

THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND
JESUS CHRIST

BY BRUCE M. METZGER

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A Biblical and Theological Appraisal

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I. WHO ARE THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

THE sect known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses originated about 1872 when Charles Taze Russell (born February 16, 1852) of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and a group of like-minded followers began studying the Bible from a special point of view. In 1884 the group secured a charter from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and adopted the name "Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society."

Because of the energetic tours of preaching and lecturing which Russell undertook, within several years earnest groups of his Bible Students were organized in many states, and headquarters were established at Brooklyn, New York. His ideas were given still wider circulation through his books. Chief among these were seven volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures," also called "Millennial Dawn," the first volume of which, entitled *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (1886), laid down certain guiding principles and motifs of Biblical interpretation. It is said that fifteen million copies of this series have been distributed.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the present century, the scope of the sect took on an international aspect, when branch offices for the distribution of tracts and books were opened in various cities of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The growth of the movement, however, did not lack its reverses. In 1909 some of Russell's followers seceded from the group on the grounds that he had come to regard his own utterances as of equal or greater authority than the Bible itself. This defection of a relatively small group, however, was nothing compared with the much larger number who left the movement in 1913 when Mrs. Russell brought suit for divorce from her husband on the grounds of "his

conceit, egotism, domination, and improper conduct in relation to other women." This is not the place to rehearse all the details of the divorce proceedings.¹ It is sufficient to observe that the movement weathered the storm and that, after the death of Russell on October 31, 1916, the guidance of the group fell upon the willing shoulders of Joseph Franklin Rutherford, commonly called Judge Rutherford. Under his leadership and particularly by means of his writings, the Watch Tower Society grew in numbers and influence abroad as well as in this country. It has been claimed that more than one hundred books and pamphlets came from his pen and that one or more of these were translated into seventy-eight languages and distributed to more than three million people.

Although hewing in the main to the line marked by Russell, in several respects Rutherford modified previous teachings of the sect. Thus, discreet alterations were made at various crucial points in reprints of various volumes of Russell's "Studies in the Scriptures." The course of history after 1914 proved several of Russell's prophetic calculations and confident deductions to be erroneous. For example, in editions before 1914 the following declaration was made: "That the deliverance of the saints *must take place some time before 1914* is manifest. . . . *Just how long before 1914* the last living members of the body of Christ will be glorified, we are not directly informed."² In the 1923 edition of the same volume the embarrassing statement was changed to read: "That the deliverance of the saints *must take place very soon after 1914* is manifest. . . . *Just how long after 1914* the last living member of the body of Christ will be glorified, we are not directly informed."³

Not all of Rutherford's corrections, however, were made as unobtrusively as those just mentioned; another of more basic significance was rectified publicly. Russell had worked out an elaborate theory that certain measurements of the Great Pyramid of Egypt disclosed the whole history of the human race and the time when Jesus would appear again on earth.⁴ In 1929, however, Rutherford officially con-

¹ See, for example, the account in Herbert Hewitt Stroup, *The Jehovah's Witnesses* (New York, 1945), pp. 9-11. Stroup's book, it may be mentioned, is the best description of the sect written from an objective point of view.

² C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. III (Brooklyn, 1891; reprinted 1910), p. 228. The italics in the quotation above are due to the present writer.

³ *Ibid.* The italics are due to the present writer. For further examples of similar alterations, see Milton Stacey Czatt, *The International Bible Students: Jehovah's Witnesses* (Yale Studies in Religion, No. 4, 1933), pp. 8-9.

⁴ Volume three of "Studies in the Scriptures," entitled *Thy Kingdom Come* (Brooklyn, 1891).

demned any attempt to find God's will outside the Bible, and deprecated Russell's interpretation of the Pyramid. As a result many followers left the movement. Another innovation was the adoption of the name, "Jehovah's Witnesses," a designation proposed by Rutherford at an international convention of members held at Columbus, Ohio, in 1931.⁸

After Rutherford's death on January 8, 1942, the vice president of the organization, Nathan H. Knorr, became the chief officer. Under his leadership the numbers and the vigor of active Witnesses have apparently increased and, in addition to the publication of still more volumes setting forth anonymously the teachings of the group, there has also been issued a translation of the New Testament.⁹ This last is a more or less faithful rendering of the Westcott and Hort Greek text into vernacular English. Furthermore, the footnotes contain a certain amount of technical information regarding variant readings in manuscripts and early versions. This information, however, is mingled with totally irrelevant material from various translations of the New Testament into Hebrew, made in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries. The quotation of these latter translations, which understandably use the tetragram (YHWH) in rendering certain passages, provides a kind of spurious authority for the introduction of "Jehovah" into 237 passages of the New Testament.

The total membership of the sect is unknown. From the beginning, so far as is known to outsiders, no records of membership were kept. Various estimates, however, both official and unofficial, have been made. At the time of his death, Rutherford, for example, claimed to have 2,000,000 followers. According to statistics published in the latest edition of the official *Yearbook*, during 1952 there were 426,704 "ministers" who bore testimony by visiting homes and distributing over fourteen million Bibles, books, and booklets as well

⁸ J. F. Rutherford, *The Theocracy* (Brooklyn, 1941), pp. 32-38.

⁹ The title page reads, *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, Rendered from the Original Language by the New World Bible Translation Committee, A.D. 1950*. The first edition, comprising 480,000 copies, was made available August 2, 1950. A second edition, containing several minor additions in the margins and in the concluding notes, was published May 1, 1951. One of the books referred to in the footnotes of the New World Translation is the *Emphatic Diaglott*, published in 1864 by Benjamin Wilson, a self-educated newspaper editor of Geneva, Illinois, who also published a semi-monthly magazine, *The Gospel Banner and Millennial Advocate*. His so-called *Diaglott* is a curious edition of J. J. Griesbach's Greek text of the New Testament (1806) with a wooden interlinear translation which, in several particulars, is an ancestor of the New World Translation. It is this antiquated edition of the Greek text to which most Jehovah's Witnesses appeal in their confident assertions that "the literal meaning of the Greek is thus and so." Dr. Isaac H. Hall termed it a "notorious" and "astonishing" edition (*A Critical Bibliography of the Greek New Testament as Published in America*, Philadelphia, 1883, p. 31).

as fifty-eight million copies of the magazines entitled *Watchtower* and *Awake!* in thirty-six languages throughout 127 countries of the world.⁷

II. GOOD AND BAD IN THE SECT

Although this article is designed to point out several of the more flagrant errors in the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses, it must not be concluded that they have nothing to teach the established churches. Obviously the self-sacrificing zeal in propagating their beliefs is a challenge to many nominal church members. Jehovah's Witnesses are, so to speak, "in good and regular standing" as long as they seek opportunity to witness. Likewise their diligence in searching the Scriptures (albeit to seek support for a prearranged system) puts to shame the indifferent ignorance of the Bible which characterizes a large number of professed Christians. These and certain other features which the Witnesses share with the early Christians of apostolic times might well be imitated by all of God's people.

At the same time the system taught by the sect, while liberally buttressed with Scriptural quotations, teems with erroneous and heretical notions. These are of two main varieties. On the one hand, the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses, although making a pretense of being "all the Bible and nothing but the Bible," is absolutely silent on several of the most central facets of the Christian Faith. For example, nothing is said about what the Apostle Paul emphasized with untiring insistence, namely, that the Christian is "in Christ." This phrase, or some cognate such as "in the Lord," "in Him," and the like, occurs 164 times in Paul's Epistles, and represents what he had found to be the central and all unifying source of his Christian life. Yet the officially approved teaching of this sect does not and, indeed, cannot logically include this glorious Christian truth. It cannot do so because its teaching is directly and fundamentally anti-Trinitarian. It is only because Jesus Christ is God that we can be in him.

⁷ 1953 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses Containing Report for the Service Year of 1952; Also Daily Texts and Comments* (Brooklyn, 1952), p. 27. In 1950 the Witnesses held an international convention in the Yankee Stadium in New York, lasting eight days, which drew an estimated 123,000 people from 78 countries. According to Marley Cole's enthusiastic article in the non-religious magazine *Color*, December, 1952, pp. 30-35, the Jehovah's Witnesses are the "World's Fastest Growing Religion"—which is also the title of Cole's article. More objective reports of the sect are given by Stanley High, "Armageddon, Inc.," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 14, 1940, pp. 14 ff.; Jerome Beatty, "Peddlers of Paradise," *American Magazine*, November, 1940, pp. 52 ff. (condensed in *Reader's Digest*, January, 1941, pp. 78-81); and Bill Davidson, "Jehovah's Traveling Salesmen," *Collier's*, November 2, 1946 (condensed in *Reader's Digest*, January, 1947, pp. 77-80).

On the other hand, the second main variety of errors in the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses arises not from a minimizing or exclusion of part of the Biblical teaching, but rather from a one-sided emphasis upon certain Scriptural passages, interpreted in a purely wooden fashion without taking into account the context or the analogy of faith. By thus joining together portions of Scripture which were never intended to go together it is possible, of course, to prove anything from the Bible. The method, if it can be called a method, is seen to be reduced to an absurdity if one should quote in succession the following three passages of Scripture: "Judas went out and hanged himself" (Matt. 27: 5); "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10: 37); "What thou doest, do quickly" (John 13: 27)! To be specific, the bizarre eschatological teaching of the sect is due quite largely to an arbitrary combining of certain Biblical passages mingled with many a gratuitous assertion. According to the time-table prepared by the Jehovah's Witnesses, "In 1914 Jehovah set his anointed One upon his throne; therefore at that time Christ Jesus took his authority as King. Three and one-half years thereafter, to wit, in 1918, the Lord came to his temple, which is the Temple of God."* At this time Christ began to gather to himself a faithful reinnant and commissioned them to be Witnesses of Jehovah and his Kingdom. In spite of opposition, those who persevere in this task may hope, after death, to become immortal spirits ruling with Jesus Christ. The number of these will be limited to 144,000; no others will be in heaven.†

III. THE BASIC ERROR

It is manifestly impossible to attempt to refute in one brief article even a fraction of the distortions of Biblical interpretation perpetrated in the voluminous writings of this sect. It is proposed, rather, to give consideration to one of the fundamental errors of the Jehovah's Witnesses, namely, that which concerns the person of Jesus Christ. Today as of old, a proper response to the primary question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matt. 22: 42), constitutes a veritable touchstone of historic Christianity. Certain other

* J. F. Rutherford, *Prophecy* (Brooklyn, no date), pp. 73-74; see also the chapter on "The Lord's Return" in the book, *Let God Be True* (Brooklyn, 1916), pp. 185-196.

† J. F. Rutherford, *Government* (Brooklyn, 1928), pp. 277-300; *Riches* (Brooklyn, 1936), pp. 293-337; *The New World* (Brooklyn, 1942), pp. 95-116; *This Means Everlasting Life* (Brooklyn, 1950), pp. 273-276.

After the acknowledged followers of this group had exceeded 144,000, a way was sought to avoid the embarrassing conclusion that evidently the number of the elect had already been filled. It is now taught that besides the 144,000, who alone will be permitted to enter heaven, a "great crowd" of those termed "Armageddon survivors" will be granted an earthly destiny of everlasting felicity.

aberrations in Biblical understanding may doubtless be tolerated if one is, so to speak, turned in the right direction with regard to Christology. But if a sect's basic orientation toward Jesus Christ be erroneous, it must be seriously doubted whether the name "Christian" can rightly be applied to such a system. (It will be observed that no judgment is here passed upon individual adherents to such a system, some of whom may be better than they have a right to be on the basis of their professed denial of central Biblical truths.)

One of the continuing features of this sect, which is taught in the early¹⁰ as well as in the latest writings,¹¹ is a modern form of the ancient heresy of Arianism. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christ before his earthly life was a spirit-creature named Michael, the first of God's creation, through whom God made the other created things. As a consequence of his birth on earth, which was not an incarnation, Jesus became a perfect human being, the equal of Adam prior to the Fall. In his death Jesus' human nature, being sacrificed, was annihilated. As a reward for his sacrificial obedience God gave him a divine, spirit nature. Throughout his existence, therefore, Jesus Christ never was co-equal with God. He is not eternal, for there was a time when he was not. While he was on earth he was nothing more than a man, and therefore the atoning effect of his death can have no more significance than that of a perfect human being. Throughout there is an ill-concealed discontinuity between the pre-existent spirit creature, the earthly man Jesus, and the present spirit existence of Christ Jesus.

Since the Jehovah's Witness makes his appeal to the inspired Scriptures to substantiate his beliefs, the only mode of argument which he will heed is the attempt to show (1) that he neglects to take into account certain important passages which bear upon the deity of Jesus Christ and (2) that he twists the clear meaning of other passages in forcing them to support his Unitarian views.

Attention will first be given to certain Biblical statements which teach the true deity of Jesus Christ, but which are not given proper consideration by the sect. The passages will be quoted according to the Jehovah's Witnesses' own translation of the New Testament, *The New World Translation*.

¹⁰ *The Divine Plan of the Ages* (Brooklyn, 1886), pp. 173-184.

¹¹ "Jesus the Faithful Son of God," *The Watchtower* (magazine), October, 1950, pp. 377-380, and *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* (Brooklyn, 1951), pp. 36-37, 231, and 257-261.

1. The Apostle Thomas addressed the risen Lord Jesus Christ with a confession of his deity when he said, "My Master¹² and my God!" (John 20: 28). If Jesus were not truly divine as God is divine, Thomas erred seriously in thus adoring him as God. Furthermore, if his Apostle had been in error, it is passing strange that Jesus made no effort to correct him. In fact, Jesus is represented not only as accepting such an open ascription of deity,¹³ but as commending all those who share Thomas's faith (verse 29, "Jesus said to him: 'Because you have seen me have you believed? Happy are those who do not see and yet believe.'").

2. While Stephen, the first martyr, was being stoned, "he made appeal¹⁴ and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'" (Acts 7: 59). Here Stephen invoked the Lord Jesus. It is obviously both foolish and sinful to pray to anyone except God. If therefore the opinion of the Jehovah's Witnesses be correct, namely, that Jesus is only a spirit creature, then Stephen was an idolater in praying to one who was not truly God.

3. The Epistle to the Galatians begins as follows: "Paul, an apostle, neither from (ἀπό) men nor through (διὰ) a man, but through (διὰ) Jesus Christ and God the Father. . . ." Here the Apostle declares that his apostleship was derived neither from men as a source nor through a man as a channel. Instead of receiving his appointment as an Apostle from or through any human being, he declares emphatically that it was "through Jesus Christ and God the Father." In these words, Paul clearly distinguishes Jesus' Christ from men and ranges him with God the Father. It is to be noted also that, although he uses two prepositions when speaking of "men" and "a man," here he uses only one preposition, "through (διὰ) Jesus Christ and God the Father." J. B. Lightfoot comments succinctly on this verse, "The channel of his [Paul's] authority (διὰ) coincides with its source (ἀπό)."¹⁵

The testimony of Paul is all the more impressive when one considers the following three circumstances. (a) Although it is evidently no part of the Apostle's purpose in this verse to refer explicitly

¹² The footnote gives, "Or, 'Lord.'"

¹³ It is not permissible to divide Thomas's exclamation (as is done by certain Witnesses), maintaining that Thomas addressed the first half of it to Jesus and the second half to Jehovah God. Such a high-handed expedient overlooks the plain introductory words, "Thomas said to him [that is, to Jesus]: 'My Master and my God!'"

¹⁴ The footnote gives as alternatives of "appeal," either "invocation" or "prayer."

¹⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 6th ed. (London, 1880), p. 72.

to the nature of Christ, yet so habitually did Paul think of Christ as fully divine that it comes naturally to him to refer, even in passing, to Jesus Christ and God in the same breath, using the same preposition for both persons of the Trinity. (b) When one considers Paul's strict Jewish monotheistic background and thorough rabbinical training, one is all the more surprised to find Paul using language such as this. Evidently his Jewish faith had been enlarged so as to enable him to regard Jesus Christ in this exalted light. (c) Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that Paul not only holds this stupendous view of Jesus, but he assumes that everyone agrees with him about it. He does not argue the point, nor does he seem to be under necessity to defend it against attack within the Church. Even those whom he combats in this Epistle to the Galatians, the Judaizers, so far as we can see, had no quarrel with Paul's lofty view of Christ. In this matter they agreed with Paul and other early Apostles who had seen Jesus as he had walked on the Galilean hills, subjected to all the petty limitations of human life. Here then is a truly amazing thing: the consensus of various groups within the early Church was that Jesus Christ must be ranged alongside God the Father.

4. Not only do Thomas, Stephen, Paul, and others regard Jesus as God, but according to John 10: 30, Jesus himself claimed, "I and the Father are one."¹⁶ (So all translations, including that of the Jehovah's Witnesses, render this verse. The marginal note of their translation, suggesting that "are one" means "are at unity," is an alternative interpretation which is so lacking in justification that the translators did not dare to introduce it into the text itself.) Here Jesus is represented as claiming much more than having one purpose or outlook with the Father. He claims to be one with the Father in essence; and the Jews understand him to mean this, for they took up stones to stone him for blasphemy (verses 31-33). Psychologically, there was no reason for them to become angry at Jesus if all he asserted was his being one in purpose and outlook with the Father. Many prophets and psalmists had done that much. The anger of

¹⁶ Not only in John, the latest of the Gospels, is our Lord represented as claiming to be God, but also in the earliest source of Matthew and Luke (the source which scholars have called "Q") is Jesus also represented as claiming to be more than human. Thus in Matt. 11: 27, according to the New World Translation, he solemnly affirms: "All things have been delivered unto me by my Father, and no one fully knows the Son but the Father, and no one fully knows the Father but the Son, neither does any one fully know the Father but the Son and any one to whom the Son is willing to reveal him" (compare the parallel in Luke 10: 22). Here the text asserts (a) that he, the Son, is so great that only the Father fully knows him, and (b) that he alone knows God truly as Father and for that supreme knowledge all men must become debtors to him. This is Jesus' "unshared sonship."

the Jews against Jesus is explicable only on the basis of their understanding him to claim for himself equality with God.

The argument of verses 34-36, which Jehovah's Witnesses frequently distort, can be succinctly summarized as follows. "If the fallible and sinful judges of Israel were rightly called 'gods,' much more may I, who am one with the Father and free from sin, claim the title of 'the Son of God.'" Furthermore, verse 38, which refers to the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, illuminates Jesus' assertion in verse 30, "I and the Father are one."

5. There are many other passages in the New Testament which reveal how deeply the Trinitarian pattern was impressed upon the thinking of primitive Christianity. Thus, besides the direct and obvious statements in Matt. 28: 19 and II Cor. 13: 14, there are such texts as I Cor. 6: 11, 12: 4-5; II Cor. 1: 21-22; Gal. 3: 11-14; I Thess. 5: 18-19; I Pet. 1: 2; and others.¹⁷ (Because the manuscript evidence of I John 5: 7-8, King James Version, is insufficient, this text should not be used. There is, however, abundant proof for the doctrine of the Trinity elsewhere in the New Testament.)

Some Jehovah's Witnesses make much of the fact that because the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible, therefore the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Scripture. The fallacy of such an argument will be brought home to them by pointing out that their favorite term, "theocracy," likewise appears nowhere in the Bible. In neither case, however, does the absence of the word for "Trinity" or the word for "God's rule" (theocracy) imply that the realities expressed by these two words are absent from the Scripture.

6. Although Jehovah's Witnesses seek to differentiate sharply between Jehovah God and Jesus his creature, it is a remarkable fact that occasionally writers in the New Testament apply to Jesus Christ passages from the Old Testament which refer to Jehovah. (Since the Jehovah's Witnesses, who have not yet translated the Old Testament, prefer the American Standard Version (1901) of the Old Testament, all of the following quotations are taken from this version.)

(a) Isaiah promises that "Jehovah will be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory" (60: 19). Luke applies this to Jesus, quoting it in the form, "A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (2: 32).

¹⁷ For a full list of such passages see J. N. D. Kelley, *Early Christian Creeds* (London, 1950), p. 23.

(b) Isaiah's vision in the Temple (6: 1, 3, 10) was of Jehovah. In the Gospel of John, however, it is said that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus Christ and spoke of him (12: 37-41, see especially verse 41).

(c) In Psalm 23: 1 and Isaiah 40: 10-11, Jehovah is said to be our shepherd. In John 10: 11 Jesus, with obvious reference to the Old Testament passages, claims to be the good shepherd.

(d) Paul quotes the promise in Joel, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall be delivered" (2: 32), and refers it to Jesus: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved . . . for, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10: 9, 13).

Such passages as these (and it should be emphasized that they constitute merely a sampling chosen out of many others of similar import) agree with the representation throughout the Gospels that Jesus both claimed and exercised the prerogatives of the Lord God himself. Thus Jesus forgives sins (Mark 2: 10, etc.), raises the dead (Luke 7: 12-15, etc.), controls nature (Matt. 8: 26), will judge the secret motives of men (Matt. 7: 22-23), and willingly receives divine homage (John 20: 28-29). The statement, therefore, in John 10: 30, "I and the Father are one," is but the epitome of the constant claim of Jesus. As has often been pointed out, Jesus' statement is either true or false. If it is true, then he is God. If it is false, he either knew it to be false or he did not know it to be false. If while claiming to be God he knew this claim to be false, he was a liar. If while claiming to be God he did not know this claim to be false, he was demented. There is no other alternative.

IV. ERRONEOUS TRANSLATIONS

Besides refusing to take into account the evidence set forth above, the Jehovah's Witnesses have incorporated in their translation of the New Testament several quite erroneous renderings of the Greek.

1. In the New World Translation the opening verse of the Gospel according to John is mistranslated as follows: "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." A footnote which is added to the first word, "Originally," reads, "Literally, 'In (At) a beginning.'" By using here the indefinite article "a" the translators have overlooked the well-known fact that in Greek grammar nouns may be definite for various reasons, whether or not the

Greek definite article is present. A prepositional phrase, for example, where the definite article is not expressed, can be quite definite in Greek,¹⁸ as in fact it is in John 1: 1. The customary translation, "In the beginning was the Word," is therefore to be preferred to either alternative suggested by the New World translators.

Far more pernicious in this same verse is the rendering, ". . . and the Word was a god," with the following footnote: "'A god.' In contrast with 'the God.'" It must be stated quite frankly that, if the Jehovah's Witnesses take this translation seriously, they are polytheists. In view of the additional light which is available during this age of Grace, such a representation is even more reprehensible than were the heathenish, polytheistic errors into which ancient Israel was so prone to fall.

As a matter of solid fact, however, such a rendering is a frightful mistranslation. It overlooks entirely an established rule of Greek grammar which necessitates the rendering, ". . . and the Word was God." Some years ago Dr. Ernest Cadman Colwell of the University of Chicago pointed out in a study of the Greek definite article that, "A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb. . . . The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun. The absence of the article [before *θεός*] does *not* make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas [John 20: 28, 'My Lord and my God']."¹⁹

In a lengthy Appendix in the Jehovah's Witnesses' translation, which was added to support the mistranslation of John 1: 1, there are quoted thirty-five other passages in John where the predicate noun has the definite article in Greek.²⁰ These are intended to prove that the absence of the article in John 1: 1 requires that *θεός*

¹⁸ Thus, for example, in Heb. 10: 31, *εἰς χεῖρας θεοῦ ἵσθῳτος* is properly rendered (even by the New World Translation) with the definite article expressed twice, "into the hands of the living God."

¹⁹ E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LII (1933), 12-21. Cf. also B. M. Metzger, "On the Translation of John 1:1," *Expository Times*, LXIII (1951-52), 125 f., and C. F. D. Moule, *The Language of the New Testament*, Inaugural Lecture, delivered at Cambridge University on May 23, 1952, pp. 12-14.

²⁰ P. 776.

must be translated "a god." None of the thirty-five instances is parallel, however, for in every case the predicate noun stands *after* the verb, and so, according to Colwell's rule, properly has the article. So far, therefore, from being evidence against the usual translation of John 1: 1, these instances add confirmation to the full enunciation of the rule of the Greek definite article.

Furthermore, the additional references quoted in the New World Translation from the Greek of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament,²¹ in order to give further support to the erroneous rendering in the opening verse of John, are exactly in conformity with Colwell's rule, and therefore are added proof of the accuracy of the rule. The other passages adduced in the Appendix are, for one reason or another, not applicable to the question at issue. One must conclude, therefore, that no sound reason has been advanced for altering the traditional rendering of the opening verse of John's Gospel, ". . . and the Word was God."

2. In Col. 1: 15-17 the Jehovah's Witnesses translation falsifies what Paul originally wrote, rendering it: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and upon the earth. . . . All other things have been created through him and for him. Also he is before all other things and by means of him all other things were made to exist." Here the word "other" has been unwarrantably inserted four times. It is not present in the original Greek, and was obviously used by the translators in order to make the passage refer to Jesus as being on a par with other created things. As a matter of fact, the ancient Colossian heresy which Paul had to combat resembled the opinion of the modern Jehovah's Witnesses, for some of the Colossians advocated the Gnostic notion that Jesus was the first of many other created intermediaries between God and men. For the true meaning of Paul's exalted description of the Son of God, therefore, the above translation must be read without the fourfold addition of the word "other."

Frequently Jehovah's Witnesses make the assertion that this passage teaches that God created the Son.²² Actually the verb "to create" in reference to the relation of the Son of God to the Father ap-

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See, for example, "The Truth Shall Make You Free" (Brooklyn, 1943), pp. 48-50; *Let God Be True* (Brooklyn, 1946), p. 35; and *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* (Brooklyn, 1951), pp. 36-37.

pears neither here nor anywhere else in the New Testament. Here he is spoken of as "the first begotten of all creation," which is something quite different from saying that he was made or created. If Paul had wished to express the latter idea, he had available a Greek word to do so, the word *πρωτόκτιστος*, meaning "first created." Actually, however, Paul uses the word *πρωτότοκος*, meaning "first begotten," which signifies something quite different, as the following explanation by a modern lay theologian makes clear.

One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God "begotten, not created"; and it adds "begotten by his Father before all worlds." Will you please get it quite clear that this has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin? We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We're thinking about something that happened before Nature was created at all, before time began. "Before all worlds" Christ is begotten, not created. What does it mean?

We don't use the words *begetting* or *begotten* much in modern English, but everyone still knows what they mean. To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is just this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers, and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set. . . . Now that's the first thing to get clear. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man.²³

To return now to Col. 1: 15 where Paul speaks of Christ as "the first begotten of all creation," it is important to observe that the adjective "first" refers both to rank as well as time. In other words, the Apostle alludes here not only to Christ's *priority* to all creation, but also to his *sovereignty* over all creation.

Later in the Epistle to the Colossians (2: 9) Paul declares, "It is in him [Jesus Christ] that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily" (using the marginal reading of the New World Translation). Nothing could be clearer or more emphatic than this declaration. It means that everything without exception which goes to make up the godhead, or divine quality, dwells or resides in Jesus Christ bodily, that is, is invested with a body in Jesus Christ. It is to be noticed also that Paul uses the present tense of the verb, "dwells." He does

²³ C. S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality: the Christian Idea of God* (New York, 1945), pp. 4-5.

not say that the fullness of the divine quality "has dwelt" or "will dwell" in Jesus Christ, but that it "dwells" there. All that the creeds of the Church mean by speaking of Jesus Christ as *eternally* the only begotten Son of the Father is contained in Paul's deliberate use of the present tense of the verb "dwells."

3. The exalted description of the pre-existent Christ in Phil. 2: 6 is given a characteristic twist in the translation prepared by the Jehovah's Witnesses: "Christ Jesus, who, although he was existing in God's form, gave no consideration to a seizure, namely, that he should be equal to God" A footnote to the first part gives as an alternative, "who, although he was existing in God's form, scorned. . . ." Another footnote supplies an alternative rendering of ἀρπαγμός, "a seizure," namely, "a thing to be seized." Paul's language is thus made to agree with the Unitarianism of the Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus was not equal with God and, in fact, scorned such an equality.

That this translation is a misunderstanding of the Greek may be shown by referring to the standard Greek lexicon of the New Testament edited by J. H. Thayer. (This book is selected as an authority here both because of its intrinsic merit and because the Jehovah's Witnesses translators themselves refer to it more than once on other occasions.) Thayer explains the passages as follows: "[Christ Jesus], *who, although* (formerly when he was λόγος ἄσαρκος) *he bore the form* (in which he appeared to the inhabitants of heaven) *of God* (the sovereign, opposite to μορφή δούλου), *yet did not think that this equality with God was to be eagerly clung to or retained*" (p. 418, col. b). In similar language, Arthur S. Way, the learned and skillful translator of many of the Greek and Latin classics, renders Phil. 2: 6, "He, even when He subsisted in the form of God, did not selfishly cling to His prerogative of equality with God. . . ." ²⁴ The admirable paraphrastic rendering recently published by J. B. Phillips agrees with Way's translation: "For He, Who had always been God by nature, did not cling to His prerogatives as God's Equal, but stripped Himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man." ²⁵

4. In still another crucial verse the New World Translation has garbled the meaning of the original so as to avoid referring to Jesus

²⁴ Arthur S. Way, *The Letters of St. Paul*, 5th ed. (London, 1921), p. 155.

²⁵ J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches* (New York, 1948), p. 113.

Christ as God. In Titus 2: 13 it reads, "We wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of our Savior Christ Jesus." This rendering, by separating "the great God" from "our Savior Christ Jesus," overlooks a principle of Greek grammar which was detected and formulated in a rule by Granville Sharp in 1798. This rule, in brief, is that when the copulative *καί* connects two nouns of the same case, if the article precedes the first noun and is not repeated before the second noun, the latter always refers to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun. This verse in Titus, therefore, must be translated, as in fact the Revised Standard Version (1952) renders it, "Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

In support of this translation there may be quoted such eminent grammarians of the Greek New Testament as P. W. Schmiedel,²⁶ J. H. Moulton,²⁷ A. T. Robertson,²⁸ and Blass-Debrunner.²⁹ All of these scholars concur in the judgment that only one person is referred to in Titus 2: 13 and that therefore it must be rendered, "Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

5. Exactly similar to the last error considered above is the rendering of II Pet. 1: 1 in the New World Translation, ". . . by the righteousness of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ." All that has been written in the preceding section, including the judgment of the grammatical authorities cited there, applies with equal appropriateness to the correct rendering of II Pet. 1: 1. Accordingly, in this verse also there is an express declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ, ". . . of our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

6. The New World Translation, in harmony with its bold twisting of Col. 1: 15-17 (considered above), is also in error at Rev. 3: 14, where it makes the exalted Christ refer to himself as "the beginning of the creation by God." The Greek text of this verse (*ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ*) is far from saying that Christ was created by God, for the genitive case, *τοῦ θεοῦ*, means "of God" and not "by God" (which would require the preposition *ὑπὸ*). Actually the word *ἀρχή*, trans-

²⁶ In his edition of G. B. Winer's *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms* (Göttingen, 1894), p. 158.

²⁷ *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. I, *Prolegomena*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh, 1908), p. 84.

²⁸ *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 5th ed. (New York, 1931), pp. 785-786.

²⁹ *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, 8te Aufl. (Göttingen, 1949), § 276, 3.

lated "beginning," carries with it the Pauline idea expressed in Col. 1: 15-18, and signifies that Christ is the origin, or primary source, of God's creation (compare also John 1: 3, "Apart from him not even one thing came into existence").

7. The passage in the Old Testament to which Jehovah's Witnesses (and Arians of every age) appeal most frequently is Proverbs 8: 22 ff.³⁰ The translation usually given is the following, or something similar to it: "Jehovah made me [that is, Wisdom, interpreted as the Son] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." This rendering understands the verb יָרָא to be used here with the meaning "to create." The true translation of this passage, however, according to a learned study by the eminent Semitic scholar, F. C. Burney, must be, "The LORD begat me as the beginning of his way. . . ." ³¹ The context favors this rendering, for the growth of the embryo is described in the following verse (verse 23, where the verb appears, as a footnote in Kittel's Hebrew Bible suggests, to be from the root יָרָא "knit together," as in Job 10: 11 and Psalm 139: 13), and the birth of Wisdom is described in the two following verses (24 and 25). Thus, in the context, the verb יָרָא in verse 22 appears with certainty to mean "got" or "begot."

In any case, however, irrespective of the meaning of the Hebrew verb in Prov. 8: 22, it is clearly an instance of strabismic exegesis, if one may coin the phrase, to abandon the consistent New Testament representation of Jesus Christ as uncreated and to seize upon a disputed interpretation of a verse in the Old Testament as the only satisfactory description of him. The proper methodology, of course, is to begin with the New Testament, and then to search in the Old Testament for foregleams, types, and prophecies which found their fulfillment in him.

The passages cited above are more than sufficient to prove that the New Testament refers to Jesus Christ as God. For a complete understanding of the Biblical teaching on the subject, however, something must now be added regarding the equally clear Scriptural teaching of the subordination of the Son to the Father.

³⁰ "In the proverbs of wisdom he [the Son] speaks of himself as wisdom and calls attention to his being a creation of the eternal heavenly Father." *What Has Religion Done for Mankind?* (Brooklyn, 1951), p. 37.

³¹ F. C. Burney, "Christ as the APXII of Creation." *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXVII (1926), 160-177.

V. THE SUBORDINATION OF THE SON

Alongside the passages of Scripture which teach the equality of the Son with the Father are also others which refer to a principle of subordination. As has often been pointed out, the Father is first, the Son is second, and the Spirit is third, in the operations of God by which redemption is accomplished. Whatever the Father does, he does through the Son by the Spirit. This principle of subordination in the "modes of operation" (as it is technically called) in the functions ascribed to the several Persons of the Trinity in the redemptive process, is reflected also in what may be called the liturgical precedence. For example, it is eminently appropriate that the baptismal formula should be in the sequence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who together constitute one God ("baptizing in the *name . . .*," not names).

One of the several passages which refer to the principle of subordination of the Son to the Father is John 14: 28, where Jesus declares, "My Father is greater than I." From the way in which Arians of all ages have seized upon this text, one would suppose it to be the only passage in the New Testament which bears upon the relation of the Son to the Father.

In seeking to bring this statement into harmony with other passages which teach an equality of the Father and the Son, some have utilized the formulation of the Athanasian creed: "Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood." That is to say, according to this explanation the assumption of humanity by the Son renders him, as man, inferior to the Father who remained in his unapproachable glory.

It appears, however, that this verse has been commonly misunderstood by both the orthodox and the Arians. The larger context of Jesus' statement makes it clear that, as Calvin succinctly phrased it, "Christ does not here compare the divinity of the Father with his own, nor his own human nature with the divine essence of the Father; but rather his present condition with the celestial glory to which he would be presently received."²² It is a fact that the question treated in the context is not about Christ's being born but the comforting of his disciples. In the penetrating words of a modern commentator:

²² Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, II (Edinburgh, 1847), 103

In the Fourth Gospel the phrase *greater than* means of *greater power and authority than* (4: 12; 8: 53; 10: 29; 13: 16; cf. I John 3: 20), and this meaning must be relevant here. The humiliation of the Son involved in some real sense a separation from the Father; His glorification and return to the Father restores to Him a position from which He can communicate to His disciples greater power, *greater works than these shall he do* (the believer); *because I go unto the Father* (14: 12). It is the certainty of union with the Father through faith in the Son, and the promise of the greater power which is to be theirs because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, that renders the saying a consolation to the disciples.³³

By reading the entire fourteenth chapter of John one can perceive both the insight revealed in the two preceding quotations, and also the ineptness of forcing Jesus' statement to refer to a permanent relation between the divine Persons.

Three other passages which bear upon the "modes of operation" are Paul's statement that Christ is God's, even as we are Christ's (I Cor. 3: 23); that as Christ is "the head of every man," so God is "the head of Christ" (I Cor. 11: 3); and that, in the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father after subjugating all enemies, then "the Son himself will also subject himself to the one who subjected all things to him, that God may be all things to everyone" (I Cor. 15: 24 and 28, New World Translation). As would be expected, both the Church Fathers and modern theologians have discussed these statements at great length. In the space available here, but two observations may be offered. In the first place, what the "subjection" means Paul does not say. In the second place, such statements represent one side, but not the whole, of Paul's thought. There is thus no need to find in these verses anything which contradicts the clear teaching elsewhere in the New Testament regarding the identity of essence of the Father and the Son.

VI. THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

More than enough has been said, it will probably be agreed, to prove that the Jehovah's Witnesses, though they profess to teach nothing but what is in the Bible, are actually in the most direct conflict with Scripture on the subject of the Person of Christ. It may be added also that theologically and philosophically, as well as scripturally, their Unitarian teaching cannot stand scrutiny. The

³³ Sir Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (London, 1947), p. 464.

Unitarian professes to agree with the statement that "God is love." But these words, "God is love," have no real meaning unless God is at least two Persons. Love is something that one *person* has for another *person*. If God were a single person, then before the universe was made, he was *not* love. For, if love be of the essence of God, he must always love, and, being eternal, he must have possessed an eternal object of love. Furthermore, perfect love is possible only between equals. Just as a man cannot satisfy or realize his powers of love by loving the lower animals, so God cannot satisfy or realize his love by loving man or any creature. Being infinite, he must have eternally possessed an infinite object of his love, some *alter ego*, or, to use the language of traditional Christian theology, a consubstantial, co-eternal, and co-equal Son.

Again, to approach the matter from another side, a human being becomes self-conscious only when he distinguishes himself from what is not himself. Now the doctrine of the Trinity indicates that from eternity the Father and the Son were personally distinct beings, knowing one another and themselves as such. The Trinitarian, therefore, has no difficulty in understanding how God was self-conscious even before the universe was created, that is, before there was any created not-self from which he could distinguish himself. It is the Unitarian, on the other hand, who has difficulty in showing how God can be eternally self-conscious—in other words, how God could say "I" if there were no person eternally objective to God to whom he could say "Thou."

It is to be understood that these considerations will not of themselves prove the reality of the Trinity. They do, however, convey to the thinking mind in a very suggestive way the superiority of the Trinitarian conception of God to the conception of him as an abstract monad, and thus bring a certain support to the doctrine of the Trinity, when once that doctrine has been given by revelation.

Perhaps it may not be inappropriate at this point to utter a warning. In all these discussions it must never be forgotten that there is but *one* living and true God. Christians do not worship three Gods. How in the unity of the Godhead there can be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity is a mystery beyond human comprehension. Jehovah's Witnesses take delight in ridiculing the orthodox Christian teaching of the Trinity, but in so doing they overlook several pertinent considerations. (a) The belief in the

Trinity is not contrary to reason, but beyond it. (b) A God who would be fully understood by our finite intelligences would be unworthy to be called God. (c) If the Christian doctrine of God and Jesus Christ were something invented by men irrespective of the data of Scripture, it could, of course, be formulated so as to give no offense to Jehovah's Witnesses. But, as C. S. Lewis pungently puts it, "We can't compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We're dealing with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about!"⁸⁴ (d) When speaking of the unity of the Triune God,⁸⁵ it is necessary to revise, or rather to expand, our idea of the nature of unity. As Leonard Hodgson suggestively pointed out in his Croall Lectures, people ordinarily assume that the only kind of unity is that which is involved in a mathematical criterion, "where one is one and three is three, and what is one is not three and what are three are not one. But we have long been acquainted with unities which are not so simple. There is, for example, aesthetic unity, the unity of a work of art. And there is organic unity, the unity of a living creature. In both of these the unity is far from being simple."⁸⁶ An organism unifies various constitutive elements in a single life, and the higher the organism, the more complex is its unity. The creature which most nearly approximates to the ideal of arithmetical unity is the unicellular amoeba; but who would compare God to an amoeba! In the organic unity of a single man there is a trinity of feeling, willing, and thinking. In such an organic type "the degree of unity," Hodgson reminds us, "is to be measured by a scale of intensity of unifying power; if the elements in the Godhead are Persons in the full sense of the word, then the unity of the Godhead must exceed in intensity the lesser unity known on earth. All existent earthly unities are imperfect analogies of the divine."⁸⁷

VII. CONCLUSION

It will doubtless be in order to conclude this brief consideration of certain deficiencies and errors of the teaching of the Jehovah's

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸⁵ The evidence of the Scriptures, part of which is given above, has been expressed with classic succinctness in the familiar statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost" (chap. II, sect. iii).

⁸⁶ Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1943), p. 90.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Witnesses with several suggestions as to the most effective ways of reclaiming members of established, orthodox Churches who have been led astray.

1. In some cases it may have happened that a Christian believer was eager to take part in serious Bible study. Not finding in the local church an opportunity to satisfy this spiritual hunger, he may have supposed that the meetings of the Jehovah's Witnesses would supply this lack. The obvious remedy is to organize a serious and thorough Bible study group, which shall make the Scriptures the object of patient search for God's will and purpose instead of an arsenal of proof-texts to support the system of teaching popularized by Judge Rutherford.

2. In personal work among Jehovah's Witnesses attention should be concentrated on the doctrines which are central to the Christian faith. It may often happen that the Jehovah's Witness will seek to divert the discussion from what is central to something that is peripheral. Quite deliberately and firmly a decision should be sought on the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the chief doctrines of the Christian faith.

3. The whole approach should be that the Bible, properly understood, and the historic Christian faith offer far more than does the distorted and aberrant teaching of Pastor Russell and his followers. To be specific, the Christian knows Jehovah as God and Father through his Son, Jesus Christ, who is truly God and truly man. The Christian can experience a vital union with the Deity, for being "in Christ" he has access to the Father. Furthermore, he has the joyous confidence that his divine Lord's mediatorial work is sufficient to bring into heaven itself not only 144,000, but a great multitude which no man can number. The emphasis, therefore, should be that of inviting the Jehovah's Witnesses to enter into the larger inheritance of life and knowledge and assurance which the historic Christian faith provides.