Clarion Review

Religion

Jehovah's Witnesses - The Good... The Bad... The Deceptive... And Worse! An Exposé
Jim Staelens
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Four Stars (out of Five)

A former Jehovah's Witnesses leader blows the whistle on what he believes is "spiritual abuse" by a "cult."

Only a former true believer who has lost his faith in the religion he gave his life to could have written *Jehovah's Witnesses - The Good… The Bad… The Deceptive… And Worse! An Exposé*. Much like a lover scorned or a soldier betrayed, Jim Staelens believes himself to be a victim of a deceit he charges is both intentional and endemic in the hierarchy that controls what the author now denigrates as the religious "cult" of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Staelens was a member of this faith for fifty years and held high offices in its organization. He has since come to see it as a cult that "steals the conscience as well as the quality of free will from its adherents." Staelens has little good to say of the church hierarchy to which he once belonged. He claims that it harmed his own family as well as made victims of many other coreligionists through "its failed prophecies, broken promises, deception, manipulation, tyranny of authority, and worse."

The "worse," accuses Staelens, includes what he calls the "disfellowshipping" of members—a form of excommunication made more harmful through the practice of shunning, which he says has led to the destruction of families as well as individuals. The spiritual abuse and tyranny of authority that Staelens claims is rampant among the church leadership would make Torquemada blush, as would the "double-talk, deception, hypocrisy, and lying."

Staelens styles himself a heroic whistle-blower—and even devotes one of the book's fifteen chapters to famous whistle-blowers from history, among whose ranks he includes Jesus Christ and Ralph Nader. Staelens, to his credit, does not cast himself as a martyr; he is instead contrite about the role he played in hurting others while a leading member of the church.

The author's contrition is often overwhelmed by his anger, but it is an anger born of half a century of serving what he now sees as the "Dark Side." This volume could have been, but is not, a rant—although, at times, it comes achingly close since Staelens's bitterness at having been deceived, as he now believes, comes through.

Most of the time, however, Staelens is much more measured, and he punctuates his chapters with three types of bullet markings that indicate where he is asking a question, illustrating a point, or providing an example. Each chapter is structured much like a lecture, complete with "Points to Consider" or "Review Points" that one would find in a textbook.

Staelens's intended audience is not the general public but members of his former faith whom he believes have been duped and victimized by an unscrupulous elite. If Staelens's accusations of how the leadership brainwash and control their followers is true, just how many of his former coreligionists will actually see this book is another story.

Mark McLaughlin