

The Jehovah's Witnesses

By Martin Kelly

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1769 (1983)

1. The Salesman and the Product

The Witnesses of Jehovah are one of the better known sects which seek converts by door knocking. Most of us have been confronted on our own doorsteps by some of these people. If we have been unwise enough to admit them into our home, we would have experienced a kind of high pressure salesmanship normally associated with the selling of encyclopedias. We have all experienced the sense of being overwhelmed by someone skilled in talking, and being pressured into committing ourselves to a decision that we would never make in our right minds. The only defense is to take a good hard look at the product through our own eyes, and not through those of its salesman.

In the case of the Witnesses of Jehovah, the salesman is impressive. He or she believes sincerely in God, in the Bible, and in many cases is prepared to sacrifice time, energy, and money to spread what he or she is convinced is the truth. In the Nazi concentration camps, the Jehovah's Witnesses offered a fine example of moral strength and courage in the face of brutal treatment, and they offer a similar example today under the persecution suffered by all religious believers in Communist countries. Perhaps the zeal shown by the ordinary Jehovah's Witness who daily faces hostility, ridicule and rejection in spreading his sect's view of God's word puts our luke-warmness to shame. Our admiration of these things should be ungrudging; but let us remember what we are about. In buying a car, the heart of the matter is its actual performance, not the salesman's eloquence in praising it, nor the hours per day he spends in polishing it. In judging a religion what matters is not the sincerity and zeal of its adherents, but what we would be letting ourselves in for by joining it. If we were to become Witnesses of Jehovah, to what beliefs would we be committing ourselves? And what would be the consequences?

We would believe in God, whose name is Jehovah; the Bible, which the Witnesses call the "Hebrew Scriptures", and the "Christian Greek Scriptures". We would not believe in the Incarnation and the Trinity - the Witnesses claim that these Christian doctrines are inventions of the Devil. We would be obliged to believe that Jesus was not God, but merely a mortal man, who before his ordinary human conception and birth was the Archangel Michael! He died an ordinary human death, not on a cross, as all Christians believe, but tied to a "punishment stake". His appearances to his followers after his death were not made in his own gloriously resurrected body, but in a series of especially materialized bodies.

We would have to believe that the Holy Spirit is not a divine Person, but merely the action of God at work. We would believe we do not have souls which survive our bodily death; we would be souls which perish with our bodies. We would probably not be resurrected as one of the 144,000 "spirit beings", but, we would have a good chance of a bodily resurrection, and a happy carefree life on this earth, which would be ruled by Jesus as an earthly paradise.

We would have to believe that all religions, especially the Catholic Church and its doctrines, were inventions of the Devil, or directly inspired by him. The government of our country, and its public service, and its courts of law, and all that goes with the running of a modern state, is perhaps not as diabolical as the Christian Churches. It is at best the structure of a "foreign" occupation - we would have to regard ourselves as aliens in a foreign land, awaiting the coming of Christ, who alone can give us a government to which we may give our whole allegiance. Throughout the whole of their existence, the Witnesses have been promising that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent. Despite the continual non-occurrence of this event on the various dates promised and hinted, we would still have to believe that we were living in the "last days" which precede the Day of Judgment.

The purpose of this introduction is not to give a detailed analysis of the Witnesses' doctrines, which will be done later in this pamphlet, but to remind us of the consequences of joining the Witnesses of Jehovah, and of rejecting Christianity: for that is what we would be doing.

In our society, "Christian" has come to mean someone who is nice and kind, sincere, warm-hearted, and concerned for his neighbor. Now one does not need to be a Christian to be all these things, as the daily example of many Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and atheists and Communists show us; indeed the personal lives of many Jehovah's Witnesses provide an extremely good example of these qualities.

The heart of Christianity is the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is not a mortal man who was especially beloved of God because of his virtue and holiness, but He is Himself God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He became man, a member of the human race. He is the God-man. To reject this belief, as the Witnesses do, is to reject Christianity itself.

In saying that the Witnesses are not Christian, we are not condemning them as wicked or immoral. We do not claim that they are inferior to Christians in goodness and sincerity; but we do claim that their knowledge of God and His plan for mankind is distorted and incomplete, and that by joining them, we would be exchanging substance for shadow.

2. A History of the Sect

A glance at the history and development of the Witnesses' doctrines throws an interesting light upon them. When looked at as a system, they present a tangled web of inconsistency and contradiction; but if looked at historically, some sense can be made of their growth.

The main influence in the development of the sect has been the personal style of its first three leaders, "Pastor" Russell, "Judge" Rutherford, and Nathan Knorr. The religious material which these men used was provided by the Protestant fundamentalism of 19th century America. It is from this stream of the American religious tradition that the Witnesses originate, rather than from that classical Protestant mainstream represented by the Lutheran, Baptist, or Methodist Churches, to name but three.

These sects vary, but they possess some basic features in common. They profess a literal adherence to the Bible, usually to the King James translation of 1611 known as the Authorized Version; but in practice, in their interpretation of Scripture, as in all other matters, they follow a strong "charismatic" leader, whose every word is law. Their Faith in their leader is absolute. No member of the sect is allowed to differ in the slightest detail from the line laid down by him. Neither the most

obvious failure in prophecy, nor the most glaring contradiction in doctrine has ever served to rock the leader on his pedestal, or to direct the eyes of his followers to his feet of clay.

Another feature which all these sects have in common is a strong, not to say bitter anti Catholicism. The Witnesses themselves regard all organized Churches and religions, and in particular the Catholic Church, as works of the devil. In the last twenty years, the Witnesses have learned the value of softening this naked hostility; but however friendly and conciliatory they may be now, the fact remains that their religion flatly denies much of what the Catholic Church holds as most dear.

Since the last world war, the Witnesses have decided that an impersonal organization is more impressive to potential members than a single personal leader. It is most rare for any of their literature to be signed, and even the translators of the Witnesses' own version of the Bible remain anonymous. Nevertheless, the modern Witness is obliged to be as faithful to all the sect's doctrine and pronouncements as previous Witnesses were to the decrees of "Pastor" Russell or "Judge" Rutherford.

Mr. Russell's new religion

The Witnesses claim to have originated, either at Pentecost, or with Abel, the son of Adam and Eve! They believe that, at least, since Pentecost, there has existed a continuous line or "true believers" with whom the modern Witnesses identify. At least one of these, as we shall see, was a major heretic whose ideas on the divinity of Christ are rejected by the Catholic, Orthodox, and all the Protestant Churches. In point of fact, the sect known today as the Witnesses of Jehovah was founded in 1872 by Charles Taze Russell, a Pittsburgh draper. He was brought up as a Presbyterian, but later became a Congregationalist. Developing an obsession with hell and its horrors he went around chalking up slogans, warning unbelievers of the dangers of damnation. At the age of seventeen he attempted to convert an atheist by scaring him with the devil and hell; but the atheist won the argument. Russell accepted the atheist's belief that there is no hell, and that man does not have an immortal soul, becoming an atheist himself. Although he became a believer again, he always retained the conviction he acquired from his atheist opponent, that there is no immortal human soul and no hell. These two atheist principles remain basic articles of the Witnesses' creed.

At the age of 20 he set up his own Bible study group. Earlier he had been present at a Second Adventist meeting in Pittsburgh, and had become convinced that the Second Coming (or Advent) of Christ, and hence the end of the world was imminent. After intensive private reading of the Bible, in particular the books of Daniel and Revelation, he felt he was competent to teach others. He believed in the Adventist prophecy that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in 1874. When it did not happen, Russell adopted the suggestion that "coming" might mean "presence", and that Christ had become invisibly present in 1874. Russell decided to unite his group of Adventists with that of a Mr. Nelson Barbour, who had suggested this face saving formula. However, Barbour still believed that the exact date of Christ's coming could be established from the Scriptures. He worked out that this would take place in 1878.

The embarrassing public failures of these prophecies did the reputation of the Adventists no good at all, and Russell decided he would do better by setting out on his own. When he left the Adventists he took with him the Adventist title of "Pastor", which his Bible-study group had bestowed upon him.

More adventures of Pastor Russell

During his subsequent career as the head of his own sect, Russell revealed a considerable talent for money-making. Before he turned 30, he had established a chain of draper's stores, which he sold for 5250,000 - in the 1880's, that was the equivalent of well over a million dollars today. He made money from investments in mining and real estate and from the sale of his considerable number of writings. He sold "miracle wheat" at sixty dollars a bushel to gullible farmers. When the U.S. authorities intervened, it was proved in court that the wheat was not miraculous, but the ordinary kind, worth one dollar a bushel on the market. Russell had to refund the money.

Russell also showed great talent for adultery, for which his wife divorced him in 1909. She had left him in 1897 on the grounds of his immoral conduct with two women, a secretary and a servant.

One area in which he showed no talent was Scriptural scholarship. He wrote a great deal about the Bible, and posed as an expert in this field. Under oath in court at Hamilton (Ontario, Canada), he declared that he knew Greek but when handed a Greek New Testament, he was forced to admit that he did not know even the Greek alphabet. Neither did he know Latin or Hebrew.

Under Russell, the sect changed its name several times. It began as Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society. Later it became the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Another corporation was set up under the title of the People's Pulpit Association of New York. In 1939 this changed to the same name as the Pennsylvania corporation. The International Bible Students Association was formed in England in 1914. It is through these corporations that the Witnesses are governed today.

The Rule of the Judge

Russell died in 1916. He was replaced by Joseph Franklin Rutherford, who went under the title of "Judge". In fact he was not even a qualified lawyer. He had been a court shorthand writer, and was given some sort of license to practice as an attorney. In Missouri it was apparently the custom for local lawyers to preside over the lower court whenever the usual court president, or magistrate, was absent. Everyone took turns at this, and Rutherford was acting court president for a total of four days. Cases came before the court on two of them. However, this brief experience was not wasted by Rutherford. On the strength of it he used the title "Judge" for the rest of his days.

His connection with Russell's followers began when he represented them in the courts. After Russell's death, he became leader after intrigues which are too complex to describe here. Many members felt that he became leader by methods which were on a par with his acquisition of the title "Judge".

One of Rutherford's most important tasks was to explain away a failed prophecy. After Christ's non-appearance in 1878, Russell became careful not to be too specific in further prophecy. The failure of the original prophecy had been explained by translating "parousia" (coming) as "presence", and saying that Christ had indeed come, but invisibly! 1874 was the year in which Christ was enthroned in the heavenly sanctuary; the next forty years (1874-1914) would be the "harvest time", when the wheat would be separated from the weeds. So 1914 was now the year of the Second Coming.

However, as 1914 came and went, and Christ did not come, Russell became more and more depressed. Rutherford snatched victory from the jaws of defeat - he claimed that Russell had really prophesied the outbreak of the First World War, which was a sign that the "last days" were beginning. This is still official Watch Tower teaching. Rutherford took the opportunity of rejecting much of what Russell had taught during his lifetime, presenting himself as the infallible leader.

Rutherford had an eventful career. With some of his associates he was imprisoned in the last years of the First World War for his anti-war activities. They were all released shortly after the war. He was an able and energetic leader, who used radio extensively in spreading his message. It is worth noting here that the Witnesses have always refused to join the armed forces of any country; they believe that the state, and all government organizations, belong to Satan. At the Second Coming, the final battle of Armageddon will take place between Satan and his followers on the one hand, and Christ and the army of the faithful on the other. This is the only army which the Witnesses can belong to.

Rutherford's main claim to fame is that he invented the name by which the sect is now universally known. In 1931 he came across the text in Isaiah 43: 10 - "You are my witnesses, says the Lord" - and he coined the term, "The Witnesses of Jehovah". Rutherford is also famous for his slogan, "Millions now living will never die". He was not one of them; he died of cancer in 1942.

Rutherford was responsible for the old image of the Witnesses, and the style of public presentation which went with it. He was aggressive, abrasive, and arrogant and consumed by a vitriolic hatred of all Churches, especially the Catholic Church. A personality cult developed around him, and it is not surprising that his personality and character exerted a strong influence on the movement as a whole.

The faceless men

After the death of Rutherford, the leadership passed peacefully to Nathan Homer Knorr. He was born in 1905. Converted at the age of 16 by reading Watch Tower literature, he joined the organization as a packer in the Watch Tower printing plant. He rose through the ranks, gaining experience in every section of the operation.

Knorr's style was very different from that of Russell and Rutherford. A quiet, self-effacing man, he deliberately encouraged a cult of anonymity; no "charismatic" personality could then take over in the way that Rutherford had done. The impersonal organization became all powerful. Articles in Watch Tower publications were no longer signed, nor were the translators of the Witnesses' Bible named.

Knorr was responsible for applying a veneer of learning to the sect's publications, and for toning down the lurid nature of their contents. The Witnesses on door knock duty were instructed to adopt a more friendly and conciliatory approach to potential converts. By the time of Knorr's death in 1977, the Witnesses claimed the allegiance of two and a quarter million people. Unlike Russell, Knorr was never accused of sexual immorality or fraudulent business practices.

Unlike Rutherford, he came to power peacefully, without causing bitter divisions in the sect; and in addition he tried to broaden the appeal of the Witnesses. But neither Knorr, nor his successor Frederick W. Franz, has been able to solve the major problem of credibility that has bedeviled the Witnesses from the beginning.

A Question of Credibility

An essential part of the Witnesses' doctrine is that we are living in the "last days" before the Second Coming of Christ. During the course of their existence, the Witnesses have named at least three dates for this event. Christ was supposed to come in 1874; He failed to appear. Russell explained this away by saying that Christ had become invisibly present in 1874, which was the date of His enthronement in heaven. Russell claimed that a forty year "harvest period" would follow, and that Christ would appear at the end of it. This was supposed to occur in 1914; it did not. "Judge"

Rutherford, in his turn, explained this failed prophecy by claiming that 1914, and not 1874, was the year of Christ's enthronement, and therefore the beginning of the "last days" which would end with the battle of Armageddon between the forces of good and evil. This event would occur in October 1975. It did not happen.

We are not concerned at this point with the remarkable text-juggling and calculations which produced these dates, nor with their refutation; simply with an undeniable fact. Theology and doctrine can be debated endlessly, but the fact remains that Christ has not yet come!

The Witnesses have a major problem of credibility on this issue, which is becoming worse. They have proved ingenious at producing face saving formulas, but that ingenuity must have limits. Although the Witnesses will not admit it publicly, a major split has developed within their ranks which extends to their ruling hierarchy. Only time will show the effects on the rank-and-file members. Any dissension from official teaching is treated very seriously. Raymond Franz, a nephew of the sect's head Frederick W. Franz, was recently expelled, or "disfellowshipped" by the Witnesses because he could not continue to believe in the prophecies of the Second Coming, nor that only 144,000 will reach heaven. He, and other dissenters, have moved closer to orthodox Christianity, although they do not believe in the Divinity of Christ.

A lifetime of devoted service to the Witnesses did not save Franz from being shunned by almost all of his former associates and relatives; nor from being denied any chance of eternal life (as far as the Witnesses are concerned, anyway).

3. The Witnesses' Own Bible

The Witnesses have arranged for their own translation of the Bible or as they refer to them, the "Hebrew Scriptures" and the "Christian Greek Scriptures". Generally they will argue from any translation, but they prefer their own, as it has been especially framed to support their own doctrines (this will become obvious as we look at these doctrines in greater detail).

The Bible is the Word of God which comes to us through the medium of poetry, prayer, law, and narrative history, and its translators should bear the various styles in mind. Knowing no Greek or Hebrew, most of us have to trust the scholars as far as fidelity to the original is concerned; but we are fully competent to judge the standard of English in the versions they offer us. Expert knowledge of the Sacred languages is no excuse for massacred English!

Their Bible exposed

With these principles in mind, let us examine a representative sample from the Witnesses' own translation of the New Testament, and compare it with the same passage taken from the Jerusalem Bible, and the Revised Standard Version. (The Jerusalem Bible, whose English edition appeared in 1966, is used for the Mass readings in the English speaking Catholic world. Its comprehensive and scholarly notes give it its particular value for serious Bible students. The Revised Standard Version appeared in 1952. It is an American Protestant version of the King James translation of 1611, revised in the light of modern Biblical scholarship. Biblical experts say that its New Testament is particularly faithful to the Greek original; and it retains the powerful English of the King James Version. The Catholic edition of the RSV differs mainly by the inclusion of certain books of the Old Testament which Protestants believe do not properly belong there; they refer to these books as the Apocrypha);

The passage for comparison is taken from the Gospel according to St. Luke, Chapter 12, verses 57-59.

New World Translation (Jehovah's Witnesses)

"Why do you not judge also for yourselves what is right? For example, when you are going with your adversary at law to a ruler, get to work, while on the way, to rid yourself of the dispute with him, that he may never hale you before the judge, and the judge deliver you to the court officer, and the court officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you will certainly not get out from there until you pay over the last small coin of very little value."

Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition)

"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper."

Jerusalem Bible

"Why not judge for yourselves what is right? For example: when you go to court with your opponent, try to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny."

Why not judge for ourselves what is good English? There are minor differences between the RSV and the Jerusalem Bible, but both passages are clear and fluent, in contrast to the stumbling awkwardness of the New World translation. Compare "get to work, while on the way, to rid yourself of the dispute with him" with "make an effort to settle with him on the way" (RSV), or "try to settle with him on the way" (Jerusalem). And contrast "adversary at law" with "accuser" (RSV) or "opponent" (Jerusalem).

This clumsiness, and the appalling English it produces, is caused by confusing fidelity to the original meaning of a text with a literal translation of its words. The best example here is the Greek word "lepton" which is the name of a "small coin of very little value"; some older English Bibles used "farthing", just as we might translate it with "cent". The RSV uses "copper", and the Jerusalem Bible uses "penny". All are following the same principle - choose a word which will have the same impact upon the mind of the reader as the original had upon the mind of the translator. Instead of doing this, the New World translation solemnly offers the dictionary explanation of the meaning of "lepton" and thereby breaks up the passage. Try reading the three aloud, and see what happens.

The incompetence of the New World translation stands out on every page. Those responsible have not been named on the title page; but we can guess at the standard of their Biblical scholarship, and at the extent of their grasp of Greek and Hebrew, by the poor English in which their efforts are phrased. To quote Professor H. H. Rowley of the University of Manchester, a most able and distinguished Scripture scholar: "They profess to offer a rendering into modern English which is as faithful as possible. In fact, the jargon which they use is scarcely English at all, and it reminds one of - nothing so much as a schoolboy's first painful beginnings in translating Latin into English. The translation is marked by a wooden literalism which will only exasperate any intelligent reader - if such it finds - and instead of showing the reverence for the Bible which the translators profess, it is an insult to the word of God" (Expos. Times, Nov. 1953, pp 41-42).

Another scholar, Professor B. M. Metzger, suggests that the, "wooden literalism" of the New World translation is due to the fact that the Witnesses have used an - antiquated edition of the Greek text with an accompanying interlinear translation (one in which a word of the Greek text has its equivalent English word printed beneath it). (Theology Today, April 1953, p 67). Our doubts about the competence of the New World translators, and in particular their knowledge of Greek, are well founded.

Manipulating God's Word

But there is more than mere incompetence in the Witnesses' version of the Scriptures - there is deliberate manipulation as well. We shall examine their strange doctrines in detail, and the texts quoted from the New World translation to support them. When these texts are compared with the same texts from the Revised Standard Version, an undeniable fact will emerge. In some cases, where the usual misinterpretation would not serve the purpose, the New World translation has twisted the original meaning of the text to suit a doctrine which would have been contradicted by a faithful translation.

The RSV has been chosen as the text for the quotations in this pamphlet. It is highly regarded by Scripture scholars both Catholic and Protestant, and is therefore suitable for use in a debate such as this, when both sides must be able to trust a common text.

4. The Doctrines of the Witnesses

(a) The Divine Name

As their title suggests, The Jehovah's Witnesses place great importance upon the name of God. They are quite convinced that His name is "Jehovah" and they refer to Him as "Jehovah God". They argue that the Christian Churches have suppressed the Divine name from the Bible, thus disobeying the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Thy name". They claim that it is the obligation of all true believers to bear God's name, or to be called by it.

Let us look at the origin and development of "Jehovah", and its use throughout the ages. Ancient written Hebrew had no letters to represent vowels: only consonants. However, readers of Hebrew knew which vowels belonged to which consonants. The name of God, transliterated from the ancient Hebrew text can be represented by the English consonants YHWH. The name itself is generally translated as "I am who am". Another interpretation says that the name means "He who causes to be what comes into existence", which designates God as the creator.

The Jews became increasingly reluctant to pronounce the name of God, possibly because of the Commandment "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7, Deut. 5:1 1). Instead they began to use the word "Adonai", which means "Lord". After the 6th century A.D., Hebrew began to develop letters to represent vowels, and by the 10th century A.D. texts were supplied with proper vowels.

YHWH was supplied with the vowels e-o-a from "edona", a variation of "Adonai". The Jewish scholars who prepared the texts did this in order to change the pronunciation, so that God's real name could not be profaned. It is also thought that the errors of some mediaeval scholars may have compounded the deception. Certainly, "Jehovah" is not the name that the early Jews used. ("Jehovah" instead of "Yehowah" because German scholars did a great deal of the early work on Hebrew texts).

The Witnesses agree that "Jehovah" is not the correct form of God's name; but they argue that it should continue to be used because people are familiar with it. This contradicts their loudly proclaimed reverence for the name of God, and also their contempt for religious traditions which obscure the "truth".

Modern scholars agree that "Yahweh" is most probably the correct pronunciation. "Jehovah" has been dropped from the Revised Version, and the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. In fact, "Jehovah" only appears a few times in the King James Version, the ancestor of the RV and the RSV. In view of the Witnesses' strong anti Catholicism, it is ironic that it was the Catholic Jerusalem Bible which brought "Yahweh" back into popular use. It may appear in the Old Testament readings used in the Mass, and in modern Catholic hymns and responsorial psalms. Today it is in Catholic Churches, and not in Witnesses of Jehovah "Kingdom Halls", that the real name of God is heard.

Naming God

Another reason for using "Adonai" instead of "Yahweh" is so obvious that it escapes the superficial onlooker. A name is needed only for something that is not unique. A name distinguishes it from other similar things.

In the beginning, the Jews were not quite sure whether their God was the only one or not; and so they needed a name for Him. It distinguished Him from the gods of their neighbors. The Old Testament tells us of the constant temptation to worship false gods - "false" in the sense of wicked or evil, rather than non-existent.

But when the Jews realized that "their" God was the only one, their pressing need to name Him disappeared. Instead, they began to use "Adonai" or "Elohim" (meaning "God"). This emphasized that Israel's God was the only God, the Lord of all mankind, and not just a tribal god interested only in one people.

The use of "Adonai" or "Elohim" was therefore firmly established by the time of Christ. "Yahweh" was never spoken aloud, even in liturgy, except by the High Priest on solemn festivals. Any Jew reading in the synagogue would say aloud "Adonai" whenever he came to "YHWH" in the text.

This is why the Divine Name does not appear in the Septuagint. ("Septuagint" comes from the Greek term, "Seventy Books". It was a Greek translation of the Old Testament which dates from before the time of Christ. The Greek speaking Jews of Egypt and Greece had forgotten Hebrew, and they needed a translation in order to conduct synagogue services in a language they could understand.) "Adonai" was translated as "Ho Kyrios" (The Lord) and "Elohim" as "Ho Theos" (God).

This also explains why the Divine Name "Yahweh" does not appear anywhere in the New Testament; and subsequently why the Christian Churches have not used it much. We don't name our human fathers when speaking to them, and we don't need to name the one Divine father, to ourselves or to others.

An Obsession

The Witnesses have inserted "Jehovah" into their own translation of the New Testament in 237 places! Normally one assumes that if there is no evidence for a theory, then the theory is wrong; but the mind of the Witnesses has been made up. They attribute the fact that "Ho Kyrios" and 'Ho

Theos" appear everywhere in the New Testament and the Septuagint, and "Jehovah" nowhere to a cunning conspiracy to suppress the Divine Name.

The proponents of this remarkable theory support it with the following two arguments:

One, that Jesus used the Divine Name when quoting from the Old Testament (as He frequently did), instead of using "Adonai", as was the custom. The Witnesses claim that Jesus usually disregarded the "unscriptural traditions" of the scribes. But nowhere in the Gospels is there any mention of the outrage that would have been caused by a public utterance of the sacred Divine Name.

Two, there exists a fragment of one copy of the Septuagint in which "YHWH" appears (written in Hebrew letters), instead of "Ho Kyrios" or "Ho Theos" in the book of Deuteronomy. In addition to this, the Witnesses point to a remark of St. Jerome, the 4th century Scripture scholar, to the effect that in some Septuagint manuscripts, "YHWH" appears in Hebrew letters. From this the Witnesses deduce that all the other surviving Septuagint manuscripts, and all surviving New Testament manuscripts have been tampered with.

The Witnesses' logic takes one's breath away, as does their ignorance of the nature of documentary evidence. Conspiracies do happen. But a forgery of a document and nearly all copies in a society which has no printing presses is practically impossible. Such a conspiracy two thousand years ago would have involved hundreds of scribes. Evidence would certainly have been left, and discovered long ago, if it had not caused immediate and widespread scandal and gossip, which would have been far more likely. The few examples which the Witnesses point to (and which are contradicted by the vast majority of manuscripts) in fact prove the opposite of what they say. We are claiming that the use of the name "YHWH" gradually died out and the survival of one or two manuscripts with the Divine Name is exactly what a historian would expect in such a case. A successful conspiracy, on the other hand, would have resulted in a complete lack, of such examples - and a successful conspiracy would have been difficult to arrange, and impossible to hide, as we have seen.

The gradual disappearance of the Divine Name from the Jewish scriptures, and its non-appearance in the New Testament can be accounted for without resorting to awkward theories.

(b) The Incarnation

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) This text is the heart of Christianity. It enshrines the most remarkable truth of all time. In a backward province of the Roman Empire nearly two thousand years ago, God became a man, and walked among us, as one of us.

This may be a hard doctrine to accept, and it is impossible to understand it fully. The Witnesses reject it, because they do not understand it. They argue:

"Another basic truth has to do with Jesus. Was he 'Jehovah God' who came to earth in human form? "If Jesus was God, then the Creator of the entire universe was in a woman's womb for nine months. It means that the Almighty crawled on his hands and knees as an infant. Do you really believe this to be the case?

"When Jesus prayed, to whom was he praying - himself? Would he teach his followers to pray to someone else and thus deceive them? (Matt. 6:9,10). Also, when Jesus died, did God Almighty die?" (The Watchtower, January 1st, 1970, p.7).

Facing Difficulties

We cannot deny that genuine difficulties exist here. But we must object to the ignorance of the nature of Divine Revelation which lies behind this approach.

We are entitled to demand that ordinary human statements should be completely clear and logical. If a book or article contains contradictions or discrepancies, we are entitled therefore to assume that there is something wrong, either with its content, or with the way in which it has been presented.

We are competent to understand and judge statements on such matters as history, science, etc., because the human mind is capable of understanding them fully. But some statements about God are a different matter; especially those statements which He Himself has made. With ordinary human statements, we can test the truth of what we read or hear against what we know (or against what others know). Statements which God has made about Himself we can only take on trust, as we have no way of checking them. These statements are part of Divine Revelation.

Divine Revelation confronts us with the mystery of God - who He is and what He is like. At this point, we had better clarify the meaning of "mystery", as much will depend upon the way in which we understand it. "Mystery" in ordinary language means something that we cannot understand. Here it has a more precise meaning. A Divine mystery is not something of which we can never understand anything; it is a matter of which we can never understand everything. The distinction may seem small, but a great deal hangs upon it.

If we are confronted by something of which we can know nothing at all, then obviously there is no point in bothering about it. But if we can know something of the object of our interest, even if that, "something" is not everything, then there is a great deal of point in discovering as much as we can. Anything that we can know about God will be of immeasurable benefit to us - as long as we remember this. Our knowledge of God will always be incomplete, no matter how much we learn about Him. We will strike problems only if we try to make our incomplete knowledge into a complete whole.

The statement "The Creator of the entire universe ... crawled on his hands and knees as an infant" is a problem only if we assume that it holds all the truth about God. In fact, this statement contains two fragmentary pieces of information about God. Our minds cannot contain the full knowledge of Him which alone would enable us to fit them together.

The problem of the Incarnation is not that Jesus Christ cannot be both God and man; but that we cannot understand how He can be both God and man. The difficulty lies in our capacity to know, not in His capacity to exist.

Gospel Evidence

When seeking to understand Jesus Christ, we must have the humility to admit that we can never know everything about God. We cannot tell God what He can do, and what is impossible for Him. We must accept everything we find in Sacred Scripture, and not pick and choose what we will believe. As St. Augustine once said, those who believe what they like in the Gospels, and don't believe what they don't like, are believing themselves instead of the Gospels.

When we come to the Gospels, we find that Jesus never says in so many words that He is God; certainly not in the words used by the Church. "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God". Those words are from the Nicene Creed, which was hammered out by two Ecumenical Councils; the first in Nicaea in 325, the second in Constantinople in 381. The Nicene Creed is thus

the fruit of three and a half centuries of coming to grips with the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. It is an answer to the question of Who and What He is.

If the Nicene Creed is a clear answer to this question, why did not Jesus give it to us Himself. If it contains the truth, why is it not to be found plainly in Scripture?

It is significant that Jesus is often addressed as "Rabbi", which means teacher. The careful observer will notice two characteristics of His teaching method. Firstly, He understood that the best way to teach a student something is to help him to work it out for himself; merely telling him the answer is not enough.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 16:15-17). Jesus uses precisely the same approach with Caiaphas (Mt. 26:63-64) and with Pilate (Mt. 27:1 1). He does not say Himself who He is - He waits for others to ask Him, and only then does He comment.

The second principle observed by Jesus the Teacher is this. When teaching students something that they do not yet know, one must begin with what they do know. The wise teacher does not introduce new material before the students are ready for it, nor more quickly than they can assimilate it.

We must bear these two principles in mind when we approach the Scriptures. We cannot expect to find precise theological terms or definitions. We will not find "Jesus Christ is one person in two natures - one Divine, and one human". Nor will we find "God is three co- equal Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in one Divine nature". These terms are not Scriptural - they are the Church's authoritative doctrinal description of the God who is revealed to us in Scripture. What we will find are words and deeds of Christ which point clearly towards the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, as do the inspired words of the human authors of the Scriptures. It will become clear that the Witnesses' rejection of these doctrines constitute a refusal to acknowledge the truth and authority of Scripture.

Evidence for Christ

The Scriptural evidence for the Divinity of Jesus Christ falls into two classes. The things Jesus said about Himself and the things He inspired the Apostles and Evangelists to say about Him. Both clearly and deliberately identify Jesus with the God of the Old Testament. The Gospel according to St. John is particularly rich in statements implying the Divinity of Jesus. For example:

"They said to him therefore, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also.'" (Jn. 8:19).

Here Jesus is claiming identity between Himself and His Father. This is the only possible interpretation of the claim that knowledge of one is automatically knowledge of the other.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." The Jews then said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple." (Jn. 8:56-59)

This text is complex. Jesus claims that He is the Messiah whom Abraham expected, and that He existed before Abraham. But this only hints at the Divinity which is proclaimed by the words, "I am" a clear and daring reference to the Divine name, "YHWH", "I am who am". Jesus' Jewish

audience tried to stone Him for that blasphemy. Even though they failed to recognize the truth of Christ's claim, they clearly understood its meaning. So should we.

We must also look at what Christ's apostles said of Him. They shared His public life for three years. Some had known Him longer. One or two were related to Him. Peter called Him "Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Mt. 16:16)

But the most moving declaration of love and adoration of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, came from the lips of Thomas, who had doubted in the resurrection of his master. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:27-28)

St. Paul's Faith

St. Paul is another witness to the Divinity of Christ. He refers to our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13)

Apart from this direct statement, St. Paul uses terms and titles from the Old Testament used only for God, and applies them to Jesus - especially "Lord" - "Adonai".

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

Compare this with the words of the prophet Isaiah: "For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'" (Isaiah 45:22-23)

Let us remember especially that St. Paul was a rabbinical scholar, and had been a student of the great Rabbi Gamaliel. He knew the Old Testament as only a Jew can, and it was not by chance that he applied to Jesus Christ names which every devout Jew associated exclusively with Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Of all the Old Testament titles which St. Paul uses, the most significant is "The Lord". It is the Pauline title for Jesus (see Romans 10:9,1 Corinthians 12:3 and 16:22, Colossians 2:6). But it was also the title for Yahweh, as we have seen; and the significance of its use would not have escaped the Jewish Christians.

The texts quoted above are merely a representative sample from the New Testament, a collection of books whose whole purpose is to proclaim the divinity of Christ, God and man.

An Old Heresy Revived

The Witnesses' rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation is not new, in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, in the year 319, a priest named Arius began to attack the Divinity of Christ (earning the title of "Christomachos", the Christ-fighter). Since the Witnesses claim that Arius was one of the Witnesses who have existed in every age, it will be useful to summarize his views.

Confronted by the phrase "Son of God", Arius argued thus. Sons are less in age than their fathers. Therefore, the Son of God came after God the Father; therefore, he cannot be eternal. Since God the Father is eternal, and His son is not, the Son is unlike God the Father, and therefore He cannot be God.

The argument looks neat enough, but it starts from a false premise, and is therefore invalid. Human sons are less in age than their human fathers, true. But this is because the essence of sonship is the receiving of the parent's nature. Human beings are finite, and have a beginning; and therefore human children do also. But God is eternal and unchanging, so His Son must also be eternal and unchanging.

Arius was confronted with Scripture which gives to Jesus Divine honour and Divine attributes; but he explained these away by saying that Jesus did not really possess them because of what He was, but rather because of what He did. He was a super angelic being, the first being that God created, and the only being that God created directly. All the rest of creation was made by Christ, acting as the agent of God. Because of Christ's fidelity, God rewarded Him by exalting Him to share in the Divine prerogatives.

Twisting Scripture

Let us see how the Witnesses cope with Scripture. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (3n. 1:1)

This text is a real stumbling block for the Witnesses. They devote several pages of the Appendix to the New World Translation to explaining it away. But this was not sufficient. They were forced to re-write John 1: 1 as: " In (the) beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god". (New World Translation).

The Witnesses claim that this is a correct rendering of the original Greek; but no other translation has referred to the Word as "A god". Professor B. M. Metzger, professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary, had this to say about it: "As a matter of solid fact, however, such a rendering is a frightful mistranslation. It overlooks entirely an established rule of Greek grammar which necessitates the rendering, '...and the Word was God'." He examined in detail the Witnesses' inadequate analysis of Greek grammar, and concluded that "...no sound reason has been advanced for altering the traditional rendering of the opening verse of John's Gospel, '...and the Word was God'." (Theology Today, April 1953, pp.75, 76).

On the question of Greek grammar, we must defer to the experts. But we know from Scripture that there can only be one God. "A god" implies that there is more than one. The Witnesses take their title from Isaiah 43:10; but while they use its first phrase they have overlooked its conclusion.

"'You are my witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me'." (Isaiah 43:10)

Another text from Isaiah identifies this one God with the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'." (Isaiah 9:6).

The Witnesses accept, as we do, that this refers to Jesus, but they display their customary ingenuity in claiming that "Mighty God" should be "a mighty god" to distinguish Jesus from Jehovah, the "Almighty God"!

This distinction reduces "a god" to a mere figure of speech. The Witnesses are quite happy to call Jesus "a god" or "divine", because this doesn't really mean anything. They even quote Scripture to their own advantage:

"The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me? The Jews answered him, We stone you for no good work but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, You are blaspheming', because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?" (Jn. 10:31-36)

Jesus is quoting here from Psalm 82, which refers to unjust judges of ancient Israel and calls on God to punish them. These judges were called "gods" and "sons of God" because they were supposed to be the vehicles of the word of God which had come to them. The Witnesses expect us to believe that Jesus is only claiming to be "a god" and a "son of God" in this allegorical sense.

In fact, Jesus is really saying, "If the ancient judges could borrow the title 'god' and 'son of God' merely because of their duty to proclaim God's word, then I can claim these titles in their fulness: I, who am the Word of God in person". His Jewish audience realized that He meant this; which is why they wanted to stone Him.

The New World Translation has the Jews saying, "We are stoning you, not for a fine work, but for blasphemy, even because you, although being a man, make yourself a god". This translation makes the whole episode meaningless. If Jesus had claimed Divinity and Divine Sonship in this merely allegorical sense, He might have been thought a trifle eccentric; but no Jew would have thought Him blasphemous.

Listening to Christ

Jesus is claiming a real unity with the Father; not just a unity of purpose, as the Witnesses would have it, but a unity of power and operation. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Jn. 10:27-30)

Jesus is constantly referring to "the Father" or "my Father"; a relationship which implies Divinity in Jesus. The Witnesses claim that this cannot be literally true, and argue that it has an allegorical or figurative meaning.

We have already seen that Jesus is making an unmistakable claim to Divinity and that his Jewish audience understands it to be such, moreover, the Evangelists and St. Paul reinforce the claim by describing Jesus in Old Testament terms which were previously used only to refer to Yahweh, the Father who is God.

Against this, the Witnesses use Arius' argument that a son must be younger than his father; Jesus cannot be eternal, and therefore cannot be God. But we have already shown that a son possesses the same qualities as his father; and therefore Jesus must be God, if He is the Son of God.

To support their claim that Jesus is a created being and therefore not eternal, the Witnesses cite St. Paul's letter to the Colossians 1: 15; which refers to Jesus as "the first-born of all creation". They maintain that this means Jesus is the first thing God created. This is not what St. Paul meant.

"Prototokos", "first-born", means that Jesus is Lord of all creation, and not a part of creation. In the very next verse he says that "...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". (Col. 1: 16) (not "all (other) things" as the New World Translation would have it!). Thrones and dominions, principalities and authorities refer to different ranks of angels - Jesus cannot be an angel himself, as the Witnesses claim. Hebrews 2:7,9 specifically says that Jesus is above any angel.

The Witnesses are also fond of quoting from the Book of Revelation 3:14, in which Jesus is called "the beginning of God's creation." The Witnesses believe that this means Jesus is the part of creation which God finished first, but this interpretation is incorrect. As the amplified New Testament puts it, Jesus is "the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation".

"Greater Than I"

To support their claim that Jesus is not equal to the Father, the Witnesses quote Jesus' statement "the Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28). To be understood correctly, this text must be linked with another: "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (Jn. 13:16). Jesus is sent by the Father, and so the Father is greater than He is - but the difference is a temporary difference of role, not a fundamental and permanent difference of nature. The Incarnation meant a self humiliation for God the Son, sent by the Father (Mk. 15:34; Philippians 2:6-8). In returning to the Father this "humiliation" is ended, and Jesus is again glorified with the glory which was His before anything was created (Jn. 17:1-5).

A correct understanding of John 14:28 corrects the Witnesses' misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone".

They believe that this text refers to a fundamental difference between the nature of the Father and the Son; but in fact St. Paul is referring to Christ's role now, and the one He will have after the Last Judgment.

Because of the Fall, man became separated from God, and could not close the gap himself. Consequently Jesus took on the role of mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no-one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn. 14:6). After His death and resurrection, He lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He has the keys to Death and Hell (Rev. 1: 18); all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Mt. 28:18). His is the only name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). Between His Ascension into Heaven and His Second Coming, Jesus has authority over all creation. His is a twofold role: He is Ruler (Acts 5:31, Rev. 1:50), and Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

These roles are temporary; they will not be necessary after Death has been vanquished at the Second Coming. The faithful will no longer need a mediator when they see God "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). God will be in direct contact with the whole of His creation; Jesus will have handed it back to the Father. But in doing so, He does not take a back seat. He does not step down into a subordinate place consoled and rewarded for a job well done by a glory which is new to Him. Jesus Christ does not assume Divine glory by virtue of His human deeds; He resumes that which was intrinsically His by right, from before all eternity.

(c) The Atonement

Because of their fundamental error concerning what and who Jesus is, the Witnesses inevitably fail to understand His most important function. Their understanding of redemption has three major defects.

The Witnesses argue that as Adam, the first man, lost perfection for mankind by his sin, any ransom for his sin would have to be of the same value. If Jesus is God and Man, then He is worth far more than Adam, who is no more than a man.

This argument is specious. It is tantamount to saying that man can redeem himself. Its flaw was pointed out by Athanasius, a staunch opponent of the Arian heresy. "If the Son were a creature man would ... not have come into contact with God. For a creature would not have brought creatures into contact with God, because it in turn would itself need someone to effect this contact. Nor could an element of creation have been the salvation of creation, because it itself had also to be saved."

(Contra Arianos 11.69)

Secondly, the Witnesses arbitrarily claim that many people simply cannot benefit from the atoning death of Christ. Adam and Eve, Cain, those who perished in the Flood; in fact, any willfully wicked person has no hope at all.

The arrogance of this claim is spine chilling. The Scriptures warn us that we will receive the judgment that we give to others. It is not for us to judge anyone - only God can do that. In the whole of the Bible, no person and no nation is finally judged. Even the fate of Judas Iscariot, dark though it seems, is not certain.

Thirdly, the Witnesses claim that 144,000 "spirit creatures" will enter heaven. The rest of us, if we are good, will live a happy life on this earth, which will become a paradise. In other words, the vast majority of people who have led good, moral lives, will never see God, which is the whole point of redemption and its goal, salvation.

A Crucifixion?

Not content with denying Christ's Divinity, the Witnesses also deny that He died upon a cross. Instead, they say He was tied to, or impaled upon a "punishment stake". This would not change the atoning effect of Christ's death, but it is a matter of historical fact that He was crucified. The Witnesses' denial of this reinforces our doubts about their ability to decide which issues are important, as well as their ability to understand them.

The Resurrection Distorted

There are two kinds of resurrection to be found in the Bible. The first involves a dead person being restored to the same kind of life he lived before his death; Lazarus is a case in point.

The second involves a previously dead person being raised to a new glorious mode of life. It is this second kind of resurrection which Jesus experienced. In both modes, the resurrected person is the same before and after, with the same body.

Denying both the Divinity of Christ, and the immortality of the human soul, it is not surprising that the Witnesses completely misunderstand Christ's resurrection.

They maintain that Jesus Christ was not raised in His own body, but as "A glorious spirit creature". This view is directly contradicted by Jesus Himself.

He appeared to His disciples, who were terrified at his appearance among them - they "...supposed that they saw a spirit... And he said to them,... See my hands and feet, that it is I myself, handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have..." And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it before them." (Luke 24:37-39, 41-43).

The Witnesses argue that a physical resurrection of Christ would have nullified the Atonement. Christ died as a ransom for mankind, and like the Mosaic sacrifices, He had to be totally consumed; if He received back His body, the sacrifice would have no effect.

This argument misses the meaning of "sacrifice". The essential part of the Old Testament sacrifices was not the killing and burning of the sacrificial beast. These actions were only the means to the end, which was the offering to God, by which the object became totally His. The heart of Christ's atoning sacrifice, in which He gave Himself totally to the Father, is shown in the garden of Gethsemane, the night before the crucifixion. "...he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'" (Mt. 26:39).

A text which the Witnesses claim proves that Christ was resurrected as a "spirit creature" is 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit."

No reputable scholar agrees with the peculiar interpretation of the Witnesses. The passage is cryptic, allowing for several interpretations; but the consensus of opinion appears to be that "flesh" refers to Jesus' life before the crucifixion, and "spirit" to His glorified life after the resurrection. The first is ordinary human life as we know it; the second is physical human life, but without many of the physical limitations that we know. (For example, Jesus suddenly appears in a room in the midst of His disciples, without having opened a locked door.)

The Witnesses claim that Jesus could not effect His own resurrection, and that this had to be performed by "Jehovah God". In fact, it was an act of the Trinity. The Father raises Jesus (Romans 10:9) through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1 1). But Jesus also plays an active part, as John 2:13-22 shows. This passage deals with the expulsion of the moneylenders from the temple. The Jews ask Jesus by what authority He has done this; and He replies that if the temple is destroyed, He will raise it up again in three days. The Jews think He refers to the temple building in which they are standing; but St. John points out that Jesus is referring to the temple of His body.

This passage contradicts two doctrines of the Witnesses, by showing that Jesus effects His own resurrection, and in the same body. The Witnesses try to avoid this contradiction by claiming that the "temple" is the spiritual temple of Jehovah, consisting of Jesus and the spiritual members of the body of which he is the head.

This is manifest nonsense. Jesus is offering a sign which will convince anyone willing to believe Him. His physical resurrection would be something out of the ordinary. But if He is only claiming that He will establish a group of disciples, then He would be doing no more than any other Rabbi. It would mark Him as ordinary; and He is extraordinary.

When it comes to the manner of Christ's post resurrection appearances, the Witnesses claim that for each appearance, Jesus used a different body, especially materialized for the occasion; and they quote three texts to prove it.

"After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country." (Mark 16:12) "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." (Luke 24:16). (These two verses refer to the two disciples who meet Christ on the way to Emmaus). "Saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus." (Jn. 20:14). (This refers to Mary Magdalene meeting Jesus outside the tomb in which He had been buried.)

The Witnesses claim that the disciples and Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus because he appeared in a different body to the one they knew as His. The second text shows that at least part of the real explanation lies in the intention of Jesus not to be recognized immediately. The two disciples only recognize Him after He has talked with them for several hours; and then their reaction is one that we all have known - surprise that something familiar can for a time appear strange to us (Luke 24:13-35).

We have already looked at the new state of life to which Jesus had returned, and the fact that He was no longer bound by some of the normal physical limitations. The Transfiguration (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:2; Lk. 9:29; 2 Peter 1: 16) is an earlier prophesy of that change of which St. Paul speaks (1 Cor. 15:51-55). Ultimately, this corruptible body will put on incorruptibility; our bodies, like Christ's, will become transformed and acquire some spiritual characteristics. But they will be the same bodies.

When we consider the inevitable changed appearance of Christ's glorified and transfigured body, it is not surprising that He was not instantly recognized; particularly by people who believed He was dead. But if He appeared in a different body on each occasion, He could not have been recognized at all.

The Witnesses do not believe in the human soul, nor in the idea of survival after death. This implies that Jesus Christ simply ceased to exist during the interval between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; and therefore His resurrection should be called re-creation. In each of His appearances, He must have been an entirely different person. If there is no soul, and a completely different body on each occasion, how can there be any continuity of personal identity?

The traditional view of Christ's death and resurrection may make demands of our faith but in no way does it distort the Scriptural texts.

(d) The Trinity

The traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that there is One God and that this God is three Persons, a Triune God, Three-in-One, known as the Holy Trinity. The Witnesses attack this term, because it is not found in Scripture. Our reply is that "Trinity" is the only adequate term for the reality revealed in Scripture.

In looking at the Incarnation, we have already touched upon the Father and the Son. Jesus begins to speak of "the Spirit"; and Christians speak of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Ghost. The Witnesses claim that the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather is "Jehovah's active force".

What does Jesus say about the Holy Spirit? "And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." (Jn. 14:15-17)

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (Jn. 14:26)

"But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me." (Jn. 15:26).

An impersonal, active force cannot be a counselor, cannot dwell in and with us; it could not teach, nor bear witness. A force cannot be lied to (Acts 5:3), cannot make intercession (Romans 8:26), cannot be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) nor outraged (Hebrews 10:29), and cannot speak to the Churches. (Rev. 2:7)

The Holy Spirit is clearly a person; not something, but someone. He guides the Apostles in their decisions. "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." (Acts 15:28)

Jesus Himself clearly states that the person of the Holy Spirit is equal to Him, and to the Father: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". (Mt. 28:19).

What are we to make of the Scriptural revelation that there is one God, and three co-equal Divine persons? We cannot reject it, as the Witnesses do, simply because we cannot understand it. However much our understanding may grow, we can never penetrate the mystery of God completely. We can arrive at the fact of God's existence, independently of revelation, by philosophical arguments constructed by our unaided human intellects. But if we would know more about Him, then we must go to Scripture and accept everything we find there. We dare not cut and trim the infinity of God to fit neatly into our finite minds.

The Old Testament ought to be a chaotic jumble of history, legends, laws, poetry and prayer; but it is not. Something unifies it into a harmonious whole, that same something which made the Jews a people. If we ask, What is this phenomenon? the answer is God. "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). If we ask, Who is the LORD our God? the answer is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19).

How can God be like this? St. John calls the Son "the Word". Now "Word" here is allegorical. A word is a sound uttered by a being who associates with that sound a meaning, or an idea. God as a spiritual being does not make sounds. But St. John has hit upon a poetical way of referring to an idea. "The Word" is God's idea or knowledge of Himself. God is perfect, and so is His knowledge of Himself; and as He has always had this self-knowledge, the Word is eternal. As God's self-expression cannot be less than Himself, the Word must be equal to God, and hence be God.

Just as God knows Himself, so He loves Himself. Just as His knowledge of Himself is perfect, eternal, and equal to Himself, so is His love for Himself.

The Word knows the Father, and loves the Father, as He is known and loved by the Father; (otherwise He would be less than the Father). This mutual love is the person of the Holy Spirit.

That is as far as our minds can go. The difficulty in comprehending the Trinity and the Incarnation lies in the incapacity of finite human minds to fully understand infinite divine reality.

(e) The Second Coming

The Witnesses are best known for their belief that the Second Coming is imminent. Their enthusiasm remains undaunted despite the repeated failures of their attempts to calculate the exact

date. They are less certain of the precise date than they used to be; but their belief that it can be calculated from Scripture persists, despite Christ's insistence that the secret is known to God alone. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." (Mt. 24:36)

The Witnesses interpret this as meaning that although the day and hour cannot be forecast, they can still calculate the year of the Second Coming.

In order to explain away their failure to name the date of the Second Coming, the Witnesses say that the Greek word "parousia" really means "presence". This enables them to claim that Christ did come - in 1874, 1914, or 1975, or whichever year they happen to fix on - but invisibly!

In fact "parousia", although it can mean "presence", was more often used to describe the official visits of kings and governors; which makes it appropriate to describe the return of Jesus Christ. Such visits were made with great pomp and circumstance, to make the greatest public impact; which makes "parousia" the most inappropriate word to describe a secret return, known only to a privileged few.

And yet this is how the Witnesses describe Jesus' return. They cite Matthew 24:43, in which Jesus compares his return to the coming of a thief in the night. But the Witnesses overlook the point - it is not the manner of Christ's return which is not known; it is its timing - "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Mt. 24:42).

An equal misunderstanding surrounds John 14:19: "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also." Jesus is warning His disciples of His coming death, and offering comfort in advance. The Witnesses mistakenly think He is referring to the period after the Second Coming.

Jesus says His return will be unmistakable and obvious to all the world - "...hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mt. 26:64).

"Then if any one says to you, Lo, here is the Christ: or There he is: do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Lo, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man." (Mt. 24:23-28).

In other words: You cannot know beforehand when I shall return; but when I do, there will be no mistaking it.

Throughout history people have been convinced that the end of the world is nigh. Every age is convinced that its tragedies and disasters are worse than those which went before; and ours is no different. It is easy to see in the symbolic and mysterious language of the Book of Revelation references to wars, earthquakes and similar events of recent history. It is quite wrong to do so. St. John is writing of the final struggle between good and evil, and he describes this moral and spiritual conflict in physical and historical language. The Book of Revelation is theological poetry. Its original Jewish Christian readers understood it as such. Our more literally minded generation - in particular, the Witnesses - is prone to be distracted by the vivid imagery and symbols, and to suppose that St. John is prophesying an actual physical war.

(f) The After-Life

The Witnesses do not believe in the survival of the human soul after death. They say that the human person is a soul which perishes utterly at death. This is an Old Testament concept. The ancient Jews were very conscious of their death, and the Old Testament reflects this uncertainty. Although the Old Testament does not contradict the Christian idea of the immortal soul, it does not provide conclusive proof. For that we must turn to the New Testament.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mt. 10:28).

Man has a foot in two camps; he is at once a material and a spiritual being. The body corrupts with death, although at the end of the world it will be raised and glorified and reunited with the soul.

St. Paul speaks of being away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6-8). He also speaks of his desire to die and depart the flesh, and to be with Christ (Philippians 1:21-25). If the Witnesses are correct in their views, St. Paul is talking nonsense. If he dies in the flesh, he ceases to exist and cannot be anywhere, let alone with Christ.

When we examined the resurrection of Jesus, we noted the impossibility of speaking of the resurrection of the dead if there is no immortal soul. If there is no continuity of identity, then we have re-creation rather than resurrection. The Witnesses acknowledge the problem; their solution is that Jehovah has preserved the genetic blue-print of each individual in his memory bank. This enables him to re-create accurately all those who deserve it.

There exist photo-copiers so good that their photostats are indistinguishable from the originals. But copies are copies, and not originals. If individuals are re-created from our genetic blue-prints, they may be our clones; but they will not be ourselves.

(g) Heaven

There are two things wrong with the Witnesses' view of heaven. The first is that only a limited number can reach it. And the second is that only spiritual beings can exist there.

The first mistake stems from a literal interpretation of a symbolic number. In the book of Revelation St. John the Evangelist speaks of the "elect", the servants of God, who have His name sealed on their foreheads. He sees 144,000 of them, from all the tribes of Israel; and then a multitude too great to number, from every tribe and tongue and nation; clad in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, praising God (Rev. 7:1-12; 14:1).

According to the Witnesses, the 144,000 are the elect who have been re-created as spirit beings, and who are in the full presence of Jehovah. The second group consists of the rest of mankind who have deserved physical re-creation, and merit a happy life in the earthly paradise.

In fact they are one and the same. The number 144,000 is a complex symbol, whose derivation is as follows. "12", like the number 7, represents perfection or totality in the apocalyptic imagery used by St. John. The second 12 stands for the twelve tribes of Israel, which in turn is a symbol of the people of God, who are from every tribe and tongue and nation. "1,000" signifies a number beyond counting. $12 \times 12 \times 1,000 = 144,000$; which is the same as saying that those living in the full presence of God are as numberless as the sands on the seashore.

To justify this segregation of the people of God, of whom the majority will never see Him, the Witnesses cite 1 Corinthians 15:50, which says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. But St. Paul clearly means flesh and blood as they are now. "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

Our resurrected bodies need not be the same as they are now. From the Scriptural description of Jesus after rising from the dead, and from what is said by St. Paul, we know that our future physical life will be very different from our present one. We do not know the details - yet; as St. Paul says, we are confronted by a mystery. But we do know that our present life has both a physical and a spiritual element, and it is impossible that life in the full presence of God will lack anything that we have now. It will have more than we can imagine, not less.

(h) Hell

The Witnesses do not believe in Hell. They claim that it is unscriptural, unreasonable, contrary to God's love, and repugnant to justice. They maintain that the wicked are annihilated instead of suffering eternally.

Jesus Himself has given us a graphic account of the judgment which we must all undergo: "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;...' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mt. 25:34,41,46).

We are created in the image and likeness of God. We cannot be happy apart from Him; and yet because of original sin, we cannot reach Him on our own. Jesus Christ, by dying for us on the cross and offering Himself totally to the Father on our behalf, bridged the gap between God and Man. It is now possible for all of us to be totally with God - if we want to. God's love for us is not of the possessive kind which insists upon what is good for us, whether we want it or not. His love respects our dignity and freedom by allowing us to choose or reject Him. Being creatures who dwell in time, our choice for or against God is made in the decisions we face every day. But God does not keep a score sheet of our good and bad deeds, and judge us solely on that. The worst sinner in the world can still reach Him. Ultimately, God will give us what we want; Himself, and the fulness of life with Him, which is heaven; or ourselves alone, which is Hell.

(i) The Devil

The Witnesses believe in the existence of the Devil and His angels; but they think of Satan almost as an equal of God (which he is not!). They speak of a long struggle between God and the devils, in which God finally established His sovereignty by expelling Satan from Heaven in 1914. However God created Satan and the other devils and keeps them in being; and it is laughable to think of them being a threat which He would need to suppress lest His sovereignty be threatened.

(j) Baptism

The Witnesses do not believe in one baptism for all. There is water baptism (which must be by total immersion); but this is only a symbol of a person's dedication. "Spirit Baptism" is reserved for the heavenly class of the 144,000, who are baptized in Christ. This idea was invented by Rutherford, to

avoid the embarrassment of having too many candidates for heaven. Compare this with the words of St. Paul.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:12-13.)

(k) Blood Transfusions

The Witnesses are totally opposed to blood transfusions, either for humans or animals. They argue that the ancient Jewish law which forbade the eating of blood also rules out a transfusion of blood, which they say nourishes the body.

This would be stretching the meaning of the law, even if it were still in force; but the old Jewish laws passed away with the new Covenant which Christ introduced. The first Jewish Christians kept the observance of the old laws because it was a part of their lives. The first Gentile converts were asked to do the same, out of consideration for the feelings of their Jewish colleagues; but as more and more Gentiles became Christian, the old Jewish dietary laws had less and less relevance to the life of the Church.

5. Conclusion

This pamphlet has attempted to examine the main doctrines of the Witnesses of Jehovah, and to suggest the best ways of refuting them. Although lack of space prevents a more detailed analysis, it is fair enough to conclude that the Witnesses' doctrines are both unreasonable and unscriptural; in other words, quite untrue!

Unless you enjoy a good argument, there is probably not much point in becoming involved in discussion with any Witnesses who knock at your door. It is very unlikely that they can be convinced of the error of their ways. Bear in mind that their usual aim is to make a series of visits, culminating in the formation of a "study group" in your home, which would be supervised by one of their officials. If you do not wish to become involved, the best policy is to make it clear at the beginning that you are not interested.

Further reading: Coffey, John Francis *The Gospel according to Jehovah's Witnesses* Melbourne, Polding Press, 1979.

This book presents a detailed and systematic analysis of the Witnesses' doctrines. It is easily the best of its kind in English, and its bibliography would be invaluable to anyone wishing to study the sect more deeply.
