

## Witnesses to Jahveh

by H. W. Moss

Most of the morning sunlight was spent by the time the first cup of coffee was poured.

Jeremy stretched his arms, grabbed air as he opened and closed his fists. A long, wide yawn engulfed his face. He had been up most of the night reading and generally considered dawn more the beginning of sundown than the start of a new day.

George The Cat picked a delicate path from one corner of the kitchen table to the other. No one tsk-tsked him away.

Lori leaned across the table toward Jeremy and placed a plate of steaming hot pancakes in front of him. As she rose slightly from her chair, his eyes drifted up toward her cleavage.

She wore the sheerest gossamer top beneath which her nipples stood upright and firm with the chill late-morning air. She sat next to her boy friend, Murry, who had nailed her twice last night.

“Mmmmmm. Those look good enough to eat,” Jeremy said.

“Eyes off mah woman,” Murry responded in mock anger. His mouth was full and a few pancake crumbs flew from his lips as he made a mad slap at Jeremy’s knuckles with his fork.

Mike, another roommate, groggily ambled into the room wearing just a pair of pajama bottoms. Silently, he filled a cup from an urn on the counter as Cathy followed

behind. She, too, plucked a mug from the shelf, held it out to Mike for filling. She wore Mike's matching pajama top and nothing else.

Although the breakfast area was beginning to get crowded, not every member of the household had arrived. There were four sleeping areas in the three-bedroom house including an attic inhabited by the reclusive Thor.

The doorbell rang.

Steaming hot cup to lips: "I'll get it," said Mike who was nearest the living room door. He returned a moment later trailing two young men who each carried a leather flap-top briefcase under their arms.

"Hey, look what I found, guys," Mike said with a wide grin and unrestrained pleasure in his voice. "I don't think they're selling anything," he said brightly.

"Yah, they are," said Murry who rocked his head backward to emphasize his point. Mike, on the other hand, looked at the newcomers with what can only be described as absolute glee.

Nearly the same age as their hosts, the two contrasted sharply with the members of the household. The young men were dressed identically in black two-piece suits, white shirts, thin black ties, shiny black shoes. Both wore their blondish hair short, very like a crew cut only slightly longer and each held what looked suspiciously like a bible in their right hand. Alike in so many ways, one distinguishing characteristic differentiated them from one another: the color of their eyes. Bright blue irises versus deep brown.

"Do join us in our cozy corner of the world," Mike said as he swept his hand toward two vacancies at the table. He remained standing. "I'm pretty sure you don't want coffee, but a glass of orange juice perhaps?"

Quick nod of yes from Blue Eyes as Brown scrutinized Mike, Murry, then Jeremy, Cathy and finally Lori who was already reaching behind her inside the refrigerator for the juice pitcher.

The proselytes were used to abuse and such hospitality was unusual, one might say unorthodox. Brown was not without distrust. This was the twentieth door they had knocked on that morning and the first at which they had been able to speak more than two words of greeting. Being in Service to the Lord was not without its trials. But when Mike pulled open the unlocked entrance and Brown Eyes delivered his warm greeting, introduced himself and his companion, he had been startled, almost bewildered by the response.

“Great to meet you guys,” Mike’s hand shot out to grab and shake each in turn furiously, sincerely. “Come in, come in. We’re just sitting down to eat. You’ll have a captive audience.”

And, they did, indeed. No one got up to leave when, after initial introductions, Brown plunged into his rote description of the sorry state the world was in and began to correlate this with passages from Revelations. He opened his Good Book and directed their attention to Prophecies where, after pausing to glance around the room, his eyes straying back to the two women, said: “Balac has been taught to cast stumbling blocks before his children such as adultery.”

Cathy and Lori looked blank. Neither woman considered that the comment might be directed at them.

“In John we read the prophecy and learn that the time is at hand,” Brown intoned.

“My personal favorite is the Alpha and Omega part,” Murry said sotto voice to Lori.  
“It’s coming up.”

“I am the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the ending saith the Lord,” Brown continued without countenancing Murry who suppressed a smirk, nudged Lori in the ribs.

“Then John talks of repentance and to do the first works,” Blue eyes piped up. He was obviously trying to curry favor from his cohort, but the comment sounded half-hearted at best.

“Ah, Caliban speaks,” Jeremy muttered. Brown Eyes talked tirelessly for perhaps ten minutes straight without further interruption from the household. The dishes were cleared away, the sink piled high by the time he invited them to begin bible study classes, perhaps around this very table.

Jeremy knew the bible thumpers were trying to close the deal and, before his housemates had an opportunity to respond, said: “The object of that would be?” The question dangled in the air.

“In order to save your mortal souls,” Brown replied with complete equanimity.

“But as I understand it, your faith says only a certain number will be saved,” said Mike. “There are a limited number of soul tickets available, right? Twelve times twelve times twelve.”

“I see you’ve talked with some of us before,” said Brown whose distrust was about to be legitimized. “But it is times twelve five times,” he corrected Mike.

“Right, you’re not the first. How many souls? Twelve to the fifth? That’s, like, a small number. But there’s, like, a billion people on the planet.”

“Fat chance, Mike,” Jeremy burst out. “Right now we’re up to six billion and counting.”

“Okay, okay. Fine. Six billion. And twelve to the fifth power is what, less than a million I bet.”

Jeremy knew the answer to that one too: “Make it a shade under a quarter million.”

“Well then. There you are.”

The two visitors looked first at one another, then back at Mike with quizzical smiles. “There you are what?” asked Blue Eyes.

“There you are how it makes no sense for you guys to try and convert anyone who might compete for your space. I mean, only a finite bunch gets to go to heaven, right?”

Blue Eyes looked thoughtful after hearing this assessment.

“Actually, no. The Chosen Ones stay here on earth,” Brown said with exactitude. “Forever. Your mortal soul is what’s in danger of dissipating. Everyone who’s accepted the Lord remains here on the earth and all the unbelievers evaporate.”

“Whatever,” Mike said. “The point is, there’s only so many who get to stay and every time you convince someone to join your little sect they stand just as good a chance as you of being one of the souls who remain. Is that correct?” Without waiting for a reply, Mike continued: “Which means they might get your ticket to the party. That’s it, no more seats available. Sold out, last performance, you miss opening night and you turn to misty vapor.”

Blue Eyes looked thoughtful. He obviously had never considered this argument.

Brown wanted to come out punching. “We’re not a sect,” clearly wounded by the comment. “We are a bona fide religion and we have missionaries all over the world!”

“Like I said: sect. Protestants are a sect of the Catholics who evolved from the Jews. Sects. They’re all sects.”

“Please, Michael. Let’s refrain from talking about what you did last night at the breakfast table,” Lori said with a wry smile.

A large black man had been standing patiently, silently at the kitchen door the last few minutes. He sipped his coffee, finally asked: “So, can God make a rock so big he can’t lift it?”

“I wouldn’t touch that question if I were you,” Jeremy said conspiratorially to Blue. “Thor’s just throwing out bait.”

Neither of the guests replied. Brown looked as if it were beneath him to say anything at all as Blue sat uneasy in his chair.

Thor took another tack: “How ‘bout the Ontological Argument, a proof for the existence of God that goes: God is something greater than which nothing can be conceived. Human beings can conceive of something greater than which nothing can be conceived. Therefore, God must exist.”

“Wait a second,” Murry exclaimed reaching for an ashtray and pulling out a cigarette. “You don’t need to convince these guys. They’ve already bought into Anselm whether they know it or not.”

“Furthermore, proof of His existence doesn’t make Him a perfect being,” Lori interrupted. “I bet if he were to think about it, this time around He’d limit the number of Bachs. Fifty-three named Johann, you can’t keep track. Johann Sebastian, okay, I can live with that. And his son, Christian, had, what, 20 children! But there’s dozens more with names like Johannes Hans, Johann Ambrosius, lots of Johanns, some spelled with an ‘e’

on the end, plenty of Friedriches, Georg Friedrich, Gottlieb Friedrich and even a guy named Wilhelm Friedemann Bach.”

“You can tell she’s a music major, can’t you?” Murry said in an aside as he winked at Blue.

“Not a Coltrane or a Byrd in the bunch,” she continued. “I mean, there’s one Mozart in all the history of music. One’s enough. Categorize everything under Kocheh, give it a listing and be done with it fer hevvin’s sake.”

“Actually, you forgot the other Mozart, Leopold, Wolfgang’s dad,” Thor observed. Brown looked hard at his bible and began to flip pages in search of another quote. Blue tilted his head as if considering Lori’s absurd bit of logic.

“Tell me something,” Jeremy looked pointedly at Brown. “I can’t be sure which is which. Are you the Catamite or the slave?”

“Now that was uncalled for,” Lori chided.

Brown ignored both comments, flopped his book out on the table, said, “And in Revelations we read . . .”

“Here we go again. Y’know, I had to read some of that when I was a kid,” Lori observed.

“I didn’t,” Murry replied dryly.

Thor was unabashed. He gave neither Blue nor Brown another opportunity to respond although Brown seemed to realize he had already lost control of the conversation.

“They were revelations to John, last book of the New Testament,” Thor said with authority. “What he wrote from these was sort of an open letter from one member of the

club written to other members who were dissatisfied with the retribution process.

Basically, this letter said, Yes, you're all going to be slaughtered but don't worry. You'll come back; your persecutors won't. They're going to burn and here's how."

Blue Eyes was clearly captured by this thought as Thor continued. "Y'know, there is this amazing dichotomy between Catholic France, with its incantations and superstitious mumbo jumbo about dying on a cross and coming back to life, and Cartesian logic, with its distrust of the senses which, of course, is the basis for almost all our technological progress. Both philosophies continue to thrive side-by-side in that country. It's most astonishing."

"Yah, and I like the joke about Descartes sitting in a bar some time in the early Seventeenth Century," Murry said as he took a drag. "And the bartender says, 'Hey Rene, it's getting late, do you want another?' And Descartes says, 'I think not' and disappeared."

Several laughs erupted as Brown glanced at the clock on the wall, began folding his book. He looked nervously at Blue who seemed to be enjoying the banter.

"I think we had better be going," Brown said as he nudged his partner.

"Bet that's the first time you've ever decided to leave on your own," said Jeremy. "Hey," turning to Blue, "You going to school? We're all college students. Majors include philosophy, music, literature, computer science. Thor's a Cultural Anthro major with a minor in religions of the world, in case you couldn't guess that."

"Stoonts as Al Capp used to call 'em," Mike added. "We're stoonts. I'm studying art and computers at the University."

“Oh no,” Blue Eyes replied with abhorrence in his voice. “We’re not allowed to go on after high school if we’re to preach the word. They call it The Conflict.”

“That’s just a trick to keep you from intellectualizing their teachings,” Thor interjected.

“You might consider looking into school though,” Cathy spoke for the first time. “Lots of scholarships available. Loans are easy to get, too.”

Blue Eyes seemed to give serious consideration to the matter. Brown did not like where the discussion was leading.

“And if you need a place to stay, there’s room here,” Cathy concluded.

“Yah. The last of our Secular Humanists just moved out,” said Murry. “Always room for one more.” Then, by way of afterthought, “That’s an old Twilight Zone episode.”

Brown stood abruptly and motioned his partner to do the same. Blue obediently rose as Brown began to walk out of the room, his free hand guiding Blue’s elbow.

“If you do come back, that’ll be you standing in the corner, losing your religion,” Thor said behind them.

“Don’t take him seriously,” Cathy caught up to Blue Eyes.

“The only radical remedy for dipsomania is religiomania,” Thor recited from the doorway. “One of the James brothers said that.”

“Which one? Frank or Jesse?” Lori’s voice intoned from inside the kitchen.

“William,” Thor answered with typical laconic cool.

“I’m a card carrying member of NOW,” Lori responded. “That’s almost a religion.”

Murry caught up with Blue in the living room and stood in front of him. “Here, take my copy of Spong’s ‘Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism,’” he said and lifted a paperback from a small coffee table. He thrust the book into Blue’s satchel. “That’s what brought Thor back to our friendly little household.”

“Yah. He’s a former militant Black Muslim,” Cathy explained as she held the front door open.

“I’m still militant!”

“He wore a suit and tie tighter than yours. One day about a year ago he knocked on our door and talked with Murry for a while. Thor moved in a week later and gravitated toward the attic after spending a few nights on the couch. Now he’s a cabinet minister in the African American Students League.”

Cathy turned to Blue: “We’re all seekers here. Lori’s a lapsed Catholic. She and Murry met at a synagogue. And I hung out with the Sikhs for a while. Temple Gurdwara Sahib in Fremont, if you care to check it out.”

Brown was eager to depart and made no attempt to hide the fact. He was half in, half out the door tugging on Blue’s sleeve.

“Glad you could stop by,” Murry shook Blue’s hand. “Had a handful of Pentacostals last week. They didn’t stay long at all. Skeedadled quick. Chalk one up for the other side.”

Brown finally had his way and Blue followed him down the steps. But Blue turned back just before reaching the sidewalk to see the entire household gathered, Thor towering over them from the rear, all waving goodbye.

Murry stubbed his smoke out in an ashtray as the door closed. “I think we got through to that one. He’ll be back, you can count on it.”

“That was great, Murr,” Jeremy said lifting his coffee mug in salute. “You sneaked them in on us pretty good.”

Murry looked defensive. “Did not. It was totally fortuitous. I had no idea they were coming.”

“Yah, sure. What you got planned for us next week?”

“Mormons. I invited a few of ‘em to bring their self-aggrandizing docudrama over and show it to us Thursday afternoon.”

“Good. I could make it into a class project. Invite several cinema majors to critique the movie. I’ll play Scorsese. You be Robert Penn Warren. What time Thursday?”

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