

PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN KAZAKHSTAN

Socio-historical and Theological Analysis

Artur Artemyev

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Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan
Socio-historical and Theological Analysis

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Artur Artemyev

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This monograph by Artur Artemyev, professor and religious scholar from Kazakhstan with a PhD in philosophy, focuses on a historical and theological investigation of Jehovah's Witnesses' life and worship in Kazakhstan.

There are two previous editions of the monograph *Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Historical and Theological Analysis*. The first edition was published in 2002 and the second edition in 2010. In the last few years, this religious organization has undergone many changes. Therefore, the author considered it necessary to prepare a new edition of the monograph focusing on Kazakhstan only.

This work is mainly addressed to lecturers of religious studies, master's degree students, teachers, and government officials who implement policies in relation to neo-Protestant denominations and new religious organizations.

The easy-to-comprehend presentation of the material also makes this monograph appealing to non-specialist readers interested in modern religion.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

To the Reader	4
Chapter 1	
The History of the Worldwide Religious Organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses	9
Chapter 2	
Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan. Historical Overview	91
Chapter 3	
Foundation of the Teachings. What Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe?.....	152
Chapter 4	
Organizational Structure of Jehovah’s Witnesses	274
Chapter 5	
Theocratic Education System. Jehovah’s Witnesses’ View of Secular Education	318
Chapter 6	
Characteristic Features of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Religious Consciousness and Lifestyle	334
Chapter 7	
From Tolerance to Persecution and Anti-cultism. Questions about Accuracy in Terminology	392
Conclusion	457
About the Author	471

TO THE READER

The edition which you hold in your hands has its “predecessors:” *Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Historical and Theological Analysis* has two editions in Russian (published in 2002, with a revised and expanded edition in 2010) and one edition in Kazakh (published in 2011).

However, because of the continuing development of their theology and worship, there have been many developments in the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the past few years. That is the first reason why a new edition was needed.

Secondly, Jehovah’s Witnesses did not come to Kazakhstan in the 1990’s, as some “experts” are trying to prove. I am not afraid to say that they have been a part of the history of our country and our society for the past 100 years. Just think about it, now you can find a fourth-generation Jehovah’s Witness who was born in Kazakhstan. However, for some reason we still think they are “strangers” or “foreigners.” Myths and rumors have been created and spread about them which have nothing to do with reality. Jehovah’s Witnesses are often portrayed in a dark light. Some try to present them as fanatics; others present them as professional scammers who can entrap new converts by hypnosis and manipulation.

At the same time, if someone is really trying to understand this subject and carry out an impartial investigation into this religious denomination, a wave of criticism crashes down on him, with accusations of being biased or affiliated with Jehovah’s Witnesses. But such a response only stirs up the interest of an honest researcher to explore the topic.

Thirdly, we live in the information age. A number of new historiographic sources have become available on this topic—here and in foreign countries—in which the history, life, and beliefs of Jehovah’s

Witnesses are thoroughly studied. The organization itself has issued many books and is still actively collecting materials on its own history.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan as a registered organization have their own separate, legal identity. They are connected to Jehovah's Witnesses of other former Soviet republics in Central Asia only spiritually, as equal partners.

These are the reasons why this edition is fundamentally different from previous versions, although some portions remain the same.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that I do not belong to any religious denomination including Jehovah's Witnesses. Moreover, I am not a man of faith even though I have studied religion for over 50 years.

I have written more than 300 academic articles, educational brochures, and teaching materials on religious subjects, among them two volumes of *Religious Study: Basic Background. History of Religion. Religion in Kazakhstan* (2011).

Some people ask me: "How can you study religion without being a religious man?" Usually, I answer: "I strongly believe that only a person who does not belong to any religious denomination can be a religious scholar in the truest sense of the word. Otherwise, he will be biased. He will consider a religious phenomenon consciously or unconsciously from the standpoint of his religious affiliation—which is the case for most scientific research today. However, there are some exceptions, when the maxim of the great, very religious, scientist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov is applied. He said that he did not allow God into his laboratory.

Jehovah's Witnesses' point of view appeals to me: "*Understanding the religious beliefs of another does not require that you accept or follow them, and to inform is not to proselytize.*"¹" It is very important to respect the beliefs of one another.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 2.

The Russian poet Yuri Levitansky wrote: *“Everybody chooses for himself his belief, his woman and his road.”*¹ Indeed, a man must decide for himself if he believes or not and choose which religion best fits his spiritual quest.

I believe that there is one truth, but you can and should go towards it using different paths. It is, in other words, pluralism of approach united by a sincere desire to achieve it. However, in doing so, it is very important to preserve personal integrity and common decency.

At different times in every society there has been a fight between tolerance and intolerance, open-mindedness and xenophobia. Our society is no exception. Occasionally, some people have tried to introduce us to a new enemy in our midst, a member of a sect who is responsible for all the problems in our life. We are encouraged to unleash all our pent-up frustration and anger upon this “enemy.” It sometimes seems that the media deliberately incite a real hysteria—there is no better word to describe big headlines that reveal danger coming from another “non-traditional religion.” Horrifying incompetence, unconcealed ignorance, use of insulting expressions and offensive tone when discussing religious topics—all create a negative attitude that can slowly destroy our social stability. In the minds of our people, especially young ones, it forms a syndrome of “aggressive intolerance” towards our neighbors.

As a scientist and religious scholar, I strongly believe that now is the time to strengthen peace and harmony within our society. We must promote respect among people of different religious and cultural identities and reject ignorance and xenophobia—it is the duty of every citizen. We can do so by promoting education; we are often afraid of what we do not know. Knowledge is the best antidote to ignorance and xenophobia. Only a person with knowledge can really understand his neighbor and respect him.

By no means should we demand that all people be impartial in their view of all religious denominations. The majority have their own

¹ Y. D. Levitansky. “Everybody chooses for himself...” Translated by Alexandra Shamarova, electronic ref., (<https://levitansky.ru/poeziya/den-takoy-to/kazhdyy-vybiraet-dlya-sebya/>).

religious ideas, and they will not like all religions. - On the other hand, a person will not change his religious beliefs just because some people do not like them. Anyone who seriously studies religious history knows that there have always been differences of opinion. In 1881, A. S. Prugavin, a well-known expert on the schism inside the Russian Orthodox Church, wrote: “*People’s thoughts are thrashing about, always looking around for the right belief, for spiritual, intellectual food...¹*”

At the same time, any church is true from the perspective of the people who support it and heretical in the view of others. Any devout believer thinks that only his church gives the right answers to questions about existence and life. Only his church provides salvation and helps one to draw closer to God. There is nothing terrible or criminal about that because it is the very essence of religion. Without it, there is no religion. The most important thing is to accept any religion the way it is without imposing our own religious or atheistic beliefs. We must not jest and speculate here, causing hatred and intolerance of different points of view.

Whether we like it or not, we cannot deny that multi-religion has become our reality, just as we cannot deny the existence of different countries in the world. Thus, we need to find ways of peaceful coexistence, as the Kazakh writer Rollan Seysenbayev said, “the dissolution of painful individuation... means the expansion of the soul until it is able once more to embrace the All.”²

Nine hundred years ago the great Sufi Khawaja Ahmad Yasawi said:

The Prophet’s testament is:

If you meet an adherent of a different faith,

Do not do him any harm,

God does not like people with a cruel heart...

¹ A. S. Prugavin. *Schism and Sectarianism in the Life of Russian People* – Moscow, 1905 – p. 23.

² AMANAT Magazine, 2006, № 3 – p. 169.

Those who do not want to accept different Religious opinions forget one important thing: Religion is the thinnest of the heartstrings; we must treat it with the utmost respect, trying to understand what lies beneath a person's religious pursuits. In addition, every person who reports on that topic must be conscientious, which means, as Aristotle said in *Nicomachean Ethics*, "being able to judge fairly."¹

That is why it is so important to understand the core of any religious belief before passing judgment on it.

In his article "Psychotherapy and Religion," V. Frankl, a famous psychotherapist, compared the variety of religions with the variety of languages. A person can find the Truth or choose the wrong way in any language. Likewise, he can find the only true God as a member of any religion².

It was within that framework and under the impact of modern realities that I worked on the new edition of my long-term research. Now, dear reader, I leave it to your own judgment³.

I really wanted this edition to be the most complete and therefore continued to work on it, even after the Russian and Kazakh versions of the book had been published. The year 2020 turned out to be a special year for the entire world. Being limited due to the pandemic, I had even more time to work on this topic. Besides, I obtained access to new interesting historical materials and works of my foreign colleagues. In view of this, I have made some small additions to the book.

I am also very grateful to the dedicated and patient translators and specialists who made my work available in English and in electronic formats.

**Artur Artemyev
December 2020**

¹ Aristotle, *Writings in Four Volumes*, V. 4 – Moscow, 1983 – p. 184-185.

² V. Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Religion* // V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* –, Moscow, Progress, 1990 – p. 337.

³ Please note that in most cases when citing the Bible, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT) is used.

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF THE WORLDWIDE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses is Christian in origin. Their uncommon name is based on the Bible. Jehovah is one way to pronounce Almighty God's name. In Hebrew it is pronounced "Yahweh" and in English, "Jehovah." Readers of the classics may also recall that in many works of foreign and Soviet authors, the name Jehovah can be found¹.

It should be noted that in religious science literature² of our day, we can find the term "Jehovism" used in relation to this religion and "Jehovists" used in relation to its followers. The authors of the book *Religious Studies. Beliefs of World Religions*, V. N. Nikitin and V. L. Obukhov, launched a whole discussion about the terms above. They stated: "We declare responsibly and sincerely, we use this term for scientific and academic interests. In scientific literature it is acceptable to form the name of a religion by adding the suffix '-ism.' For example: Hinduism, Shintoism, Catholicism, Baptism, Adventism, etc. Accordingly, the names of representatives of a certain religion are formed from the name of the religion itself: Hinduist, Shintoist, Catholic, Baptist, Adventist, etc. But in the academic process, it is common to use more concise terms." Hence, you might agree that

¹ This will be considered in more detail in Chapter 3, which is about beliefs.

² The term "religious science" has come into use relatively recently and occurs in two spellings ('religievedenie' and 'religiovedenie' in Russian). The first variant, the traditional model, is from the Russian word "religion," the second, the Latin "religio." In my opinion, the first spelling is preferable, i.e. through the letter "e," which fully corresponds to the Russian spelling rules. (A detailed justification for the preference of writing the word "religious studies" through the letter "e" was given by Academy of Sciences member V. I. Garadzha in the manual *Religious Studies – Moscow, 1994 – p. 5.*)

“Jehovism” is more concise than the term “Religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”¹

We could have agreed with the latter argument, which is about conciseness. But firstly, conciseness should be a factor only when it does not have a derogatory meaning. In this case such terms are perceived by Jehovah’s Witnesses in that sense.

Modern anti-cult organizations and some journalists are fond of this term and use it with the purpose of humiliating Jehovah’s Witnesses. The term “Jehovism” is rooted in the Soviet atheistic past. It was established in the era of the struggle against faith in a terrible attempt by the state to make a person think and believe not according to heart but according to order. Thus, it becomes clear why Jehovah’s Witnesses dislike this term.

If so, why create a confrontation? If the terms “Jehovism” and “Jehovists” cause feelings of insult among the followers of this faith, why offend people?

Additionally, V. N. Nikitin and V. A. Obukhov were either being disingenuous or do not know Russian well. Not all names of religions end in “-ism”—Islam, Orthodoxy, groups of the Old Believers, and so on. We do not say “Islamism” or “Orthodoxism” do we?

Therefore, in our opinion the authors of the above-mentioned book should simply apologize for their tactlessness without trying to justify it with doubtful “scientific” evidence.

For the past ten years, Jehovah’s Witnesses have displayed an increased interest in their history. Persistently and methodically they have gathered information about how the organization was established and the most important milestones of its history. New books that describe new aspects of historical events have been published. Documentary films have been released. Museums and exhibitions have been organized. This brings us to the conclusion that much more

¹ V. N. Nikitin and V. L. Obukhov. *Religious Studies. Beliefs of World Religions* – Saint Petersburg, Himizdat, 1999 – pp. 267-268.

information is available today about the history of the organization compared to when I was preparing the first and second editions of the book *Jehovah's Witnesses of Kazakhstan and Central Asia*.

As mentioned earlier, the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses¹ is neo-Protestant. Its adherents consider themselves to be following in the steps of God's true worshippers, whose life paths and professed teachings are found in the Bible. Such people are called "righteous ones" in the Bible. The first Biblical righteous man was Abel. This list also includes Noah, Shem, Abraham, Moses, David, and other prophets whose names are in the Bible. In Hebrews chapter 11, the apostle Paul calls them "witnesses."

Jehovah's Witnesses chose their name in 1931. Before that, they were known as Bible Students or International Bible Students. Their opponents disparagingly called them Russellites and followers of Rutherford. At first they wanted to be called Christians and nothing else. But over time they came to the conclusion that most people who call themselves Christians know nothing about Christ's teachings or the Bible.

On top of that, many Christian churches were participating in wars and causing much sorrow. They wanted to distinguish themselves from other Christian religions and movements. At the same time, they did not want to be named after any human. They wanted to imitate Christ and proclaim God's name and his will openly, helping others to feel God's mercy. They took their name from Isaiah's words: "You are my witnesses," declares Jehovah, "Yes, my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and have faith in me And understand that I am the same One. Before me no God was formed, and after me there has been

¹ Not to be confused with Jehovah's Witnesses, the religious movement that arose in Russia in the 1840's, before the appearance of the first Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States. The founder of this movement was N.S. Ilyin, an artillery staff captain. The doctrine is set forth in N.S. Ilyin's book *The Message of Zion*, which his followers consider their main text, putting it on par with, or even higher than, the Bible. In Kazakhstan, for example, today there are individual followers of this movement living in small communities. They are illegal, as they refuse to register with the authorities.

none. I—I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no savior. I am the One who declared and saved and made known when there was no foreign god among you. So you are my witnesses,' declares Jehovah, 'and I am God.'"—Isaiah 43:10-12

They also think it is very important to follow Jesus' command found at Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the holy spirit comes upon you, and you will be witnesses of me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the most distant part of the earth." This is the reason why they believe that they are witnessing about Jesus as the Messiah and Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Christian congregation of the first century set an example for all Christians and that Christ is the head of the congregation and the King of God's Kingdom. *The Watchtower* magazine, one of the most important historical and theoretical publications of Jehovah's Witnesses, stated the following:

"At Pentecost 33 C.E., thousands of Jews and proselytes were anointed with holy spirit¹. These new Christians became 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession.' (1 Peter 2:9, 10.) The apostles kept careful watch over the congregations of God's people as long as they lived. However, especially after the death of the apostles, men arose who spoke 'twisted things' in order to 'draw away the disciples after themselves.' (Acts 20:30; 2 Thess. 2:6-8) Many of these men had responsible positions in the congregations, serving as overseers and later as 'bishops.' A clergy class was taking shape, although Jesus had said to his followers: 'All of you are brothers.' (Matt. 23:8) Prominent men who were enamored of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato introduced false religious ideas, gradually replacing the pure teachings of God's Word. In 313 C.E., this apostate form of Christianity was granted legal recognition by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine. From that time on, Church and State began working hand in hand. For example, after the Council of

¹ See: Chapter 3, point 25: "The 144,000 are born again as spiritual sons of God."

Nicaea, Constantine, who was present at the council, ordered Arius, a dissenting priest, into exile because Arius refused to acknowledge Jesus as God. Later, under Emperor Theodosius I (379-395 C.E.), the Catholic Church, as the contaminated form of Christianity came to be known, became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Historians refer to pagan Rome as having been 'Christianized' in the fourth century. The truth is that by that time an apostate form of Christianity had joined the pagan religious organizations of the Roman Empire as members of Babylon the Great. Even so, a small number of anointed wheatlike Christians were doing their best to worship God, but their voices were being drowned out. (Read Matthew 13:24, 25, 37-39.) They truly were in Babylonian captivity!

“Still, for the first few centuries of our Common Era, many people could read the Bible in either Greek or Latin. They were thus in a position to compare the teachings of God’s Word with the dogmas of the church. On the basis of what they read in the Bible, some among them rejected the unscriptural creeds of the church, but it was dangerous—even fatal—to express such opinions openly.

“In time, Bible languages fell into disuse by the masses, and the church opposed efforts to translate God’s Word into the common tongues. As a result, only the clergy and some other educated people could read the Bible for themselves, although not all of the clergy could read and write well. Any dissent from what the Church taught was severely punished. Faithful anointed servants of God had to meet together in discreet groups—if they could meet at all. As was the case in the earlier Babylonian exile, the anointed ‘royal priesthood’ could not function in an organized way. Babylon the Great held the people in a viselike grip!¹”

In spite of this, in scientific and pseudoscientific communities, the question, Are Jehovah’s Witnesses a Christian religious organization? is still being debated. The pace of the discussion is primarily set by

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 2016 – p. 23-24.

Orthodox theologians and representatives of the scientific community who consider themselves to be Christians. Their argument is Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept Jesus Christ as God and do not believe in the Trinity. This is being actively supported by people who are not sufficiently aware of the roots of the matter and the history of the Christian church. But are these arguments reasonable?

As a matter of fact, the word "trinity" is not used in the Bible at all, nor will you find a clear doctrine explaining the Trinity. Instead, we read in the book of Deuteronomy 6:4, "Listen, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." Jehovah's Witnesses consider this to be solid evidence that the Trinity as a Christian teaching developed much later.

About 180 C.E., Bishop Theophilus of Antioch first used the word "trinity" in the Christian sense (previously this term was used only by representatives of Gnosticism). Among Latin theologians the Latin word "trinitas" was first used by Tertullian. Although the term was used, the concept of a Trinity in its modern understanding did not exist. This teaching does not originate in the Bible and was not accepted undisputedly.

The doctrine of the Trinity "represents the first dogma established by the church during the first centuries of Christianity"¹

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been bold, heated discussions about the doctrine of the Trinity. For centuries Christians understood this term differently and disagreed with each other. For example, not all Christians believed that Christ is equal to God. Even more of them did not believe that Christ and God are one person.

Monarchs were among the first who questioned the Trinity of God (around 2nd - 3rd century C.E.). They defended the fundamental unity of God (the Divine Monarchy). Patripassians and Sabellians contributed to this discussion, and later this issue was raised by Alexandrian presbyter Arius. Each of these religious movements

¹ S.S. Averintsev. *Christianity*. Encyclopaedia in three volumes. V. 3 – Moscow, Big Russian Encyclopedia, 1993 – p. 389-394.

had its own opinion on Christ's position and his equality to God. In a dispute with Arianism and Sabellianism, Athanasius the Great and Gregory the Theologian formulated the provisions that were adopted as the dogma of the church and enshrined in the Nicene Creed (325 C.E.). But while the Divinity of the two hypostases (the Father and the Son) was somewhat proved, the question of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit was still open. And only at the second Ecumenical Council (381 C.E.) did the modern teaching of the Trinity enter the Nino-Tsaregrad Creed.

However, Trinitarian disputes resumed with renewed vigor in the Modern Period with the emergence of Protestant movements that denied the Trinity of God (Socinians, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses in the late 19th, and Oneness Pentecostalists). All of these Christian teachings and religions are called "anti-Trinitarian."

Thereby, Jehovah's Witnesses are not the only religion which does not believe that Christ is equal to God and denies the concept of the Trinity. This position is fundamental to their teaching¹.

According to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, the only true God is Jehovah, whereas Jesus Christ is not God and is not equal to God. They believe that God is one and there is no one equal to God. Jesus is lower than God and he gives worship to God. Explaining that teaching, they refer to what Jesus himself said at John 20:17, "Go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.'" They see Jesus as the first creation of God and therefore unique and different from other creations, so that he is called the only-begotten Son of God.

As can be seen, this Bible-based position is very logical and clear. Jehovah's Witnesses do not deny Christ and his role in saving humankind. I think it is fundamentally wrong not to accept them as Christians. They are Christians. Here is one interesting experience on the subject from *The Watchtower*:

¹ In detail see the above-mentioned encyclopedic publications as well as *Religious Studies Encyclopedia* – Moscow, Academic Project, 2006 – pp. 1079-1080.

“At a convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses in London, a spokesman was asked by a TV reporter whether Jehovah’s Witnesses are really Christians. He answered: ‘Yes, very much so because Jesus is our model. There’s a lot of selfishness in the world, and we focus on Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. We believe that he is the Son of God, not a part of a Trinity, so our understanding of the Bible is different from that of standard religion.’¹”

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, shortly after the last of the apostles died, true Christianity was lost. Gnostics and other Greek philosophers took control over Christian communities. They twisted Christ’s teachings, replacing them with a mixture of Hellenistic philosophy and pagan mysticism. This is the reason why Jehovah’s Witnesses do not recognize the authority of second-century apologists or the later “Church Fathers,” and they call the period of time starting from the second century C.E. to 1919 a time of spiritual captivity.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that they received their release from spiritual captivity in 1919. They explain: “All the evidence indicates that this captivity ended in 1919 when anointed Christians² were gathered into the restored congregation. Consider: God’s people were tested and refined during the years following the establishment of God’s Kingdom in the heavens in 1914. (Mal. 3:1-4) Then, in 1919, Jesus appointed ‘the faithful and discreet slave’ over God’s cleansed people to give them spiritual ‘food at the proper time.’ (Matt. 24:45-47) This was the year when God’s people started to return to their God-given spiritual estate. It was also the time when they were released from symbolic captivity to Babylon the Great. (Rev. 18:4)³”

The documentary film *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness* discusses people who sought truth from ancient times and whose views are now shared by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 1, 2001 – p. 6.

² Please see chapter 3 for definitions of the terms “Anointed Christian”, “God’s Kingdom”, “Faithful and discreet slave”, “Babylon the Great”.

³ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 2016 – p. 29.

For example, the film mentions people such as a French merchant known as Vaudès, who translated the Bible into the language of the common people in the 12th century; the Catholic priest John Wycliffe, who strongly criticized the unbiblical practices of the church; scientist Sir Isaac Newton; the poet John Milton; and the chemist Joseph Priestley.

Besides rejecting the Trinity doctrine, Priestley declared that the teaching of the inherent immortality of the soul was false. He held that first-century Christians had the true faith and that any change to that pattern of belief was a corruption. His opinions sparked a heated controversy both in the church and in the government. In 1791 a mob destroyed Priestley's house and laboratory. The pressure mounted for three more years until he fled to the United States. He was followed by many others who held his views.

Among them was Henry Grew. In 1807 at age 25, Grew was invited to serve as pastor of the Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut. He had a very interesting philosophy on the study of the Bible, let scripture interpret scripture. Grew's point was that the Bible was its own best interpreter. As he studied the Bible, he began to realize that the doctrine of the Trinity was false. Well, you could not be a Baptist minister and not believe in the Trinity. After four years Grew and several others withdrew from the church.

In later years Grew published writings in which he used the Bible to refute the Trinity, hellfire, and the inherent immortality of the soul. Grew's pamphlet *Intermediate State* caught the attention of Methodist minister George Storrs. By 1840 his conscience troubled him so much over the difference between what the Bible taught and what he was being obliged to teach as a Methodist Episcopal minister that he resigned his position. In 1842, Storrs began publishing a monthly magazine entitled *Bible Examiner*.

Before long he met Henry Grew in person. The two became close friends and collaborated in debates against proponents of

the immortal soul doctrine. George Storrs believed that in order for everyone living during the time of Christ's return to have an opportunity for salvation, a global preaching campaign was needed. He had no idea how such a thing could be accomplished, but in faith he wrote, "*Yet too many, if they cannot see just how a thing is to be done, reject it, as if it were impossible for God.*" Storrs died in 1879 in Brooklyn, New York, in the very neighborhood that would become the focal point of the worldwide preaching work he had so eagerly anticipated¹.

Therefore, the modern church of Jehovah's Witnesses was formed at the end of the 19th century. It is rightly attributed to *the late currents of Protestantism*, or neo-Protestantism, since the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses had as an influence the Seventh-Day Adventists' doctrine. It should be noted that here we are talking about the influence of, not separation from, the Adventist Church, as Charles T. Russell was never a member of Seventh-Day Adventists².

In 1870, **Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916)** formed a class for Bible study in the North American city of Allegheny (now part of Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania.

C. T. Russell was born in the United States on February 16, 1852. His parents were Joseph and Ann Eliza (Birney) Russell, who were Presbyterians³ of Scottish-Irish descent. They emigrated from Ireland to the U.S.A. in 1845. Russell was influenced by both of his religiously-minded parents⁴. Although brought up as a Presbyterian,

¹ Documentary *Jehovah's Witnesses – Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2010.

² Russell himself wrote, "We felt greatly grieved at the error of Second Adventists, who were expecting Christ in the flesh and teaching that the world and all in it except Second Adventists would be burned up." (*Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 45)

³ Presbyterian (from Greek "presbyteros" – an old man, an elder) – a movement of Calvinism formed during the period of Reformation in Scotland and England. The founder was John Knox (1505–1572)

⁴ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 43.

Russell eventually joined the Congregational Church because he preferred its views¹.

Joseph and Ann Eliza had five children; among them was C. T. Russell. But times were hard; before Charles turned nine, two of his siblings died, and later his mother died.

That same year, 1861, the United States became embroiled in a civil war that would send 618,000 to their graves. According to researchers, more U.S. citizens died in that war than in any other war in which the United States participated. Thousands perished on battlefields not far from where Russell lived and worked. He was able to see firsthand the havoc that war wreaks on people, the suffering, and the death.

Young Russell often thought about what happens to the dead. He could never reconcile the teaching of “eternal torment” with the description in the Bible of a loving God. Russell’s feelings about such teachings can be seen in what he wrote: *“A God that would use his power to create human beings whom he foreknew and predestinated should be eternally tormented could be neither wise, just, nor loving. His standard would be lower than that of many men.”*² As a result, his faith wavered.

He felt he could do the most good for people through business. At age eleven he became his father’s partner in a growing chain of clothing stores. Charles Russell enlarged the business, eventually operating a number of stores by himself. He possessed over \$300,000, the equivalent of \$7,000,000 today.

He did charity work, but even that would not bring him satisfaction. His search for spiritual support and answers to his questions about God and the causes of suffering continued. As Russell later recalled, he explored several leading Eastern religions only to make sure that they did not satisfy him either.

¹ Congregationalism (from Latin “congregatio” - association, community) is also one of the movements of Calvinism. Originating in the 16th century, the movement proclaimed the principle of autonomy of local churches or communities (congregations)—independence from any church organizations. The founder of the first congregation in 1581 was R. Brown.

² *Mankind's Search for God* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – p. 351.

One evening in 1869, something happened that would help reestablish his faith. While he was walking near his store, he heard religious singing coming from a basement. In his own words, this is what took place:

“Seemingly by accident, one evening I dropped into a dusty, dingy hall, where I had heard religious services were held, to see if the handful who met there had anything more sensible to offer than the creeds of the great churches. There, for the first time, I heard something of the views of Second Adventists [Advent Christian Church], the preacher being Mr. Jonas Wendell . . . Thus, I confess indebtedness to Adventists as well as to other denominations. Though his Scripture exposition was not entirely clear, . . . it was sufficient, under God, to re-establish my wavering faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible, and to show that the records of the apostles and prophets are indissolubly linked. What I heard sent me to my Bible to study with more zeal and care than ever before, and I shall ever thank the Lord for that leading; for though Adventism helped me to no single truth, it did help me greatly in the unlearning of errors, and thus prepared me for the Truth.”

That meeting renewed young Russell’s determination to search for Scriptural truth. Fired by enthusiasm, he, his father Joseph, and a few acquaintances in Pittsburgh and nearby Allegheny got together and formed a class for Bible study. The small Bible class was conducted in this manner: “Someone would raise a question. They would discuss it. They would look up all related scriptures on the point and then, when they were satisfied on the harmony of these texts, they would finally state their conclusion and make a record of it.”¹ As Russell later acknowledged, the period “from 1870 to 1875 was a time of constant growth in grace and knowledge and love of God and his Word.”

Russell referred quite openly to the assistance he had received from others in Bible study. Not only did he acknowledge his indebtedness to Second Adventist Jonas Wendell, he also spoke with affection

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1993 – p. 44.

about two other individuals: George Storrs, who was publisher of the magazine *Bible Examiner* in Brooklyn, New York, and George Stetson, who was pastor of the Advent Christian Church in Edinboro, Pennsylvania¹.

In July 1879, Russell published the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (which is now known as *The Watchtower*). Its first issue laid out the magazine's noble purpose: "As its name indicates, it aims to be the lookout from whence matters of interest and profit may be announced to the 'little flock'², and as the herald of Christ's Presence, to give the 'meat in due season' to the 'household of faith.'" The results of the Bible study began to be published in the magazine.

From then on C.T. Russell devoted himself entirely to a pastoral ministry. In 1881, *The Watchtower* carried the article "Wanted 1,000 Preachers." This was an appeal to every member of the congregation who did not have dependent family members and who could give half or more of their time exclusively to the Lord's work to undertake work as evangelists. By 1885 there were already about 300 who were sharing in the colporteur work.

In 1880, Russell had a number of tracts (booklets) printed for free distribution. Outstanding among these was *Food for Thinking Christians*, 1,200,000 of which were distributed in the first four months. He did not own his own publishing house, so various third-party firms in the states of Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio as well as in the UK were used.

In order to solve organizational and financial issues, the non-profit Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society³ was formed on February 16, 1881

¹ *Ibid* – pp. 45-46.

² Jehovah's Witnesses believe that "those 'who are called and chosen' to rule with Christ in the Kingdom are referred to as a 'little flock.' (Revelation 17:14; Luke 12:32)," electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/go-to-heaven/>).

³ **Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society** - First formed in 1881 and then legally incorporated in the state of Pennsylvania on December 15, 1884. In 1896, its name was changed to **Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society**. Since 1955, it has been known as **Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania**.

with W. H. Conley as president and C. T. Russell as secretary and treasurer. Further, as noted in the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses: "To prevent disruption of the work in the event of his death and to facilitate the handling of donations to be used in the work, [Russell, who was 32 at the time], filed for legal registration of the Society, and this was officially recorded on December 15, 1884. This brought into existence a needed legal instrumentality.¹" C. T. Russell became the president of the registered Society. The charter of the Society stated that it would not be just a publisher. It carried out a religious purpose, which was to "disseminate Bible truth in various languages."

In Russell's family this caused a serious conflict fueled by slanderers, envious people, and the incredible ambition of his wife, Maria Frances Ackley. She abandoned him in 1897 after nearly 18 years of marriage. She filed for legal separation in 1903, and it was issued in 1908.

It was distressing for Russell, but he was able to cope with it. His grief was clear from his words to her in an early letter:

"I have prayed earnestly to the Lord on your behalf. . . . I will not burden you with accounts of my sorrow nor attempt to work upon your sympathies by delineating my emotions, as I from time to time run across your dresses and other articles which bring vividly before my mind your former self—so full of love and sympathy and helpfulness—the spirit of Christ. . . . Oh, do consider prayerfully what I am about to say. And be assured that the keen edge of my sorrow, its poignancy, is not my own loneliness for the remainder of life's journey but your fall, my dear, your everlasting loss, so far as I can see."²

Maria Russell's own belated regret only came at a time when Russell was no longer alive. It is said that wearing a veil, she walked down the aisle to his casket and there laid a bunch of lilies of the valley. Attached to them was a ribbon bearing the words, "*To My Beloved Husband.*"

The family drama did not discourage him. He kept on preaching with great spiritual zeal.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2004 – p. 210

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 1, 1991 – p. 12.

Gradually, Bible study classes began to form in other states, mostly neighboring Pennsylvania. The meetings were held up to three times a week. The participants were involved in spiritual, moral, and ethical conversations within the framework of the Bible.

In this regard we find it worthy to pay attention to three very important points:

First. How did Russell perceive the role that he and his associates played in publishing Scriptural truth? He explained: “Our work . . . has been to bring together these long-scattered fragments of truth and present them to the Lord’s people—not as new, not as our own, but as the Lord’s... We must disclaim any credit even for the finding and rearrangement of the jewels of truth.” He further stated, “The work in which the Lord has been pleased to use our humble talents has been less a work of origination than of reconstruction, adjustment, harmonization.”¹

In the Watch Tower of July 15, 1906 (p. 229), Russell humbly replied: “No, dear friends, I claim nothing of superiority, nor supernatural power, dignity, or authority; nor do I aspire to exalt myself in the estimation of my brethren of the household of faith except in the sense that the Master urged it, saying, ‘Let him who would be great among you be your servant.’ (Matt. 20:27.) . . . The truths I present, as God’s mouthpiece, were not revealed in visions or dreams, nor by God’s audible voice, nor all at once, but gradually . . . Neither is this clear unfolding of truth due to any human ingenuity or acuteness of perception but to the simple fact that God’s due time has come; and if I did not speak and no other agent could be found, the very stones would cry out.”²

Therefore, Russell emphasized that he knew of no such thing as “Russellism” and “Russellite,” terms that his opposers used but that he categorically rejected.

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 49.

² *Ibid* – p.143.

Second. Russell was not the only one who defended his view of “Biblical truths.” Back then, many clergymen as well as Biblical scholars opposed the well-established views on Christian dogmas that, in their opinion, contradicted the basic tenets of the Bible (for example: the immortality of the soul, the eternal torment for sinners, etc.)¹

Russell and some of his associates made it a practice to check all common Christian beliefs carefully to see if they corresponded to the Bible texts. Their objective was not to find proof texts for a preconceived idea but *to be sure* that they drew conclusions that *were in harmony with everything that the Bible said on the matter*².

Finally, third. The development of the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses took a notable step forward with a series of books entitled *Millennial Dawn* (later called *Studies in the Scriptures*) written by C. T. Russell. During his lifetime he wrote six volumes.

Volume I, *The Plan of the Ages* (1886);

Volume II, *The Time is at Hand* (1889);

Volume III, *Thy Kingdom Come* (1891);

Volume IV, *The Battle of Armageddon* (1897); originally called *The Day of Vengeance*;

Volume V, *The At-one-ment Between God and Man* (1899);

Volume VI, *The New Creation* (1904).

Russell did not survive to write an intended seventh volume of this series³.

An interesting fact: visitors of the Leo Tolstoy Memorial Museum complex, Yasnaya Polyana, can find C. T. Russell’s multi-volume series

¹ A detailed description can be found in Aaron Ellise’s book *Bible vs. Tradition*, first published in England and later in the U.S.A, by George Storrs.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 1994 – p. 24.

³ When the *Millennial Dawn* volumes began to be called *Studies in the Scriptures*, *Volume I* was designated as *Series I*, *Volume II* as *Series II*, and so forth. The name *Studies in the Scriptures* was adopted in limited editions beginning about October 1904, and the new name was more generally used beginning in 1906 (See: *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – pp. 52-53).

in the library of this great thinker. So, we can conclude that Tolstoy was familiar with Russell's work.

We would like to note that with all due respect to Charles T. Russell, Jehovah's Witnesses do not consider him to be the founder of their teachings.

By the end of the 1880's, the number of so-called full-time ministers, those who devoted their time to preaching Bible teachings and distributing relevant literature, had already reached 50 people. These were the most faithful followers of the teachings and Russell's closest associates.

In the mid-1880's, Charles T. Russell announced his plans to visit a number of towns and cities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York in order to study the activity and unite small groups of believers so that they could "edify one another' and build each other up in the most holy faith." He believed that such proposed meetings might contribute to the formation of personal acquaintances.

The "proposed meetings" that were held during Russell's trip proved to be very successful; readers of the *Watch Tower* were drawn closer together. These and other trips to visit "little bands of waiting ones" soon resulted in the forming of a number of classes, or "ecclesias" (later called congregations), located in the aforementioned areas as well as in Ohio and Michigan¹.

During the late 1890's, conventions (large meetings) began to be organized in many places.

Great efforts were made to expand the work to other countries. In 1891, Russell made a tour of Europe and the Middle East to consider what could be done to further the spread of the truth there. In the early 1900's, branch offices of the Society were established in Britain, Germany, and Australia.

The legal charter of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was officially recorded in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., on December 15, 1884.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 50.

There, the headquarters of this society was established. Later, on April 23, 1900, property for the first branch office was secured in London, England. In 1902 a second branch was opened, in Germany; and by 1904, additional branches had been set up in Australia and Switzerland.

In 1909 the headquarters of the Watch Tower Society was moved to Brooklyn, New York, to further the expansion of the preaching work on an international scale. Until recently the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses¹ was located there, as well as various departments and services that assist them in their daily work of spiritual guidance for members around the world. Recently, the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses moved from New York, New York to Warwick, New York, where a modern complex of eight buildings has been built on a plot of 102 hectares.

In 1909 it also became necessary under New York State law to form an associate corporation, which is now known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

In 1914 the International Bible Students Association was formed in London, England, and still exists today. Its purpose was to advance the activities of the Bible Students throughout the British Commonwealth.

C. T. Russell was indeed an active preacher. Each week he would telegraph a sermon to a newspaper syndicate. In turn, the syndicate telegraphed the sermon to newspapers in the United States, Canada, and Europe. It is estimated that by 1913, Russell's sermons were reaching 15,000,000 readers by means of 2,000 newspapers².

Gradually, branch offices of the Watch Tower Society began to be organized in other countries of the world (currently there are more than 87 such branches).

There were also changes within the congregation itself. First, in 1881, C.T. Russell began to collect and organize information about

¹ The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses is a small group of mature Christians who provide direction for Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide – electronic ref, (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/governing-body-jw-helpers/>).

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 15, 2015 – p. 28.

the congregations of Bible Students in each country. In 1895 all congregations were instructed to choose elders from among their ranks.

C. T. Russell could foresee the scale of the upcoming preaching growth, but he realized that it would be done after his death. At a question-and-answer session in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, in 1915, he was asked when Christ's spirit-anointed followers then living could expect to receive their heavenly reward. He replied: "I do not know, but there is a great work to be done. And it will take thousands of brethren and millions in money to do it. Where these will come from I don't know—the Lord knows his own business."

Then, in 1916, a short while before he began the speaking tour on which he died, he called A. H. Macmillan, an administrative assistant, to his office. On that occasion he said, "I am not able to carry on the work any longer, and yet there is a great work to be done." For three hours he described to Macmillan, on the basis of the Scriptures, the extensive preaching work that he saw ahead. To Macmillan's objections he replied, "This is not man's work."¹

In 1916, C. T. Russell passed away. At Russell's memorial service, Joseph F. Rutherford said: "Charles Taze Russell was loyal to God, loyal to Christ Jesus, loyal to the cause of Messiah's kingdom. He was loyal to the core—yea, loyal even unto death."²

In his will Russell outlined an arrangement for an Editorial Committee of five (whom he named) to determine the contents of *The Watch Tower*. In addition, the board of directors of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society made arrangements for an Executive Committee of three—A. I. Ritchie, W. E. Van Amburgh, and J. F. Rutherford. In 1917, J. F. Rutherford became the next president of the Watch Tower Society.

Joseph Franklin Rutherford (1869–1942) was the second president of the Watch Tower Society. He was born to Baptist parents

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 623.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 15, 1996 – p. 10.

on a farm in Morgan County, Missouri, U.S.A., on November 8, 1869. His father was a farmer.

When Joseph was 16, his father consented to his attending college, provided that he pay his own way and that he pay for a hired laborer to take his place on the farm. A determined young man, Rutherford secured a loan from a friend and managed to go to college while also studying law.

After completing his education, Rutherford spent two years under the tutelage of Judge E. L. Edwards. By the time he was 20, he became the official court reporter for the courts of the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit in Missouri.

On May 5, 1892, his license to practice law in Missouri was granted. Rutherford later served for four years as public prosecutor for Boonville, Missouri. Later still, he served on occasion as a special judge in the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court of Missouri. That is why he came to be known as “Judge” Rutherford.

Although J. F. Rutherford grew up in a family of Baptists, at one time he was an atheist. Rutherford explained that at the time he planned to marry, his religious views were those of the Baptist denomination, but those of his wife-to-be were Presbyterian. When Rutherford’s pastor said that *“she was going to hell fire because she had not been immersed and that he was going straight to heaven because he had been,”* his logical mind revolted and he became an atheist.

It took Rutherford several years of careful research to rebuild his faith in a personal God. He worked, he said, from the premise that *“that which cannot satisfy the mind has no right to satisfy the heart.”* Christians *“must be sure that the Scriptures in which they believe are true,”* Rutherford explained, adding, *“They must know the foundation on which they stand.”¹*

Interestingly, to help pay his way through school, Rutherford sold encyclopedias from house to house. It was not an easy job—there were

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 1, 1997 – p. 6.

many rejections. On one occasion he almost died when he fell into an icy stream while calling on farms. He promised himself that when he became a lawyer, if anyone ever came to his office selling books, he would buy them.

True to his word, he accepted three volumes of *Millennial Dawn* from two colporteurs who appeared at his office early in 1894. Several weeks later he read the books and promptly wrote a letter to the Watch Tower Society in which he said, "My dear wife and myself have read these books with the keenest interest, and we consider it a God-send and a great blessing that we have had the opportunity of coming in contact with them." In 1906, Joseph F. Rutherford was baptized, and a year later he became the Watch Tower Society's legal counsel. In January 1917 he became its president.

It is worth noting that Jehovah's Witnesses were formed as a functionally structured religious organization under the leadership of Joseph Franklin Rutherford, who was Russell's loyal companion and friend. On this account he wrote: "The development of the church is not an instantaneous matter. It is a gradual process."¹

Under J. F. Rutherford, annual conventions of Bible Students began to be held; the publication of literature on Biblical topics and Bible study methods dramatically expanded along with forms of preaching.

However, not everyone was supportive of the new president. A few, especially at headquarters, resented Rutherford. Opposition soon mounted. The situation came to a head in the summer of 1917, with the release of *The Finished Mystery*, the seventh volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

As noted earlier, this book should have completed the series of books by Russell, *Millennial Dawn (Studies in the Scriptures)*, but the author died without having produced the seventh volume. Following his death, the Executive Committee of the Society arranged to prepare this book, which was a commentary on Revelation, The Song of

¹ *The Harp of God* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1921 – p. 286.

Solomon, and Ezekiel. In part, it was based on what Russell had written about these Bible books, and other comments and explanations were added. The book was released in July 1917.

The book contained some references to the clergy of Christendom that were very cutting. This so angered the clergy that they urged the government to suppress the publications of the Bible Students. As a result of this clergy-inspired opposition, early in 1918, *The Finished Mystery* was banned in Canada. Opposition soon mounted against the Bible Students in the United States.

To expose this clergy-inspired pressure, on March 15, 1918, the Watch Tower Society released the tract *Kingdom News* No. 1. What was its message? The six-column-wide headline read: “Religious Intolerance—Pastor Russell’s Followers Persecuted Because They Tell the People the Truth.” Below the heading “Treatment of Bible Students Smacks of the ‘Dark Ages,’” the facts of the persecution and the ban that had begun in Canada were set forth. Who were the instigators? The tract pulled no punches in pointing to the clergy, who were described as “a bigoted class of men who have systematically endeavored to prevent the people from understanding the Bible and to throttle all Bible teaching unless it comes through them.”¹

The clergy responded quickly to this exposé, so that in the spring of 1918, a wave of violent persecution was launched against the Bible Students in both North America and Europe. The clergy-inspired opposition came to a head on May 7, 1918, when U.S. federal warrants were issued for the arrest of J. F. Rutherford and several of his close associates. By mid-1918, Rutherford and seven associates found themselves in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.

World War I was still raging. There were shortages of paper supplies and coal, which were vitally needed for the work at the headquarters of the Bible Students. With patriotism at fever pitch, there was considerable animosity against the Society; the Bible Students were

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 70.

viewed as traitors. A special issue of *The Golden Age* (now *Awake!*) of September 29, 1920, published a graphic, extensive report of the vicious persecution they endured in the United States. Included were the following accounts:

“April 22, 1918, at Wynnewood, Oklahoma, Claud Watson was first jailed and then deliberately released to a mob composed of preachers, business men and a few others that knocked him down, caused a negro to whip him and when he had partially recovered, to whip him again. They then poured tar and feathers all over him, rubbing the tar into his hair and scalp.”

“April 29, 1918, at Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, W. B. Duncan, 61 years of age, Edward French, Charles Franke, a Mr. Griffin and Mrs. D. Van Hoesen were jailed. The jail was broken into by a mob that used the most vile and obscene language, whipped, tarred, feathered, and drove them from town. Duncan was compelled to walk 26 miles [42 km] to his home and barely recovered. Griffin was virtually blinded and died from the assault a few months later.¹”

The remaining Bible Students saw the need to leave Brooklyn and after consulting with one another, sold the Brooklyn Tabernacle and closed the Bethel Home. On August 26, 1918, the operations were transferred back to Pittsburgh to an office building at Federal and Reliance Streets.

But times were changing, and on March 26, 1919—nine months after Rutherford and his associates were sentenced—the imprisoned Bible Students were released on bail. The following year, on May 5, 1920, *the charges against them were dropped*.

An important fact is that J. F. Rutherford remained a member of the bar of the United States Supreme Court from his admission in May 1909 until his death in 1942. In 14 cases appealed to the Supreme Court from 1939 until 1942, J. F. Rutherford was one of the attorneys².

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 70.

² *Ibid* – p. 654.

All of these Bible Students *were fully exonerated*. This demonstrated that *these men were unjustly imprisoned, not convicts*.

Is it not true that these facts make us think of our days? Although no one pours pitch on Witnesses or covers them with feathers, intolerance is very tenacious and from time to time our society is bothered by “waves” of xenophobia.

At the same time, the Bible Students went through their first dissension. Several individuals refused to recognize J. F. Rutherford as the president of the Society. This happened not only in the U.S.A. but also affected some other countries. Shortly after, when he was nominated and re-elected as the president, the dissenters broke off all ties with the Bible Students. Very little is known of their further fate. However, they could not create a new movement, so they dissolved. The vast majority of Bible Students supported J. F. Rutherford and the Society.

All of the aforementioned did not slow down the growth of Bible Students. It seems to have given them strength to carry on.

From 1917, when J. F. Rutherford became president, to 1941, the Watch Tower Society produced a flood of publications including 24 books, 86 booklets, and annual *Yearbooks*¹. On April 16, 1922, Joseph F. Rutherford made one of his first radio broadcasts, speaking to an estimated 50,000 people. Then, on February 24, 1924, the organization's first radio station, WBBR, began broadcasting. Regarding this new method of reaching people, *The Watchtower* of December 1, 1924, observed: “We believe that the radio is the most economical and effective way of spreading the message of the truth that has yet been used.” By 1933 the Society was using 403 radio stations to broadcast Bible lectures. Assemblies and conventions were held regularly in spite of everything. And the number of believers attending them kept increasing.

The growth of the organization became manifest. The number of Bible Students increased from 4,000 in 1918 to 56,000 in 1935 and had reached 100,000 by 1942.

¹ Ibid – p. 88.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 15, 2015 – p. 28.

In 1919 the fifth branch of the Watch Tower Society was established—this one in Canada. In 1921 alone six branches were opened in different countries. In 1923 a branch office was organized in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1927 a branch was established in Japan. In 1932 the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was established in Estonia and Romania¹. And on March 14, 1933, the International Bible Students Association was officially registered in Latvia².

On October 1, 1919, a new magazine appeared on the world stage—*The Golden Age*. This instrument would be used as an associate to *The Watch Tower*. Its articles would not delve into Bible subjects as deeply as those in *The Watch Tower*. As Rutherford announced, it would “carry the current news of importance, giving a Scriptural explanation as to why these great events [were] transpiring.”³

On October 6, 1937, the name of *The Golden Age* was changed to *Consolation*. And in 1946, *Consolation* was renamed *Awake!* It is still published under this name.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that “a milestone was reached at a convention held in Columbus, Ohio, in 1931.” At this particular event a resolution was presented, entitled “A New Name,” which was climaxed by the declaration, “We desire to be known as and called by the name, to wit, *Jehovah's Witnesses*.”⁴

From that time onward, the organization has borne the name “Jehovah's Witnesses.”

On February 23, 1936, speaking on the Shrine Auditorium radio channel in Los Angeles, California, J. F. Rutherford presented a famous resolution, which all Jehovah's Witnesses of the world then discussed and adopted:

¹ 2006 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – p. 88.

² 2007 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 – p. 187.

³ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 2019 – p. 5.

⁴ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 82.

Resolution

“We, people with goodwill from all nations, declare that we believe in God and Jesus Christ and that the Bible is the only guidance for man.

We do not wish to ascribe the power of salvation to people, worshipping and saluting any person or any sign or thing.

We fully agree with the words at Revelation 7:9, 10 and consider it as if it was said by us personally and repeat the words: ‘Salvation we owe to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’

We declare that we stand on the side of Jehovah and his Kingdom under the direction of Christ, and by His mercy we will obey our God and serve him forever.”

The following important milestones should also be noted:

1895 – After a number of volumes of Millennial Dawn (written by C. T. Russell) had been published, one Bible Student from the city of Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A., suggested holding “Dawn Circles” for Bible study. At first, these meetings, which were often held in private homes, were an experiment. By September 1895, however, Dawn Circles were being conducted with success in a score of cities in the United States. The Watch Tower of that month therefore suggested that all students of the truth hold those meetings. It directed that the one conducting should be a good reader. He was to read a sentence and then wait for those present to comment. After reading each of the sentences in a paragraph and discussing them, he was to look up and read the cited scriptures. At the end of a chapter, each one in attendance was to give a brief review of the material. The Watch Tower of November 15, 1895, directed that starting immediately, “in every company [congregation], elders be chosen” to “take the oversight” —Acts 20:28¹.

1919 – In each congregation a service director is appointed by the branch office. His responsibilities include organizing the preaching work and encouraging participation in the field ministry.

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 174.

1932 – The annual election of elders by the congregation is eliminated. Instead, the congregation elects a service committee made up of men who zealously share in the preaching work. They form a “service committee,” and one of their number, nominated by the congregation, is appointed by the branch office to be the “service director.”

1938 – According to *the Watchtower* of June 1 and of June 15, 1938, congregations adopt a resolution requesting that all congregation elders be appointed theocratically. This marks the end of democratic elections in the congregations.

In the 1930's the world faced the Great Depression as well as the rise of Nazism and nationalism. In the 1930's and 1940's, a new wave of repression against Jehovah's Witnesses swept across America and Europe. They had to defend their right to freedom of religion in court. In the U.S. Supreme Court, Jehovah's Witnesses won 43 cases as a result of appealing lower court decisions. Supreme courts in several European countries rendered similarly favorable court decisions.

In the late 1930's, cities and states throughout the United States of America sought to force Jehovah's Witnesses to obtain some form of legal permit or license in order to engage in their ministry. But Jehovah's Witnesses did not apply for licenses because they believed that if someone could issue such a permit or license, they could also revoke it. And since Christians received from Jesus the command to preach and tell people about Christ and God's purpose, no government on earth has the right to forbid Christians to carry out this commission. This provoked a conflict and, consequently, arrests and long-term trials.

The U.S. Supreme Court brought the dispute to an end. Here is how this process is described:

“Starting on March 29, 1940, Chief Justice Charles E. Hughes and eight associate judges listened to the arguments presented by Hayden Covington, a lawyer for Jehovah's Witnesses. When the attorney for the state of Connecticut presented his arguments in an effort to prove that the Witnesses were troublemakers, one justice asked: ‘Was it not

true that the message that Christ Jesus proclaimed was unpopular in his day?’ The state’s attorney replied: ‘It was, and if I remember my Bible correctly, it also tells what happened to Jesus for proclaiming that message.’ What a revealing statement! Unwittingly, the attorney grouped the Witnesses with Jesus and grouped the state with those who convicted him. On May 20, 1940, the Court unanimously ruled in favor of the Witnesses.

“What was the significance of the Court’s ruling? It expanded protection of the right to the free exercise of religion so that no federal, state, or local government could lawfully limit religious freedom. Further, the Court found [the defendant’s] conduct ‘no . . . menace to public peace and order.’ Hence, the ruling clearly established that Jehovah’s Witnesses are not disturbers of public order.”¹

Concerning these court victories, Professor C. S. Braden in his book *These Also Believe* said: “... [Jehovah’s Witnesses] have performed a signal service to democracy by their fight to preserve their civil rights, for in their struggle they have done much to secure those rights for every minority group in America.”²

From 1937 to 1953, there were 59 cases involving the Witnesses that were taken all the way up to the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. By 1988, the U.S. Supreme Court had reviewed 71 cases involving Jehovah’s Witnesses, two thirds of which were decided in their favor³.

Also, as of June 2014, the European Court of Human Rights had ruled in favor of Jehovah’s Witnesses in 57 cases that are binding on all nations of the Council of Europe⁴.

By 2013, the total number of high court victories Jehovah’s Witnesses had received throughout the world was 243⁵.

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 138.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Twentieth Century* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1994 – p. 8.

³ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 1, 2001 – p. 19.

⁴ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 15, 2015 – p. 28.

⁵ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 15, 2013 – p. 30.

Scholar Charles C. Haynes wrote: *“We all owe the Jehovah’s Witnesses a debt of gratitude. No matter how many times they’re insulted, run out of town, or even physically attacked, they keep on fighting for their (and thus our) freedom of religion. And when they win, we all win.”*¹

In a speech at Drake University, Irving Dilliard, a well-known author and editor, said, *“Like it or not, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have done more to help preserve our freedoms than any other religious group.”*²

Here is another quote from an article about the contribution of Jehovah’s Witnesses to the development and protection of the constitutional rights of citizens:

“If you have a front door, a Jehovah’s Witness probably has knocked on it. With well-dressed politeness and practiced persistence, they offer literature, biblical advice and a path to God’s kingdom as they see it.

As often as not, they knock at the wrong time, when we’re too busy to listen or not particularly interested in shopping for another faith.

But before you shut the door on a Jehovah’s Witness the next time, pause to consider the shameful persecution they suffered not too long ago, as well as the rich contribution they have made to the First Amendment freedoms we all enjoy ... So frequently did Witnesses raise core First Amendment issues that Justice Harlan Fiske Stone wrote, ‘The Jehovah’s Witnesses ought to have an endowment in view of the aid which they give in solving the legal problems of civil liberties.’ All religions have the Jehovah’s Witnesses to thank for the expansion of that freedom.³”

But the scariest stories of persecution and repression against Jehovah’s Witnesses are from the Nazi Era. In the beginning of the

¹ *Bearing Thorough Witness About God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2009 – p. 200.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 699.

³ Center for Studies on New Religions online, entry “USA Today Emphatically Hails Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Legal History for ‘Rich Contribution to Freedom,’” May 30, 2000 - electronic ref., (http://www.cesnur.org/testi/geova_USAtoday.htm).

1930's, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses and those interested in studying the Bible with them was between 25,000 and 30,000 people (0.38% of Germany's population of 65 million).

According to the official website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Even before 1933, Jehovah's Witnesses were targets of prejudice. Mainstream Lutheran and Catholic churches deemed them heretics. Moreover, citizens often found the Witnesses' missionary work—knocking on doors and preaching—to be invasive. Individual German states had long sought to curb the missionary work through strict enforcement of statutes on illegal solicitation. At various times, individual jurisdictions banned Witness religious literature, including the booklets *The Watchtower* and *The Golden Age*. During the Weimar period, however, the German courts often ruled in favor of the religious minority. Before the Nazis came to power, individual groups of local Nazis (party functionaries or SA men), acting outside the law, broke up Bible study meetings and assaulted individual Witnesses."¹

Hitler's rise to power was perceived extremely negatively by Jehovah's Witnesses. "*The Golden Age* and *Consolation* magazines often drew attention to the militaristic stirrings in Germany. In 1929, more than three years before Hitler came to power, the German edition of *The Golden Age* boldly stated, '*National Socialism is . . . a movement that is acting . . . directly in the service of man's enemy, the Devil*'. On the eve of Hitler's taking power, *The Golden Age* of January 4, 1933, said: 'There looms forth the menacing promontory of the National Socialist movement. It seems incredulous that a political party so insignificant in its origin, so heterodox in its policies can, in the space of a few years, develop into proportions that overshadow the structure of a national government. Yet, Adolf Hitler and his national socialist party (the Nazis) have accomplished this rare feat.'²

¹ Holocaust Encyclopedia - electronic ref., (URL: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/>).

² *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 22, 1995 – p. 6.

In the late 1990's, Russian "fighters against sects" made active use of the myth that Jehovah's Witnesses cooperated with National Socialists under Hitler. However, such "revelations" are nothing more than dirty lies and a mere corruption of facts. Now this kind of activity bears the name "information warfare."

What was the truth, then?

Hitler became prime minister of Germany on January 30, 1933, and a couple of months later, on April 4, 1933, the Magdeburg branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses was seized. However, the order was rescinded on April 28, 1933, and the property was returned. In different areas of Germany, the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses was banned.

Jehovah's Witnesses attempted to hold their ground, and repeated efforts were made to gain a hearing with the German authorities. But no relief was forthcoming. By the summer of 1933, their work had been banned in most German states.

Then, Jehovah's Witnesses organized a convention in Berlin, Germany, on June 25, 1933. Some 7,000 persons assembled. The Witnesses publicly made their intentions clear: "Our organization is not political in any sense. We only insist on teaching the Word of Jehovah God to the people and that without hindrance.¹"

At the convention the delegates adopted a resolution entitled "Declaration of Facts," which was later sent to government officials and distributed to other people as well. Nevertheless, in July 1933, the courts refused to grant a hearing for relief².

What was the purpose of this declaration? Did Jehovah's Witnesses want to cooperate with the Nazis? Of course not. All they wanted was to show all people, including German government officials, who they really are and that their activity is exclusively religious and peaceful.

Another thing to bear in mind is that Hitler came to power legally, and in those days most governments of the world paid honor to him.

¹ Ibid – p. 7.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 693.

Hitler provided everyone with work and awakened their faith in the Fatherland. So, the vast majority of Germans proclaimed him as the Savior. All the Nazi atrocities were still to come, so, in this case Jehovah's Witnesses' attempts seem absolutely reasonable. But they did not offer cooperation nor did they compromise.

Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Germany believed in political neutrality, did not give the "Heil Hitler" salute, refused to support the existing regime, and did not share National Socialist ideology. You can imagine the response of the aggressive Nazis, who strongly believed that every German was obliged to perform military service and affirm his loyalty to the country.

In the documentary *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*, there are accounts from eyewitnesses of that time. These are the words of one who faced pressure: *"I was the only one of 2,000 who did not raise their hands to the German greeting. ... Every single day turned into a test, as I was obliged to do it ..."*¹

The confrontation of Jehovah's Witnesses with the Nazi regime can be illustrated by the following example from pre-war years:

1933 – On Saturday, June 24, 1933, the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany came under an official ban. However, Jehovah's Witnesses only found out about it a few days later. On account of this, their scheduled convention was held.

On June 25, 1933, Jehovah's Witnesses held the convention in Berlin. More than 7,000 attended. The delegates adopted the resolution entitled "Declaration of Facts."

On June 28, 1933, the Nazis again seized the branch office at Magdeburg. A wave of persecution began throughout Germany. Witnesses began to be dismissed from their jobs; they were deprived of pensions and unemployment benefits. They suffered raids on their homes, beatings, and arrests. Their houses of worship were taken into

¹ Documentary *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996.

State ownership. By early 1934, the Nazis had seized 65 tons of Bible literature from the Witnesses and burned it outside Magdeburg.

It was a tough time which called for courage and decisive action. The November 1, 1933, issue of *The Watchtower* featured the article "Fear Them Not." It was prepared especially for the German Witnesses, exhorting them to take courage in the face of mounting pressure¹. That same year, *The Golden Age* carried the first of many reports of the existence of concentration camps in Germany.

1934 – On February 9, 1934, Joseph F. Rutherford sent Hitler a letter of protest: "You may successfully resist any and all men, but you cannot successfully resist Jehovah God. . . In the name of Jehovah God and his anointed King, Christ Jesus, I demand that you give order to all officials and servants of your government that Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany be permitted to peaceably assemble and, without hindrance, worship God."²

The Nazis answered Rutherford's demand with stepped-up abuses, sending many of Jehovah's Witnesses to the concentration camps that had recently been set up³. In 1934 alone, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that nearly 4,000 houses had been searched for Bible literature and more than 1,000 Witnesses arrested, 400 of whom had been sent to concentration camps. There were about 200 cases of ill-treatment. After each strike the persecutors kept asking: "Do you still believe in Jehovah?" That year Jehovah's Witnesses were the first ones who were admitted to the concentration camp in Dachau.

On Sunday morning, October 7, 1934, at nine o'clock, all congregations of *Bibelforscher* (as Jehovah's Witnesses were called) in Germany assembled to hear the reading of a letter that was being sent to German government officials. It said: "*There is a direct conflict between your law and God's law . . . Therefore, this is to advise you that, at*

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 22, 1995 – p. 7.

² *Ibid* – p. 7.

³ *Ibid* – p. 8.

*any cost, we will obey God's commandments, will meet together for the study of his Word, and will worship and serve him as he has commanded.*¹ On the same day, Jehovah's Witnesses in 49 other countries met at special assemblies and sent the following telegram to Hitler: "Your ill-treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses shocks all good people of earth and dishonors God's name. Refrain from further persecuting Jehovah's Witnesses; otherwise God will destroy you and your national party." It is said that Hitler himself screamed, "This brood will be exterminated in Germany!"²

1935 – Jehovah's Witnesses were largely banished to labor and concentration camps. *The Golden Age* exposed the Inquisition-like torture methods of the Nazi regime.

1936 – Berlin hosted the summer Olympic Games. A nationwide Gestapo campaign resulted in the arrests of thousands of Witnesses. Soon after, on December 12, 1936, the Witnesses answered with their own campaign, blanketing Germany with tens of thousands of copies of a resolution protesting the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses.

1937 – The situation continued to get worse. According to the Witnesses themselves, by the end of 1937, 6,000 Witnesses were camp inmates, wearing purple triangles that identified them as Jehovah's Witnesses. They were the only religious group that made up a separate category of prisoners.

On June 20, 1937, Witnesses who were still free distributed another message that was unsparing in its detail about the persecution. It named officials and cited dates and places. The Gestapo were appalled at this exposure and the ability of the Witnesses to carry it off.

1938 – Jehovah's Witnesses published a booklet entitled *Face the Facts*. It said: "We must tell the truth and give the warning ... We recognize the totalitarian government. . . as the product of Satan brought forth as the substitute for God's kingdom."³ Jehovah's Witnesses also loudly decried atrocities against Jews, Poles, the handicapped, and others.

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 22, 1995 – p. 8.

² *Ibid* – p. 8.

³ *Ibid* – p. 9.

On October 2, 1938, J. F. Rutherford delivered the lecture “Fascism or Freedom,” which was broadcast on over 50 radio stations around the world. In this lecture Rutherford condemned atrocities against the Jews. *“In Germany the common people are peace-loving,” Rutherford proclaimed. “The Devil has put his representative Hitler in control, a man who is of unsound mind, cruel, malicious, and ruthless . . . He cruelly persecutes the Jews because they were once Jehovah’s covenant people and bore the name of Jehovah and because Christ Jesus was a Jew.”*¹

In the camps the Nazis tried to strike a deal with the *Bibelforscher* by offering them freedom in exchange for simply signing the following declaration:

“Translation of Declaration That the SS Tried to Force Witnesses to Sign

Concentration camp

Department II

DECLARATION

I, the

born on

in

herewith make the following declaration:

1. I have come to know that the International Bible Students Association is proclaiming erroneous teachings and under the cloak of religion follows hostile purposes against the State.

2. I therefore left the organization entirely and made myself absolutely free from the teachings of this sect.

3. I herewith give assurance that I will never again take any part in the activity of the International Bible Students Association. Any persons approaching me with the teaching of the Bible Students, or who in any manner reveal their connections with them, I will denounce immediately. All literature from the Bible Students that should be sent to my address I will at once deliver to the nearest police station.

¹ Ibid.

4. I will in the future esteem the laws of the State, especially in the event of war will I, with weapon in hand, defend the fatherland, and join in every way the community of the people.

5. I have been informed that I will at once be taken again into protective custody if I should act against the declaration given today.

....., Dated Signature¹”

Only a few of the *Bibelforscher* signed such a document.

Pressure was put not only on adults but also on children. The Gestapo took 800 children away from their parents. More often than not they were sent to Nazi schools or orphanages, where the children were forced to give the “Heil Hitler” greeting, salute the flag, and sing Nazi songs. When children refused to do so, you can only imagine what happened to them. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany and in countries occupied by the Nazis suffered reprisals because of their faith. Some 4,200 Witnesses were interned in concentration camps, and 1,490 lost their lives². Historian Brian Dunn stated: ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses were incompatible with Nazism. Most important of the Nazi objections to them was their political neutrality. This meant that no believer would bear arms, hold office, take part in public festivals, or make any sign of allegiance.’ (*The Churches’ Response to the Holocaust*, 1986) In *A History of Christianity*, Paul Johnson added: “Many were sentenced to death for refusing military service . . . or they ended in Dachau or lunatic asylums.”³

Jehovah’s Witnesses were subjected to the most cruel and sadistic treatment imaginable. It was not unusual for them to be cursed and kicked, then forced to do knee-bending, jumping, and crawling for hours on end until they fainted or dropped from exhaustion, while guards laughed with glee. Some were forced to stand naked or lightly clad in the courtyard in midwinter. Many were whipped until they

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 661.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 15, 2007 – p. 32.

³ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 194.

were unconscious and their backs were covered with blood. Some were hung by their wrists with their arms tied behind their back. Both men and women were abused in this way. Their ages ranged from the teens into the seventies¹.

When I was preparing the second edition of the publication *Jehovah's Witnesses of Kazakhstan and Central Asia*, I looked at the material that had been accumulated, and I found a small article in one of the monthly journals of Jehovah's Witnesses. It describes an example of courage and endurance.

The camp commander in the Sachsenhausen camp had August Dickmann executed. He believed that would break the spirit of Jehovah's Witnesses.

August Dickmann was interned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1937. Three days after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, he was ordered to sign his military induction slip. When he refused, the camp commander contacted Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Hitler's elite guard), and asked permission to execute Dickmann in the presence of all other camp inmates. On September 17, 1939, The New York Times reported from Germany, "August Dickmann, 29 years old . . . has been shot here by a firing squad." The newspaper said that *he was the first German conscientious objector of that war*.

Sixty years later, on September 18, 1999, Dickmann's death was commemorated by the Brandenburg Memorial Foundation, and a memorial plaque now reminds visitors of his courage and strong faith. A second plaque on the outer wall of the former camp reminds visitors that Dickmann was just one of some 900 Witnesses of Jehovah who suffered in Sachsenhausen for their beliefs².

Max Liebster, in his book *Crucible of Terror*, writes about what happened in the camp after Dickman's execution: "The *Bibelforscher*

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 660.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 2000 – p. 32.

Ernst Wauer, my barrack companion, had been in Sachsenhausen since the spring of 1939 and had witnessed the public execution. He told me that after Dickmann was shot, the *Kommandant* was sure that the 400 purple triangles looking on would give up their faith on the spot. They could have signed a document renouncing their religion. When none of them did, the SS tortured them all with *Strafsport*¹ until every single one collapsed from exhaustion. The SS beat them with sticks and kicked them as they lay immobile on the ground. Still, on that day not one purple triangle renounced his faith. No wonder that months later the whole camp still talked about this incident.²

In July 2009, accompanied by the sweetest couple, Mathias and Olena Lindemann, I visited the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp. We found the memorial plaque in remembrance of Dickmann. The inscription on the plaque reads: “*We remember August Dickmann (born 1910), one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. [He] was publicly shot by SS on September 15, 1939, because of conscientious objection.*”

We remained silent for a while ...

In 1938 the Jehovah’s Witnesses branch in Bern, Switzerland published the book *Crusade Against Christianity (Kreuzzug gegen das Christentum)*. It was originally published in German and then translated into French and Polish. This book, based on the information gathered from a group of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany, gives a detailed report on the vicious Nazi attacks on the Witnesses and even contains maps of concentration camps in Sachsenhausen and Esterwegen. After reading the book, Nobel Prize winner Dr. Thomas Mann wrote: “I have read your book and its terrible documentation with deepest emotion. I cannot describe the mixed feeling of abhorrence and loathing which has filled my heart while perusing these records of human degradation and abominable cruelty. . . . To keep quiet would serve only the moral

¹ Strafsport was one of the most severe treatment by the SS and SA making the prisoners run round the roll-call square and whipping the slow or exhausted ones. It was so-called punitive sports, which often resulted in a complete physical fall and which prisoners found particularly painful.

² Max Liebster. *Crucible of Terror: A Story of Survival Through the Nazi Storm* – Moscow, Osobaya Kniga, 2007 – p. 63.

indifference of the world . . . You have done your duty in publishing this book and bringing these facts to light”¹.

Two thousand out of six thousand died during the Nazi period and more than two hundred and fifty were executed because of refusing to perform military service. Those who continued alive displayed miraculous courage. For instance, a member of the French Resistance, Genevieve de Gaulle (niece of the French general Charles de Gaulle), said of them: *“What I admired a lot in them was that they could have left at any time just by signing a renunciation of their faith . . . These women, who appeared to be so weak and worn out, were stronger than the SS, who had power and all the means at their disposal. [Jehovah’s Witnesses] had their strength, and it was their willpower that no one could beat.”*²

We cannot but shiver as we watch the documentary *Jehovah’s Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*. In this unique film, ten American and European historians, as well as twenty Jehovah’s Witnesses – survivors of those terrible events – relate the struggle against fascism in the name of Biblical ideals.

The video *Jehovah’s Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*, produced by Jehovah’s Witnesses, appropriately premiered at the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany on November 6, 1996³. At the opening of a similar presentation at the notorious concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen on April 18, 1998, the director of the Center for Political Education in Lower Saxony, Dr. Wolfgang Scheel, admitted: *“One of the embarrassing truths of history is that Jehovah’s Witnesses rejected National Socialism with far greater determination than did the Christian churches . . . No matter how we may feel about the teachings and religiosity of Jehovah’s Witnesses, their steadfastness during the Nazi regime commands respect.”*⁴

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 22, 1995 – p. 9.

² S.I. Ivanenko. *The People Who Are Never Without Their Bibles* – Moscow, Art-Business Center, 1999 – pp. 37-39.

³ This film was shown in Moscow in May 1997 at the International Trade Center. In Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia, this film has never been shown.

⁴ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 1, 2001. – p. 21.

Why, then, did Jehovah's Witnesses, whose activity was identified as "philanthropic and pacifist" by the police of the Weimar Republic just a year before the Nazis came to power, elicit such hatred from the regime? One of the researchers of this period, Ya. P. Sivulsky, gave what is, in my opinion, a very precise answer to this question: *"The totalitarian regime is based on the indisputable subordination of the individual to a single social or national idea, which became the basis of the state-party organization of society, cemented by fear and conformism. Any crack in the totally organized mechanism of suppression is deadly for the regime, and Jehovah's Witnesses in the criminally organized state 'were not afraid, did not ask, and did not believe' the Nazis. Therefore, spiritual dissent, the internal resistance of Jehovah's Witnesses, proved to be a powerful weapon of resistance. Jehovah's Witnesses were true prisoners of conscience."*¹

"These are the only people who were persecuted not for what they did (or who they were) but for what they refused to do," Dr. Michael Berenbaum², director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Holocaust Research Institute, later wrote. They were judged for choosing not to participate in criminally organized society. At the same time, in no case did Jehovah's Witnesses resort to violent resistance.

University of Vienna Professor Walter Manoschek explained the Nazi hatred for Jehovah's Witnesses in the following way: *"After the outbreak of World War II, the Nazi military courts did away with conscientious objectors without any pity. The Nazi Volksgemeinschaft ideology – national unity – did not tolerate any deviations. A personal decision to object to military service was considered a challenge to the entire worldview of national socialists. In the end, there was no more obvious opposition to the regime than the refusal to swear an oath of loyalty to the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, Adolf Hitler. Nearly 90 percent*

¹ Unknown pages of history: According to the proceedings of the Conference "Lessons of Repression", "Lessons of Repression - An Attempt at Moral Comprehension", Ya. P. Sivulsky – Saint Petersburg, Tipographia "Pravda", 2000 – p. 29.

² Encyclopedia for Kids. V. 6. The World Religions. Part 2 – 5th edition, revised and enlarged – Moscow, Avanta, 2004 – p. 414.

of those who refused were Jehovah's Witnesses, while among these who belonged to the two largest Christian Churches – Catholic and Protestant – there were only a few dozen brave men.¹

Regarding the faithful female Witnesses in the concentration camp in Ravensbrück, following her own release, Genevieve de Gaulle wrote: *"I have true admiration for them. They belonged to various nationalities—German, Polish, Russian, and Czech—and have endured very great sufferings for their beliefs . . . All of them showed very great courage, and their attitude commanded, eventually, even the respect of the SS They could have been freed immediately if they had renounced their faith. But on the contrary, they did not cease resistance, even succeeding in introducing books and tracts into the camp."²*

On the official website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum³, you can find many stories and photographs of German Jehovah's Witnesses who were victims of the Nazi death machine. I encourage the reader to visit this website and see photos of these courageous men, women, and even children.

There is a photo of Helene Gotthold, a Witness who was beheaded for her religious beliefs in Berlin on December 8, 1944. In the photo she is with her young children.

Another touching story is that of Berthold Mewes, who was raised in a family of Witnesses and, at age 9, was sent to live with a childless couple who had a small farm. In the morning he would attend school and afterwards he would do farm work. Berthold was able to write one letter to either his mother or father. But in 1943 he was forbidden to write any more letters to his parents. He said: "I could only hope and pray that they were still alive. Although I had no contact with other Jehovah's Witnesses, my faith in Jehovah and the teachings of the Bible

¹ B. Rammerstorfer. *Unbroken Will* – Moscow, Osobaya Kniga, 2011 – p. 19.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 664.

³ www.ushmm.org.

helped me overcome my loneliness and uncertainty.¹” Berthold was reunited with his parents in 1945, when he was 15, and together the family resumed their lives as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In the conclusion of this book, I consider it necessary to give attention to the Protocols of the Nuremberg Trials, the world-famous international judicial tribunal over the former leaders and main war criminals of Hitler’s Germany, which took place from November 20, 1945 to October 1, 1946. Here are some excerpts from a multi-volume transcript:

“The U.S.A. prosecuting attorney, Colonel R. Story said: ‘Interrogations of the “third degree” can be used exclusively against the Communists, Marxists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, saboteurs, terrorists, members of the Resistance, parachutists and antisocial elements, Polish or Soviet- Russian vagrants ... “The third degree,” as the case may be, includes, among others, the following methods: a very simple diet (bread, water), a hard bunk, a dark cell, sleep deprivation, exhausting drill, whipping.’”²

This is an excerpt from the transcript of the interrogation of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Head of the Main Directorate of Imperial Security of the SS and State Secretary of the Imperial Ministry of the Interior of Germany:

“Kaufmann: ‘With reference to Church Management Policy IV, the prosecution charges you with the following: The so-called *Bibelforscher*, or International Bible Students, were often sentenced to death for their inner conviction only because they refused to serve in *any way in the* military. My question to you is: are you aware of the state of affairs, and in what manner have you participated in this matter?’

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online, entry “ID Cards: Berthold Mewes,” – electronic ref., (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/berthold-mewes>).

² N.S. Lebedev and Ye.N. Kulkov. *The Nuremberg Trials. Collection of Proceedings in 8 Volumes* – Moscow, 1997 – v.7. p. 231 (The original transcript: http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_major-war-criminals.html).

“Kaltenbrunner: ‘German jurisdiction has used the Law on Protection and Defense of the German Nation as the main procedure against the sect of the International Bible Students. According to this law, anyone who interfered with the strength of German defenses, refusing to serve in the military, could be punished by detention or death. According to this law, both military and civil courts even passed death sentences against these International Bible Students ... In this connection, it was often said that the unusual cruelty against their attitude was dictated by the faith of these sectarians ...’¹”

The Nazis never understood what the true source of strength that Jehovah's Witnesses displayed was. They were terrified by the unity and oneness among Jehovah's Witnesses, which they deemed “fanaticism.”

After the fall of the Nazi Third Reich, Jehovah's Witnesses were recognized as victims of political oppression. Books have been written about Jehovah's Witness prisoners, streets have been named after them in Germany, and even monuments have been made to them. Why has European society shown them such respect? An answer to this question can be found in the story told by Bernhard Rammerstorfer about Leopold Engleitner, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who survived, a Nazi concentration camp, demonstrating extraordinary courage and preserving his faith and conscience. This is what he wrote:

“People like Leopold Engleitner were pioneers of freedom of speech, worship, and the press in Austria because their unwavering convictions forced the authorities to look to the future and consider freedom of speech and human rights, although the legal interpretations of these laws was still very much dominated by past convention. They were pioneers of basic rights that are today taken for granted. It is partly thanks to such courageous people that we can now voice criticism openly without having to fear legal consequences. At the time, this was not possible and caused great suffering for people like Leopold Engleitner. But it was they who paved the way,

¹ *The Nuremberg Trials: Records of Interrogations of Major War Criminals. Volume 1.* – p. 980, electronic ref., (http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_major-war-criminals.html).

and today, we are more tolerant; these basic rights are, generally speaking, respected. Thus, every one of these pioneers has done our society an enormous service.¹

Dear readers, I highly recommend that you carefully read Max Liebster's book *Crucible of Terror: Story of Survival Through the Nazi Storm*, which shows that even such a powerful organization as the SS was unable to break the spirit of the "Purple Triangle" through torture and even execution².

Joseph Franklin Rutherford had a severe case of pneumonia after his release from unjust imprisonment in 1919. Thereafter, he had only one good lung. At the age of 72, he survived an operation. He continued to weaken and passed away on Thursday, January 8, 1942.

J. F. Rutherford served for 25 years as president of the Watch Tower Society, and during those years its modern organizational structure was developed. It is worth noting that Bible Students did not make him their idol and did not even consider him a leader. In the book *Jehovah's Witnesses – Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* we find an interesting story: "At a convention in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1941, shortly before his death, he spoke about the matter of leadership, saying: 'I want to let any strangers here know what you think about a man being your leader, so they won't be forgetting. Every time something rises up and starts to grow, they say there is some man a leader who has a great following. If there is any person in this audience who thinks that I, this man standing here, is the leader of Jehovah's Witnesses, say, 'Yes.' The response was an impressive silence, broken only by an emphatic 'No' from several in the audience. The speaker continued: 'If you who are here believe that I am just one of the servants of the Lord, and we are working shoulder to shoulder in unity, serving God and serving Christ, say, 'Yes.' In unison

¹ B. Rammerstorfer. *Unbroken Will* – New Orleans, Grammaton press, 1999 – pp. 264-265.

² M. Liebster. *Crucible of Terror: A Story of Survival Through the Nazi Storm* – Moscow, Osobaya Kniga, 2007 – p. 192.

the assembly roared out a decisive, 'Yes!' The following month an audience in England responded in exactly the same way.¹"

On January 13, 1942, J. F. Rutherford was succeeded as president by **Nathan Homer Knorr (1905–1977)**.

Nathan Homer Knorr was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., on April 23, 1905. When he was 16 years old, he became associated with the Allentown Congregation of Bible Students. In 1922 he attended [a Bible Students'] convention at Cedar Point, Ohio, where he made up his mind to resign from the Reformed Church. The following year, on July 4, 1923, 18-year-old Knorr was among those who were baptized. On September 6, 1923, Knorr became a member of the Bethel family in Brooklyn.

Starting in 1932 he held different positions of responsibility in managing the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the age of 36, he was elected to be a director of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. His natural abilities in organizing and expanding the work were fully used in supervising the Society's branch facilities worldwide as well as during his long trips delivering [Bible discourses].

Times were very hard. World War II was raging, patriotism ran high, and the neutrality and unity of Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to tremendous pressure from society and state. Martial law led to a shortage of the most necessary materials. At the same time, some of Jehovah's Witnesses were seriously expecting the imminent arrival of Armageddon.

Debates in courts were continuing. The situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the province of Quebec, Canada, turned out to be the most difficult.

This was the background: On July 4, 1940, the Canadian government banned Jehovah's Witnesses. Glen How, a lawyer who conducted court cases on behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses in those years, recalled: "*Children were being expelled from school, some even being placed in foster homes.*

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2004 – pp. 220-221.

*This was because they refused to engage in nationalistic forms of worship, such as saluting the flag or singing the national anthem.” Professor William Kaplan wrote in his book *State and Salvation: The Jehovah’s Witnesses and Their Fight for Civil Rights* that the “Witnesses were publicly reviled and the object of both state action and private attacks by an intolerant government and an openly hostile citizenry caught up in the passions and patriotism of the war.”¹*

Relief came slowly by the end of World War II. In 1944 the branch property in Toronto was restored. In 1945 the highest court for the province of Ontario declared that children may not be forced to share in exercises to which they have conscientious objections. Finally, in 1946, the Canadian government released all Witnesses from labor camps. But the premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis, still wanted to quiet Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Glen How recalls that one newspaper said that the judge “gave orders to Quebec police to ‘arrest on sight every known or suspected Witness.”² Jehovah’s Witnesses were often detained, sometimes even twice a day.

Legal action lasted for 12 years. But in 1950 the Supreme Court of Canada accepted the Witnesses’ submission that in a modern democracy, “sedition” requires incitement to violence or insurrection against the government. The tract involved, *Quebec’s Burning Hate*, contained no such incitements and was therefore a lawful form of free speech. With this one momentous decision, all 123 sedition cases evaporated³.

In October 1953 the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that public distribution of printed Biblical sermons is an inseparable part of the Christian faith and service of Jehovah’s Witnesses and, therefore, according to the Constitution, such publications are not subject to censorship. Shortly after that Jehovah’s Witnesses were completely exonerated, there were no other charges pressed.

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 22, 2000 – p. 18.

² *Ibid* – p. 19.

³ *Ibid* – p. 22.

Moreover, Duplessis himself was found guilty of oppressing Jehovah's Witnesses. The decision against the Prime Minister was unprecedented in the history of Canada, and it became one of the most important human rights milestones.

Modern Canadian society highly appreciates the contribution made by Jehovah's Witnesses to the protection and defense of civil rights. Thus, the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail* dated January 21, 2009, published a full-page article, "He Helped Win Freedoms for All Canadians," dedicated to Jehovah's Witness and lawyer Glen How, who, in 1997, received the prestigious award "For Courageous Advocacy" from the American College of Trial Lawyers. This was the first time in history that a Canadian lawyer received this award.

From the very beginning of his presidency, N. Knorr was engaged in the expansion of the educational base of the organization. In February 1942 a school of public speaking for Jehovah's Witnesses was established and in 1943, Gilead School, which trains experienced ministers for missionary work, was established. His wife, Audrey Hyde, recalled those days: "Nathan was very progressive, always planning ahead for future growth. Some considered this inappropriate, since the end of this system of things was considered to be very near. In fact, one who saw Nathan's plans asked him: 'What is this, Brother Knorr? Don't you have any faith?' He replied: 'Yes, I do, but if the end does come as soon as we expect, we will be ready.'¹

On September 18-20, 1942, Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States held their historic New World Theocratic Assembly in Cleveland, Ohio. The public talk, delivered by N. H. Knorr, the new president of the Watch Tower Society, was called "Peace— Can It Last?" In it he set out that "World War II, which was then raging, would not lead into Armageddon, as some thought, but that the war would end and a period of peace would set in. There was still work to be done in proclaiming God's Kingdom. Those attending were told that in order

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., July 1, 2004 – p. 27.

to help care for the anticipated growth in the organization, starting the next month, the Society would send ‘servants to the brethren’ to work with the congregations. Each congregation would be visited every six months.¹ In 1943 special training for the ministry was added to the weekly meeting schedule of Jehovah’s Witnesses².

N. Knorr showed great concern for the publication of the Bible. On September 18, 1942, at the above-mentioned New World Theocratic Assembly, the Society’s president spoke on the subject “Presenting ‘the Sword of the Spirit,’” announcing the release of the complete Bible, which was printed in the Watch Tower Society’s Brooklyn factory. This was the complete King James version of the Bible with marginal notes. Some 700,000 copies were printed and distributed³.

However, the main event was yet to come. In 1946, N. Knorr thought that Jehovah’s Witnesses really needed an accurate and easy to understand Bible translation based on the original languages. Finally, on August 2, 1950, at an historic international assembly at Yankee Stadium, New York, the release of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* was announced. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into English and released progressively, in five separate volumes, between 1953 and 1960. These editions were for Jehovah’s Witnesses themselves and contained many teaching aids for Bible study. The Bible was released for distribution in 1961. Since then, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been constantly updating, improving, and republishing this translation of the Bible.

As Jehovah’s Witnesses write: “The *New World Translation* is a fresh translation from the original Bible languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. By no means is it a revision of any other English translation, nor does it copy any other version as to style, vocabulary, or rhythm.

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 93.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Unitedly Doing God’s Will Worldwide* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1994 – p. 11.

³ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 84.

For the Hebrew-Aramaic section, the well-refined and universally accepted text of Rudolf Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*, the 7th, 8th, and 9th editions (1951-55), was used. A new edition of the Hebrew text known as *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, dated 1977, was used for updating the information presented in the footnotes of the *New World Translation—With References*. The Greek section was translated principally from the Greek master text prepared by Westcott and Hort, published in 1881. However, the New World Bible Translation Committee also consulted other Greek texts, including Nestle's Greek text (1948) ... The translation committee has made a vigorous and accurate translation of the Bible, and this has resulted in a clear and living text, opening up the way to a deeper, more satisfying understanding of the Word of God.¹

The role of N. H. Knorr in assisting Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc should also be pointed out. He repeatedly wrote letters to fellow believers in Soviet countries and urged them to remain united; thereby they could restore and strengthen the unity of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries. More details of this will be discussed in the next chapter. N. H. Knorr is often mentioned in Soviet atheistic literature about Jehovah's Witnesses.

It is also important to highlight the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, published in 1968, which was a tool used by those studying the Bible and learning about Jehovah's Witnesses.

One of the last organizational changes N.H. Knorr shared in before his death was the enlargement of the Governing Body, located at the world headquarters in Brooklyn. In 1976 administrative responsibilities were divided up and assigned to various committees of the Governing Body².

¹ *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2004 – p. 355.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Twentieth Century* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1994 – p. 9.

As Jehovah's Witnesses explain, the need for such adjustments was caused by their desire to more closely conform to the structure of the first-century Christian congregation. "From 1964 to 1971, the governing body supervised an extensive Bible study project that examined, among many other subjects, how the first-century Christian congregation functioned. As to organization structure, it was learned that the oversight of congregations in the first century was carried out by a body of elders instead of just by one elder, or overseer.¹"

Why were such administrative adjustments so important?

Firstly, because of the growth of the organization itself. In 1953 the number of Jehovah's Witnesses preaching the good news of God's Kingdom worldwide reached a peak of 520,000. Thanks to N.H. Knorr's hard work, branch offices were established on all five continents. In 1955 there were 77 branch offices of the Watch Tower Society and 1,814 Gilead-trained missionaries serving in 100 different lands².

Arrangements were made to divide the earth into ten zones, each zone embracing a number of the Society's branches. Qualified men from the office in Brooklyn and experienced branch overseers were appointed to be zone servants (now called zone overseers)³.

Secondly, in September 1971 the decision was made that the worldwide organization would be supervised not by just one person but by the Governing Body. It was resolved that the chairmanship of the Governing Body would rotate alphabetically among its members. That same year, the Governing Body was distinguished from the Watch Tower Society and its board of directors. Before that change, the president of the Pennsylvania corporation was also the foremost member of the Governing Body. This no longer would be the case. While not equal in experience or ability, Governing Body members

¹ *God's Kingdom Rules!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 121.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 101.

³ *Ibid.*

would be equal in responsibility. (On October 1, 1971, F. W. Franz became the chairman of the Governing Body for one year.) Also in 1971, a clear distinction was drawn between the spirit-anointed members of the Governing Body and the directors of the Pennsylvania corporation.

At that time, it was decided that starting in October 1972, this adjustment also would be implemented in the congregations. First, congregations no longer would be supervised by just one individual known as the congregation servant. Instead, a body of elders would be appointed to supervise each congregation. And secondly, a chairman of the body of elders would be appointed for one year (this arrangement was adjusted in 1983, when each body of elders was asked to recommend a presiding overseer who, after appointment by the Society, would serve for an indefinite period of time as the chairman of the body of elders)¹.

In the summer of 1976, N. H. Knorr was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. His health deteriorated steadily until his death on June 8, 1977.

On June 22, 1977, 83-year-old **Frederick William Franz (1893–1992)** was selected as president of the Watch Tower Society. He also made great contributions to the growth of this religion in various parts of the world. However, at the time, the role of the president of the Society was no longer as significant as it had been. The Governing Body played the major role of oversight.

F. W. Franz was born in Covington, Kentucky, U.S.A., on September 12, 1893. In 1899 his family moved to Cincinnati, where Frederick graduated from high school in 1911. He then entered the University of Cincinnati, taking a liberal arts course. He had decided to become a Presbyterian preacher, so he vigorously applied himself to the study of Biblical Greek.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – pp. 106-107.

When he was studying at the university, his older brother Albert sent him the booklet *Where Are the Dead?* written by John Edgar, a Bible Student who was also a medical doctor in Scotland. Later, Albert gave him the first three volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. Frederick was delighted with what he was learning and decided to refuse a scholarship to study at Oxford University in England. Instead, on November 30, 1913, he was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In May 1914, he left the university and immediately made arrangements to become a colporteur (full-time evangelizer). In June 1920 he became a member of the Bethel family in Brooklyn.

He was known as a Bible scholar and is remembered for his ability to quote entire chapters of the Bible from memory. His tenure as the president of the Society is known as a time of expanding Bible study in congregations, increasing literature production, printing more colorful publications, and deepening knowledge of the Bible and Bible principles. And if Nathan H. Knorr was an excellent and energetic organizer, then F. Franz was a Bible researcher.

During his time as president, in 1984, a revised reference edition of the *New World Translation* was issued, containing extensive marginal references, footnotes, and appendix material, which was intended for serious Bible study. Four years later, the two-volume Bible encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* was published. Then, in 1991 the beautifully illustrated book *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*, a thorough study of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, was published.

The rapid growth of new congregations made it necessary to translate the literature into many more languages. For example, from 1976 to 1992, there was an increase of about 42 percent in the number of languages in which *The Watchtower* was published. In October 1992, the number of languages was 111. Witnesses with experience in the computer field developed a computerized prepress system called MEPS (Multilanguage Electronic Phototypesetting System). As a result, by 1992 *The Watchtower* was being printed simultaneously in 66 languages.

Starting in 1990, Jehovah's Witnesses began to use videos of their own and produce video tapes for distribution. In October 1990 the video entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name* was released. This video and others have been interpreted into sign languages as well. In view of the growing popularity of videos, a video recording department was formed at Jehovah's Witnesses' world headquarters.

Additionally, schools for congregation elders were established.

Special attention was focused on those who wanted to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Since 1977, these have been encouraged to study¹ two publications instead of one. This made it possible to see the sincere desire of individuals and prepare them for the high moral standards of the Witnesses.

Enormous political changes and the fall of Communist regimes took place in Eastern Europe. In the Eastern Bloc countries (Romania, East Germany, Hungary, and Poland) and then in the former Soviet Union, Jehovah's Witnesses began to receive official recognition and registration, which created the need for more literature, more buildings for worship, and more training programs for believers in those countries.

Frederick Franz died on December 22, 1992, at the age of 99.

Milton George Henschel (1920–2003) was selected as the fifth president of the Society on December 13, 1992.

As a young man, Milton Henschel joined the staff of Jehovah's Witnesses' headquarters in Brooklyn. For many years he was secretary to N. H. Knorr. Later, when Knorr began to take the lead among the Witnesses worldwide, Henschel continued as his assistant. Often at N. H. Knorr's side, Henschel traveled to over 150 countries, so he was

¹ Jehovah's Witnesses are known for engaging in a Bible educational work worldwide. They believe that by helping others to understand the Bible, they fulfill Jesus Christ's direction written at Matthew 28:19, 20. These study sessions are free and can be held at one's home or at another convenient location. Some people even have their lessons by phone or video, using a computer or a mobile device. Electronic ref. (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/what-is-a-bible-study/>).

aware of the situations in these countries as well as the general direction of the progress of the organization. Milton Henschel was distinguished by his remarkable memory and good sense of humor.

From 1992 to 2003, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses increased from 4,470,000 to 6,429,000 worldwide with 109 branch offices.

In April 1995, Witnesses began using the Watchtower Educational Center at Patterson, New York. It hosts the Gilead School and other Bible schools.

Since 1997, Jehovah's Witnesses have actively been using the Internet, and they have their own website. At the same time, a Public Affairs Office started to function. It was established due to the constant expansion of the organization and the need to provide accurate first-hand information. Anti-cult organizations had thrown Europe into confusion, trying to turn public opinion against Jehovah's Witnesses by using individuals who had left the organization.

Another highlight of the year was construction of the religious buildings and religious center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan.

Milton G. Henschel died on March 22, 2003, at the age of 82.

After the death of M. Henschel, the role of the president of the Society as a significant and prominent figure was a thing of the past. Today, if you ask a Jehovah's Witness who the president of the Society is, most likely he will not be able to give an answer. The president of the Watchtower Society now serves just a legal function.

On January 1, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses made a significant adjustment to their weekly meeting schedule¹. Two meetings were merged into one. They were encouraged to use the evening which previously had been devoted to one of the meetings for worship as families. Activities would include studying the Bible and topics that are of concern to family members.

¹ Please find more information in the 5th chapter of this book.

In November 2011, in addition to the door-to-door ministry, Jehovah's Witnesses began to acquaint people with the Bible's message by means of attractive display tables and carts. This initiative started in New York City. These display tables and carts hold publications that help people to learn the Bible's answers to many questions. People who do not wish to linger can take a publication to read later. Literature is available in many languages. If a publication is not available in a desired language, it may be ordered and picked up a few days later. This is another milestone in the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 2012, Jehovah's Witnesses started to produce the animated children's series *Become Jehovah's Friend*.

That same year, branch offices of Jehovah's Witnesses around the world were consolidated. In September 2012 oversight of almost three dozen branch offices was transferred to larger branches.

In October 2013, the revised *New World Translation* was released. Its cover is flexible and convenient to use.

Also in 2013, the decision was made to sell the Watchtower buildings in Brooklyn, New York and move to a new place. Earlier, in July 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses had purchased a 102-hectare property near Warwick, New York with the purpose of moving their world headquarters.

Construction work lasted for three years and on April 3, 2017, the new world headquarters was opened for tours. The relocation of the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses is truly a milestone and a momentous event in the history of Jehovah's Witnesses because they had used the buildings in Brooklyn, New York, since 1909.

Since 2013, other adjustments have been made in the organization which can be called historical. In some respects, Jehovah's Witnesses "changed course," more precisely, since 2013 an optimization and reorganization process began in order to fit the needs of the times.

In 2013 organizational adjustments were made in branches around the world. As a result, the number of those working at branches worldwide was reduced by 5,500 people.

Adjustments were also made to the well-known magazines *The Watchtower and Awake!* For instance, beginning in 2013, the number of pages in these magazines was reduced by half (from 32 to 16). And since 2017, the public editions of the magazines have been published just three times a year¹. In addition, *Awake!* now features only one topic instead of several. What was the outcome? First - because the magazines contain less material, translation teams are able to make them available in more languages. While in 2013 *Awake!* was translated into 98 languages and *The Watchtower* (public edition) into 204 languages, by 2019, *Awake!* was translated into 221 languages and *The Watchtower* (public edition) into 357 languages.

Second - since 2013 some of the content previously featured in the magazines now appears only on their website. The same year, they launched the *Watchtower Online Library* website (wol.jw.org), where all the publications published by the organization over the past years are available. Publications are available in Russian dating from the 1980's, in English from the 1950's, and in Kazakh from 1999.

Moreover, in October 2014, the Internet streaming channel called JW Broadcasting® was launched by Jehovah's Witnesses. A monthly program is posted at the beginning of each month and is hosted by members of the Governing Body and other qualified men. This channel provides video updates on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide and is now available in over 255 languages.

At the time of this writing, the website (jw.org) is available in 1,028 languages, which is a very impressive number. This seems to be a record set by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Third - Jehovah's Witnesses began developing applications for mobile electronic devices. In 2014 they released the *JW Library*

¹ The study edition of *The Watchtower*, i.e. for internal use, remained monthly.

application (free access to the organization's publications, including video and audio) and a little later, *JW Library Sign Language* (materials in sign languages).

Fourth - in 2015, Jehovah's Witnesses bought a complex of buildings in the state of New York where they established their own film studio. In 2016 alone about 350 different videos were released; that is almost one video per day. And the pace is growing every year. Nowadays, there are 11 crews around the world involved in the preparation of these videos¹.

Fifth - in 2015 a long-term project began related to the release of an online study Bible available on the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition to footnotes and comments, a huge multimedia section with graphic, three-dimensional, and photo-video materials on history, geography, etc. was added. Jehovah's Witnesses say more time and effort will be spent on research during this project than with the preparation of any previous publication.

Sixth - the format of worship services has significantly changed. Meetings have become more diverse in content, and video clips have been included in the programs. To this end, all religious buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses are equipped with large television screens. At conventions much larger screens are used.

In addition to all of this, Witnesses still keep on increasing the pace of translating the Bible into other languages. Between 2016 and 2017, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was released in another 30 languages.

Technology is changing the world rapidly, and it looks like Jehovah's Witnesses are well aware of this.

So, what have Jehovah's Witnesses achieved so far? By 2019 their number has reached a peak of 8,683,117 people united in 119,712

¹ At the Annual Meeting in 2019, it was announced that Jehovah's Witnesses bought a property in Ramapo, New York, and plan to consolidate media production into a new facility to be constructed. The construction should start in 2022 and finish by December 2026.

congregations located in 240 countries and territories. At their annual observation of the Memorial of Christ's death in 2018 there were 20,919,041 in attendance.

This historical background of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses shows that the development of the organizational structure as well as the understanding of Bible principles on which Jehovah's Witnesses base their beliefs is complex. And S.I. Ivanenko was right when he wrote in his book that "this evolution progressed in the direction of an ever more precise and definite awareness of their religious organization as the only true Christian theocratic organization, fundamentally different from all other religious organizations ... As a result, Jehovah's Witnesses have come to recognize their complete "isolation" from all other religions and to be aware of their universal mission to educate peoples and masses. Preaching worldwide the relevance of Bible last-days prophecies to our era has required a dynamic and sometimes radical evolution of the structure of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.¹"

Ivanenko proposed to highlight five main stages in the history of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, and in my opinion it is very reasonable to do so:

The first stage involves the emergence of the religious organization of Bible Students (1870-1879). During this stage, the Bible Students evolved from a Bible study class into an independent religious organization, later setting up their first printery.

The second stage (1879–mid-1920's) involves the formation of the Bible Students as an independent religion with their own beliefs, worship, and organizational structure, a distinctive feature of which was the recognition of the authority of the Bible and theological works of the founder and leader of the organization, C. T. Russell.

¹ S.I. Ivanenko. *Evolution of the Ideology and Activity of the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (Historical and Philosophical Analysis)*. Abstract of the doctoral thesis, 2001 – p. 24.

The third stage (second half of the 1920's–mid-1940's) involves the time when the Bible Students adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses and, from a small group of Bible students, grew to be the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. During this period, the religious organization underwent a significant change: by the mid-1920's, the transition was made from the recognition of the special authority of Russell and his theological works to a strong reliance on the Bible's authority; the organizational basis was strengthened and the centralization of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses at all levels was fortified.

The fourth stage (mid-1940's–mid-1970's) involves the transformation into a worldwide organization.

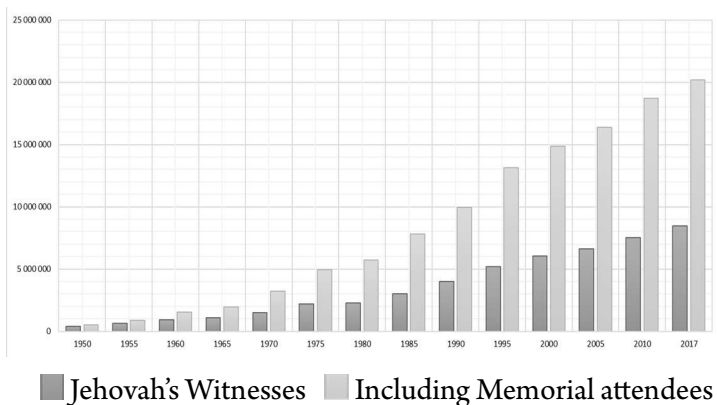
The fifth stage (from the mid-1970's to the present) involves the rethinking of some basic beliefs and reformation of the organizational structure, which ensured even greater authority of this religious organization and significant increases in the number of followers around the world¹.

Thus, having started its activity from a small Bible study class, after just 140 years, Jehovah's Witnesses have grown into an international Christian religious organization—the worldwide brotherhood of Jehovah's Witnesses.

I have analyzed the growth of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the world since 1950 and reflected it in the graph below. I would like to note that despite the fairly steady growth in the number of followers of this religious movement throughout the world, in terms of the number of members it is unlikely to ever take a place among the leading world religions, such as Catholicism, Islam, Orthodoxy, etc. As we will see later, in modern society usually only a small number of people are ready to live according to the Bible's moral standards as Jehovah's Witnesses do.

¹ Ibid – p. 25-27.

Changes in the Number of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide



So, in conclusion to this chapter, I think it would be reasonable and correct to give a list of some key points in the modern history of Jehovah's Witnesses in chronological order. They are based on the section "Noteworthy Events in the Modern-day History of Jehovah's Witnesses," published in *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* on pages 718-723. It reflects the historical facts from 1870 to 1992. I have added the events of the last 27 years based on my own research of literature of recent years, especially the very informative yearbooks of Jehovah's Witnesses.

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

1870 Charles Taze Russell and a group from Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., begin systematic study of the Bible.

1870–1875 Russell and his study associates learn that when Christ comes again, he is to be invisible to human eyes and that the object of his return includes the blessing of all families of the earth.

1872 Russell and his study group come to appreciate the *ransom price*¹ that Christ provided for humankind.

1876 C. T. Russell receives a copy of *Herald of the Morning* in January; meets N. H. Barbour, the editor, that summer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

An article by C. T. Russell, published in the October issue of *Bible Examiner*, in Brooklyn, New York, points to 1914 as the end of the Gentile Times (the “seven times” of Daniel’s prophecy with “the appointed times of the nations” spoken of by Jesus).

1879 Russell withdraws all support from *Herald of the Morning* in May. First issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, dated July 1879, is published.

1881 First tracts are published by the Bible Students; before 1914, yearly tract distribution totals tens of millions of copies in 30 languages.

Distribution of 300,000 copies of *Food for Thinking Christians* to church parishioners in principal cities in Britain.

1883 *Watch Tower* reaches China; former Presbyterian missionary soon begins to [the Bible Students’ message] to others there.

1884 *Food for Thinking Christians* reaches Liberia, Africa; an appreciative reader writes to ask for copies to distribute.

Zion’s Watch Tower Tract Society is legally chartered in Pennsylvania; officially recorded on December 15.

1885 Watch Tower publications are already being read by some truth-hungry people in North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

1886 Publication of *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, the first volume of the series called *Millennial Dawn* (later known as *Studies in the Scriptures*).

1891 First large gathering of Bible Students that they call a convention is held in Allegheny, Pennsylvania (April 19-25).

¹ See: chapter 3, point 7 “Christ’s human life was paid as a ransom for obedient humans” and point 8 “Christ’s one sacrifice is sufficient.”

1894 Traveling overseers that in time came to be known as pilgrims (today, circuit overseers) are sent out in connection with the Society's program for visiting congregations.

1900 The Watch Tower Society's first branch office is opened in London, England.

Witnessing by the Bible Students has been done in 28 countries, and the message they preach has reached 13 other lands.

1904 Sermons by C. T. Russell begin to appear regularly in newspapers; within a decade they are being printed by about 2,000 papers.

1909 Headquarters of the Society is moved to Brooklyn, New York, in April.

1914 First showing of the "Photo-Drama of Creation" in New York in January; before the end of the year, it is seen by audiences totaling over 9,000,000 in North America, Europe, and Australia.

5,155 Bible Students are actively preaching in 43 lands; reported Memorial attendance is 18,243.

1916 C. T. Russell dies at 64 years of age on October 31 while on a train traveling through Texas.

1917 J. F. Rutherford becomes president of Society on January 6 after an executive committee of three has administered the Society's affairs for about two months.

1918 The discourse "The World Has Ended—Millions Now Living May Never Die" is first delivered on February 24 in Los Angeles, California. On March 31, in Boston, Massachusetts, the talk is entitled "The World Has Ended—Millions Now Living *Will* Never Die."

J. F. Rutherford and close associates are named in federal arrest warrants issued on May 7; trial begins on June 5; they are sentenced on June 21 (one on July 10) to long terms in a federal penitentiary.

Brooklyn headquarters is closed in August, and its operations are transferred back to Pittsburgh for over a year.

1919 The Society's officers and associates are released on bail on March 26; on May 14 the court of appeals reverses the decision of the

lower court, and a new trial is ordered; the next year, on May 5, the government withdraws from the case, declining to prosecute.

September 1-8 – Bible Students hold convention at Cedar Point, Ohio; coming publication of the magazine *The Golden Age* (now known as *Awake!*) is announced.

Report for the year shows 5,793 Bible Students actively preaching in 43 lands; reported Memorial attendance, 21,411.

1920 Watch Tower Society undertakes its own printing operations in Brooklyn.

1922 Radio is first used by J. F. Rutherford on February 26 in California to broadcast a Bible discourse.

Clergy in Germany agitate for police to arrest Bible Students when these engage in public distribution of Bible literature.

1924 WBBR (first radio station owned by Watch Tower Society) begins to broadcast on February 24.

1926 House-to-house preaching with books on Sunday is encouraged.

1928 Bible Students are arrested in New Jersey, U.S.A., for distributing literature as part of their house-to-house preaching; within a decade there are over 500 such arrests per year in the United States.

1931 The name Jehovah's Witnesses is adopted by resolution at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, on July 26 and thereafter at conventions around the earth.

1932 Arrangement for "elective elders" is terminated in harmony with explanation in *Watchtower* issues of August 15 and September 1.

1933 Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Germany. During the intense persecution down to the end of World War II, 6,262 are arrested, and their combined time of imprisonment totals 14,332 years; 2,074 are sent to concentration camps, where their confinement totals 8,332 years.

Transcription machines (some mounted on automobiles) are used by Witnesses to broadcast Bible lectures in public places.

1934 Portable phonographs are used by Witnesses to play short recorded Bible discourses for interested ones.

1935 In a convention discourse in Washington, D.C., on May 31, a new explanation of the “great multitude” (Revelation 7:9–17) is announced; 840 persons are baptized at this convention; greater emphasis is progressively given to hope of eternal life on a paradise earth for faithful servants of God now living.

Meeting place is, for the first time, called Kingdom Hall, in Honolulu, Hawaii.

1937 Portable phonographs are used by Witnesses to play recorded Bible talks right on the doorsteps of homes.

1938 In harmony with *Watchtower* issues of June 1 and 15, theocratic arrangements for selecting overseers in congregations replace democratic procedures, which means they are no longer elected by the congregation but assigned by the Society.

Zone assemblies (now known as circuit assemblies) are arranged for groups of congregations.

1939-45 In the British Empire and British Commonwealth, 23 nations ban Jehovah’s Witnesses or place prohibitions on their Bible literature.

1940 Street distribution of *The Watchtower and Consolation* becomes a regular feature of the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Decision of U.S. Supreme Court on June 3 upholding mandatory flag salute regardless of religious belief unleashes nationwide mob violence against Jehovah’s Witnesses.

1941 Active Witnesses pass the 100,000 mark, reaching a peak of 109,371 in 107 lands, in spite of the fact that World War II has engulfed Europe and is spreading in Africa and Asia.

1942 J. F. Rutherford dies on January 8, in San Diego, California.
January 13 – N. H. Knorr becomes third president of Society.

Total printing of *The Watchtower* for the year in all languages is 11,325,143.

Watch Tower Society prints the complete Bible, *King James Version*, on its own press (a web rotary).

1943 On February 1 the first class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead begins.

U.S. Supreme Court renders decisions favorable to Jehovah's Witnesses in 20 out of 24 cases; High Court in Australia lifts ban on Witnesses on June 14.

1945 Average number of free home Bible studies being conducted each month is now 104,814.

1946 During the preceding seven years, over 4,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States and 1,593 in Britain have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms ranging from one month to five years because of their Christian neutrality.

Awake! magazine (successor to *The Golden Age and Consolation*) begins publication; total printing of 13,934,429 copies for the year.

Over 470 Witnesses are taken before the courts in Greece for sharing Bible teachings with others.

1947 In Quebec, Canada, 1,700 cases involving the evangelizing work of Jehovah's Witnesses are pending in the courts.

1950 *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* is released in English on August 2 at convention in New York.

1958 Divine Will International Assembly in New York draws attendance of 253,922 from 123 lands: 7,136 baptized.

1959 First sessions of Kingdom Ministry School, designed for congregation overseers and traveling overseers, start March 9 in South Lansing, New York.

1961 First group of the Society's branch overseers attends a special ten-month training course in Brooklyn, New York, with a view to further unification of the work of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.

1963 Over a million of Jehovah's Witnesses are now active in 198 lands; peak publishers for the year is 1,040,836; 62,798 more baptized.

1965 First Assembly Hall, a renovated theater, is used by Jehovah's Witnesses in New York.

1967 Waves of prolonged and savage persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses sweep across Malawi and continue for years thereafter.

1969 Home Bible studies exceed one million; report shows an average of 1,097,237.

1971 Governing Body is enlarged; on October 1, chairmanship begins to rotate among its members on an annual basis.

1972 Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses come under local supervision of the body of elders instead of one person as of October 1.

1974 Peak publishers worldwide reach 2,021,432; pioneers increase from 94,604 in 1973 to 127,135.

1975 Governing Body is reorganized; on December 4, responsibility for much of the work is assigned to six committees, which begin to function on January 1, 1976.

1976 Branch offices of Watch Tower Society each come under supervision of a committee of three or more spiritually mature men instead of one overseer as of February 1.

1984 Home Bible studies being conducted by Jehovah's Witnesses now average 2,047,113.

1985 Arrangement for international volunteers for the Society's worldwide construction work is initiated.

Report shows 3,024,131 sharing in the work of Kingdom preaching in 222 lands; pioneers now average 322,821; 189,800 baptized this year.

1986 Regional Building Committees appointed to help coordinate building of Kingdom Halls.

1987 Ministerial Training School goes into operation on October 1 with first class in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania.

1989 Changing conditions in Eastern Europe help to make possible three large international conventions in Poland and then in other lands in following years.

1990 Lifting of restrictions on Jehovah's Witnesses in lands in Africa and Eastern Europe facilitates evangelizing among an additional 100,000,000 people.

Kingdom publishers reach new peak of 4,017,213.

1991 Bans lifted in Eastern Europe and Africa make it easier to reach 390,000,000 more people with the good news of God's Kingdom.

1993 Jehovah's Witnesses in Albania and Angola are legalized by ministerial decree. First time in history more than a billion hours are spent preaching the good news of God's Kingdom.

1994 Tragedy in Rwanda claims hundreds of lives of Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not use weapons to defend themselves. Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe quickly donate and send them \$1,600,000 worth of medicine, food, and other supplies.

1995 The number of languages in which *The Watchtower* is simultaneously published reaches 100. School for Branch Committee Members is inaugurated.

1996 Recognizing the difficulties faced by families in the modern world, Jehovah's Witnesses publish a book with Bible based advice for all family members, *The Secret of Family Happiness*.

1997 The first branch facility of Jehovah's Witnesses in post-Soviet territory is dedicated. It is located in Russia about 25 miles northwest of St. Petersburg in the village of Solnechnoye.

1998 An exciting aspect of this year is the distribution of *Kingdom News* No. 35, which features the question "Will All People Ever Love One Another?" The tract urges people to follow the principles of humanitarianism and treat others well. Nearly 400,000,000 copies were distributed.

1999 A new school for traveling overseers is initiated. Traveling overseers are responsible for visiting congregations and encouraging congregation members.

2000 Jehovah's Witnesses release a new video, *Transfusion-Alternative Strategies—Simple, Safe, Effective*. After viewing the video, the National Blood Service (NBS) in the United Kingdom sends a letter with a copy of this video to all blood bank managers and consultant hematologists throughout the country. They are encouraged to watch

the program. The letter acknowledges that “the general message [in the video] is praiseworthy and is one the NBS strongly supports.”

2001 Because of a new building program organized by the World Headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses, 1,074 new Kingdom Halls are built in Africa alone.

2002 New branch buildings are dedicated in the Czech Republic.

Plaque unveiled in Buchenwald (Germany) in remembrance of Witnesses who suffered in the former Nazi concentration camp there.

U.S. Supreme Court upholds right to preach from door to door without first obtaining a permit to do so.

2003 Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kosovo are legally recognized.

Romania issues a ministerial order officially confirming the status of Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religion.

New MAN Roland Lithoman press installed at Britain branch.

2004 After 84 years of continuous printing, Brooklyn printery is closed down. Printing operations move to Wallkill.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are legally recognized in Armenia.

2005 The Higher Administrative Court of Berlin directs that Jehovah’s Witnesses in Berlin be granted the rights of a legal corporation on par with all major churches in Germany.

October – Jehovah’s Witnesses are successfully registered as a religious society in Nepal.

2006 As of June 2006, Jehovah’s Witnesses are registered as a religion in eight states in Sudan. They have built Kingdom Halls in these areas and have openly held large assemblies. Their literature is freely imported, and they have an office in Khartoum.

2007 The branch in Turkey receives confirmation that the Association for the Support of Jehovah’s Witnesses has been officially registered.

The Watchtower has average printing of 28,578,000 in 161 languages; *Awake!*, available in 80 languages, has an average production of 34,267,000.

2008 An average of over 60,000 people visit www.watchtower.org every day.

2009 Family worship evening is initiated. Weekly meetings are reduced to make time for family worship evening.

Jehovah's Witnesses purchase a plot of land (102 ha) in the state of New York, U.S.A., with plans to relocate their world headquarters.

2011 Jehovah's Witnesses begin to preach in public places by means of attractive display tables and carts.

The ECHR issues a decision in favor of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France in the case of illegal taxation of religious donations.

2012 The children's animated series *Become Jehovah's Friend* is released.

Branch offices around the world are consolidated. Thirty branch offices are merged with larger ones.

2013 The revised *New World Translation* of the Bible in English is released.

The decision is made to sell all the properties in Brooklyn, New York, and move to a new location.

The number of pages in the public edition of *The Watchtower* and in *the Awake!* is reduced from 32 to 16 pages.

Three websites managed by Jehovah's Witnesses are consolidated into one official website—www.jw.org. The other two, www.watchtower.org and www.jw-media.org, are discontinued.

The Watchtower Online Library (wol.jw.org) is launched; all the publications issued by the organization in past years are available.

2014 Internet streaming channel JW Broadcasting® is launched (tv.jw.org)

The *JW Library* application is released to work from phone, tablet, or computer.

JW Library Sign Language application is released.

2015 Jehovah's Witnesses purchase a complex of buildings in the state of New York where they establish their own film studio.

Release of *New World Translation (Study Edition)*, available online on the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses.

2016 The format of weekly meetings is changed. As it was announced on October 3, 2015, the Theocratic Ministry School, Service Meeting, and Congregation Bible Study are replaced by a new meeting called Our Christian Life and Ministry. New eight-page monthly publication entitled *Our Christian Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook* begins to be used. More videos are included in the midweek program.

2017 The new world headquarters at Warwick, New York, comes to completion.

The content of magazines is changed. Now both the *Awake!* and the public edition of *The Watchtower* feature only one topic.

On April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation rules to liquidate the Jehovah's Witnesses' National Headquarters in Russia.

2018 Both the *Awake!* and the public edition of *The Watchtower* are issued only three times a year.

Awake! is translated into 208 languages and *The Watchtower* (public edition) into 338 languages

JW Broadcasting® is available in 275 languages.

2019 It is announced that Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a property in Ramapo, New York, and plan to consolidate media production into a new facility to be constructed. Average Bible studies each month: 9,618,182. Peak of publishers: 8,683,117. Worldwide Memorial attendance: 20,919,041. jw.org website is available in 1,006 languages.

So, having been organized about 150 years ago (young for a religion) the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses has developed dramatically while having endured a lot: persecution, bans, and even violence. These trials have strengthened them and the number of believers has grown from year to year, with the doctrine spreading around the world. Today, it is an *international religious organization* with established teachings, religious practices, and a coherent organizational structure.

IMAGES FOR CHAPTER 1



The first issue of
*Zion's Watch Tower and
Herald of Christ's Presence*
July, 1879



A pilgrim
Traveling representatives of the Society, pilgrims
were assigned to visit congregations beginning in 1894



Six volumes entitled
Millennial Dawn (later called
Studies in the Scriptures)
written by C. T. Russell



C. T. Russell and a group
of Bible Students
in Copenhagen,
Denmark. 1909

Interestingly, each volume began with this citation from Proverbs 4:18: "The Path of the Just is as the Shining Light, Which Shineth More and More Unto the Perfect Day." (*King James Version*)

C. T. Russell openly referred to his understanding of Scriptural beliefs as "present truth."

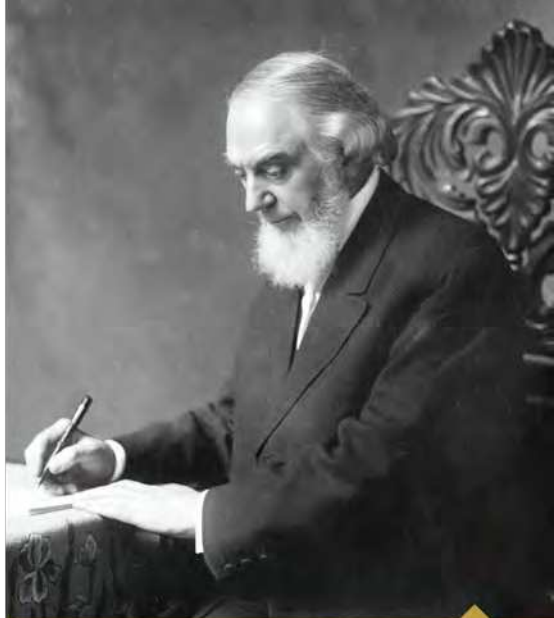
C. T. Russell traveled extensively and gave public lectures worldwide

This postcard pictures one of his trips throughout the United States and Canada



Presidents of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society was first formed in 1881 and was legally incorporated in the state of Pennsylvania on December 15, 1884. In 1896, its name was changed to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Since 1955, it has been known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania



CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL
Years of presidency: 1884–1916

JOSEPH FRANKLIN RUTHERFORD
Years of presidency: 1917–1942



NATHAN HOMER KNORR
Years of presidency: 1942–1977

FREDERICK WILLIAM FRANZ
Years of presidency: 1977–1992



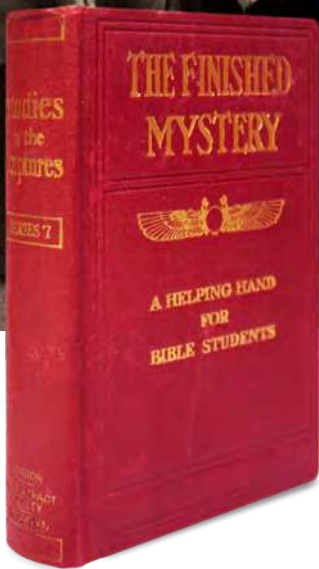
MILTON GEORGE HENSCHEL
Years of presidency: 1992–2000





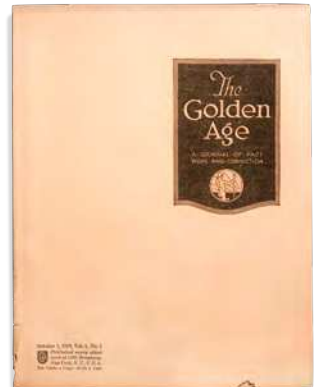
J. F. Rutherford and several of his close associates right after their release from prison on March 26, 1919

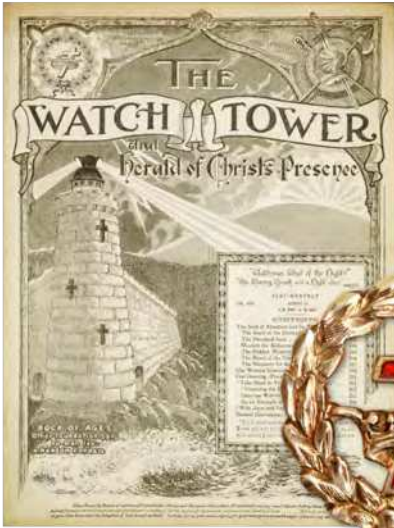
On May 14, 1919, the court ruled: "The defendants in this case did not have the temperate and impartial trial to which they were entitled, and for that reason the judgment is reversed."



▲
The Finished Mystery (the seventh volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*) was a commentary on Revelation, The Song of Solomon and Ezekiel

►
The Bulletin newsletter and *The Golden Age* magazine were regularly issued beginning in September 1919





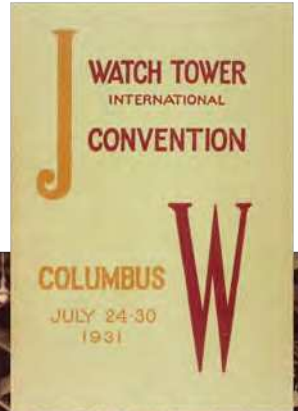
Before the 1930's the Bible Students considered the cross to be a symbol of Christianity. They even had a "cross-and-crown" pin which signified to them that if they proved faithful to death, they would receive the crown of life.



A program from the historic convention held July 24-30, 1931, in Columbus (Ohio, USA)

The two large letters J and W were printed on its front cover. During this convention a resolution was presented entitled "A New Name," which climaxed with the declaration: "We desire to be known as and called by the name, to wit, Jehovah's Witnesses."

A CONVENTION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
IN THE 1920'S (GERMANY)





**WATCHTOWER
RADIO**



WBBR Radio Station (1924–1957)

On February 24, 1924, the Watch Tower Society's own radio station, WBBR, began broadcasting on Staten Island (New York, USA).

Eventually, the Society's worldwide broadcasting network had 408 stations located on six continents





Preaching
methods
used in the
first half of the
20th century



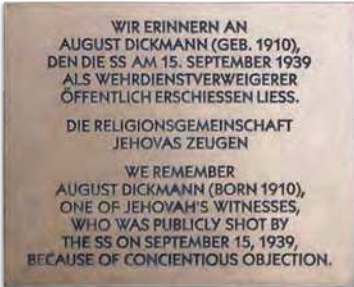
Jehovah's Witnesses were among the first inmates of the Nazi concentration camps

A purple triangle was the symbol which identified Jehovah's Witnesses in Nazi death camps. They were the only religious group that made up a separate category of prisoners

Out of 6,000 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses, 2000 died during the Nazi period, more than 250 were executed for refusing to perform military service



Categories and Marking of Prisoners at Auschwitz

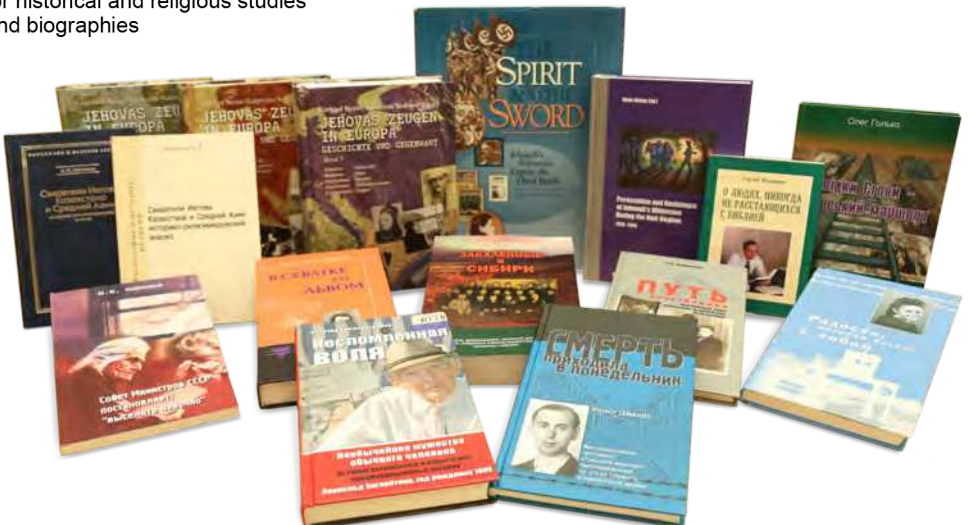


▲
Memorial plaque in remembrance of August Dickmann

The courage and resilience of believers in the face of totalitarian regimes arouses the interest of researchers and serves as a source for historical and religious studies and biographies

★	JEWS	From 1942 they were the most numerous group of prisoners in the camp. About 200,000 were registered.
▼	POLITICAL PRISONERS	Totalled around 160,000. Most of these were Poles arrested during various repressive operations, or for their activities in the resistance movement.
▼	ASOCIAL PRISONERS	This category mainly included registered Romanies (Gypsies) – more than 21,000.
SU	SOVIET POWS	Approx. 15,000, of which 12,000 were registered.
EH	CORRECTIONAL PRISONERS	Imprisoned for real or alleged breach of discipline at work. They are estimated to number 11,000.
PH	POLICE PRISONERS	These were exclusively Poles. They were not formal KL Auschwitz prisoners. As a result of the nearby Gestapo prisons in Katowice and Myslowice becoming overcrowded these prisoners were directed to the camp, where they were tried by summary court and usually sentenced to death by shooting. Their number is estimated to range in the thousands.
▼	CRIMINAL PRISONERS	Primarily with German nationality and calculated at a few hundred. The camp authorities frequently chose from among them functionary prisoners to help the SS maintain order at the camp.
▼	JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES	These were imprisoned in the camp for their religious behaviour and attitudes. There were at least 138 Jehovah's Witnesses, mainly of German origin, registered in this category.
▼	HOMOSEXUALS	At least several dozen prisoners, mainly of German origin.

SOURCE: www.auschwitz.org



Official Website of Jehovah's Witnesses – JW.ORG

The website
www.watchtower.org
first launched in 1997.
Then, in 2009, the website
www.jw.org became
the organization's
official website

In 2019 JW.ORG was
in 1000 languages, securing
its position as the most
translated website
in the world



In October 2014,
the Witnesses announced the
launch of their own Internet
television station



▲ JW Broadcasting TV-studio

▼ Film production studio
of Jehovah's Witnesses



In 2015, Jehovah's
Witnesses purchased a
complex of buildings in the
state of New York (USA),
where they established
their own film studio.

350 different videos were
produced in 2016 alone,
almost one video per day

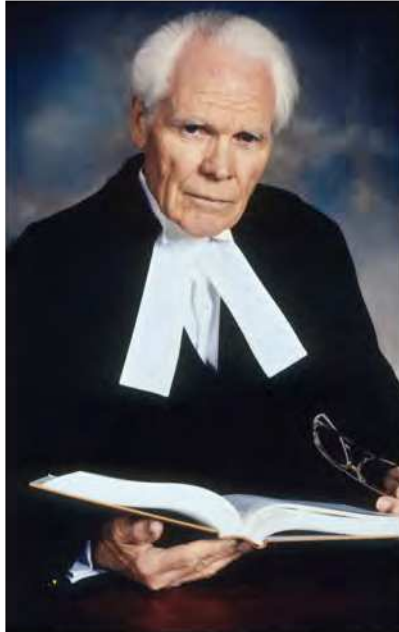


Jehovah's Witnesses are especially known for their legal victories protecting religious rights and freedoms



To date the U.S. Supreme Court has rendered about 50 decisions favorable to Jehovah's Witnesses. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled in their favor in 63 cases.

During 2009–2019, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan issued 9 decisions in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses



Hayden Covington (front, center) and Glen How (left) – the most famous lawyers of Jehovah's Witnesses in the US and Canada – leaving the US Supreme Court after another legal victory

Lawyer Glen How, who in 1997 received the prestigious Award for Courageous Advocacy from the American College of Trial Lawyers.

From 1943 to 2003, he fought hundreds of legal battles for Jehovah's Witnesses in Canada and abroad



"We all owe the Jehovah's Witnesses a debt of gratitude. No matter how many times they're insulted, run out of town or even physically attacked, they keep on fighting for their (and thus our) freedom of religion. And when they win, we all win."

- CHARLES C. HAYNES, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT THE FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER (USA)

Courtesy of Canada Wide

Violence frequently greets controversial Witnesses of Jehovah when they preach their interpretation of Scriptures. Here, Chateaugay Basin, Quebec, Canada, 1943. A crowd, held back by police officers, threaten Witness Frank Bourgeois and son (R). See's most spectacular battleground is in Quebec province.

CHAPTER 2

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES IN KAZAKHSTAN. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The very beginning of the spread of the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses (then called Bible Students) in Kazakhstan goes back to the end of the 19th century. As we all know, Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire at that time. For that very reason, it is almost impossible to study the history of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan without first examining the history of Russia.

The policy of the tsarist regime in those years was characterized by a particular intolerance to dissent or Gentiles, those who did not share the teachings of the Russian Orthodox church¹. This explains why C. T. Russell, when he visited Europe and what was then the southwestern part of Russia² for the first time, wrote: “We saw no opening or readiness for the truth in Russia.”³

I think it is important to remind our readers that in those years, only the Russian Orthodox Church officially had the right to convert people. Freedom of conscience and religious freedom were out of the question. However, this does not mean that there were no other religions.

¹ The Regulations of Criminal and Correctional Penalties (1885 edition) in force in the Russian Empire at that time. Section two of this code was called On Crimes Against the Faith and on Violation of Decisions Protecting It and provided for punishment of hard labor and exile to Siberia.

² In September 1891, *Zion’s Watch Tower* magazine reported that Russell had an important meeting in Russia with fellow believers, during which he, as a missionary, distributed Biblical truth to people living there.

³ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 406.

The Orthodox Church was trying to suppress resistance. Any dissident was violently persecuted and had to flee to Siberia or Eastern Kazakhstan, where they would establish small towns. Any traitors of the Orthodox Church would also be deported there.

Looking back at the activity of those years, one has to be impressed by the religious broadmindedness of dissidents and note their strong craving for freedom of conscience and religion.

The first followers of Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings appeared in the time of Tsarist Russia. Jehovah's Witnesses consider the first believer to be Semyon Kozlitsky, a graduate of a Russian Orthodox seminary. Kozlitsky was among some Russians who visited the U.S.A. and learned about the Watchtower Society there.

Having returned to Russia, Kozlitsky boldly began to preach the ideas of the Bible Students, for which he was exiled along with his wife and children to penal servitude in the village of Bukhtarma in the Ust-Kamenogorsk District of the Semipalatinsk Region (now Eastern Kazakhstan). Right up until his death at the age of 100 in 1935, Kozlitsky, a former priest with excellent church education who could speak several languages, zealously preached the new teachings he had learned, gathering around him a group of students and followers. Many of them still live in different villages in Eastern Kazakhstan today.

Nina Luppó, Kozlitsky's granddaughter, explained:

"My grandfather was born in Lvov ... He traveled to the United States in 1871, where he met C. T. Russell. When he came back home, he began to share his knowledge with others. My grandfather graduated from the seminary, so he sought every opportunity to talk to the clergy about the teachings of the Bible Students. However, many did not approve of his beliefs, so in 1891, the archbishop of Moscow condemned him to lifelong penal servitude. Together with other convicts, he worked for the industrialist Karpov. He was transported as a prisoner along the Irtysh River to Ust-Kamenogorsk and dragged sand barges along with other convicts. He lived there until his death in 1935. Local authorities

changed his last name in exile to Karpov. He had two sons, Andrew and Ivan. They bore his last name—Karpov. Ivan did not share his father's beliefs, but Andrew did, so he also talked to people about the Bible.¹

In 1887, *Zion's Watch Tower* reported that individual issues of that magazine had been mailed to different places, “even Russia.” And in 1904, C. T. Russell received a letter from a small group of Bible Students in Russia which reported that they had received Bible literature, though not without difficulty. The letter explained: “The literature was conspicuous and was almost not let through” by government censors².

The Watch Tower of December 1, 1911 published a letter from R. H. Oleszynski, a traveling minister of the Bible Students in Eastern Europe. He reported that 10,000 copies of the tract *Where Are the Dead?* were printed and distributed. Oleszynski wrote: “There are many difficulties, nevertheless there are many souls longing after God.”³

Interestingly, *The Watch Tower* of July 15, 1915 published the story of a Hungarian soldier who was baptized as a Bible Student while recovering from his injuries and who later returned to the front lines⁴. The account relates what happened next: “They [the Hungarian soldiers] came within 800 feet of the Russian line, and they received the command, ‘A bayonet charge!’ The Hungarian [Bible Student] was at the end of the left wing. He sought only to protect himself from the enemy, hence endeavored merely to knock the bayonet from the hand

¹ Archive of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Republic of Kazakhstan.

² 2008 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2008 – p. 71.

³ *Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 – p. 7.

⁴ During the period between 1914 and 1919 the circumstances into which individual Bible Students were thrust varied. The way they dealt with the stand on military neutrality also varied. Feeling obligated to obey “the powers that be,” as they referred to the secular rulers, some went into the trenches at the front with guns and bayonets. But having in mind the scripture, “Thou shalt not kill,” they would fire their weapons into the air or try simply to knock the weapon from the hands of an opponent. (Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 191.)

of the Russian with whom he was confronted. Just then he observed that the Russian was endeavoring to do likewise. . . The Russian let his bayonet fall to the ground; he was weeping. [The Bible Student] then looked at his ‘enemy’ closer—and he recognized a ‘Cross and Crown’ pin on his coat! The Russian, too, was [a Bible Student]!”¹

This story also confirms the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses (then called Bible Students) were living in the territory of the Russian Empire.

The main events in the lives of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia under tsars and in the former Soviet Union can be presented chronologically:

1912 – Charles T. Russell visited Finland (then a part of the Russian Empire).

1913 – On September 25, 1913, the tsar’s representative, the Russian imperial consul in New York, affixed a government stamp to the power of attorney and signed it. Power of attorney was given to Kaarlo Harteva to act on behalf of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in Finland.

1940-1941 – Jehovah’s Witnesses were exiled from Western Ukraine to Kazakhstan.

1949 – On behalf of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the USSR, a request for legal recognition was submitted to the Ministry of the Interior.

1949 – Jehovah’s Witnesses were exiled from Moldova to Siberia and the Far East in the Soviet operation called “South.” (The Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR dated April 6, 1949: “Procedure for deporting from Moldova SSR wealthy peasants, former landowners, large traders, active accomplices of German occupiers, individuals who collaborated with the German and Romanian police, participants of pro-fascist parties and organizations, White Guards, members of illegal sects as well as families of all the above categories.”)

¹ Bible Students considered the cross to be a Christian symbol for many years. They used to wear a special “Cross and Crown” pin that also appeared on the cover of *The Watchtower* in those years. However, their view on the cross changed in 1936, when it came to be considered a pagan symbol.

² *2015 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 – p. 173.

1951 – More than 7,000 Witnesses from Western Ukraine, Belarus, Bessarabia, Moldovia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were exiled for life in the Soviet operation called “North.” (The Decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR dated February 1951: “Procedure for deporting active participants of the anti-Soviet illegal sects Jehovahists and members of their families, living in western regions of Ukrainian, Belorussian, Moldovian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian SSR.”)

1956 – Between the middle of 1956 and February 1957, a petition on behalf of Witnesses was adopted at 199 district conventions held in all parts of the world. A total of 462,936 in attendance approved the petition addressed to the Soviet premier Nikolay A. Bulganin.

1961 – Instructions on how to apply the Law on Cults include refusing to legalize “Jehovists” in the USSR.

1965 – Order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR № 4020-VI, dated September 30, 1965, about the “lifting of restrictions in forced settlement on the sect members of Jehovah’s Witnesses, True Orthodox Christians, Innokentyesvsky sect, Adventis-Reformists and Members of their Families” was released.

1980 – On May 29 the Administration for Religious Affairs issued the following decree: “Intensifying Conditions and Measures to Expose and Curb the Illegal Activities of the Sect of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

1991 – On March 27 Jehovah’s Witnesses obtained legal recognition.

1992 – First communities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan received legal recognition.

These events make it possible to understand many facts from the history of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan.

Indeed, the first Bible Students in the territory of Kazakhstan appeared under the Russian emperor Alexander III at the end of the 19th century. However, their teachings were widely spread, and congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses were established in Kazakhstan by the middle of the 20th century, that is, on the eve of and after the Second World War.

It is reasonable to say that all of this is connected with the tragic history of people from the former Soviet Union—mass repressions as well as violations of human rights and freedoms in the years of totalitarianism¹.

Needless to say, having become widespread in Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century, the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses also began to spread rapidly in Soviet countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

When World War II ended, the repression continued—this time, by the Soviet totalitarian regime, which declared all Jehovah's Witnesses to be the main preachers of the anti-Communist policies of the “Brooklyn Center” and the activities of the communities and their leaders to be anti-Soviet.

In 1961 the book *Religion in the Soviet Union* by Walter Kolarz was released in English. Walter Kolarz noted two factors responsible for the dramatic increase in the number of Jehovah's Witnesses in the former Soviet Union. One, he noted, was that “the territories annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939-40”—Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Moldavia—had within them many “active groups of Jehovah's Witnesses.” In addition, parts of eastern Poland and Czechoslovakia, which included over 1,000 Witnesses, were also annexed by the Soviet Union, becoming part of Ukraine. Thus, all these Witnesses were transplanted overnight, as it were, into the Soviet Union.

Additionally, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society's legal entities were officially registered in Estonia, Romania, and Latvia in 1933. Therefore, after the annexation of Western Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic countries into the USSR,

¹ Unfortunately, I still cannot provide a complete picture of the spread of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan, since no one was engaged in collecting historical material during the most severe repression and illegal position of their community. Now materials have been collected, and there are more of them than before, but there are still gaps and questions needing research. I was helped in gathering these materials by the staff of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Kazakhstan as well as by other believers, for which I sincerely thank my volunteers.

it was not just congregations or families of believers that appeared in the USSR but also large organizational groups. However, they were not legally registered in USSR at that time.

The second factor responsible for further increase, “unbelievable as it may sound,” Kolarz wrote, came from “the German concentration camps.” The Nazis had imprisoned thousands of Witnesses for refusing to support Hitler and his war of aggression. Kolarz explained that Russian prisoners in these camps “had admired the courage and steadfastness of the ‘Witnesses’ and probably for that reason had found their theology attractive.¹” Also, in concentration camps they kept on preaching and finding followers of their teachings. For example, in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, 300 people became Jehovah’s Witnesses. As a result, many young Russians from these camps returned to the Soviet Union, and Kazakhstan as well, with a newfound faith in Jehovah God.

And we agree with a well-known Jehovah’s Witness, V. M. Kalin, who while speaking at a conference dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the exile of Jehovah’s Witnesses from the republics of the former Soviet Union to Siberia and Transbaikal, made a very accurate and objective assessment of what happened: “Millions of people were repressed for different reasons and with different consequences.” He continued: “Some disagreed with the existing political system and opposed it with weapons in their hands, others were subversive, and still others became victims of political intrigue. However, all of them were viewed ‘as enemies of the Communist state,’ and strict measures of that time were imposed against them.”

"Which category did Jehovah’s Witnesses belong to?"

"As we know, Jehovah’s Witnesses have never, at any time, under any political regime, been involved in politics. That is a religious principle of theirs, which they adhere to regardless of any consequences, and they have received a lot of respect for it.

¹ S.I. Ivanenko. *The People Who Are Never Without Their Bibles* – Moscow, Art-Business Center, 1999 – p. 39.

"Then what caused the terror against this group, relatively small in comparison with the population of the country they lived in?

"What made them stand out from others who were repressed?"

"The first reason which prompted violent persecution was the fact that this group of people wanted to apply a principle in their lives: **To obey God rather than men.** Not only did the Soviet regime fail to understand this but it demanded complete obedience to the government in how to live, think, and believe. An understanding of freedom of conscience was completely absent.

"Jehovah's Witnesses had unwavering faith which helped them to demonstrate tremendous courage. Neither prisons, nor concentration camps, nor exile, nor separation from their loved ones, nor frustrating drudgery, nor substandard living conditions, nor physical abuse—not even death could break their faith and desire to please God.

"That surely did infuriate the authorities. It did not suit them. It made the authorities powerless in front of a handful of courageous, ordinary men and women, elderly, and even little ones.¹"

Yet, I still want to add another important point.

The Great Patriotic War ended and immediately the Cold War commenced with the West, and the State needed an internal enemy to trigger a new round of repression in order to keep the entire society in constant fear and under control. And those religious communities that did not share the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church (which was co-operating with the authorities) served "just right" for this purpose. After all, Stalin, like the Athenian tyrant Critias (who died in 403 B.C.E.), considered religion to be an invention of the authorities to better supervise their subordinates.

Here are just two historical documents testifying to the terrible tragedy².

¹ Unknown pages of history: According to the proceedings of the Conference "Lessons of Repression", "Jehovah's Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity", V. M. Kalin – Saint Petersburg, Tipographia "Pravda, 2000 – pp. 32-33.

² V. I. Pasat. *Difficult Pages of History of Moldova. 1940-1950* –Moscow, Terra, 1994 – pp. 612–615.

Note by the USSR Ministry of State Security regarding the need for eviction of members of the anti-Soviet sect of Jehovahists and their families from the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, the Moldavian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian SSRs

February 19th, 1951

TOP SECRET

To Stalin. I. V.

I report that during the years of 1947-1950, several anti-Soviet organizations and groups of the illegal sect of Jehovahists, who were actively engaged in enemy work in the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, in Moldova, and the Baltic Republics, were uncovered and liquidated by the organs of the Ministry of State Security.

During this time, 1,048 sect leaders and activists were arrested, five underground printing houses were seized, and over 35,000 copies of leaflets, brochures, magazines, and other Jehovahistic anti-Soviet literature were impounded.

[...]

In order to suppress further anti-Soviet activities of the Jehovahists, the Ministry of State Security of the USSR considers it necessary, along with the arrest of leading members of the Jehovahists sect, to evict identified Jehovahists with their families from Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia into the Irkutsk and Tomsk Regions.

In total, 8,576 people (3,048 families) are subject to eviction:

In the Ukrainian SSR – 6,140 people (2,020 families);

In the Belorussian SSR – 394 people (153 families);

In the Moldavian SSR – 1,675 people (670 families);

In the Latvian SSR – 52 people (27 families);

In the Lithuanian SSR – 76 people (48 families);

In the Estonian SSR – 250 people (130 families).

[...]

With this I am submitting the draft resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers on this issue.

I request your decision.

Abakumov¹

¹ Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. Fund 3. List 58. Dossier 180. Sheets 52-53.

The resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers regarding the eviction of active participants of anti-Soviet illegal sect of Jehovahists and members of their families residing in the western areas of the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Moldavian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian SSRs

February 1951
TOP SECRET
Draft

The USSR Council of Ministers decrees:

1. To accept the proposal of the USSR Ministry of State Security for evicting participants of the anti-Soviet illegal sect of the Jehovahists and their families from the western regions of the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSRs, Moldavian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian SSRs.

The USSR Ministry of State Security (Comrade Abakumov) shall carry out lifelong eviction to the Irkutsk and Tomsk Regions at the end of March 1951 by the decision of the Special Meeting at the USSR Ministry of State Security.

[...]

2. Allow the people who are being evicted to collect their personal valuables, household items (clothes, dishes, small agricultural and handicraft equipment) and food for each family with a total weight of up to 1,500 kilograms.

To confiscate all other property and to transfer it to representatives of local authorities.

Confiscated properties of the evictees shall be used to cover arrears for state obligations; the remainder (residential and service buildings, agricultural and other equipment as well as livestock) shall be transferred to collective farms free of charge with transfer to the indivisible fund. Food, grain, and industrial crops shall be transferred to the State.

[...]

**The USSR Chairman of the Council of Ministers
Office Manager of the USSR Council of Ministers¹**

¹ Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. Fund 3. List 58. Dossier 180. Sheets 54-56.

The former Chairman of the Commission for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression in Russia, A.N. Yakovlev, cited the following facts at the Memorial Day dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the eviction of believers, which took place in the Dom Druzhby (lit. "House of Friendship"), Almaty, on April 27, 2001:

"... Recently, a document on a competition for arrests and sentences between departments in the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs fell into my hands. And I have one document, an amazing one, about the victory of the 4th Department in the competition with the 3rd Department in terms of the number of arrests and the number of those sentenced.

"Or, there is another example. When travelling to the Far East, Frinovsky, the Deputy Minister of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, took along Uushakov and Lunkvest. While travelling, they were also carrying 20,000 case files.

"As the documents show, on their way they drank and sang to a gramophone. Being drunk already, they competed as to who would write more of the letter 's' in the cases, which meant 'to shoot.' Since it was a competition, they played to advantage, and it is clear that no one would even read the information in the cases.

"The aim was to put the letter 's' on them as quickly as possible. According to the data, Frinovsky seemed to win, since he is the Deputy Minister or Commissioner. Total: 20,000 people per trip, 20,000 people for three players.

"Recently I discovered some documents which denied that the 'troika' (the three people mentioned above) and the administrative authority killed anyone; rather there was only one person who sentenced them to death. That was the Head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the Zhytomyr Region, Vyatkin, who signed a verdict himself. To be more precise, not only did he sign the verdict but he himself, without asking anybody, ordered

shooting up to 4,000 people and reported it later. Surely, his reports were approved.¹”

In 2002, a collection of documents and materials about Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Soviet Union (1951-1985) compiled by M. I. Odintsov, *The USSR Council of Ministers Decides: To Evict to Time Indefinite*, was published².

I cite only those materials that concern Kazakhstan.

¹ *The Ogni Alatau*, April 26, 2001 – p. 8.

² M.I. Odintsov. *The USSR Council of Ministers Decides: “To Evict to Time Indefinite.” Collection of Documents and Materials on Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Soviet Union – Moscow, 2002.*

“PROHIBITED FANATICAL AND ANTI-STATE SECTS”

***FROM COUNCIL INSPECTOR SOLOVYEV'S SUMMARY
OF THE RESULTS OF A ONE-TIME RECORD OF RELIGIOUS
ASSOCIATIONS***

September 1962

... Currently, in the territory of the USSR, along with the association of believers, which is subject to registration by the authorities, there are unregistered (banned) sects, the teachings and activities of which are fanatical and anti-State. As a rule, these religious associations operate in secret from the authorities. 2,200 religious associations were identified in the course of record.

[...]

Jehovists

Associations of Jehovists spread across 47 territories (RSFSR, Ukrainian SSR, Kazakh SSR, and others).

607 associations have been recorded, 149 of which have more than 20 believers in their membership and 458, less than 20 believers in each. 454 religious ministers have been counted. Total number of believers: 14,214 people. The Jehovists' sect denies any authority, except of God. They consider the Soviet government to be the power of Satan

Senior inspector

Solovyev¹

¹ The State Archive of the Russian Federation. F. R. – 6991. List 4. Dossier 428. Sheet 39. Original.

**KINFORMATIONAL LETTER OF THE COUNCIL FOR
RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS UNDER THE USSR COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS TO THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE COUNCIL
IN THE REPUBLICS, TERRITORIES, AND REGIONS**

№1884

June 24, 1982

According to the direction of the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers dated November 22, 1981, the commissioners of the Council along with the Executive Committees of the Councils of People's Deputies have done a certain amount of work to record unregistered religious associations.

With that, as the analysis of the reports of the commissioners of the Council for 1981 shows, in certain places the number of religious communities and groups functioning without registration has still not been specified. The statistical information provided by the Council's commissioners of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, Komi ASSR, Bryansk, Voronezh, Gorky, Kemerovo, Omsk, Penza, Ryazan, Saratov Regions of the RSFSR, Volyn, Transcarpathian, Lviv, Roven, Kharkov Regions of the Ukrainian SSR, Brest, Gomel Regions of the Byelorussian SSR, Andijan, Kashkadarya, Namangan, Surkhandarya, Tashkent, Fergana Regions of the Uzbek USSR, Karaganda, Chimkent, Alma-Ata Region of the Kazakh SSR, the Azerbaijan, Tadzhik, Kirghiz SSRs, etc. does not reflect the actual numbers of these associations. Especially unfavorable is the situation with the registration of functioning unregistered Muslim and sectarian associations.

The Council for Religious Affairs asks all commissioners of the Council, along with the Executive Committees of the Councils of People's Deputies, to complete the work on specification of the network of functioning unregistered religious associations during 1982 and to submit data on all previously unrecorded societies and groups of believers in the prescribed form to the Council (record card of an unregistered religious association) with the 1982 statistical report.

The chairman of the Council

For Religious Affairs

Under the USSR Council of Ministers

V. A. Kuroedov¹

¹ The State Archive of the Russian Federation. F. R. – 6991. List 6. Dossier 2287. Sheet 24. Original.

**FROM A. A. PUZIN REPORT T THE ALL-UNION
CONFERENCE OF COUNCIL COMMISSIONERS**

April 18, 1960

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union focuses attention of local party, Soviet Komsomol, and trade union bodies to the need to strengthen the fight against religious sectarianism, which is anti-State and fanatical (Jehovists, Pentecostals, etc.).

Sometimes people ask: What law or government decree states that the activities of these sects are forbidden?

As you know, there is neither a law nor a government decree of the USSR that refers to sects of Jehovists or Pentecostals. The activities of these sects are forbidden because the teachings and nature of their activity are contrary to the USSR Constitution and other laws of the State.

According to the Constitution, each citizen is obliged to obey the rules of the State, perform their public duty with dignity, and follow the rules of socialist community life. No one can shy away from performance of a public duty because of their religious beliefs.

Jehovists and Pentecostals incite their followers not to obey the law of the Soviet State. So, they refuse to perform military service, they are not allowed to bear arms to defend the socialist Fatherland, which is contrary to the USSR Constitution.

Without a doubt, the Soviet State cannot let such propaganda be spread across the country, where its followers are incited to violate the Constitution.

Sects of Pentecostals are also forbidden, due to the fact that members of these sects commit savage actions that make people physically disabled. Indeed, the Soviet State can not be indifferent to the deeds of such sectarians.

According to the available information, more than 600 Pentecostal groups are currently operating in the territory of the USSR, members of which are about 25 thousand people¹.

¹ The State Archive of the Russian Federation. F. R. – 6991. List 3. Dossier 208. Sheets 14-15.

Court cases from those times as well as memories of former convicts tell us a lot.

There is a well-known closed court proceeding sentence from 1946 of the Karaganda Regional Court, under Article 58-10 of Part 2 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR in relation to 23 Jehovah's Witnesses. From its content we can see that 22 Jehovah's Witnesses, who had earlier been exiled from Western Ukraine (Drohobych Region) to Karaganda and carried on with professing the religious views of Jehovah's Witnesses, were sentenced to eight to ten years in prison and confiscation of their property. The elder of the congregation, Fediv Petr Vasilyevich, was sentenced to execution, which was later replaced in 1947 with ten years in the camps and confiscation of property. The sentence states that the guilt of these individuals was as follows: refusal to perform military service, refusal to participate in elections, refusal to subscribe for government bonds, creation of a religious organization, printing and distribution of religious "anti-Soviet literature" and religious, therefore, "anti-Soviet" propaganda. In 1990, all these individuals were rehabilitated as victims of political repression.

Therefore, the very first Witnesses in the territory of Kazakhstan were convicts and prisoners. Locals also joined the congregations of Witnesses. An example are Nikolay and Anna Kononovs, who lived in Tekely city of Almaty region.

Nikolay Semenovich Kononov was born in 1922 to a large family of Orthodox peasants of average means. He migrated from the Stavropol Territory (Russia) and in 1907 moved to the settlement of Belokamenka (now the village of Aktasty, Yeskeldin District of Almaty Region) by the decree of Emperor Nicholas II.

Kononov's older sister, Anna Kononova, married a Ukrainian citizen in 1946 and went to live with him in Ukraine. They got acquainted with the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses there. Later, in 1948, her husband was arrested under Article 58-10 of Part 2 of the Criminal Code of

RFSFR. Anna moved back to Kazakhstan, to the village of Tonkurus (now Tonkeris) of the Taldykorgan District in the Almaty Region.

Kononov was married by then and was living in Tekeli. He was working in the lead and zinc plant as an operator of a railway steam crane. His sister would often have visits from her Ukrainian friends, who were also Witnesses. Kononov learned the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses from them and later became one of Jehovah's Witnesses himself. On March 8, 1957, Nikolay Kononov was arrested and sentenced to 25 years in concentration camps. By the time he was arrested, a small congregation of believers had already formed in Tekeli¹.

To see the whole picture of Jehovah's Witnesses of those times, I will give you a brief story of two more Witnesses from Kazakhstan, Mariya Kirilina and Vladimir Nikolayevskiy. Many local newspapers wrote about them in 1957 and 1958.

On August 23, 1958, the newspaper *Pravda Uzhnogo Kazakhstana* (*The Truth of South Kazakhstan*) published a long article entitled "Jehovah's Daughter," which was about the disclosure of a wide anti-Soviet sectarian network of Jehovahists' communities whose activities covered territories of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and even some remote areas of Uzbekistan. The main person involved in this criminal case was a citizen of Kazakhstan who lived in the city of Lenger, Mariya Mironovna Kirilina.

Kirilina learned about the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1950, when she was serving a sentence in the South Kuzbass camp in the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. She was convicted under the notorious law of August 7, 1932, which was also called the "Law of the Three Spikelets." As Mariya later recalled, a group of women who were very different from others, caught her attention. They were Jehovah's Witnesses. She returned home from imprisonment as a believer and

¹ After being released from the camp in 1967, Nikolay was convicted again on December 12, 1968. The trial was held for five days in the Cultural Center of Taldykorgan. This trial was covered by regional newspapers, and even a film, *Hiding Behind Religion*, was shot about it at the Kazakhfilm Film Studio.

joined the local congregation. According to the verdict of the closed session of the South Kazakhstan Regional Court dated August 6, 1958, Mariya Kirilina was sentenced to eight years in a correctional labor camp under the Article 58-10 of Part II with further confiscation of property and a subsequent three years of disenfranchisement. She served a new term in the No. 17 camp of the Usolye correctional labor camps in the Perm territory. In the early 1990's, Mariya Kirilina was rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression.

Initially, *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda (Truth of Kazakhstan)*, dated September 1, 1957, and later the Ust-Kamenogorsk newspaper *Znamya Kommunisma (The Banner of Communism)* in issues from September 4 and 10, 1957, published a long (full-page) article about the exposure of “sectarian-Jehovists” in Ust-Kamenogorsk called “Jehovah’s Witnesses Unmasked” and “About Jehovah’s Witnesses Again.” The articles were about Vladimir Alexandrovich Nikolayevsky and other members of the local congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Vladimir Nikolayevsky graduated from the Moscow Institute of Engineering Communication in 1932. Until 1941 he worked as an engineer and a chief architect in a Moscow institute. All of this made him stand out. During World War II he was taken into custody and eventually sent to the Gulag (acronym of the Main Administration of Camps) in central Kazakhstan, in the village of Kengir. Nikolayevsky served his sentence in the Steppe Camp, and there he witnessed a prison riot, which lasted from May 16 to June 26, 1954.

As a reference, at the time of the prison uprising in the 3rd camp ward of the Steppe camp in the village of Kengir, there were 80 Jehovah’s Witnesses from Moldovia: 46 men and 34 women. One of the active participants of the prison uprising later recalled: “ ... The large group of Jehovah’s Witnesses had a separate small cabin. We had a lot of trouble with them, as they believed that any resistance to authority is disobeying God himself. Almost all of these Jehovists were either from Bessarabia or Moldovia and they differed strikingly from

numerous Russian sectarians, who supported any resistance without even giving it a thorough thought.¹”

As a matter of fact, Nikolayevsky himself recalled: “A group of Jehovah’s Witnesses there caught my attention. They were different from the other prisoners. There were about 80 of them among some 14,000 prisoners in three camp wards. The contrast between the Witnesses and the rest was especially evident during the Kengir uprising of 1954. Jehovah’s Witnesses did not participate in the rebellion and even refused to prepare for it. They showed amazing calmness and tried to explain their stand to the other prisoners. I was so taken with their behavior that I asked them about their beliefs. Some time later, I dedicated my life to Jehovah. In the camp, the faith of the Witnesses was tested, especially when the uprising was crushed by armed forces with tanks.”²

In 1955, after he had become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, his sentence was annulled. He decided to stay in Kazakhstan and began to work as an engineer at one of the factories in Ust-Kamenogorsk, where a small group of Jehovah’s Witnesses soon appeared. In 1956, he was arrested as a Witness and sentenced to another term, despite the fact that his previous sentence had been annulled and he was found to be a victim of the Stalinist regime. In the newspapers he was again denounced as “an American spy,” a “notorious enemy of the Soviet system, an inveterate conspirator, and a miserable servant of American imperialism.”³

I think these three short stories of Kazakhstan citizens tell us a lot about the organizational structure of that time as well as the different ways people got to know the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses and become one of them.

¹ F. Varkonyi-Leber. *Until the Day ...* - Continent, 1975 – p. 342.

² 2008 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* – Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2008 – p. 140.

³ *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, September 1, 1957, “Jehovah's Witnesses Unmasked.”

But let's get back to other historical facts.

In 1940, hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to 10 to 25 years of imprisonment and sent to the Gulag. The predominant number of followers of this teaching were in the Karaganda and Zhezkazgan camps. After they were released, the vast majority of them decided to stay in Kazakhstan.

Those who stayed became the foundation of congregations and groups which appeared in the Karaganda Region (the village of Rudnik, the cities of Satpaev, Abay, Saran, Karaganda, Balkhash and others).

In the list of Witnesses of the Karaganda Region of those years there are the following last names: Roshka, Liliyak, Nesterovich, Yavorsky, Kakosh, Fisher, Dragomir, Kopas, Verbovetsky, Katyuzhansky, Znayda, Movchan, Andronik, Getchu, etc.

This is the place where the first known commemorations in Kazakhstan of Jesus' death took place, in the spring of 1955 and 1956. On August 21, 1955, a secret baptism of 6 people took place in the Nura River, and a week later 12 more people from among the newly converted ones got baptized.

According to official information, a large group of Jehovah's Witnesses arrived in the Kostanay region in 1961. In 1963, there were about 50 believers, and in 1961, authorities would report a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Petropavlovsk. But even here they could not assemble peaceably for their congregation meetings because they would always be under the control of law enforcement agencies and local party organizations.

On September 30, 1965, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR No. 4020-VI was issued on the removal of settlement restrictions of the sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses, True Orthodox Christians, the Innokentyevsky sect, Adventist-Reformists and members of their families. This decree released Jehovah's Witnesses from administrative oversight of law enforcement agencies

and let them leave their settlement places, where they had been sent in 1951¹. Undoubtedly, their confiscated properties would not be given back to them, and returning to their homeland was possible only with the agreement of the local Soviet authorities, which was close to impossible to get.

Note that freedom of movement was granted to all other special settlers as early as 1954 by the Special Decree No. 124 of the USSR Council of Ministers. However, in addition to this decree, there was an annex with a list of those to whom it did not apply. The list included “nationalists,” “gangsters” and “Jehovists evicted in 1951.”

A.U. Daniel, a representative of the “Memorial” society, gave the following comment on this decree at the 2001 roundtable dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the eviction of Jehovah's Witnesses to Siberia: “You know, I have recently learned a fact that absolutely surprised me. It turns out that the forced settlement regime was only removed from Jehovah's Witnesses in 1965. If we are mentally transported to our own life in the mid-60's, we may not be able to recall a lot, but I am more than sure that you can reflect upon this group of people who were still under forced settlement regime. That is to say, pure Stalinist realities in the mid-60's! Note that this decree, dated September 30, 1965, as usual, consisted of two points. The first, the removal of the ‘forced settlement’ regime, and the second, the indication that those who are released (Jehovah's Witnesses, True Orthodox Christians, the Innokentyevsky sect and Adventist-Reformists) by no means could return to their homelands (as a rule, Ukraine and Moldavia), and previously confiscated property was not returned to them. The relief was somewhat strange.”²

¹ Those Jehovah's Witnesses who were exiled to Siberia in 1949 were able to leave their settlement places a few years early.

² Taken from the transcript of a roundtable discussion held in the House of Journalists on April 5, 2001 dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the mass eviction of members of Jehovah's Witnesses associations from the western regions of the Soviet Union to Siberia.

As a result, many Jehovah's Witnesses decided to leave their places of settlement and move to Kazakhstan and neighboring countries of Central Asia. In Kazakhstan, Jehovah's Witnesses moved to regions where other fellow worshippers were already living (such as Chimkent, Aksukent, Shu, Abay, and Petropavlovsk). Some of them moved to southern countries, and congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses started to form in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and even Turkmenistan¹. As a result, according to the official information on religious organizations from 1973, there were 1,000 Jehovah's Witnesses living in Kazakhstan².

Public trials were held against supporters of these teachings.

Here are just two excerpts from the collection *"How We Fight Sectarianism"* (about the experience of atheistic work in the city of Balkhash), published in 1965. On pages 123 and 124 we read: "We came to know that a group of Jehovahists with more than twenty people has been formed in Balkhash. This group has connections with the sectarian "underground" in Zhezkazgan and Karaganda as well as with Jehovahists who settled in the area of Abay, Kulaigir, Karabas, Topar, and Shakhtinsk. Then the thread stretched even to Irkutsk and to the Kitoys station. Anti-Soviet literature printed in Brooklyn (USA) circulated via these routes, reports were sent, and 'servants' and 'pioneers'—senior staff and messengers of the sectarian 'underground'—travelled around."³

Page 34 describes how meetings to expose Jehovah's Witnesses were held: "For a long time another leader of the Balkhash Jehovahists, M. Bomba, played a martyr for the 'truth,' trying to prove to the workers of the concrete factory that he confessed only the Bible and had nothing to do with those who interfered with building a Communist society.

¹ Jehovah's Witnesses used to live in these republics before 1965 too, but they were relatively few.

² K. Kulumbetov. "Information on Religious Organizations in Kazakh SSR for 1973" chart. – 1973.

³ *How We Fight Sectarianism* – Alma-Ata, 1965 - pp. 123-124.

“But the workers of the factory gathered together to discuss the article of the former leader of the Balkhash Jehovahists, M. Strelan, who broke with the sect and wrote the article: “There is No Return to the Past” in the *Balkhash Worker*.

“Now, there are sixteen people left in the Balkhash sect of ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses,’ the chairman of the meeting read from the article. Mikhail Bomba and Mariya Kuts are the most active ones, working on strengthening the organization. Perhaps they are hoping to increase its members. I advise them and all the others who are in the sect and blindly believe in God, reading alien and harmful literature, to come to your senses.

“Hundreds of eyes are on the exit of the workshop where the current leader of Jehovahists, M. Bomba, is seated. And now everyone is eager to know his response to this call to be freed from the oppression of pangs of conscience, anxieties, and painful thoughts.

“But M. Bomba is fanatical. Foaming at the mouth, he is trying to prove the purity of his faith.¹”

I cite both excerpts not to cast even a small shadow on those who wrote this, since times were different then. For us they are an object of interest as “living” evidence of what is now history:

- First, we learn that in the 1960’s, groups of Jehovah’s Witnesses were already active in Central Kazakhstan;

- Second, they vividly and convincingly tell us about the situation in those years;

- And third, unfortunately, the book of Ecclesiastes is right when it says: “What has been is what will be, and what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Even today Jehovah’s Witnesses are persecuted from time to time, slandered in the media, and sometimes even prosecuted (but this will be discussed later).

¹ Ibid - p. 34.

But despite the persecution, new congregations were established in different parts of Kazakhstan. In 1964, a congregation of 30 people was formed in the city of Taraz.

In 1968, despite the KGB's (Committee for State Security) "vigilant eye," Jehovah's Witnesses were already operating in Kustanay, Tselinograd (now Nur-Sultan), Rudny, Aktyubinsk, Pavlodar, Aksu, Chimkent and many other places.

More often than not, meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses were held on the steppe. To get to the meetings most would travel 30 kilometers on foot. Anna Gitsu recalls those days: "We would set off early in the morning with kids in our arms—open field, river, and nothing else. But we were happy."¹ "About 30 people would be gathered at the meetings, and to get there we would walk for up to 30 kilometers."²

I must cite the sad chronicle of the well-known court proceedings against Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan during Soviet times:

23-25 September, 1946 – The 1946 Karaganda Regional Court case against 23 Jehovah's Witnesses. It is remarkable for the fact that it shows us a rather large community of believers living in that area. Also, the verdict is remarkable for its extraordinary severity in relation to the leader: "execution by firing squad."

28 November, 1951 – The Steppe Camp. The Camp Court of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Article 58-10 of Part II of the Criminal Code of RSFSR. I.M. Skits - The verdict: 25 years in correctional labor camps.

14 April, 1953 – Ad hoc tribunal of the Karaganda railway - P.A. Firulev, F.P. Firulev, A.P. Firuleva, A.S. Firuleva, S.P. Firuleva - Article 58-10 of Part II of the Criminal Code of RSFSR. The verdict: 25 years in correctional camps.

¹ Archive of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Republic of Kazakhstan.

² Ibid.

11 July, 1957 – The Taldykurgan Regional Court, N.S. Kononov and V.N. Kovalko. They were convicted of distributing religious literature. It is particularly noteworthy that the case involved not only magazines but also tape recordings of religious speeches. The verdict: 25 years in correctional labor camps.

13 July, 1957 – The Karaganda Regional Court, G.N. Dragomir, A.F. Shishko, M.D. Znayda, F. Stepanov, K.S. Svorichevsky, and Yu.V. Kopas - Article 58-10 of Part II of the Criminal Code of RSFSR. (“They kept and distributed sectarian literature, involved other people in the sect, engaged in anti-Soviet propaganda, had anti-Soviet judgements, and had an encrypted connection with sectarians from other cities,”) The verdict: 10 years in correctional camps. Interestingly, Yury Kopas and Anna Shishko were engaged, but on the day of their marriage registration they were both arrested. As a result, they were only able to register their marriage 10 years after the liberation from camps.

21 August, 1957 – The East Kazakhstan Regional Court, V.A. Nikolayevsky and A.G. Moroshan. Organization of a religious group, dissemination of the teaching among the population. The verdict: 25 years in correctional labor camps.

6 August, 1958 – South Kazakhstan Regional Court, M.M. Kirilina (“She has been carrying out instructions of the Jehovahists’ organization since 1955, carrying out work hostile to the Soviet government, hiding behind religious activities, namely, photocopying illegally obtained Jehovahists’ literature, disseminating it among citizens in different cities of the Soviet Union ... arranged illegal gatherings, took measures to attract new members to the organization.”) The verdict: eight years of imprisonment in correctional labor camps and confiscation of property.

19 August, 1958 – The Steppe Camp, The Karaganda Regional Court pronounced sentence on V.G. Ursu, Z.P. Nistor, and K.M. Skrepchuk. It is noteworthy that the verdict was passed regarding Jehovah's Witnesses who were already imprisoned in the camp for their

affiliation with Jehovah's Witnesses. In the camp, these individuals arranged for the distribution of religious literature, conducting of religious meetings, and conversion of other prisoners.

25 September, 1958 – The Karaganda Regional Court, N. Gitsu, O.R. Vesner. The verdict: ten years in correctional labor camps.

30 March, 1962 – Karaganda Regional Court, I.F. Andronik, E.S. Savchuk, V.S. Getchu, I.G. Russu, G.P. Grogol, S.N. Ravluk, Ya.P. Verbobetskyi, E.S. German, V.D. Kotuzhanskyi, and I.G. Roshka. The verdict: three to ten years in correctional camps. This is probably the most famous trial of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan in Soviet times. The trial lasted several days and took place in the local Cultural Center. A huge amount of religious literature and printing equipment was put on display to the public. The trial was widely covered in the press. Even the all-union magazine *Ogonyok* published an article entitled "The End of Jehovah's Asylum." Moreover, the film studio Kazakhfilm shot a propaganda report about dangerous sectarians. At the end of the film, after the verdict was announced, you could hear the announcer saying: "That's right! The air will be cleaner!" The KGB was confident that the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses would decrease.

29 June, 1962 – Karaganda, Karaganda Regional Court, M.A. Movchan and V.V. Fisher. The verdict: seven years in correctional labor camps and exile for three years.

11 July, 1962 – Kustanay region. Z.V. Varvayn and G.S. Otboyschicov. The verdict: six and seven years in correctional labor camps along with five and six years exile respectively.

14 September, 1962 – Karaganda Regional Court, M.M. Bomba, E.F. Kislyachuk, and M.N. Kuts. The verdict: seven years in correctional labor camps.

12 December, 1968 – Taldykorgan Regional Court, V.M. Smagin, I.N. Gavrish, and F.M. Sidorov. The verdict: two to three years of imprisonment.

24 April, 1969 – North Kazakhstan Regional Court, V.M. Smagin, I.N. Gavrish, and F.M. Sidorov. The verdict: two to three years of imprisonment.

10-22 December, 1969 – The People's Court of the Kaskelen District of the Alma-Ata Region, M.V. Andibur, N.V. Andibur, and A.D. Ventsel. The verdict: three to five years of imprisonment.

19 January, 1972 – Tadykurgan Regional Court, V.T. Zhiginas, I.I. Reymkhe, E.E. Ortlub, and S.F. Kurts. The verdict: three to five years in correctional labor camp.

4 March, 1982 – Kustanay Regional Court, I.N. Podurets, G.D. Pismenoy, A.E. Naiman, and E.I. Shnaider. The verdict: up to two and a half years of imprisonment. This is the last well-known verdict of the Kazakhstan courts against those belonging to the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and printing religious literature.

Surely, not all the trials are included in this list but just the most significant and sensational ones. The trials for refusing to serve in the Soviet army are not in this list either. And it should be noted that there were a huge number who refused to serve in the army, especially in the 1970's and 1980's. The position of young Jehovah's Witnesses in the courts was marked by the fact that they did not try to hide from the draft board but openly declared that they did not want to deceive anyone. They truly believed that they could not take up arms.

As a result of this treatment, the communities of Jehovah's Witnesses were illegal and semi-legal until the 1990's.

As a matter of fact, the unreasonable repression to which Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected causes emotional pain to the older generation. Moreover, it is as if the pain is transmitted to the younger generation at the genetic level. Therefore, the theme of repression for Jehovah's Witnesses is a non-healing wound, and we should always keep this in mind.

We cannot help but note that even Soviet religious scholars wrote about the courage that Jehovah's Witnesses displayed. They boldly,

even resolutely, faced inevitable arrests, imprisonment, and exile but always remained steadfast. As an example, A.V. Belov, in his book *Sects Sectarianism Sectarians*, published by Moscow publishing house Nauka in 1978, wrote the following: “Up to now, our atheistic literature has not found the answer to the question of how Jehovahists manage to keep under their influence ordinary believers who suffer various privations and refuse real earthly values. What methods and means do they use? More often than not, the answer to the question is that Jehovahism is based on fear of an eschatological picture, which is drawn by its preachers, a fear of Armageddon. *But such an answer is far from being satisfying.*”¹

He further reasons: “Apparently, one should not lose sight of the fact that believers view Jehovahism as a sophisticated, ‘new religion’ that challenges the world, where there is evil, social inequality, and injustice. Evidently, it cannot be overlooked that from the very first steps, Jehovahism began to peculiarly interpret scientific data, relying on it in justifying its ideas, that is, resolutely rejecting the anachronisms that nest in other Christian movements, and immediately claimed to become a fundamentally new teaching among other Christian teachings.”²

This book of Belov is also remarkable for not portraying Jehovah’s Witnesses as a “political organization,” as they were considered earlier and as is often reflected in court judgements. In his book, Belov comments on this: “In our literature, Jehovah’s Witnesses, as a rule, were depicted as a kind of political movement that used Christianity to preach irreligious ideas. It is hard to agree with such an approach to Jehovahism. This is a religious society, not a political one, which interprets the history of social problems according to a certain pattern, derived arbitrarily from Biblical texts. It is a different matter that the Jehovahistic interpretation of social development objectively conflicts

¹ A. V. Belov. *Sects Sectarianism Sectarians* - Moscow, Nauka, 1978 – pp. 63-64.

² *Ibid.* – p. 64.

with scientific socialism, which the enemies of socialism repeatedly used for their own purposes. It is another matter that many leaders of international Jehovahism are hostile toward socialism of Brooklyn, New York, openly opposing socialist ideology. But now we are talking not about the political views of the leaders of Jehovahism but about religious teachings, with no reason to turn them into a kind of political doctrine.¹

This was clear, not only to scholars, but also to many KGB investigators, who realized “extremes” in the persecution of many believers.

In his memoirs, *Notes of a KGB Investigator*, A.I. Spragovsky notes: “In relation to the sectarian Jehovahists, I feel that there have been extremes in assessing the public danger they posed. But that was how their actions were considered by ideologists, and, accordingly, tasks were assigned to the investigating agencies. I know that at present, some cases of Jehovahists are being reviewed, and taking into account the modern approach to the fate of believers, the process of their rehabilitation is underway. Does this mean that I should be responsible for those actions? Morally, I feel embarrassed, but I realize that I could not act otherwise then ... From the standpoint of that time, it seemed that the sectarian Jehovahists opposed the social and political events held in the country. They refused to serve in the Soviet army, to subscribe for government bonds, and to vote in the elections. The activity of Jehovahists was well-organized and conspiratorial.” A lot of literature published abroad was seized during arrests of active participants. In order to prove the reactionary and anti-Soviet nature of their activities, ideological expertise was carried out in relation to cases, and conclusions were drawn from the analysis of literature and correspondence seized from Jehovahists².

¹ Ibid. – p. 60.

² A.I. Spragovsky. *Notes of a KGB Investigator* – pp. 1, 8, electronic ref. (http://nkvd.tomsk.ru/projects/posledniysvidetel/manuscript_memories/SSpragovskij/).

A reader may ask the reasonable question: “Why did Jehovah’s Witnesses hide from the authorities? Why did they not register their organization as other religious movements in the USSR did?”

The answer is pretty simple: because in the USSR registering Jehovah’s Witnesses was banned.

Thus, the Application Instructions for Cults approved by the Decree of the Council for Religious Cults under the USSR Council of Ministers and the Decree of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the USSR Council of Ministers dated March 16, 1961, said: “23. *Religious communities and groups of believers belonging to sects, whose teachings and nature of activity are anti-State and fanatical are not eligible for registration: Jehovahists, Pentecostals, True Orthodox Christians, True Orthodox Church, Adventists-Reformists, Murashkovtski, etc.*”¹ Note that “Jehovists” are the first on the list and for good reason. The truth is that the Soviet atheistic state has always regarded Jehovah’s Witnesses as the most dangerous “anti-Soviet sect.”

I.M. Sovetov and M.I. Odintsov noted in the article “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia: From Persecution to Recognition:” “Not only staff of the Ministry of State Security were involved in monitoring the activities of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses but also employees of the Council on Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers, established in May 1944. In accordance with the Regulations on the Council (Para. 1), this State body was designed to maintain ‘contact between the USSR Government and the leaders of religious associations: Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist religions, Armenian Gregorian, Old Believers, Greek Catholic, and Lutheran churches and sectarian organizations on the issues related to these cults requiring the permission of the USSR Government.’ The ‘sectarian organizations’ included the associations of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Acquaintance with the archive fund of the council shows that one of the main directions of

¹ *Legislation on Religious Cults* – Moscow, 1971. – p. 157.

its activity was the collection of information and control of activities of unregistered 'sectarian' associations. A sizeable dossier was compiled on each of the communities, with lists of leaders and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, including their family members. Many pages of regular reports of the Commissioners of the Council for the republics, territories and regions of the Soviet Union were devoted to describing actions of Jehovah's Witnesses. Even the employees of the council's headquarters who went on business trips to the western regions of the Soviet Union focused on these problems. As a rule, they took note of peculiar activism of members of these communities. In an effort to prove the thesis of the 'anti-Sovietism' of Jehovah's Witnesses, the council workers emphasized that among them were many people who had previously been members of 'bourgeois nationalist parties.'¹

Undoubtedly, the same situation existed in Kazakhstan, where a strict record of all religious communities was maintained in each of the regions of the Kazakh SSR. And the reports contained not only the total number of believers but also their personal data, place of residence, etc.

And surely, all religious activities were supervised directly by State security agencies. The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs and then the Committee for State Security were behind the overwhelming majority of the trials and prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR.

Some researchers even claim that "Jehovists remained one of the leading priorities in the work of the secret service in terms of religious concerns until the collapse of the USSR, and the investigation on activities of Jehovists was considered, perhaps, the most difficult one at the 'religious front'²"

¹ I.M. Sovetov, M.I. Odintsov. "Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: From Persecution to Recognition" – Russian Association of Scholars in Religion – electronic ref., (<https://rusoir.ru/president/president-works/president-works-175/>).

² D. Vedenev. *Battle of Counter-Intelligence and the Underground of Jehovah's Witnesses* – February 17, 2017, electronic ref., (<https://pravlife.org/ru/content/poedinok-kontrrazvedki-i-podpolya-svideteley-iegovy-ch-1>).

Huge numbers of cases against Jehovah's Witnesses are still kept in the archives of the prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Committee for State Security. Studying all these cases would certainly help to better analyze the life and evolution of the communities of believers of that time. However, these cases are still "secret."

Films along with literature played an equally important role in antireligious propaganda. The stories about Jehovah's Witnesses took a considerable place in this regard. Among the most popular are the story of Yuriy Usychenko, *The Black Cross*, as well as the movies *The Armageddon* by Mikhail Israelev, *The Sinner* by Nikolay Evdokimov, and *I Love You, Life!* by Mikhail Ershov. In all these compositions, neither the image of a "believer" nor the teachings corresponded to reality.

Offensive clichés and expressions were used in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses, such as "sectarians," "obscurantists," "fanatics," and "American spies." And ridding society of them was presented as a good deed and social and public improvement, as if cleansing society from dirt and rot. You may recall the final words from the newsreel about the Karaganda trial in relation to the removal of Jehovah's Witnesses: "That's right! The air will be cleaner!"

A compulsory component of a "good" anti-sectarian article or report was a demonstration of "repentant sectarians" rejecting their religious opinions for the sake of a bright future for communism and for the sake of living in a prosperous Soviet society.

A review of the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan would be incomplete without taking a close look at internal problems and divisions within the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In his book *The Sword and the Shield*, published in 1999, V.N. Mitrokhin, a former employee of the Archive of the First Headquarters of the KGB in the USSR who fled the USSR and later published his memories, pays special attention to the work of the KGB in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses. As V.N. Mitrokhin affirms, by the 1960's, KGB

leaders had to admit that no persecution could destroy sectarians. That is why in March 1959 senior KGB officers leading “the struggle against Jehovahists” concluded that the correct strategy was “to continue measures of repression with measures of disruption.” The KGB set out to divide, demoralize, and discredit the sectarians as well as to arrest their most influential leaders on trumped-up charges¹.

Agents infiltrated the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, which caused panic and promoted a spirit of distrust among believers.

The split arose because of a special campaign to discredit the leader of Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR, Pavel Ziateg. Jehovah's Witnesses themselves describe the situation: “During the mid-1940's, [Ziateg] served as country servant ... The country committee included eight [men] besides [Ziateg], four from Siberia and four from Ukraine. These [men] had oversight of the Kingdom-preaching work in the entire U.S.S.R. Because of the vast distances involved and the constant persecution, [they] could not maintain good communication or have regular meetings. In time, rumors and gossip spread about [Ziateg] and the other committee members. It was said that [Ziateg] was cooperating with the security services, that he had built a big house for himself using funds that should have been used to promote the witnessing work, and that he was seen in a military uniform. Such reports were collected into a scrapbook and sent to [traveling ministers] in Siberia. None of these accusations were true.”²

The literature of Jehovah's Witnesses describes the extent of this split: “By 1958 several thousand publishers had been cut off from the Country Committee by groups of [Witnesses]. In Irkutsk and Tomsk and later in other Russian cities, the groups of [Witnesses] who separated from the organization continued to grow. In March 1958, the

¹ 2004 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2004 – p. 107.

² 2002 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2002 – p. 194.

separated ones had organized their own ‘country committee’ in hopes that it would be recognized by all the congregations.¹”

Toward the end of the 1950’s, more than 500 Witnesses were gathered out of different prison camps in the USSR and put into two prison camps in Mordvinia; Ziatek was in one of them. Among the prisoners were the leaders of the splinter group. As result, ideal conditions were established to discuss the distrust that had been created. A copy of the letter received by Jehovah’s Witnesses in the USSR from N. Knorr in 1962 also helped resolve the rift. It stated that the Society recognized Pavlo Ziatek as the responsible Christian in the USSR. And it urged Christians to be of a sound mind, reasonable, and adaptable. Consequently, they managed to overcome the split. The split was not doctrinal and was caused solely by distrust of some individuals in the organization and the general policy regarding the attitude towards the State.

Another test began right afterwards. It was caused by a Watchtower article from November 15, 1962 that contained the interpretation of “the superior authorities” mentioned in Romans 13:1. Jehovah’s Witnesses previously thought that “the superior authorities” referred to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. The Watchtower explained that “the superior authorities” mentioned here were human governmental authorities.

Although the articles showed the need for true Christians to honor such secular rulers and to render obedience to them conscientiously in all matters that do not conflict with God’s law and their Bible-trained conscience, some Jehovah’s Witnesses sincerely thought that it was a “shrewd Communist fabrication intended to make them totally subservient to the State.”² There were Witnesses who also

¹ 2008 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2008 – p. 135.

² 2006 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – p. 116.

thought that The Watchtower containing the new understanding had not originated with the official organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. Instead, they thought that the information had been fabricated by those compromising with the authorities in order to make the Witnesses more obedient to the Soviet State.

Although the majority of believers returned to the organization in the 1970's and 1980's, some remained with the opposition. The opposing communities still exist, including in Kazakhstan.

There have also been other attempts by the KGB to influence the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The history of internal hurdles in the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses is valuable for researchers not only because it directly concerns the little-explored area of the history of this religion in our country but also because it helps us better understand the situation in those years. Unlike Jehovah's Witnesses under the Third Reich, Jehovah's Witnesses in the USSR were under longer term bans and pressure from authorities. And it took great efforts to overcome the crisis without causing significant damage to the organization.

As Sovetov and Odintsov point out: "All together this led to the fact that by the beginning of the 1970's, a threatening situation was created for the associations of Jehovah's Witnesses: fines and lawsuits, searches and arrests, administrative bans, 'exposing' articles in the media dictated by the commissions that assisted the local authorities in monitoring compliance with the law on cults, as well as ideological and anti-religious campaigns by the Komsomol party and trade union bodies. Jehovah's Witnesses were still viewed as the 'most reactionary, misanthropic sect.'¹"

Throughout the 1970's, persecution and pressure continued, but in Kazakhstan most of the trials were against young believers because

¹ I.M. Sovetov, M.I. Odintsov. *Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: From Persecution to Recognition* – Russian Association of Scholars in Religion – electronic ref, (<https://rusoir.ru/president/president-works/president-works-175/>).

they refused to serve in the army. They were tried simply for belonging to an organized religion, but the term of imprisonment decreased to three to five years. People increasingly faced administrative liability and were imposed with large fines for assembling to worship. Children of Jehovah's Witnesses experienced great pressure at school because they refused to join Pioneer organizations, salute the flag, sing the anthem, and participate in fundraising programs to "help fraternal peoples in their struggle against imperialism."

By that time, there were significant changes in the community of believers. The second and third generations of Jehovah's Witnesses had already grown up. The new understanding of "the superior authorities" helped Jehovah's Witnesses to remain uncompromising in matters of faith, yet show due respect for political authorities and avoid unnecessary confrontation.

It should be pointed out that Jehovah's Witnesses could not get a college degree simply because they were not accepted to higher educational institutions or were expelled from such institutions. Neither could they hold any responsible positions. At the same time, Jehovah's Witnesses, as believers, were notable for industriousness and diligence. The position of Jehovah's Witnesses was well expressed by the believer Lidia Pleshko: "It is because Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to work. Whether a foreman is watching you or not, you must be honest with God, in work and in everything. And we've tried to follow that all the time."¹

It is not surprising that employers valued these believers and tried to hold on to them. As S. Ivanenko notes, "In the 70's, Jehovah's Witnesses gradually earned a better reputation as honest and conscientious workers who did not abuse alcohol and fulfilled production tasks assigned to them on time and with high quality. Based on the available information, the majority of believers had construction qualifications,

¹ Taken from the transcript of an interview with L. Pleshko, provided by the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan.

and little by little, they obtained the right to make their own production teams and crews engaged in the construction of various service and residential facilities. To achieve this they used the interest of local business executives, who experienced the shortage of qualified construction personnel.” And further: “As was noted in Soviet atheistic literature, honest and conscientious work ensured a higher standard of living than the national average for most of Jehovah's Witnesses and their families, including the possibility of building good modern houses with the help of fellow believers, to buy cars, etc.¹”

This was directly recognized by the State in 1982. The first issue of the internal newsletter published exclusively for party leaders by the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences noted that “a new type of believer was being formed. These are young and middle-aged people with secondary or even higher education and a high level of general culture and production qualifications. This new type of believer becomes especially noticeable in Christian sectarianism as the percentage of young people in communities of Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovahists, Mennonites, etc., is two to three times higher than in other religious organizations.²”

Ivanenko also writes about it: “The formation of a new type of believer, previously not encountered in the USSR, that belonged to the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses— combining high income with production qualifications and discipline (often united in production crews, mainly construction, consisting of fellow believers), having significant preaching activity, refusing to comply with the requirements of the Soviet legislation (from serving in the army to voting in elections), and not compromising with the

¹ S.I. Ivanenko. *Jehovah's Witnesses - a Religious Organization Traditional for Russia* - Moscow, Art-Business Center, 2002 - p. 129.

² S.M. Dudarenok. *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Far East. 1944-1990*, “Freedom of Conscience in Russia” - Issue 9, St. Petersburg, 2011.- p. 72.

Communist ideology—caused concern to the Party and the Soviet leaders.¹”

On May 29, 1980, the Council for Religious Affairs adopted the resolution *Intensifying Conditions and Measures to Expose and Curb the Illegal Activities of the Sect of Jehovah’s Witnesses*. Odintsov points out that until the mid-80’s, purposeful work was carried out to stop the activities of unregistered associations in the republics, territories, and regions of the Soviet Union. Within this framework, efforts were also made with regard to the societies of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The activity was coordinated by the Headquarters of the Council for Religious Affairs².

Some comical situations also took place at the time. Here is an example: According to information of a commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs under the USSR Council of Ministers for the Khabarovsk Territory about the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses, addressed to the first secretary of the Khabarovsk city committee of the CPSU, local business leaders simply ignored the “recommendations” of the commissioner to discredit Witnesses and suppress their missionary activities. Thus, the commissioner complained that he had discovered the “illegal activity” of a driver of the transport department of the Khabarovsk Plant of Aluminum Structures, V.F. Yelin, who was a Witness and was actively involved in promoting the teachings among plant workers. The commissioner appealed to the management of the plant, but the managers did not take any measures. The greatest indignation of the commissioner was caused by the fact that “considering the conscientious attitude of Yelin to the execution of his work duties” at the plant, he was the only one in the transport department who “was given the status of the best Communist worker,”

¹ S.I. Ivanenko. *Jehovah’s Witnesses - a Religious Organization Traditional for Russia* - Moscow, Art-Business Center, 2002 - p. 130.

² I.M. Sovetov, M.I. Odintsov. *Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia: From Persecution to Recognition* – Russian Association of Scholars in Religion – electronic ref., (<https://rusoir.ru/president/president-works/president-works-175/>).

so that his “color portrait was placed on the plant’s wall of honor.” “Yelin was repeatedly elected to be on the panel of the plant’s trade union meeting,” and “a positive characteristic was sent to the district military commissariat concerning him, emphasizing that he is the best Communist worker.¹⁷”

Here is another example: the regional newspaper Southern Kazakhstan dated March 29, 1988, published an article entitled “Honor and Glory—According to Work” praising blacksmith Andrey Melnik, an employee of the mechanical repair workshop of the Chimkent Road Construction Association. The article included a full-length photograph of him. However, the blacksmith was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses (the editor was later seriously reprimanded for this).

By the end of 1980’s, attitudes towards Jehovah’s Witnesses had begun to change. The authorities realized that imprisoning believers causes serious damage to the reputation of the country in foreign lands.

In 1989, Jehovah’s Witnesses from the Soviet Union could freely travel to Poland to attend a convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses for the first time in their lives.

On March 27, 1991, the religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses was registered in Russia.

On January 15, 1992, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 1128-XII Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations came into force.

International legal and religious examination found this law to be very democratic, tolerant, and transparent, while fully complying with international standards.

However, those who pushed for a new law that would allow more State interference in religious activities and the establishment of strict relationship rules and control over religious associations were not

¹ S.M. Dudarenok. *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Far East. 1944-1990*, “Freedom of Conscience in Russia” - Issue 9, St. Petersburg, 2011. – p. 62.

happy with it because according to lawyers, the law adopted in 1992 was “problematic in terms of the adequacy of legal regulation.”¹”

As a result, in 2011 a new law, Religious Activity and Religious Associations, was adopted. Even today there are people who are dissatisfied with this law, resulting in heated discussions about a new “stricter” version of the law.

In 1992, the first religious associations of Jehovah’s Witnesses were registered as legal entities in Kazakhstan.

The first registered communities were the congregation in the city of Esik, Almaty Region, and the congregation in the city of Almaty, which were registered on the same day – April 16, 1992.

Below is a table of the registration history of the very first associations of Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1992-1993:

Date of registration	Religious association	Place of registration
16 April 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Esik	Almaty Region
16 April 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Almaty	City of Almaty
24 April 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Karatau	Zhambyl Region
30 May 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Kaskelen	Almaty Region
10 June 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Abay	Karaganda Region
17 June 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Shakhtinsk	Karaganda Region

¹ R. A. Podoprigora. *Comment on the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On Religious Activity and Religious Associations”* – Almaty, Nalogoviy Expert, 2013 – p. 8.

22 July 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Shu	Zhambyl Region
27 August 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the village of 12th December	Almaty Region
19 October 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Kostanay	Kostanay Region
3 November 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Ust-Kamenogorsk	East Kazakhstan Region
12 November 1992	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Taraz	Zhambyl Region
15 January 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Taldykurgan	Almaty Region
21 June 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Rudny	Kostanay Region
23 June 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Satpayev	Karaganda Region
23 June 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Semey	East Kazakhstan Region
25 June 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Shymkent	City of Shymkent
6 October 1993	Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Aksukent	Turkestan Region

Nowadays, Jehovah's Witnesses are registered in all the regions of our country and have repeatedly undergone the state re-registration process. Most recently, this took place in 2012. Their charters and activities have been repeatedly checked, and each time their activities have been recognized as legitimate.

After registration, Jehovah's Witnesses immediately began constructing their religious buildings. The very first Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan (possibly in the USSR) was completed by Witnesses in the city of Shu on October 19, 1991. However, the first state-registered "Kingdom Hall" (according to construction documentation) was built in the city of Esik and put into operation on December 23, 1993.

Today, Jehovah's Witnesses have Kingdom Halls in almost all regions of Kazakhstan, about 60 in total.

In September 1991, the first regional convention was held in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. It took place in Almaty, at the ADK stadium. There were more than 5,000 delegates from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Jehovah's Witnesses reached an agreement with the stadium administration in order to repair it instead of paying the rent. Some of the people who were in charge of the program actually had to live at the stadium for three months and participate in repair work. In total, 60 tons of cement were used, 90 tons of construction waste were removed, 3,500 square meters were plastered, and more than 8,000 square meters of stands and rooms were painted manually; in the stands wooden benches were installed and painted¹.

In 1992, a similar convention was held in Almaty for the second time. The director of the Central Stadium in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, where 6,605 attended the convention, said the following: "I am thrilled with your attitude. Now I am convinced that all of you, the young and

¹ *Asia Dauysy*, November 1991, "Let Us Love God's Freedom," by A. Shtamm, Newspaper No. 15.

the old, are respectable people. I cannot say that I believe in God, but I do believe in the sacred things conveyed by your brotherhood, in your attitude toward spiritual and material values.” One police officer at the Alma Ata convention observed: “I have come in contact with you people twice, each time at a convention. It is extremely pleasant to work with Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹”

25 years later, on June 24, 2017, Almaty hosted the first Special Convention in Central Asia, which delegates from many neighboring and foreign countries attended, including the United States and Europe. The total number of attendees was 4,500. Geoffrey Jackson, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses (Warwick, New York), took part in the convention program.

In January 1997, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan registered the Religious Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kazakhstan, which was initially located in the city of Esik.

In 2007, the Religious Center was relocated from Esik to Almaty, where the construction of a special complex of office buildings in Microdistrict Kalkaman-2 had been completed. Since then, Bethel has been located in Almaty.

The construction of Bethel started in January 2005. About 40 international ministers from nine different countries and 70 local workers from among the believers as well as a large number of volunteers from local congregations were involved in the construction. The total area of the buildings is approximately 5,000 square meters located on seven hectares. The complex consists of four main buildings that are connected by passageways and consists of the office, dining room, kitchen, residential building, laundry, warehouse, and workshops. The residential building has 39 rooms, where volunteers working in the center live. Just like in other countries, Jehovah’s Witnesses call this center “Bethel,” which means “House of God.”

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 1, 1993 – p. 28.

In the Kazakhstan branch there are Shipping, Maintenance, Purchasing, Service, Legal, Translation, Administrative, Computer, and Accounting Departments as well as the Hospital Information Desk, Public Information Desk, and the Local Design Construction Department.

In the last edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and Central Asia*, I wrote about each of these departments in more detail. This time, I would like to focus only on what I consider to be the most interesting departments.

In the Translation Department the literature is now translated into the Kazakh (Arabic alphabet), Kazakh (Cyrillic), and Uighur (Cyrillic) languages. Like translators of Jehovah's Witnesses all around the world, the translators in the Kazakhstan branch use a special computer program, WTS (Watchtower Translation System), that helps them to do their work more efficiently (this program contains publications, reference materials, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc.; it is also useful in the planning stages of work).

Translation procedure is as follows: first, a group is assigned to work on a particular project. Then, everybody in the group reads the text; later they all gather together to discuss the information and make decisions regarding the text. After that, they start translation. The translation is compared with the source language to make sure that the ideas have been conveyed correctly. The translated text is read out loud in order to correct grammatical mistakes and to make sure that it sounds natural.

When everyone in the group is satisfied with the translation, the material is sent to the Graphics Department, where the text is converted into electronic files that will be used to make printing plates. Next, the text goes through another check, which is called a mechanical check, to correct any technical mistakes. The final version is sent to Germany to be printed.

Publications in the Kazakh language are read in more than 16 countries around the world. *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was released in Kazakh at a convention of Jehovah's Witnesses held September 26-28, 2014. The release was announced by Gerrit Lösch, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, who visited Kazakhstan particularly for this purpose.

Dr. Alexander Garkavets, a specialist in Turkic philology, commented on the *New World Translation* in Kazakh: "Despite the limited resources for translating holy texts into Kazakh, the Witness translators did a remarkable job. It is very commendable how they revealed new ways of expressing the source text ideas in Kazakh. *The New World Translation* reflects the current vernacular and is thus easily understood by all."¹

The Public Information Desk is a new department in Bethel and its mission is to provide timely and accurate information to journalists about the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and around the world. In addition, this department publishes refutations of defamatory allegations about Jehovah's Witnesses that are sometimes spread by the media in the name of sensationalism.

The Legal Department cares for the legal security of the center and the activity of the organization in the country. Lawyers and attorneys of Jehovah's Witnesses do a great deal of work to monitor the rapidly changing norms of legislation; they also take part in court proceedings to protect the rights and freedoms of their fellow believers. Over the past ten years alone, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan has made seven decisions in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses concerning the fundamental rights of Kazakhstan citizens to hold religious services in residences and rented facilities, to share their religious beliefs with others, and to freely take part in religious services.

¹ jw.org, January 27, 2015, "Witnesses Feature New Kazakh Bible at Convention and Open House," electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/news/releases/by-region/kazakhstan/new-kazakh-bible-translation/>).

Jehovah's Witnesses in our country have gone through a lot. They have suffered and endured a lot. They have experienced much injustice at the hands of the Soviet state.

I want to believe that with the advent of democracy, their history will also change, just as it has changed in Germany, America, and the countries of Western Europe.

When in 2017, out of the blue, the news about the prohibition of the activities of legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation spread, and one after another, reports about arrests and the criminal prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia began to appear, Kazakhstan's society froze in anticipation of whether or not Kazakhstan would follow after "big brother." It seemed everything was going to turn out that way.

On January 18, 2017, the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan arrested a 61-year-old Jehovah's Witness cancer patient from Astana (now Nur-Sultan), Teymur Akhmedov, for allegedly violating Article 174(2) of Kazakhstan's Criminal Code. On May 2, 2017, an Astana court sentenced him to five years in prison, accusing him of "inciting religious discord" and promoting the "propaganda of exclusivity, superiority of citizens on the grounds of their religion."

Later, on May 17, 2017, authorities conducted a raid on the Bethel property, which created a public spectacle and involved an intimidating force of some 40 armed officers, some of whom were masked. All of this intimidation was like a repetition of the Russian script. On June 29, 2017, a Kazakhstan court ordered the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty to suspend operations for three months and fined them approximately 680,000 KZT (\$2,107). The reason was the alleged violation of the anti-terrorism protection of buildings. It looked as if a ban was inevitable.

However, the situation suddenly began to change. The pressure began to weaken after a fairly frank speech by the Minister of Religious Affairs and Civil Society, Nurlan Yermekbayev, during a briefing of the

Central Communications Service at the end of June 2017. He said: "According to our legislation, all religious associations registered in Kazakhstan have equal rights and are equal before the law. The religious association 'Jehovah's Witnesses' is officially registered in Kazakhstan. Therefore, it acts in accordance with the law. *Our position is that this organization is not extremist, and today there are no plans for its complete closure or any other pressure on it in Kazakhstan.*"¹

It was a pleasant surprise for many. Kazakhstan made a choice and this choice was in favor of democracy and respect for the rights of believers.

Later, the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, pardoned Teymur Akhmedov and he was released from prison on April 4, 2018. Moreover, the pardon cleared his criminal record.

Today there are about 17,500 Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan. Together with those who are interested in their beliefs, there are about 30,000 people regularly gathering for meetings. Of course, this is a small but still considerable number of citizens of Kazakhstan.

In general, at present the growth of congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan is no longer as rapid as it was in the early 1990's.

For comparison: in 1997 there were 10,585 Jehovah's Witnesses united in 81 congregations. Meetings were attended by 29,710 people. 9,891 people studied the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2019, there were 17,485 baptized Witnesses who were grouped in 262 congregations. 30,516 people attended the Memorial.

Partially, the growth of the congregations is due both to the younger generation and to conversion of new ones. This demonstrates the resilience of Jehovah's Witnesses of Kazakhstan.

The congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan unite people of different ethnicities: Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Moldovans,

¹ Yermekbayev commented on the suspension of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty, InformBURO, electronic ref., (<https://informburo.kz/novosti/ermekbaev-prokomentiroval-priostanovlenie-deyatelnosti-svideteley-iegovy-v-almaty.html>).

Hungarians, Germans, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Belarusians, Gagauz, Romanians, Kazakhs, Koreans, Chinese, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Uighurs, Kurds, and Turkmen.

This reflects the whole society of Kazakhstan today.

Thus, historical perspective shows that Jehovah's Witnesses, if not a “traditional” religion for Kazakhstan, are certainly a religious organization that has been “historically present” in the country over the past 120 years. And during all those years, Jehovah's Witnesses have never been seen in any riots, protests, or any violent anti-state or anti-social actions. They are simply “different.” But, first, is “different” a synonym for the word “dangerous” or “alien?” And, second, is not each one of us “different” compared to others? Our differences should not separate us from each other. Differences create a contrast that can become part of something very beautiful.

One more thing. I recently came across an interview with the famous journalist Maxim Shevchenko, which he gave to the radio station *Echo of Moscow* in 2010. This interview touched on the topic of Jehovah's Witnesses. Here I would like to quote part of that discussion about Jehovah's Witnesses, which seemed to me very fitting for this chapter and the book as a whole:

*“In Soviet times, thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses were jailed in camps. They were there without leaving, they were jailed for decades ... In Nizhneudinsk and Verkhneudinsk, between Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk, there was a large community, not Witnesses brought from America, who appeared in the early 90s, but the old Russian Witnesses who appeared in the late 19th - early 20th centuries. **They suffered, and they paid with their blood and their lives for the right to exist and to believe in Russia the way they wanted.**”¹*

We cannot change the past, whether it was bad or good—it is what it is. The past of Kazakhstan also had its own bright pages and its tears

¹ Radio Echo of Moscow, “A Dissenting Opinion—Transcript of the Interview with M. Shevchenko,” electronic ref, (<https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/686334-echo/>).

and cries of the destitute, exiled, and imprisoned. This cannot be remedied. But we can and must do everything possible so that the past is not repeated. How our future generations will remember our time depends on us.

I would like this to be remembered as often as possible by all of us but especially by those on whom Church-State relations depend.

IMAGES FOR CHAPTER 2



Bukhrama, 1900

The largest deportations of Jehovah's Witnesses from Moldova, Western Belarus and Western Ukraine took place in the summer of 1949 and in the spring of 1951. Thousands of families were exiled to forced settlements in Kazakhstan and Siberia



By the 1940's major court proceedings were already being held against Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan

For example, in 1946 the Karaganda Regional Court sentenced 23 Jehovah's Witnesses to long-term imprisonment in correctional labor camps of the Gulag. One was even sentenced to execution (later the verdict was replaced with 10 years in the camps)

П Р И Г О В О Р

ИМЕНЕМ СОВЕТА МИНИСТРОВ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОГО КАЗАХСТАНА

1940 года сентября 20-25 дня Судебная коллегия на основании уголовного дела № 0021127, рассмотрев материалы уголовного дела № 0021127, вынесенного Судом по уголовным делам 25-го судебного участка № 1 в г. Караганде, постановила:

- 1. РУДНИКОГО Валентина Александровича**, 1908 года рождения, уроженца г. Караганды, директорского состава, не имеющего специального образования, в г. Караганду в работу назначен в Казахском металлургическом заводе, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 2. СЕДИН Иван Иванович**, 1906 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 3. МАКИН Илья Павлович**, 1912 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 4. САЛТЫКОВ Павел Павлович**, 1903 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 5. УГЛАК Ярослав Иванович**, 1918 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 6. ШИНДЕНКО Алексей Иванович**, 1907 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 7. НАУДА Павел Григорьевич**, 1909 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 8. ВОДНИК Павел Иванович**, 1901 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 9. СЕДИН Павел Иванович**, 1908 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.
- 10. СЕДИН Павел Иванович**, 1908 года рождения, уроженец г. Караганды, сменщик, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.



П Р И Г О В О Р

ИМЕНЕМ СОВЕТА МИНИСТРОВ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОГО КАЗАХСТАНА

1946 года сентября 20-25 дня Судебная коллегия на основании уголовного дела № 0021127, рассмотрев материалы уголовного дела № 0021127, вынесенного Судом по уголовным делам 25-го судебного участка № 1 в г. Караганде, постановила:

- 1. АЛЕШИНА Виталия Павловича**, 1905 года рождения, уроженца г. Караганды, сменщика, на работе с августа 1940 года, признан виновным в совершении преступления, указанного в п. 1 статьи 104 УК РСФСР, и приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы.

У С Т А Н О В И Л И :

Всё обвинительное заключение и ход судебного разбирательства в отношении осужденного А.А. Алешина в г. Караганде, в отношении которого постановлено приговором Судебной коллегии по уголовным делам 25-го судебного участка № 1 в г. Караганде от 25.09.1946 г. приговорен к 10 годам лишения свободы, изменить на лишение свободы сроком на 10 лет с отсрочкой исполнения наказания на 2 года.

П Р И Г О В О Р :

Судебная коллегия постановила:

Осужденному Алешину Виталию Павловичу изменить срок наказания на лишение свободы сроком на 10 лет с отсрочкой исполнения наказания на 2 года.

КАРГАНДА, ОБЛАСТЬ

ПОС Т А Н О В Л Е Н И Е

№ 46

1946

Судебная коллегия

Имя: СЕДИН Константин Иванович

Место рождения: Караганда, область

Судебная коллегия постановила:

Осужденному Седину Константину Ивановичу изменить срок наказания на лишение свободы сроком на 10 лет с отсрочкой исполнения наказания на 2 года.





By the 1950's and 1960's there were already many congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in a number of regions of Kazakhstan: Karaganda, Almaty, South Kazakhstan, Aqmola, North Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Eastern Kazakhstan and Zhambyl

Underground literature of Jehovah's Witnesses used during the Soviet period





Nikolay Semenovich KONONOV

Convicted as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1957 in Tekeli (Almaty region, Kazakhstan)

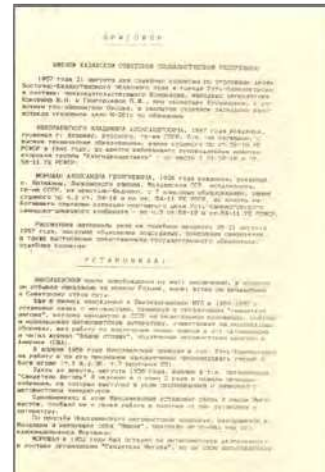
In 1993 N. Kononov was declared rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression



Vladimir Alexandrovich NIKOLAYEVSKY

V. Nikolayevsky graduated the Moscow Institute of Engineering Communication, and later worked as an engineer. When residing in Ust-Kamenogorsk, he was convicted as a leader of a local group of Jehovah's Witnesses. His court case was publicized by newspapers: the *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda (Truth of Kazakhstan)*, dated September 1, 1957, and the Ust-Kamenogorsk newspaper *Znamya Kommunizma (The Banner of Communism)*, in the issues of September 4 and 10, 1957.

In 1991 V. Nikolayevsky was declared rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression.



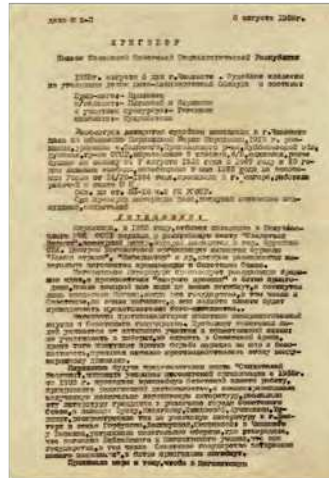


Mariya Mironovna KIRILINA

On August 6, 1958, the South Kazakhstan Regional Court sentenced M. Kirilina to 8 years in a correctional labor camp under Part II of Article 58-10 with further confiscation of property and subsequent 3 years of disenfranchisement

On August 23, 1958, the newspaper *Pravda Uzhnogo Kazakhstana* (*The Truth of South Kazakhstan*) published an article about her entitled "Jehovah's Daughter"

In 1991 M. Kirilina was declared rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression



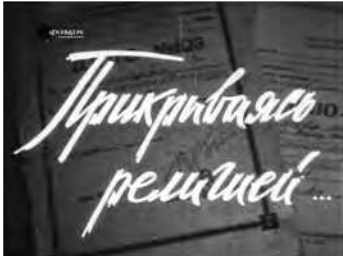
M. Kirilina with a group of fellow believers shortly before her arrest



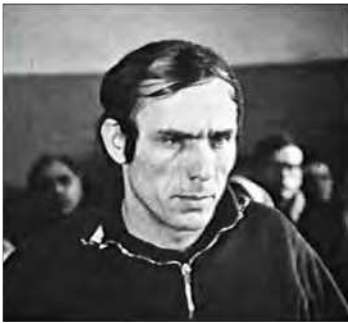
On March 30, 1962, the most famous trial involving Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan was held in Karaganda

The trial was even covered by the magazine *Ogonyok* (issue №24, 1962), available throughout the Soviet Union





In the time of Soviet antireligious propaganda, trials against Jehovah's Witnesses were the topic of many films, newspaper articles and books. The mythical image of the public "sectarian-enemy" was created



Georgiy Dmitriyevich PISMENYOY

On March 4, 1982, the Kostanay Regional Court convicted G. Pismenoy. This is the last-known verdict of the Kazakhstan courts against a member of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and those printing religious literature



In 2006 G. Pismenoy was declared rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression

According to official data, in 1970 there were 1000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan. Most of them were 3rd- and 4th-generation believers



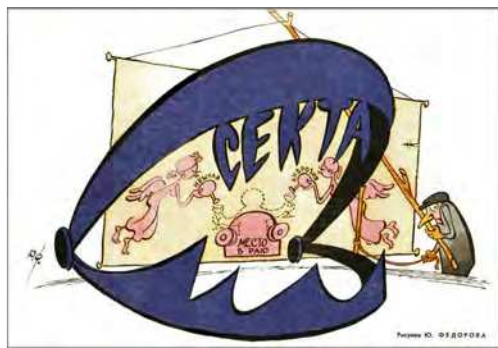
Examples of Soviet Propaganda against Jehovah's Witnesses



A. Socialist Karaganda
JUNE 9, 1961

B. Kazakhstanskaya Pravda
MARCH 15, 1986

C. Ogni Alatau
OCTOBER 21, 1976



SOURCE: В ИСТИННОМ СВЕТЕ. "БОЕВОЙ КАРАНДАШ"
SERIES OF POSTERS. "ХУДОЖНИК РСФСР".



In September, 1991, a regional convention was held for the first time in Central Asia by Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan. It took place in Almaty at the ADK stadium. There were more than 5,000 delegates from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan



According to the official position of the Soviet authorities, Jehovah's Witnesses could not be registered in Kazakhstan under any circumstances

On April 16, 1992, the Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in Esik, Almaty Region, became one of the first registered congregations

In 2012, 60 legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses underwent the state re-registration process



The First Religious Buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan

The first Kingdom Halls were constructed by believers themselves



Shu, completed on October 19, 1991

Esik, the first officially registered "Kingdom Hall," began to be used on December 23, 1993



In January 1997, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan registered the Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan, originally located in Esik



Since 2007 the Religious Center has been located in Almaty



CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATION OF THE TEACHINGS. WHAT DO JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES BELIEVE?

A person who comes across Jehovah’s Witnesses for the first time is usually very surprised by the fact that their teachings are very different from the teachings of other churches. It surprises people even more when, in answer to questions about the reasons for such beliefs, they do not hear something like “Because that’s just how it is!” but instead get a detailed response based on simple logic and Bible texts. There is no choice but to be surprised, because we have to admit that most religious people are not very familiar with the teachings of their own church. They cannot explain the reasons for or the symbolic meaning of their rituals and celebrations. Usually all teachings are accepted without any basis, just because “everyone is doing so” or “the priest knows better.” Jehovah’s Witnesses are different. Every one of them knows why he believes one thing and not another. Moreover, their teachings do not contain dogmas or traditions, and this fact affects their mindset and their view of the world.

It is very important to understand that as an organization Jehovah’s Witnesses have never been part of another religious group, so they do not carry the “baggage” of dogmas from the past. As was mentioned in the first chapter of this book, it was Charles T. Russell and his associates who established the first teachings of the Bible Students. Charles T. Russell explained that the main objective to which he and his associates committed themselves was “to bring together these long scattered fragments of truth and present them to the Lord’s people—

not as *new*, not as *our own*, but as the Lord's." Further, he emphasized that their aspiration was to systemize "the jewels of truth" that had been already discovered and that this was "less a work of origination than of reconstruction, adjustment, harmonization."¹

In order to share these teachings, Russell would publish a sermon (about two columns long) in newspapers in the USA, Canada, and Europe every week.

"In 1912, Russell and his associates embarked on a bold educational venture that was far ahead of its time. In fact, it was to reach millions of people worldwide. It was the 'Photo-Drama of Creation'—a combination motion-picture and slide presentation synchronized with musical recordings and phonograph-record talks. It was about eight hours in length and was presented in four parts. Besides the regular 'Photo-Drama,' the 'Eureka Drama,' consisting of either the recorded lectures and musical recordings or the records plus the slides, was also made available. Though it lacked motion pictures, it was successfully presented in less densely populated areas."²

Russell and his associates worked for about three years to produce the "Photo-Drama of Creation," which was released in 1914. The "Photo-Drama" was an absolute novelty for its time because it was an innovative combination of moving pictures, sound recordings, and colored slides made of glass. Hundreds of people and even animals were involved in filming the reenactment of Bible scenes. "The largest part of the population of one of the large zoological gardens was brought in to use" in order to reproduce on film scenes about the days of Noah, says a report from 1913. Artists from London, New York, Paris, and Philadelphia colored by hand hundreds of different glass slides used in the production. This "Photo-Drama" became very popular among believers and even decades later Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan used copies of it in book form.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 49.

² *Ibid* - pp. 59-60.

However, not everything was moving so smoothly. After the death of Russell, as Jehovah's Witnesses explain, "the Bible Students faced a real test of loyalty." Disagreements over theocratic doctrines led to a split. Opposers launched a massive campaign and as a result "a number of congregations of Bible Students were split into two groups—those loyal to the Society and those who were easy prey to the smooth talk of the opposers."¹

Nevertheless, this had a positive effect and strengthened the ranks of the Bible Students. The most faithful remained (the majority), and this test brought them even closer together.

Even after the death of Russell, efforts were made to develop the framework of basic teachings and to clarify some of them. Some common Christian teachings were declared unbiblical right from the beginning and some were rejected over time.

This work is still in progress.

One of the prominent modern religious experts, Professor Ekaterina Sergeevna Elbakyan, defines Jehovah's Witnesses by saying the following: "[The] foundation of their teachings is very close to 'historical' Christianity in its Protestant variation."²

In the comprehensive publication *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, it is stated that Jehovah's Witnesses "have not set out to introduce new doctrines, a new way of worship, a new religion (*i.e. to be separated from Christianity. And this needs to be highlighted – A.A. author's notes*). Instead, their modern-day history reflects conscientious effort to teach what is found in the Bible, the inspired Word of God. They point to it as the basis for all their beliefs and their way of life. Instead of developing beliefs that reflect the permissive trends of the modern world, they have sought to conform ever

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - pp. 66-69.

² *New Religions in Russia: 20 Years Later: Materials of the International Scientific Practical Conference*. Moscow, December 14, 2012 - pp. 119.

more closely to the Biblical teachings and practices of first-century Christianity.¹

Therefore, the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses do not include the Nicene Creed, a statement of belief widely used in Christian liturgy. The statement was originally adopted in the city of Nicaea by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C. E., after the writing of the Bible had been completed.

Their understanding that the Bible is the only basis for true Christianity is combined with the belief that God continues providing an ever more accurate understanding of Bible truths and prophecies through his "faithful and discreet slave." As a result, teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses are being gradually cleansed of "non-Biblical doctrines."² Therefore, Russell's words from 1909 remain the motto: "Never forget that the Bible is our Standard and that however God-given our helps may be they are 'helps' and not substitutes for the Bible."³

Another main feature that characterizes Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings is that they constantly change, or as Jehovah's Witnesses say, understanding of certain Bible prophecies is refined. Although key doctrines remain unchanged, the explanation of certain prophecies, teachings, and parables may be refined.

As regularly noted in *The Watchtower*, Jehovah's Witnesses are trying to avoid being dogmatic and speculation about things that are not yet clear. They openly admit that they do not have answers to all the questions.

And this is exactly what Jehovah's Witnesses consider as a sign that proves that what they believe is true. Here is their comment on this:

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - pp. 120.

² A.P. Zabayako, A.N. Krasnikova, and E.S. Elbakyan editors. *Encyclopedia of Religions* - Moscow, Academic Project, Gaudeamus, 2008 - p. 1130.

³ *The Watchtower*—Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 1995 - p. 13.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses freely acknowledge that their understanding of God’s purpose has undergone many adjustments over the years. The fact that knowledge of God’s purpose is progressive means that there must be change. It is not that God’s purpose changes, but the enlightenment that he continuously grants to his servants calls for adjustments in their viewpoint ... Such changes are in harmony with the Bible principle stated at Proverbs 4:18: ‘The path of the righteous is like the bright morning light that grows brighter and brighter until full daylight.’ Just as the rising sun reveals details of a landscape gradually, God grants an understanding of divine truth progressively, in his due time. (1 Peter 1:10-12) As the Bible foretold, he has accelerated this process during ‘the time of the end.’ (Daniel 12:4) Ancient worshippers of God also had mistaken ideas and expectations and needed to adjust their viewpoint. We do not try to hide these changes in our understanding of the Bible. In fact, we record and publish them. For example, see the ‘Beliefs Clarified’ entry in the online reference to our publications.¹”

The most comprehensive list of recent changes in organizational arrangements as well as doctrinal questions and moral views was published in the *2016 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses*². The table contained 26 clarifications made in the period from 2012 to 2015³. Although some things are still being refined, the key teachings, as we already mentioned, remain unchanged. In the second edition, I provided a list of beliefs from the brochure *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Twentieth Century*, published in 1994. Now, after a quarter of a century, I can say that all these key beliefs remain the same. They are listed below:

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *Watch Tower Publications Index 1986-2021*, “Beliefs Clarified,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200277174>).

² *2016 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2016 - p. 25, electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/302016051#h=3>).

³ According to the Watchtower Online Library website of Jehovah’s Witnesses, from 2016 to 2020 there were 24 more clarifications made.

Belief	Scriptural Reason
1. Bible is God's Word and is truth	2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; John 17:17
2. Bible is more reliable than church tradition	Matt. 15:3; Col. 2:8
3. God's name is Jehovah	Ps. 83:18; Isa. 26:4; 42:8, AS; Ex. 6:3
4. Jesus is not equal to God and is inferior to him	Matt. 3:17; John 8:42; 14:28; Joh 20:17; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28
5. Christ was first of God's creations	Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14
6. Christ died on a stake, not a cross	Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30
7. Christ's human life was paid as a ransom for obedient humans	Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24
8. Christ's one sacrifice is sufficient	Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:25-28
9. Christ was raised from the dead as an immortal spirit person	1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:17, 18
10. Christ's presence is in spirit	John 14:19; Matt. 24:3; 2 Cor. 5:16; Ps. 110:1, 2
11. God's Kingdom under Christ will rule earth in righteousness and peace	Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-5; Dan. 7:13, 14; Matt. 6:10
12. God's Kingdom will bring ideal living conditions to earth	Ps. 72:1-4; Rev. 7:9, 10, 13-17; 21:3, 4
13. Earth will never be destroyed or depopulated	Eccl. 1:4; Isa. 45:18; Ps. 78:69
14. God will destroy only wicked people in the Battle of Armageddon	Rev. 16:14, 16; Zeph. 3:8; Dan. 2:44; Isa. 34:2
15. Wicked will be eternally destroyed	Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9

16. People God approves will receive eternal life	John 3:16; 10:27, 28; 17:3; Mark 10:29, 30
17. There is only one road to life	Matt. 7:13, 14; Eph. 4:4, 5
18. We are living in the 'last days'	Matt. 24:3-14; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Luke 17:26-30
19. Human death is due to Adam's sin	Rom. 5:12; 6:23
20. The human soul ceases to exist at death	Ezek. 18:4; Eccl. 9:10; Ps. 6:5; 146:4; John 11:11-14
21. Hell is mankind's common grave	Job 14:13, Dy; Rev. 20:13, 14, AV (margin)
22. Resurrection hope for the dead	1 Cor. 15:20-22; John 5:28, 29; Joh 11:25, 26
23. Adamic death will cease	1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 21:4; Isa. 25:8; 1 Cor. 15:54
24. Only a "little flock" of 144,000 go to heaven and rule with Christ	Luke 12:32; Rev. 14:1, 3; 1 Cor. 15:40-53; Rev. 5:9, 10
25. The 144,000 are born again as spiritual sons of God	1 Pet. 1:23; John 3:3; Rev. 7:3, 4
26. New covenant made with spiritual Israel	Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:10-13
27. Congregation is built upon Christ	Eph. 2:20; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42
28. Prayers must be directed only to Jehovah through Christ	John 14:6, 13, 14; 1 Tim. 2:5
29. Images must not be used in worship	Ex. 20:4, 5; Lev. 26:1; 1 Cor. 10:14; Ps. 115:4-8
30. Spiritism must be shunned	Deut. 18:10-12; Gal. 5:19-21; Lev. 19:31

31. Satan is the invisible ruler of the world	1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31
32. A Christian must have no part in interfaith movements	2 Cor. 6:14-17; 11:13-15; Gal. 5:9; Deut. 7:1-5
33. A Christian must keep separate from the world	Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15; John 15:19; 17:16
34. All human laws that do not conflict with God's laws should be obeyed	Matt. 22:20, 21; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:15
35. Taking blood into the body through mouth or veins violates God's laws	Gen. 9:3, 4; Lev. 17:14; Acts 15:28, 29
36. Bible's laws on morals must be obeyed	1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 3:2; Prov. 5:1-23
37. Sabbath observance was given only to the Jews and ended with Mosaic Law	Deut. 5:15; Ex. 31:13; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:9, 10; Col. 2:16, 17
38. A clergy class and special titles are improper	Matt. 23:8-12; 20:25-27; Job 32:21, 22
39. Man did not evolve but was created	Isa. 45:12; Gen. 1:27
40. Christ set an example in serving God that must be followed	1 Pet. 2:21; Heb. 10:7; John 4:34; 6:38
41. Baptism by complete immersion symbolizes dedication to God	Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:23; Acts 19:4, 5
42. Christians must bear witness to Bible truth	Rom. 10:10; Heb. 13:15; Isa. 43:10-12

Thus, the table of the *basic beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses contains 42 positions.*

It is worth mentioning that in the ten years since the previous edition, the resources available to learn about the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses have become more numerous.

First, Jehovah's Witnesses have created an online library where you can find the publications they have published. You can find publications that were published in Russian starting from 1986 and in English starting from 1950.

The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, has also become available in Russian in the online library. It is dedicated exclusively to the Bible and does not deal with the modern history of Jehovah's Witnesses. In addition to purely encyclopedic information about places, people, and events described in the Bible, this work also contains explanations of the main beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses. That is what makes it so valuable for my research.

Second, Jehovah's Witnesses have been actively using their own websites in recent years. They even have started their own internet streaming channel. Their official website has different sections in which they explain their position on certain issues and give detailed information about their beliefs.

Thus, I had much more information at my disposal than before.

When explaining Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs, I think it is very important to rely on the original source of information that is in publications of Jehovah's Witnesses. I will give my personal opinion only when it is necessary. This gives our readers a chance to learn about Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs in their pure form, avoiding fallacy of judgment. In turn, it will help them to form their own opinion on the subject.

Let us take a closer look at every belief of Jehovah's Witnesses.

1. Bible Is God's Word and Is Truth

Yes, the Bible is the essential book for Jehovah's Witnesses, the Book of all books, the indisputable authority. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the entire Bible is "inspired of God and beneficial." (2 Timothy 3:16) They are convinced that they follow the path that Jesus, his apostles, and Christians of the first century set.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the whole Bible is the Word of God. Thus, they consider all of its 66 books to be inspired and historically accurate. What is commonly called the New Testament they refer to as the Christian Greek Scriptures and the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. Jehovah's Witnesses explain, "in this way, we avoid giving the impression that some parts of the Bible are outdated or irrelevant."¹ This emphasizes the key role of the Bible.

In 1896 the word "Bible" was officially included in the name of the publishing corporation of the Bible Students at that time.

Jehovah's Witnesses rely on both the Greek and the Hebrew Scriptures and take them literally except where the context or some expressions obviously indicate that they are figurative or symbolic. Another clarification of this question was made in a Watchtower of 2015: "Humans cannot know which Bible accounts are shadows of things to come and which are not. The clearest course is this: Where the Scriptures teach that an individual, an event, or an object is typical of something else, we accept it as such. Otherwise, we ought to be reluctant to assign an antitypical application to a certain person or account if there is no specific Scriptural basis for doing so."²

They interpret the process of the writing of the Bible as follows:

"... just as God used his powerful holy spirit to create the heavens, the earth and all living things, he also used it to direct the writing of the Bible.

"This means that the Bible has only one author, Jehovah God. He used men to write the information down, much as a businessman uses a secretary to write a letter. The secretary writes the letter, but the letter contains the thoughts and ideas of the businessman. So it is his letter, not the secretary's, even as the Bible is God's Book, not the book of the men who were used to write it ...

¹ jw.org, "Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe in the Old Testament?" electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/belief-in-old-and-new-testaments/>).

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 15, 2015 - p. 17.

“Even today a person can sit in his home and receive messages from a faraway place by means of a radio or a television set. The voices or pictures travel over long distances by the use of physical laws that God created. It is, therefore, easy to understand that Jehovah, from his place far away in the heavens, could direct men to write down the information that he wanted the human family to know. The result has been a marvelous Book.¹”

Jehovah’s Witnesses view the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament” as one book. They do not share the opinions of those who believe that the “Old Testament” is for the Jews, and the “New Testament” is for Christians. They refer to the whole Bible, “therefore, a proper study of the Scriptures must include the entire Bible,” since “actually, the two parts of the Bible complement each other, blending harmoniously to develop an overall theme.”² “... the Bible, although a collection of different books, is one unified production. It is unified in that, from beginning to end, it promotes worship of just one God whose characteristics never change, and all its books develop one overriding theme.”³

The writers of the 66 Bible books, in the Witnesses’ opinion, were those people who are mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. These are “God’s secretaries:” Moses, Joshua and others—about 40 men in total.

They do not doubt Bible chronology either. Unlike the Orthodox and Catholics, they recognize only canonical books in Hebrew, that is, 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). They do not include in their editions 11 uncanonical books, or deuterocanonical ones, believing that they were not inspired by God.

In general, the subject of the canon and the apocrypha is covered quite well in the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses. For example, in the

¹ *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 - pp. 48-49.

² *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 - p. 13.

³ *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 - p. 149.

encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*, there are articles on these topics, examining in detail all possible questions and issues. In the book *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, there is a chapter entitled “The Bible and Its Canon.” If someone is interested, the topic can be found easily in the Watchtower Online Library¹.

In general, Bible study plays a key role in the worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses. They do not study it from a theological point of view only; great attention is also paid to history and archeology. The following books published by Jehovah’s Witnesses should be highlighted: The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* is a fundamental work that includes articles on all names, titles, and places found in the Bible as well as articles on numerous related topics. The book *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* contains descriptions and comments on each of the Bible books and also provides additional detailed background information. It includes geography of Biblical lands, chronology and chronological systems in antiquity, the history of the Bible canon, the history of Bible translations, and the history of the manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. In 2003, a 36-page color brochure entitled *See the Good Land* was published containing charts, maps, illustrations, computer images, and a lot of additional information on the geography and history of Biblical lands. In the 2013 revision of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, special attention is paid to appendices, which provide a large amount of additional information on the history and geography of Biblical lands. A tremendous work preparing an online study edition of the Bible began in 2017. Extensive encyclopedic appendices, including text, illustrations, and even videos complement each Bible book.

There is a common misconception that Jehovah’s Witnesses have their own translation of the Bible and do not recognize other translations. This is not true. Jehovah’s Witnesses appreciate any Bible translation, as this greatly expands their field of activity. They

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial*, “Studies on the Inspired Scriptures and Their Background. Study Number 4—The Bible and Its Canon,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1101990131>).

do not agree with those Christian religions and denominations which use only one translation of the Holy Book in their worship and preaching.

Jehovah's Witnesses make the following comment on that topic: "Even prior to 1896, the Society was doing much as a Bible distributor. Not for commercial gain but as a service to its readers, it drew attention to various Bible translations that were available, bought them in large quantities so as to obtain good rates, and then made them available for a price that was sometimes only 35 percent of the list price. Included among these were numerous editions of the *King James Version* that were easy to carry and use, also larger 'Teachers' Bibles' (*King James Version* with such helps as a concordance, maps, and marginal references), *The Emphatic Diaglott* with its Greek-to-English interlinear rendering, Leaser's translation that placed the English text alongside the Hebrew, Murdock's translation from ancient Syriac, *The Newberry Bible* with its marginal references that drew attention to occurrences of the divine name in the original language as well as other valuable details reflected in the Hebrew and Greek text, Tischendorf's *New Testament* with its footnote references to variant readings in three of the most complete ancient Greek Bible manuscripts (Sinaitic, Vatican, and Alexandrine), the *Variorum Bible* with its footnotes that set out not only variant readings of ancient manuscripts but also various translations of portions of the text by eminent scholars, and Young's literal translation. The Society also made available such helps as *Cruden's Concordance* and *Young's Analytical Concordance* with its comments on the original Hebrew and Greek words. In the years that followed, around the globe Jehovah's Witnesses frequently obtained from other Bible societies many thousands of Bibles in whatever languages were available and distributed these...

"In 1902 a special printing of the Holman Linear Parallel Edition of the Bible was made by arrangement of the Watch Tower Society...

“In 1907, the Bible Students Edition of the *King James Version* was published. In 1926 the Watch Tower Society printed and bound a Bible in its own factory.¹”

Official libraries of Jehovah’s Witnesses prove that even today they use various Bible translations. For example, the Watchtower Online Library in English (<https://wol.jw.org>) offers a choice of Bible translations (in Russian there are as yet only three translations). In the JW Library mobile application in Russian, there is also a choice of Bible translations: Russian synodal Bible, the Bible translation of Makarios and Pavsky (the Hebrew Scriptures), and the *New World Translation*. In their publications they also often quote Bible verses from other known translations.

Another proof that Jehovah’s Witnesses appreciate other Bible translations is the fact that in 1996 they published a Bible edition that contained the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by Archimandrite Makarios, Psalms by the Russian archpriest G.P. Pavsky and the Greek Scriptures reprinted from the synodal edition of 1863.

The foreword to this edition says, “Starting in 1834 and for over ten years, Makarios was fulfilling his dream—with great enthusiasm he was translating the Holy Scriptures from Hebrew into Russian. He was eager to make all canonical books of the Bible available to all Russian people in every house. He wanted to create a translation based entirely on the originals while at the same time dignifying the linguistic purity of the Russian language so that nobody would doubt or criticize its accuracy and clarity. In his letters, he repeatedly wrote: ‘Not from the affection for the Russian language comes my concern but from the desire that all people have free and easy access to the understanding of the God’s Word so that by means of its comprehensibility, the Holy Bible would turn minds and hearts to the path of light and truth.’²”

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – pp. 605-606.

² *The Holy Scriptures. Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by Archimandrite Makarios* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996.

The Psalms translated by Gerasim Petrovich Pavsky, whom Macarius considered to be his teacher, was published in 1822 in St. Petersburg by the Russian Bible Society. Over the next two years, the book was reprinted 13 times, reaching a total of 100,000 copies. One publication considers this translation “a historical monument:” “Indeed, this was the first time the Old Testament was translated by a scholar fluent in both Hebrew and Russian. In the following years, translators would use his work as a basis in one way or another...”¹

Nonetheless, Jehovah’s Witnesses have their own translation of the Bible, the *New World Translation*. The work on the English translation started in 1947, and it was released in parts. The complete Bible as a new translation was published only in 1961. A revised translation of this edition in modern English was published in 2013. *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* in Russian was first published in 2001, and later in 2007, the release of *The New World Translation of the entire Bible* was announced. In 2010 the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* was printed in the Kazakh language. At the 2014 regional convention in Almaty, the release of the entire Bible in the Kazakh language was announced.

Jehovah’s Witnesses state: “Millions of readers have discovered the New World Translation to be not only readable but scrupulously accurate. Its translators worked from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, using the best texts available. Unusual care was also exercised to render the ancient text as literally as possible but in language that would readily be understood. Accordingly, some scholars praised this translation for its integrity and accuracy. For example, the *Andover Newton Quarterly* of January 1963 said: “The translation of the New Testament is evidence of the presence in the movement of scholars qualified to deal intelligently with the many problems of Biblical translation.”² Translations into other languages are based on the English-language version of the *New World Translation*.

¹ Ibid - p. 6.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 15, 1999 – p. 29.

Currently, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* has been partially or fully translated and released in more than 190 languages.

The Introduction to the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Russian says: “The Holy Bible is a written revelation from the Sovereign Lord Jehovah to all people on this earth. This inspired book has global appeal, since it contains good news of a God-designed Messianic Kingdom that will establish peace and righteousness forever ...

“The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic (a language related to Hebrew), and common (*koi•ne*) Greek. Since relatively few people today understand these languages, it has become necessary to translate the Holy Bible into modern languages to present its life-giving message to people of all nations.

“This new Russian translation of the Bible is based on the 1984 English edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. It includes the 39 books of the Hebrew-Aramaic Scriptures and a revised edition of the Russian translation of the 27 books of the Christian Greek Scriptures issued in 2001. The ‘New World Bible’ Translation Committee decided to designate the two parts of the Holy Scriptures based on languages rather than on a claimed ‘Testament (Covenant)’ division. Such a decision was made because in reality, the Bible is a single work and none of its parts can be called obsolete, or ‘old.’ Its main theme is emphasized from the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures to the last book of the Greek Scriptures. There are more than 125,000 marginal (cross) references and Bible words indexed in this edition.

“Since the Bible sets forth the sacred will of the Sovereign Lord of the universe, it would be a great indignity, indeed an affront to his majesty and authority, to omit or hide his unique divine name, which plainly occurs in the Hebrew text nearly 7,000 times. Therefore, the foremost feature of this translation is the restoration of the divine name to its rightful place in the Bible text. It has been done, using the commonly accepted Russian form ‘Jehovah,’ 6,973 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and 237 times in the Christian Greek Scriptures.

“The translators who prepared this work love God—the Author of the Holy Scriptures—and are especially responsible to him to ensure that his thoughts and words are conveyed as accurately as possible. They also realize their responsibility to inquisitive readers, whose eternal salvation depends on the translation of the inspired Word of the Most High God. We sincerely hope that with this translation the reader will find the way to endless life in the new world of righteousness, which the Almighty will establish.—Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13¹”.

This reverent attitude toward the Bible reflects the second important belief of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

2. Bible Is More Reliable than Church Tradition

The holy, or apostolic, tradition (lat. *traditio*, literally “transmission”) is a set of religious provisions and constitutions recognized by Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The Orthodox Church refers to the Holy Tradition as the materials of the first seven ecumenical councils, the writings of the Church Fathers (mainly from the first eight centuries after the birth of Christ), and some aspects of liturgical practice. Catholics add to this list the decisions of the popes and of their councils.

The main task of the Holy Tradition is to support and justify the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures as well as to interpret its most important provisions. Therefore, both Orthodox believers and Catholics consider the Holy Tradition equivalent to the Holy Scriptures.

The theology has the following point of view: since the Holy Tradition determines the final set of the Holy Books included in the Bible, the Holy Tradition is more authoritative than the Holy Scriptures.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, like the vast majority of Protestant religions and denominations, do not consider the Holy Tradition to be a divine revelation; they believe that only the Bible is inspired. And everything beyond it, in their opinion, is a product of human invention.

¹ *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 – p. 5.

3. God's Name Is Jehovah

God has many titles (some other religions believe that these are not titles but God's names). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God has a personal name - Jehovah. They are convinced that God's personal name, represented by the Tetragrammaton (YHWH or JHVH), appears almost 7,000 times in the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jehovah's Witnesses repeatedly note that the original way to pronounce this name is unknown today. The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* notes: "Jehovah' is the best known English pronunciation of the divine name, although 'Yahweh' is favored by most Hebrew scholars ... Still, there is by no means unanimity among scholars on the subject, some favoring yet other pronunciations, such as 'Yahuwa,' 'Yahuah,' or 'Yehuah.'" Also, the article states that "the oldest Hebrew manuscripts present the name in the form of four consonants יהוה, commonly called the Tetragrammaton (from Greek *te•tra-*, meaning 'four,' and *gram'ma*, 'letter'). These four letters (written from right to left) are יהוה and may be transliterated into English as *YHWH* (or *JHVH*)."

Jehovah's Witnesses feel that uncertainty about the ancient pronunciation of God's name is no reason for not using the common rendering of that name and trying to find the correct pronunciation. That same article stated: "If such a change were made, then, to be consistent, changes should be made in the spelling and pronunciation of a host of other names found in the Scriptures: Jeremiah would be changed to Yirmeyah, Isaiah would become Yesha•yahu, and Jesus would be either Yehohshua (as in Hebrew) or Iesous (as in Greek). The purpose of words is to transmit thoughts; in English the name Jehovah identifies the true God, transmitting this thought more satisfactorily today than any of the suggested substitutes."²

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *Insight on the Scriptures*, "Jehovah," electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002391>).

² Ibid.

To prove that God's name is Jehovah, Jehovah's Witnesses also refer to non-Biblical sources, particularly:

"In 1961 an ancient burial cave was uncovered a short distance to the southwest of Jerusalem, according to a report in the *Israel Exploration Journal* (Volume 13, No. 2). On its walls were Hebrew inscriptions that appear to date from the second half of the eighth century B.C.E. The inscriptions contain statements such as 'Jehovah is the God of the whole earth.'

"In 1966 a report was published in the *Israel Exploration Journal* (Volume 16, No. 1) about pottery fragments with Hebrew writing on them that were found in Arad, in southern Israel. These were written in the second half of the seventh century B.C.E. One of them was a private letter to a man named Eliashib. The letter begins: 'To my lord Eliashib: May Jehovah ask for your peace.' And it ends: 'He dwells in the house of Jehovah.'

"In 1975 and 1976, archaeologists working in the Negeb uncovered a collection of Hebrew and Phoenician inscriptions on plaster walls, large storage jars and stone vessels. The inscriptions included the Hebrew word for God, as well as God's name, YHWH, in Hebrew letters. In Jerusalem itself, there was recently discovered a small, rolled-up strip of silver, apparently dating from before the Babylonian exile. Researchers say that when it was unrolled, the name of Jehovah in Hebrew was found to be written on it.—*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 1983, page 18.

"Another example of the use of God's name is found in the so-called Lachish Letters. These letters, written on potsherds, were found between the years 1935 and 1938 in the ruins of Lachish, a fortified city that figured prominently in Israel's history. They appear to have been written by an officer at a Judean outpost to his superior, named Yaosh, at Lachish, apparently during the war between Israel and Babylon toward the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

"Of the eight legible shards, seven begin their message with a salutation such as: 'May Jehovah cause my lord to see this season in

good health!' Altogether, God's name appears 11 times in the seven messages, clearly indicating that the name of Jehovah enjoyed everyday usage toward the end of the seventh century B.C.E.

"Even pagan rulers knew and used the divine name when referring to the God of the Israelites. Thus, on the Moabite Stone, King Mesha of Moab boasts of his military exploits against Israel and, among other things, states: 'Chemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel!" So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all . . . And I took from there the [vessels] of Jehovah, dragging them before Chemosh.'

"In reference to these non-Biblical uses of the name of God, the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament), in Volume 3, column 538, says: 'Thus some 19 documentary evidences of the Tetragrammaton in the form jhwh testify in this regard to the reliability of the M[asoretic] T[ext]; more can be expected, above all from the Arad-Archives.'—Translated from German.¹"

In the Russian synodal Bible, the name Jehovah appears only nine times. Therefore, in the opinion of Jehovah's Witnesses, the translation of the Holy Scriptures made by Archimandrite Makarios and archpriest G.P. Pavsky G, follows the original text.

In fact, the form of God's name "Jehovah" is widely known. Famous writers, poets, and translators of foreign literature have used it in their works.

F. Engels used the form "Jehovah." This form was used by Karl Marx in Volume 1 of his monumental work *Capital*. Jack London, Rudyard Kipling, Nikolai Ostrovsky, and Walter Scott also used this name in their works.

Remember the words from *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky: "Old, silvery-haired Peisakh stood in the doorway, his blue

¹ *The Divine Name That Will Endure Forever* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1994 - pp. 12-13.

eyes wide open like a frightened child's, and he whispered a prayer to almighty Jehovah with all the passion of the fanatical believer. He prayed to God to protect this house from misfortune, and for a while the old woman standing beside him could not hear the approaching footsteps for the mumble of his supplication." (Chapter 4, page 100)¹.

Another example—the poem *Hymn before Action* by Rudyard Kipling:

The earth is full of anger,
The seas are dark with wrath,
The Nations in their harness
Go up against our path:
Ere yet we loose the legions —
Ere yet we draw the blade,
Jehovah of the Thunders,
Lord God of Battles, aid!
* * *
E'en now their vanguard gathers,
E'en now we face the fray —
As Thou didst help our fathers,
Help Thou our host to-day.
Fulfilled of signs and wonders,
In life, in death made clear —
Jehovah of the Thunders,
Lord God of Battles, hear²!

¹ N. A. Ostrovsky, R. Prokofieva translator. *How the Steel Was Tempered* – Sydney, Australia, Communist Party of Australia, 2002.

² R. Kipling. *Hymn before Action* – 1922, electronic ref., (<https://www.bartleby.com/364/170.html>).

Therefore, people who say that Jehovah's Witnesses allegedly invented this name in fact only show their own low level of religious literacy.

4. Jesus Is Not Equal to God and Is Inferior to Him

According to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is not equal to God and hence there is no Trinity. We already discussed this in the first chapter of this book. From the very beginning, Bible Students rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. *Zion's Watch Tower* said in 1887: "The Scriptures are very clear concerning the distinct individuality and exact relationship of Jehovah and our Lord Jesus." The article then noted how amazing it was that "the idea of a triune God—three Gods in one, and at the same time, one God in three—should ever have gained prominence and general acceptance. But the fact that it is so only goes to show how soundly the church slept while the enemy bound her in the chains of error."¹

The official website of Jehovah's Witnesses gives the following explanation on the position of Jesus:

"Jesus' opposers accused him of making himself equal to God. (John 5:18; 10:30-33) However, Jesus never claimed to be on the same level as Almighty God. He said: 'The Father is greater than I am.'—John 14:28.

"Jesus' early followers did not view him as being equal to Almighty God. For example, the apostle Paul wrote that after Jesus was resurrected, God 'exalted him [Jesus] to a superior position.' Obviously, Paul did not believe that Jesus was Almighty God. Otherwise, how could God exalt Jesus to a superior position? —Philippians 2:9."²

"It is ironic that in the Roman Empire, one of the accusations brought against the early Christians was that they were atheists.

¹ *God's Kingdom Rules!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 - pp. 14-15.

² jw.org, "Is Jesus Almighty God?" electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-jesus-almighty/>).

Dr. Augustus Neander writes: ‘The deniers of the gods, the atheists ... was the common name by which the Christians were designated among the people.’ How strange that Christians, who worshiped the living Creator and not multiple gods, should be dubbed atheists by pagans who worshiped “no gods, but the workmanship of man’s hands, wood and stone ... —Isaiah 37:19.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses accept Jesus’ own testimony as to who he is. He stated: ‘I am God’s Son,’ not, ‘I am God the Son.’ (John 10:36; compare John 20:31.) They accept the apostle Paul’s inspired statement concerning Christ: ‘Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped.’ (Philippians 2:6, *The New Jerusalem Bible*) The book *The Paganism in Our Christianity* states: ‘Jesus Christ never mentioned such a phenomenon [a coequal Trinity], and nowhere in the New Testament does the word “Trinity” appear.’¹”

The official website of Jehovah’s Witnesses gives the following answer to the question “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Christians?”:

“Yes. We are Christians for the following reasons:

- “We try to follow closely the teachings and behavior of Jesus Christ.—1 Peter 2:21.
- “We believe that Jesus is the key to salvation, that ‘there is not another name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved.’—Acts 4:12.
- “When people become Jehovah’s Witnesses, they are baptized in the name of Jesus.—Matthew 28:18, 19.
- “We offer our prayers in Jesus’ name.—John 15:16.
- “We believe that Jesus is the Head, or the one appointed to have authority, over every man.—1 Corinthians 11:3.”²

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., July 1, 1993 - p. 16.

² jw.org, “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Christians?” electronic ref, (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/are-jehovahs-witnesses-christians/>).

5. Christ Was First of God's Creations

Jehovah's Witnesses make the following comment on this teaching:

“The Bible teaches that Jesus lived in heaven for a long time before he came to earth. Micah said that the Messiah was ‘from ancient times.’ (Micah 5:2) Jesus himself said many times that he had lived in heaven before being born as a human. (Read John 3:13; 6:38, 62; 17:4, 5.) Even before coming to earth, Jesus had a special relationship with Jehovah.

“Jesus is very precious to Jehovah. Why? Because God created him before everything and everyone else. So Jesus is called ‘the firstborn of all creation.’ (Colossians 1:15) Jesus is also precious to Jehovah because he is the only one Jehovah created directly. That is why he is called the ‘only-begotten Son.’ (John 3:16) Jesus is also the only one Jehovah used to create all other things. (Colossians 1:16) And only Jesus is called ‘the Word,’ because Jehovah used him to give messages and instructions to angels and humans. (John 1:14)

“Some people believe that Jesus and God are one and the same person. What does the Bible teach? The Bible says that Jesus was created, which means that Jesus had a beginning. But Jehovah, who created all things, had no beginning. (Psalm 90:2) As God's Son, Jesus never thought of trying to be God. The Bible clearly teaches that the Father is greater than the Son. Only Jehovah is ‘God Almighty.’ (Genesis 17:1) He is the greatest and most powerful person in the universe.¹”

Jehovah's Witnesses fully recognize the earthly life of Jesus, but there is one nuance.

6. Christ Died on a Stake, Not on a Cross

In this postulate Jehovah's Witnesses primarily refer to the Bible. As we know, the cross as an instrument of Jesus' execution was first mentioned in some literature of the 2nd century AD, 150 years after Jesus' death. It becomes a symbol of Christian belief much later. And

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - pp. 44-45.

as we have already mentioned, since Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept traditions and base their beliefs only on the Bible, they could not ignore this question.

At once we will notice that they did not come to this conclusion right away. Originally, they used a cross on the cover of their *Watchtower* magazine, and Bible Students wore a pin with a cross and a crown. However, over time a question arose about how to translate the Biblical expression “torture stake” used in connection with the execution of Jesus at Golgotha (which literally means ‘Skull’ or ‘Skull place’) (Matthew 27:33). “There is no evidence that the Greek word *stau•ros*’ here meant a cross such as the pagans used as a religious symbol for many centuries before Christ.¹”

Why? They write: “In the classical Greek the word *stau•ros*’ meant merely an upright stake, or pale, or a pile such as is used for a foundation. The verb *stau•ro*’o meant to fence with pales, to form a stockade, or palisade ...

“The inspired writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures wrote in the common (*koi•ne*’) Greek and used the word *stau•ros*’ to mean the same thing as in the classical Greek, namely, a simple stake, or pale, without a crossbeam of any kind at any angle. There is no proof to the contrary. The apostles Peter and Paul also use the word *xy’lon* to refer to the torture instrument upon which Jesus was nailed, and this shows that it was an upright stake without a crossbeam, for that is what *xy’lon* in this special sense means. (Ac 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Ga 3:13; 1Pe 2:24) In LXX we find *xy’lon* in Ezr 6:11 (1 Esdras 6:31), and there it is spoken of as a beam on which the violator of law was to be hanged, the same as in Ac 5:30; 10:39.”

Based on this, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that “evidence is, therefore, completely lacking that Jesus Christ was crucified on two pieces of timber placed at right angles.²”

¹ *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 - p. 1577.

² *Ibid.*

You need to give credit to Jehovah's Witnesses for being rather serious and presenting very strong arguments to support their view. Here is, for example, some information from their encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*:

“What does the original Greek reveal as to the shape of the instrument on which Jesus was put to death?

“Most Bible translations say Christ was ‘crucified’ rather than ‘impaled.’ This is because of the common belief that the torture instrument upon which he was hung was a ‘cross made of two pieces of wood instead of a single pale, or stake. Tradition, not the Scriptures, also says that the condemned man carried only the crossbeam of the cross, called the *patibulum*, or *antenna*, instead of both parts. In this way some try to avoid the predicament of having too much weight for one man to drag or carry to Golgotha.

“Yet, what did the Bible writers themselves say about these matters? They used the Greek noun *stau•ros*’ 27 times and the verbs *stau•ro*’o 46 times, *syn•stau•ro*’o (the prefix *syn*, meaning ‘with’) 5 times, and *a•na•stau•ro*’o (*a•na*’, meaning ‘again’) once. They also used the Greek word *xy’lon*, meaning ‘wood,’ 5 times to refer to the torture instrument upon which Jesus was nailed.

“*Stau•ros*’ in both the classical Greek and Koine carries no thought of a ‘cross’ made of two timbers. It means only an upright stake, pale, pile, or pole, as might be used for a fence, stockade, or palisade. Says Douglas’ *New Bible Dictionary* of 1985 under ‘Cross,’ page 253: ‘The Gk. word for “cross” (*stauros*; verb *stauroo* . . .) means primarily an upright stake or beam, and secondarily a stake used as an instrument for punishment and execution.’

“The fact that Luke, Peter, and Paul also used *xy’lon* as a synonym for *stau•ros*’ gives added evidence that Jesus was impaled on an upright stake without a crossbeam, for that is what *xy’lon* in this special sense means. (Ac 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Ga 3:13; 1Pe 2:24) *Xy’lon* also occurs in the Greek *Septuagint* at Ezra 6:11, where it speaks of a single beam or timber on which a lawbreaker was to be impaled.

“*The New World Translation*, therefore, faithfully conveys to the reader this basic idea of the Greek text by rendering *stau•ros*’ as ‘torture stake,’ and the verb *stau•ro•o* as ‘impale,’ that is, to fasten on a stake, or pole. In this way there is no confusion of *stau•ros*’ with the traditional ecclesiastical crosses. The matter of one man like Simon of Cyrene bearing a torture stake, as the Scriptures say, is perfectly reasonable, for if it was 15 cm (6 in.) in diameter and 3.5 m (11 ft) long, it probably weighed little more than 45 kg (100 lb).—Mr 15:21.

“Note what W. E. Vine says on this subject: ‘STAUROS (σταυρός) denotes, primarily, an upright pale or stake. On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *stau•ro•o*, to fasten to a stake or pale, are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed cross.’ Greek scholar Vine then mentions the Chaldean origin of the two-piece cross and how it was adopted from the pagans by Christendom in the third century C.E. as a symbol of Christ’s impalement.—*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1981, Vol. 1, p. 256.

“Significant is this comment in the book *The Cross in Ritual, Architecture, and Art*: ‘It is strange, yet unquestionably a fact, that in ages long before the birth of Christ, and since then in lands untouched by the teaching of the Church, the Cross has been used as a sacred symbol. ... The Greek Bacchus, the Tyrian Tammuz, the Chaldean Bel, and the Norse Odin, were all symbolised to their votaries by a cruciform device.’—By G. S. Tyack, London, 1900, p. 1.

“The book *The Non-Christian Cross*, by J. D. Parsons (London, 1896), adds: ‘There is not a single sentence in any of the numerous writings forming the New Testament, which, in the original Greek, bears even indirect evidence to the effect that the *stauros* used in the case of Jesus was other than an ordinary *stauros*; much less to the effect that it consisted, not of one piece of timber, but of two pieces nailed together in the form of a cross. . . . It is not a little misleading upon the part of our teachers to translate the word *stauros* as ‘cross’ when rendering the Greek documents of the Church into our native tongue, and to support

that action by putting ‘cross’ in our lexicons as the meaning of *stauros* without carefully explaining that that was at any rate not the primary meaning of the word in the days of the Apostles, did not become its primary signification till long afterwards, and became so then, if at all, only because, despite the absence of corroborative evidence, it was for some reason or other assumed that the particular *stauros* upon which Jesus was executed had that particular shape.’—pp. 23, 24; see also *The Companion Bible*, 1974, Appendix No. 162.¹

Additionally, Soviet atheistic religious scholars wrote in great detail about the use of the symbol of a cross in ancient pagan religions around the world. Some of these works are readily available online and in public libraries.

In conclusion, I will cite another, in my opinion, highly authoritative source: the *Christianity Encyclopedic Dictionary*: “What form and type was the cross of Jesus Christ —the archaeologists have not identified with accuracy ... As a means of execution in the ancient world, the cross in different parts of the Roman Empire had a different form: sometimes just vertically mounted timber or log, sometimes two beams, folded like the letters X (*crux decussate*. Later, the Burgundy cross); sometimes two beams —the longer one was fixed vertically in the ground and the other, small, attached horizontally to the ground, so the cross resembled the letter T (Egyptian cross shape, *CRPUX commissa velpatibulata*)²...” Interestingly, historically there are more than 20 different types of crosses. Christianity accepts 15 of them.

It is apparent that execution on a stake really existed and was used in the past. Thus, we cannot say that Jehovah’s Witnesses’ point of view has no basis.

Finally, the instrument of execution (a cross or a stake) is not so important for Jehovah’s Witnesses because they do not use it in their

¹ [jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Impalement,” electronic ref., \(https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002159\).](https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002159)

² *Christianity: Encyclopedic Dictionary in Three Volumes - Volume I (A-K) - Moscow, Scientific Publishing House Big Russian Encyclopedia, 1993 - pp. 832-833.*

worship. They view that as a form of idolatry. For this very reason they decided to stop using cross-and-crown pins back in 1928. Later, in 1934-1936 it was noted that “cross” is an incorrect translation of a Greek word. Since then they have come to believe that Jesus died on a stake and not on a cross.

7. Christ’s Human Life Was Paid as a Ransom for Obedient Humans

In this position, Jehovah’s Witnesses have almost no differences with other Christian religions and denominations. They believe that eternal life and perfect health will be possible because Jesus died for us.

This is what Jehovah’s Witnesses say about the significance of this teaching: “Throughout their modern-day history, Jehovah’s Witnesses have consistently championed the Scriptural teaching of the ransom. The very first issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* (July 1879) emphasized that ‘merit toward God lies . . . in *Christ’s perfect sacrifice.*’ In 1919, at a convention sponsored by the International Bible Students Association at Cedar Point, Ohio, the printed program featured prominently the words ‘Welcome! All Believers in the Great Ransom Sacrifice.’ The inside front cover of *The Watchtower* continues to draw attention to the ransom, saying concerning the purpose of the magazine: “It encourages faith in God’s now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life.”¹

This teaching is explained as follows:

“The first man, Adam, lost perfect life for all humans when he disobeyed Jehovah. Could another man remove death for all of Adam’s children? Yes. (Read Romans 5:19.) Jesus, who never sinned, gave his perfect life as the ransom. (1 Corinthians 15:45) His perfect life could be used to remove death for all of Adam’s children. (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22)

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 132.

“The Bible describes how much Jesus suffered before he died. He was cruelly whipped, nailed to a torture stake, and made to endure a slow and painful death. (John 19:1, 16-18, 30) Why did Jesus have to suffer so much? Because Satan claimed that no human would be loyal to God if he was severely tested. Jesus proved that a perfect man can be loyal to God even if he suffers to the extreme. Imagine how proud Jehovah was of Jesus!

“How was the ransom paid? Jesus gave his Father the value of his life. In the year 33, on Nisan 14 of the Jewish calendar, Jehovah allowed Jesus’ enemies to kill him. (Hebrews 10:10) Three days after that, Jehovah brought Jesus back to life, not as a human, but as a spirit person. Later, when Jesus returned to his Father in heaven, he presented the value of his perfect human life to Jehovah as the ransom. (Hebrews 9:24) Now that the ransom has been paid, we have the opportunity to be set free from sin and death.¹”

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that “Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection magnify Jehovah God and are crucial to the outworking of His grand purpose ... They are of vital importance to us in that we can have our sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus’ sacrifice and can thus have a personal relationship with Jehovah God.—John 14:6; 1 John 2:1, 2.²”

The doctrine of the ransom for any believer is a key and central part in the fulfillment of God’s will with regard to the earth and humanity. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the very first prophecy about the Messiah, recorded at Genesis 3:15, was fulfilled in the year 33 C.E., when Jesus died on the torture stake.

8. Christ’s One Sacrifice Is Sufficient

To understand this doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we need to consider the question of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The following is from their publications: “On the third day after Jesus’ death, Jehovah

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 54.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 15, 1998 – p. 9.

raised him from the dead. (Acts 3:15; 10:40) By this momentous act, Jehovah not only rewarded his Son for his faithful service but gave him the opportunity to finish his redemptive work as God's High Priest. (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8) The apostle Paul explains: 'When Christ came as a high priest . . . , he entered, no, not with the blood of goats and of young bulls, but with his own blood, once for all time into the holy place and obtained an everlasting deliverance for us. For Christ entered, not into a holy place made with hands, which is a copy of the reality, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the person of God for us.' (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 24)

"Christ could not take his literal blood into heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:50) Rather, he took what that blood symbolized: the legal value of his sacrificed perfect human life. Then, before the person of God, he made formal presentation of the value of that life as a ransom in exchange for sinful mankind. Did Jehovah accept that sacrifice? Yes, and this became evident at Pentecost 33 C.E., when the holy spirit was poured out upon about 120 disciples in Jerusalem. (Acts 2:1-4) Thrilling though that was, the ransom was then just beginning to provide marvelous benefits.¹"

That is what the encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* says regarding Christ's position: "The High Priesthood of Jesus Christ——The Bible book of Hebrews points out that Jesus Christ, since his resurrection and entry into heaven, is 'a high priest according to the manner of Melchizedek forever.' (Heb 6:20; 7:17, 21) In addition to the promise recorded at Psalm 110:4: 'Jehovah has sworn (and he will feel no regret): "You are a priest to time indefinite according to the manner of Melchizedek!"' which appointment makes him a heavenly King-Priest, Christ also possesses Kingdom authority by reason of his descent from David. In the latter case, he becomes the heir of the kingship promised in the Davidic covenant. (2Sa 7:11-16) He therefore

¹ *Draw Close to Jehovah* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2013 – pp. 145-146.

holds in combination the offices of kingship and priesthood, as did Melchizedek...

“Nevertheless, although Christ does not get his priesthood from fleshly descent through Aaron, nor does he have a predecessor or successor in his office, he fulfills the things typified by the Aaronic high priest. The apostle makes this perfectly clear when he shows that the tentlike tabernacle constructed in the wilderness was a pattern of ‘the true tent, which Jehovah put up, and not man’ and that the Levitical priests rendered ‘sacred service in a typical representation and a shadow of the heavenly things.’ (Heb 8:1-6; 9:11) He relates that Jesus Christ, who had, not animal sacrifices, but his own perfect body to offer, did away with the validity or need for animal sacrifices; Jesus then ‘passed through the heavens,’ ‘not with the blood of goats and of young bulls, but with his own blood, once for all time into the holy place and obtained an everlasting deliverance for us.’ (Heb 4:14; 9:12; 10:5, 6, 9) He went into the holy place typified by the Most Holy into which Aaron entered, namely, ‘heaven itself, now to appear before the person of God for us.’ (Heb 9:24)

“The sacrifice of Jesus as the antitypical High Priest did not need to be repeated as did those of the Aaronic priests, because his sacrifice actually removed sin. (Heb 9:13, 14, 25, 26) Moreover, in the type, or shadow, no priest of the Aaronic priesthood could live long enough to save completely or bring to complete salvation and perfection all those to whom he ministered, but Christ ‘is able also to save completely those who are approaching God through him, because he is always alive to plead for them.’ (Heb 7:23-25)

“In addition to making sacrifices, the high priest in Israel blessed the people and was their chief instructor in God’s righteous laws. The same is true of Jesus Christ. On appearing before his Father in the heavens, he ‘offered one sacrifice for sins perpetually and sat down at the right hand of God, from then on awaiting until his enemies should be placed as a stool for his feet.’ (Heb 10:12, 13; 8:1) Therefore, ‘the

second time that he appears it will be apart from sin and to those earnestly looking for him for their salvation.’ (Heb 9:28)

“Jesus Christ’s superiority as High Priest is seen in another sense also. Becoming a man of blood and flesh like his ‘brothers’ (Heb 2:14-17), he was thoroughly tested; he suffered all manner of opposition, persecution, and finally, an ignominious death. As it is stated: ‘Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered; and after he had been made perfect he became responsible for everlasting salvation to all those obeying him.’ (Heb 5:8, 9) Paul explains benefits we can receive from his being thus tested: ‘For in that he himself has suffered when being put to the test, he is able to come to the aid of those who are being put to the test.’ (Heb 2:18) Those in need of help are assured of his merciful and sympathetic consideration. ‘For,’ says Paul, ‘we have as high priest, not one who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in all respects like ourselves, but without sin.’—Heb 4:15, 16.¹”

This teaching plays a very important role for every one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, because as is stated in their literature: “There is nothing that the Devil can do to prevent all who genuinely repent from eventually becoming part of Jehovah’s family. Jesus came to earth and died ‘once for all time.’ Thus the ransom has been paid permanently. (Heb. 9:24-26) It completely cancels the condemnation inherited from Adam. Thanks to Christ’s sacrifice, we are free from enslavement to this world under Satan’s control, and we no longer live in fear of death.—Heb. 2:14, 15.²”

9. Christ Was Raised from the Dead as an Immortal Spirit Person

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus’ resurrection was not physical but “in the spirit,” since humans of “flesh and blood cannot

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “High Priest,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002023>).

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 2017 – p. 12.

inherit God's Kingdom," Jesus was raised up to heaven in his spiritual body. He was resurrected to "an indestructible life" (Heb 7:16). The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* states: "Moreover, he was raised to a higher form of life and a higher position than that which he had held in the heavens prior to coming to earth. He was granted immortality and incorruption, which no creature in the flesh can have, and was made 'higher than the heavens,' second only to Jehovah God in the universe. (Heb 7:26; 1Ti 6:14-16; Php 2:9-11; Ac 2:34; 1Co 15:27) His resurrection was performed by Jehovah God himself.—Ac 3:15; 5:30; Ro 4:24; 10:9.¹"

They cite the following Bible texts to confirm this teaching: "It is sown a physical body; it is raised up a spiritual body ... *flesh and blood cannot inherit God's Kingdom.*" (1 Cor. 15:44-50, New World Translation) "For Christ died once for all time for sins ... *He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*"—1 Peter 3:18 New World Translation

10. Christ's Presence Is in Spirit

Jehovah's Witnesses believe, based on what is found in the Bible, that Christ is already present, but not everyone has yet realized and fully understood this fact. The return of Christ does not mean a return in the literal sense. "Rather, it means that he takes Kingdom power toward this earth and turns his attention to it. He does not need to leave his heavenly throne and actually come down to earth to do this. As we have seen ... , Bible evidence shows that in the year 1914 C.E. God's time arrived for Christ to return and begin ruling. It was then that the cry was heard in heaven: 'Now have come to pass the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ.'— Revelation 12:10.²"

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *Insight on the Scriptures*, "Resurrection," electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200003709>).

² *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 – p. 147.

Since Christ's return is invisible, is there a way to confirm that it has really occurred?

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that "Christ himself gave a visible 'sign' by which we may know that he is invisibly present and the end of the world is near."¹ A misconception of this was due to the incorrect translation of the Greek word *pa•rou•si'a*. It means "presence," not "coming" as is commonly believed. Therefore, the words from Matthew 24:3 accurately read: "What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" Then Jesus explained to his disciples what visible evidence of his presence in royal power would be.

They make logical arguments in support of this: "Remember, Jesus discussed the sign of his presence. (Matthew 24:3) If his presence were visible to human eyes, would a sign be needed? To illustrate: Imagine that you are traveling to see the ocean. You may see road signs directing you along the way, but once you are at the shore, standing at the water's edge with the vast expanse of water stretching out to the horizon, would you expect to see a sign with a big arrow pointing ahead, emblazoned with the word 'Ocean'? Of course not! Why have a sign to point out what you can easily identify with your eyes? Jesus described the sign of his presence, not to point out something that humans could see with their eyes, but to help them discern something that would occur in heaven. Thus, Jesus said: 'The kingdom of God is not coming with striking observableness.'—Luke 17:20²"

As a result of very complex calculations based on the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 4:7-34), Jehovah's Witnesses concluded that Christ's presence started in 1914: "Christ returned and began ruling in the midst of his enemies in the year 1914."³

The very first act that the enthroned Christ performed was "cleansing the heavens" of Satan and hurling him and the demons down to the

¹ Ibid.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 1, 2008 - p. 8.

³ *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1999 - pp. 82-97.

earth. As Jehovah's Witnesses believe, it is for this reason that after 1914, catastrophes continued on Earth, which is "the sign" of Christ's presence and the "last days" of Satan's wicked system of things.

11. God's Kingdom under Christ Will Rule Earth in Righteousness and Peace

"Originally, the Messianic Kingdom was not part of Jehovah's purpose. Why not? Because Jehovah did not predestinate the path of human history; after all, he created humans with free will. Thus, he told Adam and Eve his purpose for mankind, stating: 'Be fruitful and become many, fill the earth and subdue it.' (Gen. 1:28) Jehovah also required that they respect his standards of good and bad. (Gen. 2:16, 17) Adam and Eve could have chosen to remain loyal. If they and their descendants had done so, we would not need the Kingdom ruled by Christ to fulfill God's purpose. Right now, the globe would be teeming with perfect people, all worshipping Jehovah.

"The rebellion of Satan, Adam, and Eve did not cause Jehovah to abandon his purpose to fill the earth with a perfect human family. Instead, Jehovah adapted his method of fulfilling it. His purpose is not like a train that must run on a certain track to reach its destination and can be derailed by the actions of others. Once Jehovah states his purpose, no force in the universe can prevent its fulfillment ... If a challenge threatens to block one track, Jehovah uses another. (Ex. 3:14, 15) When he sees fit, he informs his loyal servants of the new method he will use to accomplish his purpose.

"In response to the rebellion in Eden, Jehovah purposed to set up the Kingdom. (Matt. 25:34)¹"

To understand this better, we need to turn to the Bible and remember that Jesus Christ called himself "the Son of man" when he was on earth, indicating his kinship to humankind (Matthew 16:13; 25:31). Jesus said to the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin: "You will see the Son of man

¹ *God's Kingdom Rules!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 - pp. 32-33.

sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”—Matthew 26:64, *New World Translation*.

When Jehovah’s Witnesses read the words of Jesus’ prayer from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, “Let your kingdom come,” they take it literally. God’s Kingdom is not an inner state of mind and heart to them, it is a literal ‘heavenly’ government. They call it “God’s government,” being confident that God appointed Jesus, when he returned to heaven, to be the head of this “heavenly government”. This appointment did not happen immediately, but only in 1914, as was mentioned above. “The Kingdom is mankind’s only hope. Human governments break down sooner or later, but God’s Kingdom never will. Isaiah 9:6, 7 calls its Ruler, Jesus, the ‘Prince of Peace’ and adds: ‘To the abundance of the princely rule and to peace there will be no end.’ God’s Kingdom is not like man’s governments—here today and overthrown tomorrow. Indeed, Daniel 2:44 says: ‘The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. ... It itself will stand to times indefinite.’” “ ... God’s kingdom will be the only government ruling over the earth.”²

This is the teaching often used against Jehovah’s Witnesses by those who accuse them of inciting others to disobey laws of the State. As we shall see further, though, these accusations are absolutely baseless. And those who are making them against Jehovah’s Witnesses are distorting the facts.

12. God’s Kingdom Will Bring Ideal Living Conditions to Earth

Every one of Jehovah’s Witnesses believes that this teaching is the “good news for all nations.

“It does not seem possible to enjoy happiness on earth even for a short time. Sickness, aging, hunger, crime, insecurity and oppression

¹ *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 – p. 95.

² *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 – p. 155.

often make life miserable. But there are good reasons for believing that it really is possible to live forever in happiness on earth.

“What are these reasons? First, because Almighty God made the earth just perfect for us! Also, in the ancient and most widely believed holy book, the Bible, he promises: ‘The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it.’—Psalm 37:29.

“Because God is Almighty we know he can bring this to pass. In fact, he also promises to do away with the causes of unhappiness: ‘He will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.’—Revelation 21:4.¹”

Here are some of the blessings, as Jehovah’s Witnesses understand from the Bible, that obedient people will enjoy:

“Wickedness, war, crime, and violence will be gone. There will not be any wicked people left on earth. (Psalm 37:10, 11) God will bring ‘an end to wars throughout the earth.’ (Psalm 46:9; Isaiah 2:4) The earth will be full of people who love God and are obedient to him. There will be peace forever. (Psalm 72:7)

“Jehovah’s people will feel secure. In Bible times, when the Israelites obeyed God, they were safe because he protected them. (Leviticus 25:18, 19) In the Paradise, we will not be afraid of anything or anybody. We will always feel secure! (Read Isaiah 32:18; Micah 4:4)

“There will be plenty of food. ‘There will be an abundance of grain on the earth; on the top of the mountains it will overflow.’ (Psalm 72:16) Jehovah, ‘our God, will bless us,’ and ‘the earth will give its produce.’ (Psalm 67:6)

“The whole earth will become a paradise. People will have beautiful houses and gardens. (Read Isaiah 65:21-24; Revelation 11:18.) The whole earth will be as beautiful as the garden of Eden was. Jehovah will always give us everything that we need. The Bible says about him: ‘You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.’—Psalm 145:16.

¹ *Good News for All Nations* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1983

“There will be peace between humans and animals. Animals will not harm humans anymore. Little children will feel safe, even around animals that are dangerous to us today. (Read Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25)

“No one will be sick. When Jesus was on earth, he healed many people. (Matthew 9:35; Mark 1:40-42; John 5:5-9) But as King of God’s Kingdom, Jesus will heal everyone. No one will ever say: ‘I am sick.’ (Isaiah 33:24; 35:5, 6)

“The dead will live again. God promises that he will resurrect millions of people who have died. ‘There is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.’—Read John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15.¹”

So, according to Jehovah’s Witnesses, under the rule of God’s Kingdom, which will bring paradise on earth, “people of all races and nationalities will learn to live together as one family of brothers and sisters. They will truly love one another. None will be selfish or unkind. No one will hate another person just because of his race, color, or the place that he comes from. Prejudice will cease to exist. Everyone on earth will become a true friend and neighbor of everyone else.²”

But is it realistic to think that “the new earth,” or the wonderful new world, is possible? Jehovah’s Witnesses definitely answer—“Yes.” They believe that such ideal conditions were part of God’s original purpose for the earth. He placed the first human couple in the earthly Paradise of Eden and gave them a marvelous assignment: “Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28) God wanted them to have children so they could eventually turn all the earth into a paradise. Humans were created on the sixth creative day. “That day [the seventh], like the six that preceded it, was to be thousands of years long. Jehovah had pronounced it sacred, and it would ultimately see the whole earth made into a paradise filled with a perfect family

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – pp. 35-36.

² *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 – p. 163.

of humankind. (Genesis 1:28; 2:3).¹” Adam and Eve chose to reject Jehovah. But, as Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, the original purpose of God regarding their offspring has not changed.

The book *Draw Close to Jehovah* explains God’s actions in the following way: “Jehovah responded immediately. He pronounced sentence on the rebels in Eden, and at the same time, he provided a glimpse of something wondrous: his purpose to remedy the ills they had just set in motion. (Genesis 3:15) Jehovah’s farsighted purpose extends from Eden through all the thousands of years of human history and onward, far into the future. It is elegantly simple yet so profound that a Bible reader could spend a rewarding lifetime in studying and contemplating it. Furthermore, Jehovah’s purpose is absolutely sure of success. It will put an end to all wickedness, sin, and death. It will bring faithful mankind to perfection. All of this will come about before the seventh day ends, so that, despite everything, Jehovah will have fulfilled his purpose for the earth and mankind right on schedule!²”

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that since God is called “Almighty,” it means that nobody and nothing can prevent him from fulfilling his original purpose regarding the earth and mankind. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that God’s very name is a form of the Hebrew verb meaning “to become.” It implies that Jehovah fulfils all of his promises.

13. Earth Will Never Be Destroyed or Depopulated

Jehovah’s Witnesses come to this conclusion based on the following Bible verses:

“A generation is going, and a generation is coming, But *the earth remains forever.*”—Ecclesiastes 1:4

“This is what Jehovah has said, . . . the Former of the earth and the Maker of it, *He the One who firmly established it, who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited.*”—Isaiah 45:18

¹ *Draw Close to Jehovah*. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2013 – pp. 169.

² *Ibid.* – pp. 169-170.

“He made his sanctuary as enduring as the heavens, Like the earth that he has established forever.”—Psalm 78:69

In the December 1, 2011 issue of *The Watchtower*, in the article entitled “Will the Earth Survive 2012?” it is written: “Would a loving father spend many hours designing and building a toy boat for his son’s delight or a dollhouse for his daughter’s joy, only to destroy it moments after giving it to him or her? That would be cruel! In the same way, God created the earth primarily for the delight of his human creation. To the first human couple, Adam and Eve, God said: ‘Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it.’ Thereafter, ‘God saw everything he had made and, look! it was very good.’ (Genesis 1:27, 28, 31) God has not abandoned his purpose for the earth; he will not allow the earth to be destroyed.¹”

The idea of paradise on earth is very interesting. Other religions believe that human life on earth is temporary, but Jehovah’s Witnesses always associate the word “Paradise” with the Earth. Their magazines and books are full of vivid illustrations of what they think the earth will be like under God’s rule.

This hope for an earthly paradise is so strong that they even sing about it. One of their favorite songs is “See Yourself When All Is New:”

Just see yourself, just see me too;
 Just see us all in a world that is new.
 Think how you’ll feel, how it will be,
 To live in peace, to be truly free.
 No evil one will then prevail;
 Rule by our God cannot ever fail.
 The time will have come for a new earthly start,
 The song of our praises
 will pour out from our heart:

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 1, 2011 – p. 10.

CHORUS:

“We thank you, our God, for all you have done.
All things are new by the rule of your Son.
The fullness of our heart overflows in our song;
All glory and honor and praise to you belong.”

Now see yourself, and see me too;
And look ahead to a world that is new.
No sight we see, no sound we hear
Will cause alarm or give rise to fear.
All has come true, just as he said;
Now over mankind, his tent is spread.
He now will awaken those sleeping in death;
Their voices will join ours with
ev'ry grateful breath¹.

The hope of living in paradise on earth has a very strong influence on Jehovah's Witnesses. Their aspirations, dreams, and hopes are based on this belief. It encourages them to love nature and animals even now. In their Bethels throughout the world they always try to maintain the beauty of nature. Bethels are full of greenery, various flowers, and trees. Their publications often present information about the importance of protecting life and the environment.

One publication contains the following reminders:

“It is proper, though, for us to consider the environmental impact of our choices in such areas as household purchases, transportation, and recreation. For example, some choose to purchase products that have been produced or that operate in ways that minimize damage to the environment. Others strive to reduce their share in activities that create pollution or unduly consume natural resources...

“There is no need for one person to enforce his environmental decisions on others. Personal and local circumstances vary. Still,

¹ “Sing Out Joyfully” to Jehovah, “See Yourself When All Is New” – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2016 – p. 139.

we remain individually accountable for our decisions. As the Bible states, ‘each one will carry his own load.’ (Galatians 6:5)

“The Creator placed upon humans the responsibility to care for the earth. Appreciation for this assignment and humble respect for God and his creative works should motivate us to make thoughtful, conscientious decisions regarding how we treat the earth.¹”

An interesting fact: Jehovah’s Witnesses in our country actively help in cleaning up the cities and towns. When I visited the Christian Center, I was shown thank-you letters from mayors of different cities where Jehovah’s Witnesses are thanked for their active help in Community Cleanup Days.

14. God Will Destroy Only Wicked People in the Battle of Armageddon

*Armageddon is a great battle for justice on earth to protect God’s people from destruction. The Greek *Har Ma•ge•don*’, taken from Hebrew and rendered “Armageddon” by many translators, means “Mountain of Megiddo,” or “Mountain of Assembly of Troops.”²*

Jehovah’s Witnesses understand Armageddon in a way that is different from other Christian religions. As described in their publications: “Strategically located and dominating major trade and military routes, Megiddo was a focus of international interest in Bible times. The valley plain at its feet became the site of many decisive battles. Therefore, the book of Revelation fittingly names the coming ‘war of the great day of God the Almighty’ Har–Magedon.”³ Satan and his allies will be gathered figuratively for the final battle with God and therefore Jehovah’s Witnesses named *the battle between Jehovah and Satan* Armageddon. In human wars, both good and bad people are killed, but in the battle of God, only evil forces will perish, and all the

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 2007 – p. 11.

² *Reasoning From the Scriptures* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2008 – p. 44.

³ Watchtower Online Library, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Megiddo,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002960>).

good will remain. It is then that the real paradise will come to earth and *God's Kingdom* - the only righteous government, will bring true peace to those who love peace.

Jehovah's Witnesses consider Armageddon to be the culmination of the so-called "great tribulation," the hardest period in the history of mankind. It will begin with the sudden destruction of "false" religions by governments. This destruction will be followed by a global crisis and an attack on God's people.

Witnesses believe that these events will happen in the near future, but the exact date is unknown.

The official website of Jehovah's Witnesses says the following: "The battle of Armageddon refers to the final war between human governments and God. These governments and their supporters oppose God even now by refusing to submit to his rulership. (Psalm 2:2) The battle of Armageddon will bring human rulership to an end.—Daniel 2:44."¹

It is very important to understand two points about this teaching. First, who, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, begins this war? In 2012 an issue of *The Watchtower*, in an article entitled "The Truth About Armageddon," stated: "The war of Armageddon is not an act of aggression by God. Instead, God will defend good people from those who would crush them. The aggressors in this conflict are 'the kings of the entire inhabited earth,' the world's leaders. Why the attack? Because, like a puppet master, Satan will maneuver both governmental and military agencies into an all-out assault on those who worship Jehovah God.—Revelation 16:13, 14; 19:17, 18."²

The second important question concerns the position of Jehovah's Witnesses in this battle. The above article also stated: "Jehovah instructs those who worship him to be peaceable and to love their enemies. (Micah 4:1-3; Matthew 5:43, 44; 26:52) So they will not take up arms

¹ jw.org, "What Is the Battle of Armageddon?" electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/battle-of-armageddon/>).

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 1, 2012 - p. 6.

to defend themselves when this vicious attack comes. If God did not step in to save his people, they would be wiped out. Therefore, Jehovah God's name, or reputation, will be at stake. If the aggressors managed to do away with His people, it would make Jehovah appear to be unloving, unjust, or helpless. Such an outcome is impossible!—Psalm 37:28, 29.”

After that, the *Millennial Reign of Christ* will come: “Physically, mentally, emotionally, morally, spiritually—in every way imaginable—perfect humans will fully meet God’s standards. But will all people then be identical? Far from it! Jehovah’s creations—trees, flowers, animals—all teach us that he loves variety. Perfect humans will have different personalities and talents. Each one will enjoy life as God meant it to be.¹”

15. Wicked Will Be Eternally Destroyed

This teaching was explained in the April 2017 issue of *The Watchtower*: “After foretelling that this present era would involve ‘critical times hard to deal with,’ the apostle Paul was inspired to write: ‘Wicked men and impostors will advance from bad to worse.’ (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13) Have you seen those prophetic words come true? Many of us have been victims of wicked people, such as violent bullies, hateful bigots, and vicious criminals. Some of those are openly wicked; others are impostors, hiding what they do under an appearance of righteousness. Even if we ourselves have not been victims, such wicked people still affect us. We are sickened at heart when we learn of their horrible acts. The way the wicked brutalize children, the elderly, and other defenseless ones fills us with horror. Wicked people exhibit a spirit that seems subhuman, animalistic, even demonic. (Jas. 3:15) Happily, Jehovah’s Word counters such bad news with good news.

What will Jehovah do? Right now Jehovah is giving wicked people an opportunity to change. (Isa. 55:7) As individuals, they have not yet received their final judgment. It is this system that stands condemned.

¹ *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 – p. 187.

But what of those individuals who refuse to change, who continue to support this system right up to the time of the great tribulation? Jehovah has promised to rid the earth of wicked people for all time. (... Psalm 37:10) The wicked may think that they are safe from such judgment. Many have learned to hide what they do, and in this world they often seem to escape justice and consequences. (Job 21:7, 9) Yet, the Bible reminds us: 'God's eyes are upon the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness or deep shadow where wrongdoers can conceal themselves.' (Job 34:21, 22) There is no hiding from Jehovah God. No impostor can fool him; no shadow is so dark or deep that God's limitless vision cannot pierce right to the heart of matters. After Armageddon, then, we may look where the wicked used to be, but we will not see them. They will be gone—forever!—Ps. 37:12-15.¹

The previous teaching and this one are often used by different propagators to accuse Jehovah's Witnesses of misanthropy. But let us just think about it; is this teaching new? The vast majority of religions teach that bad and unfaithful people will be punished. A lot of them teach about "hell." All Abrahamic religions have a teaching of a judgment day. This makes sense because this teaching comes from the Bible. But we do not view followers of other religions as being cruel and hating the world. We understand that along with these teachings, there are teachings on reconciliation with God, redemption, and repentance. Again, it turns out that anti-sectarians are distorting the facts to mislead others.

To lend weight to their allegations, these dishonest people often show pictures of Armageddon from the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses. But have not the Orthodox and the Catholic churches had depictions of Judgment Day and punishment in hell for hundreds and thousands of years?

As we can see, these teachings are not new. They are common religious beliefs and pose no danger to society—particularly in the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses as evidenced by a related teaching.

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 2017 - p. 10.

16. People God Approves Will Receive Eternal Life

God will change everything on the earth after Armageddon. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that under God's Kingdom rule, sickness and old age will be no more. Even the old will become young again. Satan and the demons will be put out of action and restrained from influencing human activity.

“It is not the Creator's will that our ability to learn and improve be limited to a life span of 70 or 80 years. You can see this from one of Jesus' most famous statements: ‘God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.’ (John 3:16)

“‘Everlasting life.’ That is not a fantasy. Rather, the concept of permanence without end is consistent with what the Creator offered our original parents, Adam and Eve. It is consistent with scientific facts about the makeup and capacity of our brain. And it is consistent with what Jesus Christ taught. Mankind's having everlasting life was at the core of Jesus' message. On his final evening on earth with the apostles, he said: ‘This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ.’—John 17:3.¹”

17. There Is Only One Road to Life

This road to life is the worship of Jehovah by following the example of Jesus Christ. It is necessary to do his will to receive his blessing of eternal life. Here again, Jehovah's Witnesses cite the Bible: “The righteous will possess the earth, And they will live forever on it ... When the wicked are done away with, you will see it.”—Psalm 37:29, 34.

They believe there are but two choices. Christ compared it to the choice of either one of two roads. He said: “Go in through the narrow gate, because broad is the gate and spacious is the road leading off into destruction, and many are going in through it; whereas narrow is the

¹ *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 - pp. 189-190.

gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are finding it.” (Matthew 7:13, 14) The Study Bible¹ explains: “In ancient times, roadways with gates were the means of entry into walled cities. The Bible uses such expressions as road or “path” or “way” to describe people’s life course and conduct. The image of two contrasting roads pictures life courses that are either approved or disapproved by God, determining whether an individual gains entry into God’s Kingdom.—Ps 1:1, 6; Jer 21:8; Mt 7:21.”² On it travelers are permitted the freedom to please themselves. The other road, however, is “cramped.” Yes, those on that road are required to obey the instructions and laws of God. The majority, Jesus noted, are taking the broad road, only a few take the narrow one. The broad road will suddenly come to a dead end—destruction! On the other hand, the narrow road will lead each of us right through into eternal life. This is a matter of personal choice!

Noteworthy also is how Jehovah’s Witnesses answer the question: “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Feel That They Are the Only People Who Will Be Saved?” Their official website states: “No. Many millions who lived in centuries past and who were not Jehovah’s Witnesses will have an opportunity for salvation. The Bible explains that in God’s promised new world, ‘there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.’ (Acts 24:15) Additionally, many now living may yet begin to serve God, and they too will gain salvation. *In any case, it’s not our job to judge who will or won’t be saved. That assignment rests squarely in Jesus’ hands.*—John 5:22, 27.”³

¹ *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (Study Edition)* is a new big project of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The study edition of the book of Matthew was published in English in October 2015. As for today, books from Mark to Colossians have been published. Additional content is added as the study material for each book is completed. Please find more information about this tool on jw.org, electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/online-help/using-jw-org/nwt-study-bible/>), or watch a video (<https://www.jw.org/en/online-help/using-jw-org/nwt-study-bible/overview-video/>).

² Watchtower Online Library, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (Study Edition)*, “According to Matthew”, electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/b/r1/lp-e/nwtsty/40/7#s=13&study=discover>).

³ jw.org, “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Feel That They Are the Only People Who Will Be Saved?” electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/who-saved/>).

Earlier, a 2008 issue of *The Watchtower* stated: “Jehovah’s Witnesses think that they have found the true religion. If they did not think so, they would change their beliefs. Like adherents of many religious faiths, Jehovah’s Witnesses hope to be saved. However, they also believe that it is not their job to judge who will be saved. Ultimately, God is the Judge. He decides.—Isaiah 33:22.”¹

At the same time, Jehovah’s Witnesses write in their publications that “salvation is a gift from God, yet not all people will attain it. God’s Son, Jesus, said: ‘Not everyone saying to me, “Lord, Lord,”: will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will.’ (Matthew 7:21) Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that God saves only those who exercise faith in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus and closely follow Jesus’ teachings.—Acts 4:10-12”²

Do Jehovah’s Witnesses think that they can earn salvation by preaching? Here is what they say in their book *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*: “Not at all! The book *United in Worship of the Only True God*, ... states: ‘Jesus’ sacrifice has also opened to us the opportunity for eternal life . . . This is not a reward that we earn. No matter how much we do in Jehovah’s service, we can never build up such merit that God will owe us life. Eternal life is “the gift God gives . . . by Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-10) Nevertheless, if we have faith in that gift and appreciation for the manner in which it was made possible, we will make this manifest. Discerning how marvelously Jehovah has used Jesus in accomplishing His will and how vital it is that all of us follow Jesus’ steps closely, we will make the Christian ministry one of the most important things in our life.”³

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 1, 2008 - p. 28.

² *Ibid.* - p. 29.

³ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 293.

18. We Are Living in 'the Last Days'

Here, Jehovah's Witnesses believe their own interpretation of several Bible doctrines, which is different from the interpretations of other Christian religions. In particular, they believe that there were inaccuracies in some translations of the Bible. Thus, the generally accepted translation of the question the apostles addressed to Jesus on the Mount of Olives about *the sign* of the "end of the world:" "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3, *King James Version*) Jehovah's Witnesses translated as follows: "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be *the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?*" (Matthew 24:3, *New World Translation*) Why? Because as they explain, "the Greek word *pa•rou•si'a* (in many translations rendered 'coming') literally means 'being alongside.' It refers to a presence covering a period of time rather than simply a coming or an arrival. This meaning of *pa•rou•si'a* is indicated at Mt 24:37-39, where 'the days of Noah . . . before the Flood' are compared to 'the presence of the Son of man.' At Php 2:12, Paul used this Greek word to describe his 'presence' in contrast to his 'absence.'¹

So, then, when the "sign" is seen, this means that Christ is present though unseen, that "he has already come in Kingdom power." The expression "end of the world" is also very misleading. It does not mean the end of the earth, but, rather, the end of Satan's system of things.

"Jesus did not give just one event as 'the sign.' He told of many happenings and situations. Other Bible writers besides Matthew mentioned additional events that would mark the 'last days.' All these things that were foretold would take place during the time that Bible writers called the 'last days.' (2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3, 4). These happenings would be like the different lines that make up a person's fingerprint, a print that cannot belong to any other person. The 'last

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (Study Edition)*, "According to Matthew", electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/b/r1/lp-e/nwtstj/40/24#s=3&study=discover>).

days' contain their own pattern of marks, or happenings. These form a positive 'fingerprint' that cannot belong to any other time period.¹"

According to the calculations of Jehovah's Witnesses, as mentioned above, the last days began in 1914, that is, from the moment when "Christ returned and began ruling in the midst of his enemies." At that time, God's Kingdom began ruling in heaven, and Satan the Devil and the demons were expelled from heaven and their activity was restricted to the earth. Satan's influence on mankind can be seen in many of the bad attitudes and actions that make the last days critical times hard to deal with. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the following events, predicted in the Holy Scriptures, indicate that we live in the last days (the information is cited from their official website):

- War on a large scale.—Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:4.
- Famine. — Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5, 6.
- Great earthquakes.—Luke 21:11.
- Pestilences, or epidemics of "terrible diseases."—Luke 21:11, *Contemporary English Version*.
- Increase of crime.—Matthew 24:12.
- Ruining of the earth by mankind.—Revelation 11:18.
- Deterioration of people's attitudes, as shown by many who are "unthankful, disloyal, . . . not open to any agreement, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness, betrayers, headstrong, puffed up with pride."—2 Timothy 3:1-4.
- Breakdown of the family, with people who have "no natural affection" and children who are "disobedient to parents."—2 Timothy 3:2, 3.
- Love of God growing cold in most people.—Matthew 24:12.
- Noteworthy displays of religious hypocrisy.—2 Timothy 3:5.
- Increased understanding of Bible prophecies, including those related to the last days.—Daniel 12:4.

¹ *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 - p. 149.

- Global preaching of the good news of the Kingdom.—Matthew 24:14.

- Widespread apathy and even ridicule toward the evidence of the approaching end.—Matthew 24:37-39; 2 Peter 3:3, 4.

- The simultaneous fulfillment of all these prophecies, not just a few or even most of them.—Matthew 24:33¹.

Jehovah's Witnesses came to wrong conclusions about the exact date of Judgment Day on several occasions. First, they believed it was in 1914, then that it was in 1925, but events failed to support these expectations. However, in their opinion, this is not a basis for saying it will never happen. This is how they explain it:

“The Witnesses had long shared the belief that the Thousand Year Reign of Christ would follow after 6,000 years of human history. But when would 6,000 years of human existence end? The book *Life Everlasting—In Freedom of the Sons of God*, released at a series of district conventions held in 1966, pointed to 1975.

At the convention held in Baltimore, Maryland, F. W. Franz gave the concluding talk. He referred to the many questions that had arisen as to whether the material in the new book meant that by 1975 Armageddon would be finished, and Satan would be bound. He stated, in essence: ‘It could. But we are not saying. All things are possible with God. But we are not saying. And don’t any of you be specific in saying anything that is going to happen between now and 1975. But the big point of it all is this, dear friends: Time is short. Time is running out, no question about that.’²”

The book *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* states: “It does no good to use Bible chronology for speculating on dates that

¹ jw.org, “What Is the Sign of ‘the Last Days,’ or ‘End Times?’” electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/end-times-prophecy-sign/>).

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 104.

are still future in the stream of time.¹” The Watchtower of March 15, 1980, also acknowledged that many “statements were likely more definite than advisable ... In this regard Jehovah’s Witnesses were encouraged to concentrate mainly on doing Jehovah’s will and not to be swept up by dates and expectations of an early salvation.²”

This is what you can find in the publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses on this subject:

“Jehovah’s Witnesses have been eager to know when the day of Jehovah will occur. In their eagerness they have at times made attempts to estimate when it might come. But by so doing, they have failed, as did Jesus’ early disciples, to heed their Master’s caution that we ‘do not know when the appointed time is.’ (Mark 13:32, 33) Ridiculers have mocked faithful Christians for their premature expectations. (2 Peter 3:3, 4) Nevertheless, Jehovah’s day will come, Peter affirms, according to His timetable.³”

Jehovah’s Witnesses have learned from their mistakes and now their standpoint might be described as follows: “*We will wait as long as Jehovah wants. Armageddon will come in its appointed time.*”

19. Human Death Is Due to Adam’s Sin

It seems that there is no need to discuss in detail the original sin, because everyone knows about it, from young to old. According to Jewish and Christian teachings, all of us today feel the consequences of Adam’s sin and the punishment that followed: “In the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return.”—Genesis 3:19, NWT.

¹ *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2009 – p. 287.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 104.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., September 1, 1997 – pp. 21-22

“The effect of sin on a perfect person,” says the booklet *The Time for True Submission to God*, “can be compared to what happens to a piece of machinery when it is not used properly. If you allow grit and dirt to get into it, it will quickly wear out. Thus it was with the first pair. They allowed the uncleanness of sin to enter into their lives, and so they started to deteriorate. Eventually they died.

“This affects us because it was only after this sin that Adam and Eve had children. If you have a mold and start casting models from it, the models will only be good as long as the mold is good. If the mold is blemished, the models will be blemished too. In Adam’s case, he had no children while he was perfect. It was only after he had sinned, rebelled against God, and begun to die that he produced children. Hence, the ‘mold’ was blemished, and the ‘models,’ his children, were blemished too. They inherited his sin.¹”

The apostle Paul explained it: “That is why, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because they had all sinned.”—Romans 5:12, NWT.

20. The Human Soul Ceases to Exist at Death

This teaching was one of the very first to be adopted by the small group of Bible Students. They found that other doctrines linked to the immortality of the soul were likewise “confusing” and “false”—for example, the teaching that all good people go to heaven or that God torments the immortal souls of the wicked in eternal hellfire.

Zion’s Watch Tower of April 15, 1894 stated: “Evidently it came not from the Bible . . . The Bible distinctly declares that man is mortal, that death is possible to him. . . . Scanning the pages of history, we find that, although the doctrine of human immortality is not taught by God’s inspired witnesses, it is the very essence of all heathen religions. . . . It is not true, therefore, that Socrates and Plato were the first to teach the

¹ *The Time for True Submission to God* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1994 - p. 50.

doctrine: it had an earlier teacher than either of them, and a yet more able one. . . . The first record of this false teaching is found in the oldest history known to man—the Bible. The false teacher was Satan.¹”

Appendix 4a of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* considers various meanings of the concept of “soul”—a living creature, human or animal; life as an intelligent person; and other uses.

It states that “In the Hebrew Scriptures the Hebrew word *ne'phesh* occurs 754 times, first in Ge 1:20. The *New World Translation* consistently renders it ‘soul’ and in each case it proves understandable in the light of its context. The use of this one Hebrew word in many different contexts helps us to ascertain the basic idea inherent in the word as the Bible writers used it, namely, that it is a person, an individual, or a lower creature; or, the life that a person or an animal enjoys as such. This is totally different from what the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans religiously and philosophically called a soul.

“In the Christian Greek Scriptures the Greek word *psy•khe'* occurs by itself 102 times, first in Mt 2:20. This includes Eph 6:6 and Col 3:23, where it is in the expression “whole-souled.” Additionally it is used in many compound Greek words such as in Php 2:2, 19; 1Th 5:14. The *New World Translation* consistently renders *psy•khe'* as ‘soul. This uniform rendering by the same English word proves very enlightening as to how the inspired writers used *psy•khe'* and what properties they ascribed to it.”²

Further, to aid us in understanding the uses of “soul,” Appendix 4a groups texts where “soul” occurs:

- Animals are souls;
- A living person or individual is a soul;
- The creature soul is mortal, destructible;

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 127.

² *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 - p. 1573.

- Life as an intelligent person;
- Soul delivered from Sheol or Hades (“hell”);
- Dead soul, or corpse;
- Soul distinguished from spirit;
- God has soul¹.

This is very important for our analysis because first, by saying that the soul ceases to exist at death, Jehovah’s Witnesses identify the concepts of “soul” and “life”; second, they are trying to “cleanse” this Bible concept from the complicated human philosophies and superstitions.

The brochure *What Happens to Us When We Die?* reviews in detail the origins of the idea that “something inside a person—a soul, a spirit, a ghost—is immortal and continues living after death²” and how this idea became part of the main teachings of Christian churches.

“The doctrine that the human soul is immortal and will continue to exist after man’s death and the dissolution of his body is one of the cornerstones of Christian philosophy and theology.³” (This is one of the main teachings of Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Shintoism and some others)

Jehovah’s Witnesses, unlike the vast majority of Christian religions and denominations, believe that the Bible gives a completely different interpretation of this issue.

“The Bible calls death an enemy. It likens death to a king who has ruled mankind. (Romans 5:17; 1 Corinthians 15:26) Death is an adversary of such power that no human can resist it, and every loved one who dies is just another of death’s uncountable victims. This Bible truth well accounts for the grief and helplessness we feel when a loved one dies. It confirms that those feelings are normal.⁴”

¹ Ibid.

² *What Happens to Us When We Die?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – p. 4.

³ Ibid. – p. 22.

⁴ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 15, 2006 – p. 5.

In their opinion, the state of the dead is clearly described in Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10, where we read: “As for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all . . . There is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol, the place to which you are going.”

“Death, therefore,” Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, “is a state of non-existence. The psalmist wrote that when a person dies, ‘his spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground; in that day his thoughts do perish.’—Psalm 146:4 ... The dead are unconscious, inactive. When pronouncing sentence upon Adam, God stated: ‘Dust you are and to dust you will return.’ (Genesis 3:19) Before God formed him from the dust of the ground and gave him life, Adam did not exist. When he died, he returned to that state. His punishment was death—not a transfer to another realm.”

What happened to Adam’s soul? Jehovah’s Witnesses explain: to understand this, it is necessary to remember, “in the Bible the word ‘soul’ often simply refers to a person. So when we say that Adam died, we are saying that the soul named Adam died. This might sound unusual to a person who believes in the immortality of the soul. However, the Bible states: ‘The soul that is sinning—it itself will die.’ (Ezekiel 18:4) Leviticus 21:1 speaks of ‘a deceased soul’ (a ‘corpse,’ *Jerusalem Bible*). And Nazirites were told not to come near ‘any dead soul’ (‘a dead body,’ *Lamsa*).—Numbers 6:6.

“A similar reference to the soul is found at 1 Kings 19:4. A severely distressed Elijah ‘began to ask that his soul might die.’ Likewise, Jonah ‘kept asking that his soul might die, and he repeatedly said: “My dying off is better than my being alive.”’ (Jonah 4:8) And Jesus used the phrase ‘to kill a soul,’ which *The Bible in Basic English* renders ‘to put to death.’ (Mark 3:4) So the death of the soul simply means the death of the person.”

Hence, they conclude: *the soul is simply the person*. “When the person dies, the soul dies. Hence, there is no conscious existence after

death ... Only God can restore the spirit, or life-force, causing a person to come back to life.—Psalm 104:30¹

21. Hell Is Mankind's Common Grave

The book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* describes the attitude C. T. Russell (the first president of the Society) had toward this teaching: “What the future holds for people who have not accepted God’s provision for salvation was of deep concern to C. T. Russell from the time he was a young man. When just a lad, he believed what the clergy said about hellfire; he thought they were preaching God’s Word. He would go out at night to chalk up Bible texts in conspicuous places so that workmen who passed there might be warned and be saved from the awful doom of eternal torment.

“Later, after he had seen for himself what the Bible really does teach, he was quoted by one of his associates as stating: ‘If the Bible does teach that eternal torture is the fate of all except the saints, it should be preached—yea, thundered from the housetops weekly, daily, hourly; if it does not so teach, the fact should be made known, and the foul stain dishonoring God’s holy name removed.’

“At an early point in his study of the Bible, C. T. Russell saw clearly that hell is not a place of torment for souls after death. He was most likely helped in this by George Storrs, editor of the *Bible Examiner*, whom [Russell] mentioned with warm appreciation in his writings and who had himself written much about what he discerned from the Bible as to the condition of the dead.”²

From the very beginning, Bible Students were actively revealing what was, in their opinion, the “non-Biblical” origin of this doctrine.

The logic and arguments about the “falsehood” of this teaching were well illustrated by C.T. Russell. Here are some of his words:

¹ *What Happens to Us When We Die?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 – pp. 22-24.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – pp. 126-127.

“The Scriptures are in full harmony with what you and I and every other sane, reasonable person in the world shall concede to be the reasonable and proper character of our God. What is declared of our heavenly Father? That he is just, that he is wise, that he is loving, that he is powerful. All Christian people will acknowledge these attributes of the divine character. If this is so, can we find any sense of the word in which we could conceive of God as just and yet punishing a creature of his own hand to all eternity, no matter what the sin was? I am not an apologist for sin; I do not live in sin myself, and I never preach sin . . . But I tell you that all these people around here that our brother [Dr. Eaton] says are making the air blue with their blasphemies of God and the holy name of Jesus Christ are all people who have been taught this doctrine of eternal torment. And all the murderers, thieves and evil doers in the penitentiaries, were all taught this doctrine. . . . These are bad doctrines; they have been injuring the world this long time; they are not a part of the Lord’s teaching at all, and our dear brother has not gotten the smoke of the dark ages rubbed out of his eyes yet.”¹

However, besides logic and common sense, Bible Students and, later, Jehovah’s Witnesses began to apply knowledge of ancient languages.

Appendix 4a of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* states that the word “hell” is an incorrect translation of the words “hades” and “sheol,” which would rightly be translated as “the common grave of mankind.”

“Hades,” perhaps meaning “the unseen place” or “that which lies beneath; the lower region,” is thus a fitting approximation of the word “grave.”

“In the inspired Scriptures, these words are associated with death and the dead and not with life and the living. (Re 20:13) In themselves the words ‘Sheol’ and ‘Hades’ contain no thought or hint of pleasure or pain.

“The derivation of the Hebrew word *she’ohl’* is uncertain. According to one derivation, it means the ‘place of inquiry;’ according to another,

¹ Ibid. – pp. 129-130.

the ‘hollow place’ or ‘resting-place;’ according to still another, ‘the place that asks for and demands all without distinction of persons.’ It is in the earth and is always associated with the dead and plainly means the common grave of mankind, gravedom, or the earthly (not sea) region of the dead. In contrast, the Hebrew word *qe'ver* means an individual grave or burial place.—Ge 23:4, 6, 9, 20.¹

The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* [in Russian] presents the following information on this matter:

The Russian word *ad* [“hell” in English] “is a word used in the Russian synodal Bible (as well as in most other translations) to translate the Hebrew *she'ohl'* and the Greek *ha'des*. In the Russian synodal Bible the word ‘ad’ is rendered from *she'ohl'* 13 times and from *ha'des* 10 times. This version is not consistent, however, since *she'ohl'* is also translated 43 times as ‘underworld,’ 4 times as ‘grave,’ 3 times as ‘pit’ and 2 times as ‘underworld hell.’

In 2011, with the publication of the *Contemporary Russian Translation*, the original word *she'ohl'* was in many places transliterated into the Russian text of the Hebrew Scriptures, though, in some occurrences, the expressions ‘the world of the dead,’ ‘underworld’ and ‘death’ were used. In other Russian translations, the Greek words *ha'des* and *ge'en•na* are often translated as *ad* [‘hell’ in English]. Concerning this use of ‘hell’ to translate these original words from the Hebrew and Greek, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (1981, Vol. 2, p. 187) says: ‘HADES . . . It corresponds to ‘Sheol’ in the O.T. [Old Testament]. In the A.V. of the O.T. [Old Testament] and N.T. [New Testament], it has been unhappily rendered “Hell.”²

“There is no [Russian] word that conveys the precise sense of the Hebrew word *she'ohl'*. Commenting on the use of the word ‘hell’ in Bible

¹ *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 - p. 1574.

² [jw.org, Insight on the Scriptures](https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200001978), “Hell,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200001978>).

translation, *Collier's Encyclopedia* (1986, Vol. 12, p. 28) says: 'Since Sheol in Old Testament times referred simply to the abode of the dead and suggested no moral distinctions, the word "hell," as understood today, is not a happy translation.' More recent versions transliterate the word into modern languages as 'Sheol.'—RS, AT, NWT.

"Regarding Sheol, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1971, Vol. 11, p. 276) noted: 'Sheol was located somewhere "under" the earth. . . . The state of the dead was one of neither pain nor pleasure. Neither reward for the righteous nor punishment for the wicked was associated with Sheol. The good and the bad alike, tyrants and saints, kings and orphans, Israelites and gentiles—all slept together without awareness of one another.'¹"

"With this clear understanding regarding the condition of the dead, Charles Taze Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Society, wrote back in 1896: 'We find [in the Bible] no such place of everlasting torture as the creeds and hymn-books and many pulpits, erroneously teach. Yet we have found a "hell," sheol, hades, to which all our race were condemned on account of Adam's sin, and from which all are redeemed by our Lord's death; and that "hell" is the tomb—the death condition.'²"

Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses have taught the Biblical truth about hell for more than a century. They are thereby trying to "restore the original Biblical" meaning of the term "hell." This is the reason why their interpretation is so different from what other Christian religions and denominations teach, namely, that "hell" is a place of torture where the souls of sinners go after they die.

22. Resurrection Hope for the Dead

The word "resurrection" is translated from the Greek word *a•na•sta•sis*, which literally means "a standing up again." Hebrew translators of Greek have rendered *a•na•sta•sis* with an expression that

¹ jw.org, Insight on the Scriptures, "Sheol," electronic ref, (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200004011>).

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 15, 1997 - p. 32.

means “revival of the dead” (Hebrew, *techi•yath' ham•me•thim'*). While the word “resurrection” does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures, the resurrection hope is clearly expressed at Job 14:13, Daniel 12:13, and Hosea 13:14. Thus, according to the understanding of Jehovah’s Witnesses, resurrection “involves raising the person from the lifeless condition of death—restoring and reactivating the life pattern of the individual.”¹

Jehovah’s Witnesses are convinced that “being infinite in wisdom and perfect in memory, Jehovah God can easily resurrect a person. Remembering the life pattern of dead ones—their personality traits, their personal history, and all the details of their identity—is not a problem for him. Jehovah is also the Originator of life. Hence, he can readily bring back to life the same person, giving him or her the same personality in a newly formed body ...

“The Scriptural teaching of the resurrection, however, is not compatible with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. If an immortal soul survived death, no one would need to be resurrected, or brought back to life ...

“Clearly, according to the Bible, the soul dies and the remedy for death is the resurrection. But billions of people have died since the first man, Adam, walked the earth. So who will be resurrected, and where? ...

“Those who have pursued a righteous course as Jehovah’s servants will be resurrected. But millions of other people have died without showing whether they would comply with God’s righteous standards. They were either ignorant of Jehovah’s requirements or lacked sufficient time to make needed changes. These too are in God’s memory and thus will be resurrected, for the Bible promises: ‘There is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.’—Acts 24:15.”²

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 1, 1999 - pp. 17-18.

² *What Happens to Us When We Die?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 - pp. 25-27.

23. Adamic Death Will Cease

Jehovah's Witnesses base this doctrine on the apostle John's words: "Everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all."—John 11:26.

They believe that "when millions are raised in the resurrection, they will not be brought back to life on an empty earth. (Acts 24:15) They will awaken in beautifully improved surroundings and will find that living quarters, clothing, and an abundance of food have been prepared for them." Since God marvelously provided to free mankind from sin and death (Revelation 22:1, 2), the resurrected ones "need never experience death."¹

24. Only a "Little Flock" of 144,000 Go to Heaven and Rule with Christ

We have already mentioned the teaching about God's Kingdom, which, in the hands of Christ, must undo all the suffering that Satan, Adam, and Eve caused. "Here is another truth about God's Kingdom: Jesus will not rule alone. He will have corulers. For example, the apostle Paul told Timothy: 'If we go on enduring, we will also rule together as kings.' (2 Timothy 2:12) Yes, Paul, Timothy, and other faithful ones who have been selected by God will rule together with Jesus in the heavenly Kingdom. How many will have that privilege? ...

"The apostle John was given a vision in which he saw 'the Lamb [Jesus Christ] standing on Mount Zion [his royal position in heaven], and with him 144,000 who have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.' Who are those 144,000? John himself tells us: 'These are the ones who keep following the Lamb no matter where he goes. These were bought from among mankind as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.' (Revelation 14:1, 4) Yes, they are faithful followers of Jesus Christ specially chosen to rule in heaven with him. After being raised out of death to heavenly life, 'they are to rule as kings over the

¹ Ibid – p. 30.

earth' along with Jesus. (Revelation 5:10) Since the days of the apostles, God has been selecting faithful Christians in order to complete the number 144,000.¹

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that most of the 144,00 are already in heaven, and the remaining few thousand still on earth preach the good news of the establishment of God's Kingdom. According to figures from Jehovah's Witnesses, about 18,000 people on earth consider themselves members of the 144,000 and partake of the emblems at the Memorial of Christ's death². But, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, it is very difficult to say exactly how many there are, because their calling to become future heirs in the Kingdom arrangement is from Jehovah. Thus, only Jehovah knows the exact number of Jesus Christ's corulers remaining on earth. And if some mistakenly think they are chosen, or anointed, and partake at the Memorial, it is an issue for their conscience.

This subject is brought up from time to time in the pages of *The Watchtower*. For example, the January 2016 issue states: "Do those of the other sheep need to know the names of all those who are anointed today? The short answer is no. Why not? Because even if someone has received the heavenly calling, that person has received only an invitation, not a final confirmation of the reward. That is why Satan raises up 'false prophets . . . to mislead, if possible, even the chosen ones.' (Matt. 24:24) No one can know whether an anointed Christian will receive his heavenly reward until Jehovah judges that person to be worthy of such a prize. Jehovah makes this determination and gives him the final sealing either sometime before he dies faithfully or sometime before the outbreak of 'the great tribulation.' (Rev. 2:10; 7:3, 14) It would be pointless, then, for anyone now living on earth to try to ascertain who among God's servants will eventually be part of the 144,000.

¹ *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - p. 78.

² Partaking of the bread and the wine at the Memorial is done by Christians who hope to rule with Christ in heaven. Those who hope to live on earth are present but do not partake at the Memorial.

“If it is not possible to know with certainty the names of all spiritual Israelites on earth today, how can members of the other sheep ‘go with’ them? Notice what the prophecy in Zechariah states concerning the figurative ten men. These ones would ‘take firm hold of the robe of a Jew, saying: “We want to go with you, for we have heard that God is with you people.”’ Although only one Jew is mentioned here, in both instances the pronoun “you” refers to more than one person. This spiritual Jew must, then, be a composite person, not just one individual! So it is not necessary to identify every spiritual Jew and then go with him or her. Rather, we need to identify these ones as a group and then support them as such. In no way do the Scriptures encourage us to follow an individual. Jesus is our Leader.—Matt. 23:10.¹”

This is why my attempts to find out from the Christian Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses exactly how many anointed Christians live among us have failed. “It is possible,” I was told, “there are three anointed in Kazakhstan, but this figure is very approximate.”

It is also worth noting that Jehovah’s Witnesses believe all anointed Christians who still live on earth will be taken to heaven after the start of the great tribulation but before the battle of Armageddon.

Recent publications describe this as follows: “Anointed ones who are alive during the great tribulation will be ‘caught away in clouds.’ Those ‘caught away’ will not ‘fall asleep in death’ in the sense of having a long sleep in death. They ‘will all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, during the last trumpet.’—1 Cor. 15:51, 52.”²

25. The 144,000 Are Born Again as Spiritual Sons of God

This is a very interesting teaching. In the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the 144,000 are also called “anointed Christians.” This is not a privileged or “higher” class of people, they are not chosen by others, and the exact number of “anointed” who now live on the earth is

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 2016 – p. 23.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 2017 – p. 12.

unknown. How does one of Jehovah's Witnesses become an "anointed Christian"?

Back in 1991, a *Watchtower* article entitled "Who Really Have a Heavenly Calling?" stated: "The 144,000 'have an anointing from the holy one,' Jehovah. (1 John 2:20) It is an anointing to a heavenly hope. God has 'put his seal upon them and has given them the token of what is to come, that is, the spirit, in their hearts.'—2 Corinthians 1:21, 22. Yes, those with the heavenly calling have the testimony of God's spirit to that effect ...

"The chief evidence that a person has been anointed to the heavenly calling is a spirit, or dominant sense, of sonship. (Galatians 4:6, 7) Such an individual is absolutely sure that he has been begotten by God to spiritual sonship as one of the 144,000 joint heirs of the heavenly Kingdom. He can testify that his heavenly hope is not his own cultivated desire or his imagination; rather, it is from Jehovah as a result of the action of God's spirit toward him. (1 Peter 1:3, 4)

"Under the influence of God's holy spirit, the spirit, or dominant attitude, of anointed ones acts as an impelling force. It moves them to respond positively to what God's Word says about the heavenly hope. They also respond in a positive way to Jehovah's dealings with them by means of the holy spirit. Thus, they are sure that they are God's spiritual children and heirs.

"When anointed ones read what God's Word says about his spiritual children and the heavenly hope, their spontaneous inclination is to say within themselves, 'This means me!' Yes, they respond joyfully when their Father's Word promises a heavenly reward. They say, 'That means me!' when they read: 'Beloved ones, now we are children of God.' (1 John 3:2) And when anointed ones read that God has brought people forth 'to be certain firstfruits of his creatures,' their mental inclination is to respond, 'Yes, he brought me forth for that purpose.' (James 1:18) They know that they have been 'baptized into Christ Jesus' and into his death. (Romans 6:3) So they have the firm conviction of being part of

Christ's spiritual body and entertain the hope of undergoing a death like his and being resurrected to heavenly life ...

“Anointed Christians do not want to go to heaven because of malcontent over present-day earthly life. (Compare Jude 3, 4, 16.) Rather, the holy spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are God's children.¹”

According to this teaching, an anointed Christian receives his final “seal of approval” only when he dies. If during his earthly life he proves to be unfaithful, he loses his heavenly hope. In this case, God will replace him by giving the heavenly hope to another Christian who has been serving Jehovah faithfully for many years.

The Governing Body at the Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses consists entirely of anointed Christians.

26. New Covenant Made with Spiritual Israel

Many Jews and even some Christians are convinced that Jews are the chosen people of God today. But Jehovah's Witnesses think differently. Regarding this, they build upon the literal meaning of Galatians 3:27-29: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one [person] in union with Christ Jesus. Moreover, if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham's seed, heirs with reference to a promise” and Galatians and 6:15, 16: “For neither is circumcision anything nor is uncircumcision, but a new creation [is something]. And all those who will walk orderly by this rule of conduct, upon them be peace and mercy, even upon the Israel of God.” So, from God's standpoint, it is no longer natural descent from Abraham that determines who are Abraham's seed. Jehovah's Witnesses support this thought with a text from Hebrews 8:8-10, which explains that a new covenant was made not with the nation of natural Israel but with the loyal followers of Jesus Christ to whom hope of heavenly life

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 15, 1991 – pp. 19-20.

was being extended. Jewish people, like people from other nations, need to believe in Jesus Christ in order to receive salvation¹.

Jehovah's Witnesses call the group of anointed Christians "spiritual Israel," "the spiritual remnant" or "the bride of Christ." They believe it is with this group Christ concluded this covenant. It is mainly with this group that Satan wages war. And it is from this group that the "faithful and discreet slave," who provides "spiritual food" to all Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, is chosen.

This is what publications of Jehovah's Witnesses say about this group:

"Today the full number of the Israel of God appears to have been gathered. Still, the nations continue to be blessed—and on a grand scale. How? In that the Israel of God has had 'offspring,' disciples of Jesus whose hope is everlasting life on a paradise earth. (Psalm 37:11, 29) These "offspring" are also taught by Jehovah and are instructed in his ways. (Isaiah 2:2-4) While not baptized with holy spirit or considered to be participants in the new covenant, they are strengthened by Jehovah's holy spirit to overcome all the obstacles that Satan puts in the way of their preaching work. (Isaiah 40:28-31) Their number now reaches into the millions and continues to increase as they produce offspring of their own. Jehovah's covenant, or contract, with the anointed ones gives these 'offspring' confidence that Jehovah will continue to use them too as his spokesmen to time indefinite."²

"On the last night of his life on earth, Jesus made a promise to his 11 faithful apostles. 'You are the ones that have stuck with me in my trials,' he told them, 'and I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes

¹ *Reasoning From the Scriptures* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2008 – pp. 220-225.

² *Isaiah's Prophecy—Light for All Mankind II* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2009 – pp. 301-302.

of Israel.’ (Luke 22:28-30) The covenant that Jesus then made with the 11 will extend to all 144,000 anointed Christians (Luke 12:32; Rev. 5:9, 10; 14:1) ...

“Moreover, Jesus Christ has appointed the faithful and discreet slave ‘over all his belongings’—all Kingdom interests on earth. (Matt. 24:47) Included among these belongings are the facilities of the headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses, at branch offices in various lands, and at Assembly Halls and Kingdom Halls worldwide. Included too is the work of Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making.¹”

27. Congregation Is Built upon Christ

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe that the 12 apostles have successors who receive their authority from God. They do not consider the pope as being Peter’s successor, who received his authority over the entire Church from Christ. They believe that “the rock” mentioned in Matthew 16:18 is Christ himself and that the Christian congregation was built upon him. They base this teaching on Bible verses from Ephesians 2:20: “And you have been built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ Jesus himself is the foundation cornerstone” and Acts 4:8-11: “Then Peter, filled with holy spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today about a good deed to a crippled man, and you want to know who made this man well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that in the name of Jesus Christ the Naz•a•rene’, whom you executed on a stake but whom God raised up from the dead, by means of him this man stands here healthy in front of you. This is “the stone that was treated by you builders as of no account that has become the chief cornerstone.”²”

Interestingly, Augustine, who is viewed as a saint by the Catholic Church, used to take the same position on this question. “In this same

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 15, 2009 – p. 26.

² *Reasoning From the Scriptures* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2008 – pp. 37-38.

period of my priesthood, I also wrote a book against a letter of Donatus . . . In a passage in this book, I said about the Apostle Peter: 'On him, as on a rock, the Church was built' . . . But I know that very frequently at a later time, I so explained what the Lord said: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,' that it be understood as built upon Him whom Peter confessed saying: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' and so Peter, called after this rock, represented the person of the Church which is built upon this rock, and has received 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' For, 'Thou art Peter' and not 'Thou art the rock' was said to him. But 'the rock was Christ,' in confessing whom as also the whole Church confesses, Simon was called Peter.¹

28. Prayers Must Be Directed Only to Jehovah through Christ

The book *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, which is designed to teach basic Bible doctrines, explains this teaching as follows:

"To whom should we pray? Jesus taught his followers to pray to 'our Father in the heavens.' (Matthew 6:9) He also said: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 14:6) So we should pray only to Jehovah through Jesus. What does praying through Jesus mean? For Jehovah to accept our prayers, we need to show respect for the special assignment Jehovah gave to Jesus. As we learned, Jesus came to earth to save us from sin and death. (John 3:16; Romans 5:12) Jehovah has also appointed Jesus as High Priest and Judge.—John 5:22; Hebrews 6:20.²"

The February 1, 2008 issue of *The Watchtower* brought up additional arguments: "Jesus spent most of his final night giving encouragement to his faithful apostles. It was the appropriate time to reveal something new. 'I am the way and the truth and the life,' Jesus said. 'No one comes to the Father except through me.' Later he gave them the reassuring promise: 'Whatever it is that you ask in my name, I will do this, in order

¹ Mary I. Bogan translator. *The Fathers of the Church—Saint Augustine, the Retractions Book I* - Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1968 - p. 90.

² *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - p. 177.

that the Father may be glorified in connection with the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.' Toward the end of his discussion, he said: 'Until this present time you have not asked a single thing in my name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.' (John 14:6, 13, 14; 16:24)

"These words were striking. One reference work describes this as 'the turning-point in the history of prayer.' ... Since 33 C.E., an individual's relationship with Jehovah no longer depends on adherence to the Mosaic Law. Instead, it is founded on obedience to the one to whom the Law pointed—Christ Jesus. (John 15:14-16; Galatians 3:24, 25)

"Jesus introduced a superior basis for approach to Jehovah, identifying himself as a powerful friend, one who opens the way for our prayers to be heard and answered by God. What enables Jesus to act this way in our behalf?

"Since we are all born in sin, no works we perform or sacrifices we offer can cleanse us of this stain or earn us the right to have a relationship with our holy God, Jehovah. (Romans 3:20, 24; Hebrews 1:3, 4) However, Jesus offered up his perfect human life and paid for the sins of redeemable mankind. (Romans 5:12, 18, 19) Now all who want to do so have the opportunity to achieve a clean standing before Jehovah and to enjoy 'freeness of speech' toward God—but only if they exercise faith in Jesus' sacrifice and pray in his name. (Ephesians 3:11, 12) ...

"Praying in Jesus' name honors Jesus. Such honor is appropriate, for Jehovah's will is that 'in the name of Jesus every knee should bend . . . , and every tongue should openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2:10, 11) More important, though, praying in Jesus' name glorifies Jehovah, the one who gave his Son for our benefit. (John 3:16) ...

"Yes, we must offer our prayers in Jesus' name if we want them to be heard by Jehovah. (John 14:13, 14) But we never want to repeat the phrase 'in Jesus' name' purely out of habit.¹"

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 1, 2008 – pp. 12-14.

29. Images Must Not Be Used in Worship

Since Jehovah's Witnesses do not recognize any dogmas and do not practice any rites that are not mentioned in the Bible, they do not worship icons or the sculptural images of any saints—be it the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ. Moreover, they consider all of this to be idolatry, which the Bible condemns.

“As we might have expected, then, Jesus never used images in worship. ‘God is a Spirit,’ he explained, ‘and those worshiping him must worship with spirit and truth.’ (John 4:24) Acting in harmony with this counsel, none of Jesus’ early followers used images as aids in worship. In fact, his apostle Paul wrote: ‘We are walking by faith, not by sight.’ (2 Corinthians 5:7) And his apostle John warned: ‘Guard yourselves from idols.’ —1 John 5:21.¹”

“The true God made all the living creatures on this earth, including man. Sentient life is a wonderful testimony to Jehovah’s Godship, but of course, everything that Jehovah created is inferior to him. Is it possible that man can do better than that? Can he make something superior to himself—so superior that it is worthy of his devotion? ... The image he makes may look like a man. It may even be beautiful. But it is lifeless. Images are in no way divine.²”

“Idolatry is not limited to the worship of false gods and goddesses. It is the worship of anything or anyone other than Jehovah ... Aware of this, true Christians heed Scriptural warnings against all idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:7)³” Witnesses believe that Jehovah does not want his servants to use images to worship him or to worship their ancestors⁴.

¹ *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 - p. 46.

² *Isaiah's Prophecy—Light for All Mankind II* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2001 - p. 67.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 15, 1993 - pp. 26-27.

⁴ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - p. 165.

30. Spiritism Must Be Shunned

Spiritism (from the Latin *spiritus* - spirit) is belief in the immortality of the soul and the possibility of contact with the dead through “mediums.”

The book *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* notes: “Demonism or spiritism is the bad practice of trying to communicate with spirits, either directly or through someone else, such as a witch doctor, a medium, or a psychic. People who practice spiritism do this because they believe the false teaching that spirits of humans survive death and become powerful ghosts. The demons also try to influence humans to disobey God. Astrology, divination, magic, witchcraft, superstitions, the occult, and the supernatural are also part of demonism. Many books, magazines, horoscopes, movies, posters, and even songs make the demons, magic, and the supernatural seem harmless or exciting. Many funeral customs, such as sacrifices for the dead, funeral celebrations, funeral anniversaries, widowhood rites, and some wake rituals, also include contact with the demons. People often use drugs when trying to use the power of the demons.—Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8.¹”

“Everyone who wants to serve Jehovah needs to get rid of things that have anything to do with the demons. This includes books, magazines, horoscopes, movies, music, games, and even posters that make magic, demons, or the supernatural seem harmless or exciting. It also includes things that people wear to protect themselves from evil.²”

31. Satan Is the Invisible Ruler of the World

Satan the Devil, is the fiercest and most determined enemy of God and his Son, “a very powerful but evil angel.³”

¹ Ibid - p. 221.

² *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 112.

³ Satan (from Hebrew “Satan”, literally “opposing”) the Devil, according to the teachings of a number of religions, is the evil spirit or the head of evil spirits, the culprit of evil on earth and throughout the world, the ruler of hell, pushing people to sin. Names of the Devil are: Beelzebub, Lucifer, Mephistopheles, Woland, and others.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Satan (Opposer) the Devil (Slanderer), is a real person. They believe that Jesus began ruling as the King of God's Kingdom by hurling down to the earth not only Satan but also his forces. His forces are so-called "rebel angels," or demons. It was they and Satan who in their fury would bring devastation to those on earth in the twentieth century, beginning with the First World War.

But this will not last forever. Jehovah has already set a day when the end of Satan's wicked system of things will come.

I would like to quote again from the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*:

"Yes, the Devil is a malicious 'manslayer.' The Bible reveals that he is a real person, not just the evil in someone's heart. (Matthew 4:1-11) Although created as a righteous angel, 'he did not stand fast in the truth.' How fitting it is that he is named Satan the Devil! (Revelation 12:9) He is called 'Satan,' or 'resister,' because he has opposed and resisted Jehovah. This criminal is also called 'Devil,' meaning 'slanderer,' for he has blasphemously misrepresented God.¹"

What motivated Satan to rebel against God? Greed. *The Watchtower* explains: "One of the spirit 'sons of God' saw the possibility of interfering with God's will for man, his plan being to gain benefits for himself. The more this spirit creature considered it, the more feasible it seemed and the more attractive it became. (James 1:14, 15) He may have reasoned that if he could get the first human pair to listen to him rather than to God, then God would be forced to tolerate a rival sovereignty. He may have figured that God would not execute them, for that would spell failure for God's purpose. Rather, Jehovah God would have to modify his purpose, accepting the position of this spirit son whom His human creation would now be obeying. Aptly, that rebel was later called Satan, that is, 'Resister.'—Job 1:6."²

¹ *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995 - p. 55.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 15, 2004 - pp. 4-5.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Satan is the invisible ruler of the world. "When Satan offered Jesus world rulership, Jesus did not deny that the Devil had the power to offer him all the kingdoms of the world. In fact, on a later occasion, Jesus called Satan 'the ruler of the world.' Some years later the apostle Paul described Satan as 'the god of this system of things.' (John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4) Paul wrote to fellow Christians: 'We have a wrestling . . . against the world rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirit forces in the heavenly places.' (Ephesians 6:12) Behind the scenes, wicked spirit forces are the real rulers of this world.¹"

At the same time, Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that Satan and the demons stand behind every decision and action made by human governments. Rather, they point to the "influence" of Satan on people, recognizing the fact that people still have freedom of choice and will. The following example illustrates it very well: "Just as small boats are swept along by powerful sea currents, human political systems are pulled along by powerful, wicked spirit forces. And just as the sailors in those boats can do little to change those powerful currents, politicians can do little to change the influence of those powerful spirit forces. Those forces are bent on corrupting humans beyond reform and on causing 'woe for the earth.' (Revelation 12:12) Therefore, real change can be brought about only by a person who is more powerful than Satan and his demons. That Person is Jehovah God himself.—Psalm 83:18; Jeremiah 10:7, 10."²

"Although the Bible teaches that God's adversary, Satan, has authority over political systems, it does not say that he directly controls each leader or official. (Luke 4:5, 6) We should therefore avoid implying that a particular official is controlled by the Devil. Instead, when dealing with 'governments and authorities,' we 'speak injuriously of no one.'—Titus 3:1, 2."³

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 2012 - p. 6.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 2012 - pp. 6-7.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 2016 - pp. 28-29.

32. A Christian Must Have No Part in Interfaith Movements

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to take part in the ecumenical movement¹. They do not participate in any interfaith actions.

Therefore, you will never see representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses at interfaith events with representatives of other faiths.

Jehovah's Witnesses are convinced that the disagreement within teachings is far greater than what the joint efforts can mend. "Furthermore, unity in faith hinges on beliefs based solidly on God's Word, the Bible. (Ephesians 4:3-6) Rather than coming through compromise, true unity comes from learning and doing what God asks of us. 'All the peoples, for their part, will walk each one in the name of its god,' declared the faithful prophet Micah, 'but we, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever.' (Micah 4:5)²" They believe that "such modern religious movements have added to the confusion and produced spiritual anarchy."³

The official website of Jehovah's Witnesses gives the following answer to the question "Do Jehovah's Witnesses practice interfaith?"

"As Jehovah's Witnesses, we enjoy discussing matters of faith with people of all religions, but we do not practice interfaith in the sense of worshipping with those who have other beliefs. The Bible shows that true Christians are 'harmoniously joined together,' and a key feature of this harmony is unity of belief. (Ephesians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philipians 2:2) This involves more than just agreeing on the value of such virtues as love, compassion, and forgiveness. Our religious beliefs

¹ The ecumenical movement (from the Greek Oikumene - the universe, inhabited world) is the movement for the unification of Christian religions. It is coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC). Activities are conducted at several levels. The first: the movement to unite all Christian churches (supported by most Christian denominations). The second: the activities of international Protestant organizations. The third: the activities of religious associations in one country, such as the "national councils of churches." The fourth: the activities of religious associations across a region or a number of countries. There are also "sectoral" international religious associations (for example, the World Student Christian Federation). The WCC maintains relations and cooperates with these international organizations.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 1, 2000 - p. 32

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., July 1, 1994 - p. 6.

are based on accurate knowledge from the Bible, without which our faith would be in vain.—Romans 10:2, 3.

“The Bible compares joining in worship with people of other beliefs to being under an uneven yoke, a mismatch that would harm a Christian’s faith. (2 Corinthians 6:14-17) Thus, Jesus did not allow his disciples to practice interfaith. (Matthew 12:30; John 14:6)¹”

Meanwhile, on the official website of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the following question is discussed: “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses tolerant of other religions?” Here is the answer: “We follow the Bible’s advice to ‘respect everyone’—regardless of their religious beliefs. (1 Peter 2:17, Today’s English Version) For example, in some countries there are hundreds of thousands of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even so, we do not try to pressure politicians or lawmakers into restricting or banning the work of other religious groups. Nor do we campaign to have laws passed that would impose our moral and religious convictions on the general community. Instead, we extend to others the same tolerance that we appreciate receiving from them.—Matthew 7:12.”²

33. A Christian Must Keep Separate from the World

Here Jehovah’s Witnesses are also clearly guided by the Bible. In particular, it says: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? ... So it says: ‘God opposes the haughty ones, but he gives undeserved kindness to the humble ones.’”—James 4:4, 6, NWT.

“Do not love either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world. Furthermore, the world is passing away and so is its desire, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.”—1 John 2:15-17, NWT.

¹ jw.org, “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Practice Interfaith?” electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/interfaith/>).

² jw.org, “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Tolerant of Other Religions?” electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/tolerant-of-other-religions/>).

“If you were part of the world, the world would be fond of what is its own. Now because you are no part of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you.”—John 15:19.

“They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world.”—John 17:16.

And if we go back to the history of early Christianity in the Roman Empire we will see that all these principles were understood literally.

J. F. Rutherford explained in the book *The Harp of God* that the life of the world is the opposite of the way of life of a Christian. Hence Christians must constantly exert their efforts for development. When Christians recognize that way of the world is directly opposite of this, they should not turn a blind eye to the fact that, due to the world’s misunderstanding, this is connected with struggle, constant vigilance and readiness to persecution.

But I do not want you to misunderstand this important teaching: Jehovah’s Witnesses do not reject the world itself, but the manifestations of evil in this world.

That is how the teaching is explained in the encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*: “The apostle John writes: ‘Do not be loving either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world.’ (1Jo 2:15, 16) He says, later on, ‘the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.’ (1Jo 5:19) Accordingly, those who love God hate every wicked way.—Ps 101:3; 119:104, 128; Pr 8:13; 13:5.”

And the following is taken from *The Watchtower*:

“1 John 2:15-17: ‘Do not be loving either the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life—does not

¹ jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Love,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200002781>).

originate with the Father, but originates with the world. Furthermore, the world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever.’ (1 John 2:15-17) We must not love the world, for its way of life appeals to the sinful flesh and is diametrically opposed to Jehovah God’s standards. ... True, we live in the midst of human society, which includes fornicators, adulterers, extortioners, idolaters, thieves, liars, and drunkards. (1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-11; Revelation 21:8) But we do not breathe in ‘the spirit of the world,’ for we are not driven by this sinful motivating force.—1 Corinthians 2:12.¹”

“We shun this world’s spirit—its independent attitude, its excessive concern for self, its immorality and violence. We make it a practice to listen to Jehovah and to obey him from our heart, despite any contrary inclinations of the imperfect flesh. Our entire life course gives evidence that our thinking and our motives are oriented to doing God’s will.—Psalm 40:8.²”

“In the Bible the word ‘world’ (Greek, *ko’smos*) often designates unrighteous human society, which ‘is lying in the power of the wicked one.’ (1 John 5:19) So, while hating the things that characterize Satan’s wicked system, Jehovah showed his love for mankind by sending his Son to earth in order to save all who would ‘attain to repentance.’ (2 Peter 3:9; Proverbs 6:16-19) Jehovah’s balanced attitude toward the world should guide his worshipers.³”

Even if Jehovah’s Witnesses are not involved in worldly hustle and bustle, and political and social justice causes that go against their faith, this does not at all mean abandoning civilization and earthly joys. But all those must comply with the spiritual and social moral norms that are clearly set out in the Bible, for example, in God’s commandments, in Solomon’s book of Proverbs, or in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 15, 2006 – p. 25.

² *Worship the Only True God* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – pp. 12-13.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 1, 1997 – p. 8.

34. All Human Laws That Do Not Conflict with God's Laws Should Be Obeyed

The popular belief is that Jehovah's Witnesses are in constant conflict with the authorities and do not obey the laws. But in fact, they are deeply convinced that "there is no authority except by God; the existing authorities stand placed in their relative positions by God.' (Romans 13:1) ... Jehovah allowed estranged humans to create authority structures that would permit them to live in an orderly society.¹"

Back in 1886, Charles Taze Russell wrote: "Neither Jesus nor the Apostles interfered with earthly rulers in any way. . . . They taught the Church to obey the laws, and to respect those in authority because of their office, . . . to pay their appointed taxes, and except where they conflict with God's laws (Acts 4:19; 5:29) to offer no resistance to any established law.—Rom. 13:1-7; Matt. 22:21."²

The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* states regarding Christian subjection to the superior authorities: "There being no reason for Christians to set themselves in opposition to an arrangement that God has permitted, they have good reason to be in subjection to the superior authorities. Governmental rulers, though they may be corrupt personally, would not normally punish others for doing good, that is, for adhering to the law of the land ... Christian subjection to the superior authorities is not based merely on their ability to punish evildoers. With a Christian, it becomes a matter of conscience. He is submissive to human authorities because he recognizes that this is in harmony with God's will.—Ro 13:5; 1Pe 2:13-15."³

Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses, who consider themselves "slaves of God," see their submission to political authorities as "relative, but respectful." Relative means they are submissive as long as there is no

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., July 1, 1994 - p. 19.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 1996 - p. 13.

³ jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, "Superior Authorities," electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200004262>).

conflict between Jehovah's laws and man's laws. But this is very typical for almost all religions and denominations.

Although Jehovah Witnesses believe that "the whole world lies in the power of wicked one [Satan]," (1 John 5:19) they do not view submission to the authorities as lack of devotion to God. On the contrary, this is what The Watchtower stated over 20 years ago:

"Christians need to understand that just because Satan is the invisible ruler of this world, or system, they are not subjecting themselves to him when they recognize their relative subjection to the State. They are obeying God. In this year, 1996, the political State is still a part of 'the arrangement of God,' a temporary arrangement that God permits to exist, and it should be recognized as such by Jehovah's earthly servants.—Romans 13:2.¹"

Since then, their position has not changed. Moreover, it has repeatedly been stated in the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses that respect must be shown even to those authorities who are known for their dishonesty or hostility towards Jehovah's Witnesses.

"As long as Jehovah allows these human powers to exist, they perform important functions, maintaining a measure of order and providing needed services. We show our respect for these authorities by means of our law-abiding conduct. We are careful to pay whatever taxes we owe, to fill out properly any forms or documents that the government may require, and to comply with any laws that involve us, our family, business, or possessions ...

"We also show respect for secular authorities by our demeanor. At times, we may deal directly with government officials. The apostle Paul dealt with such rulers as King Herod Agrippa and Governor Festus. These men were seriously flawed, but Paul addressed them with respect. (Acts 26:2, 25) We imitate Paul's example, whether the official we address is a powerful ruler or a local policeman. In school, young Christians endeavor to show similar respect for their teachers and for

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 1996 - p. 10.

school officials and employees. Of course, we do not limit such respect to those who approve of our beliefs; we are also respectful when dealing with those who are antagonistic toward Jehovah's Witnesses. Really, nonbelievers in general should be able to sense our respect. (Read Romans 12:17, 18; 1 Peter 3:15)

“Let us not be stingy when it comes to showing respect. The apostle Peter wrote: ‘Honor men of all sorts.’ (1 Peter 2:17) When people sense that we view them with genuine respect, they may be deeply impressed. Remember, this quality is becoming ever rarer. Showing it, then, is one way in which we heed Jesus’ command: ‘Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your fine works and give glory to your Father who is in the heavens.’—Matthew 5:16.”¹

Apparently, separate consideration needs to be given to the position of political neutrality.

The importance of showing respect and being obedient to the authorities is regularly discussed in the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, in 2002 there was an *Awake!* magazine with the cover title “The Police—Why Are They Necessary?”

Usually issues arise when Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to perform the national anthem, salute the flag, or participate in political elections.

To explain the matter, J. F. Rutherford gave a radio discourse on October 6, 1935 on the subject “Saluting a Flag,” in which he said: “To many persons the saluting of the flag is merely a formalism and has little or no significance. To those who sincerely consider it from the Scriptural standpoint, it means much. The flag representatively stands for the visible ruling powers. To attempt by law to compel a citizen or child of a citizen to salute any object or thing, or to sing so-called ‘patriotic songs’, is entirely unfair and wrong. Laws are made and enforced to prevent the commission of overt acts that result in injury to another, and are not made for the purpose of compelling a person to violate his conscience, and particularly when that conscience is

¹ *Keep Yourselves in God's Love* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 - pp. 44-45.

directed in harmony with Jehovah God's Word. The refusal to salute the flag, and to stand mute, as this boy did, could injure no one. If one sincerely believes that God's commandment is against the saluting of flags, then to compel that person to salute a flag contrary to the Word of God, and contrary to his conscience, works a great injury to that person.¹"

In the United States, the legitimacy of compelling anyone to salute the flag was a sensitive issue and the matter was handled in civil court proceedings. The U.S. Supreme Court pronounced a final judgment on June 14, 1943 in the case of *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*. The Supreme Court ruled that compulsory flag saluting was inconsistent with the guarantee of freedom set out in the nation's own constitution. It also ruled that "no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."² Interestingly, June 14 was a symbolic date for this important decision since it is the annual Flag Day, clearly showing the position taken by the court.

The publications of Jehovah's Witnesses contain examples of times when the courts defended the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses on this issue in other countries. In a decision handed down on March 1, 1993, the Supreme Court of the Philippines (population over 103 million people) ruled unanimously in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in a case involving Witness youths who were expelled from school because they respectfully declined to salute the flag. The decision upheld the right of children of Jehovah's Witnesses to refrain from saluting the flag, reciting the pledge of allegiance, and singing the national anthem.

The court explained the landmark decision: "The idea that one may be compelled to salute the flag, . . . on pain of . . . being expelled from

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - pp. 196-197.

² *Ibid.* - pp. 687-688.

school, is alien to the conscience of the present generation of Filipinos who cut their teeth on the Bill of Rights which guarantees their rights to free speech and the free exercise of religious profession and worship.” The court also ruled that expulsion of Jehovah’s Witnesses from schools would “violate their right . . . , under the 1987 Constitution, to receive free education.¹”

Jehovah’s Witnesses often point out the peculiarity of this position: “It is well-known that some religious groups have supported armed violence against governments that they disapproved. But nowhere on earth have Jehovah’s Witnesses ever engaged in political subversion. It is not because of disloyalty—because of supporting some other human government—that they refuse to salute a national emblem. They take the same stand in every country where they are found. Their attitude is not one of disrespect. They do not whistle or shout to disrupt patriotic ceremonies; they do not spit on the flag, trample on it, or burn it. They are not antigovernment. Their position is based on what Jesus Christ himself said, as recorded at Matthew 4:10: ‘It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service.’

“The stand taken by Jehovah’s Witnesses is like that taken by the early Christians in the days of the Roman Empire. Regarding those early Christians, the book *Essentials of Bible History* states: ‘The act of emperor worship consisted in sprinkling a few grains of incense or a few drops of wine on an altar which stood before an image of the emperor. Perhaps at our long remove from the situation we see in the act nothing different from . . . lifting the hand in salute to the flag or to some distinguished ruler of state, an expression of courtesy, respect, and patriotism. Possibly a good many people in the first century felt just that way about it but not so the Christians. They viewed the whole matter as one of religious worship, acknowledging the emperor as a

¹ 2003 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2003 - pp. 234-235.

deity and therefore being disloyal to God and Christ, and they refused to do it.—Elmer W. K. Mould, 1951, p. 563.¹”

This is what one of the publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses stated in 2014: “While not joining in ceremonies that they view as unscriptural, Jehovah’s people certainly respect the right of others to do so. They also respect national flags as emblems and recognize duly constituted governments as ‘superior authorities’ serving as ‘God’s minister.’ (Romans 13:1-4) Hence, Jehovah’s Witnesses heed the exhortation to pray ‘concerning kings and all those who are in high positions.’ Our motive, though, is ‘so that we may go on leading a calm and quiet life with complete godly devotion and seriousness.’ (1 Timothy 2:2) ... True Christians respect the right of others to vote. They do not campaign against elections, and they cooperate with elected authorities. However, they remain resolutely neutral with regard to the political affairs of the nations.—Matthew 22:21; 1 Peter 3:16.²”

In 2013 an issue of *Awake!* discussed the topic: “Is Protest the Answer?” It showed that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not take part in protests because they believe that only God’s Kingdom will bring peace to all the humans in the world.

It is evident that the position of “political neutrality” has a purely religious context and is in no way connected with politics. This doctrine does not represent a threat to the political order or strength of society. It is simply a matter of faith and the constitutional right of a citizen in a healthy democratic society.

Of course, from time to time, “crackpot experts” still try to revive Soviet myths about the danger of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teachings. They play on the ignorance of ordinary citizens, who do not know all the aspects of the religious teachings of numerous religions that coexist in our country. They distort the essence of the Witnesses’ teachings in their own favor and sow xenophobia and fear.

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 673.

² *Keep Yourselves in God’s Love* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 213.

However, since any researcher can easily access objective and reliable information now, I want to believe that one day we will eliminate social intolerance.

35. Taking Blood into the Body through Mouth or Veins Violates God's Laws

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God views blood as sacred. "In the Bible, the soul is said to be in the blood because blood is so intimately involved in the life processes. God's Word says: 'For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have put it upon the altar for you to make atonement for your souls, because it is the blood that makes atonement by the soul in it.' (Le 17:11) For like reason, but making the connection even more direct, the Bible says: 'The soul of every sort of flesh is its blood.' (Le 17:14) Clearly, God's Word treats both life and blood as sacred."¹ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that since God prohibited Noah from using blood, and all humankind originates from him, this prohibition applies to all people living today.

Moreover, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that by applying this prohibition, they also are following the example of the first Christians. The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* explains: "This decree rests, ultimately, on God's command not to eat blood, as given to Noah and his sons and, therefore, to all mankind. In this regard, the following is found in *The Chronology of Antient Kingdoms Amended*, by Sir Isaac Newton (Dublin, 1728, p. 184): 'This law [of abstaining from blood] was ancients than the days of *Moses*, being given to *Noah* and his sons, long before the days of *Abraham*: and therefore when the Apostles and Elders in the Council at *Jerusalem* declared that the Gentiles were not obliged to be circumcised and keep the law of *Moses*, they excepted this law of *abstaining from blood, and things strangled*, as being an earlier law of God, imposed not on the sons of *Abraham* only, but on all nations, while they lived together in *Shinar* under the dominion of *Noah*: and

¹ jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, "Blood," electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200000774>).

of the same kind is the law of *abstaining from meats offered to Idols or false Gods, and from fornication.*’—Italics his... in 177 C.E., in Lyons (now in France), when religious enemies falsely accused Christians of eating children, a woman named Biblis said: ‘How would such men eat children, when they are not allowed to eat the blood even of irrational animals?’—*The Ecclesiastical History*, by Eusebius, V, I, 26.

Early Christians abstained from eating any sort of blood. In this regard Tertullian (c. 155-a. 220 C.E.) pointed out in his work *Apology* (IX, 13, 14): ‘Let your error blush before the Christians, for we do not include even animals’ blood in our natural diet. We abstain on that account from things strangled or that die of themselves, that we may not in any way be polluted by blood, even if it is buried in the meat. Finally, when you are testing Christians, you offer them sausages full of blood; you are thoroughly well aware, of course, that among them it is forbidden; but you want to make them transgress.’ Minucius Felix, a Roman lawyer who lived until about 250 C.E., made the same point, writing: ‘For us it is not permissible either to see or to hear of human slaughter; we have such a shrinking from human blood that at our meals we avoid the blood of animals used for food.’—Octavius, XXX, 6.¹”

However, Jehovah’s Witnesses today are known for their firm position not to use blood for medical purposes. Every so often, you may hear in the news that a patient refuses a blood transfusion. What is the basis for this decision?

The official website of Jehovah’s Witnesses gives the following explanation: “This is a religious issue rather than a medical one. Both the Old and New Testaments clearly command us to abstain from blood. (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10; Deuteronomy 12:23; Acts 15:28, 29) Also, God views blood as representing life. (Leviticus

¹ Watchtower Online Library, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Blood,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200000774>).

17:14) So we avoid taking blood not only in obedience to God but also out of respect for him as the Giver of life.¹

At the same time, Jehovah's Witnesses always emphasize that by refusing blood transfusions they do not reject medical treatment in general. By doing so they exercise the legitimate right of a patient to choose a treatment method.

It should be noted that in this regard they definitely have a point. To confirm this, just have a look at the Code "On Public Health and Health Care System" of the Republic of Kazakhstan and you will read following:

"Article 145. The procedure for surgery, transfusion of blood, its components and the use of invasive diagnostic methods

1. Surgery, transfusion of blood, its components and invasive diagnostic techniques are implemented with the informed consent of patients.

Surgery, transfusion of blood and its components, invasive diagnostic techniques for persons with mental, behavioral disorders (diseases), recognized as incompetent by the court, and minors are carried out with the informed consent of their legal representatives.

2. Consent may be withdrawn, except for those cases when healthcare professionals have already started surgical intervention for health reasons and its termination is impossible due to the threat to the life and health of the patient.

3. In cases where delay of a surgery, transfusion of blood and its components, invasive diagnostic techniques threatens the patient's life, and obtaining the consent of the patient or his/her legal representatives is impossible, the decision is taken by the attending physician or case conference who later inform the patient or his/her legal representatives on the measures taken."

¹ jw.org, "Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Accept Blood Transfusions? Common Misconceptions," electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jehovahs-witnesses-why-no-blood-transfusions/>).

These laws are fully consistent with Articles 5 and 6 of the “Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine” adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in November 1996:

“An intervention in the health field may only be carried out after the person concerned has given free and informed consent to it. This person shall beforehand be given appropriate information as to the purpose and nature of the intervention as well as on its consequences and risks. The person concerned may freely withdraw consent at any time ... Where, according to law, a minor does not have the capacity to consent to an intervention, the intervention may only be carried out with the authorisation of his or her representative or an authority or a person or body provided for by law.”

It is reasonable to ask the question: **Why would the legislator set the condition of “the written consent of the patients”** for blood transfusion if it were a mere formality or a panacea for all diseases and compulsory? Or may it be that by providing such a choice on paper we do not give a patient a real choice in practice? Or we just cannot offer our patients such a choice because we do not have specialists or the quality of our medical care is so low? If so, why do we blame the patient and not ourselves?

If a patient is offered a choice, then it is logical to conclude that this choice should be respected by doctors and by society. After all, the consequences of the choice will be borne by the patient, not by someone else.

I will not go into medical evaluations of blood transfusions or blood substitutes. Anyone who wishes can refer to the previous edition of this book, in which I cited a sufficient amount of expert opinions about the transition of the world of medicine from the use of blood transfusions to the widespread use of bloodless methods and blood substitutes. Today, medicine is developing rapidly, and methods of treatment vary greatly. The fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses are asking for bloodless methods of treatment is legitimate and feasible. Another issue is that not all of our

medical staff is always ready and willing to move in this direction. But that is not a matter of faith; it is a different question.

As for the position of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is important to note what are, in my opinion, a few of the most important considerations:

1. Jehovah's Witnesses consider life a gift from God. That is why they refuse to have an abortion, even if it means a threat to mother's life or the risk of having a sick child. They are opposed to suicide and a dangerous lifestyle.

2. Jehovah's Witnesses actively cooperate with doctors, spending a great deal of time and money on this. They have "Hospital Liaison Committees," whose purpose is to interact with doctors, provide information about available bloodless treatment methods and scientific articles about bloodless treatment, and even assistance in getting advice from other doctors who are specialists in bloodless treatment. On their official website, there is an entire section containing a large number of scientific articles, videos and other information devoted to this issue¹.

3. The position of Jehovah's Witness patients who ask that their legitimate right to choose methods of medical treatment be respected.

Of course, this teaching causes a lot of controversy in society. However, it cannot be called "fanatical." Rather, we are talking about matters of faith, medical ethics, and the right of a patient to individual choice.

36. Bible's Laws on Morals Must Be Obeyed

It is well known that the Bible contains clearly defined moral standards, which a Christian must follow². It says in particular:

"Now the works of the flesh are plainly seen, and they are sexual immorality, uncleanness, brazen conduct, idolatry, spiritism, hostility, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, dissensions, divisions, sects, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and things like these. I am forewarning you about these things, the same way I already warned you, that those who

¹ jw.org, electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/medical-library/>).

² We will return to the consideration of some of these norms in the following chapters.

practice such things will not inherit God's Kingdom."—Galatians 5:19-21, NWT.

"Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are of serious concern, whatever things are righteous, whatever things are chaste, whatever things are lovable, whatever things are well-spoken-of, whatever things are virtuous, and whatever things are praiseworthy, continue considering these things."—Philippians 4:6, NWT.

"But as for the cowards and those without faith and those who are disgusting in their filth and murderers and the sexually immoral and those practicing spiritism and idolaters and all the liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This means the second death."—Revelation 21:8, NWT.

"Therefore, now that you have put away deceit, each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, because we are members belonging to one another. Be wrathful, but do not sin; do not let the sun set while you are still angry; do not give the Devil an opportunity. Let the one who steals steal no more; rather, let him do hard work, doing good work with his hands, so that he may have something to share with someone in need. Let a rotten word not come out of your mouth, but only what is good for building up as the need may be, to impart what is beneficial to the hearers."—Ephesians 4:25-29, NWT.

"You slaves, be obedient in everything to those who are your human masters, not only when they are watching, just to please men, but with sincerity of heart, with fear of Jehovah. You masters, treat your slaves in a righteous and fair way, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."—Colossians 3:22; 4:1, NWT.

"Return evil for evil to no one. Take into consideration what is fine from the viewpoint of all men."—Romans 12:17, NWT.

"Therefore, since we have these promises, beloved ones, let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."—2 Corinthians 7:1, NWT.

"Do not be among those who drink too much wine, Among those who gorge themselves on meat, For a drunkard and a glutton will

come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe one with rags.”—Proverbs 23:20, 21, NWT.

“Let us walk decently as in the daytime, not in wild parties and drunkenness, not in immoral intercourse and brazen conduct, not in strife and jealousy.”—Romans 13:13, NWT.

Following moral standards is extremely important to Jehovah’s Witnesses. If a baptized Witness sins and does not show repentance, he will be “disfellowshipped” from the congregation. If a sinner repents, spiritual help is provided to him (meetings, conversations, joint prayers, and reflection on Bible verses). This is very common for most Christian religions.

It is worth noting that disfellowshipping does not cancel family relations, as some dishonest journalists and “cults experts” sometimes try to claim.

It should be emphasized separately that Jehovah’s Witnesses, although they adhere to strict moral standards, do not in any way attempt to impose these standards on others. They do not advocate social reforms, participate in rallies and processions, or lobby for the adoption of any laws. In this regard, they believe that God gave everyone the right to choose his own course in life and no one can take this right away.

To illustrate this position, let us consider their view on homosexuality and their attitude towards homosexuals. This topic is now often raised in Western culture, and therefore the position of Jehovah’s Witnesses is very interesting.

The article “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?” issued in 2016 reads: “Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Bible’s moral code is the best standard for living, and they choose to abide by that code. (Isaiah 48:17) This means that Jehovah’s Witnesses reject all sexual misconduct, including homosexuality. (1 Corinthians 6:18) That is the Witnesses’ lifestyle choice, and they have a right to it.

“At the same time, Jehovah’s Witnesses strive to ‘pursue peace with all people.’ (Hebrews 12:14) While they reject homosexual acts, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not force their view on others, nor do they participate in homophobic hate crimes or rejoice when they hear of them. Jehovah’s Witnesses strive to follow the Golden Rule by treating others the way they themselves would like to be treated. (Matthew 7:12) ... There is a difference between rejecting homosexual *conduct* and rejecting homosexual *people*. The Bible tells Christians to be respectful of all kinds of people. (1 Peter 2:17) But that does not mean that Christians must accept all kinds of *conduct*.”

Further, the most important part: “While Jehovah’s Witnesses uphold the moral code set forth in the Bible, they do not force their views on others. Nor do they try to reverse laws that protect the human rights of those whose lifestyle differs from theirs. The message that Jehovah’s Witnesses bear is a positive one, and they eagerly share it with all who will listen.—Acts 20:20.¹”

37. Sabbath Observance Was Given Only to the Jews and Ended with Mosaic Law

This is one of the principal teachings that distinguishes Jehovah’s Witnesses from Protestant denominations such as Seventh-Day Adventists.

True, in the Bible books of Romans, Galatians, and Colossians, it is said that observing the Sabbath is not obligatory. But at the same time it is emphasized that no one should judge “about what you eat and drink or about the observance of a festival or of the new moon or of a sabbath.”—Colossians 2:16.

Since the Sabbath observance is not obligatory, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not consider this day to be special.

Insight on the Scriptures says: “After Jesus’ death, his apostles at no time commanded Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was not included as a Christian requirement at Acts 15:28, 29, or later. Nor did they institute

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., No. 4, 2016 – pp. 8-9.

a new sabbath, a 'day of the Lord.' Even though Jesus was resurrected on the day now called Sunday, nowhere does the Bible indicate that this day of his resurrection should be commemorated as a 'new' sabbath or in any other way ... From the foregoing it is clear that literal observance of Sabbath days and years was not a part of first-century Christianity. It was not until 321 C.E. that Constantine decreed Sunday (Latin: *dies Solis*, an old title associated with astrology and sun worship, not *Sabbatum* [Sabbath] or *dies Domini* [Lord's day]) to be a day of rest for all but the farmers.¹

38. A Clergy Class and Special Titles Are Improper

In this regard also, the position of Jehovah's Witnesses does not differ from the Bible.

In particular, they refer to the Gospel of Matthew, which says: "One is your Teacher, and all of you are brothers. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called leaders, for your Leader is one, the Christ."—Matthew 23:8-12.

"But Jesus called them to him and said: 'You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them and the great men wield authority over them. This must not be the way among you; but whoever wants to become great among you must be your minister, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. Just as the Son of man came, not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom in exchange for many.'—Matthew 20:25-28.

It is hard to imagine Christ and his apostles using titles among themselves or special rituals to separate themselves from the crowds following them.

An article from the series "The Bible's Viewpoint," in a 2009 issue of *Awake!*, gave six reasons why there should not be a clergy-laity distinction:

¹ jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, "Sabbath Day," electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200003778>).

“Do not go beyond the things that are written,’ the Bible states. (1 Corinthians 4:6) Sadly, when people disregard that divinely inspired directive, spiritual harm usually results, and that is true of the clergy-laity arrangement. How so? Please consider the following six points.

“1. The separation of a clergy class implies that one must have a special calling to be a minister of God. Yet, the Bible says that all true Christians should serve God and praise his name. (Romans 10:9, 10) As for ministering within the congregation, Christian men in general are encouraged to reach out for that privilege, which is the custom among Jehovah’s Witnesses.—1 Timothy 3:1.

“2. The clergy-laity distinction exalts the clergy class, an evidence being adulatory religious titles. Yet, Jesus said: ‘He that conducts himself as a *lesser* one among all of you is the one that is great.’ (Luke 9:48) In harmony with that spirit of humility, he told his followers not to adopt religious titles.—Matthew 23:8-12.

“3. A paid clergy class can impose a heavy financial burden on the laity, especially when the former have lavish lifestyles. Christian overseers, on the other hand, care for their financial needs by doing normal secular work, thus setting a good example for others. —Acts 18:1-3; 20:33, 34; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10.

“4. Because a clergyman may depend on others for financial support, he might be tempted to dilute the Bible’s message in order to please parishioners. Indeed, the Scriptures foretold that this very thing would occur. ‘There will be a period of time when they will not put up with the healthful teaching, but, in accord with their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled.’—2 Timothy 4:3.

“5. The clergy-laity distinction tends to cause lay people to relegate religion to the clergy, while the laity just turn up for weekly services. Yet, all Christians must be conscious of their spiritual need and be good students of the Bible.—Matthew 4:4; 5:3.

“6. When the laity are Biblically uninformed, they can easily be misled by clerics, even exploited by them. Indeed, history contains many examples of such abuses. —Acts 20:29, 30.”¹

It is important to note that, although Jehovah’s Witnesses distinguish between “the anointed” and “the great crowd”, this distinction is purely doctrinal. *The Watchtower* has repeatedly emphasized the absence of any difference between the two groups.

“Under inspiration, Paul appealed to anointed Christians ‘to walk worthily of the calling with which [they] were called.’ How should this be done? Paul goes on to say ‘with all humility and mildness, with patience, putting up with one another in love, earnestly endeavoring to maintain the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace.’ (Eph. 4:1-3) Jehovah’s spirit promotes humility, not pride. (Col. 3:12) Modestly, anointed ones acknowledge that they do not necessarily have more holy spirit than those with an earthly hope. They do not claim to have special knowledge or revelations; neither do they try to prove that they are in some way superior ... They would humbly acknowledge that it is Jehovah who does the calling of anointed ones.

“Although it is a wonderful privilege to have the heavenly calling, anointed Christians do not expect any special honor from others ... In no way, then, would they use their anointing as a ‘calling card’ to introduce themselves to others. For the most part, they would not even mention this personal experience to others, so as to avoid drawing attention to themselves; neither would they want to boast about their future reward. (1 Cor. 1:28, 29; read 1 Corinthians 4:6-8)

“In addition, anointed Christians do not view themselves as being part of an elite club. They do not seek out others who claim to have the same calling, hoping to bond with them or endeavoring to form private groups for Bible study. (Gal. 1:15-17) Such efforts would cause divisions within the congregation and work against the holy spirit, which promotes peace and unity.”²

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 2009 – pp. 22-23.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 2016 – pp. 23-24.

39. Man Did Not Evolve but Was Created

Jehovah’s Witnesses consistently uphold the idea of creation and refuse to compromise on this question. Books, magazines, and videos on why it makes sense to believe in the Creator are regularly published on their website.

They apply the following consideration: “The Bible encourages you to use your ‘power of reason.’ (Romans 12:1) That means your belief in God should not be based merely on ...

“EMOTION (I just feel that there must be a higher power)

“THE INFLUENCE OF OTHERS (I live in a religious community)

“PRESSURE (My parents raised me to believe in God—I had no choice)

“Instead, you should have sound reasons for your belief.¹”

Their position is clearly explained in an issue of *Awake!* from 2015: “The Bible says that ‘[God] created all things.’ (Revelation 4:11) He did not ‘rest’ until his creative work was complete. (Genesis 2:2) The implication is clear: God did not create a simple organism and then rest, or take a backseat, while that organism evolved over millions of years into various kinds of fish, apes, and humans. That idea, called macroevolution, denies the role of a Creator, who the Bible says ‘made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.’—Exodus 20:11; Revelation 10:6.”²

The same article makes some interesting conclusions about the theory of evolution: “Does the Bible’s creation account rule out the possibility that the universe began with the big bang?

“The Bible simply says: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ (Genesis 1:1) It does not comment on exactly how God created everything. So even if a cosmic explosion produced our

¹ *Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 2016 – p. 29.

² *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 15, 2015 – p. 8.

universe, that would not contradict what is stated in the Bible. Rather, Genesis 1:1 would answer the question, Who caused the big bang? Of course, many scientists believe that the big bang was a spontaneous, undirected event that led to the self-arranging of particles of matter into stars and planets over a period of time. The Bible does not support that view but states that the formation of the universe was a direct act of God, whether he employed some sort of cosmic explosion or some other method of creation.

“Yes. The Bible says that God created living things ‘according to their kinds.’ (Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25) Can variation occur within a kind? Yes. However, does observed adaptation within a kind prove that eventually new kinds can evolve? No.¹”

Meanwhile, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Bible does not support the view of creationists and fundamentalists who believe that God created Earth in six literal days.

Any believer bases his faith in the creation of man on what the Bible says: “Jehovah God proceeded to form the man out of dust from the ground and to blow into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man *came to be* a living soul.”—Genesis 2:7. And since the Bible is an indisputable authority for Jehovah’s Witnesses, the creation of man is also unquestionable.

But this point of view also requires substantiation, especially because modern educated people are not ready to accept the Bible’s version of the origin of man without proof.

In general, man, as the great Russian writer F.M. Dostoevsky said, is a mystery. And the great French philosopher and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin added: “Everything that we learn is summarized in man ...”

The evolutionary theory today is questioned by many scientists and not only by those who share the Christian idea of creation. Therefore, one cannot but agree with the opinion of the authors of a special issue

¹ Ibid - p. 8.

of *The Watchtower* magazine devoted to the origin of life: “Scientists also have differing views about where God—‘if he exists’—fits into the picture. Some say that life evolved without the intervention of a Creator, while others suggest that God started the process and let evolution take over.¹” (True, there are other equally interesting opinions, which we do not find in the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses, therefore we will address them.)

Without going into the essence of the dispute, since our goal is only to make an objective assessment of the fundamental teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we want to note that, in their opinion, the theory of evolution has not stood the test of time. It is no coincidence that the main article of the above-mentioned *Watchtower* magazine is called “Evolution on Trial.” In particular, it reads: “Some think that belief in evolution is based upon fact, while belief in creation is based upon faith. It is true that no man has seen God. (John 1:18; compare 2 Corinthians 5:7.) Yet, the theory of evolution holds no advantage in this regard, since it is founded upon events that no humans have ever witnessed or duplicated.

“For example, scientists have never observed mutations—even beneficial ones—that produce new life-forms; yet they are sure that this is precisely how new species arrived. They have not witnessed the spontaneous generation of life; yet they insist that this is how life began.

“Such lack of evidence causes T. H. Janabi to call the evolution theory ‘a mere ‘faith.’ Physicist Fred Hoyle calls it ‘the Gospel according to Darwin.’ Dr. Evan Shute takes it further. ‘I suspect that the creationist² has less mystery to explain away than the wholehearted evolutionist,’ he says.³”

After analyzing a number of other statements of scientists on this matter, the authors of this issue completely reject the views of

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., September 1, 1994 – pp. 3-4.

² Creationism (lat. creatio) – movement in biology whose followers think that the world—the earth, life, a human being—results from divine creation and deny the change of species in their historical development.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., September 1, 1994 – p. 5.

evolutionists on the origin of life as pseudoscience and invite everyone “to investigate the matter for [one]self.”

With time, more and more arguments in favor of creation have been given in their books and videos.

One issue of the *Awake!* magazine of 2017 cites Dr. Fan Yu, a research mathematician and a software designer: “As a mathematician, I was trained to calculate the probabilities of events. I had also learned that for life to occur spontaneously, proteins would already have to exist. So I tried to calculate the probability of a protein originating by an unguided process. Proteins are among the most complex molecules known, and living cells can have thousands of different types of proteins interacting in very precise ways. I realized, as others have, that the spontaneous formation of a protein is so improbable that it is essentially impossible! I have not read anything in evolution theory that explains to my satisfaction how these highly complex molecules could, in effect, create themselves—let alone the living systems of which they form an integral part. To me, the facts pointed to a Creator ...

“When I give thought to the many elements in nature, I cannot help but believe in a Creator. Currently I design software for computers, and I often feel amazed at how our brain outperforms computer programs. For example, our brain’s ability to recognize speech is mind-boggling. Most of us can easily understand speech, even if it includes incomplete sentences, laughter, coughs, stutters, accents, echoes, background noise, or telephone distortion. You might think this unremarkable. But software designers know otherwise. Even the best speech-recognition software is a far cry from the human brain.

“Unlike the most complex computers, our brain can discern emotions, recognize accents, and identify speakers by their voice characteristics. Software designers are researching how computers could mimic the human brain’s ability to recognize speech. I am convinced that in doing so they are actually studying the handiwork of God.¹”

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., No. 3, 2017 - p. 13.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the fact that man was created is the basis for his religiousness. Here are some arguments on this subject cited in one of their publications: "Do you think that life has a purpose? Evolutionist William B. Provine says: 'What we have learned about the evolutionary process has enormous implications for us, affecting our sense of meaning in life.' His conclusion? 'I can see no cosmic or ultimate meaning in human life.'

"Consider the significance of those words. If ultimate meaning in life were nonexistent, then you would have no purpose in living other than to try to do some measure of good and perhaps pass on your genetic traits to the next generation. At death, you would cease to exist forever. Your brain, with its ability to think, reason, and meditate on the meaning of life, would simply be an accident of nature.

"That is not all. Many who believe in evolution assert that God does not exist or that he will not intervene in human affairs. In either case, our future would rest in the hands of political, academic, and religious leaders. Judging from the past record of such men, the chaos, conflict, and corruption that blight human society would continue. If, indeed, evolution were true, there would seem to be ample reason to live by the fatalistic motto: 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die.' (1 Corinthians 15:32)

"By contrast, the Bible teaches: 'With [God] is the source of life.' (Psalm 36:9) Those words have profound implications.

"If what the Bible says is true, life does have meaning. Our Creator has a loving purpose that extends to all who choose to live in accord with his will. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) That purpose includes the promise of life in a world free of chaos, conflict, and corruption—and even free of death.—Psalm 37:10, 11; Isaiah 25:6-8.¹"

I think that ongoing debate on this issue has no end. There is no reason to initiate a polemic. Let everyone decide for himself what he wants to believe.

¹ *Was Life Created?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2010 – p. 29.

40. Christ Set an Example in Serving God That Must Be Followed

Like all Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses consider Jesus Christ the Great Teacher and the Great Prophet, who throughout his earthly life set the greatest example of serving God. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Christ was a perfect reflection of his Heavenly Father, Jehovah, in his deeds and in the qualities he displayed while he lived on earth as a perfect man. Thus, the example of his service to God was also perfect.

One of the songs that Jehovah's Witnesses sing at their meetings is called "Christ, Our Model." These are words that, in my opinion, perfectly reflect the attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses toward Christ's example:

Like Jesus, may our days
Provide Jehovah praise,
And may his footsteps become our own roadway.
Let Jesus' model be
Our path eternally,
And then God's favor we'll know day by day.

Jesus Christ left commandments for his disciples and all subsequent generations of faithful followers. If all people followed them, the world today would be very different.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that they must fulfill these commandments fully, the main one being: "You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets."—Matthew 22:37-40, NWT.

Consequently, Jesus taught others to value their relationship with God above all else in life. As a result, as Jehovah's Witnesses believe those who learn about God's qualities and begin to love him back will

have a desire to fulfill his commandments. And they will only benefit from that.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples how to show love for their neighbors. He said: “All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them.”—Matthew 7:12.

These words have become the standard of human decency even for those who do not believe in God.

Contrary to the allegations we sometimes hear that Witnesses deny Christ, here is a list of books they have published emphasizing the importance of Christ’s role and teachings: *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived, Learn From the Great Teacher, “Come Be My Follower,” Jesus – The Way, the Truth, the Life*. All of these fundamental publications, the result of many years of study and meticulous research, describe Christ’s life and his teachings and encourage all to follow his example.

41. Baptism by Complete Immersion Symbolizes Dedication to God

The Bible says: “In the course of those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.” (Mark 1:9) “But John too was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was a great quantity of water there, and people kept coming and were being baptized.” (John 3:23) “Paul said: ‘John baptized with the baptism in symbol of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’”—Acts 19:4, NWT.

Based on these words from the Bible, Jehovah’s Witnesses, like all Christians, consider water baptism a symbol of personal dedication to God. But unlike a number of Christian religions, such as Catholicism, Jehovah’s Witnesses baptize by full immersion in water, remembering that Jesus was baptized in a river, and John baptized only where there was a body of water.

Baptism symbolizes dying to one’s former way of life and beginning a new life as a disciple of Christ who has been dedicated to God.

The encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* states that “Christian baptism required an understanding of God’s Word and an intelligent decision to present oneself to do the revealed will of God.¹” Only those who can make this decision consciously and meet certain requirements can be baptized. At the same time, baptism should be preceded by a deep study of the Bible (offered by Jehovah’s Witnesses free of charge, usually held once a week and lasting six months to a year). In the process, the student usually brings his life in line with what he learns from the Bible.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not baptize infants. The same article in the encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Baptism,” directly indicates that there should be “no infant baptism. In view of the fact that ‘hearing the word,’ ‘embracing the word heartily,’ and ‘repenting’ precede water baptism (Ac 2:14, 22, 38, 41) and that baptism requires the individual to make a solemn decision, it is apparent that one must at least be of age to hear, to believe, and to make this decision.”

The elders of the congregation should also help an interested person comprehend the essential teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses. “The elders will make sure that a person desiring baptism has acquired a reasonable understanding of basic Bible teachings. Additionally, they will want to ascertain whether the prospective minister deeply appreciates the truth and demonstrates proper respect for Jehovah’s organization. If the person does not understand primary Bible teachings, the elders will arrange for him to receive personal assistance so that he can qualify for baptism at a later time.²”

Dedication to God in a special prayer should precede baptism. In this prayer a person makes a promise to serve God to the best of his ability forever, making God’s will a priority.

Baptism for Jehovah’s Witnesses is such an important and significant step that a 2018 Watchtower stated that “genuine discipleship includes baptism.³”

¹ jw.org, *Insight on the Scriptures*, “Baptism,” electronic ref., (<https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200000555>).

² *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 212.

³ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 2018 – p. 6.

42. Christians Must Bear Witness to Bible Truth

Here, Jehovah's Witnesses also follow the instructions presented in the Bible. "Quoting the prophet Joel, Paul wrote: 'Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.' Then he added: 'However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach?' A few verses later, Paul points out that faith does not come spontaneously; rather, it 'follows the thing heard,' that is, 'the word about Christ.'—Romans 10:13, 14, 17; Joel 2:32.

"Who will bring 'the word about Christ' to the nations? Jesus assigned that work to his disciples—those who have already been taught that 'word.'—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; John 17:20.¹"

"As a vigorous proclaimer of the good news, Jesus set an example for his followers. He took the initiative to go out among the people, speaking and teaching in their homes and in public places. (Matt. 9:35; 13:36; Luke 8:1) Jesus spoke with individuals, taught his disciples privately, and addressed groups numbering into the thousands. (Mark 4:10-13; 6:35-44; John 3:2-21) He took advantage of every appropriate occasion to speak words of encouragement and hope. (Luke 4:16-19) Even when he was in need of rest and refreshment, he did not pass up opportunities to witness.—Mark 6:30-34; John 4:4-34.²"

Based on my observations, in 2017 there was a change in Jehovah's Witnesses' attitude towards preaching. In my opinion, since then they have concentrated on preaching to those "rightly disposed towards the truth." Here is what *The Watchtower* comments: "Earnestly looking for all those who are 'rightly disposed for everlasting life' and helping them to become believers.—Read Acts 13:44-48. How can we know who are 'rightly disposed for everlasting life'? As in the first century, the only way to find those people is to give a witness. Thus, we need to do

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 1, 2000 - p. 13.

² *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - p. 81.

just as Jesus instructed: 'Into whatever city or village you enter, search out who in it is deserving.' (Matt. 10:11) We do not expect insincere people, haughty individuals, or those with no spiritual inclination to respond favorably to the good news. We are looking for people who are honest, humble, and hungry for the truth.¹ In other words, they are not trying to persuade people anymore, but are looking for those who are interested. This might be the reason why in recent years in their literature I have not been able to find any tips on how to handle objections.

It is worth emphasizing that:

(1) Jehovah's Witnesses understand that they cannot force their beliefs on others.

(2) They deeply respect the right of everyone to make their own choice.

Of course, not everyone likes being approached on the street or at home with a question about their faith. Nevertheless, it does not irritate everyone, just a few. There are many people who are very grateful that someone told them about the Bible and that they were not passed by. It is true, in modern society there are a lot of lonely people who need support, many of them are searching for a meaning in their lives. Is it wrong if we talk to each other and share our opinions more? When everyone knows how to listen and respect different opinions—that is when we will learn to be tolerant. Otherwise, we will end up in a society where everyone lives in fear, where people hear stories about terrible “sects” and “brainwashing,” and xenophobia will flourish. And can xenophobia and fear bring unity and freedom? One cannot force his beliefs, imposing them upon others. Unfortunately, not everyone understands this. And this leads to situations of conflict.

The previous edition of this book covered only the above-mentioned teachings. Since then I have discovered that in 2015, Jehovah's

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 2018 (Study Edition) – p. 12.

Witnesses shared a few more teachings on their official website. They have held them for years, but now Jehovah’s Witnesses have decided to highlight them. Let us consider them.

43. Evil and Suffering

According to the Bible, these began when one of God’s angels rebelled. (John 8:44) This angel, who received the names “Satan” and “Devil” after his rebellion, persuaded the first human couple to join him, which led to some disastrous consequences for their descendants. (Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 5:12) In rebelling against God, they took sides with Satan, who raised a sweeping challenge to Jehovah’s sovereignty. By their actions, they supported the assertion that man is better off without Jehovah, ruling himself under the guidance of a rebel spirit creature. In sentencing the rebels, Jehovah, in effect, gave them what they asked for. He allowed man to rule himself under the influence of Satan. In order to settle the moral issues raised by Satan, God has allowed evil and suffering, but He will not permit them to continue forever.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not consider suffering to be part of the natural way of living. They explain: “When studying a disease epidemic, investigators try to find the cause—what triggered the outbreak. The same principle applies to understanding the ‘plague’ of human suffering and discord. Again, the Bible is of immense help, for it documents our earliest history, the time when our troubles started.

“The book of Genesis reveals that mankind’s woes began when the first humans rebelled against God. Among other things, they took it upon themselves to set moral standards—a right that belonged only to our Creator. (Genesis 3:1-7) Sadly, since then, people in general have adopted the same independent thinking. The results? Human history is a chronicle, not of freedom and happiness, but of conflict, oppression, and moral and spiritual discord. (Ecclesiastes 8:9)¹”

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., No. 2, 2016 – p. 5.

“The Bible tells us that ‘the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.’ (1 John 5:19) The ruler of this world, Satan, is vicious and cruel. He is ‘misleading the entire inhabited earth.’ (Revelation 12:9) Many people imitate him. And that’s just one reason why the world is so full of lies, hatred, and cruelty.

“There are other reasons why there is so much suffering in the world. After Adam and Eve rebelled, they passed sin on to their children. And because of sin, humans cause other humans to suffer. They often want to be more important than others. They fight, they go to war, and they bully others. (Ecclesiastes 4:1; 8:9) Sometimes people suffer because of ‘time and unexpected events.’ (Ecclesiastes 9:11) When they are in the wrong place at the wrong time, accidents and other bad things can happen to them.

“Jehovah never causes suffering. He’s not to blame for war, crime, and mistreatment. God does not cause disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods. But you may wonder, ‘If Jehovah is the most powerful person in the universe, why doesn’t he stop those terrible things from happening?’ We know that God cares deeply about us, so he must have a very good reason for allowing suffering to continue.—1 John 4:8.¹”

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that God will soon end suffering, because the Bible says: “Death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore.”—Revelation 21:3, 4.

44. Family

Jehovah’s Witnesses adhere to God’s original standard of marriage—the union of one man and one woman, with sexual immorality being the only valid basis for divorce. (Matthew 19:4-9) They are convinced that the wisdom found in the Bible helps families to succeed. (Ephesians 5:22–6:1) Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not approve of polygamy, common-law marriages, and gay marriages.

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 - pp. 117-118.

Of special interest is the position of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding divorce. Differing faiths of spouses, incompatibility of characters, etc. are not valid reasons for divorce. The only legitimate reason for divorce is the betrayal of the marriage union.

For example, the Russian Orthodox Church gives following reasons for the dissolution of a church marriage (following is a translation from Russian): "Falling away from the Church; perversion; impotence which had set in or had been self-inflicted before the marriage; leprosy or syphilis; prolonged disappearance; conviction that leads to disenfranchisement; attempts on the life or against the health of the spouse or children; sexual intercourse with a daughter-in-law; procurement; profiting from the spouse's indecencies; incurable mental disease and malevolent abandonment of the spouse. At present, added to this list of the grounds for divorce are AIDS, chronic alcoholism or drug-addiction and abortion without husband's consent.¹"

Thus, it is ridiculous to say that Jehovah's Witnesses destroy families. Such statements are contradicted by the very teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses are often criticized for advocating that their followers marry only fellow believers. That is indeed their stand.

For example, the August 2016 issue of *The Watchtower* directly states: "Christian marriage should begin with a man and a woman who are dedicated to Jehovah and love him wholeheartedly. They should also have come to love each other so much that they want to unite their lives in the marital bond. Of course, they will be blessed for having followed the counsel to marry 'only in the Lord.' (1 Cor. 7:39) Once married, they will undoubtedly agree that the Bible gives the best advice for making their marriage a success."²

This often causes indignation among those who do not share the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses.

¹ The Russian Orthodox Church Website, "The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church > X. Personal, family and public morality," electronic ref., (<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/419128.html>).

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 2016 - p. 12.

However, this teaching is neither new nor unique. Let us consider at least the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the official document “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” in the section “Personal, Family and Public Morality” we read (following is a translation from Russian): “The common faith of spouses who are members of the body of Christ is an essential condition for truly Christian and church marriage. It is only the family that has one faith that can become ‘the church in the house’ (Rom. 16:5; Phil. 1:2), in which husband and wife together with their children grow in spiritual perfection and knowledge of God. The lack of like-mindedness presents a serious threat to the integrity of a matrimonial union. That is why the Church considers it her duty to urge the faithful to marry ‘only in the Lord’ (1 Cor. 7:39), to marry only those who share their Christian convictions.¹”

As we see, this position is common for many Christian religions, since it is based directly on the Bible.

Moreover, it should be noted that no one is disfellowshipped from the congregation for violating this instruction. Also, a marriage in which one of the spouses has different religious beliefs is not considered “sinful” or less honorable.

45. Worship

As already mentioned, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not use the cross or any other images in worship. They view that as idolatry. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19; 1 John 5:21) Key aspects of their worship include the following:

- Praying to God
- Reading and studying the Bible
- Meditating on what is learned from the Bible
- Meeting together to pray, study the Bible, sing, express faith, and encourage fellow Witnesses and others

¹ The Russian Orthodox Church Website, “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church > X. Personal, family and public morality,” electronic ref., (<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/419128.html>)

- Preaching the “good news of the Kingdom” and looking for “rightly disposed ones”
- Helping those in need
- Constructing and maintaining Kingdom Halls and other facilities used to further worldwide Bible educational work
- Sharing in disaster relief

It is worth noting that “helping those in need,” “sharing in disaster relief,” and “constructing and maintaining religious facilities” is part of their worship or “sacred service.” Jehovah’s Witnesses even consider cleaning a religious building after a meeting to be part of their service to God.

Regarding sharing in disaster relief, Jehovah’s Witnesses feel very proud of how quickly they manage to come to the aid of their fellow worshippers in other countries. On their official website you can find many videos showing how timely assistance has been provided to Jehovah’s Witnesses in different parts of the world.

46. Unity among Jehovah’s Witnesses

Jehovah’s Witnesses work hard to stay united despite social, ethnic, racial, or class differences. This unity, however, allows for personal choice. Each Witness makes decisions in harmony with his or her own conscience.

The international unity of Jehovah’s Witnesses is very well known. They condemn nationalism and racism. At their international conventions you can see relaxed Witnesses surrounded by their fellow believers from other countries and cultures. They call themselves “the brotherhood” and consider such unity to be the mark of true Christianity.

As a basis for the unity of the worldwide Christian congregation, Jehovah’s Witnesses cite the following Bible texts:

“I make request, not concerning these only, but also concerning those putting faith in me through their word, so that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me and I am in union with you,

that they also may be in union with us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory that you have given me, in order that they may be one just as we are one. I in union with them and you in union with me, in order that they may be perfected into one, so that the world may know that you sent me and that you loved them just as you loved me.”—John 17:20-23, NWT.

“For just as the body is one but has many members, and all the members of that body, although many, are one body, so too is the Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink one spirit.”—1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, NWT.

According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, unity includes the following factors:

“(1) We acknowledge Jehovah’s right to set the standard as to good and bad. ‘Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight.’—Proverbs 3:5, 6. ...

“(2) We have God’s Word to guide us. ‘When you received God’s word, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but, just as it truthfully is, as the word of God, which is also at work in you believers.’—1 Thessalonians 2:13. ...

“(3) We all benefit from the same spiritual feeding program. ‘All your sons will be persons taught by Jehovah.’ (Isaiah 54:13) ‘Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as some have the custom, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as you behold the day [of destruction] drawing near.’—Hebrews 10:24, 25. ...

“(4) Jesus Christ, and no human, is our Leader. ‘Do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, whereas all you are brothers. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called “leaders,” for your Leader is one, the Christ.’—Matthew 23:8-10...

“(5) We look to God’s Kingdom government as the only hope for humankind. ‘You must pray, then, this way: “Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.”’ (Matthew 6:9, 10) ‘Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness.’— Matthew 6:33 ...

“(6) Holy spirit produces in worshipers of Jehovah qualities that are vital to Christian unity. ‘The fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control.’— Galatians 5:22, 23 ...

“(7) All of God’s true worshipers share in preaching the good news of his Kingdom. ‘This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.’—Matthew 24:14¹”

Thus, unity among Jehovah’s Witnesses does not mean uniformity. Rather, it is unity in diversity. Therefore, this teaching is characterized by wider freedom of choice and freedom of personal decisions.

Back in 2003 the following was published on this subject:

“This does not mean, however, that each Christian is told precisely how to think and what to do in all of life’s situations. Most matters involve personal choice ... Today Christians may make decisions that differ from those of other Christians when it comes to matters of employment, health, recreation, or some other area that involves personal choice. Such variety could disturb some. They might wonder if differences in outlook could lead to disputes or divisions in the congregation. However, such an outcome is not inevitable. To illustrate: Music composers have only a limited number of notes to work with, yet the possibilities for making beautiful music are endless. Similarly, Christians make choices that are within the boundaries of godly principles. However, they have a degree of latitude when making certain personal decisions.²”

¹ *Worship the Only True God* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2002 - pp. 9-11.

² *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 8, 2003 - p. 27.

In recent years, emigration has become commonplace in the world. A huge number of people change their place of residence, moving to other countries in search of a better life and wages. Jehovah's Witnesses are no exception.

The Watchtower directly states: "We are not expected to be ashamed of our family, culture, or the region where we grew up.—Acts 21:39."¹

The October 2016 issue of *The Watchtower* reminded readers of the importance of showing hospitality and ways of doing so: "We can show kindness to newcomers from a foreign background by warmly greeting them at the Kingdom Hall. We may have noticed that new immigrants are sometimes shy and stay by themselves. Because of their upbringing or social status, they may feel inferior to those of another race or nationality. So we should take the initiative to show a warm and sincere interest in them. If available in your language, the *JW Language* app can help you learn how to greet newcomers in their mother tongue

...

"To help others feel at home in the congregation, honestly ask yourself, 'If I were in a foreign country, how would I want to be treated?' Be patient with those who are adjusting to a new country. At first, we may not fully understand their way of thinking or reacting. But rather than expect them to embrace our culture, why not accept them just the way they are?

"If we learn about the homeland and culture of those from a foreign background, we may find it easier to interact with them ... Another way to draw closer to those from another background is to invite them for a meal in our home."²

These were some basic *beliefs* of Jehovah's Witnesses.

But our review would be incomplete if we did not analyze Christian beliefs that are not recognized by Jehovah's Witnesses. "A number of Bible concepts that are important for traditional Christianity are

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 15, 2015 - p. 15.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 2016 - pp. 10-11.

interpreted” by them “in a different way: on the basis of a more precise, as they see it, understanding of the languages and the spirit of the Scriptures.¹”

Jehovah’s Witnesses strongly reject the **veneration of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God**, as well as the veneration of any saints and patron saints.

They refer to the fact that the Bible does not provide any basis for such veneration. The main arguments on this account are:

The first: Mary was officially recognized as the Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven not by the writers of the Bible, but by the participants of the III Ecumenical Council, which took place in 431 in Ephesus².

The second: In the appendix to the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Russian there are 44 Bible topics for discussion. To prove the main theses, each of these topics is supplemented with references to the original source, the Holy Scriptures. Topic #27 focuses on the question of Mary worship. The following arguments, which support the stand of Jehovah’s Witnesses, are given with references to the Bible:

A. Mary mother of Jesus, not “mother of God”

God is without beginning. Ps 90:2; 1Ti 1:17

Mary was mother of God’s Son, in his earthly state. Lu 1:35

B. Mary not “ever virgin”

She married Joseph. Mt 1:19, 20, 24, 25

Had other children besides Jesus. Mt 13:55, 56; Lu 8:19-21

These not then his “spiritual brothers.” Joh 7:3, 5

Jehovah’s Witnesses **do not celebrate Christmas or Easter**, not to mention other Christian holidays celebrated by Catholics or Orthodox Christians.

¹ N.S. Gordienko. *Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity* - Saint Petersburg, Limbus Press, 2000 – p. 48.

² N. Talberg. *History of the Christian Church* - Moscow, Interbook, 1991 – p. 154.

The matter here is not about rejecting fun—they like having fun—but about always following the Bible, which says nothing about these holidays, and there are no accounts showing that the first century Christians celebrated them.

This is what we find on this matter in their literature:

“First, the Bible does not mention birthday celebrations for Jesus or any other faithful worshipper of God ... According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the early Christians opposed the ‘pagan custom of celebrating birthdays.’

“The Bible does not say exactly when Jesus was born. ‘The day of Christ’s birth cannot be ascertained from the N[ew] T[estament] or, indeed, from any other source,’ states McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia*. Surely, if Jesus wanted his followers to celebrate his birthday, he would have made certain that they knew the date of his birth.

“Second, the Bible does not record that Jesus or any one of his disciples celebrated Christmas. According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, celebrating Christmas was first mentioned ‘in the *Chronograph* of Philocalus, a Roman almanac whose source material can be dated to 336 [C.E.]’ Clearly, that was well after the completion of the Bible and centuries after Jesus was on earth. Thus, McClintock and Strong note that ‘the observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of N[ew] T[estament] origin.’

“As the Great Teacher, Jesus gave clear instructions on what he wanted his followers to do, and these are recorded in the Bible. Celebrating Christmas, however, is not one of them. Just as a schoolteacher does not want his students to go beyond the instructions given them, Jesus does not want his followers to ‘go beyond the things that are written’ in the Holy Scriptures.—1 Corinthians 4:6.¹”

Earlier, the December 1, 2012 *Watchtower* presented the following argument:

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., No 6, 2017 – p. 15.

“Interestingly, in the mid-17th century, an act of parliament banned Christmas celebrations in England. In the United States, the Massachusetts General Court did the same. Why? The book *The Battle for Christmas*, says: “There is no biblical or historical reason to place the birth of Jesus on December 25. It adds that to the Puritans, ‘Christmas was nothing but a pagan festival covered with a Christian veneer.’”¹

Neither the day, the month, nor even the year of the birth of Jesus is really known to us. So, the celebration, as we know, was finally established only in the 4th century C.E. Therefore, the question of what year should be considered the official year of Christ’s birth is still a controversial issue.

The guidebook *The World of Russian Culture* reads: “Christmas was not included in the Christian cult right away. The early Christians did not know the date of birth of Jesus Christ. Only in the third century did Christians begin to celebrate this holiday on January 6 ... Only in the fourth century did Christmas begin to be celebrated on December 25, which was probably due to the desire of the Christian church to oust the cult of the ancient Iranian sun god Mithra, widespread in the Roman Empire. The birth of this deity was also celebrated on December 25. In Russia, Christmas began to be celebrated after the introduction of Christianity in the tenth century. It was at the time when the ancient Slavs celebrated their winter multi-day holiday, Kolyada. Many Christmas rituals and customs have been preserved in the Christmas festival.”²

Easter is another significant religious holiday. It falls on holy week in some Latin American countries. But Easter was not celebrated by the early Christians. It also originated in non-Christian festivals. *The Encyclopædia Britannica* explains: “Neither the New Testament nor the writings of the Apostolic Fathers mention the celebration of the

¹ *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 1, 2012 – p. 10.

² A.N. Myachin. *The World of Russian Culture* - Moscow, Veche, 2004 – p. 556.

resurrection of Christ. The idea of the sacredness of some days was alien to the first Christians.¹

The date of the celebration of Easter by Christians was not really based on the Bible. It was introduced at the I Ecumenical Council in the year 325. Like many other famous Christian holidays today, Christmas and the traditional Christian Easter (not to be confused with the Jewish holiday originating from the time of Moses) also appeared in post-Biblical times.

Does it really matter that Christmas and Easter are not Christian holidays but were originally celebrated by pagans? Jehovah's Witnesses believe it does. "Some may feel, however, that allowing some of the Easter customs was not wrong—that it gave 'pagans' a better understanding of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. Paul, however, would never have agreed. Although exposed to many pagan customs while traveling through the Roman Empire, he never adopted any of them to give people a better understanding of Jesus. On the contrary, he warned the Christians: 'Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness? "Therefore, get out from among them, and separate yourselves," says Jehovah, "and quit touching the unclean thing."—2 Corinthians 6:14, 17."²

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in predestination and **fate**. They state: "God does not write anything on the foreheads of people. There is no fate that determines our future before we are born. We are responsible for what we do, for the choices we make. 'Each of us will render an account for himself to God.'—Romans 14:12."³

Of course, it took some time for the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses to take shape. Their genesis can be traced in articles of *the Watchtower*, which is regarded as a reference by the followers of this religion.

¹ *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, Volume 8 - 1910 - p. 828.

² *The Watchtower* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., March 1, 2015 - p. 8.

³ *Who are Jehovah's Witnesses?* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996 - p. 5.

Here is a brief chronology of the development of the beliefs according to historical articles (decade by decade):

1870 Charles Taze Russell and a group from Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., begin systematic study of the Bible.

1870–1875 Russell and his study associates learn that when Christ comes again, he is to be invisible to human eyes and that the object of his return includes the blessing of all families of the earth.

1872 Russell and his study group come to appreciate the *ransom price* that Christ provided for humankind.

1876 Article by C. T. Russell, published in October issue of Bible Examiner, in Brooklyn, New York, points to 1914 as the end of the Gentile Times.

1877 C. T. Russell publishes the booklet *The Object and Manner of Our Lord's Return*, at the office of *Herald of the Morning*, in Rochester, New York.

1879 First issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, dated July 1879.

“God Is Love”—championed Jesus’ ransom sacrifice as the basis for mankind’s redemption.

The November *Watch Tower*— explained the Bible term “Babylon the Great.”

1880 “One Body, One Spirit, One Hope”—pinpointed 1914 for the ending of the Gentile Times.

1881 The April *Watch Tower*—man does not have a soul, but is a soul, or being.

Food for Thinking Christians (special issue of *Zion's Watch Tower*)—explained why evil was permitted.

The October-November *Watch Tower*—God has a name, Jehovah.

1882 “The Wages of Sin Is Death”—exposed the doctrine of eternal torment as a denial of God’s love.

Watch Tower of June—exposed the doctrine of Trinity as one set about by pagans.

1885 “Evolution and the Brain Age”—exposed the evolution theory as false.

1895 *Zion's Watch Tower* of November 15—Congregations are to elect elders.

1897 “What Say the Scriptures About Spiritism?”—gave proof of spiritism's demonic origin.

1902 “God First—His Appointments”—emphasized obeying God's law in the family and in business dealings.

1915 *The Watch Tower* of September 1915 suggested that Bible Students avoid joining the military. However, this article did not appear in the German edition.

1919 “Blessed Are the Fearless”—brought new life to an awakening organization of fearless worshipers.

1925 “Birth of the Nation”—made plain the prophecies showing that God's Kingdom was born in 1914.

1931 “A New Name”—believers decided to differ from other Christian groups by the new name “Jehovah's Witnesses,” taken from the 43rd chapter of the book of Isaiah.

1935 “The Great Multitude”—showed that gathering of those who would live forever on earth was under way.

1936 The book *Riches* made clear that Jesus Christ was executed not on a cross but on an upright pole, or stake. Far from being idolized, the instrument on which Jesus was impaled should be viewed with revulsion.

1938 “Organization”—introduced a truly theocratic arrangement among Jehovah's Witnesses.

1939 “Neutrality”—fortified Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide to withstand the pressures of World War II.

1942 “The Only Light”—sounded a go-ahead signal for the courageous witness work to continue.

1945 “Immovable for the Right Worship”—showed that Christians must abstain from receiving blood transfusions.

1952 “Keeping the Organization Clean”—showed that disfellowshipping by congregations is Scriptural.

1962 “Subjection to ‘Superior Authorities’—Why?”—offered reasons for relative subjection to human powers.

1973 “Keeping God’s Congregation Clean in ‘the Time of His Judgment’”—urged shunning tobacco use.

1979 “Zeal for Jehovah’s House”—reiterated that house-to-house preaching follows the apostolic pattern.

1983 “Walking With God in a Violent World”—confirmed that Christians must have no part with violence.

1984 “The Recent Pen for ‘Other Sheep’”—clarified how this earthly class is brought into unity with those in the new covenant “fold.”

1987 “Christian Jubilee Climaxes in the Millennium”—showed how all loyal Christians gain liberty and life.

1995 “What Future for the Sheep and the Goats?”—explained that separation of righteous ones and unrighteous ones will be fulfilled in the future.

1999 “The Temple’ and ‘the Chieftain’ Today”—contained evidence that prophecies from the book of Ezekiel are being fulfilled today and will be fulfilled in the future.

2000 *The Watchtower* of June 15—the use of blood fractions is a matter of conscience for every Christian.

2008 “Christ’s Presence—What Does It Mean to You?” explained that some who are Christ’s anointed brothers will still be alive on earth when the foretold great tribulation begins. New understanding of “this generation” from Jesus’ prophecy.

2013 “Tell Us, When Will These Things Be?” in *The Watchtower* of July 15—explained the phases of the great tribulation when Jesus judges his enemies.

2015 *The Watchtower* of May 15—refinement of understanding of who Gog of Magog is, as mentioned in the book of Ezekiel.

2016 Refinement of understanding of when the mark mentioned in the book of Ezekiel is acquired by faithful servants.

Having examined in detail the basic beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses are entirely based on the Bible, and they reject everything that is not in the Bible.

2. Many teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses are also present or were previously present in various Christian religions. Witnesses do not invent their teachings; they base them on the Bible.

3. They do not believe Jesus Christ is God; they believe he is the Great Prophet, the King of God’s Kingdom, the Savior, the Redeemer, the first creation of God, who was sent to save people. He is also Head of the Christian Congregation, the Way, the

Truth, the Life and the role model. Jehovah’s Witnesses strictly follow his instructions.

4. One can have different opinions on Jehovah’s Witnesses’ beliefs, but one cannot but admit that, firstly, this is an established and clearly defined religion, although the evolutionary process has not finished yet, and, secondly, it is undoubtedly a Christian, or rather a neo-Protestant religion with all the inherent specificity.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

The organization of Jehovah's Witnesses has a highly centralized, hierarchical structure—it reflects a unique “religious-democratic centralism.”

The Witnesses themselves describe their organization as a “theocracy,” which means “rule [kra'tos] by God [the•os].”

The fact that in 1944 the Society's charter was revised shows how vital theocratic organization is for them. As N. Knorr explained, “inasmuch as the charter of the Society provided for voting shares to be issued to contributors of funds to the Society's work, it tended to bedim or encroach upon this Theocratic principle with respect to the governing body; and it also tended to endanger it or create hindrances for it.”¹ For that very reason, on October 2, 1944, new arrangements were made: charter membership would no longer be unlimited as to number but would be kept between 300 and 500. Members would be chosen not on the basis of monetary contributions but by the board of directors. The main criteria for members became being mature, faithful Witnesses of Jehovah serving full-time in the work of the organization or as active ministers of congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. These 300-500 members would vote for the board of directors, and the board of directors would then select its officers.

The two-part article “Organization”, which appeared in *The Watchtower* of June 1 and 15, 1938 (in Russian, May and June 1939),

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 229.

pointedly stated: “Jehovah’s organization is in no wise democratic. Jehovah is supreme, and his government or organization is strictly theocratic.”¹ Jehovah’s Witnesses explain that the main principle of theocracy is based on the Bible principle found at 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ; in turn, the head of a woman is the man; in turn, the head of the Christ is God.” In one of their publications it is explained as follows: “to be truly theocratic, a person must do more than submit to headship in a nominal way ... He must imitate Jehovah’s ways and qualities. He must really be governed by Jehovah in every way. And since Jehovah has invested his Son with full authority, being theocratic also means copying Jesus.”²

The primary organizational structure of Jehovah’s Witnesses is a local community of believers, which is termed the *congregation*. It consists of baptized Witnesses or members of the community, and unbaptized or prospective Witnesses. The branch takes care of the needs of all the congregations throughout the country. “Local congregations under each branch are organized into circuits. These vary in size, depending on geographic and language considerations as well as the number of congregations within the area assigned to the branch. A circuit overseer is appointed to serve the congregations in each circuit. The branch office provides the circuit overseer with direction on how to care for his duties.”³

In the Christian Greek Scriptures, the word “congregation” is translated from the Greek term *ek•kle•si’a*, which means a group of people called together. Inherent in that word are the ideas of solidarity and mutual support.

Publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses highlight that “the Christian congregation upholds the truth of God’s Word and declares the good

¹ Ibid – p. 217.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., July 1, 1994 – p. 26.

³ *Organized to do Jehovah’s Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 27.

news of his Kingdom. (2 Peter 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:15).¹” However, the congregation also provides spiritual support and assistance for those associated with it. Therein, one can find a group of loving, concerned, and caring friends who are ready and willing to help and comfort others in times of stress. (2 Corinthians 7:5-7).

Worshippers of Jehovah have always found safety and security in his congregation. Similarly today, the Christian congregation is an association of fellow believers who build up and encourage one another².

The book *“Bearing Thorough Witness” About God’s Kingdom* notes: “Today, Christ uses the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses to direct his congregation. Through letters, printed literature, meetings, and other communication tools, these faithful anointed men impart guidance and encouragement to all the congregations around the world. The Governing Body also seeks to maintain close contact with each congregation. They thus use the traveling-overseer arrangement. The Governing Body has directly appointed thousands of qualified elders around the world to serve as traveling ministers.³”

They hold their meetings either in their buildings for worship called Kingdom Halls or in the homes of believers. The architecture of the Kingdom Halls takes into account local traditions, but the buildings themselves as well as internal arrangements must not be pretentious, because their purpose is to provide a comfortable setting “for holding Christian meetings.⁴” The publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses often highlight that “the Kingdom Hall should not be an elaborate building made to impress others. While the design may vary from place to place, the purpose is always functional. (Acts 17:24) In accord with local circumstances, it should be a comfortable and convenient place

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 15, 1999 – p. 25.

² *Ibid* – p. 25.

³ *“Bearing Thorough Witness” About God’s Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2009 – p. 119.

⁴ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 109.

for holding Christian meetings.” In some Kingdom Halls you can even see artwork depicting various Biblical accounts. They are used simply as decoration, certainly not in worship.

Kingdom Hall construction is another distinguishing feature of Jehovah’s Witnesses, like printing literature. In the organization there are special departments and specialists who are engaged in the architectural planning and construction of buildings for worship. Under the direction of such specialists, volunteers from local congregations build Kingdom Halls. Surely, professional contractors are there to carry out especially hard construction work. Once the construction is finished, believers take care of the maintenance and cleaning of the ready-for-use Kingdom Halls themselves. If necessary, local congregations sign Fire Alarm Service Contracts, garbage collection agreements, and so on. The Kingdom Halls are annually checked for compliance with safety and reliability requirements. In the case of any defects, a construction team is organized to do professional repair work. In caring for Kingdom Halls, special attention is paid to maintaining exemplary cleanliness, hygiene, and safety.

Jehovah’s Witnesses consider the Kingdom Halls to be buildings dedicated to Jehovah and belonging to Him. So, they respect these buildings and discourage discussion and resolution of any kind of business issues there. Advertising and distributing of any products within Kingdom Halls is also considered unacceptable and disrespectful to God. Parents are often reminded to instill in their children the same attitude as well as to teach them the importance of behaving calmly and respectfully in the Kingdom Halls.

From time to time, funeral and wedding talks are given in the Kingdom Halls. If a country allows religious ministers to register marriages, a ceremony may be performed by an elder in the congregation.

As for the meetings, everyone is invited to them. Often you can see interested ones there along with others who are acquainted with Jehovah’s Witnesses and would like to get to know more about them

and their teachings. No collections are ever taken and no faith healing is practiced.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not perform any special rituals, such as those performed by the Orthodox Church or Catholics. Those responsible for conducting meetings do not wear special vestments and do not use any kind of ritual objects. Their purpose of worship is to deeply consider Biblical teaching, including the interpretation of Biblical texts, a review of history, chronology and geography of Biblical places, and so on. Singing songs and saying prayers are parts of their worship. Singing at meetings is not accompanied by dancing or shouting, neither is it emotional; rather, it is modest and sincere. Jehovah's Witnesses are not charismatics, so showing excessively emotional elements of worship, such as screaming, crying, etc., is not encouraged.

All the meetings are free of charge. At some meetings, participation by means of giving comments is encouraged. Programs for meetings around the world are prepared by the Governing Body, so all congregations worldwide receive the same program of Bible instruction.

Two meetings for worship are held each week. Each of them follows a certain pattern, which is similar in congregations earth wide.

A weekend meeting is held which includes a 30-minute Bible discourse, followed by a question-and-answer discussion based on an article in the study edition of *The Watchtower* magazine.

Another meeting, held on a weekday, is called "Our Christian Life and Ministry."¹ A monthly publication entitled *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook* outlines the weekly meeting schedule. As its name suggests, it is a meeting in which the practical application of Bible principles in the day-to-day life and ministry of a Christian is considered. An important feature of this meeting is that it introduces the historical background and context of Bible passages and explains how to put into practice the lessons they contain. This

¹ 2017 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2017 - p. 19.

meeting is divided into three main sections: a talk, a reading, and a discussion based on the weekly Bible reading. *The Workbook* features artwork designed to make Bible reading more meaningful. The second part of the meeting is similar to *The Watchtower* study meeting, a question-and-answer discussion. A Bible study publication is chosen for the discussion. The paragraphs and Bible scriptures are read, then a question-and-answer discussion is conducted. Videos are actively used for teaching. The main thing that unites members of the congregation and interested ones is cooperative study of the Bible and its teachings.

Annual conventions and assemblies, which are held three times a year, are joyful events for the believers.

“Each year, arrangements are made for congregations assigned to the same circuit to gather for two one-day circuit assemblies. These joyous occasions afford all in attendance opportunities to ‘open [their] hearts wide’ in Christian association. (2 Cor. 6:11-13) With a special need in mind, Jehovah’s organization prepares the Scriptural themes and various parts of these programs. The information is presented by means of discourses, demonstrations, reenactments, soliloquies, and interviews. Such timely instruction builds up all who attend. These assemblies provide an opportunity for new disciples to get baptized in symbol of their dedication to Jehovah.¹”

Once a year, usually in the summer, larger gatherings are held. These regional conventions usually last three days, combining congregations from a number of circuits. The convention program includes many videos. At regional conventions, new publications are released, new translations of the Bible are announced, and in recent years new Biblical films have been shown. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, all videos and films are produced by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Periodically, international or special conventions are held in some countries and may be attended by tens of thousands of Witnesses from a number of different lands. For

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 63.

example, in 2017 such a convention was held at the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty.

Jehovah's Witnesses usually rent large facilities or stadiums to hold conventions. In some countries there are "Assembly Halls." Assembly Halls vary in size, depending on local needs. The branch office makes the decision to purchase or construct such a building only after the cost has been carefully analyzed and the amount of use determined¹.

The congregations and circuits are divided by languages. For example, in our country there are Russian, Kazakh, and Uighur congregations. There are also Russian Sign Language congregations.

The internal structure of the congregation is also highly centralized. Bodies of elders represent theocratic oversight in the congregations. Ministerial servants assist the elders with some technical matters. But at the same time, all members of the congregation, including the elders along with ministerial servants, are known as publishers of a particular congregation.

One of the main goals of each congregation is to be actively engaged in the preaching activity in the area for which the congregation is responsible.

"Jehovah's Witnesses," as noted in the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, "form the only religious organization in the world in which every member personally witnesses to nonbelievers, endeavors to answer their questions from the Bible, and urges them to put faith in God's Word. Other religious organizations acknowledge that this is what all Christians should do. Some have tried to encourage their church members to do it. However, only Jehovah's Witnesses have been doing it consistently. Whose direction, whose counsel, whose assurance of loving support, and whose promises motivate them to do this work that others shun? Ask them yourself. No matter what the nation in which they live, they will reply: 'Jehovah's.'²

¹ Ibid – p. 113.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – pp. 229, 548.

Who does all the work, then?

Publishers—volunteers who are active members of the congregation—do all the work; some of them are baptized, some are not. Unlike other Christian churches, in which preachers are either specially trained or skilled clergymen, Jehovah's Witnesses understand literally Jesus' words at Matthew 24:14 (NWT): "And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come" and the Apostle Peter's words at Acts 10:42: "He ordered us to preach to the people and to give a thorough witness that this is the One decreed by God to be judge of the living and the dead" and the Apostle Paul's words at Romans 10:13-15: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.' However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach? How, in turn, will they preach unless they have been sent forth? Just as it is written: 'How comely are the feet of those who declare good news of good things!' This is why publishers consider it their own duty to share their faith. However, they are not assigned to do this task. Preaching is a voluntary work, and everyone makes a personal choice to participate. A publisher goes preaching at any convenient time, when he or she is not engaged in household chores or other work. In the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, there are also some individuals who have attended the meetings for a long time but have never taken the step toward becoming publishers.

It must be stressed that in the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is often mentioned that they do not impose the Bible's message on anyone, and each individual has to make a personal decision in terms of beliefs. If someone shows interest, Jehovah's Witnesses are glad to share the Bible's message with them, but they do it very tactfully and politely. Therefore, all the accusations of imposing their message on others or "persecuting their victims," which biased journalists like to write, are *groundless*.

There is no fixed amount of time that a believer should spend preaching. Again, it is everybody's personal decision.

However, some believers may want to take on extra responsibilities. For example, some Witnesses want to spend more time in the preaching work. They are called pioneers. A pioneer must be an exemplary baptized Christian whose personal circumstances allow him or her to spend the specified number of hours in preaching the good news¹. Whether or not to be a pioneer is a personal decision. If one decides to be a pioneer, he then applies for pioneering by approaching the body of elders of his own congregation. The body of elders approves applications for pioneer service if the applicant meets the necessary requirements.

There are several types of *pioneering*:

1. *Auxiliary pioneers* may be appointed for a minimum of one month or for any number of consecutive months according to their circumstances. General requirements for auxiliary pioneering are being a baptized publisher of good moral standing and habits, able to meet the specified monthly hour requirement of 30 or 50 hours.

2. *Regular pioneers* are committed to reaching 840 hours each year in the public preaching work. They may choose an area they want to serve in themselves, but they have to work closely with the congregation local to that area.

3. *Special pioneers* devote 130 hours to the ministry each month. Their work is not paid, but they receive a modest allowance for living expenses. They are usually selected from among regular pioneers who have demonstrated their effectiveness in the ministry. They are usually assigned for a particular period of time (three months or more). "When the first special pioneers were sent out in 1937, they spearheaded the work of playing recorded Bible talks for householders right at their doorsteps and using recordings as the basis for Bible discussions on return visits. This was done in large cities where there already were congregations. After a few years, the special pioneers began to be

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 101.

directed particularly into areas where no congregations existed or where congregations were in great need of help. As a result of their effective work, hundreds of new congregations were formed.¹

4. *Missionaries* are appointed by the Service Committee of the Governing Body. “They accomplish much good in stabilizing and strengthening the preaching work and congregation activities. Very often, field missionaries have received training at the School for Kingdom Evangelizers². They are provided housing and receive a modest allowance for living expenses.³”

But let us get back to the structure of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Among Jehovah’s Witnesses there is no division into clergy and laity. Each one of them is a preacher, or publisher, and shares the Bible’s message with others. Each body of elders takes the lead among the community, or congregation. The main task of the elders is to support each believer in their life as a Christian, encourage them, and help in solving their problems.

Their responsibilities also include preparing the program for the weekly meetings and so forth. “Other loyal men” – ministerial servants (ministers) assist them. Neither elders nor the ministerial servants are elected, but appointed by the circuit overseer of a particular area. Circuit overseers appoint elders and ministerial servants during their visit to the congregation. Each circuit overseer along with the local congregation elders must consider carefully the recommendations made by the elders and then appoint the men who qualify.

So, what are the requirements for the elders and ministerial servants? The main requirements are recorded in the Bible at 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and Titus 1:7-9.

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*.—Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 299.

² *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook*.—Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., December 2020 – p. 7.

³ *Organized to do Jehovah’s Will*.—Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 27.

An overseer is required to be faithful, exemplary, a zealous servant of God, and display Christian qualities at all times. For example, he must be “moderate in habits, sound in mind, orderly, hospitable, qualified to teach, ... not violent, but reasonable, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, a man presiding over his own household in a fine manner, having his children in subjection with all seriousness, not a newly converted man ..., he should also have a fine testimony from outsiders and holding firmly to the faithful word.” Witnesses consider those who meet the Scriptural requirements at the time of their appointment as elders of the congregation to be appointed by holy spirit.

Overseers (elders) and ministerial servants serve free of charge; they receive neither salary nor any other material reward. Therefore, they are not considered to be clergy according to its generally accepted meaning. They perform the following functions: “For example, overseers give encouragement and personal attention to everyone in the congregation. Each week, they preside diligently at congregation meetings, where all in the faith are nourished... Their efforts to protect the flock from harmful elements, such as wicked men, contribute to our security... Their lead in the field ministry encourages us to keep active in preaching the good news regularly each month... Through these “gifts in men,” Jehovah has provided for the building up of the congregation.¹”

Circuit (traveling) overseers are appointed from among qualified elders by the Governing Body. They are assigned by the local branch office to visit the congregations that make up their circuits (as a rule, 18-25 congregations). They usually visit each congregation twice a year. Such visits include talks, meetings for elders and ministerial servants and participation in the preaching activity with congregation members. A circuit overseer gives encouragement to pioneers, arranging special meetings for them, and he also appoints elders. Local congregations cover all the expenses of the traveling overseer; he also

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 30.

receives a modest reimbursement for personal expenses. Provisions for food and lodging are also made by the congregations.

In Kazakhstan, canonical guidance of the activity of local communities (congregations) is provided by the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses located in the city of Almaty. It was registered in 1997 by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan and at the moment, it has a status of regional religious association. According to its Charter, the governing body of this particular legal entity is the Presiding Committee.

The first chairman of the Branch Committee of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan was **Fedor Makarovich Zhitnikov**, an intelligent, very mobile, and active person with an interesting history who has managed to keep his great optimism.

I have met this amazing person many times and was able to talk to him personally and ask about his life. This is what I noted from his words:

“It was 1956 ... My parents still could not come to terms with the death of my twin brother, who, despite a successful operation in Novosibirsk did not wake up from anesthesia. Back then we lived in the village of Gornyak in the Loktev region of Altay Territory, where I was born in 1947.

“One day one of Jehovah's Witnesses came to our house and offered to study the Bible with my parents. My father was not a believer. He would often talk about his own father, my grandfather, who did not recognize priests, considering them deceivers. He did not get along with them, even in tsarist times, when religion was very important in people's lives. But in those years it was close to impossible to get along without a church, since everything—birth, death, and marriage—went through the Church. That is why, in 1906, when my father was born, my grandfather could not help but go to the priest to register the birth and get a name for my father. The priest decided to take revenge; he knew that the name Makar was disliked (then it had a derogatory meaning; you must remember the saying: ‘Sent to where Makar did

not drive calves¹), and he deliberately gave this name to my father. This made my grandfather even more furious.

“So, my father was brought up seeing my grandfather’s difficult relationship with the Church. And finally the Revolution of 1917, which was followed by propaganda of godlessness, contributed to his becoming an unbeliever.

“But let’s get back to the preacher, who knocked at our door. He kept on visiting us on a regular basis, each time trying to speak with us about different Bible-based topics. On one of his visits, the question of the resurrection of the dead was raised. This question was of particular interest for my parents. They were delighted to learn about this hope. Probably, this was what prompted them to begin to study the Bible seriously.

“At that time, it was impossible to have a personal copy of the Bible; they were simply not in existence. Therefore, my parents would hand-write excerpts from the Scriptures, discuss them, and even memorize them. This, in turn, encouraged them to share their knowledge with friends, relatives, and neighbors. Thus, in a fairly short period of time (three to four months), a Bible study group was arranged. The meetings started to be held regularly. But this did not continue for a long period of time ...

“In October 1956, I was awakened by noise in the house and saw a group of men in uniform, searching our home.

“The search was carried out thoroughly: in some places they even removed the floors, in a container with flour—. They searched, literally, every centimeter. Finally, they found a piece of paper with a Bible scripture written on it. It was attached to a case ...

“The search was finished by 10 o’clock in the morning. They immediately took away my father. The other members of our family, including me and my younger brother, who was 8 years old, were

¹ English equivalent of the idiom “sent to where Makar did not drive calves” is “in the middle of nowhere.”

called to the prosecutor one after another. They interrogated each of us separately. My brother and I were kept at the prosecutor's office for 12 hours. The investigator wanted us to give evidence about who the ringleader of the 'sect' was (this is what they called our organization), where we get our literature, and so forth. They offered us different foods and candies. They spoke to us affectionately and softly. When they realized that it would not help, they started to intimidate and threaten us. After a long investigation, which lasted eight months, two ministers—Berwald and Karsten—were sentenced, one of them to ten years, the other to eight. And thankfully our father was soon released.

“In 1958 they carried out a night search in our house again; this time nothing was found, since my father was more careful. After Bible study, all the publications were concealed in hiding places.

“After the search, four more people were sentenced, each of them to 25 years of imprisonment; there was also a woman among them. All of this, surely, set the inhabitants of our village against Jehovah's Witnesses. Moreover, they were portrayed in the media as American spies. They even started to make fun of us, kids. It was becoming unbearable to study at school, as the teachers forbade our classmates to talk to us and made fun of us in front of the whole class.

“In 1959 my father was sentenced to one year of imprisonment for his religious beliefs. A week later, a second court trial was conducted, to which my father was brought from the prison cell. The jury made the decision to deprive my parents of parental rights. I remember writing a letter to Kliment Voroshilov [military and political leader of the Soviet Union who served as head of state after the death of his close friend and collaborator Joseph Stalin¹], but never got a response.

“A few days later, in April 1959, a group of policemen came to our house and forcibly took us away from our sobbing mother. Eventually, we were sent to the orphanage in the village of Korobeyniki, in the Shipunovskiy district.

¹ Electronic ref., (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kliment-Yefremovich-Voroshilov>).

“Next, a series of trials began. In the orphanage they already knew we were believers. They made fun of us and tried to make us swear. And one day, when we were working in a subsidiary farm, my brother and I were pushed into a huge burning fire so hard that we burned all our hair. At the same farm, boys on horses with whips in their hands chased us like little frightened lambs.

“In July of the same year, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose name was Boris, paid us a visit. We secretly met up in the forest. We told him about the living conditions in the orphanage and the unfair, even cruel, treatment by the other boys in the orphanage. But I told him about the most important thing, my desire to get baptized. He approved of my desire. Then we went to the river and he baptized me. I will never forget that day.

“Meanwhile in the orphanage, the mockery continued. Once, they wanted to make me swear in the storehouse, where the mattresses were dried, and when I refused, the children hung me by the legs on a hot pipe. Fortunately, after about 20 minutes, a nurse passing by saw me in the warehouse and immediately released me. She went to the director and told him about the incident. By that time my mother had learned what was happening in the orphanage and wrote a letter of complaint to the director. After all these events, my brother and I were sent to another orphanage, which was located in the village of Malakhovo, in the Bayunovsky district, Altai Territory. In the new place, the conditions and attitude towards us were better, but of course, we wanted to go home.

“In September 1960, when the new academic year started, we ran away from the orphanage and successfully reached home. But a few days later, a chief accountant of the orphanage came for us ... Happily, our father had been released by that time and he wrote a request to review his case. We were left alone for a while. Another hearing was held, but our parents were deprived of parental rights again, and they also had to pay for our provisions. It was decided to send me and my brother back to the orphanage.

“When police came to our house to take us back, we were able to hide from them. That evening both of us caught a train and left for Tekeli, where my aunt lived.

“While we were staying with our aunt, my father was sentenced to five years of imprisonment and sent to the village of Kurrai, in the Kosh-Agach district of Gorno-Altai Territory. When we heard that, we went to him. At that time, my father was living in a big tent by the river. We were placed there, as well. Later, my mother joined us, too. As a whole family, we enjoyed a temporary, tranquil and family atmosphere.

“But it did not last long; suddenly everything changed. In October 1964, another search of our place was carried out. Our Bible literature was seized, for which my father was sentenced to five years of imprisonment again, this time in a maximum security colony.

“In 1966 we decided to move to Kyrgyzstan. By that time, there was a large congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses there, so we could count on help and support. I turned 19 years old. But, despite my young age, the brothers entrusted me with conducting some congregation meetings.

“In 1969, after five years of imprisonment in a maximum security colony, my father was sent to the Gorno-Altai Region to serve the rest of his 1961 sentence, which he had never completed due to another arrest. Because he was of retirement age, he was kept there three or four months and then released to his family.

“Long before his final release in 1968, I met a beautiful girl named Julia, who I fell in love with. She also happened to experience all the hardships of Stalinist repression. Her family was deported from Ukraine to the Irkutsk region when she was only two months old.

“On March 27, 1970, we got married. In September of the same year, we moved to the city of Esik in Kazakhstan. In Esik there were about 60 of our fellow-believers. Soon, our son was born, and later, two of our daughters.

“In 1972, I was appointed as an elder in the congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Back then, meetings were held in private houses, late in the evenings, in order not to attract too much attention. But during public

holidays, we organized meetings so large that there were not enough seats, and many had to listen to the program while standing up.

“I think my story would be incomplete if I did not include that, along with my taking the lead in the congregation arrangements, I was engaged in the reproduction and distribution of Bible-based literature. Back then, before the advent of modern technology, it was difficult and painstaking work. I had to learn the basics of chemistry, printing work, and photography. At the same time, all Witnesses are required to provide for their families. Therefore, I strongly believe that all of this was possible only thanks to the support of God, who blessed our joint efforts to spread knowledge about him. By 1989, the number of Witnesses in the city of Esik was about 300.

“I think the end of the 80’s was a turning point in achieving democratic freedom in the territory of the former Soviet Union. This greatly affected both our life and our religious activities. Thus, in 1989, I was able to attend the international convention in Warsaw with my family. It was the first convention that we, Witnesses of Kazakhstan, managed to attend. I went to the convention with my family by car. I still remember an episode from this unforgettable trip. At the checkpoint on the border of Belarus and Poland, it was such a pleasure to watch how officials let all of Jehovah’s Witnesses pass without inspection. That was incredible! Just a year prior, we could not even freely gather together.

“Over time, the authorities began to give us more freedom, and in 1992 our congregation was officially registered with the State bodies of Kazakhstan. In 1991 we started constructing a Kingdom Hall (the place where meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses are held) in the city of Esik. And seven months later, on March 27, 1992, we held our annual celebration there, the Memorial of Christ’s death.

“In 1996, I began applying for registration of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Center in Kazakhstan. Every time I recall the day when we finally got a certificate of registration for the center from the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, I get excited. I was appointed as the

chairman of the center. A year later, to be more exact, in February 1998, we organized an office in the city of Esik.

“I am glad that in our society, freedom of thought, speech, and religion have finally triumphed. Because these are the things which make life meaningful and joyful.”

And I would not want anybody to encroach on this freedom!

In 2008 the chairman of the Christian Center, Fedor Makarovich Zhitnikov, was replaced by **Polat Gaukharbekuly Bekzhan**. Here is a brief account of his life story:

Polat Gaukharbekuly Bekzhan was born in 1953. He has partial university education as a hydraulic engineer. He began his career in 1970 as a machine operator. From 1972 to 1975 he served in the Soviet navy. Later he worked as an adjustment technician at a tractor service station, a diagnostic engineer, a warehouse manager, and a gas distribution operator. For his labor activity, Polat Gaukharbekuly was awarded the “Zolotoy Kolos” (“The Golden Ears”) badge, “The Seventieth Anniversary of the Kazakhstan Gas Pipeline” badge, along with many diplomas and letters of gratitude. At work he was highly respected and had a reputation as a fair and honest person who was experienced in his field.

For almost 16 years, Polat Gaukharbekuly was a member of the Communist Party, a deputy chairman of the trade union organization, and a chairman of the Housing Committee. Despite being a member of the Party, deep inside he was searching for God. One day in 1986, his wife, Apiza, who was then working in a maternity hospital, brought home the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*. Back then, the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses was under ban. One of Apiza’s co-workers was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and she accidentally forgot the book at work. In this book Polat Gaukharbekuly found the answers to his questions. Although his wife’s co-worker was afraid to meet him, since he was a Communist, he asked her about it because he wanted to know more about the Bible. While studying the Bible, he was deeply

impressed both by Bible truths and by how the Witnesses treated him personally. Finally, in 1988 he was baptized.

Initially, his parents and brothers did not accept his new faith, so he faced strong opposition. But as time passed, his relatives could see that Polat's life changed for the better (before he started his Bible study, he smoked, drank, and was not an exemplary family man—like many people around him). His relatives were impressed by the change in relations in his family (Polat Gaukharbekuly already had six children at that time) and saw the respect he showed toward his elderly relatives.

And surely his neighbors and co-workers noticed such changes. Seeing his sympathetic and kind attitude toward others, people often asked Polat Gaukharbekuly to take injured and sick ones from the village to the district hospital because the village hospital had no ambulance. Not everyone had a car back then, and gasoline was also in short supply. But no one ever doubted that Polat Gaukharbekuly would be able to help them out.

Polat Gaukharbekuly has been serving as an elder since 1992. Since 1997, he has served as a member of the Presiding Committee of the regional religious association “The Christian Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses” in Kazakhstan, and in 2008 he was appointed as its chairman.

One of the members of the Presiding Committee is **Anatoly Ivanovich Melnik**. His biography was published in the October 22, 2004 issue of *Awake!* magazine (pp. 11-15). This is what he says about himself:

“I was born in the village of Hlina, in the north of what is today known as Moldova. In the 1920’s, traveling ministers known as pilgrims [Jehovah’s Witnesses] crossed the border from Romania to our beautiful hilly region. My mother’s parents responded immediately to the good news they heard preached from the Bible. In 1927 they became Bible Students, as Jehovah’s Witnesses were then called. By the time World War II started in 1939, there was already a congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in our small village.

“In 1947, under the influence of Communist policy and the Orthodox Church, the authorities began persecuting Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moldova.

“On the night of June 6, 1949, two soldiers and an officer invaded our home. They said that we had two hours to leave the house and get into their vehicle. No further explanation was given. They simply told us that we were being exiled and would never return. So, along with Mother, Grandpa, Grandma, and fellow believers, I was sent to Siberia. I was only 13. After a few weeks, we found ourselves in the marshlands of the taiga, amid impenetrable forests.

“In 1955, I was baptized in symbol of my dedication to Jehovah. Shortly before that, at a congregation meeting in a neighboring village, I had met Lidiya, a modest dark-haired girl. Like us, she and her family were Witnesses who had been exiled from Moldova. In 1956, we decided to get married.

“In 1959 our daughter Valentina was born. Shortly thereafter, a new wave of persecution began. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* notes: ‘A new antireligious move was initiated by Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev in 1959-64.’ Members of the State security agency told us that the goal of the Soviet government was to eliminate all religion, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses.

“When Valentina was nearly a year old, I was called to the army. When I didn’t go, I was sentenced to five years in prison for remaining neutral. Once when Lidiya came to visit me, a KGB colonel told her: ‘We have received notification from the Kremlin that within two years not one of Jehovah’s Witnesses will be left in the Soviet Union.’ Then he warned: ‘You must deny your faith, otherwise you will be put in prison.’

“My case was reopened in 1963, and I was later released—after three years in prison. But we were unable to get a residence permit anywhere, so I was unable to find work. A State law decreed: ‘No permanent residence, no work.’

“Our second daughter, Lilya, was born in 1966. A year later we moved to Belyye Vody, in the south of Kazakhstan near the Uzbekistan border, where there was a small group of Witnesses. Soon a congregation was formed, and I was appointed presiding overseer. In 1969 we had a son, Oleg, and two years later Natasha, our youngest, was born.

“In 1988, when all the children were grown, I was appointed as a regular traveling overseer. My circuit included most of the countries of Central Asia. After the preaching work of Jehovah’s Witnesses was legally registered in the former Soviet Union in 1991, other capable, spiritually mature men began serving the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union. Today there are 14 traveling overseers who serve these countries, where last year more than 50,000 people attended the Memorial of Christ’s death!

“In 1998, we were invited to serve at the religious center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Issyk, Kazakhstan, near the large city of Alma-Ata.”

But let’s get back to the structure of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses. With a certain independence of regional structures, the Witnesses have formed a clear **organizational structure**.

The Governing Body, based at the World Headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses, provides the canonical guidance in their religious activities around the world. The Governing Body is a collective body, consisting of eight people at the moment. All of them are from different countries, and they have many years of experience as elders of the congregations. At present the members of the Governing Body are:

Geoffrey Jackson, Kenneth Cook, Jr., Steven Lett, Gerrit Lösch, Anthony Morris, Mark Sanderson, David Splane, and Samuel Herd. They all serve at the World Headquarters in Warwick (New York, USA).

Each member of the Governing Body participates in the activity of one of its committees, which perform different tasks. Here is a brief description of the activities of the committees:

- *Service Committee*—oversees all areas of the evangelizing work and matters affecting congregations, publishers, pioneers, elders, traveling overseers, and missionaries. It supervises, among numerous other things, the activities of Hospital Liaison Committees.

- *Coordinators' Committee*—consists of the coordinators of all committees of the Governing Body and the secretary, who is also a member of the Governing Body. This committee oversees legal matters as well as the use of the media when it is necessary to convey an accurate picture of the Witnesses' beliefs. It also responds to disasters, outbreaks of persecution, and other emergencies affecting Jehovah's Witnesses anywhere in the world.

- *Teaching Committee*—oversees the instruction provided at assemblies, conventions, and congregation meetings. It also has oversight of Gilead School, the School for Kingdom Evangelizers, and the Pioneer Service School, as well as other schools. In addition, this committee oversees the preparation of *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook* and the development of audio and video programs.

- *Personnel Committee*—entrusted with the oversight of arrangements for the physical and spiritual welfare and assistance of members of Bethel families earth wide. It oversees the selecting and inviting of new members of Bethel families and handles questions regarding their Bethel service.

- *Writing Committee*—supervises the preparation of Bible study materials in written and electronic form for fellow believers and the general public. It also cares for the organization's website and oversees the translation work done throughout the earth. Additionally, this committee responds to questions about the meaning of certain scriptures and points presented in the publications. It is also in charge of the Art Department, which works out details for the visual appearance of different publications, based on deep research of archeological, historical, literary, and other sources.

- *Publishing Committee*—supervises the printing and shipping of Bible literature worldwide. It oversees printeries and properties owned and operated by the various corporations used by Jehovah’s Witnesses as well as all construction worldwide, including the work of building Kingdom Halls. It arranges for the best use of funds donated for the Kingdom work¹.

While speaking about the World Headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we cannot fail to mention *Translation Services*, the main purpose of which is to ensure a high level of Bible translation (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*) into different languages. Translation Services is also involved in translation of other publications. The department supports and helps translators serving in different branches. Jehovah’s Witnesses translate Bible-based publications from English into more than 1,000 languages.

Translation from one language into another is not an easy task at all. But when it comes to translating into sign language, which does not even have a written form, additional efforts are required. Many deaf ones express themselves visually, using gestures and memes; this is why sign language translators translate written text into video format. Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses translate publications into more than 90 sign languages.

All of Jehovah’s Witness translators, including sign language translators, know their respective languages very well. Many of the sign language translators are either deaf or raised in deaf families. Translators work in groups. Each has their own role: as translator, checker, or proofreader. Then, if possible, the translation is checked by deaf viewers. Their corrections help to improve the quality of the translation. This step ensures that gestures and facial expressions are natural, and the thoughts are conveyed accurately and clearly.

Since 1992, the Governing Body has assigned experienced Christian elders to serve as helpers to their Committees. Unlike

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 – p. 131.

members of the Governing Body, the helpers are not “anointed.” Every week, the helpers attend a meeting of one of the committees (listed above) they work with, provide necessary information, and make their own suggestions. The Governing Body makes final decisions, and their assistants follow the directions of Committee and carry out their assignments. Additionally, the assistants accompany the members of the Governing Body to special and international conventions. They also visit branches as headquarters representatives.

In this way, with an extremely large centralization of community governance, the democratic principle of collective leadership (democratic centralism) is maintained.

The Governing Body is located at the world headquarters in Warwick (New York, USA), and its structure includes various departments and services that help the Governing Body in the day-to-day work of spiritual guidance of the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses around the world.

While speaking about the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses, I cannot help but mention the publishing activity, the scale of which is so great that large printing complexes have been built in many branches around the world. As we said earlier, the publications in Russian are printed in Germany.

The publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses are superior to any other publications in the number of languages into which they are translated. For comparison, *Reader’s Digest* is published in 21 languages, and its content differs from country to country. *The Watchtower* has a circulation of over 93 million copies in more than 357 languages, which exceeds the circulation of any other magazine in the world. All issues of the magazine begin with the following annotation: “This magazine, *The Watchtower*, honors Jehovah God, the Ruler of the universe. It comforts people with the good news that God’s heavenly Kingdom will soon end all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God’s Kingdom. This magazine has been

published continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.”

This is the main purpose of the magazine. But it has another purpose, which is as important as the first one: *The Watchtower* teaches how to live a righteous life, that is, life in accordance with the Bible’s counsel and principles, which will help one to prepare for the coming of Jehovah’s Kingdom. That is why each issue of the magazine contains articles that are studied by the believers during several weeks of a month. Each article has a separate topic and is divided into subheadings and paragraphs. At meetings, a pre-assigned reader reads each paragraph in the article and the one conducting the meeting reads the questions for the paragraphs, after which those present at the meeting discuss what was read and give answers to the questions. The thoughts in each paragraph are based on a particular scripture from the Bible.

Awake! magazine is available in more than 220 languages, has an average production of 93 million copies, and is published once every three months. As I was told, this magazine is for the whole family. It contains information about life in various countries, discusses urgent problems and their solutions, raises issues of science and religion, and analyzes world events in the light of Bible prophecies. The articles are politically neutral and equally respectful to all peoples and races. But most importantly, this magazine is designed to strengthen faith in the Almighty Creator and in his purpose—to stop injustice and lawlessness and in the near future to usher in a glorious new world on earth. Having carefully read *Awake!* magazine for more than a year, I can confirm with all sincerity that it in fact provides readers with extensive scientific information.

Both *Awake!* and *The Watchtower* magazines are distributed by Jehovah’s Witnesses in more than 240 countries and territories.

All who volunteer at the headquarters as well as branches all around the world make up what is called the “Bethel family.” Centers

of Jehovah's Witnesses in each county are called "Bethel." which means "House of God." And it is not just a beautiful name. Serving at Bethel is not work which leads to personal prominence or material possessions. This is a staff of full-time ministers who have volunteered to do whatever they may be assigned to do. And they are satisfied with the provisions made for them in the way of food, lodging, and a modest reimbursement for personal expenses. "Because of the way of life of the Bethel family, secular authorities in the United States, for example, view them as members of a religious order who have taken a vow of poverty. [...] Like others of Jehovah's Witnesses, they also share regularly in the field ministry¹"

The first Bethel family (or, Bible House family, as it was then known) was located in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. In 1896 the staff numbered 12.

There are a lot of people who want to serve at Bethel. They make their desire known to the coordinator of their body of elders and then fill out an application form. The application form is later considered by the branch, and if the applicant meets the requirements, he or she may be invited to serve at Bethel.

Until 1997, the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in countries of the former Soviet Union were under supervision of the Germany Branch.

In 1902 a branch office was opened in Elberfeld (Wuppertal), Germany. In 1923, the Germany Branch was moved to Magdeburg, where the most suitable conditions for the publication of the required amount of literature were found. After the Second World War, the branch office in Germany was moved from Magdeburg to Wiesbaden. By the end of 1970's, its size no longer met growing needs. So, the decision was made to find a more suitable place.

The new location was Selters (Taunus), where a larger complex with offices was completed. It was dedicated in 1984; however, within

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 - p. 295.

ten years the complex had to be expanded to more than double its original size¹.

In July 2009 I visited the branch office in Selters. I was delighted by the place—its beautiful architecture and rational use of space. In addition to offices and utility rooms and a well-furnished library with free access (everyone can come, take a book of interest to them, and then return it to the same place; there is no librarian), Bethel includes nine residential buildings with comfortable rooms.

Each workday morning, the Bethel family comes together to consider a Bible text, using the booklet *Examining the Scriptures Daily*. The meeting starts with a prayer, after which, a chairman presides over a 15-minute discussion, and family members are assigned to comment on the text. After the discussion, a portion of the Bible is read according to a weekly Bible reading schedule. The meeting is finished with a prayer said by the chairman.

On Monday evenings, the entire Bethel family gathers together in two different Kingdom Halls, to study the Bible with the help of *The Watchtower*. At times, there are special programs after *The Watchtower Study*.

These Bible discussions each workday morning and on Monday evenings are an important part of Bethel life.

New arrivals attend the Bethel Entrants' School and are expected to read the entire Bible during their first year at Bethel, however they do it during their personal time².

At the Germany Branch, now called the Central Europe Branch, there are the following departments:

Branch Committee. Closely following the direction of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Branch Committee takes the lead in organizing the preaching and teaching work in Germany;

¹ *Welcome to the Central Europe Branch Office of Jehovah's Witnesses - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2009.*

² *Ibid.*

Service Department. This department handles correspondence from circuit overseers, elders, pioneers, and others. In addition, the Service Department keeps records of congregation territories and compiles field service reports. This department also schedules various theocratic schools, conventions and assemblies;

Public Information Desk. This desk provides officials, news agencies, and others with accurate information about the beliefs and activities of Jehovah's Witnesses;

Computer Department;

Hospital Information Desk. This desk provides doctors and lawyers with the latest information on bloodless medical procedures. In addition, the department helps fellow believers find doctors who are willing to treat Witnesses without the use of blood. (In Germany there are now more than 5000 such doctors);

Writing Desk;

Sign Language Studio;

Audio/ Video.

The Germany Branch no longer supervises spiritual activity in the countries of the former Soviet Union, including Kazakhstan. However, all literature in the Russian and Kazakh languages, as well as in other languages of people living in other former USSR countries, continues to be printed by the printery in Selters.

I can testify that the printery in Germany is a large modern facility where most operations are done with the help of automatic machines.

In addition, since there is a large group of talented architects and builders there, the Germany Branch provides invaluable advisory assistance in Kingdom Hall and Assembly Hall construction, as well as construction of Bethels in other countries.

While talking about the branch office in Selters, I would like to mention one more point, which I consider important.

Aggressive “opposers” who are anti-Jehovah’s Witnesses often allege that in Europe, Germany in particular, the activities of this religious organization are banned. While I was in Germany, I investigated this issue. And with all certainty I declare this to be complete nonsense.

First of all, the fact that, in 2009, international conventions were held in several cities in Germany tells us a lot. For example, the convention in Berlin was held at the Olympic Stadium, and there were more than 47,000 people there (the program was translated simultaneously into five different languages: German, English, Polish, Russian, and Russian Sign Language). The same international convention was held at the same time in other cities in Germany, such as: Dortmund, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Munich. The total number of those present was more than 209,000. Some 2,600 of them were Russian-speaking delegates, including 380 from Kazakhstan. The number of languages the program was translated into was 17. Before and after the convention, the Germany Branch was open for tours, and in total, 14,000 visited the branch.

Thanks to the extremely caring and attentive attitude of the German authorities toward these conventions and the help of the local police, order during these large-scale events (the conventions spanned four days) was ensured. I had a chance to take part in the preparation work for the convention, and I never stopped being amazed at the management and friendliness of the people who were responsible for the arrangement of the convention; everything was organized so well that the stadium did not even feel overcrowded.

Secondly, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany have been active there for more than 100 years. Yes, they endured brutal persecution by the National Socialists and in East Germany by the pro-Communist regime. But that is all in the past.

After the reunification of the country, Jehovah’s Witnesses began to seek recognition of their community as a corporation under public law throughout Germany. A trial began which lasted 12 years.

In 2000, the Federal Constitutional Court, which includes seven judges, unanimously ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses. The court spoke about the fundamental relationship between the State and religious groups. In fact, they stated that the status of a religious organization "is determined not by its beliefs, but by its actions."

The court also stated that the Witnesses do not "violate democratic principles" and "do not seek to replace democracy with another political system" just because of their "Christian neutrality." Therefore, the Witnesses' refusal to participate in political elections should not be used as an argument against them regarding their legal recognition. (John 18:36; Romans 13:1).

Moreover, the court noted that any believer—either a Witness or a representative of any other religion—may happen to be in a situation in which the requirements of the State conflict with the requirements of his or her religion. And if the person acts according to his conscience and "obeys God as ruler rather than men," (Acts 5: 29) the State may consider it as a right which freedom of religion gives.

This court decision was widely spread through the media; there were absolutely no newspapers in Germany that did not print this message. All news and radio reporters broadcast reports and interviews related to this decision.

This became the basis for further decisions concerning the legal status of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in various regions of Germany. Thus, on the 24th of March 2005, the Berlin Administrative Court ruled that Berlin should recognize the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses as a corporation under public law. Higher judicial authorities of other places in Germany made the same decision.

Thirdly, another appealing fact is that one of the streets of Berlin is named after Emmy Zehden, one of Jehovah's Witnesses. It shows that Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany are popular and respected for their loyalty to God and for maintaining a firm stance of neutrality during Nazi times. The following is a brief life story of this woman:

Emmy was born in 1900. She married a Jewish businessman, Richard Zehden, who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Nazi regime. Richard and Emmy had a foster son, Horst Schmidt. Horst and two other young Witnesses of Jehovah were forced into hiding when they were called for military service.

Emmy provided shelter for Horst and his two companions. In time, however, they were discovered. All four were sentenced to death—the three boys for refusing military service and Emmy for hiding them. Horst's two companions were beheaded. Emmy applied for a pardon, but it was denied. According to official documents on display at the Berlin-Plötzensee Memorial, Emmy Zehden was executed on June 9, 1944. Horst Schmidt survived Nazi persecution and later married a Witness who was a concentration camp survivor.

On May 7, 1992, a street in Berlin was named after Emmy Zehden. In a speech given by a German official, she was praised for her courage and was mentioned as an example of the many “forgotten victims” of the war¹.

But let us get back to the history of the organization in the post-Soviet state. As mentioned earlier, Jehovah's Witnesses were officially registered in the Soviet Union on the 27th of March 1991.

In the same year, the collapse of the Soviet Union took place. In 1992, communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan began to be registered. In 1997, their first Religious Center was registered. In 2007, the center was relocated from Esik (Almaty region) to the city of Almaty (Kalkaman – micro district 2), where a beautiful complex of administrative buildings and buildings for worship were built.

In the Kazakhstan Bethel family, there are about 80 to 90 people. Commuters from the local congregations, who come to the center to provide a variety of services, have also been of great help lately. Nowadays, assistance of local commuters at Bethel has become a

¹ *Awake!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997 – p. 31.

worldwide practice of Jehovah's Witnesses. The structure of the branch in Kazakhstan is similar to the structure of branches in other countries.

The territory of the Kazakhstan Branch, with an area of seven hectares, looks very much like a park. Jehovah's Witnesses love nature and take good care of it. Many commuters come to Bethel in order to assist with the maintenance of the many green spaces of the center. It is nice to see that the Bethelites deeply appreciate the culture of the country they live in. You can see national features both in the design of the territory and buildings and in the clothes of the Bethelites themselves and, of course, in the daily menu of the Bethel dining room.

In general, the building arrangements and the work at Bethel perfectly reflect the principles of rationality and thoughtfulness. And you will never come across sad and moody people at the center. For each volunteer, being and working at the center is part of their worship of God. And Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jehovah is a happy God who loves a happy giver.

At the Kazakhstan Branch, religious literature is translated into Kazakh (Cyrillic and Arabic font) and Uighur (Cyrillic and Arabic font). Bethel takes care of about 260 congregations of believers throughout the country, and congregation meetings are attended by over 30,000 people annually.

The center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan is canonically subordinate to the World Headquarters in Warwick (New York, USA).

Thus, today the organizational structure of the international religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is fully developed and has a clear distribution of roles from top to bottom—from the leading international center to local communities and groups.

IMAGES FOR CHAPTER

3-4

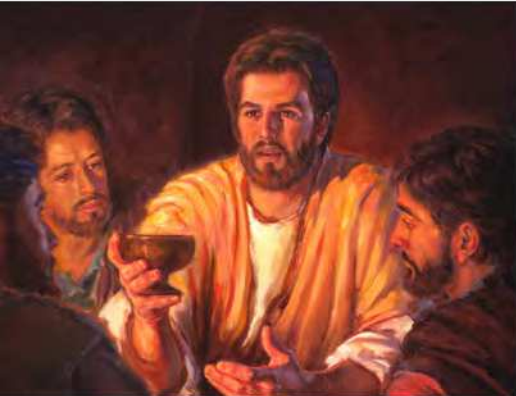
Baptism is performed by completely immersing a person in water

In 2019, the number baptized worldwide was 303,866; in Kazakhstan – 479



Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus Christ himself commanded his disciples to observe the Memorial of his death annually on the 14th of Nisan

In 2019, the worldwide Memorial attendance numbered 20,919,041; in Kazakhstan – 30,516



Tetragrammaton found numerous times on coins, in literature and paintings, both Western and Russian

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God has a personal name – JEHOVAH. They are convinced that “God’s personal name, represented by the Tetragrammaton (YHWH or JHVH), appears almost 7,000 times in the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures.”



In the Middle Ages and the Modern Period the use of God’s name, Jehovah, on various coins was widespread

יהוה



◀ The Elizabeth Bible, 1751

Church of Saint Michael (Vienna, Austria)

Military Attribute from the time of Peter the Great (Saint Petersburg, Russia)





“ He was slain by the anger
of JEHOVAH!”

A.S. PUSHKIN
FROM A LETTER TO VIGEL



“ ...it is too sinful to forget your
centuries-old JEHOVAH and
depart from him.”

F.M. DOSTOYEVSKY
A WRITER'S DIARY



“ ...he whispered a prayer
to almighty JEHOVAH.”

N.A. OSTROVSKY
HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED



“ As the chosen people bore
in their features the sign
manual of JEHOVAH...”

K. MARX. *A CRITIQUE OF
POLITICAL ECONOMY. VOLUME I*



“ JEHOVAH of the Thunders,
Lord God of Battles, aid!”

R. KIPLING
HYMN BEFORE ACTION



“ Great are thy works,
JEHOVAH, infinite
The power...”

J. MILTON
PARADISE LOST. BOOK 7



“ With golden vessels
his back is piled;
JEHOVAH's temple
has been defiled...”

H. HEINE
BELSHAZZAR



“ In the northland such
commands are equal to
JEHOVAH's in the matter of
potency.”

J. LONDON
A DAUGHTER OF THE AURORA



“ ...by whom JEHOVAH wrought
such marvels among
the nations.”

W. SCOTT
IVANHOE

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the first Christian congregation was formed in 33 C.E. during the Jewish festival "Pentecost" ▶



Religious buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses are called "Kingdom Halls"

To date, there are 105,000 such buldings worldwide, with 60 in Kazakhstan

▼



Associations of believers of Jehovah's Witnesses are called congregations

The number of the congregations worldwide is 120,387

The religious buildings are very simple inside and out, without any religious images. Also, the meetings themselves do not feature any mystical ceremonies, rituals, etc. Religious meetings include group discussions of religious literature



Conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses are a hallmark of their worship

They are held annually and those in attendance might be a small group or many thousands, from one city or from several countries



Landmark Conventions

1919

Cedar Point (Ohio, USA)

This was the first major convention of Jehovah's Witnesses after World War I. Production of the magazine *The Golden Age* (now called *Awake!*) was announced. It would "carry the current news of importance, giving a Scriptural explanation as to why these great events [were] transpiring."

1993

"Divine Teaching" Convention
(Kyiv, Ukraine)

This was the largest baptism on record at a single convention in the history of Jehovah's Witnesses — 7,402 were baptized

1958

"Divine Will" International Assembly

This was the largest international convention held in one city; more than 250,000 delegates from 123 lands assembled in New York (USA)





2009 International Convention

In June, 2017, a special convention was held in Almaty, attended by 1500 guests from the United States, Mexico, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Germany and other European countries





Administrative centers (branches) of Jehovah's Witnesses are called "Bethels" (Hebrew – "House of God")

There are 87 such branches worldwide, 15 of them are printing centers

World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Warwick (New York, USA)

Educational Center in Patterson (New York, USA)





US Branch in Wallkill
(New York, USA)



Central Europe Branch
in Selters (Germany)



Anatoly Ivanovich MELNIK

Member of the Presiding Committee of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan



In 1949, A. Melnik was evicted for special settlement in the Kurgan region with confiscation of property

In 1960, he was convicted to a term of three years for neutrality

In 1990, he was declared rehabilitated



**Fedor
Makarovich
ZHITNIKOV**

The first chairman
of the Christian Center
of Jehovah's Witnesses
in Kazakhstan



**Polat
Gaukharbekuly
BEKZHAN**

Current chairman
of the Christian Center
of Jehovah's Witnesses
in Kazakhstan



The complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in English was first published in 1961

A revised version was published in 2013

This translation is now available in whole or in part in over 190 languages, including Central Asian languages such as:

- Kazakh, released in 2014
- Uzbek, released in 2017
- Tajik, released in 2017
- Turkmen, released in 2019

September 2014,
Almaty

Gerrit Lösch, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, announced the release of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Kazakh



CHAPTER 5

THEOCRATIC EDUCATION SYSTEM. JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES’ VIEW OF SECULAR EDUCATION

“An ideal of perfection shown by Christ,” writes Leo Tolstoy, one of the greatest Russian authors, “is not a dream or a mere subject of rhetorical sermons; it is the most essential and accessible of all moral guidance in our lives ...”¹

It is wise, is not it?

This quote from Tolstoy came to my mind when I delved deeply into the question of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ education and their attitude toward knowledge. From the very beginning, their organization used the name “International Bible Students’ Association.” This name alone reveals a lot about the main principles underpinning the development of their teachings. The first chapter of this book already mentioned the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses did not secede from a different religion but started as a group of enthusiastic researchers who wanted to “let the Bible speak.” Their goal was to scrutinize every teaching to see if it was really based on the Bible. As a result, Jehovah’s Witnesses have teachings that distinguish them from other religions. From the beginning they rejected “dogma” and “sacred mysteries.” Therefore, we are not dealing with just believers but true researchers, who constantly seek a deeper understanding of Bible truths. And this is very important to understand!

¹ L. N. Tolstoy. *Afterword*, Collected Works in Twenty-two Volumes, V. 12 – Moscow, Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1978-1985 – p. 208, electronic ref., (https://rvb.ru/tolstoy/01text/vol_12/01text/0285.htm)

To show the importance of knowledge and reason in their faith, I would like to cite some of the first presidents of the Watch Tower Society and *Watchtower* magazines from different years:

“Truth, like a modest little flower in the wilderness of life, is surrounded and almost choked by the luxuriant growth of the weeds of error. If you would find it you must be ever on the lookout. If you would see its beauty you must brush aside the weeds of error and the brambles of bigotry. If you would possess it you must stoop to get it. Be not content with one flower of truth. Had one been sufficient there would have been no more. Gather ever, seek for more.” (What is now *The Watchtower* magazine’s first issue, July 1879)¹.

In 1882, C. T. Russell wrote: “The Bible is our only standard, and its teachings our only creed, and recognizing the progressive character of the unfolding of Scriptural truths, we are ready and prepared to add to or modify our creed [faith, belief] as we get increase of light from our Standard.”—*Watch Tower*, April 1882, P. 7².

“That which cannot satisfy the mind has no right to satisfy the heart.” Christians “must be sure that the Scriptures in which they believe are true,” Rutherford explained³.

“The Governing Body is neither inspired nor infallible. Therefore, it can err in doctrinal matters or in organizational direction.”⁴

“From time to time, our understanding of a Bible prophecy or some Scriptural passage may be adjusted. When such new understandings are provided, we ought to take time to study the information carefully and meditate on it ... We seek to understand clearly not only the major adjustments but also the subtle differences between the old understanding and the new one. In this way, we are certain to place the new truth securely in our own treasure store.”⁵

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 15, 1996 – p. 15.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 133.

³ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 1, 1997 – p. 6.

⁴ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., February 2017 – p. 26.

⁵ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 2017 – p. 13.

The modern history of Jehovah's Witnesses shows that their teachings are not static, they are being refined and new understanding of Bible truths is provided constantly. All these changes are seen as clarification of beliefs; they neither scare nor discourage believers. On the contrary, they prove that these teachings are true and that God guides them by giving more understanding.

Taking into account the above characteristics of their religious teachings, we can better understand Jehovah's Witnesses' view of education.

Every baptized Jehovah's Witness becomes a minister of God. They do not have passive believers. To become one of them, it is not enough to be born in a family of Witnesses or to attend their religious meetings for years. Being one of Jehovah's Witnesses means accepting a certain way of thinking and philosophy of life. Knowledge plays an important role for them.

Every religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses includes some elements of education, in which attendees not only comprehend new information but also participate in joint discussions on certain spiritual topics. Also, their organization provides a wide range of so-called "theocratic education" that includes different theocratic schools.¹ In fact, the entire life of a Witness revolves around theocratic education. For example, before being baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, a person needs to complete a personal Bible study course which includes two books. Then, before baptism, elders meet with new ones to discuss doctrinal questions in order to make sure the candidates have enough knowledge and live according to Bible principles. Even before baptism, all those who wish to improve their public speaking can receive training at the "Our Christian Life and Ministry" meeting. Until 2016,

¹ These "schools" are not to be confused with traditional educational institutions. They do not have a mandatory list of subjects, tests, exams, or an evaluation system. Students do not receive a diploma or certificates of completion and certainly the graduates do not acquire any specialty or profession. In the traditional understanding of a school, Jehovah's Witnesses have just one, the *Watchtower Bible School of Gilead*. Graduates of this school receive an actual diploma.

at their meetings, Jehovah's Witnesses conducted a school that was called the Theocratic Ministry School. But since 2016, that school has become part of the "Our Christian Life and Ministry" meeting. The book *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* says: "People of all ages, ethnic groups, and educational backgrounds are receiving this theocratic instruction, free of charge.¹" Of course, it is available only to those who live according to the Bible's standards.

Anyone who regularly attends these religious meetings and lives according to Bible principles can improve their public speaking (even small children, if they know how to read, can receive this training alongside their parents).

All the assignments are listed in a special *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook*. This publication is designed for Jehovah's Witnesses or anyone who regularly attends their religious meetings. It contains assigned study materials for every week and illustrations that can make your personal Bible study more meaningful. It looks like a real workbook in which you can make personal notes. Usually you can find workbooks for the next six months on their website. The main "textbook" is the Bible, because everyone needs to study this book extensively. In addition to the Bible, they use the brochure *Apply Yourself to Reading and Teaching*. This brochure replaced the book *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* in 2019. It contains guidance on how to express your thoughts properly, give speeches in front of an audience, read accurately—in other words, how to become a good orator and preacher. Here are some titles of the chapters of this brochure: "Accurate Reading," "Upbuilding and Positive," "Effort to Reach the Heart," "Appropriate Use of Visual Aids," "Informative to Your Audience." Altogether there are 20 practical topics on how to improve your public speaking. This "textbook" is unique, for it is based on the 80-year experience of Jehovah's Witnesses as preachers

¹ *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2002 – p. 5.

(the Theocratic Ministry School has existed since 1943). Every topic includes a tutorial video.

If a publisher becomes a pioneer, within a year he/she is invited to a week-long “Pioneer School” and is welcomed at special educational meetings with elders and the circuit overseer.

If a baptized man becomes a ministerial servant or an elder, once every few years he attends a special course of spiritual education that is called Kingdom Ministry School, or the five-day School for Congregation Elders, where he receives more instruction on how to better care for his responsibilities and help other publishers.

If a publisher goes to work at Bethel he/she receives special training for new Bethelites.

If a baptized man becomes a circuit overseer, he receives special training at the School for Circuit Overseers and Their Wives and so on. Every assignment within the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses is followed by some additional training that helps publishers to care for their responsibilities better. As a result, they complete their assignment more fully and receive more satisfaction from it.

Here is a brief overview of the religious meetings Jehovah’s Witnesses have every week:

Every week Jehovah’s Witnesses have a midweek meeting that is called “**Our Christian Life and Ministry.**” It starts with singing and prayer and has three parts: **1. Treasures from God’s Word.** This is divided into a ten-minute talk, based on the Bible chapters assigned for the week’s Bible reading and illustrations from the workbook, followed by “Digging for Spiritual Gems,” a ten-minute discussion based on the key points from the assigned chapters. It is followed by four-minute Bible reading, in which a portion of one of the chapters is read.

2. Apply Yourself to the Field Ministry. Usually three publishers demonstrate how to teach people.

3. Living as Christians. This part is about how to apply Bible principles in everyday life. An important part of it is the Congregation Bible Study, which is a question-and-answer discussion. The meeting

includes many videos from Jehovah's Witnesses' official website. Jehovah's Witnesses comment: "The midweek meeting teaches us to research and present information logically. We also learn to listen to others and focus on their spiritual needs, not just our own."¹

At the weekend they have another meeting that has two parts. It starts with a 30-minute public talk that discusses Bible principles, prophecies, or counsel on Christian conduct. Here are some titles of the talks: "Real Help For the Family," "Be Honest in All You Say and Do," "Be Merciful, Just as Your Father is Merciful," "Your View of Authority Matters to God," "A Godly View Of Sex and Marriage," "The Responsibilities and Rewards of Parenthood," "Follow the Course of Hospitality," "Suffering—Is It From God?" "Do You Harbor Resentment, Or Do You Forgive?" "Choose Your Associates Wisely!" "What Happens When We Die," etc. After the talk they sing a song and then a Bible study begins. *Watchtower* articles from study editions of the magazine are used. Here is what this Bible study looks like:

The meeting is led by a *Watchtower* conductor and his assistant, who reads the paragraphs. One or two paragraphs are read at a time and then the conductor encourages the congregation to participate by asking questions for each paragraph (the questions are provided in the study article).

Anyone willing can comment on a paragraph, basing his comment on Bible verses or his own life experience. Usually several people can comment on one question. Everyone prepares the article beforehand. This meeting is one hour long.

I have been to these meetings and I can say that everyone participates in the discussion very actively. Everyone respects the opinions of the other participants. The role of the conductor is to encourage many diverse comments from the congregation (if there is a need to do so) and provide a clear understanding of the main thoughts of the article. (On an unrelated topic, I must say that many university lecturers of

¹ *God's Kingdom Rules!* - Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2014 - p. 188.

human sciences could learn from them how to analyze original texts in workshops).

Every Christian chooses one evening a week for his personal Bible study. Families have a family worship night. In 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses reduced the number of times they meet as a congregation each week, from three to two. This was done to give families an opportunity to fortify their spirituality by scheduling a specific evening each week for family worship. There are no strict rules for family worship. Parents can choose how they want to conduct it. The main direction is that Scriptural discussions should be the centerpiece of this evening. The discussion should be based on the interests and concerns of each member of the family. It should not be dry and solemn but lively and interesting. Since Jehovah's Witnesses believe that parents are responsible for the care of their children, family worship is very important in their life.

As we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, in addition to their weekly educational program, Jehovah's Witnesses also have a special program of one-day circuit assemblies (held twice a year) and three-day regional conventions (held once a year in the summer). They also have international and special conventions. All their assemblies and conventions follow the same program in every country.

We can draw a definitive conclusion—Jehovah's Witnesses are thinking Christians with good critical thinking skills who are constantly improving their knowledge in religious matters.

We cannot fail to mention that for a very long time, a widespread belief existed in Soviet atheistic literature, namely that Jehovah's Witnesses have an extremely negative view towards secular education, because it interferes with their upbringing as Jehovah's servants. Unfortunately, this belief is still used today by some ignorant opponents.

How did this prejudice start? I believe it is partly related to the fact that children of Jehovah's Witnesses had to defend their Christian neutrality; they would refuse to participate in political rallies, May Day parades, and other communistic celebrations; they would not become

Little Octobrists, raise funds for the Vietnam war, etc. All of this could make people around them angry. That is the first possible reason.

A second reason might be that religion was declared superstitious and obscure; having a religion was thought to be a sign of mental impairment. Hence, a religious person cannot be one who loves to learn.

Let us analyze what Jehovah's Witnesses' literature says on this topic. Here are some quotations:

First: "Obtaining a good fundamental education when you are young can provide the academic skills needed for you to read and write well and to get a general understanding of geography, history, mathematics, and science. In the process, you can learn how to think clearly, analyze facts, solve problems, and generate productive ideas. Such schooling will serve you well throughout your life ... While you are in school, pay attention in class and do your homework assignments well. If you master good reading and study habits, you can more easily examine God's Word and keep yourself spiritually strong ... If you apply yourself, you can also learn the skills needed to earn a living after graduation ... Choose your subjects carefully. Instead of focusing on a field that has limited employment opportunities, consider learning a trade or a skill that will enable you to find suitable work anywhere." (*Our Kingdom Ministry*, August 1999, p. 1)

Second: "This is the time of year when many youths ask: 'Do I have to go back to school already?' Although there may be some challenges and anxieties associated with returning to school, there are also many benefits to be gained by young people who apply themselves so as to get the best out of their education. A good basic education can contribute to one's spiritual progress. What a person does during his youth has a great bearing on what he can accomplish as an adult. Even in the matter of schooling, 'whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap.' (Gal. 6:7) Youths who diligently study their school lessons can acquire skills that will make them more useful to Jehovah ... Young people, try to

get the best out of your school years.” (*Our Kingdom Ministry*, August 1997, p. 2)

Third: “Many feel that the main purpose of education is to earn money. Yet, some educated people are unemployed or do not earn enough to meet basic needs. Some parents may therefore think that it is not beneficial to send a child to school. But schooling does more than prepare someone to make money; it equips children for life in general. (Ecclesiastes 7:12) If a person can speak, read, and write the official language of the country in which he lives, dealing with medical personnel, civil authorities, or bank employees becomes easier, even routine, rather than frightening.” (*The Watchtower*, March 15, 2003, pp. 11–12).

Fourth: “What is the practical value of school? It will help you acquire wisdom, and the Bible says that ‘wisdom is for a protection.’ (Ecclesiastes 7:12) How so? To illustrate: Imagine that you are walking through a dangerous neighborhood. Which would you prefer—to be wandering alone or to be with a group of friends who could protect you if necessary? With a good education, you have several strong ‘friends’ always at your side. These include:

“Thinking ability. Going to school can help you develop what the Bible calls ‘common sense and sound judgment.’ (Proverbs 3:21, Contemporary English Version) Acquiring these skills will help you to solve your own problems instead of always having to rely on others to bail you out.

“Social skills. The Bible admonishes Christians to cultivate such qualities as long-suffering and self-control. (Galatians 5:22, 23) Mixing with a variety of people at school gives you plenty of opportunity to master those qualities, along with tolerance, respect, and empathy—traits that will serve you well in adulthood.

“Practical training. School can teach you the value of having a strong work ethic, which will help you to get a job and keep it. Also, the more you learn about the world around you, the better equipped you will be to know who you are and what you believe. (Proverbs 14:15) Armed

with such conviction, you will be able to stand up for your beliefs respectfully.—1 Peter 3:15.

“The bottom line: Since you need an education, it will do you little good to dwell on the things you dislike about school. Instead, get motivated by considering the incentives noted above. You may even be able to think of a few more!” (Awake!, October 2012, p. 3).

Fifth: “Does the Bible Discourage Education?”

“It is only the ignorant who despise education.”—Publius Syrus, Moral Sayings, first century B.C.E.

“The Bible urges us to ‘safeguard practical wisdom and thinking ability.’ (Proverbs 3:21) Jehovah, the God of knowledge, wants his worshippers to be educated people. (1 Samuel 2:3; Proverbs 1:5, 22)” Awake!, March 8, 1998, p. 19).

These are just five examples from their magazines and books published in different years. You can clearly see that Jehovah’s Witnesses teach their children love of knowledge and zeal for their studies. We also need to take into account the fact that their organization is international and the publications I have quoted were designed to appeal not only to the people in our country but to people in the whole world, including some countries whose educational system is very weak and does not reach all levels of society.

In 2015, Jehovah’s Witnesses published a revised edition of the brochure *Jehovah’s Witnesses and Education*.

“The purpose of this brochure:

“Dutch philosopher Spinoza wrote: ‘I have striven not to laugh at human actions, not to weep at them, nor to hate them, but to understand them.’ As an educator, you face the challenge of trying to understand the views, backgrounds, and convictions of the students in your care, including pupils who are children of Jehovah’s Witnesses. At times, such students may take what seems to be an unconventional stand on certain issues. But when such actions clearly spring from a student’s religious and moral convictions, they merit your attention. This brochure is produced by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society

(the publishing agency of Jehovah's Witnesses) and is designed to help you better understand Witness students. We hope you will take the time to read it carefully.

"Understanding the religious beliefs of another does not require that you accept or follow them, and to inform is not to proselytize. [Italics mine] This brochure does not seek to impose the Witnesses' religious views on you or on your students. Our desire is simply to inform you about the principles and beliefs that some of your students are being taught by their parents so that you will find it easier both to understand Witness children and to work with them. Of course, what children are taught and what they do may not always harmonize, as each child is learning to develop his own conscience.

"Like most parents, Jehovah's Witnesses want their children to make the most of their schooling. To that end, they teach their children to cooperate with their teachers. In return, Witness parents and their children appreciate it when educators treat them with understanding and respect.

"Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians who are known worldwide. However, they are at times misunderstood. Our hope, therefore, is that this brochure will help you to understand better the Witness children you have in your care. In particular, we hope you will see why, in certain specific situations, they may claim the right to be different.¹"

And here is one of the most important statements which explains their position as religious people. This is, in my opinion, the key to understanding their position:

"Witnesses endeavor to live by the Bible command: 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for men.' (Colossians 3:23, Today's English Version) This principle applies to all aspects of daily life, including school. Witnesses thus encourage their youngsters to work hard and to take seriously the tasks assigned to them at school.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 1.

“The Bible also teaches submission to the laws of the land in which one lives. So when schooling is obligatory up to a certain age, Jehovah’s Witnesses comply with this law.—Romans 13:1-7.

“While not minimizing the importance of training for day-to-day living, the Bible shows that this is neither the only nor the principal goal of education. A successful education should also foster in children the joy of living and help them to take their place in society as well-balanced individuals. Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses feel that the choice of activities outside the classroom is very important. They believe that healthy relaxation, music, hobbies, physical exercise, visits to libraries and museums, and so forth, play an important part in a balanced education. In addition, they teach their children to respect older persons and to seek opportunities to do them a service.¹”

The brochure ends with the following address to teachers:

“The Witnesses endeavor to be realistic about life, so they attach great importance to education. It is, therefore, their wish to work along with you to the best of their abilities. For their part, in their homes and in their places of worship around the world, they will continue to encourage their children to play their part in this fruitful collaboration.²”

As we see, Jehovah’s Witnesses think that it is better for students to become adults having, as Renaissance essayist Montaigne expressed it, “a well-made head rather than a well-filled head.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses are sure that “a balanced education should take into account that more than material prosperity is needed to make us truly happy.³”

Hence, education that does not conflict with their moral and spiritual principles is very important for Jehovah’s Witnesses. That is why they write instructing young ones:

“A primary function of education is to prepare you to find a job that will help you support yourself and provide for any family you may

¹ Ibid - 5.

² Ibid - p. 31.

³ Ibid - p. 6.

eventually have. (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 12) Remember, your goal is to graduate with an education that you can use.¹

On the jw.org website under Bible Teachings Teenagers there is a section dedicated to secular education. The following questions are discussed there: “Should I Quit School?” “What if I Can’t Stand School?” “How Can I Get Better Grades?” Articles like these promote education and encourage young people to be more responsible in this matter. And the fact that they have this information on their website shows that Jehovah’s Witnesses care about their young ones and want to help them to make wise choices in life. This is certainly commendable.

Their position towards higher education should be addressed separately².

In general, Jehovah’s Witnesses are wary of ambitions to pursue higher education. Their publications often warn of the dangers related to it. They believe that it is not always wise for a religious person to spend their time and huge amounts of money on a university degree (in most Western countries higher education is very expensive). In their publications they often highlight the usefulness of supplementary education. For example, in 2005 they wrote:

“Studies show that in many countries, there is an acute need, not for university graduates, but for people to work in the trades and services. USA Today reports that ‘70% of the workers in the coming decades will not need a four-year college degree, but, rather, an associate degree from a community college or some type of technical certificate.’ Many such institutions offer short courses in office skills, auto repair, computer repair, plumbing, hairdressing, and a host of other trades. Are these desirable jobs? Certainly! Perhaps they are not as glamorous as some might envision, but they do offer the means and the flexibility needed by those whose true vocation is service to Jehovah.—2 Thessalonians 3:8.” (*The Watchtower*, October 1, 2005, P. 31).

¹ *Young People Ask Vol 1* – Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2011 – p. 139.

² jw.org, *How Do Jehovah’s Witnesses View Education?* electronic ref., (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-education-school/>)

From the last sentence you can see that prestige and high-paying jobs are not their standards of success. They believe that serving Jehovah and applying his principles in their lives guarantee a fine foundation for the future.

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to have a career that will require them to sacrifice their family, their peace, and their service to God in the future. They often warn young ones about the dangers of paying undue attention to material things and earning a lot of money. Is that so bad?

Is it essential for a healthy society to be a society made up only of members with university degrees? In our country and in the world, there are many university graduates who are unemployed. Why do we judge a young man for choosing a profession that is in demand and that helps him to support himself and a family instead of graduating from a university?

It is not important whether we agree with this decision or not. Every person has the right to choose his own way of life. And everyone will have to live with the consequences of this choice.

It is also worth emphasizing that every one of Jehovah's Witnesses makes his own choice in terms of education. This is what distinguishes them from other religions.

This is what they say in their literature:

“Just as was true in the first century, a wide variety of educational backgrounds exist among Christians today. Under the guidance of their parents, young people who complete their obligatory schooling may choose to pursue additional secular education. Likewise, adults interested in improving their means of providing for their families may view such additional schooling as a viable means to that end. Some aspects of traditional academic education lay emphasis on developing general intellectual capacity rather than professional or vocational skills. Thus, a person may find that even after investing much time in acquiring such an education, he lacks marketable skills. For this reason, some choose to pursue studies in vocational programs or technical

schools, with a view to more readily filling actual demands in the job market.

“At any rate, such decisions are of a personal nature. Christians ought not to criticize or judge one another on this matter. James wrote: ‘Who are you to be judging your neighbor?’ (James 4:12) If a Christian is considering pursuing additional schooling, he would do well to examine his own motives to make sure that selfish, materialistic interests are not the driving force.

“It is apparent that the Bible encourages a balanced view of education. Christian parents recognize the surpassing value of a spiritual education based on God’s inspired Word and give balanced counsel to their children regarding supplementary education. (2 Timothy 3:16) Being realistic about life, they acknowledge the value of secular education in gaining the skills necessary for their grown children to provide for themselves and their future families. Therefore, in determining whether supplementary education is to be pursued, and to what extent, each Christian can make sound personal decisions based on devotion to Jehovah God, which ‘is beneficial for all things, as it holds promise of the life now and that which is to come.’—1 Timothy 4:8.” (*Awake!*, March 8, 1998, P. 21).

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not make rules about whether or not one should pursue higher education. To be sure, just look at the scope of their activity: construction of religious buildings around the world, high-quality publications in hundreds of languages, increased use of the Internet, their own websites, use of advanced technologies, their own broadcasting channel, animated films, movies, and documentaries produced with the use of capabilities and resources only in their own studios. Just think, could people who reject education and speak out against knowledge achieve all of that?

There is one more question: who make up the core of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ congregations? I have been analyzing members of their organization for about 20 years and I can say that:

- First of all, I have noticed a process of rejuvenation inside the organization. Most of the congregations today consist of 50-70% young people;

- Secondly, the level of education is growing. The vast majority of members are individuals with high school, vocational, or higher education, with some exceptions among elderly people who did not receive sufficient education because of difficult living conditions or other circumstances.

Jehovah's Witnesses encourage their children to have music classes. If you happen to be at one of their weddings or a hospitality evening for their guests from other countries, you will be surprised by the great artistic professionalism of their concerts, which are usually a part of events like that.

Therefore, all sorts of allegations claiming that Jehovah's Witnesses reject secular education are false. Usually insinuations like that are used to create an image of their community leaders as being some kind of monsters who find it easier to manipulate ignorant people with no education. These false allegations are used to denigrate this international organization and to incite xenophobia towards religious minorities.

CHAPTER 6

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS AND LIFESTYLE

What is the difference between a lifestyle and a religious lifestyle? How is human consciousness and behavior involved in the processes of individual and group existence that are focused on essential religious needs and interests? To what extent are religious interests divided from community and family life? What are the most important sources of a religious lifestyle and how does it function?

Before addressing these questions, we probably need to understand what “a lifestyle” is in general.

You can find the following definition in one philosophical dictionary: “It is a philosophical and psychological category that includes a complex of typical activities inseparable from the living environment of an individual, social group, or society as a whole. It provides an opportunity to explore the main spheres of life (labor, way of life, social life, and culture) in a comprehensive manner. It helps to identify reasons for behavior (way of life) resulting from standard, quality, and way of living.”¹

We must add that “lifestyle” is a very broad concept which includes many subsystems, such as urban lifestyle, rural lifestyle, etc.

Religious lifestyle is also one of the subsystems of this concept. The main factors involved are the place and role of religion in a person's

¹ *Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary*, “Way of life” – Moscow, Sovietskaya Encyclopedia, 1983 – p. 446., electronic ref. (<https://runivers.ru/bookreader/book140184/#page/445/mode/1up>).

life. The stronger his connection to religion, the more an individual is immersed in the religious lifestyle.

A person's lifestyle and way of life, culture, and social ties are regulated by his religious rules and beliefs.

It is also worth noting that a religious lifestyle and its corresponding microenvironment is a result of the interaction of several different factors that complement each other: personal and transpersonal, subjective and objective, spiritual and material, ideological, psychological and organizational premises.

In our opinion, the balance between all the parts of the internal structure of a religion, its roots and functions, always depends on history and time and space changes.

The religious complex could never arise and function in its current form if it was built of randomly selected parts that are not capable of continuous reproduction. All its components (ideological, psychological, and institutional), as we have already seen, are interdependent and subject to one another through genetic, structural, functional, space-time, and cause-effect relationships.

A *religious organization* is a community of believers with its organizational elements. It is created by a group of people in order to manifest their beliefs and has its own relevant characteristics: religious practice, worship services, religious rites and ceremonies, religious teachings and instruction of its followers.

The fundamental unit of a religious organization is a *community* (congregation). It is also called a "*religious community*," an association of people who belong to one religion.

Group-forming characteristics for a religious community are:

- a) ideological principles: common religious ideas, beliefs, goals, objectives, signs and symbols;
- b) religious activity directly connected and not connected to worship;
- c) sense of community (as a family of believers);
- d) subordination, division of roles and positions.

Religious scholars divide religious organizations according to their organizational principle into the following groups:

- Open communities (Orthodox and Catholic churches);
- Communities and groups with fixed membership (Pentecostal, Adventists, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.);
- Communities and groups organized by an ethnic or national principle (Jews, Reformed Church).

Islamic communities have a special place in this classification because they fit between open communities and communities organized by ethnic and national principle.

Organizational types of communities depend directly on the distribution of the roles and positions of their subgroups and members. Therefore, for scientific analysis, it is very important to know not only the religious affiliation and organizational structure of a religious community but also the nature of its spiritual life and features of its preaching activities. All these aspects are very important because every community claims to be special, values its long experience and traditions, and is trying to use its unique form of internal management of relationships and conflicts¹.

The structure of a religious community is determined by traditions and customs, law and regulations, and by the charter of the organization, etc. Inside its structure there is a system of formal and informal subgroups: "community council," "parishioners," "preachers," "healers" and others².

A religious community with its structure is quite a stable formation. Its activity is guided by a common goal shared by all its members, addressing common religious needs.

The prophet Mohammed used to say: "All believers remind me of a living organism; if one of its organs is in pain then the whole body has fever and insomnia."³

¹ A. I. Artemyev. *Study of Religion: Its Foundation, History of Religions, Religions in Kazakhstan* – Almaty, 2002 – pp. 46-56.

² *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Russian Civilization, "Sacred Russia,"* – Moscow, 2000 – p. 608; *Atheistic Dictionary* – Moscow, 1986 – p. 317.

³ Iman V. Porohova, translator. *The Prophet's Hadiths* – Moscow, 2000 – p. 110.

A similar description of a religious community is given by evangelical Baptist Christians. “It is a beehive where every worker bee has its own place and task, and there is no place for scroungers.¹”

Or as one theologian of modern Protestantism notes: “The church is not merely an institution ruled over by Christ as President, a kingdom in which He is the supreme authority, but an organism which is in vital connection with Him, having the source of its life in Him.²”

Here is what Jehovah’s Witnesses explain in their book *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*: “When we subject ourselves to God by doing his will, we escape many of the anxieties and frustrations that overtake those who refuse to submit to Jehovah’s sovereignty.³”

“Within the Christian congregation, we recognize Christ’s headship and the authority he has given to ‘the faithful and discreet slave.’ This affects our attitude and conduct toward one another. Godly subjection in the congregation will move us to be obedient to God’s Word in all aspects of our worship. This obedience involves our ministry, our meeting attendance and participation, our relationship with the elders, and our cooperation with organizational arrangements.—Matt. 24:45-47; 28:19, 20; Heb. 10:24, 25; 13:7, 17.

“Our subjection to God contributes to the peace, security, and good order of the Christian congregation. Jehovah’s qualities are reflected in his godly subjects. (1 Cor. 14:33, 40) ...

“Within the marriage arrangement and the family structure, ‘the head of a woman is the man.’ At the same time, men are to be in subjection to Christ, while the head of Christ is God. (1 Cor. 11:3) Wives are to be in subjection to their husbands, and children to their parents. (Eph. 5:22-24; 6:1) Peace results when each family member follows the headship principle ...

¹ *A Presbyterian’s Handbook* – Moscow, All-Union Council of Evangelical Baptist Christians, 1982 – p. 105.

² P. Billheimer. *Destined for the Throne* – Minneapolis, MN, Bethany House Publishers, 1983 – p. 58.

³ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2019 – pp. 159-160.

“Our being in subjection to God also affects how we view ‘the superior authorities,’ which ‘stand placed in their relative positions by God.’ (Rom. 13:1-7) As law-abiding citizens, Christians pay taxes, paying back ‘Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God.’ (Matt. 22:21) ...

“Theocratic subjection affects all aspects of life.¹”

Therefore, constantly increasing their knowledge is an important component of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ religious lifestyle. And their publications say that the effect that knowledge has on the lives of believers is genuine happiness. “Jehovah is described as ‘the happy God.’ (1 Timothy 1:11) Becoming close to him and imitating his ways bring you genuine happiness, which can benefit you emotionally, mentally, and physically. (Psalm 33:12) You will also be able to build a happy life—by avoiding damaging lifestyles, cultivating healthful habits, and maintaining good relations with others. You will come to agree with what the psalmist said: ‘Drawing near to God is good for me.’—Psalm 73:28.”²

It is not enough for a believer to attend religious service on particular days. Every one of them should be a diligent Bible student who can explain any teaching he believes in. Here is a comment about that from one Watchtower:

“We must find time to study—really study—God’s Word and our Christian publications. Our relationship with Jehovah and our everlasting life depend on it! (1 Tim. 4:15)³”

“No doubt, good personal study habits will help you to grasp fully ‘the breadth and length and height and depth’ of the truth. Use the ‘intellectual capacity’ that God has given you to become ‘full-grown in powers of understanding.’ (1 John 5:20; 1 Cor. 14:20) Make sure that

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2019 – pp. 159–161.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., No. 1, 2019 – p. 15.

³ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 2019 – p. 26.

you understand why you believe what you believe and that you can always give ‘a reason for the hope in you.’—1 Pet. 3:15.¹”

We should not forget that Jehovah’s Witnesses used to call themselves Bible Students, and they remain loyal to their old name even now.

This is a very important aspect of their religious consciousness. The center of their religious life and practice is developing their own relationship with God, who is their loving Father, Friend, Judge, and Grand Instructor. God’s servants undoubtedly must fear and honor him. The most important commandments are: “‘You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this: ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets.”—Matthew 22:37-40

This leads to their Christian position towards *their neighbors*: “Consider how Jehovah enriched our life by creating humans ‘in his image.’ (Genesis 1:27) That means he made it possible for us to reflect in a small way his incomparable qualities. He endowed us with spiritual capacity, or the ability to understand his views and values. As we endeavor to live by these, we enjoy greater happiness and meaning in life. More than that, he gave us the potential for building a relationship with him.²”

*Religious community (congregation)*³ has always played a special role in the preservation and reproduction of a religious form of consciousness, conduct, and communication. A congregation is a “spiritual beehive” “where every worker bee has its own place and task, and where spiritual scroungers are not welcomed.⁴”

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 15, 2009 – p. 28.

² *Ibid* – p. 10.

³ A religious community is a voluntary gathering of citizens with the purpose of meeting spiritual needs and interests (usually it is a group of no less than ten people over the age of 18).

⁴ *A Presbyterian’s Handbook* – Moscow, All-Union Council of Evangelical Baptist Christians, 1982 – p. 105.

The congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses today follow the same way as the first century Christians. “Collectively, these form a united worldwide congregation built around the nucleus of spirit-anointed ones. (Zech. 8:23)”¹

One Watchtower explains the importance for believers of being part of a congregation: “Similarly, the worldwide Christian congregation is God’s household, ‘a pillar and support of the truth.’ Our regular attendance at and participation in the meetings of our local congregation is a key way for us to be built up, strengthened in our relationship with God, and prepared to do his will. Writing to the congregation in Corinth, Paul focused on what was said at such meetings. He wrote that he desired that what was said at their meetings be clear and understandable so that those attending could be ‘built up.’ (1 Corinthians 14:12, 17-19) We today can be built up if we recognize that Jehovah God has authorized the arrangement for local congregations and is supporting it. Yes, if we desire to be built up as Christians, our place is within the congregation. It has long proved to be a bulwark against false teachings, and God has been using it to have the good news of his Messianic Kingdom declared around the globe. Without a doubt, God has accomplished much through the Christian congregation.—Ephesians 3:9, 10.”²

It is easy to see that the role of a congregation in the spiritual life of Jehovah’s Witnesses combines both religious and nonreligious interactions between its members. It also affects their view of the world, moral standards, public opinion of the group, etc.

In this respect, it should be emphasized that only under influence of a religious community can a person become firm in his conviction. Congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses are a clear demonstration of that.

“Disfellowshipping—to maintain a morally clean organization.”³

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2019 – p. 26.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 15, 2007 – p. 29.

³ *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 187.

Here are some comments from Jehovah's Witnesses on disfellowshipping:

“What about that possibility? It is true that committing a serious sin makes one liable to disfellowshipping, but not automatically. Disfellowshipping is for those who refuse to repent—who stubbornly refuse to change.... Elders are primarily healers, not punishers. They are obliged to treat God's people with kindness and dignity.”¹

“Two factors—which must coincide—result in the disfellowshipping of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. First, a baptized Witness commits a serious sin. Second, he does not repent of his sin. Although Jehovah does not demand perfection from us, he does have a standard of holiness that he expects his servants to meet. For example, Jehovah insists that we avoid such serious sins as sexual immorality, idolatry, thievery, extortion, murder, and spiritism.—1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Rev. 21:8.”²

According to them, three objectives are being achieved by disfellowshipping:

“Disfellowshipping wrongdoers honors Jehovah's name. Since we bear the name of Jehovah, our behavior inevitably reflects on his name. (Isa. 43:10).... If one of Jehovah's Witnesses practices what is bad, however, it is likely that friends and acquaintances will become aware of this. The disfellowshipping act shows that Jehovah has a clean people who adhere to Scriptural guidelines in order to maintain that holiness. A stranger once came to a meeting at a Kingdom Hall in Switzerland and said that he wanted to become a member of the congregation. His sister had been disfellowshipped for immorality. He said that he wanted to join an organization that ‘does not tolerate bad conduct.’

“Disfellowshipping protects the clean, Christian congregation. The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians of the danger of allowing willful sinners to remain in their midst. He compared the bad influence

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 22, 1997 – p. 12.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 15, 2015 – p. 29.

of such ones to that of leaven that causes a whole lump of dough to rise. ‘A little leaven ferments the whole batch of dough,’ he noted. He then counseled them: ‘Remove the wicked person from among yourselves.’—1 Cor. 5:6, 11-13.... Overlooking willful sins encourages a lax attitude toward divine standards. (Eccl. 8:11)

“Disfellowshipping may bring the wrongdoer to his senses. Jesus once spoke of a young man who left his father’s home and squandered his inheritance on a life of debauchery. The prodigal son learned the hard way that life outside his father’s home was empty and heartless. The son finally came to his senses, repented, and took the initiative to return to his family. (Luke 15:11-24) Jesus’ description of the loving father who rejoiced at his son’s change of heart helps us understand Jehovah’s feelings. ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that someone wicked changes his way and keeps living,’ he assures us.—Ezek. 33:11. Likewise, disfellowshipped ones who are no longer members of the Christian congregation—their spiritual family—may come to realize what they have lost. The bitter fruits of their sinful course, together with the memories of happier days when they enjoyed a good relationship with Jehovah and his people, could bring them to their senses. Love and firmness are needed to produce the desired result.... In many cases, disfellowshipping provides the discipline the erring one needs.¹”

It should be emphasized that disfellowshipping neither breaks family bonds nor provides a reason for divorce.

Does the practice of disfellowshipping pose any danger to society or the state? No, there is no threat in it.

This is how Professor Massimo Introvigne, PhD, sociologist of religion and Alessandro Amicarelli, President of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief, lawyer, human rights activist explain this in their book *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda:*

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 15, 2015 – pp. 30-31.

“It is factually true that Jehovah’s Witnesses have precise and detailed regulations dealing with excluding from their community members guilty of certain offenses, something that they call ‘disfellowshipping.’ The detailed norms are aimed at guaranteeing that nobody is disfellowshipped lightly or arbitrarily. It is also true that Jehovah’s Witnesses suggest that current members do not associate with disfellowshipped ex-members. An exception is, however, made for members of the immediate family, as illustrated in numerous texts published by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹”

The above-mentioned researchers believe that those who classify Jehovah’s Witnesses based on their practice of “exclusion” as some uniquely “bad” religion and call them “a cult” or “a sect” only show their incompetence and ignorance in the topic of the history of religion.

This is how the researchers explain: “Social scientists distinguish between “emic” and “etic” (not to be confused with “ethic”) explanations of the practices of a religious group. “Emic” refers to the self-understanding of the group, which would normally argue that the practices are based on scripture, theology, or divine revelation. The “etic” point of view of the scholars does not deny the value of the “emic” explanations but, since they cannot be proved or disproved with the tools of social sciences, looks for more mundane or secular causes, which do not exclude the spiritual ones (Harris 1983; Pike 1999).

Disfellowshipping and shunning practices found among the Jehovah’s Witnesses, seen from their emic point of view are based on suggestions coming from the Bible itself. Seen from the etic point of view of outside observers who are not members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses but scholars of religion, they are part of a model that followed the disestablishment of state churches and religions. The pre-disestablishment model was (and is, since it has not disappeared), if anything, much harsher.

¹ M. Introvigne, A. Amicarelli. *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda* – pp. 17-18, electronic ref., (<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>)

In the Abrahamic religions, the apostate is traditionally seen as inherently evil. That a true believer should not associate with apostates is a matter of course.¹

As far as Jehovah's Witnesses are concerned, the researchers emphasize that "it does not imply any criticism of the post-disestablishment religious liberty tradition. On the contrary, it reaffirms it. The disfellowshipped ex-member enjoys the religious liberty to criticize the congregation, and the Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy the religious liberty to separate themselves from those who have been disfellowshipped. Human beings have the right to communicate and the parallel right not to communicate. A husband can divorce and cut any contact with his wife, or ex-wife, because she keeps criticizing the husband himself, or his dear father, or his preferred political party, or football team—or religion. This individual freedom is part of modernity. The Jehovah's Witnesses disconnection policy is not "unique," and does not go as far as similar policies in other religious organizations do. Its application, as it happens with similar policies in other religions, may occasionally be harsh and painful. But most religions have provisions against associating with disfellowshipped ex-members, and minority or persecuted religions can hardly continue to exist without clearly marking their boundaries². As noted earlier, according to their organizational type, congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses belong to communities or *groups with fixed membership*³.

The position of the European Court of Human Rights and other judicial bodies of European countries and the United States on this issue is very clear. The state cannot interfere in the internal affairs

¹ Ibid – pp. 19-20.

² Ibid – p. 27

³ Organizational-type classification was invented by Ukrainian scholars V.D. Bondarenko, L.S. Kosianchuk, and V.V. Fomichenko. They wrote: "According to organizational type, religious organizations can be divided into "open" communities (Orthodox and Catholic Christians), groups with fixed membership (Pentecostal, Adventists, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.), and communities and groups organized by ethnic or national principle (Jews, Reformed Church)." (See: V.D. Bondarenko, L.S. Kosianchuk, V.V. Fomichenko, *Religious Community in Modern Society* – Kiev, Politizdat, 1988 – p. 34.)

and rules of religious organizations, including the rules for admission and withdrawal from membership. This principle “that states should not stand in the way of the internal organization of religious bodies, including how affiliation and disaffiliation or excommunication are regulated, is uncontested in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. It was affirmed by the Grand Chamber in 2000 in *Hasan and Chaush v. Bulgaria*, where the Bulgarian government was prevented from interfering in the internal affairs of the Muslim community in Bulgaria (in this case, appointing and dismissing a Mufti: European Court of Human Rights 2000b)¹.

To everyone interested in the legal side of the issue and the arguments of the courts of European countries and the United States on this topic, I recommend reading the work of Professor Massimo Introvigne and Alessandro Amicarelli, *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda*.

One of the most important components of a complex and multifaceted system of person – community (congregation) – denomination (confession) – general lifestyle interactions is *religious preaching*. Although independent, it is an element of a religious practice as a specific form of human activity.

When it comes to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, preaching can include giving a speech at a religious meeting; explaining what Jehovah God and Jesus Christ as the ruling King expect from their servants.

Therefore, *preaching* is a natural-supernatural way of creating a connection between man and Jehovah God.

The success of preaching, or a sermon, is determined by:

- the preacher's personality and his attitude toward his service;
- the content of a sermon;

¹ M. Introvigne, A. Amicarelli. *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda* – p. 31., electronic ref., (<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>).

– preaching characteristics – format and method of communicating ideas.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, as we already know, call their sermons *public talks or Bible discourses*. These are given at the *public meetings on weekends*. Such talks should help everybody “to remain alert to Christian teachings and to be steadfast in Kingdom service.

“...The subjects considered in public talks are varied. Talks cover Bible doctrine and prophecy, Scriptural principles and counsel regarding family life and marital matters, situations confronting youths, and Christian morals. Some talks center on Jehovah’s marvelous works of creation. Others highlight the exemplary faith, courage, and integrity of Bible characters, focusing on lessons for our day.¹”

Public talks are given every weekend. The speakers are elders or qualified ministerial servants from the local congregation or any nearby congregation.

When analyzing the role of public talks in the moral education of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we should probably highlight that on one hand, the speakers want to help their listeners to progress spiritually, and on the other hand, they want to show them that they are unique and valuable.

The speakers care about the form and presentation of their talks. They try to make them interesting and emotional by using illustrations from everyday life. Methods of reaching the minds of listeners and influencing their behavior, religious language, style, and emotional and rational elements of public talks are constantly modified. But the heart of any public talk – *spiritual content* – always stays the same. And it should be presented in the most simple and comprehensible way.

Worship also has a very important role in a religious lifestyle.

“Worship,” as the late D. M. Ugrinovich, a famous religious scholar, wrote, “is a system of special actions that people use to affect

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2019 – pp. 57–58.

supernatural beings, powers, or relations that they believe exist. *Belief* in the supernatural cannot be separated from *worshipping* it. Since religious people see forces of nature as supernatural because human life and future depend on them, they seek help and assistance from these forces. Worshipping supernatural forces includes a whole system of religious actions. These actions are usually called rituals.¹

Worship, or *religious practice*, in the broad sense of the word means a human activity that, deliberately or not, becomes mystical. At the same time, those who worship strive to break away and become immersed in reality, to assimilate with the environment.

Religious practice, in a narrow sense, is an embodiment of a theological doctrine, a church teaching, or a tradition as part of a set of *ritual actions*. In this case, apparently, it is an attempt to establish a connection between individual believers or religious organizations and the objects of their worship. From this point of view, religious practice can be seen as magical.

The most important types of *worship* are *religious meditation* (immersion into your inner self) and *religious association* (activities with fellow believers). They enrich and integrate the religious experiences of fellow believers as individuals and as groups: their traditions and rituals, skills and abilities to connect to the subconscious, and unconscious and transcendental spheres.

Interestingly, in contrast with other Christian religions and denominations, Jehovah's Witnesses have very simple rituals.

The reason for that is that they are imitating Christians from the first century. Jehovah's Witnesses' religious buildings and meetings are not ostentatious. But this does not affect the solemnity of their meetings, because their main goal is to show to every person present "that close association with others who love Jehovah helps [us] ... to stay close to him."² (*emphasis mine*).

¹ D. M. Ugrinovich. *On Specific Nature of Religion* – Moscow, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 1961 – p. 49.

² Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998 – p. 316.

The lack of rituals helped Jehovah's Witnesses significantly in 2020. From the very beginning of the quarantine in Kazakhstan, all Jehovah's Witnesses' communities suspended public services, closed their religious buildings, and quietly transferred all meetings online. Remarkably, not one of their communities refused to do so. It is also interesting that online meetings aroused great interest among non-Jehovah's Witnesses and the attendance of their meetings even increased. I am convinced that this interesting phenomenon needs to be studied separately.

We should also mention Jehovah's Witnesses' attitude toward **holidays**. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate religious holidays. As we have mentioned, they observe only the Memorial of Christ's death as a religious observance. And this event is also very simple and is based on a Biblical description.

Here is that description: "Jesus introduced the Memorial of his death in the presence of his 11 faithful apostles. He took what was at hand from the Passover meal and made this simple commemoration. (Read Matthew 26:26-28.) He used only the unleavened bread and the wine that were already on hand. Jesus told his apostles that those two basic items symbolized his perfect body and blood, which he would soon offer up in their behalf. The apostles may not have been surprised at the simplicity of this important new meal. Why not? ...

"In everything that Jesus said and did, he was humble. So it is not surprising that he showed great humility on that last night of his life on earth. (Matt. 11:29) He knew that he was about to offer the greatest sacrifice in human history and that Jehovah would resurrect him to a glorious position in heaven. Even so, he did not draw undue attention to himself by requiring an elaborate observance of his death. Instead, he told his disciples that once a year they should remember him by means of this simple meal. (John 13:15; 1 Cor. 11:23-25) The simple but appropriate meal shows that Jesus was not a proud person. ...

"Jesus showed love for his spirit-begotten followers by instituting, not a complicated ritual, but a simple meal for them to observe. As time

passed, those anointed disciples needed to observe the Memorial each year, doing so under various circumstances, including imprisonment. (Rev. 2:10) Were they able to obey Jesus? Yes, they were!...

“And what love Jesus displayed when he made it possible for us to observe the Memorial even under difficult circumstances!”¹

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not celebrate most of the popular holidays. They do not celebrate even their birthdays.

Here is how they explain their position on birthday celebrations: “The Bible specifically mentions only two birthday observances, both involving men who did not serve God. (Genesis 40:20-22; Matthew 14:6-11) Since the Scriptures do not reveal the birth date of the perfect man Jesus Christ, why should we give special attention to the birthdays of imperfect humans? (Ecclesiastes 7:1)”²

We should not come to the conclusion that Jehovah’s Witnesses reject all celebrations or that they deprive themselves of every joy in life. That is not true. Here is what they say: “Most people who celebrate Christmas today are not thinking of its pagan origins. They simply look forward to Christmas as a time to be with family, enjoy good food, and give gifts. Of course, we love our family and friends, and Jehovah wants his servants to share with one another. As 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us, ‘God loves a cheerful giver.’ Jehovah does not want us to give to others only on special occasions. Jehovah’s people enjoy giving gifts and getting together with friends and family at any time of the year, without expecting anything in return. They give because they love others.—Luke 14:12-14.”³

As regards other celebrations, there is no strict set of rules. Believers are encouraged to be guided by reason: “When you are deciding whether or not to participate in any celebration, think about what attitude and behavior it promotes. For example, some celebrations and carnivals

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., January 2019 – pp. 20-21.

² *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2006 – p. 126.

³ *How to Remain in God’s Love* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 176.

involve erotic dancing, uncontrolled drinking, and even immorality. Such celebrations may also promote gay and lesbian lifestyles or encourage nationalism. If we share in these kinds of celebrations, are we really hating what Jehovah hates?—Psalm 1:1, 2; 97:10; 119:37. Christians need to be very careful to avoid any celebrations that dishonor God. The apostle Paul wrote: ‘Whether you are eating or drinking or doing anything else, do all things for God’s glory.’ (1 Corinthians 10:31) Of course, not all celebrations are connected with immorality, false religion, or nationalism. If a celebration does not violate Bible principles, we need to make a personal decision about whether we will take part in it. We also want to consider how our decision will affect others.¹”

It is worth noting that believers do not impose their own viewpoint on others or insult those who have a different view of celebrations. Believers are reminded: “But some of your family who are not Jehovah’s Witnesses might think that this means you don’t like them or want to be with them anymore. They may feel that holidays are the only time that the family gets together. So, what can you do? There are many ways you can reassure them that you love them and that they are important to you. (Proverbs 11:25; Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13) You might invite them to spend time with you on other occasions. If your relatives want to know why certain holidays are no longer acceptable to you, you can look up information in our publications and on jw.org that will help you to explain your reasons to them. Don’t give them the impression that you are trying to win an argument or force them to think as you do. Help your family see that you considered many factors and then made a personal decision. Stay calm, and ‘let your words always be gracious, seasoned with salt.’—Colossians 4:6. It is important that all of us clearly understand our personal reasons for not taking part in certain celebrations. (Hebrews 5:14)²”

¹ How to Remain in God’s Love – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 182.

² Ibid – pp. 182-183.

As we have already mentioned in chapter three of this book, you cannot be born as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, you have to become one. If a person decides to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, he has **to be baptized** in water.

But before baptism, each one must "dedicate" himself to God. Jehovah's Witnesses explain: "When you dedicate yourself to Jehovah, you say a prayer in which you promise to worship only him and to make his will the most important thing in your life."¹

To make sure that a person is making an informed decision when deciding to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, a home Bible study course is offered that helps familiarize one with the main Bible teachings which are the basis for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although the main textbook used is the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses also use additional tools, the books (beginning in 2015) *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* and *How to Remain in God's Love*. These books are designed to help people find answers to their questions.

The main goal of a Bible study is to help the student understand Bible texts and principles. Any other publications are used as additional materials or textbooks and do not replace the Bible.

Additionally, even before getting baptized, anyone willing can attend all the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses and read their literature.

Those who have completed the course with the book *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* and are ready to join the congregation in other activities can then inform one of the elders. Elders will schedule a special interview upon request. During the interview elders will decide if the person understands basic Bible teachings and is living in accord with them as a Christian. If a person is living according to the Bible's moral standards (is legally married or, if single, abstains from fornication, is law-abiding, does not smoke, is moderate in the use of alcohol), is convinced that Jehovah's Witnesses' understanding of the

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 190.

Bible is correct, and is ready to share it with others, elders will allow him to become an unbaptized publisher (a trustworthy person).

Later, if an unbaptized publisher decides to dedicate himself to Jehovah in a special personal prayer of dedication, he can let one of the elders know that he is ready to be baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Next, he will have another interview that is divided in two parts and consists of about 60 questions concerning Bible teachings and lifestyle. During the interview, the elders will make sure that the decision this person is making is voluntary and that he understands the responsibility that is involved in being a Christian. A person will qualify for baptism only if he knows Bible principles well, understands them, lives according to them, and has proved by his actions that he shows faith and is a part of the congregation.

According to the Bible, baptism is a complete immersion or submersion in water. Being immersed in water and then being raised up symbolizes dying to one's former, self-seeking course of life and being raised to a new way of life, that of doing God's will.

A person can be an unbaptized publisher for an indefinite period of time, from several months to several years. It is a personal decision. Biblical standards of righteousness are the same for baptized and unbaptized publishers; there are no exceptions for anyone.

Therefore, saying that someone "is dragged in" to this organization is incorrect and ignorant. In fact, it is not easy to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses. It requires a lot of effort.

Baptism is a feature of the annual assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses. Baptismal candidates usually sit at the front of the audience. One of the speakers gives a special talk addressing them and explaining the importance of their decision. At the end of the talk, the speaker asks them to stand up from their seats and answer two questions to show that their decision is informed and voluntary. After they answer in the affirmative, the speaker says a prayer.

Next, all baptismal candidates proceed to the pool where they are baptized. One candidate at a time enters the pool and two elders

immerse him face-up into the water for a couple of seconds. Candidates wear modest bathing suits. At this point the ritual of baptism is completed.

It should be emphasized that according to the latest edition of the book *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* (2019) elders should “inform the candidate that his baptism date will be added to the Congregation’s Publisher Record held in his name. Remind him that the elders collect this personal information from him so that the organization can continue to care for the religious activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide and so that he may participate in spiritual activities and receive spiritual support. In addition, the elders can remind new publishers that any personal information is handled according to the Global Data Protection Policy of Jehovah’s Witnesses, found on jw.org.¹” This proves again that Jehovah’s Witnesses want to adhere to legal requirements of the State.

A person is baptized only (and this should be emphasized) if it is his informed decision and he qualifies for baptism. This ritual is not a sacrament as it is in the Orthodox Church. For Jehovah’s Witnesses, it is just a symbol of one’s dedication to Jehovah. More detailed information about baptism can be found in the third chapter of this book.

Any religion attaches great importance to *meditation*², because constant prayers, honest self-examination, concentration on spiritual things, and catharsis help to create a deeply spiritual personality genuinely committed to the Most High.

Jehovah’s Witnesses see *prayer* as one of the most important religious acts. In studying the Bible, they have come to the conclusion that all prayers must be directed only to God, in the name of Jesus Christ. They do not think that prayers are a type of meditation, because they do not memorize them or say them mechanically.

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2019 – p. 211.

² Meditation (lat. *meditatio*) – reflection.

Here is what you can find about prayer in one of the *Watchtower* magazines: “Some health experts recommend prayer as treatment for depression and stress. While it may be true that a quiet moment of prayer-like reflection may relieve stress, much the same could be said about certain sounds of nature or even a back rub. True Christians do not trivialize prayer by viewing it as just a feel-good therapy. We view prayer as reverential communication with the Creator. Prayer involves our devotion to and confidence in God. Yes, prayer is part of our worship.

“Our prayers must be accompanied by a sense of confidence, or trust, in Jehovah... Faithful Christians should never feel shy, unworthy, or lacking in confidence when approaching Jehovah in prayer... When we pray to Jehovah with our ‘whole heart,’ our words are charged with meaning and purpose. After such earnest prayers, we begin to experience the relief that comes from throwing our burden upon Jehovah himself.¹”

M. Y. Lermontov, a great Russian poet, describes the state of mind of a person who is praying:

The Prayer

1837

When my life is arduous,
If sadness freezes blood,
I say one prayer marvelous,
I learned it all by heart.

There's vigor unbelievable
In living words' accords,
And breathes unfamiliar
And holly charm in words.

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 15, 2004 – pp. 18-19.

A heart becomes not troublesome,
 And doubts go awry,
 And comes the truth and tears come,
 And soul wants to fly.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not have canonized texts for their prayers. They do not memorize them, write them down, attach them to their clothes, or use them as lucky charms.

Concerning the content of a prayer, the Lord's Prayer is a good example (Matthew chapter 6).

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe they need to use special religious language in their prayers or pray in a special manner.

"When we pray with holy spirit, our prayers are not filled with high-sounding words. They do not consist of formulas repeated by rote. No, they do not contain virtually meaningless doxologies, insincere expressions of praise." There are other people who shared the opinion of Jesus and some Bible writers about prayer. John Bunyan (1628-1688) is one of them: "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised." Puritan minister Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) observed: "God looks not at the oratory of your prayers, how elegant they may be; nor at the geometry of your prayers, how long they may be; nor at the arithmetic of your prayers, how many they may be; not at logic of your prayers, how methodical they may be; but the sincerity of them he looks at." To these comments may be added Bunyan's remark: "In prayer it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart."¹

In *What Can the Bible Teach Us*, "The Privilege of Prayer," we find the following recommendations:

"To whom should we pray? Jesus taught his followers to pray to 'our Father in the heavens.' (Matthew 6:9) He also said: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 15, 1990 – p. 13.

me.' (John 14:6) So we should pray only to Jehovah through Jesus. What does praying through Jesus mean? For Jehovah to accept our prayers, we need to show respect for the special assignment Jehovah gave to Jesus. As we learned, Jesus came to earth to save us from sin and death. (John 3:16; Romans 5:12) Jehovah has also appointed Jesus as High Priest and Judge.—John 5:22; Hebrews 6:20.

“Do we need to be in a special position when we pray?” No, Jehovah doesn't ask us to kneel, sit, or stand when we pray. The Bible teaches us that we can talk to Jehovah in any respectful position. (1 Chronicles 17:16; Nehemiah 8:6; Daniel 6:10; Mark 11:25) What is most important to Jehovah is, not our position when we pray, but that we talk to him with the right attitude. We can pray out loud or silently wherever we are and at anytime during the day or night. When we pray to Jehovah, we can trust that he will hear us even when nobody else does.—Nehemiah 2:1-6.

“What can we pray for?” We can pray for anything that is acceptable to Jehovah. The Bible says: 'No matter what we ask according to his will, he hears us.' (1 John 5:14) Can we pray about personal things? Yes. Praying to Jehovah should be like talking to a close friend. We can tell Jehovah anything that's on our mind and in our heart. (Psalm 62:8) We can pray for him to give us his powerful holy spirit to help us do what's right. (Luke 11:13) We can also ask Jehovah for wisdom to make good decisions, and we can pray for strength to cope with difficulties. (James 1:5) We should ask Jehovah to forgive our sins. (Ephesians 1:3, 7) We should also pray for others, including our family and our brothers and sisters in the congregation.—Acts 12:5; Colossians 4:12.

“What should be most important in our prayers?” Jehovah and his will. We should thank him from our heart for everything he has done for us. (1 Chronicles 29:10-13) We know this because when Jesus was on earth, he taught his disciples how to pray. (Read Matthew 6:9-13.) He said that they should first pray for God's name to be sanctified, that is, treated as sacred or holy. Then Jesus showed that we should pray for God's Kingdom to come and for Jehovah's will to be done all over the

earth. It was only after praying for those very important things that Jesus said that we should pray for our personal needs. When we put Jehovah and his will first in our prayers, we show what is most important to us.

“How long should our prayers be? The Bible doesn’t say. Our prayers can be short or long, depending on the situation. For example, we might say a short prayer before we eat but a longer prayer when we are giving Jehovah thanks or telling him about our concerns. (1 Samuel 1:12, 15) We don’t want to say long prayers just to impress others, as some people did in Jesus’ day. (Luke 20:46, 47) Jehovah is not impressed by prayers like those. What’s important to Jehovah is that we pray from our heart.

“How often should we pray? Jehovah invites us to talk to him regularly. The Bible says that we should ‘pray continually,’ ‘persevere in prayer,’ and ‘pray constantly.’ (Matthew 26:41; Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) Jehovah is always ready to listen to us. We can thank him every day for his love and generosity. We can also ask him for his guidance, strength, and comfort. If we truly value the privilege we have to pray to Jehovah, we will use every opportunity to talk to him.

“Why should we say ‘amen’ at the end of a prayer? The word ‘amen’ means ‘surely’ or ‘so be it.’ It is a way of showing that we mean what we said in our prayer, that is, that we are sincere. (Psalm 41:13) The Bible teaches us that it is also good to say ‘amen,’ either silently or out loud, at the end of a public prayer to show that we agree with what was said.—1 Chronicles 16:36; 1 Corinthians 14:16.”

Based on what the Bible says, Jehovah’s Witnesses conclude: “you can pray anytime and anywhere, when it is appropriate, in any respectful position and without showing greed. It is better to say a personal prayer in privacy. But you should keep in mind that Jehovah listens only to the prayers of righteous people.”

Taking to heart the Scriptural appeal “Come, let us shout joyfully to Jehovah! ... Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; Let us sing and shout in triumph to him” (Psalm 95:1, 2, *New World*

Translation), Jehovah's Witnesses attach great importance to collective ***singing of praise to Jehovah***. They open and conclude their meetings by singing songs. Back in 1879, Russell published the songbook *Songs of the Bride*, and in 1890 *Poems and Hymns of Millennial Dawn*. Over a dozen songbooks have been published since then. Now Jehovah's Witnesses are using the songbook "*Sing Out Joyfully*" to Jehovah which was published in 2016 with 151 songs.

What are the reasons for changing songs and publishing new songbooks?

In 2017, *The Watchtower* described the new songbook: "There was excitement at the 2016 annual meeting of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania when Brother Stephen Lett of the Governing Body announced that a new songbook, entitled '*Sing Out Joyfully*' to Jehovah, would soon be available for use at the meetings. Brother Lett explained that one objective of the revision was to bring the songs into harmony with the revised *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. This required removing or revising lyrics that used expressions no longer found in the New World Translation as a result of the 2013 revision. Further, new songs about our preaching work and songs that express our appreciation for the ransom have been included. Also, because singing is an integral part of our worship, the Governing Body wanted to produce a high-quality book that matches the cover of the revised *New World Translation*. To make '*Sing Out Joyfully*' to Jehovah easier to use, the songs are arranged by subject matter. For example, the first 12 songs relate to Jehovah, the next 8 songs are about Jesus and the ransom, and so on. There is a subject index that will be helpful, for instance, when choosing a song for a public talk. To help everyone to sing from the heart, some lyrics have been revised to improve clarity of thought and to remove words that are no longer in common use. For example, the word 'shall' is not widely used today, so it has been replaced. Similarly, the title 'Long-Suffering' has been changed to 'Exercise Patience,' and the lyrics have been adjusted accordingly. The change of the title 'Guard Your Heart' to 'We Guard Our Hearts' was

most considerate. Why? In the audience at our meetings, assemblies, and conventions are many new ones, interested ones, young ones, and sisters who by singing the words would be put in the awkward position of telling others what to do. So the title and the lyrics were modified.¹

That article is entitled “Make a Joyful Sound!” and it gives practical suggestions on how to improve your singing by breathing properly, making space in your mouth, and using good posture to produce a full singing voice.

The singing of songs at meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses does not just involve the group singing together to beautiful music. It is an important part of their worship.

At the meetings of Jehovah’s Witnesses, you can definitely feel the atmosphere of *unity*. They appreciate their unity with their brothers and sisters and try to strengthen this unity in every way possible. There is an article from a 2018 issue of *The Watchtower* entitled “May We All Be One as Jehovah and Jesus Are One” that discusses the dangers of prejudice among Christians. This article urges a Christian to examine himself to see if he has any prejudice towards people of another culture, race, or nationality. In its conclusion we read: “Divisions, prejudice, and hostility will doubtless increase in the world as we approach the end of this wicked system. (Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:13) As servants of Jehovah, though, we seek the wisdom from above, which is impartial and promotes peace. (Jas. 3:17, 18) We rejoice as we forge friendships with people from other lands, accepting cultural differences and possibly even learning the languages of others. When we do this, peace flows just like a river, and justice like the waves of the sea.—Isa. 48:17, 18.”²

Another distinctive feature of Jehovah’s Witnesses is a *democratic spirit*. For example, they are usually on a first-name basis regardless of age. Nobody refuses to perform a menial job if it will benefit the

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 2017 – pp. 6-7.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., June 2018 – p. 8.

congregation. Do not be surprised if you see an engineer, a musician, or a lawyer with a mop and bucket. Elders and pioneers are trying to set an example. They all build Kingdom Halls together. Their fellow believers from other countries are always ready to help if there is a need.

In any religion, *family* has a special role in the inheritance of religious beliefs, traditions and customs.

Let us remember that back in 1927, American psychologist John Watson foretold that in 50 years, which takes us to the year 1977, the family would no longer exist. And Russian-born American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin claimed that divorce and separation would become so common that there would be no difference between legal marriage and unregistered partnership.

While John Watson's prediction has not come true, Pitirim Sorokin basically described a picture of today's society. And unfortunately, we are witnesses to these modern changes to the family institution.

Some countries have legalized gay marriage, and gay parades are becoming more and more common.

It is true that 'evaporation of morality' (Anthony Giddens) leads to a further moral degradation and as French writer L. Vauvenargues used to say, "morals deteriorate faster than they improve."

Is it still possible to restore the family institution completely with its social values and moral principles within the context of present-day realities? If the answer is yes, then what should we do?

Unfortunately, all the different state projects developed by academic institutions directed at strengthening family relationships are inefficient. And events that are part of these projects are designed more for entertainment than education.

Even though I am not a religious person, I think that religion plays the main role in preserving traditional marriage, even taking into account some deviations from canonical practice. That does not pertain to just one specific religion but the vast majority of different religions and denominations. In my opinion, this phenomenon should be studied more thoroughly.

I am deeply convinced that any country, including secular ones, and any society must rely in this matter on national and religious traditions, since nearly every religion (with the exception of some pseudo-religious formations where social and cultural behavior goes beyond conventional norms) focuses on family as a purpose in life, an ideal, a spiritual value.

Community and family religiousness are defining structural elements of a religious system. Synergy between family and community and the forces of attraction and repulsion between them are complex and multidimensional.

Considering this, followers of different religions try to base their teachings on Holy Books and the most reliable sources, because they understand the important role of family. It is the family which creates the very first ideological self-esteem. It shapes the personality of an individual using moral standards and principles. It helps one to see purpose in life and teaches one life ideals, duty, justice, and other important spiritual values.

Jehovah's Witnesses see families as a very important spiritual value. They promote traditional moral norms and the Biblical view of family relations. The Bible's moral standards with regard to marriage are very clear: "For this is the will of God, that you should be holy and abstain from sexual immorality... For God has called us, not for uncleanness, but for holiness. So, then, the man who disregards this is disregarding, not man, but God, who gives you his holy spirit."—1 Thess 4:3-8 (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*). "Let marriage be honorable among all, and let the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge sexually immoral people and adulterers."—Hebrews 13:4 (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*). "Or do you not know that unrighteous people will not inherit God's Kingdom? Do not be misled. Those who are sexually immoral, ... adulterers, men who submit to homosexual acts, men who practice homosexuality, ... will not inherit God's Kingdom."—1 Cor. 6:9, 10 (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*).

Several years ago, Jehovah's Witnesses released the animated film *One Man, One Woman*, teaching the Bible's standards for marriage. That was quite a bold step considering the changing views of same-sex relations in Western cultures. Despite that, Jehovah's Witnesses' position on this matter is firm.

Jehovah's Witnesses' wedding ceremonies consist of two parts and are very similar to typical weddings in Russian or any other culture.

After a man and a woman decide to get married and announce their engagement, they choose a wedding date and register their marriage in a registry office.

Marriage registration is very important for Jehovah's Witnesses because only after such registration is their marriage legal and they can proceed with the spiritual part—a wedding ceremony at a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses¹.

Jehovah's Witnesses' **wedding ceremonies** are plain and simple. The idea of the whole ceremony is to give the new couple guidance and instruction on how to build a happy and long-lasting marriage.

The following is guidance given to Jehovah's Witnesses for weddings: "A Christian couple want their wedding to be a joyful and dignified occasion and to be enjoyable for everyone in attendance. Guests at a Christian wedding would not make speeches that are unkind, sexually suggestive, or disrespectful to the bride and groom or others. (Proverbs 26:18, 19; Luke 6:31; 10:27) A Christian wedding does not emphasize 'the showy display of one's means of life.' (1 John 2:16) If you are planning a wedding, make sure that you will be able to look back on it with happy memories."²

The ceremony starts with a special song and a prayer. Then an elder gives a special 30-minute talk on the sanctity of marriage that gives some Biblical advice for husbands and wives. At the end of the talk, the

¹ In many lands, the government authorizes a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses to officiate marriages. If possible, he would likely do so at a Kingdom Hall and deliver marriage-related discourse to mark the occasion.

² *How to Remain in God's Love* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 181.

couple make their vows as a public declaration of their commitment to each other. At the end of the ceremony, the elder says a prayer asking God to bless their marriage.

At this point the official part of the ceremony is over, and all present, friends and relatives, have a chance to congratulate the newlyweds. Usually they give them presents, flowers, and cards with congratulations.

Every couple decides if they want to have a non-official ceremony, such as a dinner or a wedding celebration.

At the wedding dinner, there are usually some alcoholic drinks but not a lot. The entertainment program can be quite varied, but it most always includes music and dancing.

Jehovah's Witnesses have many articles about family problems and how they can be solved. Since I have already discussed Jehovah's Witnesses' view of the institution of the family in general in chapter 3, in this chapter I would like to focus your attention on how important it is for them to sustain and promote the family and family values in our quickly-changing modern society.

"Serious problems that persist in marriage may lead one mate or both mates to consider separation or divorce. In some lands, more than half of all marriages end in divorce. This trend is not as common in the Christian congregation, but increasing marital problems among God's people are a cause for concern," says one issue of the *Watchtower* magazine¹.

On the website of Jehovah's Witnesses (www.jw.org), there is a whole section on Marriage and Family, and in the subsection "Marriage," there are four subtopics: "Keys to Success," "What the Bible Says," "Problems and Solutions," and "Separation and Divorce." Here are the names of some articles: "How Can Marriage Be Happy?," "Successful Families—Teamwork," "Surviving the First Year of Marriage," "How to Strengthen Commitment," "How to Show Respect," "How to Show Appreciation,"

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 2016 – p. 15.

“Making a Second Marriage Work,” “What Does the Bible Say About Interracial Marriage?,” “Husbands—Make Your Home Secure,” “Does Happiness Depend on Marriage?,” “How to Keep Peace With Your Relatives,” “Dealing With In-Laws,” “Be Loyal to Each Other,” “Dealing With Differences,” “How to Let Go of Resentment,” “How Children Change a Marriage,” “Solving Problems in Your Marriage,” “When You Are Disappointed With Your Marriage,” “Is Divorce the Answer?,” “Moving Forward After Divorce,” etc. Looking at the names of these articles, you can see that most of them are about how to make your marriage stronger and your family life happy.

It seems that those who accuse Jehovah’s Witnesses of destroying families either do not know them at all and are under the influence of informational myths or are motivated by personal antipathy and are deliberately spreading bald-faced lies about this religion. If the latter were true, I would be extremely disappointed.

How can one accuse Jehovah’s Witnesses of destroying families if they write the following in their literature: “Marital love shown by Christians should therefore be so strong that either mate would be willing, if necessary, to die for the other... A solid marriage is made up of two people who make allowances for each other’s imperfections. They ‘continue putting up with each other and forgiving each other freely.’ Yes, both mates will make mistakes. When that happens, however, there are opportunities to learn from these errors, to be forgiving, and to let love have full sway as ‘a perfect bond of union.’ (Col. 3:13, 14) Moreover, ‘love is patient and kind... It does not keep account of the injury.’ (1 Cor. 13:4, 5) Misunderstandings should be cleared away as soon as possible.”¹

Consider this quote from another magazine: “‘Must I keep on trying to save my marriage no matter what happens?’ you might ask. Nobody can or should make such a decision for you. Yet, there are sound reasons for not giving up on a marital bond that is weakening.

¹ Ibid – pp. 14-15.

The godly man or woman who endures the trials of a difficult marriage for the sake of conscience is precious to God. (Read 1 Peter 2:19, 20.) By means of his Word and spirit, Jehovah will help a Christian who makes earnest efforts to strengthen a strained marriage.¹

And the following is Jehovah's Witnesses' position on non-Witness mates: "In some cases, a Christian is married to one who is not yet a servant of Jehovah. Under those circumstances, the Bible gives good reasons why they should remain together. (Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-14.) Whether the unbelieving mate realizes it or not, he or she is 'sanctified' because of being married to a believer. Any children born to them are considered 'holy' and thus have a standing with God. [The apostle] Paul reasons: 'Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Or, husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?' (1 Cor. 7:16)²"

"IF YOUR HUSBAND HAS A DIFFERENT FAITH... Of course, the marriage vows still hold. (1 Corinthians 7:10) The Bible emphasizes the permanence of the marriage bond and encourages married people to work out their differences rather than to run away from them. (Ephesians 5:28-31; Titus 2:4, 5) What, though, if your husband strongly objects to your practicing the religion of the Bible? ... There are many practical things you can do to affect your mate's attitude. For example, if your husband objects to your religion, do not give him valid causes for complaint in other areas. Keep the home clean. Care for your personal appearance. Be generous with expressions of love and appreciation. Instead of criticizing, be supportive. Show that you look to him for headship. Do not retaliate if you feel you have been wronged. (1 Peter 2:21, 23) Make allowances for human imperfection, and if a dispute arises, humbly be the first to apologize.—Ephesians 4:26. Do not let your attendance at meetings be a reason for his meals being late....

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 15, 2012 – p. 10.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August 2016 – p. 16.

“WHEN THE WIFE IS NOT A PRACTICING CHRISTIAN. What if the husband is the practicing Christian and the wife is not? The Bible gives direction for such situations. It says: ‘If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and yet she is agreeable to dwelling with him, let him not leave her.’ (1 Corinthians 7:12) It also admonishes husbands: ‘Keep on loving your wives.’—Colossians 3:19. If you are the husband of a wife with a faith different from yours, be especially careful to show respect for your wife and consideration for her feelings. As an adult, she deserves a measure of freedom to practice her religious beliefs, even if you disagree with them. The first time you talk to her about your faith, do not expect her to discard long-held beliefs in favor of something new. Instead of abruptly saying that practices she and her family have cherished for a long time are false, patiently endeavor to reason with her from the Scriptures....¹”

Here is what the article “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Break Up Marriages?” says:

“**Do Jehovah’s Witnesses encourage their members to separate from a marriage mate who is not a Witness?** No. The apostle Paul wrote: ‘If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and yet she is agreeable to dwelling with him, let him not leave her; and a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and yet he is agreeable to dwelling with her, let her not leave her husband.’ (1 Corinthians 7:12, 13) Jehovah’s Witnesses abide by this command.

“**Is a wife who is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses encouraged to ignore her husband’s wishes if he does not share her beliefs?** No. The apostle Peter wrote: ‘You wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, in order that, if any are not obedient to the word, they may be won without a word through the conduct of their wives, because of having been eyewitnesses of your chaste conduct together with deep respect.’—1 Peter 3:1, 2.

¹ *The Secret of Family Happiness* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996 – pp. 132-133.

“- **Do Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that a husband’s authority is absolute?** No. The apostle Paul said: ‘I want you to know that the head of every man is the Christ; in turn the head of a woman is the man; in turn the head of the Christ is God.’ (1 Corinthians 11:3) A Christian wife will respect her husband as being the head of the family. However, a husband’s authority is not absolute. He is accountable to God and Christ. Therefore, if a husband commands that his wife behave in a way that breaks God’s law, a Christian wife will ‘obey God as ruler rather than men.’—Acts 5:29.

“- **Do Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that divorce is prohibited?** No. Jesus Christ said: ‘I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, *except on the ground of fornication [sexual immorality]*, and marries another commits adultery.’ (Matthew 19:9) Therefore, Jehovah’s Witnesses hold to Jesus’ view that adultery provides grounds for divorce. But they also strongly believe that marriages should not be dissolved for trivial reasons. They encourage their members to abide by Jesus’ words: ‘A man will leave his father and his mother and will stick to his wife, and the two will be one flesh. . . . Therefore, what God has yoked together let no man put apart.’—Matthew 19:5, 6.¹”

In the brochure *Your Family Can Be Happy*, published in 2014, we find the following Biblical advice on how to make your marriage happy:

“1. ACCEPT THE ROLE JEHOVAH GAVE YOU

“WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS: The husband is the head of the family.—Ephesians 5:23.

“If you are a husband, Jehovah expects you to care for your wife tenderly. (1 Peter 3:7) He made her as a complement of you, and he wants you to treat her with dignity and love. (Genesis 2:18) You must love your wife so much that you are willing to put her interests ahead of your own.—Ephesians 5:25-29.

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., November 1, 2008 – p. 13.

“If you are a wife, Jehovah expects you to respect your husband deeply and to help him fulfill his role. (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:33) Support his decisions and wholeheartedly cooperate with him. (Colossians 3:18) When you do, you will be beautiful in the eyes of your husband and of Jehovah.—1 Peter 3:1-6.

“WHAT YOU CAN DO:

“Ask your mate how you can be a better husband or wife. Listen carefully, and do what you can to improve.

“Be patient. It will take time for both of you to learn how to make each other happy.

“2. REALLY CARE ABOUT YOUR MATE’S FEELINGS

“WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS: You need to look out for the interests of your marriage mate. (Philippians 2:3, 4) Treat your mate as precious, remembering that Jehovah requires his servants to be ‘gentle toward all’ (2 Timothy 2:24) ‘Thoughtless speech is like the stabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is a healing.’ So choose your words carefully. (Proverbs 12:18) Jehovah’s spirit will help you to speak with kindness and love.—Galatians 5:22, 23; Colossians 4:6.

“WHAT YOU CAN DO:

“Pray for help to remain calm and to keep an open mind before discussing serious matters with your mate.

“Think carefully about what you will say and how you will say it.

“3. THINK AS A TEAM

“WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS: When you get married, you become ‘one flesh’ with your mate. (Matthew 19:5) But you are still two individuals and may have different opinions. So you need to learn to be united in your thoughts and feelings. (Philippians 2:2) Unity is essential when making decisions. The Bible says: ‘By consultation,

plans will succeed.’ (Proverbs 20:18) Let Bible principles guide you as you make important decisions together.—Proverbs 8:32, 33.

“WHAT YOU CAN DO:

“Share your feelings with your mate, not just information or opinions.

“Consult with your mate before making commitments.”

To this should be added that Jehovah’s Witnesses strongly condemn premarital sex, because 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (*New World Translation*) says: “For this is what God wills, the sanctifying of you, that you abstain from fornication.” The Bible also says: “To the married people I give instructions, yet not I but the Lord, that a wife should not depart from her husband ... and a husband should not leave his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11, *New World Translation*).

Therefore, Jehovah’s Witnesses view marriage as a lifelong arrangement (Romans 7:2). And even if fornication is committed, the innocent mate may decide whether to get a divorce or not (Matthew 5:32). According to Witnesses, separation should not be viewed as the easy way out of problems.

Even if there are many problems in a marriage, believers are given the following encouragement: “Do what you personally can to improve the situation in your home by applying what the Bible says in regard to your own conduct.¹”

With regard to ***bringing up children***, I can say that in all the publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses which I have studied, one similar idea is found throughout: Parents should not use rudeness or cruelty when raising their children.

Here is one example: “Regarding the correction he would give to his people, God stated: ‘I shall have to chastise you to the proper degree.’ (Jeremiah 46:28) You will get the best results if you measure out correction that is fair and commensurate with the wrong that was

¹ *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989 – p. 248.

committed. ‘Let your reasonableness become known,’ Paul wrote to Christians.—Philippians 4:5. Part of being reasonable involves administering correction in such a way that your children retain their dignity. Santi, a father in Italy, says: ‘I never belittle my son or daughter. Instead, I try to identify the root of the problem and deal with that. I don’t discipline my children in front of others, not even in front of each other, if at all possible. And I don’t make fun of their shortcomings in public or in private.’¹”

When educating their children, Jehovah’s Witnesses focus on setting a personal example, because it is a well-known fact that the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of a child depends directly on what his parents think, feel, and do. Mental and sensory activities as well as the intellectual and emotional growth of a child are encouraged or hindered by family experience. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that 50% of human intellect is formed in the first four to five years of life. Ability to sense and learn in this period is higher than ever.

It is, of course, naive to think that parents who are Jehovah’s Witnesses will teach their children another religion or atheism. It is also known that cruelty cannot be used as a convincing argument, because it only causes rejection and rage. And this is exactly what Jehovah’s Witnesses highlight in their articles directed to those who want to start their own family or are looking for guidance in raising children.

In their advice they always focus on the fact that a good, healthy family is a team; its members are not connected just by blood relation but also by spiritual traditions such as faith, truth, and prayer. The most important family virtue is obedience: Children are expected to obey their parents, and families are expected to obey spiritual leaders.

I also think it is important to note that according to Jehovah’s Witnesses only parents have exclusive responsibility to raise their children. The organization does not have Sunday schools, special educational programs for children, holiday camps, or anything like that.

¹ *Awake!* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 2011 – p. 12.

It provides a huge amount of religious material that parents themselves can choose from and use in teaching their children.

A lot of attention is paid **to protect children from sexual abuse**. This topic is regularly discussed in articles, videos, video sermons, and even animation films for children. At their meetings, they discuss what actions are needed to protect their children. Of particular interest are *Watchtower* articles from May 2019, which were analyzed at the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses around the world. They were titled "Love and Justice in the Face of Wickedness" and "Providing Comfort for Victims of Abuse."

These articles give the following tips to the parents: "Who have the responsibility to protect children from harm? Parents do. Your children are a sacred trust, 'an inheritance from Jehovah.' (Ps. 127:3) It is your responsibility to safeguard that trust. What can you do to protect your children from abuse?"

"First, **educate yourself about abuse**. Learn about the kind of individuals who abuse children and the tactics they use to deceive them. Be alert to potential dangers. (Prov. 22:3; 24:3) Remember that in most cases, the abuser is someone the child already knows and trusts.

"Second, **maintain good communication with your children**. (Deut. 6:6, 7) That includes being a good listener. (Jas. 1:19) Remember that children are often reluctant to report abuse. They may fear that they will not be believed, or they may have been threatened by the abuser to keep the abuse secret. If you sense that something is wrong, kindly draw them out with questions and then patiently listen to their answers.

"Third, **educate your children**. Share with them age-appropriate information about sex. Teach them what to say and do if someone tries to touch them in an inappropriate way. Use the information that God's organization has provided on how to protect your children.¹"

And here is how these articles characterize violence against children:

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 2019 – p. 13.

“JEHOVAH GOD hates all forms of wickedness. (Read Psalm 5:4-6.) How he must hate child sexual abuse—an especially repugnant wicked deed! In imitation of Jehovah, we as his Witnesses abhor child abuse and do not tolerate it in the Christian congregation.—Rom. 12:9; Heb. 12:15, 16” ... “(EXPRESSIONS EXPLAINED: Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult uses a child to satisfy his or her own sexual desires. It could include sexual intercourse; oral or anal sex; fondling of genitalia, breasts, or buttocks; or other perverted acts. While most victims are girls, many boys are abused as well. Although most abusers are men, some women also abuse children.)”

“Child abuse has far-reaching consequences. It affects the victims as well as those who care about the victims—their family members and their Christian brothers and sisters. Child abuse is a grave sin.

“A sin against the victim. It is a sin to inflict unjust pain and suffering on others. As we will see in the next article, the child abuser does just that—he hurts the child in devastating ways. He betrays the child’s trust, robbing the child of his or her security. Children must be protected from such a wicked deed, and those who have been victimized by it need comfort and help.—1 Thess. 5:14.

“A sin against the congregation. When someone who is a part of the congregation becomes guilty of child abuse, he brings reproach on the congregation. (Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12) How unfair that is to the millions of faithful Christians who are putting up ‘a hard fight for the faith’! (Jude 3) We do not tolerate in our midst individuals who unrepentantly commit wicked deeds and who bring reproach on the good name of the congregation.

“A sin against the secular authorities. Christians are to ‘be in subjection to the superior authorities.’ (Rom. 13:1) We prove our subjection by showing due respect for the laws of the land. If someone in the congregation becomes guilty of violating a criminal law, such as by committing child abuse, he is sinning against the secular authorities. (Compare Acts 25:8.) While the elders are not authorized to enforce the law of the land, they do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse

from the legal consequences of his sin. (Rom. 13:4) The sinner reaps what he has sown.—Gal. 6:7.

“Above all, a sin against God. (Ps. 51:4) When a human sins against another human, he also sins against Jehovah. Consider an example from the Law that God gave Israel. The Law said that a man who robbed or defrauded his neighbor was behaving ‘unfaithfully toward Jehovah.’ (Lev. 6:2-4) Certainly, then, when an individual who is a part of the congregation abuses a child—robbing that child of his or her security—he is behaving unfaithfully toward God. The abuser brings great reproach on Jehovah’s name. For that reason, abuse must be condemned for what it is—a gross sin against God.¹”

As you can see, everything is explained very clearly and directly. Jehovah's Witnesses, with their usual directness, called a spade a spade. Their members do not just read this, they analyze it together at their meetings².

Surprisingly, anti-cult organizations frequently use the topic of child abuse to create “fake news” and new accusations against believers. For example, in 2019, the media in Kazakhstan stirred up a wave of news about the alleged involvement of Jehovah's Witnesses in child abuse. It was obviously done with the expectation of public attention to the topic that would provide another ground for raising the question of banning the organization in Kazakhstan. Even if there is no ban, then the “stain” will still remain. This is a common media manipulation trick. Immediately, numerous fighters against sects and some “concerned citizens” began to call upon the state to follow Russia's example and finally ban Jehovah's Witnesses. This situation made a lot of noise. A special TV show was aired on one of the national television channels, where the “victims” of the organization shared their stories. And again, nothing but more false accusations and conspiracy theories

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 2019 – p. 9.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position on Child Protection* has been posted on the official website of the organization for several years. It is revised every few years.

were presented to the audience. The presentation in the form of “a talk show” spoke for itself—it was created to entertain the audience, and not to find the truth. Since then, as it was expected, no facts proving the involvement of the organization in such crimes have been presented to the public. Instead, Dvorkin’s supporters say that the facts allegedly exist, but the elders of the organization do not disclose them.

However, such nonsense is easily refuted by the very policy of Jehovah’s Witnesses, that is publicly voiced and known to all believers. In the same articles from the *Watchtower* study edition that were mentioned above, we find the following:

“Do elders comply with secular laws about reporting an allegation of child abuse to the secular authorities? Yes. In places where such laws exist, elders endeavor to comply with secular laws about reporting allegations of abuse. (Rom. 13:1) Such laws do not conflict with God’s law. (Acts 5:28, 29) So when they learn of an allegation, elders immediately seek direction on how they can comply with laws about reporting it.

“Elders assure victims and their parents and others with knowledge of the matter that they are free to report an allegation of abuse to the secular authorities. But what if the report is about someone who is a part of the congregation and the matter then becomes known in the community? Should the Christian who reported it feel that he has brought reproach on God’s name? No. The abuser is the one who brings reproach on God’s name.

“In the congregation, before the elders take judicial action, why are at least two witnesses required? This requirement is part of the Bible’s high standard of justice. When there is no confession of wrongdoing, two witnesses are required to establish the accusation and authorize the elders to take judicial action. (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; read 1 Timothy 5:19.) Does this mean that before an allegation of abuse can be reported to the authorities, two witnesses are required? No. This requirement does not apply to whether elders or others report allegations of a *crime*.

“When they learn that someone in the congregation is accused of child abuse, elders endeavor to comply with any secular laws about reporting the matter, and then they conduct a Scriptural investigation . . .

“What is the role of the judicial committee? The term “judicial” does not mean that the elders judge, or rule on, whether the abuser should be punished by the authorities for breaking the law. **The elders do not interfere with law enforcement; they leave criminal matters to the secular authorities.** (Rom. 13:2-4; Titus 3:1) . . .

“As Jehovah’s Witnesses, we view child sexual abuse as a gross sin and a wicked deed. Governed by the law of the Christ, our congregations do not shield perpetrators of abuse from the consequences of their sins. Meanwhile, what can we do to help those who have suffered abuse? The next article will answer that question.¹”

As you can see, the position of Jehovah’s Witnesses on this issue is very clear. However, anti-cultists claim that everything is completely different in real life and that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not report cases of violence to the authorities. I would just like to quote the opinion of my colleagues, recognized European experts, in response to this: “While states cannot compel religions to expel, or not to expel, members guilty of sexual abuse, they have the right to pass laws requiring that, when informed of cases of sexual abuse (outside of the existing safeguards that explicitly protect the confidentiality of the Roman Catholic confession and similar practices), those invested with responsibilities within a religious congregation should immediately inform secular authorities. Where such laws exist, **Jehovah’s Witnesses do respect them. It is false that they “leave the matter in Jehovah’s hands” only.**²”

At the same time, I want to highlight an important detail. Jehovah’s Witnesses have never claimed to be immune to the problems of modern

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 2019 – pp. 10-13.

² M. Introvigne, A. Amicarelli. *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda* – p. 37, electronic ref., (<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>).

society. On the contrary, all their activities in publishing materials on social problems, a strict policy of expelling unrepentant members from the Communities, clearly show that they understand the seriousness of the challenges they face, and they are making every effort to encourage their fellow believers to live according to Bible principles.

Summing up the attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses to the family, the upbringing and protection of children, we can say that they, as do many Protestant and Neo-protestant religions and denominations, think that a family is not just a basic social unit, but an arrangement created by God. Without it the life of society and the correct development of the younger generation become impossible.

According to some religious scholars, there is a growing tendency toward the sacralization and elevation of the family, in which it becomes a "home church," despite the fact that different Christian denominations have different regulations for family and marriage arrangements.

The process of converting a family into a "home church" usually includes the following steps:

- Converting a family into a mini religious community with everyday family prayers, study of the Bible and other religious literature, observance of tradition and main church regulations;
- Converting a family into a closed religious unit with a specific religious and moral atmosphere with its own strict regulations for everyday life, marriage and family, leisure time, and forms of communication;
- Requiring a family's full compliance with main Church regulations;
- Creating an emotional, psychological barrier against atheistic influence¹ and the influence of other religions.

The most important aspects of spirituality in most religions are communication with fellow believers, attending religious meetings,

¹ V.D. Bondarenko, L.S. Kosianchuk, and V.V. Fomichenko, *Religious Community in Modern Society* – Kiev, Politizdat, 1988 – pp. 89-90.

following religious traditions, reading religious literature and its explanation, sermons, discussions, etc. However, some secular realities, like interest in scientific progress and achievements in the arts, have also become part of the everyday life of religious people, especially younger generations. This is reflective of our time.

Based on the above, I propose the following not only theological and cultural but also pedagogical objectives:

1. Taking into account the fact that community and family religiousness are defining structural elements of a religious system and play the main role in preservation and reproduction of a religious form of consciousness and conduct, an integrated study of the role of family in modern religious lifestyle should be conducted.

2. An integrated study (including specific sociological study) of the social environment where the religious lifestyle is being formed should be performed. It needs to be studied as a multidimensional, constantly developing object of a specific system of activity.

3. Analysis should be done of person-oriented components of religion, such as religious beliefs, religious experience, and religious conduct. This would involve a comprehensive study of religious personality, methods of conducting modern religious value orientations, etc., which is especially important due to the existing threat of fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism.

Now is the time to combine the efforts of religious scholars and demographers (at least inside the Eurasian Economic Community, because our countries are connected historically, economically, and politically) to conduct a thorough study of all the processes that I have mentioned above.

Years ago, L. N. Tolstoy said that if all good people combined their efforts, we could create a paradise.

Now let us get back to Jehovah's Witnesses.

It should be emphasized that the world's breakdown in morals *has not led to more permissive* views among Jehovah's Witnesses. In the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* we read: "The

Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses has placed increased emphasis on the necessity to avoid not only illicit sexual acts but also influences and situations that erode moral values. During the past three decades, it has provided instruction to fortify individuals against such 'secret sins' as masturbation and to alert them to the danger of pornography, soap operas, and music that has a debasing effect. Thus, while the world's moral trend has been downward, that of Jehovah's Witnesses has been upward.¹ In recent years, The *Watchtower* has urged on its pages again and again that pornography² in any form and violent computer games must be avoided.

Jehovah's Witnesses adhere to high moral standards despite the fact that every year this results in the disfellowshipping of even some of their elders. This makes you respect them even more. Here is what we find in their literature: "In the first century, there were some who abandoned the faith for loose living. Others were turned aside because of apostate doctrines. (1 John 2:19) The same thing continues to occur among Jehovah's Witnesses... Sadly, in recent times it has been necessary to disfellowship tens of thousands of unrepentant wrongdoers each year. Prominent elders have been included among them. The same Scriptural requirements apply to all. (Jas. 3:17) Jehovah's Witnesses realize that maintaining a morally clean organization is vital in order to continue to have Jehovah's approval."³

Another aspect of the religious life of Jehovah's Witnesses is **funerals**. As we have mentioned before, Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in life after death or the immortality of the human soul. They believe that death is the opposite of life, a state of nonexistence. At the same time, they believe that the hope for the dead involves being resurrected here on earth, as Jesus said: "Do not marvel at this, because the hour

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 175.

² One who is addicted to pornography may even be disfellowshipped.

³ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 187.

is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life, those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.”—John 5:28, 29 (*New World Translation*).

This belief affects how Jehovah’s Witnesses organize funerals. The point of the ceremony is to remember all the good things about the person who died, to express words of condolence and support to the family and friends who have lost their loved one, and to reflect on the Biblical hope of the resurrection.

Usually, a funeral or memorial service is held at a Kingdom Hall. It starts with a song that is appropriate to the occasion and a prayer. Then an elder gives a talk for about 30 minutes. The ceremony concludes with a song and a prayer, and the deceased is taken to the burial site.

There are no rituals performed at the cemetery. Relatives and friends usually bring flowers and wreaths without religious symbols. Later they set a tombstone without any religious symbols (cross, half-moon, etc.). Jehovah’s Witnesses care for the maintenance of the gravesites of their relatives.

What if there are non-Witness relatives involved? Here is some advice from a Watchtower: “When deciding whether to share in a custom or tradition, we should also think about how our decision may affect the consciences of others, especially fellow Christians. Never would we want to stumble someone! (Mark 9:42) Also, we want to avoid needlessly offending those who are not Witnesses. Love will move us to speak to them in a respectful way, which glorifies Jehovah. We certainly would not quarrel with people or ridicule their traditions. Remember, love is powerful! When we reflect it in a considerate and respectful manner, we may even soften the hearts of opposers.¹”

Even though Jehovah’s Witnesses believe in the resurrection, death brings them a lot of sorrow. But their faith makes them strong; because of it they do not fall into despair. Their hope helps them to move on

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 2019 – p. 17.

with their lives. The same article gives the following advice on how to support those who have lost a loved one:

“Weep with those who weep.” (Rom. 12:15) We may find it hard to know what to say to someone who is overcome by grief. Sometimes our tears say more than our words. When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died, Mary, Martha, and others wept for their beloved brother and friend. Four days later when Jesus arrived, he too ‘gave way to tears,’ even though he knew that he was about to resurrect Lazarus. (John 11:17, 33-35) Jesus’ tears reflected the feelings of his Father. They also confirmed Jesus’ love for the family, which no doubt comforted Mary and Martha. Similarly, when our brothers sense our love and concern, they know that they are not alone but are surrounded by caring and supportive friends.¹”

Another issue of equal importance that needs to be addressed is the question of **money contributions and the financing** of the work of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This question is very important especially to those who criticize Jehovah’s Witnesses. To answer it, I will quote some of their literature:

“Collections or other solicitations of money are neither authorized nor approved by the Society.” “There are no emotional appeals for funds in their congregations or at their conventions.”²”

Where do the funds come from? Back in 1886, *Zion’s Watch Tower* stated: “He who said, ‘If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fullness thereof ... I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills,’ (Psa. 50:12, 9, 10) is able to carry on his great work without begging for funds either from the world or from his children. Neither will he compel his children to sacrifice anything in his service, nor will he accept anything from them short of a cheerful, free-will offering.” (*Emphasis mine*)³.

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., April 2019 – p.18.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 340.

³ *Ibid* – p. 341.

Here is further comment from Jehovah's Witnesses on this topic: "Our work is supported entirely by voluntary donations. (2 Corinthians 9:7) In 1879, the second issue of this magazine stated: 'Zion's Watch Tower [as this magazine was then called] has, we believe JEHOVAH for its backer, and while this is the case it will never beg nor petition men for support.' We have not wavered from that policy. Donations are sent directly to one of our branch offices or placed in a contribution box that is located in each Kingdom Hall. But we never tithe, take up collections, or charge a fee for our services or publications. We are not paid to preach, to teach in the congregation, or to help build places of worship. After all, Jesus said: 'You received free, give free.' (Matthew 10:8) All ministers at our branch offices and at our world headquarters, including those making up the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, are unsalaried members of a religious order. Donated funds are also used for disaster relief. The early Christians were pleased to share in relief measures for victims of adversity. (Romans 15:26) We likewise assist the afflicted by rebuilding their homes and places of worship and by providing food, clothing, and medical treatment... 'As is the case with all the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, religious funding is handled on a voluntary basis, each one personally determining the amount and frequency of his religious 'donations.'—European Court of Human Rights, 2011.¹"

Let us note again that donations at meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses are indeed voluntary and anonymous. No mandatory contributions or tithing take place.

The fact that the organization is spending increasing amounts of money on different things is very surprising. They design and maintain an official website that is available in more than a thousand languages and contains various videos; they designed and built their own film studio, have their own broadcasting channel, and built a new world headquarters. They also actively participate in programs of disaster

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., September 1, 2015 – p. 6.

relief work in which they help their fellow believers around the world in areas hit by natural disasters.

All of this requires a lot of funds. Of course, now there are more Jehovah's Witnesses in the world than there were ten years ago. And some of the funds may have come from the sale of a very expensive property in New York City. And yet, I am surprised at the extent of their modern activity and the pace at which it is developing.

Let us also not forget how independent the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is in many aspects. The whole process of publishing new materials—from the text layout and page proofing to printing and shipping to other countries—is done by their own members. The same is true of their producing video materials, composing music, and recording songs. They have their own lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, drivers and electricians—all of them are volunteers, who believe that helping the organization is part of their service to God. They do not consider themselves as outsiders who joined the organization; they live as members of the organization and consider it “their” organization. This is probably one of the secrets of their unity.

It is worth recalling that back in 1904, Charles T. Russell pointed out that “a person who has made a full consecration (or, dedication, as we now say) to God ‘has already given all that he has to the Lord.’ Thus, he should now ‘consider himself as appointed by the Lord the steward of his own time, influence, money, etc., and each is to seek to use these talents to the best of his ability, to the Master’s glory.’ He added that, guided by the wisdom from above, ‘in proportion as his love and zeal for the Lord grow day by day through a knowledge of the Truth and the attainment of its spirit, he will find himself giving more and more of time, more and more of his influence, and more and more of such means as are at his command, for the service of the Truth.’—*Studies in the Scriptures*, ‘The New Creation,’ pp. 344-5.¹”

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993 – p. 342.

One cannot help but note that there is no corruption in this organization. All the members of the Governing Body live in the same buildings as the other members of the Bethel family in the U.S.A.; they eat the same food and receive the same allowance as the others. Jehovah's Witnesses do not have a special clergy class, which protects the organization against a system of special benefits and privileges for a small group of members.

Concerning people who like "conspiracy theories" and see criminal offences and illegal actions everywhere, they should consider the fact that this religion has been active in the U.S.A. and Europe for over a hundred years. If they had violated tax legislation or had been involved in something criminal at least once during this period of time, that fact would have been made known to the public. Meanwhile, it is well known that Jehovah's Witnesses have never taken away anybody's property; on the contrary, their property has been taken away from them, for example, in Russia. Actually, in this regard another episode from the Nuremberg Trials comes to mind.

I want to present part of the interrogation of Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a Reichskommissar of Nazi-occupied Netherlands, in which they speak about Jehovah's Witnesses:

"THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle¹): But, in effect—see if I state the practice correctly—the Police would decide that an individual or group of individuals, on account of their words or their actions, were enemies of the Reich, and then their property would be confiscated; is that right?"

"SEYSS-INQUART: Yes ... The association of Jehovah's Witnesses belonged to those groups.

"THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle): Oh, Jehovah's Witnesses belonged to the group too?"

"SEYSS-INQUART: They were also among them.

¹ Francis Biddle was a member of the International Military Tribunal, representing the U.S.A. in Nuremberg.

“THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle): And the property of Jehovah’s Witnesses was confiscated also, since they were enemies of the Reich?

“SEYSS-INQUART: *They probably did not have very much, but what they had was confiscated because of their attitude in refusing to serve in the war effort.*

“THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle): [...] This is interesting. Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to fight or to serve in the German war effort, and therefore their property was confiscated. Is that right?

“SEYSS-INQUART: Not quite. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany refused to serve in the German Army. So first of all they were prohibited there and then this prohibition was expanded for all other regions.

“THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle): Wait a minute. I am not talking about that. I am talking about The Netherlands. Was that true in The Netherlands?

“SEYSS-INQUART: Yes, but Jehovah’s Witnesses in The Netherlands were not prohibited because they refused to serve in the German Army, but rather *because we were against this group on principle.*

“THE TRIBUNAL (Mr. Biddle): Oh, I see, on general principles. As pacifists, *you were against them, so you confiscated their property; right?*

“SEYSS-INQUART: Yes.¹”

Now let us focus on what is, in our opinion, another very important question: what principles do Jehovah’s Witnesses use in everyday life?

It is well known that one of the main pillars of true humanism is constantly making conscious moral choices; deliberate self-determination with respect to society, the country or any other social, professional, national or religious group.

Jehovah’s Witnesses make that choice. Here is how they describe themselves:

“We are ordinary people. We come from various backgrounds and social conditions. Some of us formerly practiced a different religion,

¹ Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Volume 16, Wednesday, June 12, 1946, “153rd Day,” electronic ref. (<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/06-12-46.asp>).

while others did not believe in God. Before becoming Witnesses, however, all of us took the time to examine carefully the teachings of the Bible. (Acts 17:11) We agreed with what we learned, and then we made a personal choice to worship Jehovah God.

“We benefit from studying the Bible. Like everyone else, we have to deal with problems and our own weaknesses. But by trying to apply Bible principles in our everyday lives, we have experienced a marked improvement in our quality of life. (Psalm 128:1, 2) That is one reason why we share with others the good things that we have learned from the Bible.

“We live by godly values. These values, as taught in the Bible, promote well-being and respect for others, along with such qualities as honesty and kindness. They contribute to the development of healthy and productive members of society, and they encourage family unity and morality. Convinced that ‘God is not partial,’ we belong to a spiritual brotherhood that is truly international, free of racial and political barriers. Although we are ordinary, we make up a unique people.—Acts 4:13; 10:34, 35.¹”

“We are an international organization unaffiliated with other religious groups. Although our world headquarters is in the United States, the vast majority of Jehovah’s Witnesses live in other countries. In fact, some eight million of us teach people the Bible in over 230 lands. We do so in response to Jesus’ words: ‘This good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations.’—Matthew 24:14.

“Regardless of where we live, we conscientiously obey the law. Yet we endeavor to remain politically neutral. This is because we observe Jesus’ direction for Christians to be ‘no part of the world.’ Thus we do not take part in political issues and activities or support warfare. (John 15:19; 17:16) ... Still, we do not isolate ourselves. Jesus prayed to God

¹ *Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will Today?* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2015 – p. 4.

regarding his followers: ‘I do not request that you take them out of the world.’ (John 17:15) Therefore, you may see us as we work, shop, and go to school in the local community.¹”

A sincere Jehovah’s Witness will build his life around his service to God. He will constantly keep in mind the words of Jesus Christ from Matthew 6:33: “Keep on, then, seeking first the Kingdom and his righteousness ... ” He puts God’s interests first, and this is the main life principle of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Watchtower of October 15, 2010 explained this principle: “The original-language words for ‘righteousness’ can also be translated ‘justice’ or ‘uprightness.’ Hence, God’s righteousness is uprightness according to his personal standards and values. As the Creator, Jehovah has the right to set the standard for what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. (Rev. 4:11) God’s righteousness, however, is not a cold, rigid set of laws or an endless list of rules and regulations. Rather, it is based on Jehovah’s personality and his cardinal attribute of justice together with his other cardinal attributes of love, wisdom, and power. God’s righteousness, then, is linked with his will and purpose. It includes what he expects of those who desire to serve him.

“What does it mean to seek first God’s righteousness? Simply stated, it means to do God’s will in order to please him. Seeking his righteousness includes trying to live according to his values and perfect standards and not our own. ... This way of life involves our very relationship with Jehovah. It is not a matter of obeying his laws out of fear of punishment. Rather, our love for God motivates us to endeavor to please him by upholding his standards, not establishing our own. We realize that this is the right thing to do, the very thing that we have been designed to do. Like Jesus Christ, the King of God’s Kingdom, we must love righteousness.—Heb. 1:8, 9.²”

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., September 1, 2015 – p. 4.

² *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., October 15, 2010 – pp. 7-8.

What is the conclusion? *Neither the ideology nor any practices of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses (even though they have their own understanding of certain things) harms their own members or any other people, because these do not go beyond Christian views and are based on the Bible and its commandments.* The vast amount of literature they have produced and use does not contain a single call—not even a hint of a call—to any illegal or anti-social acts.

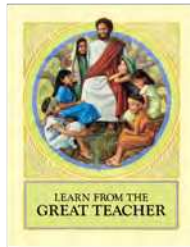
Thus, all the false statements claiming that Jehovah's Witnesses represent a threat to society or any political regime come from those who are religiously intolerant.

Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their firm convictions and their clear and logical system of values. They are very spiritual and intelligent people. After this thorough analysis we can conclude that this particular religious group is not dangerous, and we can agree with the following statement: "They are as non-subversive and peace-loving as a religious body can be and ask only to be left alone to pursue their faith in their own way."¹

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom.* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993. – p. 195.

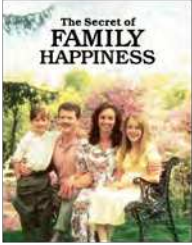
IMAGES FOR CHAPTER

5-6



Jehovah's Witnesses attach great importance to education and the upbringing of children and adolescents





Publications of Jehovah's Witnesses about family life

Marriage

See All



Is Marriage Just a Social Union?



Surviving the First Year of Marriage



Maintaining Commitment in Your Marriage

Managing Money

See All



How to Manage Money



Dealing With Debt



How to Control Spending

Communication

See All



How to Be a Good Listener



How to Discuss Problems



How to Compromise

Raising Children

See All



Fulfilling Your Role as a Parent



How to Praise Children



How to Be Humble

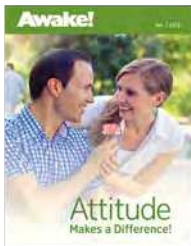
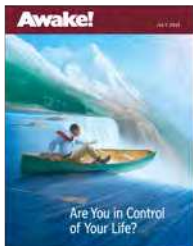
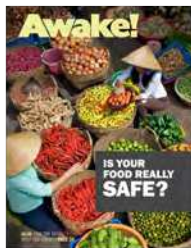


Large families are not uncommon
among Jehovah's Witnesses





In the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses considerable attention is paid to health and recreation issues



CHAPTER 7

FROM TOLERANCE TO PERSECUTION AND ANTICULTISM. QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCURATE TERMINOLOGY

The great Plato once said: “Truth, Stranger, is a noble thing and a lasting, but a thing of which men are hard to be persuaded”¹. True, this is not easy, because each era and even each society has had its own way of understanding truth. Moreover, people often try to justify atrocities with their own “truth,” more often with anti-truth. The entire history of mankind, even of religions, has proven that.

- As an example, today people often talk about spiritual agreement. The concept itself is appealing, just like the concepts of Paradise, eternal life, “God’s dwelling place,” an eternal Kingdom on earth, as well as a universal religion that would unite all the current religions and denominations, thereby bringing an end to all spiritual search and disagreement.

- Unfortunately, spiritual unity is just a dream, because there have always been, and apparently will always be, not only interfaith contradictions but also religious disagreements. From history we know many examples of interethnic, political, and interstate conflicts and wars that took place under the banner of religion.

- In the war for leadership and against any dissent, religious fanatics have always demonstrated wild morals and profound intolerance (which is always aggressive) beyond human understanding. Even now

¹ Plato. *Laws*. Book Two, electronic ref., (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.2.ii.html>).

there is a trend toward repression, intolerance of any dissent, and a trampling on freedom of conscience.

- Looking back in history, we can see that things in the beginning were peaceful. It is known that in pagan cults, each tribe or clan, and later whole nations, worshipped their own gods, and the existence of other gods was taken for granted.

The historical fact that in ancient Athens an altar to an unknown god was set up is widely known. One Byzantine Emperor, Michael II—a supporter of official iconoclasm and a follower of Paulicianism—announced a ban on arguments about religious experience and persecution of dissent. In other words, he implemented the idea of freedom of conscience.

There has always been tolerance and the ability to recognize a different point of view and to respect it. But there has also always been blatant religious intolerance.

As we see from history, the complete opposite to Michael II was Emperor Nero from the Julio-Claudian dynasty—a ruler who was known to be cruel, narcissistic, and lecherous—who first had his mother killed and then his wife. In 64 AD, he started the Great Fire of Rome, and in order to divert attention from rumors, Nero ordered that Christians should be burned alive as human torches and used for lighting his gardens.

Christians were persecuted until the 4th century AD, and only under Roman emperor Constantine the Great did Christianity receive the same rights as other religions. After his death, Christianity was given the status of State religion of the Roman Empire.

From the 13th to 15th centuries, a brutal inquisition reigned across Europe. In the Christian Middle Ages, the idea of tolerance was alien. The union of the “altar and throne” meant that “heresy” should be considered a State crime. Persecution of religious dissent by secular and Church authorities, in turn, incited fanaticism and self-sacrifice among those who were persecuted. Religious discord and intolerance

increased. Still, even at that time there were those who called for non-violence and tolerance.

The process of separating Church and State began in the Renaissance, when it was announced that not only acceptance of faith but also participation in faith were acts of freedom and nobility, therefore they could not be forced. However, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day and the massacre of the Huguenots (Protestants), plotted by Catherine de Medici and the House of Guise, took place in France (August 24-25, 1572). All the parting words of Christian humanists, such as Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, and William of Ockham, who opposed any violence against heretics and called for reconciliation with followers of different beliefs, were absolutely discarded.

Europe briefly returned to the idea of tolerance during the Reformation. Later, the views of the main reformers (M. Luther, G. Calvin, and P. Melancthon) underwent radical changes. Demands for the execution of heretics and freethinkers, accused of blasphemy, began.

Dissenters were persecuted not only by the Church, but also by the State and society. As we can see, an attitude of intolerance took root in society.

With his famous *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, published in 1689, John Locke made an attempt to implement the complete separation of State and Church (since civil and political rights should not depend on a person's belonging to a particular religion).

I will present only a few quotes from Locke's publication:

"The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.¹"

"I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just

¹ J. Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, electronic ref., (<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/locke-a-letter-concerning-toleration-and-other-writings>).

bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.¹

“A church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord in order to the public worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls. I say it is a free and voluntary society. Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands, than which nothing can be imagined more absurd. Thus, therefore, that matter stands. No man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God. The hope of salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there. For if afterwards he discover anything either erroneous in the doctrine or incongruous in the worship of that society to which he has joined himself, why should it not be as free for him to go out as it was to enter? No member of a religious society can be tied with any other bonds but what proceed from the certain expectation of eternal life. A church, then, is a society of members voluntarily uniting to that end.”²

“It is not the diversity of opinions, (which cannot be avoided) but the Refusal of Toleration to those that are of different opinions, (which might have been granted) that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world, upon account of religion. The heads

¹ Ibid – p. 94.

² Ibid – p. 96.

and leaders of the church, moved by avarice and insatiable desire of dominion, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude, 160 have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves; by preaching unto them, contrary to the laws of the gospel, and to the precepts of charity, that schismatics and heretics are to be outed of their possessions, and destroyed. And thus have they mixed together, and confounded two things that are in themselves most different, the church and the Commonwealth.¹

These words were first written in 1686—over 330 years ago—but how relevant they are in our critical times!

Russian historian S. A. Kotlyarevskyi wrote: “Religious freedom, apparently, was an ancestor of all ‘natural rights.’ The recognition of one form of freedom could not but be expanded to other human relations: the logic of freedom is as implacable as the logic of despotism ...²”

The modern interpretation of tolerance stems from the Enlightenment, when a person recognized his autonomy as a thinking and acting being. The term “tolerance” in modern political science, as well as in socio-political vocabulary, gained a foothold at the end of the 1980’s. It was facilitated by the academic study of the humanities.

A famous Western researcher, John Rawls, gave what is, in my opinion, a very detailed description of the main components of the concept of “tolerance,” highlighting the following points:

- tolerance is a moral virtue, a political value, and not just an instrument for resolving particular problems;
- tolerance is one of the embodiments of justice, or equality, in a “well-ordered society;”
- as the implementation of the principle of justice, it is based on those provisions that are chosen by people in the original positions;

¹ Ibid – p. 130.

² S. A. Kotlyarevsky. *Selected Works*. “Constitutional State. The Experience of Political and Morphological Review” – Moscow, Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2010 – p. 100.

- the grounds for tolerance are the same as for justice, namely: the equality of people as moral, rational beings with an intuitive “sense of justice” and sharing a “subtle” theory of good;

- since the implementation of tolerance requires the consent of citizens, no philosophical and religious teachings can be considered as its basis, which means that when deciding issues related to tolerance, citizens should give preference to justice, equality, and law over their many theories of good¹.

A Russian lawyer and historian M. A. Reisner wrote about freedom of conscience as “a moral duty of a person”. He noted that “since Christ awakened the human soul to free faith, love and free feat there has been no other right more holy, no other moral foundation more elevated than the right of a moral person to choose freely his supreme law of grace and truth and give all his life, all his strength to serve this highest truth. On the other hand, it seems that no other human right has waited so long to be realized, no other one has been subjected to so many desecrations in the name of religion and morality, as this right. Religious coercion and oppression reigned for about 15 centuries before this right received its final recognition; and abundant human sacrifices were brought to the altar of religious intolerance for the same number of centuries.”²

Speaking about the development of ideas of tolerance in the countries of the former Soviet Union and in Kazakhstan, I would like to dwell a little more on the history of the struggle for freedom of conscience in the Russian Empire. Even a brief consideration of this history is very important, as it will help to better see and understand many modern traditions and features of the attitude of the State and officials toward religion and freedom of conscience in Russia and Kazakhstan. After all, we have a long common past, common state and political traditions

¹ A. A. Derkach, ed. *Tolerance of Personality: Characteristics, Patterns and Mechanisms of Formation* – Moscow, Publishing House of the Russian Civil Aviation Administration, 2003 – pp. 15-16.

² M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the «Obshestvennaya Polska» partnership, 1905 – p. 2.

and institutions, which means that we have common shortcomings and mistakes in the past and present.

Will it stay the same in the future? Kazakhstan, for the first time in many centuries, can choose its own way, define its policy and attitude towards freedom of conscience and religious tolerance. This gives hope for a better future.

I would like to note that the topic of religious tolerance in the Russian Empire that I have addressed deserves not only a separate book but maybe a multi-volume series to be written. Although I think it is necessary to touch upon this issue in this chapter, since the history of the struggle against dissent in the Russian Empire and later in the USSR helps us to understand the reasons for the wariness of a part of modern society and the authorities in the post-Soviet countries towards new religious movements and new views in general. Moreover, this history helps us to understand those manipulative levers and old “myths” that have been resurrected today and are actively used by anti-cult organizations and various propagandists to instill xenophobia and discord in society, thereby achieving their political and financial goals.

I would like to begin shortly before the birth of the Russian Empire, namely from the reign of Peter the Great's father, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich. That century was called “rebellious”. In 1649, in the Russian Kingdom, a set of general laws was adopted, called the Synodic Code. It is interesting to us because it (1) legalized the priority of State power over Church power and (2) defined the status of the Orthodox Church as a State religion. The State assumed the function of “defending the right faith,” and the very first chapter of the Code was called “On blasphemers and on church rebels.” Thus, religious intolerance was directly legalized and promoted by fear of persecution and death. Any dissent had become a criminal offense that was punished by “burning.”

There are many historical examples of how such punishment was applied. The punitive role of the State was especially manifested in an extremely important event of that century as the church schism in the

Russian Orthodox Church and the emergence of the Old Believers¹. Church reforms by patriarch Nikon provoked strong resistance from some priests and society. The struggle of the opposing parties quickly went beyond the boundaries of Church disputes.

Then on April 7, 1685, a decree on the so-called schismatics was issued on behalf of Tsars Ivan and Peter Alekseevich and Tsarevna Sophia. It consisted of 12 articles². By this decree, the persecution of schismatics was transferred under the jurisdiction of the State, and not the Church, as it was before. The decree stated that those caught in heresy and schism should be tortured in order to find out their supporters. If such persons do not renounce their beliefs, then the decree briefly indicates the measure— “burn them.”

Here is what A.S. Prugavin, a famous pre-revolutionary scholar of the schism writes: “At the very beginning of the Split, the authorities wanted to end it with tough, harsh measures. As a result, the blood flowed like a river. The first leaders of the Split died on the block, were burned down in log cabins, or faded away in captivity. There were long, continuous series of ruthless torture and countless, painful executions. The Schismatics were exiled, imprisoned in cells and monasteries, ‘they were tortured and burned with fire,’ whipped ‘mercilessly,’ their nostrils torn and their tongues cut, their heads chopped, their ribs broken with pliers, they were thrown in wooden cages and buried with straw, doused naked with cold water and frozen, hung up and put on stakes, their feet, hands, and heads were cut off, their veins were taken out. In other words, everything that could be invented as human atrocities for intimidation, panic, and terror—everything was put to use.³” Many Old Believers committed self-immolation as an act of

¹ Opponents of the reforms carried out by the churches were called “schismatics” and later “Old Believers.”

² “On those who scatter (spread) and receive heresies and schisms”, *Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire. Collection (1649-1825): Volume 2 (1676-1688): Laws (619-1327)* – p. 647, electronic ref. (http://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php).

³ *Russian Thought*, 1905, “The Importance of Sectarianism in Russian Folk Life,” by A.S. Prugavin, electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/p/prugawin_a_s/text_1881_znachenie_sektatnstva_olderfo.shtml).

protest (according to some sources, at least 20,000 people died in these fires).¹

It was during the reign of the Emperor Peter I, the founder of the Russian Empire, when the authorities first started talking about “religious tolerance.” Although, in this case, it was about religious tolerance in relation to foreigners coming to serve in Russia.

The Manifesto of April 16, 1702, “On the recruitment of foreigners to serve in Russia, with the promise of freedom of religion” reads: “Since here in our capital the free worship of all other Christian sects has already been introduced, even despite the fact that they don’t agree with our Church By the power given to us by the Almighty we do not want to force the human conscience, thus we willingly grant every Christian a responsibility to care of the happiness of his soul. We will carefully observe that ... no one, either in his public or private service of worship, is disturbed, but ... is protected from any interference. If it happens that in any place of our state or with our armies and garrisons, there will be no real spiritual rank of a preacher or church: then everyone will be allowed to serve the Lord God not only in his own house and with his family, but also to invite into his house those who wish to gather with him in order to ... unanimously praise God and thus conduct the divine service.”²

It was under Peter I, on February 25, 1721, that the Most Holy Governing Synod was established, the supreme governing body of the Orthodox Church, headed by the Chief Prosecutor, directly subordinate to the Tsar. Thus, the Orthodox Church was firmly embedded in the state system and was completely subordinate to the emperor.

Interestingly, Peter I was more inclined towards tolerance and persuasion in the fight against dissent. S. M. Soloviev, a famous pre-revolutionary historian, quoted Peter I: “The Lord gave the kings authority over the nations, but Christ alone has authority over the

¹ Ibid.

² *Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire. Collection (1649-1825): Volume 4 (1700-1712): Laws (1740-2619)*, electronic ref., (http://nlr.ru/e-res/law_r/search.php) – p. 192.

conscience of people.” The historian also writes that the emperor allegedly asked his entourage once: “What are the schismatic merchants, are they honest and diligent?” After an affirmative answer, Peter I said: “If they really are honest and diligent, then, in my opinion, let them believe as they want, and if it is impossible to turn them from superstition using reason, then, of course, neither fire nor sword will help; and to be martyrs for stupidity—neither they are worthy of that honor, nor the state will have any benefit.¹”

Russia waged a difficult war with Sweden in those years. The treasury urgently needed money. In February 1716, according to two decrees, the schismatics were counted and double taxed. Those who refused such a payment for a semilegal existence faced forced labor.

It is noteworthy that it was documented that during the reign of Peter I, the ideas of Protestantism were widely spread in Russian society, especially among the educated class in Moscow. S. M. Soloviev describes two high-profile cases of those years associated with falling away from Orthodoxy.

The case of Dmitry Tveritinov's group lasted from 1713 to 1715. From the available information, we can conclude that this group rejected the veneration of icons and saints, the worship of holy relics, church rites and fasts; they also rejected the doctrine of the immortal soul. They wanted to worship God “with spirit and in truth²” and therefore opposed church rites. It is especially interesting that, as one of the members of this group allegedly stated: “[N]ow in Moscow everybody is free, thank God—anybody can choose whatever faith he likes.³”

¹ S. M. Soloviev. *History of Russia since ancient times*. Vol. 16, Ch. 3., electronic ref., (<http://www.spnl.nsc.ru/history/solov/main/solv16p3.htm>).

² This refers to the words of Jesus Christ from the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 23, 24: “Nevertheless, the hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father with spirit and truth, for indeed, the Father is looking for ones like these to worship him. God is a Spirit, and those worshipping him must worship with spirit and truth.”

³ S. M. Soloviev. *History of Russia since ancient times*. Vol. 16, Ch. 3., electronic ref., (<http://www.spnl.nsc.ru/history/solov/main/solv16p3.htm>).

The second high-profile case took place in 1717 and concerned the group of Nastasya Zima. She allegedly bought some religious books and read them to other people. “Nastasya does not bow in front of the icons and the cross and does not venerate them as relics, because this is the work of human hands. She prays and teaches others to pray to God with spirit and truth. She does not wear the cross, does not cross herself, and does not order other people to cross themselves. She does not listen to the church and to the traditions of the church teachers. Here is how she says her prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, for I am a sinner!” She does not pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, our God!”¹”

In both cases, these groups were stopped with torture and execution. Although the very fact of the existence of these groups clearly shows that there was a craving for knowledge in society, there was courage of thought, and there was a search for “truth.” It was the time of serfdom, and it turned a huge part of the peasants into slaves. The historian V. O. Klyuchevsky wrote: “The more the territory of our state expanded, the more oppressed the internal freedom of the people would become.”²

During the reign of Empress Catherine II, the philosophy of humanism and French enlightenment came into Russian high society. Even the nobles begin to write and talk about religious tolerance. Although everything remains only at the level of philosophical conversations. As V. O. Klyuchevsky aptly noted: “Voltaire would not have believed if he had learned that his freedom-loving philosophy was destined to serve as a colored bandage covering the shameful spots on the forehead of the slave owner in Russia”³.

The state remained Orthodox and the union of Church and government was still strong. This is how it is described in the modern study “Priesthood and Kingdom”: “One of the indicators of the unity

¹ Ibid.

² V. O. Klyuchevsky. *Works in nine volumes, Vol. 3* – Moscow, Kniga po trebovaniyu, 1988 – p. 365.

³ V. O. Klyuchevsky. *Results of Western influence in Russian society of the 18th century (lecture 10)* – electronic ref., (<http://historic.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000000/st010.shtml>).

of imperial Russia and the Orthodox Church was the impossibility of drawing a clear line between secular (in the ordinary understanding) and church legislation. Thus, the current legislation stated: ‘The prevailing and dominant faith in the Russian Empire is the Christian Orthodox Catholic faith of the Eastern Confession. It was also stated that ‘the person of the Sovereign Emperor is sacred and inviolable’, that God Himself commands to obey the authority of the reigning monarch ‘not only out of fear, but also based on your conscience.’ At the same time, the sovereign had a certain ‘obligation’ to the church: He could not but be Orthodox and belong to its jurisdiction (that is, he was obliged to observe all the dogmas and canons of the Orthodox Church under the threat of losing the throne). Literally, it stated: ‘The Emperor, possessing the All-Russian throne, cannot profess any other faith than the Orthodox.’¹”

At the same time, the State played the major and decisive role in this union. It subjugated the church, took into account the interests of the "dominant" church, acted against its rivals, made concessions, and granted unlimited rights to it; but, as we will see later, it always pursued first and foremost its pragmatic interests (albeit wrapped in religious clothing).

A pre-revolutionary historian, philosopher and jurist, Mikhail Andreevich Reisner, back in 1905 dedicated a large study to this topic: “The State and the Believer Personality.” This work, largely forgotten today, has not lost its relevance today and is worthy of the closest attention from a modern researcher of the religious traditions of both Russia and Kazakhstan.

Among other things, M. A. Reisner notes: “When our law speaks of religious tolerance, freedom of faith, it means something completely different from the principle of religious freedom, which is adopted in the modern West.... Our religious tolerance in its foundations is not modern, not legal Western and not Christian confessional, but rather

¹ M. A. Babkin. *Priesthood and Kingdom (Russia, early XX century – 1918). Research and its materials.* – Moscow, Indrik, 2011 – p. 30.

national ancient Roman. Our law does not know the division of the state and religious societies, nor their freedom, nor the freedom of personal faith and conscience.¹

A striking feature of this “religious tolerance” was its closed nature. You can see it from the fact that “for Russian subjects other faiths do not exist legally, except for the faith of the dominant church and tolerated by the State confessions of non-Orthodox societies. Our law recognizes the right to change your religion only if you change it for another acceptable or a dominant belief. You cannot change your religion for the one that is not accepted by the State. For example, neither the Anglican faith, nor the Old Catholic, nor the Greek-Uniate faith legally exist in Russia, therefore it is unthinkable to accept those faiths without a special legislative act.”²

On what basis then were the “tolerant religions” selected? M. A. Reisner believed that the political interests of the State played a decisive role in this: *“Tolerance was a necessary condition for Moscow to unite the whole mass of heterogeneous alien religious elements.... It was built on a purely political basis and even then acquired a completely definite TRIBAL and national character; it was not the tolerance of faith, but the tolerance of other tribes and peoples with all their customs and ... by the way, their faith.... The state will do this not for moral reasons and not by virtue of its cultural sense of justice, but by virtue of a purely political necessity: to bind new nations and peoples to a huge empire and capture their national religions within the framework of one government. This is a kind of transition of various national confessions into the pantheon of Russian state religions. A transition that puts powerful springs of spiritual power over the consciences of the newly conquered at the disposal of the state.”*³

To support this system, the authorities introduced the following restrictions: (1) a ban on missionary activity (except for the Orthodox

¹ Ibid – p. 160.

² M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905 – p. 157-158.

³ Ibid – p. 160.

Church); (2) a ban on choosing and changing your faith (So an Orthodox could not change his faith for another, even a tolerant one, while a representative of a “tolerant” faith could freely convert to Orthodoxy.); (3) a ban on the formation of new religious groups among legally recognized beliefs; (4) prohibition of certain personal and civil rights, including the right to travel, choose a place of residence, choose a profession, enter the civil service, get an education, etc.

Thus, we see that the described religious system of “religious tolerance” in imperial Russia, in fact, was not a system of freedoms, but a system of restrictions. Perhaps it would be more correct to call such a system “restrained intolerance.”

Unfortunately, even now, more than a hundred years later, this view of religious legislation still has its supporters. Think about it, when we talk about new religious laws, they are usually justified by the need to introduce new restrictions (in addition to existing ones), rather than by the need to consolidate or expand new rights and freedoms of citizens. This is certainly done to “protect society from the corrupting influence of the West and its sects.” This slogan is not new though. It is also a part of the “legacy” of the imperial past. This myth appeared in the 19th century during the reign of Emperor Nicholas I, if not earlier, in ancient Muscovy.

In the 19th century, we find a document which is very important for our topic. It is entitled “Note on the sedition of the enemies of Russia.” This document was published back in 1868, in the 9th issue of the historical and literary magazine *Russian Archive*, published monthly in Moscow since 1863¹.

¹ The creator, editor and publisher of the magazine was an excellent Russian historian and literary critic, director of the first public library in Moscow (Chertkovo Library), Pyotr Ivanovich Bartenev. The note itself is published in the magazine with a preface and commentary by the priest M. Moroshkin. Although the author of the note is not known for sure, Moroshkin himself received it from a prominent political leader of that era, A. A. Pavlov. The origin of the note, apparently, is closely related to the activities of A. S. Shishkov (Secretary of State and Minister of Public Education of that time). Full text of the Note in Russian might be found online, V. 9 – pp. 1330-1392, electronic ref. (<https://runivers.ru/lib/book7627/403867/>).

One might say that this document largely formed the foundations of information myths of subsequent generations. It was in this note that religious enlightenment, the spread of religious tolerance, religious literacy, and even work on translating the Bible into the language of the people, were presented as hostile attempts of Europe to undermine the Orthodox faith, and through it the power of the emperor.

Europe's insidious plan against Russia was ostensibly "... to support, strengthen and multiply its domestic schisms and sects in Russia; to introduce and spread foreign sects and their delusions.... The enemies of Russia hoped to weaken the adherence of the Russian people to the faith and the Orthodox Church using all of these. They wanted to acquaint them with all religions, to weaken their aversion to other people's faiths in them, to convince that there are good sides in every religion, to teach them to look at all faiths with the eyes without distinction. They wanted to make them indifferent to the Orthodox faith opening to everyone the convenience of having and reading the Bible.¹"

The author of the Note was particularly intolerant towards the activities of the Russian Bible Society, which aimed to translate the Bible into modern Russian and other languages of the peoples of the empire, in order to make the Bible as accessible as possible for all residents of the Russian Empire. The Society also wanted to "buy Bibles in the Slavic language from the Holy Synod, in order to resell these Bibles for the smallest fee or free of charge to the poor."² The author of the Note was outraged by the fact that, the Bible was sold at the cheapest price and was incredibly popular among the people thanks to the Society. He thought it was very dangerous when "*the Bible w[ould] be read by everyone, without any hermeneutic rules and then everyone w[ould] understand and interpret it according to their own reasoning.*"³

¹ *Russian Archive* (historical and literary magazine), "Note on the sedition of the enemies of Russia" – Moscow, 1868 – pp. 1342-1344.

² I. A. Chistovich. *The history of the translation of the Bible into Russian. Second edition* – Saint Petersburg, 1899 – p. 19.

³ *Russian Archive* (historical and literary magazine), "Note on the sedition of the enemies of Russia" – Moscow, 1868 – p. 1381.

Minister of Education A. S. Shishkov had a strong opinion on that subject: *“Translating the Scriptures into a simple dialect and distributing them in an incredible number of copies is also one of the means to shake the Faith invented in Bible societies.”*¹

Here is how A. S. Shishkov saw a cultist: *“What could be more dangerous than the empty saints and fanatics who have fallen away from the true Faith, whose first effort is to rob, destroy the laws, destroy the authorities and everything that has some morality and does not want to share their atrocities?”*²

Here is what the author of the Note writes: *“The founders of the new Russian sects preach to their followers new dreamy rules about worshiping God in spirit and truth, and then (therefore) reject all outward appearances in matters of serving God, and all the holy sacraments, and therefore the anointing of tsars and consecration of the anointed ones. Having assimilated spiritual freedom, they reject any dependence on the law, power, ecclesiastical and civil government. They reject any obligation to donate to the church, to perform different state duties, to pay taxes and dues. They call all of these signs of the kingdom of Antichrist; the very prayers for the tsar and for all the authorities they call impiety and an insult to God.”* Thus, *“All our secret sects are the most bitter and most dangerous enemies of the church and our fatherland: they are gunpowder waiting for a fatal explosion; they are worms, constantly eroding the pedestal of a big ear of Russia!”*³

Pay attention also to how similar all these accusations are with the calls of modern “sectophobes.” There is both the “insidious West” and the image of a sectarian as an antisocial, criminal and destructive element. Today, we face the same old myths. Nothing new has been invented since then. How right was Solomon when he wrote in Ecclesiastes: What has been is what will be, and what has been done will

¹ *Notes of Admiral A. S. Shishkov. Publication of the Imperial Society of Russian History and Antiquities at Moscow University – Moscow, 1868 – p. 65.*

² *Ibid – p. 77.*

³ *Russian Archive* (historical and literary magazine), “Note on the sedition of the enemies of Russia” – Moscow, 1868 – p. 1340.

be done again; There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one may say, “Look at this—it is new”? It already existed from long ago; It already existed before our time. No one remembers people of former times...” (Ecclesiastes 1:9-11, *New World Translation*)

Then it all ended with the Russian Bible Society being closed down, and a “cast iron” censorship was instituted over every thought. It was the time of the “apogee of autocracy” of Emperor Nicholas I in the Russian Empire. The spirit of society of that time is very well represented in the works of N. V. Gogol. The uprising of the Decembrists, who wanted a change in the political system—the expansion of civil and religious freedoms—was brutally suppressed. The State did not want to have a civil person, with his opinion, freedoms and desires. Society was to become a single, well-oiled mechanism serving the political goals of the State power and with its will completely subordinated to the wishes of the emperor.

It is significant that, as noted by Ilarion Alekseevich Chistovich, the “supreme spiritual leadership” in 1824-1825 set on fire several thousand copies of the “Pentateuch” (five biblical books of Moses, translated into Russian and published by the Russian Bible Society) at brick factories in Moscow¹. Just imagine it! Bibles were burned in the 19th century!

The new minister of education, Sergei Semenovich Uvarov, expressed the new ideology of the Russian Empire in the well-known formula “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality.” These were the principles that formed the exclusivity of the Russian Empire in his understanding. Religious tolerance has never been among these principles.

Minister Uvarov was convinced that the immature mind of the society should be protected from “incorrect information” by damming it like a river. At the same time, it was necessary to educate the society in a “correct” way. Of course, nobody asked the people.

¹ I. A. Chistovich, *The history of the translation of the Bible into Russian*. Second edition – Saint Petersburg, 1899 – p. 325.

Unfortunately, even today, there are those who are fanatically convinced that society is blind and stupid and cannot make the right choice without guidance. Thus, according to them, society needs protection and constant control. Although, these people do not like to talk about their own morality and moral values. Often, they hide behind general phrases and present their opinion as the opinion of the majority.

Here is what V. O. Klyuchevsky said about the guardians and educators of society of that time: “They were so far from the life of real people, both socially and morally, that they decidedly could not think of how these ideas could be useful, it was only an amusement for their mental idleness The more we used the fruits of Western European culture, the more we diverged from its basic aspirations for equality and freedom.¹”

During the emperor Nicholas I, in order to protect the empire and combat all dissent, the third department of gendarmes was created, which served as political police. This department was also engaged in the fight against schismatics and sectarians. They were brutally persecuted, stigmatized and exiled to the outskirts of the empire just because they dared to think in their own way, seek God, and change their faith.

At the same time, the state looked at the situation not from a religious but exclusively from a political point of view. It did not care about the purity of the Orthodox faith and proper spiritual education. The authorities were not interested in how sincerely Orthodox the person was. If a person left Orthodoxy, it was considered **“a purely secular criminal-police offence. From this point of view, schism is not a religious crime, but ... a manifestation of ‘willfulness’, ‘rebellion’, ‘disobedience to the authorities’ — in other words, political unreliability.”**² A person

¹ V. O. Klyuchevsky. *Essays in 9 volumes*, V. III – Moscow. Mysl, 1988 – p. 366.

² M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the "Obshestvennaya Polska" partnership, 1905 – p. 408.

who left the Orthodox Church and found the courage to reflect on matters of faith seemed extremely dangerous to the authorities because he got out of control and became less predictable. What if he began to ask questions about the essence of power and the nature of the state structure? And what if he doubted the divine nature of the monarchy? Although the schismatics did not think about political issues, the very likelihood of losing control over a person was a real danger in the eyes of the authorities.

During the time of the Russian Empire, religious tolerance was out of the question. In his novel *Resurrection*, Leo Tolstoy wrote:

“... this is a striking case,’ said Nekhludoff, and gave a brief outline of the case of a peasant who began to read the Gospels to the peasants in the village, and to discuss them with his friends. The priests regarded this as a crime and informed the authorities. The magistrate examined him and the public prosecutor drew up an act of indictment, and the law courts committed him for trial.

This is really too terrible,’ Nekhludoff said. ‘Can it be true?’

‘What are you surprised at?’

‘Why, everything. I can understand the police-officer, who simply obeys orders, but the prosecutor drawing up an act of that kind. An educated man . . .’

‘That is where the mistake lies, that we are in the habit of considering that the prosecutors and the judges in general are some kind of liberal persons. There was a time when they were such, but now it is quite different. They are just officials, only troubled about pay-day. They receive their salaries and want them increased, and there their principles end. They will accuse, judge, and sentence any one you like.’

‘Yes; but do laws really exist that can condemn a man to Siberia for reading the Bible with his friends?’

‘Not only to be exiled to the less remote parts of Siberia, but even to the mines, if you can only prove that reading the Bible they took the liberty of explaining it to others not according to orders, and in this way condemned the explanations given by the Church. Blaming the

Greek orthodox religion in the presence of the common people means, according to Statute . . . the mines.’

‘Impossible!’

‘I assure you it is so. I always tell these gentlemen, the judges,’ the advocate continued, ‘that I cannot look at them without gratitude, because if I am not in prison, and you, and all of us, it is only owing to their kindness. To deprive us of our privileges, and send us all to the less remote parts of Siberia, would be an easy thing for them.’

‘Well, if it is so, and if everything depends on the Procureur and others who can, at will, either enforce the laws or not, what are the trials for?’

The advocate burst into a merry laugh. ‘You do put strange questions. My dear sir, that is philosophy.’¹

“The Code of Criminal and Correctional Sentences” (1885 edition) was valid in the Russian Empire up to the 20th century. Section two of this code was called “About Crimes Against Faith and Violations, Protecting These Regulations,” and it provided for punishment of hard labor and exile to Siberia and Sakhalin for sectarianism and blasphemy.

Here is what one Russian writer said about the peasants: “[They] have the German Bible, they ask the Germans to translate it into Russian, saying that the Slavic Bible is confusing. Doesn’t it indicate the need for the Russian Bible? Where is it then? Where are the translations of the Bible into Russian? Who among us is not aware of what happened to the Russian Bible! Who has the fault, one wonders?... Where are the Bibles sanctified by the authority of the church government? Where are the cheap Bibles for the people?”²

Even though the Russian society of 19th century was familiar with the Bible only superficially, a new class of people was already forming. Many years later, a famous Russian religious and political philosopher

¹ L. N. Tolstoy. *Resurrection*. V. II – New York, Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, – p. 13, electronic ref. (https://archive.org/stream/resurrection00tols/resurrection00tols_djvu.txt).

² I. S. Aksakov. "Some of the ugliness of Russian life – and in particular the reasons for the spread of Stunde." Electronic ref, (http://az.lib.ru/a/aksakow_i_s/text_1868_nek_bezobrazia_olderfo.shtml).

Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev wrote about this class: “People of this formation can be very ‘Orthodox’, but they are very little Christian. They even consider the Gospel to be a Baptist book. They do not like Christianity and consider it dangerous to their instincts and emotions. Everyday Orthodoxy is paganism within Christianity.¹”

V. O. Klyuchevsky described the spirituality of the Russian people of those years very well: “A Russian Orthodox commoner is serving his faith as a church duty imposed on him to save someone’s soul, but not his own, which he has never learnt to save, and does not want to: ‘No matter how you pray, the devils will get it.’ This is all his theology²”

Here is the reasoning of another writer of that time: “Where does such a spiritual pliability of a Russian Orthodox person come from? Is it because this Russian person is absolutely deprived of any religious education? He sees Orthodoxy as part of his everyday life.... He, as the whole nation, lacks personality development and education in a Christian sense.³”

Unfortunately, all of the above applies to our time too. How can one fail to recall the outstanding Soviet and Russian religious scholar Nikolai Semenovich Gordienko. In one of his interviews, he said that those who criticize the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses are in fact criticizing the Bible. Some do it deliberately, not having the courage to criticize this ancient book directly. Others do it out of their own ignorance and poor religious literacy.

Then the reign of Emperor Alexander II, “the tsar-reformer and liberator”, started. And against the background of real economic and social reforms, the total intolerance that reigned in the country could not but anger the thinking of honest people. Again, loud calls were made to give society economic freedoms and freedom of religion.

¹ N. A. Berdyaev. “Is there freedom of thought and conscience in Orthodoxy?” Electronic ref., (<https://istina.russian-albion.com/ru/chto-est-istina-022-sentyabr-2010-g/naberdyaev>).

² V. O. Klyuchevsky. *From a notebook*. electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/k/kljuchewskij_w_o/text_1910_iz_zapisnoj_knizhki.shtml).

³ I. S. Aksakov. “Some of the ugliness of Russian life – and in particular the reasons for the spread of Stunde.” Electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/a/aksakow_i_s/text_1868_nek_bezobrazia_olderfo.shtml).

The outstanding Russian writer and philosopher Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov wrote in 1865: “[T]he conscience in the matter of faith must be completely free and keeping someone in the confession by a police method is contrary to the spirit of Christ's teaching.¹”

Note that Aksakov himself was a deeply Orthodox Christian. This did not prevent him from being among the part of the intelligentsia, where more and more voices were heard in support of the human right to determine faith and convictions. Over the years, the writer had published more articles in defense of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience. In 1968, he wrote: “What is it that the concept of freedom of conscience contains, if not the concept of sincerity instead of hypocrisy, in other words, of truth instead of lie? In this case, the church will no longer be a ‘gathering of believers’, but unbelievers, driven into its midst forcibly and being hypocritical?²”

For the philosopher and writer, persecution for faith in the empire was no different from the bonfires of the Inquisition in medieval Europe: “[D]o we have the same beginning that lies at the foundation of the condemned Latin Inquisition that is executed by the Russian Church, with the replacement of fires and other horrors by Siberia or prison? Aren't we replacing the methods of the Inquisition by some ‘message from the spiritual authorities’ to the secular authorities that ‘such and such, Pyotr Fedorov, deviated into the Old Believer schism and built a prayer house? For this reason the secular authorities are pleased to subject him to’ legal criminal punishment, for the good of the church.”

Half a century will pass and, during the discussion of the Manifesto of Tolerance of 1905, another Russian writer will say: “The law ... which stands between a person and his God and wants to force the

¹ I. S. Aksakov. “On the views of society and government measures that disagree with the common sense of Orthodoxy”, Electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/a/aksakow_i_s/text_1865_o_vzglyadah_obschestva_olderfo.shtml).

² I. S. Aksakov. “The church should act on conscience and conviction not with material, but with a spiritual instrument” Electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/a/aksakow_i_s/text_1868_o_tom_chno_tzerkov_olderfo.shtml).

first to act against his conscience, gives people a terrible choice: to renounce their faith and thus betray the sacred part of their soul, or to sacrifice their human existence and well-being.... It is usually strong religious characters, the sincere people that are most threatened by this alternative. Indifferent to faith, weak hypocrites know how to evade punishments of this law. They humble themselves over its power, pretending to bow before it. The law of religious compulsion is not terrible for the bad, but threatens the noblest people in their honor and safety.¹

This should be remembered by all those involved in lawmaking today.

It is known that Emperor Alexander II instructed the Minister of the Interior, Count M. T. Loris-Melikov, to develop a draft and political reform of the so-called "Constitution". The count advocated the granting of rights to schismatics among other things². The assassination of the emperor, however, put an end to all endeavor in this area.

The reign of the next Russian Emperor Alexander III began: *"The reign of Alexander III has come. This heavy-handed tsar did not wish any harm to his empire and did not want to play with it simply because he did not understand its position. He did not like complex mental combinations, which a political game requires just as a card game does too. The shrewd lackeys of the autocratic Court easily noticed this and were able to convince the complacent master without many efforts that all evil stems come from the premature liberalism of the reforms that his noble but too trusting parent stood for. They convinced him that Russia was not ready for freedom and it is too early to let her into the water, because she hadn't learned to swim yet.... The government directly mocked the society, saying: you demanded new reforms—we will take the old ones away from you...."*³

¹ M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the "Obshestvennaya Polska" partnership, 1905 – p. 9.

² A. N. Medushevsky. *Constitutional projects in Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries / collection of documents* – Moscow, ROSSPEN – p. 464.

³ V. O. Klyuchevsky. *Letters. Diaries. Aphorisms and thoughts about history* – Moscow, Nauka, 1968 – p. 299.

The main ideologist of that era, the Chief Prosecutor of the Most Holy synod, K. P. Pobedonostsev, stated in 1888 that various religions enjoy wide freedom in Russia, unlike anywhere else, and that laws protecting the dominant religion in Russia are necessary, since this is “the most important historical responsibility of Russia, the need for its life.¹”

However, three years later, in 1891, the chief prosecutor called for a “war against sectarianism.” A famous Russian philosopher, Vladimir Solovyov, later recalled the words of Pobedonostsev: “Swift increase of these sects is a serious danger. Let the sectarians be forbidden to leave their cities and villages. May criminals against faith be judged, not by secular but by spiritual authorities. Let their passports be marked so that they can neither be hired nor hidden, so that their very stay in Russia would be impossible. Let them be prohibited by law from buying, selling, or owning property. May their children be taken from them and raised in the Orthodox faith.²”

Let me remind the reader that, as mentioned in chapter two of this book, Semyon Kozlitsky, the very first Jehovah’s Witness (at that time, “Bible Student”) in Russia was exiled to eastern Kazakhstan in 1891.

Nicholas II ascended the Russian throne in 1894. The emperor was not going to engage in reforms and announced the continuation of his father’s policy. The historian Klyuchevsky wrote about Nicholas II in 1905: “This is the last tsar...³”

Despite all the persecution, exiles, and mockery of any dissidence, the people of the Russian Empire were striving for freedom of conscience and religion. Sometimes, the great numbers of individuals converting to Islam, the Old Believers, or other “sects” created difficulties for the Orthodox missionaries.

¹ M. I. Odintsov. *Dumsky Challenge: Religious Freedoms and Religious Reforms in the Russian Empire (1900 – February 1917)* – Saint Petersburg, Drevo Zhizni, 2013 – p. 26.

² Ibid – p. 28.

³ V. O. Klyuchevsky. *Essays in 9 volumes*, V. IX. – Moscow, Mysl, 1988 – p. 457.

A specialist in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, historian, archaeographer, archivist, professor Mikhail Anatolyevich Babkin provides unique data on the census in the Russian Empire in 1897. According to official data, “in European Russia 81.71% of the population belonged to the synodal church, in the Caucasus - 49.40%, and most of all in Siberia - 85.79%. A smaller number of Orthodox Christians lived in Central Asia (8.28%) and in the Polish provinces (6.47%).¹”

These are very interesting figures, which, however, may not reflect the real picture of society in those years. No, there is no doubt that the number of Orthodox Christians was predominant. But were the numbers that big? R. A. Reisner gave the reason to doubt the official figures. He studied in detail a unique source on the religious situation in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. It was the journal of the Committee of Ministers about the introduction of religious tolerance in Russia (according to the Manifesto of April 17, 1905).

According to Reisner, the Committee of Ministers found that local authorities widely used subscripts when determining people’s religion. According to the testimony of the Committee of Ministers, “100,000 people of former Uniates persisting in Catholicism” are considered Orthodox despite their Roman confession. Thirty thousand “Latvians who fell away to Protestantism” are also attributed to the dominant faith. “In the Volga provinces there is a significant number of baptized Tatars who have fallen away into Mohammedanism,” who are also considered Orthodox. “In different places of the empire, there are “groups of foreign nations who have fallen away into former, non-Christian confessions, for example, the Transcaucasian Abkhazians, the Trans-Baikal Buryats,” etc. Finally, “the largest group is made up of schismatics and sectarians who have fallen away from Orthodoxy, but

¹ M. A. Babkin, *Priesthood and Kingdom (Russia, early XX century – 1918)*. Research and materials – Moscow, Indrik, 2011 – p. 31.

are officially listed as Orthodox.” All “these people, Orthodox by name only, are prohibited from openly professing their true religion.¹”

This is confirmed by the Decree on the principles of religious tolerance in 1905, which contains the following instructions: “*People who are considered Orthodox, but in reality profess a non-Christian faith to which they or their ancestors belonged before joining Orthodoxy, should be excluded at their request from the number of Orthodox.*”² Therefore, this really took place and was so widespread that it was required to separately reflect this in the Decree.

We can also look at what professor T.I. Butkevich said in 1910: “The Kharkov eparchy was rightfully called ‘Ukraine’ (from old Russian ‘outskirts’). It was there on the outskirts of the Russian Empire where different and the most hostile false teachings towards the Orthodox Church would appear. Pecheneg’s paganism, Tatar’s Mohammedanism, Polish Catholicism inspired by Jesuits, Protestantism of German colonists, the great schism of the Russian Old Believers and semi-pagan and semi-Christian Sectarianism—all of them would find their place and freedom there. In fact, Cossacks always liked and were devoted to the Orthodox Church and often shed their blood for it. Their descendants, however, due to unfavorable historical and living conditions, were not firm in their faith following its traditions. They were easily carried away by different sectarian teachings. It is difficult to mention which false teaching the Kharkov eparchy lacks. There are Schismatics of different types, Khlysts, Eunuchs, Dukhobors, Molokans, Adventists, and Jehovahists. Meanwhile, the distinctive nature of the population there should also be taken into account: Ukrainians in their beliefs are as straightforward and stubborn as in their life. Thus, it makes it very difficult for missionaries to deal with them.”³

¹ M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905 – p. 391.

² *Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire: Volume 25, 1905*, electronic ref., (<https://www.prlib.ru/item/358577>).

³ T.I. Butkevich. *Overview of Russian Sects and their Interpretations* – Printing House of the Provincial Administration, 1910 – p. viii.

If the reader would like to take a closer look at the religious diversity of Siberia and Kazakhstan in those years, a host of discoveries awaits.

Therefore, I think that it would be a great mistake to perceive the Russian Empire of the 19th - early 20th centuries as an exclusively Orthodox country. Just as it would be a mistake to believe in the formula "Russian = Orthodox". Especially after 1861, when the peasants finally gained personal freedom and ceased to be "property," the craving of Russian people for spiritual quest became especially obvious. The same author of the "Notes on sedition of the enemies of Russia" says that no state persecution of believers brought the expected results, and even vice versa, "where sectarians were previously considered dozens, there are now tens of thousands of them. Then what can we say about the situation in the empire 100 years later? What are the real figures if we remove from them all the "subscripts" of the local authorities? The fate of the children of schismatics and those who left Orthodoxy is also an interesting topic for a researcher. The thing is that such children were considered Orthodox, and parents were obliged to raise their own children contrary to their religious views and desires.

At the beginning of the 20th century, religious intolerance in the empire seems to have reached a boiling point. "The characterization given by the committee of ministers of the Russian religious police is far from satisfactory. This is a full recognition that in fact we did not have any religious tolerance, and those very modest concessions to the Gentiles and heterodox Christians, which were made by the law, were destroyed with the help of the omnipotent administrative discretion. In the 20th century, we managed to apply the orders of the dark Middle Ages; we transferred religious torture chamber of the old Catholic and Protestant Inquisition into the new century of electricity... the journal of the committee of ministers with surprising simplicity and efficiency states the most impossible fantastic facts from Russian religious practice. Mohammedans, pagans, Catholics and sectarians are considered Orthodox and are sued for falling away from Orthodoxy. Laws are being passed on some tolerance for schismatics

and sectarians, and the police are overruling them by their own authority. The priests inform and spy, persecute heretics in the name of Christ, bring their neighbors to torture and execution. International treaties are concluded with the curia but are not implemented. Millions of Muslims are completely deprived of any legislative protection and are sacrificed to the unlimited discretion of local authorities... What is it? How is all this possible in a civilized state? Where are we?¹

To calm the society, on February 26, 1903, the Imperial Manifesto of Emperor Nicholas II was published, which mentioned religious tolerance although with restraint: “Strengthen the unswerving observance of the covenants of tolerance by the authorities which are in contact deeds of faith. These covenants are inscribed in the fundamental laws of the Russian Empire, which revere the Orthodox Church as the leading and dominant, and grant all subjects of Our heterodox and foreign confessions free exercise of their faith and worship according to the rites of their belief.”² Notice that it was not about changes in legislation and state policy, and the Manifesto was more concentrated on local officials and the importance of strict observance and application of existing laws by them. The next important state document on the way to freedom of religion was the “Manifesto on the improvement of the state order” from February 26, 1905. It said directly: “1. To grant to the population the essential foundations of civil freedom, based on the principles of genuine inviolability of the person, freedom of conscience, speech, assembly and association.”³

Count Sergei Yulievich Witte said in those years: “Russia has outgrown the existing system. She strives for a legal system based on civil freedoms.”⁴

¹ M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). *The state and the believing person: a collection of articles* – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905 – p. 397.

² Highest Manifesto of February 26, 1903, electronic ref., (<http://www.doc20vek.ru/node/3777>).

³ Manifesto for the Improvement of State Order, October 17, 1905, electronic ref. (<http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/oct1905.htm>).

⁴ *Supreme Command and Most Submissive Report of the Secretary of State Count Witte.* – “Church Gazette”, published at the Holy Governing Synod – Saint Petersburg, October 22, 1905. No. 43 – pp. 484-486, electronic ref., (<https://www.prlib.ru/item/461397>).

We all know the outcome in 1917. On March 22, 1917, right after the February revolution and the overthrow of the autocracy in the empire, the Decree of the Provisional Government “On the abolition of religious and national restrictions” was issued: “Proceeding from the unshakable conviction that in a free country all citizens should be equal before the law and that conscience of the people cannot put up with restrictions of the rights of individual citizens depending on their faith and origin, the Provisional Government decided: All restrictions on the rights of Russian citizens established by the current legislation, due to belonging to a particular religion, creed or nationality, are cancelled.¹”

Then, the October Revolution took place, and the Soviet era of atheism began. Again, any religious tolerance and freedom of conscience were non-existent. From that time on, religious intolerance started to reign in the entire territory of the Soviet Union under the banner of atheism.

It was about this form of atheism that the great Voltaire wrote in the 18th century: “Atheism is a very pernicious monster in those who govern; it is also pernicious in the persons around statesmen, although their lives may be innocent, because from their cabinets it may pierce right to the statesmen themselves; that if it is not so deadly as fanaticism, it is nearly always fatal to virtue.²”

The history of religious freedom and religious tolerance in modern post-Soviet society does not even span 30 years!

And what happens in the end? How long has our society enjoyed democratic freedoms, including freedom of conscience? How deep are traditions of religious tolerance? Thirty years! Only 30 years have passed!

V. O. Klyuchevsky, a thinker and an excellent historian, once said: “We often get angry at our ancestors because they are not like us. We

¹ Decree of the Provisional Government on the Abolition of Religious and National Restrictions on March 22, 1917, electronic ref., (<https://constitution.garant.ru/history/act1600-1918/5413/>).

² Voltaire, *Philosophical Works* – Moscow, Nauka, 1988 – p. 645.

should be rejoicing instead because we are not like them (we are more progressive).” Truly, words of wisdom!

We must admit that we are just learning tolerance and taking our first uncertain steps! Neither society nor officials have yet completely understood that freedom of conscience is freedom of an individual, and the State should no longer be an educator, controller, and supervisor over the conscience and convictions of a citizen. There is still a great danger of returning to the old order. The ban of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia is vivid confirmation of this. Let the attentive reader once again re-read the words of K. P. Pobedonostsev, uttered 100 years ago, and let him compare this with what “fighters against the sects” are calling for today. Do we want to go back to the past? Do we want to light the fires of persecution of sincere believers again? But that is exactly what modern anticultism is calling for.

It is also useful to know that in the practice of tolerance, the ideology of anticultism was formed as its extreme form. Anticultism dates back to the 1920’s-1930’s; its dawn is associated with the rise to power of the Nazis led by Hitler in Germany¹.

Hitler did not feel attachment to any religion, but as mentioned earlier, he had real hatred toward Jehovah’s Witnesses.

By 1935, Jehovah’s Witnesses were under ban throughout Germany. The ban was facilitated by the concordat signed in 1933 between the Vatican and Nazi Germany. A Catholic priest, writing in *Der Deutsche Weg* (a German-language newspaper published in Lodz, Poland), said in its May 29, 1938 issue: “There is now one country on earth where the so-called ... Bible Students [Jehovah’s Witnesses] are forbidden. That is Germany!”²

¹ According to B. Persson, the anti-cult movement grew out of the Apologetic Center for World Outlook established in 1921 in Germany and closely cooperated with the Nazis in the fight against religious movements that “could offend the moral sense of the German people” and were “a danger to the nation.”

² Documentation from the 55th anniversary of the release of prisoners at Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Brandenburg Prisons, April 14-15, 2000 – Germany, Brandenburg Memorial Foundation – p. 29; *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2007 – p. 660.

As you know, back in 1996, the Pope apologized for the fact that the Vatican was too tolerant of fascism and did not fight it by all means. And in 1997, he apologized for the Holocaust, expressing regret that “the conscience of Christians was silent under Nazism and Christians did not provide the necessary spiritual resistance to the persecution of Jewish people.”

Jehovah’s Witnesses were brutally persecuted during Hitler’s time. The transcripts of the Nuremberg trials say that the persecution of all pacifist, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses was fiercely implacable and cruel:

“There are many additional cases of the use of the concentration camp against the men who wanted peace. There was, for example, a group called the Bibelforscher, that is, Bible Students, most of whom were known as Jehovah’s Witnesses. They were pacifists, and so, the conspirators provided not only for their prosecution in the regular courts but also for their confinement in concentration camps after they had served the judicial sentences.¹”

On February 15, 1938, *A Guide Against Sects* (instructions for the work of the Reichsfuehrer SS) was published in Germany. It is quite possible that this was the first such guide in history. So, when you get different brochures on how to fight sects today, you should remember where and who published the very first one.

After World War II, one could have expected that pathological intolerance of religions would be a thing of the past. But the exact opposite took place: the seeds sown in the 1930’s-40’s violently sprouted in several countries, including those of the now former Soviet Union.

The main ideologist of anticultism in Europe was a Lutheran pastor, Friedrich Wilhelm Haack (1935–1991). He demonstrated hatred not only for Protestants, Neo-Protestants, and new religious groups but also for the Catholic Church and all Muslims.

¹ Transcripts from the trials of the major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal – Nuremberg, Germany, 1947 – V. III, p. 498, electronic ref., (http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_major-war-criminals.html).

It was on the initiative of Haack that the so-called “black list” of new religious movements (NRM) was compiled in Bavaria. This took place in 1990. It was only on November 9, 2006 that the German Federal Constitutional Court decided that defamation was used in the fight against “sects.” By then, Haack’s works had already yielded poisonous fruit, and not limited to Germany.

For years Haack and his followers actively engaged in their international activity. In this way, Haack helped another pioneer of the struggle against “sects” after World War II, Johannes Aagaard (1928–2007), to create the Institute of Missionary Theology and Ecumenical Theology (Dialogue Center) at the University of Aarhus (Denmark), and two years later, the Open Family in Ebeltoft on the Jutland Peninsula. In 1981, Haack and Aagaard founded the International Dialogue Center with offices in Greece, England, India, Ireland, Russia, and Germany, with Haack as vice president. Ultimately, he created an extensive network of information and deprogramming¹ centers in Germany, Western Europe, and the United States. From 1985 onward, he was the international director of research for the American Family Foundation (AFF) in the United States.

The Swedish historian Nils Bertil Alexander Persson states: *“Nazism and similar movements supplied ideological tools to today’s anti-democratic, anticult and anti-Semitic movements.”*²

The most famous followers of Aagaard are Thomas Gandow and Helle Meldgaard, co-author with Aagaard of the book *New Religious Movements in Western Europe* (1997).

¹ Deprogramming is a method of influencing a person through various forms of moral and psychological (sometimes even physical) pressure and coercion (including torture) in order to influence a person’s views and beliefs and make him leave an “undesirable” religious organization. It is a synonym for brainwashing. The term brainwashing was coined by American journalist E. Hunter, who first introduced it in one of his articles and then discussed it in detail in his books.

² International Scientific-Practical Conference Materials, June 26, 2012, “History and Ideological Sources of the Anticult Movement. New Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Modern Russia,” by B. Persson – Moscow, Central House of Journalists – p. 47.

The representative of the Dialogue Center in Russia was a clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church, an ardent anticultist, Alexander Dvorkin, who is the author of the controversial Orthodox textbook *Sectology. Totalitarian Sects (the Experience of Systematic Research)*. Let us begin with a July 2020 report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), where it says that “his degree in medieval studies does not provide the academic background in religious studies or the sociological and psychological concepts on which he so often relies.”¹ Therefore, in his book, he openly promotes Orthodoxy, calls it “Our Church” and defends its complete superiority both over “sects” and over other Christian religions, including Catholicism and Protestantism. Even the late patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexy II, who barely had sympathy for any other religions, distanced himself from the multi-page “opus” of the ardent confessor A. Dvorkin, although he supported him during the first stages of his activity.

At that time A. Dvorkin declared himself “a leading expert on the expansion of new religious movements.” While being abroad, he apparently co-operated with Haack, Aagaard, Gandow and other European and American anticultists. When he returned to Russia, he declared his mission to save Russia from the worst, which were in his opinion the “totalitarian sects.”² This antiscientific term (“totalitarian sect”) is used for Jehovah’s Witnesses’, as Christians, by rabid anticultists, their faithful allies, and religious fanatics.

Let us consider how the term “totalitarian sect” itself is valid in relation to religious studies.

¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. “The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union,” electronic ref, (<https://www.uscirf.gov/publication/anti-cult-movement-and-religious-regulation-russia-and-former-soviet-union>)

² According to experts from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Dvorkin’s years in the United States coincided with the anti-cult movement growing then in the United States that was based on pseudoscientific concepts such as “brainwashing” and “mind control” and the theory of psychologist Robert Jay Lifton and anti-communist activist Edward Hunter.

It seems that Dvorkin, just like his associates in the West, borrowed the term “totalitarian” from political science, and, to be more precise, from the French political scientist Raymond Aron, author of the book *Democracy and Totalitarianism*. But while using the term “totalitarian,” R. Aron did not give it a religious meaning. Impressed by N. S. Khrushchev’s report exposing the personality cult of I. V. Stalin, presented at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), R. Aron read lectures on this subject, the contents of which later became part of his published book¹.

Nevertheless, Dvorkin writes: “In order to understand what totalitarian sectarianism is, one must certainly read George Orwell’s book 1984. This ... novel is written in the dystopian genre. Orwell describes the ‘ideal’ totalitarian state ruthlessly suppressing the individuality of its citizens. In fact, the atmosphere described in the book is primarily the atmosphere of life within a sect. The principles of enslavement and control of consciousness formulated by the author and the corresponding mechanisms described in the book are actions that take place within the sect.”²

First of all, Orwell’s novel does give an artistic confirmation of R. Aron’s lectures, that is to say, it is a political work, so I am convinced that he did not even mean “sects.” And Dvorkin uses it for his own benefit. Dishonesty is his main trick.

Secondly, even if one agrees with the direction of Dvorkin’s reflections, then, if one really wants to, he can find analogs in almost all religious structures.

- And, if Dvorkin had bothered to do at least a superficial study of the origin of the term “totalitarianism,” he would have known that this term was originally introduced into political vocabulary in the 1920’s

¹ I. Ya. Kanterov. *New Movements in Russia (Religious Analysis)* – Moscow, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2007 – pp. 71-72.

² A. Dvorkin, ed. *Sectology. Totalitarian Sects: The Experience of Systematic Research* – N. Novgorod, Brotherhood in the Name of St. Prince Alexander Nevsky, 2002 – p. 52.

by the ideologists of Italian fascism (J. Gentile, B. Mussolini and others).¹

- To highlight the fact that this term has a completely different meaning, let us refer to the Political Encyclopedic Dictionary, where the word “totalitarianism” (from lat. Totalitas—wholeness, completeness; totalis—whole, complete) is defined as a “political system’ (italics mine), which exercises control over all areas of public life.”²

- Additionally, as A. Kara-Murza writes in the New Philosophical Encyclopedia, the source of totalitarianism was “the growing complexity of society (primarily in the technogenic and economic spheres), which generated a response expressed in the desire for super-centralization, etatization, and, accordingly, in suppression of self-organization and individual autonomy.”³

- Undoubtedly, Professor I. Ya. Kanterov is correct when he writes: “The vagueness of the terms ‘totalitarian sect’ and ‘destructive cult’ allows us to rank practically any neoplasm, religious-philosophical teaching, cultural-educational, or health-improving institution as such associations.” Truly, the terms “totalitarian sect” and “destructive cult” can have a multifaceted meaning and one could use them according to his own understanding⁴.

- Unfortunately, the number of supporters of Dvorkin’s idea is quite high. They influence the media of both Russia and Kazakhstan and have penetrated the minds of certain representatives of the authorities.

A researcher of the phenomenon of “anticultism,” religious scholar Yu. M. Smirnov, believes that the reason for the support of the anticult movement by a number of state structures is as follows: “Obviously, these government bodies are little concerned with the doctrinal material, doctrines, and mystical-soteriological meanings of the views

¹ B. Mussolini. *The Doctrine of Fascism. Anthology of World Political Thought in Five Volumes. V. II. Foreign Political Thought 20th Century* – Moscow, Mysl, 1997 – pp. 235-252.

² *Political Science. Encyclopedic Dictionary* – Moscow, 1993 – p. 375.

³ V. S. Stepina, ed. *New Philosophical Encyclopedia in Four Volumes. v. IV (v. I)* – Moscow, 2001 – p. 80.

⁴ I. Ya. Kanterov. *New Movements in Russia (Religious Analysis)* – Moscow, 2007 – p. 75.

of their wards ... Religious neoplasms consist of citizens of the State uniting into difficult to manage communities; their behavior is difficult to predict and even harder to influence. Actually, it is precisely an escape from control that is the main point of 'destructiveness' imputed to new religious movements and 'cults.' As a rule, a negative attitude towards them is explained by the concern for the safety of society, its moral condition, and other reasonable explanations. But the essence remains—the repressive attitude is caused not so much by claims as to the religious content of the new religious movements themselves, but by the real or apparent loss of State control.¹” But was not that what guided the power in the Russian Empire in the 19th century?

It may seem that order is good. But it is also true that “the efforts of the authorities aimed at the total regulation of all aspects of the life of the people and society have the form of the practice of streamlining social structures through an infinite increase in the degree of uniformity of their constituent elements. The State’s pursuit of absolute order discovers that the latter is no less terrible than complete disorder, since it demonstrates an extremely small degree of life-giving abilities. An excessive number of victims are brought to the altar of super-order, including Christian values, civil society, natural rights and freedoms of citizens, morality and law, dignity, culture, and civilization of an individual.²” As a result of such pseudo-order, the State system that we read about in Orwell’s novel 1984 can come into practice.

While speaking about the attitude of the State and society toward new religious associations, it is worth noting one more important fact, which was mentioned by researcher A. E. Sebentsev at a conference held in Moscow in 2012: “An important factor determining the attitude towards some religious minorities, obviously, is the State law enforcement services, which have survived from the Soviet era, and

¹ *International Scientific-Practical Conference Materials*, June 26, 2012, “Anticultism – A Concept and Practice. New Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Modern Russia,” by Yu. M. Smirnov – Moscow, Central House of Journalists – p. 66.

² *Ibid* – p.108.

the popular mentality ... distrust of religious associations with leading structures abroad ...¹

However, this lack of trust is not the result of knowledge or experience. This is a fallacy that was cultivated first by tsarist imperial propaganda and then secured by the Soviet propaganda during the Cold War and the confrontation with the “rotting” West.

And since fallacy is just a feeling, it has no logic. This is exactly what modern anticultists have used actively. They would appeal to human feelings and not the reason. Fear, suspicion, and hatred are their arguments. To everyone who wants to understand this issue in more detail, as well as to make sure of the “fake” news spread today against Jehovah's Witnesses, I recommend reading a wonderful work “The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda”. Its authors, a professor, Ph.D., Sociologist of Religion, Massimo Introvigne², and the president of the European Federation of Religious Freedom, lawyer, human rights defender, Alessandro Amicarelli, have thoroughly analyzed most of the modern accusations made by anti-cultists against Jehovah's Witnesses, including issues of exclusion from the Community, blood transfusions, and issues of protecting children from violence. The work shows in detail how the manipulation of information is used and who benefits from denigrating a religious minority.

Describing the feature of sectophobes, the authors note: “Most anti-cult publications rely heavily on press clippings and testimonies by disgruntled ex-members, and rarely if ever are based on academic studies or fieldwork among the religious movements they criticize.”³

¹ Ibid – p. 10.

² Massimo Introvigne is the founder and managing director of the Center for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR), which brings together researchers of new religious movements from different countries. He is the author of over 70 books and 100 articles on sociology of religion and religious pluralism. In the past, he was the chairman of the Committee on Religious Freedom of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³ M. Introvigne, A. Amicarelli. *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda* – p. 6, electronic ref., (<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>).

As noted in a recent report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), while anti-cultists “claim to be experts in disciplines such as religious studies, psychology, and sociology, in reality they rarely qualify in these disciplines and often rely on discredited theories and methodologies in order to promote their own ideological agenda.”¹

All this can be seen in the example of Kazakhstan.

The neologism “Burovshchina,” which was used not only in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) but also in some European countries, was once even heard in Kazakhstan. This common term was applied to scientists who actively collaborated with those who were engaged in a large-scale struggle against dissent and religious pluralism from the standpoint of ethical relativism and exalted lack of tolerance. It came into circulation thanks to the activities of Elena Burova, an ardent “follower” of A. Dvorkin, creator of the so-called Public Fund Perspective. Any science fiction writer will envy the ingenuity of the activists of this foundation and the fiction that they came up with in their television performances and anticult advertising materials directed against Protestant, neo-Protestant, and new religious groups.

Then Kazakhstan has learned of another “expert” in the fight against sects—Yulia Denisenko, a journalist from the Kostanai region, trained by A. Dvorkin. Y. Denisenko began actively promoting her ideas in our society and even declared herself an “expert” and religious scholar. At the time, she led the Association of Religion and Sects Research Centers, which still operates as a part of the Russian Association of Religion Research Centers (the Russian anticult organization headed by A. Dvorkin). It means that neither Denisenko nor the ALE are engaged in serious religious studies. Their goal was to fight against “sects.”

¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. “The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union,” electronic ref., (<https://www.uscirf.gov/publication/anti-cult-movement-and-religious-regulation-russia-and-former-soviet-union>).

In those years, Yulia Denisenko repeatedly shocked Kazakh society with statements about the “danger” of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other neo-Protestant movements. The poor believers were accused of so many things! From the ALE, the media even received press releases with comments on the activities of dangerous religious movements. The data that Y. Denisenko used was taken not from serious scientific studies but from pro-Orthodox apologetic works and websites of dubious content on the Internet. As a result, gossip and myths that are not true have spread in the media and discredited religious adherents.

Here is just one example. In 2017, a press release on Jehovah’s Witnesses was sent to the Kazakh media on behalf of Yulia Denisenko and the ALE, which, among other lies and slander, contained the following: “Today Jehovah’s Witnesses conduct their activities in more than 236 countries. In 37 countries they are officially banned. Countries such as Tajikistan, China, Spain, Greece, Romania, and the Dominican Republic are on the list of countries where their activities are banned. Despite the fact that in Kazakhstan the Jehovah’s Witnesses society is registered as a religious organization, in the U.S.A. they are registered as a publishing organization and in Austria as a public organization. Since 1943, each Witness has been obliged to learn a new method of attracting new ones to the organization.”

The Kazakh media, of course, believed this information from the so-called expert and immediately published it. Imagine how bewildered they were when this information turned out to be false! Under the threat of a lawsuit, Yulia Denisenko sent an official letter to the Jehovah’s Witnesses Christian Center in Kazakhstan and one of the media outlets with apologies and confirmation of the falsity of the “background” information. It is noteworthy that in this letter the “expert” indicated that the information was taken from open sources on the Internet, namely from anti-sectarian and pro-Orthodox websites!

One of the favorite topics of Yulia Denisenko was Jehovah’s Witnesses’ refusal to receive blood transfusions. In order to get

support for her statements that “that madness must be stopped,” Yulia Denisenko cited cases of the death of children, allegedly due to the refusal of their parents to allow blood transfusions. Again, the cited examples and facts had nothing to do with reality! All the statements and experiences proved to be false accusations, twisted stories, and lies from the Internet.

In my opinion, she is not a religious scholar or scientist and even less qualified as a specialist in the field of religion. She is just a voice of some anti-sectarian movements and a propagator of fake sensationalism from internet tabloids.

But Yulia Denisenko has earned the trust, not only of journalists and the public but also of government officials!

As Professor I. Ya. Kanterov aptly observes: “The fundamental difference between secular schools of religious studies and those participating in anticult movements is that we, the representatives of secular religious studies, along with our foreign colleagues, work directly on the subject of study. Our goal is to understand religions before making a judgment. But the main goal of representatives of the anticult movement is to condemn them and find noisier terms and concepts to expose them. None of the secular schools of religious studies, neither in St. Petersburg nor Moscow nor Yekaterinburg, accept the terminology ‘destructive sect,’ ‘totalitarian sect,’ etc.”¹

Our country does not need anticult centers with unprofessional specialists who frighten society with tales about “terrible sectarians.” We need professional, highly educated, well-mannered religious scholars; we need our own school of religious studies. In the past we did have one, and until the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was in the list of the three best schools in the USSR. It is necessary to bring back the old traditions, and then knowledge will be a defense against xenophobia and intolerance. As a result, our multinational and multicultural society

¹ I. Ya. Kanterov. “Religious Minorities As an Object of Serious Study and Not Stigmatization,” electronic ref., (<http://www.npar.ru/journal/2004/4/minorities.htm>).

will continue to be united and friendly. Let us cultivate kindness and tolerance in the hearts of our citizens, instead of the destructive emotions of fear and hatred. Let these creative feelings of a mature personality awaken the desire for development and progress.

A research scientist specializing in Russian religious movements, Vladimir Dmitrievich Bonch-Bruevich, once dreamed that “one day secular historical science will rip out of the hands of official persecutors of faith, who are propagating against freedom of speech, this powerful weapon in the form of information falsification, misleading messages, and twisted publicity, which cannot help but affect society in a demoralizing way.”¹

When I hear the calls of anti-cultists to fight new religious movements, I remember Gamaliel, a law teacher from the Bible. Reasoning on the case of Jesus’ apostles before the Sanhedrin, he said: “Do not meddle with these men, but let them alone. For if this scheme or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. Otherwise, you may even be found fighting against God himself.” (Acts 5:38, 39) Yes, my dear reader, from the very beginning true Christians have been considered members of a dangerous sect and blamed for terrible crimes. Now we realize how absurd this is. Why do we repeat mistakes from the past?

We must also remember that throughout human history, persecution, fires of inquisition, and torture have resulted in nothing but violence.

The religious intolerance, anticultism, and persecution of certain religious groups remain in the memory of humankind as the greatest evils. And people who were involved in this bigotry will live in infamy forever.

The thoughts of an academic from the 1980’s, D. I. Belyaev, are still relevant in this regard: “There are no special genes for humanism and altruism, the same as there are no genes for antisocial behavior.

¹ V. Bonch-Bruevich. *From the World of Members of Sects. Collection of Articles* – Moscow, State Publishing House, 1922 – pp. 193-194.

But there is a combination of some deterministic psychological traits that in certain social environments lead to the development of an individual with a sensitive conscience, who will hate not only unlawful activity but also careerism and acquisitiveness. But there is also a combination of psychological traits that will result in the development of an individual who will not even understand what the conscience is with all its destructive consequences.¹

He was absolutely right! Let us remember what Roger Bacon, who lived in 13th century, described as the four chief sources of ignorance:

1. Submission to unworthy authority
2. The influence of custom
3. Popular prejudice

4. Concealment of one's ignorance with a technical show of wisdom
(The Encyclopedia of Philosophy.)

We can easily use this to characterize modern religiously intolerant people and anticultists, would you agree?!

We can add one more thing—most of the time, the State spends a lot of money to fight “dangerous sectarians.” A striking example of this approach is “Victoria” rehabilitation center in Karaganda, in Central Kazakhstan. The head of this center, Victoria Artemyeva, was known for her sensational “revelations” about Jehovah's Witnesses and other new religious movements. Her speeches were published in the media and shown on television.

This continued until 2019, when the article “Rehabilitation of Ghosts” was published. It stated that “The head of the Karaganda adaptation center for people who suffered from negative religious influence turned out to be a fraud.²” She admitted her guilt, and “Artemyeva was sentenced to three years of restriction of freedom with the establishment of probation control for the same period.³”

¹ D. I. Belyaev. *Modern Science and Problems of Human Studies/Problems of Philosophy* – 1981 – p. 5.

² *Vremya*, “Rehabilitation of Ghosts” by I. Moskovka – April 16, 2019 – electronic ref., (<https://time.kz/articles/risk/2019/04/16/reabilitatsiya-prizrakov>).

³ *Ibid.*

Here is the example. Further comment is unnecessary.

A new anti-cult campaign against new religious movements in our country has been clearly visible in the past two years. Since this book is about Jehovah's Witnesses, I will consider their case.

It is interesting this time, it was not “experts” who came to the frontline, but former members of religious groups or persons allegedly harmed by the religious movement. Some of them were expelled from the communities for immoral acts and lifestyle inappropriate for the community. Others were family members of believers. Compared to the total number of Jehovah's Witnesses and those who sympathize with them, the “victims” are very few and they are surprisingly well organized and are in demand among officials and the media. They make reports about them, and their complaints are accepted for consideration. Only the complaints are very similar in content and style. Their television appearances are one-sided. There are no facts presented, and the situations are greatly simplified. A direct information manipulation is evident. Another fact is suspicious—they began their performances almost simultaneously, in Russia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. They accuse the religious organization of the same things and using the same words that the “pseudo-experts” of the anti-cult movement had done before. The same old set of myths and half-truths of “sectologists” and anti-cult organizations.

The plan of the initiators of the new campaign seems obvious—to appeal to the feelings of citizens, to find the support of society through the alleged “victims” of the organization, appealing not to reason, but to emotions. I would like to note that this is not new at all for Kazakhstan. The government actively used this technique in Soviet times. All you need is to read the Kazakh articles of the Soviet era about Jehovah's Witnesses.

I cannot help but mention the “fake news.” The philosopher Axel Gelfert of the University of Berlin offers the following definition: “Fake

news is the deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design.¹

An excellent and clear definition—following which most of the news related to the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses that has been printed over the past 30 years in Kazakhstan can be safely attributed to “fake news.” This is something to think about, do you not agree?

What is important, A. Gelfert notes, that skilled producers of fake news exploit four pre-existing cognitive biases:

- confirmation bias: we accept new information if it confirms our beliefs and prejudices;
- repetition effect: “if they continue to say it, it should be true;”
- priming: use of words that trigger a non-conscious memory reaction, e.g., in our field, “cult;”
- affective arousal: emotions lower our defenses, e.g., “they abuse children.”²

Now, try to remember how the news about new religious organizations usually sounds? They are usually scary and sensational! Do you think it is random? So who, then, is actually trying to manipulate you?

Anti-cultism is dangerous for both people and society! In 2012, S. I. Ivanenko published a book in Moscow with quite a symbolic name: *Common Anticultism*. He writes in his book: “*Anticultism is the opposite of religious studies from the point of view of Church-State relations. Anticultism brings a hefty dose of xenophobia toward religious minorities into government policies. If a multi-confessional country chooses anticultism as an ideological decision-making basis for Church-State relations, it will*

¹ M. Introvigne, A. Amicarelli. *The New Gnomes of Zurich: The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Spiess Case, and Its Manipulation by Anti-Cult and Russian Propaganda* – p. 42, electronic ref., (<https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>).

² Ibid – p. 43.

*constantly contribute to conflicts erupting and will eventually end as a failure.*¹ This is very true!

I would also agree with lawyer A. R. Sultanov who writes: *“It started in the 20th century with the spreading of two opposite trends: increasing intolerance and rising tolerance. And human progress ultimately depends on which trend will win. Intolerance is based on refusing to recognize other people’s right to have an opinion or belief that is different. An intolerant person in fact denies the ability of other people to think and act reasonably. Intolerance is denying other people’s freedom of conscience.”*²

This is something to think about. This is not new either. After all, Voltaire warned: *“The supposed right of intolerance is absurd and barbaric. It is the right of the tiger; nay, it is far worse, for tigers do but tear in order to have food, while we rend each other for paragraphs.”*³

Now let's talk about terminological correctness. In modern media and even in some specialized literature, we can find special terms that are only applied to a group of religious communities and organizations that *came to the territory of the former Soviet Union from the U.S.A. or Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century. There are terms with negative connotations such as “destructive,” “totalitarian,” “non-traditional” and “cults.”*

When you think about it, you understand that all these terms are pejorative and that is exactly how they are perceived by members of those religious organizations and the society.

The inconsistency of the term “totalitarian” has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Therefore, it is worth considering the semantic meanings of the rest of the above-mentioned terms. By doing this we would like to show why it is best to avoid them when it comes to new religious movements, and Jehovah's Witnesses, in particular.

¹ S. I. Ivanenko. *Common Anticultism* – Saint Petersburg, Tree of Life, 2012 – p. 97.

² A. R. Sultanov. *Defending Freedom of Conscience. Dissemination of Beliefs Through the Prism of Orders of the European Court of Human Rights. Notes of a Trial Lawyer* – Moscow, Statut, 2013 – p. 17.

³ Voltaire. *Philosophical Treatise and Dialogues* – Moscow, Eksmo, 2005 – p. 162.

“Destructive.” The word “destruction” (lat. *destructio*) is defined as the action or process of causing so much damage to something that it no longer exists or cannot be repaired¹.

Of course, any social formations, including religious and non-religious ones, can be destructive if it calls for disobeying the authorities, stirs up discord between different nationalities or confessions, or if its ideology is nationalistic, chauvinistic, or fascistic.

But how can you apply this term to law-abiding religious organizations that are legally registered, recognized by the state, tolerant toward society, and respectful of other religions?

The word *“destructive”* is often used together with the word “cult”—*“destructive cult.”*

The connotation of this combination is even more negative. It is no coincidence that Melton Gordon, a famous reputable American researcher of new religious movements, says in one of his works on cults: “The term ‘cult’ is an insulting tag that is used to describe some religious groups ...”²

Timothy Miller, another American professor of religious studies, writes: “‘Cult’ today typically means a group that the speaker does not like, considers potentially harmful, and wants to deprecate.”³

In our country, the term “sect” is used instead of “cult”. The scientific term *“religious sect”* (from lat. *secta* – a closed group of people, teaching, a way, road) characterizes a religious organization that is going through a certain stage in its development as a religious movement. A sect always appears in opposition to a main religion and almost every main religion has a sect, which then transforms into a religious organization of like-minded people after going through stages of development.

V. N. Nikitin and V. L. Obukhov, religious scholars from Saint Petersburg and the authors of the book *Religious Beliefs of the World*,

¹ *The Dictionary of Foreign Words – Moscow, 1986* – p. 157, electronic ref., (<https://www.lexico.co/en/definition/destruction>).

² Gordon J. Melton. *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* – New and London – p. 3.

³ *America’s Alternative Religions* – State University of New York Press, 1997 – pp. 1–2.

write: “In the past, the word ‘sect’ was often used to describe **religious organizations that were persecuted by the government or by the dominant church**. But in most cases in literature, some religious organizations are called ‘churches’ by tradition and others, ‘sects.’

“Some religious authors from dominant churches (the Orthodox Church in Russia, the Catholic Church in Western Europe) give the terms ‘sect’ and ‘sectarian’ a negative meaning, as if there is something wrong with those organizations; for example, their teachings are false, or they violate moral standards, etc. Eventually, the context in which these terms were used made them pejorative on a psychological level ...; people who are called sectarians or cultists see it as an offence. Therefore, the word ‘sect’ is also offensive, because members do not call their organization a sect but a church. For example, some Orthodox authors write about a ‘Bessarion sect,’ but the members of that religious organization call themselves the “Church of the Last Testament.”¹”

We cannot but agree with this definition of the term “sect.”

With the help of religious organizations occupying a leading position in society, as well as at the behest of the media and some authors of dubious scientific articles, a variety of religious movements and trends that have emerged over the past centuries in the countries around the world and historically have their followers, were included in the category of sects in Kazakhstan. Thus today, practically all Protestant and neo-Protestant confessions and denominations are called “sects”, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, etc.

As I. Ya. Kanterov rightly notes: “Special vocabularies are published and are widely used. They include a set of concepts intended to describe the nature of ‘totalitarian sects’ and ‘destructive cults,’ their activities and especially the consequences of such activities. Such ‘vocabularies’ become an indispensable attribute not only in the articles about sects, but also in some decrees of authorities. The authors of such ‘vocabularies’ do not use words like ‘a follower,’ ‘a supporter’ or ‘a

¹ V. N. Nikitin, V. L. Obukhov. *Religious Beliefs of the World* – Saint Petersburg, 1999 – pp. 21-22.

believer' in relation to adherents of cults and sects. These concepts are replaced by a foreign word 'adept'.¹

The famous Russian religious scholar A. K. Pogasiy notes that "the use of the word sect expresses, rather, an emotional attitude towards an incomprehensible and rejected phenomenon. It is not a definition of the phenomenon. Unfortunately, in the modern mass consciousness, a 'sectarian' is not only a believer who has a religious experience that is different from the generally accepted one, but also a person included in a different cultural and moral paradigm. This is an adherent of other cultural values and other, social ideals that are alien to the majority.... Therefore, for in a traditional perception, a 'sectarian' is not only a religious dissident, but also a traitor of collectivist values. Such consciousness is not able to grasp the difference between the multitude of sects, often diametrically opposed in views and doctrine. It cannot view this phenomenon disregarding specific religious movements. Therefore, it seems that the modern word 'sectarian' as a part of the general vocabulary has a pronounced negative connotation in its meaning that can be offensive to believers and contribute to the aggravation of the religious situation."²

Here is another opinion on this subject. A.P. Nikolaev, a chief editor of the magazine *Philosophical Sciences* and correspondent member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, writes: "From the very beginning the word 'sect' had a negative connotation, including when it was applied to religious movements or religious minorities. As a result, terms such as 'a sect' or 'a sectarian' may be perceived by members of religious organizations as an offence. In the official lexicon it is correct to use neutral terms such as 'a religious organization' or 'a religious association' and 'a member of a religious organization'.³"

¹ I. Ya. Kanterov. "Destructive, Totalitarian," electronic ref., (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130407011046/http://nauka-i-religia.narod.ru/sektoved/kanterov.html>).

² A. K. Pogasiy. "On the question of some religious terms. Religion. Church. Society." Under. ed. A. M. Prilutsky. – Issue. 1. – Saint Petersburg, Svetoch Publishing House LLC, 2012 – p. 35-49.

³ N. S. Gordienko. *Russian Jehovah's Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity* – Saint Petersburg, 2000 – p. 12.

What is the purpose of this? According to the famous Italian religious scholar Massimo Introvigne, this is done in order to separate the representatives of religious minorities in the minds of citizens from the rest of the believers of “traditional religions” in order to declare that this separated group is not subject to international and constitutional rights and freedoms, since they are not “real” believers, but “fanatics and dangerous sectarians.” In this case, society does not perceive it as persecution and does not understand it as a threat to its civil rights and freedoms, which in fact are being violated. This same method was actively used by the Nazis when preparing German society for the persecution of Jewish people. Once again, this confirms that the roots and ideology of modern anti-cultism are rooted in fascism and Nazism. The terms “sect” and “adept” are used today for this purpose.

Those who use such “stigma” are manipulators. They secretly, on an emotional level, alienate the society from certain social groups in order to motivate them to some actions against these groups. It can be a direct aggression or tacit agreement of violence from the State.

In my opinion, it is also incorrect to divide religions into *traditional* and *non-traditional* categories, or to use the term “non-traditional” to refer to new religious movements. Unfortunately, these expressions are very common not only in the media but also among officials and even in scientific and educational literature.

For example, let us take the two-volume textbook *History of Religion* that was published in 2000 by the Moscow publishing house Vyshaya Shkola. In the second volume, in the large section “Modern Non-traditional Religions and Cults,” it reads: “New religious movements differ from traditional ones, because they have some innovations that are very different from the beliefs of historical religions (*emphasis mine*).”¹

At least two questions arise from this:

The first question is, how can we decide what religions are “*traditional*?”

¹ *History of Religion, V. 2* – Moscow, Vyshaya Shkola, 2002 – p. 609.

For example, academician K. S. Shulembaev rightly pointed out that “At the heart of ancient Turks’ spirituality and religiousness was worship of nature and spirits of dead ancestors, or aruakhs. The Turks valued intergenerational equity; thus, they worshiped their elders, parents, and children. Personal relations were very important. This mentality among ancient Turks created a religion of nature.¹”

Shamanism was widespread in the territory of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Furthermore, shamanism is seen here as part of religious culture; that is the main reason for its persistence. Based on historical realities, the earliest religions of Central Asia were Zoroastrianism, Tengrism, Nestorianism, Manichaeism and Buddhism. Christianity and Islam arrived much later, in very dramatic fashion.

In modern Kazakhstan there are more followers of Sunni Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church than of Protestant and Neo-Protestant religious organizations. But this fact alone is not a scientific argument for dividing religious beliefs into traditional and non-traditional categories.

The second question is, how legitimate is it to divide religions into categories of “native” and “foreign,” “good” and “bad,” etc., in a democratic secular society which promotes tolerance and respect toward all religions? This is exactly what happens with the introduction of the terms “traditional” and “non-traditional.”

We believe this approach is **inappropriate** because it contradicts guaranteed constitutional freedoms such as freedom of conscience, freedom of belief, and freedom of expression.

I. Ya. Kanterov writes about “the term ‘non-traditional religion’ - most of the time, this expression has an accusatory connotation that implies the social and cultural inferiority of non-traditional religions.”²

This does not mean, of course, that the words “non-traditional” and “traditional” should not be used in religious studies anymore. It is

¹ N. G. Aiupov. *Religious System of Ancient Turks, “Introduction,”* by K. S. Shulembaev – Almaty, 1998. – p. 5.

² I. Ya. Kanterov. *New Religious Movements in Russia* (Religious Analysis) – p. 28.

more accurate from a scientific standpoint to use them together with “nationally”—“nationally traditional” or “new religious organizations, non-traditional for this region.” It is not just wordplay. It is a matter of principle, because on the one hand, *exclusivism*—when one religion is seen as an exclusive and only true one, and, as a consequence, its interests are lobbied, while other religions are denied the same status—is unacceptable for a secular country. On the other hand, intolerance—when certain religious beliefs are seen as negative, often leading to persecution, suppression of the rights and freedoms of members of these organizations, and sometimes even denial of their right to exist based on an invented pretext—is also unacceptable.

In general, the key principle for a secular country should be “*freedom of worldview*,” which means that every person has the right to have his own view of the world, freedom of conscience and religion—religious toleration. Human rights should be highly respected, and protection of society and its individual members against infringement from any destructive forces should be guaranteed, especially when those forces put citizens’ health and life at risk.

Another term that needs to be defined is “tolerance.”

The term “tolerance,” along with its narrower meaning “religious tolerance,” has different meanings and implications, but they all have something in common. This was explained at the General Conference of UNESCO held on November 16, 1995, in the “Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance.” Tolerance is described therein as “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human” (p 1.1, article 1). As it is further noted, “Tolerance is not concession, condescension, or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others ... (p. 1.4) Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one’s own convictions and accepts that others adhere

to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior, and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are.”

M. S. Stetskevich, major Russian specialist on freedom of conscience, is correct when he writes: “The minimum level of tolerance implies, in our opinion, being ready to accept the right to exist of those whose beliefs we do not share (if these beliefs and the actions they provoke do not contain a direct call to destroy the basis of tolerance itself, as did Fascist ideology, for example). Religious tolerance does not include doctrinal tolerance as its mandatory component. It does not mean that religious beliefs will seek common ground ... It means mutual respect between different religious organizations, mutual acceptance of the right to perform religious activities without appeals to the State from any to receive preference or benefits (a status of ‘being more equal than’ others), and especially without any appeals to restrict the religious activity of other religious organizations.¹”

This is what the younger generations need to be taught! This is what we need to instill in our citizens and promote in the media!

To resist fear, xenophobia, and violence, we must devote more time, effort, and attention to educating individuals and citizens to learn democratic principles of tolerance and mutual respect.

In the “Declaration of Principles of Tolerance” approved by Resolution 5.61 of the General Conference of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, it says:

4.1 Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach people what their shared rights and freedoms are, so that they may be respected, and to promote the will to protect those of others.

4.2 Education for tolerance should be considered an urgent imperative; that is why it is necessary to promote systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural,

¹ M. S. Stetskevich. *Freedom of Conscience* – Saint Petersburg, 2006 – pp. 9-10.

social, economic, political, and religious sources of intolerance—major roots of violence and exclusion. Education policies and programs should contribute to the development of understanding, solidarity, and tolerance among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups, and nations.

4.3 Education for tolerance should aim at countering influences that lead to the fear and exclusion of others, and should help young people to develop capacities for independent judgement, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning.

How can we not recall the Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence, prepared by a group of Nobel Peace Prize laureates with the assistance of UNESCO. It was officially presented by Federico Mayor, the director-general of UNESCO, and members of the International Advisory Group for Culture of Peace on March 4, 1999 in Paris.

This Manifesto states: “Because I am aware of my share of responsibility for the future of humanity, in particular to the children of today and tomorrow.

I pledge in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country, and my region, to:

1. “Respect the life of each human being.” Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice;

4. “Learn to listen and try to understand.” Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation, and the rejection of others;

What wonderful words! Kazakhstan’s diverse society should accept those principles and ideals as vital necessities. In my opinion, we should incorporate this into the curriculum.

It is important to remember that the idea of tolerance was opposed to the idea of religious intolerance by the humanists of the Renaissance.

During the Renaissance some humanists contrasted the idea of tolerance with the idea of religious intolerance.

Religious toleration is the antithesis of religious intolerance, it is the tolerant public attitude toward social groups and individuals who practice a religion different from the majority. Different religions are not persecuted and are not rejected by the public but are integrated into society on certain conditions where the right to practice a religion of one's choice is respected¹.

Voltaire wrote his *Treatise on Tolerance* in 1763; French encyclopedists gathered around Diderot; and d'Alembert, Lessing in Germany, American Enlighteners and others gave an interpretation of the concept of "religious tolerance" as one of the main preconditions of personal spiritual liberation and from the political perspective as a precondition of the establishment of pluralistic democratic society².

Their appeal to give every person the right to "think freely about matters related to religion" (Anthony Collins) was echoed by Thomas Jefferson, who is rightfully called the "Apostle Paul of American Democracy." He wrote in his letter to Edward Dowse: "*I never will, by any word or act, bow to the shrine of intolerance ... on the contrary we are bound, you, I, & every one, to make common cause, even with error itself, to maintain the common right of freedom of conscience. We ought with one heart and one hand to hew down the daring and dangerous efforts of those who would seduce the public opinion to substitute itself into that tyranny over religious faith.*"³

Therefore, religious tolerance involves accepting the right of every person to choose any religion and a tolerant attitude toward religious dissent.

We need to emphasize again that historically, religious toleration is an early demonstration of tolerance, the ability to accept and respect a different point of view.

We owe the concept of "*free thinking*" to the Renaissance and the modern age. It was introduced by John-Anthony Collins, an English

¹ *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, "Religious Study" – Moscow, 2006 – pp. 198-200.

² *New Philosophical Encyclopedia in 4 Volumes*. V. I, "Religious Tolerance," by I. Garadzha – pp. 384-385.

³ Thomas Jefferson, *To Edward Dowse*, electronic ref. (<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-40-02-0168>).

philosopher and a proponent of deism. He was fighting against religious intolerance, Church authoritarianism, and dogmatism. It was he who said: *“It is a moral duty of every human to think for themselves in matters of Religion.”*¹

It should be highlighted that religious tolerance is not the same as *freedom of conscience* or accepting *freedom of religious choice*.

Freedom of conscience and *freedom of religion* are international terms that describe the rights and freedoms of individuals, which are connected to religious and non-religious beliefs. *“Freedom of conscience includes the right to adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice, the right to change them and the right to act according to one’s beliefs. Freedom of choice of one’s attitude toward religion implies that a person is free to choose his attitude toward religion in general or any specific religion without any external pressure, coercion or threats of discrimination and repression. A person has the right to choose to be an atheist, to have an indifferent attitude toward religion or become a member of any religion. The right to choose one’s beliefs implies that a person is free to change his religious or non-religious beliefs.”*²

It is impossible to ask all people to be impartial toward all existing religious movements, because on the one hand, everyone has their own spiritual beliefs and not all confessions and denominations can win their sympathy. On the other hand, a person is not going to change his beliefs just because someone else does not like them. And it is completely absurd to declare a religion to be non-Muslim or non-Christian, etc., and therefore demand that it cease to exist. Humankind has already been through all of that. And the majority of people understand what consequences it brings. We do not have to go far into ancient history to find an example. There was an unprecedentedly huge religious underground created under the totalitarian regime of the

¹ G. Reale, D. Antiseri. *Western Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present Day*. V. 3 – Saint Petersburg, Novoe Vremia, 1996 – p. 564.

² *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, “Religious Study” – Moscow, 2006 – p. 958.

former USSR, and despite very cruel punitive measures, nobody could liquidate it completely.

It is important to learn “to appreciate the height of a different opinion.”—I. Zolotusky. We need to learn to defend our ideas without using our fists and without raising our weapons, while listening respectfully to our opponents.

One hundred years ago, Mikhail Andreevich Reisner wrote with sadness in his heart: “The same thing has been repeated for a hundred years. Tolerance is proclaimed, but due to ignorance and unfamiliarity with the works of faith, we cannot find a new system for its implementation. Now ‘various authorities’ or well-meaning ‘executors’ begin to invent their own system, to turn religious tolerance into religious intolerance, freedom of faith into inquisition executed by police and church. All the wonderful, humane words of the ‘enlightened and Christian government’ they turn into a sad decoration of the gloomy practice of senseless and cruel persecutions of those who cannot and do not want to lie before God!... The Committee reiterates all the arguments in favor of religious tolerance that were proclaimed in our country a hundred years ago.... We already know all this, we have heard all this many times before. Nothing has changed in the last hundred years. All these words remained completely unrealized. It is a vicious circle where good wishes are constantly replaced by violence.¹”

Another 100 years have passed and what can we say now? Will we continue the vicious circle, or will we find the strength and not return to the past?

Recently, the brilliant religious scholar Doctor of Philosophy Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Filipovich, in one of her interviews, said: “[R]eligious pluralism is the foundation for religious freedom. If we do not have religious pluralism, freedom of religion will end. And religious freedom is considered the most important freedom on which all other

¹ M. A. Reisner (ex. prof. of the University of Tomsk). “The state and the believing person: a collection of articles” – Saint Petersburg, printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905 – p. 403-404.

freedoms are based. If there is no freedom of conscience, no freedom of choice, what and how to believe - then what is the benefit from freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, and all other freedoms? This is the most important thing: the inner confidence of a person that what he confesses is true.¹ Well said!

Kazakhstan now has a unique chance. As it has been clearly noted by Kazakh professor of law Roman Podoprigora: “Legislation in Kazakhstan is currently going through the development process with regard to religion. Kazakhstan as an independent country issued its first legal act that was equal to a law regulating religious questions in 1992; it was the Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations.”²

I want to believe that we will be successful in protecting human rights for freedom of conscience and choice of faith and will not return to the bitter mistakes of the past.

What will Kazakhstan’s society look like tomorrow? It depends completely on us. I want to believe that members of our new generation, with their deductive minds, who are looking for comprehensive and objective information, will be able to protect themselves from this virus of “intolerant xenophobia”, and that they will revive the scientific school of secular religious studies and will agree with the words of Voltaire:

*“If we address justice and protection of human rights, we will find that freedom of beliefs and freedom to manifest them publicly and to conform one’s actions to his beliefs as long as they do not hurt others are as real as the right for personal freedom and the right to property. Therefore, **any restriction in exercising this right goes against justice. And every law that is against religious tolerance is an unjust law.**”³*

¹ *Granite of Science*, “Lyudmila Filipovich: ‘If there is no freedom of religion, then all other freedoms are unnecessary’” by D. Tarusova, electronic ref., (<https://un-sci.com/ru/2020/07/22/lyudmila-filipovich-esli-net-svobody-veroisповedaniya-to-vse-ostalnye-svobody-ne-nuzhny/>).

² R. A. Podoprigora. *Problems of State-Confessional Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan* – Almaty, Kaspys State Public University, 2019 – p. 50.

³ Voltaire. *Philosophical Treatise and Dialogues* – Moscow, Eksmo, 2005 – p. 138.

A portrait of John Locke, an English philosopher, political thinker, and statesman. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark brown coat over a white cravat. His hair is long and wavy, and he has a serious expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

John Locke
(1632–1704)

English
political thinker,
philosopher,
statesman

“ Whatsoever any church believes, it believes to be true; and the contrary thereunto it pronounces to be error. So that the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines, and the purity of their worship, is on both sides equal; nor is there any judge, either at Constantinople, or elsewhere upon earth, by whose sentence it can be determined.”

A LETTER CONCERNING TOLERATION

A portrait of Thomas Jefferson, an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. The background is dark and textured.

Thomas
Jefferson
(1743–1826)

Political figure,
the third US
president

SOURCE: commons.wikimedia.org

“ No man has the power to let another dictate his faith. Faith ceases to be faith if one does not believe in it. No man can conform his faith to the dictates of another.”

“ I cannot give up my guidance to the magistrate; because he knows no more of the way to heaven than I do, and he is less concerned with directing me on the right path than I am with choosing the right path.”

A BILL for establishing RELIGIOUS FREEDOM,
printed for the consideration of the PEOPLE.

WE are aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds, that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his Supreme will that free it shall remain, by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint: That all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or hindrances, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was his Almighty power able, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone: That the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and unassisted men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking, as the only true and infallible, and as such, endeavouring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world, and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical: That even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness, and is withdrawing from the Ministry those temporal rewards which, proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labour for the instruction of mankind: That our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry: That therefore the possessing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence, by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he professes this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens he has a natural right: That it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion in his heart to encourage, by setting up a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it: That though indeed there are some who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way: That the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction: That to suffer the civil Magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course Judge of that tendency will make his own opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with, or differ from his own: That it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order: And finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition, disformal of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

WE the General Assembly of Virginia do enact, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious Worship place or Ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

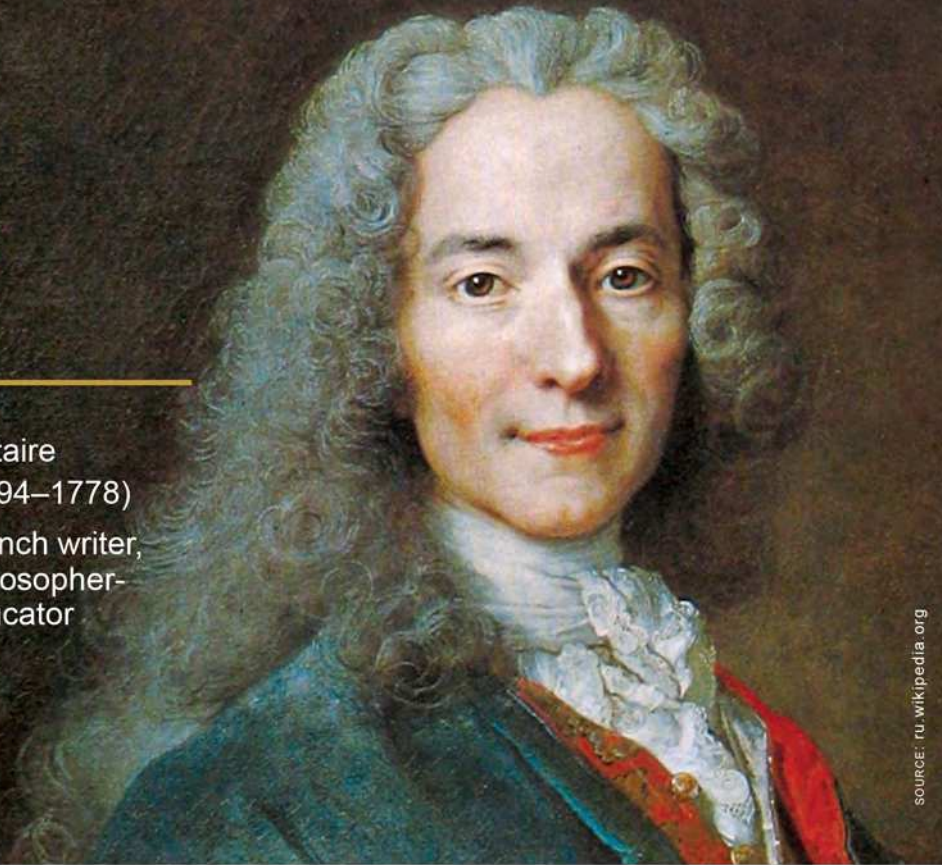
AND though we well know that this Assembly, elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding Assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own, and that therefore to declare this act irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall hereafter be passed to repeal the present, or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

Virginia
Statute for
Religious
Freedom

“ ...No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.”

Voltaire
(1694–1778)

French writer,
philosopher-
educator



SOURCE: ru.wikipedia.org

“ If we address justice and protection of human rights we will find that freedom of beliefs and freedom to manifest them publicly and to conform one’s actions to his beliefs, as long as they don’t infringe upon the rights of others, are as real as the right to personal freedom and the right to property. Therefore, any restriction in exercising these rights goes against justice. And every law that is against religious tolerance is an unjust law.”

Abai
Kunanbayev
(1845–1904)

Kazakh poet,
composer,
philosopher,
thinker, social
activist

“ The proof of the existence of one God, unique and omnipotent, is that for thousands of years people of different tongues have spoken of God, and, however many religions there might be, all consider love and justice to be attributes of God.



Believing and worshipping, we must not say that we can force others to believe and worship.

The essence of humanity is love and justice. These principles are omnipresent and control everything. They are the crown of Divine Creation. Even when a stallion takes possession of a mare it is a manifestation of love.

He who is swayed by the feelings of love and justice is a wise man and a learned man. Unable to invent science and learning, we can only behold and perceive the created world and understand its harmony by our reason.”

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

set by France's National Constituent Assembly on August 26, 1789

ARTICLE X:

No one may be disquieted for his opinions, even religious ones, provided that their manifestation does not trouble the public order established by the law.

ARTICLE XI:

The free communication of thoughts and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen thus may speak, write, print freely, except to respond to the abuse of this liberty, in the cases determined by the law.



SOURCE: commons.wikimedia.org

The United States Bill of Rights

The First 10 Amendments to the Constitution ratified on December 15, 1791

FIRST AMENDMENT:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”



SOURCE: commons.wikimedia.org



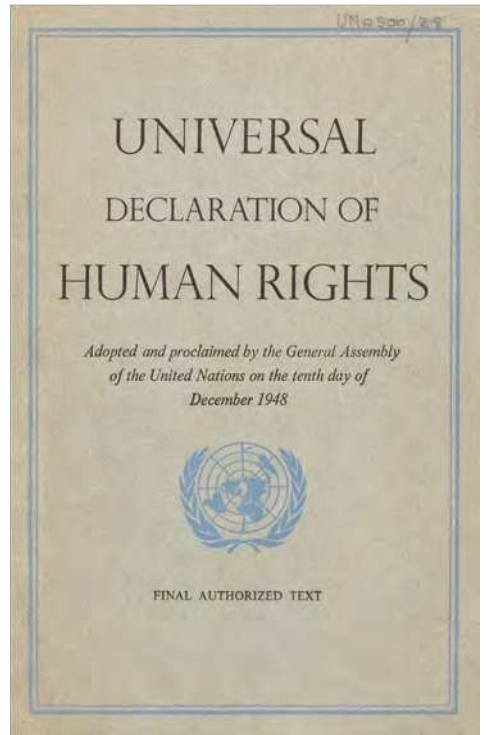
▲
Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, while serving at the UN, chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“...Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people...

ARTICLE 19:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”



Empress of Russia Catherine II (1729– 1796)

“As the Most High God tolerates all faiths, languages and confessions on earth, then Her Majesty, from the same rules, resembling His Holy will, and will please everyone to act, wishing only that love and harmony always reign her subjects.”

PSZ. VOL. 19. № 13996
JUNE 17, 1773

DECREE OF THE HOLY SYNOD
*“On the tolerance of all confessions
and on the prohibition of bishops to
engage in matters relating to
confessions of other faiths and
before the construction of houses of
worship according to their
law, leaving all this to the
secular authorities”*



source: commons.wikimedia.org

Emperor of Russia Nicholas II (1868–1918)

“To recognize that falling away from the Orthodox faith into another Christian confession or creed is not subject to persecution and should not entail any unfavorable consequences in relation to personal or civil rights, moreover, a person who has fallen away from Orthodoxy upon reaching the age of majority is recognized as belonging to that confession or faith, which he chose for himself...”

“TOLERANCE
DEVELOPMENT,”
ROYAL DECREE GIVEN
TO THE SENATE

APRIL 17, 1905



source: commons.wikimedia.org

CONCLUSION

After conducting a thorough investigation into the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and their lives and worship in Kazakhstan, we want to set the record straight by answering some basic questions:

First question: *Are Jehovah's Witnesses Christians?*

Yes, absolutely. It may seem that my investigation has answered this question. Why do we address this issue again?

The truth is that not only ordinary people but also some scientists see Jehovah's Witnesses as anti-Christian. This way of thinking is based mainly on information that is provided by the media and the Orthodox Church.

For instance, I had a chance to talk to a professor of the Institute of Philosophy and Political Science who considers himself a religious scholar and has published several works on Christianity. He tried to convince me with absolute certainty that Jehovah's Witnesses are false Christians because "their beliefs and worship are very different from other Christian religions." In his opinion, they "misinterpret and even reject basic Christian doctrines."

The headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses is situated in the U.S.A., and that may be one reason the opinion that Jehovah's Witnesses are a political and not a religious organization is still being voiced today on the territory of the former Soviet republics.

That is nonsense, of course. However, as long as those opinions exist, I think we need to define our position on the matter again.

As is known, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) opposes Jehovah's Witnesses most notably. This, however, is explainable; the desire to win the turf war prevails over reason. This fight for influence over the population and for the sole right to interpret the Bible has

been taking place for more than a century (meanwhile, people ignore the fact that the ROC is managed from abroad, although Russia is a neighboring country).

It amazes me at times that people put labels on Jehovah's Witnesses, accusing them with such ignorant incompetence and even swagger.

Then I review the history and many things become clearer. Consider, for example, the opinion of a scholar who researched religious movements in Imperial Russia and later managed the affairs of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич. He wrote in an article in 1911: "The Holy Synod, through consistories, missionaries, and parish clergy, has wrapped its tentacles around the matter of studying this side of people's life. As a result, our democracy, our society, and our science have fed on rotten fruits of their not only biased but in many cases deceitful 'research' for decades. Through its numerous magazines, books, reports, brochures, and leaflets, this may be the most malevolent institution that has polluted public consciousness on the questions of religious variety in Russia. As a result, in society, scientific papers, newspapers, and even popular fiction, we have to deal with the most absurd and wild allegations if a case concerns the so-called sectarianism, Old Belief, or even a slight difference of opinion among Orthodox Christians.

"Clerical-governmental power was able to corrupt minds to the extent that even some rational people were ready to believe anything—even the most ridiculous and disgusting things—if the word 'sect' was mentioned in the context.¹"

It has been 100 years, but some people are still using the same methods. Thus, I consider it my civil and academic duty to emphasize once again that, **firstly, Jehovah's Witnesses, originally called "The Bible Students", are not a political but purely a religious organization. Secondly, even though their beliefs are different, they are certainly Christian.**

¹ V. Bonch-Bruевич. *From the World of Members of Sects. Collection of Articles* – Moscow, State Publishing House, 1922 – pp. 192-194.

Second question: *Are Jehovah's Witnesses a sect, a denomination, or a religion?*

The right answer to this question is extremely important because “a new specific form of ‘anticult movement,’ which has some national features, emerged in the mid-1990’s. This movement is a union of heterogeneous confessional, political, and other forces. They stand against the application of the equality principle towards religious movements that they proclaim ‘destructive sects’ regardless of any scientific or theological criteria.”¹

I. Ya. Kanterov rightly pointed out that special word-lists appear and these sets of terms are only used to describe “destructive sects and cults,” their activity, and especially the impact of their activity. Such word-lists are becoming a prominent feature not only in publications about sects but also in some statements by local authorities. Authors of these word-lists do not apply terms such as “follower,” “adherent,” and especially not “religious person” to describe a member of a sect. These terms are replaced by the Latin word “adept”² that is incomprehensible and negatively perceived by many.

What is the purpose of this replacement of the terms? According to Massimo Introvigne, a famous Italian sociologist, this is done to separate religious minorities from traditional religions in the minds of the public. Then, in the future, it will allow them to announce that international and constitutional rights and liberties cannot be applied to a particular group, because they are “false” religious people, “fanatics and dangerous cultists.” In such a case, society takes the onset of persecution more lightly and does not see this persecution as a threat to human rights and liberties, which are in fact being violated. The Nazis used this method when they were preparing German society

¹ S. I. Ivanenko. *Evolution of Ideology and Activities of the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (Historical And Philosophical Analysis)*: Dissertation Abstract For Doctoral Degree In Philosophy – p. 9.

² I. Ya. Kanterov. “Destructive, Totalitarian,” electronic ref., (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130407011046/http://nauka-i-religia.narod.ru/sektoved/kanterov.html>).

for the persecution of Jewish people. This reaffirms the fact that the ideology of modern anticult movements is deeply rooted in Fascism and Nazism.

This explains the purpose of using such terms as “sect” or “adept.” Actually, the supporters of the anticult movement are manipulators who discreetly, on an emotional level, create a negative attitude in society toward the objects they choose.

It is interesting to learn what some famous religious scholars who have closely examined Jehovah’s Witnesses say:

N. S. Gordiyenko: “The organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses is a normal religious organization – confession.¹”

S. I. Ivanenko: “At the initial stage of its development, the organization of Bible Students was a denomination with some features of a sect. Under certain circumstances that type of a religious organization could become a sect (if theological works written by C. Russell were considered inspired by God, for example) or it could become a religious organization with all the features of denomination. ... After World War II, as a result of complicated and contradictory evolutionary processes inside the structure, beliefs, and forms of activities, Jehovah’s Witnesses transformed into a religious organization with the main features of a denomination ... This process finished in 1971-1975, when sole leadership inside the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses was replaced by a collective one.²”

Thus, N. S. Gordiyenko views Jehovah’s Witnesses as a *religion*, S.I. Ivanenko – as a denomination.

And notice, *neither considers them a sect.*

In my opinion, the international organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses today is ***more than a denomination and can be viewed as one of the Christian neo-Protestant religions.***

¹ N. S. Gordiyenko. *Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses: Historical Record and Contemporary Realities* – p. 12.

² S. I. Ivanenko. *Evolution of Ideology and Activities of the Religious Organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia (Historical and Philosophical Analysis): Dissertation abstract for doctoral degree in Philosophy* – p. 14.

Therefore, this international movement should be treated accordingly, with due respect for their beliefs regardless of one's own personal religious convictions.

That raises **the third and perhaps the most important question:** *Does Jehovah's Witnesses' ideology, worship, or forms and methods used to propagate their beliefs cause any damage to others?*

Definitely not. Before explaining my conclusion in detail, I will first take a step back.

It is well known that religion and society are knit closely together. Their connection is not constant. Society and its pluralist unity are continuously evolving: social formations change, whole new civilizations and empires rise and fall, new nations are born, etc.

Religion is not just a part of social life; it is deeply woven into the fabric of a society. It does not stand separate from the processes of the society; it is an active participant of these processes. As such, religion itself is constantly evolving and at times undergoes dramatic changes.

The entire history of the human race proves it: a change in social formation is always directly linked to the rise of a new religious movement, a new religion as a public institution, or a reformation of an already existing religion. Thus, functions of a religion as part of a society cannot be viewed apart from historical processes, from public and social changes, or from a change of orientation from within the society, because religion can be a catalyst for change or a conservator of old traditions. Religion can not only unite and contribute to the formation and strengthening of a nation, it can also destroy it, causing ethnic conflicts and inter-religious wars. It can inspire the creation of masterpieces of world culture and serve as justification for barbarism and vandalism. It can contribute to the consolidation of universal moral laws and at the same time, play the role of conservator of the most retrogressive cultural practices. It can elevate human beings through their spiritual quest, leading them "through the course of moral hygiene" (to quote Russian publicist D. I. Pisarev), or on the other hand, reduce them to total passivity and an animal-like existence.

Even though we are speaking about religion as a form of ideology, as a form of specific actions based on faith in miraculous powers, we must admit that everyone has his *own beliefs*. Therefore, in reality a *religion in general* does not exist, because every believer or group of believers has their own religious views, *their own religion*. For example, we cannot define religion as just faith in God. It is impossible, because some are monotheists and others believe in several gods, etc.

Nowadays, religious scholars and some theologians alike admit that religion takes up much less space in the consciousness of society than it used to; it is being pushed further into the periphery. Man, being responsible to himself, every day relies more and more on his own abilities and power than on “divine intervention.”

This process is called “*secularization*,” liberation of different spheres of social activity and behavior from any religious influence.

Naturally, this process creates a need for new “life values” that combine traditional religious views with the modern requirements of each person and society in general.

This is the main reason why many new religions have been created in recent years.

The entire history of Jehovah’s Witnesses, as we have seen, is a good example of the above.

I can also refer to my own personal observations. When I was doing research for the first edition of this book, I thoroughly studied theology and the practices of worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses. I interviewed the overseer of the Kazakhstan Center and the overseers and members of several congregations. I spent a week in Solnechnoye, near Saint Petersburg in Russia, the Center for all CIS countries at the time; I read everything about Jehovah’s Witnesses that was available in Russian, I even had some materials translated from English, but I never came across anything even remotely resembling religious extremism.

In the course of preparing the second edition of this book, I used my business trip to Dresden Technical University to visit the Central Europe Branch of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Selters, Taunus. There I

met staff members at different levels. I visited a religious meeting of a Russian-speaking congregation, where I had a detailed conversation. Once again, I became convinced of the very kind and caring attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses towards their neighbors, although they distance themselves from secular life.

Finally, by the time I was working on the third edition of this book, I had known and studied Jehovah's Witnesses for almost 30 years, and I had even more materials for my research. At that time, the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty had gathered an enormous number of materials on their history. The Religious Association had also published several quite informative and extensive books on this religious movement.

When it comes to large religious groups such as the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, we certainly must take into account developments which led them from being illegal or partially legal to being able to extend their public relations up to upholding human rights on an international level at the European Court of Human Rights.

This is why we should try to think outside the limits of the Soviet period, when Jehovah's Witnesses were functioning underground.

Jehovah's Witnesses are doing everything they can to establish civilized relations with government authorities and with the communities they live in. They write in their magazine: *"While respect for authority is rapidly disappearing in the world, as Christians we recognize that proper authorities in the community, in the family, and in the Christian congregation are established for our benefit. Respect for authority is essential for our well-being physically, emotionally, and spiritually. By accepting and respecting such God-given authority, we will be safeguarded by the greatest authorities—Jehovah God and Jesus Christ—for our eternal good.—Psalm 119:165; Hebrews 12:9."*¹ Another magazine says: "As a result of our paying back Caesar's things to Caesar, we hope that 'we may go on leading a calm and quiet life

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., August, 1 2000 – p. 7.

with full godly devotion and seriousness.’ (1 Timothy 2:1, 2) Above all, we will continue to preach the good news of the Kingdom as mankind’s only hope, conscientiously paying back God’s things to God.¹”

In 2018, Jehovah’s Witnesses made an unexpected and bold move. They started organizing Open House days at their Kingdom Halls in several regions of Kazakhstan. They invited not only journalists, officials, and non-Witness relatives but also anyone interested. These were organized as informative social events. About eight information stands were prepared on topics that would most interest people. One of the stands at each event was about the history of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the specific region. That stand featured old photographs of Jehovah’s Witnesses, verdicts of the local courts from Soviet times, and old newspaper articles on Jehovah’s Witnesses. Next to the information stand, elderly Jehovah’s Witnesses stood, holding certificates of their rehabilitation as victims of political repression. The personal stories of these people enlivened the history so that everyone could relate to it. Interestingly, hundreds of Kazakhstan citizens who visited these events said that they had not known anything about Jehovah’s Witnesses or had misconceptions about them. Even some officials agreed that they received complete information about the religious organization and now know the Witnesses much better.

I included the above in my book with a purpose, to show that an information vacuum still exists in our society. Why were Burova, Denisenko, and others so popular in their time? It was because they would provide at least some information on this strange new religious movement. It was ignorance and lack of objective and balanced information that made our society so vulnerable to myths and sensationalism. Needless to say, this has created a fertile breeding ground for xenophobia.

To these may be added the phenomenon of “information warfare” that has recently become a part of our lives. It has never been so

¹ *The Watchtower* – Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., May 1, 1996 – p. 20.

difficult to separate fact from fiction. Words like “trolling” and “fake” are now part of our everyday vocabulary. The flow of information from the Internet is becoming less and less controlled. In this challenging environment, it is vital *to acquire the skills of critical thinking*. Therefore, I call upon readers to develop a habit of not trusting blindly every sensational news report. It is important to stop and think first. If a headline or presentation of an article has an extremely emotional connotation and aims to cause outrage or anger, it is a signal to use your reasoning powers and process the information thoroughly. These same messages that appeal to people’s emotions were also used many times by propagandists. Soviet journalists used this method to cultivate hatred and intolerance towards religion and its believers. We should not be so naive!

Let us get back to the topic.

The answer to the third question is clear if we face the truth, ignoring all the myths and rumors: *Jehovah’s Witnesses’ ideology, worship, or forms and methods used to propagate their beliefs causes no damage to people or to society in general.*

Whether you like them or not—that is a different matter. That is related to your personal beliefs and sympathies.

We should learn to finally respect each other’s beliefs. We should be more responsible instead, raising the level of our religious and moral standards and even of our legal culture.

As far back as 1901, one of the greatest Russian authors, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, wrote in his letters To the Tsar and His Assistants:

“Lastly, fourthly, and most important of all, all limitation of religious liberty should be abolished. It is necessary

“(a) To repeal all the laws under which any secession from the established Church is punished as a crime.

“(b) To allow Old-Believers, Baptists, Molokans, Stundists, and others, to open and maintain churches, chapels, and houses of prayer.

“(c) To allow religious meetings and the preaching of all faiths.

“(d) Not to hinder people of different faiths from educating their children in those faiths.

“It is necessary to do this because—apart from the generally admitted fact proved by history and science, that religious persecutions fail to achieve their objective, and even produce a reverse effect by strengthening what people wish to destroy—the fact is that the intervention of Government in matters of faith produces hypocrisy, the most harmful and therefore the worst of vices, which Christ so strongly denounced. Apart from that fact, the interference of Government in matters of faith hinders each individual and the whole nation from attaining that highest blessed union with one another. For union is attained not by the forcible and impossible retention of all men in the bonds of one and the same external, once-accepted, confession of a religious teaching to which infallibility is attributed but only by the free advance of the whole of humanity towards truth which alone, therefore, can truly unite men.

“Such are the modest and easily realizable desires, we believe, of the immense majority of the Russian people.

“The adoption of these measures would undoubtedly pacify the people, and free them from those terrible sufferings and (what is worse than sufferings) crimes which will inevitably be committed on both sides if the Government busies itself only with the suppression of these disturbances, leaving their cause untouched.

“March 15, 1901.”¹

Have we not learned a thing since then?

Do we not understand that freedom of conscience, religious tolerance, and ideological diversity are great advances, the main criteria for evaluating cultural advancement and democracy? Thus, basic freedoms guarantee not only a free choice between faith and atheism, between different religions. They provide the opportunity to share our opinions with others.

¹ L. N. Tolstoy. *To the Tsar and His Assistants. Complete works in 22 volumes.* V. 17 – Moscow, Literature, 1984 – p. 197.

I want to believe that we understand that!

Willy Fautré, president of the organization Human Rights Without Frontiers, once said: **“Religious freedom is an important indicator of the state of human liberties in any society.”**

Every person has the right to choose which religion he prefers, including the choice not to become a member of a church.

It is important to know how to use your freedoms, among them—religious freedom.

It is important that a person stand up for his convictions using civilized ways of defending his beliefs and not change them as a snake sheds its skin.

A brilliant historian, V. O. Kliuchevsky, once said in a lecture to his students (and what he said is very true): *“Every generation has its own ideals; my generation has its ideals, yours, different ones. I feel very sorry for the generation that has none.”*

We should learn to respect other people’s views; we should be more tolerant and avoid conflicts based on differences of opinion.

Back in 1882, A.F. Kistiakovsky, a famous Russian philosopher and legal expert wrote in his article “About Crimes Against the Faith”: *“Universal human welfare requires the assumption and exercise of freedom of opinion, conscience, and worship. This is the only way to establish peace between people. Since it is impossible to unite all people in one religion, peace and harmony can be reached only when we learn to respect opposite religious opinions.”*¹

I cannot help but quote one famous Russian religious philosopher (I emphasize religious!), legal expert, and publicist, Ivan Ilyin (1882-1954), who wrote about relations between Church and State: *“The Church is not intended to dominate over the State and the State is not intended to become the Church and dissolve it within itself. On the contrary, the Church needs to be independent from the State. The State should serve*

¹ *Observer*, 1882 # 10, “About Crimes Against the Faith,” by A. F. Kistiakovsky – pp. 112-113.

the divine cause it has received from God but in a form that is different from the one that the Church has.¹

Another deeply religious philosopher and writer of the 19th century Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov also said the task of the state is *“not the salvation of souls, but the improvement of lives of citizens... Its task is not the truth, but benefit or well-being. It requires from its subjects not faith, not conviction, but obedience... The state, however, can and should be tolerant by its very nature and by its task.”²*

And the same position is adhered to by modern religious scholars, my esteemed colleagues, both near and far abroad.

I am very sympathetic to the words of Lyudmila Alexandrovna Filipovich, which I read in the article: “If there is no freedom of religion, then all other freedoms are unnecessary,” and which I could not help but quote in this book: “Religions will divide, dissenting ones will separate from the dominant churches, gathering in groups of oppositionists, who will continue to be called sectarians. Society should not prohibit these organizations, but set the appropriate conditions for their functioning: if you do not comply with the law, which is the same for everyone, and not specifically for the majority and minority, there are corresponding sanctions.... How does a murder committed by an atheist or an unbeliever differ from a murder committed by a Christian—a simple believer or a monk/priest? Does a fraud for the benefit of the common adventurer or pastor of the church stop being a fraud? Everyone is equal before the law.... Learning to apply it is a matter of professionals.... Are we free people? Free. And freedom implies responsibility. Learn to use your freedom, and those who does not know how will depend on the will of another person, someone else's system of measurement. But no one should tell a free person how he should believe and what he should do. Who, half- or under-

¹ I. A. Ilyin. *Complete works in 10 volumes. Vol 1* – Moscow, Russian Book, 1993 – p. 239.

² I. S. Aksakov, “On freedom of conscience and religious tolerance from the point of view of the state”, Electronic ref., (http://az.lib.ru/a/aksakow_i_s/text_1868_o_svoibode_sovesti_olderfo.shtml).

educated servants of the people, will determine my spiritual path and the degree of my spirituality?¹”

All civilized nations have already realized that. Hence, they maintain freedom of conscience and religious tolerance as the most important moral and democratic values that provide peaceful coexistence of different opinions, ideological diversity, and intellectual freedom.

To paraphrase Theodor W. Adorno, I therefore encourage the community, instead of enforcing existing laws to create a new categorical imperative, to think and act so that we never make the same mistake—a war with religion is a descent into barbarism².

I strongly believe that in our modern world it is impossible to live in a constant fight against religious organizations which we do not like just because they are different from “traditional” religions. “A situation in which pressure is the dominant way of establishing any relations threatens the existence of those relations.³” Government officials, representatives of power structures, and all those that serve as liaisons between the government and the Church should clearly understand that.

As noted by Professor R. A. Podoprigora, it is encouraging that the “Legislature of Kazakhstan quite rightly refrained from defining the terms ‘sect,’ ‘destructive organization,’ etc. The State prefers not to interfere in deciding which religious organizations are useful and which are harmful; instead, it reacts to and punishes violations of the law only. In this respect, Kazakhstan stays within European tradition.⁴”

I would like to encourage young scientists and students to be the lights of science and help people acquire real knowledge and provide

¹ *Granite of Science*, “Lyudmila Filipovich: ‘If there is no freedom of religion, then all other freedoms are unnecessary’” by D. Tarusova, electronic ref., (<https://un-sci.com/ru/2020/07/22/lyudmila-filipovich-esli-net-svobody-veroisповedaniya-to-vse-ostalnye-svobody-ne-nuzhny/>)

² T.W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics* – Warsaw, PWN, 1986 – p. 515.

³ *Novaya Gazeta*, August 8, 2009, #30 (220), 06.08 – p. 16.

⁴ R. A. Podoprigora, *Problems of State-Confessional Relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan* – Almaty, Kaspys State Public University, 2019 – p. 77.

honest information about cultural and religious diversity that exists in our society and in the world around us. Explore, study, analyze, and help people understand each other better, because this is the guarantee for unity, peace, and a better future for all of us.

Lastly, I would not have been able to finish the new edition of this book without the help and genuine interest from different people, including Jehovah's Witnesses—ordinary believers who shared some historical information with me, management and staff of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty, the Central European Branch of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany, and Jehovah's Witnesses in Warwick, New York, USA (World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses). When preparing the seventh chapter of this book, my good assistant, Lev Gladyshev, helped me a lot in collecting and systematizing rare historical sources. I received a great support from my beloved wife and all my wonderful big family. I want to thank all of them and everyone who helped me by giving words of advice and by providing materials, including from their personal archives. All of you hold a very warm place in my memory and I am very grateful!

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