

יהוה — “HE WHO IS”

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES AND CATHOLICISM

(Summary of 7/30/12 St. Thomas More Presentation by Fritz Wenisch)

I. HISTORY, MEMBERSHIP, REASON FOR THE DENOMINATION’S NAME

1. **Remarks on the movement’s history:** Founded by Charles Taze Russell (incorporated as Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society in 1884, name later changed to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society), first President, died 1916; second President: Joseph Franklin Rutherford; under him, the organization received the name “Jehovah’s Witnesses” in 1931.
2. **Membership:** 2011 U.S. membership: almost 2,000,000; world-wide: almost 7,500,000.
3. **Why *Jehovah’s Witnesses*?** The Tetragrammaton (= 4-letter word), designating God’s self-given name (see Ex 3.13-15) is: יהוה (to be read from right to left), transliterated (changed to “from left to right”) YHWH or JHVH. Meaning: “HE WHO IS” (according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, “he causes to be”; the context of Ex 3.13-15 does not bear this out). Pronunciation: Originally, Hebrew was written with consonants only, the vowels were to be supplied by the reader. (Vowel points were inserted into the Jewish Holy Scriptures only between the 7th and 11th centuries.) God’s name was, with very few exceptions, not allowed to be spoken; wherever the Tetragrammaton appeared in the Jewish Holy Scriptures (between 6,000 and 7,000 times), the reader said “Adonai,” meaning Lord. Thus, there was disagreement about the pronunciation; we use YAHWEH, in line with an ancient phonetic way to represent the word in Greek (ιαουε), Jehovah’s Witnesses use “Jehovah.” In our Old Testament, the Tetragrammaton is rendered as LORD.

II. TEACHINGS OF JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

1. **Source of teachings:** In theory, “Only the Bible”; in practice, the Bible as interpreted by the Watchtower Society; one must have grave reservations (to put it mildly) about their use of Scripture, even about their translation of the Bible (called the *New World Translation* [NWT]).
2. **God:** They are monotheists; they deny the teaching on the Trinity.
3. **Jesus:** Not God; considered as God’s first creation, and identified with the Archangel Michael.
4. **The Holy Spirit:** Not God; not even a personal being, but God’s active force.
5. **No “intermediate state”:** Humans do not exist between death and resurrection; resurrection means recreation of the individual.
6. **Hell:** There is no eternal hell; Satan and unrepentant sinners will cease to exist.
7. **Second “Coming” (1914):** The “Second Coming” of Jesus is really his “presence” (parousia) for us as him ruling over us from heaven. This began in October of 1914. Prior to that, he was, since his ascension, sitting on the right hand of God; in 1914, he was made God’s coregent. At the same time, the Devil was thrown out of heaven, and since then, he causes havoc on earth. (Rev 12.7-18; according to this passage, Michael—identified by Jehovah’s Witnesses with Jesus—is the one throwing the Devil out.)
8. **Two groups of humans destined for eternal life:** Humans destined for eternal life are divided into two groups: First, the 144,000 who are to rule with Christ from heaven, called “the anointed ones” or the “little flock” (see 2 Cor 1.21, Rev 7.1-8 and Lk 12.32); second, a much larger group, called the “other sheep” (see Jn 10.16) or the “great crowd” (or “great multitude”—Rev 7.9, 19.1), destined to live for ever on earth, turned into a paradise.
9. **Cleansing of the Temple and first resurrection (1918):** Most of the 144,000 were followers of Christ who lived prior to 1914. In April of 1918 (three and a half years after beginning his heavenly rule), Jesus cleansed the temple; one interpretation of this is that the temple is the community of his followers and the “cleansing” is the purging of dissident members out of the group—they had accumulated during the beginning years of Rutherford’s presidency. A short time later, those of the 144,000 who had lived prior to 1918 were resurrected (= recreated) by God, to assist Jesus in ruling the world (= first resurrection). Some humans destined to be among the 144,000 were still on earth after 1918; upon their death, they would immediately join the ruling class in heaven.
10. **Armageddon:** At some time after 1918, the Battle of Armageddon (= “Hill of Megiddo,” the latter being a town in Israel around which important battles had been fought) is to take place (I am passing over the unfulfilled predictions when it was to happen; the last specific year that was given was 1975; now, no year is specified; but the battle keeps on being just around the corner). All earthly governments, assisted by the Devil and his minions, will band together against the true believers; the latter ones will not have to fight; that will be done by Jesus and his angels. The hostile

forces will be overcome; all humans except for Jehovah's Witnesses will be killed, the Devil and his minions will be locked up in an abyss, and a 1000-year reign of Christ from heaven (assisted by the 144,000, whose number will have been filled by them) will begin—called the Millennium.

11. **The Millennium (= 1000-year reign):** During the Millennium, the earth will be repopulated in two ways: Those Jehovah's Witnesses who lived through Armageddon will have children; also, there will be the second resurrection. Two groups of people will be involved: First, those Old Testament figures who had led just lives (including, of course, many unknown persons) will be resurrected; some of them will be given ruling positions, but only on earth: None of them will be among the 144,000. Second, people who did not know the true faith but did not lead absolutely sinful lives will be resurrected to be given a second chance.
12. **The final test:** When the Millennium is past, it is time for the final test. It is necessary for the following reason: Given the wonderful state the earth will be in during the Millennium, it will be easy to adhere to the true faith. Will, however, the people born and resurrected during the Millennium also cling to the faith when it is difficult to do so? To test this, the Devil and his minions will be freed from the abyss and allowed to try to seduce people. Some will stay faithful, some will not. When the test is completed, fire will come from heaven and annihilate the devil, his angels, and those who have followed him. Those humans who will have passed the test will henceforth live forever on this earth, governed from heaven by Jesus and the 144,000. The state of the earth will be like Adam and Eve's paradise.
13. **Other points:** No consumption of blood, including a prohibition of blood transfusions; no birthday celebrations, no celebration of Christmas or other pagan feast days. (Christmas is considered an intrusion of paganism into Christianity.)

III. RESPONSES DERIVED FROM THE BIBLE

[Note: If biblical references are underlined and bold (like **Mt 28.19**), the passages as given in the New World Translation can be used to make the point intended; if biblical references are in italics and underlined (like *Jn 1.1*), the NWT cannot be used; in some cases, a discussion of New Testament Greek would be required to demonstrate that the NWT renders the passage incorrectly.]

1. **The Trinity: Mt 28.19:** Unity and trinity expressed: "Name" is singular although three entities are mentioned; the Holy Spirit (given with lower-case letters in the NWT) must be a person, for nothing can be done in the name of an impersonal force; the passage places the three entities mentioned on an "equal footing."
2. **The divinity of Jesus:** Jehovah's Witnesses would use passages such as Jn 14.28 against this teaching. In response, Catholics point out that indeed there is a respect in which Jesus is lower than the Father: With regard to his human nature he has freely adopted. Simultaneously, as God, he also is equal to the father, as attested to by Jn 10.30 and Jn 14.9. Moreover: "My Lord and my God": Jn 20.28 (see Jn 20.24-29); "And the Word was God": *Jn 1.1*; also *Tit 2.13* and *2 Peter 1.1*.
3. **The personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit: Acts 5.3-4.** One can lie ("play false"—NWT) only to a person; moreover, in lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias lied to God.
4. **Existence between death and resurrection:** Demonstrated, among else, by Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16.19-31). The argument of the Jehovah's Witnesses, "But this is a parable; one cannot take everything in it literally," is to be countered: True, maybe Lazarus and the rich man were not real persons; but the general conditions surrounding a parable must be as stated. Just imagine Jesus having said that the Good Samaritan (see Lk 10.30-37) had placed the half-dead man into his boat to bring him to an inn at the coast of the Sea of Galilee: Jesus would have lost credibility by making the road from Jerusalem to Jericho run along the shores of that lake.
5. **There is an eternal hell: Mt 13.49-50.** Why would there be wailing and grinding of teeth (suffering) among a group of non-existent people? Eternity of hell: Mk 9.48.
6. **Assuming an earthly paradise for most and heaven only for a smaller group is unbiblical:** According to the Bible, the "great crowd" is not on earth: Rev 7.9; the argument of the Jehovah's Witnesses that one can be before God's throne wherever one is can be countered with Rev 19.1, explicitly locating the "great crowd" in heaven.

A detailed version of the paper is on a webpage accessible through the following link:

<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/phl/wenisch/jehwit.htm>