Jehovah’s Witnesses

The Watchtower
Bible and Tract Society
Do we really know them?

- History -- where did they come from?
- Doctrines -- what they believe
- Practices -- how they live
- Presence in world today
- When you encounter them . . .
Charles Taze Russell 1852-1916

- Bounced from Presbyterian to Congregational churches
- Ended up contemptuous of all
- Age 17 -- Heard convincing argument that hell did not exist
- 1870 -- at age 18 organized Bible class
The Russell era

- Captivated by Adventist preaching on Christ’s Second Coming

- 1876 -- joined staff of Adventist publication “Herald of the Morning”
  - That group said Christ had returned invisibly in 1874 and would take believers to heaven in 1878
Charles Taze Russell

1879

- Took control of Barbour’s publication, renamed it “Watchtower”
- Married
- Began feeling he was the 7th messenger of Revelation
Movement gets underway

- 1884 -- Incorporated Zion’s Watchtower Tract Society
- 1893 -- First major convention in Chicago
  - 360 in attendance
  - 70 baptisms
1914?

- 1894 -- Watchtower set 1914 as the return of Christ and beginning of millennium
- 1914 came and went . . . remains key date for Jehovah’s Witnesses

“The Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away” -- Awake! October, 1995
Pyramidology
measurements of Egyptian Great Pyramid used to calculate dates

- **1909**
  - Wife divorced him
  - moved headquarters from Pittsburgh to Brooklyn

- **1916**
  - Died during train trip
  - Buried near this pyramid structure
“Judge” Rutherford 1869-1942

- A power vacuum ensued with Russell’s death
- By quasi-legal maneuvering, this lawyer edged out competition and took over the organization in 1917
Judge Rutherford 1869-1942

- First visited by Watch Tower representatives in his Missouri law offices in 1894
- Baptized as a Bible Student in 1906
- When he took over, several groups splintered off
Rutherford continues dating game

1918 -- *Watchtower* sets Christ’s return for 1925

“*Millions Now Living Will Never Die*” -- article became book title two years later

Worldwide anarchy was predicted to occur in 1920
Expansion in Rutherford era

- 1919 -- began *Awake!*
- 1920’s, 30’s -- Extensive use of radio and phonograph records
- 1933 -- over 400 radio stations were carrying his Bible lectures
Steady revision of doctrine and structure

- 1931 -- New name: Jehovah’s Witnesses
- Under Rutherford, membership grew from 10,000 in 1916 to 100,000 in 1942
Beth-Sarim
- Palatial San Diego home built by Rutherford
- To be deeded to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David when they returned to earth
- Rutherford planned to be buried here
- After his death, quietly sold

Beth-Shan
- 79 acres purchased in 1939; also deeded to “princes”
- Had bomb shelter
Personality era ends

With Rutherford’s death, the era of charismatic, flamboyant leadership ended. Power now vested in the governing council.
JW Bible translation

• “New World” Bible translation appeared in 1950
  - Only one member of translation committee knew anything about the original languages of the Bible
  - Knorr had two years of Greek

• What is the “New World Translation?”
  - An authentic translation? No.
  - Systematic re-writing of Scripture in support of doctrinal positions. Yes.
1975 -- a new date

- 1966 book hinted that 1975 would see a new period in human history.
- August 1968 Watchtower set 1975 as year for Armageddon
  - For JW’s, period of growth leading up to 1975, then stagnation when the year came and went
Doctrines - Beliefs

- Eschatology (end times)
- Soteriology (salvation)
- Pneumatolgy (doctrine of Holy Spirit)
- Christology (beliefs about Jesus Christ)
Authority

Watchtower Society claims to speak for Jehovah as His sole “channel of communication” on the earth
Beliefs: Apocalyptic

Focused on end times
Waiting for paradise on earth after battle of Armageddon
Future Paradise on earth

- Only 144,000 “anointed” will go to heaven
- Hell does not exist; evil people will simply be annihilated
Salvation

- People God approves will receive eternal life here on earth
- You may be saved, depending on your faithfulness and obedience

“Just as a proper secular education is necessary to fit a person for a place in everyday society, so a proper Bible education is necessary to equip one for entering the society that will survive to live in the Paradise earth.” -- from Jehovah’s Witnesses web site
Holy Spirit

- Denial of trinity
  - Claim trinity comes from ancient mythology
  - “a complicated, freakish-looking, three-headed God” -- *Let God Be True*

- Holy Spirit is an active force like electricity or fire
Core issue: Christology

- As fascinating as all the date setting and shifting is . . .
- As fascinating as the issues of blood transfusions and saluting the flag may be . . .
- The core of our disagreement with our Jehovah’s Witness friends centers on Jesus Christ
Latter day Arians

- Arianism -- a 4th century heresy denying deity of Christ, saying Jesus was the first thing God created
- To JW’s, Jesus Christ is Archangel Michael
- At Jesus’ death, God disposed of Jesus’ physical body.
- Because Jesus was raised a spirit creature, God had to “materialize” a fleshly body for him
Practices -- how they live

- No drugs; alcohol in moderation
- Sexual purity
- Limited social environment
  - Pervasive us/them mentality
  - Everyone else is of the devil
- Heavy control
  - Not allowed to read literature critical of JW’s
- Children discouraged from higher learning
- Respect government but do not participate in elections
Community life

- **Congregations**
  - Attendance expected at weekly “book studies” (can be in homes)
  - Full congregations meet in “Kingdom Halls”
  - Ministers serve without pay
  - Disfellowshipping -- kicking people out of the family

- **Communion or Lord’s Supper**
  - Observed annually on date of Jesus’ death
    - Nisan 14 -- March/April
  - Only 144,000 elite may take the elements
  - In 1999 the “partakers” worldwide were 8,755
Iconoclastic
“overthrowing traditional or popular ideas”

- No celebrating Christmas
- No celebrating Easter
- No celebrating birthdays
- No celebrating Mother’s Day
- No saluting of the national flag
- No blood transfusions
Iconoclastic
“overthrowing traditional or popular ideas”

Jehovah’s Witnesses say Jesus died on a stake rather than on a cross
Presence in world today

- 800,000 in USA
- 5 million “publishers” worldwide
  - 300,000 baptisms annually
  - 100,000 net increase
- 90,000 “congregations” worldwide
Global publishing operation

- 15 million publications each week
  - Brooklyn factory building bought in 1927
  - Several expansions
  - 3,000 now work there
Recruitment / Evangelism

- Door-to-door house calls
- 740 house calls needed to recruit one new member
7 Step Process

- Literature put in prospect’s hands
- “Back calling” or follow up
- Prospect starts actual “book study”
- Attendance at Kingdom Hall meetings
- Attendance at worship services
- Active tract distribution
- Baptism
When we encounter them

- Do we slam that door?
- Do we just politely close it?
- If we let them in . . . should we try to prove them wrong?
When we encounter them

Remember . . .

- They believe they are the only “true religion”
  - JW’s are used to attacks and persecution
  - Using logic to prove them wrong accomplishes little
  - Criticism will likely encounter a stone wall

How do we overcome that “true religion” idea?
Overcoming “true religion” syndrome

- Shy away from “setting them straight”
- Ask disarming questions
- See yourself as a sower of seeds, not a harvester
Question possibilities

. . . not to provoke a fight

- Have true Christians always existed somewhere over the last 2,000 years?
- Are the marks of real Christians exclusive to the Watchtower or are they shared by other groups?
- Does the Watchtower believe all other Christian groups are completely false?
Questions on the Bible

- Was the Bible written to all people?
- Can someone who had a Bible and no other literature understand it and become all that God wanted him or her to be?
- The Mormons claim that one must study their books in order to get an accurate knowledge of Scriptures. What do you think of that?
Key question on Christ

- Can you come to Christ as your mediator?
Be friendly and neighborly

- Don’t focus on winning arguments
- Don’t defend yourself or your beliefs
- Win trust
- Don’t try to back people into a corner
- Allow them to “save face”
Use of Scripture

- Get your Bible
- Read aloud every text they mention
- Look carefully with them at the context (the surrounding verses and chapters) in a verse appears
Be sensitive to whom you are speaking. . .

- Someone made in God’s image for whom Christ died
- A human being with whom you have much in common
Stay in touch with the One in whose presence you are having the discussion. . .

Your greatest advantage is prayer
Be constant in prayer as you talk with them
Maintain with discipline . . .

- your position and role
  - Humility and love
  - Make your conversation “heart to heart” rather than “head to head”
A bit of poetry . . .

He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic, rebel; a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win. We drew a circle that took him in.

-- Edwin Markham
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