

the Free Minds Journal

promoting awareness of the Watchtower and other authoritarian religions

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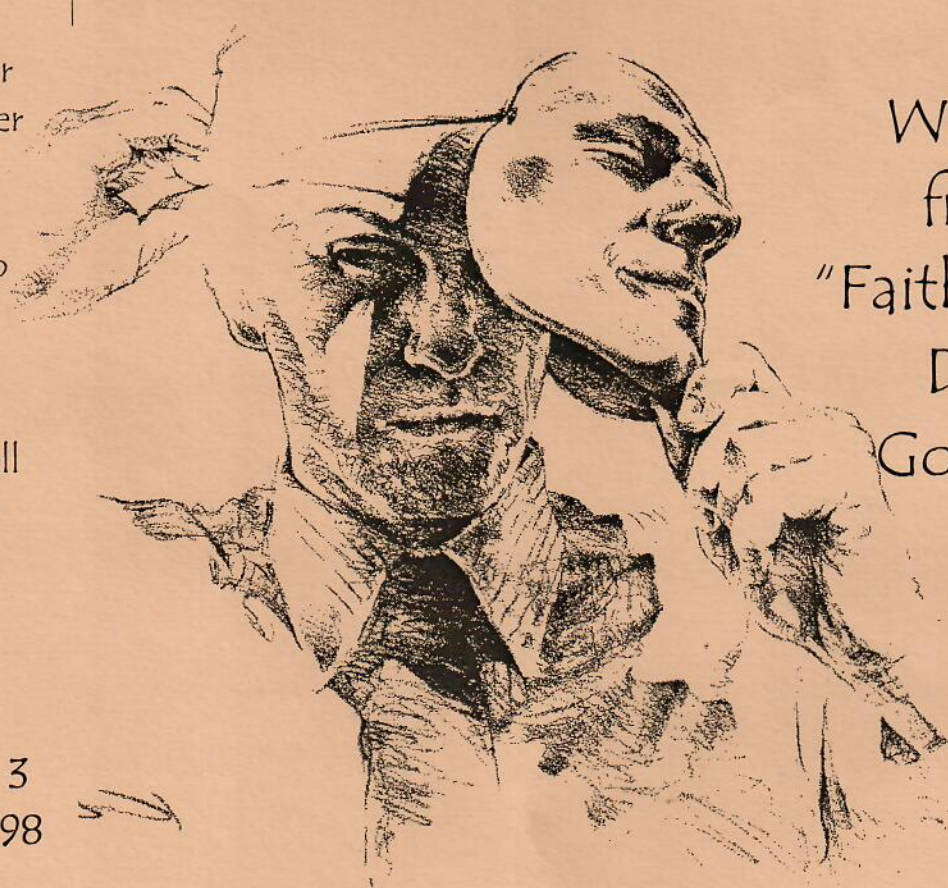
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Summer 1998

Will France Start a Wave of Religious Taxation in Europe?

America has paid attention to the phenomena of religious cults and authoritarian religions ever since hundreds of followers of the Reverend Jim Jones died in a mass suicide in Guyana, as well as the incident with cult leader David Koresh at Waco, Texas just a few years ago. But it is only in recent years that countries in Europe have paid much attention to the cult phenomena. France became alarmed when a religiously motivated mass suicide-murder of members of the Solar Temple group occurred in southeastern France in 1995, where 13 adults and 3 children perished. The government of France responded with what many consider to be extreme measures designed to cripple various religious groups in the country.

In 1981, an *Information Mission on Cults* was formed within the French Law Commission. This was followed by the *Vivien Report* on new religious movements, which was drafted during 1982 and 1983, and published in 1985.

After the mass murder-suicide by the *Order of the Solar Temple* and the gas attack in Tokyo subways by the *Aum Shinri Kyo* in 1995, the *National Assembly* established a parliamentary inquiry commission into new religious groups. It had no "ethnologists, sociologists and historians of religions" on staff. They held 20 hearings during a secret session lasting 21 hours. Such secrecy is normally applied only in matters of national security.

Jacques Guyard of the Socialist Party was the vice-chairman of the commission on cults during the interval 1995-1996. Jean-Pierre Brard, of the Communist Party, was Rapporteur. They prepared what has been called the "Guyard Report," which includes a listing of 172 new religious groups. Many people consider this a "black list" of harmful or dangerous sects.

Human Rights Without Frontiers, a European group dedicated to civil rights, believes that persecution of religious minorities is increasing in France. They believe that:

- Minority religions have been marginalized. They find difficult, or more expensive, to rent halls for public meetings. School children from small religious groups have been stigmatized.
- *Jehovah's Witnesses* have been targeted by the government. HRWF feels that they will be a test case. If there is little reaction from the public, then the persecution will expand to other religious groups.
- The government plans to eliminate minority religions one at a time.

Imposition of a Religious Tax

Jehovah's Witnesses are well established as a large Christian religion in France. They have been active there as the "Association Les Témoins de Jehovah" (continued on page 8)

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The Story of Phil Benson: A Jehovah's Witness

July 22, 1998

Dear Randy,

I began attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 1940s and at the age of 18 was baptised in 1954 and was attending the Long Beach East congregation. Don Cecil studied with me and he is such a fine witness. At the time I could respect many of the older ones and their dedication to Jehovah. Thinking back, I remember how much the expression "Society" was used in meetings. No one could do anything without the Society's approval.

I knew the personal nurse of Rutherford, she stayed with us and was a good person but some of the inside stories were always in my mind about what she had said. Berta Peal was a good friend of my family.

I was doing well as a young man of 20, and had a new Chevy with twin pipes. A pioneer sister was interested in me. She had an invitation to Gilead. She wanted to go with a husband and so in 1957 we got married. The Society

agreed and blessed our marriage. Three months later we got an assignment in Superior, Ariz. and I started to pioneer with her. I could get a job part time easily because I was specially trained in vocational schools in California for the printing trade. I had a good job and was doing great and companies sponsored my other special technical courses in printing. Putting me ahead in the latest technology at the time. I even ran a printing press at the WT depot in Lynwood, California part time. Brother Robert Porter was there for a while with brother Zook.

In Arizona, I worked three days a week and supported us, as well as another pioneer couple. It also helped the congregation to survive financially. I remember a brother Dean Songer was given his first circuit assignment there with the Superior Congregation. He rambled into town with an old trailer and Packard car that was overheating in the desert. I had filled out my application for Gilead and of course told them about my tech experience. In less than the two required years of pioneering, brother Knorr sent us an invitation to Gilead. It was the last class to be held at the old campus in upper NY, South Lansing, in 1960. After graduation Knorr asked us to go to Brooklyn and work in the printing factory (Bethel). We had already received our assignment to the Philippines.

At Brooklyn I worked in six departments from dispatch to bindery. In every department I could excel over what they were doing and introduced the offset printing idea, but it was not looked upon at the time as anything that would be used before Armageddon. I was able to teach them many shortcuts and trade secrets that old printers in the "world" had taught me. After this short stay in Brooklyn, my wife had a miscarriage and just before we were to leave, I asked the Bethel doctor to see her, but they refused and it was like a blow on the head to a young man that thought they were there when you need help. I had money and saw an outside doctor.

They always said to "Go ahead and Jehovah's spirit would take care of it." Brother Redford traveled with us to the Philippines and we became good friends and worked at the branch in Quezon City. He was teaching King-

dom Ministry School. We studied the language and shared some intimate thoughts about the way the Branch Servant Leone was caring for the 25 members. One time we were not getting enough food on the table and brother Redford told Leone about it and caused a lot of trouble and a bad report was filed in Redford's personal file. Knorr sent all the printing equipment to start the factory and I easily set it up and printed everything in 9 dialects as needed. Even on an empty stomach at times. Brother Redford and I, after leaving the Bethel table, would sometimes go to the local hamburger place and eat. I trained the local brothers to operate the factory and they were doing okay. At this time my wife got pregnant and we wondered what to do.

When we told the Society my wife was pregnant, they sent us a blunt letter saying we could leave anytime. The branch servant's wife was in same situation, and they were to stay and keep on with their work. We really felt like outsiders all of a sudden. We had to get out and they were going to bring in another brother to operate the factory. We had given our all, and had no money except a loan of a one-way ticket home. Not very rewarding for four years of work or the time spent pioneering. I decided to try for a job in Manila.

Because of my technical ability an American company which sold printing equipment offered me a job. To our surprise the job was assistant to the owner and general manager. We found a very nice place to live and the company gave us a car to drive. Our situation was as different as night and day. The Bethel brothers would not even visit us after this. When it came time for the birth of our baby, they never came around, just a few brothers that were close to us showed any concern.

My company paid all the birth expenses and took care of us. I was very successful in sales of equipment and gave many lectures at the universities there. As time passed, I was told by our family at home that my parents, now getting older, needed help. We came home by boat with all of our Filipino furniture and collection. The Bethel brother Denton Hopkinson gave us a brief goodbye.

I returned from the Philippines to Atascadero, Calif. and was received well by the brothers there. I was helped to settle back again as publisher in the local congregation. I never felt more love among the brothers than at this time. It was like Jehovah was the helping hand.

It was at the visit of the organization's circuit overseer that everything changed. Brother Graham wanted to change things. He imported a brother that he said "needed the experience" and so brother McCabe took over. Changes were made and the brothers began to move away until some of the finest brothers I knew were disfellowshipped. The whole scene changed so much that anyone not kissing up to the clicks were outsiders soon.

I wrote to Society for an assignment in Utah. We moved and served where the need was great on a starvation diet with two little boys. We started the work in Beaver and worked with Cedar City and later with the Bountiful Congregation when we almost starved to death in those small Mormon towns. In the Salt Lake area it was very slow to have the brothers accept us. I had to make an impression with my record of success to prove I was worthy of their recognition.

I did. I also impressed the Newspaper Agency Corp. who printed the two largest newspapers in Utah. They put me in charge of their promotional printing factory and I was able to give a great witness and some listened and came to be JW's to this day. Bountiful used me and I used my faith to move mountains in the building of the Kingdom Hall.

Example: One day we had a very large I-beam to position on the roof of the new hall. The brothers were all standing there and didn't know what to do. Damn it, I said, "Our faith in Jehovah will move this into place." I got into my car and went to a local crane operator. I explained what we needed and that we were JW's. He said, "Okay!" and surprised me. I drove back to the Kingdom Hall and all the brothers were eating and telling theocratic jokes. I told them that Jehovah was about to act. HA! Not long after this, a big crane outfit came up along side of the hall. A man began to ask where we wanted the I-beam. The brothers



Phil Benson at the ranch and Southern Nevada Times office

jumped to action. The crane moved in and set up and in short order it was over. The job was done, and for free. I wished that I could have given more to that crane man. He showed something that I believe is a true spirit of goodness. The friends did not even write a letter of thank you.

Time went on and I was big time with the organizing of the district assembly and many district assembly talks. Gilead graduates get extra honor, you see, even if I did not think I was so good. My secular job was with Hammermill Paper division in Salt Lake as a graphic arts specialist. The money was good and many of the friends enjoyed the drinks and food we set on the table. It really bought us into a clique of glory. I never had any time for my two boys, they were always left with my wife. I was busy "serving Jehovah."

The first problem was when my older boy (age 13) ran away from home on a motorcycle to California. In 1975, I sold my beautiful home and changed my job schedule to pioneer, but the brothers kept me so busy I could not pioneer, and I gave up. Finally I transferred my job to Las Vegas, NV and then I was confronted with more problems and responsibilities from the con-

gregation (part-time circuit work, etc.) I could not get away from them. I needed to be with my family and the teenage boys of mine who were experimenting with drinking and drugs. Oh, how I needed some of the brothers to help, but they were too busy. Then I gave up responsibility and they looked at me like I was sick and didn't love Jehovah. I was human!

I fell to a immoral condition out of hate and sorry. They did not help me but waited until the time they could disfellowship me, and they did. I was divorced. My kids left with their mother and fell to drugs and an immoral state. I changed my marriage status and lived alone. It was nice to be free. I did much good for the will of Jehovah and found friends that care. I taught at the university of Nevada for ten years and published four books on history and printing. I am well known among the historians of Nevada Historical Society and have met good people that are free to talk about life and what it is about.

I went back to the Watchtower and they required me to attend meetings for a while and reinstated me. I have since married a Filipino woman and have two children. We are helping to form a (continued on page 9)

Latest Whoppers from the "Faithful and Discreet" Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses

From one side of our mouth we say:

The idea of being someone's slave strikes most people as unpleasant. Yet, in today's world the reality is that people often let themselves be manipulated and influenced in so many subtle ways that they end up *involuntarily* doing what others want them to. For instance, the advertising industry and the entertainment world endeavor to press people into a mold, establishing standards for them to follow. Political and religious organizations get people to support their ideas and goals, not always by means of convincing arguments, but often by appealing to a sense of solidarity or loyalty. - *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1998, p. 15, 16

In order to avoid misunderstandings, Jehovah's Witnesses try to be careful about how they express themselves. Instead of saying, "The Society teaches," many Witnesses prefer to use such expressions as, "the Bible says," or, "I understand the Bible to teach." In this way they emphasize the personal decision that each Witness has made in accepting Bible teachings and also avoid giving the false impression that Witnesses are somehow bound to the dictates of some religious sect. - *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1998, p. 18, 19

If a Witness makes decisions on the basis of Bible counsel offered by the Governing Body, he does so of his own volition because his own study of the Bible has convinced him that this is the proper course. Each Witness is influenced by God's own Word to apply sound Scriptural counsel offered by the Governing Body, in full recognition that decisions he makes will affect his personal relationship with God, to whom he is dedicated.

.....

Do not the facts make clear that Jehovah's Witnesses are servants of God, not slaves of men? - *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1998, p. 22, 23

From the other side of our mouth we have said:

As we study the Bible we learn that Jehovah has always guided his servants in an organized way. And just as in the first century there was only one true Christian organization, so today Jehovah is using only one organization. ... Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they argue: "This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe." This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous? Such thinking is an evidence of pride. And the Bible says: "Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." ... If we get to thinking that we know better than the organization, we should ask ourselves: "Where did we learn Bible truth in the first place? Would we know the way of the truth if it had not been for guidance from the organization? Really, can we get along without the direction of God's organization?" No, we cannot! - *WT*, Jan. 15, 1983, p. 27

Finally, we might consider what the Society has published in the past on chronology. Some opposers claim that Jehovah's Witnesses are false prophets. These opponents say that dates have been set, but nothing has happened. Again we ask, What is the motive of these critics? Are they encouraging wakefulness on the part of God's people, or are they, rather, trying to justify themselves for falling back into sleepy inactivity?... *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1986, p. 17-19

Fight the tendency to doubt...If some tinge of doubt about Jehovah, his Word, or his organization has begun to linger in your heart, take quick steps to eliminate it before it festers into something that could destroy your faith...do not hesitate to ask for help from loving overseers in the congregation. They will help you race the source of your doubts, which may be due to pride or some wrong thinking. Has the reading or listening to apostate ideas or worldly philosophy introduced poisonous doubts?...act quickly to rout out of the mind any tendency to complain, to be dissatisfied with the way things are done in the congregation. *Cut off anything that feeds such doubts.* - *The Watchtower*, Feb. 1, 1996

Many of you may remember the article in the May/June 1996 *Free Minds Journal* noting the change in position regarding civil (non-combative) service as an alternative to military service. According to *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1996 article, "Paying Back Caesar's Things to Caesar" (p. 18)

Witnesses were subsequently "allowed" to do community service as an option if available in their country, such as hospital work, etc. instead of going to jail, as had previously been the case. Typical to the methodology of the Governing Body, no apologies were given, and the article made it ap-

pear that this was not a big change in policy, and made no mention of possible repercussions from the members who had spent long years in jail for refusing alternative service. Two years later and after many letters of objection, they feel obliged to say something.

Of course, the Governing Body takes no responsibility. As usual, it is the fault of overzealous publishers who were "very strict" and who should now re-adjust their position to match the more reasonable stance of the leadership and others whose conscience allowed them to disobey previous organizational policies. The following quotes are taken from *The Watchtower*, Aug. 15, 1998 p. 17:

Feelings of Having Suffered Needlessly

In the past, some Witnesses have suffered for refusing to share in an activity that their conscience now might permit. For example, this might have been their choice years ago as to certain types of civilian service. A brother might now feel that he could conscientiously perform such without overstepping his Christian neutrality regarding the present system of things.

Was it unrighteousness on Jehovah's part to allow him to suffer for rejecting what he now might do without consequences? Most who have had that experience would not think so. Rather, they rejoice that they had the opportunity of demonstrating publicly and clearly that they were determined to be firm on the issue of universal sovereignty. (Compare Job 27:5) What reason could anyone have to regret having followed his conscience in taking a firm stand for Jehovah? ...

....
In modern times, there have been some Witnesses who were very strict in their view of what they would or would not do. For that reason they suffered more than others. Later, increased knowledge helped them to expand their view of matters. But they have no reason to regret having earlier acted in harmony with their conscience, even when this possibly brought extra suffering."

Most modern Witnesses are unawares of the changes in policy regarding this

matter over the years. As with many other policies, "mother" has gone back and forth over what she allowed her "children" to do or not do. Note the following policy shifts starting in 1918 and moving forward:

A Christian might not have been able conscientiously to engage in the military activities of a country offering only combatant service; later, when the opportunity is enlarged so that he may choose some good work such as the hospital or ambulance service, he may with a free conscience take such service. A Christian who may have been presented the perverted viewpoint that the Red Cross work is only the aiding of that killing which is against his conscience, cannot help the Red Cross; then he gains the broader viewpoint that the Red Cross is the embodiment of helping the helpless, and he finds himself able and willing to help the Red Cross according to ability and opportunity. A Christian, unwilling to kill, may have been conscientiously unable to buy government bonds; later he considers what great blessings he has received under his government, and realizes that the nation is in trouble and facing dangers to its liberty, and he feels himself conscientiously able to lend some money to the country, just as he would lend to a friend in distress. — *Watchtower Reprints*, June 1, 1918, p. 6268

Because they are wholly dedicated to God by their vows to him through Christ, Jehovah's witnesses are according to God's Word no part of this world which is governed by the political systems. For this important Bible reason they tell officials of the government that they conscientiously object to serving in any military establishment or any civilian arrangement that substitutes for military service. — *The Watchtower*, February 1, 1951, p. 77

An examination of the historical facts shows that not only have Jehovah's Witnesses refused to put on military uniforms and take up arms but, during the past half century and more, they have also declined to do non-combatant service or to accept other work assignments as a substitute for military service. Why? Because they have studied God's requirements and then made a personal, consci-

entious decision. — *United In Worship Of The Only True God*, 1983 ed., p. 167

Then came the most recent shift:

What, though, if the State requires a Christian for a period of time to perform civilian service that is a part of national service under a civilian administration? Here again, Christians must make their own decision based on an informed conscience...What if the Christian's honest answers to such questions lead him to conclude that the national civilian service is a "good work" that he can perform in obedience to the authorities? That is his decision before Jehovah. Appointed elders and others should fully respect the conscience of the brother and continue to regard him as a Christian in good standing. — *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1996, p.20

Many Witnesses who have spent time in jail must be irked at this shift in "Jehovah's viewpoint," realizing they have wasted their time obeying, not Jehovah, but a few old men in Brooklyn who (along with the advice of their lawyers) vote on matters that severely affect the quality of their lives, usually for the worse. Yet they refuse to take responsibility for their incompetence in determining what Jehovah wants them to do.

Blood Transfusion Update

In order to gain (or retain) status as a legitimate religion in Bulgaria and potentially other European countries, the Watchtower has agreed not to prosecute members who take a blood transfusion, as of March of this year.

The branch office in Sweden has made a statement in a newspaper that JWs will no longer disfellowship or shun people for receiving a blood transfusion. Olle Hjerpe (Swedish WT representative) on the other hand says that the ban no longer exists, indicating that it *has been so for a while*, and that the Witnesses consider the issue to be a matter of "conscience."

Time will tell whether this becomes another "whopping lie" of the Governing Body, and members who receive a blood transfusion get shunned anyway. Also, will the WT tell the rest of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, or enforce a double standard? *Stay tuned!* -o-

Why Free Minds, Inc. Sells Things for Money

People may wonder why we sell books when the Watchtower gives them away for free. One might be able to go into a Kingdom Hall as a newly-interested person and get all sorts of items at no charge. Yet Free Minds, Inc. may sell some of those items at bookstore prices or higher. Why is that?

We have to buy them

The Watchtower doesn't give you something for nothing. Who do you think foots the bill? (See Reprints: The Jun/Aug 1995 *Free Minds Journal*, "How the Watchtower Was Financed Pre-1990," and the Jul/Aug 1996 *Free Minds Journal*, "The Watchtower Way of Laundering Money.") Most outsiders are unaware that the Witnesses are expected to pay from 1-2 times the retail worldly value of that book or item that they gave you for "free." In fact, the brothers working at the literature counter usually won't tell the rest of the Witnesses about how they have a money quota for specific volumes of "free literature."

We don't have salesmen

A good percentage of their income is derived from "placing" books, since whether the person at the door or on the job actually donates anything or not, the Witness is encouraged to donate BEFORE and AFTER the picking up of the item from the Kingdom Hall's literature counter. A collection box is conspicuously placed next to the counter, and Witnesses often must be "reminded" to give at least the worldly equivalent sale value. If the Witnesses don't collectively return an expected amount of money for the literature they order, each Kingdom Hall will be

refused further shipments of literature until the "amount expected" is handed over. HARDLY a true donation policy! It is illegal in principle according to local sales tax laws, and worthy of the term FRAUD. So, in effect, the Witnesses are theoretically getting MORE than retail value for their books, but the unsuspecting neophyte only sees the *appearance* of generosity and selflessness. On the part of the average JW that may very well be true, but not in the case of the motives of the organization. They will not and have never disclosed their financial records to anyone save their own lawyers.

We don't own farms and large real estate holdings, we don't rent to outsiders

The Watchtower organization owns several large farms, which primarily supply food for their operations in their local Bethel headquarters, enabling them to cut the cost of expenses. In addition to this, they own all the land that every Kingdom Hall, every Assembly Hall and Bethel Home is built on. Yet the local Witnesses are expected to pay for the Kingdom Hall property and building through a loan system that pays near-market interest. The locals are helping to enlarge the vast landholdings of the Watchtower Society, and they are punished for not paying the mortgage if they fall into arrears.

In addition to the buildings Witnesses use for Bethel residence and meetings, the Watchtower also holds a large amount of property that is simply for the sake of holding assets, and has now begun the process of actually RENTING some of their property to outside local businesses, as is the case with a large shopping mall in Florida at this time. No doubt there are other examples not yet discovered. Yet they point to such schemes on the part of other religions as being corrupt and devoid of ethics.

We don't solicit benefits from estates, inheritances and business dealings on the side

The Watchtower regularly encourages their members to donate their es-

tates when they die, as well as property and stocks and other commodities when they are still alive. No doubt with over 5 million members, they acquire a large amount of assets from this source. All donations are tax-exempt, since they are a non-profit organization. Oddly enough (and unlike with non-church non-profit organizations like Free Minds, Inc.) they are NOT REQUIRED to open their financial books by U.S. law. They are a church, or religion. (No wonder why cults get away with so much corruption for so long.) We make our finances available. Why won't the Watchtower? They consistently refuse to give any details of their monies.

We don't cheat the government

A representative of Free Minds, Inc. will not come to your door and offer you something for free, giving the impression that is really is free when in fact it is being paid for (theoretically) sometimes twice over by the Witness who gives it to you. We will charge you sales tax if you live in California, the Watchtower will not. Why?

When the headquarters punishes the local Kingdom Hall by refusing shipments of literature if the appropriate "value" in cash is not sent in to the Society, this can HARDLY be a statement of generosity and a free spirit! Yet few Witnesses know about the details of such transactions. I suggest asking the person at the literature counter in the Kingdom Hall some critical questions regarding whether the literature is really "free."

We don't hide our finances

Sometimes the persons that appear to be making the money are in fact only the ones working the hardest, and may have little recompense in return. Sometimes they believe in the community service of warning people so much that they are willing to face the embarrassment of having to send a call out for donations. *Help!* is not a dirty word. Ask the soup kitchens and local charities. Often it is the people who never give who seem to complain the most.

As far as Watchtower-printed books and antiquarian (antique) Watchtower

publications, Free Minds, Inc. follows the typical business practice of buying at 50-60% of the retail value, sometimes less if we purchase a large library with the intent of selling it for funds. We also offer these items at a much lower price than our competition, usually 60% of the advertised price of items offered by Witness, Inc. so that they are reasonably affordable. Witnesses have even been known to burn their own older publications so as to keep them from getting into the hands of their "opponents," so it is no mystery that they go out of their way to keep us from getting anything they offer for "free" to you. Why? Because we will use it to expose them for the crooks they are.

In the case of modern books, we either buy them through book wholesalers like everyone else, or we may print some books so as to cut the printing cost on small runs like we typically have.

If you are so certain the Witnesses must be right, and are unwilling to ask some critical questions, you will pay the price in being angry at yourself or others later, when after 5-10 years of working for the "mother" organization, you discover her true nature. Don't be ignorant like I was. Put your emotions aside and be real for a moment, and investigate the facts.

We give away many things free

I have written articles and books and made tapes and videos regarding the Watchtower for over 16 years of my life. When our website went up, I immediately put MOST of all that I had written up for free. I send two free samples of the *Free Minds Journal* to those who simply ask, no strings attached. I send out free tracts, spend long hours on the phone with people whose families are falling apart, and I often give away some things to needy Witnesses looking for help.

I cry with them for free, and I teach them to laugh for free. I share my faith about Christ with them for free, as I have had opportunity to do in every exit-counseling scenario I have participated in. All but one took the gospel for free as well, and became a Christian. THAT is certainly free.

-O-

FRANCE... (continued from page 2)

since 1900. There are approximately 220,000 Witnesses in that country, and almost 15 million worldwide. Many French families have belonged to this group for over five generations. They have a separate company that prints and distributes magazines and books. The latter pays taxes to the state as a commercial organization. But until now, the main religious organization has been free of taxes.

The French Tax Administration has ruled that the Witnesses are not a "worship association." Rather, they are considered to be a potentially dangerous sect. Fiscal services determined that "the association of Jehovah's Witnesses forbids its members to defend the nation, to take part in public life, to give blood transfusions to their minor children and that the parliamentary commission on cults has listed them as a cult which can disturb public order."

In 1998, the government of France imposed a 60% tax on religious offerings given by Jehovah's Witnesses to their organization, the local branch of the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society (WTS). A lien has also been established against their headquarters and printing plant. The intent appears to be to bankrupt the group. The Interior Ministry has refused to register the Temoins de Jehovah as an "association culturelle" or "association culte." Thus they assert that member's contributions are taxable at the normal 60% rate for gifts in that country, under a 1992 law. The government has calculated that 303 million in French Francs (\$50 million in US funds) is owed to the government, plus penalty charges and interest. This represents taxes not collected for the past 5 years. The Minister of Finance has refused to confirm this assessment, citing the confidential nature of the information. They do acknowledge that negotiations continue with the WTS.

On July 1, 1998 a demonstration was organized at the Esplanade of Human Rights near the Palais de Chaillot in Paris. Jehovah's Witnesses from 15 EU member countries protested the tax. They also visited embassies, foreign ministries and selected members of the French parliament.

Spokesperson Lyman A. Swingle, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses said: "If taxes are owed, the religious organization should pay. However, if our religion is targeted unfairly and illegally for exorbitant taxes, then it has a right to protest...When the law grants exemption from taxes to religious organizations and that exemption is allowed to the two largest Christian religions in the country but withheld from the third largest Christian religion, then we feel that something is seriously wrong." Swingle also wrote an open letter to Jacques Chirac, the President of France. He said, in part: "The ability to practice religion freely is a basic human right, supported by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Constitution of the French Republic. Yet the tax authority believes it has the right to use its power of taxation arbitrarily to restrict some religions but not others." He asked for the President's "support in removing this unjust and discriminatory tax...avoiding a dangerous threat to religious freedom and human rights in France."

The WTS took out full-page advertisements in the *New York Times* on July 5, 1998 and in the *International Herald Tribune* for July 8. They accused the French government of a "shocking display of religious discrimination."

According to data published in 1993 by the Interior Ministry, only 149 out of a total of 1,053 Protestant associations and only 2 out of thousands of Muslim associations in France are currently entitled to tax exempt status. All of the groups which are not recognized are presumably now at risk of losing their freedom of religion and of assembly.

The WTS has a long, historical record of successful court battles in the U.S. and Canada which have gone a long way to define religious freedom in these two countries. The next few years may see them forced to accomplish the same task in France.

[Information used by permission of the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, with a website at: www.religioustolerance.org/]

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The Story of Phil Benson

(cont. from page 4)

Tagalog congregation in Las Vegas, but they have not fully accepted me back.

One day my non-dedicated wife wanted to see how the work was done from door to door. When we got to the Kingdom Hall there was an overzealous elder that jumped up in front of everyone to confront my wife as to her qualifications to go in the preaching work. She was not an approved, non-dedicated publisher. We sheepishly left the hall and I tried to explain. She was almost in tears. I wrote to the Governing Body about this and they made the brother apologize, but ever since they have black-balled us and we are treated with little concern. The brother has spread this to other congregations and we have no chance to be a part of anything now. But they call me every month on time to get a field report for the preaching activity.

They never visit. Oh, yes, they did once when I asked the Society if I could get some disks of witnessing tracts to use on the Internet. They put me in my place as to what I could do and not do. No disks. "Just refer anyone to the official Watchtower website." I was disabled with a heart attack, and now I sit at home and no JW's ever visit me. I write to the Governing Body and they never answer my letters. I am sorry, they did give me an answer when I donated \$20. Now what am I going to do? Well, I know Jehovah and Jesus and will serve them. I no longer feel at home at the meetings and feel better at home with Jesus. I can see how it is to feel like an outcast as Jesus was from the Jewish organization. But my knowledge of Jehovah and Jesus does lead to life! (John 17:3)

I have made two visits to the branch office in the Philippines. One as disfellowshipped where I let my wife see where I was stationed as a missionary. I sat outside and they never let me enter the door. Nor would they talk to me. The second time when I was reinstated, they gave me a tour. Fabulous buildings and a factory. Yet the foundation was through my hand in setting up the printing. All my skills, my ideas (while not accepted at the time) are all into practice now and they speak of it like they thought it all up. I used to sit and

talk with brother Knorr on his visits and he said that I had good ideas and he would tell other branches. Individuals have no place in the WT organization. Maybe I did not kiss the rear of as many as I should have.

Now disabled and with a heart condition, one son is an alcoholic and the other is in prison for drugs. It makes me hurt with anger. My last two little ones I stay with and spend as much time as I can. None of the brothers seem to understand my situation. I feel alone. The other day I went over to visit my brother and they had no time for me. They had to go to the meeting, and left us for their form of worship. I think when it comes to exciting to love and good works, a simple gathering of two or three is all that is needed.

Where do we go now? No one loves us anymore. We were stepping stones to an organization and reaped very little from it. Our eyes were covered and a muzzle was put to our mouth. Hurt and anger is felt inside and this helps to get it out. I am glad Jehovah never left me and has lifted me up. You cannot hurt little ones and get away with it, Jehovah will meet out justice.



I was also the editor and publisher of the "Southern Nevada Times," and living on a ranch near Las Vegas. The local newspaper put me on the front page of their magazine with a story. These were great days of freedom from the organization, doing things I used to be guilty about taking time to do.

Phil Benson
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Letters to the Editor

Dear Randy,

I want to send this letter of heartfelt thanks for your efforts to enlighten others on the perils of the Watchtower Society. I personally have benefited immensely from the information I found on your web site, and most especially because it was there that I first found out about *Crisis of Conscience* and *In Search of Christian Freedom*.

After being disfellowshipped in 1992 at age 21, I embarked upon all the things that the WT taught I should never do: I went off to college, got my degree, landed a well-paying job in high tech, in the process meeting a beautiful young woman whom I married last year. I proceeded to buy a very nice home in Orange County - all the things that I dreamed of doing. But I still felt incomplete, because I had been neglecting God for so long. When I searched inside I knew that it came down to a feeling of guilt, which I had never really recovered from.

Just about a year ago, I considered actually returning to the WT - thinking I could never serve God apart from them. My wife was, of course, horrified at this prospect. But she knew she could never change me. That would have to come from me. Fortunately, I started browsing the web for sites on JW's and came across yours and some of the other quality sites.

I can say that the information I found on the web, as well as from reading Franz' and Penton's books, literally changed my life. It scares me how close I came to returning to the sect, in spite of all my experiences which urged me not to. The Society truly does exert a strong form of mind control.

Having put my experiences with the sect into proper context, I am now much healthier, spiritually speaking. I am able to relate to Christ in a manner I never realized was possible.

We ex-JW's have a background that few outsiders understand. It helps to know we are not alone.

Peace be with you,
David Cerwinski
Brea, CA
dcerwinski@lucent.com

Twenty Year Struggle Over

By Kelly Lutz

Twenty years in the Jehovah's Witness religion, and I don't know where to begin. I am still reeling from the experience. Perhaps by telling my story I can help someone else and bring about catharsis for my own pain.

I come from a very dysfunctional family background. My opinion is that the Watchtower organization attracts our kind. You see, I thought I had finally found love and acceptance, superior Bible knowledge and true Christians to associate with. Yet I believe my experience is somewhat unique in that I never fully believed all of the organization's teachings. Because of this I struggled with my heart and conscience daily. Why did I stay in for so many years? I wish I knew.

My doubts and protests were always met with anger that I now realize was actually fear. Elders didn't usually care for me, and it was rare when I could have an intelligent, open-minded conversation with one. I was often warned about my "independent spirit" and "bad attitude."

After two years of study with the Witnesses I had misgivings about baptism but I succumbed to the pressure, along with my husband. However we were never really welcomed into the fold because, even though we attended most meetings and assemblies, our door-to-door preaching work was very minimal. We felt uncomfortable with it and hated putting our children through the humiliation. With the exception of my oldest daughter who remains a Witness, our kids hated the whole routine of meetings and assemblies and service and picnics, etc.

Once when our girls were excluded from a party they were told by a very self-righteous young lady that it was because they had missed too many meetings lately. This attitude of having to be approved by the group puts a lot of pressure on young people to conform or they will be left out.

Except for a handful of people, I never became truly comfortable with

the friendships I made because I always had to be cautious about what I said and did. Honesty was not appreciated. I stifled my thoughts and feelings.

It was a continual battle to socialize when most of our so-called brothers and sisters thought of us as spiritually weak, and yet people who were not Witnesses were supposed to be "bad association." It becomes quite confusing especially when as a Witness you learn that there are men and women claiming to belong to the "one religion" approved by God, yet who are practicing vile things. Particularly when they hold a position where others tend to look to them as examples. This became upsetting to me. Adultery and addictions are not uncommon and the same is true of spousal and child abuse. It began to depress me and I started to drink alcohol to numb the pain. This habit eventually escalated into a pretty serious problem. I was probably the only one who knew I had a drinking problem.

Toward the end of 1996 my oldest daughter was engaged to be married. I had started my own business and was beginning to feel more confident as a woman. Two weeks before the wedding my husband told me he was having an affair. I was completely shocked and felt devastated. When I went to the elders for help, I was confused by their attitude. They seemed disgusted! It was almost as if they didn't want to be bothered. At one of the committee meetings an elder asked, "Kelly, do you try to make things pleasant for him (my husband) when he comes home from work in the evenings?" I felt humiliated and couldn't answer at the time but later that week I remember feeling angry about it. I kept imagining meeting my husband at the door in a sexy nightgown, drink in one hand and a pot roast in the other. I was sure it was what they had in mind. I could write a whole book on the difficulties of being a woman in the Watchtower.

I wanted to save my marriage and I felt it was out of character for my husband to have done this to our family. He was an alcoholic and we had been to the brothers many times seeking help. Always the same advice was given, "Go out in the field ministry more often and don't miss a meeting." I have to say that neither one of us felt like we had any business telling others how they

should live when we had our own problems and were unhappy in our religion. I wondered if "elder school" trained these men in counseling families or just on how to enforce organizational policies and procedures. We all know that most religions provide their pastors and other leaders with instruction in dealing with the common problems facing members. They make use of Alcoholics Anonymous, hold stop-smoking clinics, have teen programs and many other worthwhile outlets for the individual needs of people. It was all becoming a mockery to me as I struggled to realize that I wasn't crazy for seeing the truth about what on was really going on around me.

At the summer assembly in 1997, sitting high up in the balcony, I wanted so badly to fly away from it all. Away from these people and their programs! I had been listening to the same information and reading the same books over and over year after year and my spirit was still so empty. On the long drive home I realized that I would never attend another assembly again, I was on my way out. In September of that year I read *In Search Of Christian Freedom* by Raymond Franz. The title hit home with me. All I can say about the book is that now I knew that my feelings were valid. Raymond had "been there, done that," so to speak.

I was fired from a job because I had disassociated myself from the organization. One of my dearest friends asked my daughter, "Couldn't she have just quietly left so that I could still be your mom's friend?" She responded, "You know she couldn't do that, Mom's too honest."

I didn't feel honest hiding a drinking problem and at the same time acting bold about what I was doing. My life was falling apart in reality.

When I was a child I turned to Jesus in tearful prayer and I felt he saved me from the hell of my home life. Now I am becoming reacquainted with this Christ who was an obscure figure to me while I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I have attempted going to church from time to time but find it difficult and have even experienced panic attacks during services. The process of recovery from the effects of years in a cult is a long and difficult one, I know my journey is not over. -o-

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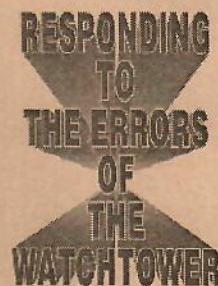
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Larry A. Bradley is a Southern Baptist pastor and a recognized authority and lecturer on Watchtower doctrine. Pastor Bradley received his Bachelor of Arts degree from San Francisco State University with his major in Philosophy and Religion. He also holds a Master of Divinity degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, in Mill Valley, California.



LARRY A. BRADLEY

"Yes, Let's Have a Bible Study, especially with a Jehovah's Witness."

This 2-volume, (8 1/2" X 11") spiral-bound study/reference set is in an easy-to-follow outline format. 250 pages of valuable information. These volumes explore the Jehovah's Witness teachings with WT Society reprints, other sources and accurate biblical understanding. Topics include: Paradise (is in Heaven), Hell, Heaven, Michael, the Last Supper, the Cross or Stake, Blood, Holidays, Resurrection of Jesus, and False Prophecies, to name a few.

This is a must for anyone working with Jehovah's Witnesses and for Witnesses themselves who are willing to take a balanced view of the scriptures. Written by Mary Mal, a former Witness for 12 years and co-founder of the Jehovah's Witness Outreach in Detroit, MI. She is currently hosting a 15-min. radio broadcast on 560 AM on Saturday mornings from 9:15-9:30 A.M. entitled, "Presenting the real truth to Jehovah's Witnesses." To order the 2-volume set send \$35.00 plus \$4.00 sh/hdl. to: Mary Mal, P.O. Box 1891, Warren, MI 48091-1891 (or send a SASE for the full list of volume topics). You can also e-mail our ministry at: Philippage@compuserve.com. —Mary Mal

Counting the Days to Armageddon by Robert Crompton

This book is a detailed historical study of the Watch Tower movement's attempts to interpret prophecy. It shows how Russell attempted to put right the failures of his predecessors. His understanding of the countdown to Armageddon is set out clearly and in detail. Rutherford's dismantling of Russell's system and substitution with his own completely different set of ideas is the next stage in this amazing saga. The teachings of today's Watch Tower Society then follow. But where does the Society go from here?

Full references are given throughout and a useful bibliography is included. *Counting the Days to Armageddon* is for anyone who is interested in the Watch Tower movement.

To get your copy send £20 Sterling (International Money Order) to:

Robert Crompton
47 Sketty Park Road,
Swansea, SA2 9AS, United Kingdom.

Preaching Doctrine to Former Witnesses

The following is a letter I mailed to our Internet mailing list known as Jesus-witnesses. It is in response to the "wars" that sometimes rage when Christians, usually who had never been Witnesses, come online and start preaching certain doctrines as being vital, such as the Trinity, etc. when they know people who are currently Witnesses and others who just left the organization and are fragile are online, and quite upset about this approach.

Hi all,

Just a thought on why preaching to former cult members (especially Jehovah's Witnesses) is such a hot topic.

When you have been seduced by a mind control system, or even a controlling church (or perhaps due to your own extreme fundamentalist way of thinking like I was) and then see the fallacy of such a system, you become aware of the nature of seduction and deception to some extent. This sends up red warning flags in our minds when we see, smell, feel or otherwise perceive something similar coming at us again. Most of us, however, have not had the time to research the issue of mind control so as to clearly identify what is dangerous and what is not. (This is recommend for anyone dealing with cult-related anger.)

Additionally, if we have had a BAD EXPERIENCE with a church or cult, we are driven by feelings such as anger, loathing, and the desire to strike back at others who may try to seduce us into their brand of truth. It is almost like being molested by a smooth-talking father as a pre-teen, and then being wary of all men later in life who have a similar STYLE (whether they be the same or very different from our molester). This is often the action/reaction we see on this list. Preachers and those who "have the truth" are seen as molesters, whether harmless or not in reality. We run and hide, we swing to hit and hurt, or we cry out for help, because we don't want to be molested again. We are rightfully angry.

Some of us have found refuge in a system of thought, a religious faith, or a philosophy to help us heal from our

wounds. It works for us. We assume it will work for others the same way, but often we are wrong. When we push the issue, we begin to appear as psychic molesters: ugly opportunists seeking to drag our listeners down into another false system.

It is especially scary for a former member of a cult to be told to seek a supernatural experience to achieve their healing. Believe me, I have personally tried them all (speaking in tongues, deliverance, born-again, faith confession, etc.). Some seem legitimate to me and others do not. I have survived, wiser and happier, and I wish the same for all of you.

I am not angry with the Watchtower, though I consider it dangerous and a cult. Often I make fun of their foppishness. CULTS ALWAYS TAKE THEMSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY. But I DO get angry when I watch someone being "spiritually molested" by another. Witnesses think I am angry because I expose the Watchtower, yet some Christians think I am bitter or angry because I expose fallacies in the thinking of those who swear they have an infallible system. Funny, they never want to debate it with me or discuss it! I guess they think I am too angry. In reality, they are the angry ones, usually because their agenda has been hindered when I confront them on it in a public forum.

As a consultant in the field of exit-counseling, I have learned that morality does not come automatically to someone just because they claim a religious faith. Daily I see Christians who pose as Witnesses, who deceive others into thinking they are studying with the Witnesses, and seem to have no qualms about using whatever technique necessary to help another "find Jesus." Yet most know in their hearts that Jesus would not do such things himself. They feel they need to help out, because otherwise the devil will make his inroads. They are God's "helping hand." Their god is like a statue dressed up, prayed to and food put before it daily, but has no actual power other than the slight of hand of its believer.

I decided early on that my goal was not to convert people who were still in a fragile mindset over the cult issue. It is immoral and despicable in my opinion. Yet because I believe in the power of Jesus' love, I find myself repeatedly being used as a channel to educate them about their questions on Christianity and the Bible, which they will ask on their own. In about the last seven exit-counselings I have done (about one per year), six have become born-again Christians, and in almost every case I was there in their moment of conversion (and often quite surprised at the phenomena). I also had this experience when I left the Witnesses, and it stands as real to me today as it was when I was much younger. I just don't buy into the current American "evangelicals club," I guess..

For those of you who are Christians and wish to help others I will say this. HAVE FAITH.

Faith that God will move his own hands.

Faith that your hands will not resist His moving them to help others.

Faith that if this belief system or relationship with God as you see it will help someone, that God will do his work and you don't need to screw it up.

Faith that God loves you as you are, and will grow you up in his own way.

I see miracles as much as any of you. I had one this morning, a small one but one that brightened my day. That is the beauty of believing, but it is not beauty for everyone. Love others anyway, we are all just small, helpless creatures at times, and though we bark big, we still die like the rest, and are soon forgotten.

Maybe share this with others sometime, if you think of it.

my thoughts,
Randy Watters