

## **The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society: The Critical Years 1975-1997 | Governing Body | Organization**

**This was written by a person who at one time belonged to the Jehovah's Witness church. I don't remember the name. I found the article to be very informative..**

**For one thing, Jehovah's Witnesses offer an attractive package. They offer the householder eternal life on a paradise earth, and can quote the Scriptures to prove it. They offer to study the Bible with interested persons, and use one of the Watchtower Society's publications such as Knowledge That Leads To Everlasting Life. As the Bible is presented in simple terms, the householder is elated to find answers to questions that the churches do not appear to answer. The newly interested person is now ready to challenge his friends and relatives on their traditional religious beliefs, and is scarcely able to contain what he is learning.**

**His friends and relatives become defensive, as their belief systems are being threatened. The new convert is warned that even his family may persecute him and speak abusively of him, according to 1 Peter 4:4. Suddenly, Christmas and Easter become pagan holidays that are forbidden to observe. Saluting the flag is idolatry, and blood transfusions are against the rules, even in life-or-death situations. In just six months, a person's life can be radically transformed so as to be unrecognizable by former friends.**

**It was not so in the beginning. C. T. Russell was against organizing his own religion, or at least he said so (see The Watchtower, 1895 p.216; also 1894 p.384 & 1893 p.266). He also noted**

**"The endeavor to compel all men to think alike on all subjects, culminated in the great apostasy and the development of the great papal system, and thereby the gospel, the one faith that Paul and the other apostles set forth, was lost - buried under the mass of uninspired decrees of popes and councils. The unity of the early church, based upon the simple gospel and bound only by love, gave place to the bondage of the church of Rome...Each new reform movement (like Protestantism) has made the failure of attempting to make a creed just large enough for its prime movers." --WT, Sep. 1893, p. 1572**

**On why organizations don't work -**

**"...we have pointed out continually the tendency of Christian people toward union, showing, too, that such a union is predicted in scripture; but that its results, while designed to be good, will really be bad; and this because it will be a mechanical union instead of a heart unity."--WT, Mar 1893, p. 1504**

The "Bible Students," as they were called back in the early years, could attend other churches and celebrate Christmas. Yet, five presidents and ninety years later, the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society is virtually unrecognizable from its origins. Boasting over five million active members and massive real estate holdings, the Watchtower is a major industry that keeps a tight clamp on its financial records as well as its inner politics.

### **Skeletons In the Closet**

By the mid-70's, some members of the Watchtower began to question their dating system, notably their "Gentile Times" calculations. The trouble began when a handful of men were commissioned to write the book *Aid To Bible Understanding*, a dictionary of Bible terms for the Witnesses. In researching their chronological dating system for the "last days," historical research proved without a doubt that their foundational date of 1914 (supposedly the invisible return of Christ) was nothing more than the start of World War I. This date had been arrived at through a series of unrelated calculations, counting 2520 years from the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 BC to the year AD 1914. But the clock-stopper was this: According to all historical records, Jerusalem was destroyed in 587-586 BC, a full 20 years later than the Witness date. Neither was there found any basis in the Bible for a 2520-year "Gentile Times." Russell's dates and concepts had been relied upon with inaccurate history as a foundation. A shock-wave within the organization was inevitable. No matter how tight the security, sooner or later it would leak out. The-'trickle' began in the '70s, and the "dam" broke in 1980.

Most Jehovah's Witnesses do not realize the critical significance of the date 1914 to their entire organizational structure and doctrine. Though originally the return of Christ was said to be in 1874 and that 1914 would be the end of the world, modern-day Witnesses have come to accept 1914 as the return of Christ (though an official statement to this effect was not made until 1929). The Governing Body has explained to the Witnesses that when Christ returned in 1914, there was a "cleansing of the organization" for 3 1/2 years, culminating in Christ judging the organization and finally choosing it in 1918 as his "faithful and discreet slave" to instruct mankind of God's truths in these last days. This was also the year of the invisible "rapture," where deceased Witnesses (supposedly including the early Christians) were resurrected and ascended to heaven.

The whole concept of "God's one true organization" is chronologically dependent on the accuracy of the date 1914.

Yet that is not all. The choosing of another "class" of Christians, those who would live on the earth but not be born again or anointed by the Holy Spirit, was also based on this pivotal date of 1914. Counting ahead to the year 1935, President Joseph Rutherford was looking for an explanation as

to why there were so many coming into the organization, while the Bible (he believed) spoke of only 144,000 going to heaven and ruling with Christ. He began searching the book of Revelation for some kind of answer, and Rev. 7:13-17 was seized upon. This was providential, as it also seemed to solve another of their big problems - how to gain more control over the local congregations. Up to this time, congregation overseers (called elders) had been elected into office, and many had full control of their congregations, much to the dismay of Rutherford. Now, a two-fold interpretation of this passage would "kill two birds with one stone." First, the "elders" of verse 13 were identified as these special 144,000 (represented by the Board of Directors), and not the congregational overseers.

Thus, the term "elder" was dropped, and all of the congregational overseers lost their positions of responsibility. Those reappointed would now be called by a new name, "company servants." Of course, a new method of choosing these key men was instituted simultaneously - they were chosen by the Board of Directors! That meant that many previous "elders" were not reappointed to office, and Rutherford assumed complete control over who would be leaders. Many of the former "elders" became disgusted and left the organization, taking others with them.

According to Rutherford, the class distinctions of the "144,000" (the anointed ones) and the "Great Crowd" were now clearly identified by this reinterpretation of Rev. 7:13, 14. Rutherford reasoned on this passage: Since the elders ask the question, "Who are these of the great crowd?" and John says to the elders, "You are the ones that know," the elders (144,000 represented by Rutherford and his directors) can apparently make that decision as to who they are! Rutherford then declares them to be an earthly class of believers who are not "born again" yet will live eternally under the direction of the 144,000 "anointed ones," gaining full rights to life only after 1,000 years of testing and thought-cleansing. The necessity of the representative Governing Body was emphasized by the added reasoning that, since

the Bible was written to "anointed" Christians going to heaven to be with Christ who are filled with the holy spirit (1 John 2:20,27), and that these of this newly designated "great crowd" could not be in the new covenant and have Christ as the mediator (compare WT, April 1, 1979, p.31),

one must conclude that the Bible was not written to them, and they would be forever subject to believing the interpretations of the Governing Body as "new light" and "food at the proper time" (compare The Watchtower, Oct. 1, 1967, p. 587). The passage at 1 John 2:27 could not apply to them, which says, "The anointing that you received from Him remains with you, and you have no need for any man to teach you, for the anointing from Him (the Holy Spirit) is teaching you all things." The possibility of a supernatural relationship with God and the intimate operation of the Holy

**Spirit upon their lives (John 14:15-27) was denied them. The Governing Body was clearly the `clergy' class and they were the `laity.' Truth thereby comes from Brooklyn, not by the Holy Spirit.**

**Now we are in a position to see the real importance of the date 1914. If it is wrong, then so is 1918 and 1935. If 1914 is wrong, Christ did not return invisibly. If 1918 is wrong, Christ did not appoint the Watchtower as his special prophet. If 1935 is wrong, there are no class distinctions - all Christians are the same, all must be born again (John 3:3,5,7), all must take the bread and the wine (John 6:53,54) and all must have Christ as their mediator, not a man-made organization (1 Tim. 2:5).**

#### **Trouble Brewing**

**"Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and dubs?**

**Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour - when darkness reigns." Luke 22:52,**

**53 The straw that eventually broke the camel's back began to materialize in 1965. For some time, the third President of the Watchtower, N. H. Knorr, had wanted to print a Bible dictionary, later known and published as the Aid To Bible Understanding. Originally Raymond Franz, the nephew of Fred Franz (fourth WT president), was assigned to accumulate data for this work. Later, it was necessary to add four more men to this project, making a committee of five. Two of these, Ray Franz and Lyman Swingle, later became members of the Governing Body. Edward Dunlap, registrar for the Gilead School, also researched material for this project.**

**In his book Crisis of Conscience (p. 20-27) Raymond Franz tells of the research he undertook regarding the dating system, which is based upon the cornerstone of 1914 as being the end of the "Gentiles Times," a period supposedly running for 2520 years since 607 BC. Franz tells of how he sent his personal secretary (Charles Ploeger) to visit the New York City libraries to try and substantiate this date for the destruction of Jerusalem. No such evidence was forthcoming. Instead, the date 587-586 BC was reinforced. Later, in 1977, a Swedish Witness elder sent a great deal of documentation based upon the cuneiform tablets (over 10,000) found in the Mesopotamian area that dated back to the time of ancient Babylon, which tablets substantiated, not 607 BC, but 20 years later as the destruction of Jerusalem. As Mr. Franz states in his book, "Much of the time and space (under the Aid book heading of `Chronology') was spent in trying to weaken the credibility of the archeological and historical evidence that would make erroneous our 607 BC date and give a different starting point for our calculations and therefore an ending date different from 1914." Franz and his secretary even took a trip to Brown University in Rhode Island to interview Prof. Abraham Sachs, a specialist in ancient cuneiform texts, in an attempt to find a weakness or flaw in the historical evidence. Not one possibility existed of such evidence being erroneous. Yet, Franz felt obligated to write the article in the Aid book without revealing all of the facts, as the rest of the Governing Body**

refused to reconsider the matter.

That Witness elder in Sweden was disfellowshipped for talking to others of his findings regarding the faulty chronology of the Watchtower and its focus on the 1914 date. He later wrote a book based on his letters to the Society and his overwhelming discoveries.

As previously mentioned, several of the key doctrines of Jehovah's Witnesses are based on 1914, such as the choosing of the organization in 1918 as the "faithful and discreet slave" and the separation of the organization into two classes in 1935. To destroy the credibility of 1914 as the invisible return of Christ would truly devastate the entire authority structure of the Governing Body. They could not be pointed to as the "appointed channel" of communication (actually, the mediator) between God and unregenerate man. Readers of the Bible within the organization would then be obliged to conclude that all true Christians would be with Christ and must be born-again, as Jesus insisted (John 3:3,7). They would have no need for any man or organization to teach them, for, as 1 John 2:27 says, the Holy Spirit would teach them, even as Jesus promised in John 14:16-26. The "straw" of factual historical evidence had begun to break the camel's back.

While it appeared as if nothing became of this for a few years, much trouble was brewing. Changes in organizational structure put more power in the hands of several key men on the Governing Body, who were not about to allow their power structure to be undermined by such self-destructive evidence. A lid was officially sealed on any discussion of these matters, yet individuals within the organization asked questions, especially at Bethel, the name given by the Witnesses to their headquarters. Just a few at Bethel knew of these matters at the time, yet these few let it be known to others who asked.

By 1979, the evidence became known to several in the Spanish JW community in New York City, and it got back to the Governing Body around Memorial time in 1980. Those who "talked" were dragged before special committees set up after hours in isolated parts of the factory at 117 Adams Street.

Cris and Norma Sanchez, who aided in translating the New World

#### **Translation**

from English to Spanish, and who had lived at Bethel for many years as faithful servants, were accused of "conspiring against the organization" and were called names before the others present, even by a member of the Governing Body, Dan Sydlik. Denounced as leeches, a cancer, and worms, they were given a few hours to pack up their belongings under total silence and leave the headquarters - they were now disfellowshipped. They appealed their disfellowshipping but the appeal was denied immediately. Their presence in Brooklyn was too dangerous - others might discover the secrets they held and blow the whole organization wide open. Others were implicated and disfellowshipped as well, such as fellow translators Nestor Kuilan and his wife, as well as Rene Vazquez. The local elders who at first believed the testimony of these ones were later exonerated by

reporting them to the Service Department, the "right arm" of the Governing Body. Members of the Bethel family were generally in the dark about the whole thing, and most remain so to this day, believing simply the explanations that are offered by the Governing Body that it was a planned conspiracy against Jehovah's organization, and that these men and women were apostates and "spiritual fornicators," being "mentally-diseased" and "corrupt." Little did they know that the real problems had just begun. The Governing Body's reaction against the private Bible studies and the discovery of the meaning of Romans and Galatians was:

(1) to hunt down all who questioned the Society's interpretation,  
(2) prevent other Witnesses from listening to them, and  
(3) to reinforce their peculiar beliefs that there are two classes of Christians, some for whom the "new birth" applies (the "anointed") and the rest who have to rely on the erratic interpretations of the Watchtower organization. (picture of Karl Klein from Watchtower, March 1, 1980, p.

9.) **Paranoia Reigns**

"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 trace the source of your doubts, which may be due to pride or some wrong thinking.

...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." --Watchtower, 2/1/96, p. 23-24

Naturally, many in the Bethel family were concerned and wept at the breakfast table when they heard what had happened with the Spanish brothers. Meantime, the Service Department was busy rounding up any evidence they could in order to disfellowship Raymond Franz, as they felt he and Edward Dunlap were conspiring against the organization. Lee Waters of the Service Department even made the statement that "They (the `apostates') had been building a platform (upon which to attack) for many years." While Lyman Swingle stood up for Ray Franz and prevented him

from

being disfellowshipped at that time (Lyman knew all the facts about 1914), Franz was spied upon and later disfellowshipped for eating a meal with his boss, a former Witness (see Time Magazine of Feb. 22, 1982, p. 66). Edward Dunlap was disfellowshipped after members of the Governing Body pleaded with him to ignore the facts and maintain their present understanding for the sake of unity. Dozens more left the Bethel family or were disfellowshipped in the months to come, as they apparently "knew too much." While members of the Bethel family heard regular denouncements of the "apostates," few knew of the events that had occurred.

In the meantime, dozens of members of the Bethel family continued having regular Bible studies every Monday night after the family Watchtower Study. Different translations of the Bible would be used, as well as

various Bible commentaries. The letters of Paul to the Romans and Galatians were of particular fascination, as they pointed to a much better and superior understanding of life and a relationship with Christ than the Witnesses were allowed to enjoy. But the fear of exposure and being disfellowshipped kept many from talking to outsiders about their findings. On Monday nights they would carry Watchtowers to the studies, just in case a "spy" knocked at their doors.

**Schroeder's "Salvation by Law"**

Albert Schroeder (a prominent spokesman on the Governing Body), during a meeting of the elders of the Bethel family on May 29, 1980 (referring to those who have questioned their absolute authority), said:

**"All the things they are teaching ignore the framework we have been developing all these many years."**

Many Witnesses at headquarters were also beginning to appreciate that Christianity is not a religion based on rules and regulations (like the Mosaic Law), but that Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ and that Christians walk by means of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul said in Gal. 2:20,21:

**"I am impaled along with Christ. It is no longer I that live, but it is Christ that is living in union with me... if righteousness is through the law, Christ actually died for nothing.**

**"Furthermore, if you are being led by the spirit, you are not under law." (Gal. 5:18)**

It is good to know that wherever the word "law" is not capitalized in the New World Translation (or any other Bible), it is not necessarily referring to the Mosaic Law but to Law Systems Or Rules Imposed Upon Christians. This is the key message of the gospel that collapses the Watchtower: Are we saved by faith in Jesus Christ, or like the "Judaizers" in the first century, must we add the rules and standards of an organization? (Gal. 5:1-4)

The surfacing of this issue was more than the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses could bear. Stinging responses were made to the Bethel family such as these, made by Albert Schroeder, speaking to elders of the Bethel family on May 29, 1980:

**"We serve not only Jehovah God but we are under our `mother.' Our `mother' has the right to make rules and regulations for us... This book, entitled Branch Organization Procedure, contains 28 subjects; and its sub-sections involve regulations and administration. In it there are 1,177 policies and regulations... this is an improved, fine-tuned organization, and we are expected to follow its policies. If there are some who feel that they cannot subject themselves to the rules and regulations now in operation, such ones ought to be leaving and not be involved here in the further progressive work."**

**"Some have fallen away from the organization, NOT FROM THE BIBLE, saying there is no need for COMING UNDER LAW...This great program of**

**organization procedure is gathering the things of heaven and earth."**

**What treatment would this "fine-tuned" mother organization mete out to those who believe they are not saved by following the organizational laws, but by faith in Jesus Christ?**

**During the peak of the Governing Body's paranoia over dissent, it published an article reinforcing their view of two classes of Christians, and even put the "three rebels" (apparently Ray Franz, Ed Dunlap and Reinhard Lengtat, co-authors of the "Aid To Bible Understanding" book) as #6 above, identifying them as "the stranger," "thief," "the hired man": Apostates and false shepherds. (picture from WT, 7/15/80, p. 26)**

#### **Intimidation Tactics**

**While Ray Franz was away on leave of absence, a special committee was established to extract confessions of his close friends and acquaintances, to determine everything he had said in private that could be used against him as respects to the aforementioned issues. For two weeks these committees intimidated many members of the Bethel family and recorded their confessions. Then Ray was suddenly called back to Bethel and made to listen to these tapes in the presence of the Governing Body. Raymond Franz was cast out and stripped of his privileges. He had served in every responsible positions for decades and had traveled the world visiting the branch offices, but this made little difference.**

**Others were subjected to long hours of intense interrogation as the "Watchtower committees" set up a series of ten "special questions" to ask any person suspected of talking about what was going on in the Governing Body. Many were disfellowshipped from the organization simply because they could not believe and conscientiously teach certain doctrines of the Witnesses. Such persons are then viewed as "spiritually dead" by the others and they are not even allowed to talk with such ones. Many more left under benign pretenses just to escape without being disfellowshipped. In the following weeks and months I noticed that the members of the Governing Body minced no words in slandering and name-calling such individuals. They were called "spiritual fornicators," "mentally diseased" and "insane." They were said to be following the "teaching of demons." In one committee meeting where a married couple who had faithfully served for decades was disfellowshipped, one member of the Governing Body called them**

**"suckers" and "liars." One Bethelite, Randy M., had his phone calls redirected through the Service Department to spy on his outside connections. Members of the family would turn in even their own friends for suspicion of apostasy. It is important to know that few of the family members knew what was really going on; the Governing Body kept it well-concealed and responded by defaming the characters of those involved. As previously mentioned, some members of the family had been holding their own Bible studies to help understand the scriptures apart from Watchtower dogma. These groups were soon discovered and told to stop unless they would use the Society's publications for reference. On April 30, 1980,**

**Karl Klein of the Governing Body stated to the whole family:**

**"If you have a tendency towards `apostasy,' get a hobby and keep yourself busy to keep your mind off of it. Stay away from deep Bible study to determine meanings of the scriptures."**

**Another member of the Governing Body, Lloyd Barry, said on May 29, 1980**  
**in**

**addressing the elders of the Bethel family:**

**"When we talk about law, we talk about organization. With all our hearts we need to search after that law. Jehovah doesn't give individuals interpretation. We need a guide, and that is the `faithful and discreet slave.' We should not be getting together in a clique to discuss views contrary to the `faithful and Discreet slave.' We must recognize the source of our instruction. We must be like an ass, be humble, and stay in the manger; and we won't get any poison."**

**These are a few of the many shocking things that could be seen and heard at headquarters. Imagine yourself as one of these Bethel elders who had recently just begun to discover what real Christianity is all about, and then imagine listening to these blasphemous statements that clearly contradict the entire message of the letters to the Romans and Galatians, as well as the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

**The Governing Body's Response to the 1980 Incident**

**While the Governing Body will not comment on the events of 1979-1980 in detail, for fear that the rank-and-file would ask too many questions, there were no shortages of backlash-related articles in the pages of the Watchtower during the 80s, in direct response to the issues raised (i.e., freedom in Christ, authority of the Governing Body, and the "two classes" doctrine). Warning: the level of maturity manifest in these responses may be unintentionally comical!**

**Show me these statements of the Governing Body**

**"Where Else Can We Go?"**

**"Therefore Jesus said to the twelve: `You do not want to go also, do you?' Simon Peter answered him: `Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life; and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.'" - John 6:67-69, NWT**

**Control-oriented religions (often called "cults") like to pose an ethical dilemma, should the recruit attempt to leave. Fears of what will happen to you if you leave the organization are implanted firmly in your mind, so that any attempts to use your own judgment or discernment will likely result in guilt for even questioning the leadership.**

**"Where else can we go?" is a pet phrase used by the Watchtower, slyly misdirecting the loyalty of the JW from Jesus to an organization. Yet Peter's statement indicated that he would be willing to suffer at the hands of men and institutions for the privilege of following Jesus his**

**Lord.**

**In the history of the Church over the last 2000 years, it has oft been necessary for men who fear God above man to separate themselves from organized religions when such become corrupt. As a result, we may face a crisis of conscience in our lives when people and institutions we have come to know and respect turn out bad. To take a stand means to be ostracized and shunned, perhaps even losing close friends, a marriage partner or even one's own children. The days ahead may seem lonely and without direction. Yet this very time of change can result in a new life, especially when accompanied by prayer, deep thought and a well-rounded education. Do not despair! Thousands are going through the same process right now. If you are facing this, know that you are not alone. When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you've ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you've ever met, and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true! Don't give up your education, your hopes and ambitions to follow a rainbow."**

**--Jeanne Mills, former member of the People's Temple and subsequent victim of assassination a year following the Nov. 18, 1978 Jonestown suicides/murders of 911 adults and children.**

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