

LAYMEN HOME MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

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TIMELINE

1917 (April 9th) Johnson proclaimed himself to be the messenger of Epiphania succeeding to C. T. Russell considered as the « Messenger of the Parousia ».

1917 (July 27th) Rutherford, the new leader of the Bible's students expelled Johnson. The movement changed its name and became the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

1918 (December) Johnson published the first issue of *The Present Truth and Herald of Christ's Epiphany*.

1919 (May) Johnson launched the monthly review: *The Present Truth and Herald of Christ's Epiphany*.

1920 (July 16 th) Johnson edited a second review of propaganda : *The Herald of Epiphania* which eventually became *The Bible Standard and Herald of Christ's Kingdom*.

1920 (July 18th) The LHMM is officially created in a ceremony that was held at the Metropolitan Opera House of Philadelphia.

1920 PSL Johnson published his first book : *Life, Death and Beyond*.

1920-1990 Johnson spread his doctrine in the Russellist communities all around the world. The LHMM organization is similar to the Bible's Students at the time of Russell. Pilgrims are nominated at the head of the different branches in order to organize all the assemblies called « ecclesias ».

1938 PSL Johnson began to write the book collection untitled « The Studies of the Epiphany in the Scriptures », 17 books in total : *Creation* (1938) - *Elijah Elisha* (1938) - *The Epiphany's Elect* (1938) - *A Miscellany* (1938)- *Merariism* (1938) - *Gershonism* (1938) - *Numbers* (1938) - *The Parousia Messenger* (1938) - *The Epiphany Messenger* (1941) - *Exodus* (1948) - *The Bible* (1949) - *Samuels, Kings, Chronicles* (1949) - *The Parousia Messenger, volume 2* (1949)- *Christ, Spirit, Covenants* (1950) - *The Chart of God's Plan* (1953) - *The Millennium* (1956).

1950 (october 22nd) PSL Johnson died. He was considered as the last « High Priest » of the Church (144, 000 members). R.G. Jolly became the leader of the LHMM.

1955 Creation of the Commission of Israel.

1979 (February 14th) R.G. Jolly died. He was the last member of the Great Company. Gohlke succeeded him as the international leader of the LHMM.

1985 Gohlke died. B. Hedman succeeded him as the new international leader of the LHMM.

2004 B. Hedman died and R. Herzig succeeded him as the new international leader of the LHMM.

2016 R. Herzig died and Leon Snyder succeeded him as the new international leader of the LHMM.

HISTORY

The LHMM emerged in the United States in December 1918. It was founded by a Russell's close collaborator named Paul Samuel Leo Johnson (1873-1950), a Jew converted to Protestantism. Thus it came from the Bible's Students Movement created by Russell (1852-1916) whose death led to dissensions and schisms in all its branches and gave birth to about sixty other movements such as : Les Amis de l'Homme (the Men's Friends), the Dawn, the Free Bible's Students and the LHMM. The later's aims are both : 1) to keep intact Russell's doctrine because of its modification done by its legal successor Joseph Rutherford, a futur leader of the Jehova's Witnesses 2) to spread the Johnson's doctrine of the Epiphany. According to him, the years

1914 and 1916 are the dates of the parting between two spiritual groups : the « Little Flock » and the « Great Company » symbolized by the parting of Elijah and Elisha. That period revealed (in the means of making it visible) in the followers' eyes these two groups. The consequence would be the second step of the Millenium (1914-1954). That idea was the opposite of Rutherford's interpretation. According to the later, the « Great Company » is all the Jehovah's Witnesses who converted after 1918. Johnson's interpretation was not anecdotic but it is central in his thought. He presented it in many articles and speeches. It explains all the work he wanted to do with his followers and enables us to understand the low increase of the LHMM in the world. His goal is different of the Jha's Witnesses who want to convert all the humans but it consists to aware the Bible's Students against a rebellion or a « questioning» against the Russell's doctrine which could lead to a reject of both spiritual categories. That is why from this particular case, the movement was named « the Movement of Epiphany » from 1918 until 1954 when Johnson and his disciples spoke to the « onsecrated ». He did not name it LHMM which, in his mind, had a larger field because it concerns all the humans. This expression : LHMM must be used after the Johnson's death (1950) since it marks the end of the period of Epiphany (preciseely in 1954) and the beginning of the Basilea (the period preceding the last era of the Millenium). Because Johnson's goal was to reveal the partition between the two categories, he spoke to all

Russell's followers all around the world. At first, he did not want to make new converts. Thus the settlement of the LHMM was the same as the Bible's Students Movement's. In the worldwide, the congregations parted such as in India, England, Denmark, Norway (1919) and France (1926). The LHMM attracted former « Bible's Students » while Rutherford got rid of all Russell's thoughts in the movement that was named Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.

Like Russell, Johnson travelled a lot to meet his followers and to organize his movement. When he died (1950), the LHMM had settled in more than twenty nations and had gathered about ten thousands « Consecrated » (15 thousands if we include the sympathizers). Its bulletin was translated in twenty Foreign languages. His successor : R.G Jolly (...) carried on his mission and developed new activities such as: the Sionism for which he created a « Commission of Israel ». Indeed, the period of Epiphany was closed since 1954 and a new period : Basilea succeeded to it. The goal was not to lead the Russellists to Johnsonism but to make a testimony » and not not so much to make new converts and mainly to speak to the Jews and their new state so as to comfort and support them. This activity increased a lot since 1976 and is nowadays the main characteristics of LHMM. The LHMM reached its peak in the 1960's with a number of 20.000 to 30.000 followers (up to 40 000 included the sympathizers). But one must take the estimation cautiously for it is difficult

to obtain the figures from the African branches (Cameroun, Ghana). Afterward, the movement declined. Today, it has about 10.000 to 15.000 followers (up to 25.000 included the sympathizers), Its headquarters is in the town of Chester Spring (PA) in the USA. The most active branch is in Poland with 6.000 Consecrated (up to 9.000 included the sympathizers). Nowadays, the other branches stagn or decline (like in France). The Norwegian and Swedish branches have disapeared.

Belief-doctrine

The LHMM's doctrine has four main characteristics. Firstly, it presents Millenarist views. The Johnson's doctrine is an extension of the Russell's and thus the followers qualify it as « Russello-Johnsonist » : it emphasises the authority of the Bible and of the Christ's atoning sacrifice. The eternal life is given to all because the coming of Christ on earth paid the ransom of the Adam's original sin. However, this sacrifice does not give automatically the eternal life but it gives the opportunity to have it on the Judgement Day. This one is in fact a period of a thousand years named the Millenium (Apocalypse 20:4) which will inaugurate the second coming of Christ. The LHMM shares this idea with the Adventists (specially the Adventists of the Coming Age and with the Christian Adventists) that inspired greatly the Russell's teaching.

In the « Russello-Johnsonist » doctrine, Jesus comes

back on Earth before the conversion of the world (Premillenarism) and he will work for this conversion. Consequently, the Adventists have different goals. The first aims at redeeming all the humanity, the second aims at reestablishing the Paradise on Earth. During this Millennium all mankind will be tested and at the end of the time of testing, the « Justs » will become perfect men and will enter the Paradise and the incorrigibles will die. There is no everlasting torments. The Millennium is divided in three periods : the Parousia (1874-1914), the Epiphany (1914-1954) and the Basilea (1954-) and finally the Christ's Government will begin with the resurrection of the « Worthy » until 2874. Johnson gave a few pieces of information about the aftertime. Secondly, a belief centered on a chronology. Johnson like C.T. Russell gave a great importance to the chronology given in the Bible. He situated himself in the dispensationalist stream.

The doctrine emphasizes on the timeline there after.

- 1874 the invisible return of Christ on Earth and the beginning of the Parousia (the Millennium begins)
- 1878 return of God's favor toward Israel. It is the beginning of the resurrection of the members of the « Little Flock » as spiritual beings.
- 1914 is the Ending of the Nations. All the governments will fall. That paves the way to the definitive setting of the Realm of God's Sons.

How Russell did made the chronology ?

Russell found this dates in taking 536 AD as the dates of Cyrus' edict. He added the seventy years of desolation (Chroniques 36:21) to the 2,520 years. This corresponds to an interpretation of Leviticus 26:18 (that says: « If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. »).

He interprets this retribution as the « Seven Times » of the nation's governing. He considered these « times » as the equivalent of the lunar years (360 days) that gives the total of 2,520 years (1 day equals 1 year). The year 1914 marks also the beginning of the Epiphany.

- 1950. At this date the Church is full. The 144,000 anointed reach the state of spiritual beings.
- 1954. Beginning of the Basilea. The calling of the « Youthfull Worthy » to become « Quasi Elect ».
- 1979. Death of the last member of the « Great Company ». Ressuscitation of their members as spiritual beings.
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Russell and Johnson's doctrine make a distinction between the God's chosen people. So, There are : 1) « the Little Flock » (144,000 anointed) called « The Church ». Its substance will change at the time of the ressuscitation « from the human, he will become divine ». It is God's instrument to complete his plan. In order to obtain the membership, one must answer to the « Heavenly Calling » i.e. the « High Call » during the age of the Gospel (from the year 33 until the year 1878). The believer is then « engendré de l'esprit ». 1878 marks the beginning of the first risen (Apocalypse 20:6). He becomes a « new creature », a spritual being. He is immortal and obtains a divine nature. He is superior to the angels (Hebrews 1:4). 2)

The second classe is the « Great Company ». It is not generated by the spirit and thus has not a divine nature. It is not immortal (undying) since its nature is equivalent to angels's. Its members are these who have failed to keep their anointment of the « High Calling » during the « Age of the Gospel ». 3) The word « Worthy » comes from « the old man » in Isaia 24:23 and Hebrews 11:2», and concerns a specific class: « The Ancient Worthy ». This expression refers to Hebrews 11:38 that says : « *The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in the deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground*». (Holy Bible. New international version). It is about the anointed during the « Judaic Age » such Abraham, Isaac, Jacob... But the expression « Youthful Worthy » is actually not used in the Bible. One can only find an expression like « young man » (Joel 2:28). These are persons anointed before 1954. At the final risen, they will receive a perfect human nature (Luke 14:14) and at the end of the Millenium they could obtain the fullness of their reward: they will turn to spiritual beings. Those who are anointed further will be named « Quasi Elects ». The word « sons » in Isaia 60:4 and Joel 2:28 corresponds to this position.

Zionism

Nowadays, the originality of the LHMM lies in its interest with Israel and the Jews. Zionism is the central pillar of the Russellist and Johnsonist theologies. Yet in 1891, in a chapter of its third book untitled « Thy Kingdom Comes », Russell foresaw that all Jews will come back to Eretz-Israel. He particularly analysed the prophecy of Amos (9:11, 14, 15) which proclaims that according to him, the Jews will be the first ones to obtain the Millenium gifts. Consequently, Russell

was interested in all concerns about the Jews as it can be seen in his numerous books, newspapers and sermons. As for him, the Jews' return to Palestine is the milestone of the beginning of the restoration of the humankind, in which he saw a clue of the beginning of the Millenium. But he warned his readers that the harassment of Israel will rise and threaten it. Then a « new covenant » between God and the Jewish nation will spread from Jerusalem to all the nations through Israel. Then the Jews will be the messengers of the messianic age. Russell supported the restorationist views and did not plan to convert the Jews to the Christian faith : « The Jews must remain to be Jews ». The LHMM supports this thought and aims at announcing the restoration of Israel which will receive God's blessing. According to their understanding of the Bible, the Jewish people must still encounter misfortunes and distresses (Jeremy 30:7) before the coming of the Millenium when the humans will reestablish « the mediatorial reign of Christ ».

A NON TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

According to Russell and Johnson: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. The Father has glorified his Son to become a spiritual king, making him his instrument to govern Heaven and Earth. Like Servet (1511-1553) before them, they consider that the Holy Spirit is a divine moving force and not a real person.

ORGANISATION

The LHMM is centralised. Its head in the USA chooses his representatives in each local branch. Travelling preachers are named « pilgrims, auxiliary-pilgrims, evangelists » and are selected by the LHMM's leader to help the local divisions. They keep this function during their lifetime even if they

become very ill. This function is not sacred like that of ordained ministers in the Catholic Church but its owner benefits of a religious authority. So, it reminds us the « *specific charisma* » proposed by Max Weber (*Economy and Society*, 576. *Sociologie des religions*, Gallimard, 1996. 227) or in Max Weber (*Sociology of Religion*, **date + page**, Dericquebourg, 2007) and specifically « **The Charisma of State of Grace, cf. traduction de Weber** ». In each country, the followers gather in assemblies named « ecclesias » for worshipping. Their sizes vary from 2 or 3 persons up to hundreds of persons (like in Poland for example). They are independant from each other and they are linked only spiritually by the acceptance of Russell and Johnson's doctrine. In the ecclesia, we find two functions: elder and deacon. The worship is not directed by a pastor but by an elder elected by a show of hand ballot (unanimous support or majority support as they like) of the consecrated in the assembly.

The members of the ecclesia choose their kind of worship: through studies or sermon, and they decide their frequency (per week, per month...). Several times a year (generally tree times), the members of the ecclesias in countries attend a convention.

RITUALS

There are only two ceremonies in the religious life of the LHMM : baptism and Lord's supper.

- Baptism is not a sacrament . In Russell and Johnson's doctrine the true baptism named the consecration and the baptism by immersion (which is symbolic) are different. The believer dedicates himself fully to **the** Christ and gives **up** to his **own** will to follow and obey him. Then baptim by immersion expresses this consecration.

Concretely, an elder immerses fully the new baptist. Although, there are no ritualist words to say, the elder uses to say a sentence such as « In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I baptize you ».

- The Lord's supper.
- Russell and Johnson accepted Zwigli's views in which Christ is not present in the bread and in the wine. The Lord's Supper is only a testimony. It is a symbolic event. It takes place, once a year, on the 14th day of the month of Nizan in the Jewish liturgic calendar. The missing of this feast is not punished, Only those who consecrated themselves to God, baptized or not can share the emblems (wine and unleaven bread).

PERPECTIVES

Sociologically the LHMM presents two mains characteristics . First, there is a high degree of endogamy as it uses to be in minority religious groups which ask a strong personal commitment in time, energy, studies and way of life. The young adults are invited to choice their partner inside the movement. However, there are few mixed marriages. As the Movement does not prozelytize, only member's children may maintain or increase it. Secondly, the LHMM dwindles drastically. In some countries, it declines. The family transmission is not evident for tree reasons : 1) The commitment in the religious life is very important. LHMM practises a religious elitism and it dislikes the uncommitted. 2) The new followers may be rebuked by the complexity of the doctrine to study. 3) The LHMM has not had a revival which could have boosted a public appeal and could have attracted new more new enthousiastic believers. Indeed, in the East european countries and in Africa, the LHMM has a strong energy. However, in nearly all branches one see tensions and

divisions which be explained by the non happening of the mediatorial reign of the Christ.

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