
Whose Disciples Are Christians?

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Responding to *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1984: This issue has articles on "Why We Must Be No Part Of This World," and "Remain Without Spot From The World," using John 17:16 and James 1:27 as the key texts respectively. In the first article, on page 9, the point is made that Jesus did not instruct his disciples to isolate themselves from the world. Then it says: "Rather, he gave them a globe-encircling work to do, saying: 'You will receive power when the holy spirit arrives upon you and you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth.' (Acts 1:8) He also commanded them: 'Go therefore and make disciples of people of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. And, look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things.'" (Matthew 28:19,20)—page 9, par. 4.

The commission of disciple-making was attended by the command to go forth as *Christ's witnesses*. In reading the inspired account of Acts of the Apostles we observe that the disciples did, indeed, present themselves as witnesses of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts documents the fulfillment of Jesus' words that their witness would first be given in "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." Accordingly, we find the apostle Peter witnessing for Christ in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day (Acts, Chapter 2) near the start of the historical account and concluding with Paul's witness for Christ in the imperial city of Rome many years later. Acts, chapter 28) As we read about their witnessing we note that the Father is not ignored, but the emphasis—the stress—is definitely on the Son, Jesus Christ. (Acts 4: 8-12)

In view of Jesus' explicit command: "*you will be my witnesses*," and the inspired history that documents the fact that the disciples so viewed themselves, it seems contradictory for the Watchtower Society to ignore Jesus' command in this matter and appropriate an appellation that focuses and omits the Son entirely, namely "Jehovah's Witnesses." This name was adopted by resolution at the Columbus, Ohio assembly in 1931. The resolution was read by the President of the Society, Joseph F. Rutherford, who in part said: "That, having been bought with the precious blood of Jesus

Christ our Lord and Redeemer, justified and begotten by Jehovah God and called to his kingdom, we unhesitatingly declare our entire allegiance and devotion to Jehovah God and his kingdom; that we are servants of Jehovah God commissioned to do a work in his name, and in obedience to his command, to deliver the testimony of Jesus Christ, and to make known to the people that Jehovah is the true and almighty God; therefore we joyfully embrace and take the name which the mouth of the Lord God has named. And we desire to be known as and called by the name, to wit, 'Jehovah's Witnesses.'"—*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (pages 125,126).

This resolution was unanimously passed and later adopted by all of the congregations which, at that time, referred to themselves as "Bible Students." By adopting this name the Watchtower Society took the focus off Jesus Christ and introduced perceptions that further compounded their error. For example, Rutherford acknowledged that they had been "bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ," but then goes on to deny a *direct responsibility to Christ Jesus, as owner*, by saying "we are servants of Jehovah God commissioned to do a work in his name." Furthermore, the Society continually speaks of "Jehovah's Organization" and how people must come to "Jehovah's Organization" in order to be saved when the Scriptures present the Christian community as Jesus' organization—if, for some reason, you have a love affair with the word "organization." Consider the following:

(1) Jesus Christ is the head of his congregation which is his body. (1 Cor. 12; Col. 1:18) (2) Christ owns the congregation by purchase. (Jude 4; Gal. 3:13 1 Cor. 7:23) (3) Christ is the bridegroom; his congregation is the bride. (2 Corinthians 11:2) (4) Christ is the master (Lord) for whom Christians are called to slave. (Colossians 3:24) (5) Christ is the vine of which disciples are branches. (John 15:5-10) (6) Christ is the shepherd; his disciples are the sheep (John 10:11-16)

All of the above scriptural illustrations present a superior/dependent relationship. The totality of Christ's dominion over the Christian community cannot be missed. The glory and honor bestowed upon the Son does not take away the glory and honor due the Father. It has pleased the Father to so glorify his Son.

(John 17:1-8; Philippians 2:9-11) So, when we honor the son *as we honor the Father* we are not taking away from the Father. Rather, we are pleasing the Father because he wills it to be so!

"Thus, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses; for the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. Whoever refuses honor to the Son refuses honor to the Father who sent him." John 5:21-23 *Jerusalem Bible*

In view of the foregoing, it would seem to be no trivial thing for an international religious body to take the focus off Jesus Christ where it rightly belongs in the new covenant church. The name "Jehovah's Witnesses" (Isaiah 43: 10-12 NW) was never given to God's covenant people as a *name*! They were to act as witnesses of Jehovah, as in a court of law, in giving testimony that their God proved himself God—in contrast to those "gods" who could produce no such witnesses to testify to their proven godship. But they were never named "Jehovah's Witnesses," nor is there one scripture that refers to them being called by that name. They were variously identified as "sons of Abraham," "sons of Jacob" or "Israelites."

The same study article condemns the witnessing carried on by "Christendom" over the centuries and says that people of the nations often had Christianity forced upon them, "by cruel and barbarous methods." (page 10, par. 5) Unfortunately, it is true that the sword of the state has often been used in the spread of nominal Christianity, all to the shame of those professing to be Christ's witnesses. Then the magazine makes this observation:

"Moreover, fear of torture in a mythical hellfire has been a potent factor in so-called conversions to nominal Christianity. (Compare Ecclesiastes 9:5,10) But how far all of this is from the only Scripturally authorized way of spreading the true Christian faith! That noble activity is to be carried on by active witnessing, teaching and disciple making." (page 10, par. 5)

The publishers of the Watchtower imply, by the above, that they would never be guilty of providing wrong motives for becoming Christ's disciple. But is

that implied boast accurate? How much of a "potent factor" has their date-setting and predictions about the imminent end of the world been on the making of converts in their 100-year history? Quite a bit, as the record shows.

Consider, for example, the infamous; "*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*," campaign, which extended from 1920 to 1925. The Watchtower Society preached that the Hebrew prophets would be resurrected in the flesh in 1925 and act as princes to direct the work of reconciliation on earth. This was accompanied by unusual growth in numbers during those years. In 1922, 32,661 Bible Students attended the yearly observance of the Lord's supper. But, by 1925 that number had grown nearly threefold to 90,434. Of course, following the failure of their prophesy there was a decrease in numbers after 1925. (*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose* (page 110)

More recently, the nine years preceding 1975 were marked by record activity and numbers of baptisms. The table below (figures from *The Watchtower Annual Reports*) shows the correlation between the expected end in 1975 and increased conversions:

Year	Witnesses	Inc.	Bapt.	Pio.
1965	1,034,268	3.2	64,393	47,853
1966	1,058,675	2.4	58,904	47,092
1967	1,094,280	3.4	74,981	53,764
1968	1,155,826	5.6	82,842	63,871
1969	1,256,784	8.7	120,905	76,515
1970	1,384,782	10.2	164,193	88,871
1971	1,510,245	9.1	149,808	95,501
1972	1,596,442	5.7	163,123	92,026
1973	1,656,673	3.8	193,990	94,604
1974	1,880,713	13.5	297,872	127,135
1975	2,062,449	9.7	295,073	130,225
1976	2,138,537	3.7	196,656	111,375
1977	2,117,194	-1	124,459	119,289

1966: The book "*Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*," released this year presented the speculations regarding what could likely happen by 1975. (see pages 29,30 & Chart of Significant dates pages 31-36) The table above clearly reveals the effect the "potent factor" of alarming people that the end is at hand can have on their religiosity.

By 1976, the expectations of the Witnesses began

to wane and by 1977 the total number of active Witnesses *decreased* by 1 percentage point. It becomes evident that the Witnesses were seized by unusual activity due to the suggestion regarding what 1975 could bring. Harping that the end is at hand by the Watchtower Society may produce increased activity but does it produce good motive for that activity? But, as they say, "how far all of this is from the only Scripturally authorized way of spreading the true Christian faith!"

The state of continued anxiety regarding how close Armageddon is helps to explain the "zeal" they publicly display in their witness activity. Historically, Christians have prayed for and longed for the return of Jesus Christ and have lived their lives with this hope and expectation in view. The uncertainty as to when Christ would return gave them the right to believe it could happen in their lifetime. They lived their lives with this expectancy. At the same time they lived balanced lives and cared for the human needs as well as the spiritual needs of others, all the while they discharged their many other obligations in this life.

But the Witnesses function under an entirely different view of reality. They are convinced that they must preach publicly the message generated by Watchtower chronological speculations and predictions if they are to be saved! From this perspective and because they must report such activity to the local congregation there is considerable peer pressure along with organizational pressure to engage in public witnessing. That is not to say they are not sincere. They are. They really do believe what they are telling others. But it is an urgency generated primarily by the Watchtower Society. As noted in the decline of activity after the failure of 1975, external stimulation is a fickle one.

It is one thing to urge people to put God first in their lives and another thing to keep them in a constant state of anxiety over the nearness of the end of the world. A surge of religious activity due to such influence is no measure of mature Christian faith. In this regard the Society likes to measure itself by these things and conclude that Jehovah's Witnesses obviously have more Christian dedication than others due to their door-to-door activity. Such comparisons, however, represent an uneven playing field. We might liken the Witnesses as sharing in a "Fire Alarm!" ministry. For decades the Witnesses have been told the end is at hand! If they want to have any hope of surviving

themselves they had better keep busy in the ministry! That is essentially what they have been told and what they believe. Their salvation into a new world they envision will not be theirs unless they engage whole-souled in the preaching work and support the worldwide activity of the Watchtower Society. That is their world view.

It is one thing for a Christian to live in expectation of Christ's return but quite another thing to insist that it must come within a certain time or generation. This mind set helps to explain the disdain the Society reflects towards higher education. They create a false sense of urgency that numbs people's ability to think clearly and objectively. Every normal pursuit must be set aside to make room for the Watchtower Society's agenda for them. The Society intimidates those having a desire (a need?) for advanced education in one field or another; gifts and talents, for the most part, remain undeveloped because there simply isn't time for such things. Those few with enough individuality and courage to pursue a career are looked down upon as being spiritually weak. Note how the matter is put in the following statement:

"What then, about a worldly career? Well, since this world will pass away (in our day), would it be reasonable to plan on a life devoted to secular advancement? (Matthew 24:34) Hardly! And surely this outlook would affect our attitude toward worldly education, would it not? Although a basic education is needed, in schools of higher learning it is nearly impossible to escape being swept along with the prevailing tide of worldly thinking. Of course, personal decisions must be made regarding education. (Galatians 6:5) But such questions as the following merit prayerful thought: During years spend in universities, have students also been able to 'keep seeking first the Kingdom and Jehovah's righteousness'? Are they totally unaffected by the theories and philosophies that undermine true faith? (Colossians 2:8) Have worldly associates had a good influence on them, or has it been spiritually detrimental? (1 Corinthians 15:33) And have many highly educated individuals really maintained humility?" (Philippians 2:2,3)-WT10/1/84, (page 17, par. 10)

The bias contained in the above quotation is obvious. The concession that "personal decisions must be made regarding education" is sandwiched in between the most negative, one-sided presentation of

education possible. Any gifted Witness with opportunity to further his or her education is manipulated by the Society's view and the subsequent peer pressure that attends it. Witnesses have a love of God and are fully capable of working out their decisions

under the direction of the holy spirit but the Society feels compelled to inject its thinking into every facet of life. The end result is an association of people dependent on the Society's approval to feel good about themselves. □

Apologetics for Failed Predictions and Date-Setting

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The Watchtower, December 1, 1984 presents an interesting exercise of apologetics in connection with the history of failed prophecies by the Watchtower leadership. It not only excuses their failures, but manages to find merit, even in the errors. In the opening article "What Has Happened to Christian Watchfulness," they set the stage for their appeal by charging that Catholic, Orthodox and mainstream Protestant Churches have all failed to keep their members spiritually alert to the second coming or "presence" of Jesus Christ. They totally ignore the Evangelicals who are very much second-coming oriented as they do not fit into the premise created by the Society. oriented as they do not fit the premise they are trying to establish. Regarding the failures of the churches in this regard they say: "Christendom's churches have abandoned the Christian watchfulness that Jesus ordered his disciples never to neglect. They are no longer on the alert for Christ's presence and the coming of God's kingdom. They have rationalized away expectation of 'the conclusion of the system of things' or 'the end of the world.'" -page 4, par. 5.

This blanket indictment is accompanied by a number of quotations from reference works to support their conclusions. The next article: "Happy Are Those Found Watching," draws attention to the fact that first-century Christians looked for the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the wholesome effect that expectation had on their course of life: "Even if the Kingdom were not to come during their lifetime, this proper attitude of expectation would protect Christians from becoming spiritually drowsy and getting involved with Satan's world." -page 12, par. 12.

" Admittedly, as the apostasy developed after the death of the Apostles, some got wrong ideas as to the nearness of Christ's coming in his kingdom. In his work *The Early Church and the World*, C.J. Cadoux states: 'Irenaeus (second century C.E.) and Hippolytus (late second, early third century C.E.) both thought it was possible to calculate with some degree of accuracy the time when the end would come. Some, due to faulty

chronology, thought that 6,000 years of human history had nearly elapsed and that the advent of the seventh millennium was near. They were wrong, of course. But at least they were endeavoring to keep spiritually awake." -Page 12, par. 13.

The last two quotations are significant. They inadvertently acknowledge that attempts to decipher the time of Christ's return by chronology based on the 1,000-year "day" theory is an old exercise-a variation of which they still use. Note also the sympathy and tacit approval of these date-setters of centuries past. They stop short of calling them "apostates" and go on to praise them for "endeavoring to keep spiritually awake. "

The reason the Watchtower restrains itself from speaking against these prognosticators is obvious. To condemn them would be to condemn themselves; to excuse them is to excuse themselves. It is no coincidence that they slant this series of articles in favor of date-setting (even if it is in error) at a time when still another of their prophecies is falling to the ground unfulfilled. That prophecy is that the generation of 1914 roust see the end of the world. their false premise is that the alternative to date-setting is Christian apathy or drowsiness. That is nonsense. but is used in these articles to justify their own persistence in this matter. Note how they present the 19th-century millennialists out of which their own organization evolved:

"In the 19th century, several such groups appeared in lands where the Bible and the means to study it were available to the common people. The mainstream churches, for whom any teaching on the 'Last Things' had become meaningless, despisngly called such groups Adventists or Millennialists, because such groups were on the watch for Christ's second advent and believed that Christ was due to reign for a thousand years." -page 13, par.16

"Naturally, 'the more established Christian