

Grace & Truth

Youth

Number 2

A pull-out supplement for young people

Nothing Else Matters

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In recent weeks a 14-year-old girl from Christchurch has become a singing sensation throughout New Zealand. When she sang at 'Christmas in the Park' in Christchurch in December 2000 she was virtually unknown; an appearance at Auckland's 'Symphony Under the Stars' in January 2001 increased public awareness a little; but it was the stream of TV interviews and advertising which accompanied the release of her first commercial album in April that catapulted Hayley Westenra into the spotlight. In about two months her album went triple platinum (over 45,000 discs sold) - the fastest selling album *ever* in New Zealand.

During the recent school holidays Hayley hit the road with her family: parents Gerald and Jill, younger sister Sophie (11), and kid brother Isaac (8). In six cities from Auckland to Timaru Hayley sang in sold-out venues to audiences of eager and expectant listeners spanning the ages, from young children to superannuitants. I had the privilege of joining well over 2000 people in the audience at the Christchurch Town Hall Auditorium to hear Hayley singing in the final concert of her tour.

Hayley sang the twelve songs on her album; including a duet with Shaun Dixon (a



prodigy of Pavarotti) in "All I ask of You", and another with her sister Sophie singing "Pie Jesu". Hayley's brother Isaac joined them for another song, and the junior choir from Hayley's school, Burnside High School, provided backing vocals. Between Hayley's songs we were treated to solos from Shaun Dixon and Tim Beverage, a Kiwi who is considered one of the finest singers of show music in the world. The audience were also thrilled by Ben Morrison, a 14-year-old violin virtuoso who is a fellow student with Hayley at Burnside High School.

That Hayley Westenra is a talented teen is beyond dispute. She has endeared herself to the New Zealand population with what has been described as 'the voice of an angel' accompanied by a natural, down-to-earth attitude. She comes across as a 'really nice girl' and, while there will undoubtedly be some who are jealous of her good fortune, most will find themselves wishing her every success in developing her talent.

From busking with her brother and sister at the City Mall, to singing to thousands in packed concert halls: this is a true story of fairy-tale proportions.

Yet, as I have pondered this situation, a question has continually come to my mind: Does any of this matter? Certainly, Hayley enjoys huge popularity and valid praise; her singing brings pleasure both to herself and to those who hear her. There is nothing wrong in any of this. I thoroughly enjoy listening to Hayley's album, and attending her concert was an awesome experience. My question does not imply criticism, but it does hint at a danger: the danger of giving one's life solely to something that, in the end, doesn't really matter.

Hayley is already popular, she has the potential to enjoy international success, and with that could come fame and wealth. But none of that really matters. Hayley has the ability to bring pleasure to thousands of people, and to inspire countless kids to use their talents and strive for success. But none of that really matters. The only thing that *really* matters is whether or not we have Jesus as our friend and are living our lives for Him. We may have all the success in the world, but if we do not love and serve Jesus none of that matters.

Hayley's album contains two bonus tracks that were not sung in the concert. One is the New Zealand national anthem, "God Defend New Zealand". In it we acknowledge God's sovereignty over the nations and ask for His help and protection. The whole anthem is a song of faith in God, and speaks of love for God and a desire to be faithful to Him. The second song is John Newton's classic hymn, "Amazing Grace", which was recorded live when Hayley sang it in Hamilton in February. It is a wonderful song of gratitude to God for His love in forgiving sin, and of confidence in God's ability to keep in safety those who trust in Him.

I don't know if Hayley is a real Christian. I have never heard whether, 'really nice girl' that she is, she has recognised that she is also a sinner and in need of God's forgiveness. I don't know if she believes that Jesus died to take God's punishment of sinners, nor if she has repented of her sins and received the forgiveness that only God can give. I don't know whether 'Amazing Grace' is just a nice old hymn to her, or if she really is amazed at the grace of God towards sinners like herself because she has experienced that grace first hand in her own life. But I know this: *Nothing else matters.*



All the fame, the popularity, the success, the wealth: none of it matters if there is no love for Jesus, no knowledge of His forgiveness and no desire to serve Him. But where that love, knowledge and desire exist then the fame, popularity, success and wealth can all be used for His glory. How wonderful it would be to introduce 'Amazing Grace' to thousands of people as a song which is truly meaningful because it is the testimony of one's own experience of the love of God!

Hayley and her friends concluded the concert as she led them all in singing a song from Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, *Aspects of Love*: "Love Changes Everything". Love does wonders. The Bible tells us that love covers a multitude of sins, that love casts out fear, that love builds up, that love is patient and kind and does not envy. Love changes people; it changes situations; it transforms enemies into friends. But those words take on powerful significance and have ultimate meaning only when applied to the love of God: for it is His love alone which can change the sinner into a saint; change darkness to light; bring good out of evil; bring life out of death.

I wish Hayley Westenra every success in developing and using her wonderful talent in bringing pleasure to others as well as herself. But more than that, I pray that she will experience the life-changing love of God in her heart, and use her life and talent for His glory. And I hope you, the reader, will also experience that love and use whatever talent God has given you for His glory, because in the end *nothing else matters!*



YOUTH CAMP 2002

A youth camp for young people of secondary school and university age, aiming:

- 🏠 To provide an enjoyable, interesting and stimulating holiday for young people
- 🏠 To present the Gospel and encourage young Christians in their walk with Jesus
- 🏠 To provide an opportunity for friendships to be formed with young people drawn primarily from the Reformed Baptist churches of New Zealand

The 2002 Youth Camp is planned for **4-9 April 2002** at Camp Sladdin, Clevedon, South Auckland. If you were on the 2001 Youth Camp you will receive further information when available, otherwise you may be added to the mailing list by contacting:

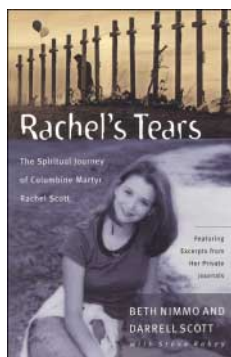
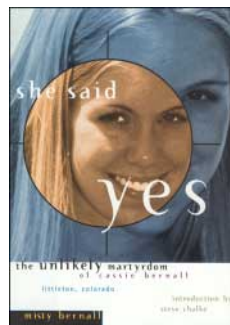
Grace & Truth Youth Camps, P.O. Box 8979, Christchurch
e-mail: camps@graceandtruth.rbc.org.nz

or visit the web site at <http://www.graceandtruth.rbc.org.nz>

Testimonies from Tragedy

On the morning of 20th April 1999 two teenage boys entered their high school, setting-off home-made bombs and firing guns. When their rampage was over twelve students and a teacher lay dead with many more wounded, then the boys took their own lives. That day Columbine became an international household name synonymous with tragedy. But out of that tragedy have come testimonies of courage and faith. The boys had targeted specific groups for whom they had nurtured a hatred in the months they plotted this massacre. Among those targeted were Christians.

She said yes is a book written by **Misty Bernall** in which she tells the story of her daughter, Cassie. The title is the response Cassie gave when the boys asked her if she believed in God: for that she was shot in the head. Just over two years earlier Cassie had been dabbling in witchcraft and associating with youths similar to her murderers. Her parents accidentally came across letters in which she was discussing their murder with a friend. Responding swiftly, the changes they enforced eventually led to a life-transforming experience on a church retreat. Unfortunately the book focusses on Cassie's old way of life and ongoing struggles rather than giving a clear testimony to her new faith in God.



Rachel's Tears describes the spiritual journey of another Columbine Martyr, Rachel Scott. Written by her parents, **Beth Nimmo and Darrell Scott**, it contains extracts from her journals and the testimonies of friends. The book paints a portrait of a girl who loved Jesus and longed to be faithful to Him, while acutely aware of her failings. Rachel was popular and talented, but she was also known for her faith. She had challenged Klebold and Harris about a violent video they had produced for class: later she was to experience their violence first-hand, dying from bullets shot from their guns. A weakness in the book is her father's emphasis on the premonitions Rachel had had concerning her death. That they were real is not disputed; that

they were revelations from God is questionable. The most helpful parts of the book are the extracts from Rachel's journals. In them she wrote prayers to God which show her hopes and fears, her joys and struggles, and reveal a Christian girl who was taken home to her Saviour through unexpected tragedy. The book testifies to the grace of God at work in an ordinary young person, living an ordinary life: for that it is worth reading.