



STATEMENT DF-200

## IN SEARCH OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

by Raymond Franz

The nephew of recently deceased Watchtower president Frederick Franz left the Jehovah's Witness organization — and his own position on its Governing Body — over a decade ago. Since that time, Raymond Franz reveals in his book *In Search of Christian Freedom*, he has remained "free from denominational ties" (p. 700), fellowshiping primarily with other ex-JWs at religious gatherings in private homes.

While his first book, *Crisis of Conscience* (Commentary Press, 1983), focused almost entirely on the Witnesses, their history, and the events leading up to his formal break with the sect, this sequel attempts to put all of that into a broader religious perspective and to answer, for other ex-Witnesses, the all-important question: Where do we go from here?

Doctrinally, Franz has come a long way since leaving the Watchtower organization. He confesses that "a considerable portion of what I formerly believed had no sound foundation in Scripture" (p. 705). But he also feels no obligation to adopt doctrinal "orthodoxy," viewing it as merely the majority opinion of "men who constituted what may properly be called 'governing bodies' of the past" (705). In fact, although acknowledging that "many religious organizations are less authoritarian than the one I left" (695), Franz seems to view the Christian community as a whole in much the same light as he now views Jehovah's Witnesses. Thus he estimates that "about the same percentage among Jehovah's Witnesses are true Christians as in any other church" (703).

So, then, where should former Witnesses look for fellowship? The answer Franz offers is "for us to 'go to him [Christ] outside the camp,'" quoting from Hebrews 13:13 (NRSV). He explains that the various Christian denominations are "individual 'camps'" together forming "a very large 'camp' constituting a city-like corporate religious establishment" (698). And he indicates that church membership tends to interfere with "the exercise of personal conscience" and often "robs one of one's freedom and personal integrity" (700). Thus, he concludes, "I believe it is possible to be of *greater* service, *better* service, to God, to Christ, and to my fellow man by not linking myself to some system, whether a single denomination or the multi-denominational religious 'establishment' as a whole" (700). And this is the course he recommends, by implication, for others.

But is Raymond Franz really outside the "camp"? Or is he in fact the founder of a fledgling "camp" of his own, a new Watchtower splinter group? He doesn't seem to think so — and the reader cannot help but be impressed with the sincerity of this man. Yet, persons familiar with Watchtower history cannot help also recalling that the sect's founder, Charles Taze Russell, similarly started out rejecting the religious establishment while providing spiritual leadership to a loose association of independent home Bible study groups. Unlike Russell, though, Franz denies having any "special 'line of communication' with God and his Son that is not available to every other member of the body" (680). Time, of course, will tell whether the fellowship of former Witnesses drawn to Raymond Franz will develop into a new denomination or will remain on the unorthodox fringe of the broader home-church movement.

Although important from the standpoint of revealing where he is leading, it should be noted that Franz confines his repudiation of orthodoxy and the established churches to some 20 pages at the end of this 732-page volume. The rest of the book contains little that traditional Christians would find objectionable, concentrating instead on refuting the Watchtower Society's approach to authority, salvation, evangelism, blood transfusions, church discipline, mind control, and so on.

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Some of the ground he covers reiterates points made in *Crisis of Conscience*, but there is enough new material to make the book of interest to serious students of the Jehovah's Witness movement. After all, Raymond Franz remains the only source of information regarding the inner workings of the sect's Governing Body — he being the only member of that Body to go public. And he is also privy to many facts not commonly known due to his years with the organization and his worldwide contacts.

For example, he reveals the authorship of several anonymously written *Watchtower* magazine articles and JW books and exposes the internal politics behind doctrinal changes that Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide accepted as from God. A rare photograph is reproduced showing the sect's second president, J. F. Rutherford, and the rest of the headquarters staff celebrating Christmas in 1926 (149). One of the more interesting anecdotes involves a case of a JW elder arrested in 1987 for using a van with concealed video equipment to spy on members visiting the home of a former Witness. Police interrupted the operation, confiscated the camera, and arrested the Witnesses in the van on charges of invasion of privacy (380-82).

Readers who found *Crisis of Conscience* tedious will find *In Search of Christian Freedom* even more so, as it concentrates not so much on the Watchtower's glaring false prophecies and doctrinal reversals as on the more subtle day-to-day influences of legalism, mind control, and organizational authority. Definitely not a primer for readers seeking an introduction to Jehovah's Witnesses, this wordy tome nevertheless proves to be an important primary source for serious students of the sect.

— *Reviewed by David A. Reed*