

THE CULT ASPECT OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ORGANIZATION

Note: I will use the letters JW in this paper instead of the full name "Jehovah's Witnesses."

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) was founded by Charles Taze Russell in 1879. The members were called "Bible Students" up until 1931 when the name of "Jehovah's Witnesses" was chosen for them by their second president Joseph Rutherford. This name was taken from Isaiah 43:10.

Today there are around 7 million JWs world-wide – one million here in the US, so this is indeed a large body of people for us to consider.

It is clear from an analysis of Scripture that a good amount of Watchtower organization teaching is correct. This includes their teaching against the Trinity, against an inherent immortal soul, and against any obligation to keep the Sabbath. Furthermore, the teaching of a coming paradise on earth and the gaining of everlasting life is clearly fully scriptural.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Indeed, I was a member of the JWs for 36 years – from 1965 to 2001, but the first time I was alerted to the possibility that the Watchtower organization could be a cult was in the mid-1990s. This was when their *Awake* magazine had an article on what constitutes a cult. Of course, it was written defensively to detract from any cultish features of the Watchtower organization itself. Yet, even after my wife and I had left the JWs, it still took about a year before we finally recognized it definitely as a cult, in fact, as an extreme cult.

In spite of those correct teachings just mentioned, there is much that is unbiblical in the teachings of the Watchtower organization. I have personally come to the conclusion that about 50% is incorrect. These false teachings are dealt with at my website, www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk, as well as at many other places on the internet and in books.

HELPING INDIVIDUAL JWS?

Certainly we have to know the false teachings of the Watchtower organization and how to show a JW that these teachings are false to the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is also vital to use biblical terminology that the JW will understand. **Theological terms or Bible translation terms such as "the elect" or "saints" from older Bible translations, will just lose the JW.** In fact it is very helpful to be familiar with the Watchtower's own version of the Bible - **the New World Translation** and try to use that with them. Better still if you can acquire their **Kingdom Interlinear**.

Nevertheless, my experience indicates that, we can also make headway with an individual JW if we are able to show that the Watchtower organization operates in some ways as do many extreme cults. Indeed, showing them information that proves that the Watchtower's claim to be God's organization is false may help.

Of course, it is counter-productive to tell the JW that he or she is in a cult or that the Watchtower is not God's organization. We have to reason with them on how cults work so that the JW will hopefully arrive at his or her own conclusions about the Watchtower organization.

So now let's get into examining the details of what makes an extreme cult and then compare those details with details concerning the Watchtower organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTREME AND ABUSIVE CULTS

The dictionary definitions of the word "cult" are quite broad, and show that not all cults have bad effects on their members. However, there comes a point where a "denomination" may move to an extreme position and so becomes an extreme cult. This kind of cult really does damage its membership psychologically, socially and perhaps even physically. On this *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives us an additional dimension to the word "cult" "as imposing excessive control over members."

The two main researchers on mind-control in religious organizations are Robert Lifton and Steve Hassan.

Neither have ever been JWs, and Steve Hassan in his book *Releasing the Bonds*, explains what is called *THE BITE MODEL* which shows the way cults operate. These consist in broad terms of:

BEHAVIOUR CONTROL, INFORMATION CONTROL, THOUGHT CONTROL, EMOTIONAL CONTROL

The following list, along with 10 more characteristics in the Appendix, shows how these four aspects of control are evident in extreme religious cults according to the experts on this subject:

1. The leadership of the group/cult views the group as superior to all other groups, makes claims of being the only channel of communication between God and mankind, and of having unique knowledge that makes them special. Phrases like “the one true church” or “God’s only true organization” are used.
2. There is an “Us-vs.-Them” mentality, so that no outside group is recognized as godly or having any real value. But the group’s members are made to feel elite – because they are told, either that they have been specially chosen by God for future eternal life, or they know more about the Bible than anyone else does.
3. Often with smile, the leadership tends to be actually authoritarian, control-orientated, and very demanding - requiring rigid lifestyles and with overwhelming service requirements, but at the same time making itself appear to be reasonable.
4. The rank and file members are required to render absolute obedience to their superiors. They must trust the group leaders absolutely, rather than using their own mental abilities. So the focus is on themes of submission, loyalty, and obedience to those in authority so that members are forbidden to think negative thoughts about the group or its leadership.
5. The doctrines of the group form the basis of all thought, feeling, and action and are proclaimed to be “the Truth.”
6. At times significant doctrine may be changed by the leadership to fit the needs of their varying situations; yet it is still the “truth” and the members must conform to these doctrines of the group even if they don’t agree with them or even understand them.
7. Members must project a façade of happiness, although some members can actually be emotionally “in pain,” because they are hiding their real feelings of disagreement with the religious organization.
8. There is a steady loss of focus on God or on Jesus, with a refocusing on the church or organization and its rules.
9. Independent thinking about biblical doctrines or the group’s policies is forbidden to the rank and file members, and so there is no allowance for any different interpretation of or deviation from even minor points of doctrine. This fosters an unhealthy dependence on the church organization.
10. There is a closed communication system: information is viewed as only valid if it comes from the top of the religious organization. So all other religious information, and even secular education are often viewed as damaging to the members or unnecessary.

SO ARE THE INDIVIDUAL JWS IN AN EXTREME CULT?

Our question has been answered many times by what ex JWs report. Furthermore, outside researchers have examined the literature, history and other details of the Watchtower organization and have come to the conclusion that it is an abusive cult.

So by comparing the details of the Watchtower organization with the above details of extreme cults we too may come to the same conclusion.

Here is one sample of Watchtower controlling of its membership:

- “Respond to the directions of the organization as you would the voice of God.” WT 6/15/1957, p. 370.

Certainly this is a frightening command! With this the Watchtower organization has really usurped the high office of Jesus Christ.

1. **BEHAVIOUR CONTROL**

Steve Hassan notes that:

- The essence of mind control is that it encourages dependence and conformity, and discourages autonomy and individuality. . . [it seeks] to undermine an individual's integrity in making his own decisions.

As with many extreme cults the Watchtower organization has laid down rules to bring about **conformity and uniformity** rather than simple biblical unity. These concern, *how one uses one's time, who one associates with, physical appearance, education, career, employment, finances, leisure, medical treatment, marriage partner selection, sexual activities, and child-training.*

Of course, all of these aspects of life for the Christian must be godly and the Scriptures give ample guidance on these matters. However, only an extreme cult would lay down stringent rules and use peer pressure to enforce them. Much of this is also done by **Behavioural Modification Techniques** such as: positive and negative reinforcements and punishment.

In particular the Watchtower organization demands large time-commitments from its members. There is persistent strong pressure for JW's to fill all their spare time with meetings, house to house calling (time spent in this must be reported), personal study of Watchtower material, and social arrangements with only other witnesses.

Furthermore, the Watchtower organization demands behaviour that can be detrimental or even death-dealing for the member or his/her family e.g.:

1. The refusal of a blood transfusion in a life/death issue.
2. The refusal in the 1960s to accept organ transplants
3. The even earlier refusal to accept any immunization by vaccines.

In cult-like fashion the Watchtower organization requires **the reporting of members** who in some significant way are not conforming to the rules.

To encourage all of the above behaviour the Watchtower organization uses short phrases taken from the Scriptures so that the Bible is diminished to the level of a rules book. One example of this is the phrase "house to house" in Acts 20:20 etc. By ignoring the context the JW is made to feel that he/she must call on all the homes in their local area.

2. **INFORMATION CONTROL**

A. Use of deception

1. Deliberate withholding of information
2. Distorting of information by misquotations to lead to the 'correct' conclusions

Most of the control exercised by the Watchtower organization is to stop the membership viewing the very great amount of legitimate criticism of its teachings, policies and conduct throughout its history. So there is a ban on the reading of so-called 'apostate' literature and on the viewing of so-called 'apostate' websites on the internet or indeed of any Bible promoting or biblical education websites.

1. Regarding the withholding of information, one example concerned the Watchtower's stating only the statistics of earthquakes since 1914 to prove a worsening of these events and purposely withheld the statistics for these events prior to 1914 which would have destroyed their case.
2. Furthermore, the Watchtower organization sometimes quotes out of context to prove their point. For instance, there are misquotations from secular sources concerning the case of blood transfusions. (Please see STUDY 20 subheading: SOME FAULTS IN THE BLOOD BROCHURE). Other misquotations have

concerned the supposed endorsements of the New World Translation by Hebrew and Greek scholars which have later been denied by those scholars.

B. Access to non-organization sources of religious information is strongly discouraged.

1. Books, magazines, articles, radio, TV and the Internet.
2. Discussion with former members.

C. Propaganda, which we will expand upon momentarily.

3. *THOUGHT CONTROL*

- **The shutting down of ‘reality testing’** by the stopping of negative thoughts through, denial, rationalization, or justification.
- The rejection of rational analysis, **critical thinking**, or any **constructive criticism**.

Primarily the Watchtower organization’s does most of this by coming down heavily on **‘independent thinking.’** More on this in a moment.

4. *EMOTIONAL CONTROL*

- a. By the use of “loaded language.” These are special words, phrase or clichés used as an appeal to the emotions. These terms have strong emotional implications for the members.
- b. By the use of Guilt e.g. not living up to what is expected.
- c. By the use of unreasonable fears (phobias):
 1. Fear of thinking independently
 2. Fear of the ‘outside world’
 3. Fear of losing one’s salvation
 4. Fear that one could never be happy outside the group.

The Watchtower organization creates an atmosphere of guilt for many things e.g. there is guilt for not supporting all of the pre-arranged activities—especially the missing of meetings, even if one is ill.

Also phobias are inculcated about anything the Watchtower organization deems to be pagan e.g. going into a church building, things to do with birthdays, mother’s day, Christmas trees etc; things with a cross on them.

They also create an atmosphere of fear of one’s being seen doing what is unacceptable to the group e.g. searching for Bible related information in a library, bookshop or on the Internet. There is also the creating of the legitimate fear of being shunned if one leaves the group.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

Propaganda differs from education inasmuch as the propagandist attempts to make the person reach the propagandist’s conclusions, but discourages any research into the relevant subject. The worst of propagandists use unethical tactics so as to mislead people with half truths and a withholding of relevant information.

USE OF STEREOTYPES

The Watchtower organization stigmatizes all other religious organizations and their leaders (clergy) with this technique. It is done by selectively focusing on the worst aspects of these groups to the total exclusion of any good aspects. All of this creates prejudice in the minds of JW’s.

This technique is also used with regard to information that comes from any source other than them or their approved quotations. Such stereotyping plants powerful world-views in the minds of JW’s.

PINPOINTING THE ENEMY

Propagandist's always have a perceived enemy to whom they direct their message. This helps to consolidate the loyalty of the membership. The Watchtower organization's main enemy is the growing body of those who criticize it and who are therefore labelled as the devil's agents, haters of God, apostates, 'evil slave' class etc., who distribute spiritual poison - they are likened to a cancerous growth. Such ones are to be literally hated because they publish "blasphemous lies."

NEGATIVE NAME-CALLING

All non-JWs are termed worldly people, Ex JWs are termed apostates, and Non-JW Bible scholars/theologians are called clergy/religionists of Christendom.

Once someone is labelled negatively it becomes very easy to treat them as of no account and show them no respect for their views. So, when someone is labelled as 'disfellowshipped,' or 'apostate,' they then become a target for mistreatment, even verbal abuse.

REPEATING THE PROPAGANDA

This conditions the mind to make positive or negative associations. Significant phrases repeated often by the Watchtower are: 'Faithful and Discreet slave' (24 times in a single WT magazine article) and 'God's faithful organization.'

GLITTERING GENERALITIES

For example using terms such as, 'the only God-approved international brotherhood,' 'the most desirable associates',

THE WATCHTOWER ORGANIZATION AND PERSONAL BIBLE RESEARCH

Now concerning the "thought control" mentioned earlier, we can now see how the Watchtower uses this on its membership.

IT IS ONLY THE WATCHTOWER ORG THAT CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

- "Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the Divine Plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone **lays the Scripture Studies aside**, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years - if he lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that **within two years he goes into darkness**. On the other hand, if he had merely read the Scripture Studies with their references, and had **not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light** at the end of the two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures." *WT 9/15/1910*, p. 298. (All boldening is ours).
- "Thus the **Bible is an organizational book** and belongs to the Christian congregation as an organization, **not to individuals**, regardless of how sincerely they may believe that they can interpret the Bible. For this reason the **Bible cannot be properly understood without Jehovah's visible organization** in mind." *WT 10/1/1967*, p. 587.
- "Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. **To it alone** God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is **not a sealed book**." *WT 7/1/1973*, p. 402.
- "All who want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the "greatly diversified wisdom of God" can become known **only through Jehovah's channel** of communication, the faithful and discreet slave." *WT 10/1/1994*, p. 8.

Certainly we may all benefit from the research of others. However, such research is best done from numerous sources and not as the Watchtower organization states—only from them.

THE HYPOCRISY IN WATCHTOWER STATEMENTS

- "Examine the evidence. Reasonable persons want to examine both sides of a matter. That is how one arrives at the truth." *Awake 10/22/1973*, p. 6.

The hypocrisy here is that these statements apply only to members of the public. Once a person becomes a

JW this right to continue examining Bible subjects is denied him/her. The JW is guided to do his/her research only within Watchtower organization publications. It is even frowned upon if a JW obtains the non-JW publication from which a quotation was taken. Those who have done this have often discovered that the quotation was taken out of context.

HOW DOES ALL THIS AFFECT THE THINKING OF A JW?

AN IMAGINARY FREE WILL

The Watchtower organization teaches quite correctly that humans have free will. Yet, in reality their free will is largely diminished or denied to the rank and file JWs. Indeed, research Scientist Kathleen Taylor stated in her book *Brainwashing—The science of thought control*:

- Brainwashed people no longer have free will: they must act as the brainwasher commands. Yet successful brainwashing leaves the victim unaware of their new-found slavery; they still regard themselves as free ... Freedom is rewarding because it implies control. We become **extremely stressed** when our sense of control is threatened; freedom, therefore, involves the absence of stress ... An organism which persistently thought itself in control when it wasn't, and vice versa, would be less likely to survive than an organism with an accurate awareness of what it could and couldn't change in the world around it, pp. 187, 200, 201.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Dissonance is created when a person is exposed to factual information that conflicts with his/her belief system. To minimize the internal conflict the person may deny its validity, disbelieve it, or seek out whatever will confirm their original belief.

In the case of a Jehovah's Witness this confirming information is sought only from within the Watchtower organization's own literature or from conversation with other JWs. This removes the effect of factual information from the mind of the JW and confirms and perpetuates the false teaching of the Watchtower organization on that particular subject.

Apparently most JWs can cope with **up to four conflicts** and still maintain their confidence in the Watchtower organization. However, whilst doing this the toll on their mental, emotional, and physical health is considerable.

CONFLICT OVER THE "SPIRITUAL PARADISE"

At some point in time, most JWs will experience personality conflicts within the congregation. They are then required to let the general public know that Jehovah's Witnesses provide a "spiritual paradise" with no problems. This is very damaging mentally for the JW. Furthermore, JWs find that the conduct and attitude that is espoused in the literature does not at all match with the way other JWs often deal with them. This is especially true if there is an issue over money.

CONFLICT OVER PROPHECY FAILURE AND OTHER DOCTRINAL FLIP-FLOPS

After such a failure of Watchtower prediction the process for the individual JWs goes from disappointment to confusion to explaining it away.

Also if past Watchtower organization policy has resulted in harm to or death of a loved one and then the policy changes, the result is extreme mental anguish and heartbreak over the damage to or loss of the loved one. It is almost impossible for the JW to come to terms with these conflicting thoughts. This tends to produce resentment toward the Watchtower organization and creates some fragmentation of the personality and integrity of the JW.

THE ESCAPING JW MUST BE ENCOURAGED TO START THINKING

From time to time individual JWs reach a kind of breaking point – and they begin to really question a number of things – attitudes, policies and teachings. This questioning should be encouraged so that the JW will have a truly open mind to all the biblical issues. The Apostle Paul tells us that: "...**the spiritual man examines indeed all things** ..." (1 Cor. 2:15).

ENCOURAGE THE JW TO BE A BEREAN TRUTHSEEKER

- ❖ “Now the latter (the Bereans) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, **carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so**. Therefore many of them became believers, and so did not a few of the reputable Greek women and of the men” (*Acts 17:10-12*).

There is nothing to show that the Bereans changed this fine habit after they became believers, and yet in the Watchtower magazine it was stated that:

“Jehovah is not pleased if we receive that food as though it might contain something harmful. We should have confidence in the channel God is using.” *WT 2/15/1981, p. 19.*

Indeed, why, after having been baptized, should any individual give up the God-given right to continue examining these matters and issues from whatever source he/she finds to be scholarly.

**WE ARE OBLIGATED TO WARN THE INDIVIDUAL JWS
THAT THEY ARE IN AN EXTREME CULT**

All of us here have a duty to try to warn anyone of danger. James said so in 5:19, 20:

- ❖ “If anyone among you is misled from the truth and another turns him back, know that he who turns the sinner back from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

However, the Watchtower organization itself advocates that we should try to warn individuals of the danger they are in. This applies just as much to the individual JWs who are in spiritual danger. On this *The Watchtower* magazine of January 15, 1974 stated that:

- When persons are in great danger from a source that they do not suspect or are being misled by those they consider their friends, is it an unkindness to warn them? They may prefer not to believe the warnings. They may even resent it. But does that free one from the moral responsibility to give that warning.

APPENDIX

FURTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF EXTREME AND ABUSIVE CULTS

1. The leaders emphasise that any waver of support for the organization or church is evidence of a wavering of one’s faith in God, so that one is viewed as spiritually weak. The members must believe that the group is always right, even if it contradicts itself in major ways.
2. The leadership causes the members to become extremely dependent on it for spiritual support: thereby creating a sense of powerlessness in its members and a dread of losing the group’s support.
3. Members are kept extremely busy with indoctrinating material to read and duties to perform, so that more and more time is spent under the direction of the group leadership.
4. Members are made to feel an extreme sense of urgency about given tasks. Many groups teach that the apocalypse is just around the corner, and have timetables for it’s occurrence with dates near enough to carry an emotional punch.
5. The group often uses guilt, shame, fear, and scare tactics; to control and to motivate its members.
6. Disagreement with the leadership, or doubts about its teachings are always seen as the fault of the member, due to the member’s lack of faith in the organization.
7. Members are indoctrinated with the belief that there is never a legitimate reason for leaving the group and

that if they do ever leave they will never find biblical truth elsewhere. They are misled into thinking that the only safety is within their religious organization.

8. If ever a member leaves the group, the love that was formerly shown to them turns into anger, hatred, and ridicule. So leaving the religious system is often painful, difficult, and with total loss of friends and family.
9. Friendships in the group tend to be shallow; the only real allegiance is to the leader/leadership.
10. Those who do not conform to the group's doctrinal and policy requirements finally will be expelled, and current members are forbidden to have contact with the former members, especially if they were expelled from the group.

SUGGESTED READING

Understanding Mind Control among Jehovah's Witnesses, Randall Watters

Captives of a Concept, Don Cameron

Combating Cult Mind Control, Steve Hassan

Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, Robert Lifton.

Brainwashing – The Science of Thought Control, Kathleen Taylor

Twisted Scriptures, Mary Alice Chrnalogar

RECOMMENDED WEBPAGES AND WEBSITE

<http://www.carm.org/jw/mental.htm>

<http://www.watchman.org/cults/mindcntr.htm>

Cult Awareness and Information Library <http://www.caic.org.au/> - under the heading 'Bible Based Cults and Isms'

Please see STUDY 19 in Volume 4 of our website www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk , which shows that the claim to be God's organization is probably bogus.

By Raymond C. Faircloth
www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk

