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The Watchtower Society and Medical Quackery

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[Kenneth G. Raines](#)

The Watchtower Society has been involved in occult, psychic and quack medical procedures throughout much of its history. Like their current ban on blood transfusions for its members, this quackery has put the lives of millions unnecessarily at risk. Many have lost their eyesight, contracted illnesses or lost their lives following the unorthodox and bizarre Watchtower teachings on medicine. This article gives an overview of the Society's strange history of medical quackery and occultism which will be examined in more detail in coming issues of *The JW Research Journal*.

One of the most recognizable aspects of Jehovah's Witnesses to the general public is not their theology, but one of their medical positions: their refusal to accept blood transfusions. Many have read or heard reports of JW's refusing a blood transfusion for themselves or for their child, with the tragic result being the death of the person who refused a transfusion, perhaps while a frustrated and helpless doctor stood by.

Unknown to most outside Jehovah's Witnesses-and in many cases JW's themselves-is their long history of quack medical endorsements which put the health of millions of their followers at risk, or caused the premature deaths of untold thousands.

The Watchtower Society has even endorsed some of the most notorious medical quacks of the twentieth century such as Albert Abrams, George Starr White, Charles Betts, Bernarr McFadden and others. They have endorsed numerous occult, psychic and pseudoscience nostrums and cures, even inventing, promoting and selling quack medical gadgets to their followers.

The Watchtower sponsored such exotic and bizarre quackery as medical radiesthesia; radionics; the Radio-Solar Pad(a worthless and perhaps harmful device containing Radium which was worn by no less than "Judge" Rutherford the Society's second president); Zone therapy; Iridiagnosis; The Biological Blood Wash; The Radio Disease Killer; The Electronic Radio Biola (invented by a JW); The Grape Cure; Ensign Remedies and much more.

Anti AMA Stance

The Golden Age magazine

The Watchtower Society rarely published anything favorable to orthodox or scientific medicine. This was especially true of *The Golden Age* magazine (Changed to *Consolation* in 1937 and to its current name *Awake!* in 1946). This magazine by the Society, unlike *The Watchtower*, was not primarily concerned with Biblical interpretation and theology. It was a news and information magazine for the general public and JW's. Numerous articles were published on the subject of health and medicine, documenting their strange views on the subject.

Their view of scientific medicine was extremely critical and condemnatory until the 1960s when they became more accepting. Here's a typical example from a *Golden Age* article which extolled the virtues of Eugenics:

We do well to bear in mind that among the drugs, serums, vaccines, surgical operations, etc., of the medical profession, there is nothing of value save an occasional surgical procedure. Their so-called "science" grew out of Egyptian black magic and has not lost its demonological character.... we shall be in a sad plight when we place the welfare of the race in their hands.[1]

They not only demonized the medical profession, but the prominent individuals within the movement such as Dr. Morris Fishbein, the past president of the American Medical Association and former editor of its two periodicals, *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and *Hygeia*. In one *Golden Age* they favorably quoted a quack medical journal that said:

The Journal of the A. M. A. is the vilest sheet that passes the United States mail.... Nothing new and useful in therapeutics escapes its unqualified condemnation. Its attacks are generally ad hominem. Its editorial columns are largely devoted to character assassination.... Its editor [Morris Fishbein] is of the type of Jew that crucified Jesus Christ. [2]

Just say no to drugs

The Watchtower Society condemned the use of drugs for the most part from Aspirin to Morphine until fairly recently. Aspirin they said (ironically) caused heart disease and other maladies. [3]

In one early *Golden Age* though they claimed that intravenous drug use would be common during the Millennium and that this would be used by The Christ (the 144,000 and Jesus) to help mankind become perfect, free of all diseases! [4]

Vaccination hysteria

Many are aware that the Watchtower Society campaigned against vaccinations for decades. They claimed it was "a direct violation of the everlasting covenant" and Witnesses were expected not to have one. Vaccines were said to cause all kinds of disease:

Thinking people would rather have smallpox than vaccination, because the latter sows the seed of syphilis, cancers, escema, erysipelas, scrofula, consumption, even leprosy and many other loathsome affections. Hence the practice of vaccination is a crime, an outrage and a delusion. [5]

Vaccinations were useless:

Vaccination has never saved a human life. It does not prevent smallpox.[6]

In addition to diseases, vaccinations were responsible for the spread of "demonism" and sexual immorality! [7] In short, vaccination was a "cruel hoax" on mankind by Satan himself. [8] They carried on their crusade for decades after

the medical community demonstrated the value of vaccinations in preventing certain contagious diseases. No one knows what effect this ban on vaccinations had on JW's, but one assumes many lives were at least put unnecessarily at risk.

Aluminum hysteria

The Watchtower Society also carried on an irrational campaign against aluminum cooking ware. This was another "demonic" or Satanically inspired curse on mankind that they tried valiantly to stop. Aluminum cookware was believed by the Society to cause all manner of ailments and disease from athlete's foot to cancer. This campaign was also carried on decades after aluminum cookware was shown to be harmless for the general population.

Germ's vs. constipation

The Golden Age and its successor *Consolation* contained several articles against the germ theory of disease. They believed the medical profession and scientific communities that held certain germs caused disease were wrong. They believed that the germs associated with certain diseases followed the arrival of the diseases. Instead of germs causing diseases, they believed diseases caused germs. The diseases themselves were actually caused by improper diet and constipation! If one had less than two bowel movements a day, one would get any number of diseases in short order.

Again, long after bacteria and viruses proved to be the cause of some diseases, *The Golden Age* was saying that not a single disease was caused by germs, that Pasteur was a "fake" and that Hydrophobia or Rabies was simply a "mental hoax". For this reason, *The Golden Age* and *Consolation* magazines advised not to drink pasteurized milk, but to drink it raw to get the benefits of nutrients destroyed during pasteurization.

Since they didn't believe bacteria caused food poisoning, they thought it must be the aluminum food was cooked in. Since viruses and bacteria didn't cause diseases such as smallpox, having a vaccination was viewed as putting "filthy pus" into one's veins. The real culprit in disease causation was constipation!

Alternative Medicine

The Watchtower Society rejected orthodox medicine until fairly recently. It has instead promoted "alternative" medical philosophies and procedures much more vigorously. *The Golden Age*, *Consolation*, and *Awake!* magazine articles on health were almost exclusively from an anti orthodox and pro alternative medical position. Most articles written on health in those magazines were written by alternative medical doctors, including Naturopaths, Homeopaths, Chiropractors and Osteopaths. These alternative systems of healing have completely different ideas on the cause and cure of diseases and have given rise to numerous quacks and quackeries.

Naturopathy

Naturopathy has had a colorful history. Its basic philosophy sounds harmless enough and even intuitive. Disease is the result of the body breaking down due to improper use and care (diet, etc.). Naturopathy seeks to help the body repair itself "naturally" once damaged and prevent diseases with such things as proper diet, sleep, rest, fresh air, sunshine, exercise, and so forth. They help "nature" cure by utilizing or strengthening the so-called "life force" of the person. Naturopaths have thus traditionally been concerned with nutrition, diet and exercise. In this they have in some ways been ahead of their time. However, this seemingly benign philosophy and approach has historically been frequently taken to unhealthy extremes and has laid Naturopaths open to numerous quacks and quackery, which hasn't helped Naturopathic methods become accepted by orthodox medicine.

Naturopathy spawned and promoted numerous quack cures and treatments, which was thus promoted by the Jehovah's Witnesses: The Biological Blood Wash; The Grape Cure; Iridiagnosis; Zone Therapy and more. This embracing of quackery was due to Naturopaths (and JW's) having the tendency to accept anything and everything opposed to orthodox medicine. MDs used "unnatural" substances (vaccines, serums, drugs, etc.) to cure which went counter to Naturopathic philosophy of "natural cures". This was the reason for their (and thus JW's) futile crusades against such things as vaccinations and drugs. [9]

Many Naturopaths accepted the other major "drugless" schools of medicine such as Osteopathy and Chiropractic. Watchtower doctors were mostly trained in these schools.

Osteopathy

Unlike Naturopathy which had no known founder, Osteopathy was founded by Andrew Still, the son of a Methodist missionary. Still's writings on Osteopathy are filled with religious themes and doctrines of his Methodist/Millerite faith. Still believed God had inspired Osteopathy. [10]

The slogan of Naturopathy, "No surgery, no drugs, no serums" was adopted by all major "drugless" schools of healing including Osteopathy. Still believed that disease was caused by improper nerve function and blood supply which were in turn caused by small dislocations of the spinal vertebrae which would pinch, restrict or cut-off nerve and blood supply to the rest of the body. These dislocations he called "subluxations". By adjusting these subluxations with the hands (massage, etc.), these could correct the problem and cure the diseases that resulted from them.

In Still's textbook for the first Osteopathy school he founded, he claimed to be able to cure yellow fever, malaria, diphtheria, rickets, piles, diabetes, dandruff, constipation and obesity by simply manipulating the spinal column to eliminate "subluxations". [11]

Many of the doctors whose articles appeared in Society literature on health from 1919 to the 1960s were Osteopaths. The Society recommended Osteopathic treatment for many ailments into the 1960s. [12] Today, Osteopaths have embraced some orthodox practices and now administer anesthesia, prescribe drugs and even perform minor surgery. They have thus dropped to some degree their "no drugs, no serums, no surgery" stand.

Chiropractic

Chiropractic medicine was started by Daniel Palmer. It sprang from Osteopathy and originally had the same basic philosophy: disease is caused by "subluxations" of the vertebrae of the spine pinching or constricting nerves. Chiropractic "adjustments" of the spine to correct these subluxations will cure many diseases and ailments in the rest of the body. Palmer believed the "life" or "vital" force of life (which he termed the "innate" force) expressed itself through the central nervous system, which could be hindered by subluxations. [13]

Many Watchtower Society writers on health were Chiropractors, including A.G. Eckols who treated J.F. Rutherford's pneumonia in San Diego which led to the building of Beth-Sarim. [14]

Chiropractic has evolved as well through the years. It now has two main branches, the "Mixers" and the "Straights". The straights being of the old school and many are still against vaccinations, drugs, surgery, etc. The mixers (who outnumber the straights) now "mix" Chiropractic with an acceptance of orthodox medicine and will refer patients to MDs for many medical problems. [15]

Quack Cures and Food Fads

In rejecting scientifically based medicine and embracing "alternative" philosophies and the anecdotes and testimonies of laymen, the Watchtower Society has promoted one quackery after the other. Most of the craziest theories and procedures of Naturopaths, Osteopaths and Chiropractors were also promoted by the Society. This led to the following endorsements.

Russell and Medicine

Under Russell, their first president, the Watchtower Society didn't publish much on the subject of health. The Watch Tower magazine was primarily concerned with theology, but when commenting on medical matters Russell had some strange things to say. In the Jan. 15, 1912, Watch Tower he announced a cure for appendicitis which he said was caused by "biting worms near the junction of the transverse colon with the small intestines, low down on the right side of the abdomen." The remedy, he said, was also good for typhoid fever "which is also a biting worm disease." [16] This announcement was carried just below an announcement for "Millennial Beans" which were especially prodigious

beans discovered by a "Sister" in the "truth".

In 1881 Russell wrote in favor of the "Faith Cottage" Pink Cure. 17 In 1915, he promoted Dr. Park's cure for pneumonia which he said "seems to effect a cure every time." [18]

It wasn't until the publication of the news magazine, *The Golden Age* in 1919, however, that the Society really 'let their hair down' in terms of explaining their medical views. What they wrote is eye opening today. *The Golden Age's* health articles reads like a who's who and a what's what in twentieth century quackery. If one wants to research the twentieth century opposition to orthodox medicine and promotion of quackery and early "alternative" medicine, *The Golden Age* is a good, interesting and entertaining source.

The Grape Cure

One of the strange cures advocated in *The Golden Age* included The Grape Cure which was purported to cure cancer. It was a fasting diet favored by Naturopaths and others consisting solely of grapes. Grapes for breakfast, grapes for lunch and grapes for dinner for weeks. This was about all that was needed to cure your cancer. The philosophy and ideas behind it were strange, some would say occultic. The grape cure worked, according to its founder, Johanna Brandt, because grapes were "magnetic" and pepped up your mind with the sun's healing "vibrations." Needless to say, there are many stories of unfortunate individuals who tried this "cure" and died of cancer. How many of those included Jehovah's Witnesses who followed *The Golden Age's* endorsement is anybody's guess. [19]

Iridiagnosis

The Golden Age also promoted iridology or iridiagnosis. This is a medical theory and practice of diagnosing illnesses in the body by the appearance of the iris. Many "drugless" schools adopted this such as Naturopathy and Chiropractic (some to this day). As may be expected, no scientific evidence exists as to the general diagnostic value of the appearance of the iris, and most iridiagnosticians disagree amongst themselves what colors, specks and streaks mean what in a person's eye. Never-the-less, it is experiencing something of a comeback in New Age/Alternative medical circles.[20]

Zone Therapy

The Watchtower vigorously promoted "zone therapy" (now called Reflexology) into the 1960s. This is another strange belief and procedure for diagnosing and even curing diseases and ailments. It states that extremities of the body such as fingers and toes control or at least represent and influence different "zones" or areas of the body. By manipulating a persons toes (by placing rubber bands on certain toes in certain places for example) one can alleviate pain, ailments and even diseases elsewhere in the body. Again, since this was a "natural" or "drugless" therapy many Naturopaths, Osteopaths, Chiropractors and thus JW's relied on this method for treatment. [21]

Medical radiesthesia

The Watchtower Society for decades was heavily involved in various forms of what has come to be called "medical radiesthesia." This is an occult philosophy that unknown and invisible rays, waves and "vibrations" can be used to diagnose and cure diseases. The most well known example of this is Radionics or the ERA.

The ERA

As documented before in this Journal, the Society for decades promoted the electronic reactions of Abrams or the ERA after scientific investigations found little to be said in favor of it. [22] A "radionic" machine is used to diagnose and cure patients sometimes at a distance from a handwriting sample, picture, blood sample or other personal item of the patient. One JW doctor even invented an ERA gadget and sold it to JW's in *The Golden Age*. This medical procedure is now viewed by the Watchtower Society as "spiritism".[23]

Radium

The Golden Age promoted the medical use of Radium, a radioactive element which is still used occasionally to destroy cancer cells as a form of radiation therapy. The Society's promotion of Radium went well beyond its use in destroying cancerous cells. *The Golden Age* even advertised The Radio-Solar Pad for sale. The Society's second president, J.F. Rutherford wore the belt to help his pneumonia on the advice of his doctor, J.W. Coolidge in the early 1920s. *The Golden Age* printed an article on this by Coolidge, followed by an endorsement by the "Judge." 24 An ad for the device was included in several subsequent *Golden Age* issues. [25]

The Golden Age even pointed out that apparently "honest" demons, speaking through mediums or Ouija Boards, were saying that in discovering Radium, mankind was getting close to the "secret" of life. The fact that "lying spirits" as they called them said this didn't raise any red flags because, they said, "even liars will sometimes tell the truth." [26]

After Radium "poisonings" from its radioactivity were widely reported in the popular press, the Society ended their endorsement of such things as the Radio-Solar Pad, despite its backing by "honest" liars.

Strange medical statements

The Golden Age and other Society publications were so full of bizarre material on health that it's hard to believe. Here's a sampling of some of their statements which may give the reader an idea:

If the organs [of your body] are diseased, heal them by correcting your diet. Avoid the use of aluminum cooking utensils and alum baking powders as they are injurious to your health, poisoning your blood stream... Sleep on the right side or flat on your back, with the head toward the north so as to get benefit of the earth's magnetic currents. Avoid serum inoculations as they pollute the blood stream with their filthy pus.... Stop chewing gum, as you need the saliva for your food. [27]

But the dog-rabies-vaccine imposition is the latest.... Rabies! When it has been shown conclusively that there is no such thing as rabies![28]

The earlier in the forenoon you take the sun bath, the greater will be the beneficial effect, because you get more of the ultra-violet rays, which are healing. [29]

It has never been proven that a single disease is due to germs. 30

Quite likely there is some connection between the violation of human blood [vaccines] and the spread of demonism.... [31]

Milk is the greatest curative food known. [32]

The Electronic Radio Biola

I HAVE named this new discovery, which I believe will be epochal in the history of the treatment of disease, and which I am exclusively announcing in THE GOLDEN AGE prior to its general publication elsewhere, The Electronic Radio Biola, which means life renewed by radio waves or electrons. The Biola automatically diagnoses and treats diseases by the use of the electronic vibrations. The diagnosis is 100 percent correct, rendering better service in this respect than the most experienced diagnostician.... THE principle of operation of the Biola is the collection... of the disease vibrations.... the fluid containing the same waves or vibrations enters the body, meets the disease waves and destroys them.... This is a great step forward, marking the Biola as the most valuable treatment apparatus obtainable today, and well worthy of notice in the columns of a magazine like THE GOLDEN AGE... [33]

All human ailments have their start in the intestines. [34]

HOW many people know, I wonder, of the curative properties of olive oil. The word "cure" is a

strong term.... I personally know of more than one being relieved of liver trouble, and even cured of gall stones, by the use of olive oil.... A friend who for years has suffered pain in the region of the appendix was entirely relieved by the oil treatments. 35

Cigarettes and Mental Instability

....Enfeebled constitutions, inherited from fashionable mothers, cannot stand up under tobacco... [36]

Aspirin—The Menace of Heart Disease [37]

Serum Led to Desire to Kill

At Los Angeles a youth of 20 years was caught in the act of choking a woman of 75. Arrested, and suspected of three murders, he claims the urge to kill came as a result of serum inoculations... [38]

Even years ago it was known by some people that the use of pacifiers by babies is one of the chief causes of diseased and enlarged tonsils and adenoid growths, which results from the suction.[39]

Lemons and Kerosene

A subscriber.... finds a drop or two of kerosene excellent for quickly cleaning sinks and bathtubs; it cuts the dirt immediately and leaves no odor; and when applied to cuts the cuts heal sooner. Try it. [40]

The Watchtower Society's "bloodguilt"

No one knows how much unnecessary illness and death resulted among the Jehovah's Witnesses from this endorsement of quackery and useless cures and remedies. Despite this though, the Watchtower Society still claims to be God's organization on earth, His sole "channel of communication" through whom alone the truth is dispensed to mankind. All other religions are false, soon to be destroyed by God at Armageddon. They claim that all these religions, especially the churches of "Christendom", are "bloodguilty" before God as their leaders promoted such things as wars which resulted in the untimely deaths of millions. They advise all who will listen to forsake all these religions because of this bloodguilt. As they have said:

According to the Bible, when we deliberately put someone's life unnecessarily in danger, we could become bloodguilty. (Compare 1 Chronicles 11:17-19.) Christian parents would not want to incur bloodguilt by risking their daughter's lives in this way [female circumcision]. [41]

Avoid bloodguilt from (1) eating blood [blood transfusions], (2) sharing in bloodguilty organizations... [42]

The Scriptures show that if we are part of any organization that is bloodguilty before God, we must sever our ties with it if we do not want to share in its sins. (Rev. 18;4, 24: Mic. 4:3) [43]

As in most other cases from their theology to prophetic date setting, the Watchtower Society's condemnatory words directed at others condemns themselves. May many JWs have the courage to forsake organizations that have put the lives of their followers at risk –such as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

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