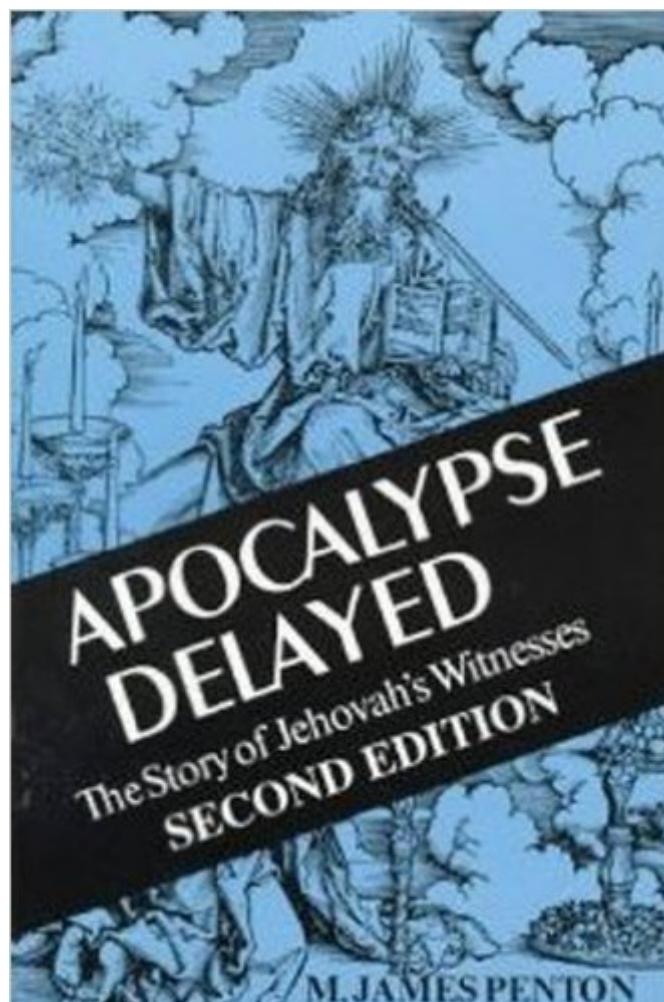


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Apocalypse Delayed: The Story Of Jehovah's Witnesses



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.

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Customer Reviews

Professor (emer.) Jim Penton grew up a Jehovah's Witness, and remained a well-known apologist for the controversial movement even as a professional historian. His earlier (published) study of the movement's unkind treatment by Quebec's authorities is from this period. Eventually, however, he was disfellowshipped from the movement after raising certain criticisms, along with a significant number of other members of the congregation in his hometown Lethbridge. Dr. Penton's combination of personal insight and professional distance has produced a milestone product that simply cannot be overlooked by any serious student of the sect. The book has three sections: History; Concepts and Doctrine; and Organization and Community. Penton looks at the history of the movement from the 1870s, its doctrinal changes, its leader figures and the sect's countless predictions of the end of the world. His insight into the inner workings is especially evident when he describes the current organizational structure and the sociological makeup of the Witnesses. The bibliography is extensive, and Penton even includes a somewhat subjective but very valuable evaluation of the sources available. This book is certainly critical of the Witnesses in many respects, but not as much as many evangelical JW critics would hope. It kills many popular myths about the sect, and criticizes inaccurate or unfounded claims made by the group's religious opponents as much as it criticizes the sect's own -- often horribly inaccurate and unreliable -- history versions. This reviewer is also a former member of the sect, and is a graduate student of History of Religions at the University of Bergen, Norway. Note: Searching the Net for articles by James Penton will reveal a number of interesting writings about the JWs that comes highly recommended.

This is the second of the books that describe the inner-workings of Watchtower and the society of the "witness" community. I also found this publication very informative. Penton breaks down his work into two parts: HISTORY and DOCTRINE and THEOLOGY. This reading is helpful because it helps the reader understand that this movement once was very small and adhered to many of the traditional belief systems of its founder; Charles Taze Russell and his association with other adventist religious groups. Apocalypse... also helps readers understand the four management systems and changes undergone by four different leaders, which are mentioned in great detail in the pages. PART TWO, helps readers understand the organizational structure of both "Watchtower" and the "witness" community. Readers also learn the doctrine and its comparison to other

doctrines. *Apocalypse...* is laced with interesting historic anecdotes and illustrations of the organization's viewpoint of traditional society outside itself. I recommend reading this publication if you are a student of mind control organizations. I give this a definite five star rating.

Few people in the world have as firm a grasp on Jehovah's Witnesses/Bible Student history as does M. James Penton. His book is a rich source of not only references to original documents but also penetrating insights into the significance of the statements made. His additional material in the new edition brings the book basically up to date, though he would have to produce new editions yearly to keep up with a religion that changes its position as frequently as does the Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, Penton refers to the recently softened stance on higher education as an indication that the movement may change its (as Harold Bloom puts it in *_The American Religion_*) "anti-mind," or anti-intellectual, position. Unfortunately, "the faithful and discreet slave" (whose authority Penton rightly identifies as being central to the theology of Jehovah's Witnesses and comparable to the Catholic doctrine of the magisterium, though one could argue that the real core of the religion lies in generally materialistic fantasies about the post-Apocalyptic Millenium after everyone but the Jehovah's Witnesses are dead) has changed its mind again. Four year colleges have returned to being evil, though technical schools are permitted since the Society still wants its members to have jobs so that they can perpetuate their lifestyle at Bethel and since technical schools don't tend to provide the philosophical, psychological, and religious training needed to penetrate the Jehovah's Witnesses' self-contradictory and anti-human theology. Nonetheless, after reading Penton's book, one ought to be prepared to comprehend any "new light" Jehovah's Witnesses come up with. Since the book covers a relatively large period of time, there are naturally places where Penton could have gone into more depth. History is deep and wide. However, Penton's discussion is characterized by an evenness of style, a scholarly detachment, and a former initiate's intimacy, interest, and sympathy. Unlike the Watchtower Society, Penton gives clear and copious citations of his sources, which are almost always original documents. I have one complaint. He uses endnotes in this book, unlike his more recent work *_Jehovah's Witnesses and the Third Reich: Sectarian Politics under Persecution_* wherein he uses footnotes. Endnotes are inconvenient for the reader who has to constantly flip to the end of the book if he would read the author's additional comments and references. My trick is to use a paperclip to keep my place in the endnote section of the book and, when I'm reading a endnote, to keep my finger in my place in the main text. The book should be an entertaining read even if you have never had anything to do with Jehovah's Witnesses. If I may borrow from Harold Bloom again, sometimes fact is stranger than fiction. Or, as the Jehovah's

Witnesses' hymnal says in its second song: All things we do to please our God; The world we've left behind. The unbelievers think we're odd, But this we do not mind.

I have read many history books of the WT: 1975 yearbook, "Proclaimers" book, Marley Cole's books, "Evocative Religion", as well as from anti-WT authors like Martin. Penton has endeavored to produce a straightforward account of the major actors in the WT movement. JW's whom I know were open-minded enough to have read this book recognize its historical accuracy, but often resent the fact that it shows too much of the fraile, human, and naive side of the Watchtower's principal players. Why? Because to do so weakens their faith in the organization, that it is THE sole organization on earth directed by Jehovah. Penton has done admirable job of treating the main figures and events very matter-of-factly, but I think he sometimes bends over backwards in a few places in defending C.T. Russell.

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