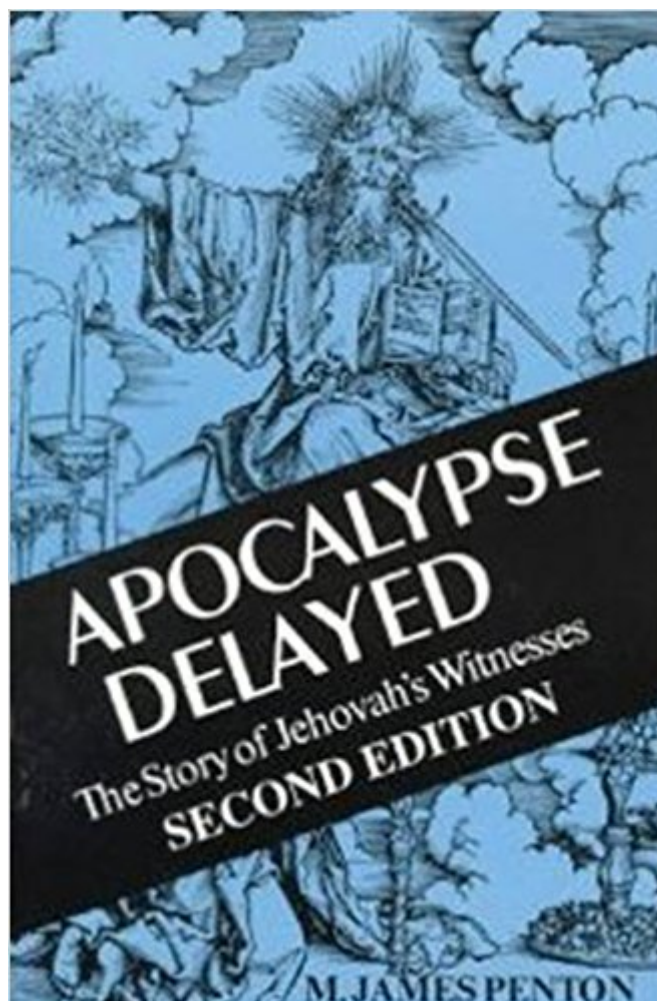


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Apocalypse Delayed: The Story Of Jehovah's Witnesses



Synopsis

Since 1876, Jehovah's Witnesses have believed that they are living in the last days of the present world. Charles T. Russell, their founder, advised his followers that members of Christ's church would be raptured in 1878, and by 1914 Christ would destroy the nations and establish his kingdom on earth. The first prophecy was not fulfilled, but the outbreak of the First World War lent some credibility to the second. Ever since that time, Jehovah's Witnesses have been predicting that the world would end 'shortly.' Their numbers have grown to many millions in over two hundred countries. They distribute a billion pieces of literature annually, and continue to anticipate the end of the world. Apocalypticism is the key issue in this detailed history, but there are others. As a long-time member of the sect, now expelled, Penton offers a comprehensive overview of a remarkable religious movement. His book is divided into three parts, each presenting the Witnesses' story in a different context: historical, doctrinal, and sociological. Some of the issues he discusses are known to the general public, such as the sect's opposition to military service and blood transfusions. Others involve internal controversies, including political control of the organization and the handling of dissent within the ranks. Penton has combined the special insight of an insider with the critical analysis of an observer now at a distance from his subject. From them he has created a penetrating study of a spreading world phenomenon. In this second edition, an afterword by the author brings us up to date on events since *Apocalypse Delayed* was first published in 1985. Penton considers changes in doctrine, practice, and governance on issues such as medical treatment, higher education, apostates, and the apocalypse. This edition features a revised and expanded bibliography.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'A well-written, clear and fascinating study.' (James A. Beverley Toronto School of Theology)'Penton's unique position - a well-travelled, fourth-generation member who served in various capacities - makes him a reliable informant. He aptly gives insight into major doctrines, past and recent prophetic speculation, the authority structure of the Witness organization, and the harshness of the total ban upon those who attempt open discussion of any differing exegetical view.' (Christianity Today)'All in all, this is an excellent book and required reading for those interested in Jehovah's Witnesses. Penton's special perspective provides a scholarly inside look at a fascinating and persistent example of modern millenarianism.' (Timothy P. Weber American Historical Review)'Penton, a fourth generation Witness with an impeccable academic background, sets forth a detailed and damning outline of the movement and, in particular, those who run the world wide organization.' (Grant MacGillivray Halifax Daily News)'M. James Penton offers us one of the few comprehensive accounts of a sectarian tradition that remains an enigma to scholars of modern religion.' (Robert C. Fuller The Journal of Religion)'This is not a vindictive slamming of the Witness organization by a raving ex-member, but a carefully written, well-documented critical analysis by a scholar with the special insight that only a former insider could give.' (Dwayne Janke Lethbridge Herald)

M. James Penton is a professor emeritus of history and religious studies at the University of Lethbridge.

It was good enough in having a more accurate (but dull in places) history of the movement, how it is organized and so on. However the author does tend to try whitewashing Russel, hiding or explaining away really damaging evidence. He also thinks the NWT mistranslation of the bible is a really good translation, and several of the heretical doctrines are good. So it is rather frustrating to see him go from hating the organization to loving it and back. Made for uneven reading as he takes back something he demolished the page before.

It is my opinion that this book is a thorough review of the history and ramifications of the Watchtower Society. Penton is fair in his appraisal. He is objective. Having been associated with this organization

for a half century I have witnessed many of the trends he describes. I consider his overall coverage of this subject to be informative, accurate and just. This is an excellent source for any who have unanswered questions about the Watchtower Society.

M. James Penton (born 1932) is a professor emeritus of history at the University of Lethbridge in Canada. He was "a fourth-generation Jehovah's Witness," but was disfellowshipped in 1981. He wrote in the Preface to this 1985 book, "there were a great many (in the JW Brooklyn headquarters) who, like myself, believed that Jehovah's Witnesses must undergo a reformation or, at the very least, a spiritual renewal... I determined to express my concerns and criticisms ... to the Witness leadership in writing--a decision which, after over a year's personal travail, led to my public disfellowshippment... These events caused me to curtail my research and writing for some time... Eventually, however, I took up my pen and completed (this book)." Here are some quotations from the book: "Jehovah's Witnesses ... have preached millenarianism longer and more consistently than any major sectarian movement in the modern world." (Pg. 7) "In ... 1929, Rutherford also introduced a new exegesis of Romans 13:1-7 which caused Witnesses to regard the secular state as demonic and virtually without any redeeming features." (Pg. 65) "...factors which may have caused strife between (Rutherford and his wife) were Rutherford's choleric and self-righteous temperament and what was quite evidently a serious case of alcoholism." (Pg. 72) "...a Swedish Witness, Ditlieb Felderer... did extensive research and produced a manuscript history of Jehovah's Witnesses ... however, he was treated with what he regarded as utmost discourtesy and became alienated. Later he was disfellowshipped." (Pg. 105) "And most serious for them, they continue to experience a tremendous turnover in membership---something that the society refuses to talk about and a fact largely unrecognized by most Witnesses." (Pg. 124) "More serious is the constant use of alcohol. Pastor Russell ... was both a vegetarian and a teetotaler. Judge Rutherford was neither and, as shown earlier, liked to drink. He regarded prohibition in the United States as a plot of both the devil and the clergy and condemned it publicly." (Pg. 225) "What all this means is that for many young Witnesses there is little opportunity to develop athletic, musical, or artistic talents. To do so would cause them to be marked officially or unofficially by their fellow believers as 'immature,' 'worldly,' or 'rebellious.'" (Pg. 276)

Very expansive review of the cult and how it has put up dates for the end of the world since CT Russell in 1874. The cult does not want you to know any of this. Being a JW for over 30 years I can tell you this book is spot on. They will run from your door if you bring any of this up from 607 being

the wrong date for the temple destruction to 1914 being wrong based on that very date.

I had been looking for a history of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement for some time. At first, I thought it was a good idea to read the society's own "Proclaimers of God's Kingdom" and "Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose", but I soon realized that many facts presented in these books contradicted other statements previously published on Watchtower literature. I wanted a book that I could trust as impartial and objective. I believe that a historian's job is not to sweet-talk the readers in order to persuade them of the value of a doctrine, but rather to impartially present facts that are proven by research. This is exactly what Mr. Penton has done in this well documented, easy to read book. Too often I have read books written by hateful former members that try to disregard the Watchtower Society. Instead, this book is critical but never judgemental, and the author's unique position (a former fourth generation member) makes this study particularly interesting. The first part deals with the history of the movement. I think this chapter is what really makes this book special, as it is the most detailed study that I have ever read on the subject. Part 2 (Concepts and Doctrines) and Part 3 (Organization and Community) are clear and fascinating but somewhat more standard, and if you have been interested in Jehovah's Witnesses for some time you will probably already know most of what is outlined here. Overall, an excellent work, one that everyone interested in the Watchtower history and beliefs should read.

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