

of desolation,' their 'new order.'" - *The New World*, pages 343,344 (italics added)

So, again, Jehovah's Witnesses were being told that the immediate end was at hand and they could expect a great persecution when the "federation" was in place. only one "danger" would then remain to accomplish "their scheme to dominate the world." That "danger" was represented by the 115,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the world at the time. This exaggerated view of their own importance is another facet of their world view. Of course, the outcome of the Second World War did not result in the scenario created by their private interpretation of Daniel 11.

Never deterred for long, however, they continued to utter their expectations based on their faulty premises: "As the days of this 'time of the end' move rapidly to their close, a promise to Daniel nears fulfillment. What? That he should be resurrected from his centuries-long rest of death in the tomb and should return to earth to be one of the King's visible princes under the heavenly kingdom. '" -*The Watchtower*, Nov. 1, 1949, page 334, par.8

Two paragraphs later this same magazine reminded its readers that there was no time to waste during these days when the tribulation against Satan's worldwide system was being held in abeyance: "May we, then appreciate that this means we are living in the 'time of the end.' We are already more than thirty-five years through it. The telic end of the Devil's system of things visible and invisible is steadily drawing closer." -*Ibid*, page 335, par. 10.

On and on it has gone over these many decades. Failed predictions are replaced by new speculations set forth as "new light. " The furor created over their 1975 speculation is but a punctuation mark in that record. Never willing to take responsibility for the seriousness and God-defaming nature of these errors they never learn from them and, unfortunately for them, they never repent. Even the slowdown of the growth of the international organization following the disappointment of 1975 is laid at the feet of "a small number of apostates": "Likely the presence of a small number of apostates had contributed to the slowing down of Jehovah's work during the last half of the 1970's -when the average yearly increase in the active ranks of Jehovah's Witnesses fell to less than 1 percent." -*The Watchtower*, December 15, 1986, page 20.

One would think they would have better sense than

to say what they say above. Everyone knows-if they choose to know-that the real reason for the slowing down of the work as well as the creation of the small number of so-called apostates rests squarely on their failed speculations backed up with strong arguments for their validity. But, as they have always done in the past, they direct attention away from themselves by singling out some scape-goat. The "Leopard" never changes its spots.

Four issues of *The Watchtower* (Oct.,1 & 15; Nov. 1 & 15, 1986) have delved yet once again in the prophecies of Daniel to reinforce their current interpretation of the image of chapter 2 and related matters. All such interpretations are set forth in the usual Watchtower mode-explicit and final-as were all the previous oracles. *The Watchtower* assures us that God's kingdom will triumph. They tell us we are living in troubled times. These things are true and we don't have to depend on their rhetoric in this regard. The Watchtower Society has created a religious system that exalts itself and misleads those who subscribe to it away from the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

As believers we know that the Lord's return in judgment against the world is certain and could occur at any time. We join with aged John in saying: "come, Lord Jesus. '"-Rev. 22:20. We are comforted in the knowledge that God's promises are sure and the failure of men to fully understand them in no way invalidates the promises. Paul's ancient warning is as valid today as it was when it was first uttered when he said:

"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction." -2 Thess.2: 1-3 NIV.□

Religious Persecution: Watchtower Gives and Receives "

(Number 31. Originally published December 29, 1986)

The Watchtower, December 1, 1986 banners the following on its cover page: "Religious Liberty Under Attack in Greece." on pages 3 through 7 there appears an article featuring the same title which outlines and documents the situation in Greece. The opening paragraph contains an appeal for religious liberty and the freedom to hold differing views: "Do you value liberty? Most people do. They want the freedom to have different opinions on such things as politics, economics, and religion, within the bounds of law and order, of course. On the other hand, being persecuted for one's opinions brings to mind the Inquisition of the Middle Ages." *-Ibid*, page 3, par. 1.

The article then proceeds to document the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses by Greeks reportedly influenced by the Greek Orthodox clergy. One incident being a gathering of about 700 Witnesses in a theater in Larisa, Greece that was set upon by "hundreds of people," intent upon disrupting and preventing the meeting from continuing. While it is alleged that verbal threats were made the Witnesses remained in the theater under the protection of the Greek police who eventually dispersed the unruly mob. The magazine goes on to report that a local newspaper *I Alithia* contained an article highly critical of "the priestly action." In summarizing this portion of the article *The Watchtower* says:

"Such persecution is not just an isolated incident.

There have been hundreds. of arrests of non-orthodox believers in the past few years, 'including 890 Jehovah's Witnesses in 1983 alone,' said *The Wall Street Journal*. And this year, reported the Athens newspaper *Eleftherotipia*, a priest attacked a 76-year-old Witness, Vasili Kapeleri, resulting eventually in Kapeleri's death." *~Ibid*, page 4.

The next subheading is: "Dark Ages Mentality."

In this section they say that the root of the problem lies in the attitude of the representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church who claim that the Jehovah's Witnesses are not really Christians and have no rights of protection under a constitution that guarantees religious liberty. The writer points out that the Witnesses do not try to prevent "the Orthodox Church the right to have its churches and to preach what it wants. But in this modern age should that

Church impose its religious views on everyone else?" (page 4) The magazine next considers certain alleged misrepresentations of their fellowship and then, under another subheading "Who Are the Christians?", proceeds to show that early disciples of Jesus Christ were persecuted by the religious clergy of their day and offer the following observation:

"Nowhere did Jesus instruct Christians to persecute, imprison, assault, or take mob action against those who disagreed with them. Thus, in the first century the real Christians were the persecuted, not the persecutors. The persecutors were the clergy and those incited by them. It is the same in Greece today." *-Ibid*, page 5

The next subheading asks the question: "Are They Antichrists?" It is clear that this stinging charge is highly offensive to the Watchtower Society. In refuting this charge they offer the following: "What does the Bible say of 'antichrist'? At 1 John 2:22 it states: 'Who is the liar if it is not the one that denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one that denies the Father and the Son.' Thus, the plain fact of God's inspired Word is that an antichrist does not accept Jesus. But Jehovah's Witnesses do! They most fervently believe in Jesus and follow his teachings! In fact, no one can become one of Jehovah's Witnesses without accepting Jesus as the divine Son of God, who came down from heaven, was impaled and resurrected, and who returned to heaven. So anyone who says that Jehovah's Witnesses are 'antichrist' either is badly misinformed, is blinded by prejudice, or has evil motive." *~Ibid*, pages 5,6

After refuting the Greek orthodox view of the Trinity as unscriptural and adopted by "apostates" at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., the article concludes with an appeal to "Uphold Democracy in Greece," wherein they say, in part: "Jehovah's Witnesses, well known and granted legal recognition internationally, uphold those democratic principles. They want Greece to uphold them, too, and not let any church impose its Inquisition mentality on others *by persecuting those who do not agree with them.*" *-Ibid*, page 7 (italics added).

Those familiar with the history of this movement realize that they have been, from time to time, the target of fierce persecution. This has been triggered,

for the most part, by their perceived hostility towards governments; their refusal to do military service and their universal rejection of all Christian fellowships as a part of the harlot woman described in Revelation chapter 17. This, coupled with their persistent house-to-house proselytizing efforts has earned them the animosity of political as well as religious elements in many countries. To their credit, they have used every legal means to establish their constitutional rights and have fought courageously in the vanguard of religious liberty. It would be a serious error to disregard this aspect of their history. Credit must be given where credit is due.

Early on in their history-especially during the presidency of Joseph F. Rutherford-there was considerable 'baiting' of the religious clergy by published and broadcasted insults and defamation. Some rather crude methods were used to antagonize Christians in general. The carrying of placards that read: "RELIGION IS A SNARE AND A RACKET," in parade fashion in the 1930's was hardly conceived to 'win friends and influence people.' (*JW Yearbook*, 1975, pages 160-1) Handing out leaflets at church doors was another practice that irritated many. The use of "sound cars" traversing city streets while blaring out Judge Rutherford's tirades of doom to an unappreciative populace was another "effective means of reaching the public," according to official Watchtower reporting. (*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, page 129) It was considerably offensive to be forced to hear what most did not want to hear.

As distasteful as some of these antics were, they were, for the most part, legal and well within the constitutional guarantees affecting freedom of speech. Those who challenged them in the courts-and many communities did-found themselves on the wrong side of the Constitution. Again, the Witnesses are to be commended for their determination to legally fight for their right to preach what they believed, whether it irritated others or not. This valiant defense fought in the courts in the late 30's and early 40's earned for the Witnesses a legal respectability as time and again they won their cases in court. These efforts were not insignificant as the following quotation attests:

"Seldom, if ever, in the past, has one individual or group been able to shape the course, over a period of time, of any phase of our vast body of constitutional law. But it can happen, and it has happened, here. The group is Jehovah's Witnesses. Through almost constant litigation this organization has made possible an ever-

increasing list of precedents concerning the application of the Fourteenth Amendment to freedom of speech and religion." - *Minnesota Law Review*, Vo1.28, No.4, March, 1944.

The protection, under the constitution, granted by the courts of the land has had the effect of strengthening these same rights for all minority religious groups as well as civil rights activists. To deny that Jehovah's Witnesses have been a significant factor in this is to deny reality. While acknowledging that the legal efforts of Jehovah's Witnesses have contributed to a strengthening of civil liberties it would be a mistake to think they have a great concern for those outside their organization. Their focus is limited to themselves. Any by-product benefit resulting from this effort is purely coincidental. Their publications are replete with examples of persecution leveled at *them* but they are silent in relation to the persecution of other Christians.

The current reporting of persecution in Greece represents an example of this myopic view. They do not report the fact that Evangelical Christians are also the targets of religious persecution in Greece. This past year members of Youth With a Mission (YW AM) were arrested for handing out tracts. In reading Watchtower literature one gets the impression that only Jehovah's Witnesses are the victims of persecution and this is a serious error. The plain truth is that the Watchtower Society shows precious little interest in the persecution suffered by other Christian individuals or fellowships. The *Watch Tower Publications Index*, 1930-1985 devotes more than four pages to the subject: "Persecution." (644-648). With but one exception- The Lollards-all of the references are reports of persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. When they do report on the imprisonment or suffering of other Christians it is usually presented in a negative light as being due to meddling in social-political affairs where they have no business being in the first place. No sympathetic or empathetic reporting on these matters is ever presented in Watchtower literature.

A book titled: *Christianity or Marxism?*, by Seventh-day Adventist pastor Jack Sequeira recounts his experience in a country that went communist. In an interview presented in *Signs of the Times* he commented as follows regarding persecution of Christians that resulted from this change in government: "But many Christians were killed, many imprisoned. I baptized a 15-year-old girl. She was in prison for three months because she refused to give up Christ. When the soldiers saw how this girl continued to

defy the government, they gave her five minutes to give up Christ. She refused, and a soldier threw her on the ground, jumped on her back, and broke her spine. The government did these things in a way that kept their actions from being exposed ... We don't know to this day how many Christians were actually killed." - *Signs of the Times*, December 1986, page 26.

The simple fact is that Jehovah's Witnesses are not the only ones persecuted for their faith. This is not said to minimize or belittle what they have suffered, but, to dispel the notion that they are unique in being persecuted for the sake of Christian conscience. If we find ourselves incapable of entering into the pain of others and can be indifferent when injustices are done to others-especially those with whom we do not agree-there is something terribly wrong with our Christianity. If we have a 'it serves them right' attitude we are not displaying the spirit of Christ. That spirit is shown in what our Lord had to say in his famous "Sermon on the Mount," wherein he condemned narrow, hate-minded attitudes:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' But now I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. Why should God reward you if you love only the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that! You must be perfect-Just as your Father in heaven IS perfect." -Matthew 5:43-48 *Good News Bible*.

Persecution, like abuse, can take many forms. The English word *persecute* is drawn from the Latin *prospectus*, meaning to pursue. It is defined as, "to harass in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict; specify: to cause to suffer because of belief." - *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. While physical abuse and imprisonment are often thought of in this connection it is not limited to these forms of persecution. Any action (or inaction) can be a form of persecution, just as abuse is not limited to attacks on one's person. Neglect is a form of abuse. Children and the elderly are often recipients of this form of abuse. Abuse may, like persecution, also be verbal. Any form of intimidation and the denial of basic human rights are all a part of persecution. Interestingly, the Watchtower Society acknowledges this:

"Throughout the Scriptures we read of *many kinds of persecution* used by the adversary against Jehovah's faithful servants, all of which are still used by him today. One of the milder forms of persecution is *verbal abuse*. The purpose of this is not only to cause the servant of God to shrink back but *to poison the minds of others* so that they will not listen to the preaching of the good news ... A subtler form of persecution and one that is often very hard to bear is *opposition from relatives*. Sometimes newly converted Christians find that relatives whom they love dearly and who have always been very close to them *now begin to oppose and persecute them, because of their new way of life.*" -*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1966, pages 5,6 (italics added).

Another issue of *The Watchtower* mentions that many Jehovah's Witnesses "have had to endure severe trials and persecution simply because they are determined to serve their God, Jehovah, faithfully." Among the trials and persecutions mentioned were some being "fired from their jobs or driven away from their places of work." Also mentioned was that many "must daily face opposition and persecution from their families and relatives because of wanting to serve Jehovah as disciples of Jesus Christ." In contrast to those perpetrating such persecution the Witnesses are described as "universally recognized as law-abiding people of good moral stature. They are good workers, pleasant, friendly, kind and reasonable and *do not behave like religious fanatics.*" ~*The Watchtower*, April 15, 1982, pages 22,23 (italics added).

According to the above, if one is verbally attacked because of his religious beliefs and statements are made to destroy his character in the eyes of others he is a victim of persecution. If his friends and family ostracize him and discriminate against him he is a victim of persecution. Of course, such persecutors may not think of it that way. They may view themselves as "pleasant, friendly, kind and reasonable," certainly not "religious fanatics." But one does not have to think of himself as a persecutor to be one. Saul of Tarsus, for example, acted in good conscience against the disciples of Jesus Christ. As a loyal, theocratic Pharisee he really believed he was doing what Jehovah God would have him do: "I, for one, ready thought within myself I ought to commit many acts of opposition against the name of Jesus, the Nazarene; which, in fact, I did in Jerusalem, and many of the holy ones I locked up in prisons, as I had received authority from the chief priests; and when they were to be executed, I cast my vote against them. And by punishing them

many times to force them to make a recantation; and since I was extremely mad against them, I went so far as to persecuting them even in outside cities. "-Acts 26: 9-11, *New World Translation*

The persecutor, Saul, acted in good religious conscience. I have often wondered what Saul's life would have been had he not encountered the Christ in such a dramatic fashion? (Acts 9) Persecutors, whether religious or political, have their own reasons for what they do. They are not necessarily wickedly motivated. And it can happen that those who are the victims of religious persecution can also be guilty of inflicting religious or ethnic persecution. The Reformation period Christian church history document many examples of the persecuted becoming the persecutors. A modern example of that is to be found in the disfellowshipping and disassociating policies of the Watchtower Society. For example, they resent being called antichrist, and view this as a form of verbal persecution. In defending themselves they point out that they believe in Jesus and what the Bible says about his death and resurrection. This proves, they argue, that it is wrong to label them antichrist and that those who do so either are "misinformed ... blinded by prejudice, or has evil motive." Yet they routinely label as apostate and antichrist those from their own fellowship who believe the very same things!

In *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986 under the "Questions From Readers," portion of the magazine they address themselves to the query: "Why have Jehovah's Witnesses disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for apostasy some who still profess belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ?" After attempting to put a scriptural face on the matter they then say: "Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, *including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses.*" -page 31 (italics added).

To question *any teaching* of the Watchtower Society means one is not worthy of being an "approved" associate. Among those "unique" teaching referred to are that (1) Christ returned invisibly in October, 1914; (2) that the resurrection of the dead in Christ took place in the spring of 1918; and (3) to have God's favor one must accept the Watchtower Society as God's exclusive channel of communication. To have doubts or reservations about these teachings or anything else they teach is to be branded an "apostate" and "antichrist." What the Society does in this regard is

to take what the Bible says against certain specific beliefs and practices and expand these to include everything they teach! In this way they twist the Scriptures to justify their persecution of dissidents.

In *The Watchtower*, July 15, 1985 in the "Questions From Readers" section the question is asked: "Did 2 John 10, which says not to receive into one's home or to greet certain ones, refer only to those who had promoted false doctrine?" The answer given was, "No!" They argued in this two-page discussion that anyone who disassociated himself from the congregation-for any reason-should be treated as those who actively taught that Jesus had not come in the flesh. "This," John said: "is the deceiver and the antichrist." -2 John 7. In this way they are able to enforce a total ban on persons-even making it a sin to acknowledge him with a common "hello." About such ones they say: "Such ones willfully abandoning the Christian congregation thereby become part of the 'antichrist.' (1 John 2: 18, 19)" -*The Watchtower*, April 1, 1986, page 31. The fact is, however, that many are thrown out of the congregation (disfellowshipped) because they cannot accept some manmade doctrine that is not found in the Bible. Many of the "unique" beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses fall into this category.

The Watchtower Society is not content just to break fellowship ties. They extend their sanctions beyond the congregation and invade families. This is where, in my opinion, they are guilty of persecution. This persecution takes two forms: (1) people are slandered in the most reviling manner possible. Everyone who willingly walks away from this fellowship or is disfellowshipped over matters of conscience is put in the same class as liars, murderers, idolaters, thieves, drunkards and adulterers. To label innocent people as wicked is nothing more than verbal persecution and condemned by God. To apply what the Word of God has to say about the antichrist to them represents an extreme abuse of the Scriptures. The second form of persecution is a product of the first, namely, the treatment afforded those who have the moral courage to say what they really believe and feel. This form of persecution is: (2) denial of fundamental human rights. It is far and away the most traumatic of the two. Psychological abuse can be overwhelming at times. It is a common practice for Witness families to treat members of their family who have left the association as non-existent. Parents have disowned their children and children, of all ages, have disowned their parents. Visitation rights are denied grandparents, and it is not uncommon to withhold information about

illnesses, marriages and even deaths within the family. People have lost their jobs simply because they could no longer, in good conscience, continue on as active Jehovah's Witnesses. Life-long friends will no longer extend the slightest expression of human dignity to disfellowshipped or disassociated ones. At a funeral in Canada the father of two dead children was not even acknowledged as their father in the service conducted by the Witnesses because he was in the disfellowshipped state. The man's mother-the children's grandmother-although a Witness in good standing was ignored because she attended the funeral with her son. The two children and their mother had been murdered by her second husband, a Jehovah's Witness.

These things are not said to demonstrate that the Witnesses, for the most part, are not caring, sensitive

people. Many of them are. But they have a mind-set dictated by the Watchtower Society that short-circuits human compassion and the spirit of Christ. Their love is highly conditional and can be turned on and off according to Watchtower directives. Those few who refuse to treat people inhumanely are, themselves, suspect and subject to discipline and possible disfellowshippment. In this climate of intimidation, fear and distrust it is not surprising that some have experienced serious mental and emotional breakdowns requiring medical treatment and hospitalization. It has even led to suicide. Recently I received a copy of a letter sent to each member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. Because it exemplifies what is being discussed here and relates to the matter of persecution I have asked, and received, permission to reproduce the letter:

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 25 Columbia Heights Brooklyn, New York 11201

Watch Tower Society:

I have just received a copy of the December 1, 1986 issue of THE WATCHTOWER. The magazine headlined the article RELIGIOUS LIBERTY UNDER ATTACK IN GREECE. It seems that you are upset because of the lack of religious freedom in the country of Greece. I feel the same way as you, religious freedom should be exercised in all countries and Christians should be able to worship their Creator without fear. One of the reasons the United States was founded was to give individuals the freedom to worship God without the control of governmental authorities. Many of the early settlers also left England and other countries because of the authoritarian control of their own religious leaders and clergy.

What about religious freedom. in this country? Are we free to worship our Creator without the hindrance of the government? What about the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, do you practice religious tolerance and love towards all? How can *you* protest the religious treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Greece when you don't show religious tolerance and understanding to anyone that leaves the Jehovah's Witness faith in this Country? Its deplorable to think that anyone that decides they no longer wish to be a Jehovah's Witness will be shunned by lifelong friends and relatives. How can you justify the cry for religious freedom when you don't practice it yourself?

I was a Jehovah's Witness for over thirty years. After searching the history of the organization and finding many failed dates and doctrinal changes I decided to become a free Christian. I do not belong to any church or organization. I attended only one meeting in the last three years and was threatened by the local elders to either disassociate or be disfellowshipped. My wife, daughter, and I decided to submit a letter of disassociation.

I also believe in religious freedom. I was raised a Jehovah's Witness and therefore never had the choice to choose my religious faith without the influence of my parents. I was baptized in 1957 at the age of twelve after being told Armageddon was so close that I would die if I wasn't baptized. Now I am paying the price for leaving the organization and that is a very expensive price indeed! The following people now treat me as if I was physically dead, refusing to speak, associate, or share love with my family. My brother works with me in a factory and even refuses to look at me because the Society said they would disfellowship him if he associated with my family. I will list the loved ones that I have lost.

My father, my mother, my brother, my brother's wife, my brother's daughter, my brother's son, my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, my brother-in-law, my brother-in-law's wife, my niece (4 nieces), my nephew, another

brother-in-law, another brother-in-law's wife, my niece, my niece's husband, my niece's daughter (2 nieces), my nephew, my nephew's wife, my nephew's son, my cousin.

I LISTED 25 PEOPLE. I NO LONGER HAVE ANY FAMILY LEFT TO SHARE LOVE WITH. On page 5 of the Dec. 1, 1986 Watchtower, I will quote the following paragraph:

"NOWHERE DID JESUS INSTRUCT CHRISTIANS TO PERSECUTE, IMPRISON, ASSAULT, OR TAKE MOB ACTION AGAINST THOSE WHO DISAGREED WITH THEM. THUS, IN THE FIRST CENTURY THE REAL CHRISTIANS WERE THE PERSECUTED, NOT THE PERSECUTORS. THE PERSECUTORS WERE THE CLERGY AND THOSE INCITED BY THEM. IT IS THE SAME IN GREECE TODAY."

"WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY OF "ANTICHRIST"? AT 1 JOHN 2: 22 IT STATES: "WHO IS THE LIAR IF IT IS NOT THE ONE THAT DENIES THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST? THIS IS THE ANTICHRIST, THE ONE THAT DENIES THE FATHER AND THE SON

"THUS, THE PLAIN FACT OF GOD'S INSPIRED WORD IS THAT AN ANTICHRIST DOES NOT ACCEPT JESUS. BUT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES DO!

The elders used 2 John 9,10 to justify the shunning of my family. I AM NOT AN ANTICHRIST EITHER! I AM A FREE CHRISTIAN THAT BELIEVES JESUS IS THE MESSIAH AND IS THE CHRIST. Therefore, how can you justify shunning us? on page 7 of the Dec.1,1986 Watchtower under the subheading: "UPHOLD DEMOCRACY IN GREECE" you say the following:

". THEY WANT GREECE TO UPHOLD THEM, Too, AND NOT LET ANY CHURCH IMPOSE ITS INQUISITION MENTALITY ON OTHERS BY PERSECUTING THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH ITS VIEWS."

HOW CAN YOU JUSTIFY PERSECUTING ME BY TRYING TO IMPOSE YOUR BELIEFS BY HOLDING MY FAMILY HOSTAGE BECAUSE I DO NOT AGREE WITH YOUR VIEWS AND WRITE STATEMENTS LIKE THE ABOVE? THIS IS NOT SHOWING THE LOVE THAT JESUS SAID WOULD IDENTIFY TRUE CHRISTIANITY.

PLEASE REPLY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE,

Signed: Tyrone & Donna Scharrer

The pain, frustration and hurt reflected in the letter to the Governing Body members by Tyrone and Donna Scharrer is self-evident. They view the whole process of their treatment as a form of persecution. The Watchtower Society Justifies the treatment as necessary to keep their organization clean. But is it necessary to destroy families in order to keep a religious fellowship free of contamination-if that's how you view dissent?

When the apostle Paul advised the Corinthian brothers not to associate with a certain one-not even sharing a meal with him-what was the situation? He was speaking about "anyone who calls himself a brother." The context shows that there was a man in good congregational standing in Corinth who was guilty of practicing incest-something God's word condemns. Apparently, this man was viewed and welcomed as a brother in the Corinthian assembly. Paul realized that

this was not appropriate for the congregation to welcome this man as an approved associate in the congregation. (1 Cor.5: 1-11) The congregation's toleration of this unclean practice made them sharers in his guilt before God. They needed to expel the offender and not treat him as a brother in Christ.

But we do not have a parallel situation with people who are disfellowshipped or disassociated from the congregation today. If a person is disfellowshipped he is no longer considered a brother by those who take the action. Jesus said that one who would not listen to the church should be treated "as a man of the nations and as a tax collector. " (Matt. 18: 17,N1iV) It is true that the Jews had no social intercourse with people of the nations and tax collectors but we must keep in mind that Jesus corrected his disciples regarding their attitude in this respect. He commanded that love be shown and prayer offered even in behalf of those who

persecuted them! (Matt.5:43-48) So how Jews in general treated people of the nations and tax collectors sets no example for Christians.

Once a person is either disfellowshipped or disassociated he is no longer viewed as a Christian brother, in the eyes of Jehovah's Witnesses. From their standpoint the congregation has cleansed itself. The one who disassociates himself obviously doesn't want to be viewed as a loyal Jehovah's Witness—a brother from the Witness viewpoint. One would have to be reinstated in order to regain the status of brother.

The apostle Paul was apparently upset because the Corinthian congregation was tolerating and even accepting a person who was openly practicing an ungodly lifestyle and bringing reproach on Christ. In order to correct matters and perhaps bring the man to repentance he told them to break off their *religious fellowship* with him. The man in question apparently saw no contradiction in his immoral lifestyle and his claim to Christianity. This severe treatment (shunning) would cleanse the congregation of its culpability and, hopefully, lead the offender to repentance.

However, people like Tyrone and Donna Scharrer, are not claiming or requesting brotherhood with their former religious community. They are not asking for *religious fellowship*. They are upset, and rightly so, for being pursued outside of the religious fellowship and further punished (persecuted) in their *family relationships*. Fulfilling ordinary and customary family obligations and courtesies ought to be clearly distinguished from religious obligations and customs. Even the *Watchtower* has made a distinction between the two:

"As to disfellowshipped family members (not minor sons or daughters) living outside the home, each family must decide to what extent they will have association with such ones. This is not something that the congregational elders can decide for them. What the elders are concerned with is that 'leaven' is not reintroduced into the congregation through spiritual fellowshipping with those who had to be removed as such 'leaven.' Thus, if a disfellowshipped parent goes to visit a son or a daughter or to see grandchildren and is allowed to enter the Christian home, this is not the concern of the elders. Such a one has a *natural right to visit his blood relatives and his offspring*. Similarly, when sons or daughters render honor to a parent, though disfellowshipped, by calling to see how such

one's physical health is or what needs he or she may have, *this act on itself is not a spiritual fellowshipping*. "-*The Watchtower*, August 1, 1974, page 471 (italics added).

This viewpoint was shared by the worldwide fellowship of Jehovah's Witnesses for the following seven years. It resulted in a more humane (and more Christ-like) spirit among the Witnesses. However, in 1981, the Watchtower Society 'adjusted' their viewpoint to a more rigid stance on this matter. This was no doubt due to the problems that had developed at the headquarters in Brooklyn. But it is interesting to note that they acknowledged, in 1974, that treatment of disfellowshipped people in a family setting was not to be confused with the treatment of those same people in a religious setting.

Once a person is no longer associated or identified with the congregation the showing of common courtesy and family ties would not reflect badly on the congregation. The person no longer associating is not claiming to be a brother to the Jehovah's Witnesses. Why then continue to pursue such ones *outside of the congregation* with the kinds of treatment already discussed in this presentation? Those who disassociate themselves no longer claim to be a part of the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and what they do and say is no reflection on it. It would be safe to say that such ones are content just to get on with their lives—to live and let live. While many have been forced out due to conscience in many instances it is not because they no longer wish to practice Christianity but rather they found that their presence was not appreciated. To apply scriptures such as those in 1 and 2 John and 1 Corinthians 5, which address totally different issues and situations is as unfair as it is unscriptural. While there are hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses for whom I will always have a measure of affection I think it is to their shame that they permit the Watchtower Society to so blatantly use the Bible to suppress loyal dissent and valid criticism. □