

## **Beyond Armageddon: Is the Jehovah's Witnesses' Paradise Earth Conceivable?**

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**Abstract:** The article considers the problems of envisaging a paradise on earth, with special reference to Jehovah's Witnesses. After an explanation of their relationship to the Christian Protestant tradition, particularly Adventism and American fundamentalism, some key doctrines of the Watch Tower organisation are identified, with particular reference to their belief in a coming earthly paradise. Jehovah's Witnesses are a restorationist movement, seeking a restored paradise on earth, and endeavouring to restore authentic Christianity in what they take to be its original form. Discussion is given to the possibility of physical accommodation on the earth, the position of animals, family life, language, and technology. Finally, brief comparison is made with the expected paradise of the Daesoon Jinrihoe, which is based on a radically different worldview. It is concluded that such differences help to explain why Jehovah's Witnesses have limited success in Korea, as compared with indigenous Korean new religions such as Daesoon Jinrihoe.

**Key words:** Bible, Eschatology, Jehovah's Witnesses, Millennialism, New Religious Movements, Paradise on Earth

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## *I. Introduction*

How much is it possible to know about a paradise on earth? In what follows I wish to consider how Jehovah's Witnesses portray the new world which they expect to inhabit. There has been little discussion in academic writing about Jehovah's Witnesses' views on life after death. Indeed, serious academic study is still only in its early stages, with a small amount of literature addressing issues such as their attitudes to political systems, to war, and to blood transfusion. Some attention has been given to their persecution in various countries, and in less academic counter-cult literature, to their Bible translation.<sup>1)</sup> Yet,

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1) See, e.g. Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Hans Hesse (ed.), *Persecution and Resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses During the Nazi Regime 1933-1945*. Bremen, Germany: Edition Temmen, 2001). Zoe Knox, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Secular World: From the 1870s to the Present*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

at a popular level, their visibility is high. Their literature carts, which are a familiar sight in city centre locations, often portray pictures of an idyllic state, in which families are living harmoniously together, at one with the animal kingdom, and harvesting flawless fruit and vegetables, looking extremely content with their environment, free from all troubles, and singing praises to God. Superficially, these illustrations invite questions. Will these children never grow up? How will ageing be compatible with their portrayal of family life? The families always appear to be stereotypical nuclear families, although not everyone on earth by any means has had a single marriage partner. What, then, will become of people who have been widowed or divorced and subsequently remarried, and perhaps have belonged to “blended” or “reconstituted” families? Have the animals and birds been resurrected? What is their status in this paradise? Will we all speak the same language and, if not, how will we communicate? How exactly will Jehovah ensure a bodily resurrection? Can he reconstitute all the parts of someone’s dead body, and how would this be accomplished? Such questions are not mere matters of idle curiosity; not only on the genuine practicalities which would need to be worked out in a perfected paradise, but these artistic portrayals are meticulously researched by the Watch Tower Society’s art department to ensure that they are compatible both with the Society’s teachings and – most importantly – with the Bible, which is their fundamental source of authority.

## *II. Resurrection in the Christian tradition*

Mainstream Christianity has been divided on various key issues surrounding death and the afterlife. While the Bible affirms the “resurrection of the body” and does not support soul-body dualism, Christianity at an early stage was influenced by Greek philosophy, particularly that of Philo, and the concept of the soul as distinct from the body was affirmed by a number of early Church Fathers, and subsequently by Saint Augustine (354~430) and later, importantly, by Thomas Aquinas (1225~1274). While affirming the immortality of the soul, Augustine believed that the resurrection involved a reuniting of soul and body, and he attempted to resolve a number of conundrums about the physical resurrection which he expected to occur. For example, would women retain their sex in the resurrection? Would they bear children? What would a resurrected body look like? At what age would they be reborn? Augustine concluded that, since the male and the female were part of God’s original creation, one’s sex would be retained in the afterlife, but women would no longer bear children, and both men and women would be free from the lusts of the flesh, and hence not engage in sexual intercourse. The age of 30 seemed the optimum age to Augustine, since Jesus began his ministry at that age. Anyone who was unduly short in stature would be raised to the same height as Jesus, but no one would be allowed to be taller than him. Deformities such as cysts and tumours were matter wrongly arranged and malicious cells would be redistributed: one could acquire additional bodily

matter, but not lose any.<sup>2)</sup>

Traditionally, Christians have believed in two eternal destinies – heaven and hell – to which Roman Catholicism adds the temporary state of purgatory, and the state of limbo, the former for the purification of souls, and the latter being reserved for unbaptised infants. The Protestant tradition has typically rejected the doctrines of purgatory and limbo, since it regards scripture as the final source of authority, and regards such teachings as unbiblical. Associated with belief in life after death is the belief in Christ's second coming, which will be followed by a time of judgement, which will determine the eternal destiny of all.

Within 19th-century American Protestantism there was a renewed emphasis on Christ's imminent return. The movement became known as Adventism and, since it was not wholly popular in Protestant circles, it emerged as a separate set of denominations. Initially the Adventist movement centred on a Baptist preacher, William Miller (1782~1849), who, in common with other Adventists, engaged in various calculations based on biblical chronology, and concluded that Christ would return in 1843 and take his faithful into heaven – a date that his followers subsequently revised to 1844. The latter date became known as the “Great Disappointment” when expectations failed to materialise. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), who founded the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, which subsequently became popularly known as Jehovah's Witnesses, first expected

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2) Augustine, *The City of God*, 2 vols. trans. John Healey (London: Dent, 1957), Book 22.

Christ's return in 1874, but later came to regard 1914 as having particular significance. The Adventists believed that, after the saints were translated into heaven, the earth would be burnt, thus destroying everything that was evil. Russell and his Bible Students (as his early followers were called) shared the belief that the faithful would have their bodies transformed into celestial "spiritual bodies", but rejected the idea that the earth would be destroyed. The number of those who would be translated into heaven was reckoned to be 144,000, as mentioned in the Book of Revelation,<sup>3)</sup> but as it became obvious that the number of Watch Tower supporters was set to exceed that number, the second Watch Tower president, Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869~1942) noted that the Bible also mentioned an innumerable "great crowd",<sup>4)</sup> who would remain or be resurrected on earth after Armageddon, and enjoy everlasting paradise on earth.

### ***1. Origins and tenets of Jehovah's Witnesses***

A very brief account of the Jehovah's Witnesses' basic tenets is necessary at this point. Several of these beliefs are shared with mainstream Christians, but by no means all, and they tend to be regarded as a schism or sect. Charles Taze Russell founded Zion's Tract Society in 1881, now known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, and the second leader Joseph Franklin Rutherford introduced the name Jehovah's Witnesses in

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3) Revelation 7:4.

4) Revelation 7:9.

1931. Like most religious organisations, its beliefs, practices, and organisational structure have changed over the years. Although Russell denied being an Adventist,<sup>5)</sup> the Society is heavily influenced by the Adventist tradition, which was renowned for its belief in Biblical inerrancy, its expectation of Christ's imminent coming, and for its calculations of key dates in biblical prophecy and post-biblical events. Witnesses believe that sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience, as a result of yielding to Satan's temptation. They were expelled from the perfect paradise that God had created for them in the Garden of Eden, and ever since then humankind is reckoned to be in a "fallen" state which needs to be restored. With that purpose God sent his son, Jesus Christ – the messiah – who died as the "ransom sacrifice" to atone for sin. Jehovah's Witnesses regard the year 1914 as a key date, marking Christ's "second presence", when Jesus cast out Satan from heaven and established his own rule there, making it possible to gather 144,000 saints who would rule with him. The "great crowd" do not belong to this class of people, but will inherit a new earth, which will become an everlasting paradise for the faithful. From its inception, the Society has denied the existence of hell as an eternal punishment, but has taught the doctrine of "probation after death", meaning that the dead will be resurrected after Armageddon, which is the final battle between Christ and Satan, after which Christ's rule will be fully

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5) C. T., Russell, "Objections of Seventh-day Adventists Answered". *Zion's Watch Tower* (1 & 15 November, 1894) pp.1731-1735.

established, and followed by a thousand-year period in which the earth will gradually be restored to perfection. Jehovah's Witnesses firmly believe that Armageddon is "just around the corner", and the urgency of this firm belief is evidenced in the proliferation of their literature carts in town and city centres. Jehovah's Witnesses hold that they are the one community who have restored the true teachings of the early Church, believing that, after the death of the first generation of apostles, Christianity became tarnished, appropriating "pagan" (their term for non-Christian) elements such as the Hellenistic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a separate class of clergy, the celebration of pagan-derived festivals, and more recently support for modern theories of evolution and biblical criticism. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they are the true organisation that has restored the true teachings and practices, as defined in the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses are therefore a restorationist organisation in two senses: first, they want to restore the true apostolic Church that existed before becoming apostate; second, they will be instrumental in showing humanity the way to the restored paradise, which was God's original intention for Adam and Eve. The early Church, which they believe took its rise at Pentecost in 33 CE, was Jehovah's true organisation, constituted in the proper way, and entrusted with spreading the truth throughout the world, in accordance with Jesus' own instructions.



### ***III. Interpreting Biblical eschatology***

Millennialist groups that believe in biblical inerrancy are faced with the task of interpreting biblical eschatology. The Bible presents an array of end-time occurrences, at different locations, without any indication of their order, and with apparent inconsistencies. The following is a typical list of end-time expectations which the Bible mentions, not always with clear explanation: Armageddon, the Great Tribulation, Christ's Second Coming, the resurrection – or resurrections – of the dead, the casting down of Satan from heaven, the cleansing of the sanctuary, the Last Judgement, the binding and loosing of Satan, the millennium, and the appearance of the new heaven and new earth. To this list some would add the Rapture, the appearance of the Antichrist<sup>6)</sup> and the giving of the mark of the beast, the testifying of the Two Witnesses, the coming of the false prophet, the burning of the earth, and “the Marriage of the Lamb”.<sup>7)</sup> For the believer in Biblical inerrancy it can be difficult to ascertain whether some of these events might be one and the same, and it requires some ingenuity to resolve apparent contradictions. (For example, is the Rapture the same as the Second Coming, and does the biblical reference to “the resurrection of the righteous”<sup>8)</sup> imply that there is a separate

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6) Much of the Christian Protestant tradition personifies the Antichrist as an opponent of God, some even identifying him with Satan. However, there is no personification in the Bible, as Jehovah's Witnesses note, and hence they reject this interpretation.

7) The word “Lamb” in the New Testament is typically a reference to Jesus Christ. Revelation 19:7 uses this expression.

8) Luke 14:14.

resurrection of the wicked? Jesus says that the son of man will come as a thief in the night, yet Paul says his coming will be accompanied by the sound of a trumpet.<sup>9)</sup>

Many American fundamentalist Christians are familiar with Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins' Left Behind series – pieces of speculative fiction about what might plausibly happen after the Rapture.<sup>10)</sup> LaHaye and Jenkins' fiction suggests the following sequence of end-time events: (1) the Rapture; (2) the rise of the Antichrist; (3) the acquisition of the Mark of the Beast; (4) the commencement of the seven “trumpet judgements”; (5) the testifying of the Two Witnesses; (6) the fatal wounding of the Beast (Revelation 13:3-4); (7) the revival of the Beast and his demand for worship; (8) the Great Tribulation; (9) Armageddon, concluding with Jesus appearing; (10) the binding of Satan; (11) the Millennium; (12) the Great White Throne Judgement, with the wicked thrown into the lake of fire; and (13) the coming Kingdom.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' end-time calendar is much simpler than LaHaye and Jenkins. Their key end-time happenings, in chronological order, are: (1) Christ's Second Presence – 1914 – followed by the gathering of the 144,000; (2) the Great Tribulation; (3) Armageddon; (4) Christ's Thousand Year Rule (the Millennium); (5) the Resurrection, including the return of the patriarchs; (6) the new world. The resurrection will be a physical one; those who belong to the 144,000, whose numbers

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9) Luke 12:38-40; 1 Corinthians 15:52.

10) Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1995).

will be complete before Armageddon occurs, are already alive in heaven with spiritual bodies.

### ***1. Practical implications***

From its inception, the Watch Tower Society has been aware of the practical problems posed by a physical resurrection. Russell discussed whether there would be enough accommodation on the earth for every generation that has lived since the time of creation. The present population of just over 7 billion within a single generation presents sufficient difficulty for earthly governments, without the prospect of all former generations being brought back to live on the planet. Russell addresses this problem in the first volume of his *Studies in the Scriptures – Divine Plan of the Ages*. Writing in 1886, Russell reckoned that the world's population was 1.4 billion at that time. While we do not know for sure exactly how many people have previously lived and died on earth, Russell performs an arithmetical calculation to demonstrate the possibility of a general resurrection. (Russell reckoned that Adam was created in 4128 BCE; the date currently favoured by the Watch Tower organisation is 4026 BCE.)

...six thousand years are sixty centuries; three generations to each century would give us one hundred and eighty generations since Adam; and fourteen hundred millions to a generation would give two hundred and fifty-two billions (252,000,000,000) as the total number of our race from creation to the present time, according to this liberal estimate, which is probably more than twice

the actual number. Where shall we find room enough for this great multitude?<sup>11)</sup>

He then goes on to calculate that the State of Texas, if it were used simply as a cemetery, could accommodate 660,718,080,000 bodies; the current world population of his time could all stand up in a city the size of London or Philadelphia; and the island of Ireland could afford sufficient standing room for twice the number of all those who have ever lived, even according to his exaggerated calculations.

Of course, humanity needs more than standing room in an everlasting paradise; accordingly, Russell reminds the reader of biblical prophecy that “the earth will yield her increase”, the desert will blossom like the rose, and that streams and waters will break out in the wilderness and the desert.<sup>12)</sup> It should be remembered, too, that the 252,000,000,000 will not all be arriving at once, and not all will be staying, since God’s judgement extends over the millennium, with progressive resurrection, and not everyone will make the appropriate decision to accept Watch Tower teachings.<sup>13)</sup>

Russell’s doctrine, which has been held continuously by the Watch Tower Society, is frequently labelled “conditionalism” – a scholarly term to denote the view that the self is not naturally immortal, but that immortality has to be earned. This view was espoused by Adventists, Christadelphians, and others. The dead

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11) C. T. Russell, *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. (London: International Bible Students Association, 1886), p.160.

12) Psalm 67:6; Isaiah 35:1-6.

13) *Ibid.*, pp.161-162.

will be raised and allowed a further opportunity for redemption. Members of the great crowd who have died are currently asleep, to be brought back to life to await judgement. Those returning from the grave will need instruction, for which provision must be made in addition to securing their physical well-being. Another Watch Tower calculation, made over a century after Russell's, states:

How would it be possible in 1,000 years to resurrect and educate the billions now in the grave? ... for the purpose of illustration, let us assume that those who compose the "great crowd" of righteous persons who "come out of the great tribulation" on this system of things alive (Revelation 7:9; 14) number about 6,000,000 (about 1/1000 of earth's present population). Then if, after allowing, say, 100 years spent in their training and in 'subduing' a portion of the earth (Genesis 1:28), God purposes to bring back three percent of this number, this would mean that each newly arrived person would be looked after by 33 trained ones. Since a yearly increase of three percent, compounded, doubles the number about every 24 years, the entire 20 billion (20,000,000,000) could be resurrected before 400 years of Christ's Thousand Year Reign had elapsed, giving ample time for training and judging the resurrected ones without disrupting harmony and order on earth. Thus God, with his almighty power and wisdom, is able to bring his purpose to a glorious conclusion fully within the framework of the laws and arrangements he has made for mankind from the beginning, with the added undeserved kindness of the resurrection – Romans 11:33–36.<sup>14)</sup>

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14) Watch Tower, "Resurrection"; in *Insight* (Brooklyn NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1988), p.793.

It is not sufficient, of course, that there is physical space and sustenance for human life on earth. Regarding housing, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the construction of houses will continue, since scripture envisages ancient ruins being rebuilt and new ones will be constructed for dwellings.<sup>15)</sup> Some critics of the Watch Tower Society have asked why the organisation is undertaking so much building work, and setting up a massive new site at Wallkill, New York, if they believed that Armageddon is "just around the corner". The answer is that Armageddon will not see an end to the Jehovah's Witnesses' evangelising. On the contrary, when the dead start returning, there will be massive education work to be done; Jehovah's Witnesses will have to conduct many more Bible studies than ever before for not all of the resurrected men and women will be conversant with the Watch Tower Society's teachings.

## ***2. After Armageddon***

Armageddon will not bring instant perfection to humanity or to the earth, but will be followed by the millennium, in which the earth will be brought to a gradual progression towards perfection. In accordance with biblical teaching, at the end of the millennium Satan will be unbound and will have a final opportunity to win individuals to his cause. It is only after this event that humanity will have finally rid itself of those who have chosen to oppose Jehovah, and it is then that the final state of perfection will be complete. After the millennium, there

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15) Isaiah 61:4; Isaiah 65:21; Jeremiah 29:5.

will be a restoration of the state of affairs that Jehovah originally intended for humankind. The Garden of Eden therefore should give us a clue as to what one might expect in the coming paradise. The most obvious feature of primordial Eden was obedience to God, which of course Adam and Eve failed to give, preferring to obey Satan, and thus subjecting themselves and all subsequent humanity to Satan's rule. Although Satan has been cast out of heaven in 1914, he continues to rule the world, and will do so until he is finally defeated at Armageddon. Then Christ will begin the work of restoring paradise. Those who will live on paradise Earth can expect a range of benefits, including plenty of food,<sup>16)</sup> good housing,<sup>17)</sup> enjoyable work,<sup>18)</sup> no sickness,<sup>19)</sup> no disabilities,<sup>20)</sup> no pain, sorrow, death,<sup>21)</sup> no war,<sup>22)</sup> and everlasting life.<sup>23)</sup> Two key activities seem to feature largely in Watch Tower illustrations: horticulture and construction work, both of which are described by Isaiah:

They will build houses and live in them,  
And they will plant vineyards and eat their fruitage.  
They will not build for someone else to inhabit,  
Nor will they plant for others to eat.<sup>24)</sup>

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16) Psalm 72:16.

17) Isaiah 65:21.

18) Isaiah 65:22-23.

19) Isaiah 33:24.

20) Isaiah 35:5-6.

21) Revelation 21:4.

22) Psalm 46:9.

23) Psalm 37:29.

24) Isaiah 65:21-22.

This runs counter to the notion of “eternal rest”, about which mainstream Christians sometimes speak. However, Jehovah’s Witnesses hold that rest was not a feature of the original paradise, and the work was not a punishment for Adam and Eve’s sin. When God first takes Adam into the garden, his given task is “to cultivate it and to take care of it”.<sup>25)</sup> Even God’s angels are given a work assignment – to guard the tree of life.<sup>26)</sup> When Adam and Eve sin, God’s curse is not upon the couple, but upon the ground – “cursed is the ground on your account.”.<sup>27)</sup> Because of their sin Adam’s work will be more strenuous: he will sweat to keep down the weeds,<sup>28)</sup> the implication being that sin has altered the nature of work rather than introduced the need to work as a punishment. Consequently, any restoration of Eden would involve work, but not “vain work”; hence work in the new world will not be unduly strenuous, unproductive, boring, enforced, or with the aim of creating excessive wealth. The houses depicted in the artists’ impressions of the new world are not palaces: they are modest, but thoroughly adequate, dwelling places.

In Isaiah’s prophecy the other type of work that is mentioned is horticulture. The prophet Isaiah described the new world as a place where there would be harmony among different species: the lion would lie down with the lamb and the child could play safely with the snake. The lion will eat straw, and the snake eat dust. Artistic portrayals of the new world never depict

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25) Genesis 2:15.

26) Genesis 3:24.

27) Genesis 3:17.

28) Genesis 3:19.



meat-eating, but rather humans harvesting and eating the produce of the land. Although it is noteworthy that God's instruction to Adam and Eve is confined to eating plants and herbs, Watch Tower literature has made little mention of vegetarianism, and its views on the subject have shifted through time.<sup>29)</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses are reluctant to speculate about such matters in the new world, but those to whom I have spoken have agreed that a vegetarian diet might possibly be part of their coming lifestyle.

There are other issues about animals. Animals are expected to live and die, as they do in the present system. They may continue to share their animal nature, except for any desire to harm humans: if lion were to feed on straw, for example, this might upset the Earth's ecological balance. Interestingly, one senior Watch Tower author, with whom I have corresponded, suggests that Isaiah's description of the lion eating straw need not be taken literally, but might be symbolic:

the imagery describes a peaceful world, a paradise. But we cannot know that each detail will be fulfilled in the new world. The lion cannot digest straw, and the serpent will not literally eat dust. But these images indicate a peaceful world.<sup>30)</sup>

He goes on to suggest that the prophecy might imply that in

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29) For a discussion, see George D. Chryssides, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Continuity and Change*. (London: Routledge, 2014).

30) *JW Scholars*, "Beyond Armageddon". *Message no. 97* (9 August 2016). Accessible online at URL: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/jwscholars/conversations/messages/97> Accessed 23 January 2019.

the new world children – who are mentioned in Isaiah’s prophecy – would be safe with adults who had behaved like lions or wolves in their past life on earth. This might seem a surprising piece of demythologising, but it should be remembered that Jehovah’s Witnesses are not literalists. They believe in biblical inerrancy, but fully acknowledge that the Bible contains parable, metaphor and symbolism.

### ***3. Family life in the new world***

One very striking feature of the Watch Tower portrayal of the new world is family life. Watch Tower literature is replete with illustrations of happy families enjoying life in a pleasant sunny environment, with their father bringing in large wheelbarrows of ripe fruit and vegetables, and tables laden with food. Such portrayals may have initial appeal, but a little reflection should highlight the problems of this lifestyle. First, are these children to remain children everlastingly, or will they grow up into adulthood, in which case the new world will consist entirely of an adult population? Second, what about issues relating to marriage? Particularly in the 21st century, nuclear families such as those depicted in Watch Tower literature are becoming less common. Obviously, there are familial relationships of which the Society disapproves, but they do not have any objection to a widow or widower remarrying, and someone may join the society after having been divorced or as a single parent. Further, one partner may come to believe that he or she belongs to the 144,000, while the other partner

entertains no such conviction. In his autobiography Marley Cole relates the pain he felt on coming to believe he was one of the anointed class, destined for heaven, while his wife would remain on earth with the “great crowd”.<sup>31)</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that even Mary and Joseph, Jesus’ parents, have different eternal destinies: Mary was present when Jesus made his ransom sacrifice,<sup>32)</sup> but Joseph is believed to have died before Jesus, and therefore counts as one of the faithful of old, who would expect to be resurrected to the paradise on earth.

The Sadducees (ancient Jewish Temple authorities) presented Jesus with the conundrum about the woman who had seven successive husbands, raising the question of whose wife she would be in the resurrection.<sup>33)</sup> Jesus’ response, that people are not involved in marriage after the resurrection, has been understood to mean that there will be no further marriage unions created in the new world, not that there will not be husband-wife or other familial relationships.<sup>34)</sup> The Watch Tower Society teaches that death breaks the marriage bond in the present system, and that a partner who is widowed is free to remarry. However, a Witness may only have one marriage partner at any one time, and hence in the new world, the widow or widower who remarries can only retrain one spouse

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31) Cole, Marley, *The Harvest of Our Lives*. (Aurora MO: Stoops Publishing), pp.118-122.

32) John 19:25-27.

33) Matthew 22:23-29.

34) This view may be changing: a recent *Watchtower* article suggested that Jesus’ remarks applied only to the heavenly class, and that there might be a possibility of marriage being entered into in the paradise on earth. See Questions from Readers; *The Watchtower*, (15 September 2014), pp.29-30.

in the resurrection. The exact details are undisclosed, but it is believed that in the coming kingdom men and women will be free from earthly, fleshly desires, and hence the separation of marriage partners who have existed on earth will not be a cause of distress.

#### ***4. Cessationism***

I made mention of health as one of the appealing features of the new world. It is anticipated that there will be no more sickness, pain or anxiety in the earthly Paradise. This expectation raises issues about healing. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, miraculous healing is one of the practices that died out after the first generation of apostles. It is not the result of apostasy, but rather a fulfilment of Paul's prediction in 1 Corinthians 13:8. Jehovah's Witnesses therefore do not hold healing services, relying on most forms of conventional medicine and in some cases certain forms of alternative therapy for healing purposes.

Cessationism admits of a number of variations among those Christians who espouse the doctrine. Some have expected a total cessation of the special gifts of the spirit, while others have expected them to return in the last days. Jehovah's Witnesses do not expect any such return, and there is certainly no problem about the dead being made whole when they are brought back to life during the thousand-year rule. Their bodies will be resurrected in perfect form, free of diseases, disabilities and imperfections. The situation, however, is

different for those followers who will not die, but will live continuously from this life through Armageddon to the thousand-year period. Jehovah's Witnesses' teach that imperfections will be healed, but only by Christ himself, who is the healer. A restoration of special gifts is therefore unnecessary, and of course in the earthly Paradise powers of healing will longer be required.

### ***5. Language***

The Bible asserts that the great crowd will be drawn from people of all lands and languages, and this raises the question of whether the new world will have a common language, and how people of different cultures will communicate. The story of the disciples at Pentecost, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, has sometimes been taken to mean that people with different mother tongues came to Jerusalem and miraculously heard the early Christians in their own language. The story is ambiguous, and an alternative interpretation is that the disciples were "speaking in tongues," which is another gift of the spirit that Paul specifically mentions.<sup>35)</sup> Speaking in tongues, or glossolalia as it is technically called, is a phenomenon mainly associated with the Christian Pentecostal tradition. It involves members spontaneously making utterances that do not belong to any known human tongue, and which are believed to be in a divine language, indicating a high degree of spiritual advancement. Jehovah's Witnesses are opposed to glossolalia, and deny that

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35) 1 Corinthians 13:8.

the phenomenon is what the Book of Acts describes,<sup>36)</sup> since it is unclear whether Luke is describing glossolalia or a miraculous translation of Peter's speech into the language of each listener. Jehovah's Witnesses opt for the latter interpretation, claiming that modern-day glossolalia is a fraudulent miracle, associated with pagan practice. Since miraculous translation is not possible, the Jehovah's Witnesses of course spread their message by conventional means of translating the Bible and their own literature. It is not expected that the new world will have a single common language to reverse the confounding of languages at Babel. When the prophet Zephaniah writes, "I will change the language of the peoples to a pure language",<sup>37)</sup> this must be reconciled with the Book of Revelation's description of the great crowd as consisting of members of all peoples and languages, dressed in white and waving palm branches, shouting praises to Christ.<sup>38)</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses therefore hold that the "pure language" to which Zephaniah refers is not a universal language like Esperanto, but a proper understanding of one's faith, which is translated into many tongues, and propagated by the Society's missionary work. In recent times, the Watch Tower Society has adopted the practice of making some literature available in minority languages such as Scottish and Irish Gaelic, in part with the purpose of ensuring that all languages will be represented around God's throne.

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36) Acts 2:4.

37) Zephaniah 3:9.

38) Revelation 7:9.

## ***6. Tradition versus technology***

One striking feature about Jehovah's Witnesses' portrayal of the new world is how low-tech it is. It does not portray this new world as drawing on human achievements in science and technology. There are no space rockets, aeroplanes, or even cars and buses. The housebuilders do not seem employ power tools, and those who work the ground do not seem to use tractors and combine harvesters. These portrayals reflect a number of tensions in the Watch Tower Society's depiction of life after Armageddon. On the one hand Jehovah's Witnesses seek restoration of the state that Adam and Eve forfeited in the Garden of Eden; on the other hand, the Society has welcomed scientific and technological progress, provided it is used for good and not harm. The second Watch Tower president, Joseph Franklin Rutherford, went so far as to claim that the technological advances of his time were predicted in the Bible. Nahum's vision of war chariots with iron fittings, shining like torches and flashing like lightning, is taken to be a premonition of the railway locomotive.<sup>39)</sup> (This interpretation is unlikely to be accepted by present-day Jehovah's Witnesses.) He proceeds to enumerate, in alphabetical order, a rather curious array of scientific and technological inventions (as well as other non-scientific phenomena), which he believed to be evidence of God's presence in the last days:

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39) Nahum 2:1-6; Joseph F. Rutherford, *The Harp of God* (Brooklyn NY: International Bible Students Association), pp.233-234).

Adding machines, aeroplanes, aluminum, antiseptic surgery, artificial dyes, automatic couplers, automobiles, barbed wire, bicycles, Carborundum, cash registers, celluloid, correspondence schools, cream separators, Darkest Africa, disk ploughs, Divine Plan of the Ages, dynamite, electric railways, electric welding, escalators, fireless cookers, gas engines, harvesting machines, illuminating gas, induction motors, linotypes, match machines, monotypes, motion pictures, North Pole, Panama Canal, Pasteurization, railway signals, Roentgen rays, shoe sewing machines, smokeless powder, South Pole, submarines, radium, sky scrapers, subways, talking machines, telephones, typewriters, vacuum cleaners, and wireless telegraphy.<sup>40)</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses, unlike more conservative religious communities like the Amish, do not hold that restoring the lost paradise involves resisting technological innovations, and living the simpler life enjoyed in biblical times. As one informant told me, the millennium affords a vast amount of time, in which technology may well develop to a state that we cannot currently envisage. However, in depicting the coming paradise, Jehovah's Witnesses do not engage in speculative fantasies about potential scientific progress, but only depict what the Bible describes.

There is therefore a tension between biblical concepts of perfection and a perfect society in which subsequent human discovery plays an important role. Regarding the Bible as the primordial authority, the Society chooses to depict a perfect world as it was conceived in biblical times. The only exception appears to be some illustrations of the worshippers' musical

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40) Ibid., p.235.



contributions, where violins and accordions seem to feature, despite the fact that these are not biblical instruments. It is hard to distinguish between what is real, what is artistic licence, and what is symbolic representation. If one presses members on fine detail, it is not unreasonable for them to claim that our present understanding of affairs in the new world is partial, and to express reliance on Jehovah to provide a paradise for the faithful that incorporates the features of perfection to which they look forward.

One informant with whom I discussed these issues quoted Ecclesiastes 3:11: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has even put eternity in their heart; yet mankind will never find out the work that the true God has made from start to finish.” Putting eternity in one’s heart entails that Jehovah’s Witnesses are encouraged to contemplate the new world, as an expectation, and as a model for how life should be lived as a member of Jehovah’s organisation. Witnesses to whom I have spoken have regarded the questions I have raised here as legitimate ones, and at times discuss some of the finer details. There is general agreement about the basic timeline and the outcomes of our spiritual decisions. Most of the 144,000 have begun their reign with Christ in heaven, while the great crowd remains asleep, awaiting the resurrection after Armageddon, and the ensuing thousand-year rule in which the earth will be progressively restored, and men and women will be judged, some to experience paradise on earth, and others to have everlasting oblivion. As for the details, they would acknowledge that our picture is partial, and that complete knowledge of the

nature of paradise Earth will only be granted when it appears. As Paul writes, “For we have partial knowledge and we prophesy partially, but when what is complete comes, what is partial will be done away with”.<sup>41)</sup>

#### *IV. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Daesoon Jinrihoe*

In this final section I want to make some comparisons between Jehovah’s Witnesses’ conception of paradise with that of Daesoon Jinrihoe. Superficially, there appear to be similarities. Both religious organisations envisage a coming paradise, which will be on earth, and in which there will be happiness, peace, and harmony between all creatures. It will come into being when the former world, which consists of conflicts, wars, and natural disasters come to an end, and in which appropriate worship of the Supreme God will be practised. Both religions acknowledge that such transformation is made possible through supernatural intervention by a saviour figure who incarnates in human form – and Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, and Kang Il-sun as the saviour in Daesoon teaching.

Notwithstanding these similarities, however, the two religions’ doctrines are embedded in very different and incompatible worldviews. First, Daesoon Jinrihoe, in common with a number of other Korean new religions, sees no problem on drawing on a range of spiritual teachings and traditions, particularly

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41) 1 Corinthians 13:9–10.

Confucian and Daoist ideas. Considerable emphasis accrues to the harmonisation of yin and yang, which are reckoned to be out of balance in the current system, but which need to be brought into harmony. By contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses are strongly opposed to any kind of religious syncretism: celebrations of festivals such as Christmas and Easter are avoided on the grounds that they are believed to have pagan origins. They therefore seek to restore their faith to what they believe is original early Christianity, as described in the Bible, and to expunge any elements that do not belong. Consequently, their conception of the earthly Paradise is firmly based on their understanding of Christian scriptures.

Second, the interdependence of yin and yang entails an intertwining of humans and spirits. According to Daesoon Jinrihoe teaching, the coming Later World will witness the harmonisation of yin and yang, corresponding to the "Harmony of Man and Spirit". Man and spirit become united, and thus the possibility exists for everyone to become a "perfect man".<sup>42)</sup> Humans are afforded the opportunity to become "Earthly-Immortals" who interact inextricably with divine beings. Such ideas are quite inimical to Jehovah's Witnesses, who, in common with most Christian traditions, perceive a marked contrast between God and humanity. This remains true, notwithstanding its doctrine of Jesus Christ's incarnation, which was needed precisely because of this chasm. For the Jehovah's Witnesses, the 144,000 who reign in heaven are neither gods nor saints, but resurrected

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42) Religious Research & Edification Department of Daesoon Jinrihoe, *Daesoon Jinrihoe: The Fellowship of Daesoon Truth* (Yeosu: Religious Research & Edification Department of Daesoon Jinrihoe, 2017), p.36.

humans with “spiritual bodies”, which only differ in kind from the physical bodies that the great crowd will assume at their resurrection. The precise nature of the interaction between heaven and earth remains unexplained, however: it is not clear whether those on earth will be able to communicate with those who have been transported to heaven.

Third, although comparisons might be made between the two organisations on the grounds that both teach the need for a saviour figure descending from heaven to earth – Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, and Sangje Kang in Daesoon teaching – Jesus performs a sacrificial role to satisfy a human debt owed to God, while Sangje Kang, whose work within the world was predominantly the proclamation of social and political teachings. Thus, the establishment of the Later World, although its coming is believed to be inevitable, will be brought through human effort rather than supernatural intervention, as Jehovah’s Witnesses expect at Armageddon.

These contrasts have important implications for the progress of each organisation. Unsurprisingly, Jehovah’s Witnesses have had greater success in proselytising in countries where Christianity has been the dominant religion. The difficulties in proselytising in parts of the world that are remote from the United States (its country of origin) are partly due to difficulties of travel, and often gaining permission to evangelise, as well as the need to translate the Watch Tower Society’s material into foreign languages. However, its relatively limited success is also due to propagating teachings whose hearers belong to a different worldview, which is based on an unfamiliar scripture

(the Bible), a theology that separates God and humanity, and a soteriology that emphasises divine grace above human effort. In present-day South Korea, Jehovah's Witnesses succeeded in attracting nearly 135,500 attendees to their annual Memorial service (and it should be borne in mind that not all such attendees are baptised members) – in marked contrast to a membership of six million who are estimated to belong to Daesoon Jinrihoe. This is despite the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses began proselytising in Korea in 1915, whereas the Daesoon religion was founded in 1969.

## *V. Conclusion*

The preceding discussion has raised the question of how much can be known, and how much can reasonably be asked, about the concept of paradise on earth, as portrayed by Jehovah's Witnesses, and how this compares with its counterpart in Daesoon Jinrihoe religious thought. The discussion has enumerated various problems in conceptualising a perfect earthly paradise, but, perhaps more importantly, the differences between the two religious organisations highlight difficulties in propagating essentially Western biblical ideas in an Eastern culture, whose worldview is markedly different. While Jehovah's Witnesses will always continue to propagate their understanding of the Bible and the paradise it offers, it is understandable that Eastern concepts, such as those of Daesoon Jinrihoe, will gain greater momentum.

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## 아마겟돈을 지나서

- 여호와의 증인이 말하는 지상낙원은 상상할 수 있는 것인가? -

국문요약

조지 크리스사이드

이 논문은 여호와의 증인을 특별히 언급하면서 지상낙원을 상상하는 문제를 고찰한다. 여호와의 증인과 기독교의 개신교 전통, 특히 그리스도 재림설과 미국의 근본주의와의 관계에 대한 설명 후, 워치타워 조직의 몇 가지 핵심 교리가 확인되며, 특히 미래의 지상낙원에 대한 그들의 믿음을 확인할 수 있다. 여호와의 증인은 복원주의 운동으로서, 지상의 복원된 낙원을 찾아, 그들이 본래의 형태로 삼는 것으로 진정한 기독교를 복원시키려고 노력한다. 또한, 지상낙원에서의 물리적 수용 가능성, 동물의 위상, 가정생활, 언어, 기술 등에 대해 논의하고자 한다. 마지막으로, 근본적으로 다른 세계관을 가지고 있는 대순진리회의 지상천국과 간략하게 비교하며, 그러한 차이점이 대순진리회 등 한국의 자생종교에 비해 여호와의 증인이 한국에서 제한된 성공을 거둔 이유를 설명하는 데 도움을 줄 수 있다고 결론지었다.

주제어 : 성경, 종말론, 여호와의 증인, 천년왕국, 신종교, 지상낙원