

THE ATHANASIAN

A publication of Traditional Catholics of America † Editor: Fr. Francis E. Fenton, STL † Volume VIII, No. 3 † April 15, 1987

ON SUFFERING

Fr. Francis E. Fenton

Ever since the commission of original sin by our first parents and as one of the consequences of that sin, suffering has always been and will always be the lot of every human being born into this world. Be it physical pain or sadness or misfortune or anxiety, everyone suffers in one form or another. Some experience more difficult trials than others; some live lives of more or less continual affliction — but suffering is a fact of life for all.

Since suffering, then, is a reality of human existence, what should be our attitude towards it? For multitudes, of course, suffering of whatever kind is an evil to be avoided if at all possible and, if unavoidable, to be reluctantly borne for its duration. If it be a serious and prolonged affliction, such a negative attitude towards suffering breeds frustration, bitterness, even suicidal tendencies. Individuals who react in such fashion are more likely to be irreligious people who live solely for this world and its pleasures and for whom God and morality and heaven and hell mean little or nothing. And so their feelings and reactions towards suffering of any kind are understandably negative and resentful.

In the theological sense of the term, there is but one evil and that is the moral evil which is sin. The only real evil in the world is that which is offensive to God and a violation of His eternal law. If suffering were evil, would Christ have suffered for us, would the saints and martyrs have suffered, would holy men and women throughout the Christian centuries have sought and willingly endured trials and tribulations of all kinds to give glory to God and to atone for sin? If suffering were evil, would Christ have preached the necessity of penance and sacrifice for those who desire or claim to be His followers?

Nor must we fail to note as a major cause of anxiety and concern (and, hence, of suffering) for all honorable and conscientious men and women the rampant immorality destroying our nation and also, for us traditional Roman Catholics, the woeful human condition of our beloved church. How much very real suffering these have caused to countless individuals, God alone knows — but it is considerable indeed.

(One can only wonder how long more the avenging hand of God will be restrained, how long more before the wrath of God will be released upon our perverse generation. Surely the Almighty will not permit His eternal law to be endlessly scorned and mocked. As distressful as the thought may be, is it not conceivable that the wrath of God is now beginning to manifest itself in the form of the horrendous AIDS disease? It is estimated on very good authority that — if no cure for it is discovered and if the present rate of increase of the disease continues — by

1991, four years from now, 484,000 people in this country alone will be dying from AIDS and some five to ten million will be infected with the AIDS virus. Could this be the ultimate punishment of an all-just God upon the human race for its worldwide rejection of Him and His moral law?)

But what should be the attitude of the true Christian towards suffering and how should he respond to it? Well, he should certainly view it and react towards it in a spiritual, supernatural manner as befits one who is truly a follower of the Son of God. He should realize that whatever trials, tribulations, afflictions he may have are either willed or permitted by God. He should strive to offer up his sufferings in union with those of Christ and from supernatural motives such as out of love for God and for His honor and glory, in atonement for sin, for the salvation of souls, etc. He should endeavor to look upon suffering with the mind and spirit of Christ and to be resigned to the will of God. (“Not My will but Thine be done.”) Whatever sentiments of bitterness and resentment may come his way should be banished at once for they are not of God and, if permitted to remain, would but negate the supernatural value of his suffering.

But it's one thing to undergo affliction and to suffer adversity with patience and submission to the will of God. It's something else to be joyful in such circumstances, especially if one's sufferings are severe and prolonged. But are not the concepts of joy and suffering incompatible? Not in this context because the joy to which we refer here is an interior, spiritual, supernatural happiness which is completely independent of human sorrow and pain and misery and wretchedness. Sacred Scripture tells us that the disciples *rejoiced* that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. Do we not read in Church history that the martyrs (just as human as you and I) joyfully suffered the most cruel persecutions out of love for Christ and in testimony to the faith? No, joy, true Christian joy, and suffering are not at all incompatible.

Certainly, then, any truly traditional Roman Catholic who strives to live his faith to the fullest has every reason to be joyful even under the most trying conditions and most arduous of sufferings. This short life is but a period of probation and trial in which we prove our love for God — and the eternal happiness of the glorious Kingdom of Heaven awaits all who remain faithful unto the end. And how consoling and encouraging are the words of the martyr Saint Paul that “the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come...” (Rom. 8, 18) †

Viewing AIDS As A Symptom

John Kenneth Weiskittel

The biggest news story of the past year, without question, has been the rising tide of deaths related to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). More printer's ink and more television minutes have been used discussing AIDS than such subjects as "Irangate," South Africa or what a refreshing progressive leader Soviet dictator Mikhail Gorbachev is (a familiar media tune sung whenever the Kremlin makes one of its infrequent cosmetic "reforms").

While the national coverage has left much to be desired in its emphasis, there's no denying that AIDS is a *very* big story. Any disease that can be reasonably likened to the Black Plague that ravaged Europe in the Middle Ages had better be front page news!

The Surgeon General's report shows an epidemic of frightening proportions. An estimated 1.5 million Americans have the AIDS virus, the report states, and 25,000 are known to have the illness. Of this latter group, half have died and, since there is no known cure, "the others are expected to also eventually die of their disease." One infectious-disease specialist predicts that by 1991 — just ten years after the first case was reported—the virus may have spread to anywhere from five million to ten million. And the likelihood of an AIDS vaccine being discovered any time soon is, by all accounts, quite poor.

Much has been written about AIDS the disease: what it is, whom it strikes, how it is treated, what research is being done for a cure and what precautions are needed to avoid contracting it. But little has been said about AIDS *the symptom*.

More than anything, AIDS is a strong indictment of the moral relativism that pervades much of American society and is a symptom of spiritual decay. The vast majority of AIDS sufferers are not innocent victims but have become infected as a result of promiscuous sexual activities or intravenous drug use. Yet the popular culture that helped spawn the "sexual revolution" doesn't repudiate this foul offspring; it simply shifts gears to promote "safe sex."

According to the Surgeon General's report, "70 percent of AIDS victims are male homosexuals and bisexuals." The "gay" (homosexual) connection is so clear that AIDS was originally called Gay Related Immunodeficiency Disease. And bisexuals (those having relations with either sex) are responsible for the spread of the disease to the heterosexual community.

The militant homosexuals refuse to accept responsibility. The Gay Men's Health Crisis group, for example, has published literature that states: "Being gay doesn't give one AIDS... lifestyles don't cause disease, germs do." This is the sort of self-deception common to homosexuals at every stage of their perverse activities. Germs *do* cause disease, of course, but certain lifestyles give it *exposure* and help *spread* it.

And the *homosexual* lifestyle invites disease the way a rotting carcass draws vultures. (The acts they commit are so profligate that decency demands that no mention be made of them here.) Sex researchers have found that, of "gays" surveyed, many—if not most—admitted to having had over one thousand sexual partners. Besides AIDS, such wantonness leads to higher rates of venereal diseases in homosexuals than in heterosexuals and, writes Kirk Kidwell in the January 19, 1987 issue of *The New American*, "over 20 'disease agents' (bacteria, viruses, fungi, protozoa, and parasites) have been identified as sexually transmissible among homosexuals." So while the "gay culture" may not be the cause of diseases, it is a veritable cesspool of them.

For many in today's "post-Christian" America the notion that AIDS may be a divine retribution for sin is considered a form of bigotry. Certainly there are Christians who mistakenly confuse hatred of the act with hatred of the person, but these are surely a minority because Christ's followers are morally bound to love the sinner while hating the sin. But the homosexual is less likely to feel bound by such demands and, although it is something the mass media haven't touched upon, many possess a hatred and resentment for "straights" (heterosexuals) that run deep. Such animosity would explain why, in "AIDS Warning" (another article in the same issue of *The New American*), it is reported that "some homosexuals have already publicly announced their intention of contaminating the nation's blood banks for the purpose of spreading AIDS(!)..."

Every sin is pleasing to Satan but homosexuality all the more so because it is contrary to nature and "an abomination" in the eyes of God (Lev. 18:22). Saint Paul includes "the effeminate" and "liars with mankind" among those who "shall not possess the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10). And yet, in defiance of the expressed will of God, Modernist theologians construct specious formulae that argue for "gay love" and some Churches have even "blessed" these unholy unions. The spiritual disease of our times can hardly be better illustrated than by the role that professedly Christian Churches have played in the "gay rights" movement and the emergence of the homosexual subculture as a political force.

As further evidence of this moral decline, the Surgeon General's report was so "value-free" that it has even been hailed by homosexuals. When appointed to the post by President Reagan, C. Everett Koop was viewed by conservatives as a man who could be counted on to bring a strong pro-life, pro-family point of view to the job. His AIDS report, however, amounts to a massive sellout for he expressly states that it is "devoid of value judgments."

Yet how can a study concerned with articulating a national strategy in the war against an illness such as AIDS avoid the reality that AIDS is transmitted largely by illicit sexual practices

and drug addiction? Although Dr. Koop is an evangelical Christian who, presumably, believes that homosexuality is immoral, the tone of the report is that it is a legitimate “alternative” lifestyle. He does advise against drugs, sodomy and promiscuity but also calls for “safe” sexual practices. What Dr. Koop means by “safe” sexual practices is mutually faithful monogamous relationships *or* the use of “protection” in promiscuous affairs.

In effect, the Koop report avoids the moral high ground in favor of an “equal rights for all” approach. Accordingly, “monogamous” refers not only to the *proper* sense of man and wife, but also takes in unmarried couples (the February 8, 1987 issue of *Parade* magazine reports 2.2 million such couples in the U.S.) and even “gay” pairings. The attitude is, “Well, you’re going to do it anyway, so just be careful.” The report is also deficient in its failure to make recommendations for the quarantining of high-risk groups, the identifying of the carriers and the closing of homosexual bars and bathhouses. (A fuller discussion of these and other important issues—outside the immediate theme of this article—can be found in *The New American* articles mentioned above.)

But it is Dr. Koop’s advising in favor of “safe” sexual activities that is most questionable. Morally speaking, there is one and only one instance in which such relations may be safely performed—marriage. Any and all sexual unions outside marriage are against the will of God and are thus proscribed as mortal sin. True, the AIDS report is a national health study and not a treatise on moral theology, but the emphasis seems to suggest the “separation of Church and state” mentality.

The report’s recommendation for proceeding with caution in liaisons has met with calls for prophylactic (commonly used as a contraceptive) ads on network TV. Such spots may soon be seen in some cities as the decision is being passed down to local stations. So far, the most notorious instance of the pushing of “safe sex” occurred on February 8, 1987, when the Rev. Carl F. Thitchener distributed boxes of prophylactics to the congregation at his Amherst, New York church. What sort of man would do a thing like that? According to an item in the February 19, 1987 edition of the *Tampa Tribune*, the 54-year-old Unitarian-Universalist minister had earlier in the month been “convicted of parading naked in front of Brownies...He also pleaded guilty in 1957 to second-degree assault and was found guilty of disorderly conduct in 1982.” In other words, he would appear to have exactly the sort of “job qualifications” needed to conduct such a “pastoral” giveaway. (But where is the hue and cry of moral indignation from the liberal media, whose editorial pages and “60 Minutes” are full of exposes on wrongdoings—sometimes real, more often imagined or fabricated—of those who espouse traditional views? Could it be that this would be hitting too close to home?)

For a large part of American society sexual activity has become “recreational.” Frequently it is described, simply, as “sex,” and is utterly divorced from the true meaning of the act. The use of the term, “procreative,” which clearly indicates the reproduc-

tive function, is often avoided in discussions of this nature as it is too sober a reminder of what they would prefer to see as merely a pleasurable pastime. (The concepts of parent and child imply *responsibility*, something abhorrent to the hedonist whose only “duty” is satisfying his baser instincts.) Likewise, “marital relations” are seen as too confining to those who uphold the “right” of fornication and to the “gay” subculture that cries discrimination.

“O infernal fire, lust,” writes Saint Jerome, “whose fuel is gluttony, whose sparks are brief conversations, whose end is Hell.” Lust is surely a major cause of damnation for, according to Saint Isidore, no sin enslaves men to the devil as much as impurity—and some of the Church’s greatest lights, such as Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, hold it to be the *principal* cause. And it is instructive in the present context to note that, some 200 year ago, Saint Alphonsus could write: “We, at the present day, see more severe temporal punishment inflicted on this than any other sin. Go into the hospitals and listen to the shrieks of so many young men who, in punishment of their impurities, are obliged to submit to the severest treatment and to the most painful operations and who, if they escape death, are, according to the divine threat, feeble and subject to the most excruciating pain for the remainder of their lives.”

Could the AIDS epidemic be the first stage of a great chastisement that God will send to punish America for its sordid transgressions? Some U.S. cities are beginning to resemble nothing so much as modern Sodoms. Can they reasonably expect to escape similar fates? There are few indications that the process eroding our nation’s spiritual strength has begun to be reversed. The Supreme Court did make one of its rare sane rulings with its decision that states were within their rights to outlaw sodomy but, by and large, the role of our nation’s government has been one of neglect (as with Dr. Koop’s report) or outright hostility to Christian values (such as federally funded abortions, “family planning,” sex education, etc.). It is a sad but appropriate commentary that our country’s capital, which should embody the best of the national spirit, is a city in which over 50 percent of the births are illegitimate and abortions outnumber live births. Religious values are more and more frequently the subject of public ridicule while a “do your own thing” amorality, cloaked under a claim of Constitutionally-guaranteed freedom, scorns the moral law of God. The war against the divine law is clearly moving into high gear — but this contempt for God has already begun to reap a bitter harvest.

The spread of AIDS, then, provides Catholic parents with an excellent object lesson for their children on the soundness of Church teaching on purity, modesty and the sanctity of the marriage bond. Likewise, it can show them all the more why Saint Paul admonished: “Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Thus the great need for constancy in prayer, penance and acts of charity. And let this pestilence serve as a stern reminder to all that “God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7) and serve too as a prefiguration of the eternal ruin warned by the Apostle: “...the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23) †

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga—Patron of Youth

Jill Wiesner

A great tragedy of our time is the wholesale scandalizing of our youth. Besieged at every level by persistent temptations against purity, our young people are in need of a heroic example and a powerful intercessor. Both are found in Saint Aloysius Gonzaga.

Born on March 9, 1568, Aluigi (Aloysius or Louis in English) Gonzaga was the eldest son and heir apparent of the Marquis Ferdinand Gonzaga de Castiglione, General of the Army of Philip II of Spain. The Gonzagas, whose ancestral home stood between the Republic of Venice and the Duchies of Milan and Ferrara, had through the centuries commanded the armies of the Venetian Republic, the Emperor, and the Pope. The Marquis Ferdinand had been offered the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Cavalry by Henry VIII of England but, believing that to accept the honor would endanger his Faith, he refused it.

Aloysius was a bright and friendly child who was unspoiled by the advantages of his rank. His mother taught him to pronounce the names of Jesus and Mary as soon as he could speak and instructed him in his prayers at a very early age. When he was old enough to find his way about the castle, he would seek out a quiet corner where he could say his prayers. He frequently slipped away from his playmates, only to be found later by his nurses in an out-of-the-way nook, his small hands folded in prayer.

Don Ferdinand recognized in his son the energy and determination of a soldier and was eager to begin his training. When he received orders from Philip of Spain to ready the Italian infantry to accompany Don Juan of Austria in an assault on Mohammedan-held Tunis, the Marquis took five-year-old Aloysius along on the training exercises to give him a taste of the military life. Aloysius was thrilled with the bright banners and colorful costumes of the soldiers but most of all he loved the firearms and nearly got himself killed setting off a cannon during the camp rest period. The men were all fond of their "little captain" and included him in many of their activities. However, in imitating the soldiers Aloysius picked up some of their rough language and ribald jokes.

On his return to Castiglione Aloysius was reprimanded by his tutor for his language and was so shocked by the meaning of the expressions he had been carelessly using that he was filled with shame. He saw that he had been on "slippery ground" and ever after described this period as his "sinful life."

He launched a full-scale attack upon any sinful tendencies within himself, strengthening his soul through prayer and penance. He learned the Little Office of Our Lady and the Penitential Psalms, reciting them daily. He knelt on the stone floor without a cushion as he prayed, a practice he followed for the rest of his life.

At the age of seven Aloysius was troubled with a recurring fever which sometimes left him so weak that he was unable to sit up in bed. He would then ask someone to support him while he said his prayers. His devotion to God increased to the point that he later referred to this stage of his life as the time of his conversion.

When the Christian army returned unsuccessful from Tunis, Don Ferdinand found in Aloysius a wisdom and maturity beyond his years and was gratified to think what a fine prince he would be for his people. He included his son in the pageants, banquets and parties participated in by the nobility but was puzzled when Aloysius stayed only as long as politeness required, excusing himself at the earliest opportunity and returning to his prayers or spiritual reading. The honors of his station were of no consequence to him and he replied to those who deferred to him, "To serve God is better than all the glory of the world."

At age twelve, Aloysius, who had not yet received his first Holy Communion, was able to receive the Sacrament from Saint Charles Borromeo who was in Castiglione on a pastoral visit. The holy Cardinal also gave him instructions in the Faith and particularly recommended to him the Catechism of the Council of Trent. Aloysius was ever afterward deeply devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and received Holy Communion often, preparing himself for reception of the Sacrament during the entire preceding day.

As he matured, Aloysius defended himself from worldly temptations through mortification of the senses. He avoided dances and other activities to which the young ladies flocked, hoping to catch the attention of the eldest son of the Marquis. He worried about the immoralities he observed all around him, keenly aware of how deeply they offended God and how gravely harmful they were to the souls of those who committed them:

Very many priests and religious think little of their vocation. How can God suffer such a devastation of His kingdom? The faithful rob Him of His honour by the great tepidity and carelessness of their lives; who is to make reparation? Woe to the worldings, who put off their penance till the hour of their death; and woe also to the clergy who slumber on until then! Such thoughts ought to rouse us from our lethargy and renew in us the resolution to do penance and serve God with constancy and sincerity.

In 1581, Don Ferdinand was called to serve at the Spanish court and Aloysius and his brother Rudolph became pages to James, the crown prince. When his duties did not require him at the palace, Aloysius was able to continue his studies at the Jesuit college of Madrid. His confessor there found in Aloysius "a prudence and maturity of judgment such as is rarely found even in elderly persons; he was a mortal enemy to idleness and

always occupied himself with something good and useful, in particular with the study of Holy Scripture....In his conversation, also, he showed great modesty and caution, never saying an uncharitable word about others.

The priests and religious of the Society of Jesus inspired Aloysius with their holy example, and he began to think seriously of taking Holy Orders. The Society of Jesus appealed to him particularly because, in addition to the accounts he had read of their missionary successes in the East Indies and Japan, the requirement that all who entered the Order cast aside all worldly honors meant that his social rank would not accord him any special advantages. To become a member of the Jesuit Order, he would be required to renounce his position as heir to the Marquisate.

Aloysius waited until he was certain of his vocation and then, at the age of fifteen, he approached his parents to tell them of his decision. His mother was overjoyed at the news but his father was furious. He scolded Aloysius for being impetuous and threatened to have him flogged if he brought up the subject again.

For the next two years, Don Ferdinand remained adamant. He tried to convince Aloysius to forget the whole business by reminding him of all the advantages of secular life, as well as how important it was for the Marquisate to have a wise ruler. He enlisted the support of various priests, begging them to test his son's resolve. One priest later told his Cardinal, "I was to play the Devil's Advocate with Aloysius, and I did it too, but he stood firm." At last Don Ferdinand relented and, with a heavy heart, gave his permission for Aloysius to renounce the Marquisate of Castiglione in favor of his brother Rudolph.

On November 2, 1585, Aloysius entered the Jesuit novitiate in Rome. Two months later his father died. Though he had often been bedridden with gout, after granting permission for Aloysius to enter the Society of Jesus, the old Marquis lost his avid interest in the advancement of his family name as well as his passion for gambling. He had the crucifix from Aloysius' room brought to him and asked his family to join him in prayers every evening. He was able to prepare his soul for a happy death and was convinced that this grace had been obtained for him through the prayers of his son.

In the novitiate Aloysius was grateful for every opportunity to conquer self-love. As the novices cared for patients in the hospitals of Rome, Aloysius, who had previously fainted at the sight of blood, treated the most repulsive abscesses with no sign of repugnance. "One must think," he said, "that one is receiving the dead and wounded body of Our Lord from the arms of His Mother, and has the honour of washing and anointing it."

He kept constant guard over his tongue, avoiding all but spiritual subjects and strictly observing the rule of silence. Recognizing that humiliation is the antidote for pride, whenever he was reprimanded, even unjustly, he would ask pardon, promise amendment and begin the task again.

As his notes reveal, every action was directed by his love for God:

Above all, you must remember that you are made for God, and that it is your duty to live for Him, because He has created, redeemed, and called you; whence it follows that you must abstain not only from every bad action, but also from indifferent or useless ones. On the other hand, you must zealously strive to let every interior or exterior act proceed from virtue, so that you may draw ever nearer to God.

In 1591, a pestilence struck Rome, and the Novitiate of Sant' Andrea opened its doors to the sick poor who overflowed the hospitals. Though in poor health himself, Aloysius begged permission from his superiors to help care for those afflicted with the disease. As in everything else, Aloysius did not spare himself. Several of the other novices who helped in the hospitals succumbed to the disease but Aloysius continued to care for the most contagious patients, inspiring courage in all who worked with him.

One day on his way to the hospital of Santa Maria della Consolazione, he came upon a man stricken with the disease and lying helpless on the street. He picked the man up and carried him to the hospital on his shoulders. Before the day was over Aloysius too was ill. Though he survived the first crisis, he suffered from a lingering fever and was too weak to get out of bed. For three months he prepared himself for death. Eventually, he told his companions he would die on June 20, the Octave of Corpus Christi. On that day he seemed much better, however, and the Brother attending him was hesitant when Aloysius requested that the Father Rector bring him Holy Viaticum. Shortly before midnight, Aloysius, but 23 years of age, gave up his soul to God, the last word on his lips being the Holy Name of Jesus.

After his death, his confessor, Saint Robert Bellarmine, zealously promoted Aloysius' beatification and gave a number of sermons encouraging the young to emulate his heroic purity. Devotion to Aloysius grew and numerous miracles were attributed to his intercession. On December 10, 1726, the decree of canonization was signed by Pope Benedict XIII who, in imitation of Aloysius, had renounced his title of Prince Orsini and entered the Dominican Order where he kept a picture of Aloysius in his cell.

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga was proclaimed "Patron of Youth" by Pope Benedict XIII. The angelic purity and heroic fortitude of this saint present a striking model for the young people of our day in the face of the grossest immorality being thrust upon them from all sides. May his fervent love of God and virtuous life be an inspiration to our children towards the fulfillment of the most important duty of their lives, the salvation of their souls! Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, pray for us! †

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES: ARE THEY GOD'S ELECT?

John Kenneth Weiskittel

The odds are very good that at one time or another you or someone you know has received a visit from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Although statistics for this are not readily available, it seems likely that only the Avon lady and the Fuller Brush man make as many door-to-door solicitations as Witness missionaries.

Such tireless neighborhood canvassing has paid dividends. Since their establishment a little over 100 years ago, the Jehovah's Witnesses have moved from being a tiny sect based in the United States to a worldwide faith with over two million members in 216 countries — and they're still growing.

Even more amazing is the fact that U.S. membership has gone from a mere 6,040 in 1928 to the current total of 697,660. Staggering as it may seem, this represents an increase of better than 10,000 percent in less than 60 years!

And if this sounds as though Witness "ministers" (which include all members) have pounded a lot of pavements in search of converts, they *have*. A former British member, W.C. Stevenson, notes in his book, *The Inside Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Hart, 1968), that it was once calculated that in a year they devoted 162,808,312 hours to ringing doorbells, with each of their leaders expected to put in 100 to 150 hours a month. But that was 20 years ago when world membership was only *half* of what it is today.

What is it about the Jehovah's Witnesses that attracts growing numbers of people and turns them into such dedicated proselytizers? This is all the more puzzling when one considers that the sect opposes business, Christmas, flag salutes, blood transfusions, voting and military service; denies the Trinity, hell, the immortality of the soul and the bodily resurrection of Christ; and teaches that Satan was cast out of heaven in 1914, that Christ was once Saint Michael the Archangel and that the 144,000 referred to in Apocalypse 7 is the *literal* number of the saved in heaven, with Witnesses making up the ranks taken from today's population. An examination of the history of this unusual religion (a term the Witnesses would repudiate since they contend that all religions are "tools of the Devil") is as good a place as any to shed light on the reasons for its popularity.

"Millions Living Today Will Never Die"

Almost every sect originating in America is the outgrowth of an earlier one. In the case of Jehovah's Witnesses the predecessor, at least indirectly, was the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Witness founder Charles Taze Russell was raised in a Congregationalist home in Pennsylvania but, after a crisis of faith, rejected his father's religion in favor of Adventism. He began preaching in 1872 at age 20 and shortly thereafter gathered five other men to form the nucleus of what in 1884 would be established as the Zion Watch Tower Society (now the Jehovah's Witnesses).

One reason for Russell's break with the Adventists was their teaching of everlasting punishment. "He became distressed," writes William Whalen in *Separated Brethren* (Bruce, 1958), "at the thought of hell and his Bible searching convinced him that the Hebrew word *sheol* should be invariably translated 'grave' instead of 'hell.'"

Armed with this and other supposed discoveries, as well as doctrines lifted from Adventism, Russell presented himself as a Scripture scholar. Was he? In *Radio Replies* (TAN Books, 1979), Fathers Rumble and Carty reveal that:

Throughout his books Russell pretended to deep learning, quoting Greek words and frequently attributing a special sense to them which they never possessed in the original language at all. Challenged in an American Court, he had to admit that he did not know Greek and he was unable to name the letters of the Greek alphabet...

Perhaps this is why the Witnesses allowed Russell's seven-volume *Studies in the Scriptures* to go out of print, and the copies of it that still exist are guarded for use only by sect leaders. (Stevenson)

Whatever the fate of his writings, the teachings of Russell are still the basis of modern Jehovah's Witness literature. Among these is the familiar Adventist theme of the Second Coming of Christ. Some American "prophets" had erred in predicting a given time and place for the event. Russell learned from their mistakes and shrewdly proclaimed that the Second Coming began to occur in 1874... but *invisibly* and *in heaven*. When Christ, a mere man, died, he was resurrected as a "mighty spirit creature." In the words of Milton G. Henschel, a member of the Witnesses governing body, "Christ is now invisibly present. He will always remain invisible to humans, but his presence is proved by human events since 1914 which fulfill all the predictions of Matthew 24." (cited in Leo Rosten's *Religions of America*; Touchstone, 1975) The significance of the year 1914 comes again from Russell's novel reading of the Bible. He wrote that it (1914) "terminated the limit of the Papacy's power to oppress and the Time of the End began." (cited, Stevenson) The outbreak of World War I in that year only helped confirm this in the minds of his followers.

Charles Russell's controversial career—which included such scandals as his wife's divorcing him for cruelty and infidelity and moneymaking schemes that ran afoul of the law (he was forced, for example, to return money he had made selling \$60-a-bushel "Miracle Wheat" to credulous believers)—ended with his death in 1916. The direction of his religion remained the same with the installation of his successor, "Judge" Joseph Rutherford, but its rhetoric became, if anything, even more shrill and fanatical.

Rutherford, an attorney in Missouri, had never been made a judge. He appropriated the title after sitting in for an absent judge on occasion; other lawyers, in turn, did the same but only Rutherford affixed “Judge” to his name. In 1918, he was “sentenced to twenty years’ imprisonment for conspiracy and disloyalty in promoting military revolt in America,” but was freed by an amnesty in the following year. (op. cit., Rumble/Carty. Contrary to popular belief, the Jehovah’s Witnesses do *not* preach pacifism; rather, they say they will not fight in the wars of worldly governments but only when commanded by God, as, presumably, Rutherford claimed to be.)

Under his leadership the movement took on a more belligerent posture, yet showed its first real growth. “Judge” Rutherford found that marketing the sect was hampered by the confusing number of names identifying it: Russellites, International Bible Students, Millennial Dawnists, Rutherfordites, and Watchtower Bible & Tract People. He hit upon a name that would give the group instant recognition—*Jehovah’s Witnesses*. This was taken from the passage in Isaiah 43:12 in which God declares: “You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God.” Rutherford also relied on catchy slogans, such as “Millions Now Living Will Never Die,” to attract converts. Some indication of his mental state can be seen by the fact that his San Diego mansion was deeded to *Abel, Jonah and Abraham*. His death in 1942 prevented his being one of those millions who would never die. Like his predecessor, the works of “Judge” Rutherford are largely forgotten today but, together with Russell’s, they form the core of Witness dogma.

Revising the Scriptures

Outsiders casually acquainted with Jehovah’s Witness theology may conclude that it is simply one of hundreds of Christian sects. They rightly reason that it holds the Bible to be its holy book, Christ as the Savior, and man’s relationship with God as crucial in determining his eternal fate. Yet looks can be misleading.

The sort of “scholarship” practiced by Russell and Rutherford has been perpetuated by the Witnesses. *The Watchtower*, started by Russell in 1879, is their official semimonthly devoted to spreading their doctrine and (according to its stated purpose) “the good news that God’s Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise...” It is now printed in 103 languages and has an average press run of 12,315,000. A companion magazine, *Awake*, (10.6 million copies in 53 languages) presents the sect’s view of current events and is also published twice a month. Also released from the Brooklyn, New York headquarters are books sold or given away in the millions, with titles such as *Is This Life All There Is?*, *Things in Which It Is Impossible For God To Lie* and *Babylon the Great Has Fallen! God’s Kingdom Rules*. And, to “clarify” key scripture passages, a *New World* translation of the Bible has been made.

Inspection of such works exposes the distinctive character of the Witnesses. God wants to be known by His name, they contend, which is “Jehovah.” They insist on this (the *New World* Bible repeatedly uses the term), yet Scripture experts have long

rejected this English translation as a misspelling of the Hebrew word for God—*Yahweh*. A different gospel is taught, as Our Lord is held to be just a mortal who, contends *Let God Be True*, “did not think himself to be coequal with Jehovah God.” Nor did He die on the cross. Every such reference in the *New World* Bible to Christ’s death is to a “torture stake.” Archaeologists have shown that, while stakes *were* used by the Romans for executions, they were *not*, as the Witnesses believe, the *sole* method (the remains of crucified men have been found in recent Middle East excavations). This insistence on “torture stake” isn’t centered on history, however, but on the claim that the cross is a pagan symbol, “proof” of an alleged link between institutional Christianity and idolators. According to Stevenson, the contention is also made that the IHS, appearing on the crucifix and elsewhere, refers to the Egyptian gods Isis, Horus and Seb. Hell is said to be another pagan invention—but the concept of heaven, which is *also* found in heathen religions, is *not* likewise proscribed by the Witnesses. (Readers will note that for similar reasons the sect’s houses of worship are designated “Kingdom Halls” and *not* churches.)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses are particularly obsessive about the figure of 144,000 “saved.” While Christ’s affirmations of His divinity and of the reality of hell are reduced to symbolic interpretations in their tracts, this number is accepted as literal despite its being found in a *prophetic* book. For this reason, few members—about one in 20—receive the annual Lord’s Supper communion; a majority believe they will each be one of the “Jonadabs” destined for a life on the Eden-like new earth. Since man has no immortal soul (another “pagan” belief), God will recall each person from His memory and give a second chance to those who have not heard the gospel preached. As Stevenson puts it: “What the Witnesses are really teaching is a re-creation of the soul, not a resurrection.” There is no hell, only annihilation, for the evildoers.

Witnessing to the Witnesses

During “Judge” Rutherford’s tenure, the Witnesses’ anti-Catholic propaganda was at a fever pitch. Their New York radio station WBBR was sometimes shut down in the early 1940’s due to the virulence of its programming. And a 1940 pamphlet, *Theocracy*, carried a cover picture showing “the Devil, with Adolf Hitler at one shoulder and His Holiness the Pope at the other.” (ibid.)

The “hear me or be damned” tone of the Witnesses’ message has been replaced with a subtler approach under their current President F.W. Franz. Today’s “ministers” are instructed to be friendly and reassure those whose homes they visit with lines such as “Well, we are always pleased to meet Catholics because we find them to be sincere people who practice their religion.” (ibid.) Yet under the surface the themes are the same. The January 15, 1987 *Watchtower* condemns as unscriptural efforts by Christian missionaries to build schools, hospitals and orphanages, while ignoring the many admonitions for acts of mercy by Our Lord and His apostles. Of interest to traditional Catholics is a passage that confuses what is being done in the Conciliar Church with the true Faith:

In China...Roman Catholics are allowed to continue their ancestor worship, although this is forbidden elsewhere. Plaques beseeching the blessing of the door god are often seen around doorways of "Christian" homes.

It is argued that non-Witness missionaries fall under the condemnation: "...depart from me, you that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:23).

And so, how are we to respond to the Jehovah's Witnesses? With Christian charity, of course. As William Whalen writes:

...Angry words and slammed doors will not bring these souls to Christianity. Adult Catholics with Catholic high school or college educations should be able to demonstrate the divinity of Christ or the fact of immortality to any Witness who calls at their door. They should not buy or keep Witness literature.

And we have some common ground, surprising as that may seem, since targets of Witnesses' opposition include abortion, lodges, world government and evolution (their arguments relating to evolution, notes the Cambridge-educated Stevenson, are "for the most part sensible and thought-provoking").

The Jehovah's Witnesses sect has grown by its appeal to the poor and uneducated (higher learning is largely frowned upon) of a better life in the future. "All expect to see Armageddon in their lifetimes," writes Whalen. "Can the movement sustain itself with a continually postponed Armageddon?" And, based on their teaching that "the end of the present world would definitely take place by the year 1975," W.C. Stevenson predicted: "It would seem that 1975 would be a year of doom, if not for the world, for Jehovah's Witnesses."

That the movement continues to flourish is proof of the power apocalyptic "last days" teachings exert over many, usually underprivileged, people. Consequently, in discussions with these or any others who dwell on the second coming, we need to remind them that our Lord teaches: "But of that day or hour no man knoweth..." (Mark 13:32)†

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