

people were greatly in reproach...because they had said so much about 1914, and what would come to pass, and their 'prophecies' had not been fulfilled."³ However, blind loyalty kept most of Russell's followers from seeing him as a false prophet, even though he perfectly fit Deuteronomy 18:20-22—"The prophet who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded him to speak...must die...when the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word does not occur or come true" (*NWT*). The year 1914 came and went, with "earth's present rulership" still running. And Russell himself died in 1916.

The organization he left behind continued stepping ahead, spellbound, like the donkey pursuing its carrot. In 1917, Russell's successor, Joseph Rutherford, published *The Finished Mystery* and prophesied of the following year: "In the year 1918, when God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by the millions, it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of 'Christianity'" (*p 485*). Another prophecy, another failure, and another lesson unlearned! In 1918, Rutherford prophesied that the ancient Biblical patriarchs would rise from the dead in 1925, to lead them into the New Order: "We may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets."⁴ And Rutherford's followers continued to follow, just as the donkey followed the carrot.

But when 1925 came and went without an earthly resurrection, the organization's leadership did learn a lesson...or, at least, they claimed to: "There was a measure of disappointment on the part of Jehovah's faithful ones on earth concerning the years 1914, 1918 & 1925...they also learned to quit fixing dates for the future and predicting what would come to pass on a certain date."⁵ But did they really abandon this technique of manipulating *JW's* into frenzied activity? *The Watchtower* referred to "the remaining months before Armageddon" (*15 Sept 1941*), thus indicating to *JW's* that "the end" was only months away, not years.

And again, in 1966, the Society named another specific date for "the end"—1975: "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."⁶ And in an article, beginning in large capital letters, entitled, "WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO 1975?"—after a detailed discussion of chronology, it concluded, "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 1000-year reign of Christ will begin by then?...It may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years."⁷

What was the result of the new carrot on a stick? another burst of activity on the part of *JW's*. Their internal newsletter *Kingdom Ministry* reported a huge increase in the number of full-time "pioneer" door-knockers in 1974, which they viewed as the final year before "the end." "A 34% increase!...Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end" (*May 1974, p 3*).

When the world survived 1975 without Armageddon, many

individual *JW's* stopped following the Watchtower's carrot on a stick; statistics reveal that roughly a million active *JW's* left the ranks during the next decade. But those coming in the front door continued to outnumber those exiting through the back door.

BLOOD, MEDICINE & CANNIBALISM

Newspaper headlines similar to this appear regularly around the world—"JEHOVAH'S WITNESS REFUSES BLOOD; DIES." Or the headline may read: "COURT ORDERS TRANSFUSION FOR CHILD OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESS COUPLE." In either case the article usually tells of the frustration of medical personnel whose efforts to save a life were hindered by the Witnesses' refusal to permit the necessary treatment.

Yes, the *JW's* are well known for their steadfast refusal to take blood, even in the face of death. This, in itself, is frightening, but the story behind that refusal is even more frightening, because it reveals an organization that has total power over its followers—even the power of life and death.

The Watchtower's first major foray into the field of medicine was in the 1930's. Under the heading, "REASONS WHY VACCINATION IS UNSCRIPTURAL," they announced: "Vaccination is a direct violation of the flood."⁸ So Watchtower followers immediately stopped having their children vaccinated. What did they do when proof of vaccination was required for a child's admission to public school? Close friends who were second-generation *JW's* explained it to me this way: The parents would take the child to a *JW* doctor or to another cooperative medical professional, and the doctor would use acid to burn a mark on the child's arm to give the appearance of a vaccination. If any paperwork was needed certifying the vaccination, the doctor could provide that, too. In situations where such deception was impossible, the Witnesses simply refused to allow themselves or their children to be vaccinated. Needless to say, this resulted in frequent conflicts with the secular authorities, and Watchtower publications of the 1930's contain reports of a number of related court cases. By 1952, however, the Society's directors had changed their minds and decided to allow followers to be vaccinated.

When I first began studying with the *JW's* in 1968, they had just introduced a new medical teaching—that organ transplants were forbidden by God.⁹ *JW's* were to "consider all transplants between humans as cannibalism."¹⁰ So, when elderly *JW's* were going blind in such a way that only a cornea transplant could restore their vision, they were told not to submit to the operation. They had to choose blindness, rather than receive a cornea transplant. Otherwise, they could be accused of cannibalism, be put on trial by a congregation judicial committee, and be disfellowshipped—cut off from family and friends. The vast majority of *JW's* accepted the ban on organ transplants as a proclamation from the throne of God. Whether the consequence was blindness for refusing a cornea operation, or death for going without a needed kidney transplant, the Society was to be obeyed.

But then, in 1980, the Society again reversed itself: organ transplants were no longer forbidden. *JW's* would now be allowed to make up their own mind as to whether or not to undergo an operation. Yes, the Society had the power to change "God's law,"

and to change it back again! But unfortunately it did not have the power to bring back the sight of those who had gone blind, or to bring back to life those who had gone to an early grave for following the instructions that were in force between 1967 and 1980.

To this very day the Society teaches that blood transfusions violate God's law. And in spite of the evidence that such teachings can be abandoned at the whim of their leaders, the millions of rank-and-file *JW's* stake their lives on the Watchtower's word. A fellow elder of mine in a neighboring congregation was struck by a car and began bleeding profusely from his legs. As long as he remained conscious, he refused to accept blood (or even plasma, because it's a blood-component), and his family continued to repeat the objections after he passed out. He bled to death.

Outsiders have, at times, expressed admiration of Jehovah's Witnesses for their displaying "the courage of their convictions" in such matters. But these observers usually know nothing of the indoctrination (I call it "brainwashing") and the intimidation that forces *JW's* to do the Watchtower's bidding. I know of a case in a nearby congregation, where a young couple was put on trial for accepting a transfusion. Aside from the fear of being punished by God with everlasting death, *JW's* also know the immediate consequences of violating the Society's medical rules. Breaking the rules, even to save one's own life, seldom occurs.

INTO THE BEDROOM

Throughout history Judeo-Christian religious groups have traditionally condemned extra-martial sexual activity. Based on the Word of God, they have spoken out against fornication, adultery and homosexuality. The Watchtower, however, has gone beyond this by intruding itself into the bedrooms of married couples, telling them what is or is not acceptable in their sexual relations and foreplay. This began in 1972 when the Society probed into the propriety of various forms of behavior in the marriage bed. *The Watchtower* said, "It is not the purpose of this magazine to discuss all the intimate aspects of marital relations."¹¹ And then it went on to do that very thing.

Without repeating the graphic details of this article that would make many readers blush, we can state simply that the conclusion reached was that not all is fair in married love. Certain forms of stimulation, foreplay, and intercourse were ruled "off limits." From that point forward, *JW's* became accountable to their leaders for their conduct in the marriage bed. Those who crossed the bounds set by *The Watchtower* faced prosecution before a judicial committee and expulsion from the organization.

This precipitated a flood of inquiry and interrogation. *JW* couples wrote letters to the Brooklyn, New York headquarters, detailing their sexual practices and asking the organization's stamp of approval. Guilt-ridden *JW's* came forward to confess what they feared were possible violations of the established standard. Wives reported their husbands to the local elders, charging them with improper advances in bed; and the elders, in turn, summoned the husbands before judicial hearings to interrogate them. Needless to say, many marriages were severely strained as a result, and some broke up.

Then, as it has also done in so many other areas, the Watchtower's Governing Body reversed itself on the matter. In 1978, they now said, "It must be acknowledged that the Bible does not give any specific rules or limitations as regards the manner in which husband and wife engage in sexual relations...in view of the absence of which the married couple themselves must bear the responsibility before God...these marital intimacies do not come within the province of the congregation elders to attempt to control nor to take disfellowshipping action."¹²

This, in effect, repealed the 1972 ruling, and the Watchtower hierarchy withdrew itself from the bedrooms of married couples. No longer could husband or wife file charges, one against the other, for excesses during their intimate relations. No longer could local congregation elders summon *JW's* to interrogate them on how they expressed their passions toward their mates.

However, nothing was done to repair the damage done—the embarrassment, guilt, confusion, fear, and breach of privacy suffered by so many during the intervening years, and the marriages that were left broken as a result of the Watchtower's intrusions. What a sad story!

But the story has not yet ended. Like a swinging pendulum, in 1983, the Society again reversed itself on the subject. This time, in a discussion labeled "an amplification and adjustment in understanding" of the 1978 article, it asserted anew the organization's right to examine "sex relations within the marriage bond" and to impose sanctions on members whose marital intimacies do not measure up.¹³

Regardless of our opinion of the leaders in Brooklyn who thus toy with people's lives, we should pity the rank-and-file *JW's* who, because of their sincere belief that the organization speaks for God, must submit to their leaders' ever-changing whims. They are like those the apostle Paul described—"tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (*Eph 4:14*). Since 1972, the back and forth changes in Watchtower teaching have caused many *JW* marriages to experience this sort of "rough sailing," some even ending up "on the rocks."

PLAYING "SIMON SAYS"

There are numerous minority religious groups in the world, each strictly adhering to its own peculiar beliefs and practices, but *JW's* are unique in that their beliefs and practices are constantly changing. As the leadership in Brooklyn, New York, changes its collective mind on matters of faith and morals, the "new truths" are published in the pages of *The Watchtower*, and followers must immediately start dancing to the new tune.

It could be compared to the children's game of "Simon Says." When Simon says "Jump!" you jump; when Simon says "Sit!" you sit. While in the game, though, everyone has a chance to become Simon; for *JW's*, Simon is always the Watchtower Society, specifically its Governing Body.

When children play the game, and Simon says, "Jump!" each one must jump. Similarly, attendees at the Integrity Keepers

District Convention in the summer of 1985 heard a Watchtower representative say this from the pulpit: “We should be working under the direction of the Governing Body and the older men in our congregations...and if one of those instructions were for us to jump, our only response should be “How high?” and “How far?””¹⁴ Although such an attitude has long been cultivated among *JW*'s, it is seldom spelled out so clearly.

Some of the sect's changes in teachings have been necessitated by circumstances. For example, in a 1943 publication, the Society indicated that mankind could not “by airplane or rockets or other means get up above the air envelope which is about our earthly globe and in which man breathes.”¹⁵ The reality of manned space flight has since called for “new truth” on the matter. And, likewise, advances in racial equality among “worldly” people made it inadvisable for “God's organization” to continue saying, “It is true that the white race exhibits some qualities of superiority over others”¹⁶ and “There is no servant in the world as good as a good Colored servant, and the joy that he gets from rendering faithful service is one of the purest joys there is in the world.”¹⁷

JW's have been taught to welcome changes in their beliefs and practices as evidence that God is leading them and teaching them new things (for example, the changing medical prohibitions mentioned above). Whenever a change is introduced, they quote Proverbs 4:18, “The path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established” (*NWT*) and rejoice that their “light” is getting brighter. Most *JW*'s, however, have not been in the group long enough to realize that much of what is present as “new light” is actually a return to old “light” that had been rejected as “darkness” at some time in the past—as between the years 1972 and 1983 when the Society alternated between different views on “God's laws” regarding sexual conduct within marriage, each view was strictly enforced, until superseded by the next, which actually constituted a return to the previous view. Actually, rather than getting brighter, the Watchtower's “light” is blinking on-and-off!

In 1972, *JW*'s were not allowed to say “Hello” to disfellowshipped friends, because “none in the congregation should greet such persons when meeting them.”¹⁸ But in 1974, the Society rejected that “rigid stand” and indicated that *JW*'s should “show common courtesy” to disfellowshipped persons.¹⁹ As a Witness at the time, I remember rejoicing at this “new truth” because Jehovah's organization was now shedding more light on God's mercy and love. Everyone in the congregation suddenly started speaking to friends and relatives they had previously shunned. But then, in 1981, the Society sent us reeling back into the past, telling us that we “should not speak at all with an expelled person, not even saying ‘hello.’”²⁰ While virtually everyone around us rejoiced at this “new light,” my wife and I recognized it as old darkness, and we began to “see the light” about the Watchtower Society. Our days as *JW*'s were numbered.

Failure of an individual Witness to “move ahead with Jehovah's organization” is treated as a sin as serious as “pushing ahead presumptuously” with one's own ideas. Once a “new truth” is promulgated, the old “truth” is immediately discarded as error, and anyone found still adhering to it is considered an

“apostate.” The sad situation of *JW*'s is described again perfectly in Ephesians 4:14 as *The Living Bible* paraphrases it: “Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different, or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like truth.”

In fact, in making charges against its enemies, the Watchtower Society actually condemns itself out of its own mouth: “It is a serious matter to represent God and Christ in one way, then find that our understandings of the major teachings and fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures were in error, and then after that, to go back to the very doctrines that, by years of study, we had thoroughly determined to be in error. Christians cannot be vacillating—‘wishy-washy’—about such fundamental teachings. What confidence can one put in the sincerity or judgment of such persons?”²¹

THE SOCIETY AS LORD & SAVIOR

Christianity has been defined as a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. We become Christians as we see ourselves as sinners in God's sight, and come to Christ in need of salvation. We come into a new relationship with Christ, receiving Him as Lord and Savior. He becomes our Master, our Teacher, our Shepherd—the One we obey. For *JW*'s, however, the rightful position of Jesus Christ has been usurped by the Watchtower organization. It, in effect, is the one they are taught to look to as lord and savior.

One can become a Christian by receiving Christ by faith before ever entering or joining an organized church. It's a spiritual relationship, not dependent upon human relationships. Individuals have been known to become Christians after reading the Bible all alone. But becoming a *JW* is not that simple. One must first receive and study Watchtower literature in order to “properly” understand the Bible. There must be a formal study program conducted by a *JW* in good standing with the organization. Then the newcomer must begin attending organizational meetings and participate in “field service”—knocking on doors with Watchtower literature. Finally, after undergoing a doctrinal quiz,²² he is acceptable for baptism and recognition as a *JW*.

Unlike Christian baptism, which is performed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, candidates for baptism by *JW*'s must answer “yes” to the following two questions: **(1)** “On the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, have you repented of your sins and dedicated yourself to Jehovah to do his will? **(2)** “Do you understand that your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in association with God's spirit-directed organization?”²³ Somehow, the organization has inserted itself into the baptismal formula. And the organization continues to insert itself into the life of the *JW*, taking the place of Jesus Christ.

For example, people are invited to “come to Jehovah's organization for salvation.”²⁴ The organization is portrayed as their savior. Moreover, followers are told: “Jehovah is using only one organization today to accomplish his will. To receive life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it.”²⁵ There is no salvation or life apart from the

Watchtower organization, according to these clear teachings.

Likewise, the Watchtower organization requires unquestioning obedience from its followers—obedience such as is due only to the Lord Himself. *JW*'s are told to “Avoid independent thinking...questioning the counsel that is provided by God's visible organization.”²⁶ Any who fail to obey are put on trial, expelled, and cut off from family and friends.

By thus inserting itself into God's plan of salvation, presenting itself as the essential means of salvation and the final authority to be obeyed, the Watchtower usurps the position of Christ as Lord and Savior. This actually borders on idolatry, since the organization is portrayed in terms that rightly apply only to Deity.

Strangely enough, the Society itself has acknowledged in the past the possibility of people becoming “idolatrour worshipers of a man-made organization”²⁷ (writing in regard to some other organization, of course, not their own). How does this happen? How does one become an organization-worshiper? Note the Society's own answer: “If one renders obedient service to someone or some organization, whether willingly or under compulsion, looking up to such as possessing a position of superior rulership and great authority, then that one can Scripturally be said to be a worshiper.”²⁸

What more perfect description could there be of the relationship of *JW*'s to their own organization? Their definition of “idolatrour worshipers of a man-made organization” fits no one better than themselves. Yes, by looking to it for salvation and by obeying it as their lord and master, *JW*'s in effect deify their organization. While pointing the finger of accusation at others, they themselves have fallen into the snare of idolatry. ■

—Adapted from the writings of David Reed

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THE WATCHTOWER EXPOSED

CARROT ON A STICK

The old man sits on the donkey's back with a stick in his hand, not to hit the animal with, but to lure it onward. At the end of the stick is a big, juicy carrot, hanging by a string, just inches beyond the donkey's reach. The donkey sees the carrot dangling there and so takes a step forward to get it, then another step, then another. Of course, each time the donkey steps a head, the carrot jerks forward; but the creature's brain functions only in the present. The lessons of the past are lost, as each step leading nowhere is forgotten before the next step is taken.

So it is with the Jehovah's Witnesses (*JW*'s) and the series of prophetic dates heralded by the Watchtower Society: 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975, etc. Each new prophetic date announcing THE END OF THE WORLD stirred the *JW*'s on to a new level of fervent activity. Every time a new date was proclaimed, the previous date faded from memory, just like the donkey's previous attempt to reach the carrot.

First, there was 1914. Charles Taze Russell, the Watchtower's founder and first president, was doubly sure that his calculations were correct. After all, he had derived the date from two sources: the Bible and the Great Pyramid of Egypt. Scripture verses that had nothing to do with “the end” were given special meaning and interpreted as pointing to 1914; and measurements of connecting chambers within the ancient Pyramid were figured in inches and then converted to years, with the assumption that one inch equaled one year. By choosing the right starting and ending points, Russell found he could measure 1914 inches and interpret this as pointing forward to the year 1914.

So, Watchtower publications proclaimed that God's Kingdom was about to wage war against man's governments and that the battle “will end AD 1914 with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership.”¹ Russell's followers scurried from house to house, warning the population about 1914. Thousands of people followed Russell wholeheartedly, accepting him as God's “faithful and discreet slave” (*Matt 25:45 New World Translation/NWT*). They believed that he spoke for God when he wrote: “... the final end of the kingdom of this world, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, will be accomplished by the end of AD 1914; and the year 1914 will see the Kingdom ‘set up,’ or firmly established in the earth, on the ruin of present institutions.”²

But in the end, Russell led his followers to disappointment. The Watchtower in 1930 looked back at that time period and admitted: “All of the Lord's people looked forward to 1914 with joyful expectation. When that time came and passed, there was much disappointment, chagrin and mourning, and the Lord's