

result in choosing a more intimate expression in naming his father. This kind of intimacy was

introduced and exemplified by Jesus Christ .□

Jehovah's Witnesses Growth-Is It Unique? "

(Number 27. Originally published August 28, 1986)

The Annual Report of the worldwide activity of Jehovah's Witnesses for the service year of 1985 shows that, on average, 2,865,183 persons shared each month in some form of public preaching activity (field service). *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1986, page 23. The same report tells us that 7,792,109 persons attended the annual observance of the Memorial (communion) with 9,051 partaking.

The accompanying article: "Building for an Eternal Future," presents a glowing picture of progress and growth. It is reported that during the year there were 1,847 new congregations formed-about 5 each day. (page 24, par.12) Publishing facilities are being expanded in various parts of the world to provide the millions of tons of books, magazines and other printed materials used by the Witnesses in their public ministry. As to what the future holds in this regard the magazine says the following: "There appears to be no end to the modern-day expansion of Jehovah's organization. Even now, the Bethel family at the Brooklyn, New York, headquarters of the Society has grown to the extent of filling all available accommodations. If it should be Jehovah's will, a high-rise building to accommodate a thousand additional Bethel workers may be erected on the Society's property on Columbia Heights. But if this does not eventuate, we will look for Jehovah's further direction in the matter. The prayers and loyal support of the worldwide brotherhood in connection with all this expansion are indeed appreciated." (page 25, par. 17)

Despite the strong case that is made for continued construction and expansion the publishers feel compelled to address a question that has apparently crossed the mind of more than one Jehovah's Witness: "'But why,' someone may ask, 'are there so many expansion projects when we stand face-to-face with Armageddon?' The answer is that Jehovah's organization does not 'close up shop' with the approach of Armageddon. That is 'closing time' only for Satan's organization. Jehovah's organization is building for an eternal future. Whether or not man-made structures weather the storm of Armageddon, we know that God's organization will survive as a going concern and that Jehovah will use it and those who loyally support it, establishing eternal peace .. and security in the

glorious earthly Paradise of God's promise." (pages 25,26, par. 18)

The question raised in the above quotation is a fair one. The answer given, however, does not address itself to a more serious aspect of the matter and that is the lives of billions of people. According to Watchtower Society eschatological doctrine the world entered its "time of the end" in 1914. The generation of people alive at that time cannot pass away before the end (Armageddon) arrives. We are now 72 years removed from 1914. That means that one who would have been intellectually capable of understanding the significance of the events beginning in 1914 would now be passed 80 years of age! It is rather obvious that the generation of 1914 is, for all practical purposes, already passed away. There is, at best, only a very small remnant of that generation still with us which means (if the Society has its facts straight) that we are, *indeed*, "face-to-face with Armageddon. " That being the case and taking into consideration that there are vast reaches of the earth and its population untouched by the Watchtower Witnesses why do they not use some of their resources to utilize communication technology such as television and satellite transmission to supplement their traditional door-to-door method? Satellite communications now make it possible to reach portions of the earth heretofore untouched by the outside world. To be sure the utilization of such technology would be very costly but we are talking about the lives of billions of people.

The fact is that the Society ignores the use of television technology as a means of reaching millions of people. Television enables people to consider a matter in a non-threatening, non-coercive environment. Failure to use this medium, even in a supplemental way, raises serious questions as to the Society's concern for people. At a time they are saying this is the final, never to be repeated-life or death- witness involving the everlasting destiny of billions of people, they seem content to be locked into the limitations imposed upon them as printers and sellers of literature.

The figures presented in *The Watchtower* appear impressive but examination reveals a serious

imbalance. In the service year of 1985 a reported 590,540,205. hours were spent in word-of-mouth witnessing. But there remain many areas where their witnessing has hardly penetrated at all. In the April 15, 1986 issue of *The Watchtower* there is an article on the work being done in India titled: "Happy Climax to 80 Years of Gathering. " The article discusses the completion of a six -year building project undertaken by the Watchtower Society in this country. According to the article there are 7,410 Jehovah's Witnesses active in 340 congregations in India. With a population of 775 million, India is second only to China that has over 1 billion population. After 80 years the Witnesses represent about one/hundredth of one percent of the population. It can be appreciated that in a country predominately Hindu (83 %) there is not presented a fertile field of activity. What appears more serious, however, is the fact that after 80 years of activity "only about 6.6 percent of the population have thus far been reached with the good news." (page 24)

So after 80 years of work 93.4 percent of the population are yet to even be reached! China and other Asian countries are virtually untouched by Witness activity. Parts of Africa such as Algeria show a very low ratio of Witnesses to the population. This takes into consideration that religious/political factors present real hindrances and obstacles that are not readily overcome if they are ever overcome. Many Christian missions are prevented from entering certain countries as missions. Countries that are open to people with technical skills are not open to Christian evangelization. Often it is necessary to enter a country as a doctor or a teacher in order for a foreigner to be allowed residence. As few Jehovah's Witnesses ever acquire college degrees due to their frowning on "higher learning" they are not qualified to apply for residence in certain countries that ban Watchtower missionaries.

In the other extreme there are places where the Witnesses are quite numerous and territory for door-to-door work is limited. In Hawaii, for example, where the ratio of Witness to population is 1/196 the same area may be visited every week or so. In this situation the matter of going door-to-door becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Confronting people on a weekly or monthly basis regarding issues of belief and faith takes on a certain absurdity. But to be a 'regular publisher' and remain in good standing one must report time in 'field service' whether the circumstances warrant it or not. To retain status in the Witness community one must be active in the

dissemination of Watchtower literature. Only those who loyally support 'Jehovah's organization' which, for all practical purposes, is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, will survive into the earthly paradise just ahead. The Witnesses march to the drumbeat that "'we are face-to-face with Armageddon." Most seem unaware or undismayed that time and again their 2,865,183 Witnesses spending more than 590 million hours converting (baptizing) 189,800 persons. In other words, it took 800,000 more Witnesses spending more than 200 million more hours to baptize a 100,000 fewer people! Obviously, the expectations surrounding 1975 was the driving force for such productivity. Newly baptized ones were often led to believe Armageddon would take place in 1975.

Are we to credit the outstanding increases of 1975 to God's blessing on their wrong expectations based on human speculation? It does the God of truth a disservice to attach his name to such 'success.' Does it not appear more correct to think that the success of 1975 was due more to the feverish activity of those manipulated by human reasoning rather than sound doctrine? If there is power in truth to motivate people to action it must also be remembered that there is power in error to motivate to action as well. Zeal for a cause can be generated by error as well as truth. (Matthew 23: 15)

It is common, even expected, that a religious minister or organization would lay claim to being directed by God's spirit and blessed by him. But can success-however that is measured-prove that a particular individual or group is God-directed? Do not other groups grow and expand? Who is responsible for their success? All lay claim to being God-blessed. obviously, someone is mistaken. When an organization says: "should it be Jehovah's will, a high-rise building ... may be erected," are they not really talking about their own will in the matter? Such talk may 'spiritualize' that which is nothing more than organization-centered ambition. At best it represents only a man's measure-not God's.

The growth and expansion of the Watchtower religion is not as dramatic or unique as they would have Jehovah's Witnesses believe. other American-born groups have and are experiencing similar growth and expansion. The Assemblies of God Church had its start around the beginning of the present century. When we compare its growth with that of the Watchtower Society it comes off rather well While the Assemblies

represent a fundamental evangelical spirit they are not committed to the door-to-door proselytizing activity to the extent that the Witnesses are. A comparison of growth figures for the two groups (limited to the United

States) proves interesting. The figures listed for the Assemblies represents "adherents" while those for the Society are "Memorial attendees." In both cases the figures seem a fair estimate of persons attached in

UNITED STATES GROWTH RATE COMPARISON: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES/ASSEMBLIES OF GOD 1980-1985

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD: "ADHERENTS"				JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: "MEMORIAL ATTENDEES"			
1980	1,732,371	Increase	6.3	1980	1.47	Increase	1.47
1981	1,788,394		3.2	1981	7.45		7.45
1982	1,879,182		5.1	1982	2.47		2.47
1983	1,992,754		6.0	1983	5.0		5.0
1984	2,036,453		2.2	1984	2.36		2.36
1985	2,082,878		2.3	1985	2.88		2.88

Statistical source for Assemblies of God: *A/G Annual Church Ministries Report*. Statistical source for Jehovah's Witnesses:

The Watchtower journal. "Adherents" A/G: Assemblies spokesmen define "adherents" as the total. number of persons attending meeting regularly, comprising both officially signed-up members and the newly interested. "Memorial Attendees" JW: Those present at the annual observance of the Lord's Supper (Evening Meal). This number includes all those active as JWs as well as newly interested ones and others formerly active but now inactive. *Note: The annual Memorial attendance always exceeds normal meeting attendance. Many attending this meeting do not attend meetings regularly therefore the figure is a bloated one.*

of 609,929,522 hours in proselytizing efforts during that period. Witnesses may point out, however, that they are doing a 'separating work' under the direction of the angels and by going from door-to-door with Watchtower literature they are fulfilling their commission to preach the good news whether people respond or not. This self-assessment of how they are being used by God carries no weight whatsoever. The 'good news' they are bringing to people with its promise 'of not having to die is not the one preached by Jesus and the apostles. It is a 'gospel' that denies union with Christ in his body and sonship with the Father. (Eph.4:4; Rom.8: 15) As for the matter of 'separating' the Scriptures assign this task to the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt. 25 :31-46) The separating work

that the Lord accomplishes is also a judgment which fixes the eternal destiny of people. As God "has entrusted all judgment to the Son," it is very presumptuous for a religious organization to teach that loyalty to it is the basis of judgment. (John 5:22)

As the Watchtower system grows it becomes more and more institutionalized. The end result is that increased size and activity produces diminishing returns. The figures presented below seem to indicate that the system is losing steam as it gets bigger. The numbers continue to grow but productivity is decreasing if you compare the number of hours reported compared to number of person baptized.

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RATIO OF HOURS PER BAPTISMS WORLDWIDE:

YEAR	HOURS	BAPTIZED	RATIO
1955	85,832,250	63,642	1349 /1
1965	171,247,644	64,393	2659/1
1975	382,296,208	295,073	1296 / 1
1985	590.540.205	189.800	3111/1

(Statistical source: Annual Report in The Watchtower magazine.)

Another 19th century religion indigenous to the United States that compares favorably with the Watchtower religion in the matter of growth and expansion is the Mormon Church. The Latter-Day Saints, founded by Joseph Smith has grown into a prosperous international entity. Like the Watchtower system it advocates an aberrant gospel. Both systems lay claim to having restored the truths of Christ and are zealous proselytizers. The systems are close-knit and authoritarian. Family structure is patriarchal in both groups. Unlike the Witnesses, however, the Mormons do have a social conscience and are politically active. They also have programs within the church that give attention to the needy in their midst as well as other programs which help facilitate self-sufficiency. They were the targets of community outrage and persecution early on in their history and came under Federal scrutiny and litigation due to the practice of polygamy among its members. That they survived all these things and have grown into the disciplined religious force that they represent well illustrates the power of error and human determination. Their survival, growth and material prosperity is at least equal to that of the Witnesses and in some ways superior. The following quotations taken from *The Mormon Experience-A History of the Latter-Day Saints*, by Leonard J. Arrington & Davis Bitton, provide some

data regarding their growth:

"In *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* Dean M. Kelly, a director of the National Council of Churches, contrasted the gradual decline of 'mainline' Protestant and Catholic churches in America with a steady growth of conservative churches in the 1960s. Of all churches, he found the Latter-day Saints had shown 'the greatest rate of membership growth for any religious body of over a million members in this country' -an increase of 5.6 percent per year."

"In 1977 Mormon missionaries baptized twice as many converts (140,000) as in 1968, and the 1977 membership (3.97 million) reflected a continuing increase at a rate exceeding 5 percent annually. "

"The 1960s saw the development of missions in Italy, Spain, and South America and another explosive growth in the Polynesian Islands. In Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, and Tahiti, where young American missionaries had earlier worked mainly to assist the few native leaders in basic church organization and where most converts had come from the church schools, effective proselytizing techniques and the use of the native missionaries had by the late 1960s produced such a

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"In the 1970s the most phenomenal success in Mormon proselytizing and the development of native leadership occurred in South and Central America, particularly Mexico ... It may seem to be a paradox that what many in recent times have thought of as a uniquely American church, the major one founded in the United States, should be one of the fastest-growing churches in Third World countries, especially at a low point in American popularity, there. "-pages 285,286.

To whom do the Mormons attribute their success?

When people visit their world headquarters in Salt Lake City-their 'Zion' -and view the city and institutions created by Mormon genius do they not attribute it all to God's direction and blessing? Their schools and university's have contributed much to the academic world. They have graduated men and women not only dedicated to the Mormon cause but equipped to contribute much to their community. The Mormons are just as morally upright, sincere and dedicated as a people as are Jehovah's Witnesses. But what does it all prove? Does it prove that they are God's exclusive people whom he has used to restore the gospel of Jesus Christ? The test of discipleship and acceptance with God lies in obedience to Christ- not human genius. The only growth and building that has any lasting value with God is spiritual growth. Jesus said:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had the foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."
-Matthew 7 :24-27. *NIV*.

Some who come away from a highly structured religious system find themselves confused and disoriented religiously. They may not even be sure what they believe anymore. Why? The root of the problem lies in the failure of having built on the 'rock' of obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ. They allowed men to determine for them what constituted obedience rather than listening directly to Christ. Then when their relationship with these men came to an end the foundation upon which they had structured their house of faith was washed away. The end result was the loss of their *perceived* spiritual security. When you add to that loss the loss of family and friends and a whole way of life the experience becomes extremely burdensome. It is at this point that a person is most vulnerable and in danger of a permanent loss of faith. If this should happen to us we should learn from it and avoid a recurrence of such a calamity. It should make us more determined to rebuild our structure of faith on a better foundation, namely, obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ-not looking to men or organizations to control our religious lives.

There is no security in man-made religious structures. The only security to be had is that which accompanies obedience to Jesus Christ. This constitutes God's will for us-being obedient to the commands of his Son. There simply is no other way. It matters not what men and religious organizations say that go beyond what Christ has said. Men and organizations may cast themselves in the role of savior as does the Watchtower Society. When they say: you must be with us; you must be loyal to us; you must be obedient to us; they are assuming the place that only Christ occupies. Some people buy into these presumptuous claims (and the Witnesses are not the only group making such claims) and get trapped and become captives to other men.

Because a religious sect attracts some and grows to become a sizable religious entity does not validate it

as approved and blessed by God. Any number of such groups can point to such growth and expansion. To be sure, many powerful works have been performed by such groups and continue to be performed but these powerful works-done in the name of God-do not validate their ministry. We must listen closely to what the Lord says about this matter as it is the key issue:

"Not everyone saying to me, 'lord, lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will. Many will say to me in that day, 'lord, lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and perform many powerful works in your name?'" And yet then I will confess to them: I never knew YOU! Get away from me, YOU workers of lawlessness. "- Matthew 7:21-23, *NW*.

What brings recognition from Christ and validates one's Christian course is doing the Father's will! And how do we determine the Father's will? By listening to his Son. How do we listen to the Son? By meditating on his recorded word, by putting into practice what we learn and by looking to him as the living Lord of our life. We have access to Christ in a living way when we address him as our mediator in prayer. (1 Tim. 2:5) He is alive to plead to the Father on our behalf. (Rom. 8:34) The spirit of Christ can comfort and sustain us. (Rom. 8:9) From the foregoing it can be appreciated that our primary spiritual support and security rests in God and Christ. Each of us must assume the load of Christian discipleship if we respond to Jesus' gracious invitation. (Matt. 11 :28-30) The Lord said: "My yoke is kindly and my load is light. "

Discipleship was not intended to be a harsh, oppressive burden but sometimes circumstances do create additional burdens that can discourage us and weigh us down. For this reason we need to comfort and encourage one another and to the extent possible we need to help share one another's burdens: "My brothers, if someone is caught in any kind of wrongdoing, those of you who are spiritual should set him right; but you must do it in a gentle way. And keep an eye on yourselves, so that you will not be tempted, too. Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ. If someone thinks he is something when he is really nothing, he is only deceiving himself. Each one should judge his own conduct. If it is good, then he can be proud of what he himself has done, without having to compare it with what someone else has done. For everyone has to carry his own load." -Galatians 6: 1-5, *Good News Bible*.

On the one hand the apostle says we should "help carry one another's burdens," (verse 2) but on the other hand each one "has to carry his own load." The context seems clear enough. We do have an obligation to come to the aid of our brother who may be burdened down due to sin or some other problem. This is to be done in a gentle, non-judgmental manner. We cannot boast or compare ourselves (favorably) with others because we stand or fall before the judgment seat of Christ in relation to ourselves alone—that is our 'load.' It is interesting that Paul uses two different Greek words here to denote weights. In verse two he used *baros* but in verse five he used *phortion*. Why the difference? We are helped to appreciate his choice of words by what W.E. Vine has to say about the shades of meaning involved here:

"The difference between PHORTION and BAROS is, that PHORTION is simply something to be borne, without reference to its weight, but BAROS always suggests what is heavy or burdensome. Thus Christ speaks of His burden (PHORTION) as 'light;' here BAROS would be inappropriate; but the burden of a transgressor is BAROS, 'heavy.'" - *W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Thus the Scriptures help us to put matters in balance. We are not to look to men or organizations as our leader but, as brothers, we can share problems and try to assist one another to bear whatever burdens (BAROS) that come our way through sin or other circumstances. Helping one another in this way is to "obey the law of Christ."

It was in this spirit that Biblical Research & Commentary International sponsored the three-day gathering of brothers at Guntersville, Alabama, August 3-5, 1986. More than a hundred brothers from various parts of the United States and Canada attended the meetings held at the scenic Lake Guntersville State Park. The assembly provided an opportunity to worship together, to share affection and to address those issues or burdens we share in common. The program was arranged around those matters which appeared to be the most important: (1) the place of the Bible, its study and the appropriate use of it; (2) finding appropriate fellowship, helping our children, dealing with emotional

stress and legal issues; (3) showing neighbor love, and (4) allowing those assembled to voice their concerns and responses to the presentations.

The opportunity to just get acquainted with other brothers and strengthen Christian family ties made it all worth doing. There was a spirit of joy and acceptance despite the diversity of views represented. Some went away disappointed not having received what they hoped they would find there. Others, and I think the majority, went away refreshed and encouraged to continue in their walk of faith. It must be remembered that B.R.C.I. is not a miniature Watchtower Society. It is not a religion. It was formed by a few former Witnesses for the express purpose of facilitating those projects and activities that, in their judgment, would best serve those choosing to separate themselves from the Society. Its efforts are directed towards supporting these persons. It is not interested in trying to get people to leave the organization. The Guntersville meeting was sponsored by B.R.C.I. because it seemed consistent with its chartered goals. The Board of Directors met during the assembly to discuss the possibility of sponsoring a similar meeting next year. It was unanimously decided that such a meeting ought to be held and Chicago, Illinois was selected as the city in which to hold it. The tentative dates are July 31-August 2, 1987 (Friday-Sunday). The site is yet to be determined but should be known shortly. It was thought that having the meeting in a major city would facilitate travel arrangements. The Guntersville location was a fine facility but getting there was not convenient for many. If such gatherings continue to prove beneficial then they can be moved around the country to make them available to a greater number of brothers.

Audio tapes were made of the program and will soon be available. I will announce that in the next *Christian Respondent*. I was not able to get an issue out in July due to the additional work in connection with the Guntersville gathering. This current issue is being mailed in September even though it is dated August. I still hope to produce 12 issues this year. I hope this finds all of you in good health spiritually as well as physically.