

Society. Failed predictions have also forced changes in the particular dates preached regarding Jesus 'invisible presence' and the end of the world. But these changes, whether forced upon them or not, have been more cosmetic than substantial. Their doctrinal 'adjustments' represent a circular pattern of reasoning. Rather than abandon the false premise that got Russell and Rutherford into trouble they simply reinvent new schemes to save and support the primary false premise, namely, that Jehovah God has revealed to them his time schedule of events and has appointed them to make this time schedule known.

Whatever truth Russell may have learned from others he did not feel an obligation to follow men. And, when he perceived that a fellow Christian was wrong he had the courage to say so and to defend what he believed. His gratitude for whatever help he may have received did not obligate him to gloss over errors and neither should we. Those interested in a comprehensive and authoritative history of Jehovah's Witnesses would do well to read *Apocalypse Delayed - The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, by M. James Penton, University of Toronto Press, 33 E. Tupper St., Buffalo, NY 13203.

The Watchtower first quoted in this issue of *The Respondent* spoke of "insidious doubts." "Insidious has the sense of treacherous, seductive-awaiting a chance

to entrap. This places the entire range of doubting in a negative light. By putting matters in this way the Watchtower Society does not have to address the fact that there are sound reasons for having doubts about many things they teach. It serves to turn attention away from themselves and focus on the motives of the ones expressing doubts. By failing to point out that there is such a thing as appropriate doubting-doubting that leads to constructive investigation and study; they make doubting a form of sin. The intent of their argument is to make people feel guilty.

It takes a measure of moral courage to stand up to this kind of organizational intimidation. Those finding themselves in this kind of situation can take comfort in the knowledge that Jehovah God and Christ Jesus are not offended by honest doubts-especially those directed towards imperfect, error-prone humans. Our highest loyalty must always be towards God and not men. If we limit our beliefs to what is clearly taught in the Word of God we will not stray far from the truth. (2 Tim.3: 16, 17) It is when men presumptuously set themselves up as religious authorities and go beyond what is scripturally sound that difficulties arise. Given their record of failed prophecies and endless changes in doctrine (the light is getting brighter syndrome) they, above all others, should know that there are reasons for doubting them. □

The Eusebius Factor: Polemics, Unity and Discipleship

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Several weeks ago I was asked by brother Tim Ervolina to make available to the readers of *The Christian Respondent* a treatise titled: "The Eusebius Factor: Polemics, Unity and Discipleship." After reading this paper prepared by Tim, I became convinced that it was worth sharing with others because it addresses the attitudes that often attend doctrinal differences. Among the many thousands who have left the Watchtower organization there are those who have come to accept the more traditional doctrines of mainline Protestantism: Trinity, Immortality of the Soul and Hellfire. Others continue to reject these teachings even though they no longer believe in certain other doctrines taught by the Watchtower. The end result is that among those who have left Jehovah's Witnesses there are different camps, as it were. At the same time some appear to have developed negative feelings toward those not sharing their doctrinal perspective. It would be incorrect to say that such attitudes are pervasive as there are many, if not most, who resist

the temptation to pass judgment on other Christians over doctrinal differences. However, in some quarters there does appear to be a growing tension and it seems appropriate to share Brother Ervolina's observations with others. I first met Tim in Guntersville, Alabama in the summer of 1986 during a conference for ex-Witnesses sponsored by Biblical Research & Commentary International. This past summer I had an opportunity to renew our acquaintance in Arlington Heights, Illinois during this year's BRCI Conference where he presented a workshop on the theme of "Salt and Light." I have come to respect his ability as well as the spirit he shows. He reflects a deep commitment to Christ and a strong desire to promote peace and unity within the family of believers. He was born to pioneering Jehovah's Witnesses 33 years ago and for the last couple of years has been separated from the Watchtower system. Tim is presently enrolled at South-eastern College in Lakeland, Florida where he is

majoring in Biblical Literature. He is active in evangelism ministry with his local congregation-an Independent Christian Church in Lakeland.

It has been disheartening to some that those coming away from the Watchtower Society cannot share a common doctrinal position. Some find it strange that doctrines long rejected as Witnesses are now warmly embraced as truth. On the other hand, if some continue to hold to certain doctrinal views they held as Witnesses they are viewed as not having really broken free from sectarianism. It is into this breach that Brother Ervolina steps to offer some timely food for thought. It is not likely that what he has to say will have much impact on what people believe but hopefully it may cause some to reevaluate their respective attitudes. It is in this spirit that the treatise is published. Each of us must take responsibility for our belief structure. At the same time we must remember that it is the doing or not doing of God's Will that determines our acceptance or rejection by Christ. (Matt.7:21-23) Nor can we take lightly the need to demonstrate love for God by how we view and treat our brother. (1 John 4:12,13,20,21) It is one thing to speak dogmatically where the Scriptures are explicit, but even then we must do so kindly and respectfully. (1 Peter 3: 15) But very often sojourns are taken into regions of thought not fully developed in the Bible. Sometimes tradition is used to validate a particular doctrine but tradition, unsupported by Scripture, proves nothing. With these thoughts I present Brother Ervolina's treatise which follows:

The summer of A.D.325 was to be a hot one.

Twelve years before emperor Constantine had declared complete freedom of religion throughout the Roman empire and Christianity flourished and spread. The number of Christian converts ran into the millions and their influence was felt at the highest levels of government. Finally Constantine himself professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ. But the new-found social acceptability of Christianity brought with it some unexpected responsibilities. Christianity is by definition a "Way," in fact THE WAY, not just a casual belief system. Therefore Christians took their theological presuppositions with them as they went about their daily lives. This is all well and good when everyone is agreed about doctrine, but not so good when there are serious disputes.

In 319 Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, Egypt, preached a sermon on "The Great Mystery of the

Trinity in Unity." One of the elders in attendance Arius, a beloved and scholarly expositor, attacked Alexander for what he felt was a reduction of the Godhead to polytheism, namely "three Gods in one." The disagreement literally split the church. Arias and his followers loudly proclaimed their allegiance to Christ, but only as the representative of the Father, who created all things (including the pre-incarnate Logos. Alexander and his followers said the issue was both the relationship of Christ to the Father and the worship due him if he was one in essence with the Father. More importantly, said Alexander, the very salvation of man was at stake, for if Christ were "less" than "very God," how could he offer up an infinite sacrifice for man's infinite affront to the Holy God?

The debate raged on daily, as the followers of each man declared that they and they alone were keepers of true Christian orthodoxy. It is said that there were riots in the streets in some towns when one group refused to do business with the other, marking them as heretics. Finally, worried that the empire itself might be engulfed in the flames of the rhetoric, Constantine called a council of bishops to settle the matter. It was into this cauldron of theological debate that the *(episkopos)* bishops or overseers of the church, were thrust that long-ago summer. And Christ-ianity has never been the same.

For it was here, at Nicaea, that a political head of state presided over a Christian meeting, setting the tone for most Christian meetings until "disestablishment" became a reality in eighteenth century America. It was here that the orthodox doctrine of the nature of Christ would be decided, and it was here that the first creedal statements of belief were adopted by the church. Oh yes, and it was here that "Arianism" became synonymous with "heresy," and a true hero of the faith was practically forgotten.

I can almost hear some of you gritting your teeth at this point. My Trinitarian brothers are saying:

"Lord, deliver us from another one of those nuts that still thinks that the Watchtower Society is God's organization in some kind of Babylonian captivity." Relax! My Christology can muster the most orthodox of tests. But to those brethren who do not accept the traditional, orthodox explanations for the relationship of the Father to the Son, much less of a Holy Spirit called a "He," rather than an "it," I likewise urge:

Relax, you are not going to get another dose of

"Believe it or else." You see, I think that there is something profoundly deeper involved here than the extra" biblical speculations of either Unitarians or Trinitarians . Though I grant that each of them has a certain validity to their arguments, anyone with an open mind can see that each view has its problems. The issue is, I believe, the Tole of polemics in the church, its effect upon the body of Christ worldwide, and the resulting perceptions of unbelievers.

At Nicaea, there were two primary views expressed. Arius, of course, and a minority of the bishops held that the Logos had not always existed, but had been created within time by God. They also maintained that Christ was of a different nature than the Father. Because of his impeccability and obedience, he was to be considered as "*theos*," divine, but not "*ho theos*," that is, God. He was created, "ex nihilo" out of nothing, as were all of God's creations, though as the Logos, he had the power to create all other things. The opposing view was taught by Athanasius. Less than half the age of Arius, he was already considered a brilliant scholar. He had been schooled at the prestigious Alexandrian catechetical school, the place where Arius' nemesis, Bishop Alexander, had taught. Athanasius, then, represented the view that Christ was not a created being, but had always existed, of the same nature, yet as distinct from the Father. Athanasius shaped the viewpoint that Christ's nature and one's understanding of if, were vital to salvation. But, believe it or not, his understanding of the nature of Christ was not the majority view. (Trinitarians don't put this down, I'm not finished yet. And, non-trinitarians, don't look so smug, for the same reason.)

It seems that the majority view was represented by the gentle old scholar and church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (his *Ecclesiastical History* is a real gem for anyone who cares about the first three centuries of our faith). Eusebius hated the controversy. He could see that unless it were resolved, brother would be against brother with sword in hand, all in the name of Jesus, whom they supposedly represented. So Eusebius, and the majority of the Bishops (over two hundred) felt that Christ was not created (as Arius taught) nor exactly consubstantial with the Father (as Athanasius taught), but rather was *homoi* (of like or similar essence) and had been begotten before all time by the Father. Eusebius drew up the first draft of the Nicenean creed, based on this belief. The creed that finally emerged reflected the Eusebian doctrine of "begotten not created before all time," (thus insuring the distinctness of Son and Father, and establishing the

implicit filial submission in the incarnate Christ), while differing from Eusebius' version by defining a unity of essence of substance of the Father and the Son.

Unfortunately, Nicaea did not settle the controversy. Both Arius and Athanasius were banished in ensuing years as their supporters came to power and the war between Trinitarians and non-Trinitarians (not to mention the countless skirmishes within each group as they wrestled to define the indefinable) has continued up until our day. It has not been Christ-glorifying. The rhetoric of heresy hunting is anything but edifying. It might result in a temporary rallying around a particular charismatic leader whose attacks on his brothers are especially virulent, but it never results in the glorification of Christ as head of the church, nor in the attraction of the unbeliever into our midst.

Today we have a particularly sad situation in the body of Christ. Many little groups are going about asking the wrong question of those to whom they are "witnessing." They ask: "What do you believe about Jesus?" What they should ask is: "Are you willing to give up your very life, pick up your cross (cross beam optional), and follow Jesus?" What has happened is that two extremes have polarized brothers, just as happened at Nicaea. Theology, not discipleship, has become all important. I doubt if it has ever occurred to those who have not served on a foreign mission field, but our perceptions of Jesus are culture bound. Study the medieval African "Black Jesus" pictures, and it will be quickly apparent that Jesus can and does function quite well in all cultures. In those areas of the world where there is little education and little influence of Hellenic western philosophical thought, the Christian convert could not even begin to understand the intricate reasonings necessary for an "orthodox" Christology. But is he any less saved? And even the most brilliant and educated of minds is at a loss to fully explain the "mystery of godliness." (1 Tim. 3: 16). If the transcendent God exists outside space and time, and is therefore inexplicable within space and time, how can we make the acceptance of our particular version of theological or christological orthodoxy a requisite for salvation?

There is a lesson that Jesus taught about this. In Mark 9:38-40, we read: "'Teacher,' said John, 'we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.' 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said. 'No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad

about me, for whoever is not against us is for us." Here we see the Lord's view of sectarian divisions. They are of our making not His. It is sad when certain groups develop bizarre teachings and go off by themselves, railing against their brethren who may disagree with them. But sectarian attitudes are by no means the exclusive property of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, or other similar bodies. Theological "correct" people can reduce themselves to the same pugnacious and heretical level by calling these groups "false" Christians.

We may define what scripture clearly teaches. That is the valid role of polemics, and we have scriptural precedent for it in the apostolic writings. But nowhere in scripture are we told that we must pass a doctrinal test to get saved. In fact Jesus contradicted the concept of salvation by theology when he spoke to the theologically orthodox Pharisees: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life .. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by means of them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:24,39,40) A correct theological understanding is no guaranty of salvation .. But believing that God sent forth His Son to conquer our sin, does guarantee it.

So what does that mean? That doctrine doesn't matter? That it's okay to believe whatever one chooses? No, doctrine is important, but only as far as it changes lives for the Kingdom. The Gospel is what is important: that God sent forth His only Son, to die for us, that, now glorified in heaven, he will soon return to fully set up the Kingdom he established in men's hearts on Pentecost. We have a world to evangelize before he returns. Moving people around from one section of the body of Christ to another is not evangelizing the world.

Sectarian groups and cults may not recognize us as their brothers. One reason may be that we don't treat them as our brothers. I heard a very prominent ex-Witness say that there is absolutely nothing good in the Watchtower organization. That is a gross exaggeration, born of a spirit of bitterness. Jehovah's Witnesses profess a commitment to the authority of scripture (though in practice this may not be true), there is a clear call to disown oneself in discipleship. Unfortunately, they have become disciples of men, not Christ, and (hold on to your hats, my fellow evan-

gelicals!) there is a wilderness voice crying about the abuses in Christendom. Wilderness voices are a bit rare these days. Sorry to have to inform you of this folks, but things are not okay. The Church of Jesus Christ is lazy, arrogant, self-righteous, and yes, apostate! Now, I don't mean that it is completely theologically incorrect but, let's face it, the "cults" have no corner on the bizarre doctrine market. Where, for example, does Scripture tell us that in order to be saved, we must "invite Jesus into our heart?" There are things that the Bible connects with salvation: confession, repentance and baptism. A pretty good case might be made for the "catholic" view of partaking of the Lord's Supper. But "inviting Jesus into your heart" is strangely missing from the Biblical plan of salvation.

If you still think I'm being unfair, go to the self-improvement section of your local Christian bookstore. There you will discover how "knowing Jesus" will help you (pick one or more): lose weight, get rich, keep your husband, find a wife, be the person you want to be. Just like Amway-without soap! Or just like discipleship with no cross. Frankly, we need some wilderness voices, and Jehovah's Witnesses, in spite of their doctrinal aberrations, might help to prick the seared evangelical conscience. There will be some (mostly non-Trinitarian) who will disagree with me on my Christology. That is their privilege. But I believe that the weight of Scripture is on my side. There will be some (mostly Trinitarians) who will disagree with my willingness to consider brethren those who are theologically heterodox. I believe the weight of Scripture is on my side here, likewise.

Those who were at the Guntersville and Chicago BRCI conventions experienced a rare display of true Christian fellowship amid great doctrinal diversity. The New Testament concept of fellowship, "*koinonia*," implies an acceptance of a person without judgment or reservations. True *koinonia*, true Christian fellowship, allows for even heresy to be expressed without destroying the bonds of unity. It is not the false doctrine that divides. It is, rather, the prideful attitude which usually accompanies it. Let us pray for unity. Let us pray that our God and Father gives us a spirit of unity that reaches across doctrinal and denominational boundaries, realizing that the "perfecting of the saints" is yet to be accomplished, but the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God," can still be enjoyed. (Eph. 4: 12, 13)

Remember, we have a world to evangelize. They are watching us to see if we have this love that we so

piously praise. (John 13:5) We have-like it are not three million Jehovah's. Witnesses who are also watching us. We can't afford to let the satanic. forces of sectarianism back into our lives and thinking fear that some of us may have changed our interpretations of Scripture without changing our religion. Cult bashing becomes a cult and the false teachers go on their merry way, devouring the sheep as they go. It is not your understanding of the nature of Christ or his Father

that counts for your salvation. It is not your particular interpretation of difficult Scriptural passages which decides your eternal destiny. It is, instead, your absolute trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your obedience to him that determines whether or not you belong to him. (Matt.7:21-23) If everybody is willing to lay down their swords, I know where we can pick up some crosses. □