



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

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ECB:ECQ August 27, 1998

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Dear Friend:

We are pleased to respond to your letter received August 6, 1998. You ask about the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses in regard to blood transfusions and whether our position has changed in view of the amicable agreement made between Jehovah's Witnesses and the government of Bulgaria.

As you made some reference to in your letter, throughout the Bible, from the days of the ancient patriarch Noah until the writings of the early Christian church, God forbade the misuse of blood. At Acts 15:20, Christians are commanded to "abstain . . . from blood." We continue to understand this to include the use of blood in medical treatment. Of course, with this stand Jehovah's Witnesses avoid the transmission of diseases such as AIDS or hepatitis through blood transfusions.

However, you inquire about the recent decisions in Bulgaria regarding Jehovah's Witnesses. The government of Bulgaria agreed to grant recognition as a religion to the Christian Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bulgaria. This came about because on March 9, 1998, the European Commission of Human Rights accepted the terms of an amicable settlement between the government and the brothers in Bulgaria. Included in the terms of the amicable settlement is Bulgaria's promise to incorporate into their law code civilian service as an alternative to military service. The agreement also includes an acknowledgment that each individual has the freedom to choose the type of medical treatment he receives.

Does this agreement mean that Jehovah's Witnesses have changed their stand in connection with medical treatment? No. The phrasing that is to be incorporated into the statutes of the Christian Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bulgaria describes the manner in which Jehovah's Witnesses have traditionally handled these matters. It is important to understand that Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all people have the freedom to determine what choices they make, not just with regard to medical treatment but with all life choices, including religion. Each individual is responsible for his own choices in life and the repercussions of those choices. As a religious organization we do explain Biblical standards, such as the requirement to abstain from blood, but it is up to each person whether he chooses to follow these or not. Before a person be-

comes one of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Bible standards are clearly explained. Of course, if someone as a baptized member of Jehovah's Witnesses engages in conduct that falls outside of those Bible standards, efforts are made in a kindly manner to help the erring one recover spiritually. If one refuses such assistance and refuses to uphold Bible standards, including Bible standards regarding the misuse of blood, then this may at times lead to the Scriptural action of disfellowshipping.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Again, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all people have the freedom to determine what choices they make, and the amicable agreement reached with the government of Bulgaria simply acknowledges this freedom of choice. Some have misunderstood the wording of this agreement, and some have endeavored to misrepresent this agreement as a change on the part of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, the agreement describes the manner in which Jehovah's Witnesses have traditionally handled these matters.

We trust the above information will be of help to you. We would also like to assure you that your further request to renew your subscriptions to the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines is being handled by another department. With our letter we send you our best wishes!

Sincerely,

Watchtower B. V. Society
OF NEW YORK, INC.