

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. □

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## ***Apologetics for Failed Predictions and Date-Setting***

( Number 7. Originally published November 24, 1984 )

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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 churches' rejoiced when these predictions turned out to be erroneous. To be sure, the Catholic, Orthodox and principal Protestant Churches made no such mistakes. For them, the teaching on the 'Last Things' was 'meaningless'. They had long since ceased to 'keep on the watch.'" -page 13, par. 17

The magazine then introduces C.T. Russell and his Bible class and attempts to show that here was something different-something better than the other groups "on the watch for Christ's advent" due to reign for a thousand years: Regarding *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, published by Russell from 1879 forward they write: "From its first year of publication this magazine pointed forward, by sound Scriptural reckoning, to the date 1914 as an epoch-making date in Bible chronology. So when Christ's invisible presence began in 1914, happy were those Christians to have been found watching." -page 14, par. 20

They avoid mentioning that the magazine Russell established erroneously taught that the "last days" began in 1799 and would end in 1914 with the destruction of the whole world. They fail to mention that the "invisible presence" mentioned above was said to have occurred in **1874**, marking the start of the last forty years of the "last days." This forty-year period was called "the harvest period" in Russell's writings. To say the Bible students were "happy to have been found watching!" in 1914 is pure fantasy. The Bible students were *devastated* by the failure of 1914 to bring the end of the world and for them to be taken to heaven!

The current presentation of matters is an insult to the intelligence of older Jehovah's Witnesses who know better. When this article is studied January 6, 1985 in Kingdom Halls around the world, this deliberate misrepresentation of the facts will go unchallenged. To speak the truth would court disfellowshipment.

The final article: "Keep Ready," contains both justification and rationalization for Russell's failed predictions and those of his successors: "True, the Bible students who wrote those articles did not, at that time, enjoy the precise Biblical and historical understanding .of what the end of those 'appointed times of the nations' would actually mean, as we understand these things today. But the important point is that they were 'on the watch' and helped to keep

fellow Christians spiritually alert. "-Pages 16,17, par. 9. False alarms do not help people remain spiritually awake. To the contrary, such false alarms dishonor God and confuse and discourage those foolish enough to put their trust in them.

At their critics they hurl the following in defense of their published predictions and subsequent failures: "It is easy for the established churches of Christendom and other people to criticize Jehovah's Witnesses because their publications have, at times, stated that certain things could take place on certain dates. But is not such line of action in harmony with Christ's injunction to 'keep on the watch?'" -page 18, par. 13

One feels a sense of sadness and pity for a governing body that cannot bring itself to confess that it has prophesied falsely and taught for many years not that something "" could take place" but emphatically taught that something would take place on a certain date and when this failed to create new errors and new predictions which subsequently failed as well? To take offense that others are critical of them for this demonstrates an inability to deal with reality when it comes to the enormity of their sinfulness in this regard. (Deut. 18;20-22) It displays a hardened

resistance to repentance and a prideful arrogance that God condemns in his word. Such self-justification is neither faithful or discreet.

And, in answer to the rhetorical question: "" is not such line of action in harmony with Christ's injunction to 'keep on the watch?'" The answer is an emphatic NO! The efforts of men to uncover what God has determined to remain hidden is not an exercise in spiritual watchfulness. It is, rather, an exercise in rebellion and presumptuousness that always lead to defaming God and causing great harm to those influenced by such irresponsible preaching. (Deut. 29:29)

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How are we to understand Jesus' words as recorded in Mark 13, Matthew 24 and Luke 21 regarding the end of the system of things? As we read these inspired writings, two things become obvious: (1) The destruction of Jerusalem is set forth in graphic detail. The disciples are plainly told what events would accompany this and what they should do to protect

themselves and avoid getting caught in that destruction. (2) The matter of the Lord's coming or parousia is *uncertain as to time* and would overtake the world *and the disciples* at a time they would not expect. However, when it did happen, it would be both sudden and universally discerned by the cosmic **manifestations** that would accompany this climactic event. There would be no time to prepare for it. Christians and all others on earth would be caught being themselves.

At the time Jesus spoke, the disciples may have linked the two events together thinking that one would follow closely on the heels of the other or even take place simultaneously. There is evidence to suggest in the Christian Scriptures that the disciples thought the return of the Lord was imminent. (1 John 2: 18; 2 Thess. 2: 1,2)

The *One Volume Bible Commentary*, edited by J.R. Dummelow, makes these comments regarding the recording of Jesus' words: "At the time when the speech was committed to writing, the apostles believed that Christ's second coming would occur in their lifetime, and that the fall of Jerusalem and the Last Judgment would be coincident: see on 1 Th. 4: 15. This belief would affect, if not the faithfulness of their reports, at any rate the arrangement of it. It would cause the evangelists to group together, as if referring to the same event, sayings which really referred to events widely sundered in time ... Our Lord, for devotional reasons, desired His disciples always to regard His coming as if it were near. The time of it was purposely not revealed, in order that Christians might live in a state of continual watchfulness, looking for their Lord's coming. Such continual exhortations to watchfulness were easily understood to imply that the Second Coming was near." -Page 702

It was the uncertainty of when the Lord would return that prompted Jesus to urge his followers to ""keep on the watch". His illustrations of the faithful and wise servant, the ten virgins and the talents in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew, all stress the unexpected hour of his return and the accountability that individual Christians have towards the Lord to always live in expectancy of his return.

The wisdom of this can be demonstrated. In the military there are two kinds of inspections: Posted Inspections, which inform military personnel of the

inspection and the date and Unposted Inspections, that occur without prior notice. It is easy to guess which inspection is the most difficult to pass. Even those who are given to untidiness get busy to clean up and get things in order for a posted inspection. However, when an officer just suddenly shows up, unannounced, and commences an inspection it is often a different story. The latter type of inspection gives a more accurate picture of a soldier's true habits and efficiency.

As respects our Lord's return at an unannounced time, it is our *Godly devotion* that will be tested as to whether we lived our life consistent with our calling. We do not need some would-be prophet sounding false alarms. We have all we need to be on the watch. Christ's sudden return need not find us inactive or unfruitful as regards our Christian life.

The apostle Peter wrote: "May undeserved kindness and peace be increased to you by an accurate knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, for as much as his divine power has given us freely all the things that concern life and godly devotion, through the accurate knowledge of the one who called us through glory and virtue. Through these things he has freely given us the precious and very grand promises, that through these you may become sharers in divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust. Yes, for this very reason, by your contributing in response all earnest effort, supply to your faith virtue, to your virtue knowledge, to your knowledge self-control, to your self-control endurance, to your endurance godly devotion, to your godly devotion brotherly affection, to your brotherly affection love. For if these things exist in you and overflow, they will prevent you from being either that individual Christians have towards the Lord to always live in expectancy of his return.

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It is true that, historically, Christians have desired to know then the Lord would return. It is also true that they have wanted to believe that it would be soon. Jesus' own words allow us to think it could be soon, regardless of the generation in which we live. But, we can never correctly say that it must be at a certain time-not even within a specific generation. Jesus' last word on the matter is consistent with what he had to say elsewhere that this was a secret known only to his Father:

"When, now, they had assembled, they went asking him: 'Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?' He said to them: 'It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons (appointed times: Interlinear NW) which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction.'" -Acts 1 :6,7 NW

From the beginning the Watchtower leadership has chosen to ignore the r in this matter and have presumptuously "un ahead" as it were. This has resulted, not only in failed prophesy, but also a

changed gospel resulting in "classes" of Christians based on certain dates calculated alongside their "Gentile times" chronology. In this way error has been heaped upon error with grave consequences for those putting their trust in these things.

The current Watchtower makes it clear that they are not repentant in all of this. It appears that they are preparing Jehovah's Witnesses for yet another failed

prediction and giving them the word as to how to respond when this matter comes up, namely, that it is better to prophesy error due to "over-eagerness to see God's purposes accomplished" (page 18, par. 14), than to be spiritually asleep. In this way the Watchtower Society places the Witnesses on the horns of a false dilemma. It is nothing more than flawed human logic that has been allowed to supplant sound biblical truth. □