

The Gospel
according to
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

By
JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

THE GOSPEL

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*"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him
who called you in the grace of Christ
and turning to a different gospel"*

— Galatians 1:6

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PREFACE

Jehovah's Witnesses receive less attention than they deserve. Founded little more than a century ago by a draper named Charles Taze Russell in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, they are now represented in almost every country of the world. Wholly unorthodox by traditional Christian standards, their teachings are not without appeal to an ever-increasing number of people, as evidenced by a comparison of statistics in their recent Year Books.

The number of books dealing with the Jehovah's Witnesses is not impressive. Only a dozen major works have appeared in the last twenty-five years, and most of these are now out of print or too dated to be of any real use to persons seeking information on current Watch Tower issues and teachings.

An overall review of the books reveals that most aspects of the New World Society have been fairly well covered. *Armageddon Around the Corner; Year of Doom – 1975*, and *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, have provided good background information on the Witnesses. The Watch Tower's doctrines have been presented in *The Theology of Jehovah's Witnesses*, and *Jehovah's Witnesses – What They Believe*. Stories of converts from the ranks of the Witnesses have been told in *Thirty Years A Watch Tower Slave*, and *Why I Left Jehovah's Witnesses*. Only in the field of apologetics – Christian answers to the Watch Tower's false teachings – has this treatment been inadequate. The notable exception to this was Martin and Klann's *Jehovah of the Watchtower*; although even this book did not deal exclusively with apologetics, but also delved into the history of the movement. Nor was it as comprehensive as it could have been; for it left many of the minor, but nonetheless important, Watch Tower teachings unanswered. For many years unobtainable, this book was revised and reissued in 1974. Most of its contents, along with additional information, was incorporated into Walter Martin's monumental work, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Another book in the same vein as *The Kingdom of the Cults* is Anthony Hoekema's *The Four Major Cults*, which has an excellent section (also available separately in booklet form), dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses.

Why I Left Jehovah's Witnesses (mentioned above) and *Into the Light of Christianity* are also concerned with apologetics, but neither book can be recommended without reserve. Both attempt to bolster their arguments, especially in regard to the deity of Christ and the immortality of the human soul, on unsound Scriptural texts, which alert Witnesses could triumphantly point to as incorrect. In many cases the fault lies in the sometimes inaccurate translation of the King James Version of the Bible, which both authors have used as their basic text. But this is no excuse, and from previous experience as Jehovah's Witnesses, the authors should have been aware that the use of faulty texts reveals their own ignorance and confirms the vigilant Witness in his belief of his superior knowledge of the Bible.

Marley Cole's *Jehovah's Witnesses – The New World Society* was so condescending to the Witnesses as to be almost pro-Watch Tower – so much so, that the Watch Tower hierarchy gave it their seal of approval and even recommended that it be read by the Witnesses themselves. Two other notable books, Royston Pike's *Jehovah's Witnesses* and H.H. Stroup's *Jehovah's Witnesses* have been out of print for many years, and though Stroup's pioneer study was re-issued in 1967, its 1945 text is of little use in describing present-day conditions in the Society.

This, then, is another book on Jehovah's Witnesses. Does it have a purpose? Does it fulfil a need? Does it have anything to say that has not already been said?

All three questions can be answered affirmatively. Its purpose is to acquaint or reacquaint a Christian with the Scripturally unsound foundations upon which Pastor Russell's Watch Tower Society has been erected. It fulfils a need in supplying a sound Scriptural basis for every important Christian doctrine. Incorporating much of what has already been said on the Watch Tower's major Scriptural deviations, this study also examines many of the minor, but equally important, Christian doctrines that are constantly being attacked by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Watch Tower's multitudinous publications never tire of highlighting the divisions that afflict the Christian Churches and of pouring scorn on the honest attempts to effect a reconciliation. But despite the Watch Tower's invective and its predictions that these divisions will continue, the Churches are drawing closer together as the Holy Spirit continues to make them more aware of the scandal of their divisions, and their mutual need for each other in the face of the growing complexity of the problems of the modern world.

A closer study of each other's doctrines is revealing that there is a far greater field of agreement than was previously thought; and there is every reason to hope that the Spirit who has begun this work of reunion will not fail to bring it to fruition. Aware of the unity that has already been achieved between Catholics and Protestants and the Eastern Rite Churches, and the common hope that they have in Christ Jesus, the author, who is himself a Roman Catholic, has not hesitated to speak of the "Christian Church" and the "Christian Faith" when comparing the doctrinal differences that exist between them and the Jehovah's Witnesses. This is not an attempt to minimize the divisions that still separate orthodox Christianity, but these divisions are not so great that one or another of the above groups can no longer be called Christian; and as there is but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5), then to a greater or lesser extent, all must belong to that one Church founded by Christ; and being in the one house of God, they must continue to strive for that unity of mind and heart that brothers in Christ should have (Jn 17:21).

There is every likelihood that Jehovah's Witnesses would not be swayed by any amount of Scriptural evidence that is contrary to the Watch Tower's teachings, but this should in no way be construed as a sign of bad faith. It is a sign of immaturity in a person's Christian development that immediately causes him to consign a Witness, or any other cult member, to eternal damnation because he is preaching radical doctrines under the guise of authentic Christianity. The thorough indoctrination the Witnesses have received has conditioned them to see everything through Watch-Tower-coloured spectacles. They have developed a faith in the Watch Tower so great that it is inconceivable to them that their interpretation of the Scriptures could be wrong. As far as they are concerned, the Watch Tower Society alone, out of all faiths, offers the true apostolic faith that is without mystery and without contradiction. Everything else is counterfeit and an abomination in the sight of Jehovah God.

Fifteen hundred years ago the mother of the future St Augustine approached a learned bishop and begged him to convince her son of the errors of the Manichean sect which he had joined. The bishop replied that Augustine was too thoroughly ensnared in the novelties of his new-found religion to be able to benefit from sound reasoning. He cautioned patience until the initial enthusiasm had waned, and he comforted her with the assurance that it was not possible for the child of so many tears to perish (*Confessions of St Augustine*, Book 3, Chapter 12). This

then, is the position of so many of the Witnesses. Most of them have probably entered the New World Society within the past ten years or so, and because of the careful training of the Society, and the feeling of expectancy it constantly engenders, their original fervour may still be reasonably strong.

The remarkable growth of Jehovah's Witnesses from an insignificant sect to an activist organization numbering almost two and a quarter million is reason enough for a book such as this to be written. (Figures released in *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1979, pp.18ff, reveal a twelve month increase of 95,052 baptized Witnesses, bringing their total number to 2,182,341. See also, the Witnesses *1979 Yearbook* for full Service Year reports.)

Although this book is a study of the Watch Tower's teachings in the light of the Holy Scriptures, it should not be regarded as a textbook of chapters and verses necessary to answer the Witnesses' arguments. It sets out a concise explanation of a doctrine as it is held by orthodox Christians, and it gives the Watch Tower's definition of the same doctrine from their official publications. It then discusses relevant Scriptural texts that are most used to prove or disprove the truth of the doctrine.

Because of the nature of this study the text may sometimes appear quite technical, but this is necessary in order to answer as fully as possible the arguments put forward by the Witnesses to bolster their teachings. Students of the New World Society, on the other hand, are likely to object that I have failed to give sufficient space to other important points. But I have not been unmindful or indifferent. It is indeed a problem of space, and because of this, the original text has been shortened by some 30,000 words. I hope there are still sufficient indicators along the way to lead the interested student to the answers he may be seeking. Meanwhile, I will be happy, within the limits of time available, to enter into correspondence with any readers concerning questions arising from the contents of this book. All correspondence should be addressed to the author through his publishers.

Knowing full well that Jehovah's Witnesses thrive on Scriptural debate, I am firmly convinced that discussions with the Witnesses can be fruitful only if they are based on the Bible. Personal testimonies and historical reasoning may benefit a few individuals, but in the end, a dialogue between Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses must always return to the Bible.

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A Short History

The sect known today as Jehovah's Witnesses is just over one hundred years old. Former President Nathan Homer Knorr did not like it said that his organization was "founded" only in 1872; he preferred to say that the Witnesses "broke in on history" a century ago, thereby suggesting a continuity preceding 1872.

The year 1872 marked the commencement of a Bible-study class conducted by a twenty-year-old draper's assistant named Charles Taze Russell. Having listened in to a Second Adventist meeting held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, two years earlier, the young Presbyterian-turned-Congregationalist was very impressed by their teaching on the imminence of Christ's Second Coming. He began an intense study of the Bible, especially the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, and two years later he felt competent enough to form his own study class with a handful of like-minded Bible devotees.

When the Adventist predictions for the expected return of Christ were not realized in 1874, Charles Russell was led to adopt the proposal of a Rochester Adventist leader named Nelson Barbour, that Christ had actually returned in 1874, but invisibly. Russell himself had been thinking along these lines, and he was delighted that someone else was of the same mind.

Barbour had reached his conclusion through the study of Benjamin Wilson's newly published *Emphatic Diaglott*, a Greek-English interlinear translation of the Bible. Wilson had translated *parousia*, the Greek word for "coming", as "presence", and in accepting this rendering of the Greek, Barbour concluded that Christ could be "present" without being seen.

Finding themselves in complete agreement on the supposed invisible presence of Christ, the Pittsburg Adventists under Russell decided to amalgamate with Barbour's Rochester Adventists so that they could provide a more effective witness to Christ. After giving some much-

needed capital to Barbour's ailing *Herald of the Morning* magazine, Russell became its co-editor.

With Second Adventism built on the belief that Christ's return was imminent, it was natural to expect that there would be further speculation as to when this would occur. Russell had already written a booklet on the supposed invisible Second Coming, called *The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return*, but it still left unanswered the question of the visible manifestation of Christ at the end of time. Realizing the consequences of failure, Russell was content to remain uncommitted on an exact date for Christ's Second Coming, but not so with Barbour.

The Rochester Adventist leader remained firmly convinced that the exact date of Christ's visible manifestation was hidden somewhere in the Bible and that it was only necessary to find the right key to unlock the secret knowledge that the Scriptures tell us is known only to God (cf. Mt 24:36; Acts 1:7). Further juggling of Scripture passages from the Book of Daniel led Barbour to believe that 1878 – three and a half years from the invisible return of October, 1874 – was to be the date of the Second Coming.

In the meantime, Russell and Barbour were beginning to have differences of opinion over certain doctrinal issues, and the failure of Barbour's latest prediction that 1878 would usher in the end of the world, brought matters to a head. Believing that the writing was on the wall for Second Adventism, Russell resigned as co-editor of the *Herald* and withdrew his financial support. The loose links he had with the Second Adventists were thus finally severed, and Russell was on his own. Henceforth, he and the Adventists were enemies. He still retained the Adventist title of "Pastor" Russell, which had been conferred upon him by his Bible-study class, but within a few short years the avowed anti-Adventist crusader would be able to point to a higher proportion of Russellite beliefs than Adventist teachings in his growing organization.

The Watchtower

Following his break with Second Adventism, Charles Russell, now 26 years old, made some important decisions. Convinced that he was not cut out to be a draper, he sold the shares he held in his father's chain of clothing stores and resolved to use the money for the further advancement of his evolving beliefs. In 1879 he published the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, with an initial

printing of 6,000 copies. Published today as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, the bi-monthly magazine now boasts an average printing run of 9,200,000 copies per issue (January 1, 1979 figures).

In 1879 Charles Russell married Maria Ackley, a young student from his Bible-study class, and for a time she became his partner in the Watch Tower enterprise which he and his associates had founded in 1884. Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society, the name given to the corporation, was changed twelve years later to the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Another corporation was established in New York in 1909, as the Peoples Pulpit Association of New York, but this name was also changed in 1939 to the same name as its sister corporation in Pennsylvania. A third corporation was formed in England in 1914 as the International Bible Students Association, and it is through these three corporations that Russell and his successors have governed the activities of their followers until this present day.

Pastor Russell's literary career is mainly centered around the six volumes of his *Studies in the Scriptures*. The first volume, *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, appeared in 1886, and the sixth volume, called *The Finished Mystery*, which was made up from Pastor Russell's unpublished writings and sermons, was published posthumously in 1917. It is estimated that the seven volumes of the Pastor's writings sold something like sixteen million copies.

During his lifetime Pastor Russell became quite a notorious figure. His public and private life was hardly compatible with the sort of life one might expect from a "man of God"; but as these aspects of the Pastor's checkered career have been well chronicled elsewhere by other writers, there is no need to list them here.

Joseph Franklin Rutherford

Charles Taze Russell died on October 31, 1916, and the transition from Russellism to Rutherfordism proved to be rather stormy. More than one corporation member aspired to the post of the presidency, but by skilful manoeuvring, the former lawyer for the Watch Tower organization, "Judge" Joseph Franklin Rutherford, not only gained complete control of the Society but also eliminated all internal opposition to his leadership by falling back on a constitutional technicality of the corporation charter, whereby all officers of the corporation who had not been elected in Pennsylvania, were not legally entitled to hold office.

Until his own death in 1942, the Judge was the "Voice" of the Watch Tower. A short term in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for his rabid anti-war efforts during the early years of his reign failed to silence the vociferous Judge, and his incarceration made him a hero in the eyes of his followers. From the time of his release in 1919, when the Appeals Court reversed the sentence against him, the Judge began the work of rebuilding the Society along the lines he wanted.

The official recognition of the break with Russellism came in 1931, when Judge Rutherford gave the Pastor's International Bible Students their new name of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Aside from his aggressiveness towards all other religions, the Judge proved to be an able leader. During the quarter-century of his reign he introduced many innovations that greatly increased the Watch Tower's field of influence. All modern means of communication were utilized by the Witnesses in the spreading of their "Kingdom Message". The Watch Tower broadcast over its own radio station, WBBR; "Kingdom Publishers" carried portable gramophones to play recordings of Judge Rutherford's sermons; and even sound trucks were used to carry the "good news" of the coming Battle of Armageddon, when the wicked would be destroyed, Satan overthrown, and a paradisiacal kingdom would be established on earth for all the faithful Witnesses who were not destined to be among the 144,000 "Anointed Ones" who would be taken to heaven as "spirit creatures".

To differentiate between the 144,000 spirit creatures¹ who were destined for an eternity of heavenly bliss, and the "great multitude" of the earth-bound faithful, Rutherford introduced the class-system into his organization. That he expected the great Battle of Armageddon to take place within his own lifetime, or the lifetime of his followers, is evident from his famous slogan: "Millions now living will never die".

Unfortunately, cancer robbed the seventy-two-years-old Joseph Franklin Rutherford of his chance of being amongst the "millions who would never taste death", and today he is hardly mentioned in official Watch Tower publications. The voluminous writings of the Judge, of which his twenty-two full length books were only a part, have long since been consigned to the scrap heap of human ignorance, where he himself assigned the seven volumes of Pastor Russell's discredited Scripture Studies, after he had weeded out the remainder of the Pastor's faithful followers.

The cults that grew up around the personalities of Russell and Rutherford have been effectively eradicated in favour of the more

impersonal anonymity that now pervades the Watch Tower organization from the top down.

Nathan Homer Knorr

The de-personalization of the Watch Tower hierarchy began soon after the death of Judge Rutherford. Nathan Homer Knorr, whose unanimous election to the top post of the Watch Tower contrasted sharply with the struggle that marked his predecessor's rise to power, was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1905. He joined Pastor Russell's organization as a young lad of sixteen and began work as a packer in the Watch Tower printing plant. His steady rise through the ranks to the presidency gave him firsthand knowledge of every phase of Watch Tower administration and eminently fitted him for the task of leading the Witnesses to glory.

Following Nathan Knorr's accession, the cultic overtones surrounding the personalities of Russell and Rutherford began to be played down. Rutherford had already done much to lay the ghost of the former Pastor, and now he began to suffer the same fate. Circulation of his books was slowly curtailed, and he was less frequently quoted in the Watch Tower's publications. Knowledge of God's plan for mankind was said to be still evolving towards perfection, and because of the progressive stages of revelation, the Watch Tower now stated that there were many things of which Russell and Rutherford were in ignorance. The Watch Tower's prohibition of blood transfusions² can undoubtedly be classed as one of the many things of which Pastor Russell and Judge Rutherford were "in ignorance".

To lessen further the chance of personality cults forming around individual members of the organization, the Watch Tower ceased to publish the names of the authors in its official publications. The reason given for the anonymity was that the increasing complexity of the subjects often required that more than one author contribute to the work and that crediting multiple authorship was neither desirable nor necessary. This procedure has the added advantage of shielding the reputation of any prominent individual authors against charges of ignorance or falsehood. No doubt, this latter consideration was taken into account when the new move towards anonymity was first proposed.

One of the effects of this anonymity on the rank and file Jehovah's Witnesses is to make them less conscious of the fact that they are being guided by individuals. By transferring all emphasis from fallible indi-

viduals to an organization, the Watch Tower has less difficulty in getting its members to accept this organization as divinely guided. By emphasizing the organization rather than the individual, the Watch Tower has been able to achieve an equality of the masses so that each member is now made to feel that because he is part of the organization, he is in no way inferior to any other member. In practical terms, this beautiful ideal remains far from realized, and no Jehovah's Witness is an authority unto himself, however much he might proclaim it. His interpretation of the Bible conforms exactly to the Watch Tower's interpretation, otherwise he does not remain a Witness for very long.

Nathan Knorr died on June 8, 1977, after a long illness, and Frederick W. Franz, the eighty-three-years-old vice-president was elected to the post of president on June 22, 1977. On September 7, 1977, the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses was enlarged, and it now has eighteen members to direct the world-wide growth of the New World Society.

There is no doubt that the Jehovah's Witnesses are on the march. In 1872 they were one of a number of Adventist splinter groups; today, the Watch Tower organization claims the allegiance of almost two and a quarter million followers,³ and it expects to maintain this rate of growth until the great Battle of Armageddon⁴ arrives to write finish to its work.

Such, then, is a brief history of the New World Society of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Because the nature of this study is doctrinal rather than historical, it has been necessary to omit much that is interesting in the lives of its past and present leaders, some of which gives valuable insight into their personalities, but this has been necessary to allow the greatest possible coverage of Watch Tower teachings. The books listed in the Preface and the Bibliography will be of assistance to readers seeking a more comprehensive history of the movement.

The Witnesses and the Bible

The Bible is one of the best known books in the world. Either whole or in part, it is revered as the Word of God by more than twelve hundred million people. Seldom does a year pass without the appearance of a new translation that seeks to clarify still further the meaning of the ancient text and make it more readable for modern man. As each new translation appears it is usually subjected to careful scrutiny by competent scholars to see whether it is a faithful rendering of the original languages and conveys the generally accepted meaning intended by the inspired authors.

The Christian Greek Scriptures

In 1950 a new translation of the New Testament appeared, called *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*. It was published by the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of New York, for use by Jehovah's Witnesses, and members of the sect immediately hailed it as a milestone in scholarly achievement. The reviews of Scripture scholars of other faiths were not so kind. In an article titled "How Not to Translate the Bible" Professor H.H. Rowley of the University of Manchester, a most distinguished and able Scripture scholar, took the New World Translators to task for their duplicity. He wrote:

"They profess to offer a rendering into modern English which is as faithful as possible. In fact, the jargon which they use is often 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."¹

Not every review was as blunt as that of Professor Rowley's, but even the most sympathetic of reviewers were forced to admit that the translators had not been entirely faithful in the rendering of the original languages into modern English.²

The general consensus of opinion among the reviewers was that where no sectarian issues were involved, the New World Translation was acceptable. But there was unanimous agreement that certain words and passages had definitely been tailored to fit preconceived doctrinal ideas.

The Hebrew Scriptures

Undismayed by the poor reception their New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures received from non-sectarian scholars, the Watch Tower's Translating Committee immediately went ahead with their plans to publish the Old Testament in five volumes. The first volume, covering the first eight books of the Bible, from Genesis to Ruth, appeared in 1953, and the other four volumes appeared at intervals over the next seven years. The fifth and final volume was published in 1960.

The Society was aware that a six-volume Bible was too unwieldy for common use, and at a district assembly at the Manchester City Football Ground in England in 1960, President Knorr, after announcing the completion and release of the final volume containing Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets, went on to say:

“Although completing this task of over ten years' duration, the New World Bible Translation Committee does not feel that it should now dissolve. We are informed that it now sets itself to go over the entire translation and work out certain refinements in it and bring it all together in one volume, without the copious footnotes and appendixes. Then it can be easily carried in one hand, for efficient use in the world-wide field of Jehovah's Witnesses' ministry.”³

The New World Translation

The dream became a reality in 1961, when the long-awaited edition made its *début* and immediately assumed pride of place amongst all other Watch Tower publications.

Although the Witnesses are prepared to argue their beliefs from any version of the Bible, they naturally attempt to have their own New

World Translation accepted as the standard text by claiming that it is a modern translation by reputable scholars (who prefer to remain anonymous – see Chapter One) and is uninfluenced by the religious traditions that have coloured all previous translations of the Bible.

In the Foreword to the 1950 edition of the *Christian Greek Scriptures* the Watch Tower mentions the good that has been accomplished by making the Bible readily available to the people in their own language. It continues:

“But honesty compels us to remark that, while each of them has its points of merit, they have fallen victim to the power of human traditionalism in varying degrees. Consequently, religious traditions, hoary with age, have been taken for granted and gone unchallenged and uninvestigated. These have been interwoven into the translations to colour the thought. In support of a preferred religious view, an inconsistency and unreasonableness have been insinuated into the teachings of the inspired writings.”⁴

The translators of the *New World Bible* assure us that a primary purpose of their version of the Sacred Scriptures has been to avoid this pitfall, and that “this very effort accounts for distinguishing this differently as a translation of the ‘*Christian Greek Scriptures*’”,⁵ because one of these traditionalisms has been the use of what the Witnesses regard as erroneous terms in designating the two sections of the Bible as Old and New Testaments. Perhaps these terms are not as precise as possible, but they have become accepted as a standard literary device for distinguishing between the pre-Christian and post-Christian books of the Bible, and it is unlikely that the Watch Tower Society will ever succeed in getting people to use the terms preferred in the Witnesses’ “*Christian Greek Scriptures*” and “*Hebrew Scriptures*”.

Authority of the Scriptures

Before we consider various features of the Witnesses’s *New World Translation*, it will be well to pause for a moment and examine the position the Bible holds in Watch Tower theology. Although the Witnesses make bold statements about the Bible being their sole authority, the issue becomes somewhat clouded when it is held up to close investigation.

A typical statement regarding the position of the Bible is found in the Watch Tower textbook, *What Has Religion Done For Mankind?*:

"The Holy Scriptures of the Bible are the standard by which to judge all religions."⁶ In a more recent book, *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, it is stated: "The religion that is approved by God must agree in all its details with the Bible",⁷ and, "Knowledge of the Bible and of God's will is essential for God's approval . . . To please God, then, one's religion must be in full harmony with the Bible and be applied in every activity of life."⁸ Similar remarks may also be found in *Let God Be True*, on pages nine and eighteen.

These statements may all seem quite unequivocal, but if they are to be properly understood, they should all have the rider: "The Bible is the ultimate authority — but only when it is interpreted by the Watch Tower hierarchy". That this rider reflects the true Watch Tower attitude towards the Bible is evident from the following quotation:

"Today Jehovah has an organization to help you put the word of truth deep into your heart. Jehovah is giving spiritual nourishment to all fruit-producing branches through study of the Bible and the study helps provided through the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in regular weekly meetings. If one believes he can derive all needed benefit from personal study at home, without going to meetings and studying in company with others, he is deceiving himself. The congregation is as a lifeline for all Christians . . . But if one begins to think wrongly in his heart towards the organization of Jehovah, he will begin to show it . . .

"Even though one has for a time partaken of the spiritual food in company with Christ Jesus, if he becomes half-hearted he will sooner or later find himself outside of Jehovah's organization, spiritually weak and, finally, like a branch that is cut off for not producing fruit."⁹

The disadvantages in using the *New World Translation* as a common text is that for most people it is an unfamiliar translation that has been designed primarily to aid the Witnesses in the spreading of their teachings amongst people who have little knowledge of the Bible. This becomes apparent as soon as a comparison is made with other versions. In view of this, it is well to be aware of a few of the more obvious defects and errors of the Witnesses' Bible.

The Divine Name

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the *New World Translation* is the use of the word "Jehovah" as the name of God. Ever since Judge

Rutherford designated the International Bible Students as the Witnesses of Jehovah, they have felt obliged to proclaim this name from the housetops, and to defend it against anyone who would dare to minimize its importance:

“True Christians are therefore under the obligation to bear God’s name or be called by God’s name, that is, to be called the people of Jehovah, God’s people. So what about Christendom?”

“Christendom has shunned that name. She has acted contrary to the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God: ‘Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9, 10, AV). Christendom has not sanctified the name of the heavenly Father, Jehovah. In most recent times her effort has been to leave that sacred name out of English translations of the Bible completely.”¹⁰

What are the facts? Should the name “Jehovah” have the significance for Christians that Jehovah’s Witnesses claim? If it is true that the God of Israel is called by his personal name more frequently than by all other titles combined,¹¹ why is it that it is so seldom used today?

The answers to these questions are long and involved, but because of the emphasis the Witnesses place on the use of God’s name, it will be well to give a brief explanation of its origin and significance. The following quotation points out the reason for the confusion surrounding the pronunciation of God’s name:

“In Hebrew, God’s name comes from the four letters YHWH, which are all consonants. Since ancient written Hebrew had no vowels. The reader had to supply the vowel sounds. However, over the centuries, the correct pronunciation became uncertain.”¹²

The Witnesses admit that the use of the name “Jehovah” does not extend back beyond about the 12th century A.D.:

“Bible translation that honors God must, above all, do justice to his distinctive name, which since as early as the year 1100 has been translated ‘Jehovah’.”¹³

Not True Pronunciation

Because of the incontrovertible evidence that is now available, Jehovah's Witnesses have been forced to abandon their long-time defence of "Jehovah" as the true pronunciation of God's name:

"Even though 'Jehovah' may not be the way the Hebrews originally pronounced the name, that is not a valid argument for not using it. The name 'Jehovah' preserves the four letters representing God's name in Hebrew and has long been recognized as his personal name. It distinguishes him from the millions of man-made gods, such as the 330 million gods of India, which cannot be said for the common title 'Lord'. While rejecting the name Jehovah, claiming that it is not the accurate Hebrew pronunciation of God's name, the churches inconsistently use the proper name Jesus, although that is not the accurate Hebrew or Greek pronunciation of the name of the Son of God. By suppressing Jehovah's name and substituting titles for it, the churches misrepresent him, making him appear to be nameless."¹⁴

To understand some of the problems associated with the translation of the Old Testament, the following quotation may be of help:

"nthbgnnnggdcrtdthhvnsndthrth"

The text, of course, is the opening verse from the Book of Genesis, giving only the consonants. Add to this the fact that Hebrew writing contained no punctuation marks or capital letters, and that confusion often developed over the similarity between certain Hebrew characters, one can readily appreciate the difficulties confronting the translators.

Hebrew speech naturally contained vowel sounds, but the indication of vowels in Hebrew writing was a development that did not occur until sometime after the 6th or 7th centuries A.D., when various symbols were added to the consonants to indicate the position of vowels. By the 10th century A.D., consonantal texts began to be supplied with proper vowels, thereby giving us the first vocalized texts. The earliest use of the word Jehovah belongs to this later period, and it is to the translating of this word that we now turn our attention.

The Hebrew consonants which appear in English as YHWH were read with the vowels of *Adonai* (LORD), a-o-a, thereby creating the hybrid "Jehovah" of the English Bibles. Because of a later reluctance

to pronounce God's personal name, a development which was seemingly the result of an overzealous application of the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). Yahweh — which most scholars now agree is the more correct pronunciation of God's name — began to be replaced with *Adonai*, both in ordinary speech and in liturgical use, the exception being its use by the high priest on solemn festivals.¹⁵

The meaning of the word Yahweh is open to various interpretations. It is usually translated in our Bibles as "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14), and this may be as close to the true meaning as we will ever come. But an interpretation which was proposed by W.F. Albright has found a measure of acceptance by many scholars. After years of intensive study of the subject, the late Professor Albright suggested that Yahweh was only the first word of the entire name *Yahweh Asher Yihweh* — "He causes to be what comes into existence" — thereby designating God as creator.

The "Jehovah" of the Witnesses, which has resulted from a mistaken application of the vowels of *Adonai*, is therefore erroneous and no justification exists for its continued use.

More than forty years ago, when Judge Rutherford thought to distinguish his followers by calling them Witnesses of Jehovah, this was the popular pronunciation of the personal name of the God of Israel. But today, while admitting that Jehovah may not be the correct form of God's name, they prefer to retain it "because of people's familiarity with it since the 14th century".¹⁶ Surely this very attitude towards the acceptance of an incorrect name of God merits for the Witnesses their own condemnation as victims of "religious traditionalism" that accepts a usage "hoary with age" and knowingly promotes an even wider circulation of it amongst their members?

"Jehovah" in the New Testament

The main reason for the furor created by the appearance of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, was its unwarranted use of "Jehovah" in the New Testament, against all available evidence to the contrary. The following example of pseudo-scholarship is just one of the means the Watch Tower organization employs to justify the use of "Jehovah" in the New Testament, but it reveals the lengths to which it is prepared to go to defend the indefensible.

On pages 16-17 of the *Christian Greek Scriptures*, the Witnesses point to the passage in Luke 4:16-21, and claim that they are justified in inserting "Jehovah" into the New Testament in this instance, for the text of Isaiah 61:1 contained the tetragrammaton (YHWH), and Jesus would have pronounced the divine name when reading this passage in the synagogue.

What the Witnesses fail to realize, or make clear, is that the Gospel of Luke is not recording the text of Isaiah, but the words of Jesus; and following the customary practice of the Jews of his day, Jesus would have substituted *Adonai* (LORD), for the tetragrammaton, so he would have said: "The Spirit of *Adonai* is upon me . . ." — exactly as Luke has recorded it, and not the way the New World Society wants us to believe.¹⁷

Another straw the Translation Committee grasped in support of the use of the word "Jehovah" in their New World Translation was the discovery of a fragment of LXX papyrus (the pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament) containing the second half of the Book of Deuteronomy, in which the normal Greek equivalents of the divine name (i.e., *Kyrios* and *Theos*) were replaced by the tetragrammaton written in Aramaic characters. This isolated fragment was supposed to "flatly disprove" the "popular theory" that the reason for the absence of the divine name in the New Testament resulted from its absence in the LXX.

The discovery of one fragment of LXX papyrus containing a transliteration of the tetragrammaton, can scarcely be considered "proof" that the original Septuagint version "did contain the divine name wherever it occurred in the Hebrew original"¹⁸

It is important that the whole question of the use of the divine name in the ancient manuscripts be properly understood, for in the Foreword to the *Christian Greek Scriptures*, Jehovah's Witnesses make so bold as to declare:

"The evidence is, therefore, that the original text of the *Christian Greek Scriptures* has been tampered with, the same as the text of the LXX has been. And, at least from the 3rd century A.D. onward, the divine name in tetragrammaton form has been eliminated from the text by copyists who did not understand or appreciate the divine name or who developed an aversion to it, possibly under the influence of anti-Semitism."¹⁹

This is a serious accusation, and it calls into doubt the integrity of all

the early copyists who labored so diligently to reproduce the original autographs of the New Testament. Fortunately, the evidence to support such a systematic conspiracy is not as Jehovah's Witnesses would have us believe. As in the case of the LXX versions, many new discoveries of New Testament manuscripts have come to light since the publication of the *Christian Greek Scriptures* in 1950, so that the earliest witness to the authenticity of our copies of the New Testament can now be pushed back to about 135 A.D. (a fragment of John 18: Rylands Papyrus 457), less than fifty years after the Fourth Gospel was written. From the more than seventy papyrus manuscripts discovered since the late 19th century until the present time, there is not a single witness to the New World Translators' absurd claim that the New Testament has been deliberately corrupted in some 237 places. Until such "evidence" can be brought to light, nothing further need be said.²⁰

There is no question here of Christians dishonoring God by failing to call him by his proper name. This may have been the way he needed to be known in pre-Christian times, but since the advent of Jesus into human history, Christians have now entered into a new relationship with God, and he is now truly "Father" to his people and is spoken of in this way by his spiritual children (cf Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).²¹

Making Known the Name of God

The only other matter to be pursued in relation to the Witnesses' preoccupation with the name "Jehovah" concerns the lack of understanding they exhibit towards the idiomatic language of the New Testament. They claim that Jesus was concerned with the restoration of the divine name to common use and would not have been afraid to pronounce it whenever it occurred in the Hebrew Scriptures. The texts they quote, referring to Jesus "making known the name of God",²² are simply Hebraisms that refer, not to a mere name, but to God as he is in himself.

An example of the Semitic use of speaking of the name of God can be found in Malachi 3:16, where the prophet speaks of those who are thinking on God's name. A careful reading of the text reveals that Malachi is praising those who are ever mindful of God and keeping his commandments. Likewise, when the Psalmist calls on God to glorify his own name (i.e., Ps 115:1), he is asking God not merely to glorify the

name by which he is known, but to glorify himself. The warrior king, David, was urged by Joab to take possession of the city of Rabbah, lest it be called by his own name. By this, Joab did not mean that the city would actually bear his personal name, but rather, it would belong to him and become his possession (2 Sam 12:28). In the New Testament, we find the apostles using similar expressions to refer to the Person of God and his claims upon us. In Acts 9:15, Ananias is told by Jesus to go and visit Paul, for the former persecutor had been chosen by Christ to carry his name before the Gentiles. Here, again, it is not simply the *name* of Jesus that is to be taken before the Gentiles, but the claims of Jesus and his purpose in regard to them. Note also, the parallelism between the carrying of God's name and the carrying of Jesus' name.

Other Changes in the New World Translation

Although the unwarranted attempts to have the name "Jehovah" inserted into the New Testament are blatantly dishonest, a far more serious deception is practised when deliberate changes are made to many key texts touching on doctrinal issues, thus altering completely their meaning. Many of these texts will be examined in their proper place throughout this study and will highlight the generally unreliable character of the *New World Translation* and the dangers it holds for people not entirely familiar with the Bible.

For a comparison of the textual changes in the *New World Translation* (henceforth, N.W.T.), the *Revised Standard Version* (R.S.V.) has been chosen as the basic text and is used throughout this study unless otherwise stated. The R.S.V. is widely regarded as one of the most reliable of all modern translations, but as an interested reader can verify, any reputable translation other than the R.S.V. will also bear out the charges of deliberate distortion made against the Witnesses' N.W.T.

The Witnesses and the Holy Trinity

In any study of the religious beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the first and fundamental teaching to be examined is that of the nature of God. Almost immediately one becomes aware of the irreconcilable differences that exist between Watch Tower theology and that of orthodox Christianity.

The Witnesses admit that God "is a spirit";¹ that he cannot be seen by man; that he is omnipotent, omniscient, and majestic; but they vehemently deny that God is Trinity, or that the Word (*Logos*) of God who became man, is also God, and that the Holy Spirit is anything other than an impersonal active force.

As the doctrine of the Incarnation (God becoming man) will be fully examined in the following chapter, and the personality of the Holy Spirit is to be studied in Chapter Nine, this study will be confined to establishing the Scriptural and historical foundations for our acceptance of the doctrine as authentic Christian teaching.

As the Witnesses have rightly observed, the teaching on the Holy Trinity is the "foundation doctrine" of the Christian Church,² and because of its intrinsic importance to Christianity, it comes up for regular denunciation in Watch Tower publications.

According to Watch Tower sources, the doctrine originated in ancient Babylon, where pagan triads of gods and demons were common.³ It later insinuated itself into Christian teaching, so that by the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., it was ready for acceptance by the religious leaders of the day.⁴

In studying the Watch Tower's case against the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, one gets the impression that the Witnesses are deliberately trying to confuse the issue by resorting to misrepresentation. One reads, for example, that a definition of the Trinity is that there are "three gods in one";⁵ that the Trinity consists of "three Gods in one Person";⁶ or that God is "three persons in one".⁷

For further evidence of the Witnesses hostility to the doctrine of the Trinity, the following statements are reproduced from authoritative Watch Tower publications.

Jehovah's Witnesses Deny the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity:

"Jehovah God is one, and Jesus Christ is his creature Son, and the holy spirit is Jehovah's active force, and therefore the doctrine of a trinity is unchristian and really of pagan origin."⁸

The Witnesses Ridicule Christians for Accepting the Doctrine of the Trinity:

"Are readers of this booklet now confused? Doubtlessly so. Any trying to reason out the Trinity teaching leads to confusion of mind. So the Trinity teaching confuses the meaning of John 1:1, 2; it does not simplify it or make it clear or easily understandable."⁹

The Witnesses Name Satan as the Originator of the Doctrine of the Trinity:

"The plain truth is that this is another of Satan's attempts to keep God-fearing persons from learning the truth of Jehovah and his Son, Christ Jesus. No, there is no trinity."¹⁰

Another typical misrepresentation of the Trinity teaching is the following:

"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?"¹¹

To untutored minds, there may not seem to be much difference between "three gods in one person" or "three Persons in one God";

but if someone is going to state the beliefs of another, then he should at least be clear in his own mind what that other person believes, so that he can state the beliefs accurately.

It is true that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a "mystery" — a word which the Jehovah's Witnesses have seized upon and use to ridicule all who accept this teaching. They claim that early Christian theologians took over this doctrine from ancient pagan sources, and being unable to give it an adequate explanation, they invented the word "mystery" to cover up their folly.¹²

Such a charge is absurd. No Christian theologian claims that nothing at all can be known about the Holy Trinity. It is a mystery, this simply means that we can never hope fully to understand it, either in this life, or in the next; for it touches upon the very nature of God himself, and, as the Scriptures tell us, the infinite nature of God is forever beyond the limited capacity of man to grasp (Ps 139:1-6; 17-18; Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 2:11).

Because of the Watch Tower's erroneous definition of the Holy Trinity as "three gods in one", it is necessary to define the doctrine correctly, give the Scriptural basis for its acceptance, and give a reasonable explanation of what is meant by "three Persons in one God".

Whenever the Witnesses mention the Trinity they are at pains to point out that the word "Trinity" is nowhere to be found in the Bible, and because of this omission, they claim that the Trinity is unscriptural. It could also be pointed out that the word "theocracy" (God's rule), a favorite expression of Jehovah's Witnesses, is likewise nowhere to be found in the Bible, but that does not prevent the Witnesses from using it as a legitimate description of God's rule over mankind. In the same way, the word "Trinity" is simply the term used to describe the doctrine of the three Persons in one God.

The Trinity in Credal Formula

The simplest Trinitarian formula defines the doctrine as "In one God, there are three really distinct Persons, equal in all things, and possessing one and the same divine nature".¹³

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was unknown to the Jews of the Old Testament times, and for this reason the Scriptural evidence for the teaching is confined to the New Testament. Although one writer has stated that the teaching "looms in outline in the Old Testament as a mystery ready for disclosure",¹⁴ the fact remains that the Old Testament texts that are usually quoted in support of the Trinity

teaching (e.g., Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7, etc.) are being given a retrospective interpretation in the light of New Testament revelation. Care should therefore be taken to avoid using them solely as "proof texts" for the Trinity, without due regard for their proper historical setting.

What the Old Testament does contain are the words which the New Testament uses to express the trinity of Persons in God, such as Father, Son, Spirit, Word, etc. A study of these words reveals the way in which the New Testament advances beyond the revelation of the Old Testament, and the way in which somewhat nebulous terms became personified in the New Testament as a result of the revelation of the Son of God. This is truly the "mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph 3:4-5).

The Scriptural foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity rests on such texts as Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Luke 1:31-35; John 14:15, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:6-8; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20-21.

The doctrine does not have to rely on these texts alone. Although each of the texts makes explicit mention of the three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses can accept these texts as Scripture yet still reject the Trinity doctrine, simply proves that no Scripture is so strong that it is immune from misinterpretation.

An Understanding of Trinity Texts

An examination of some of the above texts shows the way in which the threefold Personality of God was revealed.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she would conceive a Son through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and that the child born to her would be known as the Son of the Most High (Lk 1:31-35).

As the announcement of Jesus' birth contained a reference to the Trinity, so too, the commencement of his public ministry was also marked by a further reference to the Trinity. At the river where John baptized Jesus, the heavens were said to have opened, and the Holy Spirit, manifested in the form of a dove (a symbol of love), descended upon Jesus, and a voice was heard from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:16-17).

In these two passages all three Persons are represented as distinct realities, but it remained for Matthew to record the most explicit Trinitarian references in the Gospels: Jesus' commission to his disciples

to baptize believers in the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19).

In rejecting the Christian interpretation of Matthew 28:19, Jehovah's Witnesses state:

"As for Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14, [these texts] say nothing about there being three coequal persons in one God. They do not say that each of these mentioned is a God. They do not say that all three are equal in substance, power and eternity. They do not say all are to be worshipped. Since they do not say these things, then they do not teach the Trinity, for all those claims are made concerning the Trinity."¹⁵

This unreasonable approach is typical of the Witnesses' manner in answering the implications of the above texts. Because the texts do not spell out the complete doctrine in clear-cut detail the Witnesses deny that they can be understood as referring to the Trinity. But that this is the conclusion to be drawn from an unbiased reading of these texts becomes evident after one has studied the abundant references that are made to the Persons of the Trinity and their relationship with one another. Although many of the references will be examined in their proper place; a few of them are listed here to show the basis for their acceptance as an implicit admission of the Trinity.¹⁶

The Relationship of the Father and the Son

The statement in Philippians 2:6 on the equality that existed between Jesus and the Father was so unequivocal that the translators of the New World Bible were forced to alter the whole structure of the text (see Chapter Two) to make it harmonize with the Watch Tower teaching that Jesus was something less than God. As can be readily seen from any reputable translation, the equality of Jesus with the Father was not even mentioned; rather, St Paul was speaking of the willingness of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity to accept the limitations of humanity in order to accomplish mankind's salvation.

The Jews themselves had more understanding of the claims of Jesus than the Jehovah's Witnesses, and for this reason they were ready to stone him to death, "because you, being a man, make yourself God" (Jn 10:33).

In the Prologue to his Gospel the apostle John identified Jesus with the Word (*Logos*) of God who existed "in the beginning" with God,

and who was himself God (Jn 1:1). And in a dispute with the Jews over his mission and authority, Jesus again asserted his equality with the Father by claiming to be one and the same God who revealed himself to Moses as the "I AM" (Jn 8:58; cf. Ex 3:13-14). Furthermore, he said to the Jews: "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he" (Jn 8:24).

The intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father is mentioned frequently by John, but only rarely in the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew and Luke both record one such statement which Jesus made following the return of the seventy disciples from their mission of preparation. On that occasion, Jesus declared: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Lk 10:22; Mt 11:27).

The Fourth Gospel, which was written to prove that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn 20:31), also records a number of other statements that highlight the intimate relationship that exists between God and his Word:

"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working still, and I am working'" (Jn 5:17).

"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise'" (Jn 5:19).

"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (Jn 5:26).

"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).

"As the Father knows me and I know the Father" (Jn 10:15).

"He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (Jn 14:9-10).

"That they may all be one; even as you Father in me, and I in you" (Jn 17:21).

After the resurrection of Jesus, the unbelieving Thomas uttered the most explicit act of faith in the deity of Christ by addressing him as: "My Lord and my God" (Jn 20:28). The same unequivocal title that

would later be used by Paul when he spoke of the Christian's eagerness for the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13).

The efforts of the Jehovah's Witnesses to have us believe that Jesus was nothing more than the first creative work of God, and that he is Son only by adoption, are seen to be in direct contradiction to the New Testament witness.

Even this brief review of some of the more explicit Scriptural references to Christ's divinity, which will be further enlarged and elaborated upon in the next chapter, is enough to show that Christians are more than justified in claiming that the Bible teaches an absolute equality between God and Jesus that would be impossible if Jesus was anything less than God himself.

The Third Person of the Holy Trinity

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit never emerges as an actual person. There are numerous references to the "Spirit of God" (Jdgs 3:10; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16, etc.) and to God's "holy Spirit" (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10, etc.), but these simply refer to the mysterious activity of God, whereby he accomplishes his will. Even in the first two Synoptic Gospels it is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether the writers are speaking of the Holy Spirit as a person, or if they are merely referring to the divine activity of God. Only in Matthew 28:19, where the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit are mentioned under the "name" (singular) do we have an unequivocal declaration of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

While the terms "Father" and "Son" are readily associated with persons, the word "Spirit" implies that the personality of the Holy Spirit is not to be understood in the conventional manner.

In Luke's Gospel, and in the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit begins to be spoken of more frequently as a personal being. Although at times this personality remains ambiguous, and is not very different from the accounts in Matthew and Mark, Luke is the first to declare that it is Jesus himself who will send the Holy Spirit upon the Church (Lk 24:49; Acts 2:33). This "sending" of the Holy Spirit by Jesus is particularly prominent in the Gospel of John, where the Spirit is given the new title of Paraclete (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).¹⁷

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit's personality is clearly seen in his role as a guide, directing the apostles in their decisions: "For it has

seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). Only a person, such as an apostle or the Holy Spirit, can regard a decision as "good".

Further evidence of the personality of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the following texts:

He may be lied to (Acts 5:3).

He makes intercession (Rom 8:26).

He may be grieved (Eph 4:30).

He may be outraged (Heb 10:29).

He speaks to the churches (Rev 2:7).

Since lying, interceding, grieving, outraging, and speaking are personal characteristics and cannot be ascribed to an "active force", the Christian teaching of the personality of the Holy Spirit is seen to have a basis well founded on Scripture.

Once the foundation for our acceptance of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has been reasonably established from the Scriptures, and the respective roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have been set forth, we can move on to a brief explanation of what belief in the Trinity entails.

The Word Which Comes From God

From the Scriptures we know that God (i.e., the Father) has a Son (Mt 16:16; 26:63-64; 1 Jn 4:15). This Son is called the "only begotten" Son (Jn 1:14; 3:16; 18; 1 Jn 4:9). The apostle John introduces that Son as the "Word" of God (Jn 1:1; Rev 19:13), who became flesh and lived among us as Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). Being the *Son* of God, and *begotten* of God, the Word (Greek: *Logos*) could seem to us to have been created by the Father, and therefore inferior to the Father. But such is not the case. As we have already noted, the Word *is* God, and was with God in the beginning (Jn 1:1), and is therefore co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

In order to arrive at any understanding of this seeming impasse, John's description of the Word must be used as a starting-point.

A word is a meaningful phonetic sound uttered from the mouth by which we give expression to our thoughts. However, since God is a spirit (Jn 4:24), he has no mouth (unless, of course, we are speaking anthropomorphically), so his Word must be said to come from his mind (again, humanly speaking). God's Word is therefore a "thought" or an "idea" God has of himself, and because God is perfect (Mt 5:48), any Idea he has of himself must also be perfect. This explanation is not

new. As early as the 2nd century A.D., Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, was able to write:

“All men certainly know that a word is ‘emitted’ from the mind; and so those who have thought out the term ‘emissions’ have not hit on anything important, nor have they discovered some hidden mystery in applying to the only-begotten Word of God a meaning which is a matter of common knowledge.”¹⁸

Apart from the significance of his observations on the “generation” of the Word of God, Irenaeus is quoted here for a particular reason. From time to time, the New World Society has seen fit to appeal to this early Christian witness when they wished to defend one of their teachings. In 1962, for example, the *Awake* featured an article on early Christian beliefs and actually quoted Irenaeus in support of their denial of the divinity of Christ.¹⁹ This piecemeal quoting is typical of the Witnesses’ approach to non-sectarian authorities. When it is a matter of obtaining favorable corroboration for a particular teaching, the Witnesses will not hesitate to quote or misquote anyone who might help to lend weight to their claims. But let these same authorities dare to contradict them elsewhere and they are immediately arraigned as enemies of God and under the influence of Satan.

Not only is difficulty experienced in attempting to give a satisfactory explanation to the way in which the Word is “emitted” or begotten of God, but also to the translation of the word *Logos* itself.²⁰

As we pointed out above, God’s Word, the expressed knowledge he has of himself, is necessarily co-eternal with him, for he has always had this knowledge of himself. The Word is also co-equal with God, for as God’s self-expression, it cannot be less than God.

A formula of the basic Christian faith that became known as the Nicene Creed, after the famous Council of 325 A.D., refers to the Word as being “begotten, not made”. This, of course, is an echo of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, which speaks of the Word as “begotten of the Father” (Jn 1:14), and it brings us to an examination of the terms “person” and “nature”, which is essential to any study of the Holy Trinity.

You and I are both persons, and each of us possesses but one nature — a human nature that was transmitted to us by our parents. Our nature tells us *what* we are — human beings. The person or *ego*, the “I” in us, answers the question *who* we are. Jesus Christ is unique in that he

possesses not one, but two natures — a divine nature, and a human nature. The divine nature in Christ is his by virtue of his being begotten of the Father. Begotten of the Father, the uncreated Word possesses the same nature as the Father; not a nature *like* the Father's, but the *same* nature, without difference or distinction. It is not a nature distinct from the Father's, as that would mean that there were two Gods, and as we have already seen, such a thing is impossible.

By becoming man and "emptying himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7) the Word also came to possess a created human nature, so that he was, at the same time, both true God and true man. The paradox of this hypostatic union of the two natures in one person (Greek: *hypostasis*) in Christ is that they are both possessed by the same person of the Holy Trinity — the Word. Because of this, the "I" in Jesus, the uncreated Word, could say to the Jews: "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30), and, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn 8:58). And in speaking in the "form of a servant", he could say: "The Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28).

The theology of the word is not always easy to grasp, especially when it is encountered for the first time. But careful reflection on relevant Scriptural references that highlight the intimate relationship that exists between the Father and the Son — some of which were quoted earlier in this chapter — will help to make the doctrine a little more understandable.

The "Procession" of the Holy Spirit

Once the relationship between the Father and the Son has been established, we can proceed to an examination of the role of the Holy Spirit. "Proceed" is a good word to use in relation to the Holy Spirit, for Jesus himself used it to tell us that the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father (Jn 15:26).

After a thorough study of the Sacred Scriptures, and after the careful deliberations of the Councils of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.), the early Christian Church added the famous *filioque* to the Nicene Creed, so that the Holy Spirit could rightly be spoken of as proceeding from the Father "and the Son" (*filioque*). As we have already seen the Word is the perfect self-expression of the Father. He is distinct from the Father, and co-equally God with the Father (Jn 1:1). Between the Father and his Word, there is an interchange of perfect love that is personified in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures tell us that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). He does not *have* love, but *is* love. Everything God has, he has wholly. The usual interpretation of God's name. Yahweh (*Jehovah*), is "I AM" (Ex 3:14. cf. A.V., R.S.V., etc.); but English translations from the Vulgate, such as the Douay and Knox versions, based on Jerome's 4th century Latin translation from the original languages, offer an interesting variation that brings out the totality of God:

"And God said to Moses, 'I am the God who IS; thou shalt tell the Israelites, THE GOD WHO IS has sent me to you' "
(Ex 3:14, *Knox Version*).

Every man loves himself (Eph 5:28-29), or rather, the idea he has of himself – that is, his ideal. God also loves the Idea he has of himself, although in this case, God's Ideal is his perfect self-expression, personified in his Word, and capable of returning the intensity of love to the same infinite extent to which it is given.

God's love for his Word, and the reciprocated love with which the Word responds, finds its perfect self-expression in the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is himself the personification of the infinite love that exists between God and his Word.

The "Mystery" of the Trinity

This, then, is the supreme "mystery" of the Holy Trinity: God Knowing, God-Known, and God-Loved. Not one Person, but three Persons; not three Gods, but one God. An utterly perfect, humanly incomprehensible union of three Persons in one God. This is a mystery so profound that the unaided human mind could never have arrived at this knowledge unless it was first revealed to it by God himself.

The Athanasian Creed (so called after Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 328-373), which was drawn up to prevent further misconceptions of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, leaves no room for doubt on the plurality of Persons subsisting in the one God. It reads, in part:

"The Christian faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance; for there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the glory equal; and the majesty co-eternal . . ."

The Witnesses and the Deity of Christ

From its very beginning, the Christian faith has never ceased to proclaim Christ as "Lord of All" (Acts 10:36). He is "Emmanuel, which means, God with us" (Mt 1:23); the "great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13), "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16). Although from time to time, doubts were raised in the early Church over the deity of Jesus Christ, the teaching was never seriously disputed until the 4th century, when a young Alexandrian priest named Arius, began teaching that the Word (Greek: *Logos*) was begotten *by* the Father — that is, he came *after* the Father, and for this reason, he could not be co-eternal with the Father. Using the analogy of human fatherhood, Arius pointed out that a father necessarily ante-dates his Son, and in applying this reasoning to the Father-Word relationship, he coined the clever phrase: "There once was a time when the Word was not".

Arius refused to heed the warnings of the Bishop of Alexandria that his teachings were not in accord with the true Christian faith, and he continued to preach his heretical doctrine that Christ was not the true God, but only "a god".

The Influence of Arius

A synod of bishops was convened to deal with the Arian question, and, after due examination of the evidence, Arius was deposed, his priestly faculties withdrawn, and his teachings condemned as erroneous. Although this should have been the end of the dispute, the conflict had hardly begun.

Arius was a persuasive speaker, and he succeeded in winning the support of a number of influential people. Not only government officials, but even bishops and clergy lent their weight to have Arius reinstated again. What had started out as one man's denial of a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, in two short years erupted into a major crisis that threatened to split the eastern provinces of the Christian Church in two.

The Council of Nicaea

Alarmed at the dangerous course events were taking, the bishops turned to the Emperor Constantine with a suggestion that the only solution to the conflict was a general council, where the true Christian faith could be set forth and ratified by all the bishops of the Church. With outbreaks of violence and rioting over the contentious issue of the deity of Christ disrupting the peace and unity of his empire, Constantine readily agreed to the suggestion, and immediately summoned all the bishops of the Eastern Church to attend a General Council to be held in Nicaea on May 20, 325 A.D. The Emperor himself attended the opening sessions of the Council and presided over the assembly, but contrary to what the Watch Tower would have us believe, there is no evidence that he took part in any of its deliberations. In view of his scant knowledge of the Christian faith, it would be most unlikely.

The three hundred attendant bishops roundly condemned the defiant Arius, who had, by this time, earned for himself the terrifying nickname of *Christomachos* (Christ-fighter), and they reaffirmed their belief in what the Church had always taught, namely, that the pre-existent Word, who, in the "fullness of time" became man, is "of the same substance" (*homo-ousios*) as the Father, and is "true God of true God".

Despite the fact that the Nicæan council condemned the teachings of Arius, and that he himself was exiled for a time by the Emperor, the crisis was far from over. The postscript to Nicaea was even more involved, and it was not until a second General Council was held at Constantinople in 381 A.D., that the question was finally settled.

Modern-Day Arians

The reason so much prominence has been given to Arius is because Jehovah's Witnesses themselves regard him as an important link in the chain that connects them to Jesus and his apostles. In *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1965, a reader's question prompted the reply that Arius was one of the earlier Witnesses of Jehovah who have been "on earth in every period of human history".¹

The Witnesses, unable to trace their historical roots beyond 1872, are not unaware of the anomaly of claiming to be Christians. From time to time, depending on the particular circumstances, they will disclaim the need for such continuity, but when it suits them, they will claim affinity with the Paulicians of the 7th century, the Waldenses of the 12th century, and any others who have entertained views not dissimilar

to their own. Arius' denial of the deity of Christ, which the Witnesses also deny, singles him out as one of the early witnesses to Jehovah who fearlessly proclaimed the truth that Christ was not God.

The same arguments used by Arius and his followers to justify their heretical position in the 4th century, are those used by their modern-day counterparts, the Jehovah's Witnesses. Sixteen hundred years ago the teachings of Arius were shown to be Scripturally unsound, and time has only served to strengthen the decisions of Nicaea. The Arians, living again in the Watch Tower's New World Society, can still be vanquished by the same sound Scriptural approach that brought them to their ruin in the 4th century.

The Watch Tower on the Person of Christ

As we noted in the previous chapter on the Holy Trinity, there is abundant evidence in the Scriptures to show that Jesus Christ is true man *and* true God, but before we examine the evidence more closely, it will be well to see what the Witnesses themselves believe on this all-important teaching concerning the Person of Christ. The following quotations are taken from authoritative Watch Tower publications and are faithful to the context from which they are cited.

1. The Witnesses themselves admit that Jesus was pre-existent as the Word (*Logos*): "Since we have examined so much of what John wrote about Jesus who was the Word made flesh . . ." ² But they deny that he was God: "By calling his Father 'the only true God' he [Jesus] shut himself out from being God or even a part or a Person of God". ³
2. The "only begotten" Son of God (Jn 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9) becomes the only *created* Son of God: "He is not the author of the creation of God; but, after God had created him as his first-born Son, then God used him as his working Partner in the creating of all the rest of creation". ⁴ The Witnesses take the word *Son* in the sense of being the first and only *direct* creation of God, and therefore beloved by God in a special manner and deserving the title "Son" of God: "He was before all others of God's creatures, for he was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth. Hence he is called 'the only begotten Son' of God, for God had no partner in bringing forth his first-begotten Son." ⁵

3. The Watch Tower literature speaks of the pre-existent Word as the “chief of God’s spirit-creatures”, and even goes so far as to identify him with the angel Michael: “So on earth it was not even hinted at that he [Jesus] had been Michael in heaven and ‘one of the chief princes’ . . . Jehovah is the chiefest Prince, and with Him his Son Michael is ‘one of the chief princes’. He has become Prince of Peace.”⁶

The deity of Jesus Christ is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. Jesus himself revealed that he was God-made-man during the three-year period of his public ministry, and it is not something that an individual is free to accept or reject as he chooses. The apostle John tells us very plainly that wilful rejection of the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ will lead to the loss of eternal life, and he brands all those who deny this doctrine as Antichrists (cf. 1 Jn 2:22; 2 Jn 7).

The Scriptures are not so ambiguous on this important teaching that a person cannot be sure what he should believe concerning the Person of Jesus Christ. For more than nineteen hundred years the Christian faith has proclaimed that Christ is God “manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), and only a deliberate distortion of the Sacred Scriptures can give anyone a reason for denying that the deity of Christ is clearly taught in the Bible.

As we have already seen in the chapter on the Witnesses and the Bible, the Watch Tower’s *New World Translation* is a prime example of the willingness of the Brooklyn cult to falsify God’s Word in order to maintain its erroneous doctrines; and nowhere is this more apparent than in the passages that touch upon the deity of Christ. As might be expected, the texts which most strongly affirm the deity of Christ are the very ones that the Watch Tower has been forced to alter in order to destroy their effectiveness.

“And the Word Was God”

The Gospel of John introduces us to the Word (Greek: *Logos*) who became flesh and dwelt among us as Jesus Christ (Jn 1:14). This is the same Word whom John referred to a little earlier as God himself — “and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). From their very beginnings, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have denied that this is the correct rendering of the original Greek text, but as every reputable translation rendered it the same way, the Witnesses were hard put to make their stand sound convincing.

A turning-point in the battle came in 1950, when the Watch Tower published its own *New World Translation of the Christian Greek*

Scriptures, with all the desired readings incorporated into the sacred text. The troublesome verse of John 1:1 was finally rendered to the Watch Tower's satisfaction as "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god". Even then, four pages of the Appendix (pp.773-777) were needed for the attempted justification of this deliberate distortion of the apostle's words. When the Watch Tower published its one volume edition of the Bible in 1961, this text was revised to read: "In (the) beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god".

The controversy surrounding the interpretation of this particular verse is almost as old as the Gospel itself. Although the declaration of the divinity of Christ contained in John 1:1 was clearly defined once and for all by the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., the verse has always remained the subject of prolonged discussion. With the advent of Jehovah's Witnesses on the religious scene in the late 19th century, and the revival of the Arian controversy, the divinity of Christ has again become a live issue, and the old objections must now be answered all over again.

The whole purpose of the Watch Tower's pre-occupation with John 1:1 is to discredit the accepted reading of the verse and introduce a neo-arian interpretation into the text in accordance with their unitarian outlook. Because John 1:1 is an important witness to the divinity of Christ, it is necessary to examine the evidence the Witnesses put forward to see whether there are any grounds for their rejection of the reading: "and the Word was God".

There can be no speculation as to the pre-existence of the Word; for we are told that at the moment of creation the Word already "was". Nor can there be any confusion of the identities of the Father and the Word, for the Word was "with" God — "in God's presence". The controversy, then, centres around the third part of the verse: "and the Word was God". Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to believe that Christ is God, and in the Appendix to the 1950 edition of the *Christian Greek Scriptures* this pre-conceived opinion led the translators to attempt to prove that their objections to the accepted reading of the verse stemmed from the construction of the Greek text itself.

To understand the problems associated with the interpretation of this text, the clause is here set out in interlinear fashion:

Theos en ho Logos

God was the Word.

Because *Logos* has the definite article (*ho*) and *Theos* does not, it is proper to translate the verse as "The Word was God".⁷ Mention of the definite article brings us to the crux of the whole controversy.

The second part of the verse (Jn 1:1b) reads: "The Word was with God". In this instance, the Greek has *pros ton theon* ("with God", or, "in God's presence"). *Ton Theon* (the God) brings out the absoluteness of God, so that a literal sense translation would read: "The Word was with THE God", to emphasize the fact that it is the one true God who is being referred to. Jehovah's Witnesses construe the omission of the article as evidence that the Word was something less than God, hence, their reading "a god":

"The God with whom the Word or Logos was originally is designated here by the Greek expression *ho Theos, Theos* preceded by the definite article *ho*, hence an articular *Theos*. Careful translators recognize that the articular construction of the noun points to an identity, a personality whereas an anarthrous [without the article] construction points to a quality about someone."⁸

On the basis of these prefatory remarks, the translators are prepared to accept variant readings which render the verse as: "The Word was divine".⁹ For Jehovah's Witnesses, "divine" is to be understood as something less than God, but such was not the sense intended by the translators of the versions in question; nor by the apostle John. Had John wished to say that the Word was "divine", he could have used *theios* (divine), and the only reason the particular versions used the word "divine" in their translations of the text, was to avoid the argument put forward in the New World Translation's Appendix: "For how can the Word be with the God and at the same time be that same God?" However, as Raymond Brown answers this objection: "Yet for a modern Christian reader whose trinitarian background has accustomed him to thinking of 'God' as a larger concept than 'God the Father', the translation 'The Word was God' is quite correct".¹⁰

The Importance of the Greek Article

The omission of the article before "God" not only avoids confusion of identities between the Father and the Word, but also guards against the Hellenistic sense of a second God. That the Word is not simply a divine being (or "a god" as the Witnesses would have us believe) is

refuted by the inclusion of the article in John 20:28, where Thomas confesses Jesus as "My God" — *ho theos mou* (see below).

Perhaps the most telling reason for the omission of the article was given by Bruce M. Metzger, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary. In his article, Professor Metzger examined the Watch Tower's "a god" translation, and made the following observations:

"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'. Some years ago Dr. Ernest Cadman Colwell of the University of Chicago pointed out in a study of the Greek definite article that, 'A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb . . . The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. The absence of the article (before *theos*) does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the Gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas (John 20:28, 'My Lord and my God')' ".¹¹

In an effort to support the mistranslation of John 1:1, the Appendix lists thirty-five other passages in John's Gospel where the predicate noun has the definite article in Greek. However, as Professor Metzger points out, not one of the thirty-five instances is parallel to the usage in John 1:1, "for in every case the predicate noun stands *after* the verb, and so, according to Colwell's rule, properly has the article. So far, therefore, from being evidence against the usual translation of John 1:1, these instances add confirmation to the full enunciation of the rule of the Greek definite article."¹²

The Appendix also lists nineteen texts where the predicate noun does not have the definite article, and states: "If the indefinite article can be inserted before the predicate in such texts, no objection can rightly be raised against inserting the indefinite article 'a' before the anarthrous *theos* in the predicate of John 1:1 to make it read 'a

god' ".¹³ But again, as Professor Metzger points out: These texts "are exactly in conformity with Colwell's rule, and therefore are added proof of the accuracy of the rule". He then continues: "The other passages adduced in the Appendix are, for one reason or another, not applicable to the question at issue. One must conclude, therefore, 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' ".¹⁴

"The First-Born of All Creation"

Amongst the Scriptural "evidence" amassed by Jehovah's Witnesses to *prove* that Christ is not God is a text from Colossians 1:15, which refers to Christ as "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (N.W.T.) By repeated emphasis on this particular text, the Witnesses claim that Paul is clearly indicating that Christ was the "first creation" of God, and therefore, not God himself:

"In view of these statements and in view of the plain evidence of the Scriptures themselves, there is no reason for objecting to translations showing that Jesus is, not merely God's unique or incomparable Son, but also his 'only-begotten Son', hence descended from God in the sense of being produced by God. This is confirmed by apostolic references to this Son as 'the first-born of all creation' and as 'the One born [form of *gen.na'o*] from God' (Col 1:15; 1 John 5:18), while Jesus himself states that he is 'the beginning of the creation by God' — Rev 3:14." ¹⁵

In actual fact, Paul is not here speaking of Christ as God's "first creation" at all, but is pointing out the pre-eminence of Christ *over* all creation. The term "first-born" (*prototokos*) then, denotes the position of Christ *in order of creation*. The *Jerome Biblical Commentary* has the following to say:

"*First-born of all creation*: In Rom 8:29, we find the same sequence, 'image' then 'first-born', implying that many will share the image of God. The same sense may be here, but in view of what follows and other uses of the word (e.g., Ps 89:28), it may mean a position of supremacy, authority, and power over all creation." ¹⁶

Most authorities would be inclined to agree that the term expresses the priority of Christ in both the temporal and creative sense. As a footnote in the Knox Translation suggests, Paul is saying that Christ as man "enjoys primacy over the rest of creation", not in the sense that he himself is part of that creation, but, rather, in the sense of affirming his temporal priority *and* his Lordship over all creatures. In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses similar language when he speaks of the Christians who are to be incorporated into Christ, "in order that he might be the first-born (*prototokos*) among many brethren" (Rom 8:29). In this instance, "first-born" (or "eldest-born" — *Knox*) bears a more obvious reference to the pre-eminence of Christ, who has all the rights and privileges which the Hebrews naturally accorded their first-born male children.

That Paul had no thought of reducing the pre-existent Word to the status of a creature, however exalted, is evident from the verses immediately following his mention of Christ as the "first-born" (Col 1:15). He informs us that in Christ "all things were created through him and for him" (v.16) — not "all *other* things", as the *New World Translation's* unwarranted additions would have us believe; — and further, Christ is said to be "before all things" and in him "all things hold together" (v.17). In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that *all* creation, and this includes the angels, had its beginning through him and is completely dependent upon him for its continued existence: "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb 1:3; see also John 1:3 — "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made").¹⁷

"The Beginning of God's Creation"

Another text Jehovah's Witnesses are fond of quoting to "prove" that Christ is merely a creature, is Revelation 3:14, where the apostle John calls Christ "the beginning of God's creation". The Witnesses' understanding of this text can be seen from the comment in their 1952 textbook, *Let God Be True*:

"The truth of the matter is that the Word is God's Son who became Jesus Christ and who did have a beginning. At Revelation 3:14, he distinctly says he was the beginning of the creation by God."¹⁸

Using this text in conjunction with Colossians 1:15 (see above), the Witnesses believe that they have sufficient evidence to justify their teaching that the Word is not uncreated. However, as the translators of the *Amplified New Testament* point out:

“... the difficulties involved in expressing the ideas bound up in one Greek word or phrase in an equivalent English word or phrase are often insurmountable. In some cases the translator finds himself confronted with a Greek term that combines the thought of a number of English words, each of which conveys some shade of meaning not to be found in the others.”

Even after all things have been taken into account, the translator's final choice of a word may fail to convey the precise meaning intended by the inspired authors.

Having noted the subtle shades of meaning of the Greek word *arche*, the *Amplified New Testament* rendered Revelation 3:14 as “the Origin and Beginning and Author of God's creation”. The *Knox Version* translated the same verse as “the *source* from which God's creation began”. And in a footnote in the *Revised Standard Version*, Christ is said to be “The principle and source of all creation”.

It is evident from the above translations that *arche* can be correctly translated as the “beginning of God's creation”, but a more judicious choice of words that conveys the underlying concept of the Word as the *author* of God's creation is to be preferred.

The Watch Tower's own *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (1st edition, 1950) rendered John 1:1 as: “Originally [*arche*] the Word was . . .”. Someone must have pointed out the incongruity of maintaining that Revelation 3:14 could have only one meaning when their translation of John 1:1 clearly taught otherwise. It is not surprising that all later editions were promptly revised to read: “In the beginning [*arche*] the Word was . . .” (N.W.T., 1961 ed.).

Who Is the Word?

Who is the Word? The Witnesses are apparently not sure themselves. They call him the “Son of God”, but deny that he is God's *actual* Son (in the sense of being God the Son).¹⁹ He was with the Father at the beginning of creation, but he is not eternal.²⁰ He is a “mighty god”,²¹ but he is still only the *chief* of God's “spirit-creatures”.²² In his created

humanity he is known as Jesus Christ, but before his Incarnation he was known as the angel Michael.²³ Whoever the Word is, Jehovah's Witnesses are adamant that he is not God.

Paul's letter to the Colossians explicitly teaches that Christ is infinitely above the angels: "For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether *thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities*" (Col 1:16). "Thrones" and "dominions", etc., were the names given to the various classes of angelic beings. In the letter to the Hebrews the author states quite clearly that the eternal Word is beyond comparison with any angel. Although, for a time, Jesus was made a little lower than the angels (Heb 2:7, 9), this actually referred to his lowly condition *as a man*; for, as the writer seems at pains to show, Jesus is not to be compared to any angel:

"For to what angel did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you?' Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?' And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'. Of the angels he says, 'Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire'. But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever'" (Heb 1:5-8).

"Mighty God"

This "chief" of God's spirit-creatures is himself called a "Mighty God" by Jehovah's Witnesses (see above). They admit that Isaiah 9:6 is a messianic text and that it found its ultimate fulfilment in Christ, but they do not like what it says:

"And his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'."

"Everlasting Father", and "Mighty God" (in Hebrew, *El Gibbor*, literally, "God the mighty") are terms that offer an open challenge to professing Christians who deny the deity of Christ. While we must be on guard against ascribing a fully developed Christology to this passage without due regard for its proper historical setting, Christian tradition has been unanimous in seeing Christ as the fulfilment of this promise. Since the Witnesses themselves regard these words as finding their fulfilment in Christ — although with a different interpretation as to their

meaning — we can examine them in the light of their Christian fulfilment. If Jesus is not of the same nature with the Father, then we are faced with the absurdity of two beings who are both “mighty Gods”.

Seldom stumped for an explanation for their doctrinal aberrations, Jehovah’s Witnesses have fallen back on the same line of reasoning they used for John 1:1. They point out that the Hebrew word lacks the definite article, and therefore, can be translated as “a mighty god”.

Two points need to be made regarding the Witnesses’ interpretation of Isaiah 9:6. Firstly, by identifying the Father (Jehovah God) with Almighty God (*El Shaddai*, cf. Ex 6:3), and calling Jesus “a mighty god”, they have left us with the unmistakable impression that they believe in *two* Gods; a great God (Jehovah), who is *Almighty*, and a lesser God (Jesus), who is merely *mighty*. Whichever way one looks at it, the idea is monstrous. There can be no such thing as a great God and a lesser God, for anything less than God is simply not God at all. Strangely enough, Jehovah’s Witnesses concur. Jesus, they explain, is not a *real* God at all; but as the angels were sometimes referred to as “gods” because of their super-human powers (cf. Job 1:6; Ps 82:1ff; 89:6ff), so Christ is a “mighty god” amongst the angels because of the special privileges bestowed upon him by Jehovah God. So all their seeming adherence to the Scriptures that refer to Christ as “a god” (Is 9:6, Jn 1:1; 10:33, etc. — New World interpretation) is simply a pretence, and the title they give to him is nothing more than an empty figure of speech.

Secondly, the Witnesses correctly identify Jehovah with Almighty God (Ex 6:3), but their insistence that Jehovah is the *Almighty* God, while Jesus is merely *a mighty god*, is demonstrably unsound; both Scripturally and logically. The same passage of the Book of Isaiah which has furnished Jehovah’s Witnesses with their name (Is 43:10) also refutes any suggestion that another God — even a “mighty lesser god” — inhabits the heavens with him:

“‘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’” (see also, Is 43:11-12; 44:6-8).

Nor can any unqualified distinction be made between the use of the words “mighty” and “almighty”. Jehovah God is usually referred to as “Almighty God” (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14, etc.), but in

other places he is also called the "Mighty One" (Gen 49:24; Ps 132:2, 5) and the "Mighty God" (Ps 50:1; Is 10:21; Jer 32:18). It is interesting to note that in Isaiah 10:21 the term "mighty God" appears *without* the famous article, but we cannot conclude from this that the prophet is speaking of some other "mighty God", for the text allows no such interpretation:

"A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God" (Is 10:21).

Since Jacob (Israel) is to return to the mighty God, it can only be to the God who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush as the "God of Jacob", Almighty God (Jehovah of the Witnesses).

As was pointed out in the chapter on the Holy Trinity (see Chapter Three), anything less than God (e.g., the Watch Tower's "mighty God") is not God at all.²⁴ When we speak of God, we are referring to the supreme Being, the Creator of all things, Almighty God, and it is impossible that there could be two supreme Beings; for each would be necessarily limited in not being what the other was. Thus, to speak of the Word as a "mighty God" while implying that he was less than "Almighty God" betrays a lamentable lack of logic, and to point out, as the Witnesses do,²⁵ the Old Testament references to certain of the Judges of Israel as "gods", and to use this as an argument against the deity of Christ, is a distortion of the Scriptures and an attempt to mislead people who have little knowledge of the Bible. If a little time is taken to study the context of John, it will be seen that the Witnesses are on very shaky ground in using this passage to deny the deity of Christ.

The passage that furnishes the Witnesses with their "escape clause" — their way out of a difficult situation — is found in John 10:31ff. When the Jews prepared to stone Jesus for blasphemy, he said to 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?' "

In the Watch Tower's dictionary of the Bible, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, the words of Jesus are explained away in the following fashion:

"According to the context, those whom Jehovah called 'gods' and 'sons of the Most High' in this psalm were Israelite judges who had been practicing injustice, requiring that Jehovah himself now judge 'in the middle of such gods' (Ps 82:1-6, 8). Since Jehovah applied these terms to those men, Jesus was certainly guilty of no blasphemy in saying, 'I am God's Son'. Whereas the works of those judicial 'gods' belied their claim to being 'sons of the Most High', Jesus works consistently proved him to be in union, in harmonious accord and relationship, with his Father — John 10: 34-38."²⁶

The Witnesses would have us believe that Jesus is merely comparing his life and works to the unjust judges of the Old Testament. If they could be called "gods" in spite of their injustice, then how much more did he deserve to be called "Son of God" because of his righteousness. This superficial approach overlooks a number of important considerations.

God the Only Son

It must be understood that Jesus was not qualifying his remarks when he claimed the right to be called "Son of God" on account of his works. The Jews were not going to stone him simply because he was raising himself to the level of "a god" in the sense that the judges were called "gods", but for blasphemy — "Because you, being a man, make yourself God" (not "a god" as the Witnesses would have us believe).²⁷ Jesus had claimed to be *one* with the Father, a oneness in power and operation (the Witnesses, on the other hand, regard this unity "not as to identity of person but as to purpose and action"),²⁸ and it was for this reason that the Jews prepared to stone him. One line of interpretation on this passage that is deserving of attention is that which was proposed by Raymond Brown:

"The reason why the judges could be called gods was because they were vehicles of the word of God (vs. 35), but on that premise Jesus deserves so much the more to be called God. He is the one whom the Father consecrated and sent into

the world and thus a unique vehicle of the word of God. Thus, there is some reason justifying the use of 'god' in two different senses in the argument. Is there any suggestion in 10:34-36 that Jesus is *the Word* of God? If the argument 'from the lesser to the greater' were worked out in full detail, it might run thus: if it is permissible to call men gods because they were vehicles of the word of God, how much more permissible is it to use 'God' of him who is the Word of God."²⁹

In denying the deity of Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses point out that while Jesus is often called the Son of God, he is never referred to as God the Son.³⁰ Such a statement cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. In the Gospel of John there is a passage that speaks of "God the only Son", and this passage brings us to a discussion on the use of the term *monogenes*.

The New World Translation renders the verse (Jn 1:18): "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten god who is in the bosom position with the Father is the one that has explained him".

As we have seen, the Witnesses use the term "only-begotten" (Greek: *monogenes*) in the sense of "only-created", and for this reason they are quite agreeable to translating John 1:18 as "the only begotten god". Actually, the term *monogenes* means "of a single (*monos*) kind (*genos*)", so that the literal sense of *monogenes* is "only" or "unique" — the only member of a kin or kind.

In *Aid to Bible Understanding*³¹ the Witnesses reverse the thrust of the arguments of former critics of their theology and attempt to relate *monogenes* with *gennan*, "to beget". However, while *genos* is distantly related to *gennan*, there is little justification for the translation of *monogenes* as "only begotten":

"The Old Latin correctly translated it as *unicus*, 'only', and so did Jerome where it was not applied to Jesus. But to answer the Arian claim that Jesus was not begotten but made, Jerome translated it as *unigenitus*, 'only begotten', in passages like this one (also 1:18; 3:16, 18). The influence of the Vulgate on the King James Version made 'only begotten' the standard English rendition. (Actually, as we have insisted, John does not use the term 'begotten' of Jesus). *Monogenes* describes a quality of Jesus, his uniqueness, not what is called in Trinitarian theology his 'procession'."³²

Monogenes reflects the Hebrew *yahid*, “only”, or “precious”, a word describing Abraham’s son Isaac in Genesis 22:2, 12, 16. It is rendered as “only son” in Jeremiah 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zechariah 12:10, and as “only one” in Proverbs 4:3. That it does not mean “only begotten” can be seen from its use in Hebrews 11:17. The N.W.T. renders the verse: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, as good as offered up Isaac, and the man that had gladly received the promises attempted to offer up [his] only begotten [son]”. Isaac was not the only-begotten son of Abraham, nor was he the eldest. He was, however, the “unique, or precious” son of Abraham, the child of the promises, and it is in this sense that the word is to be understood.

Although the textual witnesses are not entirely in agreement on the reading of John 1:18, the best Greek manuscripts (including the Bodmer papyri) have [*ho*] *monogenes theos*, “God the only Son”. This reading is also supported by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origin: “This phrase is set off by itself in *casus pendens* and then resumed in the last clause of vs. 18 by *ekeinos* (‘that one’) as the subject of ‘revealed’, thus: ‘God the only Son . . . that one has revealed him.’”³³

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Christ is the Son of God only by adoption. In his pre-human existence as the Word, they say he was given the singular privilege of sharing in the creative works of God. It is because of this pre-eminent position to which he has been raised that Christ deserves to be called “Son of God” in a special sense that distinguishes him from all *other* created “sons” of God (i.e., angels and men): “The very fact that Jesus is called the ‘Son of God’ reveals that he was produced by the Father and is, therefore, his firstborn and only-begotten Son”.³⁴

It is not surprising that Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the true Sonship of Christ, for his deity and Sonship are welded together, and a denial of one is a denial of the other. However, there is ample Scriptural evidence for maintaining that Jesus was SON in the fullest sense of the word.

Throughout the New Testament Jesus is spoken of as the Son of God (Jn 20:31; Acts 9:20; Gal 2:20, etc.). In John’s writings he is also called the “only” Son (Jn 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9). Jehovah’s Witnesses have no hesitancy in accepting these terms, but they do so in a less than literal sense. In Watch Tower theology “Son of God” becomes Son by *adoption*; “Only Son” becomes “only *created* Son”. Such an understanding of these terms makes them devoid of true meaning, and in

discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses care should be taken to ensure that these terms are correctly defined beforehand.

The greatest testimony to the true Sonship of Jesus comes from the First Letter of the apostle John. He tells us that God lives in us if we acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of God: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 Jn 4:15). And, more explicitly, the same apostle warns us that he alone triumphs who believes that Jesus is the Son of God: "Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn 5:5).

Because of the importance of the issues involved in these two texts alone, the Sonship of Jesus cannot be regarded as less than actual, otherwise we are faced with the incongruity of Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny the true Sonship of Jesus, but still claim to be heirs to the rewards promised by the apostle John to all who believe in the Son of God (1 Jn 5:13). By this, it is not meant to imply that the Witnesses will be denied all chance of attaining eternal life, for, after all, this is what they set their hope on; but by denying that Jesus is the actual Son of God, they are depriving themselves of the special graces that it pleases God to give to those who so reverence his Son.

"I and the Father Are One"

Another important witness to the deity of Christ is found in John 10:30. Orthodox Christians have always understood these words of Jesus, "I and the Father are one", to refer to the unity of being that exists between the Father and the Son, but when we turn to the Watch Tower's explanation of this verse we are presented with an entirely different interpretation:

"Clearly Jesus Christ was not claiming to be his Father's equal. He himself stated that he acted not in his own name, but in the 'name of his Father'."³⁵

Like many other verses that touch upon the relationship between the Father and the Son, John 10:30 is not without its champions or its critics. But even amongst its critics, there has not always been agreement as to the way in which the verse is to be understood.

Towards the end of the 3rd Century A.D., the Sabellians (or, as they preferred to call themselves, Monarchists) began to teach that God in his own nature, was one Person only. In his role as Creator he took the

name of the Word (*logos*). According to Sabellius, the Word was God as manifested in creation.

Arianism, on the other hand, which was emerging about this time, went to the opposite extreme and sought to separate the Father and Son and to reduce the Son to a mere act of creation. Each sought to explain John 10:30 in accordance with their own peculiar outlook. Although "one" (Greek: *hen*) is neuter, not masculine, Sabellius sought to interpret it to mean that God is "one Person". Arius claimed that the verse referred to a moral unity of will. St Augustine regarded the verse as proof that both were wrong: "Through the word 'are' Sabellius is refuted; through the word 'one' so is Arius".

The Watch Tower's interpretation of John 10:30 is simply a mirror of the Arian understanding of the verse as a "moral unity of will": "What a grand oneness exists between Jehovah God and his firstborn Son. They are always 'one' in purpose and activity. But, as the Scriptures clearly show, they are not equal."³⁶

The main force of the Witnesses' argument against the traditional understanding of John 10:30 stems from the context in which Jesus' statement was made. The Jews were pressing him hard and demanding that he tell them plainly if he was the Christ. Jesus replied: "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 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 10:25-30)

The reference to "sheep" and "oneness" in the above passage leads the Witnesses to associate it with the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:

"Note that the thoughts voiced by Jesus in this prayer are similar to his words recorded at John Chapter 10. In Chapter 17, Jesus again acknowledged that his disciples, his 'sheep', were given to him by the Father. So the kind of oneness referred to in both of these chapters is the same. From Jesus' prayer we can see that Jesus and his Father are 'one' in the same sense that his true followers can be 'one' (John 17:11). Obviously the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ could never become part of a triune God. However, they could be one in purpose and activity."³⁷

The Witnesses' explanation is not as sound as it appears. In verse 28 Jesus tells us that no one can snatch the sheep from *his* hand. In verse 29, we are told that no one can snatch them from his *Father's* hand. Jesus' hand and the Father's hand are clearly equivalent, and this interchangeability gives us an understanding of the real meaning of the oneness that is expressed in verse 30. The unity is not simply a moral unity of "purpose and activity", but of power and operation. The fact that "one" (*hen*) is neuter gives the word the force of meaning "one thing" or "one being" — "I and the Father are *one being*" — an implication that does not pass unnoticed by the Jews, as the following verses show: "The Jews took up stones again to stone him . . . because you, being a man, make yourself God" (Jn 10:31, 33).

The Watchtower statement that the faithful disciples "could never become part of a triune god" is also based on a misunderstanding: "This unity that is communicated to believers is what prevents anyone from snatching them away from either Father or Son. Paul puts it more lyrically in Romans 8:38-39: 'Neither death, nor life, nor angels . . . nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.' "38

Jesus' prayer is not that the faithful disciples will become "one of us", but rather, "that they may be one *in* us" (Jn 17:21. See also, 1 Jn 5:20). "Some type of vital, organic unity seems to be demanded by the fact that the relationship of Father and Son is held up as the model of unity. The Father-Son relationship involves more than moral union; the two are related because the Father gives life to the Son (6:57). Similarly the Christians are one with one another and with the Father and the Son because they have received this life."39

"Ego Eimi"

The relationship between the Father and the Son is also expressed in another way in John 8:58. In a dispute with the Jews over the source of his authority, Jesus told them that anyone who kept his word would never taste death. The Jews then pointed out that Abraham, great as he was, had pleased God, but he was dead. Did Jesus claim to be greater than Abraham? To this, Jesus replied: "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' ". (Jn 8:56-58)

At first glance, Jesus' words may appear to be simply referring to his pre-existence; there is also the tendency to regard the sentence as incomplete. But when one reads in the following verse that the Jews again sought to stone him, it becomes necessary to examine the passage a little more closely. The mere fact that Jesus claimed pre-existence was not sufficient reason for the Jews to stone him.⁴⁰ The reason for their hostility lies in Jesus' use of the words "I am" (Greek: *ego eimi*).

Scholars have always understood Jesus' use of *ego eimi* as a claim to divinity, but the Witnesses are loud in their insistence that this is not so:

"Many translations use the expression 'I am' both at John 8:58 and Exodus 3:14. But do both texts express the same thought? No. We know they do not because at Exodus 3:14 the Greek *Septuagint Version* (the translation that was often quoted by the apostles in the first century C.E.) reads, *e.go' ei.mi' ho Ohn*, 'I am the Being'. This is quite different from the simple use of the words *e.go' ei.mi'* (I am) at John 8:58. The verb *ei.mi'*, at John 8:58, is evidently in the historical present, as Jesus was speaking about himself in relation to Abraham's past. Numerous translations indicate this in their renderings. For example, *An American Translation*: 'I existed before Abraham was born'."⁴¹

The *Watchtower's* statement that the *Septuagint* uses *ho Ohn* (the Being) as the translation of the divine name, and not *ego eimi*, is only partly correct. In Revelation 1:4, 8; 11:17; 16:5 — the only places in the New Testament where *ho Ohn* is applied to God — it can be seen that the phrase never stands by itself. Actually, *ho Ohn* is merely a portion of the verbal expression used to designate God, and by itself it cannot convey the idea of external being in ever-active manifestation. *Ego eimi* expresses the idea more completely, and for this reason it became a common reading for the name of God in the *Septuagint*.

It is true that a number of translations render John 8:58 in a similar form as *An American Translation*, but in so doing they do not convey the sense intended by the Greek. Raymond Brown has pointed out that some important manuscripts omit the verb (*ginesthai*) and have simply "Before Abraham I Am". The inclusion of the verb brings out the distinction between *ginesthai* — "to come into being", and the divine use of *einai* — "to be", in the form "I AM" (cf. Ex 3:14). Commenting on this verse, C.H. Dodd remarks:

"The implication is that Jesus does not stand within the temporal series of great men, beginning with Abraham and continuing through the succession of the prophets, so as to be compared with them. His claim is not that he is the greatest of the prophets, or even greater than Abraham himself. He belongs to a different order of being. The verb *ginesthai* is not applicable to the Son of God at all. He stands outside the range of temporal relations. He can say *ego-eimi*. This is the *ani hu* of the Old Testament, the declaration of the unique and eternal self-existence of God."⁴²

Ani hu, as Professor Dodd had already explained (pp.93-96), was the "I AM HE" of the Old Testament, and it is interesting to see how the use of the name developed.

Ani YHWH — "I am Yahweh" — occurs six times in Deuteronomy and it is also found in Hosea 13:4 and Joel 2:27. It also appears in the Hebrew Scriptures in Isaiah 45:18, but in the *Septuagint* reading of this verse it is translated simply as *ego-eimi*. *Ani-hu*, the Hebrew alternate for *ani YHWH*, is always translated in the LXX as *ego eimi*. Professor Dodd quotes from Isaiah 52:6 and cites rabbinic evidence to show that the passage is taken to mean: "Therefore my people shall know my name, therefore, on that day, that *Ani-hu* is speaking: here am I".⁴³

The implication is, of course, that the use of *ego-eimi* ("I AM") in Isaiah came to be understood not only as a statement of divine unicity and existence, but also as a divine name itself. The phrase normally means "I am he" or "It is I", but because the predicate "he" is present in the Greek only by implication, there was a tendency in the LXX for *ego eimi* to express not only the unicity of God but also his existence. When we come to consider the Watch Tower's case against the comparison of John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14, Raymond Brown offers the following observations:

"We see this same tendency at work in LXX translation of Exod 3:14, the all-important text for the meaning of 'Yahweh'. If we understand 'Yahweh' as derived from the causative form . . . the Hebrew reads, 'I am who cause to be', or perhaps more originally in the third person, 'I am He who causes to be'. But LXX reads, 'I am the Existing One', using a participle of the verb 'to be', and thus stressing divine existence."⁴⁴

The *Septuagint* reading of *ego-eimi* as the name of God (cf. Is 43:25; 45:18; 48:12, etc.) carries over to New Testament usage. In John 8:58, Jesus said to the Jews: "Before Abraham was, *ego eimi*". As in the LXX, the phrase appears without the predicate, and the Jews understood Jesus to be identifying himself with Yahweh. Leviticus 24:16 had commanded, "He who blasphemeth the name of the LORD shall be put to death", and it was for this reason that the Jews "took up stones to throw at him".

For other passages where *ego-eimi* is used in the absolute sense (i.e., without a predicate) see Matthew 14:27; Mark 13:6; 14:62; Luke 21:8; 24:39; John 8:24; 8:28; 13:19.

"My Lord and My God"

Few texts offer as much trouble to Jehovah's Witnesses as John 20:28. Indeed, the famous expression of faith of the apostle Thomas is so clear and unequivocal that the Witnesses are unable to give an adequate explanation for failing to accept what it says:

"Some scholars have viewed this expression [My Lord and my God] as an exclamation of astonishment spoken to Jesus but actually directed to God, his Father. However, others claim the original Greek requires that the words be viewed as being directed to Jesus. Even if this is so, the expression 'My Lord and my God' would still have to harmonize with the rest of the inspired Scriptures . . . Whatever the case, it is certain that Thomas' words do not contradict the clear statement he himself had heard Jesus make, namely, that 'the Father is greater than I am' — John 14:28."⁴⁵

The Witnesses also suggest that Thomas may have addressed Jesus as "my God" in the sense of Jesus being "a god". Or perhaps he may have spoken of Jesus as "my God" in a way similar to Old Testament usage, which regarded God's messenger as a manifestation of God himself. These explanations are not new, nor are any of them very convincing when they are held up for examination in the light of the Scriptures.

The Watch Tower's statement that Thomas' exclamation must "harmonize with the rest of the inspired Scriptures" brings us to the all-important question of what the Scriptures actually have to say on the deity of Christ. It is of no consequence to Jehovah's Witnesses that for almost two thousand years the Christian Church has proclaimed

“Jesus Christ to be *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). In fact, the Witnesses regard this as further proof that in all this time the Christian Church has been under the control of the devil. They deny that Christ is God, and therefore their understanding of the Scriptures must harmonize with their pre-conceived idea of Christ as the first and only direct *creation* of God. But this is not the view expressed by the apostle Thomas in his confession of faith in the risen Jesus. To the unbelieving Jews, Jesus had said: “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that *ego eimi*” (“I AM”) (John 8:28). When Jesus appeared in the midst of his apostles following his resurrection, Thomas realized that Jesus was *ego eimi*, and exclaimed “My Lord and my God”.

The Father is Greater Than I

It will be noticed that the great text for the denial of the deity of Christ is Jesus' own statement that “the Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28). No Jehovah's Witness will go past this text when discussing the Person of Christ, and from the frequency with which it is quoted in Watch Tower literature, one would get the impression that the Witnesses believe that the statement is unanswerable. However, when we come to consider the words in their context and in the light of the “rest of the inspired Scriptures” there is no real difficulty in reconciling them with the Christian belief in the deity of Christ.

Some of the early Christian writers who commented upon this verse suggested that the text was to be understood in the sense that Christ *as man* was less than the Father (cf. Ps 8; Phil 2:6-8). Other writers preferred to accept it as pointing up the distinction that exists between the Father and Son: the Son is generated while the Father is not. However, the real key to the proper understanding of the text seems to lie in a different direction.

Elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel Jesus tells us: “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). Because the Father is the sender, and the Son is the one who is sent, the Father can be said to be greater than the Son. But it should be kept in mind that “greater” (Greek: *meizon*) is a quantitative term relative to position, and it is not to be taken as a comparison of quality or nature.

Another important point to be noted concerns Jesus' words to his disciples telling them that they should rejoice because he is returning

to the Father (Jn 14:28). The Incarnation involved a real humiliation and a sense of separation from the Father (Mk 15:34; Phil 2:6-8), but his return to the Father restores him to the position of glory he had before the world was created (Jn 17:1-5). On his return Jesus promised the disciples greater power: "Greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (Jn 14:12). Further insight on this passage comes from Raymond Brown in his commentary on the Fourth Gospel:

"Neither of the classic dogmatic explanations explains why the disciples should rejoice. The idea is probably the same as in 17:4-5: Jesus is on the way to the Father who will glorify him. During his mission on earth he is less than the One who sent him, but his departure signifies that the work that the Father has given him to do is completed. Now he will be glorified with that glory that he had with the Father before the world existed. This is a cause of rejoicing to the disciples because when Jesus is glorified he will glorify his disciples as well by granting them eternal life." (Jn 17:2)⁴⁶

The Son to be Subject

The final text to be examined in this study on the deity of Christ is 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".

As we shall see in Chapter Eight, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that following the great battle of Armageddon, there will be a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity, during which time, Satan's activities will be curtailed and they will preach the Gospel to all the resurrected "men of good will" who never had a chance of hearing it during their lives on earth. At the end of this millennium, Satan will be released for one final assault on mankind. This will be the testing time, and following this brief period, all those who survive this last attack of Satan and maintain their integrity will receive the reward of never-ending happiness in the earthly paradise that God has prepared for them. The so-called "goat-like ones" (cf Mt 25:32-33) who choose to follow Satan will be annihilated with him in the lake of fire (cf. Rev 21:8).

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, once this grandiose plan has been fulfilled, Christ will hand back his sceptre of power to the Father, and in accordance with the statement in First Corinthians, will henceforth be subject to him. Such subjection, of course, is taken to be proof that Christ is inferior to the Father.

Like the Sadducees, whose initial error lay in their failure to understand the Scriptures (Mt 22:29), Jehovah's Witnesses are led into error over many texts because they apply them to false situations. In this case, the Watch Tower's fundamental error lies in its incorrect understanding of the "last things" (i.e., Armageddon, Parousia, Millennium, etc.).

Jesus is our mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). He himself tells us that he is the "way, and the truth, and the life", and that "no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). Having conquered death by his own ignominious death on the cross, and risen again to glory, Jesus now lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25). He holds the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18); for all power in heaven and on earth has been entrusted to him (Mt 28:18). Exalted higher than the angels, the glorified Jesus now possesses the only name given to men by which they may be saved (Acts 4:12). During the long period between his Ascension into heaven and his glorious Second Coming, Jesus has supreme authority over the whole of creation, so that he has a twofold role of ruler (Acts 5:31; Rev 1:5) and mediator (1 Tim 2:5).

In his letter to the Christians at Corinth Paul is pointing out that the authoritative and mediatorial roles of Christ are only temporary; they are to last only until the last enemy, Death, has been subdued, an event that is to take place at the Second Coming.⁴⁷ When this last great event has taken place, the faithful will see God "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12); for he will be in direct contact with the whole of his creation. All earthly authority and rule will have ceased, and there will no longer be any need for a mediator. With this post-redemptive aspect of his work completed, Jesus will then hand back the kingdom to the Father who is the source of all.

By falsely implying that it is the essential nature of the Father and the Son that is under discussion, and that at a given time the Son is to forfeit his inherent right of co-equal rule with the Father, Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to use this Corinthian text to advantage in their denial of the deity of Christ. However, when it is shown that the apostle Paul is speaking of Christ's protracted redemptive role as mediator and judge — roles that are his only while acting as mediator — then the Watch Tower's efforts to diminish the divine reality of the Person of Christ lose their longed-for support of the Scriptures.

Scripture References to Deity of Christ

There are two types of texts which refer to the deity of Christ. There are the direct statements such as the texts we have been con-

sidering above, and there are the texts which highlight Christ's divinity by describing his activities in the same way as they describe the activities of the Father. For example, the Old Testament speaks of God as a Shepherd (Ps 23:1); and in the New Testament, Jesus applies this title to himself. In the Old Testament God is spoken of as the source of living water (Jer 17:13); and in the New Testament Jesus refers to himself as the source of living water (Jn 4:14).

From an examination of these texts we see that whatever the Father Does, "that the Son does likewise" (Jn 5:19); for in Christ "all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19). The following texts throw more light on the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son and reveal the way the Jewish Christians of the First Century came to accept the deity of Christ, in spite of their monotheistic heritage from Judaism:

God is Lord of Lords (Deut 10:17; compare Rev 19:16).

God is King and Lord of Glory (Ps 24:7; compare 1 Cor 2:8; Jas 2:1).

God is the only Saviour (Is 43:11; compare Luke 2:11).

God is unchangeable (Ps 102:26-27; compare Heb 1:12).

God is the Holy One (Is 43:14-15; compare Acts 3:14).

God is the light (Ps 27:1; compare Jn 8:12).

God is the searcher of mind and heart (Jer 17:10; compare Rev 2:23).

God is our Hope (Jer 17:13; compare 1 Tim 1:1).

God will come with all his saints (Zech 14:5; compare 1 Thess 3:13).

The evidence does not end there. Almost every page in the New Testament bears witness to some aspect of the deity of Christ. The following texts are only a sample of some of the more significant testimonies to this greatest of all beliefs of the Christian Church:

Christ is the Power and Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).

Christ is eternal (Col 1:17; Heb 1:10).

Christ is omniscient (Lk 6:8; Jn 6:64; 21:17).

Christ is the First and Last — Alpha and Omega — (Rev 1:17).

Christ's riches are unsearchable (Eph 3:8).

Christ has created all things for himself (Col 1:16).

Christ is to draw all men to himself (Jn 12:32).

Christ is to subdue all things to himself (Phil 3:21).

Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mt 12:8).

Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev 17:14).

This is the Christ who is worshipped by Christians. How much different he is from the Christ conceived by Watch Tower theology, a Christ born from an amalgam of a hundred heresies. He is not simply an exalted angel; nor is he merely a perfect human being; but rather, he is "God who is over all, blessed for ever". (Rom 9:5).

The Witnesses and the Atonement

Eighty years ago (in 1899) the founder and the then president of the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, Charles Taze Russell, published the fifth volume of his *Studies in the Scriptures*, "The At-One-Ment Between God and Man". As with most of Pastor Russell's writings, this latest volume of Scripture Studies was simply a further negation of another of the cardinal doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses no longer regard Pastor Russell's works as authoritative and seldom quote them in their official publications, the Pastor's writings formed the groundwork for the later development of current Watch Tower doctrines; and much of what the Witnesses now teach as "present-day truth", is a faithful echo from the writings of the Society's founder.

Having reduced Jesus to the status of a creature, Charles Russell, and the modern-day Jehovah's Witnesses, have had to re-interpret the Scriptural doctrine of the Atonement to make it harmonize with their denial of the deity of Christ. To understand the full implications of the Watch Tower's version of the Atonement, we need to be acquainted with the presentation of the doctrine as it has been taught since the time of the apostles.

The Book of Genesis relates the story of the creation of the first man (Adam) and of his being placed in the Garden of Eden; of the forming of his helpmate (Eve) from his own body and the temptation by the Devil; of the subsequent Fall and the loss of Paradise; of the punishment of suffering and death that the disobedience of Adam merited for himself and the whole of mankind.

Adam was placed in the Garden as representative man — the father of the human race. His failure to maintain his integrity during his probationary period in Eden resulted not only in his own ruin, but also in the forfeiture of the paradisiacal state for all his descendants as well. As the apostle Paul so aptly puts it:

"Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned — sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." (Rom 5:12-14).

What seemed like the hour of triumph for Satan in bringing Adam down from his exalted state was actually a bitter victory, for it marked the beginning of his own end. In cursing Satan for his deceitfulness, God gave the first hint of some future redress when Satan would be vanquished by the "seed of a woman" (Gen 3:14-15).

The promise referred, of course, to the Messiah (Greek: *Christos*), whom, in the fulness of time, God sent into the world, "born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5).

Christ's atoning sacrifice effected mankind's release from the slavery of sin (Rom 6:18; 8:3; Gal 5:13; 1 Pet 2:24); it cancelled out the debt that was due to sin (Rom 3:25; Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10); and reconciled us to God (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20; etc.).

The Witnesses' Understanding of the Atonement

A comparison of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement with that taught by the Watch Tower Society, reveals a diversity of belief that can never be reconciled. In three major areas the Witnesses' understanding of Christ's atoning sacrifice is seen to be far removed from the teaching that has been held by the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years.

The first of the Watch Tower's three major deviations occurs as a result of its denial of the deity of Christ:

"If Jesus, when he was baptized at thirty years of age, had been a so-called God-man and a combination of spirit person and fleshly person, he would have been superhuman and would have had more value than a ransom for all mankind. The perfect justice of God would not unjustly accept more value than that of the thing to be ransomed. His Law as given through Moses plainly stated that like should go for

like. It was the perfect man Adam that had sinned and so had lost for his offspring human perfection and its privileges. Jesus must likewise be humanly perfect, to correspond with the sinless Adam in Eden.”¹

The second major deviation in the Watch Tower’s doctrine of the Atonement is its arbitrary placing of many people outside the pale of redemption. The classes of people who will never benefit from the atoning death of Christ were neatly catalogued in an issue of *The Watchtower*. Amongst those who are denied any resurrection are Adam and Eve and their son Cain:

“So Jehovah . . . would refuse to accept any ransom in Adam’s behalf and in Eve’s behalf, not letting them come under the ministration of his High Priest Jesus Christ . . . In the case of Cain, the first son of Adam, God justly withholds the benefits of Christ’s ransom sacrifice from Cain because Jehovah God directly warned Cain and yet he wickedly assassinated his godly brother Abel. For Cain as well as his parents Adam and Eve we can reasonably expect no resurrection from the dead.”²

Other classes of people who are excluded from the general resurrection, for even an adverse judgement, are those who perished in the Flood (Gen 7:21-23) and wilfully wicked persons now living today.³

The third major deviation in the Watch Tower’s theological understanding of the Atonement is its teaching that only 144,000 “spirit-begotten creatures” will enter heaven. The greater number of *righteous ones* (the so-called “sheep-like” Christians — cf Mt 25:33) are destined for an eternity of happiness confined to this earth:

“Not only the unrighteous ones but also the righteous ones will benefit from having the resurrection to an opportunity to live on earth under the all-powerful, perfect, heavenly kingdom of God’s dear Son, Jesus Christ, their Redeemer.”⁴

The Perfect Redeemer

By laying the emphasis on *Adam’s* sin, the Watch Tower overshadows the fact that Adam’s action was a sin against God. God was the one who was offended by Adam’s rebellion, and no man, no matter how

perfect, could ever make sufficient reparation for this affront to the loving-kindness of God.

Unlike the fallen angels, whose spiritual nature made their rebellion an irrevocable action, man's composite (spiritual and fleshly) nature rendered him capable of repeated expressions of contrition and amendment (Mt 18:21; 2 Cor 2:7; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). These later lapses, for which it is possible to obtain forgiveness, are a consequence of the original sin of Adam and mirror the imperfect state to which we have fallen. But in no way do they approach the gravity of the offence of our first parent (Rom 5:14).

Adam's sin corresponded with the rebellion of the angels in that he was unable to effect a restoration of that paradisiacal state he had with God before the Fall. He could be reconciled to God, but like Esau, who was to sell his birthright for a single meal and later discover that he had been supplanted by Jacob (Gen 25:29-34; 27:30-40), no amount of sorrow or entreaty on Adam's part could repair the breach caused by his disobedience (Heb 12:15-17). And this was the condition he bequeathed to his descendants.

God did not abandon mankind completely; for even as he drove Adam from the Garden, he revealed his providential remedy for reconciliation: a Redeemer who would vanquish Satan, but he wounded himself in the process (Gen 3:15).

The Redeemer, of course, was Christ. The wounding he received, the "bruising of the heel" that crushed Satan, was the devil's temporary victory with the apparent defeat of Christ. The atoning sacrifice of Christ was alone sufficient to effect a reconciliation with God, something that sinful man could never do. Even the "righteous men of old" who experienced "mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonment, stoning, being sawn in two, and killed with the sword" (Heb 11:36) were unable to make amends for the sin of Adam. But in due time God sent his Son to bring about the promised liberation of the children of God (Gen 3:15; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4; 1 Jn 4:9), a Son who was of the same nature as the Father (Phil 2:6) and therefore God himself "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16).

As the deity of Christ was discussed in the previous chapter, there is no point in covering the same ground again. Adam's sin was an affront to the infinite love of God, and a reconciliation with God could be effected *only by an infinite atonement*: an action performed by the incarnate Son of God, the "second Adam" who was himself God, and able to repair the damage caused by the first Adam (Rom 5).

All Will Benefit

The Watch Tower's second deviation concerns the application of the atoning merits of Christ's sacrifice. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that many individuals and large groups of people will never benefit from Christ's redemptive death. Adam and Eve are just two of the individuals (see above) who will never be resurrected, and the people who perished in the Flood and other wilfully wicked people will also remain "forever destroyed".

It is no light thing to pass judgement on a man, and the Scriptures warn us that the judgement we mete out to others will be meted out to us (Mt 7:1; Rom 2:1-2; 1 Cor 4:3-5). Paul tells us that Jesus Christ will one day judge the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1), but while he was on earth, even though his judgement was true (Jn 5:30), Christ did not pass judgement on anyone (Jn 8:15-16). Even the nameless woman caught in the act of adultery and plainly guilty under the law of Moses and deserving of death (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22-24), was not condemned by Jesus. Only God, who "sees into the hearts of men" can judge with perfect equity and justice (1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron 28:9; Jer 32:19; Lk 12:2-3).

With the *possible* exception of Judas Iscariot, who is spoken of as having "gone to his own place" (Acts 1:25), no person or nation receives an *absolute* judgement in the Bible. Only in the case of Judas do there seem to be good grounds for claiming a definite adverse judgement in the Scriptures. Speaking of his betrayer, Jesus himself said that it "would have been better for that man if he had not been born" (Mt 26:24; Mk 14:21). These words contain a note of finality, and coupled with Peter's statement, Judas' case *appears* rather hopeless, but in the absence of a more explicit statement, even Judas' ultimate fate must also remain unknown.

We may infer from certain Scriptural references that judgement will be particularly severe on some people and nations (Mt 11:21-24; 23:13-36), but we are not justified in claiming that these people have already been judged and condemned in the sense that they will be excluded from the general judgement of all mankind, when Death and Hades will give up their dead (Rev 20:13), so that the judgement already pronounced on individuals at the moment of their death (Heb 9:27) will be confirmed to the vindication of God.

The Scriptures themselves are very emphatic that the general judgement is for *all* mankind, and no one is to be omitted: "For we shall *all* stand before the judgement seat of God" so that "each of us shall

give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:10, 12). This judgement of mankind includes the living *and* the dead (2 Tim 4:1), and even those who are destined for eternal punishment will not be excluded from this manifestation of God's justice (Rom 2:5-8).

What of Adam and Eve?

In denying that all mankind is to participate in a general judgement, the New World Society has set itself at variance with the Sacred Scriptures. The Watch Tower's mistake on this important issue would seem to be in its over-reaching the bounds of what it assumes to be its earthly mission and usurping a prerogative reserved solely to God. Since the Bible has not pronounced a definite adverse judgement on any individuals or nations, then we are bound not to do otherwise. This applies also in the case of Adam and Eve.

In spite of the Scriptural "evidence" amassed by the Watch Tower to "prove" that Adam and Eve will never be resurrected to participate in a general judgement, there is every reason to believe that such is not the case. As *The Watchtower* article points out⁵ Adam's life-span is said to be 930 years (Gen 5:5). We cannot imply from the Bible's later silence on any repentance of Adam, that in all those years he never once turned to God in sorrow for his sin; and God, who has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek 33:11; 18:23; 2 Pet 3:9) would not fail to respond.

There is no need to suppose that forgiveness on God's part would necessarily have resulted in the restoration of the perfect conditions that existed before the Fall, for the personal forgiveness of Adam did not affect the penalty of death that he had incurred through his wilful disobedience. God's judgement on David (cf. 2 Sam 12:10) reflects similar conditions to this issue, and may be helpful towards a proper understanding of Adam's case.

When David repented of his sin of adultery and of causing the death of Uriah, the prophet Nathan was sent to assure him that he had been forgiven; but God's mercy did not acquit David of the punishment due to his sin — the death of Bathsheba's child (2 Sam 12:13-14).

It is worth mentioning also that the Book of Wisdom (a canonical book in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles) makes specific reference to the salvation of Adam. As the Catholic Edition of the R.S.V.⁶ translates it:

"Wisdom protected the first-formed father of the world,
when he alone had been created; she delivered him

from his transgression, and have him strength to rule all things." (Wisdom 10:1).

This was one of the reasons why the Greek Orthodox Church has venerated Adam as a saint since ancient times.

The Flood

The Witnesses' understanding of the Atonement is seen to be narrow and exclusive. Too many people fail to benefit from the all-embracing sacrifice of Christ which was offered "once for all" for *all* mankind (Heb 10:10; 1 Jn 2:2). To apply Jesus' own reasoning to those who perished in the Flood: Were they any more guilty than other people who have lived since the time of the Flood? No, says Christ, they were not more guilty, but their fate is recorded for our instruction so that we may not all perish the same way (Lk 13:1-5).

Because there are degrees of guilt, not all of those who perished in the Flood would be equally guilty and deserving of the same condemnatory punishment. Degrees of guilt incur varying degrees of punishment (Lk 8:18; 12:47-48; 19:26), yet according to Jehovah's Witnesses, at the time of the Flood, all the unrighteous alike perished in the *same* manner. When Jesus stood before Pilate he spoke of the one who delivered him up as "having the greater sin" (Jn 19:11). The apostle John also speaks of sin that is "mortal" (1 Jn 5:16-17), but what use is there in speaking of degrees of guilt if the same punishment awaits each and every person who is classed as unrighteous? The old adage, "As well to be hanged for a sheep as a lamb", certainly seems to be part of the Watch Tower's theology.

What of the very young, the aged and the senile, or the mentally defectives who cannot be held guilty of any personal wrong? These groups would have been represented amongst those who perished in the Flood that swept all but Noah and his family to their death, and provision must be made for them to benefit from Christ's redemptive sacrifice. In an article on Christ's *ransom sacrifice* and to whom it applies, *The Watchtower* makes no distinction between the guilty and the innocent who perished in the Flood — all alike were forever destroyed:

"At the Flood all those people outside Noah's ark, namely, the men, the women, the children and babies, the Nephilim or the hybrid offspring from the marriage of disobedient

angels and human daughters of men, all such then living were suddenly executed by God's direct act and were thus destroyed forever." ⁷

The Watchtower's sweeping statement makes no allowance for individuals, but only groups. Yet it is the *individuals* who make up these groups who are to be judged. To quote from Paul again, we are told that we must "*all* stand before the judgement seat of God . . . so *each* of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom 14:10-12. Cf. also, 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

The same article ⁸ correctly interprets Paul's words to the Romans (Rom 5:13), that "sin is not charged against anyone when there is no law", but the writer fails to apply it to the case in question. There is no law for the very young or for the mentally defective, but the Witnesses, who constantly quote the apostle John, "God is love", ⁹ think nothing of condemning *innocent* people to the same destructive fate as the wilfully wicked who have merited it through their deliberate rebellion against God — and all this is done in the name of God.

To justify their erroneous ideas of "collective punishment", Jehovah's Witnesses appeal to the prophet Ezekiel ¹⁰ and his account of the destroying angel who visited divine judgement on Jerusalem (Ezek 9:1ff). A careful study of Ezekiel, chapter 9, reveals that the Witnesses are quoting the prophet out of context. The article quotes only verses five and six, but the preceding verses show that the tribulations come upon the city only after an investigation had exposed the wilfully wicked inhabitants who were unconcerned with the sinful state of the city. The fact that children also shared the same sentence indicates that they were old enough to be able to distinguish right from wrong. This understanding of Ezekiel 9 is in accordance with the prophet's statement that "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezek 18:4, 20) — that is, only the sinner himself shall die. This is totally opposed to the interpretation the Witnesses place on the passage.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Abraham extracted a promise from God that the threatened destruction of Sodom would be averted if even ten righteous people could be found within the walls of the city. But Sodom was so steeped in sin that no one could be found to prevent the tragedy that swiftly followed (Gen 18:16ff). The total destruction of Sodom by no means implied that this was to be the final or eternal fate of all its inhabitants; for,

speaking of his rejection in the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, Jesus said that judgement would be less severe on Sodom than on the towns that had refused to heed his word and works (Mt 11:20-24). "Less severe" can only mean that the culpability of some of the Sodomites is less deserving of punishment than the sin of rejection by the cities of Israel, and that the punishment in some cases will not be as absolute as in others.

Strangely enough, the Witnesses concur. They are aware of the anomaly in condemning the people who died in the Flood to everlasting destruction. They take a different line regarding the people who perished in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In order to accept Christ's words that judgement will be "less severe" on Sodom and Gomorrah they have had to invent a fanciful theory that unlike the people of Noah's day, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah never had the opportunity to receive any "kingdom message" which would have rendered them culpable in the sight of God:

"It is true that Abraham's nephew Lot took up residence in Sodom, but Lot did not have the kingdom message and could not give it to them . . . It is true also that two angels of Jehovah God visited the city of Sodom, but that was only to stay overnight and to make a first hand inspection of the city, but not to preach God's kingdom to Sodom. But no message of repentance and conversion and everlasting salvation was preached to Sodom . . . Manifestly they did not get such a Kingdom witness as the city of Capernaum got in the days of Jesus and his apostles."¹¹

Orthodox Terminology

The Watch Tower's explanation is simply a grasping at straws in an effort to conceal the deficiencies in its confused teaching on the Atonement. It is evident from the above illustrations that the Jehovah's Witnesses lack a true understanding of the atoning merits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and the nature of the judgement that is to come upon all mankind. They use terminology that is fully in accord with orthodox Christianity, and even lay emphasis on less common words that help towards a deeper understanding of the nature of Christ's sacrifice: the mercy of God and the role of Christ in the plan of redemption. They speak of the "ransom sacrifice" that Jesus offered to the Father; of the "undeserved kindness" that God has shown to us in sending forth his Son who is the "Liberator" of mankind.

However, it is to be regretted that orthodox terminology is no guarantee of orthodox doctrine, for as we have already seen, the Watch Tower and traditional Christianity are poles apart in the concept of the redemption and its application to the sons of Adam.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching, he hailed him as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). It was this Lamb who was *typified* in the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament whom the apostle John later saw in a vision: "And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev 5:6).

John's vision of the Lamb¹² is an obvious reference to the perpetual application of the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice offered "once for all" by Christ is applicable to all men for all time, but not everyone is to benefit from it:

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan 12:2).

The Witnesses and the Resurrection

Two types of resurrection appear in the Bible: the restoration of a deceased person to the prevailing conditions of this life; and the conferring upon a deceased person an entirely new and permanent mode of existence not hitherto experienced. It is the resurrection in this second sense that concerns us here; for it was in this manner that Jesus Christ was restored to life three days after his crucifixion.

No Christian can remain unmoved by Christ's resurrection; for without it there would be no Christianity. The importance of the resurrection in the theology of Paul can be judged from his words to the Corinthians:

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor 15:14-17)

Since the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ and the immortality of the human soul, it is not surprising that they lack a true understanding of the nature of Christ's resurrection. A comparison of the Watch Tower's teaching on the risen Jesus with that of orthodox Christianity reveals four major points of difference:

*1. Jesus Christ was not raised in his own body,
but as a “glorious spirit creature”:*

“So the king Christ Jesus was put to death in the flesh and was resurrected an invisible spirit creature. Therefore the world will see him no more. He went to prepare a heavenly place for his associate heirs, ‘Christ's body’, for they too will be invisible spirit creatures. Their ‘citizenship exists in the heavens’, — 1 Pet 3:18, Dy; John 14:19; John 14:2; Philippians 3:20, N.W.”¹

2. *Jesus was unable to effect his own resurrection:*

"It was the Almighty God Jehovah who raised up his Son on the third day. The dead Jesus could not raise himself up from the grave."²

3. *The body of Jesus could not be taken to heaven and was disposed of by divine power:*

"Those guards of the memorial tomb saw Jehovah's angel, but they did not see Jesus come to life and come out of the tomb. They could not do so, because Jesus was raised to life as an invisible spirit. He did not take up again that body in which he had been killed as a human sacrifice to God. The apostle Peter tells us so, saying: 'Christ died once for all time concerning sins, a righteous person for unrighteous ones, that he might lead you to God, he being put to death in the flesh, but being made alive in the spirit' (1 Pet 3:18). Divine power removed the human body in which Jesus Christ had been offered as a sacrifice for human sins."³

4. *The post-resurrection appearances of Jesus were in different bodies specially materialized for each occasion:*

"Almighty God raised his Son Jesus Christ from the dead an immortal spirit person, never able to return to corruption. So to make himself visible and appear to his disciples for the forty days after his resurrection that they might be his witnesses, Jesus materialized different bodies on various occasions to show he was alive but no longer a human creature . . . As his disciples watched, Jesus ascended heavenward on the fortieth day, his materialized body disappeared within a cloud . . ."⁴

It is evident from the above quotations that the Watch Tower's teaching on the resurrection can in no way be reconciled to that of orthodox Christianity; for, in effect, the Watch Tower's teaching is not of a resurrection at all, but of a re-creation.⁵

To arrive at a proper understanding of the Witnesses' conception of the resurrection, and to give an honest evaluation in the light of the Sacred Scriptures, it will be necessary to comment on each of the above deviations in turn.

1. Christ was Raised a "Spirit Creature":

The Watch Tower's "spirit resurrection" of Christ is a necessary corollary of their understanding of the Atonement. Christ died as a ransom for mankind, and like the *typical* sacrifices of the Old Testament law of Moses, he had to be immolated; he could not receive back the same body he had freely offered in sacrifice, for had he done so, his sacrifice would have been of no effect:

"The human body of flesh, which Jesus Christ laid down forever as a ransom sacrifice, was disposed of by God's power, but not by fire on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem. The flesh of a sacrifice is always disposed of and put out of existence, so not corrupting. But the value of the fleshly sacrifice remains and counts in behalf of the one offering the sacrifice... Hence Jesus Christ was not resurrected with the sacrificed human body... Consequently, when he ascended to heaven, he did not, even as he could not, take the sacrificed human body with him. He took with him the value of his sacrificed human life, this being pictured by his blood."⁶

The Witnesses believe that Christ ascended into heaven, but because we are told elsewhere that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven" (1 Cor 15:50), it became necessary to have Christ forfeit his human body and become a "spirit creature" so that he could enter heaven and take his seat at God's right hand.

By "spirit creature", the Witnesses mean that Jesus became as one of the angels, and they make constant use of a cryptic passage from the First Letter of Peter to support their contention that Jesus was raised as a spirit creature:

"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". (1 Pet 3:18)

Although the passage from First Peter is open to more than one interpretation, no reputable scholar would accept the meaning proposed by the Watch Tower. If violence is not to be done to other Scriptural passages that emphatically deny that Jesus was raised as a spirit creature (in the Watch Tower sense — see below), then we must re-examine the text to see if it has been properly understood.

Some commentators suggest that *pneumati* ("in the spirit") should be rendered as "by" the spirit, so that the raising of Jesus is seen as an action of the Holy Spirit. Theologically, there is nothing wrong with this proposal, for the resurrection of Jesus is an action proper to the Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit; but this is not the sense intended in 1 Peter 3:18. The play on words in First Peter would seem rather to be between the physical and the spiritual, but not in the sense intended by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul refers to Jesus as "the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17). Obviously, the apostle is not identifying Jesus with the Holy Spirit whom the Lord spoke of as "another Advocate" (Jn 14:16), nor is he implying that Jesus has been "spiritualized" as suggested by the Witnesses. The "Spirit" in this context must refer to the divine and heavenly level of being that was proper to the risen Jesus. Christ's resurrected state is "spiritual", in opposition to his "carnal" state as a man. As a "spiritual man" Christ is not encumbered by the infirmities that weigh upon mortal men; he is free to look to God and live only to God, and this is the life he has gained for us. For "he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:17).

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul tells us that we are no longer ruled by the "letter of the law" which brings death, but by the "spirit of the law" which brings life (2 Cor 3:6). We are called to be like Jesus, "spiritual", and to share in the glorious and incorruptible life he has won for us.

Being put to death "in the flesh", Jesus really died, but his physical death did not mean the end of his activity. Christ was endowed with a power (*dynamis*), thereby making him a life-giving spirit (cf. Phil 3:10; Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:45), and by reason of this divine life that suffused his human soul, Christ continued to live. "In this state" (i.e., his divine and heavenly level of being unencumbered by the limitations and infirmities of his previous earthly condition — v.19), Jesus went and preached to the "spirits in prison" (an Old Testament term for *sheol*, the abode of the dead; cf. Job 17:13-16; Is 38:10; Jonah 2:3-6. In Greek: *hades*; cf. Acts 2:27).

It is one of the articles of the Christian Creeds that during the period between his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus "descended into hell" (Greek: *hades*)⁷, "and on the third day he rose again from the dead". So it was in this pre-resurrection period that Christ was "alive in the spirit", which does not mean that he was "made into a spirit creature", as the New World Society teaches.

2. Jesus was Unable to Effect His Own Resurrection:

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was unable to effect his own resurrection and would have remained forever destroyed if Jehovah God had not raised him up as a mighty "spirit creature".

It is clearly evident from the New Testament witness that the resurrection of Jesus was an action of the Holy Trinity. The Father is said to have raised Jesus (cf. Rom 4:24; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; 14:4; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Phil 2:9; 1 Thess 1:10, 1 Pet 1:21; etc.) through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11). But on two occasions (Jn 2:19; 10:17-18) Jesus foretold that he would effect his *own* resurrection. Matthew 26:61 and 27:40, 63 also allude to the prediction of John 2:19.

Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem after the commencement of his public ministry occasioned the famous incident with the money changers and the subsequent cleansing of the temple (Jn 2:13-22). The Jews asked him by what authority he did these things, and in answer Jesus said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". The Jews thought he was speaking of the temple of Jerusalem, but John notes that Jesus was "speaking of the temple of his body". Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the *body* John mentions in verse 21 is not to be regarded as Jesus' physical body, but something symbolic of the spiritual body or temple of Jehovah:

"But he foretold to those Jews that he, as the embodiment or foundation of God's spiritual temple, would be raised to life on the third day (Revelation 21:22). In that sense Jesus prophetically 'raised up in three days the temple that the Jews had broken down' by killing him . . . Jehovah's temple, which was typified by Solomon's temple in its original purity, consists of more than Jesus alone. It includes his congregation of 144,000 spiritual members, the spiritual body of which Jesus Christ is the head."⁸

Jehovah's Witnesses have two reasons for supplying a symbolic interpretation to this passage in John's Gospel; for it speaks of Jesus effecting his own resurrection and of raising himself in the *same* body he possessed prior to his crucifixion.⁹

That Jesus was speaking metaphorically of his own physical body as a temple is evident from the context. The Jews had asked him by what authority he turned the money changers out of the temple of Jerusalem, and Jesus pointed to his future death *and resurrection* as

proof that he had this authority from God. Raising up a so-called "body of disciples" would be no proof to the Jews that he had this special authority from God. For even in the New Testament we see that would-be Messiahs had been able to gather large numbers of followers to accept their claim that they were specially chosen by God (Acts 5: 36-37). Jesus' words can refer only to the resurrection of his *physical* body — as stated in verse 21 — and not to any symbolic raising of a corporate "body" of believers.

3. The Body of Jesus Could Not Be Taken to Heaven and Was Disposed of by Divine Power:

This question is also dealt with in the commentary on the Witnesses' understanding of the Ascension,¹⁰ and it is included here only insofar as it is related to the resurrection.

Having Jesus raised as an invisible spirit-creature posed certain problems for the Watch Tower. What happened to the body? It definitely was not in the tomb; nor was it, in their view, reunited with the "non-existent" soul of Jesus. Some other explanation had to be found. The founder and first president of the Watch Tower, Pastor Charles Russell, suggested that the body may have been dissolved into gases:

"Whether it was dissolved into gases or whether it is still preserved somewhere as a grand memorial of God's love, of Christ's obedience, and of our redemption, no one knows."¹¹

The fanciful speculations of Charles Russell may still be held by some Witnesses, for they laid the groundwork for the current, general explanation which speaks of a vague *removal* or disposal of Christ's body by divine intervention. In other words, the fate of Jesus' body has become a "mystery", but it is a mystery that could be solved by a simple profession of faith in the bodily resurrection of Christ as stated in the Scriptures. The Watch Tower's denial of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is completely at variance with the Sacred Scriptures, where the whole purpose of the resurrection accounts is to show that Jesus was raised in the flesh.

The Glorified Body of Jesus

The risen body of Jesus possessed certain features that made it different from other bodies; but it was still the body in which he was

crucified. When Jesus appeared to his disciples they thought they were seeing a ghost, and to dispel their fears and doubts he told them to examine the imprint of the nails in his hands and his feet:

“See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Lk 24:39)

One can only wonder what further proof could possibly be needed to convince the Witnesses that Christ has indeed been raised in the flesh. If the cross is a “stumbling-block” to those outside the faith (1 Cor 1:23), then the resurrection is a “stumbling-block” to Jehovah’s Witnesses who claim to have the faith. With a little variation, the words of Jesus’ parable can be applied to the Witnesses who have refused to believe in a bodily resurrection: “neither will they be convinced even if some one should rise from the dead” (Lk 16:31).

To deny that Christ was raised in the flesh is to make him a deceiver; for he deliberately sought to convince his disciples that he had been raised in the *same* body in which he was crucified. No other interpretation of Luke 24:39 is possible (cf. also Jn 20:20, 27; Acts 1:3).

The features that distinguish Christ’s risen body from ordinary bodies was his ability to appear or disappear at will, and to pass through solid objects. These are characteristics proper only to a *glorified* human body possessing certain spiritual attributes, but nevertheless retaining all the physical form and features that were proper to it prior to its glorification.

The Transfiguration

An incident that is not without significance to a proper understanding of the resurrection was the transfiguration of Jesus (transfiguration, from the Greek *metamorphosis*: to change one’s form – to be transfigured), when the three apostles who were to witness Jesus’ night of agony in the garden (Mk 14:33) were given a glimpse of Christ in glory (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2; Lk 9:29; 2 Pet 1:16).

The relationship between Christ’s transfiguration and his resurrection is apparent from the setting. The Synoptic accounts place it immediately after Jesus’ prediction of his death and resurrection, and from the description of the event, the three evangelists have obviously borrowed Old Testament imagery (i.e., the radiant features, the bright cloud, and the heavenly voice, etc.) in an attempt to express the inexpressible.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the transfiguration “served to fortify Christ for his sufferings and death, while also comforting and

strengthening the faith of his followers. It showed that Jesus had God's approval and it was a foreview of his future glory and kingdom power. It presaged the second presence of Christ, when his kingly authority would be complete."¹²

The transfiguration is not without its problems for the Witnesses. They do not like the idea of dead (i.e., annihilated or non-existent in Watch Tower teaching) men — Moses and Elijah — appearing in a "vision" and actually speaking to Jesus. They attempt to explain that Moses and Elijah were "not literally present. They were represented in vision."¹³

But however the Witnesses may try to interpret the event, the transfiguration was really a "preview" of the resurrection, and Christ's *body*, transformed in glory on the mountain, must be regarded as essentially the same as his resurrected body. As Paul says in his masterful account of the general resurrection (1 Cor 15:51ff), we must all be *changed*; our bodies, like Christ's, must be transformed. They will take on certain spiritual qualities, but nowhere does it say that they will be "spiritualized", in the sense of becoming as intangible as angels.

4. The Risen "Bodies" of Jesus:

A denial of any of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity invariably leads to a chain-reaction, in which the faith becomes so distorted as to be barely recognizable. Jehovah's Witnesses began by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus and insisting that he was raised as an invisible spirit creature. Since Watch Tower theology rejects any suggestion of continuity of life after death — even for the Son of God — Jesus was in no position to effect his own resurrection, and so he was *non-existent* for three days, until God raised him from the dead.

Faced with an empty tomb and a disembodied Christ, the Witnesses sought to explain the disappearance of the unwanted body as a result of the direct intervention of God. With Jesus' body disposed of, only one final problem remained: that of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples. The Witnesses claim that these manifestations of Christ were actually in different bodies specially materialized for each occasion, and a number of texts are quoted that supposedly offer some sort of support to their teachings. The three major texts that are most commonly used are Mark 16:12; Luke 24:16, and John 20:14.

There is a difficulty associated with Mark 16:12 that needs to be put into proper perspective before any comment can be made on the actual text itself. It is generally agreed, even by the Watch Tower,¹⁴ that the

original ending to Mark's Gospel has been lost or mutilated, and the additional verses from v.9 onward have been appended by ancient authorities to smooth out the abrupt and unnatural ending at v.8. There are two main appended conclusions to Mark's Gospel; the longer, and more common of which, contains the verse in question.¹⁵

Speaking of the risen Jesus, verse 12 says:

“After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.”

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, “another form” means “another body”, but in the light of other Scriptural passages, this interpretation is not possible. The Greek word *morphe* is usually translated as “form”, but the *New English Bible* renders the word as “guise”, while the freer *Knox Version* translated the verse: “After that, he appeared in the form of a stranger”. So *morphe* need not necessarily refer to a totally different body as the Witnesses would have us believe.

If the last eleven verses of Mark's Gospel are to be regarded as the work of a copyist drawing upon material from Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, then the two disciples of verse 12 are almost certainly the same two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus (Lk 24:13ff). This seems to be the opinion of most commentators. It is this passage in Luke's Gospel which sheds valuable light on Mark 16:12, which is used by the Witnesses as their second “proof text” for claiming that the risen Jesus materialized a different body for each separate appearance he made to his disciples.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the two disciples failed to recognize Jesus because he appeared in a new and unfamiliar body, but a careful reading of the text reveals otherwise. The disciples failed to recognize Jesus, not because he appeared in a different body, but because “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Lk 24:16). The Greek word Luke uses in this instance is *ekratounto*, and it has as its root meaning a form of restraining or hindering; so that in many Bibles it is usually translated as “held”. The *Knox Version* renders the word “held fast”, while the *New English Bible* translates it as “something held their eyes”. The translation of C.H. Rieu reads: “But a spell was on their eyes”. So the disciples failed to recognize Jesus because, by an act of his will, he prevented them from doing so. And again, what possible motive would Jesus have in appearing in various bodies? A *transformed* body could make him look “different”, but a completely new and unfamiliar body would only confuse the disciples. Taken at its face value, the Witnesses' explanation means that the

disciples would never know in whose likeness Jesus might appear next.

The real reason for the delayed revelation of Jesus can be seen in the disciples' reaction to his crucifixion. Their remark: "But we had hoped" (vs.21), suggests that it had become a "stumbling block" to them, and their faith in Jesus was weakened because of it. Before Jesus would reveal that he had indeed risen, he sought to rekindle their faith in him as the Messiah. Jesus sometimes demanded similar professions of faith before he would work a miracle (Mk 9:24), after he worked a miracle (Mk 5:34), and before conferring a special office (Mt 16:16). Only after Jesus has stirred their hearts were the disciples permitted to recognize him: "And their eyes were opened and they recognized him." (Lk 24:31)

Mary Magdalene

John 20:14 contains the account of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene, and this is the third text the Witnesses use to support their contention that Jesus continually manifested himself in different bodies.

If particular attention is paid to verses 14 and 16, it will be noticed that Mary turned around twice. On the first occasion, John records with special emphasis that Mary was *weeping* outside the tomb. Jesus approached her as she stooped to look into the tomb, and from the structure of the sentence, it would appear that Mary *glanced* around to see who it was. She thought it was the gardener until he spoke her name, and then she *turned around* and recognized that it was Jesus.

Without going to the Watch Tower's extremes and claiming that Jesus materialized different bodies, we can admit that the risen Lord possessed transformed features. This is in accordance with 1 Cor 15:51-54, where Paul assures us that on the last day our bodies are to undergo a change and put on incorruptibility. If we are not reading more into John's words than he intended, we can say that Mary turned around twice. The first time was probably mechanically, and she did not pay too much attention to the newcomer. In her distraught state she failed to recognize her risen Lord and Master, and merely assumed that it was the gardener. It was not until she heard him call her by name that she turned her full attention to him and realized that he was Jesus.

A Transformation in Glory

Christ's resurrection was not like that of Lazarus, whom he had restored to the same life as before and under the same earthly conditions. The body of Jesus was now transformed in glory and completely under the control of the spirit. He no longer went about openly as had

been his custom, but appeared only at intervals and to select groups. The transformation of his body to its supernatural mode of existence required a special spiritual insight in those who were to see him, and if this was lacking, then the person needed special grace to "open his eyes" to the recognition of the risen, glorified Christ.

The primary purpose of the emphasis on the wounds of Jesus in John 20:20, 27 was to establish a continuity between Christ's crucified body and his resurrected body. The risen Jesus who stood before his disciples was the Jesus who had died on the cross. He had been "lifted up", and had passed through death to a new life; his body had been "changed" (1 Cor 15:51). He was now transformed in glory, and for this reason he was not always instantly recognizable to his disciples, but his wounds remained to convince the disciples that his body, which had been sown in corruption, was now "raised in glory" (1 Cor 15:43). Jesus now possessed a transcendent, eternal, spiritual body elevated altogether beyond the conditions of earthly bodies.

Like the two disciples of Luke 24:16, the Witnesses' eyes are "held fast" and they fail to understand the true nature and meaning of the resurrection. They certainly speak of a resurrection; they believe in a resurrection; but it is not the resurrection experienced by Jesus and proclaimed by the apostles that they teach. Rather, it is a pale imitation of their own devising and totally lacking any of the power attributed to it by the apostle Paul (Phil 3:10).

Further aspects of Christ's resurrection are treated in the following commentary on the Witnesses' understanding of the ascension of Christ into heaven.

The Witnesses and the Ascension

The Acts of the Apostles states that Christ's ascension into heaven occurred forty days after his resurrection. At the end of this time he led his disciples out to a mountain, and after giving them certain instructions, Luke tells us that he was "lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9).

The Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the ascension is unintelligible apart from their presentation of the resurrection. As we pointed out in the previous chapter, the Witnesses teach that Christ was raised a "spirit creature", and one of their reasons for denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus was a text in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, which states that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50).¹

Watch Tower theology places heaven somewhere beyond the visible universe, and in this scientific age, scientifically-minded Jehovah's Witnesses realized that they had another reason for believing that Jesus did not take his human body to heaven with him; for it would have been impossible for him to negotiate the trackless wastes of space and survive the fearful radiation belts and cosmic rays that are encountered beyond the earth's atmosphere:

"Dematerializing his assumed human body and returning to his invisible spirit state, Jesus in his ascension ran no risks to his life such as from radiation belts around the earth or cosmic rays in outer space."²

But other absurd, and more personal reasons are advanced for the rejection of a bodily resurrection, such as those contained in an article in *The Watchtower*. The offending paragraph is quoted in full:

"Another thing: If Jesus had his human body in heaven, then he has the entire digestive system, including the mouth

and the stomach; and his faithful disciples, on going to heaven, would have the same things. We remember that Jesus said to them: 'I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom' (Luke 22:29, 30). Well, then, after eating and drinking, the food and drink would go through their digestive systems. So what? Well, Jesus said: 'Whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught' (Mt 15:17, A.V.). Think of it. Since the arrival of human bodies, there now have to be draught houses in heaven, toilets, both private and public, with separate ones for men and women. And now and forever Jesus, who the clergymen say is very God himself, has to use a heavenly toilet, something that he never had to do in heaven before he became a man. This has to be true if we carry arguments to their logical conclusions."³

The Jehovah's Witnesses labour under a delusion. They are unable to conceive of a glorified human body that is no longer bound by earthly limitations; and because of this, they lack a true understanding of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. That Christ actually rose from the dead in the *same* body he had prior to his crucifixion has been adequately treated in the previous chapter, and there is no need to offer further proof here. As the Watch Tower's locating of heaven somewhere beyond the visible universe will be discussed in Chapter Ten, we can withhold comment on this point till then. It is only the *manner* of Christ's ascension itself that calls for our attention here, and on this matter two points need to be mentioned.

Firstly, a favourite argument employed by the Witnesses for claiming that Jesus was raised a "spirit creature" and ascended into heaven after dematerializing his "assumed" human body, is the false assumption that the sacrificed body of Jesus had to remain on the altar in order to be effective as a ransom sacrifice for mankind. As *The Watchtower* puts it:

"If Jesus were to take his body of flesh, blood and bones to heaven and enjoy them there, what would this mean? It would mean that there would be no resurrection of the dead for anybody. Why not? Because Jesus would be taking his sacrifice off God's altar."⁴

Old Testament "Types"

Jesus is the sacrifice *par excellence*. He is the fulfilment of all the sacrifices of the Old Law. The animal sacrifices offered by the Jews were but *types* of the perfect sacrifice which Christ offered "once for all" on Calvary. A slavish literalism in the application of *all* the details of the typical sacrifices of the Old Testament has led the Witnesses into folly. Old Testament *types*, of which there are about one hundred and fifty (some scholars would see more), do not have to be exact in all details. They contain certain features that find a fulfilment in the life or person of Christ or his Church, but their "typicalness" should not be pushed too far or we end up with contradictions and absurdities.

One *typical* illustration that readily comes to mind is the famous "sign of Jonah" which Jesus applied to himself (Mt 12:40). From the Gospel accounts, it is evident that Jesus was in the tomb for only about forty hours, whereas, a literal application of the "sign" would necessitate his being in the tomb for seventy-two hours.

Jehovah's Witnesses would do well to remember that Isaac is also a *type* of Christ (cf. Heb 11:17-19). Isaac carrying the wood on his shoulders (Gen 22:6) is symbolic of Christ carrying the wood of his cross to Calvary. And if Old Testament types are to be carried through to the letter, then the Witnesses must agree that Christ, like Isaac, received back the *same* life (only glorified in Jesus' case) at the resurrection (Heb 11:19).

The Lamb of God

The Watch Tower's teaching that Christ could not take his sacrificed human body to heaven is contrary to the Scriptures. Revelation, chapter 5, speaks of a "Lamb of God", and this can be none other than Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Revelation reads:

"And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."
(Rev 5:6)

"Standing"; that is, the Lamb is alive. It may also refer, as some commentators have suggested, to the perpetual mediatorial role of Christ as priest and victim. Like the high priest of old, "*standing daily at the altar*" (Heb 10:11), he "always lives to make intercession for

them" (Heb 7:25). "As though it had been slain"; the Lamb *standing* in the midst of the throne is alive, but it still bears in its body the *marks* of death. The sacred wounds which Jesus showed to Thomas in answer to the apostle's demands (Jn 20:24-28). Cf. previous chapter on the resurrection) are forever present in his glorified body as a visible witness to the sacrifice he made for us on the cross.

Heaven Not "Out There"

Secondly; heaven is not "up and up" as Jehovah's Witnesses suggest in their writings, and even if it were, there would be no need for Jesus to dematerialize his human body so as to take it safely through cosmic rays and radiation belts. After his resurrection Jesus' body was glorified; that is, it was no longer subject to the conditions and limitations that could have affected him before his glorification. By coming and going at will and passing through locked doors, Jesus clearly demonstrated that he had passed to a higher plane of existence where other, less-restrictive conditions now prevailed.

There is no need to talk about any passage through radiation belts and the like in order to reach heaven, as though it is to be located somewhere "out there". As the ascension narratives show, Jesus rose only a short distance from the ground before a cloud "took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). The cloud may be figurative of the cloud on which Jesus is to reappear at his Second Coming (Mt 26:64); or may refer to the cloud of the Exodus (Ex 13:21), or the cloud that filled the temple of Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:10), which was a symbol of the abiding presence of God among his people. In this latter sense, Jesus' entry into the cloud could be symbolic of his entry into the presence of God (i.e., heaven).

Even if no mystical significance is attached to the cloud, its providential concealment of any further ascension of Jesus should serve to remind us that Jesus' entry into heaven is not a fact that is observable to the naked eye.

The Watch Tower's teaching that the dematerializing of Jesus' body was necessary for his entry into heaven is a fantasy of their own making, and is entirely without Scriptural foundation. Just as Christ's bodily resurrection has become the guarantee of our own future resurrection (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:21), so too, his ascension into heaven meant the fulfilment of his promise to send the Holy Spirit to remain with us always (Jn 16:7; Acts 1:8) and the preparation of a place for us so that we can be with him for ever (Jn 14:3).

The Witnesses and the Second Coming

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ as taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses follows a long and involved history that begins with Pastor Russell's first associations with Second Adventism. As a young man Charles Russell was led to accept Adventist calculations that the stage was all set for Jesus to make his triumphant return in October, 1874. However, by the end of that year, it was evident that something had gone wrong with the Adventist predictions, and the looked-for return of Christ had been unaccountably delayed.

Only loosely connected with Second Adventism, Charles Russell was quite free to explore a number of possible solutions for the unexpected failure of the Scriptural "prophecies". For some years prior to October, 1874, he had been toying with the idea that the second coming might not be a "visible" event at all, and it was this hesitancy over the manner of the second coming that enabled him to hold onto his faith when so many of his contemporaries were turning their backs on Adventism. The Scriptural basis for Pastor Russell's acceptance of an invisible second coming will be treated below; for the same Scriptures are now used by Jehovah's Witnesses to prove that Christ came invisibly in 1914.

In consultations with another Adventist leader who shared similar views to his own, Russell accepted a three-and-a-half years' "cleansing period", after which time, Christ might yet appear. The cleansing period corresponded with the Scriptural account of the cleansing of the temple at Jerusalem three and a half years after Jesus was anointed "the Christ" at the Jordan. This cleansing period also became an invisible event when Christ failed to appear the second time; but by now, Pastor Russell was looking further ahead, to 1914 as the year which would mark the end of the "age of the Gentiles". Russell had regarded 1874 as the time of the enthronement of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and the following forty years (1874-1914) was the "harvest time",

when Christ would separate the "wheat" from the "weeds" (Mt 13:30).

From a study of the second volume of Pastor Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures* ("The Time Is At Hand"), there can be no doubt that 1914 was, in his view, to mark the end of the world as we know it:

"October, A.D. 1874 is the date of the beginning of the Times of Restitution . . . If these time-prophecies teach anything, it is that the Great Jubilee, the Times of Restitution of all things, has begun, and that we are already in the dawn of the Millennial age, as well as in the 'harvest' of the Gospel age — which ages lap one upon the other for forty years — the 'day of wrath'. We are already fourteen years into this forty-year-day of wrath; and the preparations for the struggle are progressing rapidly. The coming twenty-six years, at the present momentum, will be quite sufficient for the accomplishment of 'all things written'." ¹

As the years crept on and 1914 loomed closer, Charles Russell began to have misgivings. "Things were continuing as they were from the beginning" (2 Pet 3:4), and there were none of the signs that were supposed to herald the "great Day of the Lord".

The Watch Tower president lived to see his prophecies discredited, and his perplexity at his repeated failures can be summed up in the words he wrote in 1916 for a Foreword to a new edition of Volume II of his *Scripture Studies*:

"Dealing with subjects so difficult that they are rarely touched by others, it is not to be considered strange if some of the suggestions made in this volume have not been fulfilled with absolute accuracy to the very letter." ²

Further Prophecies

Judge Rutherford, who succeeded Charles Russell to the presidency, sought to offset the effects of his predecessor's failures to predict the "time of the end" by claiming that Pastor Russell's prophecies were actually forecasting the commencement of the First World War. With great hindsight, Rutherford wrote:

"In fulfillment of the antitype, the Elijah class knew that the war was coming and one of them, the Lord's faithful servant, Pastor Russell, for forty years pointed out from the prophecies that it would come in 1914." ³

This reinterpretation of Pastor Russell's writings is still accepted today and is to be found in varying forms in official publications.⁴

Rutherford himself was unable to resist the temptation to try to predict the "time of the end", and in his famous booklet *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* he calculated that 1925 would be the year set by God to usher in the "new order of things":

"That period of time beginning 1575 before A.D. 1 of necessity would end in the fall of the year 1925, at which time the type ends and the great antitype must begin. What, then, should we expect to take place? In the type there must be a full restoration; therefore the great antitype must mark the beginning of restoration of all things. The chief thing to be restored is the human race to life; and since other Scriptures definitely fix the fact that there will be a resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other faithful ones of old, and that these will have the first favour, we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death, being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on earth."⁵

In later years of the Judge's reign and following his death in 1942, modifications gradually transformed these original prophecies until today they are barely recognizable.

1914 – Now the All-Important Year

Jehovah's Witnesses no longer regard 1874 as having any special significance, and 1914 now occupies the position once held by the earlier date. The three and a half years of "temple cleansing" now extends to 1918, and refers to the expulsion of Satan and his followers from the heavenly sanctuary:

"However, as soon as Jesus sat down at his heavenly Father's right hand, Jehovah did not at once command him to rule in the midst of his enemies who had caused his death on earth. He told David's Son and Lord to wait until Jehovah made those enemies his footstool. Why? Because the 'appointed times of the nations' had not yet run out. Obediently David's Son and Lord sat there as High Priest after the likeness of Melchizedek until those times did end in 1914 (Hebrews 10:13, NW). In that year Jesus Christ was

installed to reign as king and began ruling with authority in the midst of all his enemies. But he did not begin to execute them in that year. He turned warrior like his enthroned ancestor King David and waged war against Satan the Devil and his demon angels in the heavens and hurled them down to the earth, where that original Serpent once had bruised him at the heel. In the spring of 1918 he came to the spiritual temple with *A.do.nay*' Jehovah for judgement work, but even then he did not begin to execute his enemies."⁶

Pastor Russell's "harvest period" has been updated by the Witnesses and is now part of the "time of the end", a period that is expected to reach its *definite end* within a few years' time.

Strictly speaking, then, the Christian doctrine of the second coming of Christ is no longer part of Watch Tower theology, for according to Jehovah's Witnesses, the looked-for return of Christ took place *invisibly* in 1914, the year that marked the beginning of the First World War. Instead of looking forward to the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit 2:13), the Witnesses now long for the great battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16), which is to be the prelude to a "righteous new system of things" in a world transformed to its original paradisiacal purity. Needless to say, Christians who are acquainted with the Scriptural prophecies for the "last things" will have difficulty in trying to reconcile the Watch Tower's fantasies with the prophetic realities of the Bible; but in truth, no reconciliation is possible.

So that an accurate picture may be formed of the Watch Tower's beliefs concerning the "last things", the following quotations are taken from authoritative text-books and magazines that faithfully present the Witnesses' teachings.

1. Jesus' coming, like his going, was to be invisible, and it was to take place in 1914:

"Some wrongfully expect a literal fulfilment of the symbolic statements of the Bible. Such hope to see the glorified Jesus come seated on a white cloud where every human eye will see him. They overlook Jesus' words before he left: 'A little longer and the world will behold me no more'. Since no earthly men have ever seen or can see the Father, they

will be unable to see the glorified Son. — John 14:19, NW, Exodus 33:20; 1 Tim 6:16.”⁷

“As Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem three and a half years after he was anointed with God’s spirit to be King, so three and a half years after he received kingly power in the autumn of 1914 he came to the spiritual temple as Jehovah’s Messenger and began to cleanse it. So this occurred in the spring of 1918. That marked the beginning of the period of judgement and inspection of his spirit-begotten followers.”⁸

2. Why 1975 was regarded as a possible date for the end of “this system of things”:

“According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man’s creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E.

“So six thousand years of man’s existence on earth will soon be up, yes, within this generation . . . How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years a sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants. This would be most timely for mankind. It would also be most fitting on God’s part.”⁹

To shed more light on the preoccupation the Watch Tower had with 1975 as the possible date for the end of “this system of things”, the following information is taken from an article in *The Watchtower*, entitled, “Why Are You Looking Forward To 1975?”:

“Are we to assume from this study that the battle of Armageddon will be all over by the autumn of 1975, and the long-looked-for thousand-year reign of Christ will begin by then? Possibly, but we wait to see how closely the seventh thousand-year period of man’s existence coincides with the sabbath-like thousand-year reign of Christ. If these two periods run parallel with each other as to the calendar year, it will not be by mere chance or accident but will be according to Jehovah’s loving and timely purpose.”¹⁰

3. The Battle of Armageddon is to bring about the end:

“The coming war of Armageddon will be Jehovah’s fight in which all wickedness will be swept from the universe. Revelation 16:14-16 calls it ‘the war of the great day of God the Almighty’ (NW). It will completely destroy the invisible and visible parts of Satan’s world, and thus it will spell the accomplished end of this wicked old world. It will be the climax of the tribulation which Jesus predicted, saying: ‘Then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world’s beginning until now, no, nor will occur again’ – Matthew 24 21. NW.”¹¹

We now turn to an examination of these three main points of belief in the Witnesses’ understanding of the “last things” to see how they compare with the Holy Scriptures.

The “Invisible Presence” of Christ

The first point was the statement that Jesus’ coming, like his going, was to be invisible, and was supposed to have taken place in 1914.

The Witnesses’ reason for insisting that Christ has returned invisibly is to cover up their mistaken calculations that promised all the attendant signs of the second coming in 1914. In line with this thinking, the New World Society now speaks of Christ’s invisible “presence” rather than his visible “coming”, and Watch Tower publications hammer home the idea that the Greek word *parousia*, which is usually translated as “coming”, can only be rendered rightly as “presence”.

The Greek word *parousia* can have the meaning of “presence”, but to insist that this is the only correct meaning of the word is utterly without foundation. In passages such as 2 Cor 2:10 and Phil 2:12, “presence” is quite acceptable, but the New World Translators have systematically contrived to eliminate any other meaning for *parousia* by inserting “presence” in every instance where the Greek word appears, such as Mt 24:3; 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; Phil 1:26. A careful study of the texts in question reveals that “presence” is not always the best rendering of *parousia*, and it is only because of their original errors regarding the supposed “invisible presence” of Christ that the Witnesses have been forced to defend their illogical and indefensible position.

In the Graeco-Roman world of the first century *parousia* was used to designate the official visit of a ruler or emperor to a city or country,

and in the New Testament, this same word is carried over into common usage to indicate the looked-for "arrival" or "coming" of Christ in glory; and not an "invisible presence" of Christ as the Witnesses would have us believe.

The Watch Tower's direct Scriptural support for the invisible return of Christ hinges almost exclusively on two texts: John 14:19: "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more"; and Acts 1:11: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven".

As an examination will quickly reveal, neither text offers any support to the Watch Tower's "invisible presence" teaching. Christ's words in John 14:19 actually do no more than affirm the imminence of his approaching death and are simply a way of saying that he is going to die. His death will mean the end of his earthly existence and "the eye which saw him will see him no more, nor will his place any more behold him" (Job 20:9). To interpret the words the way the Watch Tower has done is to give them a meaning they simply do not have.

After his resurrection, Jesus did not take up the *same* life he led prior to his crucifixion, in the sense that he was visible to everyone (i.e., the world) as he went about his daily business. The post resurrection narratives make it clear that the appearances of Jesus occurred only at intervals and to select individuals and groups. In other words, *the world in general* was to "see him no more" in this life. Further than that, the words imply nothing.

The Witnesses' understanding of Acts 1:11 can be seen in the following quotation:

"Most people will say, 'Our eyes did not see him return then'. Well, at the time that Jesus ascended to heaven, the two angels who appeared did not say that the onlooking apostles would see 'this Jesus' come again. They merely told the apostles that Jesus would come back. How? 'Thus in the same manner as you beheld him going into the sky.' They saw him go away but would not see him return. The angels' words, 'Thus in the same manner', do not say 'thus in the same body'. As to the manner of his going away, 'a cloud caught him up from their vision' so that he became invisible to them. His return would therefore be invisible. The words 'thus in the same manner' call attention to the fact that the world of mankind in general did not see Jesus

going into heaven; only the disciples there with him, the 'men of Galilee', saw him leave."¹²

"The manner of his going away was quiet, thieflike, without sound of trumpet or public display, yet with the message, 'You will be witnesses of me . . . to the most distant part of the earth', ringing in the disciples' ears (Acts 1:8, 11, NW). His witnesses alone saw him leave."¹³

No responsible Christian can accept such an extraordinary distortion of words and their meanings. Christ's ascension was not an invisible event, but was clearly seen by all who accompanied him to the Mount of Olives. It was not until a cloud took Jesus from their sight that the disciples could no longer see him, and it was only then that the actual entry into heaven took place.

"In the Same Manner"

After Jesus had departed, we are told that two angels appeared to the disciples and assured them that Jesus would return in the same manner or fashion as they had beheld him going. It is true that the angels did not tell the disciples that they would actually see Jesus come again, but a simple cross-reference to Revelation 1:7 shows that Jesus will definitely be visible at the time of his return:

"Look. He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief because of him. Yes, Amen." (N.W.T.)

If every eye is to see him, Jesus has to be visible. But according to Jehovah's Witnesses, only his disciples saw him leave, and only his faithful witnesses would recognize his return; that is, with the eye of faith:

"His return is recognized by the eye of one's understanding, such eyes being enlightened by God's unfolding Word. Christ's arrival and presence are not discerned because of a visible bodily nearness, but by the light of his acts of judgment and the fulfilment of Bible prophecy."¹⁴

If a little more attention is paid to Revelation 1:7, it will be noticed that John says that *all eyes* are to witness Christ's return – even those

who crucified him. This does not imply an early return of Christ, or that the generation which saw him leave would also be alive to witness his return. The passage in Revelation can best be understood by comparing it with Paul's words to the Thessalonians:

“For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.”(1 Thess 4:15)

Those who have “fallen asleep” are specifically mentioned as “the dead in Christ” (vs. 16); for this will be part of their glorious reward. But in the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul also says that the wicked — and this would include those “who had pierced him” and persecuted him through all the ages — shall suffer punishment and exclusion from the presence of the Lord “on that day” (2 Thess 1:8-10); so they too will see him coming.

The Watch Tower publications have pointed out that if *every* eye is to see Jesus on his return, then his coming must be invisible and seen with the eye of faith. The Witnesses' argument is that if Jesus returned in his human body, his arrival would be confined to a particular locality and only those in the immediate vicinity would be able to witness his return. The Jehovah's Witnesses have failed to take cognizance of the fact that *all* things relating to the second coming are to take place simultaneously, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52), the dead are to be raised, and those who are still alive are to undergo a transformation, as is the earth itself, and judgement is to take place upon all mankind. Paul's gathering of the peoples (cf. 1 Thess 4:17) is indicative that all eyes will see Christ at his coming. Jesus himself attested that his return would be a visible event during his interrogation by the high priest:

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, 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)

To deny that the second coming will be a visible event is to deny the words of Christ himself.

In order to convey the impression that Christ's departure was quiet and unobserved, the Witnesses use the analogy of a thief (cf. 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 16:15) and insist that his coming would also be stealthy. But this is not the sense intended by the inspired writers. That Christ's return would be “thief-like” is not a reference to an

“invisible presence”, but to an *unexpected* “coming”. The key to this analogy is to be found in Christ’s own words as recorded in Matthew 24:43:

“But know one thing, that if the householder had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have kept awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. On this account YOU too prove yourselves ready, because at an hour that YOU do not think it to be, the Son of man is coming.” (N.W.T.)

The Day of the Lord

That the return of Christ is to be a visible event is also apparent from other Scriptures such as the following: In his letter to Titus, Paul speaks of the “appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). The Greek word used in this instance is *epiphaneia*, and its meaning is “appearing” or “manifestation”. Clearly a visible return is here indicated (cf. also 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10). Another word Paul uses is *apokalypsis*, from which we get our “Apocalypse” or “Revelation”. In his letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle speaks of the great Day when the Lord Jesus is “revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire” (2 Thess 1:7). Again, the “revelation” points towards a visible event that will be apparent to all (cf. also, 1 Pet 1:7, 13).

We are told elsewhere that Christ’s return will be preceded by the sound of a trumpet blast and the voice of an archangel (1 Thess 4:16); that Christ will come on the clouds with great power and glory (Mt 24:30), and will manifest the glory of his Father. His appearance on that day will be in flaming fire and accompanied by the angels (2 Thess 1:7). Even allowing for imagery and symbolism in the above descriptions of the second coming, it remains certain that the return of Christ will definitely be a *visible* event that will affect the whole order of creation.

Enough has been said to show that the visible return of Christ is a truth that is firmly established in the whole body of the New Testament; and to answer the Witnesses’ claim that Christ returned “invisibly” to the heavenly sanctuary in 1914 we turn to the following passages from the Gospel of Matthew:

“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. Wherever the body is, there the vultures will be gathered." (Mt 24:23-28)

Matthew 24 leaves no room for a vague or nebulous "presence" of the Son of Man; for it compares the Lord's return to a flash of lightning that lights up the whole sky and is clearly visible to everyone. As gathering vultures (or *eagles* in the R.S.V.) are a sure sign to the hunter that carrion is present, Christ's coming, when it occurs, will be just as unmistakable.

Signs of the End

The Watch Tower's present preoccupation with the moral laxity in our permissive society, the use of drugs, the soaring crime rate, widespread poverty, racial injustice, and the leaning towards the occult, as sure signs of the imminence of the "destruction of this entire wicked system"¹⁵ may seem to have some Scriptural foundation, but when one compares this state of affairs with periods of past history, it can be seen that things are continuing as before (2 Pet 3:4) and that "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles 1:9). The present state of our society may indeed be cause for concern, but is it so vastly different from past ages? Read what an early Christian writer, Cyprian of Carthage, had to say regarding the situation in his day:

"Everyone is adopting a get-rich-quick policy. Forgetting what was the conduct of believers under the apostles and what ought to be their conduct in every age, with insatiable eagerness for gain they devote themselves to the multiplying of possessions . . . there is no mercy in works, no discipline in behaviour. Women stain their complexion with dye. The eyes are changed from what God made them, and a lying colour is given to the hair. The hearts of the simple are misled by treacherous artifices and brethren become entangled in seductive snares. Ties of marriage are formed with unbelievers. Members of Christ are prostituted to the

heathen. Not only rash, but false swearing is rife. Persons in high places are swollen with contemptuousness, poisoned reproaches fall from their lips, and men are sundered by unabating quarrels.”¹⁶

This description was written about the year 250 A.D., over 1700 years ago, but it could just as easily be transposed to almost any period of human history, and it goes to show that our own state of society is not so different from that of Cyprian’s day. How mistaken Cyprian would have been if he had imagined that these conditions warranted the assumption that they heralded “the destruction of this entire wicked system”.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are just as mistaken in thinking that today’s long list of modern ills is fulfilling Bible “prophecy” in a special manner, or that they are indicative of the imminence of the “great tribulation” that is going to come upon “this generation”.¹⁷

The long list of other “signs” such as wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, etc., that Watch Tower publications use to “prove” that we are in the “Last Days”, may also seem impressive; but equally impressive lists may be culled from almost every age in history, and not a few of them have been used by false prophets to show that they too had entered upon the “last days”. Earthquakes, famines and wars are recorded in every page of mankind’s history, and if they seem to be more prevalent today, then this is probably due to our more modern means of communication, whereby the tragedies and events in even the remotest corners of the earth no longer pass unnoticed as they did in previous years. As for “wars and rumors of wars” being part of the “signs” of the approaching end, one could just as easily quote from 1 Thess 5:3, where we are told that it is when people are saying that there is “peace and security” that the end will suddenly come.

No Christian will deny that the Lord’s coming will be “soon” (James 5:8), but the “signs of the times” occurring in every age of man, are meant to bring the people to repentance and to keep them alert and ready for their Master’s return (Lk 12:35-40); for the time of the end is always near.

Too much useless speculation as to the “times of the end” can only distract us from performing our duties to God and man. If we do our best to serve God and remain in his grace and friendship, it will not be of any great practical importance if the end of the world comes sooner or later than expected.

Further Speculation

The second point to be examined is the preoccupation Jehovah's Witnesses had with 1975 as the possible date for the "end of this system of things".

While no Christian will deny that Christ is to return again in glory, less than a handful would admit that the time of the *parousia* can be pin-pointed from the Scriptures. On the contrary, most would quote the words of Jesus that such knowledge is reserved to God alone (Mt 24:36), and leave the future safely in his hands. Despite the assurance of Christ that no one can know the times the Father has appointed for the end, Jehovah's Witnesses have worked out an elaborate system of dates, and by careful juggling with Scriptural chronology, they discovered that mankind was six thousand years old in 1975. Viewing this date in the light of the "events"(?) of 1914, the Witnesses believed that by 1975 it was possible that "this wicked system of things" could be no more.

It was admitted that the time of the end could extend slightly beyond October, 1975, for there were one or two gaps in the early part of the Watch Tower's chronology that left open a question of doubt on the precise extent of the time lapse between Adam's creation on the "sixth day" and the length of time he lived into the "seventh day". In an article titled, "Why Are You Looking Forward To 1975?", it was admitted that "... the end of that sixth creative 'day' could end within the same Gregorian calendar year of Adam's creation. It may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years."¹⁸

Because of the speculation that was aroused by this and similar articles which had been featured in Watch Tower publications for almost ten years,¹⁹ and the feeling of expectancy that had taken hold of Jehovah's Witnesses as a result of so much emphasis on 1975 as a year of special significance — and this after it had itself aroused this expectancy that something special *could* take place in 1975 — the Watch Tower hierarchy, perhaps mindful of its record of past failures in attempting to predict the time of the end, began to have second thoughts as 1975 drew ever nearer and "things continued on as before", at last found it necessary to issue a statement to the effect that 1975 need not necessarily be the year for the decisive battle of Armageddon to take place:

"The publications of Jehovah's Witnesses have shown that, according to Bible chronology, it appears that 6,000 years

of man's existence will be completed in the mid-1970's. But these publications have never said that the world's end would come then. Nevertheless, there has been considerable individual speculation on the manner. So the assembly presentation 'Why We Have Not Been Told That Day And Hour' was very timely. It emphasises that we do not know the exact time when God will bring the end. All we know is that the end will come within the generation that sees fulfilled on it the sign that Jesus Christ said would then be in evidence (See Matthew chapters 24, 25). All indications are that the fulfillment of this sign began in 1914. So we can be confident that the end is near."²⁰

The Witnesses' "Generation"

Since the "signs" that supposedly began in 1914 indicate that we are in the "last days", it is well to realize that time would seem to be running out for Jehovah's Witnesses. As the battle of Armageddon and the ushering in of God's "new order" must take place within the lifetime of the generation that witnessed the beginning of these signs in 1914, the Witnesses must be wondering why "all things are continuing as before". There was a time lapse of sixty-one years between 1914 and 1975, and each passing year only serves to increase the interval, so it is reasonable to ask what the Witnesses mean by a "generation".

*Aid To Bible Understanding*²¹ points out that some generations (e.g., between Adam and Noah) averaged 850 years. Psalm 90:10 is quoted to the effect that "the days of our years are seventy years; and if because of special mightiness they are eighty years" (N.W.T.). It is also noted that thirty-seven years of one generation passed between the time of Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and its fulfillment in 70 A.D. Although Jehovah's Witnesses may one day be forced to fall back on one of these longer Biblical "generations" to explain the delay in the destruction of "this wicked system of things", they are at present using the word "generation" in its accepted modern sense of approximately seventy years. *The Watchtower* comment concluded: "So we can be confident that the end is near; we do not have the slightest doubt that God will bring it about . . . But we have to wait and see exactly when, in the meantime keeping busy in God's service."

With this final comment no Christian would disagree, for one of the great themes of the New Testament is undoubtedly the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. Though we are urged to look forward to this

event with hope and longing (2 Pet 3:11-12) and pray that it may soon take place (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:17, 20), we are constantly reminded that it is not for us to know "the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). Although the New Testament constantly seeks to discourage speculation as to the time of the end, Jehovah's Witnesses are not to be dissuaded. Undismayed by their past failures and the failures of all the would-be prophets before them, the Witnesses have reinterpreted their former prophetic failures and redoubled their efforts to pin-point the time of the great Day of the Lord.

Hours and Days

To escape the charge of being labelled unscriptural because of their speculative attempts in the field of prophecy, the Witnesses resort to the most primitive literalism in interpreting such texts as Mt 25:13 and Mk 13:32. In these passages, Jesus warned his disciples to be always vigilant, for they knew "neither the day nor the hour" of his return. The "day nor the hour" is understood by every Scripture scholar as an idiomatic reference to *time in general*, but not so for Jehovah's Witnesses. They believe that the "time in general" (i.e., the *year*) can be determined from the Scriptures; but not the *exact* "day nor hour".

As the Witnesses themselves are aware, "hours and days" are not always limited to their strictly literal sense in the Bible, but are sometimes used figuratively. It was in this latter sense that Jesus spoke of the "hour" of his passion (Mk 14:35), meaning the whole time between his agony in the garden and his crucifixion. And Paul and other New Testament writers refer to the whole time between Christ's ascension and his second coming as "these last days" (2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; 2 Pet 3:3). The Witnesses are not on very solid ground in affirming that the prophecies necessarily refer to literal hours and days.

By directing attention to the texts that speak of hours and days so that their own interpretations can be advanced, the Witnesses find that they are less frequently called upon to answer other embarrassing passages that speak of the time of the end as being unexpected (Mt 24:44; Lk 12:40); to come suddenly (Mk 13:36); imminent (Mt 10:23; 1 Pet 4:7; Rev 3:11; 22:20); like a thief (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10); at a time unknown (Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32). Besides the above passages that militate against any supposed "knowledge" the Watch Tower may profess to have on the time of the end, there are one

or two other factors that must be taken into consideration if *all* the Scriptures are to be fulfilled beforehand.

The apostle Paul assures us that the end will not come before the Jews — *as a people* — have been converted to Christianity:

“Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren; a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:25-26)

No such acceptance of Christ has yet taken place amongst the Jewish people, nor does there seem any likelihood of this happening in the near future. It was of this passage from Romans that Gregory Baum, O.S.A., wrote:

“It has been suggested . . . that Paul means by ‘all Israel’ the entire Christian Church and hence does not refer to the Jewish people at all. But quite apart from the unparalleled usage of the term Israel, this interpretation does not fit into the context of Chapter 11. Paul reveals a ‘mystery’ in order that the Gentiles may not be proud and despise the unbelieving Jews: while a part of Israel is blinded, he tells them, eventually ‘all’ the people shall be saved, ‘the remnant’ and the ‘others’.”²²

Also to be fulfilled is Paul’s prophecy of the “great apostasy” and the emergence of Antichrist, whom the apostle describes as the “man of lawlessness . . . the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3). Jehovah’s Witnesses would do well to ponder the words Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, for they are as pertinent today as when they were first written:

“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” (2 Thess 2:1-3)

Armageddon

The third point to be examined is the statement that the battle of Armageddon is to bring about the end.

Addressing more than ninety thousand Jehovah's Witnesses at an international assembly held in the Yankee Stadium in 1953, Watch Tower president, Nathan Homer Knorr, warned his listeners and the world that the coming battle of Armageddon "will be the worst thing ever to hit the earth within the history of man".

Armageddon, of course, is the symbolic name which the Book of Revelation gives to the final encounter between the forces of good and evil, and according to the Witnesses, this conflict is due to take place within a few short years — or any time within the generation of those who witnessed the invisible coming of Christ in 1914:

"Soon now, Jehovah, by means of Jesus Christ, will fight the 'war of the great day of God the Almighty' to destroy this wicked system of things of which the Devil is the god, and then the Devil himself will be put out of operation in the abyss. This will show God's power over all his enemies and will vindicate him as the Universal Sovereign. Christ will usher in the new order, wherein 'righteousness is to dwell'."²³

Except for the obvious symbolisms that are clearly intended to be understood as such, Jehovah's Witnesses take the Book of Revelation at its face value and invest the visions of John with a reality they were never meant to have. This not the place to go into a detailed discussion of the Watch Tower's understanding of the Book of Revelation, but while limiting oneself to a brief comment on Armageddon, it can be mentioned in passing that the other visions of John, such as the thousand-year reign of Christ, the limiting of heaven to 144,000 so-called "spirit creatures", and the "chaining" of Satan in the abyss, are not to be understood in the crudely literal way they are interpreted by the Watch Tower.

Contrary to what the New World Society teaches, the battle of Armageddon is not some vast super-cosmic conflict that is soon to take place between the opposing armies of Christ and Satan, with mankind somewhere in the middle. By claiming that it is, the Witnesses betray a lamentable lack of logic and understanding of the Sacred Scriptures.

Apocalyptic Writing

The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic in character, that is, it belongs to a form of Jewish writing that employed vivid imagery, symbols and signs in which to express its hidden message. Apocalyptic writings were common in later Judaism and early Christianity, and usually appeared in times of persecution and war. Although Revelation is the only truly apocalyptic book in the New Testament, certain prophetic books of the Old Testament, such as Ezekiel and Daniel 7-12 are apocalyptic in character and supply much of the imagery used in Revelation. Apocryphal apocalypses, both Jewish and Christian, are quite common, and can even be helpful in shedding light on the correct understanding of the less common images and symbols used in Revelation.

Being a Jew and familiar with earlier apocalyptic writings, John had a wealth of ready-made images and symbols in which to couch his message of hope for the persecuted Church. While John's message would have been readily understood by the average Jew of his day, we must remember that Oriental imagery is completely foreign to our western way of thinking, and in this particular case, it is also 1900 years removed in time.

The message of Revelation is applicable to all men for all time, but the message cannot be divorced from its setting. To open the book as the Witnesses have done, and read it with as much interpretation as they would give to a modern text book is surely, in the words of Peter, "to twist them [the Scriptures] to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16).

The Message of Revelation

According to the testimony of an early Christian writer named Irenaeus, John's Apocalypse (from the Greek *apokalypsis*: revelation) ". . . appeared towards the end of Domitian's reign". Domitian was assassinated in 96 A.D., when the Church was passing through a time of crisis. It was natural for the Christians to wonder "where was the promise of Christ's coming" (2 Pet 3:4), and in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9), John was inspired to write words of hope and encouragement to the persecuted Church. Being a Jew, and familiar with Jewish literature, history, and tradition, John cast his message in a form of writing that was well suited to the current circumstances.

John's message to the Church was one of expectancy, Christ had not abandoned his Church, nor would he permit it to suffer indefinitely.

He would "come like a thief" (Rev 3:3); his coming would be soon (Rev 22:12, 20), and he would destroy his enemies with "the sword that issues from his mouth" (Rev 19:21). The underlying message of Revelation is therefore concerned with stressing the triumph of Christ that has already taken place (Col 2:13-15); that is now taking place (1 Cor 15:24-26); and which will reach its definite realization "shortly" (Rev 17:14). All three concepts are merged into one in Revelation, so that persecution and conflict and the triumph of Christ are seen as a constantly recurring cycle that will "soon" be brought to its definite conclusion with Christ as the victor. The Witnesses' famous battle of Armageddon, which they conceive of as some future cataclysmic event, is actually part of this perennial struggle between the forces of good and evil.

Signs and Symbols

It is the nature of apocalyptic literature to use the names of persons and places and events as symbols of what they were remembered for. In this way Revelation uses the Old Testament symbols of the dragon and the serpent to represent the Devil (Rev 12:9). Babylon the Great had long since ceased to be the decadent capital of the ancient world, but its former reputation was so well known that it symbolized perfectly the degradation of the powerful Roman Empire.²⁴ In using Babylon as his symbol, the apostle John pictured it as seated on seven hills (Rev 17:9), a description which most commentators accept as an obvious reference to the city of Rome built on the famous seven hills. As the new Babylon, the Roman Empire had embodied all the tyranny and evil of the ancient world-power that had subjugated the people of God at the time of the Exile.

Armageddon is generally understood to refer to the famous battlefield of Megiddo in northern Palestine, the scene of many decisive conflicts in Israel's turbulent history. It was here that Barak and Deborah defeated Sisera (Judges 5:19) and Pharaoh Neco killed Josiah (2 Kings 23:29). Megiddo's long association with death and violence readily lent itself to symbolic adaptation, and the apostle John used it to good effect in his apocalyptic description of what will be the *ultimate triumph* of good over evil, of Christ over Satan, and God over all. John's vision is not so much of a spectacular event that is going to take place in a few years' time, as an assurance that the ultimate victory will belong to God.

Jehovah's Witnesses, who have set themselves up as exponents of the Bible, are truly "blind leaders of the blind" (Mt 15:14): for their absurd interpretation of the Book of Revelation reveals an abysmal ignorance of the true nature of apocalyptic literature and an inability to understand the Word of God in its total concept.

The Witnesses and the Holy Spirit

Fifty-six years after the historic gathering of bishops for the Council of Nicaea, one hundred and fifty-one bishops met again in council at Constantinople (now Istanbul) to deal with a recurrence of technical problems that were an aftermath of the earlier council in 325 A.D. The First Council of Constantinople was not concerned solely with a reiteration of the Nicæan decrees; for another important matter concerning the "personality" of the Holy Spirit also called for its attention.

Macedonius, the usurper of the See of Constantinople, had been active in proclaiming that the Holy Spirit was not an actual "person", but an impersonal "force" or "power" by which God accomplished his desired purpose.

Because of his eminent position, the bishop was able to influence many into accepting his teachings; but his sphere of influence never reached the proportions of the Arian crisis. The Council of Constantinople convened in May, 381 A.D., and was concluded the following July. The "Arian Question" was brought to a successful conclusion, and after due examination of the teachings of Macedonius, his doctrine was condemned as erroneous. The conciliar bishops then set forth the true Christian doctrine, professing their faith in the "personality" of the Holy Spirit as it had been held since the time of the apostles.

Today, almost sixteen hundred years after the council's solemn profession of faith, the "personality" of the Holy Spirit is again being challenged by modern-day Macedonians, the New World Society of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses deny that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person, and claim that he is simply the active force or power of God:

"Just as the wind is invisible to man, so is the spirit of God. When a man has God's spirit upon him it means he has been authorized by God to do a certain work, whatever that

work may be. So the holy spirit is the invisible active force of Almighty God which moves his servants to do his will.”¹

Blanket Rendering

The theology of the spirit is rather complex (except to the Witnesses); for the Greek word *pneuma* (spirit) can be used in a number of different ways, and very often, it is only the context that decides which way the word should be understood. As with other words that cut across their pre-conceived understanding of the Scriptures (i.e., “soul” and “hell”), the Witnesses give *pneuma* a blanket rendering in passages where other translations interpret it to be referring to the Holy Spirit, and they make no allowance for the various meanings the Greek word is capable of expressing. There is no denying that in many cases *pneuma* can be understood to refer to the active force or power of God manifesting itself in the recipient (see below), but to claim that it can have no other valid meaning is further evidence of the shallowness of Watch Tower “scholarship”.

Most modern translations of the Bible, such as the *Revised Standard Version*, which serves as the basic text for this study of the Watch Tower’s doctrines, simplify the “*pneuma* question” for the general reader by using capital letters whenever the context seems to be referring to the *person* of the Holy Spirit. Although the “personality” of the Holy Spirit is thus more easily distinguishable, the procedure is arbitrary and governed by the context, the translator, and the traditional understanding of the particular passage in question. However, the use of capital letters for identifying the person of the Holy Spirit is not unjustified, for there are very few instances in the New Testament where we cannot be sure of the precise way in which *pneuma* is to be understood.

“Impersonal Force”

What Jehovah’s Witnesses call God’s “active force” (or his “holy spirit”) is that inner motivation which stems from God and moves or inspires us to carry out his will.

As we saw in chapter 3, the tri-unity of persons in God (Trinity) was completely unknown to the Jews of the Old Testament. God was “one” (Deut 6:4), and even though the Hebrew word *echod* was capable of expressing a composite oneness, this was not the way the Jews conceived of God. With no knowledge of the tri-unity of persons

in God, there was, logically, no knowledge of the "person" of the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew equivalent of *pneuma*, "*ruah*", was consequently regarded as the impersonal force or power of God active in man and nature. In this way, "The Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2); it is also the "breath (*ruah*) of life" that is in man (Job 33:4) and beast (Eccles 3:19). It is a saving spirit of power in Zech 4:6, and a prophetic spirit that reposes on men in Num 11:26. *Ruah* can also be evil (1 Sam 16:14), or irritated (1 Kings 21:5); it can produce confusion (Isa 19:14) and jealousy (Num 5:14); but in all these examples it is never thought of as possessing a "personality". Even when it is spoken of as a "holy spirit" (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10) and a "good spirit" (Neh 9:20; Ps 143:10), it remains an impersonal wind-like force that effects the will of God. Although *ruah* was identified with God, it was not accorded any existence apart from God.

Two points need to be emphasized. Firstly, any attempt to prove the personality of the Spirit from the Old Testament is reading back into the Hebrew Scriptures something that is not there. Secondly, any attempt to prove from the Old Testament that the Spirit does not have a personal reality, without taking the fuller revelation of the New Testament into account, is a gross misrepresentation of the Sacred Scriptures and evidence of a complete lack of understanding (deliberate or otherwise) of the growth and development of revealed truth in the pages of the Bible.

The Greek word *pneuma* adequately expresses the sense of *ruah*, but, unfortunately, no single English word is capable of expressing the precise meaning of either the Greek or Hebrew words. "Wind", "breath", "force", "power" and "life", which are used in various contexts, all convey something of the meaning of *pneuma*, but not one of them can be used to the exclusion of the others. Even "spirit" (whether personal or impersonal) which is the usual translation of *pneuma*, fails to catch the subtle sense of the Greek word. Something of the difficulty in capturing the precise meaning of *pneuma* in English can be seen in the following passage from the Witnesses' N.W.T. rendering of John 3:8:

"The wind [*pneuma*] blows where it wants to, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone that has been born from the spirit [*pneumatōs*]."

The Personality of the Spirit

Many New Testament translations are particularly free in ascribing personality to *pneuma*, and though it may be quite legitimate for a Christian to read back into the sacred text his belief in the all-pervading influence of the Holy Spirit, it should be noted that it is not always the sense intended by the inspired authors. A careful study of the New Testament reveals that *pneuma* still retains the basic meaning of the Old Testament *ruah*, but only in the New Testament is there any mention of the actual "personality" of the Spirit. It is to the New Testament, then, that we must look if we are to find the fulfilment of the great truths that were merely foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Two of the many texts in the New Testament that reflect Old Testament ideas of an impersonal spirit are Mt 4:1 – "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil"; and Lk 4:18 – "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (cf. Isa 61:1). Strangely enough, the Witnesses' handbook of Scriptural texts, *Make Sure of All Things*, fails to use either of these or similar texts to "prove" that the Holy Spirit is not a person, and instead, quotes from passages that refer to the events of Pentecost:

"Now while the day of the festival of Pentecost was in progress they were all together at the same place, and suddenly there occurred from heaven a noise just like that of a rushing stiff breeze, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting. And tongues as if of fire became visible to them and were distributed about, and one sat upon each one of them, and they all became filled with *holy spirit* and started to speak with different tongues, just as the *spirit* was granting them to make utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

"When they had made supplication, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were one and all filled with the *holy spirit*" (Acts 4:31. Italics added).²

For Jehovah's Witnesses, the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost was a special outpouring of the same spirit that appears elsewhere in the Bible as God's impersonal active force, and following their usual practice of retaining blanket translations for controversial words and phrases, the Witnesses deny that any "personality" is attached to the Scriptural usage of *pneuma*.

In the Watch Tower's dictionary of the Bible, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, the Witnesses take up the matter of New Testament usage of ascribing personality to the Holy Spirit:

"It is true that Jesus spoke of the holy spirit as a 'helper' and spoke of such helper as 'teaching', 'bearing witness', 'giving evidence', 'guiding', 'speaking', 'hearing', and 'receiving' . . . [but] his remarks must be taken in context. Jesus personalized the holy spirit when speaking of that spirit as a 'helper' (which in Greek is the masculine substantive *pa.ra'kle.tos*). Properly, therefore, John presents Jesus' words as referring to that 'helper' aspect of the spirit with masculine personal pronouns. On the other hand, in the same context, when the Greek *pneu'ma* is used, John employs a neuter pronoun to refer to the holy spirit, *pneu'ma* itself being neuter. Hence, we have in John's use of the masculine personal pronoun in association with *pa.ra'kle.tos* an example of conformity to grammatical rules, not an expression of doctrine."³

What the Witnesses have done is to reverse the thrust of the argument in support of ascribing personality to the Holy Spirit by claiming that because *pneuma* is neuter, then any further reference to the Holy Spirit as a "helper" (demanding masculine gender), must be regarded as simply conforming to grammatical rules, and not to an expression of doctrine. But what are the facts?

It is true that *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter, and any "personality" ascribed to the noun is therefore arbitrary. "However, the masculine pronouns *ekeinos* and *autos* are used of the Spirit/Paraclete in [John] 15:26; 16:7, 8, 13, 14. As the Paraclete, the Spirit takes on a more personal role than in many other sections of the NT."⁴

The Paraclete

Throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, *pneuma* was always regarded as the impersonal active force of God; but at the Last Supper (what the Witnesses call the "Memorial Supper") Jesus enlarged upon his previous references to the Holy Spirit and began to speak to the apostles about the role the Spirit would have in the Church after his departure. *For the first time*, the Spirit is referred to as "another Counselor" (Jn 14:16).

The Greek word Jesus used was *Parakletos*, a word which is still the subject of much debate. Scholars are undecided as to its origin or its exact meaning, and its usage in the New Testament is confined to the Johannine writings. On the basis of its use in John 16:6-7, where Jesus promises to send the *Parakletos* to "comfort" the disciples in their sorrow, the *Authorized Version* translates it as "Comforter". The *R.S.V.* renders it as "Counselor", while the *Jerusalem Bible* translates it as "Advocate". However, in a footnote in the *Jerusalem Bible* we are told that it is "difficult to choose between the possible meanings: 'Advocate', 'intercessor', 'counselor', 'protector', 'support' ". Each of these words conveys a meaning of *Parakletos*, but because no single English word can capture the complexity of thought behind the title, it would be wise to follow the practice of the *New American Bible* and settle for "Paraclete", a near-transliteration that preserves the uniqueness of the word and does not emphasize one meaning to the detriment of others.

The N.W.T. has chosen to render *Parakletos* as "helper", as have a number of other modern translations; and in *Aid To Bible Understanding*, the Witnesses explain the *impersonal nature* of this "helper":

"As the Messianic king, Christ Jesus has the 'spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of mightiness, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah' (Isa 11:1, 2; 42:1-4; Matt 12:18-21). This force for righteousness is manifest in his use of God's active force or spirit in directing the Christian congregation on earth, Jesus being, by God's appointment, its Head, Owner and Lord (Col 1:18; Jude 4). As a 'helper', that spirit now gave them increased understanding of God's will and purpose and opened up his prophetic Word to them."⁵

Another Jesus

To answer the Jehovah's Witnesses' denial of the Spirit/Paraclete as a person, it is necessary not merely to examine the role the Paraclete has in the Church, but also his relationship to Jesus.

If the Holy Spirit is called "another Paraclete" (Jn 14:16), it implies that Jesus was the first paraclete. In 1 Jn 2:1 Jesus is given this role in heaven with the Father. But while on earth, he also had this role. And it is in this role that we can see something of the relationship between Jesus and the Paraclete.

Just as the world refused to accept Jesus (Jn 5:43; 12:48), so, too, the Holy Spirit is rejected by the world (Jn 14:17). The disciples alone knew and recognized Jesus as the Holy One of God (Jn 6:69), and we are told that they alone were to recognize the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:17). As Jesus taught his disciples all things (Lk 20:21; Jn 8:26), so, too, the Holy Spirit would teach them all things (Lk 12:12). Jesus bore witness to himself and his authority (Jn 8:13-18), and in the same way, the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus (Jn 15:26-27). As the Paraclete is the Spirit of truth and guides the disciples along the way of truth (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), Jesus is the Way itself, and the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6).

Even from these few brief texts, a pattern emerges which reveals that the Holy Spirit/Paraclete is modelled on Jesus himself. He is an image or likeness of Jesus, just as Jesus is the image or likeness of the Father (Phil 2:6; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). But what is most important is that the Holy Spirit cannot come until after Jesus has departed (Jn 16:7). Although Jesus is going to return to the Father, he assures his disciples that he will not leave them orphans. He is coming back. Jesus is not referring to his second coming, but to an immediate return. Nor is this return referring to the short time he spent with his disciples between his resurrection and ascension; for the disciples' hearts are to rejoice with a joy that no man can take from them. Jesus is going to be with them always, so that their joy may be full (Jn 16:16-24).

So the Holy Spirit, the "other Paraclete", is *another Jesus*. All the promises of Jesus to dwell with his disciples are fulfilled in the Holy Spirit. He is the presence of Jesus with the disciples while Jesus is absent. As the quasi-personified "Wisdom" of God (Prov 8:24ff) came to be identified with the Word of God through the influence of later Christology and was seen to be truly a person, so, too, the mysterious spirit of God which moved through the pages of the Old Testament as the "active force" of God and was given a number of "personal" attributes, was to be revealed by Jesus as a real "person"; one who was going to dwell among the people of God after Jesus had departed. Nor can it be otherwise. The "activities" of God are not separate from God. As the Word of God, Jesus is one with the Father. As the Spirit of God, the Paraclete is also one with the Father and with Jesus.

What the Witnesses have to say about "personification not proving personality"⁶ is correct -- but only to a point. It does suggest that for John, the Spirit was more than an impersonal force or influence. The

fact that the personal pronoun is applied to *pneuma* in itself may not prove that the Spirit is a personal being. It is because of the revelation of Jesus that the Holy Spirit is “another *Parakletos*” who is to remain with the disciples and teach them all things, that we are justified in accepting the Holy Spirit as a person — another Jesus. And the Watch Tower’s statement that the assignation of the personal pronoun in reference to the Spirit is only “an example of conformity to grammatical rules, not an expression of doctrine” is thus seen to be without merit or support from the Scriptures.

Back to the Article

In *Aid to Bible Understanding*, Jehovah’s Witnesses come back to one of their favourite arguments: the lack of the article to distinguish the Holy Spirit from other holy spirits (God included). “It would be expected that, at the very least, the definite article would be used . . . this would at least distinguish it as *THE* Holy Spirit.”⁷ A list of texts then follows to show the reader where the Holy Spirit is mentioned without the famous article.

Since the use of the article was fully discussed in chapter Four, all that needs to be said here is that the Watch Tower has again failed to tell the whole story. As they themselves said above in relation to the use of the personal pronoun, the omission of the article can be “an example of conformity to grammatical rules, not an expression of doctrine”.

However, there is an instance in the Fourth Gospel where the article gives us the fullest form of “Holy Spirit”: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit (*to pneuma to hagon*), whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things” (Jn 14:26). Even if we did not have this well-attested reading, what was said above on the revelation of Jesus would still apply. The Holy Spirit is “another *Parakletos*”, and truly personal. And this has been the faith of the Church from the very beginning.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

A further argument Jehovah’s Witnesses use to deny the personal reality of the Holy Spirit is founded on Biblical statements which speak of Christians being baptized with the Holy Spirit:

“As for the ‘Holy Spirit’, the so-called ‘third Person of the Trinity’, we have already seen that it is, not a person, but

God's active force (Judg 14:6). John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with holy spirit even as John had been baptizing with water. Water is not a person nor is holy spirit a person (Matt 3:11). What John foretold was fulfilled when God caused his Son Christ Jesus to pour our holy spirit on the apostles and disciples during the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., so that 'they all became filled with holy spirit'. Were they 'filled' with a person? No, but they were filled with God's active force — Acts 2:4; 33."⁸

There is no difficulty in John the Baptist's remarks that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit just as he baptized with water. Nor is there any problem in the Pentecost account of the disciples being "filled" with the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that baptism under John was merely an external rite or repentance (Acts 19:2ff). Christian baptism, on the other hand, is something dynamic. The very fact that Jesus is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit indicates that the action will be completely different from John's baptism of repentance.

The Christian is baptized "into Christ" (Gal 3:27), and in a mysterious way he dies in Christ so that he can be raised to new life (Rom 6:3-4). This new life is the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), who thereafter dwells in the believer (Rom 8:9), just as the Father and the Son dwell in the believer who loves Jesus and keeps his word (Jn 14:23). In this way the Christian is truly the "temple of God" (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:20-22) and is able to be "filled" with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Admitting that it is possible to be filled with the "person" of the Holy Spirit is no more difficult than accepting the teaching that we must be filled with the person of Jesus Christ; and this is exactly what is demanded of us: "Examine yourselves to make sure you are in the faith; test yourselves. *Do you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is really in you? If not, you have failed the test*" (2 Cor 13:5, *Jerusalem Bible*).

The Role of the Spirit

If the reality of the Holy Spirit is less observable in the Gospels, it is because they are concerned with the actual life of Christ himself. It was only when Jesus was nearing the end of his earthly mission that he began to speak more forcefully of the Holy Spirit and the role he was to have in the Church.

Just before his ascension into heaven, Jesus directed his disciples to convert the world, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). In this Gospel text we have the clearest declaration of the reality and co-equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and Son. Paul takes up the same idea and casts it in similar formulae in such passages as 1 Cor 12:4-5:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."

Like the poorly-instructed Christians at Ephesus who lacked a valid baptism and were unaware of the existence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1ff), Jehovah's Witnesses are without a sound knowledge of the Scriptures which testify to the person and power of the Holy Spirit, and as long as they continue to deny the personal reality of the Holy Spirit, they are denying the very existence of the source of life itself.

"The Holy Spirit is not simply a 'he' but a 'we': the Father and Son coming to us, the dialogue of the Father and Son. I think of the Holy Spirit as the divine 'we', so intensely does the Spirit make present to us the Father and Jesus, and so transparent is 'he' in himself. He is the 'we' that makes us the people of God, one with the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is also the ecclesial 'we'. When we say 'we' Christians, or 'we' the people of God, it is the Spirit within us that enables us to say 'we'. He is the one person in many persons in the Church, one person with two other persons in the Trinity."⁹

The Witnesses and the After-Life

This chapter examines briefly the Witnesses' attitude to the after-life. It is divided into three sections, and looks firstly at the Watch Tower's teaching on man's soul. It then examines the Witnesses' strange understanding of heaven, and finally it looks at the reasons behind the Witnesses' rejection of the teaching on hell as a place of punishment for all those who deliberately turn away from God.

THE SOUL — Mortal or Immortal?

Just four years after the death of Judge Rutherford in 1942, the New World Society published what was to be one of its most popular text books, *Let God Be True*.¹ Before it was revised and enlarged in 1952, the first edition ran through an alleged ten million copies (by 1971 the copies printed numbered more than nineteen million). Instead of bringing out a revised third edition of *Let God Be True* in 1965, the Society simply rehashed most of the material contained in the earlier volumes and came up with *Things in Which it is Impossible For God to Lie*.

Of particular interest in the new text-book was the chapter devoted to the Scriptural use of the word "soul", and under the heading "Your 'Soul' Is You",² the Witnesses attempted to disprove the Christian teaching that man possesses an immortal soul. It seems hardly necessary to point out that the Christian teaching is synonymous with the Biblical teaching, and both are used as complementary terms to denote the true religion as taught by Christ and embodied in the pages of the New Testament.

Before proceeding to an examination of the Scriptural basis for the Christian belief in an immortal soul, it will be well to see what the Witnesses themselves have to say about the soul:

"In describing the creation of the original man Genesis 2:7 very simply states: 'The Lord God formed man of the dust

of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul'. Thus we learn that man is a combination of two things, namely, the 'dust of the ground' and 'the breath of life'. The combining of these two things (or factors) produced a living soul or creature called man . . . So we see that the claim of religionists that man has an immortal soul and therefore differs from the beast is not Scriptural. The Bible shows that both man and beast are souls, and that man's pre-eminence is due to the fact that he is a higher form of creature and was originally given dominion over the lower forms of animal life (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21). The first man, Adam, was created a living soul, and nowhere is it stated that he was given an immortal soul. — 1 Corinthians 15:45"³

It is important to realize that the Christian concept of an immortal soul is completely foreign to the Hebrew Scriptures, but contrary to what the Watch Tower would have its readers believe, Christians are not confused over the nature of the soul.

A Living Soul

The Hebrew people did not think of man as having a composite nature of soul and body, but as a single "concrete" *person*. When God breathed into man "the breath of life" (Gen 2:7), man became a "living soul"; or, as we would say, a "living person". Although there are a number of divergent views on how the Hebrews conceived of *nephesh*, for the purpose of this study we can agree with the Jehovah's Witnesses (with reservations) that the "soul" in Hebrew thought is the "total person". In modern terminology, it would also be called the "Ego" or the personal "I". What cannot be accepted, however, are the Witnesses' remarks that man's pre-eminence is simply due to the fact that "he is a higher form of creature and was originally given dominion over the lower forms of animal life". Man's pre-eminence stems from a "special kind of life distinguishing him from all earthly beings, a life that comes from God — the 'breath of life'".⁴

Because the Bible contains a progressive revelation of the "truth that leads to eternal life", we should not expect to find fully formulated doctrines in the earlier ages of Israel. The Old Testament texts that Christian apologists usually advance in favour of the immortal soul (e.g., Gen 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22; Eccles 12:7; etc.) must there-

fore be understood in the light of the Hebrew vision of the "total" man. The texts may be favourable to immortality from a Christian point of view, but this retrojected interpretation does not always represent the original meaning intended by their authors, and in doctrinal discussions with the Biblical-minded Witnesses, accurate statements are essential.

A point that needs to be made is that if the Hebrew *nephesh* ("soul") is not synonymous with the later Christian concept of soul, then there is little use in the Witnesses going to so much trouble to "prove" that it can die. If immortality is nowhere ascribed to *nephesh* in the Old Testament, it simply means that in the early stages of its development the doctrine was incomplete and needed the fuller revelation of the New Testament to perfect it.

It can also be argued that it is nowhere stated that a *nephesh* is annihilated. The texts that speak of the death of a *nephesh* are referring to the termination of a person's active life on this earth, and no wider horizon appears. There are texts, however, that seem to imply that the *nephesh* (i.e., the "soul" understood in the Christian sense) enters into a state of "conscious" inactivity in *sheol* (the abode of the dead. Cf. Isa 14:9-11; Ezek 32:17-32); but here, again, there is the tendency of Christian apologists to read more into these texts than their authors intended.

The Witnesses of Matthew

To speak of the New Testament conception of the soul as though it represented a radical departure from the Old Testament use of *nephesh* is not entirely correct. For the most part, the Greek equivalent to *nephesh*, *psyche*, conveys the same basic meaning as the Hebrew word, but on a number of occasions, a concept that began to appear in later Judaism, also appears in the New Testament.

One of the clearest declarations of the Christian concept of *psyche* as the persisting "self", is found in Mt 10:28:

"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."

The first part of the verse distinguished between the body (*soma*) and the soul (*psyche*). In Hebrew thought the body represented the whole person — the "living soul" of Gen 2:7; but here Matthew differ-

entiate between the two and points out that the soul survives the death of the body.

Being committed to their denial of the immortality of the human soul, Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to cloud the issue by accusing the Christian clergy of laying undue emphasis on the first part of the verse.⁵ In *Let God Be True* they even give the verse a futuristic interpretation and claim that the "soul" is to be understood as representing the whole man at the time of the resurrection on the last day.⁶

No matter where one places the emphasis in verse 28, it remains obvious that Matthew is advocating a dualism of body and soul, and the Watch Tower's fanciful suggestion that the verse points towards the future resurrection and judgement of mankind, is entirely without foundation. The first part of the verse stresses the natural immortality of the created human soul which does not perish with the death of the body, and it is the fate of the surviving soul that now needs to be considered.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the "souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne", and of those "who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus" (Rev 6:9; 20:4). They are spoken of as being "under the altar", that is, in the presence of God. They are the "spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23); the "blessed ones" who have been "persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10).

Evidence for an Immortal Soul

The Witnesses state that the word *psyche* appears 102 times in the New Testament,⁷ and they falsely assume that the Scriptural basis for this Christian doctrine is limited to these texts alone, or they attempt to confine discussion on the soul to these texts alone. No Christian apologist teaches that the doctrine of the immortal soul relies solely on the texts containing the Greek word *psyche*, for the foundations of Christianity are more secure than this, and survival after death can be expressed in passages that do not even mention the word "soul".

Some of the strongest Scriptural evidence for survival after death is to be found in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Philippians. Two texts in particular express his firm conviction of being "forever with the Lord" immediately after his death. The first text is taken from the Second Letter to the Corinthians:

"So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for

we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Cor 5:6-8)

Ordinarily Paul is only concerned with two states of being for a Christian: that which he experiences in this life, and that which he will experience after the *parousia*, following the general resurrection of the dead. But in these verses from Second Corinthians, Paul speaks briefly on the intermediate state which Christians dying before the *parousia* (second coming) will experience. Although this intermediate state of the disembodied soul can never be preferable to the final state when we shall be "at home with the Lord", that is, in his presence, it is far more preferable than remaining as we are in our present "home" (vv 1-2).

The second text appears in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith." (Phil 1:21-25)

Although Paul does not mention the word "soul" or its immortality, there can be no doubt — except for the Jehovah's Witnesses — that the teaching is implicitly contained in both passages. In fact, if Paul is not speaking of the soul and its survival after death in these passages, then his words are nonsensical.

Paul teaches us that death means being with Christ, while the Witnesses tell us that it means extinction. The two are hardly compatible. If Paul's missionary work was of the utmost importance to the Philippians and his death simply a state of complete extinction, where is the dilemma? He speaks of his work as "fruitful", for it is Christ working in him and drawing all men to himself (cf. Jn 12:32). The longer Paul can continue this work the more converts he can win to Christ; yet he speaks of his death as being "gain". There can scarcely be any gain in passing into a state of non-existence where there is "no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom" (Eccles 9:10).

As the ancient Hebrews had no revealed knowledge of what took place after death, Eccles 9:10, and related texts, merely record what

was readily observable to the naked eye; namely, that the dead *nephesh* or "person", like the beasts of the field, ceased to have any further part in this world's affairs. The Witnesses, on the other hand, taking these texts on their face value, find it necessary to mistranslate Phil 1:21-25 so that it will not contradict their teaching that man becomes non-existent at death. But their various attempts to explain it away testifies to its effectiveness in answering their claims that man does not possess an immortal soul.

Resurrection of the Body

Lack of space prevents any discussion on other important references to the immortality of the soul, such as Rev 6:9; 20:4; Lk 16:19-31; 23:43; Acts 7:59; Heb 12:23; 1 Pet 3:19, but each of these texts offers strong support for the acceptance of the Christian teaching of the immortal soul.

As we have already seen in earlier chapters, many of the terms used in orthodox Christianity have been taken over and given an entirely different meaning by the New World Society. When the Witnesses use familiar terms such as Christ's "resurrection" and his "ascension", they are giving the words a meaning all their own. In the same way, their teaching on the resurrection of the body in no way resembles any teaching ever held by the Christian Church.

The resurrection of the body supposes a continuity of existence after death, so that the enduring "self" (i.e., the spiritual soul), ever conscious of its identity, and retaining its intelligence and will and other distinguishing characteristics, can be reunited with its risen body. For many years the Witnesses refused to see any inconsistency between their denial of the immortal soul and the acceptance of a bodily resurrection. They failed to realize that if there was no enduring soul to form a connecting link between the former mortal body and the later risen body, there could be no true resurrection, for there would be nothing to resurrect. God could, of course, create a person who might be identical with someone who had previously existed, but it would not be the same personality.

Some of this simple logic finally penetrated the Watch Tower fortress, and to make their paradoxical position more tenable, they have even gone so far as to ascribe "memory" to God:

"'But if a person is thus re-created', someone may say, 'is he really the same person? Is he not just a copy?'" No, for

this reasoning overlooks the fact earlier mentioned that even in life our bodies are constantly undergoing change . . .

"Accordingly, as soon as the genetic combinations are formed at the time of conception, Jehovah God is capable of perceiving and having a record of a child's basic traits. So it is wholly logical that he is capable of having an accurate record by which to re-create one who has died.

"We can have confidence in Jehovah's perfect memory. Why, even imperfect humans, by means of videotape, can preserve and construct visible and audible reproductions of persons. Far greater is God's ability to keep such records, for he calls all the numberless stars by name . . .

"Because of his perfect memory of life patterns and his purpose to resurrect the dead, Jehovah God could count deceased men of faith like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as being alive."⁸

Although God's "memory" is now supposed to provide the necessary "link" between the former and later personalities, the situation still remains basically the same. God can certainly "remember" a person, that is, he can recall all his distinguishing characteristics and incorporate them into this "new" person, but if a man passes into nothingness at death and becomes completely non-existent, then the new personality is nothing more than a new creation, and all the Witnesses' talk of a resurrection is simply words without meaning.⁹

Nor can we rightly speak of God as having a "memory", as though he had need to remember every individual in order to be able to recreate him anew. The reason God could "count deceased men of faith like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as being alive" is because they *are* alive; or, as Luke puts it, "for all live to him" (Lk 20:38). The patriarchs are not living on only in God's "memory", but are really living. God has no need of a memory, for everything is ever-present to him. There is no yesterday, today or tomorrow for God, just the eternal "now".

The absurdity of having the dead live on in the "memory" of God is a pathetic substitute for the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul. The Witnesses' denial of an immortal soul and their teaching that man becomes non-existent at death is irreconcilable with the belief in a resurrection, and it is opposed to the positive testimony of the Scriptures. In other words, it is opposed both to reason and revelation.

HEAVEN — Who Can Attain It?

Heaven is the goal of all Christians. Christian theology teaches that through the merits of Jesus Christ heaven has become accessible to all men. But according to Jehovah's Witnesses, only an infinitesimal number, 144,000 to be exact, will actually attain this state of bliss. The rest of mankind, the so-called "other sheep", are destined for an eternity of happiness to be spent on earth. There can be no doubt that the two teachings are violently opposed to each other, but before proceeding to an examination of these differences, it will be well to have some clarification of the precise meaning of the word "heaven".

Heaven in the Scriptures

The Hebrew word *samayim*, which we translate as "heaven", expresses a number of different ideas. In the cosmography of the Hebrews, the heavens were a "firmament" stretched out above the earth (Gen 1: 6-8); and the expression "heaven and earth" (Gen 1:1) simply signified the whole universe. As the whole universe had been created by God (Isa 42:5), it is impossible that he could be contained by the heavens and the earth (1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:24). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, heaven is spoken of as the dwelling place of God (1 Kings 8:30), and to distinguish between the visible heavens and the dwelling place of God, the Hebrew people spoke of God as being in the "highest heavens" (Deut 10:14). The apostle Paul also uses this metaphor when he speaks of being rapt to the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2), and of Jesus ascending above "all the heavens" (Eph 4:10).

Although the New Testament view of heaven is sometimes nothing more than an extension of the ideas found in the earlier Hebrew Scriptures, a number of new elements are added that stem from the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus has come down from heaven (Jn 3:13, 31; 1 Cor 15:47), and following the resurrection, he ascended again into heaven (Mk 16:19). He has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven (Jn 14:2-3), and where he has gone, we are to follow (Jn 13:36), and be with him forever (1 Thess 4:17).

The Watch Tower's View

The New World Society presents a somewhat different picture from the accepted Christian teaching on heaven. In Watch Tower theology, heaven is reserved for the "anointed class" who form the body of Christ:

"Not all of Jehovah's witnesses expect to go to heaven. Indeed, only a small proportion, a 'little flock' do. (Luke

12:32) Almighty God, who sets all members in his organization as it pleases him, has limited to 144,000 the number of the 'body of Christ', whose members will reign with Christ Jesus in God's heavenly kingdom. Only a small remnant, sufficient to complete the fullness of that body, now remain on earth."¹⁰

Of the other faithful Witnesses, those who are not numbered among the 144,000, the textbook goes on to say:

"An unnumbered crowd of faithful persons now working as Jehovah's witnesses are sometimes called his 'other sheep' or 'Jonadabs', because they were foreshadowed by Jonadab, companion of King Jehu (Jn 10:16; 2 Kings 10:15-28; Jeremiah 35:8, 18, 19). They do not expect to go to heaven. They have been promised everlasting life on earth, including the privilege of subduing, beautifying and populating the earth, if they, as Jehovah's witnesses, prove their faithfulness to him before his war of Armageddon."¹¹

The above quotations from the Watch Tower's textbook raises a number of important questions. Is heaven accessible to all the faithful, or is it limited strictly to 144,000 "spirit-begotten" persons? Is the Witnesses' view of heaven in any way compatible with the Scriptures? And is there any basis for maintaining that the earth is to be transformed into one vast paradise for those outside the select band of 144,000?

The Watch Tower's doctrine of the heavenly glory reserved for only 144,000 "spirit-begotten" persons stems from a too-literal understanding of two passages in the Book of Revelation (Rev 7:4; 14:1).

Who Are the 144,000?

In Rev 7:4 we are introduced to those who are numbered among God's elect. This is the text which has supplied the Witnesses with their teaching of heavenly glory for only 144,000; but unfortunately, they have misunderstood the whole meaning of John's vision.

The 144,000 mentioned in Rev 7:4 symbolize the total number of God's elect. As John sees it in his vision, the four destroying angels are told not to harm the earth "until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads" (Rev 7:3). The seal is an identifying stamp with which the elect are set apart from the world, and it is reminiscent of Ezekiel's vision of the angel with the writing case who was

commanded to place an "X" on the foreheads of the righteous Jews who were to escape the judgement that was soon to fall on Jerusalem.

In keeping with the type of literature in which it appears, the 144,000 is symbolic of all the elect, and it should be understood to refer to the total number of the redeemed people of God – the "body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12-13) – that is, all the elect: pre-Christian, Christian, and all non-Christian peoples "sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel" (Israel being understood as the people of God).

This interpretation does not sit too well with the Jehovah's Witnesses; for in Watch Tower theology the 144,000 are the "anointed class", in contrast with the "great multitude" of the following vision who are destined for an eternity of happiness confined to the earth. John, however, sees things differently.

Contrary to what the New World Society teaches, the great multitude "which no man could number" is not a group distinct from the 144,000, but rather, it is the same group. John is explaining one group by the other. "After this", that is, after John "heard" the number of the sealed, he was granted a vision of the whole company of the elect. The definite number of the elect signified completeness: All the tribes had their required number; none were missing (cf. Jn 17:12). Nor should God's chosen people be understood as being only a tiny group, for the members were so many that John could not count them himself, he "heard" the number of those sealed – 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1,000). In apocalyptic imagery, the number 12, like the number 7 symbolizes perfection or totality. The second 12 corresponds to the tribes of Israel or the people of God. And the 1,000 indicates an immense number. In other words, the 144,000 symbolizes the great multitude of the elect whose exact number is known only to God.

To forestall any objection to the interpretation that the elect can be specified as 144,000 one moment and the next as "innumerable", it should be remembered that we are dealing with imagery and symbolism; and in apocalyptic language 144,000 represents a multitude beyond numbering. It can also be pointed out that Jehovah's Witnesses, with no regard for accepted norms for interpreting apocalyptic literature, actually teach that the twenty-four "older persons" (Rev 4:4) stand for the 144,000 followers of Jesus Christ.¹²

An Earthly Paradise?

Having misunderstood the meaning of the 144,000 elect of God, Jehovah's Witnesses have been forced to add qualifications to the texts

that promise heavenly glory to all the righteous. As was noted in the quotations from the Watch Tower's textbook, *Let God Be True* (see above), all "men of good will", the so-called "Armageddon survivors", who are not numbered among the 144,000 "spirit-begotten creatures" can expect nothing more than an eternity of happiness confined to this earth.

Even the "great men of old", such as the patriarchs, the prophets, and holy men like John the Baptist, whom Jesus praised so highly (Mt 11:11), are denied any opportunity to attain heavenly glory and must content themselves with being "princes over all the earth."¹³

The prospect of an earthly paradise might appeal to some materially-minded people whose thoughts seldom rise above the comforts of earth, but it is completely unsatisfactory for those whose hope it is to be "forever with the Lord". Needless to say, the cruel delusion that predestines all but a token number of men to immortality on earth is a teaching that is nowhere to be found in the Sacred Scriptures.

Although Watch Tower theology has three final states for mankind (i.e., heaven for the 144,000 spirit creatures; an earthly paradise for the "other sheep", and total annihilation for the unregenerate evil-doers), the Bible speaks of only two states: heaven for the righteous, and hell (*gehenna*) for the wicked.

We are told that God, who desires not the death of a sinner (Ezek 18:23), but "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4), has assigned each person to a particular position in the "body" of Christ (1 Cor 12:27-30). The metaphorical use of a body to explain the relationship between Christ and his followers also provides us with a key to the understanding of the universality of heaven. In reminding the Ephesians of the intimate union contracted by marriage partners, Paul takes the opportunity to use it as an analogy of the relationship between Christ and his Church — which is his body (Eph 5:23). By virtue of their baptism, *all* Christians belong to the body of 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 12:13).

Although Paul speaks of the Church, which is Christ's body "the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23), he also points out that it is still expanding (Col 2:19); for it has not yet attained to its full stature promised by its incorporation in Christ (Eph 4:13). The knitting together of Christ's body in all its members, which is only imperfectly realized now, is to achieve this perfection in the future, when *all* its members are finally united with Christ in heaven.

When the Christians at Corinth began separating into factions, Paul was obliged to write a strong letter of protest:

“What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I belong to Paul’, or ‘I belong to Apollos’, or ‘I belong to Cephas’, or ‘I belong to Christ’. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:12-13)

An Indivisible Body

Just as it is impossible for the Church to be divided in its allegiance to Christ, so it is impossible to accept a teaching which would attempt to split up this *total* Christ into 144,000 “spirit-begotten” Christians in Heaven and those who are numbered among the “other sheep” on earth. Only a defective knowledge of the Scriptures, which is reprehensible in a group who have set themselves up as “Bible guides”, can account for the Witnesses’ total failure to grasp the conclusions to which their teaching must necessarily lead. -

The Witnesses’ division of righteous mankind into two classes is simply an attempt to cover up past mistakes that promised the heavenly kingdom to be ushered in towards the end of the last century. But God’s promises cannot be so easily distorted, and no matter what the Witnesses may claim, the Bible has no knowledge of a remnant of Christians destined for heavenly union with Jesus and a “great multitude” of “other sheep” settling down to an eternity of happiness on earth.

It is true that the Scriptures speak of a class of “sheep”, but they are contrasted with the unrepentant “goats” of the parable, who are for ever excluded from God’s presence (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

The Witnesses quote a number of texts that seem to suggest the future establishment of an earthly paradise, but when they are subjected to scrutiny, these texts fail to offer the support the Witnesses imagine. Lack of space restricts comment on all of these texts, but an examination of one of the Watch Tower’s most common objections will suffice to show the shallowness of its arguments.

Flesh and Blood

The text in question is 1 Cor 15:50, and it tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. But contrary to the emphasis the Watch Tower puts on this verse, Paul is not suggesting that a

vast number of earthly "Armageddon survivors" are going to be excluded from heaven. The key to the proper understanding of this passage is to be found in the context of 1 Cor 15. After reminding us that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God", he goes on to say in verse 51: "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."

Paul admits that he is telling us a "mystery" — a revelation that we cannot fully understand. Even after he has revealed God's plan to us, it does not become any less a mystery, for the process and result of our transformation in Christ remains beyond our knowledge and experience. And about forty years later, the apostle John reaffirmed Paul's statement by writing: "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2. Cf. Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:1-5).

Instead of being so easily led astray by the speculative fantasies of the Watch Tower, a person would do well to content himself with the words of Paul: "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him', God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:9).

HELL — A Place of Punishment

If it is true that the Bible promises a heavenly kingdom to all who love and serve God in this life, it is also true that it offers the awful possibility that many may fail to attain this union with God and be forever excluded from his presence. All who deliberately reject the saving grace of God are to be cast into hell, which in Christian theology, is the place or state of punishment where all who die at enmity with God will suffer the pains of loss and of sense.

Biographers of the Watch Tower's founder, Charles Taze Russell, are unanimous in declaring his rejection of orthodox Christianity to be due to his inability to reconcile the doctrine of hell with the teaching that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16). Today, a century later, the former Pastor's denial of hell is still at the heart of Watch Tower theology, and Jehovah's Witnesses are as loud as ever in proclaiming that "there is no hell".

Many of the Witnesses' objections to the teaching of hell may be summed up in these quotations from one of their textbooks:

"The doctrine of a burning hell where the wicked are tortured eternally after death cannot be true, mainly for four reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) it is unreasonable; (3) it is contrary to God's love; and (4) it is repugnant to justice."¹⁴

As to the perpetrator of this doctrine, the Witnesses state:

"Who is responsible for this God-defaming doctrine of a hell of torment? The promulgator of it is Satan himself. His purpose in introducing it has been to frighten the people away from studying the Bible and to make them hate God."¹⁵

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the "God-dishonoring doctrine of a fiery hell for tormenting conscious human souls eternally"¹⁶ is kept alive by the Christian clergy:

"Imperfect man does not torture even a mad dog, but kills it. And yet the clergymen attribute to God, who is love, the wicked crime of torturing human creatures merely because they had the misfortune to be born sinners."¹⁷

Even the teaching of Christianity is misrepresented:

"But are not Satan the Devil and his demons down in hell keeping the fires and making it hard for those who are in it? This is what is taught by Christendom's clergy."¹⁸

There are so many errors contained in these few brief quotations that this whole chapter could be devoted to answering them, but that would lose sight of the primary purpose of this book, which is to state the Watch Tower's doctrines in a clear and concise manner and examine them in the light of Christian tradition and sound principles of Biblical interpretation.

Sheol and Hades

Many of the Witnesses' objections to hell rely on the confusion caused by the evolution of the word in the English language, so before

any answer can be offered to the Witnesses' denial of hell, we must first establish correct terminology.

Jehovah's Witnesses assert that the Hebrew word *sheol*, which some Bibles translate as hell, refers to the common grave of mankind, and that its Greek equivalent, *hades*, must also be taken to mean the grave:

“The Hebrew word at Psalm 16:10 translated ‘hell’ is *sheol*; but in Peter’s Greek quotation it is *hades*. So we see that *hades* is the Greek equivalent for *sheol*. The original word in each language means mankind’s common grave.”¹⁹

The Witnesses labour under a delusion. Their position is so precarious that despite all the evidence to the contrary, they are forced to deny that *sheol* and *hades* can have more than area of meaning. It is true that in certain contexts, *sheol* does have the meaning of the grave (cf. Gen 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kgs 2:6, 9; Job 21:13); but to state forcefully that this is its only meaning is to set oneself at variance with facts established by reputable scholars of every major Christian denomination.

In Isa 14:9-11 the Old Testament view of *sheol* reaches a new level of understanding as the prophet pictures the “shades” of the great kings of the past rousing themselves to greet the arrival of a fellow king (see also Ezek 32:17-32). Saul’s recourse to the forbidden practice of necromancy brought Samuel’s spirit back from *sheol* with the warning that Saul and his sons would be joining him the following day (1 Sam 28:7-19).

These texts, although highly poetic, are best understood as being descriptive of a state or condition beyond the grave, where the dead retain a vague, shadowy existence as replicas of what they had been in life. Although *sheol* can sometimes mean the grave, contextual study demands that it also be given a wider range of meanings, such as the R.S.V.’s *nether-world*, the non-world, which is variously described as being a “pit” (Job 33:24, 28); “chambers of death” (Prov 7:27), and a “fortress” (Isa 38:10). Job describes it as being barred by gates (Job 38:17), and the Psalmist speaks of it as a place of darkness and of silence (Ps 88:6; 115:17). It should be mentioned here also, that when the Jehovah’s Witnesses speak of the dead as being in *sheol*: “Hence, *sheol* is obviously the place to which the dead go,”²⁰ they are actually using contradictory terms. If a person becomes non-existent at death, which is what the Witnesses teach, then he cannot be said to be anywhere — even in a “common grave of mankind” — whatever such a phrase might mean.

In the New Testament the Greek equivalent to *sheol*, *hades*, often echoes the Old Testament usage of *sheol* as the "grave", but there are a number of departures. In condemning the indifference of Capernaum, Jesus warned that it would be brought down to *hades* (Mt 11:23; Lk 10:15); which in this instance represents utter ruin or destruction. In Luke's parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19ff), *hades* becomes a place of punishment scarcely distinguishable from hell. And in Mt 16:18, it is spoken of as a fortress-like kingdom that will never overcome Christ's Church.

Gehenna

A chapter in *The Watchtower* of November 1st, 1968, claims that *hades* cannot be understood as the place of the damned because the Bible says that Jesus was in hell.²¹ It is an article of the Christian faith professed in the Apostles Creed that Jesus descended into "hell" (*hades*), but this is not the hell of the damned which is the meaning of the Hebrew word *gehenna*, but the "abode of the dead" which Peter clearly teaches was the lot of all men and the place where Jesus went and preached the Good News during the period between his death and resurrection (1 Pet 3:19).

Like *gehenna*, *hades* was the kingdom of death, and it remained so until Jesus descended there and brought "spiritual" life to all the righteous. Having broken the reign of death (2 Tim 1:10), he brought release to its captives, and only those who were "spiritually dead" (Eph 2:1; Col 2:13) and cut off from the love of God, continued to be held fast in that state.

When rightly understood, both *hades* and *gehenna* can be termed "hell" without any of the Watch Tower's supposed contradiction between the two words.

The word *gehenna*, which appears twelve times in the New Testament, is a term derived from the Hebrew *ge-hinnom*. This word referred to a valley outside the south-west wall of Jerusalem. Excellent draught conditions had made it an ideal site for the furnaces of potters and founders, but it obtained an unholy reputation when altars were erected there for human sacrifices to Moloch (2 Kgs 23:10). Because of its association with all that was abhorrent to the Jews, Jeremiah cursed the place and predicted that it would become a burying-ground and wasteland (Jer 19:6-9). In the time of Jesus it was used as a garbage dump and for the disposal of everything unclean. With its long

history of idolatry and corruption, Gehenna's constantly-burning, sulphur-fed fires provided an apt symbol for the fearful punishment that would overtake the wicked. This was the sense in which it was used in the New Testament.

No Annihilation

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, *gehenna* is a symbol of complete destruction: "So when Jesus said that persons would be thrown into Gehenna for their bad deeds, what did he mean? Not that they would be tormented forever. Jesus used that valley (Gehenna) of fire and brimstone as a proper symbol of everlasting destruction."²²

Contrary to this statement from the Watch Tower, it can be shown that the concept of annihilation, even when it is applied to the wicked, is nowhere taught in the Scriptures. However, in accordance with their denial of the immortality of the soul, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the New Testament use of the verb "destroy" means nothing less than complete extinction:

"In order to support the pagan Babylonian teaching and the pagan Greek teaching that the human soul is immortal and does not die with the death of the human body, some clergymen of Christendom quote the words: 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul'. They stop short of quoting all of Jesus' words, for the verse (Matthew 10:28, AV) goes on to say: 'But rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul (*psykhe*) and body in hell (*Gehenna*)'. So it is not impossible for Almighty God to destroy the human soul, put it out of existence."²³

As an examination of the original language will quickly reveal, the Watch Tower's statement is completely unsupported by the facts. The verb "destroy" is a rendering of the Greek *apolesai*, which in turn is derived from the root word *apollumi*, a word which even the Watch Tower's Translating Committee was forced to admit had a wider range of meaning than "destroy". It will be seen from the following examples that *apollumi* and its derivatives can be used in contexts which exclude any idea of destruction:

"But, instead, go continually to the lost (*apoololota*) sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:6, N.W.T.).

"How many hired men of my father are abounding with bread, while I am perishing (*apollumai*) here from famine" (Lk 15:17, N.W.T.).

“On seeing this the disciples became indignant and said: ‘Why this waste? (*apooleia*)’ ” (Mt 26:8, N.W.T.).

“Then Jesus said to him: ‘Return your sword to its place, for all those who take the sword will perish (*apolountai*) by the sword’ ” (Mt 26:52, N.W.T.).

“Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins; but if they do, then the wineskins burst and the wine spills out and the wineskins are ruined (*apolluntai*)” (Mt 9:17, N.W.T.).

The identical form of *apollumi* used in Matthew 10:28 (*apolesai*) also appears in a number of other places in the New Testament (e.g., Mt 2:13; Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; 6:9; 19:47; Jas 4:12), and it is interesting to study some of its contexts. In common with the Revised Standard Version, the Witnesses translate each usage of *apolesai* as “destroy”, but it is patently absurd to interpret this destruction as annihilation.

In Mt 2:13, Joseph is warned of Herod’s plan to “search for the young child to destroy (*apolesai*) it” (N.W.T.). “Destroy” in this passage has the sense of “kill”, as in *Today’s English Version*: “Herod will be looking for the child to *kill* him”. There is no question here of Herod annihilating Jesus, which would be the case if the Witnesses were consistent in their rendering of *apolesai*; nor is there any question of annihilation in a similar passage in Lk 19:47, where we are told that the Jews “were seeking to destroy (*apolesai*) him [Jesus]” (N.W.T.). In Lk 6:9 Jesus cured a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath, and answering the Pharisees’ objections, he asked: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do injury, to save or to destroy (*apolesai*) a soul?” (N.W.T.). In this instance a more meaningful rendering of the verse would be “to save a life or let it *perish*?”.²⁴

The word *apolesai*, then, does not necessarily imply annihilation, and in view of the less severe connotations of the root word *apollumi*, it is passing strange to interpret it this way in Mt 10:28. In the light of other Scriptures that speak of the fate of the wicked (see below), *apolesai* must be understood to refer to the exclusion from God’s presence, which will mean the destruction or end of all those hopes and aspirations that were meant to terminate in that final intimate union with him. Because nothing can compensate for the loss of one’s soul (Mk 8:36), such a person would be better off if he had never been born (Mk 9:42-48; Mt 26:24). As W.E. Vine remarks: “The idea [expressed in the word *apollumi*] is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being”.²⁵

Jehovah’s Witnesses put forward a number of similar arguments built

around the precise meaning of New Testament Greek words, but as with *apolesai*, none of them can stand analysis in the light of sound Biblical scholarship.

Degrees of Punishment

It should be borne in mind that the doctrine of hell as a place of punishment is no less a revealed truth than the teaching that God is love, so the two cannot be incompatible. God is love, but he is also just; and perfect justice demands punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offence. The Witnesses believe that it is more in keeping with their idea of a loving-God image to have him simply annihilate all those who deliberately oppose his will. But such a blanket penalty fails to reveal the justice of God.

Watch Tower theology views Biblical catastrophes, such as the Flood and that which befell Sodom and Gomorrah, as divine judgements on the people as a whole; so that all who perished in these disasters, guilty and innocent alike, will have no part in the general resurrection, even for adverse judgement.²⁶

We are expressly told that God is to "render to every man according to his works" (Rom 2:6; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23), and though all who perished in these catastrophes may have been guilty before God, they were not equally so. Yet, without distinction, men, women and children all shared the same fate, and according to Jehovah's Witnesses, all are denied mercy or forgiveness, and all are to be forever annihilated. Elsewhere in the New Testament we are told that not all sin is mortal (1 Jn 5:16, 17); that is, deserving of death — which in this case refers to the "second death" mentioned in Rev 20:14 — and Jesus himself tells us that varying degrees of guilt will incur varying degrees of punishment:

"And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more" (Lk 12:47-48).

Jehovah's Witnesses accuse the Christian clergy of teaching that God punished men simply because they had the misfortune to be born sinners (see above). But nothing could be further from the truth. It is

true that all mankind is born in sin (cf. Ps 51:5), but this is not actual personal sin, which a child is incapable of committing, rather, it is inherited sin. As the apostle Paul puts it, "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin" (Rom 5:12). And further on, he tells us, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (vs. 19). Elsewhere, he writes: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

This inherited or transmitted sin of Adam, which Roman Catholic theology refers to as "original sin", prevented a person from attaining the vision of God, and it was for the very purpose of removing this impediment that Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross. The punishment of hell, therefore, is reserved solely for deliberate acts of conscious rebellion against God, that alienates a person from his love and stands in the way of reconciliation to his friendship. This is the unforgivable sin because it is the rejection of God's mercy and grace.

If there is difficulty in reconciling a burning hell with a loving God, it should be remembered that it was Jesus himself, in whom the love of God was revealed (Rom 8:39), who told us that he would "send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt 13:41-42); and it is from the lips of Christ that sinners will hear the terrifying sentence: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41). It is Jesus who will disown those who rebel against him: "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you" (Mt 25:12; see also, Mt 10:33). And it is Jesus who will give the command to "cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt 25:30).

If these are harsh words, it is because they are spoken by the Lord whose "soul hates him that loves violence" (cf. Ps 11:5). The greater one's love of good, the greater his hatred of that which would destroy the good. The punishment or torment, whatever one conceives it to be, which is to be meted out to the wicked, remains compatible with the teaching that God is love. But unless a distinction is made between the innocent and the guilty, not only is God's love obscured, but also his justice.

Hell is Eternal

As to the duration of the punishment of hell, Rev 14:11 tells us that it is to be eternal (*aionios*). But although the Witnesses would have us

believe that because the Lamb and the Beast are symbolic, the torment (*basanismos*) must also be symbolic,²⁷ they generally prefer to allow *basanismos* its right meaning and attempt to weaken the force of *aionios* by claiming that it may simply refer to an indefinite period of time. In this view, the passage from Revelation is given an interpretation that is intelligible to no one but initiates of the cult:

“Though now fallen according to the judgement of Jehovah God, Great Babylon still exists by his permission. So her drinking of the cup to the very dregs will not be finished till he, by means of his greater Cyrus, Jesus Christ, destroys her at the end of this world or system of things. In all this interim, while she still exists in her fallen state, she undergoes torment; and the smoke of her torment keeps ascending, in the sight of the holy angels and the Lamb of God. The world empire of Babylonish religion is not immortal; and so her torment could not go on directly for all time.”²⁸

The “torment” spoken of by the Witnesses is said to be that of the “message that tells of the everlasting destruction awaiting them”.²⁹ In other words, mankind is pictured as quaking in terror at its impending doom as proclaimed by Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Watch Tower's statement is completely unfounded. The Greek adjective *aionios* occurs some seventy times in the New Testament and “describes duration, either undefined but not endless, as in Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2; or undefined because endless, as in Rom 16:26, and the other sixty-six places in the N.T.”.³⁰ Moreover, it is applied to persons and things which of their nature are endless: “The eternal God” (Rom 16:26); the “Eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14); “eternal glory” (1 Pet 5:10); “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15); “eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12); and the very common “eternal life” (Jn 3:15; 4:36; 5:39; 6:54, etc.). That the word *aionios* means “eternal” is apparent from its use in 2 Cor 4:18, where it is applied to spiritual things which are “eternal”, in contrast to earthly things which are “transient” (*proskairos*).

But all objections to *aionios* being understood to refer to endless duration must surely crumble in the light of Mt 25:46 where the wicked are said to “go away into eternal (*aionion*) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (*aionion*) life”. Since the identical word is used to describe the duration of both reward and punishment, both must be everlasting.

To Bring to Conversion

The doctrine of hell is not a pleasant subject, nor is it meant to be. Its revelation is meant to bring us to our senses and effect our conversion or turning to God. So, to regard it as an invention of the devil or the Christian clergy, as the Witnesses would have us believe, and to dismiss every reference to it as irrelevant is too foolish for comment. As a revealed truth that has its roots in the Old Testament, the doctrine of hell has been explicitly taught in the Christian Church for almost two thousand years. And to deny its reality, one has to deny the teaching of Christ who taught it.

Further Scriptural evidence for the reality of hell and its punishments may be found in the following passages: Dan 12:2; Mt 3:10; 3:12; 13:41-42; 2 Thess 1:7-8; Heb 10:26-31.

The Witnesses and Angels and Devils

In the book, *Jehovah of the Watchtower*¹, the authors declare that the Jehovah's Witnesses "maintain a guarded orthodoxy towards the doctrine of Satan in the Scriptures and deviate in only one major place where they can be called to reckoning".² Actually, the deviation Martin and Klamm allude to, the final annihilation of Satan, is only one of a number of the Witnesses' more serious departures from the norms of orthodox theology.

Mention should also have been made of the Watch Tower's teaching that Satan constituted a threat to God's supremacy; that prior to his expulsion from heaven in 1914, he had free access in and out of God's presence; and that in the days before the Flood, the devils took human forms and came to earth to seduce the daughters of men.

As a study of the Watch Tower's literature quickly reveals, the Witnesses are little more orthodox on the subject of Satan than they are on other important doctrines.

About the only thing the Jehovah's Witnesses have in common with orthodox Christianity on this point is a belief in a personal devil. After speaking of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1-11), the Witnesses conclude: "Thus the Scriptures and sound reasoning make clear that Satan is a real, live person in the invisible spirit realm".³

By the name Satan ("accuser" or "adversary", in Hebrew) or the devil (from the Greek *diabolos*: "the slanderer"), the Bible designates an invisible personal being of malignant intent. Scriptural exegesis and Christian theology identify Satan and his followers with the fallen angels. Like God, the angels are pure spirits, and though they belong to a higher order of creation than man (Ps 8:5) and are "mighty ones" who carry out the will of God (Ps 103:20); they are not infinite. As creatures of God, their power is limited to that which is proper to angelic beings.

Although the angels were created good by God, they did not have

immediate enjoyment of the Vision of God: this was to be the reward of their fidelity (Mt 18:10). A “probationary period” followed their creation, and that some of them failed to maintain their integrity is part of divine revelation:

“And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgement of the great day” (Jude 6. See also, 2 Pet 2:4).

Not a Challenge to God’s Sovereignty

Unlike orthodox Christians, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Satan or the devil (singular) was alone in his rebellion against God, and that his followers, the other devils, joined him later (see below).

According to the Witnesses, the rebellion of Satan and the subsequent temptation and fall of Adam put God in an embarrassing position. Could he “rule all heaven and earth with the willing submission of living persons? Would the Devil be able to take away the universal sovereignty from the true God? The Devil boasted that he could turn all men away from God – See Job, chapters 1 and 2.”⁴

In the Watch Tower’s view, the burning issue was the question of sovereignty. Because of the devil’s rebellion, God actually had to vindicate his name:

“In the great controversy or disagreement of thought that had now arisen the point to be settled was not the question of power or who is the most powerful. It was the question of sovereignty in heaven and earth. Who will rule all heaven and earth with the willing submission of all living persons in heaven and earth? Satan the Devil had started the first rebellion in all creation, and so now how far could he go with it? How far could he go with this rebellion in inducing other sons of God to join him? Would he and any other creatures who would join him be able to take away the universal sovereignty from the only living and true God, Jehovah?”⁵

That God’s sovereignty could be jeopardized for a single moment is absurd, and the Witnesses’ problem is one of their own making. As was pointed out in the chapter on the Holy Trinity, God knows, loves, and is loved, all within himself. He is, as we might say, self-sufficient,

and he has no need to prove his sovereignty or vindicate his name to his creatures. Sovereignty is not bestowed on God or increased because certain creatures, and this includes the devil, choose to deny it. God's supremacy is absolute, and though his sovereignty remains unaffected by submission or rebellion, it is his creatures themselves who benefit or suffer accordingly.

The reason why Satan and Adam and Eve were not immediately destroyed was not so that God could have time to vindicate his name and prove the devil wrong, but that he might reveal the richness of his love. As the Scriptures tell us, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16. See also, 1 Jn 3:1; 4:10). In his mercy God withheld the penalty the rebels' action deserved and promised them a future Redeemer who would break the power of Satan and restore man to his friendship, so that "in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7).

Satan's Access to Heaven

By scorning more than nineteen centuries of profound Christian learning and pursuing their own path of untutored interpretation of the Scriptures, Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to arrive at the most fantastic conclusions. Not the least fantastic is their teaching that it is only since 1914 A.D. that Satan has been barred from heaven (see below). Although the Witnesses make frequent appeals to "sound reasoning", their teachings reveal that this is seldom exercised. As anyone with even an elementary understanding of the holiness of God and the happiness of heaven should realize, there can never be any interchange between perfect Good and utter evil. But quite apart from the folly associated with allowing Satan any access to heaven, the Witnesses' fantasy is also unscriptural.

Throughout the Bible the powers of darkness are engaged in constant warfare with the people of God, and Satan, in whom there is no truth (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:8), is said to be the ruler of darkness (Eph 6:10-12. Cf. Acts 26:18). The apostle Paul asks: "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor 6:14). If that which is evil never comes into the light so that its evil might not be exposed (Jn 3:20), how, then, can the Witnesses say that Satan was able to enter so freely into the presence of God, whom, as the Scriptures tell us, "dwells in unapproachable light" (1 Tim 6:16)?

In order to support their teaching that Satan had access to heaven, the Witnesses quote from the first two chapters of Job, and Rev 12:7. But in neither instance have they understood the meaning of these Scriptures. As Shakespeare, in his "Merchant of Venice" has Bassanio say:

"In religion, what damned error but some sober brow will
bless it, and approve it with a text."

In order to understand the first two chapters of Job, one must first have some knowledge of the Old Testament usage of the word *Satan*. The Hebrew word *Satan* appears as a proper name only in 1 Chron 21:1, elsewhere it always has the article and is properly translated as "*the Satan*". Although *the Satan* in the Book of Job has some unsavoury traits, he is not the malignant spirit of later Judaist and Christian theological development. The author of Job sees the opening scene as an elaborate heavenly assizes where God sits enthroned in the midst of his angelic council. Into this throng comes *the Satan* or "Accuser", who, ironically enough, has the role of a "devil's advocate", whose duty it is to test the sincerity of the people of God. It is in this capacity that he questions the loyalty of God's servant, Job, and is granted permission to visit limited misfortune upon him. To regard this as anything other than poetic imagery and a literary vehicle for what is to follow is to lose sight of the essential purpose of the Book of Job.

War in Heaven

Rev 12:7 alludes to the expulsion of Satan from heaven and provides the Witnesses with the basis for maintaining that Satan had access to heaven until the year 1914 A.D.:

"Already the finished 'mystery of God' has performed magnificent exploits, to its own credit and to the vindication of Jehovah God as Sovereign Ruler over all. In the year 1914 its crowned king, Jesus the Messiah, 'went forth conquering and to complete his conquest' (Rev 6:1, 2). Under his heavenly title, Michael the archangel, he led his holy angels in victorious warfare against the 'great dragon', Satan the Devil, and his demon angels. Down he hurled them to this earth, where then the 'heads' and the diademned 'horns' of the symbolic 'wild beast' were fighting for world domination in World War I of 1914-1918 C.E."6

An isolated view of Rev 12:7 could conceivably see it as a reference to the primeval struggle that followed the rebellion of Satan, but no such justification can pardon the crude interpretation the Witnesses have given it in their official exposition of the first half of the Book of Revelation, published in 1969.

The "war in heaven" forms an integral part of the preceding vision of the birthpangs of the New Israel or People of God (pictured as a "woman", cf. Isa 54:1-3; 66:7ff; Jer 50:12; etc.), which came into being through the crucifixion ("in travail" — see also Jn 16:19-22) and glorification ("caught up to God and to his throne") of the Messiah. The war in heaven is not fought out in the presence of God, but rather in the region of the "upper air" where contemporaneous Jewish literature located the habitat of the evil spirits. Paul presents the same view of the devil's domain when he tells the Ephesians that they are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against "the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12).

Whereas the devil was spoken of as having a "house" and a "kingdom" (Mt 12:26; Mk 3:23-25), the letter to the Hebrews reveals that it was for the purpose of destroying the devil's power that Christ became man (Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). According to the Witnesses, Christ had to wait nineteen centuries before he could go forth "conquering and to complete his conquest". But the New Testament message is that even while he was alive on earth — through the momentous fact of his incarnation — Jesus had already conquered the devil in principle (Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31), and that this defeat became a reality with his death and resurrection. This is the meaning of John's vision of the war in heaven. Through Christ's exaltation to God's right hand, the devil's limited rule is over; his power has been broken; he has been dethroned:

"And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.'
(Rev 12:10-11)

If Satan continues to molest the Church it is only for a *short while*. The victory belongs to Christ, and the devil knows it. He still goes around "like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8),

but the power of the Gospel has rendered his assaults virtually ineffectual. Satan's position has become so precarious that John pictures him as standing on the shifting sands by the sea (Rev 12:17).

Sons of God and Daughters of Men

Watch Tower theology sees Satan's rebellion as an individual action affecting only a single angelic being. Satan's followers, the other devils, did not join him until they lost their heavenly position through lust. Commenting upon the Genesis account of the "sons of God" who married the "daughters of men" (Gen 6:1-4), the Witnesses continue in all seriousness:

"To marry the daughters of men, those heavenly sons of God materialized human bodies, clothing themselves with fleshly bodies like those of men on earth. Regardless of what their duties were up in heaven, they remained in the flesh with their good-looking wives and made them fruitful. Their sons were called Nephilim, 'Fellers', and were 'mighty ones', who made a name for themselves."⁷

When God sent the Flood upon the earth to destroy mankind, the Witnesses tell us that the "sons of God" simply dematerialized their assumed human bodies and returned to their spiritual state of being.⁸

The passage from Genesis, chapter six, poses a celebrated problem that has intrigued Scripture scholars for centuries. Who are the "sons of God" who married the "daughters of men", and who were their mighty offspring, the *Nephilim*?

The "sons of God" have been variously presented as descendants of Seth; male prostitutes of the Canaanite temples; demons, or more likely, these "mighty men of old, the men of renown", were a tribe of warriors whose exploits were magnified in the telling, so that they took on the stature of giants. Each proposal is not without its possibilities, but they cannot be accepted unreservedly. Parallels to the Genesis account are also to be found in mythology, and that angels assumed human forms and seduced the daughters of men became a favourite theme of the ancient apocryphal writings. The spurious "Book of Enoch" went to great lengths to embellish the Genesis account of the union of the "sons of God" with earthly women, and it explicitly stated that the "sons of God" were "angels, the children of heaven".⁹ No doubt influenced by the apocryphal accounts, many early Christian

writers accepted the "sons of God" as angels, and in the same vein, the literal-minded Jehovah's Witnesses have pushed the story to its limits.

Whether the inspired account of Genesis embodies fact or fiction can remain open to question, as can the precise identity of the mysterious "sons of God". But whatever the explanation, there can be no room for the Witnesses' absurd view of angels lusting after earthly women. The angels are pure spirits, neither male nor female, and as such, are incapable of experiencing sexual passions towards men or women. Even the "ravings of the apocrypha" can be capable of showing more common sense than the Witnesses display in speaking of the paternity of the *Nephilim*. In a book on spurious Old Testament writings, the author quotes an apocryphal reference to the *Nephilim* of Genesis:

"Now of them [the *nephilim*] ancient wise men have written that the angels came down from heaven and associated themselves with the daughters of Cain, and that from them they engendered the giants. But in this opinion they were mistaken and it is not true that angels, who are pure spirits, could mingle in sin with men. If indeed that had been possible to them, there would not be left one unsullied woman on the earth, for the Satans are wicked and perverse. But according to their being and their nature, they are neither male nor female, but pure spirits, who since their fall have become spirits of darkness."¹⁰

The Punishment of Satan

The Witnesses' fourth major deviation on Satan centres around his ultimate fate. According to the Witnesses, his end is extinction:

"The ultimate end of Satan is complete annihilation. This is made sure by Christ's words to those who have been deceived by the wicked one: 'Be on your way from me, you who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:41, NW). What is destroyed by everlasting fire is preserved nowhere, but is consumed for everlasting."¹¹

The Witnesses' teaching on the annihilation of Satan was answered in the previous chapter, where it was shown that the end of the wicked (and the devils) is not annihilation but conscious punishment and everlasting exclusion from God's presence. The Witnesses have no warrant

for declaring that the "fire prepared for the devil and his angels" is all-consuming (in the sense of utter annihilation). Since the fire affects spiritual beings as well as earthly beings, it obviously differs from the physical fire we know, and that such a fire (burning, but not consuming) is possible is clear from the story of Moses at the burning bush (cf. Ex 3:3).

In Satan's case, the burning but non-consuming fire in which he is punished is retributive and unceasing. The apostle John tells us that "the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" — *aionas ton aionon* — literally: "ages of the ages" (Rev 20:10; see also, Rev 14:11). Because the angels have no physical senses and would be unaffected by fire as we know it, many scholars are of the opinion that the fire in which the devils are "tormented" should be understood as a metaphor for the pain and remorse they endure being cut off from the Source of life.

It is unfortunate that having withstood the tendency to reduce Satan to an impersonal force, the Witnesses should have gone to the opposite extreme of seeing him as an almost equal opponent of God and sovereign of the world. It is true that Satan is called "prince of this world" (Jn 12:31), but he is prince only insofar as the world powers and allurements keep us from God.

Satan's powers are definitely limited, and ever since Jesus triumphed over sin and death, his sovereignty has been only an arrogant pretence that is quickly passing away.

The Witnesses and Baptism

In Christian theology baptism is the first and fundamental sacrament by which a man, being washed in the name of the persons of the Holy Trinity, is spiritually reborn and incorporated into the body of Christ. Jehovah's Witnesses regard this rite as invalid unless it is performed by total immersion, and even then it is not considered essential to salvation, but merely an outward sign or symbol of the person's inward dedication to God.

Apart from one notable exception, the Witnesses' teaching on baptism has remained virtually unchanged since the days of their founder, Charles Taze Russell. In 1904, the Pastor published "The New Creation", which formed volume six of his *Studies in the Scriptures*. Russell's misunderstanding of the Bible and his theological incompetence were seldom more in evidence than in his exposition of Christian baptism.¹

All existing forms of baptism, with the exception of total immersion, were rejected as unscriptural, and the religious bodies that did practice total immersion were repudiated on other grounds. The Pastor failed to see himself and his followers as constituting yet another "Christian sect", and wrote:

"We claim that all sects and denominations are contrary to the divine institution, — one Head, one Body, one Faith, one Baptism."²

Charles Russell admitted the importance of baptism *as a symbol*, but regarded it as useless to salvation:

"How evident it is that if we were baptized a thousand times in water it would not bring us into membership in the body of Christ."³

And of the baptismal formula:

“No particular form of words for this service is set before us in the Scriptures, and all can readily see that the words are of secondary importance, — that the baptism might be equally valid if no words at all were used.”⁴

As for re-baptism:

“Our reply is that the symbol needs no repetition; but since it would have no meaning whatever, and no virtue whatever, any more than any other bath or dip in water, unless it *followed* the full consecration unto death.”⁵

Different Types of Baptism

At the time of the publication of *The New Creation* (1904), Russell firmly believed that the then-current “system of things” was to end in 1914.⁶ This was the date Russell settled on following the failure of 1874 to usher in the Second Coming. And the relatively small number of “Bible Students” (as Russell’s followers were then known) justified him in thinking that they constituted the “remnant” needed to complete the symbolic number of 144,000. As all the Bible Students belonged to this “remnant” of the faithful, they were all regarded as having been baptized into Christ. It was left to Judge Rutherford to extricate the Society from the follies of his predecessor, and he accomplished this by introducing the “class system”, whereby baptism into Christ, which was said to be different from water baptism, was reserved solely for the “heavenly class” of 144,000. By this means, Rutherford was able to avoid the embarrassment of having too many eligible candidates for heaven. It is a tribute to the persuasiveness of the Judge and the gullibility of his followers that this subterfuge was accepted with such little dissension.⁷

The Judge’s manoeuvre, which was nothing more than a cover-up for Russell’s mistakes, has now become part of the Watch Tower’s platform:

“So baptism into Jesus Christ and into his death is something apart from water baptism . . . Thus God baptized Jesus with the holy spirit in order that, through Jesus, his followers might thereafter be baptized with holy spirit. Therefore, those who become joint heirs of his, *with heavenly hopes*, have to be ‘baptized into Christ Jesus’.”⁸

Because of the summary nature of these final chapters, it is not possible to examine the Witnesses' remaining doctrinal deviations at length, so in this study on baptism, three of their more important deviations have been selected for detailed comment.

1. **Baptism must be by "complete immersion, not sprinkling"**⁹

In their attempts to show that complete immersion is the only correct form of baptism, the Witnesses go to great pains to prove that the Greek word *baptizein* primarily meant a "plunging or dipping under water". There can be no quarrel with the Witnesses' definition, but they should also have pointed out that even the washing (*baptismos*) of one's hands or a cup or vessel could be referred to as a baptism (Mk 7:2-4), so we must go beyond the meaning of the word itself to discover the original method(s) of baptism.

Since the Witnesses regard water baptism merely as a symbol of their dedication to God and deny that it effects an intimate relationship between the recipient and Jesus Christ, there seems little point in their being so meticulous as to the precise form of its administration.

Although total immersion seems to have been the *normal* method of administering baptism in the early Church, there are no grounds for stating that this was the only method. Baptism is called the sacrament of regeneration, by which a man, being properly disposed, is cleansed of all his sins and enters into a new life of grace in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul expresses this same idea when he speaks of Christians being cleansed "by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:26. See also, 1 Cor 6:11; Tit 3:5).

This spiritual cleansing is achieved by God acting through the water, and its symbolism can be either whole (total immersion) or partial (pouring). This has been the practice of the Church from the beginning. The Witnesses' claims that immersion was the only recognized form of baptism until the 3rd century does not accord with the facts. Even in the New Testament there is evidence that baptism may not always have been administered solely by immersion. Paul was baptized in the house of Judas in Damascus (Acts 9:10-18), and he in turn baptized the jailer in the jail at Philippi (Acts 16:33). In neither instance is there any reason to suppose that there was sufficient water to baptize a person by total immersion.

In 1875 a long-lost work of Christian antiquity identified as *The Didache*, or "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles", was discovered at

Constantinople. Scholars date its composition to about the late first or early second century A.D.; perhaps within the lifetime of the apostle John, and therefore an important witness to apostolic teaching. This document alone ante-dates the Witnesses' alleged earliest testimony to baptism by infusion (pouring) by more than one hundred years:

“Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. Having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in living [flowing] water. But if you do not have living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, in warm; If you have neither, pour water thrice on the head in the name . . . ”¹⁰

2. “Infant Baptism Unscriptural”¹¹

The main objection to infant baptism in Watch Tower theology stems from the child's lack of faith. Using such texts as Mt 28: 19-20, and Acts 2:41; 8:12, the Witnesses argue that faith is required of a person before he can receive baptism; and since an infant has not attained the use of reason, it is incapable of making the necessary profession of faith.

The texts quoted by the Witnesses refer, of course, only to baptism for adults and are not applicable in the case of children, who have the life of Christ bestowed upon them as a gift and an obligation. Although the child becomes a full member of Christ's Church by baptism, it accepts its obligations and responsibilities only as it advances in wisdom and knowledge. But in the meantime the child can still continue to benefit from the graces that come to it through baptism.

The New Testament knows of no prohibition of baptism for infants, and while it cannot be shown with certainty that baptism was administered to children, there is enough evidence to suggest that this was the practice in the early Church.

Speaking to the crowds at Pentecost, Peter told them, “The promise is to you and to your children” (Acts 2:39). “Children”, in this case, more likely refers to “descendants”, but it can also be taken literally. Men, women, and children were to share in the gift of the Holy Spirit, “and there were added that day about three thousand souls”. (Acts 2:41)

Jesus' words to Nicodemus, “Unless one (*tis*) is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5), underline the necessity of baptism, and who is eligible to receive it. “Anyone”

(*tis*), means any person, young or old, just as the "nations" Christ commanded to be baptized (Mt 28:19) embrace not only the adult population, but the children as well.

That baptism was not restricted solely to adults can be implied from Paul's statement that he baptized the "household of Stephanas" (1 Cor 1:16). The term "household" included wife, *children* and slaves, and is used on a number of other occasions in the New Testament, where whole "households" were said to be baptized into the faith (cf. Acts 11:14; 16:15; 18:8).

Paul's comparison of baptism with circumcision (Col 2:11-12) also implies that the Christian sacrament can be received by the very young. Just as the ancient Jewish rite incorporated the male children into the Old Covenant promises God made to the patriarchs, even though the child lacked any knowledge of his obligations under the covenant, so too, the baptized infant is incorporated into the body of Christ to share in the New Covenant promises inaugurated by our Saviour.

Further testimony to the apostolic practice of baptizing infants appears in Christian writings of the early second century. The Christian martyr, Polycarp, whom Irenaeus and Tertullian name as a disciple of the apostle John, went to his death in the year 155 A.D. The account of his martyrdom, recorded in *Martyrium Polycarpi*, tells of an offer of a pardon made to him if he would deny Christ. To this, Polycarp answered: "Eighty-six years have I served him, and he has never wronged me; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?" Polycarp's baptism must have taken place about the year 70 A.D.; within the lifetime of many of the apostles. From his infancy he had been dedicated to Christ, and he could see no reason for denying him at such a late stage of his life.

Another Christian martyr, Justinus (Justin Martyr), who knew Polycarp personally, and who died about the year 163 A.D., also records that men and women of sixty and seventy years of age had been "disciples of Christ from childhood". This figure places their baptism within the lifetime of the apostles, and because it is mentioned only in passing, it obviously refers to a practice that was universally accepted.

A point made elsewhere in reference to the Witnesses' objections to blood transfusions (see Appendix) speaks of their inconsistency in permitting an uncomprehending child to die rather than receive a life-saving transfusion, yet refusing that child a right to the divine life God gives through baptism on the grounds that it lacks a proper understanding.

3. **“Spirit Baptism into body of Christ for ‘little flock’ of 144,000 puts them in line for heavenly kingdom”¹²**

The Watch Tower’s most serious deviation on baptism stems from its teaching that baptism into Christ differs from water baptism, and is available only to the so-called “anointed class”.

As has been mentioned, the Witnesses’ teaching on “spirit baptism” was born out of necessity and it in no way resembles the teaching of the New Testament. Contrary to the Witnesses’ multiplication of baptismal forms, the Scriptures are aware of only *two* types of baptism: John’s baptism of repentance, and Christian baptism.

John’s baptism was never meant to be permanent. He himself told the people that his baptism “was with water for repentance”, and that he who was coming after him was to “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt 3:11). Jesus came to be baptized by John in the Jordan, not as a sinner in need of repentance, but as a man “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Heb 4:15). He identified himself with sinful humanity which he had come to deliver from its sins.

The Witnesses have no justification for distinguishing between water baptism and Spirit baptism, for in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, baptism in the new order was to be in “water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5). Nor is there any ground for claiming that only a select few were to receive the so-called “spirit baptism”. On the day of Pentecost, when Peter stood up and proclaimed the messianic role of Christ, the Jews repented and asked what they had to do to be saved. “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 2:38) There is no suggestion here that any of Peter’s listeners were excluded from the “anointed class”, for “there were added that day about three thousand souls”. All were baptized in water, and all received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Spirit baptism).

One Baptism for All

Jehovah’s Witnesses admit that all the early Christians were members of the “anointed class”, but they claim that following the “great apostasy” after the death of the last of the apostles,¹³ “Spirit baptism” gradually ceased and did not recommence until it was revived in the days of their founder, Pastor Russell. The Watch Tower’s chicanery is flatly contradicted by the Scriptures. In his letter to the Ephesians,

Paul wrote that just as there is only one Lord and one faith, so too, there is only one baptism (Eph 4:5). Therefore, all who are validly baptized in water, are baptized with the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ:

“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).

Conclusion

It is no small task to write a critical appraisal of a religion that differs from one's own. It is necessary to be reliably informed on the subject, and this entails reading all the literature on the movement, attending its meetings, and endlessly discussing its teachings with its members. Even after one has spent countless hours on his subject, there is always the possibility that certain nuances or inflections of thought have escaped him, or that he has misunderstood particular aspects of what the religion is teaching.

In order to avoid this situation as much as possible, I verified doubtful Watch Tower quotations with members of the New World Society, so that this book could be presented in the honest belief that it is an accurate statement of Watch Tower teachings.

My interest in the Jehovah's Witnesses goes back more than twenty years, to the beginning of 1957. Since that time, because of personal reasons and a growing desire to understand how the Witnesses can accept teachings that have no basis in Scripture or history, I have studied their theology as few others outside of the New World Society would care to do.

While standing by every statement I have made, I apologize to Jehovah's Witnesses if some of my remarks have seemed harsh or offensive. With Paul, my desire has been that charity should prevail over all (1 Cor 16:14; Col 3:14). But charity does not permit us to close our eyes and allow the teachings of Christ Jesus to be perverted by people who have no knowledge of the truth. Jehovah's Witnesses may have all the good will in the world, a powerful love for God, a personal commitment to Christ, care and concern for all people, especially to those who are of their "household of the faith", and a burning desire that all mankind should hear the Good News; but what they are preaching is not the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), but a gospel of their own making. Instead of

“deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6), the Witnesses are urged to re-examine themselves to see if they are really in the faith (cf. 2 Cor 13:5).

Throughout this book the Christian faith has been presented as an answer to the Watch Tower's distortions; but Christianity is more than arguments, it is the “power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16), and when the arguments are put aside the teachings take on a new meaning and help us to “comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18, 19).

The following passage, expressing my own feelings on the completion of this study, is taken from the closing paragraph of Augustine's monumental work, *The City of God*:

“I am done. With God's help, I have kept my promise. This, I think, is all that I promised to do when I began this work. For all who think that I have said either too little or too much, I beg pardon; and those who are satisfied I ask, not to thank me, but to join me in rejoicing and in thanking God. Amen.”

Appendix

Two Important Issues: War and Blood Transfusions

I WAR

The Jehovah's Witnesses are totally opposed to war, refusing either to bear arms or to serve in the armed forces in a non-combatant capacity.¹ For them, war is part of the sign of the conclusion of this wicked system of things; and, so they assert, as early Christians avoided all political involvement, so Christians, being no part of the world, do not take sides in its political affairs.²

This stance they attempt to justify by an appeal to 1 Pet 2:11ff. The apostle writes:

“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the *passions of the flesh* that wage war against your soul.”

On this passage, the Witnesses comment:

“Their [Christians'] alien standing debar[s] them from mixing in and obliges them to stay neutral and let the worldly country run itself and fight its own fights.”³

The description of a Christian as a “visitor and pilgrim” in this world is not a statement on non-involvement in the world, but of his eternal destiny in the next. It is clear from the apostle's words (i.e., “passions of the flesh”) that he speaking of spiritual combat, not of war – which makes nonsense of the commentary.

In the Witnesses' mind, war, together with earthquakes and floods, is one of the incontestable signs of the approaching end of this “wicked system of things”. Watch Tower writings pour out statistics on natural and man-made disasters, giving them special relevance to the present

time, but ignoring the fact that these things are commonplace in every age of mankind's history. Their unique chronology places the end of the "Age of the Gentiles" (itself a meaningless term) in October, 1914. They see the outbreak of the war in that year as part of their "proof" that since that date disasters have been occurring on an unprecedented scale; and that this state of affairs is the fulfilment of "prophecy". It should be borne in mind, however, that improved communications and the enormous growth of the media has a considerable bearing on the "incidence" of disasters — a point which the Witnesses conveniently overlook.

Prayers for Peace

Neutrality towards worldly affairs causes the Witnesses to decline even to pray for peace. In 1914 Charles Russell, the founder and then president of the Watch Tower Society, "knowing that the world had now reached the time for its dissolution . . . refused to heed the plea of U.S. President Wilson for all clergymen and preachers to join in nation wide prayer for peace".⁴

It is logical enough. If war is seen as part of the "sign", why pray for it to cease? Or, if one does pray "that those days be shortened", it is not out of compassion for the victims of war but to hasten Armageddon and the arrival of the new order of things.

Biblical Wars

The Witnesses allow that the battles of Israel recorded in the Old Testament were justified, for "Jehovah used ancient Israel as his executional forces"⁵ "in the interest of Theocracy" (i.e., the Rule of God), and this justified conscription⁶. They do not, however, explain how the Persian king, Cyrus, or the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar are described by Israel's prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as "God's anointed", "shepherd", and his "servant" (Isa 44:28; 45:1; Jer 25:9; 27:6). Nor do they explain why the Israelites, used by God as his executional forces, lost so many battles (cf. Jos 7:2; 1 Sam 4:1ff; 31:1ff; Jer 27:6ff; etc.). Sometimes prophesied, sometimes not, these reversals, interpreted to Israel by its prophets, taught Israel that God's "executional forces" could be used against themselves. When these defeats were not prophesied, how were Israel's conscripts to know if they were fighting for God or against him?

The Witnesses' brand of opposition to war seeks to create an aura of peace here and now, but in fact denies any obligation or responsibility

to defend the lives of others. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches the Christian his duty to minister to the victims of unjust attacks. He is also obliged to do all he can to prevent such attacks from succeeding. All war is unchristian, but that does not mean that it is unchristian to take part in war. The principles that permit a man to defend his own life and the lives of the members of his family, also extend to the state and country of which he is a citizen.

There is no love of war in the Bible; but neither is there a single text which debars a person from defending his country in time of war. Paul urges the Romans to "live peaceably with all" (Rom 12:18), but realistically adds, "if possible, so far as it depends upon you". But how is one to live peaceably when others are bent on war? The psalmist echoes this difficulty when he says: "I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps 120:7). Abhorrent as it is, we cannot say that war is not justified in the face of an unwarranted attack by an aggressor.

II BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS

The Witnesses' much-publicized ban on blood transfusions is of relatively recent date. Charles Russell himself and his successor, Judge Rutherford, were both unaware that the ancient Jewish law forbidding the eating of blood extended to the modern practice of blood transfusions. It was left to Rutherford's successor, the late Nathan Homer Knorr, to make this important discovery.

The first intimation of the new doctrine's promulgation came with the July 1st, 1945, edition of *The Watchtower*. Under the heading, "The Sanctity of Blood", Scriptural texts were reinterpreted by the New World Society and given a meaning they never had before. Characteristically, the Witnesses accepted the new interpretation without question, and a whole new outlook began to develop around texts related to the eating of blood. Foods prepared from animal blood or having a high blood content were declared taboo; and many even began to eat only kosher meats.

At a Kingdom Hall meeting in Melbourne, Australia, which the author attended some years ago, during the early stages of the preparation of this book, a circular letter from the Watch Tower headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, was read to the Victorian congregations, warning them that a well-known brand of pork sausages locally produced had become suspect owing to an alleged use of blood in their manufacture. The Witnesses were assured that representation was being

made to the offending company on their behalf, and that they would be notified of the outcome.

A little-known feature of the Witnesses' opposition to blood transfusions is that the ban extends even to animals. A veterinarian may not use such means to save a pet. ⁷

Of far more serious consequence was the attitude the Witnesses adopted towards blood transfusions for people. Having reached the conclusion that Old Testament laws forbidding the eating of blood were still in force, the Watch Tower hierarchy declared that blood transfusions, by nourishing the human body, were to be equated with the "eating" of blood, and were, therefore, to be condemned. ⁸

In support of their position, the Witnesses cite Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:27; 17:10, 11, 14; and Acts 15:28, 29. Since they admit that the Mosaic Law lapsed with the inauguration of the new covenant in Christ's blood, ⁹ it is hard to see why they continue to draw on Leviticus in support of their position ¹⁰. Actually, the Witnesses do not mind admitting that the Mosaic Law has been cancelled, for they point out that there is also a prohibition against the eating of blood in Gen 9:4, and insist that since this antedates the Levitical laws, it is unaffected by the abrogation of the Mosaic Law, and is still in force.

However, to insist on the Genesis text while admitting the abrogation of Levitical decrees demands the co-existence of two laws — one Mosaic, and the other pre-Mosaic. But the Bible does not admit any such distinction. Salvation history and the action of God as lawgiver, are a continuum. The Law of Moses receives and includes many of the ordinances given to the Patriarchs — as we see in the all-important case of circumcision, which also ante-dates Moses.

The Old Testament prohibition on the eating of blood is not so much dietary as moral in concept. Its purpose is to affirm God's creation of and dominion over, life. The language of the ban accommodates this idea to the mind of a people whose knowledge of physiology and psychology was rudimentary. They observed that when blood was drained from a living body, life, too, departed. Blood, therefore, was equated with life, hence the Genesis text: "You must not eat flesh with life, that is to say blood, in it". Since the disposition of life belonged to God, the shedding of the blood (life) of man or beast was seen as a usurpation of the prerogative of God. In Gen 9, Noah and his descendants are represented as being given permission to slay animals for food; but the moral and religious principle that all life belongs to God alone is preserved by the prohibition on the eating of blood.

The New Testament is also pressed into service. In Acts 15:28-29, we read:

“For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to YOU, except these necessary things, to keep yourselves free from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication. If YOU carefully keep yourselves from these things, YOU will prosper. Good health to YOU.” (N.W.T.)

From this, the Witnesses conclude:

“So, we, too, must ‘keep free from blood’. And our doing so is a serious matter, having been put on a level with avoiding fornication and idolatry.”¹¹

The decree of the council of Jerusalem quoted above does not speak of idolatry, but of eating food sacrificed to idols – a question Paul deals with quite adequately in 1 Cor 10:23-33, showing that it is not unlawful for Christians to eat such food. To compare what is lawful (the eating of food sacrificed to idols) with eating blood in order to prove the latter unlawful is simply absurd. Again, the “fornication” forbidden by the Council is not sexual immorality, which both Jews and Gentiles know well was forbidden by the law of God. Here it more likely refers to marriage within degrees of kinship forbidden by Jewish law.

If Acts 15:29 is compared with Lev 17:8-18:18, it will be seen that the obligations laid on Gentile converts by the Council are the same four requirements Israel had demanded of its alien residents for centuries. What the Council is telling the converted Gentiles is this: that, although they are free of the observance of the Law of Moses, yet they should accommodate themselves on these four points out of consideration for the ingrained sensitivities of Jewish Christians.

There is no need to labour the irrelevance to the issue of the failure of a diet of blood or of a modern blood transfusion to save the lives of Pope Innocent VIII, in 1492, and of Pope John XXIII, in 1963, respectively, fascinating and all as the Witnesses find these items.¹² Nor need we delay to share their fears that criminal characteristics might be transmitted from donor to receiver through the medium of a blood

transfusion.¹³ Worthy of comment, however, is their version of the martyrdom of the apostle Peter:

“Can you imagine the apostle Peter, a natural circumcised Jew, permitting human blood to be injected into him? Especially after he subscribed to that Jerusalem decree on blood? Rather than take human blood into his physical organism by blood transfusion, Peter shed his human blood in martyrdom — John 21:18, 10.”¹⁴

Since blood transfusion was a procedure unknown to the apostles, it is difficult to visualize Peter receiving one; nor can we imagine what his attitude would be to blood transfusions, if they had been known then to be possible. There is certainly no evidence that Peter shed his own blood in martyrdom rather than accept a blood transfusion — either orally or intravenously.

The final remarks concern the Witnesses' attitude to blood transfusions and children.

Trading on the sentiments of their readers, many writers condemn the Witnesses for their callousness in allowing their children to die rather than have a blood transfusion. However, it is wrong to suggest that the Witnesses are indifferent to their children's welfare. Although their zeal may be misguided, the average Witness is no less loving and affectionate towards his child than a non-Witness. And his grief at the thought of losing his child is as real and poignant as would be that of any parent.

Like Abraham, who was prepared to sacrifice his only child in obedience to God's command (Heb 11:17ff), the Witnesses are prepared to let their children die in obedience to what they believe to be the law of God. That they are mistaken in this belief is what makes their action so tragic.

It is unfortunate that Jehovah's Witnesses will vigorously defend their right to let an uncomprehending child die for want of a blood transfusion; yet, at the same time deny that child a right to the divine life that God gives through baptism, on the grounds that the child lacks a proper understanding.

No matter how one looks at it, the Witnesses' ban on blood transfusions is neither Scriptural nor rational. Blood transfusions have been instrumental in saving innumerable lives, and any idea that they are forbidden by the law of God is based on ignorance of the most elementary rules of Scriptural interpretation.

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The two principal magazines published by the Watch Tower are *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, and *Awake. The Watchtower* now has an average printing of over nine million copies (as at January 1st, 1979), and appears in 82 different languages. *Awake* is the

sister magazine to *The Watchtower*. It is only slightly behind *The Watchtower* in circulation figures. Whereas, *The Watchtower* is primarily concerned with the Society's teachings and doctrines, *Awake* is slanted towards the human interest angle, and is very popular with housewives and families of the Witnesses. Both magazines are published bi-monthly. *The Watchtower* appears on the 1st and 15th of the month, and *Awake* on the 8th and the 22nd of the month.

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During the preparation of this study, the author also received a large number of early issues of *The Watchtower*, dating back to 1916, and copies of *The Golden Age*, *Consolation*, *The Messenger*, and assorted pamphlets, tracts, and booklets from the period 1919-1955. Much of this material is of little use in evaluating present-day teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but it is of interest in tracing the growth of the New World Society, and the evolution of its theology and methods of propagating its teachings.

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Footnotes

1

1. See Chapter Ten for a full discussion on the Watch Tower doctrine on the interpretation of the 144,000 "spirit-creatures".
2. Appendix II contains a short study on the blood transfusion issue.
3. The actual number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide is given in the 1978 Service Year Report as 2,182,341. This is the 1978 peak figure. The average number of Witnesses is given as 2,086,698. (cf. *The Watchtower*, January 1st, 1979, pp.18-21. The same figures also appear in the 1979 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, p.24ff).
4. The Watch Tower's interpretation of the Battle of Armageddon is covered in Chapter Eight.

2

1. *The Expository Times*, November 1953, pp.41-42.
2. Professor Rowley's comment on the "wooden literalism" of the N.W.T. also found an echo in an article written by Professor Bruce M. Metzger, who apportioned part of the blame for the uninspired translation to the Witnesses' long-term use of Benjamin Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott: "His so-called *Diaglott* is a curious edition of J.J. Griesbach's Greek text of the New Testament (1806) with a wooden interlinear translation which, in several particulars, is an ancestor of the New World Translation. It is this antiquated edition of the Greek text to which most Jehovah's Witnesses appeal in their confident assertions that 'the literal meaning of the Greek is thus and so'." (*Theology Today*, April, 1953, p.67)
3. *The Watchtower*, October 1st, 1960, p.601.
4. *Christian Greek Scriptures*, p.6.
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6. *What Has Religion Done For Mankind?*, p.32.
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9. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1960, p.178.
10. *The Watchtower*, April 15th, 1962, pp.234-235.
11. *The Watchtower*, December 15th, 1963, p.762.
12. *The Watchtower*, January 1st, 1970, p.7. Note: In *The Watchtower* text, YHWH is represented by the Hebrew characters.
13. *The Watchtower*, December 15th, 1963, p.762.
14. *The Watchtower*, January 15th, 1968, p.39.

15. Whereas Yahweh, an appellative which needed no further definition, designated the uniqueness of God, the Hebrew *Adoni* could also be applied to a king or anyone else of authority. For this reason, the word began to appear in the grammatically anomalous form of *Adonai*, which managed to retain some of the distinctiveness of the name Yahweh. Although it appears more frequently in the Psalms and Isaiah, it is used as a solemn hymnic title, usually in invocation.
16. *Christian Greek Scriptures*, p.25.
17. In the Foreword to the *Christian Greek Scriptures*, the New World Bible Translation Committee devoted nearly sixteen pages (pp.10-25) to the question of the use of the divine name, and stated that it had incorporated "Jehovah" into the body of its text in some 237 places, and that there were only two instances where their action failed to find support from the Hebrew versions (p.20). It should be noted that the Hebrew versions (numbered J1-J19 in the Foreword) the Watch Tower refers to are all of comparatively recent date (1385-1930) and are simply translations of *existing* Greek manuscripts into the Hebrew language. Since the Greek words *Theos* (God) and *Kyrios* (Lord) were the normal equivalents for YHWH, it is only natural that when these words appeared in the New Testament, a translation *into the Hebrew* would render them as YHWH. There is nothing to be gained by giving full reference data to manuscripts that *translate* the language in which the New Testament was originally written into another language and render words by their particular equivalents.
18. Page 12. The LXX fragment (Faud Papyrus, Inv. 266) is dated around the 2nd or 1st centuries B.C., and may have been considered unique when the *New World Translation* was first published in 1950; but continual archaeological work has produced even more remarkable finds, so that the Faud Papyrus is now only one of a number of Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament belonging to the same period. From a comparison of the other manuscripts — none of which contain the tetragrammaton — it can be shown that the incorporation of the divine name in the Faud Papyrus was by no means the normal practice. In fact, judging by the wealth of evidence in other manuscripts of the period between 100 B.C. and 100 A.D., it would appear that the practice followed in the Faud Papyrus was the *exception* rather than the rule.
19. *Christian Greek Scriptures*, p.18.
20. There can be no real objection to using the divine name in the Old Testament, for as the Witnesses rightly point out, *Kyrios* (Lord) and *Theos* (God) are not translations of YHWH, but substitutes. However, every effort should be made to ensure that the rendering of the name should be as accurate as possible. The hybrid "Jehovah", which appears four times in the *King James Version*, and throughout the Old Testament in the *American Standard Version* (a feature which made it a popular translation with the Witnesses in the days before the N.W.T.) is not an accurate rendering of the tetragrammaton, and for this reason, the translators of the *Revised Standard Version* preferred to omit it altogether and substitute the traditional "Lord" or "God" wherever it occurred. On the other hand, the translators of the *Jerusalem Bible* decided to incorporate the divine name into their text, but chose "Yahweh" as the more accurate form of the name. But there is absolutely no warrant for introducing any form of the divine name into the New Testament.

21. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul denounced the so-called "gods" of the heathens. When he spoke of God in the same breath as the false gods, he did not find it necessary to distinguish him with a proper name, "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist" (1 Cor 8:6). In all but one of his thirteen letters (excluding Hebrews) Paul greeted his readers with the prayer, "May YOU have undeserved kindness and peace from God our Father" (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2 etc. N.W.T.). The logical place to speak of God's proper name would be at the start of a letter, but not once does this occur. For Paul, and for all the New Testament writers, God is Father, and this title replaces all other names by which he was known.
22. *The Watchtower*, January 1st, 1970, p.6.

3

1. *The Truth That Leads To Eternal Life*, p.19.
2. *The Watchtower*, May 1st, 1966, p.277.
3. *The Watchtower*, May 1st, 1966, p.277.
4. *The Watchtower*, May 1st, 1966, p.278. See also, *Awake*, January 8th, 1973, pp.16-19.
5. *Awake*, September 8th, 1962, p.6.
6. *The Watchtower*, April 15th, 1962, p.235.
7. *The Watchtower*, January 15th, 1968, p.40.
8. *Let Your Name Be Sanctified*, p.300.
9. *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.7.
10. *Let God Be True*, p.111.
11. *The Watchtower*, January 1st, 1970, p.7.
12. Cf. *The Watchtower*, April 15th, 1962, p.235.
13. The Witnesses are only half right when they claim that this definition is not Scriptural because it was not formulated until the 4th century; for the definition itself is simply an attempt to express in concise terms a teaching that extends throughout the whole of the New Testament, and it can be seen to have a Scriptural basis from the various texts that speak of the three Persons and their relationship to each other.
14. *Concise Theological Dictionary*, Herder, Burns & Oates, p.469.
15. *The Watchtower*, February 1st, 1960, p.94.
16. Since the Witnesses themselves rightly identify the Father of Jesus Christ with Jehovah God (cf. 2 Pet 1:17), there is no need to prove this point from Scripture. They also acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Son of God in a unique way (cf. *The Watchtower*, January 15th, 1961, p.35), but when it is shown that they have reduced the Sonship of Jesus to a mere act of creation (cf. *The Watchtower*, September 15th, 1961, pp.549-552), the term becomes meaningless. As the Sonship of Jesus will be examined more fully in Chapter Four, there is no need to go into detailed explanation of the doctrine at this point, but to show from the Scriptures that the Son is equal to the Father, and is therefore God himself who was "manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16).
17. A peculiarity of the Witnesses' N.W.T. is that the rendering of the Greek word *parakletos* as "helper" is never capitalized. In a version of the Sacred Scriptures that does not hesitate to capitalize various titles that refers to Jesus Christ (e.g., Son, 1 Jn 4:15; Savior, 1 Tim 4:10; Lord, Jn 20:28; Prophet, Jn 7:40; and even Chief Agent, Acts 5:31), such an omission is

indicative of the translators' subtle efforts to lessen the tendency to think of the Holy Spirit as an actual Person. The fact that Jesus himself is designated as *parakletos* in 1 Jn 2:1 and that he calls the Holy Spirit "another *parakletos*" (Jn 14:16), would tend to suggest that the Spirit is something more than an "active force".

18. *Against Heresies*, II. xxviii. 6.
19. Cf. *Awake*, April 22nd, 1962, p.4. *The Watchtower*, July 15th, 1969, p.421.
20. In Proverbs 8:22ff., the pre-existent Word (admittedly a retrojected view in the light of later New Testament revelation) is spoken of as the personified Wisdom of God; and in 1 Cor 1:24, as the "power and wisdom of God". In the 1962 Watch Tower booklet, *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, the Witnesses quote from Count Leo Tolstoy's, "The Four Gospels, Harmonized and Translated", where *Logos* is rendered as the *Comprehension of God* (*The Word*, p.53). Tolstoy's efforts to convey the meaning of the Greek word is similar to the difficulty Goethe's *Faust* experienced when he attempted to translate the New Testament into German. Sensing the inadequacy of "Word" as an accurate translation of *Logos*, Faust turned to philosophy and came up with "In the beginning was the *Thought*". He discarded this in favour of "In the beginning was the *Power*". This too failed to convey the full sense of *Logos*, and Faust settled for, "In the beginning was the *Act*".

4

1. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, pp.191-192. For further examples of the way in which the New World Society has distorted the history of the period in question, the reader is referred to *The Watchtower* issues of May 1st, 1966, pp.278-279; July 15th, 1969, pp.421-424; and *Awake*, January 8th, 1973, pp.16-19.
2. *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.52.
3. *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.33.
4. *Let God Be True*, 1952 ed., p.33.
5. *Let God Be True*, 1952 ed., p.32.
6. *Your Will Be Done on Earth*, pp.315-316.
7. Cf. Footnote to Jn 1:1, in *R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Samuel Bagster, 1973.
8. *Christian Greek Scriptures*, p.774. That this still reflects current Watch Tower thinking is borne out by the fact that the Foreword and most of the Appendix to the 1950 edition of the *Christian Greek Scriptures* has been incorporated into the 1969 edition of *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*. Additional material may also be found in the Watch Tower's Bible Dictionary, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.918-919.
9. I.e., *The Complete Bible — An American Translation*, and that of James Moffatt.
10. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.5.
11. *Theology Today*, April, 1953, p.75.
12. *Theology Today*, April, 1953, p.76.
13. *Christian Greek Scriptures*, p.776.
14. *Theology Today*, April, 1953, p.76.
15. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1530.
16. *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. II, p.337.

17. While discussing Col 1:15ff, it is well to point out a further example of the way in which the Watch Tower is prepared to falsify the Word of God in order to bolster its doctrinal aberrations. In Col 1:16-17 the *New World Translation* has inserted the word "other" four times into the text in an effort to identify Christ with part of God's creation. He is said to be the "first creation" of God, and that through him "all other things" have been created. In a footnote to Col 1:16-17 in the 1950 edition of the *Christian Greek Scriptures*, the reader is referred to "Lk 13:2, 4, and elsewhere", to obtain the reason for this unwarranted addition to the sacred text. But in reality, the cross-reference offers no support whatsoever for this deliberate distortion of the Scriptures. Lk 13:2 refers to the "Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices". Jesus asked his listeners whether they imagined that "these Galileans were proved worse sinners than all other Galileans because they have suffered these things?" (N.W.T.). The second reference (Lk 13:4) recalls the tragedy that overtook eighteen men on whom a tower in Siloam fell. Jesus asked if these men were to be considered "greater debtors than all other men inhabiting Jerusalem?" (N.W.T.).

The similarity between Lk 13 and Col 1 is that neither has the word "other" in the original text. The Watch Tower's implication is that because it is admissible to insert the word "other" in Luke (an insertion that is made by the majority of modern translations), they are also justified in inserting it in the letter to the Colossians. However, the sole reason the Witnesses have for inserting the word "other" into Col 1:16-17 is to bolster their teaching that Jesus is nothing more than the first of God's creatures. In the first instance, the insertion of the word "other" is permissible on the grounds that it is already present in the text by implication. But there are no grounds whatever for inserting it into the text of Colossians, for no such comparison exists — unless, of course, one is prepared to accept the preconceived teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses that Christ was merely a creation of God.

18. *Let God Be True*, p.107.
 19. *Cf. The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.19.
 20. *Cf. the above comment from Let God Be True for the Witnesses' understanding of Rev 3:14.*
 21. *Cf. Isa 9:6 — Make Sure of All Things*, p.282.
 22. *Let God Be True*, p.32; *Your Will Be Done on Earth*, pp.315-316.
 23. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.288; *Your Will Be Done on Earth*, pp.308-323.
 24. See Chapter Three.
 25. *Cf. Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.919.
 26. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.1530-1531.
 27. See discussion on the interpretation of Jn 1:1 above.
 28. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.919.
 29. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.410.
 30. *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.18.
 31. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.1254 and 1530.
 32. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.13.
 33. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.17. To keep the humanity of Jesus firmly fixed in our minds, the author of the 1962 booklet, *The Word — Who Is He? According to John*, p.11, is quick to tell us about the sixteen times the apostle John calls Jesus the "Son of Man", but he is not so eager to acknowledge the similar number of times he is also called the "Son of God". If the Watch Tower writer believes that the expression "Son of Man" refers to the obvious humanity of Jesus, then he should accept that "Son of God" is an obvious reference to his divinity. Or is this same line of reasoning invalid when it is applied to the deity of Christ?

34. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1974, p.527.
35. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1974, p.525.
36. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1974, p.527.
37. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1974, pp.525-526. See also, *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.919.
38. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.408.
39. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29A, p.776.
40. The Jews were governed by a strict code of laws, and stoning was permitted only for certain offences. That there may be no mistaking the Jews' reasons for attempting to stone Jesus, the crimes deserving the death penalty by stoning are set out as follows: Idolatry, Deut 13:6-10; Blasphemy, Lev 24:14; Sacrificing children to idols, Lev 20:2; Divination, Lev 20:27; Violation of the Sabbath, Num 15; 32-36; Adultery, Deut 22:22ff; Fornication with an unmarried woman, Deut 22:20-21; Rebellious children, Deut 21:18-21; and the stoning of an ox that gores, Ex 21:28. From this list it is obvious that the only offence punishable by stoning that the Jews could bring against Jesus was that of blasphemy — as John records elsewhere (Jn 10:31-33).
41. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1974, p.527.
42. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, pp.261-262.
43. *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p.94.
44. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29, p.536.
45. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.919-920. The suggestion that Thomas' words were an exclamation of astonishment spoken to Jesus but directed to God is a revival of the theory of Theodore of Mopsuestia — a theory that was condemned by the Councils of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and Constantinople (553 A.D.) and one that has had few supporters since.
46. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29A, p.655.
47. Cf. Parousia discussion in Chapter Eight.

5

1. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.232.
2. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, p.174.
3. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, pp.166, 175-177.
4. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, p.178. As this third aspect of Christ's Atonement forms part of the larger question related to the "last things", we can withhold comment here and discuss it in the chapter on the afterlife (cf. Chapter Ten).
5. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, p.170.
6. *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*, Thomas Nelson, 1966.
7. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, pp.165-166.
8. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, p.168.
9. 1 Jn 4:8, 16. Cf. *Let God Be True*, 1952 edition, pp.98-99.
10. *The Watchtower*, March 15th, 1965, p.176.
11. *The Watchtower*, March 1st, 1965, p.139.
12. For further comment on "The Lamb of God", see Chapter Seven.

6

1. *Let God Be True*, 1952 edition, p.138.
2. *You May Survive Armageddon into God's New World*, p.80.
3. *Let Your Name be Sanctified*, p.267.

4. *What Has Religion Done For Mankind?*, p.260. See also, *Let God Be True*, p.40.; *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.332.
5. Cf. Chapter Ten, "The Witnesses and The Afterlife".
6. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, pp.354-355.
7. Chapter Ten, for study on hell and the Witnesses' understanding of *hades* and *gehenna*.
8. *You May Survive Armageddon into God's New World*, pp.80-81.
9. It is true that throughout the New Testament the Christian congregation or church (Greek; *ekklesia*) is often spoken of as the "body of Christ" (cf. Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:13; Eph 2:16; 4:4; Col 3:15), or the "temple of God" (2 Cor 6:16), but this is not the sense intended in Jn 2:21. The whole Church forms the "temple of God", but every Christian is also an *individual* temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). See also the apostles' references to their bodies as a tent or tabernacle, a term which described the temporary shelter for the Ark of the Covenant during the nomadic existence of the early Israelites (2 Sam 7:6. Cf. 2 Cor 5:1, 4; 2 Pet 1:13, 14). It was in this latter sense, the *individual* or *personal* sense, that Jesus spoke of his body as a "temple".
10. Cf. Chapter Seven, "The Witnesses and The Ascension".
11. *Studies in The Scriptures*, Vol. 2, 1924 ed., p.129.
12. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1612.
13. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1611. We are asked to believe that what the apostles saw were *non-existent* persons holding conversation with Jesus.
14. Cf. N.W.T., 1961 ed., p.1112.
15. One book dealing with Watch Tower aberrations suggested that it was unnecessary to refute the Witnesses in this particular instance, for the portion of the Gospel they quote in evidence is "noncanonical and worthless" (*The Kingdom of The Cults*, p.86). While it can be admitted that the additional verses (vv.9-20) may not be the work of Mark himself, it cannot be said that they are worthless. They date from some time prior to 150 A.D., when they were quoted as belonging to the Gospel narrative. There is nothing heretical in the verses, such as might be found in the apocryphal gospels, and it is obvious from a study of their content that the information they contain would seem to be derived from Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The antiquity of the verses, and the fact that they have long been included in almost every translation of the Bible — even if only in an appended form — is reason enough to regard them as having some degree of authority. This is certainly the position in Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, where they are held to be canonical, though not necessarily of Marcan authorship.

7

1. For a comment on this text from First Corinthians, see Chapter Ten.
2. *Let Your Name Be Sanctified*, p.272.
3. *The Watchtower*, April 15th, 1963, p.238.
4. *The Watchtower*, April 15th, 1963, p.237.

8

1. *The Time Is at Hand*, p.196,
2. *The Time Is at Hand*, p.i, 1924 edition.
3. *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, pp.85-86.

4. E.g., *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.96.
5. *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, p.88.
6. *You May Survive Armageddon Into God's New World*, pp.206-207.
7. *Let God Be True*, 1952 ed., p.197.
8. *Let God Be True*, p.202.
9. *Life Everlasting — In Freedom of The Sons of God*, pp.29-30.
10. *The Watchtower*, August 15th, 1968, p.499.
11. *Let God Be True*, p.259.
12. *Things in Which It is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.330.
13. *Let God Be True*, p.197.
14. *Let God Be True*, p.198.
15. *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p.9.
16. *De Lapsis* (on The Lapsed).
17. Cf. *The Watchtower*, December 15th, 1974, p.751, and *passim*.
18. *The Watchtower*, August 15th, 1968, p.499.
19. Cf. *Life Everlasting — In Freedom of The Sons of God*, pp.22ff., and *passim*.
20. *The Watchtower*, October 15th, 1974, p.635.
21. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.641-642.
22. *Is The New Testament Anti-Semitic?* Paulist Press, 1965, p.337.
23. *What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?* Watch Tower tract, p.6. The Witnesses' conception of the battle of Armageddon is based on a literal interpretation of the symbolic battle mentioned in Revelation. Former Watch Tower president, the late "Judge" Rutherford, could scarce restrain himself as he described the carnage that was to be wrought amongst the enemies of God. On one occasion he prophesied that the number of people who were to perish in this manifestation of God's wrath would be so great that there would not be enough survivors left to bury them all (*Salvation*, p.25). Since the Judge's death in 1942, the Watch Tower hierarchy has toned down some of his more violent invectives, but there is still enough evidence in their present literature to suggest that they have not been entirely abandoned. The toning down of the more lurid elements in their descriptions of the coming conflict has not meant any change of attitude in the Witnesses' approach to Armageddon, and they continue on in their ignorance of the true meaning of the battle to which they attach so much importance.
24. Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to reject any suggestion that "Babylon" is a cryptic reference in New Testament writings to pagan Rome, and insist that both John (Rev 17:5) and Peter (1 Pet 5:13) are speaking of the ancient city on the Euphrates — *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.177; 1298-1299.

9

1. *Let God Be True*, p.108.
2. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.466.
3. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1543.
4. *Anchor Bible*, Vol. 29A, p.639.
5. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1545.
6. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1543.
7. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.1543.
8. *The Watchtower*, October 1st, 1968, pp.582-583.
9. *The Messenger* [Australia], Jan-Feb, 1975, p.36.

10

1. Cf. 1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses, p.211.
2. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, pp.134-150.
3. *Let God Be True*, p.68.
4. *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. I, p.12.
5. Cf. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.145.
6. *Let God Be True*, 1952 ed., pp.71-72.
7. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.135.
8. *Is This Life All There Is?*, pp.172-174.
9. Although it may not emerge very clearly from the above quotation, the Witnesses' mention of "genetic combinations" and "memory" illustrates the Watch Tower's denial of omniscience to God (cf. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, pp.594-600). The Witnesses may speak of God as omniscient (see above, Chapter Three), but the attribute is not without restriction. In the case of individuals God actually has to wait until the "genetic combinations" are formed so as to permit him to see what sort of person he has created.
10. *Let God Be True*, p.231.
11. *Let God Be True*, p.231.
12. Cf. *Then Is Finished The Mystery of God*, p.12.
13. *Let God Be True*, pp.136-139.
14. *Let God Be True*, p.99.
15. *Let God Be True*, p.98.
16. *Let God Be True*, p.88.
17. *Let God Be True*, p.98.
18. *Let God Be True*, p.93.
19. *Let God Be True*, p.93; see also, *Is This Life All There Is?*, pp.91-95.
20. *Is This Life All There Is?*, p.93.
21. *The Watchtower*, November 1st, 1968, p.662.
22. *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p.44.
23. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.145.
24. Cf. *The Twentieth Century New Testament*.
25. Cf. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. I, p.302.
26. See above, Chapter Five, for further comment on God's judgement in Watch Tower theology.
27. Cf. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.234.
28. *Babylon The Great Has Fallen*, p.510.
29. *Babylon The Great Has Fallen*, p.511.
30. *Expositiroy Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. II, p.43.

11

1. *Jehovah of The Watchtower*, Zondervan, 1956.
2. *Jehovah of The Watchtower*, p.84.
3. *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, p.56.
4. From a Watch Tower tract, *What Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe?*, p.4.
5. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.163.
6. *Then Is Finished The Mystery of God*, p.356.
7. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, p.167.
8. *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God to Lie*, pp.167-168.
9. Cf. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, Vol. II, pp.191-192.
10. Cf. *The Old Testament Apocrypha*, Catherine Dimer, p.35.
11. *Let God Be True*, 1952 ed., p.64.

12

1. Cf., *The New Creation*, pp.421-456.
2. *The New Creation*, p.430.
3. *The New Creation*, p.435.
4. *The New Creation*. p.455.
5. *The New Creation*, p.455.
6. Cf., *The Time Is At Hand*, pp.76-77 (1908 ed.).
7. Cf., *Thirty Years A Watch Tower Slave*, especially chapters 11 and 12.
8. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.188. Italics mine.
9. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.40.
10. *Didache*, 7.
11. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.41.
12. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.43.
13. The so-called "Great Apostasy" is a Watch Tower fantasy based on such texts as 2 Thess 2:3, and 2 Tim 2:16-19 — cf. *Aid To Bible Understanding*, p.91.

Appendix Notes

1. Cf., *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, chps. 7, 10 and 11.
2. Cf., *Make Sure of All Things*, pp.489, 373, 353.
3. *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, p.305.
4. *The Watchtower*, July 15th, 1950, pp.216-217. Cited by Martin and Klann in *Jehovah of The Watchtower*, 1956 ed., p.94.
5. *Make Sure of All Things*, p.490.
6. Cf., *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, p.268.
7. Cf., *The Watchtower*, February 15th, 1964, p.127.
8. Cf., *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God*, p.14.
9. Cf., *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, p.331.
10. Cf., *Make Sure of All Things*, pp.53-55.
11. *The Watchtower*, June 1st, 1969, p.326.
12. Cf., *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, pp.335-336, and *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God*, p.12.
13. Cf., *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, p.337, and *Blood, Medicine and The Law of God*, p.33.
14. *Life Everlasting in Freedom of The Sons of God*, p.336.

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For many years the zeal of the Jehovah Witnesses in promoting their religious ideas has made apparent the need for a detailed and thorough criticism of their teachings. This book faces up to the difficult task of pursuing the Witnesses' defensive arguments to the last Scriptural text.

The author has spent years in research on the Witnesses' ideas and in finding adequate answers to them from the only source recognized by the Witnesses as reliable — the Bible.

To avoid any charge of bias or misrepresentation, the author submitted his presentation of Witness teachings to an adherent of the Watch Tower Society. Consequently, the teachings, ideas and arguments that are criticized in this book are really those of the Witnesses. The author's criticisms always meet the Witnesses' interpretations and their endeavours to defend and bolster their views.

The main subjects treated are:—

The Bible

The Ascension

The Holy Trinity

The Second Coming

The Deity of Christ

The Holy Spirit

The Atonement

The After-Life

The Resurrection

Angels and Devils

Blood Transfusions

Baptism

War