

# APOLOGIA

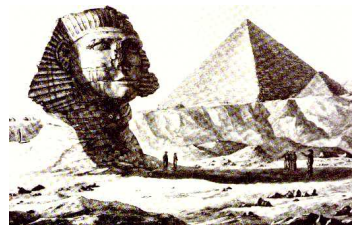
... always be ready to give a defense [Greek, *apologia*]  
to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ... I PETER 3:15

## Paradise & Paradosis

### THE WATCHTOWER AND REMEMBRANCE

*Remember the days of old,  
consider the years of all  
generations. Ask your father,  
and he will inform you, and  
your elders, and they will tell  
you.* Deut. 32:7

**F**ACED with dwindling memberships, local chapters of the Royal Canadian Legion wonder aloud not only how they can keep their doors open much longer, but also how, with the dying off of our World War II veterans, the memory of their sacrifice will be kept alive at all. With a parallel fear, Steven Spielberg, the world's most successful commercial film producer, is spending much of his personal resources on a massive project which involves recording on video the recollections of Holocaust survivors -- before that generation too has died off. Is it really true that we could forget WW2 and the Holocaust



### How do you hide a pyramid?

Unlike the nearby Sphinx, which till recently was quite buried under the desert, neither sand nor 5000 years have been able to hide the Great Pyramid of Cheops. Yet till very recently *The Watchtower* has been able to cover completely one of the more scandalous aspects of its past. The *Watchtower Publications Index 1930-1985* contains not one reference to the Pyramid's importance in the Watchtower 'good news' for 50 years. Since this cover-up has been exposed widely by ex-JW's, the Watchtower's new 'history', *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (1993), has admitted what the Society's silence so long concealed -- that 'God's organization' preached that the Pyramid of Cheops was 'God's stone witness'. But even now, several of the Watchtower's early emphases remain hidden from most JW's (e.g. the need for the 144,000's sacrifices to complete the atonement).

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in a mere 2 generations? The success of neo-Nazi propagandists suggests the fears of Spielberg and our veterans are not without foundation. As the wise man said many centuries ago about our historical apathy:

There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still ... For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. ECCLESIASTES 1:11; 2:16

This is not a paean or hymn to progress, but a lamentation. The biblical writers see the best solution to defective -- or selective -- memory as the memory of the **community**. Israel was not only to remember her wars and her war dead, she was also to remember ALL the deeds of her God. Protecting the nation against memory lapse or distortion was **collective** memory.

### Credibility and historical continuity

Even before the nation of Israel had an Old Testament, its past was kept alive by oral transmission. And that generation to generation transmission was not just the trust of the priesthood:

I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generations to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He ... appointed a law in Israel, which He commissioned our fathers, that they should teach them to their children; that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they might arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. PSALM 78:1-7 (NASB)

Even without the written record completed much later (our Old Testament), the community memory of Israel would keep intact the record of God's dealings. This was the larger application of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, "Honour your father and your mother ...", in that

the most important of family heirlooms was the faith of its fathers. While the method of oral transmission was not infallible, the sheer quantity of family-transmitted traditions would weigh against distortion. One might even add that the possibility of distortion, especially at the early stage, would be much greater if we had to rely on a written record, for such records would be very expensive to reproduce in ancient times, and therefore the exclusive possession of the few. For example, the fact that over a million witnesses saw the events of the exodus and the entrance into Canaan gave a sureness to the historical memory that even an early manuscript of the Torah couldn't offer.

Israel, particularly after the exile, seemed to learn the value of its tradition. Malachi, the last of the prophets, warned them to keep alive the law of Moses, and the last Old Testament word to Israel is of Elijah's coming to "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Mal.4:4-6). God had no blessing for a nation that forgot the tradition of its fathers.

The hesitation of many Protestants to place any second authority beside Scripture finds its extreme application in the position of the cults toward tradition (Greek *paradosis*). Ask the average Jehovah's Witness what the Bible says about tradition and likely the first text he will cite is Matthew 15:6, "you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition". But not all the New Testament references to *paradosis* are negative. Paul, for example, urged the Thessalonians to "stand firm, and hold fast the traditions [Gk *paradoseis*] you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle" (2 Thess. 2:15). Thus both written *and* oral transmission of the apostolic teachings would protect them against heretical innovations. Later in the same letter, Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to withdraw themselves from every brother not walking "after the tradition [Gk *paradosin*] he received from us" (3:6). Paul also commended the Corinthians for holding "firmly to the traditions [Gk *paradoseis*], just as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor.11:2). Again Paul is talking about the oral instruction he gave them during 18 months ministry in

Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). Near the end of that same letter he reminds them, "I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you" (15:1,2). Even Paul didn't have the authority to change the gospel he had received (v.3). Indeed, he pronounced a double anathema (curse) on those who attempted to alter the gospel he had preached to the Galatians (Gal.1:6-9). An apostle couldn't change the gospel -- even an angel couldn't change it! And the protection of Paul's churches was the faithful transmission -- oral at first, later also written -- of the traditions of the apostles.

### **The Watchtower rejection of tradition -- even its own!**

That the Watchtower and other cults should reject the universal tradition of the church, which, in creeds still recited by Christians Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant, has survived 1900 years intact, is best explained by Witnesses' failure to comprehend the balanced biblical view of *paradosis*. When Christ criticized the Scribes and Pharisees for holding fast to traditions, he was speaking of the "precepts of men" (Matt.15:9). These human doctrines were preferred to the Mosaic and prophetic traditions. In other words, Christ lambasted his religious leaders for their 'new light', which had shoved out of sight the commandments divinely revealed (Mark 7:8,9). The older tradition had been "nicely set aside" to accommodate human teaching. Jeremiah made a similar protest to religious innovators in his day, who preferred the carnal delights of Baalism to the "ancient paths" (Jer. 6:16; 7:9). What JW's and others rejecting "tradition" in toto don't seem to understand is that the traditions of the Scribes were not *old* teachings, but recent innovations, going back likely no more than 400 years, to the time of the last Old Testament books. Christ by no means rejected ALL tradition, but rather "YOUR tradition", the innovations of the sectarian Scribes and Pharisees to whom He was talking (Matt. 15:1,6). As Alfred Plummer says in his commentary on Matthew, "These Scribes professed to be jealous defenders of God's law; but what they really cared about was their own traditions about the Law

..."<sup>1</sup>. There is no record, for instance, that Christ or the apostles condemned the festival of Purim, a festival introduced in the time of Esther, despite its Persian connections. Nor did they condemn Hanukkah, the festival commemorating Maccabean victory over their Hasmonean oppressors. Both these festivals were religious innovations, not commanded by God. But the Jews still keep them today.

Official Watchtower reference books acknowledge much of this. For example, *Insight on the Scriptures* tells us that part of the "valid tradition" of the apostles was Paul's counsel to the Thessalonians referred to above:

The teachings and example set by the apostles constituted valid tradition. Thus, Paul, who had personally toiled with his hands so as not to be a financial burden on his brothers (Ac 18:3; 20:34; 1 Cor 9:15; 1 Th 2:9), could urge the Thessalonian Christians "to withdraw from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition [paradosin]" they had received. One who would not work was plainly not following the fine example or tradition of the apostles. - 2 Th 3:6-11.<sup>2</sup>

This is fine and scriptural. But no upper-echelon Watchtower leader works with his hands, in the 'tradition of the apostles'! There is no evidence that C. T. Russell or J. F. Rutherford did either. All of them are and were supported totally by the Watchtower Society. This is one Watchtower tradition that has remained consistent, while others have dropped by the wayside. Among such discarded teachings we might list most of the contents of 7 volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, for 40 years publically promoted as indispensable to the correct understanding of the Bible. The Watchtower no longer prints these books, nor indeed ANY of the books it used as preaching tools during the first 8 decades of its existence. Surely this disavowal even of its founders' works is a unique characteristic of the Watchtower. The doctrine of "progressive truth"<sup>3</sup> has been used both to excuse the Watchtower's multitude of false predictions and altered doctrines, and to explain how it is that no one other than Jehovah's Witnesses has ever held to their peculiar interpretations of the Bible.

Point out that even JW's don't believe what the Watchtower once proclaimed as "present truth"<sup>4</sup> and your JW will likely reply "the light gets brighter and brighter", admitting neither accountability for nor connection with the Watchtower's early leaders. Even the Watchtower's present 'good news' - *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (the title of their best-selling book since 1975, the last prophetic 'adjustment') - is admitted to be a preaching innovation adopted since 1935<sup>5</sup>.

### **'A perverse and crooked generation ... a foolish and unwise people'**

So Moses described the generation that stood on the brink of the promised land (Deut. 32). And of what did their perversity consist? They had forgotten the "The Rock ... God of faithfulness" (v.4), who had led his people from days long before the exodus. If they were disloyal, corrupt children (v.5), it was entirely their own fault. For if they had desired to know this most precious truth - that God is the Eternal I AM, as reliable as rock in his consistency and faithfulness - all they had to do was

Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations.  
Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders and they will tell you ... (v.7)

This, perversely, is exactly what Watchtower leaders have consistently refused to do. Respecting no light but their own, they do not even honour the teachings of their own spiritual 'fathers'. Therefore their 'good news' - 'another gospel' even by their own admission than the one preached by Christendom for all these centuries, and a different message even than the one spread all over the earth by the Watchtower's missionaries before 1935 - stands self-condemned.

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4. *Ibid*, pp.120-148, esp. pp.133, 146-147
5. *Ibid*, pp. 83-84, 170, 261