

The Watchtower and Violent Crime

By Lorri MacGregor

Dr. Jerry Bergman was still an active Jehovah's Witness when he wrote his thesis on Crime and the Watchtower Society. As an active elder, he hoped to explain away the embarrassing statistics linking Jehovah's Witnesses to a high crime rate, statistically out of proportion to the population in general. He also researched Jehovah's Witnesses and Mental Illness. His findings were part of the reasons why he left the Organization.

Consider for example the headline-grabbing case in 1995 near Allentown, Pennsylvania. Why would 17-year old Bryan Freeman, his 15-year old brother David, and their cousin Ben Birdwell, become hate-filled skinheads, after being raised as Jehovah's Witnesses? Why would they brutally murder their mother, stabbing her several times? Why would they slit their father's throat, and beat their brother Eric to death with a baseball bat?

Dr. Bergman has some very good insights, and I would like to also add my own observations to this sorry scenario.

I have observed how Jehovah's Witness children are victims of "conditional love." Their parents strive to have them obey the Society's rules to the letter. I remember my friend forcing her young child to sit perfectly still in a chair for two hours, so she wouldn't squirm so much at the Kingdom hall!

In the sixties, we were expected to dress our children like little adults. My pre-school boys attended the Kingdom Hall in little suits and ties! They were expected to act like "miniature adults." All Jehovah's Witness kids missed all the fun stuff too, like Christmas, Birthdays, Easter, Valentine's Day, etc. Feeling left out by their peers, they looked to other Jehovah's Witnesses and their parents for acceptance, which was conditional on their obedience.

All this is a recipe for rebellion in the teen years. These Pennsylvania teenagers began resisting their parents control when they were only 13 and 11, refusing to go to Jehovah's Witness meetings. When the elders could not control them, they were publicly marked as "bad associations" and suffered further rejection from their Jehovah's Witness friends, parents, and Jehovah's Witnesses in general.

The family sought outside help from Social agencies and one of the boys was placed in a State institution. It is common for Jehovah's Witness parents to remove unruly children from their home with little thought of the consequences of such actions. It was in that cold institution, on the heels of eviction from the home, that the Aryan Brotherhood of Man offered one of the troubled teens unconditional acceptance and friendship. He was vulnerable, hurt, and starved for affection. He belonged at last! He drew the other two into the fold as well.

Teaching them all to hate was nothing new to the teens. They were taught to hate everything non-Jehovah's Witness right at the Kingdom Hall. All they needed to do was refocus their hate. Both groups claimed to have God's favor for their actions, so that fit right in as well. The teens were used to authority figures telling them what to do in God's name. Unquestioning obedience was already drilled into them. They were ripe for the picking.

They blamed their parents and the Watchtower Society for their isolated, miserable

childhood. They left the absolute “truth” of the Watchtower Organization, replacing it with the absolute “truth” of their new organization, the Skinheads. They were unskilled at questioning or compromising. They still clung to the promise of living on a new earth; only this new earth would not be with Jehovah’s Witnesses, but with white Anglo-Saxons. The difference was that the Jehovah’s Witnesses fought with words and the printed page. The Skinheads had a more activist philosophy, which often included physical violence.

The troubled teens were now of a mindset to get “revenge” on their tormentors. Twisting their Jehovah’s Witness reasoning, they probably thought that since the skinheads were now God’s chosen ones, their parents were therefore the “Satanic” ones. They had always been taught to hate anything of the Devil.

Their parents fueled their paranoia by desperately going to groups like the anti-Defamation League, and even seeking out psychologists. They knew the Watchtower could not help them.

Things had gone too far. All this was “too little, too late.” If competent help had been sought when the boys first rebelled at pre-teen ages, perhaps the whole family could have been preserved.

In any event, the boys planned the murder and carried it out in a callous, cold manner. They “disposed” of their parents and their favored brother who was accepted, the good Jehovah’s Witness one. They put their hate into action.

Would that this incident was an isolated one, but it is just one among many crimes of violence involving Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Perhaps this will be a wake-up call for any Jehovah’s Witness parents reading this article who are following the Watchtower line of strict obedience. Perhaps they should make their child feel “special” on the day he was born, and let him know how much he is loved, even when he is not perfect. Most Jehovah’s Witnesses are striving to be good parents, but they need to be careful. Statistics do not lie.