

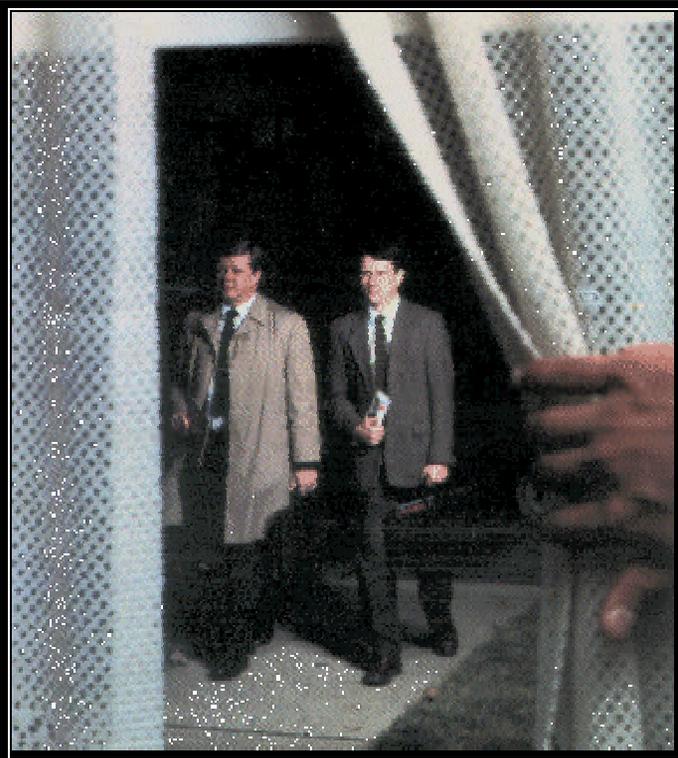
Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses:

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Propaganda

By Timothy B. Kline

**Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses:
Propaganda, part 1**

For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, this one is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, and off he goes and immediately forgets what sort of man he is. –James 1:23,24

The June 22, 2000, *Awake!* Magazine, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, discussed the topic of “propaganda” at length. The result was both informative and well-written. This response incorporates much of the discussion contained in the magazine, along with pertinent information so that the interested one might better understand whether this powerful tool is used by Jehovah's Witnesses today by addressing the question “Is the Work of Jehovah's Witnesses Propagandistic?”

The cover of the magazine features a balding, white-haired man dressed in business-like attire standing behind an array of microphones with his hand slightly extended in invitation. His demeanor appears to be sincere, his face clean-shaven and mouth formed into the hint of a smile or in mid-sentence. The caption below reads “Should You Believe Everything You Hear?”

The discussion begins on the inside of the cover, where a close-up of a man's ear, hand cupped around, is pictured, along with the caption “Most of us are bombarded with information every day. What forms does it take? How can you sift the true from the false?” The discussion is to be elaborated in a three-part series, on pages 3-11.

Article One: Propaganda Can Be Deadly

The first article is titled “Propaganda Can Be Deadly” and begins with a quote attributed to Mark Twain which says:

“A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.”

Pictured on the page, in the lower right corner, is a young child, thin and dressed in what appears to be winter clothing of the WWII era. The caption beside the photo reads “Propaganda was used to victimize Jews during the Holocaust. The article then discusses what first appears to be another case of anti-Jew persecution in a school involving a teacher directing her students to mistreat a seven-year-old student. But then it's revealed that the student is not Jewish, but rather that he is the son of Jehovah's Witnesses. The discussion then turns to the varied forms of propaganda that spread in Germany and nearby countries “some 60 years ago.”

Next, the writer mentions the open use of emblems of hate (i.e., swastika) in propaganda as well as the more subtle use (e.g. tasteless jokes). A key statement to *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Propaganda* is quoted below:

Its persuasive techniques are regularly applied by dictators, politicians, clergymen, advertisers, marketers, journalists, and others who are interested in influencing thought and behavior.¹

As the writer admits, “propagandistic messages can be used to accomplish positive social ends, as in campaigns to reduce drunk driving. But propaganda may also be used to promote hatred for ethnic or religious minorities...” Researchers Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson are then quoted as having said:

*“Every day we are bombarded with one persuasive communication after another. **These appeals persuade not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions.** For better or worse, ours is an age of propaganda.” [Emphasis mine]*

The first article closes with questions about how human thinking and actions have been affected by propaganda, how a person could protect themselves from it, and whether there is a trustworthy source of information, and then states that these and other questions will be discussed in the articles to follow.

It is the intention of *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Propaganda* to address just how the organization known worldwide as Jehovah's Witnesses has been guilty of the very same propaganda as others are accused of, using the same techniques discussed within the magazine's three-part series of articles.

Article Two: The Manipulation of Information

The second article begins by citing Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*:

"By clever and persevering use of propaganda even heaven can be represented as hell to the people, and conversely the most wretched life as paradise."

The writer continues by pointing out that with the advent of today's means of communication, the "flow of persuasive messages has dramatically accelerated."² Because of the increase of information flow and the pressures thereof, the writer argues:

"Many respond to this pressure by absorbing messages more quickly and accepting them without questioning or analyzing them.

"The cunning propagandist loves such shortcuts... **Propaganda encourages this by agitating the emotions, by exploiting insecurities, by capitalizing on the ambiguity of language, and by bending the rules of logic.** As history bears out, such tactics can prove all too effective."³ [Emphasis mine]

Under the subheading "A History of Propaganda" the reader is introduced to the actual origin of the term that has such a negative connotation today. Having apparently come from the name given to a group of Roman Catholic cardinals that formed a committee that was established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 to oversee missionaries, the term eventually came to be equated with "any effort to spread a belief."

Of course, as the writer points out, the concept of propaganda has its history going clear back to ancient times, with the usage of various symbols (the writer cites the Egyptian pyramids as an example).

The era of WW1 saw the term "propaganda" take on the more familiar negative connotation that most recognize today. The writer draws attention to Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels as "master propagandists."⁴ That era also saw a more active role played by the nations in promoting national policies, the article continues. Even today, the use of alluring advertisements for tobacco by the tobacco industry seems to downplay the threat to public health in order to gain sales.

The article then begins to address the various means used by those who engage in propaganda.

First among these is found under the subheading "Lies, Lies!"

*Certainly, the handiest trick of the propagandist is the use of outright lies.*⁵

The writer then mentions Martin Luther's statements made in 1543 concerning Jews of Europe:

"They have poisoned wells, made assassinations, kidnapped children... They are venomous, bitter, vindictive, tricky serpents, assassins, and children of the devil who sting and work harm... Set fire to their synagogues or schools... Their houses [should] also be razed and destroyed."

The next subheading “Making Generalizations” starts off with the pointed statement:

*Another very successful tactic of propaganda is generalization. Generalizations tend to obscure important facts about the real issues in question, and they are frequently used to demean entire groups of people.*⁶
[Emphasis mine]

The subheading that follows, “Name-Calling” makes another valid point:

*Some people insult those who disagree with them by questioning character or motives instead of focusing on the facts. Name-calling slaps a negative, easy-to-remember label onto a person, a group, or an idea. The name-caller hopes that the label will stick. If people reject the person or the idea on the basis of the negative label instead of weighing the evidence for themselves, the name-caller’s strategy has worked.*⁷ [Emphasis mine]

As the writer points out, recent years have seen a tremendous growth in antisect sentiment, especially in Europe. To cite how the writer put it so succinctly:

*Often “sect” becomes a catchword. “‘Sect’ is another word for ‘heretic,’” wrote German Professor Martin Kriele in 1993, “and a heretic today in Germany, as in former times, is [condemned to extermination]—if not by fire..., then by character assassination, isolation and economic destruction.”*⁸ [Emphasis mine]

“Playing on the Emotions” is the next subheading. There, the writer states:

Even though feelings might be irrelevant when it comes to factual claims or the logic of an argument, they play a

crucial role in persuasion. Emotional appeals are fabricated by practiced publicists, who play on feelings as skillfully as a virtuoso plays the piano.

*For example, fear is an emotion that can becloud judgment. As, as in the case of envy, fear can be played upon.*⁹ [Emphasis mine]

Another example involving propaganda against Jehovah’s Witnesses is brought forward. In this instance, three girls had committed suicide in Moscow. The accusation was that that the girls were “fanatical followers” of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The writer draws attention to the term “fanatical” in this instance, pointing out how fear became the motivation for people’s view of Witnesses afterwards, then reveals how the accusation was false, but that by then the information was already in the media to such an extent that the population certainly must have come to the conclusion that Jehovah’s Witnesses were a suicidal cult. It is because of being misinformed that the people would come to such a conclusion in light of such negative media, the writer alleges.

The article continues:

Hatred is a strong emotion exploited by propagandists. Loaded language is particularly effective in triggering it. There seems to be a nearly endless supply of nasty words that promote and exploit hatred toward particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups.

*Some propagandists play on pride. Often we can spot appeals to pride by looking for such key phrases as: “Any intelligent person knows that...” or, “A person with your education can’t help but see that...” A reverse appeal to pride plays on our fear of seeming stupid. Professionals in persuasion are well aware of that.*¹⁰ [Emphasis mine]

The final subheading of the second article is titled “Slogans and Symbols.” There, the reader is told:

*Slogans are vague statements that are typically used to express positions or goals. **Because of their vagueness, they are easy to agree with.***¹¹ [Emphasis mine]

The writer poses the question:

*But do most people carefully analyze the real issues involved in the crisis or conflict? Or do they just accept what they are told?*¹²

Follows is a strong point by the writer as the article comes to its close:

*The propagandist also has a very wide range of symbols and signs with which to convey his message... Love of parents can also be exploited. Thus, **such symbolisms as the fatherland, the mother country, or the mother church are valuable tools in the hands of the shrewd persuader.***¹³ [Emphasis mine]

The article ends by asking the question of how a person can protect one's self.

Article Three: Do Not Be a Victim of Propaganda

The third and final article cites Proverbs 14:15 from *Today's English Version*.

"A fool will believe anything."

In the lower right corner of page 9 is a portion of a woman's face, along with a caption that reads "Discernment enables you to discard irrelevant or misleading information."

The article begins by pointing out the differences between education and propaganda:

*There is a difference—a big difference—between education and propaganda. **Education shows you how to think. Propaganda tells you what to think.** Good educators present all sides of an issue and encourage discussion. Propagandists relentlessly force you to hear their view and discourage discussion... They sift the facts, exploiting useful ones and concealing the others. They also distort and twist facts, specializing in lies and half-truths. Your emotions, not your logical thinking abilities, are their target.*

The propagandist makes sure that his message appears to be the right and moral one and that it gives you a sense of importance and belonging if you follow it. You are one of the smart ones, you are not alone, you are comfortable and secure—so they say.¹⁴ [Emphasis mine]

The writer reassures the reader by saying that:

*Once you are familiar with some of their tricks, you are in a better position to evaluate any message or information that comes your way.*¹⁵

The first way to avoid becoming a victim, according to the article, is to "Be Selective." Having a completely open mind is compared to a pipe that lets anything flow through it... "even sewage."

Proverbs 14:15 is cited again, this time from the *New World Translation*, "Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps." Added to this is the writer's own statement:

We need to scrutinize whatever is presented to us, deciding what to accept and what to reject.¹⁶ [Emphasis mine]

At the same time, the writer continues,

*...we do not want to be so narrow that we refuse to consider facts that can improve our thinking.*¹⁷

By using the Bible as a sure guide, the Christian has the source of reliable wisdom. While being open-minded to new information, the article points out, the Christian's mind "sees the danger of information that is entirely inconsistent with his Bible-based values."

On pages 10 and 11 of the magazine, at the top, are four pictures. The first is of a well-dressed middle-aged man wearing a suit and glasses perusing a newspaper while sitting in a chair. The second is that of a cleanly dressed woman watching what appears to be a news broadcast. Below these two pictures is the caption "Test whatever you are reading or watching to see if it is truthful."

The third picture is taken of a crowd of people walking to and fro, apparently in cooler weather or climate. That picture has the caption "Popular opinion is not always reliable. The fourth picture shows a Bible open to Mark with a well-manicured hand. The Bible is not in English. It has the caption "We can confidently look to God's Word as the source of truth."

Another way, the article goes on, is to "Use Discernment." The writer defines "discernment" as "acuteness of judgment." It enables a person to "discard irrelevant information or misleading facts" and "distinguish the substance of a matter."

"Put information to the test" is another recommendation of the article. The writer acknowledges that "Some people today are like sponges; they soak up whatever they come across. It is all too easy to absorb whatever is around us."

More importantly, the article endeavors to impress upon the reader that

...it is far better for each individual personally to choose what he will feed his mind. It is said that we are what we eat and this can apply to food for both the body and the mind. No

matter what you are reading or watching or listening to, test to see whether it has propagandistic overtones or is truthful.

Moreover, if we want to be fair-minded, we must be willing to subject our own opinions to continual testing as we take in new information. We must realize that they are, after all, opinions. Their trustworthiness depends on the validity of our facts, on the quality of our reasoning, and on the standards or values that we choose to apply.¹⁸ [Emphasis mine]

The article then suggests that the person "Ask Questions."

First, examine whether there is a bias. What is the motive for the message? If the message is rife with name-calling and loaded words, why is that? Loaded language aside, what are the merits of the message itself? Also, if possible, try to check the track record of those speaking. Are they known to speak the truth? If "authorities" are used, who or what are they? Why should you regard this person—or organization or publication—as having expert knowledge or trustworthy information on the subject in question? If you sense some appeal to emotions, ask yourself, 'When viewed dispassionately, what are the merits of the message?'¹⁹

The final suggestion of the writer is "Do not just follow the crowd."

If you realize that what everybody thinks is not necessarily correct, you can find the strength to think differently. While it may seem that all others think the same way, does it mean that you should? Popular opinion is not a reliable barometer of truth. Over the centuries all kinds of ideas have been popularly accepted, only to be proved wrong later. Yet, the inclination to go along with the crowd persists.²⁰ [Emphasis mine]

The third article closes with the assurance that if we rely on the Bible, and God, who is the author of the Bible, we will not fall under the sway of propagandists.

Personally, I found the articles both informative and helpful. But I also found myself shaking my head as I reread the information and realized that even Jehovah's Witnesses are both victims and unaware propagandists, myself included. Follows is my closer examination and discussion of *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Propaganda*.

Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: *Propaganda, part 2*

For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, this one is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, and off he goes and immediately forgets what sort of man he is. –James 1:23,24

Being one of Jehovah's Witnesses and then reading a series of articles such as this can cause a great deal of concern when reflections take place of one's approach in the field ministry or the varied approaches in the literature to Witnesses and non-Witnesses alike. Writing a response to the articles seemed the logical thing for me to do, because it would then allow me to express myself *to* myself while making efforts to be objective about the information that I was either already familiar with or had just read in the article.

Since in the organization it is the policy of Witnesses to speak in agreement with one another, and thus in agreement with the Society's leadership which issues any policies or doctrines, I feel confident in using cited information from the publications in making my points that are forthcoming. Out of respect for the time and effort spent by the writers of the organization, I will endeavor to give appropriate credit to the name of the publication used as well as page referred to, and publication date, if necessary. This will be done through the endnotes, in a fashion similar to the previous section.

Tackling the subject of *propaganda* by the Society may very well prove to be one of the most important discussions to take place, and is certainly being set upon by the opposers of the organization known worldwide as Jehovah's Witnesses... for better or worse only time will reveal. My first impression as I read the articles was "Do they realize what they are saying? Do they realize that we Witnesses engage in the very things that they are writing about?"

I thought first of James' words that are now quoted above, because it spoke so well of the individual who is faced with their reflection of reality, then steps away from the reality, forgetting what they saw, as if it was of no consequence. Of course, James was speaking about those that hear the Word of God, see what it is in themselves, but do nothing about it. But the verse is just as applicable to truth itself, since God's Word is truth. So, to put it in simpler terms, if we are faced with a truth, and realize that we are not acting in accordance with that truth, but rather go off with the things we are more comfortable with or familiar with, then we are just like that man that peered, then went off and forgot, are we not?

So, as Witnesses, we have an obligation to not just stand and speak words such as are contained in the articles discussing propaganda, but actually take the time to look at ourselves as we say them, and decide if we have been just as guilty of propaganda as we view others to have been... and then take steps to correct the situation if we do come to that conclusion.

There will be no such suggestions as to what to do within this paper's contents: that is up to the individual. As the magazine pointed out on page 9,

Education shows you how to think. Propaganda tells you what to think.

It would be improper and unchristian of me to tell anyone what they should do since we shall all be held accountable before Jehovah God for what we do. I am, therefore, only presenting the information, and my own feelings and views as they relate to me.

On page 6 of the magazine, one of the subheadings is titled "Playing on the Emotions." There, we see the following statement made:

Even though feelings might be irrelevant when it comes to the factual

claims or the logic of an argument, they play a crucial role in persuasion.²¹

One of the emotions found to be appealed to by "some propagandists" is *pride*. The article points out:

Often we can spot appeals to pride by looking for such key phrases

as: "Any intelligent person knows that..." or, "A person with your

education can't help but see that..." A reverse appeal to pride plays

on our fear of seeming stupid. Professionals in persuasion are

well aware of that.²²

One of the most reliable tools available to Witnesses out in the field ministry is the publication titled *Reasoning from the Scriptures*. Contained therein is a plethora of information about Witnesses' beliefs as well as something called "Introductions For Use in the Field Ministry." These allow a Witness to *persuade* a person to listen to field point, and come highly recommended by the Society.

The following introductions show how some experienced Witnesses

begin conversations. If the introductions you are now using

seldom open the way for conversations, try some of these suggestions.²³

Here are some that caught my eye, with the emphasis placed in conjunction with the "Playing on the Emotions" portion of the article:

*'We're visiting our neighbors to find people who are deeply concerned...'*²⁴

*'We're speaking with people who are truly concerned...'*²⁵

*'I was hoping to find someone like yourself who has an interest in spiritual things.'*²⁶

*'Then I'm sure you will appreciate the seriousness of...'*²⁷

Still, as the article brought out, *fear* is often the emotion appealed to when it comes to propaganda, and this appeal is quite evident in the literature. In fact, every year there are several issues of the *Awake!* and *Watchtower* which feature fearful situations on the cover, meant to grab immediate attention and play upon the emotion of fear.

While it's clear that the Society publishes articles and publications that use the tool of "Playing on the Emotions," I have to personally agree that sometimes that is the *only* way to grab the attention of people. Subjects such as abortion, nuclear warfare, and tobacco usage have themselves engaged in such methods, as have campaigns against drunk driving. In and of itself, this approach, while propagandistic in *nature*, does not make it negative.

To determine to what extent Jehovah's Witnesses engage in propaganda, we must look further, using the three-part article as our guide.

Returning to page 6, we want to examine two subheadings together: "Lies, Lies!" and "Making Generalizations."

The reason why we must examine these two tools together is because they are often so interwoven that it becomes difficult to differentiate the two. A generalization can be a lie in many cases, but is worded in such a way that it is difficult to see it for what it truly is.

There are too many instances of the usage of this two-fold method by the organization to discuss here.

However, to demonstrate how it *is* used by the Society, we shall examine one particular instance here, and then another later.

The first is the Society's consistent reference to all other Christian religions apart from Jehovah's Witnesses as "Christendom." This actually also comes under the tool "Name-Calling," mentioned on page 6 of the *Awake!* Magazine, and possibly the "Slogans and Symbols" category on page 8.

To the Witness, *Christendom* is the most heinous of all organizations, next to Babylon the Great, which encompasses *all* other religions apart from Jehovah's Witnesses, who claim to practice the only *true* religion. Through the use lies and generalizations, the term *Christendom* takes on a life of its own in the minds of Witnesses.

Mentioned by the writer in the article, Martin Luther made sweeping accusations of Jews in Europe in 1543, along with a "treatment plan" to resolve the problem. The Society today, too, makes similar sweeping accusations about Christians of other groups and religions through the use of generalizations that make no effort to differentiate between those groups that *do* engage in a doctrine called into question and those groups that *do not promote such doctrine*, leaving the listener or reader with the impression that *all other groups besides Jehovah's Witnesses* teach such doctrines. Only those individuals with personal knowledge about any given group will identify the error.

One such generalization can be found in the publication *Reasoning from the Scriptures, 1989 edition*, where this is a suggested conversation point on page 16:

Frankly, the churches are not making this world a safer place to live, are they?

Another, located on the next page (page 17) is offered:

That is one reason why we are calling—because the churches have not told people the truth about God and his wonderful purposes for mankind.

By use of the generalization “the churches” rather than “many churches” or “most churches” or “some churches,” the Witness thus implies that every other church has somehow failed in telling people about God and his wonderful purposes for mankind. But is this true, or do we have a case of “Lies, Lies!” and or “Making Generalizations”?

Calling it a *successful* tactic of propaganda, the magazine points out that

*Generalizations tend to obscure important facts about the real issues in question, and they are frequently used to demean entire groups of people.*²⁸

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to evaluate each religion’s creeds and doctrines, but any local library will usually have a copy of *Religions of America* or any other work similar to that which can give a reliable overview of practices of other groups. In my personal experience, the actual groups targeted by such generalizations are the older religions such as Catholicism and Protestantism, and their varied sects. But I have also found that there are numerous groups which practice in nearly the same manner and hold to nearly the same beliefs as Witnesses, but since they are not mainstream religions, and thus people are not able to recognize them or are not otherwise aware of said groups, this generalization “the churches” does a great deal of harm to the actual truth of the situation.

In spite of this, however, the fact remains that through its use of generalizations which do not necessarily mirror the truth, the Society is able to promote propaganda to the masses outside the organization. And, as we shall soon see, the same is being done to the masses *within* the organization.

In closing *Part Two* of *Understanding Jehovah’s Witnesses: Propaganda*, I want to return to the article we’ve been examining.

The final subheading, “Slogans and Symbols,” deserves to be more closely observed, for there, on page 8, we read the following:

*For example, in times of national crisis or conflict, demagogues may use such slogans as “My country, right or wrong...” But do most people carefully analyze the real issues involved in the crisis or conflict? Or do they just accept what they are told?... such symbolisms as... the mother church are valuable tools in the hands of the shrewd persuader.*²⁹

It seems fair that we substitute Witness-specific terms into the statement above to keep the scales of justice balanced (the mirror mentioned at the outset). This is the result of our mirror, with the key changes noted in **boldface** type:

*For example, in times of **organizational crisis or conflict**, **the Faithful and Discreet Slave** may use such slogans as “My **organization**, right or wrong...” But do most **Witnesses** carefully analyze the real issues involved in the crisis or conflict? Or do they just accept what they are told?... such symbolisms as... **the mother organization** are valuable tools in the hands of the shrewd persuader.*

As I shall discuss in *Part Three*, such an approach is a dangerous one for the individual Witness within the organization, but there are ways to protect one’s self from propaganda, even from the Society.

**Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses:
Propaganda, part 3**

Loyalty. It's a word that strikes the innermost part of our soul. Governments have called upon the loyal to fight in their wars, while those that remained behind shunned and terrorized those who were deemed disloyal. In schools, classmates form into social circles with the same degree of emphasis placed on loyalty to one another within the circle. And within the organization known worldwide as Jehovah's Witnesses, it is no different: loyalty to the organization is placed above the value of individual life. I know this because I am a Witness. But as I shall soon demonstrate, this is not just my perception of the issue of loyalty. Through the use of cited material, I shall provide a clearer understanding, in light of the third and final article in the June 22, 2000, *Awake!* discussing "propaganda," that while others are admonished to "not be a victim of Propaganda," Witnesses are expected and directed to do just that.

"Education shows you *how* to think. Propaganda tells you *what* to think."³⁰

It is here that we begin our journey. The article provides 5 basic things that we can do to protect ourselves from propaganda. The articles are primarily directed towards non-Witnesses, but the 5 rules should be just as applicable to Witnesses. The easiest way to do this is to take each suggestion made to non-Witnesses and then compare that to what Witnesses themselves are told by the Society.

#1: Be Selective

The article says the following:

A completely open mind could be likened to a pipe that lets just anything flow through it—even sewage. No one

*wants a mind contaminated with poison... We need to scrutinize whatever is presented to us, deciding what to accept and what to reject."*³¹

This would seem to be sound advice, until we reflect on what the same Society has told us as Witnesses:

*Certainly, we owe loyalty to it (the organization), including "the faithful and discreet slave," through which the Christian congregation is fed spiritually.*³²

*But what if it is hard for us to accept or fully appreciate some Scriptural point presented by the faithful slave? Then let us humbly acknowledge where we learned the truth and pray for wisdom to deal with this trial until it comes to an end with some published clarification of matters.*³³

This would seem to contradict the advice given to non-Witnesses. As Witnesses, we do not *decide* what to accept or what to reject, but rather, we pray that we can be able to accept what has been said, even if we personally find it either offensive or incorrect. Remember, the *Awake!* article says: "Education shows you *how* to think. Propaganda tells you *what* to think.

Being able to scrutinize "whatever is presented to us," is not something appropriate for Witnesses, although it is strongly encouraged for non-Witnesses within the article. Follows is a good quote from the Society to Witnesses:

*How shall we view the spiritual food provided by this "faithful and discreet slave?" Should it be viewed critically—'Oh, well, it might be true then again it might not be and so we have to scrutinize it very critically'?*³⁴

*If we have once established what instrument God is using as his "slave" to dispense spiritual food to his people, surely Jehovah is not pleased if we receive that food as though it might contain something harmful.*³⁵

Here are some others:

*At times we hear brothers talking complainingly about the Scriptural explanations and truths published in The Watchtower. Being unable to understand fully why a certain point is made... they begin expressing their doubts to others. This, of course, creates confusion among the brothers, especially among newer ones. He is showing a spirit of discontent...*³⁶

The truths we are to publish are the ones provided through the discreet-slave organization, not some personal opinions contrary to what the slave has provided... rather than opposing and rejecting it and presumptuously taking the position that we are more likely right than the discreet slave... We should meekly go along... rather than balk at the first mention of a thought unpalatable to us and proceed to ... mouth our criticisms and opinions as though they were worth more than the slave's provision of spiritual food...

*Now some may ask, Should we accept as from the Lord and true the food provided through the discreet slave, or should we withhold acceptance until we have proved it for ourselves?... Are we to be doubtful and suspicious about each new provision?... How much more readily we can receive the slave's provisions with confidence...*³⁷

*To properly study The Watchtower we must approach it with the right heart attitude... we have no grounds for approaching a study of it with suspicion...*³⁸

*We should eat and digest and assimilate what is set before us, without shying away from parts of the food because it may not suit the fancy of our mental taste.*³⁹

Yet there are some who point out that the organization has had to make adjustments before, and so they

argue: "This shows that we have to make up our own mind on what to believe." This is independent thinking. Why is it so dangerous?

*Such thinking is evidence of pride.*⁴⁰

The above quotes surely echo of contrariness to the admonishments contained within the *Awake!* article where we read such things as "But it is far better for each individual personally to choose what he will feed his mind," and "Do not just follow the crowd... While it may seem that all others think the same way, does it mean that *you* should? Popular opinion is not a reliable barometer of truth."

Certainly the above quotes also make emotional appeals. After all, who wants to be considered as "smarter than" someone else? Or be perceived as "prideful?" Or a know-it-all? Or a trouble-maker? By playing on these emotions, Witnesses are made to feel insecure about their own conscience's prodding, and replace it with the Society's conscience in order to seek peace and solitude. Within the organization, there is the pseudo-reality of "strength in numbers," by thinking the same as the rest of the crowd of Witnesses, even in the face of personal disagreement.

There are numerous other such statements contained within the literature which could be cited here, but the above should be enough to determine that propagandistic undertones do, in fact, have a place in the Society's literature and its promotion thereof. They are geared to those within the organization while other statements are directed to those outside the organization (non-Witnesses). It would appear, unfortunately, that there are two standards to live by.

In the next part, which will conclude my personal reflection on the articles I've been discussing, I want to return to examining the Society's use of "Making Generalizations" this time when it comes to those who no longer wish to "follow the crowd" of Witnesses because of the Society's own advice about "testing" whatever they read..."

There, we shall examine the Society's campaign against "apostasy."

**Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses:
*Propaganda, part 4***

Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How dare you say to your brother, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye. – Matthew 7:3-5 Jerusalem Bible

In war, even weapons of mass destruction cannot outmatch the sheer power of words. Its strength lies in its ability to subtly corrode one's view or mold it to something else. Or both. Surely the use of propaganda among the nations during times of national crisis and warfare give evidence of this, with all its incomprehensible fury and appeal to the basest of human nature, motivating its listeners to action.

Today, there is a war that is going on that doesn't involve weapons of mass destruction, but its effects can be measured in words and the actions of those that listen to those words. That war is being driven by the organization known worldwide as Jehovah's Witnesses, and its opponent is a conglomerate of individuals who leave that organization for any number of reasons, sometimes after decades of faithful service.

The war is against *apostasy*.

Since the days of Paul and Peter, there have been those who tried to subvert the faith of others who had come to believe that Jesus was the Christ. There have been those who claimed that the resurrection that was such a fundamental hope among Jews had already occurred. Paul's appeal to the congregations as he watched them grow in number was to not lose the love they had at first, not go after these men who not only disagreed with the way things were being taught regarding Christ and the resurrection and the passing of Mosaic Law, but

were seeking followers of their own to espouse their own views... in effect making men into slaves with themselves as authority on Scripture.

Having been counted among the clique of Pharisees at one time, Paul must have felt angry that the same thing was happening all over again in the name of Christianity, but his later letters showed that he had come to accept that it must be so once the apostles passed from the scene, for even Jesus had predicted that weeds must rise up before the harvest. Those same letters contained admonishment to not become a victim of that manner of teaching, not abandon the teachings he had brought them about the Christ.

So what *is* apostasy according to Paul, according to the Bible?

This is how it is defined in the *Insight on the Scriptures*:

*** **it-1** **126** **Apostasy** ***

This term in Greek (*ἀποστασία*) comes from the verb *ἀφίστημι*, literally meaning “stand away from.” The noun has the sense of “desertion, abandonment or rebellion.” (Ac 21:21, ftn) In classical Greek the noun was used to refer to political defection, and the verb is evidently employed in this sense at Acts 5:37, concerning Judas the Galilean who “drew off” (*ἀπεστεσε*, form of *ἀφίστημι*) followers. The Greek *Septuagint* uses the term at Genesis 14:4 with reference to such a rebellion. However, in the Christian Greek Scriptures it is used primarily with regard to religious defection; a withdrawal or abandonment of the true cause, worship, and service of God, and hence an abandonment of what one has previously professed and a total desertion of principles or faith.

That is the *textbook definition*. We are going to use the last part of this definition to further our discussion:

In the Christian Greek Scriptures it is used primarily with regard to religious defection; a withdrawal or abandonment of the true cause, worship, and service of God, and hence an abandonment of what one has previously professed and a total desertion of principles or faith.

Before we go on, it needs to be understood that the Society itself uses its literature to target two specific groups: non-Witnesses and Witnesses. While not every single article is written to a specific group, since there are numerous articles that discuss matters that are of a general nature such as an article on flora and fauna, many articles *are* written to a specific audience. This can be anything from the fear of being a victim of crime or the internet being directed at non-Witnesses, to a current understanding of Ezekiel being directed at Witnesses.

The articles that have been discussed in the June 22, 2000, *Awake!* magazine seems to have been written to non-Witnesses, as I’ve briefly shown in Part 3 of my response. That is an important distinction for us to make because the advice contained in the Society’s discussion of propaganda, while sound for *all* individuals, is apparently not intended by the writer to be a concern for Witnesses or the writer is not aware of the advice and admonitions given by the Society to Witnesses concerning being critical of the information that the Society itself dispenses, much less to act upon such information when found questionable or incorrect.

This would either indicate that the writer is not aware of a double-standard within the organization or it is not applicable advice when it comes to the Society’s literature, as though the Society is somehow above such critical examinations:

How shall we view the spiritual food provided by this “faithful and discreet slave?” **Should it be viewed critically—** ‘Oh, well, it might be true then again it might not be and so we have to scrutinize it very critically’?⁴¹

If we have once established what instrument God is using as his “slave” to dispense spiritual food to his people, **surely Jehovah is not pleased if we receive that food as though it might contain something harmful.**⁴²

Here we have advice given to Witnesses who are a part of the organization known worldwide as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Yet what did the article, on page 10, say?

Put information to the test: “Beloved ones,” said John, a first-century Christian teacher, “**do not believe every inspired expression, but test the inspired expressions.**” (1 John 4:1) *Some people today are like sponges; they soak up whatever they come across. It is all too easy to absorb whatever is around us.*⁴³

Do we have a contradiction... a double-standard? Which advice do we follow? Or is this a situation where we have a specific audience, as I inferred earlier? John, in the above-cited scripture, was referring to *inspired* expressions. Shouldn’t that advice be applicable to everyone trying to seek Jehovah and keep his ways.

Have there been other statements made by the Society in reference to itself that also do not follow the advice set out in the recent *Awake!* magazine? Surely the February 15, 1981, *Watchtower* statements were but isolated examples.

As can be seen in the next cited example, this sort of double-standard has been in place at least back into the 1950’s, and one could probably locate statements going back to C.T. Russell’s time:

Now some may ask, Should we accept as from the Lord and true the food provided through the discreet slave,

*or should we withhold acceptance until we have proved it for ourselves?... Are we to be doubtful and suspicious about each new provision?... How much more readily we can receive the slave’s provisions with confidence...*⁴⁴

I quoted some other examples in Part 3, which you are invited to refer back to before we go on.

The point here seems to be that the Society wants non-Witnesses to be critical of non-Witness religions or other establishments, but Witnesses are not to be critical of the Witness establishment, contrary to the Apostle John’s own advice.

In all fairness, let me for a moment address the concerns of some that might point out that the statements I quoted above were taken from magazines that were written long before the June 22, 2000, *Awake!* magazine, and that makes a difference.

This has not, however, been the first time that the Society has published information about such things, written presumably to non-Witnesses just as this magazine’s articles have been. Some examples are the *Awake!* articles “An Open Mind or a Closed Mind—Which Do You Have?” and “An Open Mind Wins God’s Approval” which appeared in the November 22, 1984, issue. There has also been an article in the *Watchtower* magazine titled “Are You Open to New Ideas?”⁴⁵ That article made the powerfully poignant statement:

*Even some religious people have closed minds. They are interested only in “their” religion, showing no willingness to as much as listen to the views of others.*⁴⁶

The intention, I assume, is to get the reader to be willing to examine the Witnesses’ literature and not be closed-minded about it. It might here be interesting to note that the first article in that issue features the picture of a man with his face turned away and his hand held forward in opposition, perhaps in something being offered to him. This is probably to

symbolize how many people at the doors that Witnesses knock upon respond to the Witnesses' dispensation of literature. By being "open-minded," the person will be receptive to ideas that may directly challenge their current beliefs.

Again, those things are written to non-Witnesses, in advocating the receptiveness of ideas that may run contrary to the religious beliefs of individuals.

Yet notice the picture on page 12 of the March 15, 1986, *Watchtower*. There we are shown a picture of a woman standing in a doorway, a mailman walking away after having delivered the mail. We watch as the woman drops some of her mail into a trash receptacle. The caption reads "Do you wisely destroy apostate material?" Given the proximity of the mailman to the door and the immediate motion of the woman to discard some of her mail, is it possible that she never even examined it? How, then, can it be said that the information was apostate?

Receptiveness to facts and related information which then challenges our convictions, our faith, can indeed be trying, but if we revise that picture of the woman discarding the mail by making that person a householder who has just received a magazine or tract, and the mailman is one or two Witnesses, then what do we learn about ourselves?

As Witnesses, we *are* quick to call such people who never even bother to *look* at the literature "closed-minded." I shudder to think about the sheer volume of literature produced by the Society that *does* end up thrown away or otherwise discarded!

But, again, what do we learn about *ourselves*? Aren't we the same way? If someone offers us information, don't we, if it is even slightly religious in nature, deem it unworthy of our attention? Aren't we, too, interested "only in" our "religion, showing no willingness to as much as listen to the views of others?"

This brings us back to the beginning again.

What if one of Jehovah's Witnesses decides to follow the Society's advice to *non-Witnesses* and not the advice to its own ranks? What if they decide to go back over everything they have learned, this time with a critical eye, with an open rather than a closed mind? What if they come to discover that they don't actually agree with everything that is being taught by the Society?

It would be foolish to assume that there are any Witnesses that agree entirely with every teaching of the Society. At the same time, it is not always immediately apparent how much any given Witness might disagree with the Society until they begin to think about that aspect of their relationship with the Society.

On the other hand, it is just as foolish to think that everyone in the rest of the world's Christian religions agree entirely with their particular religion's collection of beliefs... fanaticism aside. My question, of course, is this: at what point does one question their own religion? When one considers that every person is convinced that the religion they are involved in is the *best* and *truest* religion, so why *question* it, it all gets pretty confusing.

But I digress.

Returning to the war that is taking place, at the behest of the Society, is against all those that leave the organization. Without having any numbers, I'd still have to assume that there are a great majority that leave the organization over *doctrinal* matters, and not simply because they want to live immoral lives (more on this later).

Of those that leave over doctrinal matters, is it too difficult to understand that they would feel just as strongly about their convictions as we do? And aren't they just as free to express themselves as we are? Or as Witnesses do we somehow come in above the laws of a land while denying other groups the right to speak out in Christ's name?

Every Witness must realize that in order to become a Witness, any former membership or set of beliefs *must be abandoned!* In other words, thousands who join the

organization must *apostasize*, or become apostates. Then, during the course of their tenure in the organization, they are considered non-apostate because they have found “the true religion” and therefore apostasy doesn’t apply to them. Finally, when they leave, not only are they given (back) the title “apostate,” but the label is given a darker, more sinister application, with loss of all that they may have gained while a part of the organization. I find it intriguing that while under the umbrella of the Society, Witnesses are no longer “apostate,” but are “approved association.”

As Witnesses, we are taught, even admonished, to speak from our heart, to produce fruitage that is in agreement with “the truth.” We are taught to be better defenders of “the truth” among worldlings and we are regularly educated on the current teachings of the Society. We are directed to take advantage of every opportunity to speak freely to one another and to others not of our sort (non-Witnesses). We are expected to be *preachers!*

The paradox is astounding! What we see is something quite different when someone has something *negative* to say about the Society and what we as Witnesses see and feel when the member of any other religion bravely speaks out negatively against his or her former religion and renounces their membership and association with it.

Again, what does this say about us? What do we learn by this?

Those that, because of their conscience, find that they can no longer run with the crowd, (and the *Awake!*’s discussion on propaganda demonstrates that what the majority is thinking or believes does not provide enough compulsion to go blindly along for the sake of going along) and decide to part ways with the organization face living the rest of their lives with the Society’s label.

At the same time, the inculcation to be a *preacher* does not necessarily diminish in the individual. They may still feel just as compelled to speak out in defense of their faith, even to their previous associates among the organization.

This is where the battle line seems to have been drawn by the Society. This is where the tools of propaganda take their root and stretch out like tenuous vines.

While you are free to speak out against your former religion (be it Catholic, Protestant, Mormon or whatever) and join the organization, you are all but forbidden to speak out against the Society either while you are a member or when you part ways (voluntarily or involuntarily).

The truths we are to publish are the ones provided through the discreet-slave organization, not some personal opinions contrary to what the slave has provided...⁴⁷

*At times we hear brothers talking complainingly about the Scriptural explanations and truths published in The Watchtower... they begin **expressing their doubts** to others... **he [the person expressing their doubts to others] is showing a spirit of discontent...⁴⁸***

*If some **tinge of doubt**... has begun to linger in your heart, take quick steps to **eliminate it** before it festers into something that could destroy your faith... **Cut off anything that feeds such doubts.**⁴⁹*

Even with this last statement, we can see that there is an expectation to not question the Society. If we as Witnesses come across something which casts a bad light on the Society to such an extent that we begin to question the Society, we are to get rid of it. Immediately.

To further isolate the Witnesses that remain with the organization, the Society has in place a shunning policy that involves those who do not meet “approved association” status or that have been disfellowshipped. This is clearly another tactic of war, since even the nations do that with their borders in time of national conflicts. It also invites the use of propaganda since those that are kept within the boundaries can only receive the facts that are made available by the regime

within the boundaries. In the case of the Society, Witnesses only know what the Society tells them. We do not look elsewhere for information, trusting that the Society will tell us all that we need to know of a matter.

In the case of a Witness that leaves the organization over doctrinal matters, there is no communication between the Witness that left and those that stayed, at the Society's behest. Rarely is it the choice of the Witness that left to break off all communication with their former brothers and sisters. However, as mentioned a few paragraphs earlier, some who leave feel compelled to be preachers still, and look for opportunities to speak to others about the organization, their own beliefs, and possibly even their former associates within the organization.

Some have taken up their efforts on the internet, hoping to educate others the things they themselves came to realize about the Society with hopes that everyone else will make a more *informed* decision about whether to join the organization or not. This has only made the war between the Society and those who leave its headship a more bitter war.

Through the various tactics that the *Awake!* magazine admitted as propagandistic, the Society is working to maintain their authority over the remaining Witnesses by cutting off the symbolic knock on the door by former Witnesses bringing with them information that could challenge the religious beliefs of the Witness. At the same time, the former Witnesses are taking their cause to a much larger audience, through the internet, hoping that the Witnesses who wouldn't dream of questioning the Society in view of fellow Witnesses, might find consolation that they are not alone in their beliefs and disagreements with the Society, whether they choose to leave or stay in spite of those convictions. As the article brought out:

*Good educators present all sides of an issue and encourage discussion. Propagandists relentlessly force you to hear their view and discourage discussion.*⁵⁰

Long disdained by the Society, websites that actually *invite* discussion about Witnesses and their beliefs have come into existence. One such website is *Hourglass2 Outpost*, a site that itself claims:

Although this site is run by baptized Jehovah's Witnesses in good standing with their congregations, it is not sponsored by the Watchtower Society (Watch Tower Society) and is a resource free to you!

There, the visitor will find an international forum that discusses, both frankly and not without a few quarrels, a wide range of issues involving the organization and the Society which heads it. But it is intended to *educate*.

On the other hand, the Society regularly informs those within the organization that the internet can be a source of great harm to Witnesses, because "apostates" have put up websites that "cast doubt" on the organization. They do this through the use of name-calling and generalizations, and through the propagandistic approach of "My organization, right or wrong."

By referring to all who speak negatively against the Society as "apostate," the Society adds to its own definition in the *Insight* reference. The Society then plays on "loyalty" and "fear" to further its campaign so that "loyal" Witnesses will not pay heed to either said websites or people who leave over doctrinal matters or anything that will cause a Witness to evaluate the organization they've become a member to. Quite the opposite of "good educators" that the article made reference to, is it not?

Add to that the use of generalities and "loaded words" and the campaign becomes still more clear:

Yes, apostates publish literature that resorts to distortions, half-truths, and outright falsehood... it would be a dangerous thing to allow our curiosity to move us to feed on such writings or to listen to their abusive speech! ...For one

*thing, some of the apostate literature presents falsehoods by means of “smooth talk” and “counterfeit words.”... And while the apostates may also present certain facts, these are usually taken out of context with the goal of drawing others away...All their writings simply criticize and tear down! Nothing is upbuilding.*⁵¹

The danger is made to seem real. Certainly there exist true apostates, individuals who would derive great satisfaction in turning others against God and Christ. But when it comes to those who leave over doctrinal issues and preach to others about the things they know to be true regarding the Society, we can see that the Society does not mince words: we are not to even be curious about what they have to say. Through the use of generalizations (“distortions, half-truths, and outright falsehood,” “abusive speech,” “smooth talk,” “counterfeit words”) without examining a single example, and through the use of loaded words (“may also,” “certain facts,” “usually,” “all their writings,” “simply,” “nothing is upbuilding”) a façade is created that invites all “loyal” Witnesses to perceive any that leave as evil, and most certainly to be avoided.

True to the article’s warning, even the Society is guilty of propagandistic tactics when it insults “those who disagree with them by questioning character or motives instead of focusing on the facts.”⁵² Research into the many articles discussing opposers and the “evil servant” are good examples of this very approach being taken by the Society. Space does not permit me to discuss those examples in this paper.

Regarding the internet, the 1999 District Convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses had this to say about the content of any website discussing Witnesses:

...misinformation at best... lies at worst...

The war being waged by the Society against former members is growing in intensity if last year’s (1999) District

Convention is any indication. There were several talks that went into almost doctrinal approach. The advice of the Society is to stay away from the internet unless you positively must be using it, and then only in the presence of others so that you are not tempted to visit any sites other than the official website of the organization. Parents are strongly encouraged to place the family computer in a central location (wonderful advice even for non-Witness parents, I agree!) and to be aware of any websites that their children may put up. At the convention, however, the example used by the Society was of a family that *had* the internet, but decided that it was too dangerous for them... this instead of a family that had the internet and how they were actively monitoring its usage in their household.

As those Witnesses that leave strive to continue being preachers, as they were encouraged by the Society, they will likely search for more effective ways to inform others about the things they have come to learn about the Society, and to be a source of encouragement to others who, like them, took the Society’s advice concerning looking at things with a critical eye and deciding for one’s self what to believe or not to believe about Jehovah God and Christ... and left.

Until Jehovah’s God’s timetable for the present system comes to completion, the war will likely rage on for the Society to retain their followers.

--Timothy B Kline

Notes: As a matter of convention, I have used the term “the Society” when referring to the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses, also known as “the faithful and discreet slave.” I have used the term “the organization,” when referring to the group of people who have subjected themselves to the Society. These are also known as “the New World Society,” “the Great Crowd.” The two together are believed to be “Jehovah’s organization,” or “Jehovah’s earthly organization.”

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- ¹ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 3
² *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 4
³ *ibid.*
⁴ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 5
⁵ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 6
⁶ *ibid.*
⁷ *ibid.*
⁸ *ibid.*
⁹ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, pages 6, 8
¹⁰ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 8
¹¹ *ibid.*
¹² *ibid.*
¹³ *ibid.*
¹⁴ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 9
¹⁵ *ibid.*
¹⁶ *ibid.*
¹⁷ *ibid.*
¹⁸ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 10
¹⁹ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, pages 10-11
²⁰ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 11
- ²¹ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 6
²² *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 8
²³ *Reasoning from the Scriptures, page 9 (1989 edition)*
²⁴ *ibid.*, page 13
²⁵ *ibid.*, page 13
²⁶ *ibid.*, page 18
²⁷ *ibid.*, page 19
²⁸ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 6
²⁹ *ibid.*, page 8
³⁰ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, page 9
³¹ *ibid.*
³² *Watchtower*, March 15, 1996, page 16
³³ *Watchtower*, November 15, 1992, page 19-20

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- ³⁴ *Watchtower*, February 15, 1981, page 18
³⁵ *ibid.*, page 19
³⁶ *Watchtower*, August 1, 1967, page 469
³⁷ *Watchtower*, February 1, 1952, pages 79, 80
³⁸ *Watchtower*, October 15, 1953, page 623
³⁹ *Watchtower*, February 1, 1952, page 79
⁴⁰ *Watchtower*, January 15, 1983, page 27
⁴¹ *Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1981, p. 18
⁴² *Watchtower*, Feb. 15, 1981, p. 19
⁴³ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, p. 10
⁴⁴ *Watchtower*, Feb. 1, 1952, p. 79,80
⁴⁵ *Watchtower*, January 15, 1989
⁴⁶ *Awake!* November 22, 1984, p. 8
⁴⁷ *Watchtower*, February 1, 1952, p. 79
⁴⁸ *Watchtower*, August 1, 1967, p. 469
⁴⁹ *Watchtower*, Feb. 1, 1996, p. 23, 24
⁵⁰ *Awake!* June 22, 2000, p. 9
⁵¹ *Watchtower*, July 1, 1994, p. 12
⁵² *Awake!* June 22, 2000, p. 6