

On News Radio 620, KTAR this is The God Show

For the next hour, we'll be examining the important contemporary issues of your life in spiritual terms. Our guests represent diverse areas in the world of theology. Now, here's your host, KTAR's Pat McMann.

Pat: Well hello. Yes, this is Pat McMann. I'm the host of The God Show every Sunday at noon here at News Radio 620, KTAR. And happy New Year! This is our first official 2002 The God Show. And we're going to depart from our regular format of looking at social issues through theological, liturgical eyes. Just a little bit—most of the time we don't examine the specific practices of a faith I guess primarily because that's done and done and done. You can see that on the History Channel and the Discovery Channel. You hear that over the years on a lot of radio stations. But when it comes to a religion that is massively misunderstood then I think we have an obligation and a responsibility on The God Show to perhaps clarify positions of that faith and clear up some of those misunderstandings. So in this brand new year, rather than focusing on contemporary social issues that effect us, we're going to do something just a little different and look at the practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Our guest is J R Brown, national spokesperson for the Jehovah's Witness faith. And he is the director for the Office of Public Information. J R we welcome you to the program and this is Pat McMann and since I came to you, it's a little different because most of the time I'm used to having the Jehovah's Witnesses come to my door, knock on my door and say "Do you have a minute?" or something like that. So let's start with that. Why do you come to my door uninvited?

JR: Well, first Pat thank you for very much for having me on this show that's gracious of you. And I acknowledge the fact that normally we're looking for you instead of someone looking for us. But we come to your door for one very important reason and that is: we feel there is a message from God that brings good news that all people today need to hear. And since we voluntarily do this as ministers of this gospel, this good news, the we look for 'hearing ears' in order to present this Biblical message.

Pat: I've always wondered, from the public relations standpoint, why you and other missionary oriented religions don't wait for an invitation? Because it seems to me that the percentages would be that you'd come to a door and we don't know you're coming, you'll probably be interrupting something at home.

JR: Well, this is true but it depends on how important the minister feels the message is. We feel this message is not our own, it's from God. And so we feel that a more aggressive approach is appropriate. So we seek out people. Now, that's not novel. You go to primitive Christianity introduced by Jesus Christ—he approached people, whether in their home, or in the marketplace, or by the seashore. When you read the exciting account of the Gospels of the Bible you find he took the initiative, he approached people because he had good news and a God-assigned message. Well likewise, even though we're very modern-times, we feel the message that's in the Bible is from God.

Pat: Do you have restrictions on what your members must do within certain areas of latitude? For example, would you approach me in an airport like Hare Krishna's?

JR: Well, no, we try not to be so intrusive as to be an irritant to people. For example, if there's places like airports, or malls and we have not been given specific permission to evangelize there, or if there are laws restricting us from openly approaching people there then we basically respect that. And here's why I would say 'basically,'" Pat. Because if I'm in an airport, and maybe I'm traveling in business or some other reason, but I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and you're sitting next to me, and we strike up a conversation, then I would feel free to speak to you about my beliefs. On the other hand, if I were looking for a site or location to evangelize that day, and they had restrictions in this particular area, I would respect that.

Pat: Now I don't mean this frivolously, JR, and we've just met, but there is a picture in my mind of a Jehovah's Witness or a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses coming from their neighborhood to my house and having to wait for the Mormon kids to leave my front door. I mean, do you compete in a missionary capacity for the souls of man?

JR: Not at all, in other words, if we did find by some chance go into an area, and there were Mormons at work

there then we would respectfully go to another part of our territory. And you know, Pat actually I've had that experience.

Pat: Really?

JR: Yeah, in the early days when I went out to do evangelizing work out in North Carolina it seems the Mormons had assigned to the same town—a little town over on the coast—they had persons in there, and so they were quite active, and so we would try not to get in their way, they would try not to get in ours. We were friendly about it, but we did not want this work to seem to be some sort of a harassment for people. So if we noticed them in a certain section, then we would respectfully go to another one. But there's one marked difference. They had a time limit on a period of time they would spend in a certain area with individuals whereas we tended to sort of settle in give the one-on-one instruction—what we refer to as 'home Bible instruction.'

Pat: So, you could just 'wait them out'?

JR: Yes, it was a matter of avoiding conflict. We do not seek confrontation in any way, we do not view ourselves in competition with anyone, because we follow what Jesus said. He said, if you go into a certain city or village, seek out in it those who want to hear or who are rightly disposed to that message. So we're really looking for an individual who is looking for something spiritual in his life. These are the people we are primarily looking for. At the same time, others are made aware by our presence and activity there, that we are actively evangelizers.

Pat: As the national spokesperson for the Jehovah's Witnesses, J R Brown is our guest on The God Show this Sunday at noon, and I wonder as you, JR, talk about respect for other religions and their practices and their proselytizing, with only a minute left in this segment I wonder if you can capsule your relationship with other religions—or is yours the only truth?

JR: Well, we feel we're different from others in this sense, that we take a direct approach at evangelizing. We do not have really a membership, per se of people who just say "I want to belong to Jehovah's Witnesses." If we count you, you are an active evangelizer. If you stop, you're no longer that. So in that way, we're different. We do not have a class, let's say of laymen who come to listen to others who are professional preachers.

Pat: I want to get back to that JR when we get back because I want to go into the structure of the Jehovah's Witnesses and your relationship of the other great faiths of the world; areas of tolerance, moral teaching, the clergy—all of those things that we can learn about today on this very special New Year's program in twenty-ought two. The God Show, on News Radio 620, KTAR

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Pat: Pat McMann once again, speaking with JR Brown. We welcome you all to a kind of unique God Show this Sunday as we look into the practices and the background of a religion that we often talk about and often do so with little knowledge unless we happen to be a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. How big a religion is it by way of numbers, J R Brown, national spokesperson out of Brooklyn New York?

JR: Well, numerically we are an international organization our current practicing members world-wide: 6, 117, 666. But Pat as I mentioned earlier, important to us is that you are active if you are a Witness. If you discontinue that, then we are not like other organizations who continue to count you as a member.

Pat: So I have to be a real participant?

JR: Right, that's what a Jehovah's Witness is, a witness actually gives testimony so we're not seeking to have an impressive number, but we're seeking to do a work which we feel is a God-assigned work.

Pat: If I want to become a Jehovah's Witness, is there a series of instructional classes that I have to go to, is there a

ritual, is there a baptism?

JR: Well, first of all we would feel it appropriate that you make a study of the Bible because it's not a matter of saying "I want to become a Jehovah's Witness". You have to show you have the knowledge and the proper motivation to carry out this particular work. So what we would do first is put you through a study course, a sort of one on one course. You could have the whole family involved, we enjoy teaching the whole family together, after a period of instructions, say six months to a year, maybe you're ready to decide if this is what you want to do. It's totally up to you but if it is your decision to do so, then we sort of advance the training, we give you some instruction how to do the evangelizing work by taking you along. You notice we're always in twos when we approach the doors. Also, one is training and the other you have there is the trainee.

Pat: I always thought it was a security factor that involves the fact that perhaps no scandal then could be associated with the member of the church.

JR: It does provide security. But it's also a Biblical pattern. Recall, when Jesus sent his disciples out, first the 12 and then the 70, the Bible says he sent them out in twos. So security is factored in, but at the same time it gives support for the work. And going back to how you originally presented the question, if it's your desire then that you want to dedicate your life to God, not to an organization, but to Jehovah God, then if you do that, and if you qualify, then we will submit you for the baptism ceremony.

Pat: Here's a simple question that probably has a complex answer, but I'm going to ask you for the short paragraph version.

JR: Okay.

Pat: If you are a Jehovah's Witness, who are you?

JR: (Pause). Okay, say that once more.

Pat: Okay, if you are a Jehovah's Witness, if you are an active member, then who are you? Describe being a Jehovah's Witness, faithful and participating, to someone who has no knowledge of the faith.

JR: Okay, if you are one of Jehovah's Witnesses, basically, it's a lifestyle. First in your life is doing God's work. As we talked about a little earlier, it's evangelizing. In order to do that, then you have to continue to read and study the Bible, we have meetings that will keep you abreast with the best way of carrying out the evangelizing work. And you live a good clean moral life. Willing to share what you know everywhere you go in your daily life.

Pat: Sounds like every religion I know.

JR: Well, in other words, it's the ideal standard that's presented in the Bible. But of course we know it's one thing to make a claim, it's another really to live up to it.

Pat: Where did you come from, who's the first Jehovah's Witness?

JR: Well, if you want to look at it from our theological viewpoint, we would go all the way back to Abel, the faithful son of Adam. Why? Because the book of Genesis tells us he was a witness. If you go through the Hebrew prophets, all of them gave a witness. With the coming of Jesus Christ he trained others as Christians, they went out giving a witness. If you come to more modern times, then you would come toward the 1870's, and a small Bible study group under the direction of Charles Taze Russell, which started out in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania area.

Pat: How long ago?

JR: 1870. At that particular time, that Bible study group started to try to take a look at the Bible in its pure teachings to see what restorations to true worship had to be done. And one important thing that came out of that

was something we alluded to earlier and that's the fact that if you are Christian then you are to be an evangelizer. The idea of separating clergy and laity was not really something that the first Christians did, who were instructed under Jesus Christ and then the apostles, they did everyone..

Pat: Do you have clergy, do you have appointed teachers?

JR: We have appointed teachers, the Bible speaks of them as elders or overseers, and they give instruction in the congregational setting. But you'll notice, when you're approached at your door, or in another place, it could be a man, or a woman, or a teenager, even a youngster. And they're able to the best of their ability to present this message. So we do not discriminate there. Whoever has the desire and wants to serve God this way by giving testimony to his beliefs, then we equip them to the best of their ability to do so.

Pat: Why is it important for Jehovah's Witnesses to express themselves politically within what you call neutrality? What exactly do you mean by that?

JR: Our views of neutrality are really based on the words of Jesus Christ. He spoke of his followers and himself as being separate from the world. Now, to clarify that: that does not mean we're better or more worthy. Why? Because he also said that God loved the world, that is mankind, so much that he gave his only begotten son. But we feel separate as far as being set apart as doing this particular work of evangelizing, to live a moral life, in harmony with what the Bible says. And to show love and concern for our neighbor. Because when we go out evangelizing, we're motivated by love. I think you realize that most persons do. There's no pay or financial considerations. But we feel as a loving gesture toward our neighbors, we need to share with them something good that we have.

Pat: Now, does that neutrality within the definition of the Jehovah's Witness church, does that mean that there are no Jehovah's Witness office-holders?

JR: We're separate from the political world. And there's strong Scriptural support. You'll recall an occasion when they even wanted to make Jesus a king, and he withdrew because he didn't see that as his role. So we feel expressing ourselves politically is not our aim. Our aim is to preach good news about God's Kingdom. And so, that's where we're focused. Why? Because we feel that that will answer everybody's problem as far as government and rulership. That's the prayer Christians pray for. They pray 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven'.

Pat: And when we get back, I want to find out about the Jehovah's Witness position on other government service like the military. I want to ask you medical questions, I want to talk about your positions on social issues and we have so little time and so much to discuss about the Jehovah's Witnesses. All new information to me provided by J R Brown, national spokesperson for the Jehovah's Witnesses out of Brooklyn. This is the God Show at News Radio 620 KTAR. I'm Pat McMann.

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Pat: Fascinating program I think, anytime that we learn something about any other facet of the world and particularly something that we coexist with—another faith. Neighbors who call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses and on the God Show we examine that unique form of worship that is unique if you don't happen to be a Jehovah's Witness. As I'm sure JR Brown as the national spokesperson for the faith you probably run into more misinformation than information about your faith.

JR: Well, that's correct Pat that's why we appreciate this opportunity to clarify some things.

Pat: You have a number of Witnesses right here in the valley , you were just telling me that Phoenix was well-represented within the Jehovah's Witness movement.

JR: Oh very well. We have 70 congregations and our congregation size we keep between one and two hundred. The reason for that is to allow room for visitors as well as to make sure no one gets overlooked and they get individual

attention.

Pat: So if I went to the service at any one of the seventy congregations, what would I experience?

JR: All right, first of all you'd see a sign so that's the meeting time. All of them are open to the public. You walk in and you take a seat. Everything is free no collections are taken.

Pat: Hold on, let's cover that again. Are you telling me that you are a religion that not only limits the size of its individual congregations but also doesn't take up collections? So you handle your expenses with tithing?

JR: Not at all, we've never taken a collection from our modern-day beginnings and the reason for this is because we feel that if God's backing the work he will see that we have the resources. When you walk into our meeting place, the Kingdom Hall, most would commonly refer to as a church, we don't have any Scriptural objection to that term. But you will notice one or two contribution boxes towards the back, there's a slot on it. If you pass and you want to put in it a voluntary donation that's between you and God, no one monitors it to see whether you give or do not give and that's how we support the world-wide work.

Pat: You don't have a big guy with a legal pad standing right next to it?

JR: No, we haven't found that necessary thing to do because you know, look at like this Pat; we're not paying anybody. The teachers or elders, overseers are volunteers. Those you see going door-to-door, they're volunteers.

Pat: You have no paid clergy at all?

JR: We have no paid employee clergy or anyone.

Pat: Well, you're a paid employee though aren't you?

JR: Not really. Why? I'm a volunteer. I give my services working in this office here in New York. We've got six thousand others volunteers here in our three complexes. And if we work right here at headquarters and we receive a modest room and a stipend to care for incidental expenses and we are volunteers like everybody else.

Pat: Well, I've talked to a lot of directors, a lot of public information officers, and you are the first one that didn't get a salary. So this is an education to me again even past all the information about your church. Very impressive. The neutrality issue-- I want to get back to that because you were talking about the fact that you do not participate in politics, that it's against the fundamental teachings of your church ergo: the Bible. What about other government service like the military?

JR: Well, our neutrality extends to all areas of political expression. It's not just something here in this country, it's around the world. For example when there was trouble during the second world war, the first world war, we remained neutral so there never was any fear that someone on the battlefield would see one of Jehovah's witnesses to take a life of another .

Pat: But you must have experienced hostility over the years as a result of that position.

JR: Well, sometimes it's not understood but it's not to be interpreted as anti-country or lacking love for our country. Jehovah's Witnesses certainly love the country where they are. And we're supportive in other ways. In other words, we're supportive as good citizens. We pay our taxes. We're honest. We contribute to support whatever the local efforts are anywhere in the world, and we make things better where we may live. But it's just, we feel our life is from God. If you're to give it up, it's to be in his service. He's the only one that can restore it. So we feel very strongly about that, our dedication is to God, we love him enough to give our life even as his Son did. He gave his life for mankind, to open up a way to salvation. But we do not feel that the individual differences between nations that might call for the sacrifice of one's life is something that we are obligated from God to do.

Pat: Is yours the only path to salvation?

JR: Well, when you put it that way, you're trying to say 'well, unless someone does exactly as you do, and you say, as Jehovah's Witnesses, you won't get life? And our answer to that is no, because God is the judge as to who gets life. Some persons live and die without an opportunity to hear what we're talking about. There are places we cannot even go and do evangelizing work now. We feel we have a message of truth and people listen to it, respond, and that can put them on the way to life if God judges them as such, but we're not the judges of others. When you look in Matthew chapter 25, Jesus made it very clear that he is the one that divides the sheep from the goats. He said he is the one that puts the sheep on his favorable side the right, goats on his left, he makes the decision if anyone is worthy of destruction, not us. That's not our responsibility to pass judgment.

Pat: We're looking at the Jehovah's Witnesses with the help of its national spokesperson J R Brown at the Jehovah's Witness office, the director of the office of public information in Brooklyn New York. And there's so many things to talk about, particularly clearing up some areas of confusion and curiosity. For example, the Jehovah's Witness' position on transfusion. I never did understand that.

JR: Well, it's something that many may not understand. But it's a personal conviction that we have and it has biblical support that the Bible makes very clear; that God's law regarding blood means that blood removed from the body is to be poured out and disposed of. Now that's something that goes back all the way to when Noah and his family came out of the Ark. Genesis chapter seven there allows them to eat the vegetation and he then said they could eat the animals. But he then specified right then 'only do not eat its soul. It's blood'—it was restricted. Later when he developed a relation with the nation of Israel he repeated this, that they could eat the animals but the animal had to be drained of their blood. Later in Christian times in the book of Acts when it came up whether this was something Christians would continue to follow. there in chapter 15 it says 'do not eat the blood'.

Pat: But what about my baby who has a serious medical problem and the doctor says the only way that we can save him is with a transfusion?

JR: Well, that does not hold up under examination. Often doctors may say that, but you see we have found doctors willing to do surgery using alternatives to blood transfusion; that's confirmed here and other parts of the world; we publish information on it. We have a current series of three videos that has a number of doctors go on record that they do bloodless surgery. So we can be accommodated. So we do not feel 'so here we're giving up your life, or that of your child, if you do not take blood transfusions'. There are alternatives. And there are many doctors doing surgical procedures without blood. We have a number of bloodless centers right in this country so Jehovah's Witnesses know where their religious wishes will be respected. And Pat, I want to emphasize that our objection is not medical and all the other areas; our objection to blood is Scriptural, it is religious conviction we follow what those Scriptures say on not eating blood.

Pat: When we get back I want to find out what your interpretation of the Scriptures is when it comes to social issues like abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and equality and so on. All of this coming up as we learn about the Jehovah's Witnesses on the God Show. This is Pat McMann on News Radio 620, KTAR

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Pat: As we look at the Jehovah's Witnesses with the help of JR Brown, the national spokesperson, here on the God Show, this is Pat McMann thanking all of you for being with us, hoping that you, like I, have really absorbed a lot of information. Much of this I didn't know. I will tell you JR, that one of the things that caused me to feel a bit of sadness and sympathy for kids from Jehovah's' Witnesses families, has been the fact that at least, according to my interpretation of their lives, they don't celebrate holidays, they don't celebrate birthdays; it just seems like such a loss out of the child's life. Explain please.

JR: Well I can certainly understand why you might draw that conclusion, Pat, and likely others do too. I can tell you personally it does not bring unhappiness, I was raised a Witness, without celebrating the holidays. You see the thought is, we try to have time with our children year round. We take them with us when we go out evangelizing,

they're with us at the meetings there. Parents buy them gifts at any time, we are not programmed into any specific dates. And the reason that we do this, we explain to our children, is because while there is an apparent excitement to holidays ,that none of them are really in the Bible. The Bible only sets aside one date for Christians, and it does not include Christmas or some of the other big holidays; so we just do not commemorate them. There's no direction to celebrate them in Scripture.

Pat: Do you interpret the Scriptures literally?

JR: Well, it depends. Not all of it because all of the Scripture is not literal. But parts of it is. So if it is something that is talking literally to those serving God, we follow that. We recognize that you have in the Bible figurative or symbolic language.

Pat: Give me an example of your position, the Jehovah's Witness official position on abortion.

JR: Abortion we feel is something that the Bible condemns. The reason for this is because it takes a life. We look at life as a most precious and sacred thing, that it is from God. No man can give it. And if a life is conceived, then every effort should be made to preserve that life so that life can be given in praise to God.

Pat: So then there are no exceptions?

JR: No. Well, you're following what God has said there, you don't reason out how to get your way in spite of it. This is not saying that there cannot be a lot of very sad situations. But when you follow what God says, there's a bright side and there is a blessing. And so we follow strictly what the Bible says. And since we would not take the life of another person, we could not please him to take the life of an unborn, since it is a life.

Pat: Since the time of Jesus, though, laws dramatically changed, as lives changed, societies, cultures change. What's your position on divorce, in this year 2002?

JR: Well, that's why we like the Bible Pat, because it doesn't change. So we take the Christian standard. The Bible recognizes one valid grounds for Scriptural divorce that frees one for remarriage. And that's adultery or fornication. In other words, a person might get a divorce, say for legal reasons or whatever. But the key thing there when you follow the Bible is: only divorce on the grounds of adultery frees the parties to remarry someone else.

Pat: With strict attention to the Scripture though, and this is where I have some difficulty simply in my own life recognizing the reality of then and now. One could hardly look at biblical times as a period of equality for women and sometimes for other categories of people that we read about in the Bible. There were certainly the haves and the have nots when it comes to respect. How do you look at women's equality now through the eyes of a Jehovah's Witness who gains so much information out of the Bible?

JR: Our position is very much respectful of women. The Bible respects women. Jesus Christ respected women. Even though you don't have strict things that people could for the most part apply to modern-day settings, the principles are in the Bible. And the principles say that women should be respected as wives and as mothers. They are not inferior persons in any way. The Bible does not teach them to be inferior in any way. They have a role just as a man has a role, the child has a role. There is an order of things that is quite obvious when you look at the way the family is structured. Women have an important role, they are dignified, respected, they are loved, they're intelligent.

Pat: Are they equal to men within the structure of the Jehovah's Witness faith?

JR: On that we follow the way the first Christian congregations were set up. And there the Bible says very clearly in the congregational setting that the male members appointed as overseers or elders will do the teaching. That's just in the church or congregation. Now you notice, when you go out and do evangelizing work, the Bible places no such restrictions on anyone. So men, women, children, teenagers, all can go out doing evangelizing work and conduct Bible lessons with others, and can help bring them to the congregation. But in the congregational setting

itself the teaching is assigned to appointed male members serving as elders and overseers.

Pat: Can a woman be a faithful member of the Jehovah's Witnesses religion and choose not to be married, not to have a family, but to be an attorney, or a poet or a surgeon?

JR: Yes, yes and we have many in that category. Many of the women in our organization are professionals in everyday life, we don't try to make those decisions for people. They can decide it. Where we come into the picture is when the Bible says should exist in the congregational setting. We have many women who have pursued careers, professions—that's fine. There they may be the supervisor or one who owns the company, or the boss as someone might say. But that's not in the congregational setting.

Pat: I have so little time JR I'm going to have to jump to a subject that I know people want to know about and I have little time for your answers so please take that into consideration. May I be a faithful member of Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexual?

JR: No, you could not, and we're very straightforward on that. And it's not our ruling. The Bible shows that the Christians in the first century that were homosexuals changed to qualify as Christians, and so we set the same pattern today. We're willing to help anyone, we do help anyone, just as in early Christian times. There are some, if you looked into the background you would find there was homosexuality there. But a change was made, this change pleases God and it qualifies one to be part of the modern-day congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Pat: Are heaven and hell places?

JR: Heaven certainly is and hell is.

Pat: They are physical places?

JR: Yeah, heaven is where God is, it's an invisible realm. There are spirit creatures, angels there. Hell exists too, but it's the grave. Hell in English translates to the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades, as these words are used in the Bible they refer to mankind's common grave. The place of burial. We do not find the Bible to teach that hell is fire and that you're punished there. We do not feel a God of love would burn individuals eternally as a punishment.

Pat: I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, we only have a few seconds left. You don't pledge allegiance to our country, but you consider yourself a good American?

JR: Oh yes, we feel we're good Americans, we're good citizens, we love the country, but we pledge our allegiance to God. And we feel that we're devoted to him, that will take care of everything else, everything else will fall in place.

Pat: Well, you certainly have allowed areas of information to fall into place for me and I'm sure our audience knows more about the Jehovah's Witnesses now as a result of J R Brown being here. If you want more information by the way there's an 866 number. 866 388 2222 to find out about the Jehovah's Witnesses as I hope you have on the God show this Sunday afternoon on News Radio 620 KTAR.

You've been listening to the God Show on News radio 620, KTAR To respond to any of these issues discussed, write to the God Show, in care of KTAR Radio, 5300 North Central Avenue, Phoenix 850 12. The God Show, heard Sundays at noon only on News Radio 620 KTAR.