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The History and Doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses with Final Reference to Hermeneutical Principles

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THE HISTORY AND DOCTRINE OF JEROMAH'S WITNESSES
WITH FINAL REFERENCE TO HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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June 1951

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PREFACE

The religious group commonly known as Jehovah's Witnesses, is in many respects an enigma. Over a relatively short period of time the group has gained many adherents so that today it is a force that must be reckoned with both religiously and politically. Since the movement has become almost world-wide, the problems this group raises are not only national, but inter-national in scope. This is all the more phenomenal because of the Society's, a) extreme millennialism; b) anti-social attitude, evidenced by attacks on the governments of the world; c) peculiar Biblicism; and d) fanaticism.

Hence the question arises quite naturally, "Just what is the appeal of the Society that so many have joined?" To answer this, we have studied the Society as a whole. We have studied the practices, the history, the methods used by the Society, and the mechanics and organizational procedure. The appeal is not in these, but in the Society's theology that is so appealing to natural man. This we have studied particularly.

To study the Witnesses to try to determine the appeal of the Society, we have had to use chiefly primary sources. Except for a few studies done recently from a sociological basis, most research on the Society is outdated. As far as we know, no one has published a comprehensive study of its

doctrine, hence it was first of all necessary to systematize the doctrine. This could be done only by using the books, magazines, and periodicals published by the Society as its official teaching. We have not covered nearly all of the Society's publications, for besides the immensity of the task, it would have proved quite worthless, for many of its publications are extremely repetitious. Some of its books have become outdated and besides the point for a modern study. We do feel that we have studied a sufficiently large number of the Society's books to present a complete picture of its doctrine, we feel that we have clearly grasped its teachings. Our examination of its theology is on the basis that we have accepted the principle that God's Word must be decisive on all matters of Christian faith. For this we make no apology. Since the Witnesses also claim to accept the Bible as binding and authoritative, our primary concern has been a study of the use the Society makes of the Bible, or a study of the Hermeneutical Principles employed by Witness exegetes.

We have chosen to present the study under three headings: I. The History of Jehovah's Witnesses; II. Jehovah Witness Doctrine; and III. Jehovah Witness Interpretation on the Basis of Hermeneutical Principles.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORY OF THE JEHOVAH WITNESSES

The movement known today as the Jehovah Witnesses is one of the few religious sects whose beginnings are strictly indigenous to America. Practically all denominations, and most cults and sects, trace their origin to European sources. Stroup lists only four that he considers typically American in their origin and development. These are the Mormons, Christian Science, the religion of the American Negro, and Jehovah's Witnesses.¹ The study of the origin of the last named group must deal with the confusing difficulty that it has been known by many names since the founding in 1872. Among these names have been, the Miller-Dawnites, Russellites, Watch Tower Bible People, Rutherfordites, as well as the current name of Jehovah's Witnesses. Russell, the founder, claimed that the members of the organization were to be known only as "Christians".²

The history of the group is not entirely clear. There has never been an official history of the movement published and facts about the organization must be gathered from its Year-Books, references in secular newspapers and magazines,

¹Herbert Stroup, The Jehovah's Witnesses (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 1-2.

²Ibid. p. 3.

and other secondary sources. Many of the followers of the group act as though they had no history, nor does it seem important to them that they are not clear on the matter.³ Enough is known, though, to present a sufficiently complete history.

The founder of the group was Charles Taze Russell. Although the early days of his life are not referred to in the Witnesses' writings, we do know that he was active in the Young Men's Christian Association. The matter of his church affiliation is confused; while some believe that he was a member of the Congregational Church, others believe that he was a Presbyterian.⁴ As a young man he seems to have been troubled with certain doctrines of his church, the doctrine of the inspiration of Scriptures and the doctrine of hell. About the year 1886, while living in Pittsburgh, Russell came into contact with the Seventh Day Adventists and was influenced by their teachings, particularly the theory of annihilation. He later admitted indebtedness to this group, although he admitted indebtedness to many

³Ibid., p. 5.

"Report of International Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Yankee Stadium, New York City), August 2, 1950. p. 4. Hereafter to be referred to simply as the "Report". cf. also C. S. Braden, They Also Believe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 389.

organizations but allegiance to none.⁵ Russell at that time began to formulate the teachings he claimed he gained from Bible study, and soon attracted many followers. No doubt his followers were attached to him because of his dynamic personality, and considered his many strange doctrines as the proclamation of a new prophet. Stroup says: "His natural charm, his seeming broad-mindedness, his devotion to the Bible, his extreme claims, all won him devotees in the early years."⁶ Coupled with his charm was a willingness to meet people and he soon had a sizeable group with him in his work. Then, as now, each member was to witness for the movement so that the growth was rather rapid. At first the members campaigned by handing out tracts to Christians as they left their churches on Sunday mornings. Since many of these tracts were violently anti-clerical, the opposition of the clergy was not long forthcoming. Russell was never one to back away from a fight and soon gained many new converts in his battle with the clergy.⁷

In 1879 Russell began publishing a magazine entitled, Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Coming. A year

⁵Stroup, op. cit., p. 6.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

⁷"Report", August 2, 1950, p. 13.

later his first book, Food for Thinking Christians, appeared. In 1882 one of his books appeared that was to sell over six million copies. This was the Divine Plan of the Ages.⁸ These books were eagerly read by the faithful of the organization and proved to be useful to win others. Already then the members of the organization considered mission work as the most important work in life so that they were militantly mission-minded. In 1884 Russell legally organized the group as Zion's Watch Tower Society.⁹ The work of the home organization was controlled by a board of directors which was completely dominated by Russell, although suffrage was given to all who contributed ten dollars a year, Russell was in absolute control.¹⁰ He must have been a wise leader for by 1901 fifteen men were devoting their full time to the preaching of his message.¹¹ In 1909 the organization was moved to Brooklyn where it was chartered under the name People's Pulpit Association. By 1910 over 1,500 newspapers carried Witness' sermons which proved to be excellent publicity for a group so small.¹²

⁸Ibid.

⁹Braden, op. cit., p. 359.

¹⁰Atroup, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹"Report", August 2, 1950, p. 13.

¹²Ibid., p. 14.

Russell enjoyed meeting people and very often was able to dominate them with his dynamic personality. This was perhaps the reason for much of his success. A man so dynamic would also have some enemies and Russell was no exception. There were, from time to time, schisms within his organization, but none was ever important enough to seriously disturb the Society. In 1909 twenty-nine members of his group left because they claimed he was beginning to sound as though he believed he were inspired.¹³ The greatest schismatic difficulty he met arose from his divorce. His wife, whom he had married in 1879, had been a devoted follower and had contributed much to his work. As time went on she became disgusted with him and asked for a divorce on four grounds:

That his conceit, egotism, and domination were such as to make life intolerable to any sensitive woman; that his conduct in relation to other women was improper; that on occasion he was silent to his wife for four weeks and only communicated with her by letters of a reproachful character; . . . that he sought by most despicable means to isolate his wife from society, and designed to get her pronounced insane in order to put her away.¹⁴

Much was made of the fact that he had been indiscreet in his relations to other women but Stroup feels that nothing conclusive was proved, but that his wife had been able only

¹³Stroup, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁴Ibid.

to suggest that he had not been faithful.¹⁵ She was given a divorce in 1913 and the results to the Society were almost disastrous. Many felt that their leader could not be divinely ordained if he were divorced. He was able to withstand the storm and in a few years became more popular than ever. By 1914 there were 22,304 active witnesses in the field, though not all were full time preachers, nevertheless, the number is substantial.¹⁶

Russell conducted many personal appearance and lecture tours and it was on one of these that he died on October 31, 1916. Many observers believed that the movement would cease with the death of the dynamic and forceful leader, but they counted without the man who had been the legal counsel and was elected leader upon the death of Russell. Approximately 150,000 votes were cast in his election. Rutherford confidently believed that the organization would continue to prosper under his leadership, for he had much self-confidence. It seemed for some time that he was mistaken, for many people who wished to keep the theology of Russell refused to accept the leadership of Rutherford and there were many minor defections from the group. It must be kept in mind that the organization owed its entire exist-

¹⁵Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶"Report", August 2, 1950, p. 14.

once to one man and any man attempting to replace him would naturally encounter much opposition. It is surprising that Rutherford succeeded at all; that he succeeded so well is astounding. The two men were entirely different. While Russell built the organization by means of his personal magnetism, Rutherford hated crowds and tried to keep away from people as much as possible. Russell's strength lay in personal charm and magnetism while Rutherford's lay in argumentation and preaching.¹⁷ Called "Judge" by the faithful followers, Rutherford's life was shrouded in secrecy.

To any contemporary American, the most important factor in the history of the Society, is its strained relations with the governments of the world. Severe political difficulties faced the movement as soon as Rutherford ascended to a position of leadership. At this time, Russell's The Finished Mystery was published posthumously. The whole tenor of the book was one of pacifism and since America was then engaged in the first World War, the leaders of the Society were arraigned on the charge of hampering the war effort and teaching insubordination to the military and naval forces of the United States. The leaders, which the government considered to be the board of directors, were tried and found guilty. Seven of the men were sentenced

¹⁷Braden, op. cit., p. 351.

to prison in Atlanta. A year later they were granted a new trial, but since the war soon came to an end and new trials were expensive to the government, the matter was dropped. On the surface this may have been considered a set-back for the movement, but such was not the case. Rutherford had continued the leadership from his cell and although things may not have run smoothly, the movement prospered. After his release the organization made new strides forward. Rutherford became a martyr to his followers and the Society was soon rejuvenated. In October of 1918 a large rally was held and since that time Jehovah Witnesses have been a force in America. While their growth has not been spectacular, it has been rapid so that churchmen and the government must recognize it.¹⁸

Under Rutherford the Witnesses were very active. Rutherford was tremendously active behind the scenes of the organization. One of the areas of activity was his radio work. He made many radio speeches criticising organized Christianity, or as he called it, the "religionists". His special target was the Roman Catholic Church. When his attacks became too vitriolic, some of the stations refused to give him time. He then claimed this was persecution and became all the more vicious in his attacks in the remaining areas of publicity. All of this made him popular with a large

¹⁸Stroup, op. cit., p. 17.

segment of the American population. Rutherford was a prolific writer. In 1940 he claimed that he had written ninety-nine books and pamphlets in the preceding twenty years.¹⁹ His books, like his radio addresses, were often nothing more than argument after argument heaped together and couched in legal phrases. He claimed no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew although he would often quote words and phrases in either language to prove a point. More often he would quote from some other translation of the Scriptures if the King James Version did not suit his particular need. He was also probably active in the publishing of the Society's magazines, although this cannot be proved for the articles in the magazines are anonymous. Much of the private life of the man is shrouded in mystery, not even his followers knew him well. To the followers he was the leader with almost absolute power; nothing more was known, nothing more required. He was respected by all his followers but loved by few, for few knew him intimately. He set up such an efficient organization under the direction of the Brooklyn headquarters, that when he died there was little or no change in procedure. His death occurred on January 8, 1942 and he was succeeded by N. H. Knorr who had been the vice-president. Stroup ascribes much to Rutherford when he says:

¹⁹Ibid., p. 18.

Rutherford's death closed the second cycle in the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The organization which Pastor Russell founded and enlarged into a world-wide business was consolidated and augmented by the Pastor's militant successor. It has been strong enough to survive the death of Leader No. II, and to carry on.²⁰

Concerning Brother Knorr, Braden thinks that he conducted the business of the Society for some time before the death of Rutherford while Rutherford was ill at the Society's home at San Diego, California.²¹ Of the three leaders, Bach says that the first two considered themselves amanuenses of Jehovah. He typifies Russell with the word "Scandal", Rutherford with "Mystery", and Knorr with "Silence".²²

Knorr is well typified by the word "silence", as he makes few personal appearances. He is known only because at the annual convention of the Society he is one of the main speakers. As Rutherford, he refuses to grant interviews to anyone outside the organization.²³ Stroup relates how he was repeatedly rebuffed when he wanted to get information unless he was really "interested in the truth".²⁴ The organization is completely authoritarian and the average

²⁰Ibid., p. 20.

²¹Braden, op. cit., p. 363.

²²Marcus Bach, They Have Found a Faith (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1940), p. 28.

²³Braden, op. cit., p. 364.

²⁴Stroup, op. cit., p. 24.

Witness is not expected to decide on any matter of importance; he is merely expected to be a good Witness and obey. The average Witness is not permitted to give out information to non-members. Stroup's experience is a case in point. He wanted to gather firsthand information on the reasons why the Society was persecuted. In reality, his interest was a real concern for the rights of a minority group. In this endeavor he had received the support of the Civil Liberties Union which was also interested in seeing that the Society received fair treatment. All this was known to the Society. Nevertheless the Society refused to cooperate with him since the members felt that he would be unfair to them and would give them no real help.²⁵ His book is nevertheless very useful for he spent much time studying the Society in the local groups and saw exactly how they operated.

From the beginning the Society was entirely under the absolute leadership of a single man. The organizational setup may be compared to that of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Although the Society is a bitter enemy of the Roman Church, nevertheless it has copied the Roman Church government most effectively. The president of the organization is in control of the Board of Directors, the Board selects six

²⁵Stroup, op. cit., p. iv.

regional servants whose task it is to oversee the work of the Society. These regional directors are in charge of the zone servants of whom there are 154. These men, corresponding to the bishops of a hierarchical system of church government, control each local group which is called a "company". Each company meets in a building called a "Kingdom Hall". As soon as a company has over 200 members a new company is started. Each company is controlled by the company servant who must make reports to the headquarters and to whom the Society orders are sent.²⁶ Each local company also has a number of men active in the affairs of the local community, chief of whom are the publishers, who must make calls on prospective members and witness to the theocracy. A pioneer publisher is a full time worker who does the witness work on a full time basis. These pioneer publishers are further subdivided into classes known as the special pioneers and the general pioneers. The special pioneer must do 175 hours of service a month for which he receives twenty-five dollars allowance. He must make at least fifty calls and can be sent anywhere in the world to do his work. The general pioneer works 150 hours a month, selects his own place of work, and receive ten dollars a month. It is small wonder that the Society has a difficult time to hold its

²⁶Braden, op. cit., pp. 264-265.

workers, as the publishers find it extremely difficult to live adequately on such meager pay.²⁷ We have listed the organizational setup to show the complete loyalty shown to the Society on the part of the workers.

For many years the educational system was quite haphazard. Society members were educated only by means of the periodicals published by the Society and by meetings held to bring information from the leaders. This was not wholly successful for at times the Witnesses were not too well trained to argue and to witness. To remedy that situation, a school was established to train workers for the Society. Such a procedure would have shocked Russell who abhorred such "religionist practices". The graduates are ordained for the work, they are even called "ministers" which also would have been met by stern opposition from Russell.²⁸ The specified purpose of each minister is not to convert the world, his purpose is rather to witness to the theocracy of Jehovah. Consequently, statistics of numbers won are unimportant. Only those who work for the Society are listed in their official publications.²⁹ Because many of the workers work only as Witnesses on a part-time basis, it is also

²⁷Ibid., p. 367.

²⁸Stroup, op. cit., p. 121.

²⁹Let God Be True (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1946), p. 216.

very difficult to determine the number of workers active at present. In the summer of 1950, at the Society convention in New York, 3,381 people were baptized. Since baptism is considered to be a symbol or a rite of initiation this would mean that at least that many were accepted into the organization in 1950.³⁰ In the report to that convention it was stated that a total of 317,877 publishers were active.³¹ This might be considered to be an abnormally high figure but it must be remembered that not all publishers engage in their work on a full-time basis. The whole tenor of the report seems to indicate that the Society is experiencing difficulty in keeping its publishers.³² Publishers were active in 1950 in 32 countries, including the following: in Germany there were 51,000; in Denmark, 4,873; in Chile there were 428; in Argentina there were 1,277; in Cuba 7,000 were active; Mexico had 8,000; Italy 1,182; Poland had 20,000; and the Philippine Islands had 9,671.³³ Over a million and a half subscribe to the Society's chief magazine, the Watchtower, and this is considered to be the number of adherents.³⁴

³⁰"Report", August 2, 1950, p. 13.

³¹Ibid., p. 11.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., pp. 14-15.

³⁴Ibid., p. 11.

One of the chief reasons for the Society's growth is the widespread dissemination of its magazines and books. When Rutherford became leader, his argumentative style proved to serve the Society in good stead. He was considered to be inspired by many of his followers and although he disclaimed actual inspiration, he did believe that he was Jehovah's instrument in bringing the truth to the world and that anyone who doubted this must be of the devil.³⁵ Perhaps the most popular book ever written by Rutherford was The Harp of God,³⁶ but that was merely one of many. Over a half billion Bibles, books, magazines, and periodicals have been distributed by the faithful. These books were never sold but each Witness was billed for them and was permitted to accept contributions for them. Many of the books were cheaply printed and the usual contribution was twenty-five cents. In this way the teachings of the Society were spread over the world. One of the most common ways of the Society to bring its message has been by the means of recordings. Recordings were made of some of the speeches of Rutherford and taken from house to house by the publishers in an attempt to get the householder to listen. Each accompanied

³⁵J. F. Rutherford, Riches (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1936), p. 16.

³⁶J. F. Rutherford, The Harp of God (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1921).

one of the Witnesses on such a trip and expresses much doubt as to the effectiveness of such a procedure. He reports that it was awkward to get people to listen and if they did listen they heard only the Harvard accented voice of Rutherford speaking in unintelligible language.³⁷ One gets the impression that since the death of Rutherford, this practice has stopped among the Witnesses and their approach is much more personal and direct. Another reason for this might be a rather apparent desire on the part of the Society to minimize the work of any one man, for today even the Society's books are published anonymously.

One of the chief ways in which the faithful are given a new impetus to do the work of the Kingdom is through the annual conventions held by the Society. The first convention was held in 1893 and since 1918 the meetings have usually been held yearly. At a local Kingdom Hall, Stroup heard a leader urge attendance at a convention, intimating that those who did not attend were "doubtful members of the body of Christ."³⁸ Such urgings would perhaps explain the abnormally large attendance at their meetings, e.g., 115,000 attended the St. Louis convention in 1941 and 85,000 attended the New York convention of 1950. The faithful usually

³⁷Bach, op. cit., p. 47.

³⁸Stroup, op. cit., p. 21.

hear speeches by the leaders who attempt to spur them on to new heights in witnessing for Jehovah. These conventions have also been the cause of much trouble the Society members have had with the American public. In the early days many of the members carried canes for their protection and the leaders at times had difficulty in finding cities that would accomodate them, fearing uprisings with the local populace. Nor has mob interference been confined to the conventions. As early as 1937, in Newark, New Jersey, one hundred witnesses were jailed because they were considered dangerous. In 1940 there was mob violence at Little Rock, Arkansas and many were injured. At Grinnell, Iowa, in 1942, a mob attacked a Witness trailer camp and destroyed much property.⁵⁹ Much of the animosity against the Witnesses is due to their refusal to join the armed forces of the United States and to salute the flag, which they consider an idolatrous practice. In time of war, this naturally incites hatred on the part of many American citizens. The charge is often made that the Witnesses suffer from a persecution complex and perhaps the charge has merit. Although the instances of actual persecution and mob violence are a blot on American justice, it is also true that the Witnesses have magnified these instances out of all proportion. When a door is slammed in the face of a

⁵⁹Bach, op. cit., p. 24.

witness, this is listed as persecution. When a person disagrees with them in a religious argument the Witnesses are happy, for they feel that they are being hated for the truth's sake.⁴⁰ The witnesses do not consider themselves as citizens of any country but God's country, hence any laws of a country do not apply to individual Witnesses. They consider their position in any country that of a foreign ambassador with diplomatic immunity. This naturally leads to much trouble with the courts of the country.⁴¹

The question arises as to the future of the organization. Their steady and solid growth in the past tends to make one believe that the Society will continue to grow, perhaps at a more rapid rate. Negroes are being accepted since Rutherford's death and the Society is making appeals to the Jew.⁴² We may also expect them to grow because of the leadership. While the leaders are not outstanding men, they seem to be capable men. They are following in the tradition of Rutherford but evidently are not averse to using new methods of witnessing. The Society publications are better written, the style is better, the format neater,

⁴⁰Stroup, op. cit., p. 91. and Bach, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴¹Let God Be True, p. 229.

⁴²Stroup, op. cit., pp. 34, 80. and "The Witnesses Hear The Word", Life, XXIX (August 14, 1950), 32-33.

and the content is not as anti-Roman Catholic as was the case under Rutherford.⁴³ The Society's emphasis today is not to magnify the importance of one man as was the case when Russell and Rutherford were in the position of leadership. The Society is more concerned with public opinion and in making a good impression on the American public.⁴⁴ Because the role of each individual leader is minimized, there is less chance for internal troubles, a situation which confronted Rutherford almost continuously.⁴⁵ With all of this there is a certain refinement that was unknown to Rutherford, and while this would appeal to some members and to some on the outside of the organization, the ruggedness of Rutherford's appeal must be considered largely responsible for much of the earlier growth. The American public seems also to be viewing the Society in a different light today than formerly. For many years the Society was considered dangerous at least unworthy of any respect. As late as 1946 Dan Gilbert wrote a booklet severely condemning the Society for its communistic leanings. He regarded them

⁴³Rutherford, *Riches*, pp. 30-31. This book is one of the examples of Rutherford's violent anti-Romanism, containing over one hundred-twenty references to the Roman hierarchy.

⁴⁴"Report", *Passim*.

⁴⁵Stroup, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

as traitors.⁴⁶ We feel that theological reasons made him judge the Society uncharitably for the Society has suffered much under the communistic Governments. Stroup feels that Marx would call the Society a good example of "opiate for the masses".⁴⁷ At the conclusion of the New York convention in 1950 three of the more popular American magazines gave the Society an excellent report and commended it for its orderliness. The magazines also sympathized with the Society for its troubles with the American courts and expressed the hope that the American people would regard the Society in the future as a legitimate religious organization.⁴⁸ If such opinions should become the rule of the American press, it will be interesting to note what effect this will have on the attitude of the Society over against the American public. Perhaps they may attempt to curry public opinion more in the future and become less vitriolic.

To gain a clear insight into the future of the Society, we must study the appeal the Society has for the American public. Stroup lists the following reasons for the popu-

⁴⁶Dan Gilbert, Jehovah's Witnesses (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1946), Passim.

⁴⁷Stroup, op. cit., p. 89.

⁴⁸"The Witnesses Hear The Word", op. cit., pp. 32-3
 "Waiting for Armageddon", Time, LXI (August 14, 1950), 67.
 "Safe From Hades", Pathfinder, LVII (August 25, 1950), 40.

larity the Society today enjoys: some join the movement because of mental troubles; some are responsive to the Society's claims of purity; many have joined because of the failure of local congregations to care for their spiritual charges; some have sympathy for any oppressed group and join to make common cause with it; the stern theology appeals to some, even to many infidels with a Biblical background; a few social outcasts are drawn to the movement; and the authoritarian procedures, producing extreme reliance on leaders, undoubtedly attracts some.⁴⁹ The doctrines of the Society have a tremendous appeal to natural man and as long as the theology remains somewhat constant we may expect growth in the Society. It shall be the purpose of the second chapter to analyze the Society's doctrines and the appeal these doctrines have for natural man will be noted.

⁴⁹Stroup, op. cit., pp. 92-94.

CHAPTER TWO

DOCTRINE OF THE JEHOVAH WITNESSES

Every system of theology or philosophy must concern itself with two major principles, the formal and the material principles. The formal principle deals with the source of the doctrines or teachings while the material principle concerns itself with the central point or core idea of doctrine, in the light of which the entire system must be viewed and evaluated. The Jehovah Witnesses claim that their formal principle is the Bible. It shall be the purpose of our third chapter to study this claim while this chapter shall confine itself with the material principle. The Society's material principle is the doctrine of the Theocracy which affects the entire body of its tenets and beliefs. The Society holds that the Theocracy is the government of the world by Jehovah through His chief agent, Christ. All of the events in history and also the Scriptures are to be interpreted in the light of Jehovah's rule. Historic events are merely vindications of the name of Jehovah and man must recognize that if he would have blessings. It is man's chief duty to bear testimony to this theocratic government by witnessing.¹ According to Witness theology, the formal princi-

¹J. F. Rutherford, Theocracy (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1941) p. 28-56.

ple must be interpreted in the light of the material principle. Thus, for instance, the atonement itself is not important, its importance lies in the fact that it was an unfolding of the will of Jehovah and an unfolding of God's plan for His church, the elect. It shall be the purpose of this chapter to review the doctrines of the Society in the light of its teaching on the Theocracy. We shall attempt to systematize the doctrine without repeated reference to Scriptural proofs. We must stress the fact that this thesis is primarily not concerned with refutation but with analyzing and systematizing. Such analysis is not always easy for the Witnesses have no official dogmatics, their teachings must be culled from their many books and periodicals. Any attempt to systematize under such circumstances runs the very real danger of over-simplification. It must also be borne in mind that it is impossible for the writer to be purely objective and impersonal, a Lutheran cannot be perfectly objective when another interpretation of Scriptures and especially another interpretation of Christ is given, than the one that is his by faith. Recognizing the problems, we shall attempt to analyze the Jehovah Witnesses doctrines.

Jehovah Witness doctrine is based on the premise that for centuries the world lay in ignorance of the Theocracy, which, they claim, is true Christianity. The Witnesses believe that Christ knew the truth and that His immediate fol-

lowers knew it, but that it was soon lost until Russell and Rutherford resurrected it from the grave of error. The Report to the 1950 Witness convention states:

As the years progressed these Christians came to a clearer understanding of many fundamental doctrines which had been lost sight of since the day of fusion religions, A.D. 325 and thereafter. They learned that hell as a place of torment was a devilish doctrine not taught in the Bible, that religion's Trinity was not supported by the Scriptures, that man does not possess an immortal soul, but that those of the church company must seek immortality as a prize, that purgatory is unscriptural, that salvation is only through the ransom sacrifice of Christ Jesus, and that God is not responsible for the woes which affect mankind.²

These are extravagant claims, they go against the tradition of centuries of Christian thought and doctrine. Aware of this, both Russell and Rutherford disclaimed the right of tradition to speak on any religious matter. They claimed that they were the first after many centuries to understand clearly the Biblical doctrines. Witness books abound with Biblical quotations; the Witnesses are extreme Biblicists. But while claiming to be true Bible students, the Witnesses unblushingly place a high emphasis on reason. On the basis of Isaiah 1:18, "Come, now and let us reason together, saith the Lord.", they claim that the Bible does not ex-

²"Report of International Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses" (Yankee Stadium, New York City), August 2, 1950, p. 13.

pect us to believe anything contrary to or above reason.³

The Witnesses believe that the chief teaching of the Bible is that Jehovah is God. In an attempt to keep the Unity of God pure they have fallen into the errors of Arius and Nestorius and have denied the Trinity. They believe that God is uni-personal and since the doctrine of the Trinity is unreasonable, God cannot be three persons. Such must be the case for the name Jehovah means, "the self-existing one". This Jehovah, according to Rutherford, possessed four great attributes, justice, power, love, and wisdom. Since the Son and Holy Spirit did not possess these attributes, they are not God.⁴ This teaching of the Jehovah occupies much space in the Witness books. They believe that all who honor the Son even as they honor the Father are guilty of idolatry.⁵ Much emphasis is laid on the fact that the term "Trinity" does not occur in Holy Writ, consequently, they believe that it cannot be "the chief doctrine of the Christian religion".⁵ Such an argumentum e silentio must be rejected for by the same token the Theocracy would be un-Biblical, for one looks in vain for the term in the Scriptures.

³Evolution Versus the New World (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1950), p. 35.

⁴J. F. Rutherford, The Harp of God (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1921), p. 14.

⁵Let God Be True, (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1945), p. 83.

We also reject the assertion that the doctrine of the Trinity is the material principle of the Christian religion, that principle is the doctrine of justification by faith which is certainly found throughout the Scriptures. The Witnesses claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery, causes confusion, and since God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), the doctrine is false.⁶

It must be remembered that anyone who has any conception of the "wholly otherness" of God must know that God cannot be logically understood by finite man. Any attempt to disprove the Trinity must deal with many Scriptural passages which show clearly that Christ and the Holy Spirit are God. One of these we shall mention at this time: "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30). In dealing with such passages the Witnesses insist that one must remember "Get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7).⁷ That this passage refers in no way to the deity of Christ is simply ignored.

Jehovah Witnesses teach that Jehovah created the world with the purpose that He be served. To carry out this purpose Jehovah created the Logos and Lucifer and gave each a definite sphere of influence. To Lucifer was given control of the world. But he became evil and attempted to set up a

⁶Ibid., p. 81-2.

⁷Let God Be True, p. 85.

kingdom in opposition to Jehovah. For this purpose he tempted Adam to sin through Eve, and then successfully thwarted Jehovah's plan that Adam serve Jehovah only. Lucifer was now able to subdue the entire world unto himself. His main weapon consisted in lies, as Christ pointed out, when He called the devil the father of lies. He is the author of all lies, especially the lies of the religionists, notably the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, hell, and the Trinity. The devil today still has control over the religious organizations and governments of the world. But the doom of the devil was spelled in the invisible return of Christ in 1918. After Armageddon Christ will finally conquer the devil and consign him to complete extinction.⁸ This teaching is basic for the entire system of the Jehovah Witnesses.

Man was created in Jehovah's plan to serve Him. Adam and Eve had a wonderful paradise in which to serve God, but Eve sinned and God's justice demanded that she be cast out of Eden, away from the tree of life. Adam was on the horns of a dilemma, either he could follow God's command to replenish the earth or he could remain loyal to Jehovah. Since Adam was more interested in being with his wife, he left Jehovah. Through his sin, Adam lost the only valuable thing

⁸Sp. E. Mayer, Jehovah's Witnesses (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), pp. 11-3.

he possessed, the right to live. Because Adam chose to live with his wife as a husband, he lost the right to live for Jehovah.⁹ The Witnesses believe that there can be no actual punishment for sin, especially not an eternal punishment. They maintain that such a teaching is unreasonable since it is contrary to the love of God,¹⁰ and it is unBiblical since man has no soul.¹¹ Man has no soul, he is a soul.¹² Because man through Adam has lost the right to live, he must be ransomed from the power of the Devil and regain that right. This ransoming was accomplished by Christ. As one reads Witness literature, one is struck by many well-chosen statements concerning the work of Christ. The Witnesses hold that Christ made it possible for man to live by redeeming man, that the Devil's powers were overthrown, that man is God's child through the work of Christ. All of this sounds as being in the best Christian tradition, but these teachings must be subjected to closer scrutiny. First of all it must be remembered that when the Witnesses speak of Christ they make no reference to the eternal Christ, but rather to a Christ who was the first of God's creations. His original function was to serve as Jehovah's agent to carry out

⁹Rutherford, The Harp of God, pp. 35-7.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹Ibid., p. 44.

¹²Let God be True, pp. 60-1.

Jehovah's plans for the Theocracy. Though Christ is called "god" in the Scriptures, this must be understood to mean that there are many gods, but only one God, who is Jehovah. The angel that spoke to Mary said that Christ was to be called the son of the Highest. That did not mean that He was to be God, but simply that He would be called god as a manner of speaking.¹³

Christ was born to Mary in fulfillment of promise. When God's judgment was placed upon Adam and the whole human race, this judgment was irrevocable. The judgment, therefore, had to be balanced with a like amount of mercy, which was personified in Christ. By man's physical death God's justice was completely satisfied, but if man was to live again, Christ had to come.¹⁴ Another man, the exact equivalent of Adam, had to ransom the world by volunteering his life although he had gained the right to live for himself. He had to pay the exact price, for the essence of the law is perfect payment, a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. To be exactly like Adam, Christ had to be a pure man; half-God and half-man would not have satisfied Jehovah, for Adam was all man.¹⁵ Christ could have produced a race of perfect people who would have served

¹³Ibid., pp. 37-8.

¹⁴Rutherford, The Harp of God, p. 122.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 129-30.

Jehovah eternally on this earth, but this Christ did not choose to do, for Jehovah's plan was that Christ should be a substitute for man and thus become an asset to him by regaining the right to live for man. Christ stayed on the earth for a short time after His resurrection because the earth had been the scene of His death and it was only fair that the earth should get a glimpse of His glory. His body after the resurrection was an entirely different body for His followers did not even recognize Him.¹⁶ When He ascended, the human body was removed from the divine but it did not decay. Rutherford says: "We can only assume that the Lord may have preserved it somewhere to exhibit to the people in the Millennial Age."¹⁷ After the resurrection Christ was exalted and the anonymous author of Let God be True claims that this proves that Christ was not God or Jehovah would not have had to exalt Him.¹⁸ He presented this "right to life" to Jehovah as a ransom, i.e., Christ did not make use of His right to live on this earth but gave it up so that Jehovah could apply it to others instead. Thus Christ redeemed man not by His death but by His life, for that was what Jehovah required, that was what Adam had forfeited.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁸Let God be True, p. 101.

His death was simply a manifestation of the fact that He understood Jehovah's plan for the world.¹⁹

It would take us far beyond the scope of this thesis to critically analyze all that the preceding paragraphs contain, but it could quite readily be done. We have simply attempted to synthesize the Witness doctrine concerning Christ. As refutation we simply refer to the book of Hebrews where Christ is pictured as the perfect sacrifice for Divine punishment. The book of Colossians refers repeatedly to the fact that Christ was true God, as do the Gospels, especially John. The entire themes of Romans and Galatians refute the Witness doctrine of the ransom. The Witnesses speak of being redeemed by Jehovah but their doctrine is the crassest work-righteousness, e.g., the following steps are listed as being essential to becoming a child of God: consecration (a work of meritless man, having no reference to the work of Christ), justification (supposedly accomplished by a Christ who was not God), and acceptance of the Lord (without any regard to the person of the Holy Spirit). Furthermore, man must after those three steps continue to joyfully obey God's commandments if he would have understanding and appreciation of the truth of God's Word.²⁰ Accord-

¹⁹ Rutherford, The Harp of God, p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 194.

ing to Witness theology the primary work of Christ was to vindicate Jehovah, His foreign work was to redeem man. Such teaching is absolutely contrary to Scripture. The Witnesses define faith as a belief in the right to live.²¹ Another unChristian definition is given by Rutherford: "To have a knowledge of Jehovah's purpose as expressed in His Word, the Scriptures, and then to confidently rely upon the Word of God."²² We note that Rutherford defines faith without so much as a reference to Christ or His work! It is small wonder that Stroup reports that the only time he heard the Word "Christ" in the local Kingdom Hall meetings was when prayers were ended in His name.²³ Great emphasis is laid on the meaning of "Jehovah" by the Witnesses. But it is strange that they have missed entirely the Septuagint translation of the Yahveh, which is always Kyrios, the term applied to Christ by the Apostles. Andrews makes the striking comment that many passages referring to Jehovah in the Old Testament were applied to Christ by the New Testament Apostles. (Acts 2:21; 9:14; 10:36; 22:16).²⁴ Any person

²¹Let God be True, p. 94.

²²J. F. Rutherford, Riches (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1936), pp. 136-7.

²³Herbert Stroup, The Jehovah's Witnesses (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), p. 33.

²⁴Elias Andrews, The Meaning of Christ for Paul (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 138.

who would accept the Witness doctrine would necessarily be unsure of his faith for according to the Witnesses some "are beyond redemption by Christ's blood."²⁵ Such teaching is a mockery of the real worth of Christ and makes objective comment almost impossible. We close our discussion of the person and work of Christ with the obvious conclusion that Witness doctrine, though it claims to be Biblical, makes Christ a worthless Christ and of no avail to sinful man.

The work of Christ becomes all the more confusing when man's relationship to God is considered. Since Christ has made it possible for man to live, the major part of salvation depends on man. Life in the Theocracy is obtained by the following steps: repentance, justification, spirit-begetting, and consecration. The first essential is that man desire to know the Lord and His will and then try to do His will. It is at this point that the ransom theory is applied. Christ has deposited His right to live with Jehovah. He can and does dispose of it upon those whom He will if they first of all approach Jehovah in repentance. These are then justified by the following involved process:

- 1) Man must have faith in God and His promise. Faith must be proved and exercised by surrender to God.
- 2) Man then receives Christ's merit, i.e., the right to live, and is pre-

²⁵Let God be True, p. 287.

sented to Jehovah. 3) Jehovah determines that the one presented is right or that his desire to come under the theocratic government of Jehovah is genuine. The time for accepting this plan is fast running out and man must soon make the choice for Jehovah will not make the plan available much longer. As soon as man accepts the plan, he grows until he too has acquired the right to live for himself; he then is in a class with Christ. He is part of the body of Christ, he too has a right to reign, he is a member of the mystery class of the 144,000. But such people voluntarily give up their right to live on this earth, as did Christ. They substitute the right to live on this earth for a spirit life which is on a higher plane for it is with Jehovah in heaven. Since they have given up their right to live, Jehovah can use it substitutionally for others. Thus, there is not one Redeemer, but 144,001 redeemers. This mystery class is now ruling with Christ in heaven and this is their reward for relinquishing the right to live on earth.²⁶ Such a doctrine clearly destroys entirely the work of Christ as Scripture teaches and as the Christian Church has always believed.

The mystery class is also referred to as the Jahu class, named after the Old Testament King. But not all men are

²⁶Rutherford, The Harps of God, pp. 195-200.

said to come under this classification. Only the mystery class will receive immortality in heaven and all other men fall into one of three classes. 1) The Old Testament believers cannot attain the status of the mystery class, because they lived before Christ gained the ransom. They will become rulers and make up the visible part of the kingdom on earth. These men will be raised after Armageddon and will be instructed in the newer revelations. They will be apprised of the teachings of Russell and Rutherford so that they will be able to rule effectively. A palace has been readied for them in San Diego, California.²⁷ 2) The Jonadab class includes the people of good will who are not quite good enough to reach the Jehu class. They will be given the rejuvenated "new earth" and will be told to replenish it after Armageddon. In this "new earth" there will be no shame or pain connected with child-birth or the begetting of children, and therefore, as Bach relates, some of the faithful have decided to postpone having children until that time.²⁸ 3) The final class includes those who had no opportunity to learn of the ways of Jehovah while on earth. Because the Devil is in control of the world, some men, who otherwise

²⁷This Means Everlasting Life (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1950), pp. 295-8.

²⁸Marcus Bach, They Have Found a Faith (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), p. 44.

would believe, never get a chance to hear Jehovah's witness. That chance will be given them after Armageddon. If they reject it at that time, they will be destroyed with total extinction along with the Devil and those who rejected the witness while they were alive.²⁹

Witness theology has proclaimed that there have been three dispensations or systems of laws and governments since the fall. Immediately after the fall the government of the world was commended to the angels. But they failed completely by marrying the daughters of the sons of men, therefore God destroyed the first era or dispensation with a flood. In the "second world" Lucifer was given control. Jehovah kept only His people, the Jews. The Devil made great gains even among the Jews so Jehovah, in 606 B.C., gave them into the Devil's powers also.³⁰ The third dispensation began in 1914 when Christ was put in control.³¹ After the Devil was deprived of his powers, he started all the trouble he could by starting wars in heaven and on earth but he again was defeated so that in 1918 Christ returned to the earth in an invisible parousia.³² The work of con-

²⁹Mayer, op. cit., pp. 27-9.

³⁰Let God be True, p. 244.

³¹Mayer, op. cit., p. 6.

³²Rutherford, Theocracy, p. 39.

temporary Witnesses is to make this return known to the world and to warn the world of the approaching Armageddon which will be the great and final attempt of the Devil to set up a kingdom in opposition to Jehovah. In this battle the Devil will be decisively defeated and then will be consigned to total extinction. Bach says that the common people among the Witnesses expect Armageddon in 1972.³³

We note especially that in their entire eschatological system, the Witnesses make no reference to hell as being a place of torment, rather they vehemently deny that such a place exists. Their reasons, which we shall discuss at greater length in our final chapter, are chiefly that such a doctrine mitigates against man's reason and God's love.³⁴ We categorically deny the legitimacy of placing reason on such a high plane. Their reference to the love of God is unwarranted, because it does not take into consideration the holiness of God, nor the work of Christ as man's Redeemer in His vicarious death. It is on this point that the entire dogmatic system of the Witnesses must be rejected for their Christ is a worthless Christ. The entire theological system is therefore contrary to Scripture. All of their doctrinal errors have their root in the fact that the

³³Bach, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁴Rutherford, The Harp of God, p. 47.

Witnesses have overlooked completely the meaning of the atonement. With that in mind we shall discuss the hermeneutical principles applied by the Society as our final chapter.

As we have seen, the Witnesses claim that all of their doctrines are taken from Scripture. We have shown in our previous chapters that the Witness doctrine does not agree with accepted biblical theology. Honesty demands that the Witness claim be studied to determine its correctness. To do that properly we have chosen to investigate the hermeneutical principles employed by the Witnesses, for then only can we determine whether their exegesis is correct or not. Hermeneutics may be simply defined as the theory of interpretation.¹ Now who study any piece of literature must follow hermeneutical principles whenever they attempt to determine the exact meaning of written words. Terry says: "Biblical Hermeneutics is a department of General Hermeneutics and . . . calls in the main for application of general principles required in the interpretation of all literature."² Biblical Hermeneutics, though, must be distinguished from general hermeneutics be-

¹Martin Franzmann, "Hermeneutical Essays," Seaside Theological Monthly, XIX (1948), 586.

²William Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, c.1897), p. 140.

CHAPTER III

JEHOVAH WITNESS INTERPRETATION TESTED ON THE BASIS OF HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES

Jehovah Witnesses claim that all of their doctrines are taken from Scripture. We have shown in our previous chapters that the Witness doctrine does not agree with accepted Biblical theology. Honesty demands that the Witness claim be studied to determine its correctness. To do that properly we have chosen to investigate the hermeneutical principles employed by the Witnesses, for then only can we determine whether their exegesis is correct or not. Hermeneutics may be simply defined as the theory of interpretation.¹ Men who study any piece of literature must follow hermeneutical principles whenever they attempt to determine the exact meaning of written words. Terry says: "Biblical Hermeneutics is a department of General Hermeneutics and . . . calls in the main for application of general principles required in the interpretation of all literature."² Biblical hermeneutics, though, must be distinguished from general hermeneutics be-

¹Martin Franzmann, "Hermeneutical Essays," Concordia Theological Monthly, XIX (1948), 595.

²Milton Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, c.1890), p. 143

cause of the nature of the thing with which it must deal, the revelation of the speaking God. The principles we shall discuss in this chapter might well be applied to any piece of literature, from the classics of antiquity to the popular magazine of today, but the dynamic of Scriptures must never be forgotten or overlooked. Anyone can acquire certain words skills, but true interpretation of the Scriptures is a gift of the Holy Spirit, a charisma. God not only spoke in the Scriptures but He still speaks, we not only have a record of revelation, but revelation. Man must let the Word speak as it is in truth, the Word of God. Either the Scriptures speak to man or man is antagonistic to the Author. The Scriptures are never accepted as a half-truth, but wholly and entirely as God's Word. Men must not only suspend judgment in dealing with God's Word, but even renounce their judgment.³ It is the Word that brings life to a Christian, the Word must be treated properly by those who would have that life. Franzmann says:

The church that has the Word is impregnable; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And it is the sole business of Hermeneutics to see to it that we really have the Word that spells life.⁴

³Franzmann, op. cit., p. 739.

⁴Ibid., p. 396.

The plea is often made that man must be unbiased about the Scriptures. In a sense, this is correct, the Word must speak. At the same time, it can be said that a Christian cannot be unbiased about the Scriptures, for the Word testifies of Christ, and the Christian is not unbiased about Christ. Complete openmindedness in any field of interpretation is impossible for all men have been influenced one way or another by previous impressions. Previous impressions concerning the Word may have been received only by hearing the name of the Author taken in vain, but an impression has been implanted nonetheless.⁵ Natural man, because he is enmity against God, opposes the Word. But interpretation demands submission, and that in any field of literature.

Franzmann has summed it neatly when he said:

And so it is no unreasonable demand, even from an untheological view, to ask the interpreter to begin by submitting himself to Scripture in order to understand it. There is, of course, this cardinal difference between submitting to Scripture and submitting to any other book: a man can, and ought to detach himself again from the Horace or Homer to whom he has for a time pathetically subdued himself; but--let the candid reader beware, and let him reckon the cost of the tower beforehand--and he will never again be able to detach himself from the Scripture once he has given himself to it unreservedly; for he will have been taken by a power of love that will not let him go.⁶

⁵Ibid., p. 740.

⁶Ibid., pp. 741-2.

In such a humble manner must the interpreter deal with Scripture. It shall be our purpose to show that the Jehovah Witnesses have not dealt with the Scriptures so humbly, for rather than allowing the Word to speak to them, they have attempted to speak to it.

Before anyone can interpret a passage of Scripture, the text must be established. The interpreter must attempt to determine what the original text is and then translate it into the vernacular. The Witnesses believe that they have been at a disadvantage in their work because of the faulty translation of the King James Version and hence have tried to remedy that with a new translation of their own.⁷ After the text is established both by lower criticism and a proper translation, the primary rule of interpretation must be remembered. That rule is, "Scripture interprets Scripture." This must be the basis for all interpretation.⁸ We shall point out how the Witnesses quite consistently overlook this basic rule. We shall also show how other important hermeneutical rules are broken repeatedly. These traditional

⁷New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1950). We are at a disadvantage in studying the Society's use of Scripture at this time for most of the Society's books use the King James Version as a basis for Scriptural quotations. Undoubtedly the Society's position will change on some passages when the new translation is used.

⁸Franzmann, op. cit., pp. 744-5.

hermeneutical principles, which could be applied to the interpretation of any literature, are: 1) interpretation must remember the etymology and usus loquendi of words; 2) words must be taken in their context; and 3) one's material principle dare never color interpretation so that it militates against the analogy of faith. We shall show the legitimacy of each rule and then list passages taken from Witness books that show that these rules have been violated. We shall not, of course, list all passages in their books that we feel are incorrect hermeneutically, but enough will be listed to show that the Society interpreters do ignore hermeneutical rules with a great deal of frequency.

The first requisite of interpretation is that the interpreter must understand exactly what a given word meant at the time and setting in which the author used it. Any study of Biblical interpretation must recognize the fact that the human authors of the Bible did not live in a vacuum but lived during a definite period of history when a word had a specific meaning. It is the task of the exegete to determine what that meaning was. Knowledge of word-meaning is only a starting point for proper exegesis, but it is a starting point that cannot be overlooked. At times the meanings of certain words changed, at times the writers of the Bible gave words a special religious meaning, but the hearers of the Bible

understood what the Word meant and it was meaningful and relevant to them. The Biblical writers used language as all authors do, to convey thoughts, ideas, and concepts. It must furthermore be remembered that the New Testament writers were greatly influenced by the Semitic language and the Semitic thought-pattern. Their thinking was not Hellenistic, rather all, with the possible exception of Luke, thought in Aramaic. Any etymological study must take this into account, especially when such words as "time", "wisdom", and "know" are considered.⁹

We feel that the Witnesses have often overlooked the etymology of words and how a word was used by a certain author. As we have seen, the Witnesses deny the reality of hell, first of all, because they feel it is unreasonable.¹⁰ Therefore they attempt to establish their own doctrine on the basis of Scripture. The Witnesses claim that the concept of hell in the Bible is one of total extinction rather than of punishment. Amos 9:2 is quoted: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them." Also, "If thine eye offend thee, it is better to pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye,

⁹Ibid., pp. 599-600.

¹⁰Let God Be True (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1945), p. 80.

than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire; where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:47. 48). The Amos passage is alleged to show that since man can dig into hell, it cannot be a lake of fire. Of the Mark passage Rutherford says:

A close examination of the text reveals that that which is undying is not the creature but the worms . . . Jesus says nothing about creatures being conscious and suffering in the fire.¹¹

The words sheol, hades, and gehenna must be studied etymologically in order to determine the correctness or incorrectness of Rutherford's claims. Obviously, at times sheol and hades are used to designate the state of death or the grave (Psalm 16:10; Genesis 37:35; Acts 2:27,31). On the basis of such passages the Witnesses claim that death is total extinction. But all Scripture dealing with the sheol must be examined. In Numbers 16:33 Korah and his band are said to have gone alive into sheol, hence in this passage sheol cannot mean total extinction. David, in Psalm 9, speaks of the judgment of God upon the heathen and in verse 17 that the wicked shall be turned into hell. The Witnesses forget that the judgment of God is eternal and that God's wrath shall be the punishment of hell. Other instances in the Old Testament where sheol must mean the realm of the

¹¹Ibid., p. 72.

damned are Psalm 28:1; 30:3,9; 31:17; 49:12-15; and 55:15. The context must decide which concept the author had in mind. Hades, the Septuagint translation for sheol, must be given the same consideration in the New Testament. There are instances where it cannot mean anything but the place of damnation. One such instance is Luke 16:23 where the rich man is pictured as looking up from hell, being in torment. The passage leaves no room for the Witness idea of total extinction. In Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15 the contrast between heaven and hell are pictured as contrast between the extremes of happiness and despair.¹² Gehenna was also used in the New Testament to picture eternal punishment (Matthew 5:22,30; 10:28). Originally the term was applied to a valley near the city of Jerusalem where the city offal was burned and the utter deflection it pictured make it fitting that it should be applied to the future of the damned.¹³ It is also interesting to note that the Jews, at Christ's time, believed that hell was a place of suffering.¹⁴ Christ now-

¹²John Schaller, Biblical Christology (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), p. 73.

¹³John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics, A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 635.

¹⁴Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), II, 280.

where said that they were wrong, rather, such passages as Luke 16 would certainly have strengthened such belief. Our conclusion is that the Witnesses have generalized unwarrantedly on the meaning of the terms and have overlooked the meaning that the authors meant them to have, which was also the meaning the people who heard the Apostles and Prophets gave to the words.

Closely aligned with the Witness doctrine that there is no hell is the doctrine that man does not have an immortal soul. The Witnesses teach that man does not possess a soul, he is a soul. In support of this they list certain passages as proofs. "And Jehovah God formed man of the dust . . . and man BECAME a living soul." (Genesis 2:7). Since man became a soul when God breathed into him, he cannot have a soul, he is a soul.¹⁵ In Matthew 10:28 Christ says that man should not fear them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul but man should fear God who can destroy both the body and the soul in hell. Since the soul will be destroyed, according to Witness doctrine, the word "soul" must mean, "the right to live".¹⁶ And levy a tribute unto the Lord of the men of war which went out to battle; one soul

¹⁵This Means Everlasting Life (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1950), p. 30.

¹⁶Let God Be True, p. 63.

of five-hundred, both of persons, and of beeves, and of asses, and of sheep." (Numbers 31:28). The Witnesses claim that this passage definitely shows that animals are also souls and man is no different from the animals.¹⁷ Man then, at death, ceases to exist and returns to dust.

Any consideration of the term soul must take into account the context. Admittedly, at times the term is not set into antithesis over against the body of man but simply refers to man as a human being. One of the very passages the Witnesses use to attempt to disprove the actuality of the soul shows it most conclusively, Matthew 10:28. In this passage Christ speaks of the body and soul as two different concepts. The two are placed in antithesis to each other for man is presented as being able to kill the body but not the soul, which right is reserved for God. In denying the immortality of the soul the Witnesses are guilty of the same error as the Sadducees of Jesus' time. Christ said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not a God of the dead but of the living." (Matthew 22:32). Here the Lord simply refers to the Old Testament patriarchs as living though they had died centuries before.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 59-60.

A case where the Witnesses baldly overlook the etymology of words is in their treatment of the ekklesia of Matthew 18:16,17, where Christ tells men to bring grievances to the ekklesia. The Society says that this cannot refer to the congregation as traditional Lutheran exegesis had maintained,¹⁸ but to the Theocracy or to the representative of the Jehovah Witness organization in any area.¹⁹ Such an interpretation is impossible for at Christ's time no such organization existed and hence the passage would have been unintelligible to the hearers of Christ's words. While the disciples did not always fully understand fully what Christ said, He never allowed them to put wrong ideas into practice as they did the directive of the ekklesia. The Witness interpretation of John 3:16 is another example of the Society's failure to appreciate the etymology of words. Christ in this passage said that God loved the world. But Witnesses do not believe that God loves all the people in the world so that they interpret this "world" as referring to the new "world" that Jehovah will establish after Armageddon.²⁰ We must turn their argument against them for this

¹⁸A. L. Graebner, Outlines of Doctrinal Theology (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), p. 208.

¹⁹This Means Everlasting Life, p. 190.

²⁰Let God Be True, p. 128.

interpretation would have made the passage meaningless to the disciples since they had never heard of the new "world" which the Witnesses proclaim.

The Witnesses also claim to find Scriptural proofs for their doctrine that Christ is a creature. But an examination of their alleged proofs shows a number of obviously incorrect interpretations. One of the passages which they adduce is Revelation 3:14, "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." According to the Witnesses, this passage proves that God created Christ first, before the rest of creation. Hence, Christ is not equal with Jehovah, the Creator.²¹ To understand the passage correctly we must consider John's use of arxe. It can, of course, have a purely temporal meaning as the author of Let God be True has taken it. But such an interpretation militates against other clear passages of Scripture where Christ is said to be everlasting and almighty. (Hebrews 13:8). Correct meaning in this instance must be the meaning given by Thayer, "that by which anything begins to be, the origin, active clause."²² This is also in harmony with Hebrews 1:10-12 where heaven and earth are

²¹Ibid., p. 35.

²²Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 21.

said to be the work of Christ's hands. Scripture must always be employed to determine the meaning of the words of Scripture. John 1:1 is traditionally considered to be one of the clear passages concerning the eternity and deity of Christ. This the Witnesses deny. According to them, the fact that the article does not occur in the words καὶ θεός ἐν ὁ λόγος proves that Christ was not the God but a god. The devil is also a god, for he is so called in 2 Corinthians 4:4.²³ Concerning the absence of the article in this passage it must be remembered that in the Koine Greek the presence or absence of the article does not have the significance it had in classic Greek. In this particular instance the Greek places the emphasis on the qualitative aspect of the noun rather than on mere identity. This is especially true since the clause is prepositional.²⁴

A final passage which we shall consider etymologically is the Witness interpretations of Romans 12:21-13:4. According to the Witnesses the civil magistrates are merely symbols of the devil and Paul would nowhere urge subjection to the devil. All civil governments are under the power and

²³Let God Be True, pp. 35-6.

²⁴H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 149-50.

influence of the devil. Hence, this passage does not refer to the government but to Christ. He is the "higher powers".²⁵ A number of reasons make such an interpretation impossible. In 13:3 the powers are referred to in the plural, as "rulers", and again in 13:7 the plural occurs. Verse seven speaks of rendering custom (taxes) to these powers. Certainly any first century Christian could get no other meaning from this than that Paul wanted his Christians to pay their taxes and be obedient subjects. Many other examples could be cited which would also show that the Jehovah Witnesses misinterpret Scripture by overlooking the etymology and usus loquendi of words. But any other examples we would cite would show nothing new, it would be merely repetitious. We feel that enough examples have been cited to show conclusively that the Witnesses mishandle God's Word.

The interpreter must furthermore always consider the context of words and passages for not every word has the same meaning every time it occurs in Scripture. Clear examples of this would be the meaning of such words as ekklesia, logos, sheol, elohim, and pistis. The meanings of these words may vary with the different authors and even in

²⁵This Means Everlasting Life, pp. 195-7.

different sections by the same author. The context must determine the author's meaning. Therefore, first of all the immediate context of the word must be taken into consideration, then, perhaps, the section of the book, then the entire book or the author. For example, when Paul speaks of pietis he usually refers to fiducia. This is usually the case in his general epistles. As a rule, in his pastoral epistles, a different meaning is evident, that of a conviction, belief, or creed.²⁶ Only the context can be used to determine the exact meaning intended, hence it is important that passage be kept in their context. To take a word or phrase out of its context is to make the author say something that he did not mean to say. It is making God's Word say what man would have it say rather than letting God's Word itself speak. True interpretation, because it demands submission to the Word, dare never formulate a doctrine and then look for a proof from Scripture by tearing passages out of their context. We shall cite numerous examples which we believe will show that the Witness interpreters have taken words or passages out of their context and have tried to prove a point from these mutilated portions of Scripture. This applies especially to their use of figurative portions

²⁶Thayer, op. cit., p. 312.

of Scripture which they interpret literally, and their use of literal or historic sections which they interpret figuratively.

When an historic event is pictured in Scripture we have no right to say it is allegoric unless some portion of Scripture directs us to that end. At the same time, some portions of Scripture are allegoric or figurative, as the parables of Jesus, and are not to be taken historically. Any attempt to interpret figurative portions literally or literal portions figuratively is tearing these passages out of the context in which they were written. An example of the latter is the Witness treatment of the historic figure, Jehu. We are told that Jehu was an admirable character because he drove furiously (2 Kings 9:16). Thus he is said to prefigure Christ because Christ also moved fast when angered. He is supposed to be one of the outstanding Old Testament figures because he fought the Baal-worshippers. Baal today is represented by organized Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church.²⁷ Thus a man, because he drove fast and fought Baal is to be admired and a type of Christ. Such an interpretation cannot be defended because God nowhere tells us that he was a type of Christ. The condition of Protestantism today or of the Roman Church is hardly comparable to a situation

²⁷H. J. Rutherford, *Riches* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1936), pp. 72-80.

that obtained many years before Christ. Scripture also paints Jahu as an evil figure, telling us that he was an idolator and disobedient to God's commands. His end was disgrace (2 Kings 10:29,31). Another example of the Witnesses interpreting literal sections of Scripture figuratively is their treatment of the word "day". According to the Witnesses, the word "day" is symbolic in many instances of a long period of time, usually a thousand years. This interpretation is based on 2 Peter 3:8, "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day." On the basis of this passage the Witnesses claim that the world was not created in six days but six thousand years. The seventh day is God's period of rest and has extended over a longer period of time.²⁸ In dealing with such an interpretation we must remember that the Jews who read Moses' words had no reason to interpret them other than the way they read, that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, that each day represented the traditional twenty-four hour day they knew. If, in Moses' writings, the word "day" meant a longer period of time, Genesis 7:4 could have no meaning whatsoever when it speaks of rain for forty days and nights. Even in Genesis 2 the days are

²⁸Let God Be True, pp. 165-6.

closely defined in the words," and the evening and the morning were the first day." Hence the argument fails etymologically. At the same time the Witness exegesis is fallacious when the context of the 2 Peter passage is considered for that section is merely showing the eternity of God and that God's actions cannot be measured as man's actions. It has no reference to creation or to time. Hence the Witnesses have torn a passage out of context to attempt to prove a point.

It is usually a preconceived notion that drives men to tear passages out of their context. One such example of this is the Witness treatment of Genesis 3:17-19. In this passage God denied Adam the pleasures of the Garden and cursed the ground for his sake. He was also told that he would return to dust. On the basis of this passage the Witnesses would have us believe that Adam has already been judged and will remain in the grave forever. They also feel that his sin was so great there could be no redemption for him. All men will be given only one chance to be saved and because Adam had his chance, he is destroyed already for eternity.²⁹ This is contrary to Scripture for we are told that all men will return to dust and all will be raised, and especially

²⁹Ibid., p. 267.

is it contrary to the immediate context. Genesis 3:16, the protevangel, clearly is a promise of God to Adam and Eve that redemption was for them also.³⁰

Some of the Witness interpretations are faulty on more than one count as more than one hermeneutical rule is often discarded in the treatment of a single passage. One example of this is the Witness use of 1 Peter 5:1, "I, too, am an older man like them."³¹ This is to show that in the 144,000 are some men who are older and have been put into positions of authority. Hence elections in the theocratic organization and in the local Witness groups are to be "from the Top sic down."³² Such an interpretation is faulty first of all because it does not recognize the true meaning of presbuteros which the King James Version has translated as "elder". Thayer points out that this term was used at times synonymously with episkopos and referred to the rulers of the local ekklesia and stressed merely the dignity of the office and not the function.³³ The term had become a title and had little reference to the age of the ruler. Hence the Witness

³⁰Infra: p. 61.

³¹New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures.

³²This Means Everlasting Life, p. 129.

³³Thayer, op. cit., p. 536.

interpretation is wrong etymologically. At the same time the passage has been taken out of its context when applied to a group as the 144,000 for the entire section deals with the local congregation and its problems. There is no reference to a heavenly organization as the Witness 144,000. Thus we feel that the Witnesses clearly tear passages out of their context when they try to establish a Biblical proof for certain doctrines.

Hermeneutics may be viewed in three concentric circles; the circle of language, the circle of history, and the circle of Scripture.³⁴ The circle of language corresponds to the etymology and usage classification we have considered, the circle of history to the context heading, and the circle of Scripture corresponds to the category we have chosen to call the analogy of faith. Such a concentric system has a great deal of merit to it in that it clearly shows the different areas of thought and fact with which the interpreter must deal. But even under such a system there are example of misinterpretation that would fit under more than one circle, for a mistake in one area generally leads to mistakes in other areas as well. In theory it may be possible to make clear-

³⁴ Franzmann, op. cit., pp. 598, 641, 738.

cut categories, in actual practice that is not so easy.

We must keep in mind that these distinctions cannot always be fully applied. This is also true of our last category, the circle of Scripture, or as we have chosen to designate it, the analogy of faith.

True theology must be received from the Word. Any theology must determine what the Word says and no doctrine dare be formulated that is not found in Scripture. Thus, if a theological system would say that God hated the world, we could point to John 3:16 where we are told that God loves the world. The error would be easily discerned. Interpretation and formulation of doctrine is not always that easy however, for clear words of Scripture have not been found to cover every idea that men have tried to propound as Scriptural theology. It is necessary to remember that not only the clear words of Scripture must be considered, but also that the spirit of the word dare not be violated. The interpreter must keep in mind that Scripture is a unit and all interpretation must agree with the faith in Christ. True interpretation demands humble faith, hence a novice cannot be a polished exegete. Factual understanding of the words of Scripture must be coupled with understanding of the Christ Who redeemed also the interpreter. Man's subjective thought must be shunned. The problem diminishes in propor-

tion to the amount the word has spoken to the interpreter through faith in Christ. Franzmann quotes Franz Pieper as saying that any interpretation not done in faith is not interpretation but criticism.³⁵ Interpretation will always remain a charisma and only by the Holy Spirit will the interpreter retain the unity of Scripture.³⁶ We have seen in the second chapter that the Jehovah Witness theology is not Christo-centric. The same is true of their interpretation, and as their theology necessarily is in error because of a false reference, so their exegesis errs because it is not Christ-centered. The center of their theology is the Theocracy, and while all Christian exegesis centers in the redemption by Christ, the Society centers interpretation in the Theocracy. Rutherford says:

Reason should always be employed in the examination of Scriptural questions. Sound reason and the Scriptures are necessarily in accord. 'Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.' (Isaiah 1:18). As our vision of the divine plan enlarges, we can see a scripture for every step and every development in the divine arrangement.³⁷

Our objection is based on the point that the Society first of all uses reason to formulate its chief doctrine, that of the Theocracy, and then tries to find a "scripture" to try to prove it. Thus Witness interpretation is contrary not only to the spirit of Scripture but also to the letter.

³⁶Terry, op. cit., pp. 449-51.

³⁷Let God Be True, p. 31.

Genesis 3:15, according to Witness doctrine, does not refer primarily to Christ but to the organization God has set up to witness His Theocracy. Christ was merely representative of the organization and was to pass the test given Him by Jehovah. Because Christ passed the test, mankind has the right to live.³⁸ Christ then is the type of the organization and the organization joins Christ in ransoming the world for Jehovah by giving up the right to live. Such an interpretation not only robs Christ of the honor due Him as the only Redeemer of mankind, but also is contrary to clear words of Scripture. Paul says that the promise of the seed was made to Eve and subsequently repeated to the patriarchs, which seed is Christ." (Galatians 3:16). Eve also considered that the protevangel referred to an individual rather than to an organization for she named her first son Cain, meaning, "I have a man, the Lord." (Genesis 4:1). She interpreted the promise correctly in that she concluded that through her the Man would come who was to be the Lord, she applied it incorrectly. The Witnesses have misinterpreted. Another example of this occurs in the Witness treatment of the term basileia, which is equated with the Theocracy. Thus, when in Matthew 3:2 Christ speaks of the kingdom of God being at hand, the Witnesses claim that means that the Theocracy was

³⁸This Means Everlasting Life, pp. 42-3.

not far off in point of time.³⁹ It must be remembered that the kingdom refers primarily to God's gracious rule on the hearts of men and that was certainly at hand when Christ spoke the words. The Society claims that heaven is a figment of the imagination because the Lord's prayer proves that the Theocracy must be on earth for "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" follows immediately after "thy kingdom come".⁴⁰ Traditional Christianity admits gladly that God rules the earth, we also know that such is His will, but to say that the passage must refer to the Theocracy is unfounded exegesis.

A glaring example of the Society's material principle coloring its exegesis is found in its treatment of Luke 23: 43. Since the Witnesses teach that when a man dies he returns to dust and can reach heaven only on a spirit plane, this passage has proved particularly difficult to them. Rutherford translates it as: "Today I say unto thee (that is, I am saying it now, this day) Shalt thou be with me in paradise?"⁴¹ Even members of the Society have recognized that this translation is untenable and the position is now changed. Although Rutherford was recognized as an amanensis of

³⁹Let God Be True, p. 124.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 260.

⁴¹Rutherford, Riches, p. 183.

Jehovah, a more recent publication eliminates the "today" altogether, thus eliminating the difficulty. The claim is made that such a translation is legitimate because an ancient Syriac manuscript does not have the ameron.⁴² Nestle has the ameron although he refers to Marcion's manuscript which does not have it.⁴³ Marcion's manuscript, hardly to be called Syriac, is the least acceptable manuscript, ~~hardly to be called Syriac, is the least acceptable manuscript of~~ all for he consciously changed the text of the Word to fit his theology. He attempted to remove from the texts any reference to Old Testament concepts. Our criticism is that the choice of texts was obviously made to conform to their doctrine, not with other clear words of Scripture.

It will be readily seen on the basis of the examples cited that the Jehovah's Witnesses will interpret Scripture to fit their own peculiar doctrines. It is a truism that one can find Bible Passages to prove almost anything if one is willing to overlook proper hermeneutical procedure. Our charge is that the Witnesses have done just that. In conclusion we must remember that the Society is anti-Trinitarian.

⁴²This Means Everlasting Life, p. 232.

⁴³Nestle, Eberhard. Greek New Testament, Edited With Critical Apparatus, Revised by Erwin Nestle (Stuttgart: Priv. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1936), p. 224.

ian, the Society denies the Deity of Christ, hence it cannot be called a Christian society. Although it claims to have support from the Bible, we have seen that this is an unfounded claim and must be disregarded as false. All this shows how impossible it is to discuss theological matters with the Witnesses for they do not speak the theological language spoken by those with faith in Christ, and the errors found throughout the Society are traceable to the fact that they do not regard Christ as their all-sufficient Savior.

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