

1. History

Russell

Just over a hundred years ago, a young lad tried to convince an unbeliever that he should accept the Christian faith. The unbeliever, however, got the better of the Christian, and, as the story goes, it turned Charles Russell into a skeptic. He thought about it and he decided that he could no longer believe the tenets of the Christian faith. Look at what had happened with that unbeliever! He could not be touched or convinced by the gospel, for the gospel was simply unreasonable! So Charles Russell rebelled against Christianity, against the faith he had been taught in the Congregational Church in Pittsburgh.

It was especially the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell that were very obnoxious to him, and he therefore denied them. With the help of Mrs. Ellen White, who was a Seventh-Day Adventist, he sought to make the Word of God prove his own preconceived theories, that there is no hell and that there is no eternal predestination.

So we notice right away (and it is something to keep in mind) the very strong influence of rationalism. What seems unreasonable is not worthy to be accepted and believed. As he reacted against Christianity, Russell did not keep things to himself. He published a pamphlet entitled *Food for Thinking Christians*. Notice the title. You did yourself a favour by reading it. It showed that you were a thinking Christian. In this booklet Russell sought to show from the Bible that his ideas were right. He would gather all the passages that appeared to contradict the Biblical doctrine, tear these texts out of their context, and set them side by side to show the people that what they were taught in the Christian church was not true. In this way, he attracted many followers who had similar dislikes of hell and predestination. It is clear that with such a method, any Biblical doctrine can be "proven" false and it is not so much what the Bible teaches, but what you want to believe that is decisive.

Via his booklet, Russell set himself up as a teacher. He also started a so-called Bible Study group in Pittsburgh. This group eventually made him their "pastor." After all orthodox belief had been ridiculed and mocked, Russell, in effect, slowly became the sole source of the truth and enlightenment. He determined what was to be believed and what combination of Scriptures were to be used to "prove" it. Soon after *Food for Thinking Christians* was published, he started a bi-monthly paper called *The Watchtower*. Also six volumes of *Scripture Studies* were eventually published. One notices in these developments that from the beginning, the printed

page was a very important tool for this sect. In 1884, Russell's group secured a charter from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and adopted the name: "Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society."

Russell did not stop his work with Pittsburgh. He pushed on and held many speaking engagements in his tours throughout the state and even the country. Within several years earnest study groups of his Bible students were set up all over America. Eventually the headquarters of the growing sect were established in Brooklyn, New York.

What was the drawing power of Russell's movement? Surely there was more involved than his rationalism. What attracted the people? Undoubtedly many came to hear him because they were disillusioned with their church. Playing on a common grievance of weak members of the church, Russell advertised his meetings as "Free — no collection" and many were attracted. His ideas about hell also appealed to very many people who thought that indeed it was repulsive that the God Who was love would send people to hell. They gladly listened to someone who would get rid of eternal punishment for them. Others liked him because he appeared to stand very strong on the Scriptures. He, after all, opposed evolution! Therefore, many from the liberal churches gave Russell a thought, and an ear, and even their heart. Furthermore, the drawing power of Russell is also seen through the printed page. Many, many people read his message. He published low cost books and magazines that were widely distributed and were therefore of great influence.

Perhaps the greatest single drawing power of Russell was that he himself was convinced of his own claims and believed them as divine truth. This, coupled with his personal magnetism by which he could hold crowds spellbound for hours, drew many into the maelstrom of this sect. Russell firmly believed that God had revealed to him His plan for the end of the age. God's plan as revealed to Russell (and to him alone) was very sensational. Russell's widely publicized slogan was: "The Lord returned invisible to human eyes, in His second coming in 1874!" To keep this momentum up, Russell also said that in the year 1914 the world would end and the great Armageddon would be fought. Then the "holy people" (as the Russellites called themselves) would be taken to heaven. This "gospel" provided momentum!! The time is limited! Therefore, join us, before it is too late!

It was therefore a tremendous shock when in 1914 the apocalyptic prophecies of Russell and company were proven false. In 1916 Russell died. This almost stilled the drawing power of the sect.

Rutherford

After Russell's death, "Judge" J.F. Rutherford came into the forefront. He succeeded Russell as president of the Society in 1917 and served it until 1942.

One can imagine that many people were disillusioned after 1914. And not surprisingly, in the two years following Russell's death, thousands left the sect.

Rutherford took very firm control over the organization. He allowed

no opposition. If someone had any different ideas in the organization, they were either promptly ousted or silenced. Purges took place in the head office, so that Rutherford's word became the absolute law. One of the first things that Rutherford did, after he was firmly in power, was to "correct" Russell's more embarrassing prophesies. These corrections were usually done in a very slick way.

How could Rutherford justify "correcting" his predecessor's work, when Russell even claimed revelation from God? Rutherford's justification was that now more light had come. The revelation from God was a progressive thing. Rutherford firmly insisted that God has a definite time to reveal certain Biblical facts. For example, he maintained that for thousands of years the Book of Ezekiel had been a mystery; but, now, he said, God's time had come for the prophecy to be understood! This approach of progressive revelation on any given subject meant that every time Rutherford published a new book, it promised to be a sensation. New revelation was being given! The truth, as has just been revealed, is now coming off the press! Rutherford and the *Watchtower* organization came to be considered God's sole dispenser of the truth, for God spoke only in revelation to Rutherford and a choice few who happened to be in the editorial department of the *Watchtower* magazine.

Much of Rutherford's work was with the Old Testament and the Old Testament prophesies. Instead of stressing, as Russell did, "the restitution of all things" and the end of the world, Rutherford stressed "the vindication of Jehovah's name." This shift of emphasis even resulted in a new name "Jehovah's Witnesses." Jehovah of the Old Testament is now to be the centre of attention, and not Jesus Christ of the New Testament.

Apparently the vindication of Jehovah's name meant that the Jehovah's Witnesses had to wage an all out attack against virtually every institution here on earth. The church, political institutions, and business organizations were all viciously attacked, under the guidance of Rutherford. Everything was an instrument of Satan, especially the Christian church, and everyone was ready for the wrath of God to be revealed, except the Jehovah's Witnesses. This again created drawing power for the sect. After all, people had to be drawn back into the organization. Their hostility to all sorts of institutions gave the movement a tremendous lift. People started coming again. One could ask: How is that possible? Well, if all large organizations are attacked, you are bound to please very many people who have grievances against the government or against the church or against some large institution. By attacking all organizations, the Jehovah's Witnesses set themselves up as "the clean organization." Everything else is an instrument of the devil. Therefore join the Jehovah's Witnesses. They are the "*New World Society*." Of course — do not wait. The end is just around the corner! "Join us, and be part of the New World."

Rutherford had a famous slogan in his day. It was this: "Millions now living will never die." As a result, great expectancy was again aroused concerning the future; for, the clear implication of the slogan was that the end of the world would soon come. "Join us before it is too late." And many

joined the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. The sect prospered. It somehow seemed to give people hope. It somehow provided a firm footing. Here was a strong figure who told them the way it was. If anyone had any lingering doubt, the continual stream of literature from head office soon brainwashed them.

Knorr

Rutherford died in 1942 and H.N. Knorr took over. He is still the president of the Society today. Under his leadership, there has been and still is a great stress on education. By the end of Rutherford's rule the Jehovah's Witnesses had acquired the reputation that they did not know too much and just followed their leader. Knorr decided to change all that. Therefore, we see in his leadership a strong stress on education. The result is that the average Jehovah's Witness is well-trained in the doctrine of the sect and in presenting their views in door-to-door witnessing.

Under Knorr's leadership there is tremendous growth. When he assumed leadership, there were 115,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, but by 1968 there were over 1.2 million (presumably in the United States), with a world membership of almost 2.5 million. Besides, an estimated 10 million are in the Jehovah's Witnesses' programs of indoctrination and working to membership. Much of the success must be attributed to the education program and the tremendous advertising and continued distribution of free literature. Also the successful theme of the expectancy of a "new world just around the corner" continues to draw many to the false hope of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1960 an important project was finished. In that year the Jehovah's Witnesses completed their own translation of the Bible. This New World Translation was designed to reflect as much as possible their distinctive doctrinal views. In line with Knorr's emphasis on education it is also an attempt to provide a "scholarly" undergirding for their teachings and to back up their own special beliefs.

Let us now turn to their doctrine.

2. Doctrine

In general it can be stated that the Doctrine of this sect has a thoroughgoing rationalism by which an attempt is made to make the Bible acceptable even to an unbeliever. As a result, their doctrine is a denial of practically all orthodox Christian doctrine.

As can be expected, their doctrine also clearly motivates them. It provides the reasons why they do what they do. It is not simply an abstract set of teachings, but it relates closely to their lives and to the life of the organization as a whole.

Let us take a look at two key areas of doctrine — Scripture, and the person and work of Christ. In looking at their doctrine we will at the same time try to see how we should deal with them. In a concluding section we will discuss in general our strategy for dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses.

Scripture

The Jehovah's Witnesses pride themselves with the thought that *they* put the Bible first. Their boast is that they build their doctrine on the Bible, unlike, for example, the liberal churches which accept evolution and deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim to accept all of Scripture and be subject to what they find there. This appeal to the Scriptures as the only authoritative and inspired book has appeal. However, the sect does not live up to this claim to be subject in everything to what is written in Scripture.

The sect was born of scepticism and rationalism, and the Jehovah's Witnesses have, to this day, their own preconceived idea of what they want to find in the Bible. The method is still the same as it was with Russell. First they decide what they want to accept and believe, and then they go to the Bible to prove it. And you can prove almost anything out of the Bible if you are willing to take texts out of context. Russell, in speaking before audiences, was noted for claiming to quote Scripture while in reality, the "quotes" were filled with his interpretative remarks to suit his purpose. In this way he taught his doctrines. Most people listening to him did not know the Bible so well, and so they accepted his word that he was actually only quoting Scripture. This method of fabricating doctrines, which to this day are still accepted, clearly show that Scripture is not the absolute authority it is claimed to be. Any idea repulsive to them (e.g., hell, or the divinity of Christ) is denied.

Another clear indication that the Bible does not have the first and final say is seen from the advice Russell gave people. If a choice has to be made between reading his *Scripture Studies* and the Bible, the *Scripture Studies* should be preferred. In the *Watchtower* of September 15, 1910 we read:

If the six volumes of SCRIPTURE STUDIES are practically the Bible topically arranged, with Bible prooftexts given, we might not improperly name the volumes — the Bible in an arranged form. That is to say, they are not merely comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself . . . if he then lays them [i.e. *Scripture Studies, CVD*] aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years [with the *Scripture Studies, CVD*], our experience shows that within two years the goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the SCRIPTURE STUDIES with their references, and had not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures.

You can see that this is a rather crude and haughty way of negating the Bible. In effect it means: "Read our literature; it is even better than reading the Bible. Then you understand what the Bible is all about." If someone goes into "darkness" and leaves the "light" of Jehovah's Witnesses' doctrines by simply reading the Bible, even after having studied the sect's doctrines for years, then clearly, these doctrines have been super-imposed on Scripture.

The Jehovah's Witnesses do not put the Bible central, for they also believe in progressive revelation. The whole *Watchtower* organization is still viewed as God's channel for truth today, and it claims that God speaks only through that one channel. No other organization or person can have that claim. God only speaks through them. God only spoke through Russell in his day. He spoke only through Rutherford in his day, and today He also still speaks only through the same organization. And therefore, if you are a Jehovah's Witness, you must obey headquarters. If you do not, you disobey God. A Jehovah's Witness must therefore become a complete slave to the machinery of the organization. This is the current doctrine and not just something from the early years. For example, on page 22 of the book, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Divine Purpose* (1959), one can read:

. . . Jehovah had chosen the publication we now call *The Watchtower* to be used as a channel through which to bring to the world of mankind a revelation of the divine will and, through the words revealed in its columns, to bring a division of the world's population into those who would do the divine will and those who would not.

Another example; in *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1960 (page 439), the Society is identified as God's "sole collective channel for the flow of Biblical truth to men on earth."

The Jehovah's Witness agrees that the Bible cannot be properly understood without the Holy Spirit. But, the Holy Spirit is not received unless one recognizes the *Watchtower* Society as God's visible organization. *The Watchtower* of July 1, 1965 (page 391), states;

He does not impart his holy spirit and an understanding and appreciation of his Word apart from his visible organization. . . .

Should we expect the same today? Yes, for Jesus prophesied that he would have a visible agency upon earth at the time of the end of this system of things where we now are. . . .

. . . However, for God to answer our prayers for his spirit we must meet his conditions, among which is that we recognize the visible channel he is using for that very purpose.

One can see that to recognize any earthly channel for God's continuing

revelation is to deny both the authority and the sufficiency of Scripture. Not the Scriptures, but the *Watchtower* organization has the final say. Through the organization God is telling His people something they did not know earlier. Via the revelation through the organization, one's understanding of the Bible is kept up to date. It is clear that in this system, one is moulded, not by the Scriptures, but by the *Watchtower* organization. The Scriptures are not allowed to speak for themselves.

The Person of Jesus Christ

The doctrine of the trinity is viciously misrepresented by the Jehovah's Witnesses. According to this sect, the doctrine of the trinity means that there are three gods in one. Scripture, of course, teaches three persons, but one God. There is even a failure to distinguish properly between the persons. For example, in his book, *Chaos of the Cults* (page 268), J.K. Van Baalen quotes from official Jehovah's Witnesses' material the following:

There are some clergymen, no doubt, who are really sincere in thinking that Jesus was his own father, and the Almighty is the son of Himself; and that each of these is a third person who is the same as the other two, and yet different from them.

This makes nonsense out of the Biblical truth. Their book, *Let God be true* (1952), expounds their "refutation" of the trinity. It is viciously unfair (as E.C. Gruss has shown in *Apostles of Denial*, pp. 105-124).

The doctrine of the trinity is especially attacked with respect to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour. The question: "What do you think of the Christ?" (Matthew 22:24) is still relevant today.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have some very strange thoughts and ideas about the Christ. They believe that before His earthly life, Christ was a spirit-creature named Michael, the first of God's creation, through Whom God made the other created things. As a consequence of His birth on earth, Jesus became a perfect human being, the equal of Adam before the fall. Jesus' birth was not an incarnation, for He was totally emptied of all things heavenly and spiritual and was flesh only. At His baptism by John, Jesus became the Messiah. When Jesus died, His Human nature was sacrificed and was, therefore, annihilated. Then the spirit-creature, Michael took up his existence and again in an even higher exaltation. In this view, Jesus was never eternal with God or equal with God. He was and is not eternal, for there was a time when He was not. He is created, and when He was on earth He was no more than a man. One can see that, therefore, the atoning effect of His death can have no more significance than that of a perfect man dying for others. (Think of question and answer 17 of the Heidelberg Catechism.) This means that their doctrine of the Christ necessitates a weak view of sin as we will see.

When Jehovah's Witnesses speak to you about their faith they will try to trap you concerning the Christ by involving you in texts which refer to Christ's human life here on earth. For example, a text often used by them is John 14:28 where the Lord Jesus says: "The Father is greater than I." Then they will say, "See — the Father is greater than Jesus. Here is proof that we are right." The Jehovah's Witnesses will also misuse I John 5:7. This

text, in the King James Version, reads: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." However, these words are not included in the modern translations, because there is simply no evidence in the ancient manuscripts that they should be. The Jehovah's Witnesses will say that therefore the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity is gone. However, the doctrine of the Trinity, as we shall see, is a Biblical doctrine, found throughout Scripture, and does not stand or fall on the King James Version of I John 5:7.

What should we do when the Jehovah's Witness speaks in a negative way about our Saviour? One possibility is that, when he comes with texts, we should insist that each text be read in its context. We must, therefore, stop him when he mentions the first text, and get our Bible to examine it in its context. Usually, however, especially at the beginning of an encounter with a Jehovah's Witness, it is best to ignore what he says and later simply show him from a clear testimony from Scripture Who the Lord Jesus really is. Politely indicate to him that he has overlooked areas of Scripture which clearly show that the Lord Jesus is indeed God.

Schnell, who wrote *Thirty Years Watchtower Slave*, says that the Jehovah's Witnesses use only six and a half per cent of Scripture. That may be an exaggeration, but it does point out that they do not know the Bible, as they pretend to, and that they do not submit to Scripture, as they claim to. They submit to and follow the prepared "sermon" given to them by headquarters. It is, therefore, usually best to ignore what they say and just let them talk, and then come and show positively the doctrine of the Trinity — especially the deity of Christ. You can even use their New World Translation to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is God!

The first place you can refer to is John 20:28. There, Thomas addresses the risen Lord in the upper room and confesses the deity of the Lord by saying, "My master and my God" (the New World Translation — NWT). The Jehovah's Witnesses in their literature (but not in their Bible) divide the exclamation and say that "my master" refers to Christ and "my God" has reference to God in heaven. Even those who do not have too much intelligence can see that they are wresting the Scriptures completely out of their context. It is breaking the clear unity of this confession and twisting the obvious meaning of Thomas' words. Notice that Christ accepts the title given to Him by Thomas. He does not reprimand or correct Thomas' confession and adoration. No, He even commends those who do likewise, who share in the faith of Thomas. The Lord Jesus says, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Happy are those who do not see and, yet believe." In this confession of Thomas' and Jesus' response we have clear evidence of the deity of Christ.

A second place one could turn to is Acts 7:59. Stephen is being stoned. "He made appeal and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit' " (NWT). The NWT indicates in the footnote that it is also possible to translate, "he made prayer." Stephen is praying. Stephen is invoking the Lord Jesus. It is sinful to pray to anyone but God. Yet Stephen the apostle is

praying to the Lord Jesus. He can, for the Lord Jesus is God. As Dr. Bruce Metzger, in his well-known article on the Jehovah's Witnesses, concludes on this text: "If, therefore, the opinion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, be correct, namely that Jesus is only a spirit-creature, then Stephen was an idolater in praying to one who was not truly God."

Another Scriptural reference one could use is Galatians 1:1. Here is it written: "Paul an apostle, neither from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God, the Father. . ." (NWT). As Bruce Metzger indicates: "Here the Apostle declares that his apostleship was derived neither from men as a source, nor through man as a channel. Instead of receiving his appointment as an apostle from or through any human source he declares emphatically that it was 'through Jesus Christ and God, the Father.'" Paul puts the two together. In the Greek this is also emphasized by the fact that there is only one preposition in front of Jesus Christ and God, the Father. Paul clearly distinguishes Jesus Christ from men and includes Him with God, the Father. This indicates that Paul is accustomed to thinking of Christ as fully divine and associating Him with the Father; for, it is noteworthy that Paul writes all this just in passing. This also indicates that he does not anticipate any argument in the Galatian churches concerning this point. No issue needs to be made of aligning Christ with God, the Father, and setting Him over against men, even though many have seen Him as a man. Christ's divinity is an accepted truth. In addition it can be mentioned that Paul had been educated as a Jew, and the rabbinic training he received emphasized that God is one. Think, for example, of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one God." Yet Paul could align Jesus with God the Father and set these two persons over against men, without any apparent struggle that he was denying the Scriptural truth that God is one.

We now come to John 10:30. There we read the words of the Lord: "I and the Father are one." The NWT suggests in the footnote (for they did not dare to put this unjustified translation in the text): "I and the Father are at unity." The Greek does not mean anything close to that. Here the Lord Jesus had much more than His one purpose with Father in mind, as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim. No, the Lord Jesus was saying: I and the Father are one in essence. The Jews understood. For, if you look in John 10, you will see in verses 31 to 33 that the Jews want to stone the Messiah for blasphemy. They understood that Jesus was making Himself equal with God, and therefore in their eyes He deserved to be stoned. The Jews understood Christ's words very clearly, but the Jehovah's Witnesses do not want to see it.

As a fifth point one could mention to the Jehovah's Witnesses that the idea of the trinity — three persons but one God — pervades the entire Scriptures. To think of the most obvious examples: the command of our Lord to baptize "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19); the benediction given after our worship services as we find it in II Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you;" also the trinitarian pattern of the blessing in Numbers 6:24-26.

An interesting point that could also be mentioned is that the Jehovah's Witnesses do their utmost to separate the Jehovah of the Old Testament from the Christ of the New Testament. However, if one takes the time with the Jehovah's Witness, one can point out to him that Old Testament passages which speak of Jehovah are in the New Testament often used of the Lord Jesus Christ. To give two examples: Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2, 3, Luke 3:4 and John 1:23 all quote Isaiah 40:3 "Listen! Someone is calling out in the wilderness: 'Clear up the way of Jehovah, YOU people! Make the highway for our God through the desert straight!' " (NWT). Isaiah 6:1, 3, 10, which tells of Isaiah's vision of the glory of Jehovah, is explained by John (John 12:37-41) as the glory of Jesus Christ. Note especially verse 41.

In trying to defend their doctrine that the Lord Jesus is but a man and is not God, the Jehovah's Witnesses have included mistranslations in the NWT. To mention a well-known example: in the Revised Standard Version (RSV), John 1:1 reads: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Jehovah's Witnesses translate it this way: "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God and the Word was a god." As any good commentary on John will demonstrate, New Testament scholars have shown that this is a frightful mistranslation. It is an ironical fact that (as B. Metzger has pointed out) the additional examples the Jehovah's Witnesses list to back up their wrong translation, actually confirm the rules of grammar that produce the translation we have in the RSV. Besides the grammatical arguments which are very strong, another strong argument that can be brought against the NWT translation of John 1 is this: to accept their faulty translation is to accept polytheism. For according to the NWT of John 1:1, John is saying that there are at least two gods while the consistent teaching of Scripture is that there is only one true God. (Reference could be made to Isaiah 43:10.) By accepting their faulty translation of John 1:1 the Jehovah's Witnesses therefore make themselves polytheists.

In spite of the mistranslations (and there are many more examples that could be mentioned), the doctrine of the Trinity pervades throughout the Bible, and even the NWT cannot get rid of that. Their translation can be used (as we saw already from the few examples just given), to show them that the Lord Jesus is truly God. When speaking of our God, especially to rationalists like the Jehovah's Witnesses, we must, however, always bear in mind that we cannot understand our triune God. Let God be God! If we could exhaustively understand our God, then He would not be God.

In *New Heavens and New Earth* (an official *Watchtower* publication published in 1953), page 27, the Jehovah's Witnesses are told that the angel of the Lord is Jesus Christ in His pre-human form. This suggests another way (using their literature) to show the Jehovah's Witnesses the Biblical teaching about Christ's divinity. If the angel of the Lord is Jesus

Christ in pre-human form, it is but a simple matter to show from the Old Testament that the angel of the Lord is equated with God. One could point, for example, to Genesis 16:7-14. In verses 10-12, "Jehovah's angel" speaks. Verse 13 reads: "Then she (Sarah) began to call the name of Jehovah, who was speaking to her. . . ."

Another approach which can work very well is as follows: One could ask a Jehovah's Witness whether he believes it is possible for Jehovah God (as they call their God) to take upon Himself a human form. Now if the Jehovah's Witness understands the question he will see that the question is a very dangerous one, and he will say, "No." For, if the Jehovah's Witness says that God is able, if he wishes, to take a human form, then he acknowledges the possibility of the incarnation. God appeared in human form, in the Old Testament. One can point to Genesis 18 where God appeared to Abraham in human form (verse 1, 2). Abraham washed the feet of his visitors, also God's feet, so to speak. He was there in human form. Abraham also gave God something to eat. They talked together and went on the road together. And God revealed to Abraham His plans for Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham pleaded with God for the sake of the righteous who may be there (verses 17, 22ff). After you have shown to the Jehovah's Witness that indeed the Lord God can take upon Himself a human form, then you can point to Isaiah 9:6 where it says that "mighty God" will be born as a child. ("Unto us a child is born . . . and His name will be called. . . mighty God.") In all likelihood, the Jehovah's Witness will get angry and he will say Christ is *a* mighty God, not *the* almighty God. But then you can gently rebuke him for having two Gods instead of one. Polytheism is not taught in the Scriptures. (Think again of Isaiah 43:10.) Then you can remind him that Jehovah God could take a human form and did take human form in the incarnation event in Bethlehem.

Redemption

Like the person of Christ, the sect's doctrine of redemption is also a very complicated area for us who are looking in, because the emphases in their doctrine change because of their progressive revelation. But one thing stands out very clearly. For the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christ delivers man from the Adamic sin, but Christ does not deliver man from the sin of every day. Jesus Christ delivers from Adam's sin only, because the results of Adam's sin were too much for us to carry and bear. Therefore, Jesus Christ delivers us from death, from the imperfect conditions of life and from guilt. We cannot get rid of these evils. God in compassion, therefore, asked Michael to exchange his spiritual existence for a human one, live a perfect life, and die to ransom the guilty from these ills.

However, although all men are now absolved and released from the penalty of Adam's sin (except Adam himself), Christ's ransom does not give or guarantee everlasting life or blessing to anyone. It only guarantees this: that every man will have another opportunity to acquire life eternal.

Christ's atoning work only secures "the blessing of a new trial." God will now reconsider your condition or situation on the basis of this new trial, which has circumstances more favourable than Adam's trial, for we know more than he did. One's obedience or disobedience will decide whether one will have eternal life or not. If the atonement of Christ is not accompanied by human works, then it is not enough to provide for eternal life. Man must show God in this new trial that he does good and pleases God with his works. Now no one will deny that we must strive to be pure and perfect before God; but, can this ever be a *condition* for eternal life *besides* the condition of Christ's sacrifice? The Jehovah's Witnesses' answer is yes. They thereby show a weak view of sin.

This weak view of sin is not surprising since they deny the deity of Christ, and they therefore deny that it takes divine power to release men from sin. This weak view of sin is also a natural consequence of their rejection of eternal punishment. "Man is not that bad. There is no hell." Their weak view of sin is also evident from the Jehovah's Witness' estimation of himself. A Jehovah's Witness considers himself unregenerated, and yet, in spite of that, he is still capable of pleasing God with his works, capable of having true faith, and capable of inheriting eternal life, if not in heaven, then on earth. (When John 3:3 speaks about being born again, the sect interprets this as having reference only to 144,000 people, no more. This number is derived from Revelation 7. However, it is clearly a symbolic number there, referring to the total number of those saved, who together form the Church, the Israel of God (Revelation 7:3-8 and, for example, Galatians 6:16.)

Because of the weak view of sin, the Jehovah's Witness must be confronted with the holiness of God. He must be confronted with the reality of a God Who demands absolute perfection and Whose standards are infinitely higher than any human standard. The Jehovah's Witness must realize that zeal can also be misplaced, as Saul's zeal was before he became Paul. "There is not a righteous man — not one!" (Romans 3:10, NWT). It is by free grace alone that man can be saved and have eternal life. The zeal of the Jehovah's Witness is the zeal of a Pharisee. To him the kingdom of God is not the free gift of a gracious Father in heaven to the unworthy, helpless sinner. The kingdom of God is instead a status symbol to be earned by zealous obedience and by getting proselytes, if need be, on the other side of the ocean. In the tradition of the Pharisees, they are indeed willing to compass land and sea to make one proselyte. (Think of Matthew 23:15.)

Under such a system of earning your place in the kingdom, a truly personal God can hardly exist. God becomes a remote Judge Who must be satisfied. God becomes impersonal and far away. The Jehovah's Witnesses therefore quite consistently reject the idea that God is everywhere. They completely ignore Psalm 139 on this point. They do not believe that God is everywhere present. As Dr. C.J. Miller has aptly put it: "The reason for this is that the legalist is planning to work his way up to God and does

not see any need for God to build any Jacob's ladder between heaven and earth."

The terrible tension of the matter is that the ladder of legalism does not go up; but, it goes down . . . to hell — to hell in the life to come, but also to a hell in the present life. Nothing is ever finished. The burden of the work that has not been finished (and that needs to be finished for entry into the kingdom) grows ever heavier. The burden of the moment wasted when it should have been used grows and grows. It affects not only the person immediately involved, but others in the home as well. Children who grow up in Jehovah's Witnesses' homes find the large demands of the religious system very destructive for normal family life. It is hell in the home of a Jehovah's Witness. They always have to be putting in their hours for the New World Society. There is no time for the family, for a place in the kingdom must be earned.

We must show the Jehovah's Witness what grace is all about. We must show him the need for repentance. We can tell him that with true repentance and true casting himself on the mercies of God, he, by grace, becomes a child of Father, part of the household and family of God. There are no two classes — those who inherit heaven (the 144,000) and those who inherit the earth. When one is born of the Spirit, one is God's child. In this connection our personal testimony and our personal witness of what it is to be a Christian is most effective. We have no ground for boasting. It is all of grace. But we do owe it to them to tell them of His gracious work of re-birth and salvation.

3. Dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses

At the Door

A Jehovah's Witness comes to your door. What should you do? Slam the door? Get rid of him? We can think here of what is written in II John 10 and 11: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work." What does this text mean? Does it give us a basis for slamming the door? We must consider these words of John, for they are often used when we speak about the Jehovah's Witnesses. To receive a man into one's house in the time of John meant that you expressed appreciation for his work and for his message; for, to receive a man into your house meant that you exercised hospitality, that you gave him food, and, if need be, a place to sleep. In this way, teachers and preachers were often provided with their necessities. They were cared for by the people they visited. Wherever they went, houses would be open to them, and thus they could continue their work. And now the apostle John says: Do not do that with those who do not bring the gospel. Do not even greet them for greeting includes the idea of wishing one well with his work. This text therefore teaches us that we in no way should help the Jehovah's Witnesses or welcome them into our homes in order to aid their cause. We must not even wish them well.

II John 10, 11 therefore does not necessarily mean that we slam the door in their face. Actually, if we too easily slam the door in their face, the Jehovah's Witness on the other side is beaming. He feels very happy and satisfied. After all, he has been told by his leaders that the church is a house of the devil, and that the people will hate him, and that he will be persecuted for his faith. Well, if you simply slam the door in front of his face you will only give him confirmation of what he has been taught and give him the satisfaction of saying: "Yes, I guess what I believe is right. My teachers were right on this point. I must be believing the right thing. It says in the Bible that we will be persecuted and now I am persecuted. See!" Slamming the door is therefore not *the* answer. You will simply entrench him in his error.

Does this mean that we should or must always listen to them or talk to them? Not necessarily. It may very well be that there is a moment and a time when you say: "No. I leave the door shut or I ask him to go on." However, we should not make this a standard, easy way out. For, when a Je-

hovah's Witness comes to our door, there is an opportunity for us to be a light in the world. Here comes a person who is a product and a slave of the *Watchtower* organization and regime and probably is not aware of it. Here is a person who is working for a salvation that can never be earned, and who does not know what it means to have peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Here is a person whose brain has received much attention. Everything has been figured out and subjected to the demands of human reason. His thinking has completely changed. Those who knew him before he became a Jehovah's Witness will not recognize him as the same person. But here is also a person for whom the Bible as the living Word of God is a closed book. His heart has never been moved by it. For the Jehovah's Witnesses do not really know their Bible. It is a popular myth that they know it, but they do not. It is also a myth that they never give up their faith. Schnell estimates that over a nine-year period at least 12,000 left the organization.

There is a Jehovah's Witness at the door. What do we do? The first thing we must remember is: do not argue. Often they come provocatively with questions such as: "Are you worried about what is happening today?" "Are you ready for the end?" This approach is deliberate and pre-planned. They want to draw you out so that they can categorize you, and have an idea how to handle you. Do not fall for it. Just remain silent and listen. It is a waste of time to argue with a Jehovah's Witness on his terms. They will have their stock answers ready, for they are the ones who started the discussion. They control the debate for it is going along their terms. Therefore remain silent and do not fall for their tactics. Let him make his presentation without interruption. When he is finished he will expect a response and eagerly await your reaction. Do not give any response. Stand there and look at him. The shock of hearing heresies can be tremendous for us. We become livid inside, and hot under the collar, because our God is being maligned and evil spoken of. But, we must stay calm and just leave his presentation, which he has so sweated over, dangling in the air.

What we must now do is try to show him, in one way or another, what it means to have a living Lord and Saviour. What we must show to that "clever" Jehovah's Witness, with all his texts stuck in his brains, is that our gospel speaks to our heart; that we have a faith, not just for the brain, but for all of life, for everything. Let us confess our faith simply and clearly before a Jehovah's Witness. Tell them of the joy we have in the Lord. Take it out of the realm of argumentation and reason and put it in the realm of your faithful confessing the Lord Jesus Christ. Who can argue with you when you say you are happy to be a Christian? Who can challenge your word when you say that the Lord Jesus satisfies all your needs in life? Who can argue with that? Now imagine if that Jehovah's Witness standing in front of you heard the same thing door after door, that all the people simply testified their joy in the Lord, and that in Him they had everything they needed. It will leave him helpless. He will ask himself:

“What have they got anyway? I work hard to try to get some peace, but what kind of joy and peace have they got?” It will make him stop and think whether the gospel of the Jehovah’s Witnesses really does give the same joy and salvation. After he hears your simple confession of faith, he will probably leave you. According to an ex-Jehovah’s Witness, those who made a simple, personal testimony of their faith in Christ were the ones who made the most lasting impression on her. When she went to bed at night, she would think about those people and about what they had said.

Let us assume that the Jehovah’s Witness who has left comes back or that the Jehovah’s Witness is still standing there. What are we going to do? He starts now on a certain point of doctrine which they, of course, claim is based on the Bible. If you have heard a Jehovah’s Witness talk, you will know that the words stream out like a torrent and the texts follow one after another. Slow him down! When the first text is mentioned, tell him you must get your Bible and take the time to read the passage through together. Do not be rushed. See the passage in its context and only then go on to his next text. A Jehovah’s Witness cannot stand that kind of treatment. The careful investigating of the Scriptures in this way gets him “up tight.” They are not used to figuring out these things for themselves. They get their information directly from headquarters, and they are only used to regurgitating what they have been taught. Therefore, the careful, meticulous reading and comparing of Scriptures is very frustrating for him. But, you can teach him a lot by reverently opening the Bible and showing him how much you value that precious Word of our Lord. You will leave a lasting impression on him, and you will show him that you indeed *use* the Bible in your daily life, that you can work with it, and that it *is* your possession, a possession that is dear to you.

If the same Jehovah’s Witness keeps coming back in further attempts to persuade you, one should not keep talking with him indefinitely. According to Titus 3:10 there is a limit to our speaking with the same heretic. If, for example, he comes a third time a different approach must be used, for you know that you cannot simply keep talking with him. One approach that has been suggested is to ask personal questions so that you can better gauge the commitment of the Jehovah’s Witness to the sect. Ask him what his name is and how many hours he devotes to the New World Society. From the number of hours a month he works for the sect, you will have a pretty good idea of how zealous he is. If, for instance, he says that he spends seven hours a month for the cause, then you know that he is not very strong. Perhaps you could win him over. (For an active member, an absolute minimum of ten hours a month is typical, but the ideal is about sixty hours per month. Those designated “pioneers” spend at least one hundred hours per month spreading *Watchtower* propaganda and witnessing.) Next, one could ask: What is your address? Where do you live? Usually they will not give it, for they are not supposed to. One should indicate one’s concern for him and that one wants to visit him. This will scare off a Jehovah’s Witness if he is zealous. He will never come again for he

will not want you in his house. However, asking for the address may also be an opener for those Jehovah's Witnesses who are themselves becoming troubled and would like a visit.

If they give you their name and address, then work on them, perhaps with another church member. Work on them! This takes *much* preparation and should not be entered lightly and without prayer. In our preparations of becoming more and more familiar with the Biblical teachings, we must outdo them. We, after all, have been entrusted with the gospel of grace! They work at it and work at it hours on end, memorizing the sermonettes they get so that they can feed it to the public. We, too, must *work* at it prayerfully, so that we can defend the true gospel of our Lord, and so that the Lord may be pleased to use us as His instruments to convince those who do not believe.

Further Pointers

There are some more general pointers that could be mentioned. We should never accept any of their literature. This will frustrate them immensely, for they believe that their literature is God's Word. Your firmness in refusing their "free" literature will also soften up their zeal somewhat for the next person they visit.

Do not get side-tracked. They are *very* good at bringing new subjects into the discussion, especially when they feel it getting pretty warm. Do not be taken in by such diversions!! It is a favourite tactic.

Deal only with the fundamental errors. There are so many things to talk about, but stick to one or two main points. Otherwise, you accomplish nothing and most of your time will be spent listening to their "proof texts" on any topic they please to speak about.

Stress the strongest Scriptural arguments against their heresies and insist that they see it. Do not leave the text until they say: "Yes, indeed, that is what it says." *Insist* that they acknowledge that! If they run to another subject, ignore it and bring them back to the text in question.

Check out all the Scripture passages that he quotes and investigate the context.

And, above all, let us show the Jehovah's Witnesses that faith and doctrine is more than just a matter of the brain. As Schnell has noted (in *How to Witness to Jehovah's Witnesses*, page 25): "The doctrines Jehovah's Witnesses teach are upheld by reason, and are coloured with fine shades of interpretations. The 'doctrines' once delivered to the saints are upheld by the Holy Spirit, and come by revelation and faith. They grow into your consciousness as your faith increases. You can't attain that sort of thing by arguing, so don't try." Show the Jehovah's Witness the grace of God in Jesus Christ and the salvation that He has brought about for all those who believe. The Jehovah's Witness trapped in a works-righteousness system is driven by the fear that he will not make it to get a spot in the kingdom. Show him the grace of our Lord.

We operate under a tremendous handicap when we are speaking

with Jehovah's Witnesses. As far as they are concerned, we are a tool of the devil and not to be trusted. They are told that we hate them and so on. We must therefore take pains to show our genuine compassion for those in bondage—and to point out the basics of the hope in us because they do not know the basics. The Jehovah's Witness does not know the basics like the greatness of his sin and the magnitude of God's grace, Who sent the Son Who took *all* our weaknesses and sin to His account and set us free in love and righteousness.

Summation

There is good literature available for further study on the Jehovah's Witnesses (see below). We must more and more train ourselves — also to meet the challenges of this sect. It is a difficult field, for the Jehovah's Witnesses are very, very well-trained. Their training system has been described by people, who have been involved in the sect, as a brain-washing system equalled by none.

However, the Jehovah's Witnesses really have little to offer, although they have tremendous zeal. They walk the streets constantly. But they are driven by fear.

We have a lot to offer. We have great treasures from our God. Does our zeal match those riches? Do we realize the greatness of our salvation? Are we *moved* not by fear but by gratitude? Think about that next time you see a Jehovah's Witness and do not slam the door too easily. Perhaps the Lord will use us to snatch some out of the fire (II Timothy 2:25ff.).

C. VAN DAM

FOR FURTHER READING

E.C. Gruss. *Apostles of Denial*. An examination and expose of the history, doctrines, and claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses. (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970.) A most useful book, containing much information.

W.J. Schnell. *How to Witness to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961) and by the same author *Into the Light of Christianity: The Basic Doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Light of Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959.) Both of these books are very practical and can be used with much profit. Schnell's *Thirty Years a Watchtower Slave*. The confessions of a Converted Jehovah's Witness (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1971) can also be mentioned.

Good books dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses along with other cults are: A.A. Hoeksema, *The Four Major Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); G.R. Lewis. *Confronting the Cults* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966); J.K. Van Baalen. *The Chaos of Cults* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

Two excellent articles that should be mentioned: Bruce M. Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal" (available from the Theological Book Agency, Princeton, New Jersey and originally published in *Theology Today*, Volume 10 [1953-54]). C.J. Miller, "Approaching the Cultist with the Gospel" (available from Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA 19118).