

# JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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## Introduction

In our series on cults in Kenya, we introduce first the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are known officially as either the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society or the International Bible Students Association. In spite of the fact that there were only 4,373 full members here in Kenya in 1987,<sup>1</sup> there is strong evidence of their commitment to their work. That evidence is seen especially in the urban centres, where they are well known for their regular house calls. We note here that, as an organisation, they reportedly put in 1,580,774 hours in their work in Kenya last year, an average of more than thirty hours per member per month.<sup>2</sup> Many Christians have reported to us that they have been called on more than once by a Witness who was seeking to win them to his organisation. Rarely, however, can they say that they have been called upon by a Christian trying to win them to Christ. The Witnesses' zealotry in Kenya is an accurate reflection of the whole movement; it was reported that in 1987 they spent 739,019,288 hours working in 210 countries.

The literature written about the Witnesses is voluminous and covers far more territory than we will be able to in this brief introduction. The reader is encouraged to peruse the endnotes for a representative sample of that literature. Because of the ready availability of good materials, in this article introducing the Jehovah's Witnesses we limit our goals to the following:

1. Introducing two key men in the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses
2. Overviewing briefly the work of the Witnesses in Kenya
3. Identifying several key teachings of the Witnesses
4. Explaining the basic method Witnesses use in recruiting others
5. Outlining three basic suggestions to consider in responding to adherents of the movement.

### The First Two Presidents

Knowing the history of a cult can aid us in understanding the foundations, motives, and convictions of its current members. If we want to be effective in reaching Jehovah's Witnesses for Christ and in refuting their claims, their history will be a primary concern. An article of this length cannot begin to trace the complete history of any cult, let alone one that has been around for more than one hundred years. With that in mind we will present here only selected sketches of the two men who were the most important in shaping the Jehovah's Witness organisation as it exists today. They are the first two presidents: Charles Taze Russell and Joseph Franklin Rutherford.

#### Charles Taze Russell

##### Biographical sketch \*

Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was the founder and first president of the Witnesses. His father was a prosperous clothing store owner, and possibly because Russell's mother died when he was nine, he was brought into the business at an early age. His own initial success and the legacy left him by his father provided him with funds for the development of the Witness movement. His parents were of Presbyterian descent though he attended a local Congregational church for two years in his early teens. At the age of fifteen he was defeated soundly in an encounter with a sceptic. As a result he himself assumed a position of scepticism, being especially troubled by the doctrines of predestination and eternal punishment. His scepticism proved to be short lived. By the time he was eighteen, he found a small congregation of Second Adventists (related closely to the Seventh Day Adventists of today) whose teaching was more to his liking. In his new denominational home he and some other business friends formed a Bible study group in which some of Russell's main doctrinal concepts were developed. This group elected him as their "pastor" in 1876. By that time he had formulated his early thinking on the spiritual return of Christ. Finding a like minded man, N. H. Barbour, he united with him in publishing a magazine to spread their views. Out of his successful clothing business Russell provided the funds and was co-editor. The two of them merged their respective groups and began their own work of leading Bible studies and publishing materials explaining their understanding of the "true" Biblical faith. This union lasted only two years, the two parting in 1878 over a difference concerning the atonement of Christ.

After breaking with Barbour, Russell finally launched out on his own. One important date for the Witnesses is 1 July 1879, when Russell published the first edition of *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, the precursor of today's

*Watchtower*. Over the years the numbers of his followers, recruited through distribution of the magazine, slowly began to grow. He organized them into a society which was granted a legal charter as a corporation on 13 December 1884. This is usually recognized as the official date of the beginning of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The movement remained relatively obscure and grew slowly, not receiving much real public attention until around 1910 when booklets and articles began appearing which denounced Russell and his teachings. Though the movement as a whole remained unknown, Russell, on the other hand, was constantly involved in public scandals and trials from 1893 until his death in 1916.

After thirty two years of promoting the movement with tireless energy, Russell died on a train while returning to Boston from, appropriately enough, a preaching tour. Over these years the Witnesses report that he

. . . travelled a million miles, delivered 30,000 sermons and table talks . . . wrote over 50,000 pages . . . of advanced Biblical exposition, often dictated 1,000 letters per month, managed every department of a world-wide evangelistic campaign employing 700 speakers. . . <sup>4</sup>

There can be little doubt that Russell devoted his life to his movement and that his energy was expended in propagating his message. The questions that remain concern the character of the man thus driven and the message to which he gave birth. Here we will review several pertinent facts of his character, leaving the teachings for later consideration.

#### **The Character of Russell**

In evaluating the Witness organisation it is necessary to consider the founder's character. What type of man was the originator of the Jehovah's Witnesses who gave so completely of himself to this organisation? Does this character portray a man uniquely chosen by God to propagate truth to a deluded and dying world? Many have found after close investigation that he was not as upright as would be expected for the position given him by the Witnesses. There are four negative character traits noted in this regard.

First, Russell was proven to be a perjurer in court — a man who lied while under oath to tell the truth before the God he claimed to serve. J. J. Ross, a Baptist pastor in Ontario, Canada, published a pamphlet in which Russell was described as unlearned in the Biblical languages, falsely claiming the title of "Pastor", and of questionable moral character, having been divorced by his wife on grounds of cruelty and immorality. Russell promptly sued Ross for libel. <sup>5</sup> In court he testified under oath to know Greek and Hebrew yet when forced to respond to the advocate's questions was unable to even identify individual Greek letters. <sup>6</sup> Further, he initially testified that he was officially ordained by a recognized church but when pressed had to admit that he was

not. He initially denied that he had been divorced but was forced finally to admit that he had. <sup>7</sup>All of these statements were made while Russell was under oath. Needless to say, Russell lost the libel suit.

Second, he was a man who developed schemes to make money by deceiving the public. These schemes included, among other things advertising false cures for typhoid and cancer. <sup>8</sup> The most infamous scheme involved an attempt to sell what Russell termed as "Miracle Wheat." He claimed that this wheat would grow

five times as fast as any other type. One newspaper exposed the scheme, and Russell sued them for \$100,000 (about 1.7 million Kenyan shillings) in another libel suit. In the trial the results of U.S. government tests to determine the quality of Russell's wheat were requested. The results showed the wheat to be of slightly inferior quality to normal wheat rather than five times better. As with the libel suit against Ross, the newspaper was cleared of the accusation. <sup>9</sup>

Third, he was a man who was separated from his wife in 1897 and divorced by her in 1913. Her stated grounds in the divorce application were "his conceit, egotism, domination, and improper conduct in relation to other women." <sup>10</sup>The most serious charge levelled against him was the last which was adultery. At first he claimed to be innocent, but ultimately under cross-examination confessed it to be true. <sup>11</sup>

Fourth, and finally, he was a man who falsely advertised that he had given sermons to large groups in "round-the-world tours". The tours themselves were real, but the large crowds and the sermons delivered to them were not. As with the "Miracle Wheat" this was exposed in the newspaper. <sup>12</sup>

The picture painted only in outline form here of the founder and first president of the Witness organisation is certainly not one of a man of upright standing and clear testimony. Edmond Gruss concisely summarizes:

He lacked education; he was no theologian although he developed his own theology; he was not a scholar; he was plainly a man that at times could not be trusted; he was clearly a perjurer before the courts; he was left by his wife because of his conduct; his teachings denied almost every cardinal doctrine of the Bible. From his claims and those of his followers he certainly was the greatest egotist of his age. <sup>13</sup>

Could it possibly be true, as the Witnesses claim, that "God gave Brother Russell to the church to be as a mouthpiece for him; and those who claim to have learned the truth apart from Brother Russell and his writings have been manifested by the Lord as deceivers . . ." <sup>14</sup> Is this the type of man we would like to take as *the* authoritative teacher of God's Holy Word and on whose teachings we should base our entire lives? We think not!

### Joseph Franklin Rutherford

Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942), the society's legal advisor, took over after Russell's death in 1916. In contrast to Russell, Rutherford was something of an enigma. He avoided personal publicity, only rarely making public appearances. His personal life was kept private, and he thus avoided the scandals that plagued Russell. At the same time, however, he displayed some of the same tendencies as Russell wielding great personal power in forging the movement into the monolithic entity that exists today.

Rutherford first came into contact with the teachings of the Witnesses in 1894 but did not give himself wholeheartedly to the movement until 1906. By 1907, however, he was the society's legal advisor. His legal expertise proved invaluable in two respects. First, it greatly aided the Witnesses, and Russell in particular, in dealing with court cases. Second, and more importantly, it provided Rutherford with the skills and background necessary to consolidate control over the organisation after Russell's death. For example it was especially helpful in enabling him to find loopholes in the charter which allowed him, in the years of the struggle for control, to dismiss others in leadership positions who were particularly troublesome to him.<sup>15</sup>

The picture painted of him is generally quite different from that of Russell.<sup>16</sup> His ability, hard work, and success in accomplishing his goals were what made the Jehovah's Witnesses the group that they are today. His shaping of the movement, however, did not come without a high cost. From 1921 to 1931, as a result of his continual tightening of the organisational chain of command, almost three-fourths of those originally associated with the movement left. The ones that remained of course were completely committed to the party line.<sup>17</sup>

During his twenty five year tenure from 1917-1942, several significant changes took place in the movement. The name, Jehovah's Witnesses, was adopted in 1931; the emphasis was changed from that of Bible study and personal spiritual development to works - such as the number of pamphlets placed, the number of calls made, etc.; street distribution of its publications was begun; organisational structure was changed from a generally loose democratic federation of like minded local bodies to a single, highly organised, "theocratic" one.<sup>18</sup> The last change was one of the most important as it consolidated the movement, gave it channels for quashing dissent, and solidified the "Witnesses versus the rest of the world" mentality which is so important for cults to maintain their distinctive identity.

In addition to these organisational developments, Witness theology underwent several significant changes. These included a change in emphasis from Christ to God ("Jehovah"); a reversal of several of Russell's doctrines; and a more open attack on established religion, politics, and business.<sup>19</sup> The Witness stance on politics, seen specifically in attitudes such

as a refusal to pledge allegiance to any political leadership, caused them to fall into disfavour with the United States government during World War I. Eventually Rutherford, as leader of the movement, was incarcerated for nine months shortly after the end of World War I for his refusal to declare allegiance to the U.S. government. The net result of his jail sentence was an elevation of his status in the movement from a possibly questionable power broker to a martyr/hero, paving the way for his complete control of the Witnesses during the years to come.<sup>20</sup> By the time of his death in 1942, the organisation was a tightly controlled regime submitted completely under the authority of its one director.

#### **The Jehovah's Witnesses in Kenya**

A summary of the Witnesses' published work statistics for Africa during 1987 is provided in Table 1.<sup>21</sup> The 76,904,778 total hours of work reported by the Witnesses on the continent is little short of incredible. It should serve as a strong reminder to us that the time commitment of the average Witness, who invests almost eighteen hours per month in reaching others with the Witness message, undoubtedly far exceeds that of the average Christian church member.

Table 1: Jehovah's Witnesses Africa Statistics for 1987

Country	1986 Ave. Pub.	1987 Ave. Pub.	Inc. over 1986	1987 Peak Pub.	Memorial Atten- dance	1987 Bap.	Ave. Pim. Pub.	Number of Cong.	Total Hours Worsh	Ave. Hours	Ave. Bible Stud.
Algeria	37	37	0.00	41	82	5	1	3	2030	4.12	38
Benin	1491	1565	4.96	1752	9005	49	114	64	304632	14.48	1744
Botswana	430	466	8.37	510	1711	29	72	18	127072	20.76	606
Burkina Faso	288	340	18.05	361	1402	71	89	15	140009	32.31	799
Cape Verde	212	244	15.09	277	1415	32	30	7	69763	20.98	434
C.A.R.	1170	1166	-0.34	1248	4042	41	140	40	249669	16.67	1250
Chad	172	186	8.13	196	1228	17	50	9	78051	33.18	416
Congo	1084	1103	1.75	1256	4725	49	91	47	238572	15.82	1807
Cote d'Ivoire	2207	2478	12.27	2584	11284	187	491	75	857057	27.63	4923
Eq. Guinea	143	144	0.69	159	466	26	34	4	50531	26.48	328
Gabon	499	553	10.82	584	2163	46	53	13	130435	18.61	1214
Gambia	18	23	27.77	26	99	1	8	1	14100	45.19	61
Ghana	28635	30430	6.26	32614	133754	2281	4726	548	7977112	20.38	52673
Guinea	151	152	0.66	206	745	22	25	11	47630	19.26	189
Guinea-Bissau	2	5	150.00	6	33	0	3	1	3735	32.15	19
Kenya	3686	4081	10.71	4373	15683	466	1021	105	1580774	30.12	6876
Lesotho	791	902	14.03	1044	4204	67	177	42	270020	21.55	1096
Liberia	1318	1446	9.71	1576	8254	118	312	33	504257	26.66	2855
Libya	5	5	0.00	10	34	0	0	0	489	4.07	6
Madagascar	2146	2424	12.95	2598	13382	241	305	37	626611	20.09	3535
Mali	50	58	16.00	63	299	8	31	1	50915	67.34	238
Mauritania	0	2	New	2	11	0	1	0	346	14.41	4
Mauritius	759	765	0.79	798	1929	65	78	9	157820	16.48	784
Mayotte	18	18	0.00	19	65	0	4	1	8432	36.98	41
Morocco	71	65	-8.45	78	194	5	7	3	14918	15.93	49
Namibia	368	416	13.04	460	1318	38	49	12	99190	17.96	503
Niger	71	83	16.90	96	365	4	17	5	30338	26.33	152
Nigeria	121670	126450	3.92	133899	429281	5647	13310	24	27857216	16.83	148345
Reunion	1093	1246	13.99	1311	3481	86	154	14	311171	19.77	1327
St. Helena	97	107	10.30	111	300	7	5	2	14922	11.20	65
Sao Tome	13	23	76.92	30	108	5	0	1	3797	10.54	69
Senegal	451	481	6.65	507	1447	46	126	14	213108	35.02	995
Seychelles	57	65	14.03	73	220	6	6	1	15111	17.25	89
Sierra Leone	635	639	0.62	708	3184	22	133	30	214028	25.19	1005
R. S. A.	38291	40456	5.65	42509	124234	2511	5196	993	9335298	18.69	41003
Swaziland	860	926	7.67	1003	3419	58	234	44	335418	29.32	1333
Tanzania	2425	2646	9.11	2800	8529	281	491	84	816025	24.28	2657
Togo	2822	3023	7.12	3366	12841	32	268	64	649948	16.09	5949
Tunisia	45	44	-2.22	52	89	3	3	1	6483	10.38	30
Uganda	310	369	19.03	401	2036	53	96	11	146654	30.47	886
Zaire	35680	33430	-6.30	38109	82069	2716	5614	1063	8433065	18.44	47196
Zambia	57624	63281	9.81	67144	381129	4933	6493	1715	12426151	15.42	79384
Zimbabwe	14557	14726	1.16	15448	51925	1119	1506	521	3071855	16.57	13973
<b>Africa Totals</b>	<b>322452</b>	<b>337069</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>360408</b>	<b>1322156</b>	<b>21393</b>	<b>41564</b>	<b>5686</b>	<b>76904778</b>	<b>17.78</b>	<b>428906</b>
<b>World Totals</b>	<b>13063289</b>	<b>3237751</b>	<b>5.69</b>	<b>3395612</b>	<b>8965221</b>	<b>230843</b>	<b>436179</b>	<b>54911</b>	<b>739019286</b>	<b>18.13</b>	<b>3005048</b>

Source: "The Last Days—A Time of Harvest", The Watchtower, 1 January 1988, pp. 13-15.

**Definitions of Selected Terms**

*Publisher ("Pub.")*: A baptized member of the Jehovah's Witness organisation who gives his spare time over to "preaching" for them.

*Memorial*: The Witness celebration commemorating the Last Supper. One does not have to be a full member to attend the celebration, and this gives a good indication of the total number of people affiliated, or at least in sympathy, with the Witnesses in a given location.

*Pioneer publisher ("Pion. Pub.")*: A publisher who becomes a full time worker for the organisation. He may do this on a permanent basis, or for a stipulated period of time (e.g., one month per year).

*Average Hours*: This gives a very rough idea of the number of hours of "preaching" per witness per month in each country. It is obtained by dividing the total number of hours by 12 (for the months) and then again by the number of "peak Publishers" for the year. This is the method used by the Witnesses themselves in determining the average number of hours put in per member each month, though it does not appear to take into account the fact that it includes the hours of both the publishers and the pioneer Publishers (the latter of which, of course, put in more hours).

*Bible Studies*: Actual studies of Witness publications in the homes of potential converts. This figure, as far as I am able to tell, is for the number of actual studies not the number of people involved in the studies.

*Preaching*: (not actually used in the table, but appears in the definitions above) This is not preaching in terms of street preaching, but in terms of going door to door and trying to sell literature. It also includes back calls and Bible Studies but does not appear to include time spent during "in house" activities such as attending weekly talks or services.

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The Witnesses first came to Kenya in 1931 when two of them travelled through Kenya and Uganda distributing literature. In 1937 two teams followed up this initial visit, one of them remaining in Kenya <sup>22</sup> and the other travelling through Uganda and Tanzania. Near the end of their four month stay, the team in Kenya experienced trouble with the colonial authorities and left as a result. <sup>23</sup> Their literature was subsequently banned, and no Witnesses were allowed to enter Kenya as missionaries. This ban, however, did not apply to people who sought entry as settlers who happened to be Witnesses which is how entry into the country was affected. The success of the Witnesses in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) and Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) caused the local Witness leaders to send in two Witness missionaries to Kenya as settlers in 1956. They finally were given official recognition in 1962 shortly before independence. By that time some 150 Europeans had become Witnesses most of them in Nairobi. <sup>24</sup> Official recognition meant that expatriate missionaries could enter Kenya, that house to house canvassing by members of the movement was now legal, and that they could



now approach Africans. By 1972 thirty four expatriate Witness missionaries were in Kenya, and the national movement had grown to 1161 publishers.<sup>26</sup> At that time the movement consisted primarily of young relatively well to do people.<sup>26</sup>

There have been two periods of disruption for the Witnesses since they were first registered in 1962. The first major disruption began in April of 1973 when they were deregistered and banned from the country (the Attorney General reportedly referred to them as "Devil's Witnesses"),<sup>27</sup> and their thirty four expatriate workers were expelled.<sup>28</sup> The ban lasted only until August of the same year when they were reinstated as an officially registered religious group. No reasons for the lifting of the ban were given.

The second disruption to their activity in Kenya started on 16 November 1987 when they were deregistered again. To date they are appealing the deregistration, and it is reported that at least in the Nairobi area they are still actively carrying on their house to house work. To gain an idea of the scope of their activity in 1987 note the following: they averaged slightly more than thirty hours per member per month in their preaching activities during the year, grew by almost 11 per cent, baptised 2281 new members, and conducted an average of 6876 Bible studies. In addition 15,683 attended the annual celebration of Christ's last supper (see Table 1).

Kenya is not the only country in Africa in which the Witnesses have experienced disruptions from the government. They have been banned at various points in time in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Zaire, and Uganda.<sup>29</sup> Why the disruptions? In Kenya during the 1973 deregistration the government stated that it would not tolerate "people who create havoc under the pretext of religion."<sup>30</sup> The Malawian authorities accused the Witness organisation "of being dangerous to the good government of the state".<sup>31</sup> What causes an avowedly apolitical organisation to be banned for apparently political reasons? Possibly because of the particular ways in which their apolitical attitudes are worked out including their refusals to salute any national flag, to become party members, or to purchase political party cards.<sup>32</sup> As Adrian Hastings points out:

Witnesses await the imminent return of Christ to establish the Kingdom; in the meantime they see all governments as an expression of the power of Satan and, while willing to pay taxes and keep the peace, they refuse to participate further in political life - to join a party or vote, to sing the national anthem or salute the flag. It is not surprising that they are unpopular with governments, particularly young governments sensitive to any slight.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to their apolitical orientation, their lack of overt works of charity or development may hurt them in the eyes of political leaders. They run no hospitals, develop no community agricultural projects, and operate no schools for general education- which seems to leave them open to the charge of being a group which refuses to participate in the development of a country.

### Teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses

What do the Jehovah's Witnesses teach? Space does not permit a full presentation of their doctrines which are adequately explained in many books that are readily available. Neither does it permit refutations of the doctrines which do not agree with those of orthodox Christianity. Because our purpose is introductory in nature, we will present some of the basic teachings of the movement and leave to the reader the study of the refutations which will be found in most of the standard works.<sup>34</sup>

First and foremost, the Witnesses deny the normal Christian understanding of the Trinity. In addition to using the argument that the word "trinity" is not found anywhere in the Bible,<sup>35</sup> they consistently represent the Christian doctrine in their literature as though Christendom is either polytheistic or that it teaches that God and Jesus are the same *person*,<sup>36</sup> both of which are easy for them to "refute" scripturally. Part and parcel of their denial of the Trinity is their understanding that Christ is not God. Though they deny the deity of Christ they do acknowledge Him to be "a god" from their translation of John 1:1 which they render: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."<sup>37</sup> Also within the framework of their denial of the Trinity, they deny the person and deity of the Holy Spirit defining Him as "the invisible active force of Almighty God which moves His servants to do His will".<sup>38</sup>

In addition<sup>1</sup> to the denial of the Trinity, the Witnesses deny several other major Christian doctrines. In that sense they may be considered a cult of denial. The doctrinal truths affirmed by the Christian Church which they reject include the following:

1. That Christ was resurrected physically, saying that He was resurrected as a spirit<sup>39</sup>
2. That Jesus was eternally pre-existent, teaching that in His pre-human and post-human form, He is none other than Michael the archangel, a created being<sup>40</sup>
3. That the final return of Christ will be physical, saying that He came spiritually in 1914<sup>41</sup>
4. The doctrine of an eternal Hell, saying that the grave is the final destiny of those who are not saved<sup>42</sup>
5. The immortality of man, saying that man has no soul and can perish into a state of non-existence which is the final result of all who are not part of God's theocratic kingdom manifested through the Jehovah's Witnesses<sup>43</sup>
6. That all believers will enter heaven, saying that heaven is reserved for the 144,000 mentioned in Rev. 7:4-8 - the rest of mankind can only hope for a place in an earthly kingdom which God will establish<sup>44</sup>

7. That a Christian should not give allegiance to any earthly state or government as discussed above.

Two less important yet interesting doctrinal denials may be noted:

1. Blood transfusions are considered taboo, being thought of as "eating blood" which is prohibited in Lev. 17:14<sup>46</sup> and
2. Christmas and Easter are not celebrated, since the modern celebrations are held to be a part of Satan's religion.<sup>46</sup>

In one major doctrine the Witnesses agree with the conservative evangelical; they hold the Bible to be inerrant and infallible in all that it teaches. Unfortunately they feel that the only correct understanding of the Bible is to be found in their own material including their own translation.<sup>47</sup>

#### **The Basic Methodology of the Jehovah's Witnesses**

How do the Witnesses win converts to their movement? They follow a well ordered, seven step sequence, the end of which results in the baptism and consequent full membership of another Jehovah's Witness. These seven steps include: (1) getting to the door and leaving a magazine (2) making a back-call and, if the contact has not yet read the magazine, reading it together (3) getting the contact to agree to be part of an informal Bible study (4) having him come to an area wide meeting led by a Witness instructor (5) getting him to come to the local Kingdom Hall, especially for a discussion meeting after the Sunday talk (6) involving him in starting the work of calling on others (7) bringing him to the stage of full identification with the movement which is culminated in baptism.<sup>48</sup> The whole process may not sound very long or involved, but keep in mind that the 1987 worldwide statistics indicate that an average of 3200 hours of work (steps one through six) occur for each baptism (step seven).<sup>49</sup>

#### **Responding to the Jehovah's Witness**

In light of the above discussion, what should the Christian do when the Jehovah's Witness comes knocking on his door? We offer the following three suggestions.

First, *do not argue* especially over doctrine! The Witness is well versed in his discussion and already has answers for the standard objections that a Christian will offer, especially if that Christian is not well versed himself on the Witnesses positions. Rather than argue allow them to go completely through their material and then simply disregard what they have said. Once they are finished, tell them the personal testimony of how you came to Christ and what He means to you.<sup>50</sup> If you stress anything stress the facts that you have been saved by grace not works, that you have security in your salvation, and that you experience great freedom in Christ.

Second, *politely refuse any literature* from them.<sup>61</sup> *Refusing* the literature blocks their progression at step one in their programme making it difficult for them to feel that they are progressing in bringing you into their fold. Refusing it *politely* hinders them from feeling martyred and thereby thinking that they are gaining favour with God. They may even be curious about your attitude which they probably do not see very often.

Third, if you are interested in discussing genuine issues further, *be prepared to discuss authority* not doctrine with them. The main appeals for many involved in cults, as was pointed out in our previous article,<sup>62</sup> are the appeals of authority, community, commitment, idealism, and experience. If these appeals are countered effectively then the doctrine can be dealt with at a later time. In considering the five appeals of a cult to its members, the appeal of *authority* seems to be the most vulnerable in regard to the Jehovah's Witness. If you seek to deal with doctrine first, you will be attacking only the surface level of the cult member's commitment. Even if you prove him wrong he will only return to his leaders to get better doctrinal arguments to use against you or others who argue like you. His trust in their authority will not be undermined by pure doctrinal discussion. We are not meaning to imply that doctrine is not important – it most certainly is! The point we seek to make here is that a doctrinal attack on a cult member is often the weakest attack that can be made, because it does not deal with the deep rooted spiritual and emotional dynamics that keep that person in the cult.<sup>63</sup> For that reason we suggest the approach of confronting authority as a method of witnessing to a Jehovah's Witness.

The Witness is a member of an organisation which has claimed infallibility<sup>64</sup> and which time has shown to be anything but infallible. The claim of infallibility has given the Watchtower organisation a stranglehold on each member. If that organisation can be shown to be false, or Satanic, or deceptive, then the stranglehold may be broken. In light of this the Christian who wants to reach the Jehovah's Witness for Christ should challenge the authority of the Witness organisation and writings.

In addition to the possible points made concerning the character of Charles Taze Russell above, a challenge on authority should follow some of the arguments in two resources that are readily available, namely Robert A. Morey, *How to Answer a Jehovah's Witness* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1980) and Duane Magnani and Arthur Barrett, *The Watchtower Files: Dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985). Both do an excellent job of laying out a detailed, systematic programme for gently undermining the authority of the Watchtower over its adherents; both include numerous photocopies of the arguments and statements as they appeared in the original Witness publications (which prevent the Witness from believing that your arguments are invented fabrications); both explain clearly how to use the photocopies to show the Witness that his organisation is not as infallible as it appears to him to be.

The basic flow of the argument used in Morey is built around one core idea which shows the Witness that the Watchtower is a false prophet with a corresponding false authority.<sup>65</sup> The first step is to show that the Witness

organisation claims to be a prophet of God. Once that is demonstrated the second step is to examine the Biblical qualifications for a prophet which can be found in Witness material. The Witnesses themselves are fully aware of those Biblical qualifications which include one hundred percent accuracy (from Deut. 18:18-22). This leads to the third step which is to examine the predictions made in Watchtower materials. If any prediction can be shown to be false (such as those concerning the return of Christ in 1887, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925, 1942, and 1975) <sup>56</sup> then the Witness organisation is shown to be a false prophet. Morey gives many examples of such prophecies and leaves it to the Witness to decide for himself their accuracy. We personally recommend Morey's book because, in addition to giving a sensitive but firm approach, it is more affordable than Magnani and Barrett. If you can afford them both, however, do not deny yourself the material they offer.

### Conclusion

What then have we seen in this introduction to the Jehovah's Witnesses? We noted that the character of Russell as the founder of the movement falls far short of being a man of God. We touched on Rutherford's accomplishments as president of the organisation. We pointed out the many areas in which the Witnesses disagree with the Christian Church and the clear teachings of the Bible. Finally we made three suggestions for dealing with a Jehovah's Witness who approaches you.

In conclusion we remind our readers that the average Witness is concerned for you. He fears that you are headed for an eternity of non-existence in the grave and would like you to join him in God's theocratic organisation to be established here on earth. He also fears for himself not having an assurance of his own "salvation". As a result he puts in hours and hours of work each month designed to prove his worth to the organisation. Our responsibility is to love the Witness into the kingdom of Christ, to gently persuade him that he has submitted himself to a false authority, and to show him the freedom and assurance offered freely in Christ. Our hope is that the material presented in this brief article will better equip us to fulfill that responsibility.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The statistics given here are extracted from "The Last Days—A Time of Harvest", *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1988, pp. 13–15.

<sup>2</sup> "Works" as used by the Witnesses refers to their "preaching" endeavours, which include door to door literature distribution, back calls, and studies of Witness materials which are called Bible studies. Note the growth rate in total hours: in 1959 it was 126,317,124; in 1974 it was 371,132,570, and in 1987, as related, it was 739,019,286 a rate of roughly 6.4 per cent per year during that 28 year period. The term "average number of hours per month per Witness" is somewhat misleading as it includes the work of both the normal congregation and the work of the fulltime "pioneer" publishers. See Table 1 in the text for further explanation and the average work per month for other African countries.

<sup>3</sup> The information for Russell's biographical background was extracted from several sources including Anthony A. Hoekema, *Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 9–11; Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults: An Analysis of the Major Cult Systems in the Present Christian Era* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1965), pp. 34–42; Duane Magnani with Arthur Barrett, *The Watchtower Files: Dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1983), pp. 35–56; and Edmund Charles Gruss, *The Apostles of Denial: An Examination and Expose of the History, Doctrines, and Claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (N.P.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 38–52.

<sup>4</sup> C. J. Woodworth and George H. Fischer, *The Finished Mystery* (Brooklyn: International Bible Students Association, 1917), p. 57; cited in Gruss, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> A libel case is one in which the accused is supposed to have made false statements for the purpose of damaging the character or public opinion of a person. The responsibility in such a case rests on the one filing the suit who has to prove in court that the statements made are false. For details on this case see Gruss, pp. 48–9 and Martin, pp. 37–8.

<sup>6</sup> Hoekema, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Gruss, pp. 45–6.

<sup>9</sup> Martin, pp. 35–6, and Hoekema, pp. 12–13.

<sup>10</sup> As reported by Bruce M. Metzger, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ," *Theology Today*, April 1953, pp. 9–11; cited by Hoekema, p. 13. Though not as sensational, the character charges cannot be lightly dismissed. What person knows a man's true character better than his wife? In considering Russell's claims to be a true man of God we cannot neglect the court testimony of

his own wife.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Gerstner, *The Theology of the Major Sects* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 31; though Gruss notes that this charge was never actually proven, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, pp. 36-37, recounts the expose.

<sup>13</sup> Gruss, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *The Watchtower*, 15 September 1922, p. 179; photocopied in Magnani and Barrett, p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> See the fascinating account of William J. Schnell, a former insider, who gives a very negative evaluation of how Rutherford achieved his goals in *30 Years a Watchtower Slave: The Confessions of a Converted Jehovah's Witness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 34-9.

<sup>16</sup> Though note that Gerstner, p. 31, relates that Rutherford "followed his leader in matrimonial infelicity"; see also Schnell's account, pp. 34-9. In addition we note that Olin Moyle, a legal advisor for the society, resigned under Rutherford's leadership because of "Rutherford's poor treatment of the Bethel personnel, his excessive anger, his discrimination, the allowance of 'vulgar speaking and smut,' and the 'glorification of alcohol and condemnation of total abstinence . . ."; cited in Edmund C. Gruss, *We Left Jehovah's Witnesses - A Non-Prophet Organization* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Schnell, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Hoekema, pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> See Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, pp. 56-65 for discussion.

<sup>20</sup> Schnell, pp. 34-5.

<sup>21</sup> Table 1 does not include the countries of Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sahara, Somalia, and Sudan. In most of these countries the Witnesses cannot operate legally, and so they are not listed in the annual report though statistics from them (and other similar countries around the world) are given in lump form in the report under a general category. See the category "37 Other Countries" on p. 15 of "The Last Days".

<sup>22</sup> They primarily came to pass out Witness literature, though we note here that the colonial authorities did not allow literature distribution among the Africans; see Bryan R. Wilson, "Jehovah's Witnesses in Kenya", *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1973) 5: 129.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 133. Publishers are full members of the Witness organisation who in their spare time go house to house selling Witness literature seeking to bring others into the organisation.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-1.

<sup>27</sup> "Church Wants its Fate Clarified", *Daily Nation*, 24 November 1987, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900-2000* (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 436.

<sup>29</sup> Sholto Cross, "Independent Churches and Independent States: Jehovah's Witnesses in East and Central Africa", in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, ed. Edward Fashole-Luke, et al. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 306.

<sup>30</sup> "Church Wants its Fate Clarified", p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> "Jehovah's Witnesses Allowed to Contest Ban", *Daily Nation*, 20 November 1987, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion on this, see Wilson, pp. 145-8. He feels that antagonism of the established mission organisations is another factor which should not be overlooked. For more on the political analysis, see Cross, pp. 304-15.

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Martin, Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, and Hoekema for some basic and fairly thorough treatments. See also the more general approach of James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980).

<sup>35</sup> Though it is pointed out in Magnani and Barrett, pp. 146-9, that theocracy, a favourite word used to describe the Witness organisational approach, is nowhere used in the Bible. Is their organisation thus unbiblical?

<sup>36</sup> For examples of these misrepresentations and a suggested methodology of responding to them, see Magnani and Barrett, pp. 126-45; Martin, pp. 54-63; Hoekema, pp. 45-50; Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, pp. 105-135; and F. W. Thomas, *Masters of Deception: A Christian Analysis of the Anti-Biblical Teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), pp. 4-10.

<sup>37</sup> For discussion of this translation see Hoekema, pp. 129-31; Martin, pp. 61 and 75-77; Sire, pp. 161-3; Magnani and Barrett, pp. 184-206; Thomas, pp.



39-40; Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1983), pp. 59-60; and William J. Schnell *Into the Light of Christianity: The Basic Doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), pp. 178-80.

<sup>38</sup> *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1952), p. 108; cited in Hoekema, p. 26. As a basic refutation (following the argument presented in Magnani and Barrett, pp. 228-231) we note that the Witnesses use a simple logic test to determine whether or not Satan is a personal being. They show how he carries on conversations, is called a liar, and a murderer, and a ruler. Based on this evidence, they conclude that he is an intelligent person. The very same tests, however, can be applied to the Holy Spirit. He is our teacher and comforter (John 16:7, 13); He prays for us (Rom. 8:26-27); He has power (Rom 15:19); He speaks (Rev. 2:7); He can be lied to (Acts 5:3), insulted (Heb. 10:29), and grieved (Eph. 4:30). By applying the same test to the Holy Spirit as the Witnesses do to Satan, we can see that He is a person, just as Satan is.

<sup>39</sup> See Martin, pp. 49 and 89-93.

<sup>40</sup> See Hoekema, pp. 60-1. Their understanding is promulgated by, among other things, a misinterpretation of Christ as "firstborn" in Col. 1:15; see the discussion and refutation in McDowell and Stewart, pp. 50-6.

<sup>41</sup> See Thomas, pp. 85-94.

<sup>42</sup> See Magnani, pp. 102-117.

<sup>43</sup> See Martin, pp. 49-50 and 93-7.

<sup>44</sup> See Schnell, *Thirty Years*, pp. 42-3.

<sup>45</sup> See Magnani, pp. 274-81.

<sup>46</sup> See Magnani, pp. 263-73. They do bring up some very valid points including the uncertainty of the actual date of the birth of Christ, the excesses of the Christmas season, and the pagan origin of many current Christmas and Easter practices.

<sup>47</sup> Note the often quoted statement of Russell: "If the six volumes of 'Scripture Studies' are practically the Bible, . . . we might not improperly name the volumes 'The Bible in Arranged Form.' That is to say they are not mere comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself. Furthermore, . . . we see, also, that if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' aside, even after he has used them, . . . for ten years- if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the 'Scripture Studies' . . . and had not read a page of the Bible as such, he

would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures." From *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1910, p. 298; cited in Martin, p. 41. The discussion on the New World Translation in Gruss, *Apostles of Denial*, 32-3, is also worth reading.

<sup>48</sup> These seven steps are presented in fair detail in Schnell, *30 Years*, pp. 119-131.

<sup>49</sup> This does not mean that it takes 3200 hours to *produce* one full member; those who are baptised are at the end of a chain that may have taken many years to complete. This is simply an indication of the ratio of "hours preaching" to "number baptised" seen in the year 1987.

<sup>50</sup> Recommended by William J. Schnell, *How to Witness to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), pp. 19-21.

<sup>51</sup> Also recommended by Schell, *How to Witness*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>52</sup> A. Scott Moreau, "Introduction to Cults," *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 6:2 (1987), pp.10-11.

<sup>53</sup> In making this statement we are also not meaning to imply that doctrinal arguments can never win over a Jehovah's Witness. Obviously they can, but only by someone extremely well versed in the issues. In addition when the doctrinal approach does work, it does so because the Witness organisation is shown to be a false teacher, and its authority is undercut. That is why we suggest to go straight to the heart of the issue and deal with the authority from the outset.

<sup>54</sup> Note the documentation on this in Magnani and Barrett, 13-24.

<sup>55</sup> For the full arguments and materials consult the books. Morey focuses almost exclusively on this one approach, while Magnani and Barrett take a broader approach by including doctrinal and character analysis.

<sup>56</sup> Photocopies of the original predictions for all but the 1942 date are given in Morey, pp. 41-88; material for the 1942 date is in Magnani and Barrett, pp. 65-8 and 90-6.