

plus history of loudly proclaiming wrong chronology of prophetic events.

In Luke chapter 21 Jesus is not giving a blueprint of events that were to occur thousands of years later so that a specific generation of people would know they were living in the "last days." He was speaking to the generation that was alive and listening to him speak. He was describing events that they were to be eye-witnesses of and he cautioned them not to get excited when they saw or heard these things because they were *not* the sign of his presence. His expressions about the cosmic disturbances that *would* mark his return as contained in verses 25-27 are parenthetical—inserted to show the contrast between the mere human and natural calamities (wars, famines, diseases, earthquakes, etc.) in *contrast* to the universal, cosmic manifestations of himself at the end of the age. The generation that heard Jesus speak did witness the non-signs of human and natural disturbances of which he spoke. They did not pass away until all these things took place. Many, if not most, would still be alive in 70 A.D. when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. "Remember that all these things will take place before the people now living have all died." —Luke 21:32. —*Good News Bible*. That is obviously the meaning intended.

His coming at the end of the age was to be sudden, unannounced and unexpected according to Jesus' own statements. (Matthew 24:43,44; Mark 13:32-37; Acts 1:6-8). Everything that the Watch Tower Society teaches on the timing of the Lord's return is a contradiction of what the Lord actually said. □

UPDATE: The November 8, 1994 *Awake!* featured an article titled: "The Real Significance of 1914," wherein they continue to argue that the generation of

1914 will see the end of the world and then quote their own statement found on the title page of each issue of *Awake!*: "this magazine builds confidence in the *Creator's promise* of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away." —page 10. (italics added). Note that it is '*the Creator's promise*,' not theirs!

For obvious reasons they no longer limit the "generation" to those who saw the events of 1914 "*with understanding*," as they previously did. Nor do they stress the point that it is "*within*" the generation of 1914 that the end comes. Now they make every attempt to stretch out the time of the generation and say: "This time of the end is, however, to be a relatively short period— *stretching* over one generation. (Luke 21:31,32) The fact that we are now 80 years beyond 1914 indicates that we can soon expect the deliverance that God Kingdom will bring." — Page 10. (italics added).

The November 8, 1995 *Awake!* presented yet another alteration in their mission statement. It now reads: "**Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.**" Two important elements have been removed from the previous statement: 1) the date 1914 and 2) the word *generation*. While the publishers of *Awake!* are not likely to acknowledge it, the fact remains that the generation of 1914 has already passed away and they must now distance themselves from their earlier teaching.

It is not likely that the Society will ever completely abandon the 1914 date as it explains their reason for being, but they are now being forced to reinvent their interpretation of its prophetic significance.

Putting Faith in the "Slave" Organization

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Responding to *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1984. Several articles, including study articles, consider the attaining and maintaining of Christian faith. The lead article: "Who Can Have Faith in This Age of Doubt?" begins this way: "Ours is an age of doubt. Skepticism has become fashionable. We are urged to question values, even the existence of God and the truthfulness of his Word, the Bible. Many people who know very little about the Bible doubt it anyway. Their doubts are based, not on what the Bible really says, but on what some have said that it says." —page 3.

As presented above, the matter of questioning or doubting is cast as a negative exercise. However, in the real world there are many ideas and customs that warrant questioning—even religious ideas and customs that are presented as Bible truth. It is certainly true that many have been put through the trauma of doubts regarding their faith "not on what the Bible really says, but on what some have said that it says."

This has certainly been the case with many thousands of those first known as Bible Students and

now Jehovah's Witnesses. A number of generations of these believers have been led to believe that their deliverance into a righteous new world was at hand and that the Bible taught this. Repeatedly, these expectations were not realized and the expected end was postponed. And as the Proverb says: "Expectation postponed is making the heart sick."—Prov. 13:12a, *New World Translation*.

Despite the many failures of the past, the leadership of Jehovah's Witnesses continues to excite the expectations of their followers by teaching them that the end is at hand and they ought to pick up the pace of public witnessing. This constant theme, over the years, has become tiresome to many who have either read of or experienced disappointments in the past. As a result the Society must always be busy trying to prop up sagging confidence on the part of many Jehovah's Witnesses. Despite the constant reinforcement of their views many lose faith and drift away. As no one can be viewed as walking away from the organization in good faith they are slandered as either being immoral persons, apostates or both. Even if one remains within the organization and is silent about the real problem yet if his activity is considered below par of what is expected of him, he, too, will be viewed as spiritually sick or unworthy.

Addressing itself to the question: "Are You Really Seeking True Faith?," the next article argues that there are those who really do not want to believe in God because that would necessitate changes in their lives they do not want to make so they "invent doubts and objections, convincing themselves that the Bible is not true."—page 5. The magazine then turns its attention specifically to Jehovah's Witnesses:

"Even some individuals in the Christian congregation could be like this. The truth sounds good to them, but they may still be holding on to some secret practice that they know God's Word forbids so they hang back or slowly drift away. The Bible says. 'It was through spurning conscience that certain persons made shipwreck of their faith.'—I Timothy 1:19, *The New English Bible*.—page 5.

There is, I believe, a hidden agenda in the above statement. There are many among Jehovah's Witnesses who "hang back or slowly drift away" because of problems with some of the Society's teachings and practices—not the Bible. But by putting matters as they do in the above statement, it tends to color all those who "hang back or slowly drift away" with the same brush-stroke of immorality or spiritual laxity. The reality, oftentimes, is just the opposite. Instead of "spurning conscience" they have listened to their Bible-trained conscience and can no longer accept and parrot certain dogmatic teachings of the Society that lack Bible support.

The study article in this issue: "Maintain A Solid

Faith" (pages 8-12) urges its readers to personally read and study the Bible: "God gave you intellect, intelligence and the ability to understand. These are gifts, and he expects you to use them in learning about him. If you write a letter to someone, you expect him to read it, not Just put it on a shelf or leave it on a table as an ornament. Have you read and studied God's letters to us—his written Word? By studying and understanding it you will learn things you would not otherwise know. It is important to remember the value of the information that the Bible provides. One Christian elder said: 'Persons who express doubts usually don't study very much. They don't know a lot about the Bible—they never really make the truth their own.'"—page 9.

It is certainly good advise to encourage people to read the Bible and true that by doing so "you will learn Things you would not otherwise know." The assertion, however, that those among Jehovah's Witnesses who "express doubts usually don't study much," is highly questionable. Many former Witnesses experienced doubts because they were serious students of the Bible and accepted it as authoritative in matters of faith and practice. The same article makes an appeal to humility: "Accurate knowledge, combined with love, should prompt humility, not an exaggerated opinion of our own importance. Some people study, not to learn how to serve God better, but to exalt themselves and their own opinions. They may get puffed up and criticize others—older brothers and even the Christian congregation and the body of Bible truth that it teaches."—page 10.

Such remarks are intended to intimidate and silence any questioning of the Society or risk being labeled as one guilty of exalting oneself and having an judgment." So how can it be argued that teaching is a "exaggerated opinion" of one's importance, "main work" of ail Christians if "not many of you

To express a conclusion drawn from personal should become teachers."? The scriptures at Mark 13 reading of the Bible that in any way differs from the and Romans 10 discuss the matter of witnessing before Society's position is to run the risk of being put in the judicial courts and the need for those who are to class of those who wish to "exalt themselves and their become believers to hear the good news preached. own opinions." This represents a rank form of The Bible is clear that teaching is not the main or psychological blackmail that can short-circuit the primary work of all. It is only for those whom the thinking process and one's God-given "intelligence and Lord selects for such service, "and he gave some as the ability to understand." It is a cruel use of authority apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelizers, clearly intended to paralyze independent thinking and, some as shepherds and teachers."—Eph. 4:11, *NW*. unfortunately, it works very well in the controlled Generally speaking, parents do teach their children and environment of the Kingdom Hall. it could be said that

we all teach by example. But as

Even Christian meetings and the importance of that term is used by the WT Society in this discussion these, in relation to faith, is presented in an arbitrary it binds all Jehovah's Witnesses with equal manner: "People whose faith is strong take advantage responsibility to act as door-to-door evangelists and of all Christian meetings. They do not leave after the systematically teach and indoctrinate people in the full first hour, or come only for the second."—page 11, range of organizational beliefs. And that is an entirely par. 18. This is presented as an unqualified statement, different matter. It does not take into consideration the host of The next sub-title discusses having "Confidence in reasons—valid reasons—that might necessitate the 'Slave,'" and has this to say: "It is also important missing of meetings from time to time or even on a to remember where we first learned the truth. Who regular basis, helped us to build our faith in the Bible and its

By presenting meeting attendance in such a way it promises? How did we come to understand what the places an unequal burden on the shoulders of many Bible means for us today? Jesus said that upon his Jehovah's Witnesses. (Matt. 23:4) On the return he would find a "faithful and discreet slave" congregational level this translates into a judgmental providing spiritual food and that the "slave" found so attitude towards all those who, for various reasons, doing would be appointed over all the master's find it necessary to come late or leave early even belongings." Matt. 24:45-47.—page 12. though the meetings they do attend may represent adhere is nothing subtle about the intent of the considerable sacrifice on their part. It is another above. In effect, they are saying: "You owe us and example of manipulation through quilt. Coupled to the don't forget it!" Those who have difficulty with the matter of meeting attendance is public witnessing or Society in matters of faith are regarded as "field service." ingrates—lacking appreciation for all they have been

Under the subtitle: "Witnessing and Our Faith," given through the Society. When this kind of rhetoric they say the following: "A main work of Christians is compared with the earlier statement regarding the teaching others and any one of Jehovah's Witnesses matter of "Accurate knowledge, combined with love, will tell you: "Witnessing definitely builds faith." should prompt humility, not an exaggerated opinion of —page 11.our own importance," we observe a radical departure

The paragraph in which this assertion is made from that admonition. When the Society focuses on its quotes James 2:18,26 and cites Mark 13:11 an down perceived importance it resorts to the very thing Romans 10:14. None of these texts support contention that "teaching others" is a "main work of Christians."

James discusses the importance of Christian works as an evidence of faith, but the example he uses has nothing to do with teaching. In fact, the very next chapter of James begins with this warning: "Not many of you should become teachers, judgment." So how can it be argued that teaching is a "main work" of all Christians if "not many of you should become teachers."? The scriptures at Mark 13 and Romans 10 discuss the matter of witnessing before judicial courts and the need for those who are to become believers to hear the good news preached.

The Bible is clear that teaching is not the main or primary work of all. It is only for those whom the Lord selects for such service, "and he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelizers, some as shepherds and teachers."— Eph. 4:11, NW. Generally speaking, parents do teach their children and it could be said that we all teach by example. But as that term is used by the WT Society in this discussion it binds all Jehovah's Witnesses with equal responsibility to act as door-to-door evangelists and systematically teach and indoctrinate people in the full range of organizational beliefs. And that is an entirely different matter.

The next sub-title discusses having "Confidence in the 'Slave,'" and has this to say: "It is also important to remember where we first learned the truth. Who helped us to build our faith in the Bible and its promises? How did we come to understand what the Bible means for us today? Jesus said that upon his return he would find a "faithful and discreet slave" providing spiritual food and that the "slave" found so doing would be appointed over all the master's belongings." Matt. 24:45-47.—page 12.

There is nothing subtle about the intent of the above. In effect, they are saying: "You owe us and don't forget it!" Those who have difficulty with the Society in matters of faith are regarded as ingrates—lacking appreciation for all they have been given through the Society. When this kind of rhetoric is compared with the earlier statement regarding the matter of "Accurate knowledge, combined with love, should prompt humility, not an exaggerated opinion of our own importance," we observe a radical departure from that admonition. When the Society focuses on its own perceived importance it resorts to the very thing they condemn in others. When they do this they betray an arrogance foreign to the Apostles and other teachers of the first century Christian congregation. The apostle Paul showed appropriate humility when he wrote: "What then, is Apollos? Yes, what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, even as the Lord granted each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God kept making it grow, so that neither is he that plants anything nor is he that waters, but God who makes it grow."—I Cor. 3.5-7, NW.

By deciding that the Lord returned in 1914 and in

1919 were "appointed over all the master's belongings" they have, in fact, appointed themselves! What was the message the Bible Students (Jehovah's Witnesses) were preaching in 1919—the year of their "appointment" for "faithful and discreet service"? They were teaching that the Lord had been invisibly present since 1874 and that the world would end in about six years—1925—at which time the Hebrew prophets would be resurrected. They were preaching that Charles T. Russell was the "wise and faithful servant" of Matthew 24: 45-47 and still directing the Lord's work from heaven since his death (and resurrection) in 1916!

The good news of the Kingdom is the good news about Jesus Christ. This good news began to be preached at Pentecost and has been faithfully preached for over 19 centuries since. It is the good news of salvation from God through Jesus Christ. (Acts 10:34—43). It is the theme that runs through all of the inspired Christian Writings. We are promised eternal life by a resurrection from the dead. Everyone putting faith in Jesus Christ is made righteous by God. (Romans 10:4). It was concerning this good news that

Paul wrote: "For if you publicly declare that 'word in your own mouth,' that Jesus is Lord, and exercise faith in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one exercises faith for righteousness, but with the mouth one makes public declaration for salvation." —Romans 10-9,10 AW. And the apostle John wrote: "God has given us eternal life, and this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has this life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." —1 John 5:11,12, Today's English Version. D

UPDATE: Since writing this material in 1984 I have discovered much more about the spiritual food being provided in the 1914-1918 period. The book *The Finished Mystery*, published by the Society in 1917 said that all of the churches and church-goers would be destroyed in 1918. The same book taught that 1920 would see the destruction of all of the earth's governments and institutions. This was the entree—the main course—of the food being served up during that period they were being inspected by Jesus Christ as to their worthiness of additional responsibility, according to their interpretation of matters!
