, storm; earthquake and lightning. After all the noise and fury a still, small voice says: 'Now, look, Elijah, you've been living with the lightning. It was a great day back there when you tri-

umphed over those prophets of Baal. You saw the lightning and the fire and all that excitement, but now its time you listened to your conscience. Are you doing the right thing? What are you doing here Elijah?'

Isn't God gentle? The way he patiently puts up with people. Surely this is the same loving and gracious God we see in the New Testament.

## The Miracle of the Book (3)

Desmond Ford

The Bible is unified in its view of the nature of fallen human-kind. The Apostle Peter is a fitting representative of us all. That's because Peter is always finding fault with circumstances—and thereby implying fault with the God of circumstances.

In Acts chapter ten, God gives Peter a vision. God is showing Peter that now, in the days of the Gospel, no human being is to be considered unclean. The Gospel is for all who believe. No one is to be assumed as excluded from the Gospel.

Peter sees a large sheet let down from heaven containing all kinds of animals, including animals no Jewish Christian would eat. God says: 'Now, Peter, look, rise and eat' (Acts 10:13). Peter informs the Lord that the Lord's theology is not too good. 'Surely not Lord!' (Acts 10:14). Peter is instructing God. I would very quickly have been rid of Peter, and found a better apostle. But God is very patient. What a God!

After Christ's resurrection, the angel at the tomb gave a message to the women. They were to meet Christ in Galilee (Mark 16:7). 'Tell his disciples, and Peter' said the angel. Why did God send a message that called Peter by name? Because he knew that Peter was saying to himself, 'I was once one of Christ's disciples. But I denied him. I don't belong to him any more.' But Christ says, 'Go and tell Peter I want to see him.'

What a glorious picture of the faithful forgiving God. Sadly, it's an unflattering picture of weak humanity. A scary picture. The Christ who said, 'Beware of men,' (Matthew 10:17) knew that our poor human nature without him is prone to every conceivable wickedness. Even the mighty apostle Peter failed.

Let me say something that most of us will not want to believe. Given the right circumstances, any of us is capable of any iniquity and monstrosity. Given the right circumstances, any of us is capable of anything.

I'd be ashamed to tell you what the early Australians did to

the Aborigines, the native peoples. It is an horrendous scandal what the people from England, arriving in Australia, did to the people who had more rights to the land than they did

There has been a similar sad story in the USA. Soldiers of the United States army would cut off the private parts of women and spread them across their saddles or wear them on their hats. They would smash the heads of infants and children. You see, when men get together they are even worse than when they are alone. In every war you hear about the terrible atrocities by the enemy.

The Bible is so realistic, so direct, so trenchant; it has the same picture of human-kind all the way through. 'If ye then being evil ...', said Jesus to us all. (Matthew 7:11) The story I think of often is about Hazael. He is told by the prophet Elisha, 'I know the harm you will do to the Israelites, you will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women' (2 Kings 8:12). 'And

kill the king.' Hazael answers: 'What! Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?' (2 Kings 8:13). The quaint old commentator, Matthew Henry, says, 'Dog or no dog, he did it.' Beware of men!

The Bible is unified in its view of salvation by grace. The New Testament of course, begins and ends with the Grace of God in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 'From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:16-17).

But even the Ten Commandments, the epitome of Law, begins with grace. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery' (Exodus 20:2). The Law begins with grace. God says in effect: 'I have redeemed you. Therefore you are free from all these sins that enslave others.' 'Thou shalt not' is a promise to God's people, because God is speaking to a redeemed people.

\* \* \*

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