

# **A RESEARCH PAPER ON THE MAJOR DOCTRINES AND DOOMSDAY APOCALYPTICISM OF THE WATCHTOWER ORGANIZATION**

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## ***Introduction***

Why the Watchtower? Is not this ground well ploughed? Do the Jehovah's Witnesses really measure up as a "doomsday cult," using any contemporary yardstick? Other cults and cult-like beliefs and activities have made the headlines lately. One reads of the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate and is reminded of similar fanaticism among the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas in 1993. The esoteric "Solar Temple" and the Aum Shinri Kyo of Japan are groups whose recent histories provoke fear and disgust if not wonder and inquisitiveness. However, few seem to have had the staying power of the Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>1</sup> Few are as persistent in proselytizing and evangelizing.

Are the Jehovah's Witnesses a "cult"? By most standard definitions the answer appears to be "yes." The Jehovah's Witnesses can naturally be subsumed under the broad category of "apocalyptic cults" (though not the violent cults).<sup>2</sup> They imbibe part and parcel of the "doomsday mentality" described by Pate and Haines in a recent work on the subject.<sup>3</sup> The Jehovah's Witnesses have long predicted the imminent "end of the world" and the coming of the battle of Armageddon for our generation. In fact, it may be said that they are the preeminent cult emphasizing these "doomsday" ideas. Canadian scholar and former Witness elder, M. James Penton, has written, "In an important way, though, Jehovah's Witnesses are unique; they have preached millenarianism longer and more consistently than any major sectarian movement in the modern world."<sup>4</sup>

Again, why this choice? First, the JW's are among the most successful of cult groups or aberrant Christian religions in terms of the numbers of adherents and new converts made each year (as will be demonstrated later). Second, they seem to wield a disproportionate influence on the beliefs of many evangelicals who might be surprised to learn of the probable pedigree of some of their pet

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<sup>1</sup>Hereafter referred to simply as "JWS" or "Witnesses" for the sake of brevity, not in derision.

<sup>2</sup>See "Doomsday, Destructive Religious Cults," ("Common Factors Among Doomsday Cults,") available from <http://www.religious.tolerance.org/destruct.htm>. Internet, accessed 7/20/97.

<sup>3</sup>C. Marvin Pate & Calvin B. Haines, Jr., *Doomsday Delusions: What's Wrong with Predictions About the End of the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p.13.

<sup>4</sup>M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p.7.

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dogmas. Third, they are probably the most persistently and insistently evangelistic (this writer has never been called upon at home by the Branch Davidians, but has received numerous visits from the Witnesses). Finally, the author considers the central doctrines which they espouse to be terribly destructive to true faith, even though often very plausible sounding.

The aim here is, first, to give a brief history and description of the JW's. Second, to trace the broad outlines of their distinctive doctrines and practices. Third, their unique interpretation of key texts from the Book of Revelation will be summarized and then evaluated. And, finally, the student will offer a few suggestions about possible ways of conversing with the Witnesses.

## I. HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

### *Early Beginnings*

The group known today as "Jehovah's Witnesses" actually traces its lineage to certain religious developments of the last century in the United States. In the beginning, they were known as "Millennial Dawnists," "International Bible Students," or even "Russellites," after "Pastor" Charles **Taze Russell**, the early leader who effected the incorporation of movement in 1884. <sup>1</sup> But, this was not the beginning of the general movement. "Its roots lie in the nineteenth-century Adventist movement begun by William Miller."<sup>2</sup>

The Russellites first became "a separate sect in the 1870's and [have] remained one ever since." It is now "an 'established sect,' but one which, although routinized, is still hostile to society in general."<sup>3</sup> It is "very closely tied in with the history of the three presidents" [up to that time]<sup>4</sup> and in fact, "much of the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses can be told through the careers of its leaders."<sup>5</sup>

The first president and founder of the "Millennial Dawnists" was Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916). <sup>6</sup> Born in Allegheny (now part of Pittsburgh) in Pennsylvania on February 16, 1852 to a

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<sup>1</sup>Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. New Sixth Edition Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951, 1975), pp.153, 154.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon J. Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*. Revised & Updated Edition New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), p.81.

<sup>3</sup>Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, p.3.

<sup>4</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963, 1976), p.223.

<sup>5</sup>Melton, *Handbook*, p.81.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

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family of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, Russell joined the Congregationalists at the age of 15. <sup>1</sup> Due to Russell's being troubled with the doctrines of predestination and eternal damnation, by age 17 he "had become an avowed skeptic."<sup>2</sup>

But, in 1870, the young Russell stumbled upon a Bible study group of Second Adventists meeting under the tutelage of Jonas Wendell.<sup>3</sup> He was so impressed with Wendell's ideas, that he recovered "faith" and formed his own such Bible study group. It met in Pittsburgh from 1870-1875.

In 1876, Russell met N. H. Barbour of Rochester, N.Y who shared with Russell the notion that the second coming would be "spiritual" and not literal. The two began jointly to publish Barbour's magazine, *The Herald of the Morning*.<sup>5</sup>

In 1877, they also published jointly a book entitled, *Three Worlds or Plan of Redemption*. Its thesis was that Christ's "second presence began invisibly in the fall of 1874. It was at that time argued that 1914 would be the end of the "Gentile times" (to be a forty-year "harvest period").<sup>6</sup>

July 1, 1879 was the date of the first issue of Russell's magazine *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. In 1881, the unincorporated Watch Tower Tract Society was begun, and on December 13, 1884, it was incorporated. Penton observes, "...we may therefore recognize this date as the official beginning of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement."<sup>7</sup>

In 1886, the first volume appeared of the *Millennial Dawn* series (later called *Studies in the Scriptures*).<sup>8</sup> These later came to be highly revered among the

Witnesses as a source of information about the correct interpretation of the Bible."

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p.224.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. However, they did not accept the Adventist view of a bodily return of Christ, believing that "...His Second Coming would be a spiritual or invisible one." (Ibid., p.224.)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.225. See also Melton, pp.81, 82. Since Russell actually encouraged Dr. Nelson H. Barbour to write it, "*Three Worlds* is therefore a very important work. In fact, it contains within it most of the ideas that Russell and those in association with him were to promulgate during the next forty years. Even today, many of the concepts within it—though frequently, but not always, changed in minor ways—are still taught by Jehovah's Witnesses." Barbour was thus "... a major contributor to their overall doctrinal system" (Penton, p.22.).

<sup>7</sup>Penton, p.225.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. This was to become a major source of "authority" for the movement. In fact, Hoekema quotes from the *Watch Tower* of Sept.15, 1910, p.298, as found in Martin and Kwaan, *Jehovah of the Watchtower*, rev., ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), pp.15-17) to the effect that Russell believed that if anyone, after studying the scriptural studies, .... lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone... in two years he goes into darkness." But, if he reads the scriptural studies instead of the scriptures, "he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the scriptures" (Hoekema, *Four Major Cults*, p.227).

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In 1912, Russell brought suit against Rev. Mr. J. J. Ross of Ontario on the charge of libel. Unfortunatley, Russell perjured himself when his claim to be able to read the Greek alphabet was challenged and disproved in court. It was also learned that he had not been ordained by a recognized religious body, as he had also claimed.' Martin gives some details of this trial, then explains, "... offer it as open proof of their [JW's] founder's inherent dishonesty and lack of morals, that they

may see the type of man to whose doctrines they have committed their eternal souls."<sup>2</sup>

Russell died on October 31, 1916 on a train near Pampa, Texas.<sup>3</sup> The JW's can hardly be understood apart from some knowledge of their colorful founder.

### ***Rutherford and His Successors***

On January 6, 1917, Joseph Franklin Rutherford became the second president.<sup>4</sup> But, his ascension to power was rough, with open rebellion breaking out among Russell's followers.<sup>5</sup> Rutherford took a more iron-fisted approach to leadership and put more stress on "publishing" (proselytism or evangelism).<sup>6</sup>

On June 20, 1917, Rutherford and various other leaders were sentenced to prison for allegedly conspiring to dissuade recruits from entering military service. But, on May 14, 1919 the convictions were overturned and the leaders were all released.<sup>7</sup>

It was under Rutherford that the "millions now living will never die" campaign was orchestrated. He predicted that the end of the "world" (i.e., present age or system of things, consisting of the political, religious and social structures) would come in 1925, and that Abraham, Isaac and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.227-228.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1965,

1985), p.43.

<sup>3</sup>Hoekema, *Major Cults*, p.228.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.230.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.228.

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Jacob would be resurrected.<sup>1</sup>

In 1931, at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, Rutherford changed the name of the organization officially to the "Jehovah's Witnesses," purportedly based on Isaiah 43:10.<sup>2</sup> Rutherford "claimed that the Witnesses had been on earth as an organization for more than 5,000 years and cited Isa. 43:10-12; Heb. 11; and John 18:37 to prove it."<sup>3</sup> This name change was "... to differentiate between the Watchtower and the true followers of Russell as represented by The Dawn Bible Students and the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement."<sup>4</sup> With this, "Rutherford became the first popular religious leader to raise the issue of God having a name in Hebrew...

Rutherford died, after 25 years at the helm of the Watchtower organization, on January 13, 1942.<sup>6</sup> "During his presidency the society moved from a more or less democratic organization to a 'theocratic' one, in which the directors of the various local congregations were no longer elected by local assemblies, but were appointed by the governing body in Brooklyn."<sup>7</sup>

Nathan Knorr succeeded Rutherford on January 13, 1942. Since Knorr, the *Watchtower* and all other literature is now published anonymously." Under Knorr the *New World Translation of*

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<sup>1</sup>Penton, p.57. Of course, Rutherford confessed that the calculations were only probable, a prudent caveat leaving a little wiggle room, which, as it turned out, he really needed after 1925 (ibid.).

<sup>2</sup>Hoekema, *Cults*, p.230.

<sup>3</sup>Mead, *Handbook*, p.154.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p.38.

<sup>5</sup>Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook*, p.83. Melton further explains that "...this concern with the 'name' of God in the 1930's would give rise to separate denominations within Adventism generally referred to as the Sacred Name Movement" (op. cit.). Penton writes that the name changed at exactly 4:00 p.m. on July 26, 1931 (Penton, p.62). Penton also observes that under Russell, the "vindication of Jehovah's name" came to be more important than the ransom theory of atonement under Russell. And, "significantly, the doctrine of the vindication of Jehovah's name was in many ways like John Calvin's doctrine of the majesty of God." This has led to even more zealous intolerance on the part of the JW's (Penton, p.69,70).

<sup>6</sup>Penton's synopsis of Rutherford's personal life is uncomplimentary: "He used vulgar language, suffered from alcoholism, and was once publicly accused by one of his closest associates of attending a nude burlesque show with two fellow elders and a young bible student woman on a Wednesday evening before the celebration of the Memorial of the Lord's Supper" (Penton, pp. 47,48). Again, Penton documents that Rutherford undoubtedly had a "serious case of alcoholism" and even went on drinking binges with the Society's money (Penton, pp.72, 73).

<sup>7</sup>Hoekema, *Cults*, p.231.

<sup>8</sup>Hoekema, *Cults*, p.232.

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*the Christian Greek Scriptures* was published (the entire Bible in 1961).<sup>1</sup> "The last decade of Knorr's tenure was filled with the expectation that the Second Advent would occur in 1975. He only lived a short time after that prediction failed, a fact which has shaken the organization in recent years."<sup>2</sup>

When Knorr died in June of 1977, Frederick W. Franz took the helm. He had been a "longtime leader and then vice-president of the Society."<sup>3</sup> Franz simply continued "to pilot the Watch-tower after the pattern of his predecessors."<sup>4</sup>

When Franz died in December of 1992, he was replaced by Milton G. Henschel.<sup>5</sup> It is here presumed that Henschel remains the current president.

### ***Present Numbers and Activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses***

"When we remember that approximately 33 per cent of the membership of the Jehovah's Witnesses reside in the United States, and almost 67 per cent on the mission field, the gravity of the problem which confronts the Christian Church is apparent to all but the most adamantly obtuse," wrote Walter Martin in 1985.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Bowman cites from the *1995 Yearbook* of Jehovah's Witnesses the figure of 4.9 million active members (950,000 in the US. alone). The number of "adherents," however, may be double that.<sup>7</sup> Significant growth took place in the 1980's, with two hundred thousand in the U.S. and a million additions worldwide." In some countries, "...they are the second largest religious body next to the national church."<sup>9</sup>

Martin laments that there is rarely enough literature on the mission field for evangelism with evangelicals, but even less for countering the JW's, who never seem to run short!<sup>10</sup> More than 16

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.233.

<sup>2</sup>Melton, pp. 83, 84.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, *Kingdom*, p.48

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Robert M. Bowman, Jr. *Jehovah's Witnesses Zondervan Guide to Cults & Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p.13.

<sup>6</sup>Martin, *Kingdom*, p.370.

<sup>7</sup>Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, p. 14. Bowman also mentions that the JW's grew from 1.1 million in 1965 to 4.4 by 1992. Their fastest growth has been in Central and South America, Africa, and the Pacific Rim (ibid.). It is interesting to note that, "worldwide, only about 1 out of 15 'publishers' made a convert in 1994 (counting baptized children as converts), despite putting in an average of 1" hours a month going door-to-door and standing on street corners to hand out literature" (ibid., pp.14,15).

<sup>8</sup>Melton, p.86.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Martin, p.369.

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million copies of *The Watchtower* are published biweekly in 120 languages.' "...more than 1,000,000,000,000 Bibles, books, booklets, and leaflets have been distributed since 1920..."<sup>2</sup> Such

statistics prompted Martin to warn, "If evangelical Christianity continues to virtually ignore the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it does so at the peril of countless souls."<sup>3</sup>

## II. DISTINCTIVE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

There are a number of beliefs and practices peculiar to the JW's which simply cannot be covered in this short analysis.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the present research is to focus particularly upon the eschatological beliefs of the group and their interpretation of the Apocalypse of John. But, beliefs are rarely held in a vacuum, and seeing some of the more outstanding differences between the JW's and evangelical Christians will help the reader better understand their strange apocalypticism.

## ***Major Doctrinal Peculiarities***

### THEIR ARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

While claiming to be "Bible-believing followers of Christ," the Witnesses hold a radically different view of the person of Christ from the orthodox view.<sup>5</sup> Like Arius (ca. 256-336 A.D.), they deny that Christ was the second person of the Trinity and hold instead that he was "the first of God's creations."<sup>6</sup> Their view of the Godhead may be summarized briefly by the following declarations:

"1) There is no Trinity. Jehovah the Almighty God, is a solitary person.... 2) Jesus is not Almighty God.... 3) There is no personal Holy Spirit.... Rather, the "holy spirit' is an impersonal energy or active force that God uses and that he gives to his people to empower them to obey him."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, they deny that Christ was raised physically or bodily from the grave, but was "raised" a "divine spirit."<sup>8</sup> This "spirit body" could present itself to the senses as a material body, but it was not really so. The original body was annihilated or just passed off into gasses.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bowman, p. 15. He adds: "This is about as many copies, worldwide, as TV Guide sells in the U.S" (ibid.).

<sup>2</sup>Mead,p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p.125.

<sup>4</sup>See ibid., pp. 51-46 in which Martin lists in detail a number of the distinctive beliefs of the Witnesses.

<sup>5</sup>Melton, p.84.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Bowman, p.20.

<sup>8</sup>Martin, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup>Bowman, pp. 39-40.

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### WITNESSES' BIBLICAL CHRONOLOGY

The Witnesses make much ado over Biblical chronology, claiming to have discovered important keys to interpreting prophecies and understanding types previously hidden to the average Bible reader. It should be pointed out that their views in this field have been revised a number of times over the years.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there has been a least one consistent theme throughout most of their existence, viz., "the end is near; Christ will reveal himself shortly to bring destruction upon the nations and all who oppose his messianic kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

How they arrive at their dates and figures is both interesting and complex. Bowman shows that their calculations are so complicated that even the average JW cannot know them by memory, although this system of numbers is considered sacrosanct and not to be questioned under penalty of excommunication.<sup>2</sup> A sampling of their complicated chronology will here be attempted:

Basically, the JW's believe that 2,520 years of history have been marked beginning with the year 606 B.C. (later revised to 607 B.C.) in which allegedly Jerusalem fell to the Nebudchadnezar.<sup>3</sup> This ensuing period of time known as the "Gentile times" culminated in the year A.D. 1914,<sup>4</sup> a time when the Witnesses believe that Christ's "second presence" was realized (in heaven, not on earth!). It is believed that 1914 was the year of the setting of the eschatological stopwatch to tick until the battle of Armageddon, certainly to come in this generation!

The JW's do not believe that Christ established his kingdom when he came in his earthly ministry. This did not happen until the year 1914.<sup>5</sup> The Watchtower literature describes the invisible

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<sup>1</sup>Penton, p.4.

<sup>2</sup>Bowman, pp. 6Sf

<sup>3</sup>Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience* (Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1983), pp.140-143. Franz was nephew to former president, Frederick Franz, and at one time a member of the governing body of the Watchtower organization before being dismissed for doctrinal aberrations.

<sup>4</sup>Former Witness and Swedish scholar, Carl Olof Jonsson, made a thorough review of his organization's chronology and was forced to the conclusion that the idea of the fall of Jerusalem in 607 B.C. "was historically, archaeologically, and astronomically indefensible." However, he got into much hot water when he shared these findings with the Watchtower hierarchy. In 1982, he was disfellowshipped (see Penton, p.107).

<sup>5</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), pp.89,90.

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events that supposedly happened in heaven in that year in the following way:

The kingdom was "brought forth" in 1914 as Jesus was elevated "to the active kingship in the throne at God's right hand."<sup>1</sup> When Jesus was baptized, he was then and there anointed "to be a royal priest like Melchizedek."<sup>2</sup> "That was about October 1, A.D. 29, the thirtieth anniversary of his human birth" (Luke 3:21 -23).<sup>3</sup> Then, for three and a half years he acted as a witness. This comes to A.D. 33, Nisan 14, at which time he died. Three days later, he was raised. The fiftieth day from thence, he started bringing forth living stones and building the temple (Acts 4:10-12; 2:32-36).<sup>4</sup>

"Corresponding with Jesus' being begotten by God's spirit and his being anointed to be King-Priest is the birth of God's Kingdom in 1914 by the crowning and throning of his anointed King-Priest Jesus Christ, at the end of the 'appointed end of the nations'.<sup>5</sup> Nineteen hundred years ago, Jesus came to his typical temple to cleanse it, three and a half years after his baptism. "To correspond with that, we measure three years and a half years from Oct 1, 1914 when the glorified Jesus Christ became the newborn king of the new world. This brings us to the passover season of 1918."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, "at the temple is where his Messenger of the covenant in whom they delighted was to appear or be manifested; they loved his appearing or manifestation (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Tim. 4:8, NW)."<sup>7</sup> Who were those who "loved his appearing," since the *appearing* was "invisible"?" These would have been the "living stones" (of the temple), or the 144,000 who had died and "were sleeping in death," but were then given a new spiritual existence in heaven at that time, or shortly thereafter.<sup>9</sup> The countdown thus begun will continue until the final end of the present system, the battle of Armageddon.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *You May Survive Armageddon into Gods' New World* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society Inc., 1955), p.100. Prior to that, Christ was only sitting by the throne.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.104.

<sup>8</sup>Penton argues that the idea of the invisible return of Christ was derived by Russell from a Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, a prominent Philadelphian Lutheran Pastor. "...Russell drew directly on biblical commentaries of Adam Clarke and Sir Isaac Newton from which he took a standard historicist interpretation of the book of Revelation" (Penton, p.17).

<sup>9</sup>*You May Survive*, p.104.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.85-86.

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It is vital to note that the Witnesses do not expect a physical second coming of Christ to this earth.<sup>1</sup> He has already come once, "spiritually," in 1914, and will come again, "spiritually," in the imminent battle of Armageddon.<sup>2</sup>

This quick sampling of the Watchtower Biblical "chronology" is partly illustrative of their hermeneutic.<sup>3</sup> Penton quotes Melvin Curry as putting it "so nicely," when he writes: " 'Biblical chronology is the play dough of Millenarians. It can be stretched to fit whatever timetable is needed, or it can be reduced to a meaningless mass of dates and figures so that future predictions can be molded out of the original lump.' "<sup>4</sup> As will be seen, this plasticity given to Biblical chronology is crucial for the JW's' continued revision of failed predictions.

#### WITNESSES' ECCLESIOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

Witnesses conceive of more than one class of the redeemed. Former Watchtower worker, William Schnell, explains the number of terms used to refer to these.<sup>5</sup> Basically, there are to be the 144,000 of the "anointed class," and then a larger multitude of "the other sheep."<sup>6</sup> The 144,000 are believed to have the reward of heaven awaiting them (in fact, most are there since 1914), whereas the "other sheep" can only have the hope of living on a paradisiacal earth for ever.<sup>7</sup>

"Most present-day Witnesses do not expect to go to heaven. After Armageddon, the dead in Christ will be raised to enjoy eternal life.'" This doctrine of multiple classes was in fact even more complicated before Rutherford simplified it and bound it up in the spring of 1935.<sup>9</sup> The JW's "have a distinct aversion to the word 'church,' almost invariably preferring 'congregation.' It always

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p.99. See also Bowman, pp. 60f

<sup>2</sup>Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pp.90-91.

<sup>3</sup>To be treated as a separate topic subsequently.

<sup>4</sup>Melvin Dot son Curry, Jr., *Jehovah's Witnesses: The Effects of Millenarianism on the Maintenance of a Religious Sect* (doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, Gainsville, 1980), p.243 as quoted in Penton, p.4.

<sup>5</sup>William J. Schnell, *Thirty Years a Watchtower Slave*. Abridged Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), pp.40-44.

<sup>6</sup>Bowman, pp. 48-51.

<sup>7</sup>Melton, p.84

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Penton, p.72.

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refers to the 144,000." In must be understood that, for JW's, the church is not the kingdom, except perhaps in embryo,<sup>2</sup> though they do believe that the church started on Pentecost.<sup>3</sup>

### **OTHER WATCHTOWER PECULIARITIES**

The Witnesses believe in the doctrine of *conditional immortality*, or the notion that the human soul is not inherently immortal, but can only receive immortality on the condition of obedience.<sup>4</sup> Consonant with this is their denial of a continued state of punishment for the wicked (existent, sentient creatures) in hell. Rather, they hold to *annihilationism*. Neither the righteous nor the wicked dead have continued existence (except in the memory of God) until the "resurrection," which they conceive as a "recreation" of the original person. Some of the incorrigible among the wicked dead will not be resurrected (i.e., recreated). They are thus annihilated already. Most others will, however, be given a second chance after the battle of Armageddon when a series of "resurrections" (i.e., recreations) are to begin. If they then prove to be wicked once more, they will be annihilated once and for all.<sup>5</sup>

It is well known that the JW's are opposed to blood transfusions, thinking them to violate the inscriptural prohibitions against eating blood.<sup>6</sup> Penton demonstrates that they even believe it a sin to have an autotransfusion (of one's own blood stored and then reintroduced).<sup>7</sup> In the 1960's, the Witnesses were told not use products made from animal blood (not even fertilizers), and not to give a

transfusion to a sick animal. " And many other such examples of aberrant beliefs and practices among the JW's could be given.

Without doubt, the Jehovah's Witnesses are a "doomsday cult" who are convinced that we

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<sup>3</sup>Darrell Conley, "The Church, The Kingdom, and the Millennium According to Jehovah's Witnesses' Doctrine," in *Some Modern Cults, Sects, Movements and World Religions*. Sixth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship in Memphis, Tenn., eds. Garland Elkins & Thomas B. Warren (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, Inc., 1971), p.53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.54, quoting Russell's *Plan of the Ages*.

<sup>3</sup>Penton, p.182.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, p.106.

<sup>5</sup>Bowman, pp. 30-32. See Martin, p.101.

<sup>6</sup>Melton, p.87.

<sup>7</sup>Penton, pp. 203-204.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp.204, 205.

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are living in the last generation in which Armageddon will come, along with the obliteration of the present world order. In 1953, the then President of the Watchtower organization announced, "Armageddon is so near at hand it will strike the generation now living."<sup>1</sup> He added, "It will break forth at an unguarded hour for this generation,"<sup>2</sup> and "no part of the earth will escape this war."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he said, "the same inspired Word [Bible]... unerringly foretold many centuries ago the very situation that we face up to in this generation...."<sup>4</sup> The JW's continue to preach this, for in 1997 *The Watchtower* said, "In the very near future, Jesus' heavenly government will rule over a righteous new human society, in effect, 'a new earth' (2 Peter 3: 13)."<sup>5</sup>

### ***The Witnesses' Hermeneutic***

Hoekema lists at least four characteristics of the JW's method for interpreting the Bible.<sup>6</sup> First, is what he calls their "*absurd literalism*."<sup>7</sup> (The prohibition against "eating blood" is an example.)

Second, he describes an *"absurd typology."*<sup>8</sup> The opposite of the first, this method tends to "spiritualize" or allegorize any text which seems to get in the way of their dogmas when interpreted literally. It also finds a rich source of "prophecy" in the myriads of persons, institution and events of the Old Testament. Almost anything can be made to serve as a "type," if it suits the purpose. For example, the author of *You May Survive Armageddon* says that he finds forty two distinct types corresponding to the heirs who will survive, including some fish of the Salt Sea!<sup>9</sup> To this student, this seems to be the major source of information for their chronologies.

Third, Hoekema mentions what can be called *"knight-jump exegesis"*<sup>10</sup> The idea is that they

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<sup>1</sup> *You May Survive Armageddon*, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>5</sup> "The Miraculous Healing of Mankind is Near," in *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*. July 1, 1997: 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> Hoekema, *Four Major Cults*, pp.249-255.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.

<sup>9</sup> Penton, pp.178-179. See also *You May Survive Armageddon*, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> Hoekema, *Cults*, pp.251-254.

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can simply jump all over the Bible without regard to differences in setting, times, covenants, etc., finding verses which seem to fit their dogmas. This might also be called the "proof-text method."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Hoekema lists their *"rear-view method of interpreting prophecy."*<sup>2</sup> They first see something happening in the present or in recent history, and then head straight to the scriptures to "find" the prediction of which the event is supposedly the fulfillment. This is as Pate and Haines have warned:

Our point of contention lies in anachronistically viewing current events as the necessary fulfillment of those end-time prophecies. In our estimation, the basic flaw of the doomsday prophet is hermeneutical-though sincerely motivated, such a person allegorizes Scripture. This is the wrong way to handle biblical prophecy. The right way to handle material is to interpret it within the context of its day-from a historical, cultural, grammatical and theological perspective.<sup>3</sup>

Years ago, Eaton observed that the "whole structure" of *Millennial Dawnism* (i.e., JW's) is founded "upon the affirmation that there is to be a Millennium...", though the modern Witnesses have modified their understanding somewhat as compared to Russell's notions.<sup>4</sup> He exclaims, "what an outrage to take a scoop and shovel fifty-one chapters of OT prophecy over into the Millennium, and to deny that they have any application to the present Gospel Age!"<sup>5</sup>

"In a large measure," the methods of the JW's today are the same as those of Russell.<sup>6</sup> Russell believed that some of the prophecies were to communicate even more to our time than to the original readers.<sup>7</sup> However, Penton notes

At this point, then, it can hardly be said that Jehovah's Witnesses have anything that can be described as a systematic method of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation. If they have anything it is a tradition and nothing more. And that tradition allows them to be arbitrary in using the Scriptures to explain what is wanted in terms of Witness

doctrine or the notions of the dominant figures of the governing body.<sup>8</sup>

This reference to "the dominant figures" above gives rise to the next point of inquiry:

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<sup>1</sup>Mead, p.156.

<sup>2</sup>Hoekema, *Cults*, pp.254-255.

<sup>3</sup>Pate & Haines, *Doomsday Delusions*, p.22.

<sup>4</sup>E. L. Eaton, *The Millennial Dawn Heresy* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1911), p.9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.19.

<sup>6</sup>Penton, p.176.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.177. He adds that Russell was heir to popular Protestantism which "continued to use allegories and types with wild abandon to proclaim that the Scriptures had really foretold modern-day events in detail" (ibid., p.178).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.179.

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### **Sources of Authority**

The JW's claim that the Bible is their authority. However, they believe that *Gods' organization* (i.e., the Watchtower hierarchy) is necessary for interpreting it.<sup>1</sup> Penton observes that Russell had proclaimed the protestant idea of *sola scriptura*, "yet, by granting himself a special teaching role, the Bible Students (and Russell himself) were beginning to adopt something like the Roman Catholic concept of the *magisterium* of the papacy." <sup>2</sup>

Amazingly, "Frederick Franz and Hayden Covington went so far as to state that *Jehovah's Witnesses* must even *accept false teachings* from the Watch Tower Society in order to gain everlasting life."<sup>3</sup> Today, the JW's still have such attitudes toward their organizational leadership. In the July 1, 1979 (centennial) edition, *The Watchtower* says, .... he [Jehovah] lovingly appeals to righteous-hearted persons to come and associate with his approved organization, and then guides them gently by holy spirit, his inspired Word and his truth-dispensing organization on earth."<sup>4</sup> This is so, even though the organization admits to having made errors in its prophetic calculations.<sup>5</sup>

With a unique twist on Matthew 24:45-52, the Watchtower organization believes itself to be "that faithful and wise servant." The "servant" is thought to be a class of people, the JW hierarchy.<sup>6</sup> Hoekema details the network of responsibility and administrative duties, as for example the three corporations under which they operate, the "regional servants," "zone servants," "companies," and "company servants," etc.<sup>7</sup> Melton provides a more recent description of their intricate setup." It is not necessarily the purpose of this inquiry to bog down in this minutia, however.

The Witnesses are guilty of special pleading with their own translation of the Bible, the *New World Thansiation*.<sup>9</sup> Penton says that this version "is used as an apologia for Witness beliefs as much

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<sup>1</sup>Schnell, p.43. See also Hoekema, *Cults*, pp.237-248.

<sup>2</sup>Penton, pp.34-35.

<sup>3</sup>Penton, p.83, quoting from the *Pursuers' Proof* in the case of Walsh v. Cyde, 340-3.

<sup>4</sup>*The Watchtower*, July 1, 1979: 25.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p .29.

<sup>6</sup>Schnell, *Thirty Years*, pp.55-56.

<sup>7</sup>Hoekema, *Cults*, p.236.

<sup>8</sup>Melton, p.85.

<sup>9</sup>Martin, p.72. He points out that the "New World Bible Translation Committee had no known translators with recognized degrees in Greek or Hebrew exegesis or translation." He then shows that Frederick W. Franz, who represented the translation committee and was the president of the Watchtower, "... admitted under oath that he could not translate Genesis 2:4 from the Hebrew" (*ibid.*, p.73).

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as a basis for them."<sup>1</sup> Raymond Franz writes that his uncle, Frederick Franz, was "the principle translator" of the *NWT*<sup>2</sup> *The New World Translation* is not generally recognized as a scholarly work outside of JW circles.

### ***Their Exclusivity and Separatism from Society***

The JW's are not a separatist group in the narrow sense of having enclosed themselves in armed compounds or in cloisters (as the notorious Waco fiasco or the Heaven's Gate tragedy). However, they are a separatist group within the larger society. Penton quotes Cohn as saying, that they are a socially estranged group which feels a sense of alienation from the larger societies in which they live."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they have become "more thoroughly isolated and alienated in a psychological sense from the rest of society...."<sup>4</sup>

The basic reason for their"... development as a sect and their insistence on remaining one— that is, a religious movement alienated from the world which stresses that it alone is the bearer of 'the truth'-has been their peculiar millenarian eschatology."<sup>5</sup> This eschatology will now be explored in greater detail under the following heading:

### **III. THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

The reader is reminded of the JW's fondness for "typology." This is apparent in their treatment of Revelation.<sup>6</sup> Also, the "absurd literalism" described earlier by

Hoekema characterizes their use of the book. The "rear-view method of prophecy" is present, and in fact is a predominant factor.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Penton, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, p.50.

<sup>3</sup>Penton, p.6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.65. Penton also quotes Joseph Zygmunt, saying that the JW's are "a world-denying 'contrast group' which is amazingly isolated psychologically from the larger societies in which it exists" (ibid., p. 304).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.,p .3.

<sup>6</sup>See *Thu May Survive Armageddon*, p p .132-133, where after giving a history of Egypt, then Assyria, Babylonia, and Medo-Persia re: the Jews, the author says: 'According to the inspired rule stated in 1 Corinthians 10:6,11, all this was typical. It foreshadowed a restoration of the true worship of the one living and true God Jehovah among his spiritual Israelites on earth in this 'time of the end' of the world.' This tendency is common throughout their use of the Book of Revelation.

<sup>7</sup>In *"Then Is Finished the Mystery of God"* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., International Bible Studetns Association, 1969), p.38, the author says: "Consequently, what the apostle John wrote down in describing what he saw after the breaking of each seal did not settle the matter. The correct interpretation of the symbolic things that he saw and heard needed to be given for us to understand. This made it needful for us to wait upon the outworking of universal history for the correct interpretation to be given us by the help of God's invisible active force or spirit.' This work is basically a commentary on Revelation, but too extensive for treatment here.

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### ***Their Use of Specific Texts in Revelation***

A few of the key passages which they take from Revelation and apply to today (or to the doomsday) will be listed along with a brief explanation of their interpretation. Following this, the author will attempt to evaluate these interpretations in light of generally recognized New Testament scholarship.

## REVELATION CHAPTER SIX

The five horses and five horsemen are symbolic of events of today. These woes represent the famines and earthquakes that are happening now.<sup>1</sup>

## REVELATION CHAPTERS 7 AND 14

Of course, this is where the Witnesses derive their view of the 144,000 literal number of the saved in heaven. "So from among mankind only 144,000 persons will every go to heaven."<sup>2</sup> For other elements of these visions, they tend to "spiritualize," for example, the twelve tribes (in Rev. 7:4-8).<sup>3</sup>

## REVELATION CHAPTER 11

The "two witnesses" must be members of the Watchtower organization in this century.<sup>4</sup> Precisely, these were the Bible Students at the end of WWI (in 191") who were persecuted for their stance.<sup>5</sup> The 1260-day period in 11:3 is really 1260 years.<sup>6</sup>

## REVELATION 12:1-9

The woman giving birth and the ensuing battle happened in A.D. 1914 at Christ's "second presence." Michael is the name given again to the glorified Christ. He battled in heaven with Satan

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<sup>1</sup>In *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 195"), p.182, it is asserted: "Since 1914 food shortages and famines have affected twice as many people as in the 900 years before. The Bible said this would happen in the 'time of the end'...." Also, "True it is: since 1914 earthquakes have occurred more than ever before" (ibid., p.183.).

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.186. See also Martin, p. 111f. where he explains in detail their views of the 144,000.

<sup>3</sup>Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, p.39.

<sup>4</sup>*Paradise Lost*, pp.188-190.

<sup>5</sup>*You May Survive Armageddon*, pp.116,117. They also believe that the disheartened remnant at that time were "revived" by God in 1919 50 that they could witness again. This "... was like having them ascend to heaven in the sight of their frightened enemies... this corresponded to the apostle's prophecy concerning this remnant..." (then quotes 1 Thess. 4:16,17, "will rise first!").

<sup>6</sup>Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp.141,151.

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in Rev. 12:5-17. Satan was hurled out of heaven (forever) in 1914. He will soon "be bruised" by the seed of "God's woman."<sup>2</sup>

### REVELATION CHAPTER 13

The "beast" is really modern Christendom.<sup>3</sup> Since the Bible lists seven world powers through its history (namely: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the "Anglo-American Imperial Power"), then obviously—obviously—! the eighth power is the United Nations. The UN is not symbolized by a head of the beast, but rose out of these. The war waged against the holy ones has gone on through all the seven empires.<sup>4</sup>

### REVELATION 16:14

The battle of Armageddon is soon to occur. It "will be the worst thing ever to hit the earth within the history of man."<sup>5</sup> Then will come the new world order. "That revelation [i.e., of Armageddon] was given in order to show 'the things that must shortly take place.'—Revelation 16:13-16:1:1NW."<sup>6</sup> The battle described in the text will be literal, but the place is to be "symbolic."<sup>7</sup>

### REVELATION 17:1-3

The woman described here is heathendom and Christendom. The beast that she rides is the United Nations (or the even the earlier League of Nations)."

### REVELATION CHAPTER 20

The millennium will be literal. It will begin at the end of Armageddon. Revelation 20:6 mentions the "first resurrection." This happened for the 144,000 in heaven in the spring of 1918.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *You May Survive Armageddon*, pp.112-113.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Schnell, *Thirty Years*, pp."3, "4. He here gives an interesting counter interpretation and turns it back on the head of the JW's showing that the beast could really be the Watchtower organization! If not, why not? Once the typology is rolling, how can it be stopped? Ultimately, it seems that only an authoritative pronouncement by the WT hierarchy determines if it is or is not. The JW's do not encourage personal Bible reading with a view toward deriving individual interpretation (See Hoekema, p.248.).

<sup>4</sup>*You May Survive*, pp.126-128.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>7</sup>*Paradise Lost*, p.204.

<sup>8</sup>Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pp.43-44, citing *What Has Religion Done for Mankind Lately?* (Watch Tower, 1951), p.328.

<sup>9</sup>*You May Survive*, p.104. See also Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, p.95.

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Satan and his hordes will be cast into the abyss at the end of Armageddon.<sup>1</sup> WWI was "the beginning of the pangs of distress."<sup>2</sup> More is to come at Armageddon. God gave the devil a respite since 1914 until Armageddon, at which time he will be bound a thousand literal years.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Evaluation of witnesses Use of the Book of Revelation***

First, the JW's' hermeneutic of reading current events back into the book can be questioned. It is reminiscent of what may be called "the *peshet*" method of interpretation that was common among the Qumran community (cf 150 B.C. to A.D. 70).<sup>4</sup>

Second, their "absurd literalism" in these texts ignores the basic genre of Revelation, i.e., a book written "in the language of apocalyptic".<sup>5</sup> The book abounds in figures and symbols, even as John said it would, in 1:16

Third, they cause the interpretation of these texts to come into conflict with other plain Bible teaching. It is an illicit move to measure the rest of the Bible by these enigmatical apocalyptic symbols, rather than the reverse.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, they ignore the time frame clearly stated at the outset (1:1), and reiterated near the end (22:6), i.e., "things which must shortly come to pass." A basically preterist interpretation of the book is almost demanded by this phrase (at least for the bulk of its prophecies)." These objections may be applied to the specific texts analyzed above:

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<sup>1</sup>Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, p.106.

<sup>2</sup>*You May Survive*, p.114.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Pate and Haines, *Doomday Delusions*, pp.29, 31-33.

<sup>5</sup>D. S. Russell, *Prophecy and the Apocalyptic Dream: Protest and Promise* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p.42.

<sup>6</sup>"So the Lord *signified* his message. The Greek word *semeion* means 'sign.' In the Gospel of John, for instance, in the Greek text you don't find the word for 'miracle.'" The King James has 'miracles,' but the Greek word in John is the word for sign. It was a sign of Jesus' deity. So 'signified' or showed in signs may also read that he showed in *symbols*" (Herschel H. Hobbs, "Amillennialism," in *Revelation: Three Viewpoints*. Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1977), p.76.

<sup>7</sup>Taton, *Millennial Dawn Heresy*, p.93.

<sup>8</sup>JW's believe that John and Habbakkuk have predicted how we are to understand Revelation. It would be a secret shut up to the appointed time when the "faithful and wise servant" (i.e., WT organization) would come along to interpret it. The things which "must shortly come to pass," "...began at once in John's day, and will continue until the completion of all that he foresaw" (in *The Finished Mystery, Studies in the Scriptures, Series VII*, 1917, p.11, as viewed in a photocopy found in Duane Magnani and Arthur Barrett, *The Watchtower Files: Dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1983, 1985), p.139. However, this does not do justice to the phrase, especially when it is seen that the bulk of the prophecies are not seen to have been fulfilled until this century!

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## REVELATION CHAPTER 6

The observation about the preterist understanding of the book will suffice here. It may be added, however, that there is no evidence that earthquakes are more frequent in this century. Only the means of detecting them have improved.<sup>1</sup>

## REVELATION CHAPTER 7 AND 14

Some commentators have thought that the two groups here represent Jews (or Jewish Christians) and Gentiles, respectively (the 144,000 being the Jews).<sup>2</sup> But, this "will not do," for it would mean that the Jews only get the seal.<sup>3</sup> The seal symbolizes "preservation" for "participation in the kingdom of God."<sup>4</sup> The 144,000 must symbolize all the redeemed.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the JW's have the same difficulty with their dual classes as do those other commentators. Again in ch. 14, "the whole Church is in view. The language must therefore be interpreted symbolically, and this is not unduly difficult."<sup>6</sup>

## REVELATION CHAPTER 11

It is doubtful that the two witnesses symbolize the Watchtower. A critique of this futurist view could ask, How would a prediction of the JW's' woes after the Great War help the original readers. Morris writes, "It seems to me important that the whole section (verses 1-13) is to be taken symbolically.... Thus it seems best to take the witnesses as symbolizing the witnessing church

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<sup>1</sup>Pate and Haines, p.45, n. 22.

<sup>2</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*. New Century Bible (Greenwood, S.C.: the Attic Press, Inc., copyright Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), pp.139-140.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.140. He explains: "As Charles pointed out, the sealing must be coextensive with the peril, and must therefore embrace the entire Christian community" (*ibid.*).

<sup>5</sup>Mounce concurs that the 144 thousand "correspond with the innumerable multitude found in the second vision of chapter 7. Both portray the full complement of the redeemed throughout history," in Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p.268.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.223. See also Summers who concludes that the 144 thousand of ch. 7 are the same as those of ch. 14. He writes: "...in chapter 14 it is clear that the whole number of the redeemed is symbolized," in Ray Summers, *Worthy is the Lamb: An Interpretation of Revelation* Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), p.149. He also offers a good explanation for the duplication of the visions (i.e., first speaking of the church as the 144 thousand, then as the "great multitude"). It was a Johannine tendency to "set forth the same object in two different lights, the latter of which is climactic to the former" (*ibid.*, p.150). This is what John seems to be doing here.

<sup>7</sup>Summers asks: "What possible comfort could there have been to the persecuted Christians in John's day in knowing that several thousand years from then such events as those above described would take place? None whatsoever; it would have been meaningless and comfortless to them" (*ibid.*, p.163).

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or some part of it."<sup>1</sup> He also points out the inconsistency in taking the temple mentioned earlier as symbolic while taking the witnesses as literal.<sup>2</sup>

It is better to take the two witnesses as symbolic of the church in general in its testimony for Christ.<sup>3</sup> Mounce sees them as a symbol of the "witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age."<sup>4</sup> Tenney thinks that they might be "actual reappearances" of Moses and Elijah.<sup>5</sup> However, it appears to this author that these sort of futuristic suggestions fall right into the trap set by the JW's. A more virulent and consistent preterist position would seem better able to resist their weird identifications, for once the can of worms of futurism is open, what else spills out?

#### REVELATION 12:1-9

Did this happen in 1914? Probably not. A better interpretation keeps it in its original context for John's readers as an event "shortly to come to pass." Beasley-Murray believes that this is the central part of the book and is pivotal in terms of its content. "The struggle of the saints against the Caesars is here portrayed in the context of an age-long resistance to the God of heaven on the part of evil powers."<sup>6</sup> Summers discusses two possibilities: either the woman is the church and the man child is Christ, or the woman is Israel (symbolized by Mary) and the man child is Christ. The latter better fits the picture.<sup>7</sup>

#### REVELATION CHAPTER 13

Mounce reminds the reader of the symbolic nature of the number seven (rather than it being likely literal here) and adds that "for John the beast was the Roman Empire as persecutor of the church... the deification of secular authority."<sup>8</sup> Mounce makes no mention of seven world powers

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969, 1976), p.144.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Beasley-Murray, p.178.

<sup>4</sup>Mounce, p.223.

<sup>5</sup>Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p.191.

<sup>6</sup>Beasley-Murray, p.191.

<sup>7</sup>Summers, pp.170, 171. It is interesting that Summers writes about some in the continuous-historic school who see the man child as the martyrs "born of the travail of the church." But, he objects that, "this sounds good, but it does not answer the need of those who first received the book" (ibid., p.171). This same may be said for the 1914 war in heaven idea!

<sup>8</sup>Mounce, p.251.

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and no mention of the Roman Catholic church. Summers surmises that the devil's allies are "the first beast (3:1), who symbolizes the emperor of Rome, Domitian, and the second beast (13:11), who symbolizes the committee set up in Asia Minor to enforce emperor worship."<sup>1</sup>

#### REVELATION CHAPTER 16

In commenting on 19:1-7, Ladd says that the reference to the battle of Armageddon had been "proleptically announced" (in 16:12~16).<sup>3</sup> "Obviously this is a vivid, picturesque way of describing a great and decisive destruction of the enemies of God and cannot be taken literally."<sup>3</sup> Summers says that the battle symbolizes "righteousness and evil in deadly combat." But, it is not a literal battle.<sup>4</sup> It is a "logical" not a "spatial" battle.<sup>5</sup>

#### REVELATION CHAPTER 17

"For John, the city is Rome."<sup>6</sup> Beasley-Murray writes that "there was one city only in the first century to which this description could refer, namely Rome...."<sup>7</sup> Summers mentions the "continuous-historic" view of the harlot's being the Roman Catholic church (and remember, the JW's view is a variant of this). Then he shows how the angel explains to John, falling back on the Nero redivivus myth, that this is the Roman Empire and is "pictured as personified in Domitian, the reincarnation of Nero."<sup>8</sup>

#### REVELATION CHAPTER 20

The millennialists say that the angel is figurative for Christ. So, they start out figuratively. But, the 1000 years are literal? Why? If it starts out figuratively, why is it not all figurative?<sup>9</sup> Summers keenly observes that .... the *overthrow of Satan*, and not the reign of a thousand years, is the

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<sup>1</sup>Summers, p.171.

<sup>2</sup>George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p.256.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.257.

<sup>4</sup>Summers, p.189.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.190.

<sup>6</sup>Mounce, p.320. However, he also speculates that this is *typical* of the "last attempt of the Antichrist to establish his kingdom" (*ibid.*). To this author this speculation seems quite gratuitous. With this type *type* speculation, how could Mounce possibly preclude the identification with the United Nations as put forth by the JW's? Beasley-Murray, pp. 260-261.

<sup>7</sup>Summers, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup>Eaton, *Millennial Dawn*, pp.93,94.

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main theme of the first ten verses of this chapter." The effective stopping of the adversary, the devil, is in reference specifically to his "deceiving the nations in the matter of emperor worship."<sup>2</sup> This is the particular work from which he is restrained in this context. "The chain is not literal; one would hardly use a literal chain on a spiritual being. The thousand-year period is no more literal than the chain."<sup>3</sup>

#### **IV. CONCLUSION: CONVERSING WITH JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**

Former Witness, William Schnell, lists several "do's and don't's" in discussing religion with the JW's.<sup>4</sup> Bowman provides a comparable list.<sup>5</sup> Some of these seem apparent in keeping with the principle of Christian charity.

It appears that a crucial issue to settle with the JW's is that of authority. Space did not permit this work to document in more detail the actually oppressive nature of the Watchtower Society and the number of times it has lied to its members and reversed its rulings over the years.<sup>6</sup> It seems important to show that they claim to have the only true interpretation of prophecy as a result of the prophetic privileges they enjoy, while their predictions have failed miserably a number of times. If 1) they are claiming that these interpretations were given by the Spirit (*holy spirit*),<sup>7</sup> then such claims may be only *quantitatively* since not *qualitatively* different from others who have claimed modern revelations. The failures, of course, prove that they were NOT guided by the Spirit in those instances." But, if 2) they are claiming only a special intellectual competence at their seat of power, then the failures explode that arrogance. Obviously, if they keep getting it wrong,

something must be the matter with their underlying methodology-maybe it is the idea that we can set dates!

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<sup>1</sup>Summers, p.202.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.204.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Summers also observes that if this reference in Rev. 20 were omitted, no one would ever dream of a millennium. "Yet whole systems of eschatology, theology, and philosophy of history have been constructed on this precarious basis of highly symbolic verses" (ibid., p.203.).

<sup>4</sup>Schnell, *Thirty Years*, pp.190-192.

<sup>5</sup>Bowman, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, pp.71-76.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp.73-76.

<sup>7</sup>And they do claim this. See "How Jehovah Guides His People," in *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1979: 25-30.

<sup>8</sup>See Schnell, pp. 29f. Also, Bowman, p.10-11 on Russell's blunder about 1914 being the end of the world; Penton, p.106; Franz, *Crisis*, p.107; Bowman, p.12, the failure of 1975 being Armageddon; also, Penton, pp.91-94 on 1975.

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The research paper deals with media representation of apocalyptic predictions. It aims at describing how the apocalypse is represented/constructed in media discourse and what functions the apocalyptic predictions may perform. The more. The research paper deals with media representation of apocalyptic predictions. It aims at describing how the apocalypse is represented/constructed in media discourse and what functions the apocalyptic predictions may perform. A major paper for Eighth Enoch Seminar "Apocalypticism and Mysticism." June 21-26, 2015 (Gazzada, Italy, Villa Cagnola). Save to Library. The following articles document events, books, teachings and decisions the organization's founders and their successors made, implemented and enforced. They guided the Watchtower and Jehovah's Witnesses through the end of the 19th and all of the 20th centuries. While there is very little left of their original teachings and practices, those influences are still felt and frequently referenced. Most modern Jehovah's Witnesses have little real knowledge of the origins of their religion but still hold many of the founders up as examples of "great and righteous men" who promoted "the truth" and act. Although not all apocalypticism is violent, in its extreme forms radical apocalypticism gives rise to terrorists as varied as members of Al Qaeda, Anders Behring Breivik, or Timothy McVeigh. In its secular variations, it also motivates ideological terrorists, such as the eco-terrorists Earth Liberation Front or The Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski. This book provides an original paradigm for distinguishing between peaceful and violent or radical forms of apocalypticism and analyses the history, major transformations, and characteristics of the apocalyptic thought system.