

12

AFTERMATH

I know that after my going away oppressive wolves will enter in among you and will not treat the flock with tenderness.—Acts 20:29.

THERE is an old expression, “An iron hand in a velvet glove.” I do not believe that the events of the spring of 1980 produced the hardhandedness manifested by the authority structure. I believe the hardness was already there, that history shows it was. What took place in the spring of 1980 merely caused the velvet glove to be removed, exposing the unyielding hardness underneath. What followed supports that conclusion.

When the judicial committee of five Bethel elders that, by any standard of rightness, did for the Governing Body what the Governing Body should have done for itself, finally met with Ed Dunlap and informed him of their decision to disfellowship him, Ed said to them:

All right, if that is your decision. But *don't you say that it's for "apostasy."* You know that apostasy means rebellion against God and Christ Jesus, and *you know that that is not true of me.*

In the August, 1980, edition of the monthly paper called *Our Kingdom Service*, sent to all congregations, the front page contained the statement that a number of persons in the Bethel family had been disfellowshipped and then spoke of “apostasy against the organization.” This phrasing, though still false (for there had been no rebellion even against the organization) was at least closer to the truth than statements made elsewhere.

On May 28, 1980, my letter of resignation was read to the headquarters family. On May 29, a meeting of all Bethel elders was called. Jon Mitchell was among these. He was serving as a secretary in both the Service Department and the Governing Body offices. My only contact with him had been when he obtained visas for me for my trip

to Africa. He had never conversed with any of those who were disfellowshipped. He had, however, seen some of the correspondence from judicial committees passing through the offices and had heard the departmental gossip about the “heresy” trials. Relating his impressions of the elders meeting, and the talks given by Governing Body members Schroeder and Barry, he says:

Schroeder’s talk focused on the subject of organization. He spoke about our “finely tuned organization” and how certain ones who seemed to feel that they couldn’t go along with its rules and regulations “ought to be leaving and not be involved in the further progressive work here.” (The publication *Branch Organization* was held up to illustrate how “finely tuned” the organization was, and he said that this publication contained over 1,000 rules and regulations regarding the operations of the Branches and the Brooklyn headquarters.) He stressed that this was not a “witch hunt,” but there appeared to be a “pruning” going on.

Of those who had left, he said, “It’s not that they don’t believe the Bible, you’d have to be an atheist to think that way,” but “they understand it differently.”

He concluded his part by opening it up to questions from the Bethel elders. Harold Jackson raised his hand and suggested that there be a “forum” or open discussion of what the issues were. Schroeder replied that they had no plans to do this. If we had a question we could send in a letter. Another elder, Warren Weil, asked if the possibility of having the brothers take “loyalty oaths” had been considered. Brother Schroeder replied that that avenue was not being pursued at that time.

Lloyd Barry’s talk seemed to be an effort to refute some of the beliefs apparently held by those viewed as apostates and to sound a call for loyalty to the organization. He read Proverbs 24:21, 22, and warned that we should beware of “those who are for a change.” He spoke disparagingly of certain ones who were getting together to study the Bible in an independent fashion, claiming that some were even doing this instead of going to the *Watchtower* study on Monday evening.

He likewise spoke in unfavorable terms of those inclined to use commentaries by writers of Christendom. (Barnes’ *Notes on the New Testament* were possessed by men in the Service Department and kept in open display; this remark prompted them to remove these and put them in drawers.) Barry spoke about our “rich heritage” as Jehovah’s Witnesses and was visibly upset by the possibility that some did not hold it in as high esteem as he did and seemed inclined toward thinking which could be detrimental to the organization’s growth and prosperity.

Though he had never discussed any Scriptural points or any of the issues involved with any of us who were the target of these talks, Jon writes:

This meeting and the events that followed had the effect of augmenting the sickening feeling developing in me since I first heard of the startling news of the disfellowshipings and Brother Franz's dismissal.

The August 1, 1980, *Watchtower* was to contain an article which listed what were considered to be various "signs of apostasy." But I already had some very clear-cut ideas of what the *actual* signs were. I was deeply distressed by the realization that the organization more and more seemed to be displaying these signs itself, as follows:

1) The suppression of free Bible reading. Though I knew it was not likely there would be Bible burnings, nonetheless, it was apparent that complete freedom to read the Scriptures and enjoy open Bible discussions was being curtailed. Why wouldn't the Governing Body permit an open discussion of the issues as suggested, especially since it involved individuals who had contributed much to the organization and who were greatly respected as good Bible scholars? What were they trying to hide? Couldn't the 'truth' stand up to such examination?

2) The apparent shift in emphasis from the Bible to our "rich heritage" or organizational traditions. I knew quite well that this had been the failing of many religious sects, including the Pharisees. Matthew 15 and Mark 7 contain the words of Jesus wherein he denounced them for giving greater weight to tradition than to God's word. The suggestion that a "loyalty oath" be required to ensure loyalty to an organization and its traditions was absolutely appalling to me. Yet it had been made in all seriousness.

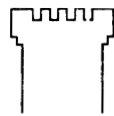
3) Inquisition tactics. It seemed clear that the Governing Body, which I had considered to be there more for the purpose of serving the brothers, was wielding a very powerful authoritarian hand and was determined to act quickly and decisively in its handling of the matter. Would it not have been far wiser and judicious for them to act carefully and deliberately, thoroughly weighing and considering matters and then *slowly and cautiously* reaching a decision?

I remember thinking to myself at the Elders' meeting, "Stop! Slow down! Can't you see what you're doing?" I felt this way, not because of being disloyal to the organization, but because I loved it and wanted more than anything else for it to be solidly based on a firm foundation of truth.

Like him, I initially retained hope that after the nightmare had passed, perhaps more rational thinking would begin to prevail, that the emotional, almost hysterical, "siege mentality" which treated a small number of conscientious individuals as if they constituted a

mammoth threat to the worldwide organization, would be replaced by calmer, more judicious thought and action. The opposite took place.

Perhaps nothing illustrates so clearly the incredible demands now made for total conformity as does the following letter, sent out to all traveling representatives, Circuit and District Overseers, by the Service Department of the international headquarters, dated September 1, 1980. Here presented is material from the first two pages of the letter, the section under the heading "Protecting the Flock" being of special interest in this discussion (particularly relevant points are underlined).



WATCHTOWER
BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

CABLE WATCHTOWER

117 ADAMS STREET, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11201, U.S.A. PHONE (212) 625-1240
SCG:SSF September 1, 1980

TO ALL CIRCUIT AND DISTRICT OVERSEERS

Dear Brothers:

We know that you and your wives benefitted greatly from the "Divine Love" District Conventions. They impressively brought to our attention why love is the most beneficial quality that we can develop. (1 Cor. 13:13) Love enables us to remain united in spite of the limitations and shortcomings we manifest. --Col. 3:12-14.

You can be sure that by your loving example, the brothers you serve will be uplifted and strengthened in the faith. We have received a number of letters informing us of the love you brothers and your wives have displayed. One body of elders wrote concerning their circuit overseer: "(He) is truly devoted to do Jehovah's will . . . being of spiritual assistance to all . . . approachable in discussing any matter. (He) has a listening ear, showing empathy for the brothers. Such brothers we can rely upon when future problems we know will come, set in."

You can be confident that the brothers treasure your friendship, association and love when you 'genuinely care for the things pertaining to them.' (Phil. 2:19-23, 29) Therefore, continue exerting yourselves to deal lovingly with them. Never pressure them or scold them. Lead them, work hard with them, exhort them in accord with their needs. Be patient if their progress appears slow. Such loving, patient treatment will refresh the brothers.--Matt. 11:28-30.

PROTECTING THE FLOCK

A major responsibility of an overseer as he 'shepherds the flock of God in his care' is to protect it from dangers. (Acts 20:28) Acts 20:29, 30 indicates that one of those dangers can be men who apostatize. There is a fine study of this subject in the August 1, 1980, Watchtower. All of you want to get thoroughly familiar with the contents of the study articles. Encourage all of the elders and ministerial servants, especially, to do likewise. Include key points in your "Continue in the Things You Have Learned" program.

Help the elders discern between one who is a trouble-making apostate and a Christian who becomes weak in faith and has doubts. (2 Peter 2; Jude 22, 23) The former one should be dealt with decisively after extended efforts have been put forth to readjust him. (2 John 7-10) On the other hand, one weak in faith should be patiently and lovingly assisted to get the accurate knowledge that will solidify his faith.

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Keep in mind that to be disfellowshipped, an apostate does not have to be a promoter of apostate views. As mentioned in paragraph two, page 17 of the August 1, 1980, Watchtower, "The word 'apostasy' comes from a Greek term that means 'a standing away from,' 'a falling away, defection,' 'rebellion, abandonment. Therefore, if a baptized Christian abandons the teachings of Jehovah, as presented by the faithful and discreet slave, and persists in believing other doctrine despite Scriptural reproof, then he is apostatizing. Extended, kindly efforts should be put forth to readjust his thinking. However, if, after such extended efforts have been put forth to readjust his thinking, he continues to believe the apostate ideas and rejects what he has been provided through the 'slave class, then appropriate judicial action should be taken.

This is not to say that you or the elders should go on 'witch hunts,' as it were, inquiring into the personal beliefs of your brothers. Rather, if something reasonably substantial comes to the attention of the elders along this line, it would be appropriate to make a kindly, discreet inquiry so as to protect the flock. We cannot overemphasize the need to be cautious, discreet and kindly as such situations are dealt with.--James 1:19, 20.

COOPERATION BETWEEN BODIES OF ELDERS

In some of our larger cities it has been noticed that, at times, when wrongdoing is uncovered, several congregations may be involved. There is a need for full cooperation between the bodies of elders of these congregations. The elders should be alert to the need to quickly pass on to the bodies of elders of other congregations any information about publishers in their congregations that may necessitate an investigation. Any who have indiscreetly gotten themselves involved in wrong conduct need to be assisted right away. Any who have allowed themselves to become hardened in sin need to be severely reproofed and if unresponsive to this, expelled from the congregation. It would be good for you to alert the bodies of elders in your circuit to the material that was presented to you in your seminar in the fall of 1979 in outline #13 under the heading "Elders Still Need Assistance in Handling Intercongregational Problems." Whatever information is needed and available should be passed on quickly to the elders of the congregation involved.

You want to help elders feel keenly the obligation before God to prevent wrongdoing from infiltrating and spreading within the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:6-8) The judicial committee should make great effort to see if the individual is genuinely repentant before extending forgiveness to him for the bad name that he has given to the congregation. Usually a person who is truly repentant can point to some "fruit that befits repentance." (Matt 3:8) We want to have in mind that no matter how good the counsel or reproof, if the person's heart is unresponsive, given the same circumstances he will repeat the sin. To protect the flock the elders must be willing to take decisive action in such cases.

The letter presents an official policy. It actually says that a person's believing—not promoting, but simply *believing*—something that differs from the teachings of the organization is grounds for taking judicial action against him as an "apostate"!

The letter makes no qualifying statements limiting such differences of belief to fundamental teachings of God's Word, such as the coming of God's Son as a man, the ransom, faith in Christ's shed blood as the basis for salvation, the resurrection, or similar basic Bible doctrines. It does not even say that the person necessarily disagrees with the Bible, the Word of God. Rather, he disagrees with "the teachings

of Jehovah, *as presented by the faithful and discreet slave.*” Which is something like saying that a man’s accepting and obeying a King’s written message is no guarantee that he is loyal; it is his accepting and obeying what a slave messenger claims the ruler meant that decides this!

The symbol at the top of the September 1, 1980 letter (“SCG”) identifies the composer of it as Leon Weaver. But it should not be thought that this “thought-control” policy was the thinking of one individual, nor was it some momentary off-the-cuff expression of extremism which a person might make and afterward feel ashamed of as a rash, harsh and utterly unchristian position to take. The composer was a member of the Service Department Committee whose members, such as Harley Miller, David Olson, Joel Adams, Charles Woody and Leon Weaver, were all longtime representatives of the organization, with decades of experience behind them. They were agents of the Governing Body in supervising the activity of about 10,000 congregations and the activity of all the elders, Circuit and District Overseers in the United States, where nearly one million Jehovah’s Witnesses live. They were in regular contact with the Service Committee of the Governing Body and were supposed to be thoroughly familiar with the Governing Body policies, attuned to its thinking and viewpoint and spirit.

But this only adds to the appalling aspect of the position the letter took. As I know from years on the Service Committee, any letter of this importance *must* be submitted to the Governing Body Service Committee for approval before being sent out.¹ Objection by even one member of that Committee would have resulted in the letter’s going before the entire Governing Body for discussion.

Whatever the case, the letter and its policy—which evokes memories of the position of religious authorities in the Inquisition—had to have been approved by a number of headquarters representatives, including several Governing Body members. Since people’s friendships, family relationships, personal honor and other life interests were all at stake, it should be presumed that these men gave long, careful thought to that statement of September 1, 1980, before approving it as an official expression from the “faithful and discreet slave” of Jesus Christ. What they there said was no light matter to be explained away later by saying, “Well, we really didn’t mean it exactly the way it sounded.” As the facts show, people, many persons, were actually disfellowshipped and continue to be disfellowshipped

1 The members at that time were Ted Jaracz (Coordinator), Milton Henschel, Albert Schroeder, William Jackson and Martin Poetzinger.

solely on the basis of this very thought-control policy sent out. The denigrating label of “apostate” is placed on their name simply because in their own hearts, they cannot accept all of the Society’s interpretations.

Possibly this policy resulted from or was influenced by something that developed earlier that year in one of the New York congregations. Jon Mitchell, mentioned previously as working part time in the Service Department, relates:

Somewhere around this time period [referring to the early summer of 1980] a memo came down from F. W. Franz, apparently in response to a question that had been sent in by Harold Jackson [part of the Service Department staff].

It seems there was a pioneer (full-time preaching) sister in a Spanish congregation who felt she could not conscientiously teach that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 was a literal number. She said she would not proselytize or seek to publicize an opposing view, but she did not want to teach that the 144,000 was a literal number to those with whom she studied the Bible.

Brother Jackson’s question apparently was to the effect of wanting to know whether or not such a person could be classified as an “apostate.” The memo confirmed that such a person could indeed be viewed as an apostate and should be disfellowshipped if she did not agree to teach what the Society instructed her to teach. I recall someone in the Service Department referring to the outcome of this case and stating that the girl had “recanted.” I was amazed that such terminology could be used without any sense of shame.

One might think that the extreme position taken in the September 1, 1980, letter, earlier quoted, conveyed to all elders by the traveling representatives, would produce, if not a storm of protest, at least some measurable expression of dismay from elders and others. They were too well trained for that to be the case. Some few individuals did express themselves, but cautiously, lest they also receive the label of “apostate.” Certainly the lack of protest was not because they had ‘proved to themselves that this was the good and acceptable and perfect will of God,’ as the apostle urges.² Rereading the paragraph on page two, one finds not a single scripture advanced as proof that such thought-control policy has any Scriptural support. The Christian’s thoughts are to be ‘brought into captivity to the Christ,’ not to men or an organization.³ Why then this willingness to surrender one’s conscience to such total control?

It is the concept of “the organization” that produces this. That concept creates the belief that, to all intents and purposes, whatever

² Romans 12:2

³ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

the organization speaks, it is as if God himself were speaking. Perhaps epitomizing the spirit that the Society's pronouncements, including this letter, produced is an incident occurring at a Circuit Assembly meeting for elders of a section of Alabama. The District Overseer, Bart Thompson, held up a Society publication that had a green cover. He then said to the assembly of elders, "If the Society told me that this book is black instead of green, I would say, 'Y'know I could have sworn that it was green, but if the Society says it's black, then it's black!" Others have used similar illustrations.

True, there are many thinking Witnesses who are repelled by such blatant expressions of blind faith. Yet most are still willing to conform, even to take "judicial action" against any who express doubts about the Society's interpretations. Why?

I try in my own mind and heart to understand the feelings of all these persons, including those on the Governing Body. Based on my own experience among them I believe that they are, in effect, the captives of a concept. The concept or mental image they have of "the organization" seems almost to take on a personality of its own, so that the concept itself controls them, moves them or restrains them, by molding their thinking, their attitudes, their judgments. I do not believe that many of them would take the position they now take if they thought only in terms of God, Christ, the Bible, and the interests—not of an organization—but of their Christian brothers, fellow humans. The insertion of the existing concept of "the organization," however, radically alters their thinking and viewpoint, becomes, in fact, the dominant, controlling force.

I believe that when the men on the Governing Body think about and refer to "the organization" they likewise think of the *concept* rather than the reality. They think of "the organization" as something far bigger and grander than themselves, thinking of it in its numerical aspect, in the extent of its scope of control, as something international, worldwide. They do not realize—apparently—that this aspect relates more to the organization's *domain* than to what it itself actually is. When, however, they urge "loyalty to the organization" they must know, they certainly *should* know, that they are not talking about that domain—about the thousands of congregations and their members that the organization directs. They are talking about loyalty to the *source* of the direction, the *source* of the teachings, the *source* of the authority. Whether the Governing Body members acknowledge it or whether they prefer not to think about it, the fact remains that in these crucial respects *they, and they alone, are "the organization."* Whatever other

authority exists—that of the Branch Committees, that of the District or Circuit Overseers, that of Congregational Elder Bodies—that authority is totally dependent on that small body of men, subject to adjustment, change or removal at their decision, unilaterally, with no questions asked

The June 22, 2000 *Awake!* earlier referred to makes these comments:

Slogans are vague statements that are typically used to express positions or goals. Because of their vagueness, they are easy to agree with.

For example, in times of national crisis or conflict, demagogues may use such slogans as “My country, right or wrong,” “Fatherland, Religion, Family,” or “Freedom or Death.” But do most people carefully analyze the real issues involved in the crisis or conflict? Or do they just accept what they are told?

The propagandist also has a very wide range of symbols and signs with which to convey his message—a 21-gun salvo, a military salute, a flag. 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.

So the sly art of propaganda can paralyze thought, prevent clear thinking and discernment, and condition individuals to act en masse. How can you protect yourself?

I believe that for most of these Governing Body members, like the rest of Jehovah’s Witnesses, “the organization” takes on a symbolic nature, something rather undefined, abstract, a concept rather than a concrete entity. Rather than the “mother church” it is the “mother organization.” Perhaps because of such an illusory view of “the organization” a man can be a member of such a Body that has virtually unrestricted power and authority, and yet not feel a keen sense of personal responsibility for what the Body does, for whatever hurt or whatever misleading information and consequent misdirection results. “It was *the organization* that did it, not us,” seems to be the thinking. And, believing that “the organization” is God’s chosen instrument, the responsibility is passed on to God. It was His will—even if later the particular decision or the particular authoritative teaching is found wrong and changed. People may have been disfellowshipped or otherwise hurt by the wrong decisions. But the individual member of the Governing Body feels absolved of personal responsibility.

I express the above points, not as a means of condemnation but as a means of explanation, an attempt to understand why certain men that I consider to be honest, basically kind individuals could be party to what I feel that they in their own hearts, would normally have rejected. I think the concept earlier described is tragically wrong, as pernicious as it is tragic. I believe the drastic actions taken toward those persons accused of “apostasy” were, in almost all cases, not only unjustified but repugnant, unworthy not only of Christianity but of any free society of men. Yet this effort at comprehension enables me to be free from brooding

or harboring bitterness toward the persons involved, either individually or collectively. Bitterness is both self-defeating and destructive. I do not know any person among those men that I would not be willing to express hospitality to in my home, with no questions asked, no issue of apology raised. Neither I nor any of my personal friends had any thought of cutting them, or any other persons, off from association because of a difference in understanding. The cutting off was not our thought, not our action.

When I met with the Governing Body the meeting was taped and I had been promised a copy of the tape. What happened to this? I believe what occurred is illustrative of points that have just been made.

About three weeks after returning to Alabama, I had occasion to write the Governing Body and took the opportunity to ask about my copy of the tape. I received a reply dated June 26, 1980.



June 26, 1980

R. V. Franz
c/o P. V. Gregerson
Route 4, Box 444
Gadsden, AL 35904

Dear Brother Franz:

Your letter of June 14 has been received.

We checked with the shipping department and they inform us that your furniture has been crated and it was shipped out from Brooklyn on Tuesday, June 24. So you should be receiving it soon.

As for the tape about which you write this matter is being given attention and it will be sent to you just as quickly as a copy can be made and shipped on to you.

We will look forward to receiving the two procedure books that you will be sending to us. Your letter also enclosed the convention talk material you mentioned returning to us.

May Jehovah's blessing be with you and we send Christian love.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower Bible Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA
For the Chairman's Committee

Two weeks passed and then this letter came:



July 10, 1980

Mr. Raymond V. Franz
c/o P. V. Gregerson
Route 4, Box 444
Gadsden, AL 35904

Dear Brother Franz:

Further with regard to our letter of June 26:

We thank you for the return of the Branch Organization and Governing Body Procedure books, which arrived the other day. Also, the shipping department has notified us that your furniture items were sent and that they have been received by you.

While the Chairman's Committee had mentioned that the matter of sending you the tape of May 20 (although it may be the tape of May 21st that you have in mind of the Governing Body meeting) was "being given attention," the Governing Body has now thought it well not to make up and give out any copies of the tapes for either of such dates. Also, in view of a confidential item which had been sent to the Governing Body members in April somehow coming into the hands of one of the members of the Bethel family who was disfellowshipped, and which was further circulated, the Governing Body has determined that it would not be advisable to open the records of its sessions (be it by tapes or minutes in writing) to anyone off the Society's premises. Furthermore, a change of status as to yourself has occurred. If in the future you would wish to obtain information from the tape we would not object to making such available to you to hear at Bethel.

While we did verbally mention, and also write, that a copy of the tape would be available to you, now the situation has seriously changed. As you no doubt can appreciate the Governing Body feels that this would be a more discreet course. We trust that you will find this arrangement a reasonable one.

It is hoped all is well with you and we send our Christian love and greetings.

Your brothers,
Watch Tower B. & T. Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA
For the Chairman's Committee

A NONPROFIT CORPORATION

The letter unavoidably brought back memories of the way matters had been handled from the start, from the time the Chairman's Committee had first put in motion the judicial machinery and actions that produced the various disfellowshipings. I had hoped all that was passed. I had no way of knowing what they were referring to in writing of "a confidential item which had been sent to the Governing Body in April." While in Brooklyn I had not seen any of the disfellowshipped persons, nor did I see them between then and my return to Alabama. So I replied as follows:

July 19, 1930

Watchtower Society
Attention: Chairman's Committee

Dear Brothers:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of July 10. Yes, the furniture items were received by us in good condition and we appreciate the work of the brothers in shipping in caring for this.


I note what you say about the decision not to send the tape of May 21 (incorrectly stated by me as May 20). As you must realize, the agreement was, and it was stated by the Chairman of the body before the session, that such would be provided to me. There were no qualifications stated, such as my status, my being at Bethel or outside of Bethel. It was a simple acknowledgement of the one provision that I required before agreeing to having the session taped, and you accepted that stipulation and agreed to it. Since you have acknowledged in writing that this is the case then it seems you should hold true to your agreement. What others have done cannot be used as a basis for breaking your agreement with me. If you do not intend to hold true to that agreement then it is plain that the only fair thing for you to do is to destroy that tape and any transcripts or copies thereof. For if I am not entitled to a copy of it then neither should you be, for I only agreed to it on the provision that I would receive a copy of it.

I have not completed my review of my papers but believe that I have some further material that should be returned to you and I will do this as soon as possible.

I will look forward to hearing from you at an early date on the matter of the tape. I will expect to receive either the tape or your letter to the effect that the tape and any copies or transcripts thereof have been destroyed.

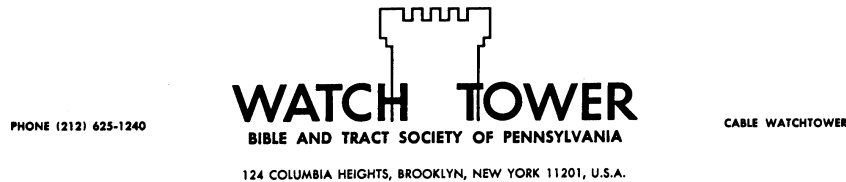
Thank you for your attention to the above and may God aid you in loyally upholding the high principles of his Word and the good news about his Kingdom.

Yours in Jehovah's service,



R. V. Franz

This is the answer the Governing Body sent me three weeks later.



August 8, 1980

Raymond Franz
c/o P.V. Gregerson
Route 4, Box 444
Gadsden, AL 35904

Dear Brother Franz:

Your letter of July 19 with reference to the Chairman's Committee letter to you of July 10, has been received.

The Governing Body decided for the time being not to send you the tapes of the May 21 meeting as mentioned in our letter to you of the 10th of July. As described in our letter if you desire to hear the information on these tapes they are available to you for listening at Bethel.

We send our greetings.

Your fellow servants of Jehovah,

Watch Tower B. & T. Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA

For the Chairman's Committee

They answered not a single point I had raised. The sense of unreality I had experienced before now came back. It seemed difficult to believe that men in responsible positions could act so irresponsibly. The letter's tone conveyed the attitude that all rights belonged to them (to "the organization") and that the rights of individuals could simply be ignored, if that appeared desirable and advantageous, summarily set aside as of no particular consequence. I wrote once more, as follows:

August 28, 1980

Chairman's Committee
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Brothers:

I have received your letter of August 8 which is in response to mine of July 19 with regard to the tape you agreed to send me.

Your letter is a response but not a reply. It simply repeats in abbreviated form your letter of July 10 and makes no reply to the points presented in my letter of July 19.

The fact is that you have in your possession tapes of the May 21 meeting only as a result of an unkept agreement. To set up new conditions after an agreement has been made, doing so unilaterally and arbitrarily, is certainly not fair by any standards. In your letter of June 26 you acknowledged in writing that you had made an agreement to provide me a copy of the tape of the meeting and stated your intention of preparing such copy and sending it to me. My status had already changed at that time, yet this was subsequently used as one basis for not keeping your agreement. The reasons given for not carrying out your agreement, as stated in your letter of July 10, are in no way a justification for a breach of contract.

May I urge you to meditate upon the consequences of such a course, keeping in mind the principle set forth at Leviticus 19:15; Romans 1:31. In view of your evident concern about releasing a copy of the tape, I have offered you the only honorable alternative, that of eliminating the tape and any copy or transcripts thereof. If you wish to keep the tape then the only just thing to do is to keep the agreement by which you obtained it. I have no doubt that if the circumstances were reversed, with the tape being in my possession and you being the petitioners for an agreed-upon copy, you would take the same position that I have taken.--Matthew 7:12.

Please accept the above as an expression of concern for your own spiritual interests as well as for that of brothers everywhere. Though my status may be viewed as a lowly and not a high one, I will appreciate your manifesting consideration for the points made in this letter and my letter of July 19.

Your brother,


R. V. Franz

Nearly one month later, another letter came:



GT/A September 24, 1980

Raymond V. Franz
Route 4, Box 440F
Gadsden, AL 35904

Dear Brother Franz:

Your letter of August 28, 1980 has been received and has been given consideration.

This is to inform you that the tapes of the May 21, 1980, meeting to which you have made reference have now been destroyed. There are three witnesses of the Governing Body who were present when such tapes were destroyed. There were no written transcripts made of the material that was taped, nor were any taped copies made of the recordings. The tapes have been totally destroyed.

This is in accordance with your wishes as set out in your correspondence to us.

Your brothers,

Watch Tower B. & T. Society
OF PENNSYLVANIA

For the Chairman's Committee

As the correspondence already presented shows, my "wishes" actually were for the copy of the tape to be sent as promised. Since they clearly were unwilling to part with it (recalling somewhat the "Watergate" attitude), I had offered them an option, which they finally exercised. At any rate, I was glad to have the matter settled and hoped that was the end of any further dealings with the Body. It was not.

Some weeks after my return to Alabama, and prior to the exchange of letters set out above, the Society had sent me a check for \$10,000, as a gift 'to aid in reestablishing in the South.' I had made no request for money and the action taken was both unexpected and appreciated. It took a loan of another \$5,000 to obtain a mobile home, and Peter Gregerson allowed us to park this on his property. I was grateful to

be able (as well as economically obliged) to do strenuous physical labor for Peter in yard work. Each day was spent mowing lawns, cutting weeds, trimming hedges, being stung by wasps and yellow jackets, bitten innumerable times by fire ants, sweating through one period when for 30 consecutive days the temperature out in the sun passed 100° Fahrenheit (38° C.). I cannot recall any other time in my life till then when I had experienced the constant physical pain that I did during those months. Yet I was glad for it, as it served to offset the emotional hurt I felt.

The greatest help, for both my wife and myself, was, however, our daily reading of the Scriptures. Each morning we read four of the Psalms, doing this consecutively until completing them. Though read many times before, they seemed almost new to us now. We could relate to them so much more. For if any one part of the Bible makes clear the very *personal* relationship that can and should exist between God's servants and himself, the Psalms seem to do this, outstandingly so. The emotional upset, the sighing, the feeling of helplessness and despair that the writers so often expressed, their ultimate acknowledgment in each case that their full and final hope was and must be, not in men, but in Jehovah God as their Rock and high place of protection, struck a very responsive chord in both of us.

My determination on leaving the international headquarters had been not to precipitate problems. I did not go looking for trouble. The trouble came looking for me.

For a number of months we enjoyed a pleasant relationship with the members of the East Gadsden Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, sharing in their meetings and in the "field activity." A few months after my arrival the local body of elders wrote to Brooklyn recommending my appointment as an elder in the congregation. The brief reply that came back said succinctly that the Society did not think it advisable for the elders to recommend me as such (or as a ministerial servant). The only reason given was that the notice of my resignation (published in the same *Our Kingdom Service* as the information about the disfellowshipping of several staff members) was still recent. The presiding overseer of the congregation seemed upset by the spirit of the letter but I recommended he simply forget about it.

With this letter, plus the information given out to elders as a result of the September 1, 1980, Society letter (stating that mere *belief* that differed from the published teachings of the Society was grounds for disfellowshipping), the atmosphere gradually began to change. The *Watchtower* magazine began publishing articles clearly designed, not

to calm matters, but to focus discussion on the supposed “apostasy” taking place. From then till now, by word and by printed page, a concerted campaign has apparently been under way to justify the extreme treatment meted out to those brothers in Brooklyn who were so swiftly expelled, and more particularly the viewpoint and policy behind this that continue to operate. Rather than a lessening of dogmatism the claims of divine authority and the accompanying calls for unquestioning loyalty became more strident. Issue after issue of the *Watchtower* magazine focused on points that had been questioned, insisted on their rightness, and in general produced a definite entrenchment of position rather than a moderating thereof. The argumentation used to achieve this seemed to reach new lows in misrepresentation of any contrary views.

An atmosphere of both suspicion and fear developed. Elders who were by nature moderate men felt hesitant about calling for moderation lest this be viewed as evidence of disloyalty. Those who were inclined toward tough action found favorable opportunities to express their hard-line attitude. It recalled the McCarthy period in the United States, when anyone who spoke on behalf of civil rights and freedom and expressed disapproval of ruthless methods of crushing unpopular ideologies was in real danger of being classed as a “Communist sympathizer,” a “fellow traveler” of radical elements.

Under these circumstances, meeting attendance for me became more and more depressing, as it meant hearing God’s Word misused, made to say things it did not say, as well as hearing the constant self-authentication and self-commendation of the organization. It made one wish that there was at least the freedom of expression found in the first-century synagogues that granted persons, such as the apostles, opportunity to speak out in favor of truth (though even there this inevitably led to a hardening of attitude that eventually would close the doors of the synagogue to them). But, as I remarked to Peter Gregerson, I considered myself simply a guest at the Kingdom Hall; it was their Hall, their meetings, their programs, and I had no desire to put a “damper” on their carrying them out. So, I limited my comments to the reading of relevant scriptures, simply emphasizing whatever portion was applicable. It was a rare meeting that someone, often an older member, did not come up afterward and make some expression of appreciation.

The “crusade” atmosphere developing, however, gave me reason to believe it was just a matter of time until some further action would be taken toward me. And so it happened.

THE CRIME AND THE SENTENCE

Both the Pharisees and the scribes kept muttering, saying: "This man welcomes sinners and even eats with them." —Luke 15:2.

One meal was all the evidence needed. It happened this way:

Within about six months of my return to northern Alabama, the Society sent a new Circuit Overseer into the area. The previous man had been a moderate person, inclined to play down problems rather than make issues of them. The man who replaced him had a reputation for greater aggressiveness. This was about the time the Society's letter to District and Circuit Overseers had come out saying that "apostasy" included persons who even *believed* something different from the organization's teachings.

On his second visit to the East Gadsden Congregation (March 1981) the new Circuit Overseer, Wesley Benner, arranged to meet with Peter Gregerson, going to his home along with a local elder, Jim Pitchford. The reason? Benner told Peter that there was a "lot of talk" about him in the city and in the circuit. Peter said he was very sorry to hear that. Where was the "talk" coming from? Benner was reluctant to say, but Peter pointed out that he needed to know to remedy the situation. Benner then said the source was an in-law of Peter's family.

Peter made clear that he had put forth every effort to be circumspect in his expressions and that any conversations on Scriptural matters he had had with anyone in the area were strictly with his own relatives. He was deeply concerned that persons outside his family relationship were now engaging in "a lot of talk," as the Circuit Overseer had said. "How could that be?" he asked. Wesley Benner offered no explanation.

What, then, were they talking *about*? Benner brought up a point in a certain *Watchtower* article that Peter had reportedly objected to. Under no circumstances could the point be called a "major teaching" of Scripture; it actually involved a technicality.⁴ Nonetheless, since Peter had not agreed with the organization it became important. After long discussion, the Circuit Overseer was finally obliged to

4 The article, in the August 15, 1980, issue of the *Watchtower*, endeavored to show that the Greek term *naos* (temple or sanctuary), used in Revelation 7:15 with regard to the "great crowd," could apply to the temple courtyards. In doing so it said that Jesus chased the moneychangers out of the *naos*. (See page 15, box at the bottom of the page.) Since the Bible account itself, at John 2:14-16, clearly uses another term (*hieron*), the claim was obviously false, as one elder expressed it, "either an example of intellectual dishonesty or intellectual ignorance."

acknowledge that the point might indeed be in error. (In actual fact, the Watchtower Society acknowledged the error in a letter dated May 11, 1981, sent in response to an inquiry. The letter stated that “point three in the summary that appears at the bottom of page 15 was deleted in translating this article for publication in foreign language editions of The Watchtower.” (This statement, however, was not true.)⁵

Peter said afterward, “I was determined not to let a ‘confrontation’ situation develop and I did everything I could to keep the conversation calm and reasonable.” When the Circuit Overseer and the local elder left, Peter felt the matter had ended on a friendly basis and was glad that was the case. It was not.

The following week, the Circuit Overseer sent word that he wanted a second meeting to pursue the matter further.

Peter told me he felt that the time had come to make a decision. The spirit that had been generated by the Governing Body, its Service Department and its letter of September 1, 1980, and a succession of *Watchtower* articles, had built up to the point where a “witch hunt” atmosphere prevailed. He felt it would be naïve on his part if he failed to recognize the strong likelihood that efforts were under way to bring about his disfellowshippment. His befriending me, he felt, was at least a contributing factor. As he saw it, he had two choices: either voluntarily disassociate himself from the congregation or let the efforts under way continue to their goal of disfellowshipping him. He found neither choice desirable but of the two he believed he should take the first, voluntarily disassociate himself.

When I expressed doubt as to whether things had reached that stage yet, he said he had weighed the matter, prayed about it, and felt it was the wiser course. The factor that most concerned him, he said, was his family. Of his seven children, three were married, some had children, and he had three brothers and two sisters living in the area and many nephews and nieces. All of them were Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁶ If he allowed the organization’s representatives to push matters to the point of disfellowshipping, it would make for a very difficult situation for all these family members. It would put them in a serious dilemma as to whether to associate with him as their father or grandfather or brother or uncle, or, instead, to be obedient to the organization and shun him. Additionally, there were about thirty-five Witnesses in the employ of his grocery company. Voluntary

5 See the Appendix of the book *Where Is the “Great Crowd” Serving God?*, by Jon Mitchell (Commentary Press, 1998) for full documentation of this matter.

6 His wife’s family also included many witnesses.

disassociation seemed better since, as he understood it, it simply meant that he was no longer a member of the congregation. But it did not call for the rigid cutting off of relations that organizational policy required in cases of disfellowshipping⁷

Peter submitted his letter of resignation on March 18, 1981. It was read to the congregation. Although normal comment followed, inasmuch as Peter had been a Witness from childhood and had taken the lead for many years in local congregation activity, the letter seemed to clear the air since it calmly presented his reasons and expressed no animosity. With rare exception, Jehovah's Witnesses in Gadsden, on meeting up with Peter, treated him in a manner that was at least cordial. I think they would have kept on doing so had they been governed by their own sense of right and wrong. It seemed that a crisis situation had been averted.

Within six months the *Watchtower* magazine published articles changing the whole picture. Some commented to me, "They did everything but put your name and Peter Gregerson's in the magazine." I do not believe the situation in Gadsden was solely responsible for the articles. I do believe, however, that it did have some effect on the ones motivated to prepare these. What was the change made in these articles?

Back in 1974 the Governing Body assigned me to write articles on the treatment of disfellowshipped persons. (The Body had just made a decision that made this advisable.)⁸ Those articles, duly approved by the Body, greatly moderated the attitude that had prevailed up to that time, encouraged Witnesses to manifest a more merciful attitude in many areas of their contacts with disfellowshipped persons, reduced

7 I knew personally that the Governing Body had till then equated disassociation and disfellowshipment *only* in the case of persons entering politics or the military, *not* for a simple resignation from the congregation. I had, in fact, been assigned to undertake a revision of the *Aid to Answering Branch Office Correspondence* manual which spelled out all such policies and I knew that no such extreme position had been reached on disassociation. Persons who resigned were not treated the same as those disfellowshipped, with the sole exception that if they desired to re-enter the congregation they had to submit a request to that effect. After hearing that the Service Department had sent out some letters that, in effect, equated disassociation with disfellowshipment, I talked with a member of the Service Department Committee and pointed out that the matter had never been presented to the Governing Body and that any such action had to be of the Service Department's own doing (an example of the Department's occasional unauthorized "policy-making" actions). He acknowledged that nothing on this had come through from the Governing Body.

8 Two cases had come before the Body of disfellowshipped persons who wanted to attend meetings but needed assistance. One was a young girl living in a rural area in New England, the other a woman in a drug rehabilitation center in the Midwest. Neither could get to meetings without assistance as to transportation. The Governing Body's decision was that it would be acceptable to provide transportation in such cases.

the rigidity of policies governing dealings with a disfellowshipped family member.

The September 15, 1981, *Watchtower* not only reversed this, on some points it carried the matter backward to an even more rigid position than had existed previous to 1974. (An example of “tacking” backwards, this time to a point *behind* the starting place.)⁹

A major change made was with regard to any voluntarily disassociating themselves (as Peter Gregerson had done a few months previous). For the first time the policy was officially published that anyone doing this was to be treated in the same way as if he had been expelled from the congregation.¹⁰

When I read the material, viewing it against my background of experience on the Governing Body (and particularly in the light of my recent experiences with the Chairman’s Committee) I had little doubt as to where this would lead. I did not have long to wait.

What is now related is given in detail not because my own case is involved or because it is so unusual, but instead because it is so typical of what others experienced, the methods and actions of elders of Jehovah’s Witnesses in case after case of this kind. It is illustrative of the thinking and spirit inculcated in them, a thinking and spirit derived from a central source.

Though published with a September 15 date, the *Watchtower* magazine in question arrived over two weeks before that date. Within a few days, came a visit from a local elder of the East Gadsden Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Dan Gregerson, Peter’s youngest brother. He asked if he and a couple of other elders could come out and speak to me. I said that would be all right; what did they want to talk about? After some hesitation, he said first that it was to discuss my having made remarks of an adverse nature about the organization. When I inquired who was the source of such a claim, he said the person preferred to remain anonymous. (This ‘shooting of spears out of the fog’ is quite common and the one accused is supposed to take this all as quite normal and proper.)

9 The *Watchtower* of December 1, 1981, carried an article attempting to justify all the shifting back and forth on various doctrinal points on the Society’s part. It used the analogy of a boat tacking against the wind. The problem is that the shifting of teaching often brings them back virtually to the point where they began.

10 This was directed primarily toward those who resigned. While those entering politics or the military were classed as “disassociated,” this was not some voluntary action on their part, not on their request. It was an automatic action taken by the elders in accord with Society policy. So the new position dealt with those *voluntarily* withdrawing.

I asked him, however, if he did not think that Jesus' counsel at Matthew, chapter eighteen, verses 15 to 17, should apply (the counsel there being that one with a complaint against a brother should first go himself and talk with his brother about the problem)? Dan agreed it did apply. I suggested that as an elder he see the individual and recommend that he come and talk to me about the matter and thus apply Jesus' counsel. He replied that the person did not feel "qualified." I pointed out that that really was not at issue, that I had no interest in arguing with anyone, but that if I had disturbed someone I would appreciate that person's telling me personally so that I could apologize and set matters straight. (I still do not know of whom he was speaking.) Dan's reply was that I had to realize that the elders also had "a responsibility to protect the flock and watch out for the interests of the sheep." I agreed fully and said I was sure he realized that doing this certainly meant that elders should encourage everyone in the flock to hold carefully to God's Word and apply it in their lives. In this case, they could help the party involved to see the need to apply Jesus' counsel and come and speak with me, then I could know what had offended the person and make whatever apology was needed.

He said he would drop that point and went on to say that they wanted to discuss my "associations" with me. They would be welcome to do that, I said, and it was agreed that he and another elder would come two days later. Dan and an elder named Theotis French came. The conversation started with Dan's reading Second Corinthians, chapter thirteen, verses 7 to 9, and informing me that they were there to "readjust" my thinking in connection with the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*, particularly as regards my association with his brother, Peter Gregerson, now disassociated. Dan had been in a restaurant in August when Peter and I and our wives had a meal there.

I asked them if they realized they were right then on Peter's property, that in that sense he was my landlord. That I was also in his employ. They knew that.

I explained that, as in all matters, I was governed by conscience as regards my associations and I discussed Paul's counsel about the importance of conscience in his letter to the Romans, chapter fourteen. Whatever the Scriptures instructed, I would be happy to do, but I saw no evidence to support the view now adopted as to disassociated persons. What Scriptural support was there?

The conversation now followed an easily predictable course: Dan referred to First Corinthians, chapter five, in support of the position. I pointed out that the apostle there spoke of not associating with

persons called brothers who were fornicators, idolaters, revilers, drunkards and extortioners. I had no such persons among my associates and would not want them in my home. But surely they did not consider Peter Gregerson as included among that kind of people? Neither responded.

Dan then referred to the apostle John's words at First John, chapter two, verse 19: "They went out from us, but they were not of our sort; for if they had been of our sort, they would have remained with us." When asked what the context showed as to the kind of persons John spoke of, they acknowledged that he was speaking of "antichrists." I pointed out that the same was true in John's Second Letter, verses 7 to 11, which deals with association with such ones. I assured them that I would never fellowship with an antichrist, one who had rebelled against God and Christ, but that again I had none such among my acquaintances. Surely they were not saying that Peter Gregerson was an antichrist? Again no response.¹¹

This was, *actually*, the extent of the Scriptural "readjustment" that I received from these two shepherds of the flock. From that point on their only references were to the *Watchtower* magazine. Did I accept what it said on this subject, did I submit to the organization's direction? I stated that in the end the real question was what God's Word says on any matter, that some teachings are clearly solid, founded immovably on God's Word; other teachings can be subject to change.

In illustration, I asked Dan if he thought it possible that the organization could, at some future time, change its view as to the application of Jesus' expression about "this generation" in Matthew, chapter twenty-four? (I did not tell them that Governing Body members Schroeder, Klein and Suiter had in fact suggested a change that would have moved the start of that "generation" from 1914 up to 1957.) Dan's reply was, "If the organization sees fit to change it at some future time, then I will accept it." While not a direct answer, that indicated he recognized the possibility of a change. I then asked him if he thought the organization could possibly change as regards the teaching that Jesus Christ gave his life as a ransom for mankind? He just looked at me. I said I was sure that he did not think that could take place, for that teaching was solidly based on Scripture. The other teaching was a "current understanding," subject to change, certainly not on the same level with the teaching of the ransom sacrifice.

¹¹ Dan acknowledged that he had never made the effort to speak to his brother, Peter, about Peter's differences of viewpoint, although Dan was fully aware of them.

I viewed the material in the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower* and its prohibitions regarding association with disassociated persons in the same light.

Dan now began speaking of the “need to be humble” in accepting God’s direction. I could wholeheartedly agree to that and said I was sure they would also agree that those who preach humility should be the first in exemplifying it.

Again to illustrate, the example was given them of a group of people in a room, conversing. One person expresses his views very emphatically on a variety of matters. When he finishes, another person in the room comments, saying he agrees wholeheartedly with the initial speaker on several points; however, he feels differently on a couple of them, giving his reasons. At this the first individual becomes incensed and calls on the group to expel this person from the room as unfit company—because he did not agree with him on *every* point. Who, I asked, is the one needing to learn humility? Again, no response. The conversation ended not long thereafter and they left.

Peter visited me that evening to find out the results. He was very sorry about the position taken toward me and knew to what it could lead. He said he wanted me to know that if I thought it advisable not to have any further association with him that he would understand.

I reminded him of an incident that took place a year and a half earlier one evening shortly before I went to Brooklyn in May, 1980, for my final session with the Governing Body. He and I were alone in his car and I told him that Cynthia and I had talked things over and decided it would be better not to return to Alabama after the session, but instead go to the home of members of Cynthia’s family. I said that I did not know what might come of the meeting, perhaps “the worst,” and I did not want to create problems for him and his family.¹² We felt there was less likelihood that problems would be made for my wife’s family if we went there. He replied that they very much wanted us to return, were counting on it. I told him we appreciated that greatly, but that he had a large family—wife, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, grandchildren and in-laws, all Witnesses—and that if disfellowshipped, my returning could result in considerable difficulty and unpleasantness for them on the part of the organization.

His response was, “I realize that, and don’t think I haven’t thought a lot about it. But we’ve talked it over among ourselves and we’ve crossed that bridge. We want you to come back no matter what.”

12 Peter at that time had not yet disassociated himself. His disassociation came nearly a year later.

It would be difficult to say how much those words had meant to me at that particular time. Now the situation was the other way around and I now told Peter that I did not see how I could do any less than he had done for me. I could not be party to something that labeled a man wicked who had simply acted according to conscience, out of concern for truth and for the interests of others, as he had done.

After the “readjustment” meeting with the two elders of the East Gadsden Congregation, nothing further was said to me until the arrival of Circuit Overseer Wesley Benner, some weeks later. He arranged to come to my home with Dan Gregerson. Tom Gregerson, also a brother of Peter and the second of the four sons of the Gregerson family, was also present at his own request.

The discussion followed the same predictable pattern, except that the Circuit Overseer was inclined to interrupt my statements to the point that I finally had to request that, as a guest in my home, he at least wait until I had finished an expression before breaking in. The “readjustment” was once more based on the *Watchtower*, not on Scripture. Again, when asked if they really considered Peter Gregerson to be a “wicked” man of the kind described at First Corinthians, chapter 5, or an “antichrist” as described by the apostle John, neither had any comment.

I drew their attention to Romans, chapter fourteen, where the apostle stressed the need to be true to conscience, that anyone who does something while doubting that it is approved of God thereby sins, since “everything that is not out of faith is sin.” Since the Scripture states that, “Anyone pronouncing the wicked one righteous and anyone pronouncing the righteous one wicked—even both of them are detestable to Jehovah,” I could not conscientiously violate that principle by viewing or treating Peter Gregerson as a wicked person, when all I knew about him told me otherwise.¹³

Benner’s response was that, if I had to be guided by my conscience, so did the elders have to be guided by theirs. That if this was my position then “they would have to take action accordingly.” (Evidently the conscience of the elders did not allow for respecting the conscience of another man, showing tolerance.) What kind of “action” was meant was made quite clear by his further expression. He said he simply viewed himself as one who conveyed the things provided by the organization. Quoting his own words, he said, “I parrot what the Governing Body says.” This was stated with evident pride,

13 Proverbs 17:15.

for what reasons I could not understand. I have never viewed being a parrot as an achievement of any great merit.

Not long after this the conversation ended and they left. Tom Gregerson shook his head in disbelief, saying the experience had been revealing but depressing; that he would not have believed that men would say things such as he had heard.

By the first of November the same judicial machinery that had functioned in Brooklyn, began functioning in Gadsden. Phone calls asking one thing after another came from the elders. I was advised that a judicial committee would meet with me.

I had been planning to write to the Governing Body to submit my resignation to membership in the Society's corporations. (I had been a voting member of both the Pennsylvania and the New York corporations for several years.).¹⁴ Along with informing the Body that I was resigning from such membership, on November 5, I wrote:

Locally, certain elders have taken the information in the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower* as authorization to demand a change in my relationship with the man on whose property I live and for whom I work, Peter Gregerson. They state that, since he has disassociated himself, I should view him as among those with whom one should not eat--wicked persons and antichrists--and that failure to conform to this position requires disfellowshipping. Approaching 60, having no financial resources, I am in no position to move or to change my employment. So I would very much appreciate knowing if the intent of your statements in that issue of the magazine is truly as they present it, namely that my accepting an invitation from my landlord and employer to eat with him is grounds for disfellowshipping. If, instead, they have exceeded the intent of what was published, some counsel of moderation would grant me relief from a situation that is potentially oppressive. I will appreciate whatever clarification you can give, whether directly or through one of your departments.

That same day a phone call came from the elders. Their calls had been so numerous and the approach so unbrotherly that my wife and I both began to feel emotionally upset every time we heard the phone ring. I instructed my wife that if the elders phoned and I was not there that she should inform them that anything they had to say to put it in writing. So, she now passed this information on. The next day the appointed judicial committee wrote, the letter arriving November 10, 1981.

Many of Jehovah's Witnesses find it incredible that I was actually disfellowshipped because of eating a meal with a man, Peter

¹⁴ That membership continued after I left the headquarters. Both in 1980 and 1981 I received the usual "Proxies" for voting at the annual meeting. The first year I mailed the proxy in, but in 1981 I could not find it in myself to do so, particularly in view of the material being published in the society's magazines.

Gregerson. Some insist that this could not be the case. I believe the correspondence that now developed makes the matter plain. The first letter, sent by the judicial committee, was dated November 6, 1981.

2822 Fields Avenue
East Gadsden, AL 35903
November 6, 1981

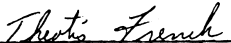
Raymond V. Franz
Route 4, Box 440F
Gadsden, AL 35904

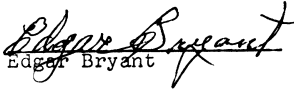
Dear Brother Franz:

As per your instructions given us by Sister Franz on Thursday, November 5, this is to ask you to meet with a judicial committee on Saturday, November 14, at 2:00 p.m. at the East Gadsden Kingdom Hall. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss with you your continued association with a person disassociated from the congregation.

If you are unable to meet with us on the above date, please contact one of us to arrange another meeting.

Your brothers,


Theotis French


Edgar Bryant


Dan Gregerson

This letter makes clear that one charge, and one charge only, formed the basis for their "judicial action," namely, my "association with a disassociated person."

In my written response, I pointed out to the Gadsden elders that, I had written to the Governing Body for clarification of the meaning of the material published in the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*, and wondered why they had given no consideration to this, evidently being unwilling to allow time for me to receive a reply. I also pointed out the unreasonableness of having Dan Gregerson serve on the judicial committee when he had already presented himself as my accuser. I expressed the hope that the judicial committee might be

enlarged to make more likely a fair and impartial discussion of this new policy and its application.¹⁵

I sent this letter and a week later, on Friday, November 20, when I arrived home from work, my wife told me that Elder Theotis French had phoned. They would be meeting as a judicial committee the very next day, Saturday afternoon, he said. They had sent me a letter to that effect.

In that afternoon's mail there was a notice of a certified letter. I hurriedly drove to the Post Office and was able to obtain the letter before closing time. The letter was dated November 19, 1981.

2822 Fields Avenue
East Gadsden, AL 35903
November 19, 1981

Raymond V. Franz
Route 4, Box 440-F
Gadsden, AL 35904

Dear Brother Franz:

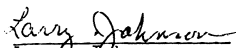
As a body of elders, we have reviewed your letter and would like to respond. First, we would like to let you know that the body of elders had been made aware that you had mailed a letter to the Watchtower Society and we had determined that we should proceed with the judicial committee hearing. Second, in view of Dan Gregerson's being an accuser the body of elders has decided to replace him on the judicial committee with Larry Johnson.

Third, there are persons other than Dan who could serve as witnesses regarding the matter in question, but we feel that it is not necessary to disclose their names in view of your acknowledging that you have been fellowshipping with persons who are disassociated from the congregation.

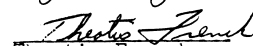
Fourth, the body of elders has determined that three elders will serve on the committee. We would like to assure you that the brothers designated have not prejudged you and that they will approach the meeting objectively.

Finally, Brother Franz, the appointed judicial committee would like to schedule a meeting with you on Saturday, November 21, at 4:00 p.m. at the Kingdom Hall. If you are unable to attend we request that you notify one of the brothers shown below to arrange a more convenient meeting.

Your brothers,


Larry Johnson


Edgar Bryant


Theotis French

15 For the reader's information my letter is presented in full in the Appendix.

The letter was not merely formal. It might as well have come from some civil court, for, although signed “Your brothers,” it conveyed none of the warmth of a Christian brotherhood. Cold legalism dominated its tone. Yet, unless I had already been prejudged (which they affirmed was not the case), there surely should have been a brotherly spirit expressed, a sense of compassionate concern for the life interests of the man to whom they wrote. Setting aside my entire adult life’s service among Jehovah’s Witnesses or my having served on their Governing Body or my age and existing circumstances—setting all that aside, they still should have manifested some measure of loving interest, even if they viewed me as ‘*one of the least of Christ’s brothers.*’ (See Matthew chapter twenty-five, verse 40.) I do not believe the unfeeling spirit expressed originated with these men. It had another source. The letter was typical.

My wife had already informed Elder French in the phone conversation that we had guests arriving from out of state on Saturday and that there was no way to communicate with them or change our plans.

The following Monday, November 23, I again wrote to express my dismay at the hurried and inconsiderate manner in which the judicial committee was proceeding.

That very afternoon a phone call came from Elder French stating that the judicial committee would meet two days later, on Wednesday evening (November 25) and make their decision whether I was present or not. I decided that it was useless to mail the letter I had written to them. They seemed to be in an enormous hurry, a “rush to judgment.” I do not personally think that this was of their own initiative. As the chairman of the committee later acknowledged, they were in communication with the Society’s representative, Circuit Overseer Wesley Benner. Many of their expressions and attitudes reflected remarkably those made by him in my home. He, in turn, was almost certainly in touch with the Service Department of the Brooklyn headquarters, and that department was—beyond any doubt—in communication with the Governing Body. This is not unusual; it is the usual way in which things work. The methods employed were not surprising to me; they were simply depressing.

When Wednesday (November 25) came, I decided that, rather than be tried *in absentia*, I would go to their meeting which Elder French said would be held “Wednesday evening.” That afternoon I called the home of one of the committee members to ascertain the exact time. The man’s wife said that he was already at the Kingdom Hall.

I phoned the Hall and found that they were going to have the meeting in the afternoon—to them the “evening” apparently meant any time after 3 p.m. I told them that I had not understood that, that no specific time had been given me and asked if they could postpone their meeting till after 6 p.m. They agreed.

Tom Gregerson had said that he wanted to accompany me and I now phoned him. On arriving at the Kingdom Hall we went into the conference room where the judicial committee, Elders French (chairman), Bryant and Johnson were. They informed Tom that he could not be present except to give testimony. He said he wanted to be present since about thirty-five Jehovah’s Witnesses worked for the company (Warehouse Groceries) of which he was an officer. He wanted to know just what position was being taken on this issue. Their answer was still, No.

After his departure, the committee opened the hearing and called in the witnesses. There were two: Dan Gregerson and Mrs. Robert Daley.

Dan spoke first. He said he had seen me in the Western Steak House along with Peter Gregerson (and our wives). This was the essence of his testimony. When he finished, I asked him when this was and he acknowledged that it was in the summer and hence before the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*, with its new ruling that called for treating anyone voluntarily disassociating himself the same as though he were disfellowshipped. I told the committee that unless they believed in *ex post facto* laws, Dan’s testimony was irrelevant.

The other witness was then asked to present her testimony. She testified to essentially the same thing as Dan, except that the occasion in the restaurant was after the publishing of the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*.

I readily acknowledged that I had indeed had a meal with Peter at the time she referred to. I also asked her if it was not the case that she and her husband (an elder in the East Gadsden congregation) had similarly eaten a meal with Peter? (Peter had gone to Morrison’s Cafeteria one day and found himself in line right behind Elder Daley and his wife. Since, previous to his present marriage, Daley had been Peter’s stepfather, having married Peter’s mother after his father’s death, Peter now nudged Daley and Daley turned, began talking with Peter and asked Peter to sit with them and the three conversed throughout the meal. This, too, was after the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower’s* appearance.)

The witness became quite excited at this and said that while that was true, afterward she had told some of the “Sisters” that she knew it was not right and would never do it again. (Later, after the hearing, I mentioned this to Peter and he said, “But they ate with me twice! Another day I went into Morrison’s and they were already seated and when they saw me they waved to me to come and sit with them.” The witness said nothing of this second occasion, which was unknown to me at the time of the hearing.)

That was the absolute sum and substance of the “evidence” against me. The two witnesses left.

The judicial committee then began asking me about my position toward the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*. I inquired why they had not been willing to wait for the Governing Body’s response to my inquiry on this, written on November 5? The chairman, Theotis French, brought his hand down on the September 15 *Watchtower* open before him and said, “This is all the authority we need.”

I asked if they would not feel more confident if they had confirmation of their viewpoint from the Governing Body? He repeated that ‘they had to go by what was published,’ and that, anyway ‘they had called Brooklyn on the matter.’ This was the first I had heard anything about such a call. Evidently that was why, when I spoke to the committee chairman, Elder French, on the phone two days earlier he had said that the body of elders “did not feel it was necessary” to wait for the Governing Body to answer my letter! They followed the same secretive course followed earlier by the Chairman’s Committee and apparently did not feel any need whatsoever to let me know that they had already communicated by telephone with the Brooklyn headquarters.

I asked if they spoke with someone on the Governing Body. The answer was, No, that they talked with a member of the Service Department. What had they been told? French said they were told, “Nothing has changed and you can go ahead.”

French said that his understanding was that “the Society has taken a hard look at the previous position [in the 1974 *Watchtower*] and they are now going back to the way it was before.” (This is basically the way Circuit Overseer Benner expressed himself in my home.) Theotis went on to say that “the *Watchtower* helps us to see where to draw a fine line” in these matters. Elder Edgar Bryant added, “We are all trying to put ourselves in line with what the *Watchtower* requires.”

Up to this point none of the three men had made any reference to the Bible. I stressed that this was my guide. On what *Scriptural* basis should I consider Peter Gregerson as a person unfit to eat with?

Elder Johnson turned to First Corinthians, chapter five, began reading a couple of verses, hesitated and stopped, making no application of the information. I asked each member of the committee individually, if he himself could say he honestly believed Peter Gregerson was the kind of person described in such texts, including John's writings about "antichrists"? Theotis French reacted with some agitation, saying 'it wasn't up to him to make a judgment of the man,' that 'he didn't know everything about Peter so as to make such a judgment.' I asked him how, then, they could possibly ask me to make such a judgment and be governed by it, when they themselves were not willing to do so?

His response was, "We didn't come here to have you teach us, Brother Franz." I assured him that I was not there to "teach" them, but that my whole course of life as a Christian was being put in question, was at issue, and I felt I had a right to express myself. Neither Edgar Bryant nor Larry Johnson would make any clear statement as to how they viewed Peter Gregerson, eating a meal with whom was now being treated as a "criminal" act.

The chairman then said he saw no purpose in further discussion. Tom Gregerson was called in to see if he had any testimony to give. When he asked what effect this *Watchtower* position would have on Witness employees in his company who periodically might travel with, or attend a meal in company with, a disassociated person, Larry Johnson said they were not there to answer that question, Tom could bring the question up at another time.¹⁶ Tom replied that he had been asking the question for some time, had asked the Circuit Overseer, and still had no answer. There was no response, the meeting concluded and we left. The judicial committee remained behind to discuss the "evidence."

About a week later, the phone rang and Larry Johnson informed me that the committee's decision was for disfellowshipping. I had seven days from the date of his phone call in which to appeal their decision.

I wrote them a lengthy letter, my "appeal" letter. I felt that whatever I had to say it would be best to put it in writing. What is spoken can be easily changed, twisted or simply forgotten; what is written remains and is not so easily ignored. My experience at the previous hearing made it obvious that a very unhealthy climate prevailed and that even in an appeal hearing the likelihood of any calm, reasoned Scriptural discussion of matters was quite remote.

16 Tom Gregerson was at that time the president of Warehouse Groceries.

In the letter I called their attention to the Society's published counsel that elders on a judicial committee should "weigh matters carefully," that they should not look for "rigid rules for guidance," but "think in terms of principles," that they should "be sure the counsel is based solidly on God's Word," should "take sufficient time and endeavor to reach the heart of the person," should "discuss the application of the scriptures that apply and be sure that he [the one accused] understands." That was what was said; it was not what was being done (yet what was being done was known to the ones responsible for the publishing of that same counsel). The essence of my position is perhaps summed up in these two paragraphs:

Perhaps it may be said that I have not expressed repentance for having eaten with Peter Gregerson. To express repentance I need first to be satisfied that doing so is a sin before God. The only means for providing such conviction must rightly come from God's Word, which alone is inspired and unfailingly reliable. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) My understanding from the Scriptures is that loyalty to God and to his Word is of supreme importance and supercedes any other loyalty or whatever kind. (Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29) My understanding also is that it is not for me or any other human or group of humans to add to that Word, under pain of being "proved a liar" or even receiving divine plagues. (Proverbs 30:5, 6; Revelation 22:18, 19) I cannot take such scriptural warnings lightly. In view of all the scriptural admonition against judging others, I have a healthy fear of setting myself (or any human or group of humans) up as legislator and feel compelled to let God's Word alone do such judging. To do that I need to be certain that I am not simply following some humanly devised standard that poses as a divine standard but which is in fact uninspired, unsupported by God's Word. I do not wish to be guilty of presumption and impertinence in judging someone whom God by his own expressed Word has not so judged.--Romans 14:4, 10-12; James 4:11, 12; see also Commentary on the Letter of James pages 161 to 168.

I assure you that if you will help me to see from the Scriptures that the act of eating with Peter Gregerson is a sin I will humbly repent of such sin before God. Those who have talked with me thus far have not done this but have cited the above-mentioned magazine as their "authority" (the term used by the chairman of the judicial committee). My understanding is that all authority within the Christian congregation must derive from and be solidly based on the Word of God. Proverbs 17:15 states that "Anyone pronouncing the wicked one righteous and anyone pronouncing the righteous one wicked--even both of them are something detestable to Jehovah." I have no desire to be detestable to God and hence am very concerned about this matter.

I closed making yet another appeal that they honor my request to wait for a reply from the Governing Body to my letter of November 5.¹⁷

By now, however, I had little doubt but that the Governing Body had no intention of answering my letter. One month had already

17 See the Appendix for the letter in its entirety.

passed and they were well aware of my circumstances and how critically some statement from them was needed. From my years of experience on the Body I knew that, though preferring to remain in the background, they were very definitely kept informed of every development in my case. The Service Department would be expected to pass on all information, and it in turn would be supplied with reports from the Circuit Overseer. Both the actions and the expressions made by the local elders indicated that procedures were orchestrated from the center of authority, through the Circuit Overseer. The center of authority, the Governing Body, was willing to communicate with those who were judging me, doing so through their Service Department, but they were not willing to respond to my petition written to them, not even to acknowledge receipt of the letter.

So, on December 11, seven weeks after my initial letter, I again wrote the Governing Body, sending them a copy of my “appeal letter” and reminding them of my letter to them dated November 5.¹⁸

Exactly seven days after submitting my appeal letter, Elder French phoned to tell me an appeal committee had been formed, naming the members selected. Three days passed and another phone call came; he was informing me that the appeal committee would meet with me on Sunday. I told him I had written him asking for the specific names of the committee members (he had only given me family names of a couple of them) and said I would be asking for a change in the committee membership. When I inquired why these particular men had been selected, his reply was that Wesley Benner, the Society’s representative, had selected them.

Those he had chosen as appeal committee members were Willie Anderson, Earl Parnell and Rob Dibble. In view of the fact that the principal charge against me was my association with Peter Gregerson I found this selection incredible.

Every one of these men was very unlikely to show objectivity where Peter was concerned.

As I pointed out in a letter to the Gadsden elders (although they themselves already knew it), Willie Anderson had been at the head of a committee that created a considerable stir in Gadsden in its handling of issues involving a large number of young people in the local congregations. Peter Gregerson had appealed to the Brooklyn headquarters to send in a review committee and when this was done the committee headed by Willie Anderson was found to have been excessive in a number of its actions. This had a noticeable effect on

18 See the Appendix.

the relationship between Elder Anderson and Peter Gregerson thereafter.

Circuit Overseer Benner's selection of Earl Parnell was even harder to fathom. One of Peter Gregerson's daughters had been married to a son of Elder Parnell but had recently obtained a divorce from him. The strained relations between the two sets of parents was obvious; Circuit Overseer Benner knew of the divorce action and, one would think, would also have been sensitive enough to have realized how inappropriate it would be to assign Elder Parnell to a case in which Peter Gregerson was a central figure.

Similarly with Rob Dibble. He was Elder Parnell's son-in-law, his wife being the sister of the Parnell son recently divorced by Peter Gregerson's daughter.

As I wrote to the Gadsden elders, I found it difficult to think of a committee of three men that would have less to recommend it for an unbiased, objective hearing. (The only way I could see any logic to the selection would be if an adverse decision was somehow being deliberately sought.) In my letter I requested that a totally different appeal committee be selected.¹⁹

The same day I wrote these letters (December 20), yet another phone call came from Elder French. The appeal committee wanted to inform me that they would meet on the next day, Monday, and 'would hold the hearing whether I was present or not.' I told Elder French I had written requesting a change in the committee and had written to the Brooklyn headquarters as well. I delivered copies of these letters directly to his home the next day, Monday.

Two days later, Wednesday, December 23, the following note came by registered mail:

RAY FRANZ,
 THE MEETING THAT WAS SET FOR THURSDAY
 DEC. 24 AT 7:00 PM AT THE EAST GADSDEN
 CONGREGATION HAS BEEN CHANGED, TO DEC. 28th
 1981 AT 7:00 PM AT THE EAST GADSDEN Cong.
 Would VERY MUCH LIKE TO SEE YOU THERE.

Thomas French

¹⁹ See the Appendix.

No one had said anything to me about a proposed meeting on Thursday. But the above note was my official notice of a December 28 meeting, Monday.

During the two days after delivering the letters to Elder French's home, I learned that he was trying to obtain information to support a new and totally different charge.

Mark Gregerson, another of Peter's brothers, informed Peter that Theotis French had called long distance to Mark's home in Florida where he had moved from Alabama. Elder French spoke to Mark's wife and asked if she could recall ever hearing me make any remarks against the organization. She told him she never had heard me make remarks against anybody, including the organization. Why did he want to know? He replied that he was 'just seeking information.' He did not ask to speak with her husband.

This, too, brought memories of the nightmarish situation I had experienced a year and a half before, and of the conduct of the Chairman's Committee of the Governing Body then.

Approximately seven weeks had passed since I first wrote the Governing Body asking for an expression on the material in the September 15, 1981, *Watchtower*, telling them why it was of serious importance to me. I had now written them two more times, petitioning them to make some expression. They did not see fit to answer or even to acknowledge *any* of this correspondence.

Is it unbelievable that the leadership of a worldwide organization with millions of members, one that claims to be the outstanding example of adherence to Christian principles, could conduct itself in such manner? No, not if one is familiar with the attitude prevalent among its leadership. I have personally been witness to similar ignoring of letters when the Governing Body felt it was not to their advantage to provide an answer. They clearly felt so in my case.

From the beginning I had felt no doubt as to the ultimate goal of all that was being done. I was thoroughly sickened by the whole conduct of the affair, what I can only describe as a narrow-minded approach, an obvious determination to find something, no matter how trivial or petty, that could serve as a basis for bringing adverse action against me. So I wrote my last letter, dated December 23, 1981, sending copies to the Governing Body and to the East Gadsden Congregation Body of Elders.

December 23, 1981

East Gadsden Congregation Body of Elders
Gadsden AL

Dear Brothers:

By means of this letter I am withdrawing my appeal of the decision to disfellowship me. My reason for doing so is as follows:

On the basis of testimony that I had eaten a meal on one occasion with Peter Gregerson since the publication of the September 15, 1981, Watchtower, the initial judicial committee decided to disfellowship me. That forty years of full-time service could be discounted on such a petty basis indicates to me that there is no real concern to take into account my conscientious feelings, expressed in detail in my letter of December 8, 1981, nor concern to show me from Scripture wherein I have erred.

Additionally, the selection of the membership of the appeal committee, as made by the circuit overseer, gives no real basis for expecting a fair consideration in my case. The selection made, as pointed out in my letter of December 20, 1981, was of three persons who are obviously among those least likely to be able to handle my case in an objective way, free from the influence of personal feeling. I can think of no justification for the selection made, and believe it makes a travesty of justice.

There seems to be no evidence to indicate that the Governing Body is desirous of providing any aid or relief for me, since my letter of November 5, 1981, has now gone approximately seven weeks with no response to me. While the chairman of the initial judicial committee has stated that he called the Service Department on more than one occasion, the conversations give no indication of relief since, according to the chairman, they said that 'nothing has changed and to go ahead.'

Finally, I now know that effort is being made, by phone, even by long distance, to try to find something to use against me in an effort to incriminate me. This has been done in the last few days, since my turning in my letter of December 20, 1981, requesting a different appeal committee. Even though the person contacted has never made any complaint about me, the request is made to see if they can remember anything I said that might be viewed as improper. Surely if I were responsible for making a disturbance in the congregation, one of a genuinely perverse or malicious kind, it would never be necessary to resort to such methods to substantiate such a charge.

East Gadsden Congregation Body of Elders
December 23, 1981, Page II

The continuation of such method can only result in further damaging of my good name and character. It is an open invitation to suspicion and gossip.

My feelings are as those of the apostle at Galatians 6:17: "Henceforth let no one be making trouble for me, for I ^{AM} carrying on my body the brand marks of a slave of Jesus." For the past eight weeks my wife and I have been subjected to much mental anguish, not merely by the repeated visits and more than a dozen phone calls (to the point where the ring of the phone became an unpleasant sound), but more especially by the attitude manifested. Now there is added to all this the knowledge that a surreptitious inquiry is being carried on that is clearly adverse to my rightful interests. I experienced similar treatment last year in New York, where similar efforts were made for one month--and not one word was said to me during that time to indicate to me that my conduct was in any way under accusation, this despite the fact that a clear opportunity was given by me for those conducting the inquiry to express such. I have no desire to undergo similar mistreatment again, particularly since there is nothing to indicate that the truth of the matter can be made known in such a way as to remove the unwarranted stain produced. That must rest in God's hands. --Matthew 10:26.

My withdrawal of my appeal should in no way be construed as an acknowledgment of guilt or an acceptance of the disfellowshipping decision as being in any sense proper, just or Scriptural. Again with the apostle I can say: "Now to me it is a very trivial matter that I should be examined by you or by a human tribunal. Even I do not examine myself. For I am not conscious of anything against myself. Yet by this I am not proved righteous, but he that examines me is Jehovah." (1 Corinthians 4:3, 4) My confidence in his righteous judgment is implicit and my confidence in the rightness and truthfulness of his Word is only strengthened by what I have experienced. And as long as I have life I will endeavor to make the truth of that Word known to others for their blessing and God's praise.

As for my brothers among Jehovah's Witnesses, I can say that the good will of my heart and my supplication to God are on their behalf. I have labored conscientiously since 1938 in their spiritual interests and I assure you that if I saw any hope that my subjecting myself to further trial would result in benefit to them I would gladly endure such.--Compare Romans 9:1-3.

Respectfully,



There was little doubt in my mind that those directing the whole affair had begun to feel that the "evidence" used to disfellowship me—one meal with Peter Gregerson—might appear rather weak. Rather than seek to provide the evidence from God's Word (demonstrating that my act was truly sinful) which I had requested in my appeal letter, they tried to build a stronger "case" by soliciting adverse testimony. I saw no good in further submission to this.

Eight days later, a phone call came from Larry Johnson informing me that they had received my letter and that in view of my withdrawal of my appeal, the disfellowshipping action taken by the first committee was counted as remaining in force.

That the call came on the day it did, seemed rather appropriate. I had been baptized on January 1, 1939, and exactly forty-three years later, on December 31, 1981, I experienced excommunication—the only charge serving as the basis for this being testimony that I had eaten a meal with a disassociated person.

Do I personally believe that this was the true reason for their taking the action they did? No. I believe it was simply a technicality used to achieve an objective. The end justified the means in their minds. That an organization would make use of a technicality of such pettiness, to my mind betrays a remarkably low standard for conduct and a great insecurity.

Based upon my past experience on the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, upon the conduct of its Chairman's Committee during the spring of 1980, and also upon the material published from that time until the present, my personal belief is that it was considered "advantageous" that I be disfellowshipped so as to eliminate what they considered a "threat." If so, then this too, I think, reveals a very great sense of insecurity—particularly so for a worldwide organization that claims to be God's chosen instrument, backed up by the Sovereign power of the universe, the reigning King's appointee as supervisor of all his earthly interests. This would surely *not* be the action of an organization fully at ease with its own teachings, calmly confident that what it presents is truth, solidly supported by God's Word.

Nor is it the action of an organization having genuine confidence in its body of adherents, confidence that the instruction and training given have produced mature Christian men and women who do not need some maternal *magisterium* to prescribe what they shall read, discuss or think about, but who are instead capable of discerning for themselves between truth and error, through their knowledge of the Word of God.

The action *is* typical, however, of many religious organizations of the past, all the way back to the first century, organizations that felt a compelling need to eliminate anything that, *in their view*, threatened to diminish their authority over others.

In his book, *A History of Christianity*, scholar Paul Johnson writes of methods employed during the dark period of religious intolerance which produced the Inquisition, and says:

Convictions of thought-crimes being difficult to secure, the Inquisition used procedures banned in other courts, and so

contravened town charters, written and customary laws, and virtually every aspect of established jurisprudence.²⁰

The methods employed regularly by judicial committees formed of Witness elders would be considered unworthy of the court systems of any enlightened country. The same withholding of critically important information (such as the names of hostile witnesses) also the use of anonymous informers, and similar inquisitorial tactics, described by historian Johnson, have been employed with great frequency by these men in dealing with those not totally in agreement with the “channel,” “the organization.” What was true back then, is true in the vast majority of cases now, as Johnson puts it:

The object, quite simply, was to produce convictions at any cost; only thus, it was thought, could heresy be quenched.²¹

Again, I do not think the coldness or the hardness, the aloof, superior attitude experienced, is owing to the normal personality of most of the men involved. I believe it owes very definitely to the teaching that allows an organization to make claims of exclusive authority and unapproachable superiority that are both immodest and unfounded. That concept deserves not only to be questioned, it deserves to be exposed for the hurtful, God-dishonoring doctrine that it is. The October 15, 1995 *Watchtower* article “Watch Out for Self-Righteousness” said:

When a Christian displays a spirit of superiority because of his God-given abilities, privileges, or authority, he is in fact robbing God of the glory and the credit that only He deserves. The Bible clearly admonishes the Christian “not to think more of himself than it is necessary to think.” It urges us: “Be minded the same way toward others as to yourselves; do not be minding lofty things, but be led along with the lowly things. Do not become discreet in your own eyes.”—Romans 12:3, 16.

What is true of an individual is equally true of a collective body. Reading the above, one cannot but think of the apostle’s words to those who viewed themselves as in a superior relation to God:

You are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself?—Romans 2:17-21, *NRSV*.

20 Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 253.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 253, 254.