

group is the one likely to behave most evilly. Failure wounds our pride, and it is the wounded animal who is vicious. In the healthy organism failure will be a stimulus to self-examination and criticism. But since the evil individual cannot tolerate self-criticism, it is in time of failure that he or she will inevitably lash out one way or another. And so it is with groups. Group failure and the .. stimulation of group self-criticism act to damage group pride and cohesiveness. Group leaders in all places and ages have therefore routinely bolstered group cohesiveness in times of failure by whipping the group's hatred for foreigners or the 'enemy.'" -*People of the Lie*, pages 225-226

In the end, therefore, it becomes obvious that the practice of expelling from the congregation persons who honestly dissent, shunning people who have done nothing worse than to try to more accurately follow the will of God as they perceive it, is itself an act by the leaders of shunning the light of discovery. A clear desire to maintain the rank and file in a state of blissful ignorance. It is an act of fear. The same fear the Jewish religious leaders felt over the threat they understood Christianity to be to their deeply entrenched authority. "All the same, many even of the rulers actually put faith in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess [him], in order not to be expelled from the synagogue; for they loved the glory of men more than even the glory of God." -John 12:42,43 *New World Translation*.

For those who are shunned the pain can be intense. Especially so when that one knows that the shunning is wrong but has no opportunity to prove this to loved ones who have turned to them a deaf ear. But the person who has separated him or herself from the

Watch Tower is left with the knowledge, painful though it is, that what was sacrificed was lost on the altar of integrity, peace, and a more sure hope for the future. As Dr. Peck states: "Attitudes have a kind of inertia. Once set in motion, they will keep going, even in the face of the evidence. To change an attitude requires a considerable amount of work and suffering. The process must begin either in an effortfully maintained posture of constant self-doubt and criticism or else in a painful knowledge that what we thought was right all along may not be right after all. Then it proceeds into a state of confusion. This state is quite uncomfortable; we no longer seem to know what is right or wrong or which way to go. But it is in a state of openness and therefore learning and growing. It is only from the quicksand of confusion that we are able to leap to the new and better vision." -*People of the Lie*, page 240. (Rod Rayborne's address is: P.O. Box 1301, Grover City, CA 93433)

*Great truths are greatly won. Not found by chance,  
Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream, But  
grasped in the great struggle of the soul, Hard  
buffeting with adverse wind and stream.*

*Grasped in the day of conflict, fear and grief, When  
the strong hand of God, put forth in might, Plows  
up the subsoil of the stagnant heart, And brings the  
imprisoned truth-seed to the light.*

*Wrung from the troubled spirit in hard hours, Of  
weariness, solitude, perchance of pain,  
Truth springs, like harvest, from the well-plowed field,  
And the soul feels it has not wept in vain.*

-Horatius Bonair- submitted by Elaine Sabatine □

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## **1988 B.R.C.I. Conference Report**

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Wyoming, New Mexico, Arizona, California Illinois, Florida, Minnesota, Washington, Connecticut, Missouri, Canada and Australia were all represented at the 1988 conference sponsored by Biblical Research & Commentary International held at the Red Lion Inn Ontario, California, August 12-14, 1988. This was the third annual meeting sponsored by B.R.C.I.-a facilitating group providing a forum for discussion and interaction among former Jehovah's Witnesses. While the attendance was down from previous years the spirit shown was, in my opinion, better. There seemed to be a better feeling of spiritual security and joy. The theme of the gathering was "Being Peacemakers Without Compromising Conscience".

(Matthew 5:9; Romans 14: 19) By means of meetings like this we are learning to deal with our differences in constructive ways, It is possible to have a unity in Christ despite these differences. B.R.I.C. does not take a doctrinal position apart from recognizing that God has given His Son Jesus Christ as savior to the world. (John 3: 16) That doesn't mean that the officers and board members do not have specific doctrinal views as individuals. They do. But they refrain from forcing these views on others and urge, rather, that each Christian take responsibility for their belief system or structure. They encourage dialog between differing opinions in a spirit of respect and humility. (1 Peter 3:15)

For some this was their first conference even though they may have been removed from the Watch Tower organization for some time-10 years or even more in some cases. In talking with these people it became clear to me that more than just the passage of time is needed in overcoming the negative effects of the Watch Tower experience. Unless one has taken positive steps to move on, spiritually one tends to remain in a sort of religious 'limbo'. Conferences like this help such ones realize, that they need to take responsibility for themselves and move forward. One of the joys to be realized is that • the spirit of brotherhood is alive and well outside the Watch Tower environs. These gatherings provide an opportunity to bond with other Christians in a non-judgmental way. The freedom in Christ that our Lord intended for us to have becomes meaningful and real. It is not an 'anything goes' mentality but, rather, a recognition that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and that he will be the one to determine a value on our beliefs and actions. (2 Cor.5: 10) Until that time we have opportunity to share love, faith and hope with one another.

Apart from the program Which I thought was excellent there was ample opportunity for casual discussion and fellowship. There was a lot of laughing as well as serious discussion taking place. Affection was displayed and genuine interest and concern for others shown. One touching moment came when two sisters looked at each other and began to realize that they had one time been together in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses! It had been many years since seeing one another and there they were, in of all places, a gathering of ex-Witnesses!

For me it was an opportunity to fellowship once again with many I have come to know and love since leaving the Watch Tower system, As a Witness I used to thrill at those large international assemblies when I would look out over the crowd and realize that all these many people were my brothers and sisters. Oftentimes, I could not hold back the tears of joy that I felt. The same is true now. The feeling of brotherly love is just as real and just as strong. Experiencing this now has demonstrated to me that such attitudes come from within. It wasn't because I was a Witness that I felt these strong emotions. It was because I brought these emotions to my being a Witness. I am still the same person. I still feel toward God and mankind, especially my brothers in Christ, what I have always felt. This intense feeling didn't come from an organization; it came from within me-from my heart.

This is one of the reasons I support and urge others to support conferences designed to facilitate ex-Witnesses. Some may feel that the camaraderie they once knew as Witnesses is lost forever. It need not be. The Watch Tower Society has perpetuated a myth by teaching that only among Jehovah's Witnesses can be found the love that proves one a disciple of Jesus Christ, (John 13:35) If we but reach out for it we will find that there is a community of believers wherein the love of God is real. I experience it at the B.R.C.I. conferences and I experience it when I fellowship with a little group of Christians in Minneapolis. I know that many others are finding acceptable Christian community in a variety of congregations in their local areas. We are part of the family of God under Christ. He is dealing with us as sons. (Hebrews 2: 10-13) As brothers in Christ we need one another. How else can we carry out our obligation toward one another by sharing burdens if we fail to take advantage of meeting together? (Galatians 6:2,10) This doesn't mean that we must join some mainline church. It does mean that we need to join with other believers. It might be only a few meeting in a private home in a very unstructured setting. The important thing is not large numbers but, rather, coming together in a spirit of worshipful love; caring for one another; bearing the burdens of one another.

Another conference is being planned for next year in the New York area. There is a point where several states come together (New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut) and it is somewhere in this area that B.R.C.I hopes to hold its 1989 conference. This effort will be coordinated by Tom Cabeen who lives Milford, Connecticut. It hoped that a location can be found and dates set relatively soon so those wishing to attend will have ample time to make appropriate plans. "Getting to Know the Truth, the Way and the Life", was developed by Tom Cabeen wherein he argued that the failure of Jehovah's Witnesses to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was a most serious flaw in their belief structure. He argued that the Witnesses are prevented from having this relationship and depend entirely on a man-made religious structure for salvation. The afternoon was concluded by Jeff Hamilton, also a former Bethelite, who spoke on "The Security of the Christian Believer". Jeff's remarks stressed the biblical facts that "The gospel of Jesus Christ is that God welcomes sinners to himself; that once welcomed we are in the family of God and are able to stay by the power and the persistence of God and not by our own ability. And thirdly, that the good news has within itself

the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes" . Jeff provided the assembly with a three - page handout to underscore his arguments.

Sunday Morning: A Memorial of Christ's death was presided over by Joe Maes who made it clear that if there were those not comfortable in sharing in this that they should not feel obligated in any way. Brother Maes reviewed for us the original observance and how the focus was directly on the person of Jesus Christ - his flesh- his blood. The observing of the Lord's Supper or Evening Meal is a regular feature of B.R.C.I. conferences. The subject, "Resources, Options and Choices", stressed that our primary resources are spiritual. To have the "nature of God", means that we must think and act as Christ would think and act. Only in this way can we do the will of God.

The conference was brought to a conclusion by reminding the brothers that B.R.C.I. was formed to pro-

vide some sort of support network for those leaving the Watch Tower organization. The isolation that many of us felt initially when leaving the organization helps us realize the need for such support. These conferences are a product of trying to fill that need. Because we have shared a common experience we are able to better understand the unique spiritual difficulties facing those who find themselves outside a religious community they once called home. Additionally, and more painfully, many have lost entire families in the process. It was at this point that the installation of an 800 number came up as an additional effort to assist those being alienated by the Watch Tower Society. As a footnote to all of this it might be mentioned that at the annual business meeting it was decided that we should change our name to something that would more correctly convey the image of a supporting group (the bridge) we have developed. So, if you have any suggestions along this line please feel free to send them on to Tim Ervolina .•