

## **Ostracism – harsh practice of systematic abuse**

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*“What worries me is not the outcry of those who do evil.  
It is the silence of good people.”  
(Martin Luther King)*

### **Introduction**

One of the assumptions of Democracy is the absence of a single system of thought and the presence and protection of the right to a difference of opinion<sup>1</sup>. Well, if a legal system has to protect a religious group, it must equally protect the rights of those who are its members, allowing them to voice even their blunt criticism, especially when it comes from those who used to be firm believers within their former religious group. The type of right referred to here should be understood as the expression of a democratic principle, inseparable from the expression of both cultural and the religious pluralism.

The protection of a religious group's reputation should be balanced with human rights and the Constitutional values cherished by all, especially by members of the same religious group – such as the freedom of thought, the right to change religion without suffering pressures and intimidations, the right to the critique and the protection of inviolable human rights.

This implies that, given an equal recognition of dignity among religious groups, the same must be true within the aforesaid groups, granting its members the right to criticize the ideology of their group, even if it enters into the public domain<sup>2</sup>.

The right to critique should be considered, in fact, as the manifestation of the freedom to determine one's individual philosophical and religious course, even within the social environments in which that course takes form. *Therefore, there must be a counter right of protection to the recognition of the dignity and honor granted to a religious group, viz. the protection of the human rights of the members of the same group who are in search of the meaning of existence.*

### **Ostracism among Jehovah's Witnesses**

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<sup>1</sup> The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, in particular *article 18*, states: «Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance».

<sup>2</sup> See: Giudice per l'udienza preliminare – 39^ Sect. Criminal Court in Rome (ordinance 14 June – 29 July 2002); 4^ Criminal Sect. Court of Appeal in Rome - sentence n°108/04 of December 9<sup>th</sup> 2004; Giudice per l'udienza preliminare of Venice Court - ordinance of October 1<sup>st</sup> 2002.

One of the characteristics of the religious Movement<sup>3</sup> of the Jehovah's Witnesses is the pervasive conditioning of the social and private life of each one of its members. In fact, the sophisticated judicial processes followed by Jehovah's Witnesses extending to the *trial to intentions* of its members, are well known (see the confidential handbook KS<sup>4</sup>, 1991, p. 140). The Watchtower's publications systematically attribute negative qualities, such as pride and rebellion, to the dissident members of the Movement. Rank and file members are expected to accept the fundamental assumption that "if someone is disfellowshipped [*expelled*], he must at the time have had a truly bad heart and/or been determined to pursue a God-dishonoring course."<sup>5</sup>

To fully appreciate the Movement's leadership attitude towards its members who factually dissent from the group's ideology, for which they are subject to disciplinary action, it is sufficient and enlightening to recall the Movement's official publication – "*The Watchtower*,"<sup>6</sup> statement which says: "We are not living today among theocratic nations where such members of our fleshly family relationship could be exterminated for apostasy from God and his theocratic organization, as was possible and was ordered in the nation of Israel ... we can take action against apostates only to a certain extent, ... The law of the land and God's law through Christ forbid us to kill apostates, even though they be members of our own flesh-and-blood family relationship."<sup>7</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the responsibility for such a harsh position falls, not on the rank and file members who *must abide* by the rules set forth by their religious leadership but on the latter, whose directives are the cause of the separation of families. The consequential emotional sufferings are countless.

Sifting through Jehovah's Witnesses Annual Reports in the period 2000-2010, we discover that 1,335,139 members left the Movement or became inactive (in Italy, this number was 37,128)<sup>8</sup>; this

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the term "movement" fits best when referred to the Jehovah's Witnesses religion, considering the many ideological changes and the consequential members' sensitivity changes throughout their history. This religious sensitivity is due to the leadership back and fore policies on doctrinal and organizational issues. See: R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience – The struggle between loyalty to God and loyalty to one's religion*, Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2002; R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Commentary Press, Atlanta 2007; M.J. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, University of Toronto Press 1999; A. Aveta – S. Pollina, *Movimenti religiosi alternativi: effetti dell'adesione e motivi dell'abbandono*, Vatican City 1998; Jerry R. Bergman, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Problem of Mental Illness*, 1992; S. Pollina, *I nostri "amici" Testimoni di Geova*, Cinisello Balsamo 1996; H. Bloom, *La Religione Americana*, Milan 1994; A. Aveta, *Storia e dottrina dei Testimoni di Geova*, Rome 1994; A. Aveta, *I Testimoni di Geova: un'ideologia che logora*, Rome 1990; B. Blandre, *La storia dei Testimoni di Geova*, Cinisello Balsamo 1989; H. Botting – G. Botting, *The Orwellian World of Jehovah's Witnesses*, University of Toronto Press 1984; M. Castiglione, *I Testimoni di Geova: ideologia religiosa e consenso sociale*, Bari 1981; B. Grizzuti Harrison, *Visions of Glory: A History and a Memory of Jehovah's Witnesses*, New York 1978; J. Beckford, *The Trumpet of Prophecy: A Sociological Study of Jehovah's Witnesses*, New York 1975; T. White, *A People for His Name: A History of Jehovah's Witnesses and an Evaluation*, New York 1968; G. Hébert, *Les Témoins de Jéhovah*, Montreal 1960.

<sup>4</sup> This abbreviation (KS) refers to the Kingdom Ministry School textbook published by the Watchtower in 1991. In its introductory note it states: "A copy of this textbook is issued to each appointed elder, and he may retain it as long as he continues to serve as an elder in any congregation. At such time as he should cease to serve in that capacity, his copy of the book must be handed over to the Congregation Service Committee, since this publication is congregation property. No copies are to be made of any part of this publication". The 1981 KS textbook edition said: «Both this Kingdom Ministry School textbook (KS81) and the previous ones (KS77 and KS79) are designed for use by the travelling overseers and elders only. **They should not be lent or given to anyone else, not even members of your family**».

<sup>5</sup> WT January 1<sup>st</sup> 1983, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Known since March 1939 as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* was originally *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1879 – 1908), and later as *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1909 – 1931), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1931 – 1938), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom* (1938 – 1939), Simply referred as "WT" in this paper.

<sup>7</sup> WT November 15<sup>th</sup> 1952, p.703-704

<sup>8</sup> The Movement keeps a large amount of personal records on the expelled: in 1985 36,638 were disfellowshipped (see WT January 1<sup>st</sup> 1986, p. 13), in 1986 these were 37,426 (WT September 15<sup>th</sup> 1987, p. 13).

is a dramatic situation considering the reported number of members – 7,224,930<sup>9</sup> on average for the year 2010. It is clear that their annual high turnover rate is due to the large number of them leaving the movement.

Each and every Witness who leaves the Movement for reasons of conscience does so painfully, knowing they will be labeled a heretic with whom Witnesses in good standing, even family members, will stop mixing being considered an outcast. The Movement policies do not contemplate an honorable exit<sup>10</sup>. Only in absence of natural human feelings and sensibility can one pretend that these shunning treatments are not the cause of any emotional damages.

Disfellowshipping (i.e. expulsion) *can be* a very effective social control instrument, but the Movement obviously makes a gross abuse of it. In spite of the fact that we can recognize it as an effective way to guarantee conformity for beneficial purposes, such as the ban on the use of drugs, sexual promiscuity, practicing fraud or lying, disfellowshipping can be harmful when it is used in the way taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. In this context, the disfellowshipping disciplinary system adopted by the Movement, more than a proper disciplinary process, appears as an *instrument of power* over its members. Resorting to the threat of ostracism implied by the disfellowshipping provision, to intimidate the members and force them to conform to a behavior in contrast with their own conscience, or exercising pressure so that they accept doctrines which, for reasons of conscience, they regard as contrary to the Bible, is a form of *spiritual extortion*, a *spiritual blackmail*. It may be difficult to identify these behaviors, single them out and expose them the way we do, for example, with theft and literal homicide, fraud or material extortion, but they are, however, equally immoral and, sometimes perhaps, even worse.

It is therefore not uncommon to read about depictions of the Movement as an entity characterized by dogmatism, inflexibility and conditioning techniques aiming at pervading the private and social lives of its members. One may doubt that these strict and intolerant policies are actively practiced within the Jehovah's Witnesses community; however, a quick look at some cases available online<sup>11</sup> will give a view, even if only limited, of the extent to which this hard line discriminatory and alarming practice occurs.

To mention just one striking case, the national TV channel RAI DUE aired in 2004, in its TV series "TG2 / Dossier storie," a number of programs on the Jehovah's Witnesses religious Movement. One of them featured a 30 years active Jehovah's Witness Elder who, because of his blunt criticism against the Movement's leadership, had to disguise his face in order not to be recognized, which would have meant taking the risk of being expelled and, consequently, ostracized by his Witnesses relatives and friends<sup>12</sup>.

## **The worse sin: disagreement with the Movement's Leadership**

Jehovah's Witnesses rank and file members who are not "Elders" [appointed male ministers overseeing the flock], are not allowed to have any association or communication with those who are in a disfellowshipped "state." While some exceptions are allowed when the expelled member still lives with his family, contact with every other relative not sharing the same home is seriously restricted to only necessary family urgencies – see *Appendix*.

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<sup>9</sup> 2011 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses p. 51

<sup>10</sup> Official documentary evidence of such harsh shunning and discriminatory instructions against those who abandon the Movement is found in the *Appendix*.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.freeminds.org/search.html?q=shunning>

<sup>12</sup> Can be watched on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgkdOcNyLpQ>

Contrary to what could be assumed, these situations are not due to the bigotry of some local “Elders,” but are specifically the result of the instructions spelled out by the Movement’s Leadership.

The case<sup>13</sup> of a young Witness, whose father had been expelled on the charge of rejecting some of the Movement's teachings as non-biblical, clearly shows the responsibilities.

The young man had written a letter to the Movement's Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn, questioning the fact that his sister and brother-in-law had since stopped seeing his father, which he deemed to be disrespectful.

The attached Brooklyn Service Department answer is self-explanatory (for privacy reasons, the person's name and address have been blanked out).



[Redacted address block]

Dear Brother [Redacted name]

We have your letter in which you say that you are troubled by a problem that the elders seem unable to resolve. Your father has been disfellowshipped and as a result of this your sister and her husband do not have any association with your father. You seem to feel that this is disrespectful to your parents.

It is most unfortunate to hear that your father has been disfellowshipped. His taking action that resulted in his being disfellowshipped has brought about a Scriptural barrier between him and those loyal members of the family who continue to faithfully serve Jehovah. The loyal ones have not been the creators of the problem but, rather, the one who is disfellowshipped has caused it. Therefore, it would not be appropriate on your part to find fault with your sister if she respectfully obeys the Scriptural command at 1 Corinthians 5:11.

A person who is disfellowshipped has been spiritually cut off from the congregation; the former spiritual ties have been completely severed. This is true even with respect to relatives, including those within his immediate family circle. Thus, family members—while acknowledging family ties, will no longer have any spiritual fellowship with the disfellowshipped relative. (1 Sam. 28:6; Prov. 15:8, 9) While you and your sister may find it necessary from time to time to care for necessary family matters in regard to your parents, the direction at 1 Corinthians 5:11 would prohibit any association on a regular basis. We can appreciate that sentiment and family ties are particularly strong between parents and children but, in the final analysis, we will not benefit anyone or please God if we allow emotion to lead us into ignoring his wise counsel and guidance. We need to display our complete confidence in His perfect righteousness and ways, including his provision to disfellowshipped unrepentant wrongdoers. If we remain loyal to God and the congregation, the wrongdoer in time may take a lesson from that, repent and be reinstated into the congregation. It is our hope that will be the case with your father.

Faithfully yours,

cc: [Redacted]

*Brooklyn Service Department*  
OF NEW YORK, INC.

<sup>13</sup> Reported by R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Atlanta 2007, pp. 350-351

As it can be seen, simply because of disagreeing with the Movement's teachings due to reasons of conscience, this father has been considered a 'wicked man,' similar to people condemned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:11 as 'immoral,' 'greedy,' 'extortioner' or 'idolater.' The responsibility for the separation of the family was laid exclusively on him.

He that is labeled by the Watchtower's Movement, through its "Elders," with the mark of "disfellowshipped" is considered as "dead." The specific reason behind the mark is utterly meaningless. The important aspect behind the discriminatory treatment is not the reason for the disfellowshipping but the "label." The case of Raymond Victor Franz, former member of the Movement's Governing Body, is paramount in this respect. He was disfellowshipped because he had lunch in a restaurant together with his employer who himself, had been disfellowshipped from the Movement<sup>14</sup>.

Another emblematic case was that of Edward Dunlap<sup>15</sup> who, after 50 years of militancy, most of which while working in different roles for the Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn (one of which as President of the Missionary School of the Movement, Galaad), then aged 72, was literally thrown out into the street, after having been disfellowshipped only for having discussed with some of his friends a few of his opinions not in line with the Movement's teachings. Edward returned to Oklahoma City, his native hometown, where he joined his brother Marion, hanging wallpaper, the trade he practiced before moving to the Movement's Headquarters. What happened next?

Marion Dunlap was, at that time, "town overseer" of the Oklahoma City congregations. He also was a Jehovah's Witness since about fifty years, and had always been very active in the propaganda activity of the Movement and the attendance and participation to the group's meetings. Well, only for hosting his elderly brother and providing him with a decent job, he was investigated and eventually disfellowshipped. In the same period, in the course of a single year, five other members of the Dunlap family were disfellowshipped. These were not sinful bad people, nor did they promote any demonstration of protest; they simply felt obliged to follow their conscience, based on the Bible, rather than the word of fallible men or of an authoritarian religious group.

Another Witness, professor at the State University of Oklahoma, convinced of Edward Dunlap teaching qualifications, gave him the possibility to teach at his faculty. He was soon called up by the "Elders" and rapidly disfellowshipped.

In reality, expulsion by the Movement occurs for many disparate reasons; perhaps for disagreeing with the leaders doctrinal interpretations on the question of birthday celebrations, or for accepting a blood transfusion, smoking, criticizing the Movement's history revisionist strategy or questioning some of the changing "revelations," of which the worldwide Leadership believes to be the elected recipient. It is, therefore, quite clear that *the right to criticize* what is promoted by the Movement's Leaders *is not allowed to its members*.

In reality, the objective of the Movement's Leadership is to stamp in the minds of all the Witnesses that "no one can disobey organizational instructions with impunity."

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<sup>14</sup> See R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 355-377.

<sup>15</sup> See R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 334-338.

## Turning in offenders

The cases just described are all but exceptional. They are, instead, the worldwide norm within the Movement. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot refrain from the obligation to turn in their fellow believers to the Movement representatives if they detect in the former any behavior that seems not to conform to the latter's teachings and expectations.

An article titled "A Time to Speak – When?" which appeared in *The Watchtower*<sup>16</sup> magazine, set forth the official position that a Witness has the responsibility to reveal infringement of the Movement's rules by another member if these involve what are often called "disfellowshipping offenses," even where it means violating existing standards, even an oath of confidentiality – as in the case of a doctor, nurse, lawyer, or other person privy to confidential records or information. The wrongdoer should be encouraged to confess his sin to the "Elders," but if he does not do so, the counselor would feel an obligation, due to his oath of loyalty to God, to go to the elders himself.

The purpose of the aforesaid article is to convince each and every Jehovah's Witness that hiding from the "Elders" other fellow believers' sins constitutes a serious guilt in front of God. "Purity of the congregation" is the claimed justification for such a behavior. The problem, though, is that the definition of the term "purity" depends upon the organizational rules, regardless of what the Bible says or not on the matter. Consequently, it is always the Movement which establishes the procedures to be followed in order to "help others to remain clean." The fact that, based on those assumptions, all members feel bound by oath to "keep the purity of the congregation," is of real concern.

Because of this multitude of organizational norms and rules, the possible variety of wrongdoings runs in the hundreds. For example, if a Witness, working as accountant, happens to deal with an invoice issued by a firm owned by another Witness for works on a church roof or installation of its alarm system, he would feel obliged to refer the matter to the "Elders." Another consequence of these rules and regulations would be the need to bring accusations against a Witness for having done some work on a building inside a military base or proceeding with disinfestations of the same, or to question a woman whose life-sustaining activity is working as maid in military barracks. The "oath" requires giving up those who dissent from or reject the doctrine according to which Christ "is invisibly present" since the year 1914, or that He is the mediator only of the "anointed" class.

The end result of such a harsh line, in the final analysis, is of no help to the wrongdoer. Those committing a serious sin may have the need to speak to someone in order to receive help. A Jehovah's Witness, however, cannot even speak about it to a fellow believer with the assurance that the matter will remain confidential between the two of them. Jehovah's Witnesses are taught that it is not showing love not to give in their fellow believers who have not spontaneously confessed their sins to the Movement authorities.

## Violation of Privacy

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<sup>16</sup> WT of September 1<sup>st</sup> 1987, p. 13.

In observance of existing complex judicial procedures<sup>17</sup> established by Jehovah's Witness Leadership, the Movement has kept, for years, secret archives containing classified records of members' private lives (personal habits, sexual activity and possible crimes of a secular judiciary nature). The Watchtower Movement keeps with great care voluminous archives containing large amounts of embarrassing information. Records of disfellowshipping cases are kept at the Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn, as well as in other national branches. Usually, what is being kept goes beyond the name of the expelled members, to include, based on the procedure, details and narratives related to the individual case. This information can be kept for many years, even after "reinstatement" of the repentant wrongdoer. Even in the event of death of the expelled member, its records continue to be kept by the Headquarters or other branches! According to the disclosures of R.V. Franz, Jon Mitchell, who worked for the Service Department and the Governing Body offices at the Worldwide Headquarters of the Movement, expelled members records, with the "death" stamp, are kept on file even after their death. Once Lee Waters, one of his fellow workers, said "We are probably the only organization keeping such private records even after the death of those concerned." It is, therefore, no wonder that the Danish branch of the Movement was found in 1992 by the Danish authorities to have systematically violated the privacy regulations in force in that country, keeping for decades secret archives containing "crimes" committed by its members.

An Italian data protection act<sup>18</sup> guarantees the privacy of the citizens' personal data and prevents intrusion in their personal sphere, from a political, religious or sexual orientation standpoint. These guarantees and protections are frequently disregarded by the Orwellian society of Jehovah's Witnesses; maybe some well documented cases can serve illustrating this point:

As far as Italy is concerned, a letter from the "Congregazione Cristiana dei Testimoni di Geova," the Movement's Italian branch, dated March 14<sup>th</sup> 1997 and addressed to the Body of Elders of all Italian congregations, instructs them to report on any sexual misconduct known to them by any member of the community, even behind the back of the latter.

A shattered Witness woman, after an investigation of a couple of hours by a Witnesses' "Judicial Committee," was tailed and caught up with on her way home by two members of the "Committee" and body searched, in spite of her complaints. This case happened in the second week of July 1985 in Michelina's Street, town of Catania (Sicily)<sup>19</sup>.

In a different case, in Greece this time, a group of 50 people gathered on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1987, in Athens, in the house of former Jehovah's Witnesses Nick and Efisia Bozartzis, for a Bible discussion. From his terrace, Nick noticed that, on the other side of the street, a couple of men were spying people's back and forth from his house, some of whom had not yet formally abandoned the Movement. As he recognized one of the men as a Jehovah's Witness, Nick went down to talk to him but, as soon as he showed up on the street, the two men literally ran off. A few days after the event, three Jehovah's Witnesses who participated in the Bible discussion at Nick's house were disfellowshipped by the "Elders," after a Judicial Committee hearing.

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<sup>17</sup> The aforesaid Kingdom Ministry School textbook (see note n°4) can be viewed, in some of its content, as a sort of "criminal code" of the Movement; in fact, in the KS edition 2010, chapters 5 and 9 contain lists of offenses that may require review by a judicial committee. It must be also noted that, in the Movement's judicial matters, the "two witnesses rule" is strictly applied: in essence, with reference to 1 Timothy 5:19, it is asserted that no one can be accused of any sin (including children sexual abuse) unless proven by at least two eyewitnesses. Because of this "rule" the Watchtower has been tainted by the plague of children abuse. For a comprehensive understanding of the subject see the site [www.silentlambs.org](http://www.silentlambs.org)

<sup>18</sup> Law n° 675 of 1996

<sup>19</sup> The case is reported in Conti, Meli, Trovato, *Incatenati alla Torre di Guardia o buttati giù dal muraglione*, Catania 1988, p. 19



A second case in Greece, involves a group who used to meet every Friday at Voula Kalokerinou's house, another former Athens' Witness, to discuss the Bible. Because of the planned Witnesses celebration of the "Lord Evening Meal," which that year happened to fall on Sunday, for the convenience of the guests, the discussion meeting planned for the previous Friday Bible was cancelled. That same Friday, however, Voula noticed a car with five people on board stationed for several hours in front of his house. The same happened the following night.

If someone would assume that these Greeks were suffering from a kind of collective paranoia who wanted to see at all costs in these events an arrogant attempt to fabricate evidence in order to expel dissidents, the rest of the story will prove the absolute sanity of their suspicions.

The following Sunday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, a number of people gathered at Voula's house to celebrate the "Lord Evening Meal." Voula noticed again an unfamiliar car stationed at the corner of the street, while a little camper van was stationed on the opposite corner. The view from the camper's back window was concealed all over with paper, with the exception of a hole in the middle of the window. Several times that evening, people from the car crossed the street to talk to the people inside the van. Voula asked one of her guests to see why these cars were stationed just there. When the guest approached the car, the driver started the car to drive it away. Then, the guest decided to look through the hole in the paper stuck on the van's rear window. He saw two Jehovah's Witnesses he obviously knew, equipped with complete video cameras; one of them, Nikolas Antoniou, was a local "Elder," the second, Dimetre Zerdes, a member of the branch office of the Watchtower in Athens. More of Voula's guests joined the first one and surrounded the camper while a policeman, stationed nearby approached the group to question them. At this very moment the Witnesses in the van, wanting to escape, drove to a nearby park where they tried to free themselves of the video equipment but were stopped by two police cars, arrested and charged with violation of people's privacy. The recorded video in the camera showed Mrs. Kolokerinou's house with close-ups of people going through the main entrance.

The case ended up in a court trial. In the public prosecutor's closing speech, the public attorney said "I don't believe that there is one single Christian organization that teaches its members to lie, however, as the defendant and his organization do so, they should stand up to their responsibility and state aloud: 'Yes, we have spied'. If an organization is capable of doing this, what can we expect from its members? They have used special video recording equipment and have been caught in *fragrante delicto* by some eyewitnesses while shooting the video, but they insist that they were not spying but only shooting videos. All of this does not honor neither the defendants nor the organization they represent. We are all free to associate with the organization of our choice but we are also free to abandon it and to act as it pleases us within the limit of the law ... Does the fact that someone leaves and abandons this organization give a person the right to spy on him? The law forbids the use of any recording equipment, from simple sound recorders to video recorders, to poke one's nose into the life and habits of another person. Our private life can in no way be subject to any type of control, and this is also true for our personal convictions. It is a very serious matter. Instead, the defendants have been found using video recording equipment and this, not by chance. The Watchtower, seeing itself as an Arch and teaching that salvation can be found only by joining them, as they are God's channel, creates in its members a state of dependency, which forces them to behave in ways which represent a threat to the human rights." The court case ended with a guilty verdict<sup>20</sup>.

## **Stirring up Hate**

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<sup>20</sup> For more details see R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, pp. 380-385.

Once the authors of motivated criticism are labeled “apostates,” the Movement’s warmongering against them explicitly stirs up hate: “When a person persists in a way of badness [*therefore including motivated criticism without “repenting”*] after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of his make-up, then in order to hate what is bad a Christian [*meaning a Jehovah’s Witness*] must hate the person with whom the badness is inseparably linked.”<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, no member can express any thoughtful evaluation of the quality of the “spiritual food” provided by the Movement’s Leadership; this is how this thought is conveyed: “Some apostates profess to know and serve God, but they reject teachings or requirements set out in his Word. Others claim to believe the Bible, but they reject Jehovah’s organization and actively try to hinder its work. When they deliberately choose such badness after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of their makeup, then a Christian must hate (in the Biblical sense of the word) those who have inseparably attached themselves to the badness.”<sup>22</sup> Disfellowshipping becomes an effective means of conscience control; in fact, *The Watchtower* magazine of July 15<sup>th</sup> 1992 states: “The obligation to hate lawlessness also applies to all activity by apostates” (page 12) and defining what hate is, it pinpoints “the meaning of the word “hate” ... has the thought of having such an intense feeling of dislike for or strong aversion to someone or something that we avoid having anything to do with such a person or thing” (page 9). It is therefore clear that in the social world of Jehovah’s Witnesses, love and hate do not assume their common meaning.

Therefore, there is no country in the world where Jehovah’s Witnesses who disagree with the teachings and practices of their Movement do not live in a state of continual anxiety and fear, because they know that whatever they may say, do or read is constantly controlled, the same as with whom they associate with. I have, myself, received telephone calls from people who preferred to use a so as not to run the risk of being recognized in their contacts with me or with other former Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are just like hostages due to the Movement’s power to inhibit any communication with their family and friends, who themselves are subject to the same power.

Expressing any disagreement, no matter how respectfully, discussing any subject supporting opinions contrary to the ones promoted by the Movement, even in private conversations with close friends, means giving the green light to an immediate investigation and summoning in front of a “Judicial Committee.” Why? Because, in so doing, the individual who questions the Movement’s history or doctrines finds himself off-limits, separated from all the other members. In this way, there is no danger that other members discuss with him subjects silenced by the Movement.

Men and women who sincerely love God and who, in good conscience, do not agree with some of the Movement’s teachings, have been “robbed” of the place they deserve among their friends and acquaintances, *they have been deprived of their good name and their reputation, of the respect and affection they earned during their whole life and have been driven apart from their family.* Sadly enough, however, all this has been justified by the Movement’s “rules.”<sup>23</sup> Sincere and harmless men and women who only wanted to follow their good conscience have actually been “*stabbed in the back*” with unjustified, sometimes malicious accusations, undergoing a “*moral lynching*,” and leaving them as *spiritually dead* in front of those who knew them.

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<sup>21</sup> WT July 15th 1961, p. 419; *italic* text between squared brackets added for understanding.

<sup>22</sup> WT October 1<sup>st</sup> 1993, pp. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Appendix* for documental evidences about Movement's shunning severity.

Is all this an exaggeration? Far too many cases depict what happens within a Movement which resorts to “mind control” to “protect” its members from external “contamination.” Such an environment is not suitable to hold thinking and teachings built on solid basis. Truth does not fear confrontation with error. Because of its dignity and validity, truth can only benefit from such a confrontation. On the other hand, fragile arguments and inconsistent teachings have no foundation and therefore have to be protected against those who want to prove their validity.

## **Italian State and Watchtower Society Agreement (Intesa) issue**

Article 8 of the Italian Constitution<sup>24</sup> grants the State the right to undersign an Agreement (Intesa) with all those religious confessions that make a request for it. This type of Agreement is more than just a simple protection of rights; it offers increased freedom of action and wider potential of dissemination, and represents a kind of trustworthiness license in front of the citizen’s conscience. At the very least, it is a kind of State guarantee against any danger that a given group might represent for the collectivity.

The Jehovah’s Witness Movement has also made a request to the Italian State to subscribe to such an Agreement. At this moment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Permanent Commission for the Constitutional Affairs of the Italian Republic Senate is examining the bill proposal Number 2237<sup>25</sup>, charting the “Norms for the regulation of the relationships between the State and the Congregazione Cristiana dei Testimoni di Geova in Italia (Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Italy).”

Just imagine, now, what would happen if this proposal becomes the law of the State; what kind of exception could be claimed to stop the overflow of ostracism promoted by Jehovah’s Witnesses against those who, within the Movement, are not in line with the same and dissent from its views and ideology? This concern was the main reason why, on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, a demonstration was held in front of the Italian Parliament, to alert publicly the State Institutions and ask them to evaluate more thoroughly, with care and judgment, the conditioning designed by the “Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses” Italian branch, before stipulating an Agreement with this religious organization. The demonstration was *not aimed at denying the freedom of religion of a religious group*; instead, the demonstration aimed at drawing the attention of the Institutions and public opinion to the possibility of *denying a state of special favors* to the “Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses” which uses a system of harsh discrimination and ostracism. This disgraceful practice, subsequent to the disfellowshipping disciplinary measures, in fact limits the freedom to relinquish membership from the Movement. This forces many people to remain in the Movement for fear of losing all their emotional bonds should they abandon it.

This kind of psychological pressure is different from their proclaimed religious freedom, which obviously has to be granted to all. In the past, some political leaders have shown their concern about the problem of ostracism; in fact, one member of the Parliament stated that “given how the Agreement between the State and the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses, contrary to similar Agreements with other religious groups, has engendered serious contrasts, it is appropriate that the Government cautiously stays attuned to the historical and cultural evolution of the country. Such a precaution is more than necessary with respect to a reality which, according to some aspects, is worrying, in particular under the interpersonal relationships aspect between the members of the religious group, especially when the membership bonds are broken. Later, the same member of the

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<sup>24</sup> «All religious confessions are equally free before the law. Religious Confessions other than Catholic have the right to organize in accordance with their own charters, in so far as they are not in conflict with Italian laws. Their relations with the State are regulated by law on the basis of an agreement between the respective representatives».

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.senato.it/leg/16/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/35521.htm>

Parliament added: “the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses displays very peculiar characteristics; this is what stems from the very large number of reports received on account of the ostracism practiced against those who come to the decision to abandon the Movement, frequently with dramatic consequences within the family units.”

Let’s be clear: Jehovah’s Witnesses are free to expel anyone they want; they assume the total responsibility; but one could ask oneself: is it normal for the State to offer a special license to a Movement which forces its members to comply with these policies which are disrespectful of fundamental human rights?

Unfortunately, in some religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, the exercise of the right to criticism by its own members suffers a harsh *vulnus* through the practice of systematic ostracism, frequently inducing radicalization of the family conflicts, when a member of the family decides to abandon the religious group because he no longer shares the same ever changing ideology and positions<sup>26</sup>.

This procedure alone justifies the social alarm created by adhesion to the Jehovah’s Witnesses Movement. The problem is not if a person is free to stop greeting a relative, a friend or a co-worker; the true question is should the State legitimize a Movement which uses the discriminatory practices just described.

It should therefore be reasonable, before engaging in such an Agreement, that the State makes a serious evaluation of the case. This does not mean denying the freedom granted to all. Perhaps, what would be denied is a state of special favor, which is quite different from the exercise of religious freedom.

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<sup>26</sup> See for examples of that situation <http://www.freeminds.org/psychology/shunning/>

## Appendix

### The rules of Jehovah's Witnesses ostracism

It's interesting to note that, when the Movement literature speaks about the ostracism practiced by other religious groups against dissenters, it refers to "intimidation,"<sup>27</sup> whereas, when the ostracism is practiced by the Movement, it becomes a proof of *loyalty to God*. In fact, this is how ostracism is described by Jehovah's Witnesses when they are induced, by their leaders, to practice it against those who have nothing against God, but simply dissent with the changeable teachings of their worldwide leadership.

What does it mean to Jehovah's Witnesses to "observe the disfellowshipping order" issued by the Judicial Committee among them?

A concise review of quotations from the Movement literature, referring to the systematic practice of ostracism also – indeed mostly – against the critics of the ideology, will offer a significant base for the countless stories which periodically attract the public opinion.

Note that "the one who deliberately does not abide by the congregation's decision puts himself in line to be disfellowshipped."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, whoever, in his own conscience, would decide to maintain social and family relationships with an expelled former member may put himself at risk of being sanctioned. In fact, the WT of May 15<sup>th</sup> 1963, p. 299 par. 19, states that "any attachments to the disfellowshipped person, whether these be ties of personal friendship, blood relation or otherwise, must take second place to the theocratic disciplinary action that has been taken."

How should the loyal members in the family behave in relation to a parent or a son who is expelled from the Movement? Replying this question, the WT of October 1st 1961, p. 591 par. 21-22, states: «What, then, if the son of a family that is within God's visible organization should oppose this prophesying concerning the Kingdom? ... What should the dedicated, baptized father and mother do? They dare not let their affections run wild; they dare not spare even this dear one whose natural birth they caused. ... They must pierce him through because of his false prophesying. They must consider him as spiritually dead to themselves, as one with whom to have no religious association and fellowship and whose prophesying are to be rejected».

Furthermore, the WT of November 15<sup>th</sup> 1952, p. 703 legislated: «Of course, if the children are of age, then there can be a departing and breaking of family ties in a physical way, because the spiritual ties have already snapped».

What if the expelled relative isn't of the immediate family's circle? Well, the rule is: «The excommunicated relative should be made to realize that his visits are not now welcomed as they were previously»<sup>29</sup>.

In addition, the Movement orders: «What if a disfellowshipped person and a member of the congregation both work at the same place of secular employment? ... While it is permissible to converse to the extent necessary for carrying out the functions of the work, it would not be proper to associate in the sense of communicating freely, without regard for his status. Only the necessary business would be discussed, never spiritual matters or any other matter that does not come under the category of necessary business related to the secular employment. If the contact required is too

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<sup>27</sup> See WT February 1<sup>st</sup> 1967, p. 93. As the magazine known since March 1939 as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* was originally *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1879 – 1908), then *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1909 – 1931), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1931 – 1938), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom* (1938 – 1939), it is cited simply as WT in all instances.

<sup>28</sup> See WT July 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, p. 409.

<sup>29</sup> See WT July 15<sup>th</sup> 1963 p. 443 ff.

frequent and intimate, the Christian could consider changing his employment so as not to violate his conscience»<sup>30</sup>.

And what if a man and a woman, both Witnesses, are fiancé and one of them is expelled before their marriage? The loyal Witness "should sever the tie with the disfellowshipped one. ... If the Christian disregards this by marrying the disfellowshipped one, he too can be disfellowshipped."<sup>31</sup>

What if the expelled one is not a relative? The rule of the movement is very simple: «All association with him is severed»<sup>32</sup>. Doggedness against the expelled ones is astonishing: «Those in the congregation will not extend the hand of fellowship to this one, nor will they so much as say "Hello" or "Good-bye" to him. ... Therefore the members of the congregation will not associate with the disfellowshipped one, either in the Kingdom Hall or elsewhere. They will not converse with such one or show him recognition in any way»<sup>33</sup>.

It is undeniable that these cruel attitudes often do not manifest themselves because the relatives feel strong dislike for the expelled one, but only because it is the Movement that so decided. To prove this, simply observe the sudden change of attitude shown by the Witnesses worldwide, after the publication of the articles which appeared in the WT of August 1<sup>st</sup> 1974, which modified drastically the family ties between loyal Witnesses and expelled relatives. That change was accepted with relief by Jehovah's Witnesses<sup>34</sup>. For example, for years, a policy of the Movement barred funeral ceremonies in favor of expelled ones: no exception was allowed<sup>35</sup>.

The WT of June 1<sup>st</sup> 1976, pp. 344-348, however, ruled that each case was different from another and had to be judged on its own by the elders, stating that: «if the elders felt that it would not disturb the peace and harmony of the congregation nor bring reproach upon God's people, there would be no objection to an elder's giving a talk». Later, however, in 1979, the Movement leadership changed their mind back – in fact, within a few years, they restored their previous hard-line policy, shunning again the expelled members of a family, isolating them at the border of social life, deserving to be dealt with as perfect strangers.

Probably the situation changed owing to what had happened at the worldwide headquarters in Brooklyn in the Eighties. In fact, after some authoritative officers of the Movement, who disagreed on some of the group's teachings, were expelled<sup>36</sup>, the new direction taken by the leadership was evidenced in a letter, dated September 1<sup>st</sup> 1980, sent to travelling overseers.<sup>37</sup> The letter said that continuing to believe – not promoting, but simply believing – something different from the teachings of the Movement was grounds for taking judicial action for apostasy. Asking questions entailing sound and deep reflection relating to the Movement's teachings means troubles: the questioner is reduced to a sudden silence and, instead of answering his questions, his own intellectual honesty is questioned.

In fact, the embitterment of the shunning rules is manifest throughout the literature of the Movement from the Eighties onward: «if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home, it might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative. Even if there were some family matters requiring contact, this certainly would be kept to a minimum»<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> See WT July 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, pp.409-414.

<sup>31</sup> See WT July 15<sup>th</sup> 1963, p. 443.

<sup>32</sup> See WT July 15<sup>th</sup> 1963 p. 443 ff.

<sup>33</sup> See WT July 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 p. 409.

<sup>34</sup> These 1974 articles were written by Raymond V. Franz on behalf of the worldwide leadership (Governing Body).

<sup>35</sup> See *La Torre di Guardia* 15 April 1963, p. 255.

<sup>36</sup> In that period Raymond V. Franz resigned from the membership of the worldwide Governing Body and other authoritative Witnesses – as Edward Dunlap – were disfellowshipped.

<sup>37</sup> You can find the text of this letter in R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 341-342.

<sup>38</sup> See WT April 15<sup>th</sup> 1988, p. 28.

In the summer 2002 the Movement reiterated its intolerant policy against former members as follows: «Hence, we also avoid social fellowship with an expelled person. This would rule out joining him in a picnic, party, ball game, or trip to the mall or theater or sitting down to a meal with him either in the home or at a restaurant»<sup>39</sup>.

Most recently, in the WT of February 15<sup>th</sup> 2011, once again the Movement tries to convince rank and file Jehovah's Witnesses not to associate with allegedly "lawless" expelled ones. On p. 31, paragraph 15, it states: «Do we share Jesus' view of those who have become set in their lawless course? We need to give thought to these questions: “Would I choose to associate regularly with someone who has been disfellowshipped or who has disassociated himself from the Christian congregation? What if that one is a close relative who no longer lives at home?” Such a situation can be a real test of our love of righteousness and of our loyalty to God». The Movement has its own definition of what it considers a "lawless" course – it is any disfellowshipping offense.

Paragraph 18 of the aforesaid article drives the point home; it states, «By cutting off contact with the disfellowshipped or disassociated one, you are showing that you hate the attitudes and actions that led to that outcome. However, you are also showing that you love the wrongdoer enough to do what is best for him or her. Your loyalty to Jehovah [read: “the Movement”] may increase the likelihood that the disciplined one will repent and return to Jehovah». In other words: If you shun a person enough letting them down and without friends – they will have no other alternative but to reintegrate into the Movement and submit again to its control!

With this concise review of the official literature of the Movement we hope to have offered sufficient evidence of the questionable rules enforced by the Movement and subscribed to by the Legal Entity with which the Italian Parliament is contemplating signing-up the “Intesa” [“Agreement”], i.e. the “Congregazione cristiana dei testimoni di Geova” in Rome.

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<sup>39</sup> See the monthly *Kingdom Ministry* (a periodic paper for publishers only) August 2002, pp. 3-4, par. n°3.