

# Preface

TO INVESTIGATE a widespread, socially meaningful organization like the Jehovah's Witnesses is a herculean task for any one researcher, yet such has been my effort. During a period of several years I have sought, through various means, to acquaint myself scientifically with the Jehovah's Witnesses. This purpose has not been an easy one, although probably I would not have enjoyed it half so much had it been so.

The Witnesses awaken tremendously complex reactions. To the person interested in current affairs they present a vital problem, because of their attitude toward the nation, its flag and symbols, its stake in the second World War, and the deeper and underlying problems concerning the significance of democracy and freedom. For the person interested in the nature of religion and its many varying ramifications the Witnesses contribute much significant data. While opposed to all traditional religious associations, they have developed their own particular interpretation of the character of personal and social religion. More specifically, the failure of the Christian churches to create a highly satisfactory medium of expression for the needs and aspirations of the underprivileged can in part be seen in this movement. For the person who, with abstraction, seeks to understand the character of human motivation in general and the sociological nature of the "sect," the Jehovah's Witnesses furnishes present and powerful resources.

The main basis of the work which I have done is observation. In the course of preparing this interpretation I have sought to secure my information chiefly through the medium of participation in the activities, both public and private, of the Witnesses themselves. For some time after beginning the study I did not even make a systematic survey of the official literature, because I wished, above all else, to understand the Witnesses for themselves and without the bias which might come from a somewhat artificial approach to their organization. Only late in my investigation did I deem it necessary and proper to create a historical and literary frame for my findings. That such a frame is highly important in terms of the final estimate of the group I do not doubt in the least, and one can find in this account the results of my belief. But, first and foremost, I have sought to understand the Witnesses as people.

One of the methods employed in seeking to understand the Witnesses themselves was to make as many personal contacts as possible with their

way of life. To that end I attended regularly the various types of meetings which the Jehovah's Witnesses offers. These meetings differ somewhat from section to section of the country, and occasionally I have mentioned in the body of my report the meaning of these sectional variations. Furthermore, to secure my information I spent considerable time in friendly association with some of the Witnesses. This involved "canvassing" with them on the streets of certain cities, entering their homes for social occasions, eating at their tables, even visiting them in jail. In order that these personal contacts might have a more objective bearing, I undertook several hundred case studies and made detailed reports for my own use on all aspects of the movement that seemed of chief importance.

Unfortunately, in many respects, I could not obtain that kind of information from the Witnesses themselves or from their leaders from which a more statistical report could have been prepared. To the casually interested person, this failure may signify the lack of hard work on my part, but this, I make bold to claim, is too hasty a judgment. In planning the investigation, I sought to create several questionnaires for use in securing quite definite information. I found, all too quickly, that the questionnaires led to a lessening of rapport between myself and member Witnesses. Since the movement is in many ways a "secret" one, the members were loathe to give me openly any information. Moreover, the leaders issued orders to all local groups that I should not be aided in any direct way in securing my information. Even as late as November, 1943, the present leader of the Witnesses, Mr. N. H. Knorr, informed me by letter that the "Society does not have the time, nor will it take the time, to assist you in your publication concerning Jehovah's witnesses." Indeed, according to the incumbent President of the Society, aside from the scant materials to be found in the brief *Yearbook*, "there is no other information that we have available to the public."

My information has, therefore, come the hard way. For the most part what I have uncovered, while on the surface it may look inadequate, is about all that is known concerning the organization at the present. Probably a detailed study of the movement is available to a very few of the Witness leaders only. In many ways, mine is a pioneering venture. There is no detailed and accurate study with which I could check my findings. In regard to the experiences of the Witnesses themselves I have sought wherever possible and practical to select from the official literature

those personal testimonies which would provide a later researcher with a fairly sure means of checking the present findings. I do not assume to have exhausted the possibilities of research upon the Jehovah's Witnesses. Indeed, I am well aware of certain limitations which my study involves, both as to approach and to findings.

For assistance in the preparation of this study, I am indebted to many more persons and organizations than can be mentioned here. From Professor Horace M. Kallen of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research, I received valued aid in the construction of the whole project. He has given me much from his storehouse of wisdom and experience. Professor Carl Mayer of the same institution also contributed intelligent guidance. The American Civil Liberties Union opened its files and services to me. The American Council of Learned Societies, through the awarding of a grant, made possible in large part the publication of the findings. My thanks are extended to various members of the Columbia University Press staff for their generous aid, and especially to Miss Matilda Berg for her detailed assistance. Mrs. Anna E. D. Guldin of Reading, Pennsylvania, and Mr. and Mrs. William V. Stroup of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, were also helpful in many ways. To the Witnesses themselves I owe a tremendous debt both for the personal and for the formal instruction which they tendered me. Finally, my largest obligation is extended to my wife, Grace, who, with patience, hard work, and skill has undergirded the entire undertaking. She is a living testimony to the fact that a woman can be both Martha and Mary. Needless to say, responsibility for the final form of the study rests upon me.

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