

SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

of Communities of
Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan

ARTUR ARTEMYEV



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

There are two previous editions (2002 and 2010)—*Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Historical and Theological Analysis*. In recent years, this religious organization has undergone many changes. Therefore, the author considered it necessary to prepare a new edition of the monograph focusing on Uzbekistan separately.

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 nonspecialist readers interested in modern religion.

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TO THE READER

“Be noble, writer!
Write,
Truly before the mirror of the soul.”
Alisher Navoi. *“Confusion of the Righteous”*

They say that every journey is an unwritten book. The one who visits Uzbekistan might not write a book, but he will never forget the days spent here. I can guarantee you this, as I have been to this incredibly beautiful country, with its very rich history, several times; and every time I discovered something new for myself—a new world and a new layer of history that caused my admiration.

It cannot be otherwise. After all, Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, is more than 2,000 years old. This city is a monument itself with its characteristic colors and an amazing combination of antiquity and modern design.

The stunning beauty of Samarkand lies in its unique monuments from the 14th to 17th centuries, including Registan ensemble square, Bibi-Khanym, Gur-Emir mausoleum, Shakhi-Zinda ensemble, and the “city-museum” Bukhara, the foundation of which is dated no later than the first century C.E.

When you come to these cities, it takes your breath away, from everything you see to the contact with ancient times.

Other cities that I had a chance to visit are also very interesting, for example, Namangan—a city in the Ferghana Valley. It has been known since the end of the 15th century. Today, it is a city of light, food and chemical industries, and mechanical engineering.

There is also the completely new city of Navoi, built in the 1960s of the last century.

The Uzbek land gave humanity outstanding thinkers, scientists, and poets, who had a great influence on world culture, such as Al-Khorezmiy, Biruni, Abu Ali Ibn Sino, Jami, Navoi, Ulugbek, and Babur. “But the ignorance and cruelty of the feudal lords, . . . religious fanaticism eventually wiped out the flourishing culture of the past.”¹

Today, Uzbekistan is an independent, multinational republic, where Karakalpaks and Russians, Tatars and Kazakhs, Tajiks and Koreans live and work together with the titular nation, making up most of the population.

Naturally, the religious palette here is diverse too.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, to whom this book is dedicated, have their place in this palette.

I have been studying this phenomenal religion for almost 25 years. I became interested in this religious organization for the following reasons.

First, they have original teachings coming from the early Christian communities.

Second, an unimaginable avalanche of negative materials was hitting this worldwide Christian organization almost daily through the media and law enforcement agencies, which, in my opinion, even competed with each other. And all of these were despite the fact that Jehovah’s Witnesses had come out of the underground and officially registered their communities by that time, like some other “persecuted” confessions and denominations.

Third, many highly educated people have an extremely negative attitude toward Jehovah’s Witnesses, even though in other situations, they are not averse to speculating about freedom of thought and religious tolerance.

And fourth, although by the time I had been studying religions for almost thirty years, the Jehovah’s Witnesses remained for me a “blank spot.” I had only a general idea of this religious organization, hence,

¹ O. Abidov, *Tashkent 2000* [in Russian] (Tashkent: Uzbekistan Publishing House, 1983), 140.

the desire to somewhat deepen my knowledge and understanding of their history, teachings, religious practices, and the current state of this religious phenomenon. In my opinion, there is no better way to do that than to sit down and to write a book about this.

And so, I did. As a result, I wrote the book *Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan: Socio-historical and Theological Analysis*.

Naturally, not everyone accepted it unambiguously. Some said with horror: "Artemyev has clearly gone crazy!" Others: "Well, he ended up becoming a Jehovah's Witness."

At that time, I knew very well that this book would be met with mixed emotions. My "faithful enemies" could have started their persecution, and they did. But, somewhat paraphrasing my old friend Vladislav Vladimirov, an excellent writer and a man of a sharp mind, I said to myself: "Curs will definitely be barking, sometimes wolfdogs will appear too. But I will live according to the saying: 'The dogs bark, but the caravan goes on.'"

The history and life of Jehovah's Witnesses has taken a special place in my scientific work.

People often ask me if I believe in God. I usually answer: "Although I have studied religion for over 50 years, I do not belong to any religious denomination, Jehovah's Witnesses included. Moreover, I am not a man of faith."

Nevertheless, I have written more than 350 scientific papers on religious subjects.

People often 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 with 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.

I adhere to the view of the great Alisher Navoi [unofficial English translation]:

“Truthfulness—is a core of a genuine man,
Distinguished by two main features unflinching.
First, to be truthful in thought and in deed,
And not just in word, unavailingly.
Second, to turn down the world of deception,
But fearlessly utter the verity.”¹

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.”*² It is very important to respect the beliefs of one another.

The Russian poet Yuri Levitansky wrote: *“Everybody chooses for himself his belief, his woman and his road.”*³ 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 toward 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

¹ Alisher Navoi, *“Confusion of the Righteous,”* in *Five Fingers* [in Russian] (Tashkent: Gafur Gulam Publishing House of Literature and Art, 1983), 65.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses and Education* (Wallkill, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2015), 2, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-and-Education/The-Purpose-of-This-Brochure/>.

³ Yuri D. Levitansky, *“Everybody Chooses for Himself ... ,”* trans. Alexandra Shamarova, <https://levitansky.ru/poeziya/den-takoy-to/kazhdyy-vybiraet-dlya-sebya/>.

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 “nontraditional 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” toward our neighbors.

I strongly believe that the duty of every citizen, and even more so of every scientist, is to strengthen peace and harmony within our society, to promote respect among people, and to reject ignorance and xenophobia. 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 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

¹ A. S. Prugavin, *Schism and Sectarianism in the Life of Russian People* [in Russian] (Moscow, 1905), 23.

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.”¹

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.*

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.”²

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,” Victor 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

¹ Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf* (New York: Picador, 2002), 64, quoted by Rollan Seysenbayev in *AMANAT Magazine*, no. 3 (2006): 169.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Aristotle: Works in Four Volumes*, Vol. 4 [in Russian] (Moscow: “Thought” Publishing House, 1983), 4:184–85.

any language. Likewise, he can find the only true God as a member of any religion.¹

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 judgment.

So, who are Jehovah's Witnesses? Here is what our socio-historical and theological analysis has shown.

Artur Artemyev
March 2022

¹ Victor E. Frankl, "Psychotherapy and Religion," in *Man's Search for Meaning* [in Russian] (Moscow: Progress, 1990), 337.

CHAPTER 1

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

I feel it is very important to start my book with the history of this organization, its rise and evolution, since this will allow the reader to better understand the distinctive features of this doctrine and to see when and under what circumstances Jehovah's Witnesses had appeared. I am sure that a brief historical journey will help the researcher to better understand the standpoint of Jehovah's Witnesses on a number of important issues. Jehovah's Witnesses, as will be mentioned later in this book, have a clear understanding of why they believe in certain teachings and why they avoid certain holidays or activities and also why they consider it important to act in one way or another. Unfortunately, it is the lack of understanding of the Witnesses' standing on many issues that leads to incorrect interpretation and, as a result, to conflicts and persecution.

Let us start with the basics. 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. Readers of the classics may also recall that in many works of foreign and Soviet authors, the name Jehovah can be found.¹

It should be noted that in religious science literature of our day, we can find the term "Jehovism" used in relation to this religion and "Jehovists" used in relation to its followers. I consider it wrong because

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

it is perceived by both society and believers as a derogatory term. Modern anti-cult organizations and some journalists are fond of this term and use it with the purpose of humiliating Jehovah's Witnesses and arousing hostility and repugnancy toward them. Thus, it proves to be just a dirty trick, a psychological manipulation of public opinion.¹

In addition, using these terms inevitably causes confusion, because it was already traditionally assigned to the "Desnoe Brotherhood," the Russian religious movement of the 19th century.² It is also worth considering that Jehovah's Witnesses themselves have never used these terms. It is noteworthy that even in the Soviet time, criminal case materials of the 1940-1950s, at least those that I was able to access, the believers call themselves exclusively "Jehovah's Witnesses" and nothing else.

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 reached the conclusion that most people who call themselves Christians know nothing about Christ's teachings or the Bible. Additionally, 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.

¹ The term "religious science" has come into use relatively recently and occurs in two spellings ('*religievedenie*' and '*с*' 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 *Religievedenie* [Religious Studies], 2nd ed. (Moscow: Aspekt-press, 1995), 5.)

² Also known as "Jehovists-Ilyintsy." The movement appeared in the Russian Empire in the 1840s. Its founder was Nikolai S. Ilyin (staff captain of artillery). The movement was very widespread in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. The movement's doctrine is stated Ilyin's book, *The Message of Zion*, which his followers consider the main text, putting it on par with, or even higher than, the Bible.

They took their name from the prophet 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. . . . I—I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no savior. . . . So you are my witnesses,’ declares Jehovah, ‘and I am God.”—Isaiah 43:10–12.¹

“A New Name” resolution adopted on July 26, 1931, stated: “We desire to be known as and called by the name, to wit, Jehovah’s witnesses.”²

Here is how the adoption of the new name is explained in modern literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses:

Many people think that Jehovah’s Witnesses is the name of a new religion. However, over 2,700 years ago, the servants of the only true God were described as his “witnesses.” (Isaiah 43:10–12) Until 1931, we were known as Bible Students. Why did we adopt the name Jehovah’s Witnesses?

It identifies our God. According to ancient manuscripts, God’s name, Jehovah, appears thousands of times in the Bible. In many translations this name has been replaced by titles, such as Lord or God. Yet, the true God had revealed himself to Moses by his personal name, Jehovah, saying: “This is my name forever.” (Exodus 3:15) In this way, he distinguished himself from all false gods. We are proud to bear God’s holy name.

It describes our mission. A long line of ancient people, beginning with the righteous man Abel, bore witness about their faith in Jehovah. Throughout the centuries, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David, and others joined this “great cloud of witnesses.” (Hebrews 11:4–12:1) Just as an individual may bear witness in court in behalf of an innocent person, we are determined to make known the truth about our God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2013).

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), 81–82, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Proclaimers-of-Gods-Kingdom/You-Are-My-Witnesses-Says-Jehovah/Proclaiming-the-Lords-Return-1870-1914>.

We are imitating Jesus. The Bible calls him “the faithful and true witness.” (Revelation 3:14) Jesus himself said that he ‘made God’s name known’ and kept ‘bearing witness to the truth’ about God. (John 17:26; 18:37) Christ’s genuine followers must, therefore, bear Jehovah’s name and make it known. This is what Jehovah’s Witnesses are endeavoring to do.¹

This, in my opinion, is an excellent example that illustrates one of the most distinguishing features of the believers of this denomination. It is the awareness and consciousness of the choice of faith and the consistency of their religious beliefs. I will be coming back repeatedly to this feature throughout the book, as I consider it an important key to understanding this particular religion. If you ask an ordinary believer (parishioner) of any other religion why their movement has a certain name, why he should perform certain rituals and what are their meanings, and also why there are certain prohibitions in his religion, in most cases you get something like, “That’s how it works!” “It’s what we always do!” “It’s a tradition!” But ask Jehovah’s Witnesses, and they will give you a complete and detailed answer, using both Biblical texts and logical arguments.

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 Orthodox theologians and representatives of the scientific community who consider themselves to be Christians. Their argument is that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept Jesus Christ as God and do not believe in the Trinity. This viewpoint 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

¹ *Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 5–6, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/jehovahs-will/why-called-jehovahs-witnesses/>.

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. I will give a little more detail on the reasons for the denial of the Trinity doctrine in Chapter 3, which is devoted to doctrines.

In addition, it is worth considering the believers’ viewpoint on this issue. Thus, 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.

However, in a number of ways, we are different from other religious groups that are called Christian. For example, we believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God, not part of a Trinity. (Mark 12:29) We do not believe that the soul is immortal, that there is any basis in Scripture for saying that God tortures people in an everlasting hell, or that those who take the lead in religious activities should have titles that elevate them above others.—Ecclesiastes 9:5; Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 23:8-10.¹

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.

¹ “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Christians?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org (official website of Jehovah’s Witnesses), <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/are-jehovahs-witnesses-Christians/>.

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 accept 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."

At the same time, they admit that during this period of "spiritual captivity" there were servants of God. For instance, 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

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.

As shown in this film, besides rejecting the Trinity doctrine, Priestley declared that the teaching of the inherent immortality of the soul was false.

[Priestly] 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.

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2010), https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/#en/mediaitems/VODOrgHistory/pub-ivfa1_x_VIDEO.

Among them was Henry Grew. By 1807, at age 25, Grew was invited to serve as pastor of the Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut; and 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. Now 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 was teaching 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*.¹

It is noteworthy that later young C. T. Russell published his article "Gentile Times: When Do They End?" in this magazine, presenting his research on four chapters of the book of the prophet Daniel and concluding that, apparently, "the seven times will end in A.D. 1914." This article was printed in the October 1876 issue of the *Bible Examiner*.

[George Storrs and Henry Grew] 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."

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness, 07:27* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2010), https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/#en/mediaitems/VODOrgHistory/pub-ivfa1_x_VIDEO.

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 anticipated.¹

Therefore, the modern church of Jehovah's Witnesses was formed at the end of the 19th century. Many religious scholars attribute it to the *late currents of Protestantism, or neo-Protestantism*.

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 Presbyterians² of Scottish-Irish descent. They emigrated from Ireland to the U.S.A. in 1845. Russell was influenced by both of his religiously minded parents.³ Although brought up as a Presbyterian, Russell eventually joined the Congregational Church because he preferred its views.⁴

Joseph and Ann Eliza had five children; among them was C. T. Russell. But times were hard; before Charles turned nine, three of his siblings died, and later his mother died.⁵

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 has participated. Thousands perished

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness*, 10:32 (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2010), https://www.jw.org/en/library/videos/#en/mediaitems/VODOrgHistory/pub-ivfa1_x_VIDEO.

² Presbyterian (from Greek *presbyteros*, meaning 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).

³ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 43.

⁴ 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.

⁵ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness*, 12:15.

on battlefields not far from where Russell lived and worked, so he was able to see firsthand the havoc that war wreaks on people—the suffering, and the death.¹

Young Russell often thought about what happens to the dead, but could never reconcile the teaching of “eternal torment” with the description in the Bible of a loving God.² 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.”³ As a result, his faith wavered.

He felt he could do the most good for people through business. At age 11, he became his father’s partner in a growing chain of clothing stores and worked to enlarge the business, eventually operating a number of stores by himself. He accumulated over \$300,000 (U.S.), the equivalent of \$7,000,000 (U.S.) today. He did charity work, but even that did 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.⁴

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.⁵

«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.

¹ Jehovah’s Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness, 12:50.

² Ibid., 13:37.

³ As quoted in *Mankind’s Search for God* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2006), 351, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Mankinds-Search-for-God/A-Return-to-the-True-God/>.

⁴ Ibid., 15:08.

⁵ Jehovah’s Witnesses—Faith in Action, Part 1: Out of Darkness, 15:59.

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.” 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.”¹

C. T. Russell himself later recalled the activities of this Bible class as follows:

We found that for centuries various sects and parties had split up the Bible doctrines amongst them, blending them with more or less of human speculation and error. . . . We found the important doctrine of justification by faith and not by works had been clearly enunciated by Luther and more recently by many Christians; that divine justice and power and wisdom were carefully guarded, tho not clearly discerned by Presbyterians; that Methodists appreciated and extolled the love and sympathy

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 43–44.

of God; that Adventists held the precious doctrine of the Lord's return; that Baptists amongst other points held the doctrine of baptism symbolically correctly, even tho they had lost sight of the real baptism; that some Universalists had long held vaguely some thoughts respecting "restitution." And so, nearly all denominations gave evidence that their founders had been feeling after truth: but quite evidently the great Adversary had fought against them and had wrongly divided the Word of God which he could not wholly destroy.¹

In July 1879, C. T. Russell published the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (now known as *The Watchtower*).² The results of the Bible study began to be published in the magazine.

Besides the magazine, C. T. Russell devoted much attention to the publication and distribution of tracts that described the results of his Biblical research. In 1881, 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 Society was formed on February 16, 1881, 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.

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 48–49.

² The title of this magazine has undergone several changes through the years. The above title was used from July 1879 through December 1908. In January 1909, it appeared as *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. From October 1931 to February 1939, the magazine bore the name *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. Today, it is known simply as *The Watchtower*, its full name being *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*. For the most part, the magazine will be referred to as *The Watchtower* regardless of its historical title, unless a distinction is necessary for the context. All source citations reflect the title of the magazine at the time of publication, as does the Chronology section of this book.

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.”²

In 1882, an article called “Assembling Together” appeared in *The Watchtower*. The article exhorted Christians to hold meetings “for mutual edification, encouragement and strengthening.” It noted: “It matters not whether there is any one learned or talented among you. Let each one bring his own Bible, paper, and pencil, and avail yourselves of as many helps in the way of a Concordance, . . . as possible. Choose your subject; ask for the Spirit’s guidance in the understanding of it; then read, think, compare scripture with scripture and you will assuredly be guided into truth.”³ That moment marked the beginning of congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In 1882, members of the Bible study group voted C. T. Russell their pastor. From then on, he devoted himself entirely to a pastoral ministry, and special efforts were made to spread the work in other countries. In 1891, Russell made a tour of Europe and the Middle East, which played a huge role in spreading the fruits of his endeavors to other countries.

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

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; by 1904, additional branches had been set up in Australia and Switzerland.

Gradually, branches of the Watch Tower Society began to be organized in other parts of the world. (There are currently 87 branches around the world).

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

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 210.

² *Ibid.*, 576.

³ *God's Kingdom Rules!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 18, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/the-kingdom-is-born-in-heaven/>.

First. C. T. Russell and his associates have not created a new religion and never claimed divine vision, revelation, or any new knowledge. He himself 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 . . . 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

C. T. Russell never claimed to be a prophet or spiritual leader. In *The Watchtower of July 15, 1906* (p. 229), Russell openly stated:

*“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.

Second. The Bible Students, led by C. T. Russell, from the very beginning decided to use the canonical Bible as the sole authority, and nothing more. 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*

¹ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 49.

² *Ibid.*, 143.

on the matter."¹ Such a critical approach to research contributed to the fact that believers were distinguished by unparalleled courage, boldness, independence of thought, and an active viewpoint of life, which was expressed, among other things, in the desire to share what they learned with other people.

Finally, third. The Bible Students carefully recorded and published all conclusions drawn from the study of the Bible and verification of Christian beliefs. Due to this, the unity of understanding and religious worship was achieved. 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. Numerous congregations of believers around the world studied this work in their worship. During his lifetime, C. T. Russell wrote six volumes:²

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 series.³

All three of these features are common to the modern organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. They still have no leaders or any people who are specially revered. They all also regard the Bible as their sole

¹ "Why Jehovah's Witnesses Keep on the Watch," *Watchtower*, May 1, 1994, 24, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1994325>.

² An interesting fact: Visitors of the Leo Tolstoy Memorial Museum complex, Yasnaya Polyana, can find C. T. Russell's multivolume series in the library of this great thinker. So, we can conclude that Tolstoy was familiar with Russell's work.

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 *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 52–53.

authority, and any organizational change must be in harmony with it. They are all brave and are known to share their beliefs with anyone who is willing to listen. And they maintain unity in all their communities around the world through the use of a single channel of religious teaching. Today, *the Watchtower* magazine and, in the last decade, their own Internet television streaming channel are the main sources of education for believers. Without these features, it would be simply impossible to understand this religious group.

Now let us turn back to the history of the organization.

The growth in the number of believers required expansion of the organization's activities, and in 1909, the headquarters of the Watch Tower Society was moved to Brooklyn, New York. Situated in the heart of the largest transportation hub in the Western Hemisphere, if not the entire world, the Bible Students were able to actively coordinate and expand their activities around the globe.¹ 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 million readers by means of 2,000 newspapers.²

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.

All this led to the growth of congregations of believers around the world.

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

¹ In 2017, the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses moved from Brooklyn, New York, to Warwick, New York, where a modern complex of eight buildings has been built on a plot of 102 hectares.

² "One Hundred Years Under Kingdom Rulership!," *Watchtower*, November 15, 2015, 28, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20151115/one-hundred-years-kingdom-rulership/>.

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

C. T. Russell's dedication to his cause was also reflected in the fact that he literally spent himself and his entire capital on the cause of the Bible Students. The book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* says the following about this fact:

As a means of determining whether his course was in harmony with the Scriptures, and also as a means of demonstrating his own sincerity, he decided to test the Lord's approval as follows: (1) Devote his life to the cause; (2) Invest his fortune in the promulgation of the work; (3) Prohibit collections at all meetings; (4) Depend on unsolicited contributions (wholly voluntary) to continue the work after his fortune was exhausted. . . . After his death it was reported in *The Watch Tower*: "He devoted his private fortune entirely to the cause to which he gave his life. He received the nominal sum of \$11.00 per month for his personal expenses.

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 623.

² "Behold the Loyal!" *Watchtower*, March 15, 1996, 10, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1996204>.

He died, leaving no estate whatsoever.”¹

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

The official website of the organization states:

«While Russell took the lead in the Bible education work at that time and was the first editor of *The Watchtower*, he was not the founder of a new religion. The goal of Russell and the other Bible Students, as the group was then known, was to promote the teachings of Jesus Christ and to follow the practices of the first-century Christian congregation. Since Jesus is the Founder of Christianity, we view him as the founder of our organization.—Colossians 1:18-20.²

In his will, C. T. Russell outlined an arrangement for an Editorial Committee of five (whom he named) to determine the contents of *The Watchtower*. In addition, the board of directors of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society arranged 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 on a farm in Morgan County, Missouri, U.S.A., on November 8, 1869.

His father was a farmer. When Rutherford was 16, his father consented to his attending college, provided that he paid his own way and that he paid 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.

¹ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 351.

² “Who Was the Founder of Jehovah’s Witnesses?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/founder/>.

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 his fiancée *‘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 himself said: “*“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 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.”²

In 1906, J. F. Rutherford was baptized, and a year later he became the Watch Tower Society’s legal counsel. In January 1917, he became its president.

¹ “Know Jehovah—The Personal God,” *Watchtower*, October 1, 1997, 6, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1997721>.

² *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 67.

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

However, not everyone was supportive of the new president. 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*.

Since the book contained some references to the clergy of Christendom that were very cutting, the clergy 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.

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 viewed as traitors. A special issue of *The Golden Age* (now *Awake!*) of September 29, 1920, related the following accounts:

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

¹ *The Harp of God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1921), 290.

km] to his home and barely recovered. Griffin was virtually blinded and died from the assault a few months later.¹

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

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 attorneys.²

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 the 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*.³ On April 16, 1922, J. 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

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 70.

² *Ibid.*, 654.

³ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 88.

the message of the truth that has yet been used.”¹ By 1933, the Society was using 403 radio stations to broadcast Bible lectures.

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.

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 1933, both Romania and Estonia registered branches of the Watch Tower Society.² And on March 14, 1933, under the name of the International Bible Students Association, a branch was officially registered in Latvia.³

On October 1, 1919, a new magazine appeared on the world stage—*The Golden Age*. This instrument would be used as a complement to *The Watchtower*.

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.”

¹ “One Hundred Years Under Kingdom Rulership!” 28.

² 2006 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2006), 88, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2006-Yearbook-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses/Romania/>; 2011 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2011), 175, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2011-Yearbook-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses/Estonia/>.

³ 2007 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2007), 187, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/2007-Yearbook-of-Jehovahs-Witnesses/Latvia/>.

⁴ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 79, 82.

An interesting marker took place in 1938. That year the democratic election of elders in the congregations of believers ended. Elders would now be appointed from above.

This was remarkable because it highlighted another interesting feature of the organizational order of Jehovah's Witnesses. On the one hand, we see the well-known Protestant principle of the "Universal Priesthood" according to which all believers are equal and call each other "brothers" and "sisters"; but at the same time, we see the elders as those who take on religious leadership in the congregations, conduct services and coordinate preaching activities, are available to listen to the problems and confessions and consider the sins of believers. And these individuals are not elected by the congregation but appointed by the Governing Body. At the same time, although the elders do not receive any salary and bear no titles (such as "Holy Father" and "His Eminence"), it is the elders who exercise the oversight of the congregations of believers.

Also, the period under review in the history of Jehovah's Witnesses may be interesting for a number of high-profile judicial victories that were won by believers in the U.S. Supreme Court. More details can be found in the chronology, presented in the appendix.

In the 1930s, the world faced the Great Depression as well as the rise of Nazism and nationalism. In the 1930s and 1940s, 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 late 1930s, 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 had the right to forbid Christians to carry out this commission. This provoked conflict and, consequently, arrests and long-term trials.

The U.S. Supreme Court brought the dispute to an end. 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 ‘no . . . menace to public peace and order.’ Hence, the ruling clearly established that Jehovah’s Witnesses are not disturbers of public order.”¹

It must be said that in the U.S. Supreme Court alone, 43 cases were won by Jehovah’s Witnesses as a result of appealing the decisions of lower courts during the 1930s and 1940s.

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 favor.²

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 Europe.³

By 2013, the total number of high court victories Jehovah’s Witnesses had received throughout the world was 243.⁴

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.”⁵

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

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!*, 138.

² “Moving Ahead to Final Victory!,” *Watchtower*, June 1, 2001, 19, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2001404>.

³ “Jehovah Guides Our Global Teaching Work,” *Watchtower*, February 15, 2015, 28, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20150215/jehovah-guides-global-teaching/>.

⁴ “Elisha Saw Fiery Chariots—Do You?,” *Watchtower*, August 15, 2013, 30, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20130815/elisha-saw-fiery-chariots/>.

⁵ As quoted in *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Twentieth Century* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1994), 8, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-in-the-Twentieth-Century/Their-Modern-Development-and-Growth/>.

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*

The idea of freedom of religion is quite new for our post-Soviet countries. Our societies are just beginning life within the framework of civil democratic freedoms, and undoubtedly, the formation and strengthening of the traditions of a strong civil society will take years and a change of generations. Perhaps that is why the exercise of their rights by Jehovah’s Witnesses today may seem to be a violation of the law to someone from older generations. But be careful in your conclusions. By accusing believers of breaking the law, you can unwittingly act to the detriment of your own rights and freedoms. It is also worth remembering that Jehovah’s Witnesses defended their right to believe and share their faith with others not only in the most respected and authoritative civil courts around the world but also in Nazi death camps. And a special mention should be made of the latter.

In the beginning of the 1930s in Germany, 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 percent 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

¹ As quoted in *Bearing Thorough Witness About God’s Kingdom* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2009), 198, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bearing-thorough-witness/preaching/appeal-to-caesar/>.

² As quoted in *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 699.

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.*"

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.

By the summer of 1933, their work had been banned in most German states.

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

¹ "Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany: From the 1890s to the 1930s," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jehovahs-witnesses-in-germany-from-the-1890s-to-the-1930s>.

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

It was a tough time that 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 pressure.²

That same year, *The Golden Age* carried the first of many reports of the existence of concentration camps in Germany.

On February 9, 1934, J. 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.”³

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 up.⁴

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?”⁵ That year, Jehovah’s Witnesses were the first ones who were sent to the concentration camp in Dachau.

¹ *Jehovah’s Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996).

² “The Evils of Nazism Exposed,” *Awake!*, August 22, 1995, 7, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/101995603/>.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵ “The Evils of Nazism Exposed,” *Awake!*, August 22, 1995, 7, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/101995603/>.

On Sunday morning, October 7, 1934, at nine o'clock, all congregations of *Bibelforscher*¹ 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 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."*² 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."*³

It is said that Hitler himself screamed: *"This brood will be exterminated in Germany!"*⁴

In 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."*⁵ Jehovah's Witnesses also loudly decried atrocities against Jews, Poles, the handicapped, and others.

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. He proclaimed: *"In Germany the common people are peace-loving. 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."*⁶

¹ Bible Students (later Jehovah's Witnesses) in Germany were called *Bibelforscher* (from German "Bible Searcher").

² "The Evils of Nazism Exposed," 8.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ "The Evils of Nazism Exposed," 8.

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.*"¹

By 1939, when World War II broke out, 6,000 Witnesses had already been sent to camps and imprisoned, where they wore a distinctive sign—a purple triangle. They were the only Christian religious group to form a separate category of prisoners.

In the camps, the Nazis tried to strike a deal with the *Bibelforscher* by offering them freedom in exchange for simply signing the renunciation of the faith. The signature meant that you renounce your faith, recognize the German government as the supreme power, voluntarily submit to Hitler, and confirm that the Bible is a false teaching. Only a few 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, one can only imagine what happened to them.

During the period from 1933 to 1945, 97 percent of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany were persecuted in one form or another; more than 2,000 of them died in the camps.²

¹ Ibid.; see also "Shadow of the Holocaust," in *Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on Lessons of the Holocaust and Contemporary Russia* [in Russian] (Moscow, 4–7 May 1997), 102.

² *Unknown Pages of History: Proceedings of the Conference "Lessons of Repression"* [in Russian] (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Tipographia Pravda, 2000), 28.

Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to cruel and sadistic treatment. 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 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 seventies.¹

I am personally very impressed by the story of courage of a Jehovah's Witness, prisoner of the Nazi camp of Sachsenhausen, August Dickmann:

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 beliefs.²

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

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 660.

² "He Died for a Principle," Watchtower, May 1, 2000, 32, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000328>.

The *Bibelforscher* 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* (punitive sports activity) 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.¹

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 . . .

During the Nazi period, 1,600 out of 6,000 died and 282 were executed because of refusing to perform military service. Those who remained 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

¹ Max Liebster, *Crucible of Terror: A Story of Survival Through the Nazi Storm* [in Russian] (Moscow: Osobaya Kniga, 2007), 63.

² Sergey I. Ivanenko, *The People Who Are Never Without Their Bibles* [in Russian] (Moscow: Art-Business Center, 1999), 37–39.

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?

“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 Berenbaum,¹ 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 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.»*²

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.

¹ *Encyclopedia for Kids*, vol. 6, *The World Religions. Part 2*, 5th ed., revised and enlarged [in Russian] (Moscow: Avanta, 2004), 414.

² Walter Manoschek, “No More War!,” introduction to *Unbroken Will: The Extraordinary Courage of an Ordinary Man* by Bernhard Rammerstorfer (New Orleans: Grammaton Press, 1999), 19.

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.¹

To draw a line on this period of history, I consider it necessary to give attention to the minutes of proceedings 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. The documents of the proceedings also mention Jehovah's Witnesses. Here are some excerpts from a multivolume 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

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

¹ Proclaimers of God's Kingdom, 664.

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

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, 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

The book ends with a detailed chronology of the organization's history by year. I want to draw the reader's attention to an important detail—the ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses was almost always imposed exclusively by dictatorial regimes. The only exception is the periods of world wars, when the ban was imposed in democratic countries, but again under pressure from the military and on a general wave of restriction of all the rights of citizens.

That is why today Jehovah's Witnesses are viewed by world human rights institutions as a "litmus test" for determining the level of freedom and democracy in the countries where they live. The ban on their activities speaks almost unmistakably of the rise of authoritarianism and the destruction of democratic freedoms in society as a whole. So, the next time you hear calls to ban Jehovah's Witnesses, you will have something to think about, will you not?

But back to the history of the organization.

J. F. 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, although he survived an operation, he continued to weaken, and passed away on Thursday, January 8, 1942.

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.

¹ Rammerstorfer, *Unbroken Will*, 264–65.

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 started to work at the Bible Students' religious center 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 Watch Tower 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.

From the very beginning of his presidency, N. H. 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 trained 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 doesn't 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 entitled "Peace—Can It Last?" was delivered by N. H. Knorr, the new president of the Watch Tower Society. 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

¹ "A Satisfying Life Despite Heartaches," *Watchtower*, July 1, 2004, 27, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20040701/A-Satisfying-Life-Despite-Heartaches/>.

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 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 Witnesses.²

Let me remind the readers that in 1942, it was extremely risky to make any predictions about the end of the war and about the post-war world order. The Battle of Stalingrad ended only at the beginning of 1943, and the turning point in World War II had not yet come. However, this characterizes N. H. Knorr as a resolute "man of faith."

N. H. 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 distributed.³

However, the main event was yet to come. In 1946, N. H. 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

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 93.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses—Unitedly Doing God's Will Worldwide* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1994), 11, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Unitedly-Doing-Gods-Will-Worldwide/Jehovah-Gathers-and-Equips-His-People-for-Work/>.

³ *God's Kingdom Rules!*, 84.

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. 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 revised edition of the *New World Translation* of the Bible was published in Uzbek in 2017, in Russian in 2021.

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 Body.²

As Jehovah's Witnesses explain, the need for such adjustments was caused by their desire to more closely conform to the structure

¹ *All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1990), 355, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/All-Scripture-Is-Inspired-of-God-and-Beneficial/Study-Number-7-The-Bible-in-Modern-Times/>.

² *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Twentieth Century*, 9.

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?

First, it was 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 five continents. In 1955, there were 77 branch offices of the Watch Tower Society in different lands.²

Second, 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.

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 second, 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).³

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.

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!*, 121.

² *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 101.

³ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 106-07.

On June 22, 1977, 83-year-old **Frederick William Franz** (1893–1992) was selected as president of the Watch Tower Society.

F. W. Franz was born in Covington, Kentucky, U.S.A., on September 12, 1893. In 1899, his family moved to Cincinnati, where Franz 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. 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 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 1914, he left the university and immediately made arrangements to become a colporteur (full-time evangelizer).

On June 1, 1920, he started working at the headquarters of the Watch Tower Society in Brooklyn, New York. 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 N. H. Knorr was an excellent and energetic organizer, then F. W. 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 *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, an audio\video recording department was formed at Jehovah's Witnesses' world headquarters.

F. W. 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, M. G. 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 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.

With eastern Europe undergoing global political changes, accompanied by the fall of communist regimes, Jehovah's Witnesses began receiving official recognition and registration in the Eastern Bloc countries (Romania, East Germany, Hungary, Poland) and then in the former Soviet Union, which meant that more literature, more church buildings, and training programs were required for believers in these countries.

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 have their own website. At the same time, a Public Affairs Office (now, Office of Public Information) 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.

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

After the death of M. G. 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 Watch Tower Society now serves just a legal function.

On January 1, 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses made a significant adjustment to their weekly meeting schedule. 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. Later in the book, I will write more about the efforts Jehovah's Witnesses devote to strengthening the institution of family and marriage.

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 location. Earlier, in July 2009, Jehovah's Witnesses had purchased a 102-hectare (252 acre) property near Warwick, New York, with the purpose of moving their world headquarters there.

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 their buildings in Brooklyn, New York, since 1909.

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 year.¹ In addition, *Awake!* now features only one topic per issue 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 2021, *Awake!* was translated into 214 languages and *The Watchtower* (public edition) into 418 languages.

Second, this allowed the organization to invest the savings into the development of their own website. Since 2013, some of the content previously featured in the magazines now appears only on their official website jw.org. The website is incredibly popular with believers. It contains both print publications and quizzes, activities for children and teens, tips for families (and for a happy marriage), news about global activities, songs, and a huge number of videos and films. The availability of content in more than 1,000 languages makes it "global" in the fullest sense.

¹ The study edition of *The Watchtower*, i.e., for internal use, remains a monthly publication.

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. In fact, this means that they now have their own Internet television station with regular broadcasting all over the world.

The same year, they launched the Watchtower Online Library website (wol.jw.org), which stores publications published by the organization over the past years. Publications are available in Russian dating from the 1980s, in English from the 1950s, and in Uzbek from 1997.

Third, Jehovah's Witnesses began developing applications for mobile electronic devices. In 2014, they released the JW Library 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 videos. The 2019 Annual Meeting announced the purchase and construction of a separate complex in Ramapo, New York, U.S.A., which will focus on audio and video production. Construction was scheduled to start in 2022 and to finish by December 2026.

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 graphics, 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. In 2020, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was released in another 33 languages. Thus, as of December 31, 2020, the *New World Translation* of the Bible has been published and is now available in both print and electronic versions, in whole or in part in 195 languages. In 2021, Jehovah's Witnesses announced that they plan to release the Bible in whole or in part in 36 more languages.

Technology is changing the world rapidly, and it seems that Jehovah's Witnesses are well aware of this. This helps them not to slow down their growth rates, despite the pandemic that gripped the world in 2020. I would like to dwell on this especially.

In March 2020, all religious halls of Jehovah's Witnesses were closed and all services were transferred to online format. The Witnesses actively used "Zoom" (a software) to conduct their meetings. Also, through the official website of the organization (jw.org), believers were regularly reminded of the need to comply with all quarantine and sanitary measures. For example, a video was even released in the form of a whiteboard animation called *Virus Outbreaks—What You Can Do*, which reminded the listeners about the main principles of protection against coronavirus. Almost every month, members of the Governing Body spoke to believers about the situation of their fellow believers around the world and the importance of continuing to follow all government directives and quarantine restrictions.

It is especially noteworthy that believers were called upon to support the requirements of the state and comply with all restrictive measures imposed by the authorities during this period. And even more impressively, their door-to-door and public ministry was suspended for the duration of the pandemic. This was a landmark in the history of the organization; nothing like it had ever happened before. Their annual assemblies were no exception. As the Witnesses themselves wrote: "Breaking the age-old tradition, for the health and safety of

citizens, the worldwide religious organization, which hosts some of the largest public events in the world, will hold annual assemblies in a virtual format for the second year in a row, canceling almost 6,000 assemblies in 240 countries around the world.”¹

And thanks to the development of modern technology, Jehovah's Witnesses were able to hold their annual conventions in 2020, 2021, and 2022 as a worldwide virtual event in 240 countries in more than 500 languages.

There was no entanglement with the issue of vaccination among believers. The main page of their official website even featured an article entitled “Are Jehovah's Witnesses Opposed to Vaccination?” Among other things, it read:

No. Jehovah's Witnesses are not opposed to vaccination. We view vaccination as a personal decision for each Christian to make. Many of Jehovah's Witnesses choose to get vaccinated.

We seek quality medical care and appreciate the many advancements of medical science to reduce the risk of serious illness. We are grateful for the commitment and dedication of health-care professionals, especially in times of crises.

Jehovah's Witnesses cooperate with public health officials. For example, since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Jehovah's Witnesses have continued to publish reminders in hundreds of languages on this website, encouraging adherence to local safety guidelines. These include the importance of physical distancing and of following regulations on public gatherings, quarantining, hand washing, and the wearing of face coverings as well as other practical measures required or recommended by the authorities.—Romans 13:1, 2.²

¹ Regional Religious Association Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses, “United by Faith,” press release [in Russian], 30 June 2021, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

² “Are Jehovah's Witnesses Opposed to Vaccination?” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-vaccines-immunization/>.

On October 15, 2021, the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses announced that meetings in Kingdom Halls would be experimentally resumed in some countries (those with high vaccination rates and low incidence of disease). On April 1, 2022, Jehovah's Witnesses resumed holding in-person meetings; and starting September 1, 2022, resumed the door-to-door preaching activity, which has become the "calling card" of believers, was announced.

As a summary of this chapter, I would like to relate my view of the main stages in the development of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses.

One of the leading Russian experts on Jehovah's Witnesses, a well-known and respected religious scholar, Professor S. I. Ivanenko, proposed to highlight five main stages in the history of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses; and I agree with him, except that I see these stages a little differently, and I propose the following periodization:

The first stage (1870–1879) involves the activities of the Bible Study group of C. T. Russell and his associates. At this stage, the basic approaches to the study of the Bible and the formation of their own faiths were laid. It ended when C. T. Russell realized the need to share his research with the public.

The second stage (1879–mid-1920s) involves the forming of the Bible Students as an independent religious movement with its own printery, its own legal entity, branches abroad, regular religious meetings, a program of religious worship and training, and its own formalized creed. This stage culminated in the relocation of the headquarters of the society to New York.

The third stage (1909–1943) is the time of test; an internal structure (centralization) was formed, and, one might say, the movement took shape as a large international religious organization. This phase culminated in the opening of the Gilead School to train missionaries who would later serve in various parts of the world.

The fourth stage (1943–2011) is the stage of rapid international growth and internal learning. It ended in 2011 when the purpose of the School of Gilead was changed from preparing missionaries to preach around the world to preparing missionaries to strengthen existing congregations.

The fifth stage (2011–present) is the stage of active internal strengthening of congregations, implementing changes in holding meetings, and running branches. The growth of the organization continues. Researchers, I think, will be able to give a more accurate description of this stage only in years to come.

I surely do not insist on the proposed division to be surpassingly accurate, since I well understand that any such division is very subjective and, in essence, only formal. Life is like a river, and the rapids are not always clearly visible. Each researcher can find his key dates, events, and boundary points, and therefore propose his own milestones.

I want to note that there are features of the organization that are present and clearly seen throughout all the stages of its history. I am referring to the following:

(1) Continual refinement of beliefs. Even C. T. Russell had noted in his writings that a gradually increasing understanding of the Bible is evidence of God's affection for believers. Therefore, every Jehovah's Witness strives to be a good researcher, trying not only to know the doctrines, but also understand the reasoning behind them and find their confirmation in the Bible.

(2) An active desire to share Bible knowledge with others. This is perhaps the most famous difference between Jehovah's Witnesses and other religions. The organization has tried numerous methods in the past to accomplish this goal: newspapers, book distribution, photo-drama, movies, radio, cars with horns, marches with posters, public speaking, international tours, missionaries, and now—the Internet, interactive courses, and carts with literature. . . . In defense of believers, I just want to say that they indeed, like no other religious group, follow

the example of the first Christians who brought the teachings of Christ to the most remote parts of the Roman Empire. Yes, and Jehovah's Witnesses know well the difference between preaching and intruding. Over the past 100 years, they have accumulated invaluable experience in how to start and conduct conversations without hurting the feelings and beliefs of others, showing respect and tact. It is now a part of their educational program. And this is also commendable. In recent years, I hear more and more from them that their current goal is to "search" for those who are interested in their message and not to persuade and argue with those who value their own views.

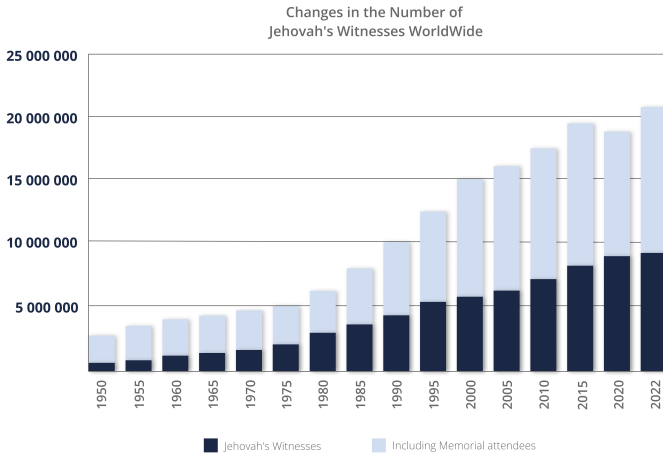
(3) The unquestioned authority of the Bible. It is also the only authority. All other religious literature does not belong to "divinely inspired" and may be out of date and contain errors.

And, probably, (4) a unified training program around the world. This is an important feature because it allows them to maintain the literal unity of such a large organization.

So, what have Jehovah's Witnesses achieved so far? By 2022, their number has reached a peak of 8,686,980 people united in 119,297 congregations located in 239 countries and territories. At their annual observation of the Memorial of Christ's death in 2021, there were 21,367,603 in attendance.

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, annually joined by 200,000 new members around the world.

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 numbers, 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.



So, having been organized about 150 years ago (young for a religion), Jehovah's Witnesses today constitute an internationally recognized and respected religious organization with a well-established doctrine, religious practice, and a harmonious organizational structure. However, work on improvement of the ideology and religious practice continues.



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

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 and a group of Bible Students in Copenhagen, **Denmark, 1909**



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 Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania

- **Year 1881**

Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society
was formed

- **Year 1884**

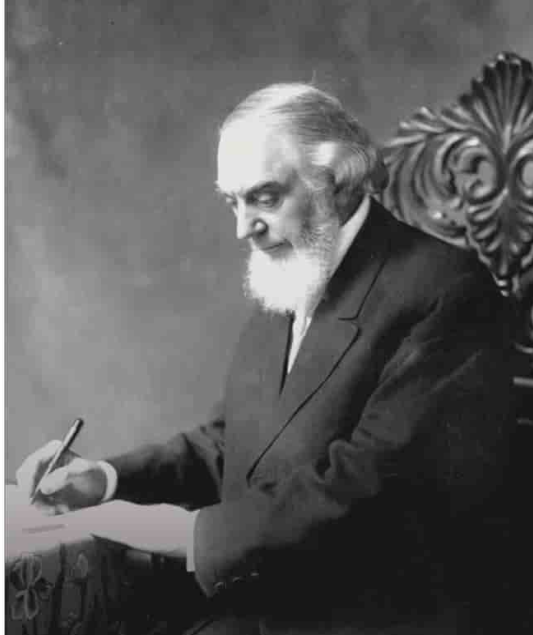
Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society
was legally incorporated in the state
of Pennsylvania

- **Year 1896**

Its name was changed to Watch Tower
Bible and Tract Society

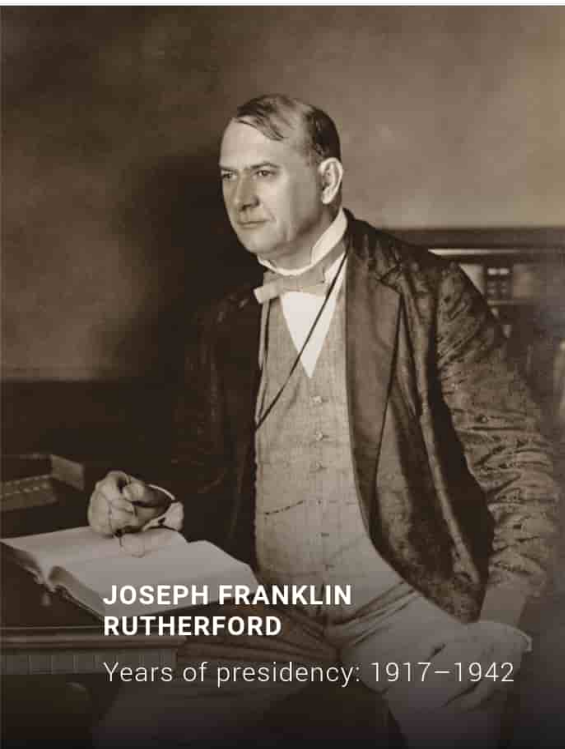
- **Since 1955,**

it has been known as the Watch Tower
Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania



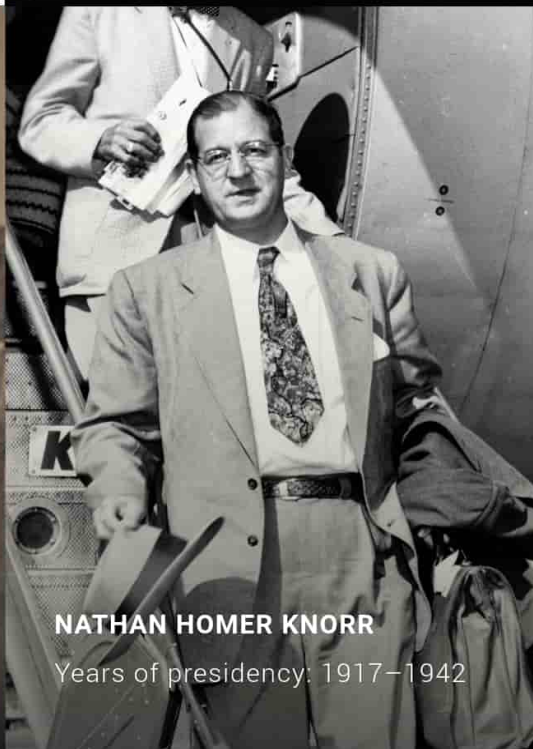
CHARLES TAZE RUSSELL

Years of presidency: 1884–1916



**JOSEPH FRANKLIN
RUTHERFORD**

Years of presidency: 1917–1942



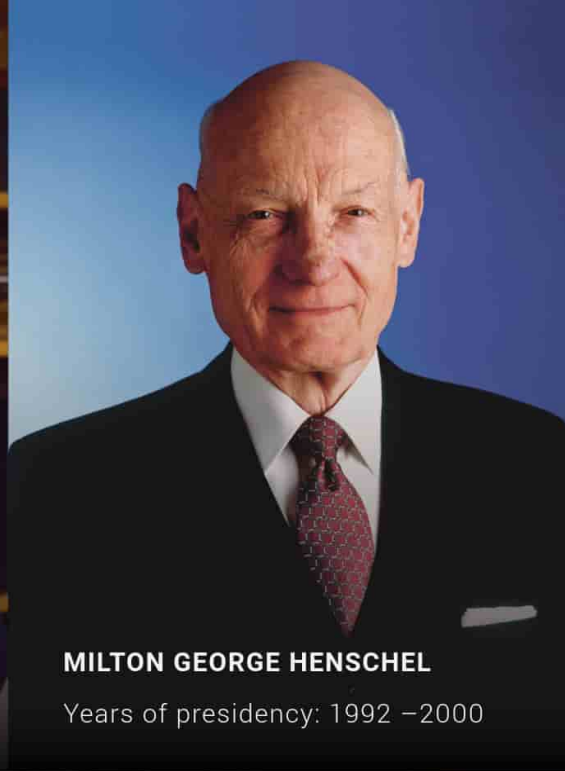
NATHAN HOMER KNORR

Years of presidency: 1917–1942



FREDERICK WILLIAM FRANZ

Years of presidency: 1977–1992



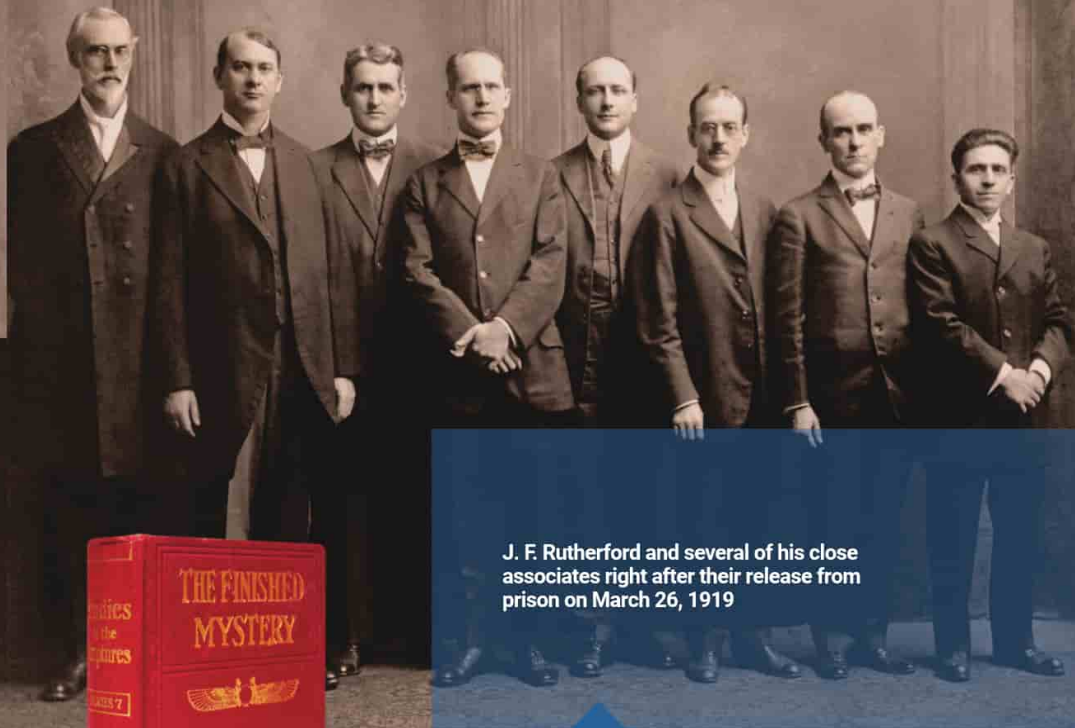
MILTON GEORGE HENSCHEL

Years of presidency: 1992 –2000

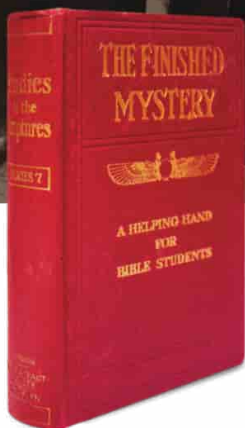


THE MODERN GOVERNING BODY

Left to right: Kenneth Cook, Gerrit Lösch, Geoffrey Jackson, Samuel Herd, Mark Sanderson, David Splane, Anthony Morris, Stephen Lett

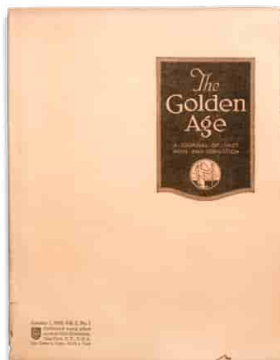


J. F. Rutherford and several of his close associates right after their release from prison on March 26, 1919



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



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"

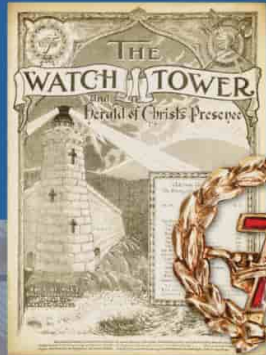


The Historical Convention

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".

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 convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 1920's
(Germany)



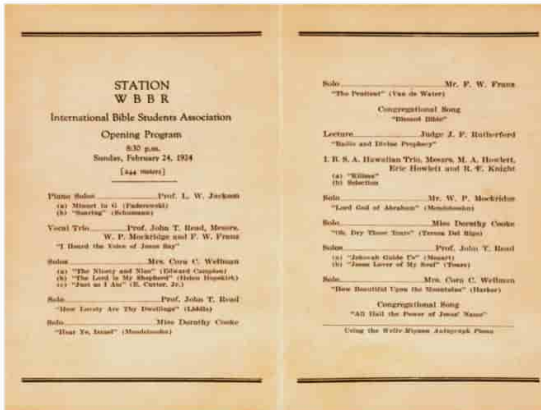


On February 24, 1924,

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

408 stations

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



WBBR radio station (1924-1957)



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



1,600 died

Out of 6,000 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses, 1,600 died during the Nazi period

282 executed

282 Jehovah's Witnesses were executed for refusing to perform military service

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



Wewelsburg



Mauthausen



Jehovah's Witnesses

were imprisoned for behavior stemming from their religious beliefs. In the Auschwitz camp, at least **138 people** were registered under this category, mainly of German nationality

Memorial plaque
in remembrance
of August Dickmann



WIR ERINNERN AN
AUGUST DICKMANN (GEB. 1910),
DEN DIE SS AM 15. SEPTEMBER 1939
ALS WEHRDIENSTVERWEIGERER
ÖFFENTLICH ERSCHIESSEN LIESS.

DIE RELIGIONSGEMEINSCHAFT
JEHOVAS ZEUGEN

WE REMEMBER
AUGUST DICKMANN (BORN 1910),
ONE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES,
WHO WAS PUBLICLY SHOT BY
THE SS ON SEPTEMBER 15, 1939,
BECAUSE OF CONCIENTIOUS OBJECTION.

SOURCE: «WWW.AUSCHWITZ.ORG»

August Dieckmann, a Jehovah's Witness,
was **executed** for his faith in the
Sachsenhausen concentration camp

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



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES OFFICIAL WEBSITE JW.ORG

JW .ORG

In 1997

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 available in **1000** languages, securing its position as the most translated website in the world



JW.ORG website sections



Bible Questions Answered



Peace & Happiness



Faith in God



Marriage & Family



Help for Teenagers



Activities for Children



Science & the Bible



History & the Bible



Frequently Asked Questions

In 2014

the Witnesses announced the launch of their own Internet television station

In 2015

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

In 2016 alone

350 different videos were produced, almost one video per day



JW Broadcasting TV-studio
Film production studio
of Jehovah's Witnesses



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



Victories in the Supreme Court

In Uzbekistan, the Supreme Court issued **6 decisions** in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2018 and 2019 alone

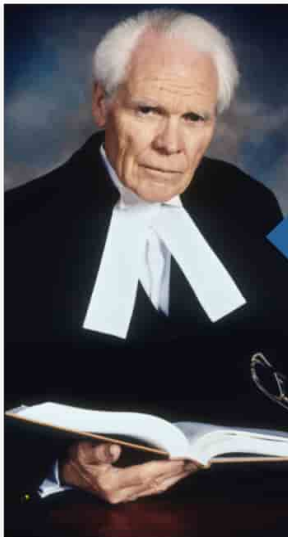
To date, about 50 decisions of the US Supreme Court and 63 decisions of the European Court of Human Rights have been handed down in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses

"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)

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



Courtesy of Canada Wide

Violence frequently greets controversial Witnesses of Jehovah when they march. Held back by police officers, threaten Witnesses of Jehovah. (R). See's most mentioned background in the

CHAPTER 2

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN UZBEKISTAN— HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

To me, Uzbekistan is not just a strikingly beautiful country and culture, with an incredible variety of patterns, colors, and smells. In all the diversity of Uzbek culture, I see an indestructible and incredibly bright force of life, a joyful and enchanting power of goodness and light.

Wonderful bright ornaments and patterns remind us that the beauty of life is in its magnificent diversity. Human society is quite similar to that. There is a special beauty and strength of life in diversity of races and cultures. We should not isolate each other by raising fences and separating ourselves from the outside world; on the contrary, we all need to strive to expand, develop, and learn from each other, adopting all that is most beautiful and beneficial. And just as every person has something unique, something in which he excels, so every culture on earth has something uniquely beautiful that is worth learning and imitating.

Uzbekistan offers the brightest palette of various cultures and religions, and I believe that it is the duty of every scientist to try to capture it for present and future generations.

This book aims to shed light on the history of the Christian communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan from a new angle. For a number of reasons, this Christian denomination is mostly unfamiliar to religious science society and has been scarcely described by Uzbek scholars. So, even the *History of Religions* textbook, edited

by the respected religious scholar Professor Anvar Ishankhanovich Abdusamedov, provides only the following information about this denomination:

The Jehovah's Witnesses movement appeared in the USA (New York City) in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. . . . One of its main goals is to increase the number of its followers by establishing missionary activity. To this end, they are engaged in distribution of literature, which reflects their ideological direction, and missionary activity, going from house to house. . . . Jehovah's Witnesses interpret the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in their own way. That is, "they promote the idea that Jehovah is God, Jesus is the only person created by Jehovah, while other people were created by Jesus Christ." Their main holiday is the commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ. . . . One organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is officially registered in our Republic.¹

A very short description indeed. I believe that this religion, which has been present in the country for more than 70 years, is worthy of an independent additional study.

I want to note right away that my research and findings allow me to call Jehovah's Witnesses a "historically present"² religion in the country.

The history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan is an extremely interesting topic that is just opening up for research. Since access to archival data from the Soviet years is still restricted, only fragments of Soviet Uzbekistan's religious palette are available to us.

But we know for sure that the religious picture of this part of the world has always been extremely diverse. And how could it be otherwise in the land of the Great Silk Road, which along with transporting exotic goods, was used by ancient merchants and travelers to bring new views

¹ Anvar I. Abdusamedov, *Dinlar Tarihi (History of Religions)* [in Russian] (Tashkent: National University of Uzbekistan, 2010), 58.

² I use this term to show that this denomination, although it does not have a centuries-old history in the country, however, did not appear only in the 1990s. Its followers have been living and working in Uzbek society for several generations. And I think that they have historically earned the right to be recognized and respected.

and beliefs? All the world religions have a very long and rich history in Uzbekistan.

Since the end of the 19th century, after the lands of Uzbekistan were joined to the Russian Empire, a new chapter began in the religious history of the region. Settlers rushed here in huge numbers, some of them traveling to these parts under the auspices of the imperial government, while others fled here in search of freedom and peace.

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.

The Orthodox Church tried to suppress resistance. Dissidents were violently persecuted and had to flee to Siberia or Eastern Kazakhstan. Among them were those who fled further south, to the Turkestan region, where they would establish small towns.

By the way, the very beginning of the spread of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses (then known as Bible Students) in Central Asia dates back to the end of the 19th century.

The first followers of the doctrine appeared in Tsarist Russia, under the reign of the Russian Emperor Alexander III. 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 Watch Tower Society there.

Having returned to Russia, Kozlitsky boldly began to preach the ideas of the Bible Students, for which he was tried in 1891 and 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, and who could speak several languages, zealously preached the new teachings he had learned, gathering around him a group of students and followers.

Even in Soviet times, Uzbek researchers of religious movements of the Turkestan region noted “the historical continuity of modern Christian sectarianism” and wrote that it was “the accession of Central Asia to Russia in the 60-80s of the 19th century that created specific conditions for emergence of Christian sects in Turkestan.”¹

It is still impossible for me to say exactly when the first Jehovah's Witnesses moved to Uzbekistan. And I believe that now it would be hasty to name any date as the beginning of their residence in this region as it requires deep digging into their local history. And that is not as simple as it might seem at first.

Thus, for example, the Soviet researcher of sectarianism in Uzbekistan Nella Khristianovna Kolemasova in her work entitled *Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan* noted: “In the ‘20s, Uzbekistan was a region, which along with Islam and Russian Orthodox Church, to a greater or lesser extent was represented by associations of Baptists, Evangelicals (Evangelical Christians), Seventh-Day Adventists, Adventists-Reformists, Evangelical Christians (Pentecostals), *Jehovists*, Mennonites, Molokan Spiritual Christians, Molokan Jumpers, New Israel, Christovers, Dukhobors.”²

Unfortunately, she does not specify whether she refers to Jehovists-Ilyints or Jehovah's Witnesses. But it should be noted that Nella Khristianovna perfectly distinguished between these two different religious groups, and in her works, she called the followers of the Desnoy Brotherhood “Jehovists-Ilyints.” And, in my opinion, she refers here to the “Jehovists-Ilyints,” but I can't presume to assert this, since the sources used by the researcher are not available to me.³

It is even more intriguing to learn that N. Kh. Kolemasova in her writings quite clearly points to the exact years when certain Christian

¹ Nella Kh. Kolemasova, *Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan* (Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1986), 6.

² Nella Kh. Kolemasova, *Crisis Phenomena of Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan* (Tashkent: Island “Znaniye” of the Uzbek SSR, 1981), 10.

³ During those years the first Jehovah's Witnesses (then known as Bible Students) already resided in Kazakhstan. Bible Student Semyon Kozlitsky (Karpov), together with his family, was exiled to East Kazakhstan in 1891 or 1892.

sects appeared in the country. But, when it comes to Jehovah's Witnesses, she simply states their presence and activity in Soviet Uzbekistan.

N. Ch. Knauer, another Uzbek researcher of the history of Christianity in Central Asia, in his article "Christian Sects in Turkestan," wrote that "the appearance of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Asia most likely dates back to 1939."¹ Unfortunately, the author of the article does not provide any facts, documents, or specific names of places. It looks like this is just his assumption, and his choice of 1939 remains incomprehensible. It is, however, possible that according to the author's reasoning, the capture of the Western regions of Ukraine and Belarus by the USSR led to the deportation to Central Asia of hundreds of families of Jehovah's Witnesses living there. We find his commentary notable, since the author has no doubts about the rather long history of this denomination in Central Asia.

The next possible period for occurrence of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country could be the years of mass evacuation of western regions of the USSR during the World War II.

According to N. Kh. Kolemasova, "from the summer of 1941 to December 1942 alone, 786,866 people were evacuated to Uzbekistan."² If we recall Kazakhstan, it was at the beginning of the war that Jehovah's Witnesses from Ukraine were evicted to the central part of the country, to the city of Karaganda. However, again, I do not have any specific data on the expulsion of Jehovah's Witnesses to Uzbekistan.

Indeed, the widespread dissemination of the teachings and creation of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in neighboring Kazakhstan falls in the 1940-50s, that is, just before and after World War II.

All this is connected, among other things, with the tragic history of the former Soviet Union peoples, mass repressions, violation of rights and freedoms of citizens during the years of Soviet totalitarianism.

¹ N. Ch. Knauer, *Christian Sects in Turkestan: On the History of Christianity in Central Asia* (Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1998), 248.

² Kolemasova, *Crisis Phenomena*, 12.

So far I have expressed only assumptions, correctness of which can be only confirmed or refuted by time and succeeding researchers, who will hopefully have access to the state archives.

Therefore, I will move on to the facts known to me about the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan.

And the first fact that I discovered dates back to 1955.

While working on the book about Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan, I worked a great deal with archival criminal cases of believers. Now they are available to the researchers, and besides, the believers convicted in those years have long been rehabilitated and are now recognized as innocently convicted victims of political repression.

The Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty also provided valuable assistance in searching for historical documents. It turned out that this denomination has been scrupulously collecting historical records and materials about the history of their fellow believers for many years. And I was pleasantly surprised when I was granted access to these materials. I am stating this as a hint for future researchers of this topic. Do not be too hesitant to ask for help from the believers themselves. They can share extremely useful and rare historical materials with you.

This is exactly what happened to me. Back then, I worked on the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in South Kazakhstan and discovered the news articles, which dated as early as September 10-12, 1957, about a high-profile trial which took place in Uzbekistan pertaining to two Christian women, Jehovah's Witnesses, Serafima Vlasovna Yanushina and Ekaterina Filippovna Kobzar.

Serafima Yanushina was born in 1907 in the city of Baku (Azerbaijan). She met Jehovah's Witnesses in 1945 while working in the Kuibyshev region. She was considered literate.

Ekaterina Kobzar was born in 1912 in the Kuibyshev region, and in 1945, she also met Jehovah's Witnesses there. She came from a "kulak family" or peasant-landowning family and was even a member of the Communist Party for some time in the 1930s. True, when the

authorities found out about her parents, she was expelled from the Party for “wrong social origin.” It seems that of the two women, it was Ekaterina who was the most educated, active, and courageous.

We also know that in 1947 and 1948, both Serafima and Ekaterina were convicted for their faith and sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment in labor camps by the Kuibyshev Regional Court based on Articles 58-10 and 58-11 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic). They were imprisoned in the infamous KarLag (Karaganda camp).

Let me explain which articles of the Criminal Code we are talking about. *Article 58-10.* Propaganda or agitation, containing a call for the overthrow, subversion, or weakening of Soviet authority or for the carrying out of other counterrevolutionary crimes (Arts. 58-2 to 58-9 of this Code), and likewise the distribution or preparation or keeping of literature of this nature shall be punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term not less than six months.

The same actions during mass disturbances, or with the use of religious or nationalist prejudices of the masses, or in a war situation, or in areas proclaimed to be in a war situation, shall be punishable by measures of social defense, indicated in Art. 58-2 of this Code.

Article 58-11. Any type of organizational activity, directed toward the preparation or carrying out of crimes indicated in this chapter, and likewise participation in an organization, formed for the preparation or carrying out of one of the crimes indicated in this chapter, shall be punishable by measures of social defense, indicated in the corresponding articles of this Code.¹

In 1955,² these women were released from prison early. After their release, they decided to move to the very south of the USSR. I find

¹ Code of Criminal Procedure of the RSFSR, Art. 58, <http://www.cyberussr.com/rus/uk58-e.html#58-10>.

² As a matter of fact, after the death of Stalin in 1953, the Supreme Court of the USSR and the prosecutor’s office received more power and authority to review previously adopted court decisions. This led to a reduction of prison terms and the release of many citizens.

this decision rather strange. In those years, many believers were being liberated. Some of them went back to their native lands, to Ukraine and Moldova, and some decided to stay at the place of liberation. That is how large communities of Jehovah's Witnesses appeared in Kazakhstan. But never before have I come across information that, after being released, someone decided to leave their fellow believers and move so far to the south.

It is also strange that they chose not the capital of the Uzbek SSR, the large and beautiful city of Tashkent, and not one of the major cities of the Republic, but the distant Jarkurgan district of the Surkhan-Darya region, located on the border with Afghanistan, as the place of their new residence. It is much easier to blend into the crowd in big cities and surrounding areas, where the risk of being detained is much lower than in sparsely populated areas.

Could the reason be that their fellow believers already resided in large cities and they decided to go to places where no one had yet heard of Jehovah's Witnesses? After all, it is well known that the desire to share with others their newly acquired faith has always distinguished Jehovah's Witnesses from other Christian denominations. It is their hallmark.

This can be confirmed by the fact that the criminal case materials of 1957 on Jehovah's Witnesses of Kazakhstan contain documents of the believers themselves about the locations of "strefs" (groups of believers) in parts of Russia and Central Asia in 1955. There is an indication that among approximately 40 such groups, one of them was located in the Tashkent region, the city of Angren, Novaya Privokzalnaya Street, Uzbek SSR.

In Jarkurgan, both women got jobs at the kindergarten of the local Machine and Tractor Station (MTS). Serafima worked there as a watchman, and Ekaterina was a laundress.

They were arrested after refusing to vote in local political elections on May 3, 1957. At the time, such a refusal was akin to signing a death warrant. To say the very least, this could lead to dismissal from work,

which deprived a person of a livelihood; and, in a worst-case scenario, such actions could draw the attention of the USSR State Security Committee, which could lead to a long term in labor camps.

According to my observations, it was these believers' refusal to participate in political life that was often the first "spark" or, as they now say, the "trigger" that initiated further persecution. This was especially true in the 1940s and 1950s, when the religious activity of a believer and his conversations with others about his faith, along with printing and distribution of religious literature, were, for the most part, a "formal basis" for applying harsh criminal sentences to dissidents.

Very often, when studying criminal case files of the 1950s, I saw that, at first, a believer refused to participate in political life, and only then law enforcement would start collecting materials for an indictment. (The case would be bolstered with testimonies of alleged witnesses, examination of seized literature, etc.)

And here I would like to dwell on what prompted Jehovah's Witnesses, who clearly realized all this, to hold on to their position of political neutrality. There were cases when believers tried to leave their place of residence for the period of elections in order to stay out of trouble. But if they could not avoid the situation, then they openly and explicitly defended their position, explaining to officials that this was not disrespect or disobedience to state authorities. It was something else. It was their religious understanding of "devotion to God."

The neutral position of Jehovah's Witnesses is not limited to only one country. It distinguishes all of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. And in almost every country, this has caused certain difficulties for them. I already gave examples of this in the first chapter of the book. But it is also true that, sooner or later, the state becomes convinced of the "harmlessness" of this position in relation to society and political institutions and recognizes the right of believers to be "politically neutral." It is true even for the USSR, where at first, the authorities stopped throwing believers into camps for their neutrality; and then

years later, in the second half of the 1980s, the authorities even stopped paying attention to the refusal of believers to vote in elections.

In their testimonies to the investigator, the two women openly stated that they were members of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, but its activities were not of an anti-state or anti-Soviet nature.

However, they were each sentenced to 25 years in labor camps. They were convicted for the storage and production (copying by hand) of religious literature, as well as for active religious activity, which had been expressed in "distribution of literature and reading excerpts from it to the residents of the region."

On October 10, 1957, the Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court of the Uzbek SSR, having considered the cassation complaints of these women, reduced the terms to seven years for Serafima Yanushina and to eight years for Ekaterina Kobzar. The court explained that the age of the convicts, their poor health, and the fact that they were not leaders of a religious organization were taken into consideration.

Then in 1957, the USSR KGB (Committee for State Security) uncovered an entire network of communities of Jehovah's Witnesses living in Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

The trials were widely covered in newspapers. Thus, for example, the major newspaper *Uzhnyi Kazakhstan* [South Kazakhstan] published a large article entitled "Jehovah's Daughter," dedicated to Maria Kirillina, who lived in the city of Lenger (near Shymkent). She actively maintained correspondence and regular contacts with her fellow believers, Serafima Yanushina and Ekaterina Kobzar, who lived in the Jarkurgan region.

In order to better understand the reasons for the behavior of these two courageous women, Serafima Yanushina and Ekaterina Kobzar, we need to take a short excursion to see how Jehovah's Witnesses ended up in such large numbers in the USSR.

The fact is that having become widespread in Europe in the beginning of the 20th century, the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses also began to spread rapidly in countries and territories bordering the USSR, such as

Poland, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia; and large communities of believers appeared in Western Ukraine and Moldova.

In 1961, the book *Religion in the Soviet Union* by Walter Kolarz was released in English.¹ 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, I mentioned in the previous chapter that the Watch Tower 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, it was not just congregations or families of believers that appeared in the USSR but also large organized groups. However, they were not legally registered in the USSR at that time.

Also, according to Kolarz, "unbelievable as it may sound," further increase of believers 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."² Also, in concentration camps they kept on preaching and finding followers of their teachings. For example, in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, 300 people from Russia became Jehovah's Witnesses.³ As a result, many young Russians from these camps

¹ Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 338–44.

² *Ibid.*, 340.

³ Sergey I. Ivanenko, *The People Who Are Never Without Their Bibles* [in Russian] (Moscow: Art-Business Center, 1999), 39.

returned to the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan, as well, with a newfound faith in Jehovah God.

When the Great Patriotic War ended and the Cold War with the West began, the State needed an internal enemy to unleash a new round of political repression upon 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, became the most convenient targets 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 master their subordinates.

The darkest chapter in the struggle of the Soviet state with Jehovah's Witnesses is associated with two operations of deportation of believers from the western territories of the USSR to Siberia and Central Asia.

During the first operation, which took place in 1949, hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses were deported to Siberia and central Kazakhstan.

In 1951, a second, larger-scale operation called "North" took place.

This is how this operation is described on the official website <https://1951deport.org/>:

Operation North was the forced eviction of Jehovah's Witnesses from the Belorussian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Ukrainian, and Estonian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Over two days in April 1951, Jehovah's Witnesses' houses were confiscated and 9,793 people—men, women, elderly ones, and children—were deported under harsh and inhumane conditions to Siberia and scattered in special settlements in the Tomsk and Irkutsk Regions and Krasnoyarsk Territory. The decision to deport them was personally approved by Joseph Stalin.

Several waves of deportations took place in Stalin's time. About 10 nationalities were subjected to total deportation, and other citizens were selectively deported on ethnic, social, political, and religious grounds. Operation North was unique in that it was the biggest total deportation of members of one religion, as the Soviet authorities

tried to evict Jehovah's Witnesses with their families from the areas in which they lived.¹

In 2021, a large scientific and practical conference "70 Years after Operation 'North': Important Lessons of Repression for Faith" was held in Kyiv (Ukraine), where religious scholars from all over the world shared their research on this mass deportation of believers in the USSR.

Thus, the president of the Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies Professor Anatoly Kolodny, PhD, noted: "Operation North of April 1951 is one of the shameful pages in the history of the Soviet era. Thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses were evicted from Ukraine and other western regions of the USSR for their faith without a court order and the opportunity to challenge their eviction, simply according to pre-compiled lists of the MGB (Ministry of State Security). This crime, like all other crimes against humanity, calls for a comprehensive study and a clear moral and legal assessment."²

Here are just two historical documents testifying to that terrible tragedy.³

¹"70th Anniversary of Operation North," 70th Anniversary of Operation North website, <https://1951deport.org/ru/why/>.

²"70 Years after Operation 'North': Important Lessons of Repression for Faith," proceedings of online conference (Ukrainian Association of Religious Studies (UAR), 2021), 6.

³ Valerii I. Pasat, *Difficult Pages of History of Moldova, 1940–1950* [in Russian] (Moscow: Terra, 1994), 612–15.

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 Abakumov to Stalin, February 19, 1951, 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 USSR Council of Ministers resolution, February 1951, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. Fund 3, List 58, Dossier 180, Sheets 54–56.

Two very interesting and important details for our study were noted by the historian/researcher of this operation, Konstantin Berezhko. To the question “Did believers have the opportunity to avoid deportation?,” he gives the following answer:

Yes, they did have such opportunity, a few of them. This fact is decisive and unique in comparison with other Soviet deportations. Unlike political prisoners, the Witnesses had a real opportunity to avoid deportation not once but twice. First, many Witnesses knew beforehand about their deportation, but still stayed at home that day. Second, most Witnesses were given the opportunity to renounce their faith and stay home. There was no special refusal form, but often the leaders of the groups, on their own initiative, offered to sign a renunciation of the faith. Such cases were not uncommon during the operation in Ukraine. If the family agreed, it was entered into a category that had converted to another faith at the time of eviction, and such a family was not evicted. We do not know all the details of the operation, but we know that in the Drobych region (which became part of the Lviv region in 1959), 5 families remained untouched for this reason. This is a single occasion that I am aware of throughout the entire Ukraine and other republics of the USSR. The very existence of such an alternative suggests that the authorities subconsciously understood: these people are not criminals.¹

So the first important factor a researcher must bear in mind when studying this religious group is the immense impact these religious beliefs have on the believer. To the believer, these are not just beliefs; but are an entrenched part of his personality, of his being.

Remember the actions of Yanushina and Kobzar in the Jarkurgan region of Uzbekistan, and compare it with the behavior of their fellow believers during the deportation. For the sake of their convictions, these people were willing to go to camps and to be deported to Siberia.

¹ “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 23.

This vital detail is noted by all researchers of the history of this religious denomination. Here, for example, are the observations of Tomasz Bugaj, D Hum, associate professor at the Institute of Cultural Studies at the Silesian University in Katowice (Poland):

I studied the topic of repression of Jehovah's Witnesses when I was preparing my doctoral thesis at a Polish university. My trips to Russia took place over the course of five years, until 2016. And when Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in early 2017, I stopped going there, interviewing and collecting documents. But the Polish university funded this research. I received a one-year scholarship and two grants, two prizes, to research the types of repression and trauma these people endured. . . .

. . . Moral and ethical values have always remained unchanged in the lives of my interlocutors. They didn't even consider making a compromise. Their consciences did not allow them to give up their convictions just for the sake of food, housing or better working conditions. They were given the opportunity to start cooperating with the authorities, but even under extremely harsh conditions they did not go for it. . . .

. . . The behavior of Jehovah's Witnesses did not go unnoticed. It influenced others and impressed those who watched them. I had the opportunity to interview people from . . . Riga and Lviv who were sent to the GULAG (Siberia) as freedom fighters (as they defined themselves)—they fought for the freedom of their country. In the camp or in the place of exile they met Jehovah's Witnesses and said that the behavior of these people was different from other prisoners in the camp. The Witnesses helped each other and other prisoners, shared food and parcels. They had some kind of inner core principles that they tried to adhere to. This made a deep impression on people, so that over time some of them accepted the same principles, and even in camps, where it was strictly forbidden and seemed almost impossible, they got baptized and were released as members of this religion. . .

. . . Absolute adherence to Biblical principles, protection of human values and loyalty to convictions were a challenge and resistance to the totalitarian regime of that time. All this was so unique in the camp and in exile that it always attracted the attention of others. As a result, this small group stood out distinctly from other prisoners. The heroic and altruistic attitude of the believers was also long remembered by those who were their opponents at that time.¹

My 30 years of experience in studying the communities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Asia fully confirm these words of the researcher.

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, Anatolii 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.*²

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 its very first steps, Jehovahism began to peculiarly interpret scientific data, relying on it in justifying its ideas, that is, resolutely rejecting the anachronisms

¹ "70 Years after Operation 'North,'" 27, 29–31.

² Anatolii V. Belov, *Sects, Sectarianism, Sectarians* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 63–64.

that nest in other Christian movements, and immediately claimed to become a fundamentally new teaching among other Christian teachings.¹

The second important detail, emphasized by Konstantin Berezhko, was that “the authorities subconsciously understood: these people are not criminals.”²

Here is how the former KGB investigator A. I. Spragovsky wrote about this in his memoirs *Notes of a KGB Investigator*: “With regards to Jehovah’s sectarians, I feel that there were excesses in assessing their public danger. But this is how their actions were considered by ideologists, and the investigative apparatus was set tasks accordingly.”³

Jehovah’s Witnesses did not resist during the arrests and did not engage in anti-state activities. Even during the mentioned Operation North in 1951, there was no resistance. Here is how Dr. Emily Baran, associate professor and chair of the Department of History at Middle Tennessee State University (U.S.A.), writes about it:

These were people who were awakened in the middle of the night, ordered to pack their belongings into several small suitcases, and then herded into overcrowded cattle cars and taken to a completely unknown place for days, weeks. We have few reports of escapes and none of resistance. Instead, the survivors remember how families rallied on the long journey, how they sang songs to keep their spirits up, how they understood that thousands of others were with them on this difficult journey, and the realization of all this gave their journey meaning and purpose.⁴

What was their main danger to the State? As we said earlier, one of the strongest irritating factors was that the believers completely refused any participation in the political life of the country.

¹ Anatolii V. Belov, *Sects, Sectarianism, Sectarians* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 64.

² “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 23.

³ Anatoly V. Spragovsky, *Notes of a KGB Investigator*, ed. V. Khanevich [in Russian] (Tomsk: Tomsk Memorial Museum, 1990), 1, <https://nkvd.tomsk.ru/projects/posledniysvidetel/writings/letter-s/SSpragovskij/>.

⁴ “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 36.

A. I. Spragovsky also writes: "From the position of that time, it seemed that the Jehovah's Witnesses sectarians opposed the socio-political events taking place in the country. They refused to serve in the Soviet army, refused to sign a state loan and to participate in elections."¹

Almost all state records of the 1940-1960s about this religious organization, which can be found in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB, essentially say the same thing, namely, that due to the isolation and secrecy of their religious meetings, their dogma and rituals are very poorly studied. But it is known that their main headquarters is located abroad; it is also known that believers refuse to perform civic duties, do not recognize military service, and do not participate in elections. Very often, in such references, believers are called "cosmopolitans" (internationalists).

A well-known religious scholar, Sergey Ivanenko, PhD, noted that during those years the state created a myth about believers claiming that: Jehovah's Witnesses, under the guise of religious preaching, are actually engaged in ideological, subversive work. That is, they refuse to serve in the army; their children do not join the ranks of pioneers and Komsomol members; they themselves refuse to become members of labor unions, since union cards have an inscription on them saying that labor unions are schools of communism; and they do not participate in electoral procedures (in voting, and so on), not because of the principles of Christian neutrality prescribed in the Bible, but because they are committed adversaries of socialism. They want to inflict maximum damage on it, but at the same time look hypocritically, like defenders of some Christian, Biblical values. This point of view also does not withstand any criticism. It is absolutely hypocritical, false and far-fetched, and in no way justifies those harsh, inhuman repressions that were used by the Stalin and, to a lesser extent, Khrushchev's regimes.²

¹ Spragovsky, *Notes of a KGB Investigator*, 1, 8.

² "70 Years after Operation 'North,'" 55.

A vivid example of the above is the following brief review of the court case of 1969 against 14 Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Angren.

On September 30, 1965, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR No. 4020-VI was issued "On the removal of restrictions on special settlements from members of the 'Jehovah's Witnesses,' 'True Orthodox Christians,' 'Innokentievites,' 'Reformist-Adventists' and members of their families." By this decree, Jehovah's Witnesses were exempted from administrative supervision by law enforcement agencies. They were allowed to leave the special settlements to which they had been exiled in 1951.¹ Naturally, the confiscated property was never returned to them; and the way back to their homelands was possible only with the consent of the local Soviet authorities, which has almost never been given. As a result, many Jehovah's Witnesses decided to move from their places of settlement to the republics of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan.

According to the recollections of believers of that time, Grigory Zenyuk and his family came from Siberia in 1964, first to Tashkent and then to the city of Angren in the mid-1960s.² He also became a leader of the local community of believers. In the past, he was a Baptist but changed his views after encountering Jehovah's Witnesses.

According to the recollections of the participants of that trial, believers from Angren regularly visited the cities of Almalyk and Bekabad, where local communities had also been formed.

Then in 1969, 14 people were arrested by the KGB and brought to trial.

This trial is unique in many ways and contributes to a portrait of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan in those years and evaluates their activities in the country.

Unfortunately, I was not able to study all the materials of the case. But I had access to the verdict of the visiting session of the Judicial

¹ Jehovah's Witnesses exiled to Siberia in 1949 were able to leave the special settlements at an earlier date.

² As already noted, there are good reasons to believe that a group of Jehovah's Witnesses appeared in the city of Angren as early as 1955–1957, and perhaps even earlier.

Collegium for Criminal Cases of the Tashkent Regional Court dated May 30, 1969, and the memoirs of the participants of the trial. The trial lasted for 12 days (May 19-30) and was what appears to be the largest trial of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Uzbek SSR.

By the way, it is noteworthy that on April 24, 1969, in the north of Kazakhstan, in the city of Petropavlovsk, a similar trial took place over four "leaders" of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses, numbering, according to investigators, at least 23 people. Some of those convicted at that trial were relatives of those convicted in the Angren case. I do not think it is a coincidence. Most likely, this was a countrywide, "planned" KGB operation to combat communities of believers. This is also confirmed by the fact that after these trials, there were no further persecutions of either the believers in the city of Petropavlovsk or the believers in the city of Angren.

The ethnic composition of those brought to trial was heterogeneous. Among them were six Ukrainians, one Moldavian, two Germans (from eastern Ukraine), one Pole (from Belarus), and four Russians from Siberia and Kazakhstan. Seven of them had previously been convicted as Jehovah's Witnesses. Some had minor children.

The community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Angren, apparently, was very strong and quite large. Even from the text of the court verdict, it is clear that there could have been more than 30-40 believers. After all, only those who were considered to be leaders and "active participants" of the community were condemned. Their wives, children, relatives, as well as ordinary believers, were brought to court only as "witnesses" and, of course, continued their religious activities.

As a result of the trial, five of the accused were given five years in the camps, eight were given three years, and the final one was given only two years and then put on probation. I also consider this to be very indicative, since it shows that times have changed and the pressure on believers has begun to weaken, although undoubtedly, the prison terms were still very long.

And here I would like to give a portrait of one believer, also convicted at this trial, Valentina Dmitrievna Garnovskaya.

She was born in 1924 in Belarus. Together with her mother, she first learned about the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses at the age of 20 from three short conversations with one of the believers. What she learned from the Bible had such a great impact on her, that she immediately began to share with others what she had read. She said:

Everything he talked about and read from the Bible touched me very deeply and I liked it. He specifically emphasized the fact that God's Kingdom will be on earth, people will live forever in paradise. . . . I loved God very much since childhood, but I always argued with priests. Once, a priest told to my parents: "Your children are not like everyone else, they don't even take sweets from me and they argue with me, especially so does your daughter!" And I did argue.

We had the New Testament¹ at home, which my father read to us when we were kids, and I liked the teachings of Jesus Christ. I always used Jesus as an example. I especially liked the way Jesus reproved the priests (Pharisees). And since I was a child, I often argued with Orthodox and Catholic priests, as I saw that they did not act like Jesus. So, when that man, a Jehovah's Witness, came to our house, I really liked what he said and read from the Bible. He visited us three times and never came back again. I don't know who he is or where he went. However, he gave me a New Testament in Polish. I read it and began to talk to others about things I learned and heard from that man. I also learned from the gospel² that the servants of God will be thrown into prison and persecuted.

It was then that the authorities began to question others about me and my faith. But my friends did not give me away and always replied the way I asked them. They were not afraid, because some of

¹ The New Testament (or Christian Greek Scriptures) is part of the canonical Bible, and includes 27 books.

² The gospel literally means "Good News," and comprises the story of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In total, the New Testament contains four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In this case, most likely, we are talking about all four gospels.

them were partisans during the war. Half of the first year I worked as a secretary in the village council, in the second half of 1945, I was fired for talking to others about God. And on December 24, 1945, they arrested me.¹

The first time, Valentina was sentenced in March 1946 to eight years in a forced labor camp in the Ulyanovsk region (Russia). And her second encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses took place there. She recalled it this way:

Upon my arrival at the camp in 1946, I received news of my mother's death, although she was only 42 years old. Then I received a message about my father's death on the war front in 1944. And in 1947, I received news of my brother's death in the army. It was a great grief, and other prisoners thought that I would not survive.

But I was searching for God and Jehovah's Witnesses among the prisoners. For more than a year and a half from 1946 to 1948, I watched, listened to other prisoners and looked for someone who would talk like that person (Jehovah's Witness). And when I finally met Asya, a Jehovah's Witness, I simply cried out with joy. I listened to her and constantly repeated: "You speak just like that person." Asya was sent religious literature to the camp in driblets, and I began to read it with pleasure and learn from Asya. Back then I considered myself the happiest person, because I was in the same place where Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted and thrown into prison for the truth. At first, there were only Asya and me. Then three more women, Jehovah's Witnesses, were transferred to the camp. I also talked about my faith with a female prisoner, a former nun, and she decided to join us. Asya was the oldest among us and taught us the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses.²

After being released from prison in 1953, Valentina left her home village for the city, where she was trying to find Jehovah's Witnesses, but to no avail. She worked as a housekeeper, and in her free time, she

¹ Archived interview with Valentina Dmitrievna Garnovskaya from the archives of the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses, Kazakhstan.

² Garnovskaya, interview.

tried to share her faith with others. After three and a half years, in 1957, again as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, she was sentenced to ten years in a forced labor camp in the Kemerovo region (Siberia, Russia). She recalls that she was overjoyed when she learned that more than 180 Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned in that camp. And, by the way, Valentina has a photo from those years in prison, capturing her and her "sisters" in faith. We already know two of them. They are Ekaterina Kobzar and Serafima Yanushina. How remarkably their life paths have crossed in Siberia!

The camp administration treated believers very badly and tried their best not to let them talk about their faith or read the Bible and religious literature.

Valentina recalled that they studied the Bible in groups of two or three, hiding under a blanket in the barracks. If anyone from the camp administration saw even two believers walking together and talking about something, then the speaker would be punished, because it was believed that the speaker "was giving organizational instructions to the rest of the believers."

In the camps, women used only handwritten literature made by them. They had the Bible, but it could only be used as a last resort and only with extreme caution. One "sister" had to be on the watch when the other could very quickly look up the necessary verses from the Bible. If the administration found out that the prisoners had a Bible, it would be immediately confiscated.

Believers were very successful in hiding religious literature from guards. Valentina said: "We have never been left without literature. In winter, we hid literature in the snow, and in summer, in the grass and in the ground. During the searches, I took the manuscripts in my hands, covered my shoulders with a large headscarf, and held the ends of the headscarf with my hands. When I moved from camp to camp, I would put on a hat that I made myself and hid several issues of *The Watchtower* in it."¹

The guards were surprised that even after being moved to another place, believers always had the literature on them.

¹ Garnovskaya, interview.

According to Valentina, the camp commander once asked the “sister” where she got the literature from. To this the woman replied: “The ravens brought it to me.”¹

The commander then said: “China has now exterminated all the sparrows, and we, apparently, will have to exterminate the ravens.”²

Believers, although with great caution, still continued to hold even large religious meetings. The extraordinary courage of these women is amazing. In this regard, I will cite Valentina’s story about the celebration of the Memorial of the death of Jesus Christ, the main religious holiday of Jehovah’s Witnesses, that was held in the camp.

According to her recollection, during her second ten-year term, they held the Memorial twice, although the persecution from the authorities was quite severe. On the day of the Memorial, all female Jehovah’s Witnesses were closely monitored by a jailer, and he guarded the moment when everyone would start gathering together. So they decided to gather at a different location. And from four o’clock in the afternoon, all the “sisters” (and according to Valentina, there were 80 women) began to gradually enter one large building in the camp, inside which there was a small office. Only Valentina had a key to it (since she worked in that building). Everyone gathered cautiously, entering the building from two sides so that no one would notice. Someone was able to bring bread and wine.³

Finally, when they all gathered together, the older sisters began the meeting with a prayer. They did not sing songs so as not to reveal themselves. At first, everything was going well and happy; but toward the end, they heard a loud noise in the street—steps in the building and loud voices getting closer. They realized that those were the

¹ Garnovskaya, interview.; The woman is referring to the Biblical account when the prophet Elijah, by the will of God, was fed by ravens in the desert. The words of the woman, as such, meant that God took care of her.

² Garnovskaya, interview.; The commander was referring to the Four Pests campaign, which was one of the first actions taken in China’s economic and social campaign “The Great Leap Forward” (1958 to 1962). The sparrow was one of four “pests” that the campaign targeted for eradication.

³ Bread and wine for the celebration were required in very small quantities, since they were not used by the majority of believers and served only as symbols. See Chapter 3 for more details.

guards looking for them! Peeking out of the window, they saw a team commander¹ standing right there. At that moment, someone started banging on the door, trying to break in. The women opened the door, and the soldiers burst into the room. They immediately grabbed the “sister” who was holding the meeting and took her to a solitary confinement cell. But replacing her, another “sister” stood up and continued giving the talk. They grabbed her too. Then a third woman spoke. She was also taken away. So they locked away three “sisters;” the rest were driven out into the street and threatened to be punished and locked up in a solitary confinement cell. But in the end, only five more were sent to the punishment cell, and the rest were taken to a utility room and locked there. The women decided that this was a good opportunity to continue the meeting. And, in that room, without fear of being discovered, they finished the celebration and even sang a song. They burned all the notes they had on them that could get them punished; so when they were later searched, the guards did not find anything and simply let everyone go to their barracks.²

And a few years later in 1967, in the same camp, the Memorial was celebrated even more freely and with 58 participants. The celebration was held in the camp dining room with bread and wine and without any interference from the camp guards.

In 1967, Valentina was released and decided to move to Angren in Uzbekistan, where, as she knew, there was already a strong community of believers.

It is remarkable that it was after 22 years since she first learned about the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses, that Valentina was finally able to be baptized, in Angren.

Moreover, it was in Uzbekistan that Valentina first saw “brothers” (males) in the Witness community; before that, she had always been imprisoned with the female believers.

¹ Back in the 1930s, in Soviet camps all prisoners were grouped into construction teams. Each team was led by an NKVD (KGB) officer.

² Garnovskaya, interview.

However, in 1969, Valentina was arrested and sentenced under the already mentioned “Angren case” to three years in a strict regime camp. The court verdict called her a “particularly dangerous recidivist” and highlighted her active role in the activities of the community of believers.¹

These three years of imprisonment were especially difficult for Valentina, since she was deprived association with fellow believers and was left without any literature. Only immediate relatives were allowed to visit her, and only once a year; however, all her relatives were no longer alive. Therefore, these three years were years of complete loneliness.²

After being released in 1972, Valentina returned to the city of Angren (Uzbekistan) to the community of believers that became her home. She lived there until her death in 2001. Of her 77 years, Valentina spent 21 years in prison for her faith! This fragile-looking but strong-willed woman was able to defeat the totalitarian state machine and keep her faith. Her story cannot but amaze one as vivid proof of the strength of the human spirit.³

I am deeply convinced and constantly repeat that persecution does not break the believers and does not solve the tasks of the State. Intolerance and cruelty give rise only to grief and shame for those who use them. In historical retrospect, it is precisely such people as Valentina who remain “heroes” and an example of the strength of human spirit and thought, while the names of her persecutors are covered with indelible shame.

During the last conference held in 2021 dedicated to the 70th anniversary of Operation North, one of its participants, Dr. Tomasz Bugaj, associate professor at the Institute of Cultural Studies of the Silesian University in Katowice (Poland), made a very remarkable personal observation about conversations with elderly Jehovah's

¹ Garnovskaya, interview.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Witnesses who survived the times of exile and imprisonment during the Soviet years. Here are his words:

I thought that I would communicate with people immersed in mourning, almost depressed, that our conversations would be perceived very emotionally, because they went through a lot. I met with parents who had their children taken away and sent to an orphanage, and with children who were separated from their families. I interviewed those whose heads were smashed against the wall in the interrogation room, those who went through attempted rape, who were placed in mental hospitals, and so on. But in fact, when I met these people, I thought that in my old age I want to have exactly this kind of attitude and this very concept of life. We can learn a lot from them.

The phenomenon of Jehovah's Witnesses, who were repressed in the Soviet Union, lies in the fact that during the communist regime, they managed not only individually, but as a group, to fully preserve and develop their religiosity, not yielding to atheistic Bolshevism, which tried in various ways to expel God from the hearts of the people. Therefore, resistance to totalitarian enslavement was a general rule among all members of the community, and not just among individuals.¹

And now I would like to return to the verdict of the Angren Regional Court of 1969. What was the delinquency of the believers voiced by the state in this court verdict? Here are some excerpts:

(1) This group, under the guise of preaching a religious creed, encroached on the rights of citizens, encouraged them to renounce their social activities and [refrain] from performing civic duties.

(2) The leading center of this reactionary religious sect of Jehovah's Witnesses is located in the USA on the outskirts of New York and is headed by the capitalist Knorr, under whose direction a huge propaganda apparatus has been created, which publishes religious literature in mass circulation—the magazines, *The Watchtower*

¹ "70 Years after Operation 'North,'" 31.

and *Awake!*—and also has established the missionary school “The Watchtower [School] of Gilead.”

(3) This leading center, under the guise of the religious dogma of the Christian faith, gives the Jehovah's Witnesses instructions of a reactionary nature in published magazines, lectures and religious literature: not to make any compromises with state authorities, . . . not to take part in elections of state authorities, avoid public life and military service, . . . not to join a labor union, prevent their children from joining the ranks of pioneers, educate their children in a religious spirit.

(4) Jehovah's Witnesses preach the imminent destruction of the existing state system on earth as a result of the last upcoming holy war “Armageddon” and therefore oppose the struggle of common people for peace and security.

(5) [They] encroach not only on the consciousness of people, but also on their health, preaching the inadmissibility of blood for medicinal purposes and other dogmas aimed at harming medicine.¹

Here, we have basically all the modern information accusations and “myths” about this religious organization. And, as this court verdict vividly demonstrates, these accusations were invented by Soviet atheistic propaganda. These “labels” were created by the state to justify persecution of dissent in the eyes of society. Please note that even the myth of “encroachment on the consciousness and health of citizens” was used half a century ago!

The absurdity of these accusations was debated even under the USSR.

So back in 1978, A. V. Belov, in the work *Sects, Sectarianism, Sectarians* mentioned earlier, did not consider Jehovah's Witnesses a political organization. Belov says: “In our literature, Jehovah's Witnesses, most commonly, were portrayed as some kind of political movement that used Christianity to preach far from religious ideas. One can hardly agree with such a view on Jehovism. This is a religious, not a political movement.”²

¹ Verdict of the visiting session of the Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases of the Tashkent Regional Court, Criminal Case Number 65, May 30, 1969.

² Belov, *Sects, Sectarianism, Sectarians*, 60.

The reader may have a reasonable question: “Why did Jehovah’s Witnesses hide from the authorities? Why didn’t they register their activities, as did some other religious movements in the USSR?”

That is because it was forbidden in the USSR to register Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Thus, the Instruction on the Application of Legislation on Cults, approved by a resolution of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR and by a resolution of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR of March 16, 1961, stated: “*Religious societies and groups of believers belonging to sects whose doctrine and nature of activity is anti-state and savage in nature are not subject to registration: **Jehovists**, Pentecostals, True Orthodox Christians, True Orthodox Church, Adventist-Reformists, Murashkovites, etc.*”¹ Note that Jehovah’s Witnesses come first on the list. And this is no coincidence. The Soviet atheistic state has always considered Jehovah’s Witnesses as the most dangerous “anti-Soviet sect.”

It is noteworthy that the believers themselves made several attempts to register their activities. The historian Konstantin Berezhko writes about one of them:

Although the Witnesses tried many times to register their community, they continued to be persecuted. Thus, during the last attempt to register the community in 1949, they were offered to print their literature in the Communist party printing houses, and in their sermons to glorify Stalin and the policy of the party. Naturally, adhering to the principle of complete political neutrality, the Witnesses could not agree to this.²

The files of criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses of the Soviet period very often contain references from the Council for Religious Cults under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, which directly state that “this cult, Jehovah’s Witnesses, . . . is a pronounced anti-Soviet

¹ *Legislation on Religious Cults (Collection of Materials and Documents)*, ed. V. A. Kuroedov and A.S. Pankretov [in Russian] (Moscow: Legal Literature, 1971), 84.

² “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 20.

movement, and therefore is not subject to registration. Be aware of this group, monitor its activities and report it to the relevant authorities.”

As 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. . . . 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.¹

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

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 sealed.

Now let us get back to the history of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Uzbek SSR.

It has been established that in 1968, Gura Marfa, a Jehovah’s Witness, lived with her family in the city of Chirchik, Tashkent region. A little later,

¹ I. M. Sovetov and M. I. Odintsov, “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia: From Persecution to Recognition,” Russian Association of Scholars in Religion [in Russian], <https://hro.org/files/iegov.pdf>.

² Dmitry Vedeneev, “Battle of Counter-Intelligence and the Underground of Jehovah’s Witnesses,” Orthodox Life website [in Russian], February 17, 2017, <https://pravlife.org/ru/content/poedinok-kontrazvedki-i-podpolya-svideteley-iegovy-ch-1>.

a community of believers was formed there, which still exists in Chirchik to this day. In the early 1970s, we know that there were the communities in the cities of Kokand and Fergana.

On September 9, 1977, the Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases of the Leninabad Regional Court (Tajikistan) considered a criminal case against a local Jehovah's Witness, Gelmund Andreevich Shlishevsky, who was accused of leading the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses, at least since 1963, and "repeatedly traveled both alone and with members of his family to the city of Bekabad (Uzbekistan), where he delivered sermons to believers." Additionally, "[he] also provided various explanations,

One of the Witnesses explained to the court that "he was a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses community in the city of Bekabad from 1972 to the autumn of 1975." The verdict of the court on ten pages states that the believers of this city held a meeting in a "house of prayer," which proves that there was a newly formed community of Jehovah's Witnesses in that city.¹

It is noteworthy that N. Kh. Kolemasova in her work *Crisis Phenomena of Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan*, published in 1981 by the Society of Uzbekistan "Znaniye," also mentions the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Bekabad.

The verdict also names Mikhail Bomba, a Jehovah's Witness from the Kazakh SSR, who was detained in the city of Tashkent together with Gelmund Shlishevsky on June 2, 1977, while transporting 900 copies of religious literature and a rotary stencil duplicator in the trunk of his "Zhiguli" car. As stated verbatim in the court verdict, he told the court that he "won't say where they were going and with what purpose."²

The court verdict also mentions certificate No. 1 dated June 15, 1977 of the Authorized Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for the Leninabad Region, which states that "the

¹ Dmitry Vedenev, "Battle of Counter-Intelligence and the Underground of Jehovah's Witnesses," Orthodox Life website [in Russian], February 17, 2017, <https://pravlife.org/ru/content/poedinok-kontrrazvedki-i-podpolya-svideteley-iegovy-ch-1>.

² Ibid, 2.

religious sect of Jehovah's Witnesses is the most reactionary misanthropic Christian sect and therefore the Soviet authorities do not register it; however, this sect operates illegally on the territory of the USSR."¹ As you can see, this is almost an exact copy of similar documents from the late 1940s.

Gelmond Shlishevsky was sentenced by the court to four years in prison with confiscation of property, even though the court admitted that he "had no previous convictions, was engaged in socially useful work and was positively characterized at the place of work."²

So, as we can see, from the early 1950s to the early 1970s, large communities of Jehovah's Witnesses were formed in the Uzbek USSR, which were quite active and had good communication both with each other and with communities from other republics of the USSR. The detained cargo of 900 copies of religious literature in Tashkent in 1972, which in those years for the most part was used to satisfy the needs of believers only, gives us a good reason to assume an existence of a fairly large number of communities of believers in the country.

These conclusions are also confirmed by the opinion of N. Kh. Kolemasova, expressed in the book *Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan*, which explains that since the 1960s in Uzbekistan, "there has been a strengthening of the structure and organization," including Jehovah's Witnesses as well.³

In *The Sword and the Shield*, published in 1999, Vasili 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 memoirs, pays special attention to the work of the KGB in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴ As V. N. Mitrokhin affirms, by the 1960s, KGB leaders

¹ Certificate No. 1 of the Authorized Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for the Leninabad Region (June 15, 1977), quoted in verdict in the case against Gelmond Andreevich Shlishevsky, 9.

² Verdict in the case against Gelmond Andreevich Shlishevsky, 9.

³ Kolemasova, *Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan*, 19.

⁴ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

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 charges.”¹

Agents infiltrated the congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which caused panic and promoted a spirit of distrust among believers.

Also, in addition to the open persecution of believers, colossal propaganda against religion and “sects” was launched in the USSR.

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.

Throughout the 1970s, persecution and pressure continued; but in Uzbekistan, most of the trials were against young believers because 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.”

¹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 504.

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.

Among Jehovah's Witnesses, the issues of raising children and strengthening the family institution have always occupied an extremely important place. Mentioned earlier, N. Kh. Kolemasova specifically highlighted this feature of believers: "Particular attention is paid to religious education of children. 'We must protect our children, from early years helping them to develop their Christian personality.'" ¹

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." ²

It is not surprising that employers valued these believers and tried to hold on to them. As Sergey Ivanenko notes:

In the 70s, 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, and little by little, they obtained the right to form 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

¹ Kolemasova, *Christian Sectarianism in Uzbekistan*, 27.

² Archived interview with Lidia Pleshko, August 2017, Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses, Kazakhstan.

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:

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 Communist ideology—caused concern to the Party and the Soviet leaders.³

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-1980s, purposeful work was carried out to stop

¹ Sergey I. Ivanenko, *Jehovah's Witnesses: A Traditional Russian Religious Organization* [in Russian] (Moscow: Art-Business Center, 2002), 129.

² Svetlana M. Dudarenok, "Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Far East, 1944–1990," *Freedom of Conscience in Russia* [in Russian], Issue 9 (2011): 72.

³ Ivanenko, *Jehovah's Witnesses*, 130.

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 Affairs.¹

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," 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 evaluation was sent to the district military commissariat concerning him, emphasizing that he is the best Communist worker."²

Dr. Emily Baran very aptly observed:

Jehovah's Witnesses adapted remarkably during the period of persecution, finding ways to maintain their faith and practice

¹ Sovetov and Odintsov, *Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia*.

² Dudarenok, "Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Far East," 62.

their religion despite intense pressure. We know this from the documents of the state archives. This documentary evidence, apart from the period of exile, shows that government officials regarded the Witnesses as active and dedicated believers and could do nothing about it. There are documents in which government officials complained about educated Witnesses who were excellent at defending their beliefs during atheist seminars. . . . In addition, one can read about the many cases when government officials responsible for conducting atheist agitation complained that the Witnesses were superior to them in ability and eloquence.

In one of such complaints, an agitator remarked that he had spent several hours over the course of a month trying to persuade his neighbor to give up his religion. But he had little chance of success, as the Witnesses could spend ten times as much time talking to their neighbors during the same period. The community (Jehovah's Witnesses) was created to support each other. Of course, not all Witnesses remained in the faith. Some have left the organization. But the community was dynamic enough to endure really difficult situations, including even two mass exiles, and actually survive the Soviet Union.¹

It is also worth noting that, perhaps, understanding the “harmlessness” of believers and the “absurdity” of the very struggle against them, the local authorities, and especially those in the outskirts far from Moscow, have never been overly “zealous” in the fight against the religion.

I can assume that many of those trials of believers that took place after the mid-1960s could often be of a “reportable” nature to Moscow, when local authorities wanted to provide the necessary statistics and show that they were also actively working along this line.

Here are just two documents to prove it:

¹ “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 35–36.

**On Strengthening Supervision Over Implementation
of Legislation on Religious Cults
Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR
February 7, 1969 No. 65**

The Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR notes that lately, in a number of districts, cities and regions of the republic, the executive committees of local Councils of Workers' Deputies have somewhat weakened control over the implementation of the legislation on religious cults.

Some executive committees of city, district, settlement and kishlak Councils of Workers' Deputies have removed themselves from the control over the observance of the legislation on cults by religious associations and clergy, poorly manage the work of public commissions to promote control and poorly familiarize members of these commissions with the basics of the legislation on cults. In a number of regions there is no record of actually operating religious associations, pilgrimage sites and ministers of religion.

The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek SSR of 28 May 1966 "on administrative responsibility for violation of the legislation on religious cults" is not applied in a number of places. The financial and administrative bodies of the republic are poorly involved in combating the illegal activities of religious organizations and ministers of religion.

The Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR decides:

1. To obligate the Council of Ministers of the Karakalpak ASSR, executive committees of regional and Tashkent city Councils of Workers' Deputies:

a) to eliminate the existing shortcomings indicated in this resolution and ensure strict control over observance of the legislation on religious cults. Increase the role and responsibility of local Soviet bodies in this work; do not allow distortions of the true situation of religious life and underreporting of the degree of religiosity of the population;

b) to regulate the registration of religious organizations, deal with each of the unregistered religious associations and determine which of them must be registered in accordance with the current legislation, and take the necessary measures against religious organizations that evade registration in accordance with the established procedure. Carefully consider and resolve applications and petitions of believers to form religious societies and to use prayer buildings;

c) by June 1, 1969, to conduct an accounting of all actually operating religious associations and ministers of religion. Check the condition of vacant mosques and other prayer buildings and, in accordance with established procedure, take measures to use them for economic and cultural purposes or to demolish those that are in a critical condition;

d) to intensify the work on halting pilgrimage to so-called “holy places”; by June 1, 1969, to examine each such place and develop specific measures to halt pilgrimage to those places;

e) to periodically consider the issues of control over the observance of the law on religious cults at meetings of the executive committees of the Councils of Workers’ Deputies.

2. The executive committees of city and district Councils of Workers’ Deputies are proposed to carry out the following:

a) to exercise daily control over compliance with the current legislation on cults, to be constantly aware of the religious activities of associations and ministers of religion, to take timely measures to suppress violations; . . .

c) to intensify the activity of commissions of assistance on the observance of the legislation on religious cults. Reconsider their composition and attract competent, sufficiently trained people to work in the commissions. Constantly study, summarize and actively promote the positive experience of their work. Conduct seminars with members of the commissions of assistance to study the legislation on cults and the practical implementation of their duties.

3. To oblige the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Uzbek SSR (H. H. Yahyaeva) to take measures to strengthen the detection and prevention of crimes arising on religious grounds, to suppress the sale and

distribution of religious literature (photocopies of sermons, fragments from the Koran, tapes and gramophone records with recordings of religious poems, songs, etc.), to thwart able-bodied persons begging near prayer buildings, to suppress activity of parasitic elements from among roving clergy and leaders of sectarian organizations.

4. To instruct the Prosecutor's Office of the Uzbek SSR (K. B. Ruzmetov) and the Supreme Court of the Uzbek SSR (T. Pulatkhodjaev) to study the practice of applying Articles 145, 146, 147, 147 (1) of the Criminal Code of the Uzbek SSR and the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek SSR "on administrative and criminal responsibility for violations of the legislation on religious cults," and to take the necessary measures to strengthen the fight against criminal violations of the law by religious associations and individual worshipers, and to ensure the strict observance of socialist legality. . . .

7. To authorize the Council for Religious Affairs for the Uzbek SSR to hold in the first half of 1969 a republican meeting of the authorized representatives of the Council for regions with the participation of representatives of the executive committees of regional, city and district Councils of Workers' Deputies to generalize the practice of monitoring compliance with the legislation on religious cults.

8. To approve the new composition of the Coordinating Council under the authorized Council for Religious Affairs in the Uzbek SSR to generalize the practice of monitoring compliance with the legislation on cults in accordance with Appendix No. 1. . . .

10. In the second half of 1969,¹ to hear a report of the Tashkent Regional Executive Committee on the implementation of this resolution at a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the Uzbek SSR.²

¹ Let me remind you that the large trial of 14 Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Angren took place in May 1969.

² *Legislation on Religious Cults*, 156.

**Informational 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 Andijan, Kashkadarya, Namangan, Surkhandarya, Tashkent, Fergana Regions of the Uzbek USSR, . . . 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 Council for Religious Affairs Under the USSR Council of Ministers to the Commissioners of the Council in the Republics, Territories, and Regions, June 24, 1982, State Archive of the Russian Federation. F. R.–6991, List 6, Dossier 2287, Sheet 24, Original.

Thus, although from time to time active leaders of local communities of believers could be convicted for religious activities, ordinary believers, most commonly, were fined and subjected to strong, psychological social pressure at their workplace.

The trials of Jehovah's Witnesses in the 1980s were mostly in cases of believers refusing to serve in the army. And only occasionally, there were trials for production of publications and dissemination of religious teachings.

By the mid-1980s, the USSR was in dire need of fundamental reforms. "Perestroika" (restructuring) had started and "Glasnost" (free speech) was proclaimed. By the end of the 1980s, the attitude of the authorities toward Jehovah's Witnesses began to change.

Dr. Igor Kozlovsky, senior researcher at the Department of Religious Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine named after G. S. Skovoroda, the President of the Center for Religious Studies and International Spiritual Relations (Ukraine), recalls that time as follows:

In the late 80s, representatives of Soviet party structures faced the need to decide what to do next, and how to deal with Jehovah's Witnesses in particular. At some point they even considered the idea that the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses are very close to communism, because they are going to build the Kingdom of God on earth, which is what the communists themselves are doing. There were attempts to impose communist ideology on certain groups of Jehovah's Witnesses—I remember this very well.¹

I, myself well remember those years. At the very end of 1984, by the decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee,² I was relieved of the post of editor-in-chief of the magazine *Party Life of Kazakhstan* for making it too critical, which resulted in enraging party functionaries of various levels. A wild persecution began, and I was sent to work as a deputy of the Authorized Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR for the Kazakh SSR.

¹ "70 Years after Operation 'North,'" 82.

² Referring to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan.

Being in this position, having access to reports and documents of strict reporting category and limited access, I was able to see, very objectively, the whole picture of the religious life of the Soviet republic and to understand the complexity of the situation at that time. And I thank fate that I ended up in this difficult position when Gorbachev's Perestroika had launched in the country.

The policy toward believers began to change. The authorities wanted to start a dialogue. Moscow instructed us to do everything to eliminate underground religious activities, which at that time were quite widespread in Kazakhstan. It was extremely difficult to get Jehovah's Witnesses, True Orthodox Christians, Innocentians, Adventists-Reformists, and others out of hiding. Decades of cruel persecution resulted in the leaders of these religious organizations basically not trusting the authorities. (I must say right away that we were not able to solve this problem completely at that time.)

In order to fulfill the task of the Moscow leadership, we even tried to personally meet with the leaders of the underground communities. At first, it was quite amusing. We would call regional or district leaders and ask them to arrange a meeting. On the appointed day and time, we would go to the alleged leader of the community only to be received by his wife. The further conversation would sound something like: "Is Ivan Ivanovich at home? We made an appointment with him." "No, he left to the county on personal business." "When will he come back?" "He said maybe tomorrow." Then we would drive off for some distance and watch the window. Shortly, we would see Ivan Ivanovich looking out of the window. Community leaders were simply afraid of us, remembering past repressions.

It required tremendous effort to gradually improve our communication with many of them. I am writing all this in order to show that those who are engaged in persecution of believers today go down the same road, repeating mistakes of the past.

The USSR eventually realized that persecution of believers, including Jehovah's Witnesses, was a big strategic mistake, and they tried to make it right.

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 February 28, 1991, the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses was registered in the Ukrainian SSR, and then on March 27, 1991, in Moscow, which signified official recognition and long-awaited peace for believers.

On August 31, 1991, at an extraordinary session of the Supreme Council of the Uzbek SSR in Tashkent, a historic decision "on the proclamation of state independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted, according to which the country gained full state power.

On December 8, 1992, the country adopted the Constitution, the supreme legal act of independent Uzbekistan, which from the very beginning paid a great deal of attention to protection of rights and freedoms of citizens. I consider it very important to quote some of its excellent articles:

Article 12.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, public life shall develop on the basis of a diversity of political institutions, ideologies and opinions.

No ideology may be established as the state.

Article 13.

Democracy in the Republic of Uzbekistan shall be based on the principles common to all mankind according to which the ultimate value is a human being, his life, freedom, honor, dignity and other inalienable rights.

Democratic rights and freedoms shall be protected by the Constitution and laws.

Article 16.

None of the provisions of the present Constitution may be interpreted in a way detrimental to the rights and interests of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

None of laws or normative legal acts may run counter to the norms and principles of the Constitution.

Article 18.

All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before law without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, conviction, individual and social status.

Any privileges may be granted solely by law and must conform to the principles of social justice.

Article 19.

A citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the state shall be bound by mutual rights and mutual responsibility. Citizens' rights and freedoms, established by the Constitution and laws, shall be inalienable. No one shall have the right to deprive or limit them without a court.

Article 29.

Everyone shall be guaranteed freedom of thought, speech and convictions. Everyone shall have the right to seek, obtain and disseminate any information except that which is directed against the existing constitutional system and some other instances specified by law.

Freedom of opinions and their expression may be restricted by law if any state or other secret is involved.

Article 31.

Freedom of conscience shall be guaranteed to all. Everyone shall have the right to profess or not to profess any religion. A compulsory imposition of religion shall be impermissible.¹

The Law No. 289-XII of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On freedom of conscience and religious organizations” entered into force on June 14, 1991.

Then on May 3, 1994, Jehovah's Witnesses were finally able to register the first religious community in the city of Fergana; and on December 17, 1994, they registered the second community in the city of Chirchik (a suburb of Tashkent).

¹ Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, <https://constitution.uz/oz>.

At this time, believers began to hold their annual worship services (conventions) and receive religious literature.

Then on May 1, 1998, serious additions No. 618-I were made to this Law, making it extremely harsh on believers and introducing strict state control over the activities of religious associations.

After that, and in fact a little earlier—from 1996—the authorities refused to register new congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, and this inevitably led to peaceful religious meetings of believers being considered illegal. But since a person's faith and religious services had never been given state permits and registrations, this inevitably led to an aggravation of the situation and new persecution of believers.

A particularly difficult time for believers began in 2004-2005. At that time, in 238 cases, Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned or fined because of their religion. In subsequent years, heavy fines (which amounted to 40-50 times the average monthly wage), arrests, imprisonment for several years in prison or in a penal colony on charges of "illegal religious activity" (which included even personal or private Bible study), or "violation of the law on religious services" have unfortunately become a usual practice.

On August 24, 2006, the state registration of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Fergana was revoked.

Between 2007 and 2009, more than 50 Jehovah's Witnesses were detained and fined, and more than 1,100 cases of state persecution against members of this religious community were recorded. Four believers in 2008 were sentenced to four years in prison, each for sharing their faith with others.

Jehovah's Witnesses tried to meet with the authorities and explain the peaceful nature of their activities, applied to the courts to protect their rights, but all to no avail. In the end, they even filed 13 separate complaints with the UNHRC against court decisions that imposed heavy fines on believers for peaceful religious activities.

Tangible changes began to occur when Uzbekistan adopted a number of recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review

(UPR) of the UNHRC in May 2018. These recommendations called for, *inter alia*, “the abolition of burdensome and repressive [religious] registration requirements,” the adoption of “effective measures to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief,” “the decriminalization of peaceful religious activity . . . and the abolition of penalties for distribution of religious literature.”

Since 2018, the number of incidents of police harassment, house searches, or seizure of personal property has dropped significantly—in 2017 there were 240 such cases, then in 2018 there were only 114.

Further relief came from a new government order in December 2018 that banned raids on religious communities. Accordingly, there were no raids in 2019.

Then in 2019, all over the country (not only in Chirchik, but also in Fergana, Karshi, and Urgench), with the permission of the authorities, open services were held to celebrate the Memorial of the death of Jesus Christ, the main holiday of believers.

A delegation from the United States, including Mr. Mark Sanderson, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses, visited Uzbekistan, and was able to meet with high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Justice and the National Center for Human Rights and discuss the registration issue and activities of communities in the country.

On July 5, 2021, a new Law No. ZRU-699 “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” was adopted, which was supposed to resolve all the difficulties and obstacles that had previously existed in the registration of religious associations.

But, unfortunately, even with the coming to power of the new president of the country and the beginning of serious legal reforms in the field of human rights, this issue of registration of believers has not yet been resolved.

Perhaps part of the reason is that, both in society itself and among officials, Jehovah’s Witnesses are viewed through the prism of old Soviet ideological myths.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom report of November 2020 entitled “Global Persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses” noted the following:

The Soviet Union (USSR) spent decades demonizing Jehovah’s Witnesses as a danger to society. In the aftermath of World War II, the group’s pacifism and Western origins made it a target of paranoid Soviet authorities. Jehovah’s Witnesses were labeled an “anti-Soviet” organization and were one of the few religious groups that the state denied legal registration. . . . [A] concerted propaganda campaign spanning decades reinforced the image of Jehovah’s Witnesses as a potential “fifth column” in the public psyche. . . .

The Soviet legacy, paired with widespread and vague anti-extremism laws, facilitates the contemporary targeting of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the FSU, where it was easy to transition from viewing the historically vilified community as “anti-Soviet” to branding them as ‘extremists.’¹

This was also noted by Professor Anatoly Kolodny at an online conference held in 2021:

Analysis of repressions against the Witnesses is important not only from the academic point of view and clear establishment of reliable historical facts. . . .

Another challenge to freedom of conscience and an atmosphere of tolerance is the distortion of facts in the media in pursuit of sensationalism or as part of an ideological struggle against “wrong”, “false” and “destructive” religious movements. Unfortunately, examples of such phenomena also occur in our country carried out by some local authorities. Therefore, an objective, impartial and academically honest coverage of the history and contemporary activities of various religions, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, is of great importance.²

¹ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “The Global Persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses” (November 2020), <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Issue%20Update%20-%20Jehovahs%20Witnesses.pdf>.

² “70 Years after Operation ‘North,’” 7.

Jehovah's Witnesses have a difficult history in the countries of the former USSR. They faced and endured a lot, experiencing terrible injustice on the part of the Soviet state.

I would like to believe that this chapter, like this book itself, will help those seeking objectivity to reconsider and expand their views, to free themselves from ideological myths and fake ideas.

And I would like to end the chapter with a quote from the famous journalist and blogger Maxim Shevchenko, extracted from his interview given to the radio station *Echo of Moscow* back in 2010:

*In Soviet times, thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses were jailed in camps. They were there without leaving, they were jailed for decades. . . . **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

¹ Radio Echo of Moscow, "A Dissenting Opinion—Transcript of Interview with M. Shevchenko" [in Russian] (2010), <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/686334-echo/>.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s

some Jehovah's Witnesses from Siberia moved to Uzbekistan in order to find people willing to study the Bible.

Just in few years there were groups of such willing students.



Ekaterina KOBZAR Serafima YANUSHINA

In 1947 and 1948 they were convicted for their faith for the first time under Art. 58-10 and 58-11 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR by the Kuibyshev Regional Court to imprisonment for a period of 25 years.

In 1955, after early release, they moved to the Surkhan-Darya region, Uzbekistan, where in 1957 they were re-sentenced for their faith to 25 years in labor camp by the Surkhan-Darya Regional Court.

In 1995 E. Kobzar and in 1993 S. Yanushina were rehabilitated and recognized as victims of political repression

П Р И К Л А Д

ИМЕНЕМ УЗБЕКСКОЙ СОВЕТСКОЙ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ.

Иван-Дарьянский областной суд 1957 года, сентября месяца 11-12 Акт в городе Термезе в составе:

Председательствующего - ПУШКИНО,
 Народные заседатели - СИМОНОВА, КАБРОВА,
 при секретаре - КАРАЧЕНОВА

вместе с черном пом. прокурора области, ЕЛЕНЧИКОВА, адвоката ЛЕВКО, а защитой служившим адвокатом Э. Иван областного суда (именно угадываемое дело за № 2/56 по обвинению: 1/ИЗЪЕЗДНОЙ регион Кавказов, 1907 года рождения, уроженка г. Дому, русская, партийная, гражданка СССР, из лесотопки, рабочей, одиокая, вистина, ранее - в 1947 году судима Кузбасским областным ком по ст. 58-10 и 58-11 УК РСФСР в 25 годах ИТЛ, по делу казанки отбыла в лесу, работала сторожком в детском лагер-инской ИТС, проходила там же, под стражей содержания с 7-1957г.

2/КОБЗАР, Екатерина Еванловна, 1928 года рождения, именина Кузбасской области, Пржевальского района, села Томея, украинка, гражданка СССР, из семьи куликов, рабочая, партизанка, с 1903 по 1974 год была членом партии, одиокая (сепаратное проживание), одиокая, гражданка, ранее в 40 году судима Кузбасским областным судом по ст. 58-10 и 58-11 УК РСФСР в 25 годах ИТЛ, по делу казанки отбыла в лесу, работала сторожком в детском лагер-инской ИТС, проходила там же, под стражей содержания с 24.7-1957г., обожж по ст. ч.б и ст. Ул. Удб. СССР

Примерно интересам дела, выслушав показания подсудимых, свидетелей, участкового прокурора, адвоката, составив доклад орудий, суд





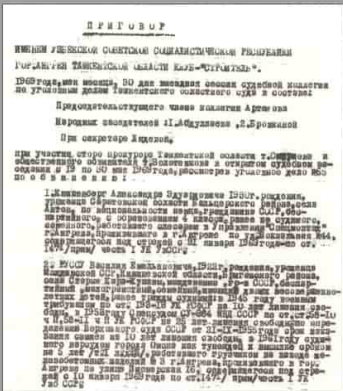
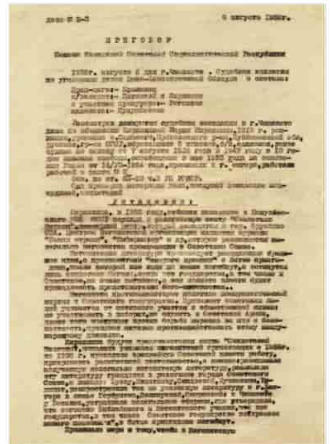
Maria
KIRILINA

In the 1950s, she transported literature from Kazakhstan to the Surkhan-Darya region in Uzbekistan to a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On August 6, 1958, she was sentenced to 8 years of labor camp with loss of rights for 3 years and with confiscation of property under Art. 58-10 p. II by the South Kazakhstan Regional Court in a closed session.

On August 23, 1958, the Pravda of Southern Kazakhstan newspaper published an article about her under the title "Jehovah's Daughter".

In early 1991, Kirilina M. was rehabilitated and recognized as a victim of political repression.



In 1969
a high-profile trial of 14 Jehovah's
Witnesses took place in Angren.

- The court hearing lasted for 12 days
- The total amount of the years of punishment for all the Witnesses was 53.5 years
- After the trial, the authorities published a long article titled "The Fall of Jehovah's Apostles" in one of the local newspapers



Valentina **GARNOVSKAYA**

She met Jehovah's Witnesses in Belarus, where in 1945 the authorities condemned her for her faith and sentenced her to 8 years in a labor camp. In 1956, she was convicted again and sentenced to 10 years of labor camps.

After her release in 1967 she moved to Uzbekistan. There, in January 1969, she was arrested for preaching and was sentenced to 3 years in prison as a "especially dangerous recidivist".



**In the camp with
fellow believers
during her second
imprisonment**
(third from the right)

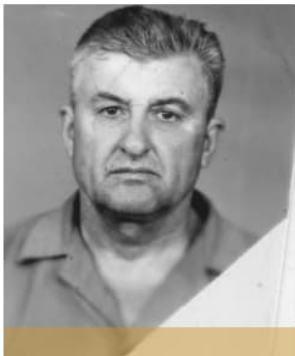
Valentina spent **21 years** in prisons and labor camps for her faith, many times she was in solitary confinement



FIRST JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN UZBEKISTAN



Martha **GURA**
1968 in Chirchik



George **GAYTUR**
The 1970s in Chirchik



Arseny **KOSTYUK**
The 1970s in Fergana



Viktor **GECHU**
The 1970s in Chirchik



Valentina **DOROKHOVA**
1953 in Angren



George **KOKOSH**
1970 in Fergana



Lyubov and Vasily **SMAGIN**
The 1970s in Angren



Khamrakul **ABDUNAZAROV**
The 1980s in Angren

The 1980s

Numerous communities of Jehovah's Witnesses already exist in the cities of Tashkent, Angren, Almalyk, Chirchik, Samarkand, Shakhrisabz and Fergana

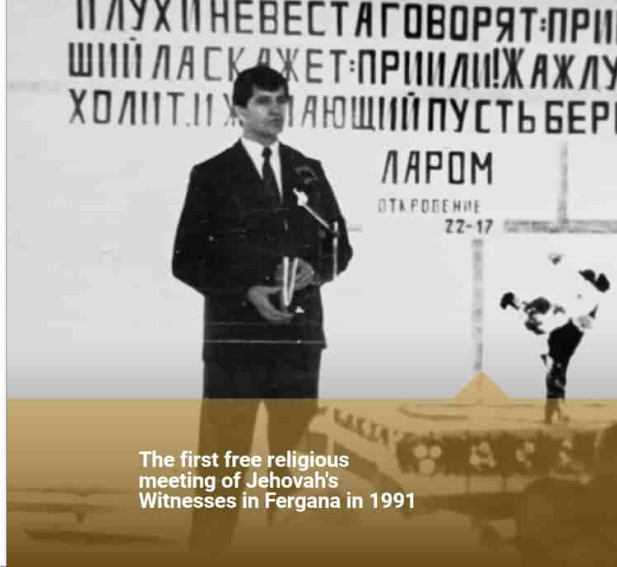


Year 1989

For the first time in the history of Uzbekistan, 50 Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to travel to an international convention held in Poland



In March 1991, the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the Soviet Union, including the Republic of Uzbekistan, was officially legalized



The first free religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Fergana in 1991



In the 1990s, about **1,600** people would gather with Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan to study God's Word together.

In some cases, whole families would start studying the Bible together

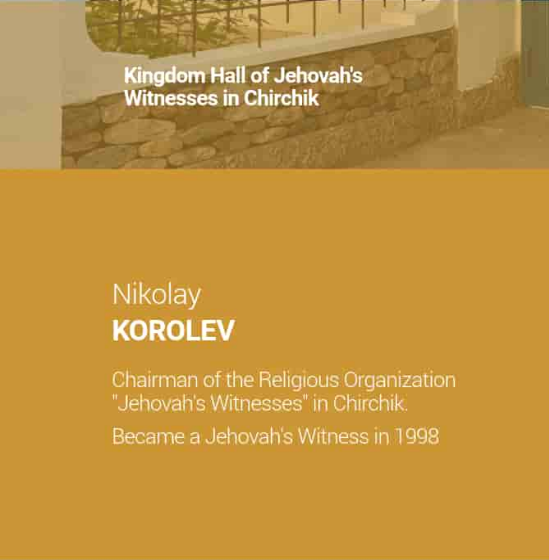
In September 1991,

the first regional convention of Jehovah's Witnesses was held in Central Asia. It took place at the ADK stadium in Almaty (Kazakhstan). More than 5,000 believers including from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan attended this event





Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Chirchik



Nikolay KOROLEV

Chairman of the Religious Organization "Jehovah's Witnesses" in Chirchik.
Became a Jehovah's Witness in 1998



In 1994, the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses was registered in Fergana and Chirchik

In 1999, it was successfully re-registered

CHAPTER 3

FOUNDATION OF THE TEACHINGS— WHAT DO JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES BELIEVE?

“All colors will agree in the dark. . . .”

De Unitate Ecclesiae

Essay III., “Of Unity in Religion”

Sir Francis Bacon, English philosopher and poet

The context of this quote from the great scientist/philosopher states: “There be also two false peaces or unities: the one, when the peace is grounded but upon an implicit ignorance; for all colours will agree in the dark.”

How important it is to remember this truth to all those who endeavor to study the religious diversity of the world. To onlookers, the religious denominations may seem to be alike, but upon close study, the penetrating gaze of a scientist notices a difference, a special “color” of each denomination. And therein lies the professionalism of a religious scholar and researcher, does it not?

It is “darkness” or ignorance that causes exaggerated generalizations, labels, and clichés. It is the “darkness” of the mind, limited understanding, lack of knowledge that inevitably breeds xenophobia, intolerance, and results in persecution and violence in society. All of this is the mark of a narrow mind.

In this chapter, I want to share with you the distinctive “color” of the Christian doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This color is extraordinarily unique and distinct from other Christian denominations.

And I truly hope that this transmitted knowledge, like a bright light, will help you to see a clear picture and save the mind from the darkness

of fears and prejudices about this denomination. This will undoubtedly contribute to greater tolerance and peace in our society.

To begin with, a person who encounters Jehovah's Witnesses for the first time is usually 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, they 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. Each one of them knows why he believes one thing and not another.

Moreover, their teachings do not contain dogmas or traditions. 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

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 emphasized.* "Jehovah's Witnesses have sought to

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1993), <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Proclaimers-of-Gods-Kingdom/You-Are-My-Witnesses-Says-Jehovah/Proclaiming-the-Lords-Return-1870-1914/>.

conform ever more closely to the Biblical teachings and practices of first-century Christianity.”¹

This is also noted by one of the outstanding religious experts of our day, Professor Ekaterina Sergeevna Elbakyan, who defined Jehovah’s Witnesses by saying that “[the] foundation of their teachings is very close to ‘historical’ Christianity in its Protestant variation.”²

Therefore, the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses do not include the Nicene Creed, a statement of belief widely used in Christian liturgy that 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 through his “faithful and discreet slave” an ever more accurate understanding of Bible truths and prophecies.

Here is how it is explained in their literature:

Jesus is the Head of the Christian congregation. (Ephesians 5:23) Today, from his position in heaven, Jesus directs his followers on earth by means of a “faithful and discreet slave.” (Matthew 24:45) Having received an appointment from Jesus himself, the “slave” would have a certain amount of authority but would remain a slave of Christ and serve Christ’s brothers. Who is that slave? How does the slave care for us?

Jehovah has always used a man or a small group of men to give direction to his people. (Malachi 2:7; Hebrews 1:1) After Jesus’ death, the apostles and elders in Jerusalem took the lead. (Acts 15:2) Following that pattern, today a small group of elders—the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses—provides spiritual food and directs the preaching work. This group is “the faithful and discreet slave whom [Jesus] appointed.” (Matthew 24:45a) All members of the Governing Body are spirit-anointed Christians,

¹ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 120.

² E. S. Elbakyan, “New Religions in Russia: 20 Years Later,” *Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference* [in Russian] (Moscow: December 14, 2012), 119.

who look forward to joining Christ in his heavenly Kingdom when their life on earth is over.¹

Another main feature that characterizes Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings is that they constantly change—or as Jehovah's Witnesses state it, understanding of certain Bible prophecies is refined. Although key doctrines remain unchanged, the explanation of certain prophecies, teachings, and parables may be refined.

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.²

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the following basic beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses:

¹ *Enjoy Life Forever!—An Interactive Bible Course* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2021), 225, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/enjoy-life-forever/section-4/lesson-54/>.

² “Why Have Jehovah's Witnesses Changed Some of Their Beliefs?,” Frequently Asked Questions, [www.jw.org](https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-doctrine-changes/) (official website of Jehovah's Witnesses), <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-doctrine-changes/>; see “Beliefs Clarified,” in *Watch Tower Publications Index 1986–2021* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2022), <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200277174>.

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. The doctrine of the Trinity of God is not Biblical .	Matt. 3:17; John 8:42; 14:28; John 20:17; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28
5. Jesus Christ was the first of God's creations	Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14
6. Jesus Christ died on a stake, not on a cross	Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30
7. Jesus 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; Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:25-28
8. Jesus Christ set a perfect example to imitate	1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6; Heb. 12:1-3; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 10:7; John 4:34; 6:38
9. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as an immortal spirit person	1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:17, 18
10. Jesus Christ is now present in spirit	John 14:19; Matt. 24:3; 2 Cor. 5:16; Ps. 110:1, 2
11. God's Kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ will bring peace and righteousness and will establish wonderful living conditions on earth	Isa. 9:6, 7; 11:1-5; Dan. 7:13, 14; Matt. 6:10; Ps. 72:1-4; Rev. 7:9, 10, 13-17; 21:3, 4
12. Earth will never be destroyed or depopulated	Eccl. 1:4; Isa. 45:18; Ps. 78:69

13. In the battle of Armageddon, God will destroy all wickedness forever	Rev. 16:14, 16; Zeph. 3:8; Dan. 2:44; Isa. 34:2; Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9
14. People God approves will receive eternal life	John 3:16; 10:27, 28; 17:3; Mark 10:29, 30
15. There is only one road to life	Matt. 7:13, 14; Eph. 4:4, 5
16. We are living in the “last days” of Satan’s wicked system	Matt. 24:3-14; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Luke 17:26-30
17. Human death is due to Adam’s sin	Rom. 5:12; 6:23
18. The human soul ceases to exist at death	Ezek. 18:4; Eccl. 9:10; Ps. 6:5; 146:4; John 11:11-14
19. Hell is not a place of torment but mankind’s common grave	Gen. 3:19; Job 14:13, 14; Rev. 20:13, 14, AV (margin)
20. Resurrection is the hope for the dead	1 Cor. 15:20-22; John 5:28, 29; John 11:25, 26
21. Only 144,000 Christ’s followers go to heaven and rule with Christ; they are called “the little flock,” “the Israel of God”	Luke 12:32; Rev. 14:1, 3; 1 Cor. 15:40-53; Rev. 5:9, 10; John 3:3; Rev. 7:3, 4; Heb. 8:10-13
22. Christian congregation is built upon Christ Jesus	Eph. 2:20; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42
23. Prayers must be directed only to Jehovah God through Christ	John 14:6, 13, 14; 1 Tim. 2:5
24. Images must not be used in worship	Ex. 20:4, 5; Lev. 26:1; 1 Cor. 10:14; Ps. 115:4-8
25. Worshiping anyone other than God is prohibited	Deut. 4:39, 40; 6:13; 10:20; Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; Eph. 4:4-6

26. Spiritism must be shunned	Deut. 18:10-12; Gal. 5:19-21; Lev. 19:31
27. Satan is the invisible ruler of the world	1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31
28. Jehovah's Witnesses have no part in interfaith movements	2 Cor. 6:14-17; 11:13-15; Gal. 5:9; Deut. 7:1-5
29. God's servants must keep separate from the world	Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15; John 15:19; 17:16
30. All human laws that do not conflict with God's laws should be obeyed	Matt. 22:20, 21; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:15; Rom. 13:1-7; Mark 12:17
31. God's servant as a worker should be distinguished by honesty and diligence	Prov. 22:29; Eph. 4:28; Eccl. 3:13; Prov. 15:19
32. God's servants should be distinguished by kindness, courage and boldness, meekness, and humility	Col. 3:12; Prov. 11:17; 1 Chron. 28:20; Prov. 28:1
33. Life and blood are sacred	Gen. 9:3, 4; Lev. 17:11, 14; Acts 15:28, 29
34. Believers must abide by the Bible's moral standards	1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 3:2; Prov. 5:1-23
35. 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
36. Paid clergy class and special titles are improper	Matt. 23:8-12; 20:25-27; Job 32:21, 22
37. Man did not evolve but was created	Isa. 45:12; Gen. 1:27
38. Baptism by complete immersion symbolizes dedication to God	Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:23; Acts 19:4, 5

39. God's servants must bear witness to Bible truth	Rom. 10:10; Heb. 13:15; Isa. 43:10-12
40. Christians must study the Holy Scriptures and engage their power of reason in the worship of God	Rom. 12:1, 2; Prov. 3:21; Mark 12:30
41. Evil and suffering should not have existed	Rev. 21:3, 4
42. Marriage and family is a sacred union of man and woman, established by God	Matt. 19:6; Heb. 13:4; Gen. 2:24; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10
43. Worshiping God is not just about praying and attending meetings	Jas. 2:26; Micah 6:8; Jas. 1:26, 27; John 4:23, 24
44. Congregations of God's servants should be united in love	John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13; John 13:34, 35

When explaining Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs, I think it is very important to rely on the original source of information, that is, key Bible scriptures, which Jehovah's Witnesses use, and their publications. 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 opinions 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

"All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, so that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work."—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

Yes, the Bible is the essential book for Jehovah's Witnesses, the Book of all books, the indisputable authority.

The entire 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 as 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

“It took more than 1,600 years to write the Bible. Its writers lived at different times. Some were well-educated and others were not. For example, one was a doctor. Others were farmers, fishermen, shepherds, prophets, judges, and kings. Even though there were different writers, all parts of the Bible agree. It doesn’t say one thing in one chapter and the opposite in another.”²

Unlike the Orthodox and Catholics, they recognize only canonical books of the Bible.

C. T. Russell’s words still remain the motto for Jehovah’s Witnesses. In 1909, he wrote: “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

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.

¹ “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe in the Old Testament?” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/belief-in-old-and-new-testaments/>.

² *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2015), 21, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/bible-study/the-bible-a-book-from-god/>.

³ “Benefiting from Daily Bible Reading,” *Watchtower*, May 1, 1995, 13, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1995323>.

But this 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.

3. *God's Name Is Jehovah*

“Then God said once more to Moses: “This is what you are to say to the Israelites, “Jehovah the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”—Exodus 3:15.

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that:

Jehovah is the true God of the Bible, the Creator of all things. (Revelation 4:11) The prophets Abraham and Moses worshipped him, as did Jesus. (Genesis 24:27; Exodus 15:1, 2; John 20:17) He is the God, not just of one people, but of “all the earth.” (Psalm 47:2) Jehovah is God's unique name as revealed in the Bible. (Exodus 3:15; Psalm 83:18) It comes from a Hebrew verb that means “to become,” and a number of scholars suggest that the name means “He Causes to Become.” This definition well fits Jehovah's role as the Creator and the Fulfiller of his purpose.—Isaiah 55:10, 11.¹

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 “the divine name, represented by the four Hebrew consonants יהוה, appears nearly 7,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.”

Although Jehovah's Witnesses repeatedly note that the original way to pronounce this name is unknown today, they find it important

¹ “Who Is Jehovah?,” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/who-is-jehovah/>.

to use the form “Jehovah.” To justify their opinion, they offer the following reasoning:

Those who say that the divine name should not be used because it is not known exactly how to pronounce it will nevertheless freely use the name Jesus. However, Jesus’ first-century disciples said his name quite differently from the way most Christians do today. To Jewish Christians, the name Jesus was probably pronounced Ye-shua'. And the title “Christ” was Ma-shiach, or “Messiah.” Greek-speaking Christians called him I-e-sous Khri-stos, and Latin-speaking Christians Iesus Christus. Under inspiration, the Greek translation of his name was recorded in the Bible, showing that first-century Christians followed the sensible course of using the form of the name common in their language. Similarly, the New World Bible Translation Committee feels that it is reasonable to use the form “Jehovah,” even though that rendering is not exactly the way the divine name would have been pronounced in ancient Hebrew.¹

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 form in their works. It is the form “Jehovah” that is used in the Orthodox Synodal translation of the Bible.

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. The Doctrine of the Trinity of God Is Not Biblical

“Jesus said to her: ‘Stop clinging to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending

¹ “The Divine Name in the Hebrew Scriptures,” Appendix A4 in *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—2013 Revision* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2013), 1733 <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/nwt/appendix-a/tetragrammaton-divine-name/>.

to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God.”” — John 20:17.

According to the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus is not equal to God, and hence there is no Trinity. God's Holy Spirit is not a person but represents God's active power. 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

Historically, the term Trinity first appears only at the end of the second century C.E. The word Trinity in relation to Christian teaching is first found in Theophilus of Antioch about 180 C.E. (Earlier this term was

¹ *God's Kingdom Rules!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 14–15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/the-kingdom-is-born-in-heaven/>.

² “Is Jesus Almighty God?” Bible Questions Answered, [jw.org, https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-jesus-almighty/](https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-jesus-almighty/).

used only by representatives of Gnosticism.) Of the Latin theologians, the word Trinity was first used by Tertullian in his treatise *On Shyness*.¹ But even the use of the term was not the use of the concept of trinity in the modern sense. This teaching was not intrinsic and was accepted, but not without controversy.

Throughout the history of Christianity, there have been heated discussions around the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians in the first few centuries understood this term in different ways that did not agree with each other. For example, not all Christians recognized Christ as equal to God. Moreover, not everyone considered Christ and God to be one person. Among the first to question the Trinity of God were the monarchist Christians (between the first and the third centuries). They defended the fundamental unity of God (Divine monarchy).

Christian sects such as the Patripassians and the Sabellians also contributed to this discussion, and later this issue was raised by the Alexandrian presbyter Arius. All of these directions had their own views on the position of Christ and on his equality with God. In a dispute with them, Athanasius the Great and Gregory the Theologian formulated provisions that were accepted as the dogma of the church and enshrined in the Nicene Creed only in 325 C.E. But even when the divinity of the two hypostases (Father and Son) was, as it were, proven, for many Christians the question of the divinity of the Holy Spirit was still controversial; and only at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 C.E., was the modern doctrine of the Trinity formed in the Nino-Constantinople Creed.

However, Trinitarian disputes resumed with renewed vigor in modern times with the emergence on Protestant soil of movements that denied the Trinity of God (Socinians, Unitarians, and later, at the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, Jehovah's Witnesses

¹ Archimandrite Nicephorus, *The Illustrated Complete Popular Bible Encyclopedia* [in Russian] (Moscow, 1891; Reprint: Light of the East, 1989), 706–07. See also *Catholic Encyclopedia in Five Volumes* [in Russian] (Moscow: Franciscans Publishing House, 2011), 4:1459–64.

and Oneness Pentecostals). All these Christian confessions in the scientific community are usually called “antitrinitarians.”

Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses is not the only Christian denomination that denies Christ as equal to God and the very idea of the Trinity of God.

5. Jesus Christ Was First of God's Creations

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”—Colossians 1:15.

Regarding Jesus, Jehovah's Witnesses explain:

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 1:1.

Some people believe that Jesus and God are one and the same person. But that's not what the Bible teaches. 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

Thus, Jesus is the only, unparalleled “Christ, the Son of the living God.”—Matthew 16:16.

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* 44–45.

Jehovah's Witnesses fully recognize the earthly life of Jesus, but there is one nuance.

6. *Jesus Christ Died on a Stake, Not on a Cross*

“Christ purchased us, releasing us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse instead of us, because it is written: ‘Accursed is every man hung upon a stake.’”—Galatians 3:13.

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 second century C.E., 150 years after Jesus' death. It becomes a symbol of Christian belief much later. And 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.

Credit should be given to Jehovah's Witnesses for being rather serious and presenting very strong arguments to support their view:

Long before the Christian era, crosses were used by the ancient Babylonians as symbols in their worship of the fertility god Tammuz. The use of the cross spread into Egypt, India, Syria, and China. Then, centuries later, the Israelites adulterated their worship of Jehovah with acts of veneration to the false god Tammuz. The Bible refers to this form of worship as a “detestable thing.”—Ezekiel 8:13, 14.

The Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John use the Greek word *stau•ros* when referring to the instrument of execution on which Jesus died. (Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:30; Luke 23:26) The word *stau•ros* refers to an upright pole, stake, or post. The book *The Non-Christian Cross*, by J. D. Parsons, explains: “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 *stau•ros* used in the case of Jesus was other than an ordinary *stau•ros*; 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.”

As recorded at Acts 5:30, the apostle Peter used the word *xy•lon*, meaning “tree,” as a synonym for *stau•ros*, denoting, not a two-beamed cross, but an ordinary piece of upright timber or tree. It was not until about 300 years after Jesus’ death that some professed Christians promoted the idea that Jesus was put to death on a two-beamed cross. However, this view was based on tradition and a misuse of the Greek word *stau•ros*. It is noteworthy that some ancient drawings depicting Roman executions feature a single wooden pole or tree.¹

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. 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.

Thus, we cannot say that Jehovah’s Witnesses’ point of view is without basis.

¹ “Did Jesus Really Die on a Cross?,” *Awake!*, April 2006, 12, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g200604/Did-Jesus-Really-Die-on-a-Cross/>.

² *Christianity: Encyclopedic Dictionary in Three Volumes* (Moscow: Scientific Publishing House Big Russian Encyclopedia, 1993) 1:832–33.

Finally, Jehovah's Witnesses do not use the instrument of execution (neither a cross nor a stake) in their worship. They view that as a form of idolatry. For this very reason they decided to stop wearing the cross-and-crown pins back in 1928. It was emphasized that, not a decorative symbol, but one's activity as a witness showed he was a Christian. Additionally, they ceased printing the cross-and-crown on the cover of the *Watchtower* magazine in 1931. 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. Jesus Christ's Human Life Was Paid as a Ransom for Obedient Humans

"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 20:28.

"By this the love of God was revealed in our case, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might gain life through him. The love is in this respect, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins."—1 John 4:9, 10.

In this position, Jehovah's Witnesses have almost no differences with other Christian religions and denominations.

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.

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

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.

Also, since Jesus redeemed obedient people, there is no longer a need to sacrifice animals.

"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. (Hebrews 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.—Hebrews 2:14, 15."²

"Because of the ransom, we can have a close friendship with Jehovah even though we are imperfect. Because of the ransom, the works of the Devil will be completely broken up. (1 John 3:8) Because of the ransom, Jehovah's original purpose for the earth will be fulfilled. The entire planet will become a paradise. Everyone you meet will love Jehovah and serve him. Let us, then, each day look for ways to show our appreciation for the ransom—God's greatest gift to mankind!"³

"Jesus' sacrifice corresponds exactly to what Adam lost—one perfect human life. (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22, 45, 46) The Bible says:

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, 54–55.

² "The Ransom—A 'Perfect Present' From the Father," *Watchtower*, February 2017, 12, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-february-2017/jesus-ransom-a-perfect-present/>.

³ "Continue Appreciating the Ransom," *Watchtower*, April 2021, 19, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-april-2021/Continue-Appreciating-the-Ransom/>.

‘Just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one person [Jesus Christ] many will be made righteous.’ (Romans 5:19) This explains how the death of one man can pay the ransom for many sinners. In fact, Jesus’ sacrifice is ‘a corresponding ransom for all’ those who take the steps necessary to benefit from it.—1 Timothy 2:5, 6.”¹

8. Jesus Christ Set a Perfect Example to Imitate

“In fact, to this course you were called, because even Christ suffered for you, leaving a model for you to follow his steps closely.”—1 Peter 2:21.

“The one who says he remains in union with him is himself under obligation to go on walking just as that one walked.”—1 John 2:6.

Like all Christians, Jehovah’s Witnesses consider Jesus Christ as the Great Teacher and Great Prophet, who throughout his earthly life showed people the greatest example of serving God. The Witnesses believe that Christ, in the manifestation of attributes, was the complete likeness of his heavenly Father, Jehovah, and lived on earth as a perfect man. Thus, his example of serving God was also perfect.

One of the songs that Jehovah’s Witnesses sing at their worship services is called “Christ, Our Model.” And the lyrics, in my opinion, perfectly reflect the attitude of Jehovah’s Witnesses to the example of Christ:

“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.”²

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that they are the ones who fully and most accurately try to fulfill God’s commandments, the main ones

¹ “How Is Jesus’ Sacrifice ‘a Ransom for Many?’ Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-sacrifice-ransom/>.

² “Christ, Our Model,” in *“Sing Out Joyfully” to Jehovah* (Wallkill, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2016), <https://www.jw.org/en/library/music-songs/sing-out-joyfully/13-christ-our-model>.

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.

Thus, Jesus taught to value the relationship with God above all else in life; and then, as the Witnesses believe, those who learn about God’s qualities and come to love him will have a desire to fulfill his commandments.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also taught his followers how to show love to those around them. In it, he said: “All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them. This, in fact, is what the Law and the Prophets mean.”—Matthew 7:12.

These words have become the standard of human decency even for non-believers.

And in contrast to the accusations sometimes made against the Witnesses, that they allegedly deny Christ, one can list the books published by them that emphasize the importance of Christ in their teachings: *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*; *Learn From the Great Teacher*; *Come Be My Follower*; *Jesus—The Way, the Truth, the Life*.

9. Jesus Christ Was Raised From the Dead

As an Immortal Spirit Person

“For Christ died once for all time for sins, a righteous person for unrighteous ones, in order to lead you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”—1 Peter 3:18.

“It is sown a physical body; it is raised up a spiritual body . . . flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s Kingdom.”—1 Corinthians 15:44-50.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus’ resurrection was not physical but “in the spirit,” since humans of “flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s Kingdom”; therefore, Jesus was raised up to heaven in his spiritual body.

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. (Hebrews 7:26; 1 Timothy 6:14-16; Philippians 2:9-11; Acts 2:34; 1 Corinthians 15:27) His resurrection was performed by Jehovah God himself.—Acts 3:15; 5:30; Romans 4:24; 10:9.”¹

10. Jesus Christ Is Now Present in Spirit

“While he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately, saying: “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.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, based on what is found in the Bible, that Christ is already present; but that not everyone has yet realized and fully understood this fact.

As a result of some calculations based on the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 4:7-34) and information in other Bible books,² 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 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.”⁴

The very first act that the enthroned Christ performed was “cleansing the heavens” of Satan and hurling him and the demons down to the vicinity of the earth. As Jehovah’s Witnesses believe, it is for this reason that after 1914, catastrophes continued on the earth, and became a part

¹ “Resurrection,” in *Insight on the Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2018), 2:786, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200003709>.

² “What Does Bible Chronology Indicate About the Year 1914?,” Bible Questions Answered, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/daniel-4-bible-chronology-1914/>; *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1999), 82–97.

³ *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1989), 149.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

of “the sign” of Christ’s presence and the “last days” of Satan’s wicked system of things, as the Bible defines them.

11. God’s Kingdom Ruled by Jesus Christ Will Bring Peace and Righteousness, and Will Establish Wonderful Living Conditions on Earth

“For a child has been born to us, A son has been given to us; and the rulership will rest on his shoulder. His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. To the increase of his rulership and to peace, there will be no end, On the throne of David and on his kingdom in order to establish it firmly and to sustain it Through justice and righteousness, From now on and forever. The zeal of Jehovah of armies will do this.”—Isaiah 9:6, 7.

Regarding God’s Kingdom, Jehovah’s Witnesses explain:

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.” (Genesis 1:28) Jehovah also required that they respect his standards of good and bad. (Genesis 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. (Exodus 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.—Matthew 25:34.¹

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.” Every one of Jehovah’s Witnesses believes that this teaching is the “good news for all nations”:

God created the earth so that righteous humans could live on it forever. (Psalm 37:29) . . . When God fulfills his promises, what will conditions on earth be like? . . .

The earth’s new human society will not be divided by nationality or ethnicity. Mankind will be one united people. (Revelation 7:9, 10) All humans living on earth will love God and love their neighbor, and they will cooperate peacefully to accomplish God’s original purpose of taking care of their home, the earth.—Psalm 115:16.

When God’s Kingdom takes charge of the earth, the Creator will take full control of all aspects of the weather, keeping it in perfect balance. (Psalm 24:1, 2) When he was on earth, Jesus gave a glimpse of the power God gave him when he effortlessly calmed a frightening storm. (Mark 4:39, 41) Under Christ’s rule, no one will have any reason to fear natural disasters. God’s Kingdom will also restore the original harmony between nature and humans.—Hosea 2:18.

Everybody will enjoy perfect health. No one will become ill, grow old, or die. (Isaiah 35:5, 6) People will enjoy a beautiful and clean environment like the one the first human couple enjoyed in the garden of Eden. In the new world, just as in Eden, the ground will produce food in abundance and all inhabitants of the earth will

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!*, 32–33.

have plenty. (Genesis 2:9) Like God's ancient nation of Israel, everyone in the Paradise will "eat [their] bread to satisfaction."—Leviticus 26:4, 5.

Under God's global government, all people will enjoy peace and will treat one another kindly and fairly. There will be no wars, no abuse of power, and no need to struggle for basic needs. The Bible promises: "They will sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one will make them afraid."—Micah 4:3, 4.

Every family will have a home without fear of being displaced, and all the work that we do will be rewarding. As the Bible says, those living in God's new world "will not toil for nothing," or in vain.—Isaiah 65:21-23.

The Bible promises: "The earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah." (Isaiah 11:9) Members of the new human society will learn from the infinite wisdom of their Creator, Jehovah, and about the beautiful things he created. They will not use their knowledge to build weapons or to harm other humans. (Isaiah 2:4) Instead, they will learn how to live in peace with one another and how to care for the earth.—Psalm 37:11.

God took great care to prepare the earth so that we can enjoy life to the full each day. He intends for humans to live on earth forever. (Psalm 37:29; Isaiah 45:18) To fulfill his original purpose, God "will swallow up death forever." (Isaiah 25:8) "Death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore," the Bible promises. (Revelation 21:4) God will give all humans—both those whom he saves when he destroys this wicked world and the countless dead ones he will resurrect in the coming new world—the opportunity to live forever.—John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15.¹

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that since God is called "Almighty," it means that nobody and nothing can prevent him from fulfilling his

¹ "The Paradise New World That Is Near!" *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 2, 2021, 13–15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no2-2021-may-jun/new-world-paradise/>.

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 is the Fulfiller of all of his promises.

“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!”¹

12. Earth Will Never Be Destroyed or Depopulated

“A generation is going, and a generation is coming, But the earth remains forever.”—Ecclesiastes 1:4.

“For this is what Jehovah says, The Creator of the heavens, the true God, The One who formed the earth, its Maker who firmly established it, Who did not create it simply for nothing, but formed it to be inhabited.”—Isaiah 45:18.

“No, planet Earth will never be destroyed, burned in fire, or replaced. The Bible teaches that God created the earth to be inhabited forever. . . . God will not allow humans to ruin the earth completely by pollution, warfare, or any other means.”²

“Jehovah wants us to have the best life possible. When he created the first humans, Adam and Eve, he placed them in a beautiful paradise, the garden of Eden. Then “God blessed them, and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful and become many, fill the earth and subdue it.’” (Genesis 1:28)

¹ *Draw Close to Jehovah* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2022), 169, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/draw-close/wisdom/divine-wisdom-jehovah-god/>.

² “Will the Earth Be Destroyed?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/earth-destroyed/>.

Jehovah wanted them to have children, to make the whole earth a paradise, and to take care of the animals. His purpose was for all people to enjoy perfect health and live forever.

“Although things did not work out that way, God’s purpose has not changed. (Isaiah 46:10, 11) He still wants obedient humans to live forever in perfect conditions.—Revelation 21:3, 4.”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.

13. In the Battle of Armageddon God Will Destroy All Wickedness Forever

“And I saw three unclean inspired expressions that looked like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the wild beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are, in fact, expressions inspired by demons and they perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the entire inhabited earth, to gather them together to the war+ of the great day of God the Almighty. . . . And they gathered them together to the place that is called in Hebrew Armageddon.”—Revelation 16:13, 14, 16.

“Armageddon is the symbolic place of ‘the war of the great day of God the Almighty, his war against the wicked.’”²

Their publications give the following explanation:

The war of Armageddon will not destroy but save mankind! How so? The Bible shows that the war of Armageddon will save mankind by ending human rule. That war will save mankind by removing the wicked and preserving the righteous. And it will save mankind by protecting our planet from ruin. (Revelation 11:18) . . .

¹ *Enjoy Life Forever!*, 103.

² “What Is Armageddon?,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 6, 2017, 16, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no6-2017-november/survive-armageddon/>.

The word “Armageddon” appears just once in the Scriptures, and it comes from a Hebrew term that means “Mountain of Megiddo.” (Revelation 16:16; fn.) Megiddo was a city in ancient Israel. (Joshua 17:11) But Armageddon does not refer to any literal place on earth. Strictly speaking, it refers to the situation to which “the kings of the entire inhabited earth” are gathered in opposition to Jehovah.—Revelation 16:14.¹

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.

As described in their publications:

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 Timothy 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. (James 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. (Isaiah 55:7) As individuals, they have not yet

¹ “Armageddon Is Good News!,” *Watchtower*, September 2019, 8, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-september-2019/armageddon-is-good-news/>.

received their final judgment. It is this system that stands condemned. 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. (Read 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!—Psalm 37:12-15.¹

The previous teaching and this one are often used by different propagandists 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-cultists are distorting the facts so as 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?

¹ “What Will Go When God’s Kingdom Comes?,” *Watchtower*, April 2017, 10, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-april-2017/what-will-be-gone-when-gods-kingdom-comes/>.

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.”¹

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 to defend themselves when this vicious attack comes.”

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.

14. People God Approves Will Receive Eternal Life

“The righteous will possess the earth, and they will live forever on it.”—Psalms 37:29.

“The rebellion in Eden did not thwart God’s original purpose for mankind and the earth. God’s perfect love and sense of justice moved him to provide a way to free us from the bondage of inherited sin and death. The apostle Paul explained: ‘The wages sin pays is death, but the gift God gives is everlasting life by Christ Jesus our Lord.’ (Romans 6:23) Lovingly, God ‘gave his only-begotten Son [Jesus Christ], so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.’ (John 3:16) By offering himself willingly as a ransom sacrifice, Jesus redeemed all that was lost through Adam.”²

15. There Is Only One Road to Life

“Jesus said to him: ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’—John 14:6.

¹ “The Truth About Armageddon,” *Watchtower*, February 1, 2012, 6, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20120201/The-Truth-About-Armageddon/>.

² “You Can Live Forever on Earth,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 2, 2018, 13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no2-2018-may-jun/live-forever-on-earth/>.

“Jesus saved faithful humans when he gave his life as a ransom sacrifice. (Matthew 20:28) Thus, the Bible calls Jesus the ‘Savior of the world.’ (1 John 4:14) It also states: ‘There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved.’—Acts 4:12.”¹

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.”²

16. We Are Living in the “Last Days” of Satan’s Wicked System

“But know this, that in the last days critical times hard to deal with will be here.”—2 Timothy 3:1.

“These events would be the sign of ‘the conclusion of the system of things.’ Jesus said: ‘Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another.’ (Matthew 24:3, 7) He also said that there would be ‘pestilences’—epidemic diseases. (Luke 21:11) Are you seeing the events that Jesus prophesied?

“Devastating wars, famines, and earthquakes as well as relentless diseases have ravaged the earth in our day. In 2004, for example, a massive earthquake in the Indian Ocean triggered a tsunami that killed some 225,000 people. In over one year, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in some 2.6 million deaths worldwide. Jesus said that events like these would indicate that the end of this system of things is near.”³

¹ “Jesus Saves—How?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-saves/>.

² “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe That They Are the Only Ones Who Will Be Saved?,” *Watchtower*, November 1, 2008, 28, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20081101/Do-Jehovahs-Witnesses-Believe-That-They-Are-the-Only-Ones-Who-Will-Be-Saved/>.

³ “When Will the End Come? What Jesus Said,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 2, 2021, 8, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no2-2021-may-jun/what-jesus-said-about-the-end/>.

17. Human Death Is Due to Adam’s Sin

“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.

“The first humans, Adam and Eve, lost their lives because they sinned against God. (Genesis 3:17-19) Death was the only possible outcome of their rebellion against God, for with him is ‘the source of life.’—Psalm 36:9; Genesis 2:17.

“Adam passed on the defect of sin to all his descendants. The Bible says: ‘Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned.’ (Romans 5:12) All people die because they all sin.—Romans 3:23.”¹

The article “What Is Sin?” on the official website [jw.org](http://www.jw.org) states the following:

Sin is any action, feeling, or thought that goes against God’s standards. It includes breaking God’s laws by doing what is wrong, or unrighteous, in God’s sight. (1 John 3:4; 5:17) The Bible also describes sins of omission—that is, failing to do what is right.—James 4:17.

In the Bible’s original languages, the words for sin mean “to miss a mark,” or a target. For example, a group of soldiers in ancient Israel were so adept at slinging stones that they “would not miss.” That expression, if translated literally, could read “would not sin.” (Judges 20:16) Thus, to sin is to miss the mark of God’s perfect standards. As the Creator, God has the right to set standards for mankind. (Revelation 4:11) We are accountable to him for our actions.—Romans 14:12.²

“Adam and Eve passed on their sinful condition to all their descendants. This is similar to the way human parents pass on genetic

¹ “Why Do People Die?,” Bible Questions Answered, [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/why-do-people-die/>.

² “What Is Sin?,” Bible Questions Answered, [jw.org](http://www.jw.org), <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-sin/>.

defects. (Romans 5:12) Thus, all humans have been born 'in sin,' meaning that we are born imperfect and inclined toward error.—Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3.

“Because of inherited sin, or imperfection, we get sick, grow old, and die. (Romans 6:23) We also suffer the consequences of our own errors and those of others.—Ecclesiastes 8:9; James 3:2.”¹

18. The Human Soul Ceases to Exist at Death

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all, nor do they have any more reward, because all memory of them is forgotten. Also, their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished, and they no longer have any share in what is done under the sun. . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might, for there is no work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the Grave, where you are going.”—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10.

This teaching was one of the very first to be adopted by the small group of Bible Students. *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 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.²

“The word ‘soul’ in the Bible is a translation of the Hebrew word *ne'phesh* and the Greek word *psy•khe'*. The Hebrew word literally means ‘a creature that breathes,’ and the Greek word means ‘a living

¹ “What Was the Original Sin?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/original-sin/>.

² *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 127.

being.’ The soul, then, is the entire creature, not something inside that survives the death of the body.”¹

“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.”²

“‘There is no work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the Grave.’ (Ecclesiastes 9:10) The Scriptures definitively tell us that when someone dies, ‘he returns to the ground; on that very day his thoughts perish.’ (Psalm 146:4) A dead soul is in a state of inactivity, and thus, the Scriptures often metaphorically refer to the dead as ‘sleeping.’—Matthew 9:24.”³

19. Hell Is Not a Place of Torment but Mankind’s Common Grave

“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.

“For the one who has died has been acquitted from his sin.”—Romans 6:7.

From the very beginning, the 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. In 1903, he was challenged to public debate. The condition of the dead was one of the issues in the resulting series of debates between C. T. Russell and Dr. E. L. Eaton, who served as minister of the North Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church and

¹ “What Is the Soul?,” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-a-soul/>.

² “A Sure Guide to Happiness,” *Watchtower*, June 15, 2006, 5, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20060615/A-Sure-Guide-to-Happiness/>.

³ “The Soul,” *Awake!*, December 2015, 13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201512/the-soul/>.

as spokesman for an unofficial alliance of Protestant ministers in the western part of Pennsylvania. During those debates C. T. Russell said:

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. . . . 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

20. Resurrection Hope for the Dead

“Do not be amazed at this, for the hour 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, and those who practiced vile things to a resurrection of judgment.”—John 5:28, 29.

“‘The resurrection of the dead’ is part of the ‘foundation,’ or ‘primary doctrine,’ of all Christian teachings. (Heb. 6:1, 2)”²

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 means “revival of the dead.”

¹ *Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 129–130.

² “The Resurrection—A Sure Hope!,” *Watchtower*, December 2020, 2, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-december-2020/The-Resurrection-A-Sure-Hope/>.

Jehovah's Witnesses are convinced that:

Some people are resurrected to life in heaven to rule as kings with Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:1; Revelation 5:9, 10) The Bible calls this 'the first resurrection' and 'the earlier resurrection,' both expressions implying that there is another resurrection to follow. (Revelation 20:6; Philippians 3:11) This later resurrection will be to life on earth, which the vast majority of those brought back to life will enjoy.—Psalm 37:29. . . .

The Bible says that 'there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.' (Acts 24:15) The righteous include faithful people, such as Noah, Sarah, and Abraham. (Genesis 6:9; Hebrews 11:11; James 2:21) The unrighteous include those who failed to meet God's standards but did not have the opportunity to learn and follow them.

However, those who become so wicked that they are beyond reform will not be resurrected. When such ones die, they suffer permanent destruction with no hope of a return to life.—Matthew 23:33; Hebrews 10:26, 27.¹

"During the Thousand Year Reign, Jesus will bring billions back to life and heal the pain caused by our 'enemy, death.' (1 Corinthians 15:26; Mark 5:38-42; Acts 24:15) The history of mankind has been like a heartbreaking story filled with sadness and loss. But as each generation is brought back to life, Jesus will be erasing the tragic story and giving the resurrected ones the opportunity to write a better story. On the basis of the ransom sacrifice, he will undo all the harm caused by sickness, war, disease, and famine. More than that, he will help us dig out and destroy the root cause of our sorrow—the sin we inherited from Adam. (Romans 5:18, 19) Jesus will completely 'break up the works of the Devil.'" —1 John 3:8.²

¹ "What Is the Resurrection?," Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-the-resurrection/>.

² *Pure Worship of Jehovah—Restored at Last!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2021), 229, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/pure-worship/worship/give-god-exclusive-devotion/>.

This understanding also has an impact on the way Jehovah's Witnesses arrange funerals. Generally, they try to recall all the good things that distinguished the personality of a deceased, say words of comfort and support to relatives and friends, and once again remind themselves and those present of the Biblical hope for the resurrection.

Commonly, a funeral talk is given at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. The memorial service could start with singing a song appropriate for this occasion. The song could be followed by a prayer. Then one of the elders gives a funeral talk, which lasts about 30 minutes. In conclusion, a prayer is said, after which the body of the deceased is transported to the burial place.

There are no rituals in the cemetery. Relatives and friends usually bring flowers and mourning wreaths, but they do not carry any religious symbols. Later, a tombstone is installed on the grave without any religious symbolism (cross, crescent, etc.) on it. Jehovah's Witnesses tend to the graves of their deceased loved ones and try to keep them in proper order.

Although the Witnesses believe in a future resurrection, death still causes them deep emotional pain and grief. At the same time, faith gives them the strength not to fall into despair, and hope serves as an incentive to live on.

***21. Only 144,000 Go to Heaven and Rule With Christ;
They Are called a "Little Flock", "the Israel of God"***

"However, you are the ones who have stuck with me in my trials; and I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and sit on thrones to judge the 12 tribes of Israel."—Luke 22:28-30.

"Then I saw, and look! the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. . . . 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, and no deceit was found in their mouths; they are without blemish.”—Revelation 14:1-5.

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.

“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 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; Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1). . . . Moreover, Jesus Christ has appointed the faithful and discreet slave ‘over all his belongings’—all Kingdom interests on earth. (Matthew 24:47) Included among these belongings are the facilities at the world 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

“The vast majority of God’s servants on earth today do not have the hope of living in heaven.”²

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that most of the 144,000 are already in heaven. The Governing Body at the headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses consists entirely of anointed Christians.

22. Christian Congregation Is Built Upon Christ Jesus

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. This is what they say:

¹ “They ‘Keep Following the Lamb,’” *Watchtower*, February 15, 2009, 26, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20090215/They-Keep-Following-the-Lamb/>.

² “The Spirit Itself Bears Witness,” *Watchtower*, January 2020, 25, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-january-2020/the-spirit-bears-witness/>.

So how are we to understand the words: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church”? To understand an excerpt correctly, we need to read its context. What were Jesus and Peter speaking about? Jesus had just asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” Without hesitation, Peter answered: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” With that, Jesus commended Peter and then added that he would build his “church,” or congregation, on an even more solid “rock,” the one in whom Peter had just expressed faith—Jesus himself.—Matthew 16:15-18.¹

23. Prayers Must Be Directed Only to Jehovah God through Christ

“You must pray, then, this way: ‘Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified.’”—Matthew 6:9.

“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

It is worth considering the importance of prayer in the life of believers.

For Jehovah’s Witnesses, prayer is one of their main religious activities; but the Witnesses themselves do not consider their prayers to be meditation, since they do not pronounce them routinely or memorize them.

One of the *Watchtower* issues says the following:

God gave humans a unique gift—the ability to communicate with him and to express their feelings to him by means of prayer. . . .

¹ “Was Peter the First Pope?,” *Watchtower*, December 1, 2015, 13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20151201/was-peter-the-first-pope/>.

² *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, 177.

Offer humble, heartfelt prayers. Your personal prayers allow you to pour out your heart before God—to convey your true feelings.

(Psalm 62:8) The Almighty cherishes sincere prayers from the heart.

Address God by personal name. Although God has many titles, he has only one personal name. . . . Abraham said: “Jehovah, please, . . . let me go on speaking [with you].” (Genesis 18:30) We too should use God’s name, Jehovah, when we pray.

Pray in your own language. God understands our thoughts and feelings no matter what language we speak. His Word assures us: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34, 35.¹

French positivist philosopher Jean Marie Guyot (1854–1888) once wrote: “Prayer is a consolation, it is one of the most pleasant delights given by faith.”²

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not have canonized prayer texts. They do not memorize prayers or write them on a piece of paper for “protection”; nor do they sew them into clothes or use them as a talisman.

The model prayer of Jesus, known as the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew chapter 6), is commonly used as a sample structure of prayer.

24. Images Must Not Be Used in Worship

“Therefore, my beloved ones, flee from idolatry.”—1 Corinthians 10:14.

Jehovah’s Witnesses 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. They cite the following Bible verses to justify their position:

- “You must not make for yourself a carved image or a form like anything that is in the heavens above or that is on the earth underneath or that is in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them nor be induced to serve them, because I Jehovah your God am a God exacting exclusive devotion.” (Exodus 20:4,

¹ “Keep Praying for God’s Favor,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 3, 2020, 10, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no3-2020-sep-oct/keep-praying-for-gods-favor/>.

² J. M. Guyot, *Irreligiousness of the Future* [in Russian] (Moscow, 1909), 143.

5) Since God requires “exclusive devotion,” he is not pleased if we praise or worship images, pictures, idols, icons, statues, or symbols.

- “I will not let statues take the praise that should be mine.” (Isaiah 42:8, *Easy-to-Read Version*) God rejects worship given to him *through* images. When some Israelites tried to worship him using a statue of a calf, God said that they had committed “a terrible sin.”—Exodus 32:7-9, *Easy-to-Read Version*.

- “We ought not to imagine that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, like something sculptured by the art and contrivance of man.” (Acts 17:29) In contrast to pagan worship, which often uses images “sculptured by the art and contrivance of man,” Christians should be “walking by faith, not by sight,” as the Bible says.—2 Corinthians 5:7.

- “Guard yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5: 21) In commands given both to the nation of Israel and to Christians, the Bible consistently exposes as a myth the teaching that God approves of the use of images and icons in worship.¹

Witnesses believe that Jehovah does not approve of his servants using images to worship him or of worship of their ancestors.²

25. *Worshipping Anyone Other than God Is Prohibited*

“Then Jesus said to him: “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service.’”—Matthew 4:10.

Jehovah’s Witnesses in the strongest possible terms reject the Christian veneration of the Virgin Mary as the “Mother of God” and the veneration of any saints and intercessors.

First, they point out that the Bible provides no basis for such veneration and here are the main reasons for this:

Mary was officially recognized by the titles of “Mother of God” and the “Queen of Heaven,” not by the compilers of the Bible, but on the

¹ “Should We Worship Images?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/should-we-worship-images/>.

² *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, 165.

basis of the participants of the Third Ecumenical Council, which took place in 431 C.E. in Ephesus.¹

In addition to it, the appendix to the Russian edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* contains 44 topics for Biblical conversations. To argue the main theses on each of these topics, references are made to the original source, that is, the Holy Scriptures. Topic 27 is specifically devoted to the problem of the worship of Mary. In it, in particular with reference to the Bible, the following arguments are presented in favor of the position of Jehovah's Witnesses:

A. Mary is the mother of Jesus, not the "Mother of God"

God has no beginning (Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17)

Mary was the mother of God's Son when he lived on earth (Luke 1:35)

B. Mary was not "always a virgin"

Married Joseph (Matthew 1:19, 20, 24, 25)

Had other children besides Jesus (Matthew 13:55, 56; Luke 8:19-21)²

Back then they were not his spiritual brothers (John 7:3, 5)

And second, Jehovah's Witnesses emphasize the role and value of personal prayer addressed directly to God:

God wants us to approach him directly in prayer even if we are burdened down by personal shortcomings. He does not assign others to hear our prayers. The Bible urges us: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself, and he himself will sustain you." (Psalm 55:22) Rather than depending on the intercession of saints or anyone else, we would do well to develop a positive view of Jehovah God.

Our heavenly Father cares about us as individuals. He wants to help us with our problems and invites us to draw close to him. (James 4:8)³

And in this, once again believers seek to imitate the first century Christians. It is known that the first Christians paid little attention to the mother of Jesus, Mary. But the world surrounding the first Christians,

¹ N. Talberg, *History of the Christian Church* [in Russian] (Moscow: Interbook, 1991), 154.

² "Topics for Bible Discussion," in *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* [Russian language edition] (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2019).

³ "Should We Pray to Saints?," Watchtower, June 1, 2013, 12, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20130601/should-we-pray-to-saints/>.

on the contrary, literally drowned in the cults of female deities, mother goddesses (Cybele, Astarte, Athena, Artemis, Isis, etc.).

The deification of Mary was introduced no earlier than the fifth century C.E. This is so, because even in the middle of the fourth century, Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus, who lived in the middle of the fourth century, condemned those who worshiped and offered up prayers to Mary in his work *Panarion*.

And only in 431 C.E., at the cathedral in the city of Ephesus, convened by the decision of the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Theodosius II, Mary was called “theotokos” and “Mother of God.” Ephesus becomes the center of Mary’s veneration. It is noteworthy that in ancient times, it was Ephesus that was the center of the worship of Artemis. Holidays in honor of the Virgin were introduced by the church even later. They were timed to coincide with local pagan holidays.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are extremely attentive to the origins of holidays or rituals. They unconditionally reject those with pagan roots.

26. Spiritism Must Be Shunned

“Do not turn to the spirit mediums, and do not consult fortune-tellers so as to become unclean by them. I am Jehovah your God.”—Leviticus 19:31.

Spiritism (from the Latin *spiritus* - spirit) is the belief in the immortality of the soul and the possibility of contact with the dead through “mediums.”

“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

“A major way in which Satan and the demons try to mislead people is through spiritism. Those who practice spiritism claim to know or control things that humans cannot normally know or control. For example, some claim to be able to know the future by using divination or astrology. Others may act as though they were speaking to those who have died. Some practice witchcraft or magic, and they may try to cast a spell on another person. . .

“Jehovah warns us against spiritism because he knows that Satan uses it to harm people. Satan uses spiritism to promote lies—including the lie that the dead are alive in some other realm. (Read Ecclesiastes 9:5.) Satan also uses spiritism to keep people in fear and to turn them away from Jehovah. His aim is that people who practice spiritism will trust in wicked spirits instead of in Jehovah.”²

27. Satan Is the Invisible Ruler of the World

We know that we originate with God, but the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.”—1 John 5:19.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Satan the Devil is a real person. Their official website states the following:

“Yes, the Devil is real. He is ‘the ruler of the world,’ a spirit creature who became wicked and rebelled against God. (John 14:30; Ephesians 6:11, 12) The Bible reveals the Devil’s personality through these names and descriptions:

“Satan, which means ‘Resister.’—Job 1:6.

“Devil, which means ‘Slanderer.’—Revelation 12:9.

“Serpent, which is used in the

Bible to mean ‘Deceiver.’—2 Corinthians 11:3.

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, 221.

² “Accept Jehovah’s Help to Resist Wicked Spirits,” *Watchtower*, April 2019, 20, 21, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-april-2019/gods-help-to-resist-wicked-spirits/>.

“Tempter.—Matthew 4:3.

“Liar.—John 8:44.”¹

What motivated Satan to rebel against God? *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.”²

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.”³

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.”

¹ “Is the Devil Real?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/is-the-devil-real/>.

² “When God’s Will Is Done on Earth,” *Watchtower*, April 15, 2004, 4, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20040415/When-Gods-Will-Is-Done-on-Earth/>.

³ “What Should Christians Do Today?,” *Watchtower*, May 1, 2012, 6, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20120501/What-Should-Christians-Do-Today/>.

(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, 10.¹

“By means of his spirit organization, Satan exerts authority over all human governments. That fact was made plain when Satan showed Jesus ‘all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth’ and said: ‘I will give you all this authority and their glory, because it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.’ (Luke 4:5, 6) Despite Satan’s evil influence, many governments do a measure of good for their citizens. And individual rulers may have noble intentions. But no human government or individual ruler is capable of bringing about the changes mankind needs most.—Psalm 146:3, 4; Revelation 12:12.”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

28. Jehovah’s Witnesses Have No Part in Interfaith Movements

Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to take part in the ecumenical movement.⁴ 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.

¹ “What Should Christians Do Today?,” *Watchtower*, May 1, 2012, 6-7, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20120501/What-Should-Christians-Do-Today/>.

² “Know Your Enemy,” *Watchtower*, May 2018, 23, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-may-2018/know-your-enemy/>.

³ “Maintain Your Neutrality in a Divided World,” *Watchtower*, April 2016, 28–29, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-april-2016/maintain-neutrality-in-a-divided-world/>.

⁴ The ecumenical movement (from the Greek *oikumene*, meaning 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.

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."¹

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; Philippians 2:2) This involves more than just agreeing on the value of such virtues as love, compassion, and forgiveness. Our religious beliefs 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 14:6.²

Meanwhile, the following question is also 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

¹ "Religious Unity in Sight?," *Watchtower*, December 1, 2000, 32, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000888>.

² "Do Jehovah's Witnesses Practice Interfaith?," Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/interfaith/>.

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.”¹

29. God’s Servants Must Keep Separate from the World

To begin with, we can recall the Biblical view of this issue.

On the one hand, the Bible explicitly warns believers:

“Adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world is making himself an enemy of God.”—James 4:4.

“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.

But, on the other hand, the following words are in the Bible:

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16.

“Honor men of all sorts, have love for the whole association of brothers, be in fear of God, honor the king.”—1 Peter 2:17.

And there is no contradiction in this. If we go back to the history of early Christianity, we will see how these principles were applied by believers from the very beginning, back in the Roman Empire. Showing love for people, the early Christians shunned the mores of ancient Roman society with its immorality, love of violence, and cruelty. It was this “world” that the Christians rejected.

Jehovah’s Witnesses strive to follow the example of the first Christians in this as well.

¹ “Are Jehovah’s Witnesses Tolerant of Other Religions?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/tolerant-of-other-religions/>.

“How can we be ‘no part of the world’? . . . We remain loyal to God’s Kingdom and are neutral, that is, we do not take sides in politics. We resist the spirit of the world. We are modest in our dress and grooming, and we are balanced in our view of money.”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

Believers combine such an attitude toward the moral norms of society with their sincere love for the people themselves.

“Imitate Jesus, and learn to love people more than things. Jesus was willing to give up all he had—even his life—because of love for people. (John 15:13) He said: ‘There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.’ (Acts 20:35) If we make it a practice to give to others of our time and resources, people will respond in kind. ‘Practice giving,’ Jesus said, ‘and people will give to you.’ (Luke 6:38) Those who pursue money and possessions cause themselves pain and suffering. (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) On the other hand, true contentment comes from loving and being loved.”³

“As descendants of the first man, Adam, we are all one family. Even though members of a family are expected to love and respect one another, nowadays it is hard to find such love. This is not what our loving God wants.”⁴

¹ *How to Remain in God’s Love* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2017), 60, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/in-gods-love/keep-separate-from-the-world/>.

² *Worship the Only True God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2002), 12–13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Worship-the-Only-True-God/Unity-of-Worship-in-Our-Time-What-Does-It-Mean/>.

³ “Love People, Not Money and Possessions,” *Watchtower*, November 1, 2010, 4, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20101101/Love-People-Not-Money-and-Possessions/>.

⁴ “How to Show Love to Our Fellow Man,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 3, 2020, 12, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no3-2020-sep-oct/love-fellow-man/>.

30. All Human Laws That Do Not Conflict With God's Laws Should Be Obeyed

“Let every person be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God; the existing authorities stand placed in their relative positions by God. Therefore, whoever opposes the authority has taken a stand against the arrangement of God; those who have taken a stand against it will bring judgment against themselves. For those rulers are an object of fear, not to the good deed, but to the bad. Do you want to be free of fear of the authority? Keep doing good, and you will have praise from it; for it is God’s minister to you for your good. But if you are doing what is bad, be in fear, for it is not without purpose that it bears the sword. It is God’s minister, an avenger to express wrath against the one practicing what is bad. There is therefore compelling reason for you to be in subjection, not only on account of that wrath but also on account of your conscience. That is why you are also paying taxes; for they are God’s public servants constantly serving this very purpose. Render to all their dues: to the one who calls for the tax, the tax; to the one who calls for the tribute, the tribute; to the one who calls for fear, such fear; to the one who calls for honor, such honor.”—Romans 13:1-7.

“Jesus then said: ‘Pay back Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God.’ And they were amazed at him.”—Mark 12:17.

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.

“Today, Jehovah allows governments to have some authority, and we should respect them. They organize countries and communities so that they function smoothly and provide people with necessary services. Christians obey the instruction found at Romans 13:1-7. (Read.) We respect ‘the superior authorities’ and obey the laws of the country or community where we live. These laws may affect our family, business,

or possessions. For example, we pay taxes and provide information that the government requires. . . .

“If we must deal with a government official, such as a judge or a policeman, we should always be respectful. Young Christians show respect to their teachers and other school employees. At our place of work, we show respect to our employer, even if other employees do not. When we do this, we imitate the apostle Paul, who was respectful to officials although it was sometimes difficult. (Acts 26:2, 25) Even if others do not treat us well, we remain respectful.—Read Romans 12:17, 18; 1 Peter 3:15.”¹

At the same time, believers remember the importance of maintaining neutrality in political matters.

“However, subjection to political rulers is to be *relative*, not unlimited. When there is a conflict between Jehovah's laws and man's laws, those who serve Jehovah are to obey His laws. Notice what the book *On the Road to Civilization—A World History* says of the early Christians: ‘Christians refused to share certain duties of Roman citizens. The Christians . . . felt it a violation of their faith to enter military service. They would not hold political office. They would not worship the emperor.’ When the Jewish high court ‘positively ordered’ the disciples to stop preaching, they answered: ‘We must obey God as ruler rather than men.’—Acts 5:27-29.

“Regarding political and military controversies, the disciples maintained strict neutrality. In 66 C.E., the Jews in Judea revolted against Caesar. The Roman army quickly surrounded Jerusalem. What did Christians in the city do? They remembered Jesus' counsel to get out of the city. When the Romans temporarily withdrew, the Christians fled across the Jordan River into the mountainous region of Pella. (Luke 21:20-24) Their neutrality serves as a pattern for faithful Christians later.”²

¹ *Remain in God's Love*, 54–55.

² *Worship the Only True God*, 162–163.

“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.”¹

The position of believers as described above sharply distinguishes them from other religious groups. Despite the fact that discontent around the world continues to snowball, and even the most developed countries are consumed by rallies and demonstrations, Jehovah’s Witnesses remain neutral and obedient to the authorities.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic of the past two years has shown, in real terms, the stand Jehovah’s Witnesses take on the issue of submission to secular authorities. They closed their religious buildings and moved all meetings online. Even annual conventions around the world were cancelled. For the first time in their history, Jehovah’s Witnesses suspended preaching in public places and door-to-door. They were blunt about the fact that they are not against vaccination and do not avoid it. Instead, they made every effort to help all Bethel staff, circuit overseers, and others in the organization get the vaccine as soon as possible.

¹ Keep Yourself in God’s Love (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 213, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-love/flag-salute-voting-civilian-service/>.

This is what their website says about obeying government requirements: “These include the importance of physical distancing and of following regulations on public gatherings, quarantining, hand washing, and the wearing of face coverings as well as other practical measures required or recommended by the authorities.—Romans 13:1, 2.”¹

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.

31. God's Servant As a Worker Should be Distinguished by Honesty and Diligence

I deliberately added this and the next topic because, in recent years, I have seen Jehovah's Witnesses increase their emphasis on the practical application of Bible principles in their lives. Of course, this topic was relevant and important before. But lately, they have begun to put a greater emphasis on it. For example, after the Theocratic Ministry School was cancelled as a meeting, the new weekday meeting in its place became known as Our Christian Life and Ministry.

So, Jehovah's Witnesses have always had a reputation for being honest and hardworking workers. It is not uncommon for employers to purposefully seek workers from among the Witnesses. It is important to understand that for a believer of this denomination, decency and diligence are not just positive aspects of a person, but these are prerequisites for their worship of God. Otherwise, their worship will not be acceptable to God.

Here are just a few Bible verses on this subject used by Jehovah's Witnesses:

“Have you seen a man skillful at his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before common men.”—Proverbs 22:29.

¹ “Are Jehovah's Witnesses Opposed to Vaccination?” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-vaccines-immunization/>.

“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.”—Ephesians 4:28.

“Also that everyone should eat and drink and find enjoyment for all his hard work. It is the gift of God.”—Ecclesiastes 3:13.

“The way of the lazy one is like a hedge of thorns, But the path of the upright is like a level highway.”—Proverbs 15:19.

The Bible encourages God’s servants to be diligent and hardworking, and it condemns laziness. The publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses state the following:

“As an honest citizen, a Christian maintains a good conscience. He knows that by subjecting himself to the superior authorities and paying due taxes, not only is he upholding the standard of the community in which he lives but he is also living in harmony with divine requirements.”¹

“Clearly, both Jehovah and Jesus work very hard and feel joy and satisfaction in their work. We want to ‘become imitators of God,’ and we want to ‘follow [Jesus’] steps closely.’ (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 2:21) That is why we try to work hard and do our best in anything we do. . . .

“Be hardworking and honest. This can make it easier for you to enjoy your work. (Proverbs 12:24; 22:29) For one thing, your employer will be able to trust you. Employers value honest employees because they will not steal money, materials, or time. (Ephesians 4:28) Even more important, Jehovah knows when you are hardworking and honest. You can have “an honest conscience” because you know you are pleasing the God you love.—Hebrews 13:18; Colossians 3:22-24.”²

“Christians are admonished to do their work as if God himself were reviewing their performance: ‘Whatever you are doing, work at it whole-souled as to Jehovah, and not to men.’ (Colossians 3:23) God’s servants are commanded to do good work. . . .

¹ “Respect for Authority—Why Essential?” *Watchtower*, August 1, 2000, 5, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000561>.

² *Remain in God’s Love*, 202, 204.

“In the light of this, we do well to ask ourselves what kind of quality and diligence we put into our work. Would God be pleased with our performance? Are we fully satisfied with the way we carry out our assigned tasks? If not, there is room for improvement.—Proverbs 10:4; 22:29.”¹

32. God's Servants Should Be Distinguished by Kindness, Courage and Boldness, Meekness, and Humility

“He has told you, O man, what is good. And what is Jehovah requiring of you? Only to exercise justice, to cherish loyalty, and to walk in modesty with your God!”—Micah 6:8.

“Accordingly, as God's chosen ones, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, humility, mildness, and patience.”—Colossians 3:12.

“A kind man benefits himself; but the cruel person brings trouble on himself.”—Proverbs 11:17.

“Be courageous and strong and go to work. Do not be afraid or be terrified, for Jehovah God, my God, is with you. He will not desert you or abandon you, but he will be with you until all the work for the service of Jehovah's house is finished.”—1 Chronicles 28:20.

“The wicked flee when no one pursues them, But the righteous are as confident as a lion.”—Proverbs 28:1.

“Kindness is the quality of taking an active interest in others. It is shown by helpful acts and considerate words. To be kind means doing good rather than anything harmful. A kind person is friendly, gentle, sympathetic, and gracious. He has a generous, considerate attitude toward others. And kindness is part of the fabric of every true Christian's figurative attire.”²

“Joseph, Rahab, Jesus, and the apostles displayed an inner strength that motivated them to perform good works. Their courage was

¹ “Work—A Blessing or a Curse?” *Watchtower*, June 15, 2005, 6, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2005441>.

² “Please Jehovah by Showing Kindness,” *Watchtower*, July 1, 1991, 12, <https://wol.jw.org/ru/wol/dsync/r2/lp-u/r1/lp-e/1991523>.

not overconfidence. It came from reliance on Jehovah. We too face circumstances that require courage. Rather than rely on ourselves, we must rely on Jehovah. (Read 2 Timothy 1:7.) Let us consider two areas of life where we need courage: in our family and in the congregation. . .

“As Jehovah helped Solomon, he can help us to be courageous and to accomplish our work, both in our family and in the congregation. (Isaiah 41:10, 13) When we show courage in our worship of Jehovah, we can be confident of his blessing now and in the future. Therefore, ‘be courageous . . . and go to work.’”¹

“The Greek word translated ‘boldness’ means ‘outspokenness, frankness, plainness.’ That word conveys the idea of ‘courage, confidence, . . . fearlessness.’ Boldness does not mean bluntness or rudeness. (Colossians 4:6) While being bold, we also want to be peaceable with all.—Romans 12:18.”²

“To walk in Jehovah’s ways, we must have courage. In fact, the Scriptures command God’s people to display this quality. For instance, the psalmist David sang: ‘Be courageous, and may your heart be strong, all you who are waiting for Jehovah.’—Psalm 31:24.

Courage is ‘mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.’ (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*) A courageous person is strong, bold, valiant. That Jehovah gives his servants courage is clear from these words of the apostle Paul to his coworker Timothy: ‘God gave us not a spirit of cowardice, but that of power and of love and of soundness of mind.’—2 Timothy 1:7.”³

“Jehovah loves humble people. Only those who are truly humble can have a warm, personal relationship with him. On the other hand, ‘the haughty he knows only from a distance.’ (Psalm 138:6) All of

¹ “Be Courageous . . . and Go to Work,” *Watchtower*, September 2017, 29, 32, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-september-2017/be-courageous-go-to-work/>.

² “Speak the Word of God With Boldness,” *Watchtower*, February 15, 2010, 6, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20100215/Speak-the-Word-of-God-With-Boldness/>.

³ “Courageously Walk in Jehovah’s Ways,” *Watchtower*, November 15, 1993, 12, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1993844>.

us want to please Jehovah and experience his warm love, so we have good reasons to learn to cultivate humility. . . .

“Humility is lowliness of mind and freedom from pride or arrogance. The Bible indicates that a humble person has a proper view of his relationship with Jehovah God and with his fellow man. The humble person acknowledges that everyone is superior to him in some way.”¹

33. Life and Blood Are Sacred

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God views blood as sacred.

“For the soul of the flesh is in the blood.”—Leviticus 17:11.

“For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you except these necessary things: to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you carefully keep yourselves from these things, you will prosper. Good health to you!”—Acts 15:28, 29.

“In the Bible, blood represents life. God's law on blood has never changed. It has stayed the same from the time of Noah to the time God gave Israel the Mosaic Law and down to Christian times.”²

However, Jehovah's Witnesses today are known for their firm position on refraining from using whole blood for medical purposes. From time to time, you may hear in the news that a patient has refused a blood transfusion. What was 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 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.”³

¹ “Jehovah Values His Humble Servants,” *Watchtower*, September 2019, 2, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-september-2019/jehovah-values-his-humble-servants/>.

² *Remain in God's Love*, 101.

³ “Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Accept Blood Transfusions? Common Misconceptions,” Frequently Asked Questions, *jw.org*, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jehovahs-witnesses-why-no-blood-transfusions/>.

It is important to note that each individual must make his own decision in such matters. And this is also emphasized in their publications:

“Jehovah didn’t create us to be like robots. He gave us free will and the ability to make decisions that show how much we value life. . . . A situation may arise that requires us to make serious decisions about certain medical treatments involving blood, including whether or not we will accept blood fractions. Others should not make these decisions for us. Before such a situation arises, we should pray for guidance and do necessary research.”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 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.”

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.

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 *Remain in God’s Love*, 100, 101.

1. Jehovah's Witnesses consider life a gift from God. That is why they refuse to have an abortion. They are opposed to suicide and a dangerous lifestyle.

2. Jehovah's Witnesses actively cooperate with doctors, spending a great deal of time and personal 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 obtaining 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 issue.¹

3. The active position of Jehovah's Witnesses patients who ask that their legitimate right to choose methods of medical treatment be respected is fully consistent with the norms of international law and medical ethics.

Of course, this teaching has caused 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.

34. Believers Must Abide by the Bible's Moral Standards

Believers are convinced that the Bible contains clearly defined moral standards, which a Christian must follow. 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 practice such things will not inherit God's Kingdom."—Galatians 5:19-21.

"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.

¹ "Medical Information for Clinicians," jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/medical-library/>.

“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.

Following moral standards is extremely important to Jehovah’s Witnesses. The general idea can be described as follows: A Witness can commit a sin, but one who follows the sinful course and does not want to change cannot remain a Jehovah’s Witness.

Thus, if one of Jehovah’s Witnesses commits a serious sin, then he should turn to the elders for help and confess his sin. This is a prerequisite for God’s forgiveness of grave sin. If it becomes evident that the person has indeed committed a serious sin and is unrepentant and unwilling to make reasonable and appropriate amends, it may be necessary to expel the wrongdoer 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.

Their publications offer the following explanation:

“If we have committed a serious sin, we need to talk to those whom Jehovah has appointed to shepherd us. (James 5:14, 15) And we must avoid the urge to justify ourselves. The sooner we accept and apply whatever discipline we receive, the sooner we will regain our peace and joy.”¹

“Why Confess One’s Sins? Whether the sin is grievous or not, the person who committed it has damaged his relationship with his fellow man and with God. Consequently, he may feel troubled or ill at ease. This is the work of the faculty of conscience, with which our Creator has endowed us. (Romans 2:14, 15) What can be done?

“Turning once again to the book of James, we find these encouraging words: ‘Is there anyone [spiritually] sick among you? Let him call the older men of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, greasing him with oil in the name of Jehovah. And the prayer of faith will make the indisposed one well, and Jehovah will raise him up. Also, if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him.’—James 5:14, 15.

¹ “Let Jehovah Soothe You,” *Watchtower*, February 2020, 25, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-february-2020/let-jehovah-soothe-you/>.

“Here again, the older men, or elders, are called upon to respond to the needs of the flock.”¹

“Serious sins must be brought to the attention of the elders. Examples of such sins are found at 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. Serious sins are gross violations of God’s law. If a Christian commits such a sin, he must approach Jehovah God in prayer, and he must go to the elders of the congregation. (Psalm 32:5; James 5:14) What role do the elders play? Only Jehovah has the authority to forgive sins fully, which he makes possible on the basis of the ransom sacrifice. Jehovah, however, has entrusted the elders with the responsibility of determining from the Scriptures whether the sinner can remain in the congregation. (1 Corinthians 5:12) Among other things, they will endeavor to answer the following questions: Was the sin intentional? Did the person scheme to do what was wrong? Did he practice the sin over an extended period of time? Most important, is there evidence that he is sincerely repentant? Are there indications that Jehovah has forgiven him?—Acts 3:19.

“When the elders meet with the wrongdoer, their goal is to reach the same decision on earth that has already been reached in heaven. (Matthew 18:18) How does this arrangement benefit the congregation? It ensures that unrepentant wrongdoers who might harm Jehovah’s precious sheep are removed. (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7, 11-13; Titus 3:10, 11) It may also help a sinner to repent and benefit from Jehovah’s forgiveness. (Luke 5:32) The elders pray in behalf of a repentant one and ask Jehovah to help him recover spiritually.—James 5:15.

“Suppose that a person is not repentant when the elders meet with him. In that case, he will be disfellowshipped from the congregation. If he has violated the law of the land, the elders will not shield him from the consequences. Jehovah allows governmental authorities to judge and punish anyone who violates the law—whether he is repentant or not. (Romans 13:4) Yet, if the person later comes to his senses and sincerely repents and turns around, Jehovah is willing to pardon him.

¹ “Is Confession of Sins Required by God?” *Watchtower*, September 1, 2010, 24, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20100901/Is-Confession-of-Sins-Required-by-God/>.

(Luke 15:17-24) That is true even if his sins were very serious. — 2 Chronicles 33:9, 12, 13; 1 Tim. 1:15.”¹

It should be emphasized separately: “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.”²

35. 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.

“Since Christ fulfilled the Law, are Christians obligated to keep the weekly Sabbath? Under inspiration, the apostle Paul answers: ‘Therefore let no man judge you in eating and drinking or in respect of a festival or of an observance of the new moon or of a sabbath; for those things are a shadow of the things to come, but the reality belongs to the Christ.’—Colossians 2:16, 17.

“Those inspired words suggest quite a change in God’s requirements for his servants. Why the change? Because Christians are under a new law, ‘the law of the Christ.’ (Galatians 6:2) The former Law covenant given through Moses to Israel came to an end when Jesus’ death fulfilled it. (Romans 10:4; Ephesians 2:15) Did the commandment about keeping the Sabbath also come to an end? Yes. After saying that ‘we have been discharged from the Law,’ Paul went on to refer to one of the Ten Commandments. (Romans 7:6, 7) So the Ten Commandments—including the Sabbath law—are part of the Law that came to an end. God’s worshippers, therefore, are no longer required to observe a weekly Sabbath.”³

¹ “Jehovah Blesses Those Who Forgive,” *Watchtower*, June 2022, 9, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-june-2022/Jehovah-Blesses-Those-Who-Forgive/>.

² “What Does the Bible Say About Homosexuality?,” *Awake!*, No. 4, 2016, 9, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/awake-no4-2016-august/bible-say-about-being-gay/>.

³ “Should You Keep the Weekly Sabbath?,” *Watchtower*, February 1, 2010, 14, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20100201/Should-You-Keep-the-Weekly-Sabbath/>.

36. Paid Clergy Class and Special Titles Are Improper

In this regard also, the position of Jehovah's Witnesses does not contradict the Bible.

In particular, they refer to the Gospel of Matthew, which says: "But you, do not you be called Rabbi, for 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. But the greatest one among you must be your minister. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."—Matthew 23:8-12.

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. 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

Does this mean that Jehovah’s Witnesses do not have spiritual “elders” who lead believers in the religious life of the community? It would be a big mistake to make such an assumption!

The elders in the congregations of believers are the overseers, the spiritual shepherds of God’s flock. See what the publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses have to say about this:

“Centuries later, the apostle Paul wrote that Christian overseers were to be ‘God’s stewards.’ (Titus 1:7) Appointed to shepherd ‘the flock of God,’ overseers give direction and take the lead in the congregations.—1 Peter 5:1, 2.”²

“[We] humbly [follow] the direction of those who have been placed in positions of oversight, such as circuit overseers and congregation elders. These brothers are included among ‘those who are taking the lead,’ to whom we should be obedient and submissive. (Hebrews 13:7, 17)”³

¹ “Should There Be a Clergy-Laity Distinction?” *Awake!*, August 2009, 22–23, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g200908/Should-There-Be-a-Clergy-Laity-Distinction/>.

² “You Are a Trusted Steward!” *Watchtower*, December 15, 2012, 10, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20121215/you-are-a-trusted-steward/>.

³ Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will (Wallkill, NY: *Watchtower* Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2019), 22, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102014933>.

As you can see, “elder” is an appointed religious position in the denomination of Jehovah’s Witnesses, which gives them the authority and the right to conduct religious services, deal with the sins of believers, provide spiritual guidance, and manage the religious life of the Community. They are not saints or sinless, and if they cease to meet high standards, they are removed from this position.

Then how do we reconcile the statement about the absence of a division into classes of *clergy* and laity and the existence of a division into elders and publishers? On careful reading and observation, one can see that Jehovah’s Witnesses oppose a privileged, narrow, paid class that separates itself from the main body of believers with pompous titles and rituals. But the clergy (as described above), of course, remain because without them it is simply impossible to worship and conduct divine services.

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:

Jehovah’s spirit promotes humility, not pride. (Colossians 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 Corinthians 1:28, 29; 1 Corinthians 4:6-8.

In addition, anointed Christians do not view themselves as being part of an elite club.¹

37. *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.”²

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.”³

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

¹ “We Want to Go With You,” *Watchtower*, January 2016, 23–24, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-january-2016/we-want-to-go-with-you/>.

² *Answers to 10 Questions Young People Ask* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2016), 29, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/teen-questions/should-i-believe-in-evolution/>.

³ “Evolution,” *Awake!*, October 2015, 9, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201510/adaptation-evolution/>.

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 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.

Does the Bible's account allow for living things to change over time? 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the very fact that man was created is the basis for his religiousness. Time and again in their books, magazines, and videos, they present more and more arguments in favor of creation.

¹ “Evolution,” *Awake!*, October 2015, 9, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201510/adaptation-evolution/>.

38. Baptism by Complete Immersion Symbolizes Dedication to God

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, in order to be baptized by him. . . . After being baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water.”—Matthew 3:13, 16a.

“Baptism, which corresponds to this, is also now saving you (not by the removing of the filth of the flesh, but by the request to God for a good conscience), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”—1 Peter 3:21.

Their publications state the following:

“The Bible clearly teaches that if you want to serve Jehovah, you should get baptized. Jesus told his followers: ‘Make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them.’ (Matthew 28:19) Jesus also set the example by getting baptized himself. He was completely immersed in water, not just sprinkled with water on his head. (Matthew 3:16) Today when a Christian is baptized, he must also be completely immersed, or dipped, in water.”¹

“Baptism refers to a person’s being submerged in water and coming up out of it. [A footnote adds: ‘The Greek word translated “baptism” comes from a root that means “to dip in.” See the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume I, page 529.’] That explains why Jesus was baptized in a sizable river. (Matthew 3:13, 16)”²

“The baptism referred to in the Bible is complete immersion in water—not just a sprinkling of water—and it has rich symbolic meaning.

- Going underneath the water during baptism shows publicly that you will no longer live to do just what pleases you.
- Being raised out of the water shows that you have started a new life focused on doing what pleases God. “By getting baptized, you

¹ *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, 186.

² “What Is Baptism?” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-baptism/>.

publicly acknowledge that Jehovah has the authority to set the standard of right and wrong, and you officially make known your promise to conform voluntarily to what he wants you to do.”¹

As we can see, baptism for believers is more than just a ritual, it is a deliberate step, a decision that is one of the most important in life and which must be approached with all seriousness and responsibility.

“Before a student can get baptized, he must cultivate faith based on accurate knowledge of God, His purpose, and His arrangement for salvation. (1 Timothy 2:3-6) Such faith moves the student to reject conduct that is displeasing to God and to come in line with Jehovah’s righteous standards. (Acts 3:19) Understandably, an individual could not make a valid dedication to God while engaging in any conduct that would exclude him from the Kingdom.—1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

But more is needed than adhering to Jehovah’s elevated moral standards. One who is pursuing righteousness would also be present at congregation meetings and have a meaningful share in the lifesaving preaching and disciple-making work. Jesus said that this work would be carried out by his true disciples. (Acts 1:8) Only after taking such steps can a new disciple make a valid dedication to Jehovah in private prayer and then publicly symbolize this dedication by getting baptized before onlookers.”²

Interestingly, Jehovah’s Witnesses do not baptize infants. They offer the following explanation regarding this matter:

“The Bible does not endorse infant baptism. For example, it shows that before being baptized, first-century Christians heard the message, ‘gladly accepted’ it, and repented. (Acts 2:14, 22, 38, 41) Thus, to be baptized, one must be old enough to comprehend what the Bible teaches, must believe it, and must have made the decision to live by those teachings. These are things that an infant cannot do.

¹ “Should I Get Baptized?—Part 1: The Meaning of Baptism,” *Young People Ask*, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/teenagers/ask/meaning-of-baptism/>.

² “Baptism—A Requirement for Christians,” *Watchtower*, March 2018, 6, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-march-2018/baptism-requirement-for-christians/>.

“As children grow, they may in time choose to be baptized. However, to do so, they must understand the commitment they are making.”¹

And here come to my mind the words of the Christian theologian Tertullian (the third century C.E.) from his famous work *Apology*, saying that “Christians are made, not born.”² So, in this creed, Jehovah’s Witnesses did not come up with something of their own.

The elders of the congregation should also make sure that an interested person comprehends 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.”³

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.”⁴

39. God’s Servants Must Bear Witness to Bible Truth

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.’ However, how will they call on him if they have not put faith in him? How, in turn, will they put faith in him about whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach? . . . So faith follows the thing heard. In turn, what is heard is through the word about Christ.”—Romans 10:13, 14, 17.

¹ “Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Force Their Children to Adopt Their Faith?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-children-accept-faith-preach/>.

² Tertullian, *Apology*, ch. 18.

³ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*, 212.

⁴ “Baptism—A Requirement for Christians,” 6.

“Jesus approached and spoke to them, saying: ‘All authority has been given me in heaven and on the earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. And look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things.’”—Matthew 28:18-20.

Let us note a few important details about the way this teaching is perceived by Jehovah's Witnesses.

“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. (Matthew 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.”¹

“Jesus taught his followers not to push others to change their beliefs. Instead of trying to force people to accept the good news of the Kingdom against their will, his disciples were to look for listeners who were receptive.—Matthew 10:7, 11-14.”

“Conversions made under compulsion are meaningless, since God only accepts worship that comes from the heart.—Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Matthew 22:37, 38.”²

Jehovah's Witnesses oppose proselytism and any forms of coercion and violence in the matter of choosing one's faith and beliefs. In this regard, their publications state:

“We do not force our message on anyone. (1 Peter 3:15) We believe that each person must make his own decision in the matter of worship.—Deuteronomy 30:19, 20.”³

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 81.

² “Do Jehovah's Witnesses Pressure People to Change Religions?” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/change-religion/>.

³ “Why Do Jehovah's Witnesses Speak With People Who Have Previously Said ‘I'm Not Interested?’” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/not-interested/>.

“In modern times, the term ‘proselytism’ has been used to mean forcible conversion of one kind or another. The Bible does not support such a practice. Rather, it teaches that men were created as free moral agents with the privilege and responsibility to choose how they will live their lives. This includes the decision of how to worship God.—Deuteronomy 30:19, 20; Joshua 24:15” .¹

I think it is appropriate that I cite the position of the international community on this topic. Thus, the OSCE Policy Guidance contains a fairly clear position:

The right to convert, in the sense of the right to adopt, leave or change one’s religion or belief, enjoys absolute protection under international law, since it concerns the internal dimension of an individual’s freedom of religion or belief (*forum internum*). The right to change one’s religion or belief is also specifically recognized in OSCE commitments. . . .

Individuals have the right to engage in non-coercive persuasion as part of freedom of religion or belief. The right to manifest religious or non-religious convictions includes the freedom to try to persuade other people about the truth of one’s own beliefs and the relevance of those beliefs and associated practices to a meaningful and fulfilling life. Indeed, for many religious believers, sharing their message with others is a religious obligation. The right to persuade others in a non-coercive manner is also protected under the right to freedom of expression, which includes ‘freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of one’s choice. (ICCPR Article 19).²

. . . The state has a duty to provide a legal and social framework in which the rights to conversion and to engage in non-coercive

¹ “Should Christians Preach to Others?,” *Awake!*, June 8, 2002, 13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g20020608/should-christians-preach-to-others/>.

² “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security,” Policy Guidance, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (Warsaw, Poland), 65, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/429389>.

persuasion can be freely and fully exercised. This includes the duty to protect the right of individuals to convert (adopt, leave or change religion or belief), as well as to protect individuals and communities engaging in non-coercive persuasion from violence, intimidation, harassment and discrimination.

Freedom of religion or belief is necessarily contingent on exposure to new ideas and the ability to share and receive information.¹

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 has spoken to them about the Bible and that they have not been passed by. It is true, in modern society, there are many lonely people who need support, many of them 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. But can xenophobia and fear bring unity and freedom?

40. Christians Must Study the Holy Scriptures and Engage Their Power of Reason in the Worship of God

“Therefore, I appeal to you by the compassions of God, brothers, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, a sacred service with your power of reason. And stop being molded by this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, so that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”—Romans 12:1, 2.

“My son, do not lose sight of them. Safeguard practical wisdom and thinking ability.”—Proverbs 3:21.

“You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind and with your whole strength.”—Mark 12:30.

¹ “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security,” Policy Guidance, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (Warsaw, Poland), 67, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/429389>.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are not charismatic, and they repel the idea of “blind faith” and emotional outbursts in their ministry. With good reason they were originally called “Bible Students.” Reason, logic, and common sense play a very important role in their worship. In this book, I have already quoted the words J. F. Rutherford: “‘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

Here are several quotes from their publications on this topic:

The Bible says, for example, that if your worship is to be “acceptable to God,” it must be “a sacred service with your *power of reason*.” In other words, you must worship God “in a way that is worthy of thinking beings.” (Romans 12:1; *The Jerusalem Bible*) So the faith described in the Bible is not something blind and irrational, or a leap of faith, as some have called it. And it is not credulity. Rather, it is something you have thought through carefully—resulting in trust in God and his Word, which is firmly based on reason. . .

The Bible warns you not to put faith “in every word.” (Proverbs 14:15) Rather, it says that you should “make sure of all things”—or test out the things you hear before believing them.—1 Thessalonians 5:21.²

To start with, you need to prove to yourself at least three basic truths. First, you need to be convinced that Jehovah God is the Creator of all things. (Exodus 3:14, 15; Hebrews 3:4; Revelation 4:11) Second, you must prove to yourself that the Bible is God’s inspired message to mankind. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) And third, you need to confirm that Jehovah has an organized group of people who are worshipping him under Christ’s headship and that Jehovah’s Witnesses are that group. (Isaiah 43:10-12; John 14:6; Acts 15:14) Proving to yourself

¹ “Know Jehovah—The Personal God,” *Watchtower*, October 1, 1997, 6, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1997721/>.

² “Are Faith and Reason Incompatible?,” *Awake!*, January 2011, 28, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201101/Are-Faith-and-Reason-Incompatible/>.

those basic truths does not require that you become a walking encyclopedia of Bible knowledge. Your goal should be to use your “power of reason” to strengthen your conviction that you have the truth.—Romans 12:1.¹

As a matter of fact, it is the study of the Bible that is given a key place in the religious practice of Jehovah's Witnesses. What is more, they study not only theological issues, but great attention is also paid to Biblical history and archeology.

Amidst the numerous publications of Jehovah's Witnesses on these topics, the following works can be distinguished: the encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures* (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*” (gives not only a description and comments on each of the books of the Bible, but also provides detailed background information on geography of Biblical lands, chronology and methods of reckoning in ancient times, history of creation of the Biblical canon, history of Bible translations, manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures).

In 2003, Jehovah's Witnesses published the 36-page color atlas “*See the Good Land,*” which included diagrams, maps, illustrations, computer generated images, and much additional information on the geography and history of Biblical lands. The 2013 revised edition of the *New World Translation* emphasized the appendices, which also provide a great deal of additional background information on Biblical history and geography.

And since 2017, a lot of work has been going on to create an online Bible for study. The books of the Bible are complemented by fairly extensive, encyclopedic applications, including text, illustrations, and even video presentations.

¹ “Be Convinced That You Have the Truth,” *Watchtower*, July 2020, 10, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-july-2020/Be-Convinced-That-You-Have-the-Truth/>.

41. Evil and Suffering Should Not Have Existed

“With that I heard a loud voice from the throne say: ‘Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them. And 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 21:3, 4.

“When under trial, let no one say: ‘I am being tried by God.’ For with evil things God cannot be tried, nor does he himself try anyone. . . . Every good gift and every perfect present is from above, coming down from the Father of the celestial lights, who does not vary or change like the shifting shadows.”—James 1:13, 17.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not consider suffering to be part of the natural way of living. They explain:

Suffering was not part of Jehovah God’s purpose for mankind. However, the first human couple rebelled against God’s rulership, choosing to set their own standards of good and bad. They turned away from God and suffered the consequences.

Today we are experiencing the effects of their bad choice. But in no way did God originate human suffering.

The Bible says: “When under trial, let no one say: ‘I am being tried by God.’ For with evil things God cannot be tried nor does he himself try anyone.” (James 1:13) Suffering can afflict anyone—even those who are favored by God.¹

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that “although evil abounds now, God is permitting it for a limited time to allow all to see its sad consequences. (2 Peter 3:7-9) Soon, however, the earth will be filled with happy people who obey God.—Psalm 37:9-11.²

¹ “Is God to Blame for Our Suffering?,” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/our-suffering/>.

² “Bible Questions Answered: Where Does Evil Come From?,” *Watchtower*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20150701/evil/>.

42. *Marriage and Family Is a Sacred Union of Man and Woman, Established by God*

“So that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has yoked together, let no man put apart.”—Matthew 19:6.

“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.

“To the married people I give instructions, not I but the Lord, that a wife should not separate from her husband. But if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled with her husband; and a husband should not leave his wife. But to the others I say, yes, I, not the Lord: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is agreeable to staying with him, let him not leave her; and if a woman has an unbelieving husband and he is agreeable to staying with her, let her not leave her husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in relation to his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in relation to the brother; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbelieving one chooses to depart, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not bound under such circumstances, but God has called you to peace. For wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Or, husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?”—1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

“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.”—1 Corinthians 11:3.

“Let wives be in subjection to their husbands as to the Lord, because a husband is head of his wife just as the Christ is head of the congregation, he being a savior of this body. In fact, as the congregation is in subjection to the Christ, wives should also be to their husbands in everything.”—Ephesians 5:22-24.

“Husbands, continue loving your wives, just as the Christ also loved the congregation and gave himself up for it. . . . In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself, for no man ever hated his own body, but

he feeds and cherishes it, just as the Christ does the congregation.”—Ephesians 5:25, 28, 29.

“Children, be obedient to your parents in union with the Lord, for this is righteous. ‘Honor your father and your mother’ is the first command with a promise: ‘That it may go well with you and you may remain a long time on the earth.’ And fathers, do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and admonition of Jehovah.”—Ephesians 6:1-4.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are especially reverent about the family arrangement, defending traditional moral standards and the Biblical view of family relationships.

“In God’s eyes, marriage is much more than a mere social arrangement. It is a sacred union between a man and a woman.

“. . . by pointing to our Creator as the Originator of the marriage arrangement, the Bible emphasizes the seriousness of this union. Couples who see their marriage in that light treat it as a sacred, permanent bond, thus strengthening their determination to make their marriage a success. They further increase their prospects for success when they turn to the Bible for guidance in fulfilling their respective roles as husband and wife.”¹

This is the commentary on Matthew 19:6 (“So that they are no longer two, but one flesh...”) in the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Study Edition): “one flesh: This expression is a literal rendering into Greek of the Hebrew term at Genesis 2:24 and could also be rendered ‘one body’ or ‘one person.’ It describes the closest bond possible between two humans. It not only refers to sexual relations but extends to the whole relationship, making the two individuals faithful and inseparable companions. Such a union cannot be broken up without damage to the partners bound by it.”²

¹ “The Bible’s Viewpoint: Marriage,” *Awake!*, November 2013, 14, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201311/roles-in-marriage/>.

² Study Notes to Matthew 19, supplement to *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* [Study Edition] (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2019), 86, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/bible/study-bible/books/matthew/19/>.

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) Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses do not approve of polygamy, common-law marriages, and “gay” marriages.

After the bride and groom decide to get married and announce their engagement, they set the wedding day and register the marriage with the state authorities.

Marriage registration for Jehovah's Witnesses is an important factor, since only after such registration is marriage considered valid; and only in this case, the couple can proceed to the second (spiritual) part—the actual marriage ceremony held in the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.¹

The marriage ceremony of the Witnesses is not pompous or theatrical. Its purpose is to give a young couple Bible-based parting words and advice for building strong and deep family relationships.

The program can begin with a prayer. Then one of the elders gives a half-hour talk discussing Bible advice for husbands and wives. At the end of the speech, the newlyweds, in the presence of guests, make a solemn vow of love and fidelity to each other. At the end of the ceremony, a prayer is said asking God to bless the newly married couple.

This is where the official part of the religious program ends, and all those present in the hall—fellow believers, relatives, and friends—begin to congratulate the newlyweds. The newlyweds are given gifts, flowers, cards with congratulations. The entertainment program is the most diverse and includes, of course, music and dancing.

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.

¹ In a number of countries, Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to register marriages of fellow believers. In such cases, the local elder conducts the registration process right at the Kingdom Hall, where a solemn wedding speech is delivered.

For these reasons, the literature of the Witnesses also places great emphasis on resolving marital problems.

One of the *Watchtower* issues says: “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.”¹

“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.’ (Colossians 3:13, 14) Moreover, ‘love is patient and kind. . . . It does not keep account of the injury.’ (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5) Misunderstandings should be cleared away as soon as possible.”²

“Accordingly, married couples who love Jehovah’s ways imitate him. They do not seek an unscriptural way out of a difficult marriage. They realize that Jehovah has yoked them together and that he wants them to ‘stick’ to each other. The only Scriptural ground for divorce that might free one to remarry is sexual immorality. (Matthew 19:5, 6, 9) By making the best of their situation and even seeking to improve it, they uphold Jehovah’s righteous way of ruling.”³

And here is the view of Jehovah’s Witnesses on spouses who do not share their religious beliefs:

¹ “Making Christian Marriage a Success,” *Watchtower*, August 2016, 15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-august-2016/making-christian-marriage-a-success/>.

² “Making Christian Marriage a Success,” *Watchtower*, August 2016, 14-15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-august-2016/making-christian-marriage-a-success/>.

³ “Uphold Jehovah’s Sovereignty!,” *Watchtower*, June 2017, 31, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-june-2017/uphold-jehovah-gods-sovereignty/>.

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. 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 Corinthians 7:16.¹

The website of Jehovah's Witnesses (jw.org) has an entire section on “Marriage and Family” dedicated to strengthening the family. Here are the titles of just some of the articles posted in this section: “How Can Marriage Be Happy?,” “Successful Families—Teamwork,” “Surviving the First Year of Marriage,” “How to Strengthen Commitment,” “Treating Your Mate With Respect,” “How to Show Appreciation,” “Making a Second Marriage Work,” “What Does the Bible Say About Interracial Marriage?,” “What Does the Bible Say About Living Together Without Marriage?,” “Husbands—Make Your Home Secure,” “Does Happiness Depend on Marriage?,” “Dealing With In-Laws,” “How to Keep Peace With Your Relatives,” “Be Loyal to Each Other,” “How to Let Go of Resentment,” and “When You Are Disappointed With Your Marriage.” Thus, even the titles of these articles, which provide sound advice and admonition, clearly show that they are all aimed at strengthening the marriage and well-being of the family.

Additionally, the topic of “headship” in Jehovah's Witness families is worth mentioning.

“Jehovah established headship out of love for his family. It is a gift from him. Headship makes it possible for Jehovah's family to function in a peaceful, orderly way. (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40) Without the clear-cut role of headship, Jehovah's family would become disorganized and

¹ “Making Christian Marriage a Success,” 16.

unhappy. For example, no one would know who should make final decisions and who should take the lead in carrying out those decisions.”¹

This is how the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses talks about the role of each family member:

The husband is head of the family. (Ephesians 5:23) But a good husband is not harsh or demanding. He values his wife and takes good care of her material and emotional needs. He also tries hard to please her, not always insisting on doing what he wants. (Philippians 2:4) He communicates openly and listens when she speaks. He does not become “bitterly angry” with her or hurt her physically or emotionally.—Colossians 3:19.

Wives, Respect Your Husband. . . . When a wife respects her husband and supports his decisions, she promotes family peace. If he makes a mistake, she does not belittle him, but she remains mild and respectful. (1 Peter 3:4) When she needs to bring a problem to his attention, she chooses a good time to do so and speaks to him respectfully.—Ecclesiastes 3:7. . . .

God has given parents the responsibility to train their children. That includes teaching them how to behave and setting a good example for them. (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7) When a child misbehaves, a wise parent does not overreact. He or she is “quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19) If the parent determines that discipline is needed, he or she administers it in love, not in anger. . . .

Children should obey their parents and treat them with deep respect. When children show honor to their parents, they bring much joy into the home and contribute to family peace and harmony. Adult children honor their parents by ensuring that they are well cared for. That may include helping them to maintain their home or giving them needed financial assistance.—1 Timothy 5:3, 4.²

¹ “The Head of Every Man Is the Christ,” *Watchtower*, February 2021, 3, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-february-2021/The-Head-of-Every-Man-Is-the-Christ/>.

² “Wisdom for Family Happiness,” *Awake!*, No. 1, 2021, 4–5, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/awake-no1-2021-mar-apr/wisdom-for-family-happiness/>.

While working on this book, I came across a unique sociological study of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses on the subject of their attitude to the institution of family and family values. I had never seen such studies on Jehovah's Witnesses before. But even more unique to this study was the fact that it was done at the Department of Sociology and Demography of the Family, Faculty of Sociology, Moscow State University (MSU) named after M. V. Lomonosov. I simply had no right to overlook this study by this prominent Russian university. I believe that you will be interested in its results.

Sociologists of Moscow State University interviewed 997 people—members of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Let me introduce the findings of this study:¹

- “Familism as a system of values aimed at family and children, domesticity, manifests itself among JW through a positive attitude towards a lasting marriage and a family with children.”²
- “Randomly selected sample of the surveyed group as a whole showed a positive effect of the increasing JW experience on the stability of marriage. . . . The increase in JW experience in a number of parameters is associated with the strengthening of orientations towards marriage and family, with the strengthening of familism—which rightly can be recognized as a positive phenomenon from a social point of view.”³
- “The high degree of respect by JW respondents for the views of their non-Witness spouses is confirmed by the fact that almost 60% of their spouses do not share religious beliefs with them (75.1% among women alone). Tolerance of freedom of conscience among JWs is also confirmed by the fact that 18% of the married JW

¹ A. I. Antonov and V. M. Medkov, “Family and the Bible: Research Report on the Outcome of Sociological Research on the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses” [in Russian], Faculty of the Department of Family Sociology and Demography of Sociology (Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, 2001).

² *Ibid.*, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 15, 17.

respondents have atheist spouses, 12% Orthodox, 3% Muslim, and 27% noted something else.”¹

- “The value orientations of the respondents towards a family lifestyle are evident from the fact that 97% accept a lifelong marriage, 75%—a family with 3-4 children.”²
- “At the same time, an almost 100% sharply negative attitude was recorded regarding such phenomena of modern life as parenting without marriage, induced abortions for any reason, pre- and extramarital sexual relations, sexual relations of adolescents.”³
- “Almost 100% of respondents believe that strong marriage depends on the ability of spouses to build warm relationships, on their loyalty and respect for each other. Satisfaction with sexual relations or material well-being of the family, in their opinion, have insignificantly small impact on the happiness. 0.5% of respondents indicated that the strength of marriage depends on satisfaction with the well-being of the family and sexual relations and 99.5%—on the ability to build solid relationships.”⁴

And here is the conclusion made in 2001 by the Head of the Department of Sociology of the Family at Moscow State University, A. I. Antonov, professor, PhD (in Applied Psychology), member of the Presidium of the Russian Association of Sociologists, Academician-Secretary of the UN International Academy of Informatization:

An analysis of the survey data shows the absence of any negative impact of the doctrine and religious activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses on intra-family relations, on the relationship of husbands and wives, parents and children. The positive influence of belonging to JW was found in almost all aspects of communication in the field of marriage and family, as well as the “healing” of spiritual wounds, beneficial in its moral and humanistic meaning, of those who faced

¹ Antonov and Medkov, “Family and the Bible”, 16.

² Ibid., 29.

³ Ibid., 19.

⁴ Ibid., 19.

the unfortunate consequences of the global collapse of family institution. As for the value of orientations towards the family way of life, and above all towards lifelong marriage with several children, the figures obtained in this study indicate an unusually high level of familism for the capital's residents.¹

These are the facts—clear and specific.

But one might object to this by noting that a couple's difference in faith can threaten their marriage? From time to time, believers are even accused of “destroying families.” I want to respond to this with facts, too.

The reader will be interested to know that this accusation has twice been considered by the European Court of Human Rights, the most authoritative international judicial body. And twice this court has clarified the following:

178. The Court has previously found, in relation of a similar charge, that, in so far as the Russian courts did not give examples of any coercive, forceful or threatening action on the part of the applicant organisation, what was taken by the courts to constitute “coercion into destroying the family” was the frustration that non-Witness family members experienced as a consequence of disagreements over the manner in which their Witness relatives decided to organise their lives in accordance with the religious precepts, and their increasing isolation resulting from having been left outside the life of the community to which their Witness relatives adhered. It is a known fact that a religious way of life requires from its followers both abidance by religious rules and self-dedication to religious work that can take up a significant portion of the believer's time. Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may feel about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the

¹ Antonov and Medkov, “Family and the Bible”, 32.

break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: **it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practise his or her religion that is the source of conflict.** It is true that friction often exists in marriages where the spouses belong to different religious denominations or one of the spouses is a non-believer. However, this situation is common to all mixed-belief marriages and Jehovah's Witnesses are no exception."¹

Thus, difficulties in families of people of different faiths arise not because of faith but because of intolerance and lack of respect for the rights of a life partner.

One gets an impression that those who accuse Jehovah's Witnesses of destroying families are either completely unaware of their position regarding the family or have been captured by informational myths or—which would be extremely sad—are deliberately guided by personal antipathy or selfish motives, namely—spreading obvious and gross lies about this Christian organization.

43. Worshipping God Is Not Just About Praying and Attending Meetings

“Indeed, just as the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”—James 2:26.

“He has told you, O man, what is good. And what is Jehovah requiring of you? Only to exercise justice, to cherish loyalty, and to walk in modesty with your God!”—Micah 6:8.

“If any man thinks he is a worshipper of God but does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he is deceiving his own heart, and his worship is futile. The form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself without spot from the world.”—James 1:26, 27.

¹ European Court of Human Rights, chamber judgment in *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia* (application nos. 32401/10 and 19 others), <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng/?i=001-217535>.

“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.”—John 4:23, 24.

“Our worship, however, is not just a feeling; rather, genuine worship involves action. (James 2:26) When we dedicate our life to Jehovah, we vow that in every aspect of our life, we will obey him as our Sovereign and show the deepest respect for his name. Recall that in his reply to the third temptation, Jesus linked worship with ‘sacred service.’ (Matthew 4:10) As worshippers of Jehovah, we are eager to serve him. (Deuteronomy 10:12) We render sacred service to our God when we engage in activities that are directly related to our worship and that call for self-sacrifice. What activities?

“Sacred service comes in many forms, all of which are precious to Jehovah. We perform sacred service when we witness to others, share in meetings at our Kingdom Hall, and care for and construct our meeting places. In addition, we render sacred service when we participate in family worship, support the relief work for needy fellow believers, volunteer at our conventions, or serve at Bethel. (Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27) When pure worship is foremost in our minds and hearts, we will render ‘sacred service day and night.’ We delight in worshipping our God, Jehovah!—Revelation 7:15.”¹

Key aspects of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses 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
- Preaching the “good news of the Kingdom” and looking for “rightly disposed ones”
- Helping those in need

¹ *Pure Worship of Jehovah*, 10.

- Constructing and maintaining Kingdom Halls and other facilities used to further worldwide Bible educational work
- Sharing in disaster relief

It is worth noting that Jehovah's Witnesses even consider cleaning a religious building after a meeting to be part of their service to God.

44. Congregations of God's Servants Should Be United in Love

"I make request, not concerning these only, but also concerning those putting faith in me through their word, . . . 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.

"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.

"I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples—if you have love among yourselves."—John 13:34, 35.

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 Witnesses comfortably surrounded by their fellow believers from other countries and cultures. They call themselves "a brotherhood" and consider such unity to be the mark of true Christianity.

Thus, unity among Jehovah's Witnesses does not mean uniformity. Rather, it is unity in diversity. They love the culture of their homeland.

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 And international conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses confirm this very well. Such events are adorned with evening gatherings accompanied by national dances, songs, and, of course, national dishes. And the delegates are often dressed in national costumes.

Besides, this teaching is characterized by wider freedom of choice and freedom of personal decisions.

These are the basic *beliefs* of Jehovah's Witnesses. I discussed some of them in more detail, and some I addressed only in general.

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 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.”²

Jehovah's Witnesses **do not celebrate Christmas or Easter**, not to mention other Christian holidays celebrated by Catholics or Orthodox Christians.

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]

¹ “You Can Fight Satan—And Win!,” *Watchtower*, May 15, 2015, 15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20150515/win-fight-against-satan/>.

² N. S. Gordienko, *Russian Jehovah's Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Limbus Press, 2000), 48.

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:

“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.’”²

Neither the day, the month, nor even the year of the birth of Jesus are actually known to us. So, the celebration, as we know, was finally established only in the fourth century C.E.

Easter is another significant religious holiday. *The Encyclopædia Britannica* explains: “Neither the New Testament nor the writings of

¹ “Is Christmas for Christians?,” *Watchtower* (Public Edition), No. 6, 2017, 15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-no6-2017-november/christian-christmas-bible/>.

² “Why Do Some People Not Celebrate Christmas?,” *Watchtower*, December 1, 2012, 10, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20121201/why-some-do-not-celebrate-christmas/>.

the Apostolic Fathers mention the celebration of the 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 actually based on the Bible. It was introduced at the First 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses explain their view of this celebration the following way:

- The Easter holiday celebration is not based on the Bible.
- Jesus commanded that we commemorate his death, not his resurrection. We observe this Memorial each year on the anniversary of his death according to the Bible's lunar calendar.— Luke 22:19, 20.
- We believe that the origins of Easter customs, which come from ancient fertility rites, make Easter unacceptable to God. God requires that we give him “exclusive devotion,” and he is offended by worship that includes practices that he does not approve of.— Exodus 20:5; 1 Kings 18:21.

We believe that our decision to abstain from celebrating Easter is based firmly on the Bible, which encourages the use of “practical wisdom and thinking ability” rather than simply following human traditions. (Proverbs 3:21; Matthew 15:3) While we share our beliefs about Easter with others when asked, we also respect each person's right to decide what he will do.— 1 Peter 3:15.²

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in predestination and **fate**.

They state:

God dignifies us with free will, the power to make decisions of our own rather than having God or fate predetermine what we do. Consider what the Bible teaches.

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1910), 8:828.

² “Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Celebrate Easter?” Frequently Asked Questions, [jw.org](https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/why-not-celebrate-easter/), <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/why-not-celebrate-easter/>.

- God created humans in his image. (Genesis 1:26) Unlike animals, which act mainly on instinct, we resemble our Creator in our capacity to display such qualities as love and justice. And like our Creator, we have free will.
- To a great extent, we can determine our future. The Bible encourages us to “choose life . . . by listening to [God’s] voice,” that is, by choosing to obey his commands. (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20) This offer would be meaningless, even cruel, if we lacked free will. Instead of forcing us to do what he says, God warmly appeals to us: “O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river.”—Isaiah 48:18.
- Our success or failure is not determined by fate. If we want to succeed at an endeavor, we must work hard. “All that your hand finds to do,” says the Bible, “do with your very power.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10) It also says: “The plans of the diligent one surely make for advantage.”—Proverbs 21:5.

Free will is a precious gift from God, for it lets us love him with our “whole heart”—because we want to.—Matthew 22:37.¹

The above-mentioned sociological study of Moscow State University says the following about Jehovah’s Witnesses:

An important and rather unexpected result was the fact that a surprisingly high percentage of those who believe that human life depends on one’s own efforts (88% compared to 55% of non-Jehovah’s Witnesses respondents). The emphasis on the active role of the person himself, independence from external circumstances and fate is most likely an attribute of the religion of Jehovah’s Witnesses.² The index of faith in one’s efforts among Moscow Jehovah’s Witnesses is much higher than even among bankers and businessmen, although

¹ “What Does the Bible Say About Free Will? Is God in Control?,” Bible Questions Answered, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/free-will-in-the-bible/>.

² Antonov and Medkov, “Family and the Bible,” 29.

in our sample of respondents the standard of living is lower than in these categories.¹

The familistic orientation well correlates with this active quality of JWs, since everything that is highly valued within the framework of the confessional community of JWs is associated with the desire to demonstrate this accepted system of values within the practice of one's personal way of life.²

In conclusion of this chapter, I would like to note that 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. You can find a detailed chronology of the development of the beliefs according to historical articles at the end of this book.

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 religious traditions that are not supported by the Bible.
2. One can have different opinions on Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs, but one cannot but admit that their doctrine is, of course, *Christian*.
3. Many teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses are also present or were previously present in various Christian religions.
4. The doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses is exceptionally peaceful and constructive. It has a positive effect on an individual's personality, contributes to their self-realization and self-development. Believers increase their degree of self-control, responsibility for their actions and life. Believers are distinguished by a high degree of socialization and strong families. Diligence, kindness, altruism, and being law-abiding are just the most striking features that characterize the majority of followers of this denomination. There is no doubt that

¹ Antonov and Medkov, "Family and the Bible," 24.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

their doctrine either attracts such people to the community in the first place or educates and develops these qualities in them once they become part of it. And the experience of confessing the doctrine directly affects the growth and intensity of the manifestation of the above qualities.

CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

The organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is a centralized, vertical hierarchical structure, a structure that has continued to evolve throughout the 150 years of the existence of the organization. In the appendix to this book, you can find a chronology of the history of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses that shows the most important stages of its formation.

The Witnesses themselves describe their organization as a “theocracy,” which means “rule [Gr. *kratos*] by God [Gr. *the•os*].”

“The two-part article ‘Organization’ that appeared in *The Watchtower* of June 1 and 15, 1938, 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

¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1993), 217, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Proclaimers-of-Gods-Kingdom/An-Association-of-Brothers/Development-of-the-Organization-Structure/>.

² “Joyful Submission to Authority,” *Watchtower*, July 1, 1994, 26, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1994485>.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the leadership of the organization belongs to the resurrected Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven with God, and is the Head of the Christian congregation and the King of God’s Kingdom. (See Chapter 3 of this book for more information.)

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.

How does a person become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and part of the congregation?

Those who decide to devote their life to God and become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses are baptized in water. But before getting baptized, they must “dedicate” themselves to Jehovah. Jehovah’s Witnesses explain it as follows:

What is dedication? Before you can get baptized, you must make a dedication. When you make a dedication, you approach Jehovah in earnest prayer and tell him that you will use your life to serve him forever. When you dedicate yourself to God, you “disown” yourself. (Read Matthew 16:24.) You now belong to Jehovah, which is a great privilege. (Romans 14:8) You are telling him that from now on, you will be focused on serving him and not on pleasing yourself. Your dedication is a vow—a solemn promise made to God. Jehovah does not force us to make such a vow. But when we do, he expects us to fulfill it.—Psalm 116:12, 14. . . .

. . . Your dedication is personal and private; it is between you and Jehovah.¹

As we have already mentioned, to make sure that a person is making an “informed decision” when choosing to become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a home Bible study course is offered that helps familiarize that individual with the main Bible teachings that are the basis for the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Additionally, even before getting

¹ “Are You Ready to Get Baptized?,” *Watchtower*, March 2020, 9, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-march-2020/are-you-ready-to-get-baptized/>.

baptized, anyone desirous of doing so may attend all the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses and read their literature.

Those who 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 that person understands basic Bible teachings and is living in harmony with them as a Christian. They want to see whether the person is really exercising the Christian faith, which involves 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), and really wants to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. If this is the case, the person will be announced as becoming an unbaptized publisher.

Later, when 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 into two parts and consists of about 60 questions concerning Bible teachings and lifestyle.

Here is what is written about baptism in the publications of Jehovah's Witnesses:

1. How much do you need to know before you get baptized? To get baptized, you need to have "an accurate knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) This does not mean that you have to know the answer to every Bible question before you get baptized. Even Christians who have been baptized for a long time keep learning. (Colossians 1:9, 10) But you do need to have a basic understanding of Bible teachings. Congregation elders will help you determine if you have enough knowledge.

2. What are some steps you need to take before baptism? Before you can get baptized, you must "repent . . . and turn around." (Read Acts 3:19.) This means that you feel deeply sorry for any sins you have committed and you ask Jehovah to forgive you. You also firmly reject bad conduct and are determined to live in a way that pleases

God. In addition, you begin to participate in congregation activities by attending meetings and preaching as an unbaptized publisher.¹

«If you feel that you are ready to get baptized, you no doubt have already taken a number of steps to build a good relationship with Jehovah. As a result of your regular Bible study, you have come to know much about Jehovah and Jesus. You have developed faith. (Hebrews 11:6) You completely trust in Jehovah's promises found in the Bible, and you are convinced that your faith in Jesus' sacrifice can save you from sin and death. You have repented of your sins; you feel deeply sorry for the wrongs you have committed, and you have asked Jehovah for his forgiveness. You have turned your life around; you have firmly rejected your former bad way of life and have begun living in a way that is pleasing to God. (Acts 3:19) You are eager to tell others about your faith. You qualified to become an unbaptized publisher and began preaching with the congregation. (Matthew 24:14) Jehovah is proud of you for taking these necessary steps. You have brought great joy to his heart.—Proverbs 27:11.

Before you can get baptized, there are a few other things you need to do. As we learned earlier, you must dedicate yourself to God. Approach him in private, heartfelt prayer, and promise him that you will use your life to do his will. (1 Peter 4:2) Then let the coordinator of the body of elders know that you want to get baptized. He will ask some elders to meet with you. Please do not be anxious about meeting with them. These dear brothers no doubt already know you and love you. They will review with you the basic Bible teachings that you have learned. They want to make sure that you understand those teachings and that you are aware of the importance of dedication and baptism. If they agree that you are ready, they will inform you that you can get baptized at the next assembly or convention.²

¹ *Enjoy Life Forever!—An Interactive Bible Course* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2021), 195, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/enjoy-life-forever/section-3/lesson-47/>.

² “Are You Ready to Get Baptized?” 12–13.

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.

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.

Baptism is a feature of biannual assemblies and annual conventions 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. 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 and serving one’s neighbors.

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.

“Once you get baptized, what will you need to do? Recall that dedication is a vow and that Jehovah expects you to keep it. So after your baptism, you have to live up to your dedication. How can you do that?

“Stay close to your congregation. As a baptized Christian, you are now part of an ‘association of brothers.’ (1 Peter 2:17) Your brothers and sisters in the congregation are your spiritual family. By regularly attending the meetings, you will strengthen your bond with them. Read God’s Word and meditate on it every day. (Psalm 1:1, 2) After reading a portion of the Bible, take some time to think deeply about what you

have read. Then the words will reach your heart. ‘Pray continually.’ (Matthew 26:41) Your sincere prayers will draw you closer to Jehovah. ‘Keep on . . . seeking first the Kingdom.’ (Matthew 6:33) You can do that by making the preaching work a priority in your life. By sharing regularly in the ministry, you will keep your faith strong, and you may help others to get on the road to everlasting life.—1 Timothy 4:16.

“The decision to dedicate yourself to Jehovah and get baptized is the most important decision you will ever make.”¹

“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.”² Publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses highlight that “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 another.”³

They hold their meetings twice a week 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. This is because their purpose is to provide a comfortable setting for holding Christian meetings. 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 for holding Christian meetings.”⁴ In some Kingdom Halls, you can even see artwork depicting various Biblical accounts. They are used simply as decoration, certainly not in worship.

¹ “Are You Ready to Get Baptized?” 16.

² “The Christian Congregation—A Source of Strengthening Aid,” *Watchtower*, May 15, 1999, 25, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1999365>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2019), 117, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102014941>.

Kingdom Hall construction is another distinguishing feature of Jehovah's Witnesses, just as is printing literature. In the organization, there are specialized departments and experts who engage in the architectural planning and construction of buildings for worship. Under the direction of such experts, volunteers from local congregations build Kingdom Halls. Professional contractors are there to carry out especially difficult construction work as needed. Once the construction is completed, 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 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 this 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.

Who are the elders, how do they become elders, and what role do they play?

“A body of elders supervises each congregation. About 20 congregations form a circuit. Congregations receive periodic visits from traveling elders known as circuit overseers.”¹

¹ “How Are Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses Organized?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org (official website of Jehovah's Witnesses), <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/congregations-organized/>.

An elder is the name of a church minister among Jehovah's Witnesses, similar to a bishop, pastor, priest, or presbyter in other Christian denominations. All these positions, although they differ in names, in fact, come from the same Biblical tradition and the same Biblical texts and ancient Greek words. The difference in the name is the result of a different translation from ancient Greek. Of course, these persons have different rights, functions, and characteristics in each denomination according to their teachings and internal rules; but their initial existence is associated with the same Biblical verses.

Regarding the role and functions of elders, the literature of the Witnesses states the following:

“A key is to submit ourselves to and respect those whom Jesus has designated to provide direction in the congregation, the elders.—Hebrews 13:7, 17.”¹

“Jehovah has assigned the elders to act as judges, and he has given them the responsibility of removing unrepentant sinners from the congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.”²

“Ministerial servants” help elders. Drawing an analogy with other Christian denominations, it is correct to compare them with “deacons” or assistants to priests. The Greek word *diakonia* is most often translated as “service” or “worship,” and it turns out that “deacon” (Greek *dea'konoï*) in Greek means “servant.”

“Ministerial servants render services that help the overseers and that contribute to the good order of the congregation.

“. . . thus allowing the overseers to spend more time caring for teaching and and shepherding responsibilities. . . .

“Just consider some of these services: One ministerial servant may be assigned to care for the literature so that we can obtain it for personal use and for the field ministry. Others are assigned to keep

¹ “You Can Share in Strengthening Our Christian Unity—How?,” *Watchtower*, March 2016, 15, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-march-2016/strengthen-christian-unity/>.

² “Understanding Headship in the Congregation,” *Watchtower*, February 2021, 18, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-february-2021/Understanding-Headship-in-the-Congregation/>.

congregation accounts or territory records. Some are assigned to handle microphones, to operate sound equipment, to serve as attendants, and to help the elders in other ways. There is much work to be done in maintaining the Kingdom Hall and keeping it clean, so ministerial servants are often called on to assist in caring for these responsibilities.”¹

The Biblical requirements for elders or “overseers” (bishops, pastors, priests, presbyters) and “ministerial servants” (deacons) are found in the first letter of the apostle Paul to Timothy, chapter three, and in the letter of the apostle Paul to Titus, chapter two.

The congregations are divided by languages and grouped into circuits. All congregations in the circuit are cared for by an experienced elder who has been designated as a “circuit overseer.”

Circuit (traveling) overseers are appointed from among qualified elders by the Governing Body. They visit congregations of one circuit approximately twice a year. Such visits include giving religious sermons to fellow believers and holding meetings with elders and ministerial servants. They also appoint elders and ministerial servants in the congregations.

Canonical guidance of the activity of all congregations around the world is provided by the *Governing Body* of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Governing Body is a collective body currently consisting of eight members from several different countries, all of whom have rich experience of serving as elders. Currently, the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses includes: Geoffrey Jackson; Kenneth Cook, Jr.; Stephen Lett; Gerrit Lösch; Anthony Morris III; Mark Sanderson; David Splane; and Samuel Herd. They serve at the world headquarters in Warwick, New York, U.S.A. The official website of the organization gives the following explanation:

“Jesus is the Head of the Christian congregation. (Ephesians 5:23) Today, from his position in heaven, Jesus directs his followers on earth by means of a ‘faithful and discreet slave.’ (Matthew 24:45)

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*, 53, 55.

Having received an appointment from Jesus himself, the ‘slave’ would have a certain amount of authority but would remain a slave of Christ and serve Christ’s brothers.”¹

“The Governing Body is a small group of mature Christians who provide direction for Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide. Their work is twofold:

- They oversee the preparation of Bible-based instruction through the publications, meetings, and schools of Jehovah’s Witnesses.— Luke 12:42.
- They supervise the worldwide work of Jehovah’s Witnesses by directing our public ministry and overseeing the use of donated assets.

“The Governing Body follows the pattern set by ‘the apostles and elders in Jerusalem’ in the first century, who made important decisions on behalf of the entire Christian congregation. (Acts 15:2) Like those faithful men, the members of the Governing Body are not the leaders of our organization. They look to the Bible for guidance, acknowledging that Jehovah God has appointed Jesus Christ as the Head of the congregation.—1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23.”²

Each member of the Governing Body participates in the activity of one or more “committees,” which committees perform different tasks. Here is a brief description of each committee and its functions:

- *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.”³

¹ *Enjoy Life Forever!*, 225.

² “What Is the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses?,” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/governing-body-jw-helpers/>.

³ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 131, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/standards/organization/>.

- *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.”¹
- *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 Web site and oversees the translation work done throughout the earth. Additionally, this committee responds to questions about the meaning of certain scriptures and information presented in the publications.”² It is also responsible for the Art Department, which works out details for the visual appearance of different publications based on deep research into archeological, historical, literary, and other sources. This department could be safely called a “research” department.
- *Service Committee*—oversees “all areas of the evangelizing work and matters affecting congregations, publishers, pioneers [full-time evangelizers], elders, traveling overseers, and missionaries. [It supervises,] among numerous other things, the activities of Hospital Liaison Committees.”³
- *Personnel Committee*—is “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.”⁴

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 131, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/standards/organization/>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- *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 work.”¹

Since 1992, the Governing Body has assigned experienced Christian elders to serve as helpers to their committees. Unlike members of the Governing Body, the helpers are not necessarily “anointed.” Every week, the helpers attend a meeting of one of the committees they work with; they provide necessary information and make their own suggestions. The Governing Body makes final decisions, and their assistants follow the directions of the 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.

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 translations (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*) into different languages. Translation Services is also involved in the 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; therefore, sign language translators translate written text into video format. Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses translate publications into more than 100 sign languages. All of Jehovah’s Witness translators, including sign language

¹ *God’s Kingdom Rules!* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 131, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/standards/organization/>.

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 his or her own role: 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 that the thoughts are conveyed accurately and clearly.

Particular attention should be paid to the publishing activities of the organization, the scale of which is so great that large printing complexes have been built at many branches around the world. (As we noted earlier, the publications in Russian are printed in Germany.)

They describe their publishing activities as follows: “We translate, print, ship, and distribute millions of Bibles and other Christian publications each year, all without charge. Likewise, the *jw.org* website and the *JW Library* app make our digital publications available without charge or advertisements.”¹

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. For 2022, the public edition of *The Watchtower* has a circulation of over 36.3 million copies in more than 419 languages, which exceeds the circulation of any other magazine in the world. All issues of this 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.”

¹ “How Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Use Donations?,” Frequently Asked Questions, *jw.org*, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-do-jw-use-donations/>.

This is the main purpose of the magazine. But it has another purpose, which is as important as the first one: *The Watch tower* 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 the monthly issues of the study edition of this magazine contain articles that are considered by the believers during the respective 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 article are based on a particular scripture from the Bible.

As of 2022, *Awake!* magazine is available in more than 216 languages, has an average production of 31.4 million copies, and is published once every four 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 end 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.

In recent years, Jehovah's Witnesses have been concentrating great efforts on the development of their own Internet site, jw.org. This is a very extensive resource that provides a huge amount of information. It is amazing that this website is already available in 1070 languages. In a press release distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses in November 2019, they cited the opinions of different experts on this matter:

John Yunker, author of *The Web Globalization Report Card*, states: “The internet connects computers, but languages connect people. . . . The jw.org website shows great respect for those who speak languages that may not be supported by the Fortune 500. But on a larger level, jw.org is ahead of the curve. Even Facebook, with support for more than 100 languages, has a long way to go. And while the jw.org effort is volunteer-driven, it even outpaces the world’s most popular crowdsourced website, Wikipedia, which supports more than 280 languages.”¹

“Translating into and publishing in so many languages can pose special challenges,” explains Izak Marais, who directs the Translation Services group at the world headquarters in Warwick, New York, U.S.A. “At times we wanted to publish in a less common language, but all the characters were not available for that language. So, over the years, we have provided artwork for countless characters and font sets, allowing us to produce printed publications in hundreds of languages. Similarly, we have overcome many challenges to make our publications available in so many languages on jw.org. In fact, many of those 1,000 languages have no other publications available on the web.”²

After all of the above, a quite reasonable question arises: How is all this, dare I say, grandiose activity financed?

All of this is especially interesting in view of the fact that there is no tithing in the organization and, as it states in their literature: “Let it be understood from the first that collections or other solicitations of money are neither authorized nor approved by this Society.”³ “There are no emotional appeals for funds in their congregations or at their conventions.”⁴

¹ “World’s Most Widely Translated Website, JW.ORG, Now Features Content in 1,000 Languages,” media release, November 4, 2019, New York.

² “World’s Most Widely Translated Website, JW.ORG, Now Features Content in 1,000 Languages,” media release, November 4, 2019, New York.

³ *Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, 340.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Where do the necessary funds come from? Back in 1886, the *Zion's Watch Tower* stated as follows: "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' (Psalm 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*)¹

Here is how the Witnesses themselves answer the question about funding their organization:

Jehovah's Witnesses are not expected to tithe or to donate any specific amount or percentage of their income. (2 Corinthians 9:7) We never take collections or charge admission at our meetings, nor do our ministers charge fees for baptisms, funerals, weddings, or other religious services. We do not raise money through bake sales, bazaars, bingo games, carnivals, dinners, raffles, or similar events, nor do we solicit donations. Donors' information is never shared or made available to the public. (Matthew 6:2-4) Our websites and publications do not contain revenue-generating advertisements.² You can donate in one of the following ways:

Contribution boxes: You may place donations of cash or checks in contribution boxes at Kingdom Halls, Assembly Halls, or other locations where our meetings are held.

Online donations: In many countries, you may use the page "Donate to Jehovah's Witnesses" to make donations by means of credit cards, debit cards, bank transfers, and other electronic methods. Some Witnesses choose to "set something aside" each month by scheduling recurring donations using one of these methods.—1 Corinthians 16:2.³

¹ Proclaimers of God's Kingdom, 341.

² "How Is the Work of Jehovah's Witnesses Financed?," Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/donations-worldwide-work-finances-money/>.

³ Ibid.

The organization also spends a lot of energy on informing its members about how exactly the funds are being spent. For example, on the official website of the organization, there is a special section “How Your Donations Are Used,” which publishes articles about the projects and activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses around the world.

When considering this issue, it is important to understand 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 production of video materials, music composition, and recording of songs. They have their own lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, drivers, and electricians—all of whom 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.

One cannot help but note that there is no corruption in this organization. All of the members of the Governing Body live in the same buildings as do other members of the Bethel family in the U.S.A.; they also eat the same food and receive the same allowance as the others. Jehovah’s Witnesses have no special clergy class, and this likewise protects the organization against a system of special benefits and privileges limited to a small group of individuals.

Concerning people who like “conspiracy theories” and see criminal offenses 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 there had been violations of tax legislation or involvement in anything criminal even once during this period of time, that fact would have been made known to the public.

To conclude this chapter, I want to especially note that Jehovah’s Witnesses are very open in providing information about their activities and their congregational structure.

Their publications are easily available on their official website, which describes the structure of their organization in great detail, the history of the appearance of certain elements of the organization, as well as the reasons and Biblical justifications for all the changes.

And it becomes quite understandable why Jehovah's Witnesses constitute "a well-known religion" in the international community, and their religious practice designated as "recognized and known."

Thus, today the organizational structure of the international religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which has been developing for over 100 years, has a clear distribution of roles from top to bottom—from its leading international center to local communities (congregations) and groups.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTERS 3-4

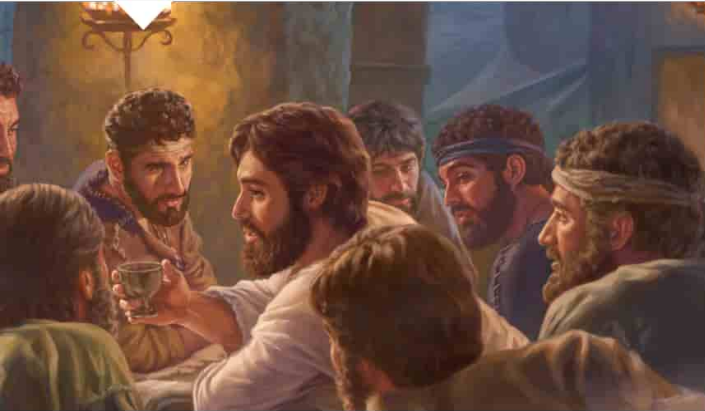
FOUNDATION OF THE TEACHINGS—
WHAT DO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES BELIEVE?
STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Baptism is performed by completely immersing a person in water

- In 2021, the number baptized worldwide was **171 393**

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 2021, the worldwide Memorial attendance numbered **21 367 603**





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



Associations of believers of Jehovah's Witnesses are called congregations

- The number of the congregations worldwide is **119,297**

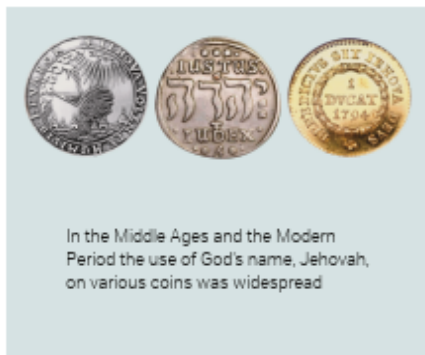
Religious buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses are called "Kingdom Halls"

To date, there are **105,000** such buildings worldwide



Tetragrammaton found numerous times on coins, in literature and paintings, both Western and Russian

יהוה



In the Middle Ages and the Modern Period the use of God's name, Jehovah, on various coins was widespread

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"

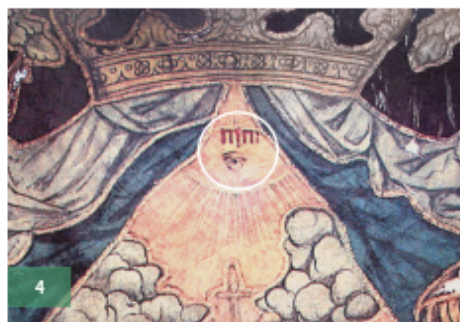


1) The Elizabeth Bible, 1751



2) Church of Saint Michael (Vienna, Austria)

3) Military Attribute from the time of Peter the Great, 1700 (Saint Petersburg, Russia)



3

4



“ He was slain by the anger of Jehovah”

A.S. PUSHKIN

FROM A LETTER TO VIGEL



“ ...it is too sinful to forget your forty-century-old Jehovah and depart from him”

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

WRITER'S DIARY



“ ...he whispered a prayer to almighty Jehovah”

N.A. OSTROVSKY

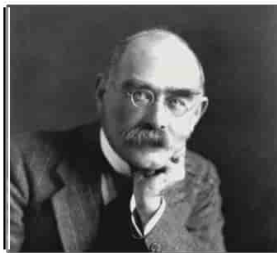
HOW THE STEEL WAS TEMPERED



“ As the chosen people bore in their features the sign manual of Jehovah...”

KARL MARX

CAPITAL. VOLUME I



“ Jehovah of the Thunders, Lord God of Battles, aid!”

R. KIPLING

HYMN BEFORE ACTION



“ ...all worlds together make one great house which is ruled by Jehovah”

N.M. KARAMZIN

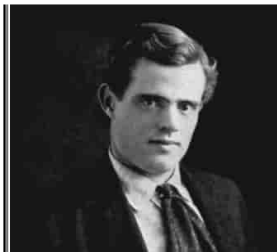
TAKING A WALK



“ ...amidst the clouds the wrathful countenance of Jehovah illumined by a flash of lightning”

M.E. SALTYSKOV-SHCHEDRIN

THE GOLOVLEVS



“ ... such commands are equal to Jehovah's in the matter of potency”

J. LONDON

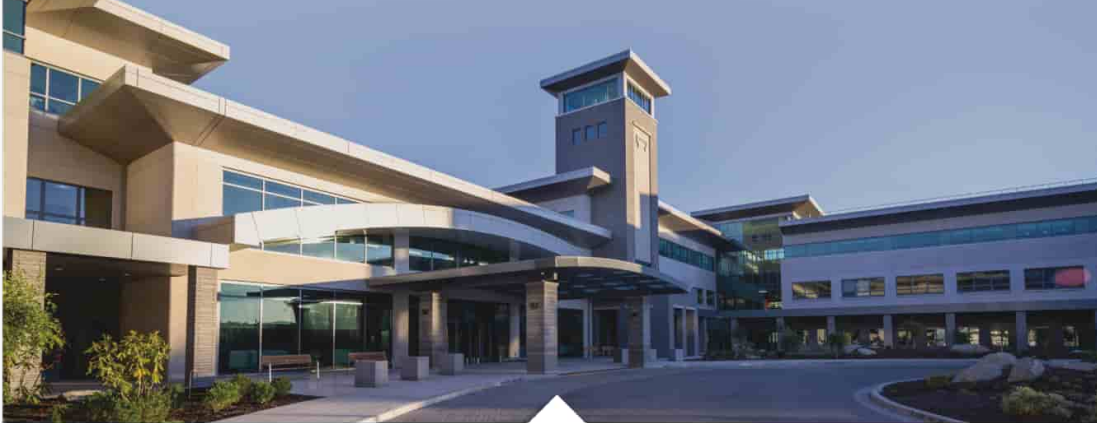
A DAUGHTER OF THE AURORA



“ I witness before Jehovah that the gold is not with me, but him!”

A.I. KUPRIN

SULAMITH



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)





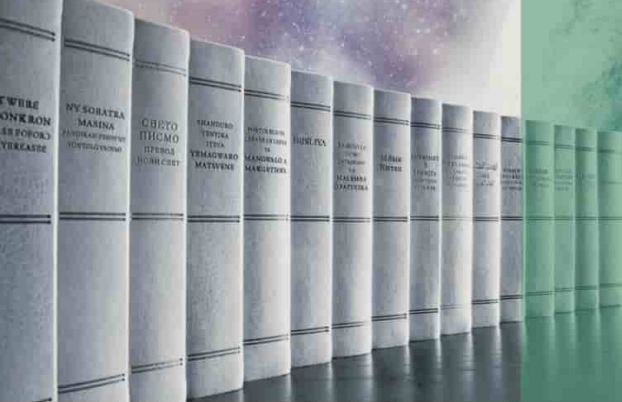
**Branch in Anseong
(South Korea)**



**Branch in Almaty
(Kazakhstan)**

**Central Europe Branch
in Selters (Germany)**





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



June 2017, in Almaty (Kazakhstan)
Geoffrey Jackson, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, announced the release of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Uzbek



CHAPTER 5

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' VIEW OF EDUCATION IN CONGREGATION AND IN FAMILY

“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

This statement is wise, is it not?

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, they referred to themselves as “Bible Students”; and starting in 1910, they used the name International Bible Students' Association with reference to their meetings. 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' teachings 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 Bibletruths. It is very important to understand this!

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:

¹ Leo N. Tolstoy, “Afterword,” in *Collected Works in 22 Volumes*, vol. 12 [in Russian] (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1978–1985), 12:208.

“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.” (Quote taken from the *Watchtower* magazine’s first issue, July 1879.)¹

“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.”—*Watchtower*, April 1882, p. 7.²

“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.³

“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 “Read God’s Word and Serve Him in Truth,” *Watchtower*, May 15, 1996, 15, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1996364>.

² *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1993), 133, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Proclaimers-of-Gods-Kingdom/Gaining-Accurate-Knowledge-of-Gods-Word-and-Applying-It/Growing-in-Accurate-Knowledge-of-the-Truth/>.

³ “Know Jehovah—The Personal God,” *Watchtower*, October 1, 1997, 6, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1997721>.

⁴ “Who Is Leading God’s People Today?,” *Watchtower*, February 2017, 26, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-february-2017/who-is-leading-gods-people-today/>.

⁵ “Set Your Heart on Spiritual Treasures,” *Watchtower*, June 2017, 13, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-june-2017/set-your-heart-on-spiritual-treasures/>.

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.

This is a real challenge for any researcher of this Christian organization because he is required not only to know the basic teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses but also to understand their current vision and understanding of certain issues and facets of these teachings. It is simply impossible to rely entirely on scientific works, not only 30 years old, but even 10 years old. Since we are talking about a dynamically developing organization, the researcher is always required to "keep his finger on the pulse of things," so to speak.

So, what can be said about 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 into a family of Witnesses or to simply 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 in this for them.

In the literature of this religious denomination, a lot of attention is paid to the development of analytical thinking skills in a person. For example, here is what a 2017 *Watchtower* states:

The above-mentioned examples convey to us a clear lesson. It is up to each of us to make decisions, and the wise, right choices are based on sound Scriptural knowledge. Galatians 6:5 reminds us: "Each one will carry his own load of responsibility." We should not give someone else the responsibility to make decisions for us. Rather, we should personally learn what is right in God's eyes and choose to do it.

How might we give in to the danger of letting others choose for us? Peer pressure could sway us to make a bad decision. (Proverbs 1:10, 15)

Still, no matter how others try to pressure us, it is our responsibility to follow our Bible-trained conscience. In many respects, if we let others make our decisions, we are essentially deciding to “follow them.” It is still a choice, but a potentially disastrous one.

The apostle Paul clearly alerted the Galatians to the danger of letting others make personal decisions for them. (Galatians 4:17) Some in the congregation wanted to make personal choices for others in order to alienate them from the apostles. Why? Those selfish ones were seeking prominence. They overstepped proper bounds and did not respect their fellow Christians' responsibility to make their own decisions.

Paul set a fine example of respecting his brothers' right of free will to make decisions. (2 Corinthians 1:24) Today, when giving counsel on matters involving personal choice, the elders should follow that pattern. They are happy to share Bible-based information with others in the flock. Still, the elders are careful to allow individual brothers and sisters to make their own decisions. That is logical because those individuals will bear the responsibility for the results. Here is an important lesson: We can show helpful interest in others and call attention to Scriptural principles or counsel. Still, others have a right and responsibility to make their own decisions. When they do this wisely, they benefit. Clearly, we should avoid any tendency to think that we are authorized to make decisions for other brothers and sisters.¹

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.²

¹ “Exercise Faith—Decide Wisely!” *Watchtower*, March 2017, 15–16, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-march-2017/exercise-faith-decide-wisely/>.

² These “schools” are not to be confused with traditional educational institutions. 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.

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 a large interactive course using the book *Enjoy Life Forever!—An Interactive Bible Course*.

This manual appeared in 2021 and replaced several books at once that had been used formerly to conduct Bible studies with persons (*What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, *What Can the Bible Teach Us?*, *How to Remain in God's Love*).

This new manual is very different from the previous ones, and as Jehovah's Witnesses note, it reflects their new approach to teaching others. The manual consists of 60 interactive lessons divided into four sections. Their previous teaching aids were in the form of text divided into paragraphs with questions for each paragraph. Currently, the main emphasis is on specially prepared video materials, point of view questions, and numerous illustrations.

I would like to commend Jehovah's Witnesses for adapting to the changing habits and lifestyles of people. The world around us is changing rapidly. Printed books are no longer the exclusive source of information. E-books, the Internet, educational videos, and television have made their own adaptations to this circumstance, opening up a veritable ocean of new data on any topic of interest to persons. The younger generation also no longer enjoys reading as much, and so, faced with such a huge flow of different kinds of information, some people have begun to lose their ability to focus on one topic for a long period of time. Jehovah's Witnesses understand this, have changed their approach and they continue to keep up with the latest trends in technology to accommodate this.

Before baptism, elders meet with new ones to discuss doctrinal questions in order to make sure each of the candidates has enough knowledge and is living 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, Jehovah’s Witnesses conducted a school at their meetings 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* states: “People of all ages, ethnic groups, and educational backgrounds are receiving this theocratic instruction, free of charge.”¹

Anyone who regularly attends these religious meetings and lives according to Bible principles can enroll in this school to improve their public speaking. (Even young children, if they know how to read, can receive this training alongside their parents.)

All the assignments are listed in the *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 each week and illustrations that can make each one’s personal Bible study more meaningful. It looks like a real workbook in which one can make personal notes. Usually, one can find workbooks for the next six months on the *jw.org* website. Of course, 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*.² Since 2019, this brochure has been used at the meetings in place of the book *Benefit from Theocratic Ministry School Education*. It contains guidance on how to express ones thoughts properly, give talks in front of an audience, read accurately—in other words, how to become a good orator and/or 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,” and “Informative to Your Audience.” Altogether,

¹ *Benefit From Theocratic Ministry School Education* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2002), 5, <https://wol.jw.org/ru/wol/dsync/r2/lp-u/r1/lp-e/1102001051>.

² *Apply Yourself to Reading and Teaching* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2018).

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. (The Theocratic Ministry School has existed since 1943.) Unlike previous teaching aids, the new brochure contains minimal text, and every topic includes a tutorial video.

If a publisher becomes a pioneer (or full-time minister), within a year he/she has the opportunity to attend a six-day-long “Pioneer Service School,” as well as special educational meetings with elders and the circuit overseer.¹

If a baptized man becomes a ministerial servant or an elder, once every few years, he attends a special course of spiritual education 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 others in the congregation.

If a publisher is invited 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 these individuals to better care for their responsibilities. As a result, they accomplish their assignments more fully and receive more satisfaction from carrying them out.

We must not forget that every one of Jehovah’s Witnesses is encouraged to engage in deep personal study of the Bible and publications of the organization. The organization regularly publishes a large amount of varied material for these purposes. Thus, the process of learning affects each one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and continues indefinitely.

¹ Some believers may want to take on extra responsibilities, for example, 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 news.

The Witnesses' religious meetings are open to everyone. Therefore, they are often attended by those who are simply curious, as well as those who already have certain ideas about the Witnesses and would like to get to know their teachings better.

At their meetings, no fees are charged. There are no faith healings, and no special rituals are performed (such as those of the Orthodox or Catholic churches). Those responsible for conducting meetings do not wear special vestments and do not use any kind of objects of ritual. They do not use honorific titles or special forms of addressing one another.

At the center of their meetings is Biblical education. Their purpose of worship is to deeply consider Biblical teachings, including the interpretation of Biblical texts, a review of history, chronology, and geography of Biblical places, and other related topics. Singing songs and saying prayers are both included in their worship. Singing at meetings is not accompanied by dancing or shouting; neither is it an emotional "performance". Rather, it is modest and sincere. Jehovah's Witnesses are not charismatics, so such excessively emotional elements of worship as screaming or crying, are not encouraged. The focus is on the mind and heart, not some sort of charismatic display.

All the meetings are free of charge. Programs for meetings around the world are overseen by the Governing Body, so all congregations worldwide receive the same program of Bible instruction. This requires good organizational skills and a great deal of work on the part of the translators because the training program and all materials must be available simultaneously all over the world in hundreds of languages.¹ This fact also highlights once again the significance of Biblical education for Jehovah's Witnesses.

Two meetings for worship are held each week, each of them following a certain pattern, which is similar in congregations worldwide.

¹ Some language groups may have different study materials assigned based on what material is available in their language.

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:

The first part of this meeting, called Treasures From God’s Word, will help us to become familiar with the background and context of Bible accounts and to learn how these can be applied. The meeting includes a talk, a reading, and a discussion based on the weekly Bible reading. Visual aids and worksheets to help teach these accounts are included in the *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*. This in-depth consideration of the Bible benefits us in our personal life and in our teaching, so that we “may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.”—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

The second part of the meeting, Apply Yourself to the Field Ministry, is designed to give all the opportunity to practice for the ministry and to improve in their ability to preach and teach. In addition to student assignments, videos of sample conversations are considered. This section of the meeting helps us to acquire “the tongue of those taught” so that we “may know how to answer the tired one with the right word.”—Isaiah 50:4.

The third part, Living as Christians, considers the practical application of Bible principles in day-to-day life. (Psalm 119:105) A primary feature of this part of the meeting is the Congregation Bible Study. Like the *Watchtower* Study, the Congregation Bible Study is a question-and-answer discussion.¹

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.”²

¹ Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2019), 64, <https://wol.jw.org/ru/wol/dsync/r2/lp-u/r1/lp-e/1102014937>.

² God’s Kingdom Rules! (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2014), 188, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/gods-kingdom/education/ministry-school-training/>.

On the weekend, they have another meeting that has two parts: The first part of the weekend meeting consists of a Bible discourse that is especially designed for the general public, some of whom may be attending a meeting for the first time. The public talk plays an important part in filling the spiritual needs of both newly associated ones and congregation publishers.—Acts 18:4; 19:9, 10. . . .

. . . Such talks help us 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

Here are some titles of the talks: "Real Help For the Family," "Be Honest in All You Say and Do," "Your View of Authority Matters to God," "Imitate 'the Father of Tender Mercies,'" "A Godly View of Sex and Marriage," "The Responsibilities and Rewards of Parenthood," "Follow the Course of Hospitality," "Acts of God—How Do You View Them?," "Choose Your Associates Wisely!," "What Happens When We Die?," "Work What Is Good Toward All," and "Show Respect and Love in Your Marriage."

Analyzing the place and significance of public talks in the system of spiritual education of Jehovah's Witnesses, it should be noted that those who deliver them strive to keep their listeners from lagging behind in their spiritual development on the one hand, and on the other, to instill in their listeners a sense of "belonging."

The speakers are elders or qualified ministerial servants from the local congregation or any nearby congregation.

The speakers care about the form and presentation of their talks. They try to make them interesting and thought-provoking by using illustrations from everyday life. Methods of reaching the minds of

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 61–62.

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—its spiritual content—always stays the same. And it strives to present this spiritual content in the most simple and comprehensible way.

It is worth noting that short videos are now sometimes included with public talks; these are shown on large monitors in the Kingdom Halls.

After the talk, all those present may rise from their seats and sing a song to musical accompaniment, and this is followed by a Bible study using one of the *Watchtower* articles specially designed for study at such meetings. This meeting is held as follows:

The meeting is led by a *Watchtower* conductor and his assistant, who reads the assigned paragraphs. By asking questions for each paragraph, the conductor encourages the congregation to participate by offering their responses. (The questions are provided in the study article.) Anyone willing can comment on a paragraph, basing their comments on Bible verses or their own life experience. Usually, several people can comment on one question. Everyone is encouraged to study 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 comments 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 to provide a clear understanding of the main thoughts of the article. (On an unrelated topic, I must say that many university lecturers in the human sciences could learn from the Witnesses how to analyze original texts in their workshops.)

The annual assemblies and conventions are especially joyful events for Jehovah's Witnesses. For them, they are like holidays and at the same time huge Bible seminars:

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 Corinthians 6:11-13)

With a particular 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 also 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.

World headquarters periodically organizes international or special conventions, attended by tens of thousands of Witnesses from various countries. For example, in 2017 such a convention was held at the Christian Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty (Kazakhstan).

Jehovah's Witnesses usually rent large facilities or stadiums to hold their conventions. In some countries, they own "Assembly Halls." Here, it is worth noting another important component of the services of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is the singing of religious songs.

We should also highlight that singing religious songs is considered part of the religious education.

Taking to heart the direction of the Bible: "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) Witnesses see great importance in singing religious songs together. They open and conclude their meetings singing songs. Back in 1879, C. T. Russell published *Songs of the Bride* and, in 1890, *Poems and Hymns of Millennial Dawn*. Since then, more than a dozen songbooks have been released.

¹ *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, 67–68.

Jehovah's Witnesses currently use the 2016 songbook "*Sing Out Joyfully*" to *Jehovah*, which contains 151 songs.

What are the reasons for changes and publishing new songbooks?

The Watchtower wrote about the release of a new songbook as follows: 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

¹ "Make a Joyful Sound!," *Watchtower*, November 2017, 6–7, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/watchtower-study-november-2017/singing-essential-part-of-true-worship/>.

That same article in *The Watchtower* entitled “Make a Joyful Sound!” gave practical advice on singing technique: how to breathe correctly while singing, open the mouth, and adjust the posture to produce a voice that is sonorous and beautiful.

Songs at the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses are not just a joint performance of beautiful music but they constitute a very important part of their worship and education.

Speaking about the education and worship of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is worth noting their position regarding the upbringing of children and adolescents. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that parents are responsible for educating their children. The organization has consistently taken a firm stance on this issue. Here is what they write about it:

Parents have the primary responsibility for the protection, safety, and instruction of their children. Therefore, parents within the congregation are encouraged to be vigilant in exercising their responsibility at all times and to do the following:

- Have direct and active involvement in their children's lives.
- Educate themselves and their children about child abuse.
- Encourage, promote, and maintain regular communication with their children.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:3.

Jehovah's Witnesses publish an abundance of Bible-based information to assist parents to fulfill their responsibility to protect and instruct their children. . . .

Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses do not separate children from their parents for the purpose of instruction or other activities. (Ephesians 6:4) For example, their congregations do not provide or sponsor orphanages, Sunday schools, sports clubs, day-care centers, youth groups, or other activities that separate children from their parents.¹

¹ “Jehovah's Witnesses' Scripturally Based Position On Child Protection,” Legal Resources, jw.org (official website of Jehovah's Witnesses), www.jw.org/en/news/legal/legal-resources/information/packet-jw-scripturally-based-position-child-protection/.

This is clearly explained in their publications:

Jehovah entrusts parents with the primary responsibility to teach their children. (Proverbs 1:8; Ephesians 6:4) Family Bible study teaches children that worship is, not a formal ritual observed only in public, but part of the family’s private life.—Deuteronomy 6:6–9. In addition, a well-conducted family study can provide parents with a window into their children’s thinking on spiritual and moral matters. For instance, when children are young, parents can use such publications as *Learn From the Great Teacher*. In almost every paragraph of this Bible study aid, children are asked to express their opinion on the subjects discussed. By reasoning on the scriptures mentioned in the book, parents may be able to help children to develop their perceptive powers “to distinguish both right and wrong.”—Hebrews 5:14.

As your children grow, adapt the study to their needs. . . . True, it requires perseverance and imagination to keep a family study regular and relevant, but the rewards are worth the effort.—Proverbs 23:15.¹ Parents are encouraged to use the following approach to teaching:

Keep your connection to your child strong. . . .

Peers can provide friendship, but they should never replace your role as a parent. . . .

Do not settle for peer friendships only. . . .

Be aware, however, that while peer friendships might help a child appear to get along well with others, peers do not provide a broad range of friendship. And peers do not provide the guidance and leadership that a young person needs and that loving parents can best provide. . . .

Provide wise guidance. . . .

Even as they grow older, your children can benefit greatly by spending time with you.²

¹ “Teach Your Children to Love Jehovah,” *Watchtower*, September 1, 2007, 28–29, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20070901/Teach-Your-Children-to-Love-Jehovah/>.

² “How to Provide Parental Guidance,” Bible Teachings, [jw.org, https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/family/parental-guidance-influence/](https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/family/parental-guidance-influence/).

«If you imitate Jehovah's loving, reasonable, and consistent discipline, you can be certain that your efforts will benefit your children. Your loving direction may help your children to develop into mature, responsible, and balanced adults. As the Bible says: "Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he grows old, he will not depart from it."—Proverbs 22:6.

Bible-based discipline is . . .

1. Loving: Effective discipline is founded on love, not anger. When faced with a particularly difficult situation, postpone discipline until you are calm.

2. Reasonable: Endeavor to take into account all the circumstances, including the child's limitations and abilities.

3. Consistent: If you have warned your child that a certain form of discipline will result if he misbehaves, be sure to follow through.¹

The organization does a lot to help parents. Their official website, jw.org, has a wide variety of material for parents, children, and teenagers. There are articles, films and videos, various children's activities and stories illustrated in a comic book style, as well as animated films.

Some examples of topics for parents include: "What Makes a Good Parent?," "What Parents Should Know About Day Care," "Raising Responsible Children," "Should My Child Have a Smartphone?," "Teaching Children Smartphone Sense," "Help Your Children Deal With Disturbing News Reports," "How to Be a Good Father," "When Your Child Is Disabled," "The Benefits of Creative Play," "The Importance of Chores," "Raising Considerate Children in a Me-First World," "Inculcate Moral Values in Your Children," "How to Help Children Deal With Failure," "How to Help Your Child Improve His Grades," "What if My Child Is Being Bullied?," "How to Praise Children," "Teaching Children Self-Control," "Teaching Children Humility," "How to Deal With Tantrums," "Preparing Teens for Adulthood," and "Talk to Your Teenager—Without Arguing."

¹ "How Should You Discipline Your Children?," *Watchtower*, July 1, 2014, 12, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20140701/how-to-discipline-your-child/>.

Every Christian is encouraged to set aside time every week for his personal Bible study. Families are also encouraged to have a family worship evening. 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.

We can draw a definitive conclusion: Jehovah's Witnesses are thoughtful 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 against them 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 communist celebrations. Neither would they become Little Octobrists and raise funds for the Vietnam war. All of this could make people around them angry. That is the first possible reason.

A second reason might be that religion itself was declared superstitious and obscure. Having a religion was thought to be a sign of mental impairment. Hence, a religious person could be one who loves to learn.

Let us turn to the official position of Jehovah's Witnesses posted on their official website:

Education helps a person to develop “practical wisdom and thinking ability,” qualities that the Bible praises highly. (Proverbs 2:10, 11; 3:21, 22) Further, Jesus told his followers to be teachers of the things he commanded. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Thus, we encourage and help those in our congregations to have a well-rounded education, including skills in reading, writing, and communicating, as well as knowledge about other religions and cultures.—1 Corinthians 9:20-22; 1 Timothy 4:13.

Governments also see the value of education and often require young people to receive primary and secondary schooling. We comply with such laws in harmony with the command: “Let every person be in subjection to the superior authorities,” or governments. (Romans 13:1) In addition, we encourage our children to apply themselves at school and to do their best, not being satisfied to do the bare minimum. As God's Word says: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.”—Colossians 3: 23, *Good News Translation*.

Education helps us to provide for our families. According to the Bible, “if anyone does not provide for those who are his own, and especially for those who are members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith.” (1 Timothy 5:8) Secular education can help us fulfill the sacred obligation to support our families. As *The World Book Encyclopedia* states, a key purpose of education is to “enable people to become productive members of society . . . as workers in the economy.” A skillful, well-educated person can provide for his family more readily and reliably than one who is unskilled and lacks a basic education.—Proverbs 22:29.

Parents also provide for their children by equipping them for adult life, and formal schooling can be invaluable in that regard. (2 Corinthians 12:14) We encourage parents to provide a formal

education for their children even if they live in areas where it is not free, is difficult to obtain, or goes against cultural norms. We also give practical suggestions on how parents can get involved in their children's education.¹

As it can be seen, their position is very balanced and correct. Jehovah's Witnesses teach their children love of knowledge and zeal for their studies. We also need to remember 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.

Their position toward higher education should be addressed separately.

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 large amounts of money on a university degree. (In most Western countries, higher education is very expensive.)

Here is how they explain their position:

We examine secular education options carefully. The Bible says: "The naive person believes every word, but the shrewd one ponders each step." (Proverbs 14:15) We apply this principle by carefully examining the range of options available for supplementary (postsecondary) education and the cost and value of each. For example, vocational training can often provide good value for a reasonable investment of time. . . .

A Bible proverb says: "The shrewd one sees the danger and conceals himself." (Proverbs 22:3) Jehovah's Witnesses feel that the environment in some universities or similar centers of higher learning can pose moral and spiritual dangers. For that reason, many Witnesses choose not to immerse themselves or their children in such

¹ "How Do Jehovah's Witnesses View Education?," Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-education-school/>.

an environment. They feel that in centers of higher learning, mistaken ideas such as the following are often promoted:

Misconception: Money brings happiness and security

Higher education is often promoted as the surest way to a high-paying job, so an increasing number of students attend a university primarily to make more money. Some hope that money will bring them happiness and security, yet the Bible exposes the futility of such thinking. (Ecclesiastes 5:10) More important, the Bible also teaches that “the love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things” and often leads to a loss of faith. (1 Timothy 6:10) Jehovah's Witnesses make every effort to avoid being ensnared by “the deceptive power of riches.”—Matthew 13:22.

Misconception: A person should seek the prestige or status that can result from higher education

For example, Nika Gilauri, a former prime minister of Georgia, wrote regarding the common viewpoint in his homeland: “A university degree is almost obligatory as a status symbol in Georgia. . . . [In the past,] young people who did not get a degree were a disgrace to their families.” In contrast, the Bible warns against seeking prominence in this world. Jesus told the glory-seeking religious leaders of his day: “How can you believe, when you are accepting glory from one another?” (John 5: 44) The university environment could foster a haughty spirit, which God hates.—Proverbs 6:16, 17; 1 Peter 5:5.¹

Jehovah's Witnesses' attitude toward higher education is explained by different life goals and not by the fact that they refuse knowledge. You can see that prestige and high-paying jobs are not their standards for success. They believe that serving Jehovah and having a strong and happy family guarantees 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

¹ “How Do Jehovah's Witnesses View Education?” Frequently Asked Questions, jw.org, <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jw-education-school/>.

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 throughout 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? Is manual work less valuable than office work? There was a time when we were proud of people of all professions, since any work ennobles a person and makes him valuable to society.

It is also important to remember that 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.”¹

Jehovah's Witnesses do not impose upon others whether or not to 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?

Another striking indicator of well-developed, analytical thinking among Jehovah's Witnesses is their low susceptibility to propaganda

¹ “The Bible's Viewpoint: Does the Bible Discourage Education?” *Awake!*, March 8, 1998, 21, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/101998165>.

and “fake” information. This was especially evident during the coronavirus pandemic, when they actively supported all sanitary restrictions and government regulations.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been regularly publishing articles on the importance of analyzing incoming information for many years now. For example, the 2013 *Awake!* magazine answers the question “Can You Trust the News Media?” as follows:

A Need for Balance

While it is wise not to believe everything we read in the news, it does not follow that there is nothing we can trust. The key may be to have a healthy skepticism, while keeping an open mind.

The Bible says: “Does not the ear itself test out words as the palate tastes food?” (Job 12:11) Here, then, are some tips that will help us to test out the words we hear and read:

- **PROVIDER:** Does the report come from a credible, authoritative person or organization? Does the program or publication have a reputation for seriousness or for sensationalism? Who provide the funds for the news source?
- **SOURCES:** Is there evidence of thorough research? Is the story based on just one source? Are the sources reliable, fair, and objective? Are they balanced, or have they been selected to convey only one point of view?
- **PURPOSE:** Ask yourself: ‘Is the news item primarily to inform or entertain? Is it trying to sell or support something?’
- **TONE:** When the tone of a news item is angry, spiteful, or highly critical, it suggests that an attack is under way and not a reasoned argument.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Are the facts consistent with those in other articles or reports? If stories contradict one another, be careful!
- **TIMELINESS:** Is the information recent enough to be acceptable? Something thought to be correct 20 years ago may be discounted today. On the other hand, if the news item is a breaking story, it may

lack complete and comprehensive information.

So, can you trust the news media? Sound advice is found in the wisdom of Solomon, who wrote: “Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps.”—Proverbs 14:15.¹

The topic of “mass mailing” of messages using messengers and social networks was discussed in detail in a 2015 issue of the *Watchtower*. The article begins with a quote from the German historian and publicist of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, August Ludwig von Schlözer: “Foolish is the man who never reads a newspaper; even more foolish is the man who believes what he reads just because it is in the newspaper.” Among other things, the following advice is given:

A huge amount of information—true and false, useful and worthless, harmless and dangerous—is now available, thanks to modern technology. We must be very selective about what we consider worthy of our attention. Especially could those who are new to the Internet conclude that a report or a news item, however strange or sensational, is true simply because it is online or because a friend sent it via e-mail. For good reason, the Bible warns: “The naive person believes every word, but the shrewd one ponders each step.”—Proverbs 14:15.

How can we become “shrewd” and identify hoaxes, urban legends, swindles, and other misinformation that may appear on our computer screens? First, ask yourself: ‘Is the item from an official, reliable website or from a blog or an unknown source? Has it already been exposed on anti-hoax websites?’ Then, use “good sense.” (Proverbs 7:7) If a news item seems unbelievable, it probably is. Furthermore, when the information discredits others, think about who would benefit from such news being spread and whether the source has ulterior motives in spreading it. . . .

It takes effort to verify news. That is why some decide simply to leave it up to the recipient to determine if it is credible. But how

¹ “Can You Trust the News Media?,” *Awake!*, December 2013, 7, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/g201312/can-you-trust-news-media/>.

much time will it take for him to do that? Time is precious. (Ephesians 5:15, 16) Instead of thinking, "If in doubt, send it out," it would be better to adopt the motto, "If in doubt, throw it out!"¹

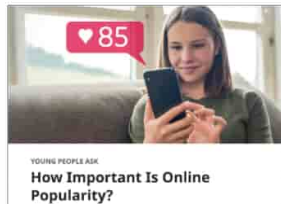
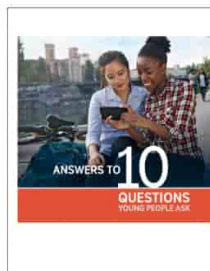
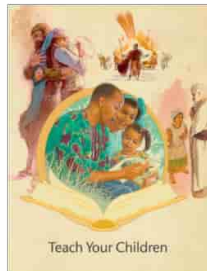
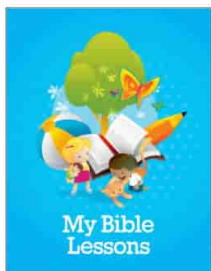
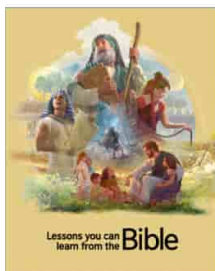
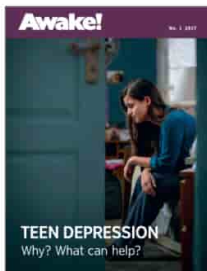
Thus, the attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses toward education, knowledge, development of skills and abilities can be described as the most positive. It is also very important to understand that their active position directly follows their religious teachings and beliefs.

They have a different approach only as regards the "system" of higher education, which, in their opinion, distorts the values of young people, produces in them vanity and pride, develops a desire for wealth, destroying their faith and leading them away from serving God and strengthening their families.

¹ "The Naive Person Believes Every Word," *Watchtower*, October 15, 2015, 30–31, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/w20151015/true-because-it-is-on-internet/>.

ILLUSTRATIONS FOR CHAPTER 5

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' VIEW OF
EDUCATION IN CONGREGATION AND IN FAMILY



Jehovah's Witnesses attach great importance to education and the upbringing of children and adolescents

CHAPTER 6

A GLIMPSE OF THE HISTORY OF THE THORNY WAY TO TOLERANCE

“Truth, Stranger, is a noble thing and a lasting,
but a thing of which men are hard to be persuaded.”

Plato. Laws. Book II

The entire history of mankind is vivid proof of the truthfulness of these words attributed to Plato, the great thinker of antiquity. Moreover, people often try to justify atrocities with their own “truth,” and more often with “anti-truth.”

As an example, today, people in our countries 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 held in the name of purity of faith, as well as fights against dissidence waged under the banner of religion.

In the war for leadership and against any dissent, religious fanatics have always demonstrated a lack of morals and profound intolerance (always aggressive) beyond human understanding. Even now, 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, at the very beginning, things 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. 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.

Take an example from the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the Roman Emperor Nero, a ruler who was known to be cruel, narcissistic, and lecherous—who first had his mother killed and then his wife. In 64 C.E., 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.

The persecution of Christians was extremely severe, especially under Emperor Diocletian. Christians were persecuted until the fourth century C.E., and only under Roman Emperor Constantine the Great did Christianity receive the same rights as other religions. It was after Constantine's death that Christianity was given the status of state religion of the Roman Empire. And it should be noted that the pagan emperor had exclusively political reasons for showing tolerance toward Christianity.

A special milestone in the establishment of religious freedom was reached in 313 C.E., when the Roman emperors Constantine and Licinius jointly issued the *Edictum Mediolanense*, now known as the Edict of Milan. It granted Christians and all other inhabitants of the empire the right “to observe that religion which each preferred.” It also pointed out that “no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, or of that religion which he should think best for himself.”¹

¹ “The Edict of Milan,” *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1897), https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/ed_tolerat2_engl.htm.

The edict itself demonstrates a special treatment of Christianity: Christians were returned all their places of worship and property that had been taken away from them earlier, and the authorities were commanded to give them special assistance.

This edict repealed all the laws against Christians, and from then, they could practice their faith freely and openly, without any restriction or hindrance from the authorities. The edict also granted all “other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases.”¹

That is why the Edict of Milan is rightly considered an edict of religious tolerance and a wonderful step of human society toward universal religious freedom.

The text of this edict, however, makes it clear that religious freedom was introduced, not with an aim of recognizing the rights and freedoms of citizens, but for political gain—to achieve internal peace and order in the Empire.

Emperor Constantine and his successors granted more and more privileges to Christianity, eventually making it the dominant doctrine of the entire Roman Empire. And as scholars correctly note: “The Church was not slow to take advantage of its new position. As soon as it was recognized, it immediately began using state means of violence to settle its internal disputes.”² And once again a new wave of intolerance began, but this time by the Christian church. First, the already dominant Christian church began persecuting dissenters within itself. Then the Roman forces drowned in blood the revolt of the Donatist Christians³

¹ “The Edict of Milan,” *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1897), https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/ed_tolerat2_engl.htm.

² Irina S. Svetsitskaya, *Early Christianity: Pages of History* [in Russian] (Moscow: Publishing House of Political Literature, 1987), 176.

³ A Christian religious and political movement in Roman North Africa, which existed between the fourth and the seventh centuries and advocated, among other things, purging Christianity of apostates and sinners, and rejected the union of Church and State.

in North Africa, later followed by the persecution of Arian Christians,¹ Nestorian Christians,² etc.

On February 27, 380 C.E., the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Theodosius, in the presence of the co-emperors of the Western Roman Empire, signed the Edict of Thessalonica (also known as *Cunctos populos*), which proclaimed Christianity (of the Nicaea Council of 325 C.E.) as the state religion and prohibited the practice of pagan rites.

The edict expressly forbade the inhabitants of the Empire to renounce the form of Christianity defined by the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. All other forms of Christianity were recognized as “heretical faiths,” and their followers were called insane and feeble-minded and were persecuted by the state. All other religious groups of the Empire were also persecuted.

A year later, in 381 C.E., the First Council of Constantinople of the victorious Christian church adopted the Nicene Creed,³ giving it its final form as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁴ All other forms of Christianity were thus considered as heretical.

For the next twelve centuries, Christian Europe witnessed a cruel and merciless struggle between the alliance of church and throne against all dissent. The union of the “altar and throne” meant that “heresy” should be considered a state crime. Christianity established its authority by means of the sword and fire. As a result of this policy of intolerance, entire peoples and cultures have vanished forever from the map of Europe. In this gloomy millennial darkness, the sparks of

¹ A movement in Christianity of the fourth century C.E., which denied the doctrine of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ as God.

² A movement in Christianity of the fifth century C.E., which rejected the worship of the “Mother of God” (God-bearer).

³ A creed adopted at the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. that recognized Jesus not only as equal to God but as God Himself. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity was accepted, but it was opposed by part of the Christian communities, including the Arians.

⁴ A strictly dogmatic formulation of the foundations of the faith, which enshrined the doctrine of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit as part of it.

the struggle for freedom of faith and conviction disappeared one after another, no matter how brightly they flashed.

In that somber atmosphere, the medieval East looks like a beacon of civilization. It certainly should not be idealized, but it must be admitted that the dawn of science and art, which brought freedom of thought and principles of religious tolerance, originates there.

As a result of the Arab conquests, the Middle Ages saw mixing of cultures and languages, as well as the flowering of science and secular philosophy (*falsafa*) in the depths of successive Islamic caliphates. *Falsafa* was a continuation of the philosophy of antiquity and developed, not as part of religion, but within the framework of science and secular culture of cities and active extensive trade between civilizations. Such philosophy formed a particular view of faith, religion, and truth.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (870-950); Ibn Sina Abu Ali Husain (Avicenna) (980–1037); Ibn Miskawayh, Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad (Ibn Yaqub Miskawayh) (about 932/936–1030); Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni (Al-Biruni) (973–1048); Guiyas al-Din Abu l-Fath Omar ibn Ebrahim Hayyam Nishapuri (Omar Khayyam) (1048–1131); Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi (about 865–circa 925); Muhammad Taragai ibn Shahrugh ibn Timur Ulugbek Guragan (1394–1449)—these are the most famous representatives of the whole Pleiad of outstanding Oriental thinkers, poets, and scholars who elevated Islamic culture of the Middle Ages to a previously unseen level for those times.

Eastern thinkers sought to comprehend everything by reason; they even sought to understand faith rationally and grasp the truth, not through revelation, but through reflection and logic. For example, Abu Rayhan Biruni, in chapter two of his book *Kitab Tarikh Al-Hind* (The Book of the History of India) notes that “in every nation the faith of the chosen and the crowd differs, as the chosen by nature have the capacity to struggle for rational comprehension and to strive for an exact knowledge of [common] beginnings, whereas it is natural

for the crowd to limit themselves to sensual [perception] and to be content with private provisions without seeking clarification, especially in matters where there is a difference of opinion and inconsistency of interest.”¹

Such an approach provided a safeguard against fanaticism and intolerance, for knowledge always helps a person to see more, understand better, and not to be guided by emotion. Abu Rayhan Biruni, describing the religious views of the Indian people, who worship many deities and use idols and images for this purpose, does not get upset to the point of distraction by this (although for a Muslim the worship of idols is a great sin), but on the contrary, sees what unites them.

And speaking of the worship of idols by the Indian people, he notes that it is not a learned man who adheres to such “ugly absurdities,” but “an ignorant man who is not allowed to pursue science.” Thus, he writes: “the Indians believe that God—praise be to him!—is one, foreordained, without beginning or end, free in his acts, almighty, wise, living and life-giving; he controls and preserves all things; he alone in his realm, there is none like him or equal to him; he is like nothing and nothing is like him.”²

And it is logical to conclude that such a scholar, seeing how lack of knowledge leads to wrong views, would rather advocate enlightenment and the spread of knowledge than violence, coercion, or persecution of nonbelievers.

How very different it is from the views of his contemporaries! And how close his views are to the age of humanism!

Such a pity that this great dawn of Islamic scholarship did not last long. But it was powerful enough to pass the baton to European thinkers.

¹ Abu Rayhan Biruni, *Kitab Tarikh Al-Hind* (The Book of the History of India) [in Russian] (Moscow: Ladomir Scientific and Publishing Center, 1995), 71.

² Ibid.

A new era, later called the Renaissance, began in Western Europe. Europeans were now reaching out for the ancient thought. The influence of the church began to gradually diminish.

John Wycliffe (1320–1384), William Tyndale (1494–1536), Jan Hus (1369–1415), Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), Thomas More (1478–1535), Ulrich Zwingli (1481–1531), Martin Luther (1483–1546), Thomas Münzer (1490–1525), John Calvin (1509–1564), Jean Bodin (1529–1596), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), William Shakespeare (1564–1616), Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), and many others have toiled in this era.

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. Beginning with the Italian humanists of the 14th century, the idea of religious tolerance became increasingly popular.

But the influence of the church was still very strong, and there was an open struggle for the right to believe differently from what the church dictated. The Reformation, then the Counter-Reformation, shook up Europe and plunged it into bloody wars, marked by the famous Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day and the massacre of the Huguenots (Protestants) plotted by Catherine de Medici and the House of Guise, which 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.

As a result of these wars, following the thinkers and philosophers of that time, now politicians turned to the idea of tolerance. For example, the religious and bloody Thirty Years' War in France ended with King Henry IV issuing the famous Edict of Nantes in 1598—perhaps the first official document in a thousand years that established religious tolerance in a European state.

The document is worthy of quoting. Below are several significant excerpts:

We have, by this perpetual and irrevocable Edict, said, declared, and ordered, do say, declare, and order:

1. First, that the memory of everything which has occurred between one side and the other since the beginning of the month of March 1585 up to our accession to the crown, and during the other preceding troubles and on account of them, shall remain extinct and dormant as though they had never happened. And it shall not be allowable or permissible to our *procureurs-generaux*, or any other person whatever, public or private, at any time, or for whatever occasion there may be, to make mention of them, or institute a suit or prosecution in any courts or jurisdiction whatsoever. . . .

3. We command that the Roman Catholic, and Apostolic religion shall be reinstated and re-established in all places and parts of this our kingdom . . . where its exercise has been interrupted, that it may be peaceably and freely exercised without any disturbance or impediment. . . .

6. And to leave no occasion for troubles and differences among our subjects, we have permitted and do permit those of the so-called Reformed religion to live and dwell in all cities and places of this our kingdom and the lands of our obedience, without being questioned, vexed, or molested, nor constrained to do anything with regard to religion contrary to their conscience, nor on account of it to be searched out in their houses and the places where they wish to dwell. . . .

13. We expressly forbid all persons of the said religion from making any exercise of it, either of ministry, regulation, discipline, or public instruction of children, and any other kind, in this our kingdom and in the lands of our obedience, in what concerns religion, except in those places permitted and granted in the present edict. . . .

18. We also forbid all other subjects, of whatever quality or condition they may be, from bearing away children of the said religion by force or persuasion against the will of their parents, in order to have

them baptized or confirmed in the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The same prohibitions are made to members of the so-called Reformed religion, under pain of exemplary punishment. . . .

21. Books concerning the said so-called Reformed religion may not be printed and sold publicly except in the cities and places where the public exercise of the said religion is permitted. . . .

22. We order that there shall be no difference or distinction made with regard to the said religion in receiving students to be instructed in the universities, colleges, and schools, as well as for the sick and poor in hospitals, sickhouses, and public charities.¹

What was the legacy of this wise policy of the king of France? The next 60 years were the dawn of prosperity for France. Even now they are referred to as the “*Grand Siècle*” or “Great Age.” During these years, the country became the mightiest power in Europe, led by the Sun King, Louis XIV.

But then in 1661, religious persecution resumed, and hostility along with it. In 1695, the edict was repealed. France began weakening. This was followed by the French Revolution of 1789 and the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Here are just two articles from it on our subject:

X. No man ought to be molested on account of his opinions, not even on account of his *religious* opinions, provided his avowal of them does not disturb the public order established by law.

XI. The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious rights of man, every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely, provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty, in cases determined by law.²

The period from the end of the 17th century and the entire 18th century is commonly referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. It was

¹ “The Edict of Nantes,” trans. Jotham Parsons, in Richard L. Goodbar, ed., *The Edict of Nantes: Five Essays and a New Translation* (Bloomington, Minn.: The National Huguenot Society, 1998), 41–70.

² National Assembly of France, “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, 1789,” Constitutionnet.org, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/declaration_of_the_rights_of_man_1789.pdf.

founded by Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), and René Descartes (1596–1650). These ideas were shaped by the great John Locke (1632–1704), Isaac Newton (1643–1727), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), and Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677). The ideas of enlightenment were actively promoted by the “great encyclopedists” of the time: Marie-François Voltaire (1694–1778), Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689–1755), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Denis Diderot (1713–1784)—not to mention such giants of the century as Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), Claude Adrian Helvetius (1715–1771), Paul Henri Golbach (1723–1789), David Hume (1711–1776), and, of course, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

Immanuel Kant quite clearly reflected the ideas of the Enlightenment in his essay “An Answer to the Question: ‘What Is Enlightenment?’” in 1784. I think it is important to quote from it:

Sapere aude!—“Have courage to use your own reason!”—that is the motto of enlightenment. . . .

For himself (and only for a short time) a man may postpone enlightenment in what he ought to know, but to renounce it for posterity is to injure and trample on the rights of mankind. . . .

[A monarch] can leave it to his subjects to do what they find necessary for their spiritual welfare. This is not his concern, though it is incumbent on him to prevent one of them from violently hindering another in determining and promoting this welfare to the best of his ability. To meddle in these matters lowers his own majesty, since by the writings in which his own subjects seek to present their views he may evaluate his own governance. He can do this when, with deepest understanding, he lays upon himself the reproach, *Caesar non est supra grammaticos*. Far more does he injure his own majesty when he degrades his supreme power by supporting the ecclesiastical despotism of some tyrants in his state over his other subjects. . . .

A prince who does not find it unworthy of himself to say that he holds it to be his duty to prescribe nothing to men in religious matters but to give them complete freedom while renouncing the haughty name of tolerance, is himself enlightened and deserves to be esteemed by the grateful world and posterity as the first, at least from the side of government, who divested the human race of its tutelage and left each man free to make use of his reason in matters of conscience.¹

These ideas of the Enlightenment—the desire for rational thought, constant self-development, and the elevation of reason over feelings and fears—are still with us today. It is not true that the Age of Enlightenment is over. The foundations laid by it became the foundations of modern democracy and human rights. And the calls of the “Enlighteners” across the centuries are still relevant and important to rulers and to society as a whole.

In the 19th century, the ideas of the Enlightenment were further developed. An entirely new state emerged in the world—the United States of America. Let us read the founding documents of this state: The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of [Civil] Rights. No wonder that these documents are imbued with the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment, as the foundation of American statehood was laid by philosophers, scientists, and thinkers. And its society was formed by people who had fled the despotism of the old world and sought to build a free society, where everyone had the right to think, believe, and speak as he or she saw fit.

The great American writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “Fear always springs from ignorance.”² Remind yourself of this truth the next time you encounter xenophobia and intolerance. Knowledge is the best tool for peace and harmony.

The next significant milestone in the history of tolerance was reached in 1948. On December 10, 1948, the world was presented

¹ Immanuel Kant, *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784), 1, <https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/What-is-Enlightenment.pdf>.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar: An Address* (New York: Laurentian Press, 1901), 40.

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is the worldwide, enshrined definition of the rights that every person on our planet enjoys. It is hard to overestimate the importance and value of this document.

The terror and horror of World War I and then World War II prompted mankind to think seriously about its future and to realize the pricelessness of human life and personality.

I hope that even this brief excursus into history has confirmed that the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not just a beautiful political slogan but a hard-earned truth that is the result of endurance of centuries of hardships—the pillar for progress and prosperity of modern society.

Now, I think it is important to say a little about the political traditions of the post-Soviet states of Central Asia.

Unfortunately, ideas of intolerance that are foreign and harmful to the state still remain in our countries. After all, any pandemic is cyclical. Here and there, in speeches of politicians and from the pages of the media, we can hear xenophobic statements about the harm of sects, Western trends, “non-traditional religions.” All this is aimed at destroying peace and unity in society, generating fear in people, which leads to violence and persecution of dissent.

Whether we realize it or not, these myths are alien to our societies and were inherited from the empire, first Russian and then Soviet. This was aptly pointed out by one of Russia's greatest historians V. O. Klyuchevsky who wrote: “The more the territory of our state expanded, the more oppressed the internal freedom of the people would become.”¹ The great empires (Russian and Soviet) needed such societal glue. But the question is, Do we need it now? Do we still want to build a wall separating our society from the rest of the world? Do we want to continue thinking in the patterns and “scarecrows” of the past and to base social unity, not on knowledge and tolerance, but on fear and hatred?

¹ V. A. Alexandrov and V. G. Zimina, afterword and comments to *Works in Nine Volumes*, vol. 3, by Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, ed. V. L. Yanin [in Russian] (Moscow: “Thought” Publishing House, 1988), 3:365.

I understand that this topic requires a separate in-depth study and a separate book, if not a multivolume work. But it cannot be left out of this chapter either, since the entire history of the struggle against dissent in the Russian Empire, and later in the USSR, allows us to understand the reasons for the wariness of modern post-Soviet society and the authorities toward new religious movements and new ways of thinking, in general. Moreover, this history makes it possible to see the manipulative levers and old “myths” that have been resurrected and are being actively used today by anti-cultists to continue to inculcate xenophobia and discord in society. I will take the liberty of revealing at least some of them. And I hope that this will contribute to overcoming old prejudices.

By the end of the 19th century, the struggle between tolerance and intolerance in the Russian Empire came to its highest point and already had a long and bloody history.

During the reign of Empress Catherine II, the philosophy of humanism and French enlightenment came into Russian high society, although everything remained 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.”¹

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 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

¹ Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, “Results of Western Influence in Russian Society of the 18th Century,” lecture 10 in *A History of Russia* [in Russian], <http://historic.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000000/st010.shtml>.

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

And it is important to understand that 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 and is worthy of the closest attention from a modern researcher of religious traditions.

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 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.”²

The researcher 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

¹ M. A. Babkin, *Priesthood and Kingdom (Russia, Early XX century – 1918): Research and Its Materials* [in Russian] (Moscow: Indrik, 2011), 30.

² Mikhail A. Reisner, *The State and the Believing Person: A Collection of Articles* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg: Printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905), 156–60.

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.¹

To support this system, the authorities introduced the following restrictions: (1) a ban on missionary activity (except for the Orthodox 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, was in fact, 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. Unfortunately, there are still officials who see their task in the field of religion as 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. And this is done, at times, under the slogan “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.

¹ Mikhail A. Reisner, *The State and the Believing Person: A Collection of Articles* [in Russian], 160.

In the 19th century, we find a document entitled “Note on the sedition of the enemies of Russia.” This document was published in 1868, in the ninth issue of the historical and literary magazine *Russian Archive*, published monthly in Moscow since 1863.¹

It would not be wrong to 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.”²

Later, the new Minister of Education, Sergei Semenovich Uvarov, expressed the new ideology of the Russian Empire in the well-known formula “Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality.”³ 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.” At the same

¹ The creator, editor, and publisher of the magazine was an excellent Russian historian and literary critic, and 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, the Secretary of State and Minister of Public Education of that time.

² “A Note on the Sedition of the Enemies of Russia,” *Russian Archive* 9 [in Russian] (1868), 1342–44.

³ The state argued that unlimited monarchy was the only possible political form of state power in the empire. Orthodoxy was declared an indispensable part of a happy society and nation, and the society of the empire was to preserve and multiply its exceptional features—obedience to authorities and patience.

time, it was necessary to educate the society in a “correct” way. Of course, nobody asked the people.

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.

Under 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.”***¹ A person who left the Orthodox Church and found the courage to reflect on matters of faith seemed extremely dangerous to the authorities because these got out of their control and became less predictable. What if they began to ask questions about the essence of power and the nature of the state structure? And what if these 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.

¹ Reisner, *The State and the Believing Person*, 408.

You might remember that in his novel *Resurrection*, Leo Tolstoy wrote: *“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.”¹

“The Code of Criminal and Correctional Sentences” 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 by hard labor and exile to Siberia and Sakhalin for sectarianism and blasphemy.

The only solution to the religious question as seen by the state was in strengthening the existing order by introducing new prohibitions, increasing repression, and banishment of the undesirables to hard labor.

As a result, the religious literacy of society and, in particular, of the common people was unusually low. Even though the Russian society of the 19th century was familiar with the Bible only superficially, a new class of people was already forming. Many years later, the famous Russian religious and political philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev wrote about this class: “People of this formation can be very ‘Orthodox,’ but they are hardly 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.”²

V. O. Klyuchevsky described the spirituality of the Russian people of those years very well: “A Russian Orthodox commoner is serving his

¹ Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Louise Maude Tolstoy (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1900), 275, <https://archive.org/details/resurrectionnove00tols/page/274/mode/2up>.

² Nikolai A. Berdyaev, “Is There Freedom of Thought and Conscience in Orthodoxy?,” quoted in *What Is Truth*, no. 22 [in Russian] (December 2010), <https://istina.russian-albion.com/ru/chto-est-istina-022-sentyabr-2010-g/naberdyaev>.

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 theology."¹

Here is the reasoning of another writer of that time: "Where does such 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."²

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.

But back to history, namely the reign of Emperor Alexander II, "the tsar-reformer and liberator." 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.

Thus, the outstanding Russian writer and philosopher Ivan Sergeyevich Aksakov wrote in 1865: "The 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."³

¹ Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, *Letters, Diaries, Aphorisms and Thoughts About History* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), [ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Из_записной_книжки_\(Ключевский\)](http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Из_записной_книжки_(Ключевский)).

² Ivan S. Aksakov, "Some of the Ugliness of Russian Life—And in Particular the Reasons for the Spread of Stunche" [in Russian] (Moscow: Typography of M. G. Volchaninov (formerly M. N. Lavrova & Co.), 1886), [ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Некоторые_безобразия_русской_жизни_-_а_в_частности_причины_распространения_штунды_\(Аксаков\)/ДО](http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Некоторые_безобразия_русской_жизни_-_а_в_частности_причины_распространения_штунды_(Аксаков)/ДО).

³ Ivan S. Aksakov, "On the Views of Society and Government Measures That Disagree with the Common Sense of Orthodoxy" [in Russian] (Moscow: Typography of M. G. Volchaninov (formerly M. N. Lavrova & Co.), 1886), [ru.wikisource.org/wiki/О_взглядах_общества_и_мерах_правительства,_несогласных_с_здоровым_пониманием_православия_\(Аксаков\)/ДО](http://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/О_взглядах_общества_и_мерах_правительства,_несогласных_с_здоровым_пониманием_православия_(Аксаков)/ДО).

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, this writer has published several articles in defense of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience.

In 1868, 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? . . . Without free conscience, there is no sincerity; without sincerity, there is no faith—neither right nor wrong. . . . In this case, the church will no longer be a ‘gathering of believers,’ but unbelievers, driven into its midst forcibly and being hypocritical?”¹

Half a century would pass after that, and during the discussion of the Manifesto of Tolerance of 1905, another Russian writer would say: The law . . . which stands between a person and his God and wants to force the 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 under its power, pretending to bow before it. The law of religious compulsion is not terrible for the bad, but threatens the honor and safety of the noblest people.²

This should be remembered by all those involved in lawmaking today, as this history is repeating itself and the number of those being persecuted for their faith is growing again.

The reign of the next Russian Emperor Alexander III began:

This heavy-handed tsar did not wish any harm to his empire and did not

¹ Ivan S. Aksakov, *Public Matters in Church Affairs*, vol. IV [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Printing house of A. Suvorin, 1903), 79–80.

² Reisner, *The State and the Believing Person*, 9.

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.¹

The main ideologist of that era, the Chief Prosecutor of the Most Holy Synod, K. P. Pobedonostsev, stated in 1891:

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

When modern Uzbekistan, like other Central Asian lands, became part of the Russian Empire, religious tolerance was out of the question.

Before 1914, religious missionary work and religious conversion were prosecuted under criminal law in the Russian Empire.

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

¹ Klyuchevsky, *Letters*, 299.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, *Unpublished Works* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 382; R. A. Kireeva, afterword and comments to *Works in Nine Volumes*, vol. 9, by Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, ed. V. L. Yanin [in Russian] (Moscow: "Thought" Publishing House, 1990), 9:457.

and religion. Sometimes, the great numbers of individuals converting to Islam, the Old Believers, or other “sects” created difficulties for the Orthodox missionaries.

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 society, on February 26, 1903, the Imperial Manifesto of Emperor Nicholas II was published. The next important state document was the “Manifesto on the Improvement of the State Order” from February 26, 1905. Following it, on April 17, 1905, the “Decree on the Principles of Religious Tolerance” was issued. But in fact, it was not yet about tolerance in its full sense.

¹ Reiser, *The State and the Believing Person*, 396–97.

It was during those years that Count Sergei Yulievich Witte said: “Russia has outgrown the existing system. She strives for a legal system based on civil freedoms.”¹

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.*”²

Then, the October Revolution took place, and the Soviet era of atheism began. Again, any religious tolerance and freedom of conscience were nonexistent. 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.”³

Once again, the government used fear and xenophobia to keep the lid on large parts of the empire and justify repression of politically undesirable citizens.

We now live during the unique time of independent states. We must admit that we are just learning tolerance and taking our first uncertain

¹ “Supreme Command and Most Submissive Report of the Secretary of State Count Witte,” *Church Gazette*, No. 43, published at the Holy Governing Synod [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia, October 22, 1905), 484–86, <https://www.prlib.ru/item/461397>.

² “Decree of the Provisional Government on the Abolition of Religious and National Restrictions” [in Russian], March 22, 1917, <https://constitution.garant.ru/history/act1600-1918/5413/>.

³ Voltaire, *Philosophical Works* [in Russian] (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 645.

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 reread 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? Do we want to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world again, considering everyone around us as the enemy? But that is exactly what modern anti-cultism is calling for.

It is also useful to know that in practice, religious intolerance, the ideology of anti-cultism was formed as its most extreme form. Anti-cultism dates back to the 1920s to 1930s; its dawn is associated with the rise to power of the Nazis led by Hitler in Germany.¹

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

It is also noteworthy that on February 15, 1938, *A Guide Against Sects* (instructions for the work of the *Reichsführer 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.

To frighten society, anti-cult movements like to use offensive labels and expressions, such as "sectarians," "adepts," "totalitarian sect," "brainwashing," "zombification," etc. All of these expressions have no

¹ According to Bertil Persson, cited in the following paragraph, 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 Bertil Persson, "History and Ideological Sources of the Anticult Movement: New Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Modern Russia," International Scientific-Practical Conference Materials [in Russian] (Moscow: Central House of Journalists, June 26, 2012), 47.

scientific validity or value, and their main purpose is to emotionally intimidate listeners and separate believers from society. After all, if society ceases to see believers as part of itself, it will not protect them and will not see the violation of their rights as a threat to itself.

“Fake news” is also actively being used in our day. 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

“Gelfert argues 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 an unconscious memory reaction, e.g., in our field, ‘cult’;
- *affective arousal*: emotions lower our defenses, e.g., ‘they abuse children.’”²

I am convinced that understanding these facts will help the readers to protect themselves against lies and manipulation spread through the media.

But why, then, are the state authorities sometimes so favorable to anti-cult movements? A researcher of the phenomenon of “anti-cultism,” religious scholar Yu. M. Smirnov believes that the reason is that “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

¹ 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” (Center for Studies on New Religions, 2020), 42, <https://www.cesnur.org/2020/jehovahs-witnesses-whitepaper.htm>.

² Ibid., 43.

by claims as to the religious content of the new religious movements themselves, but by the real or apparent loss of State control.”¹

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

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 the popular mentality . . . distrust of religious associations with leading structures abroad.”³

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 seemingly “rotting” West.

And since fallacy is just a feeling, it has no logic. This is exactly what modern anti-cultists have used actively. They would appeal to human feelings and not to reason. Fear, suspicion, and hatred are their

¹ Yu. M. Smirnov, “Anticultism—A Concept and Practice: New Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Modern Russia,” *International Scientific-Practical Conference Materials [in Russian]* (Moscow: Central House of Journalists, June 26, 2012), 66.

² *Ibid.*, 108.

³ Yu. M. Smirnov, “Anticultism—A Concept and Practice: New Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Modern Russia,” *International Scientific-Practical Conference Materials [in Russian]* (Moscow: Central House of Journalists, June 26, 2012), 10.

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, professor and sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne, Ph.D.,¹ and the president of the European Federation of Religious Freedom, lawyer and 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.”²

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.”³

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

¹ 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.

² Introvigne and Amicarelli, “The New Gnomes of Zurich,” 6.

³ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union” (July 2020), <https://www.uscirf.gov/publication/anti-cult-movement-and-religious-regulation-russia-and-former-soviet-union>.

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 anti-cult 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

We must also remember that throughout human history, persecution, fires of inquisition, and torture have resulted in nothing but violence. The religious intolerance, anti-cultism, 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.

I hope that the historical sketch given in this chapter clearly highlights the fact that religious tolerance always leads to inner peace in society and to the rapid development and strengthening of the state. To the contrary, intolerance, xenophobia, and persecution for faith, like diseases, greatly weaken states and lead them only to crisis and decline.

There will always be different opinions and views in society. But this does not create any difficulties, and, in my opinion, V. G. Belinsky gave very wise advice in this regard: “Let everyone express their opinions without worrying that others think differently than they do. One must have tolerance for other people’s opinions. You can’t make everyone think the same. Refute other people’s opinions that don’t agree with yours, but don’t pursue them with exasperation just because they disgust you; don’t try to make them look unfavorable in nonliterary terms. This is a bad calculation: wanting to win more room for your opinion, you may be thereby depriving it of any ground at all.”²

¹ Igor Ya. Kanterov, “Religious Minorities as an Object of Serious Study and Not Stigmatization,” <http://www.npar.ru/journal/2004/4/minorities.htm>.

² Vissarion G. Belinsky, *Selected Aesthetic Works in Two Volumes* [in Russian] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986), 2:409.

It is my deep conviction that 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 tolerance. 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.

Recently, the brilliant religious scholar and doctor of philosophy Lyudmila Aleksandrovna Filipovich, in one of her interviews, said: “Religious 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 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!

The European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Kokkinakis v. Greece* noted the following:

Spiritual, religious and philosophical convictions belong to the private sphere of beliefs and call into play the right to express and manifest them. Setting up a system of criminal prosecution and punishment without safeguards is a perilous undertaking, and the authoritarian regimes which, while proclaiming freedom of religion in their Constitutions, have restricted it by means of criminal offences of parasitism, subversion or proselytism have given rise to abuses with which we are all too familiar. . . . Whether or not somebody intends to change religion is no concern of the State’s and, consequently, neither in principle should it be the State’s concern if somebody attempts to induce another to change his religion.²

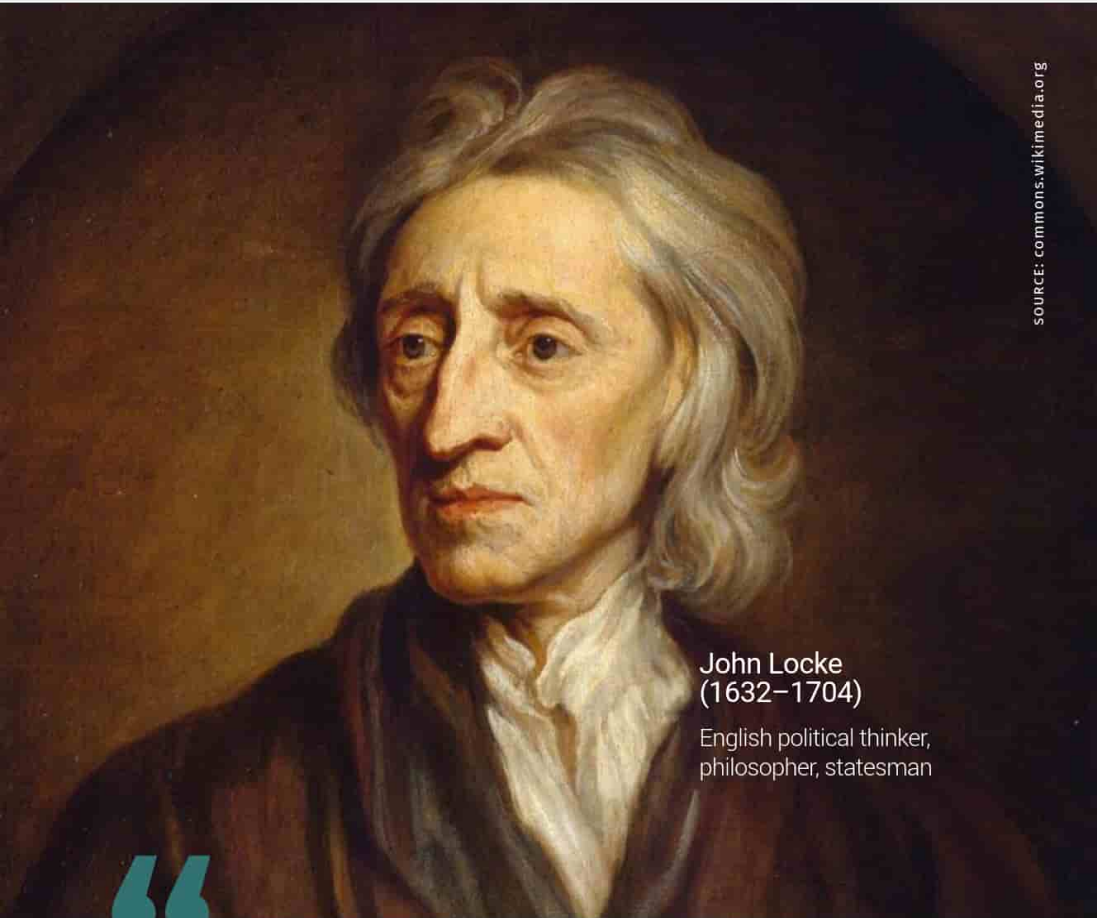
¹ Anastasia Guzhva, “Lyudmila Filipovich: ‘If There Is No Freedom of Religion, Then All Other Freedoms Are Unnecessary,’” *Granite of Science* (July 22, 2020), <https://un-sci.com/ru/2020/07/22/lyudmila-filipovich-esli-net-svobody-veroisповedaniya-to-vse-ostalnye-svobody-ne-nuzhny/>.

² *Kokkinakis v. Greece*, 3/1992/348/421, Council of Europe: European Court of Human Rights, April 19, 1993, www.refworld.org/cases,ECHR,3ae6b6ff4.html.

What will our 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.**”¹*

¹ Voltaire, *Philosophical Treatise and Dialogues* [in Russian] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2005), 138.



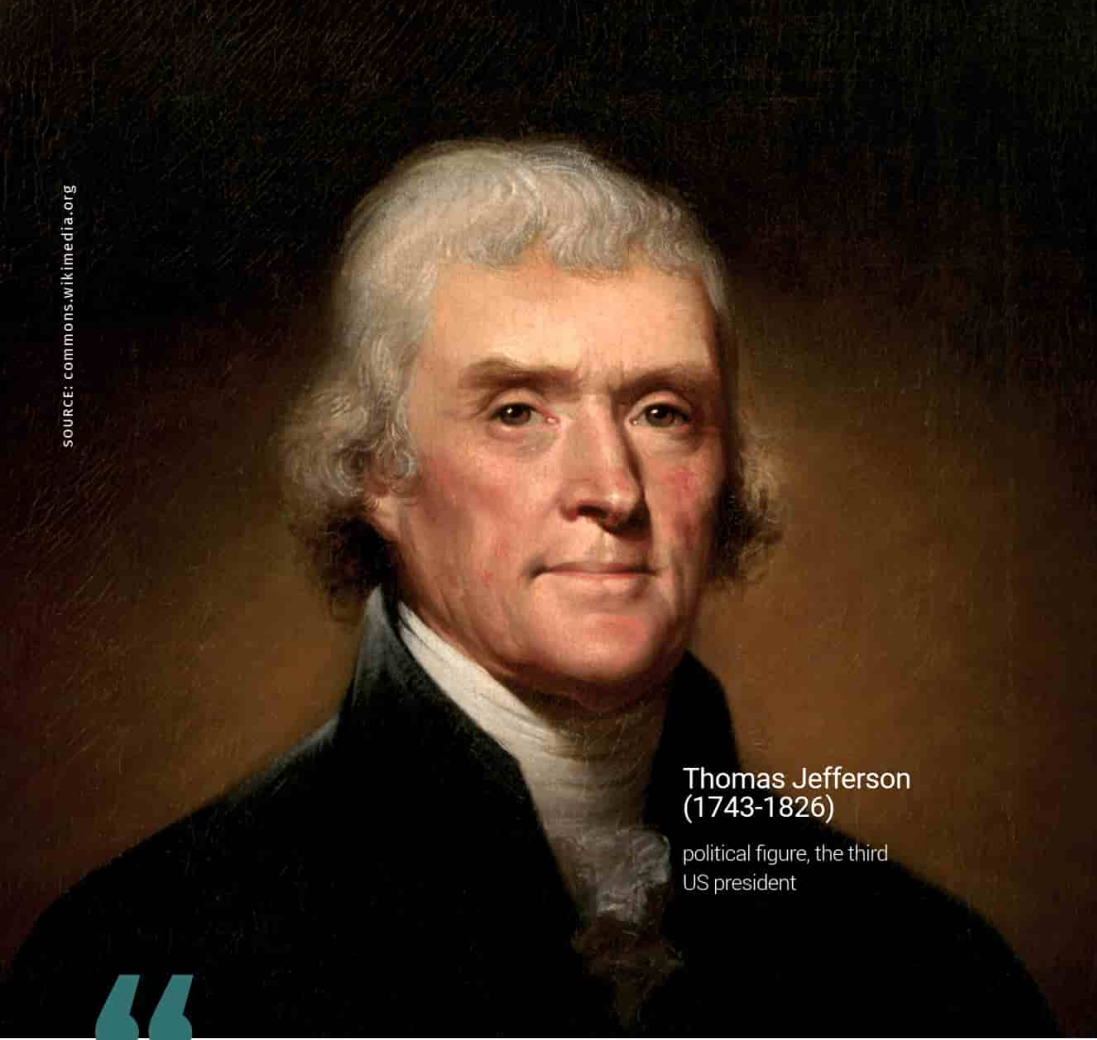
John Locke
(1632–1704)

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



Thomas Jefferson
(1743-1826)

political figure, the third
US president



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”.

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

Adopted by the National Assembly of France on August 26, 1789

Article 10

No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law

Article 11

The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law



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The United States Bill of Rights

The First 10 Amendments to the Constitution ratified on December 15, 1791

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,

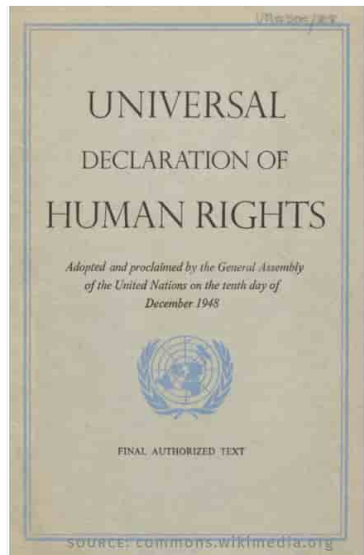
while serving at the UN, chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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





Alisher Navoi (1441-1501)

Turkic poet,
Sufi, statesman
of Timurid Khorasan

"Truthfulness is the
essence of true people;

Two main properties are
distinguishable in it.

Here is the first: not only
in words,

Be truthful in thought and
deed.

Second: regret the world
of lies

But tell the truth out loud
fearlessly".

POEM CONFUSION OF THE
RIGHTEOUS (NINTH
CONVERSATION ON
TRUTHFULNESS)

CHAPTER 7

QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCURATE TERMINOLOGY

I believe that the topic of terminological correctness should not be marginalized. In the modern media of post-Soviet countries, and even in some specialized literature, in private statements at the level of basic consciousness, and even in scholarly discussions on the religious situation, we can find special terms that are only applied to a certain group of religious communities and organizations that came to the territory of a certain country.

Therefore, it is quite logical to talk about the correctness of the terminology in order to bring some clarity to the legitimacy of applying certain definitions to religious organizations, to figure out how much they (i.e., their concepts) reflect the essential features of each religious phenomenon.

I would like to dwell on the meaning of the following concepts: “community,” “sect,” “cult,” “denomination,” “confession,” and “church.”

A “religious association” 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 association is a *community* (congregation). It is also called a “*religious community*,” an association of people who belong to one religion.

Following are group-forming characteristics for a religious community:

- a) ideological principles: common religious ideas, beliefs, goals, objectives, signs and symbols
- b) religious activity directly connected and not directly connected to worship
- c) sense of community (as a family of believers)
- d) subordination, division of roles and positions

The structure of a religious community is determined by traditions and customs, law and regulations, and by the charter of the organization, and other factors. Inside its structure, there is a system of formal and informal *subgroups*: “community council,” “parishioners,” “preachers,” and others.¹

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.”²

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.”³

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

¹ *Holy Russia: Encyclopedic Dictionary of Russian Civilization*, ed. Oleg Platonov [in Russian] (Moscow: Orthodox Publishing House “Encyclopedia of Russian Civilization,” 2000), s.v. “Community”; *Atheistic Dictionary* [in Russian] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1986), s.v. “Religious Society.”

² *The Prophet’s Hadiths*, trans. I. V. Porohova [in Russian] (Moscow: Avanta+, 2000), 110.

³ *A Presbyter’s Handbook* [in Russian] (Moscow: All-Union Council of Evangelical Baptist Christians, 1982), 105.

important because every community claims to be special, values its long experience and traditions, and tries to use its unique form of internal management of relationships and conflicts.¹

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**,” “**cults**,” and other similar terms; but most often the term “sect” is applied, giving it a clearly expressed negative connotation.

All these terms are pejorative, and that is exactly how they are perceived by members of those religious organizations and of the society.

Let us consider semantic meanings of each of the above terms.

“**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 repaired.”² Of course, any social formations, including both religious and non-religious ones, can be destructive if these call for rebellion against the authorities, stir up discord between different nationalities or confessions, or if these ideologies are nationalistic, chauvinistic, or fascist.

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?

Akin to the term “destructive,” the term “**totalitarian**” (“totalitarian sect”) is also used.

Here is what the Soviet and Russian religious scholar Professor I. Ya. Kanterov says about this: “The vagueness of the terms ‘totalitarian sect’ and ‘destructive cult’ allows us to rank practically any

¹ A. I. Artyemyev, *Study of Religion: Its Foundation, History of Religions, Religions in Kazakhstan* [in Russian] (Almaty: Bastau, 2002), 46–56.

² *New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. “Destruction.”

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 can use them according to his own understanding.¹

According to Professor E. S. Elbakyan: “Such definitions (‘dangerous totalitarian destructive sect’) are unacceptable in the academic approach to the object of study and in pursuit of scientific objectivity and impartiality. They are not only unscientific, but rather anti-scientific concepts, picked up and widely used by individual unscrupulous journalists.”²

I fully agree with my colleagues. And the fact that this term is related to political science, and not to religious studies, can be clearly seen by checking with *Political Science: 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.”³

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, state control, and, accordingly, suppression of self-organization and individual autonomy.”⁴

The terms “*totalitarian*” and “*destructive*” are most often used in combination with the “*cult*” and “*sect*”—“*destructive cult*,” “*totalitarian sect*.”

¹ Igor Ya. Kanterov, *New Movements in Russia* (Religious Analysis) [in Russian] (Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2007), 75.

² E. S. Elbakyan, *Religious/Non-Religious: On the Issue of Criteria* (Theoretical and Practical Aspects) [in Russian], Religion and Law website, http://www.scj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=534&ELEMENT_ID=8366.

³ Y. I. Averyanov, *Political Science: Encyclopedic Dictionary* [in Russian] (Moscow: Moscow Commercial University, 1993), 375.

⁴ A. A. Kara-Murza, “Totalitarianism,” in *New Philosophical Encyclopedia in Four Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. V. S. Stepin [in Russian] (Moscow: “Thought” Publishing House, 2010), 1:80.

The connotation of these combinations is even more negative. It is no coincidence that J. Gordon Melton, 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.”¹

Regarding the term “sect” 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 offense. 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.’”²

Moreover, as I. Ya. Kanterov rightly notes, the use of the terms “sect” and “cult” is inevitably followed by the change in the way believers are referred to. The words like “follower,” “supporter,” or “believer” are not used in relation to adherents of cults and sects. These concepts are replaced by the word “adept.”³

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 the separated small groups, “alien” to society, because they are “false” religious people, “fanatics and dangerous cultists.” Thus, in the minds of society, the image of an “enemy” and an “alien element,” a “dangerous sectarian,” is skillfully created. In such a case, society takes the onset of persecution more lightly and

¹J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

²N. S. Gordienko, *Russian Jehovah's Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Limbus Press, 2000), 12.

³Igor Ya. Kanterov, “Destructive, Totalitarian” [in Russian], <https://web.archive.org/web/20130407011046/http://nauka-i-religia.narod.ru/sektoved/kanterov.html>.

does not see this persecution as a threat to human rights and liberties, which are in fact being violated. This manipulation of public consciousness is used to justify the persecution of not only religious but also any other groups of society. The Nazis used this method when they were preparing German society for the persecution of Jewish people.

Although society does not perceive the persecution of “sects” as a violation of their civil rights and freedoms, in fact, this is exactly what happens. And, as a rule, religious persecution is always followed by political repression and totalitarianism.

That is why many international experts consider religious freedoms, in general, and the freedoms of Jehovah’s Witnesses, in particular, as an indicator of the level of development of democracy in a particular country. If Jehovah’s Witnesses are being persecuted in the country, then you can be sure that civil society will soon be persecuted as well.

Now the concept of “denomination.”

In religious studies, “denomination” (Lat. *denominatio*—renaming, giving a special name) means an intermediate state between a sect and a confession (church). It was introduced by the American theologian Helmut Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962), who was the first to draw attention to the fact that there are no clear boundaries between a sect and a denomination (church): Any sect can develop into a denomination (church), and a denomination (church) can become a sect. A significant contribution to the development of the concept of “denomination” in the context of the study of religious organizations was also made by G. Becker, A. Pop, J. M. Yinger, B. R. Wilson, I. Wah, T. O’Dia, and others.¹

The term “denomination” is most often used to refer to religious associations that are in the process of formation, organizational establishment, and sometimes as a synonym for religion, confession.

¹ *Entsiklopediya religiy* [Encyclopedia of Religions], ed. A. P. Zabiako, A. N. Krasnikova, and E. S. Elbakyan [in Russian] (Moscow: Academic Project, 2008), 361.

“A denomination,” writes I. N. Yablokov, doctor of philosophical sciences, “can develop from two types of associations or be formed from the very beginning as such. Its ideological, cult, and organizational principles are formed in opposition to the church and sect and are diverse in nature. While maintaining the emphasis on the ‘being chosen’ of its members, it recognizes the possibility of spiritual rebirth for every believer. Isolation from the ‘world’ and isolation within a religious group is not considered a necessary sign of ‘true’ religiosity. Although there is the principle of permanent and strictly controlled membership, which prescribes activity to primarily religious activity, there is a tendency to connect with the ‘world,’ with followers encouraged take an active part in the life of the society. The denomination has a clear organization, both horizontally and vertically.”¹

The concept of “confession” (Lat. *confessio*—recognition, profession)—the same as religion, that is, belonging to any religion, church. But today the word “confession” most often refers to large religious movements that have their own creeds and organizational structure.

“Church” (Lat. *ecclesia*)—literally “God’s house,” or “temple of the Lord.” This type of religious organization arose under certain historical conditions as a means of streamlining relations within associations of religious communities and groups (for example, the Russian Orthodox Church) and linking the association with secular groups and organizations.

In most cases, this term denotes religious communities of Christians (but not only Christians) and the corresponding hierarchical structures, the life and activities of which are regulated by doctrinal and canonical norms developed in the context of Christianity. But one must keep in mind that today many new religious formations, which are far from Christianity in doctrine, also call themselves “churches.”

¹ I. N. Yablokov, *Fundamentals of Religious Studies* (Moscow: Gardariki, 2000), 128.

In the course of history, the Christian church has experienced many divisions, the result of which was confessionalism—the existence of many churches within the framework of a common religious tradition.

“The Church is a relatively broad association, belonging to which is determined, as a rule, not by the free choice of an individual, but by tradition. Here hence the recognition of the possibility of each person to become a member of the church. In fact, there is no permanent and strictly controlled membership, the followers are anonymous. In many churches, members are divided into clergy and laity. Positions and roles, degrees and gradations are ordered according to a hierarchical principle.”¹

A very important remark was made by the Russian historian V. O. Klyuchevsky. In the speech “The Church’s Assistance to the Successes of Russian Civil Law and Order,” given at a public act of the Moscow Theological Academy on October 1, 1888, he emphasized: “The Church operates in a special field, different from the field of state activity. It has its own territory—a believing conscience, its own policy—the defense of this conscience from sinful inclinations.”²

Clearly, the concepts of “church,” “confession,” “denomination,” “sect,” “religion,” and “cult” are very arbitrary. They only help to note the specifics of certain religious processes and emphasize some of the nuances in the organizational structure of religious formations in their relations with the state and society as a whole.

Such definitions and concepts as “*tolerance*” and “*religious toleration*” also merit mention.

The term “tolerance,” along with its narrower meaning “religious tolerance,” has different meanings and implications; but they all have

¹ Ibid

² Vasily O. Klyuchevsky, “The Church’s Assistance to the Successes of Russian Civil Law and Order” [in Russian], in *Church and Russia* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1969), 8.

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.”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. . . . 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.”²

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.”³

¹ “Declaration of Principles on Tolerance,” adopted by the 28th General Conference of UNESCO (Paris, November 16, 1995), art. 1.2, 1.4, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000151830>.

² *Ibid.*, art. 1.2, 1.4.

³ M. S. Stetskevich, *Freedom of Conscience* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Publishing House of St. Petersburg State University, 2006), 9–10.

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 respected.¹

French encyclopedists of the Age of Enlightenment 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 society.²

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. This is exactly what many of us, who call ourselves democrats, lack.

We need to emphasize again that religious toleration is an early demonstration of tolerance, the ability to accept and respect a different point of view.

¹ Religious Studies: An Encyclopedic Dictionary, ed. A. P. Zabyako, A. N. Krasnikov, and E. S. Elbakyan [in Russian] (Moscow: Academic Project, 2006), s.v. "Religious Tolerance."

² I. Garadzha, "Religious Tolerance," in *New Philosophical Encyclopedia in Four Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. V. S. Stepin [in Russian] (Russia: "Thought" Publishing House, 2010), 1:384–85.

³ Thomas Jefferson to Edward Dowse, April 19, 1803, Founders Online, National Archives

We owe the concept of “*free thinking*” to the Renaissance and the modern age. It was introduced by Anthony Collins, an English 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 must be said that freethinking as a worldview phenomenon existed as early as in antiquity.

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 nonreligious 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 his own spiritual beliefs and not all confessions and denominations can win everyone’s 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 that brings. We do not

¹ G. Reale and D. Antiseri, *Western Philosophy from Its Origins to the Present Day*, vol. 3 [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Novoe Vremia, 1996), 564

² *Religious Studies: An Encyclopedic Dictionary*, s.v. “Freedom of Conscience and Freedom of Religion.”

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 former USSR; and despite very cruel punitive measures, nobody could liquidate it completely. Therefore, such concepts as “tolerance,” “religious tolerance,” “freedom of conscience,” “free thinking,” and “freedom of religion” should be put at the basis of interfaith and interethnic dialogue, since they are the key moral principles. This is *freedom in diversity*.

But such freedom cannot be absolutized, since everything must have its limits, beyond which the path to arbitrariness and violence opens. Any civilized society is obliged to grant the right “to every citizen to reason in his own way, if only his actions are always consistent with reason.”¹ It is important to learn “to appreciate the height of a different opinion.” (I. Zolotussky) We must learn to defend our ideas without using our fists and without raising our weapons, as we listen respectfully to our opponents.

Tolerance, religious toleration, and free thinking are the main conditions for coexistence and mutual understanding in a world divided by cultural, national, religious, social, and political barriers. And an ideology based on narrow national class and narrow religious principles is always aimed at dividing people.

As rightly noted by law professor Roman Podoprigrora, today, finally, “state bodies are getting to grips with the fact that problems in religious sphere cannot be solved using only administrative and legal tools, constant pressure, and criminalization of actions that do not pose a public danger.”²

¹ Paul-Henri Thiry (Baron d’Holbach), *The Sacred Contagion: The Natural History of Superstition* (1768), ch. 15.

² Roman A. Podoprigrora, “Legal Regulation in the Sphere of Religion in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Approaches and Consequences,” in *Reforms of the Late 20th – Early 21st Century in the Post-Soviet Space: Regional Aspect*, ed. A. Vaschu (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences Far Eastern Branch, 2020), 328, cyberleninka.ru/article/n/pravovoe-regulirovanie-v-sfere-religii-v-postsovetskom-kazahstane-podhody-i-posledstviya.

I sincerely want to believe that this understanding will lead to a new round of expansion of religious freedoms and that our society will enjoy them to the fullest.

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

Now another 100 years have passed and what shall we say? Will we continue the vicious circle, or will we find the strength to not return to the past?

Research scientist 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.”²

¹ Mikhail A. Reisner, *The State and the Believing Person: A Collection of Articles* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg: Russia: Printing house of the “Obshestvennaya Polska” partnership, 1905), 403_04.

² Vladimir D. Bonch-Bruevich, *From the World of Members of Sects: Collection of Articles* [in Russian] (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1922), 193–94.

Yes, it is the secular science, the school of religious studies, that can give society knowledge that can dispel old prejudices, myths, and fears. That is why it is so important today for the state to pay more attention to the education of each person, each citizen.

The “Declaration of Principles of Tolerance,” approved by Resolution 5.61 of the General Conference of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, 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. . . .

4.3 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.¹

It is important for us and our children to often recall the Manifesto 2000—a magnificent document prepared by a group of Nobel Peace Prize laureates with the assistance of UNESCO:

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 and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice; . . .

4. Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation, and the rejection of others.²

¹ “Declaration of Principles on Tolerance” art. 4.1, 4.3.

² Mikhail Gorbachev et al., “Manifesto 2000: Creating a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence” (March 4, 1999), <https://www.culture-of-peace.info/history/Manifesto-launch.pdf>. The manifesto was officially presented in Paris on March 4, 1999, by UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor and members of the International Advisory Group for a Culture of Peace.

CONCLUSION

After conducting a thorough investigation into the organizational structure of Jehovah's Witnesses, their beliefs, their lives, and worship in Uzbekistan, 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.

Even today, one can hear, or even read, that Jehovah's Witnesses is a political rather than religious organization, since its headquarters is situated in the U.S.A.

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 history, and many things become clearer. Consider, for example, the opinion of the scholar Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич, who researched religious movements in Imperial Russia and later managed the affairs of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR. 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 civic and academic duty to emphasize once again that, ***first, Jehovah’s Witnesses, originally called “Bible Students,” is not a political organization, but purely a religious one. Second, even though the Witnesses’ beliefs are different, the Witnesses are certainly Christian.***

Second question: *Is 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-1990s. 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.”²

It is interesting to learn what some famous religious scholars who have closely examined Jehovah’s Witnesses say:

¹ Vladimir D. Bonch-Bruevich, *From the World of Members of Sects: Collection of Articles* [in Russian] (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1922), 192–94.

² Sergey I. Ivanenko, “Evolution of Ideology and Activity of the Religious Organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia: Historical and Philosophical Analysis” [in Russian] (Ph.D. dissertation, Rus. Acad. Civil Service under the President of the Russian Federation, 2001), 9.

N. S. Gordienko: “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 their 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. Gordienko views Jehovah’s Witnesses as a *religion*, S. I. Ivanenko—as a denomination.

And notice, *neither considers Jehovah’s Witnesses as 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 religions.***

Therefore, this means that this international movement should be treated accordingly—namely, with due respect for their beliefs, regardless of one’s own personal religious convictions.

That raises **the third and perhaps the most important question:** *Do the ideology, worship, or forms and methods used to propagate the beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses cause any damage to others?*

Definitely not. And even more than that, all of this is of great benefit to the whole of society.

To explain my conclusion in detail, I will first take a step back.

It is well known that while religion and society are closely knit together, their connection is not constant. Society along with its pluralist

¹ N. S. Gordienko, *Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses: History and Contemporaneity* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Limbus Press, 2000), 12.

² Ivanenko, “Evolution of Ideology”, 14.

unity is continuously evolving—social formations change, whole new civilizations and empires rise and fall, new nations are born.

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, but is an active participant in these processes. As such, religion itself is constantly evolving and, at times, undergoes dramatic changes.

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 each person has his own beliefs. Therefore, in reality, a religion in common does not exist, because every believer or group of believers has its own religious views, its own religion. For example, we cannot define religion as just “faith in God.” It is not possible because some people are monotheists and others believe in several gods or other variations on this concept.

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 powers 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 come into existence 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 the theology and the practices of worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses. I interviewed the overseer of the Christian Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses

in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the overseers and members of several congregations. I spent a week in Solnechnoye, near Saint Petersburg in Russia, which at that time was the center for all countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); 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.

I used my business trip to Dresden Technical University to visit the Central Europe branch of Jehovah's Witnesses in Selters/Taunus, Germany, where I met staff members at different levels. I visited a religious meeting of a Russian-language congregation.

In both cases, I had detailed conversations. I especially remember meeting former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps in Germany, who went through all the horrors of the Nazi punitive system. These were very special conversations that are alive in my memory to this day. These were bright people with beautiful and kind eyes, able to somehow preserve kindness, warmth, and humanity despite all the hardships and persecution they had endured. They said this was possible because of their faith in God and his help.

Once again, I became convinced of the very kind and caring attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses toward their neighbors, although they distance themselves from secular life. This is what they say about themselves:

We are ordinary people. We come from various backgrounds and social conditions. Some of us formerly practiced a different religion, 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 [nearly 240] 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 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.²

I would also like to point out one feature that is characteristic of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the former Soviet countries. Back in the 2000s, when I was visiting their religious centers, called “Bethel,” in post-

¹ *Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will Today?* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2016), 4, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/jehovahs-will/who-are-jehovahs-witnesses/>.

² “What Sort of People Are Jehovah’s Witnesses?,” *Watchtower*, September 1, 2015, 4, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20150901/jehovah-witness-religion/>.

Soviet countries, I was surprised that many elderly Witnesses, seeing my gray hair and thinking I was one of them, would sincerely ask me: “Brother, where are you from? What prison were you in?!” This question helped me understand that for all Jehovah’s Witnesses in the USSR, the state most often acted exclusively in the role of “punisher” and “persecutor.”

Think for a minute! Many believers spent up to a third of their lives in prison! The children of Jehovah’s Witnesses were denied admission to universities. The media would label them as sectarians and enemies of the socialist system. Even attending a simple religious meeting required them to be very cautious because it could result in a prison term for those present. This was a harsh reality for the entire older generation of Jehovah’s Witnesses. This same reality has given rise to some wariness among believers toward representatives of the media and other authorities.

Taking the above into account makes us admire even more that Witnesses did not fight against the state, did not organize riots, and did not resort to violence. They did not become embittered and did not turn away from society. On the contrary, they often initiate dialogue with the authorities and society.

Understanding the past gives us huge advantages in the present. For example, we do not need to ask ourselves today whether Jehovah’s Witnesses pose any social danger to us or the state. Their history has already answered this question. They have lived under government persecution and pressure for generations. They have never responded with violence and have never been involved in political games and protests. These are irrefutable facts.

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. There is found, not a single call—not even a hint of

a call—to any illegal or anti-social acts in the vast amount of literature they have produced and use.

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.

“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

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.*”² 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 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.”³

And shame on those who stubbornly continue to write and talk about Jehovah’s Witnesses being opposed to governments! Such people take advantage of the fears of the society and deliberately incite hatred.

¹ Letter to the editor, *Omaha World-Herald*, November 10, 1978, as quoted in *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1993), 195, <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/Jehovahs-Witnesses-Proclaimers-of-Gods-Kingdom/Gaining-Accurate-Knowledge-of-Gods-Word-and-Applying-It/They-Are-No-Part-of-the-World/>.

² “Respect for Authority—Why Essential?” *Watchtower*, August 1, 2000, 7, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2000561>.

³ “Paying Back Caesar’s Things to Caesar,” *Watchtower*, May 1, 1996, 20, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1996332>.

The reader has less and less time to separate truth from fiction in the growing avalanche of information that confronts us. It has never been so 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 skill of critical thinking*.

Therefore, I am convinced that today it is more important than ever before to separate truth from lie.

Therefore, I call upon readers to develop the 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 toward religion and its believers. We should not be so naive! Do not let yourself be fooled! Stop and think!

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.”**¹

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 just as a snake sheds its skin.

Back in 1882, A. F. Kistiakovsky, a famous Russian philosopher and legal expert wrote in his article “On Crimes Against Faith”: *“Universal human welfare requires the assumption and exercise of freedom of opinion,*

¹ “Singapore—Asia’s Tarnished Jewel,” *Awake!*, June 8, 1997, 25–26, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/101997407>.

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

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 do 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-educated servants of the people, will determine my spiritual path and the degree of my spirituality?²

I strongly believe that in our modern world *it is impossible* to live in a constant fight against religious organizations that we do not like just

¹ A. F. Kistiakovskiy, “On Crimes Against Faith” [in Russian], *Observer*, no. 10 (1882), 112–13.

² Anastasia Guzhva, “Lyudmila Filipovich: ‘If There Is No Freedom Of Religion, Then All Other Freedoms Are Unnecessary’” [in Russian], *Granite of Science* (July 22, 2020), <https://un-sci.com/ru/2020/07/22/lyudmila-filipovich-esli-net-svobody-veroisповедaniya-to-vse-ostalnye-svobody-ne-nuzhny/>.

because they are different from “traditional” religions. Government officials, representatives of power structures, and all those who serve as liaisons between the government and the Church should clearly understand that.

I would like to encourage young scientists and students to be the lights of science and help people acquire real knowledge and provide 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, among whom are Jehovah’s Witnesses from different countries, including congregations from Uzbekistan. I cannot but mention the remarkable researcher of the history of religion, Lev Gladyshev, my good assistant, who provided me with invaluable assistance in collecting material for the book. I wish him to continue his research work and make it available to the general public.

I received great support from my beloved wife and all my wonderful, big family. Their love, patience, and support gave me strength and kept me working on the book.

I want to thank all of them and everyone who helped me by giving words of advice as well as by providing materials, including that from their personal archives. All of you hold a very warm place in my memory and **I am very grateful!**

BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF THE HISTORY OF THE ORGANIZATION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES¹

- 1870** Charles Taze Russell and a group from Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., **began a systematic study of the Bible.**
- 1870-75** Russell and his study associates **learned that when Christ would come again**, he would be invisible to human eyes and that the object of his return would include the blessing of all families of the earth.
- 1872** Russell and his study group came to appreciate the *ransom price*² that Christ provided for humankind.
- 1876** Russell met Adventist N. H. Barbour, editor of the religious magazine *Herald of the Morning*, who shared Russell's view of Christ's imminent return. Soon, their study groups became affiliated, with Russell providing funds for printing *Herald of the Morning* and becoming an assistant editor.
- An article by Russell, published in the October issue of *Bible Examiner*, in Brooklyn, New York, pointed 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** In May, Russell completely ceased financial support of *Herald of the Morning* and broke off cooperation with Barbour because of Barbour's rejection of the doctrine of Christ's ransom for salvation of mankind.

¹ It took a lot of time and effort to prepare, in my opinion, a very complete chronology of the development of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. The chronology is in many ways unique and very useful for the reader and researcher. A researcher in the history of this organization, Lev Gladyshev, actively participated in compiling and preparing this chronicle, and I am sincerely grateful for his invaluable assistance.

² For more details, see Chapter 3, point 7, "Jesus Christ's Human Life Was Paid as a Ransom for Obedient Humans."

Russell **started publishing his own magazine, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence***, with the first issue in July 1879. The magazine was published on eight pages and came out once a month. Its purpose would be to advocate for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and to provide spiritual nourishment to all believers.

- 1881** C. T. Russell began publishing multipage tracts (some over 100 pages long) called *Bible Students' Tracts*, which were later (from 1889) also called *Old Theology Quarterly*. Readers of *Zion's Watch Tower* were provided these tracts for free distribution to the public. (Here are the titles of some of them: No. 1 "Why Will There Be a Second Advent?"; No. 4 "Why Evil Was Permitted"; and No. 5 "The Narrow Way to Life.") By 1918, the Bible Students had distributed over 300 million tracts.

Bible Students began to use God's name. The Watch Tower of October-November pointed out: "JEHOVAH is the name applied to none other than the Supreme Being—our Father, and him whom Jesus called Father and God."

In September, C. T. Russell released the 162-page book *Food for Thinking Christians*. In four months, 1,200,000 copies of the book were distributed.

Prompted to gather together. In the article "Regular Meetings" of the April issue of *Zion's Watch Tower*, C. T. Russell urged its readers: "If you have no gathering of this sort, let me recommend you to establish one in your own home with your own family, or even a few that may be interested. Read, study, praise and worship together, and where two or three are met in His name, the Lord will be in your midst—your teacher. Such was the character of some of the meetings of the church in the days of the Apostles. (See Philemon, 2)."

- 1882 First organized meetings of believers.** An article called "Assembling Together" appeared in *Zion's Watch Tower*. The article exhorted Christians to hold meetings "for mutual edification, encouragement and strengthening."

Bible Students refuted the doctrine of three Gods in one person (the Trinity). In reply to the question, “Do you claim that the Bible does not teach that there are three persons in one God?,” the June issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* provided the following answer: “Yes: On the contrary, it does tell us that there is one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom are all things (or who created all things). We believe then in One God and Father, and also in one Lord Jesus Christ. . . But these are two and not one being. They are one only in the sense of being in harmony. We believe also in a spirit of God. . . But it is no more a person than is the spirit of devils and the spirit of the World and the spirit of Anti-Christ.”

First pastors in congregations. The congregation of Bible Students in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., was the first to elect C. T. Russell as their pastor. Soon 500 other congregations in the United States followed suit.

1883 Translation of publications into other languages. For the first time, a sample issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* was translated into Swedish and published for use as a tract.

Zion’s Watch Tower found its readers in China. Shortly thereafter, a former missionary of the Presbyterian Church began to preach in that country as a Bible Student.

The doctrine of the hope to live forever on a paradise earth. *Zion’s Watch Tower* of July 1883, said: “When Jesus has established his kingdom, bound evil, . . . this earth will become a paradise, . . . and all that are in their graves shall come into it. And by becoming obedient to its laws they may live forever in it.” The November issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* **for the first time brought up the subject of falseness of the “torment in hell” doctrine:** “We find that [hell] is the translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, which simply means the state or condition of death. There is not in it the remotest idea of either life or torment; . . . But still [the clergy] go on preaching this false idea of hell, which is nothing short of a slander against the character of God.”

1884 *Food for Thinking Christians* reached Liberia, Africa; an appreciative reader wrote to ask for copies to distribute. Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society was legally chartered in Pennsylvania; officially recorded on December 15.

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

The first publication against the “theory of Evolution.” *Zion's Watch Tower* of March featured an article entitled “Evolution and the Brain Age” that pointed out the falseness of the evolution theory.

1886 **Multivolume work *Studies in the Scriptures*.** C. T. Russell published the first volume of a series of seven books as an aid to Bible study, which came to be known as *Millennial Dawn (Studies in the Scriptures)*. Volume I was called *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. It contained studies on 16 subjects, such as “The Existence of a Supreme Intelligent Creator Established,” “The Bible as a Divine Revelation Viewed in the Light of Reason,” “Our Lord's Return—Its Object, the Restitution of All Things,” and “The Permission of Evil and Its Relation to God's Plan.”

First assemblies. *Zion's Watch Tower* printed an invitation to a three-day “general meeting” after the celebration of the annual Memorial of Christ's death, thus, beginning the practice of holding annual assemblies.

1887 The February issue of *Zion's Watch Tower* mentioned that the October 1886 issue of the magazine was sent to Russia.

1889 C. T. Russell published the first tract of *The Old Theology* series (*Bible Students' Tracts*), entitled “**Do the Scriptures Teach That Eternal Torment Is the Wages of Sin?**” In it, he offered “further reading matter to assist in Bible study, with a view to getting rid of all false traditions of men and to the full recovery of the old theology of our Lord and the apostles.”

He wrote regarding the doctrine of fiery hell: “The eternal torment theory had a heathen origin, though as held by the

heathen it was not the merciless doctrine it afterward became, when it began gradually to attach itself to nominal Christianity during its blending with heathen philosophies in the second century. It remained for the great apostasy to tack to heathen philosophy the horrid details now so generally believed, to paint them upon the church walls, as was done in Europe, to write them in their creeds and hymns, and to so pervert the Word of God as to give a seeming divine support to the God-dishonoring blasphemy. . . . Eternal torment as the penalty for sin was unknown to the patriarchs of past ages; it was unknown to the prophets of the Jewish age; and it was unknown to the Lord and the apostles; but it has been the chief doctrine of Nominal Christianity since the great apostasy—scourge wherewith the credulous, ignorant and superstitious of the world have been lashed into servile obedience to tyranny. Eternal torment was pronounced against all who offered resistance to or spurned Rome’s authority, and its infliction in the present life was begun so far as she had power.”

C. T. Russell set up a four-story brick building in Allegheny (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.), known as the Bible House, which served as the Society’s headquarters for the next 19 years, from 1890 to 1909.

1890 Publication and distribution of Bible translations. In that year, printing rights were obtained from the British Bible translator Joseph B. Rotherham to publish in the United States the revised 12th edition of his *New Testament*. On the title page of these printed copies, there appeared the name of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

Their first building for religious meetings. A group of Bible Students in the United States at Mount Lookout, West Virginia, built their own meeting place (the New Light church).

1891 A cross-and-crown symbol began to appear on the cover of the *Watch Tower*. It was removed only in 1931.

C. T. Russell made his first international tour with his Bible lectures. He visited the Middle East and Europe, including the Russian Empire (Kishinev, Moldova).

- 1891** Semyon Kozlitsky (Karpov) was exiled from Moscow and eventually was moved to the village of Bukhtarma (modern eastern Kazakhstan) for preaching the doctrines of the Bible Students.
- 1893** The first large convention lasting several days was held in Chicago (Illinois, U.S.A.). A total of 360 attended and 70 were baptized.
- 1894** **First circuit overseers.** The September issue of *Zion's Watch Tower* announced new arrangements made for the Society to have well-qualified speakers travel more regularly to visit congregations. Later, they were called pilgrims. (Now called circuit overseers, they visit congregations within their assigned circuit territory to encourage fellow believers.)
- 1895** **Methods and ways of conducting religious meetings.** After some of the volumes of *Millennial Dawn* were published, these began to be used as a basis for study. In 1895, the study groups came to be known as Dawn Circles for Bible Study. Some in Norway later referred to them as “reading and conversation meetings,” adding: “Extracts from Russell’s books were read aloud, and when persons had comments or questions, they raised their hands.” C. T. Russell recommended that at such studies, participants make use of a variety of translations of the Scriptures, marginal references in the Bible, and Bible concordances. The studies were often held with groups of moderate size, in a private home, on an evening convenient to the group. (A similar approach is generally used by believers today.)
- Congregation elders.** *Zion's Watch Tower* of November 15 urged each congregation and group, no matter how small it was, to follow the principle found in 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29 and select men from among themselves to serve as elders and to take

spiritual leadership. It also emphasized the need for candidates to meet the Biblical requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. This procedure for the election of elders continued until 1932.

Bible Students appeared in **Poland**.

In the *Watch Tower* of August 1, 1895, C. T. Russell commented on 2 Corinthians 7:1, saying: "I cannot see how it would be to God's glory, or to his own profit, for any Christian to use tobacco in any form. . . . We cannot imagine our Lord reeking with the fumes of tobacco or putting into his mouth anything defiling."

- 1896** C. T. Russell published a booklet entitled *What Does the Scripture Say About Hell?*

The legal name of the association was officially changed to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

- 1897** C. T. Russell faced personal tragedy. His wife Maria left him. Nevertheless, he provided her with a place to live and means of maintenance. Years later, after court proceedings that had been initiated by her in 1903, she was awarded, in 1908, a judgment, not of absolute divorce, but of divorce from bed and board, with alimony.

The first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower* was published in **German**.

- 1898** Bible Students began organizing local assemblies for people living nearby.

C. T. Russell published tract No. 43 *The Bible Versus the Evolution Theory*.

Bible Students appeared in **Hungary**.

- 1899** On March 26, the Memorial of Christ's death was celebrated at 339 meetings, and 2,501 people participated in the celebration. **Donations.** The August 1 issue of *Zion's Watch Tower* stated: "We have never considered it proper to solicit money for the Lord's cause, after the common custom. . . . It is our judgment that money raised by the various begging devices in the name of our Lord is offensive, unacceptable to him, and does not bring his blessing either upon the givers or the work accomplished."

- 1900** The Watch Tower Society's first branch office was opened in

London, England. By 1900, there were nine congregations and a total of 138 Bible Students in the country.

1902 The Watch Tower Society became **the copyright owners, sole publishers, and distributors of *The Emphatic Diaglott***. This version of the Christian Greek Scriptures was prepared by the English-born Bible translator Benjamin Wilson, of Geneva, Illinois, U.S.A. It was completed in 1864. It used the Greek text of J. J. Griesbach, with a literal, interlinear English translation and Wilson's own version to the right using his special signs of emphasis. Those plates and the sole right of publication had been given as a gift to the Society. After copies already in stock had been sent out, arrangements were made by the Society for more to be produced, and those became available in 1903.

1903 Use of newspapers for preaching. C. T. Russell engaged in a public debate with theologian Dr. E. L. Eaton, a spokesman for the unofficial association of Protestant ministers in western Pennsylvania. Among the issues discussed were the state of the dead and the doctrine of hell. The debates were held at Carnegie Hall in Allegheny (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.) and were widely covered in the media. The newspaper articles were so popular and Russell's clear explanation of Bible truth so compelling that the paper offered to publish Russell's lectures every week. By 1913, Russell's sermons, published in 2,000 newspapers, were estimated to reach 15 million readers.

Russell's second international trip to Europe.

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

The third branch of the Society (Australia) was founded.

1905 On March 1, *Zion's Watch Tower* began printing an outline for congregation discussions containing questions, as well as references to the Bible and Society publications. This continued until 1914.

Bible Students appeared in **India and Greece**.

1906 Bible Students formed their first congregation in France.

1907 The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society published the Bible Students Edition of the *King James Version*. The “Berean Bible Teachers’ Manual” was bound with it, as an appendix. Later, Jehovah’s Witnesses began to print the *King James Version* in their own printing houses. By 1992, they had printed 1,858,368 copies.

The Society published *Daily Heavenly Manna for the Household of Faith (Daily Heavenly Manna and Birthday Records)*, which included a Biblical text for each day. This book contained photographs of other Bible Students along with a list of their birthdays. (During those years, Bible Students celebrated birthdays.)

1908 Bible Students published *Watch Tower Bible (Berean Bible)*—new edition of the *King James Version*. The “Berean Bible Teachers’ Manual” was bound with it, as an appendix. This edition included concise comments on verses from all parts of the Bible, along with references to Watch Tower publications for fuller explanation.

Bible Students appeared **in Hungary**.

In the spring, C. T. Russell made his third international trip.

1909 Headquarters of the Society moved to Brooklyn, New York, in April. The December 15, 1908 issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* stated: “Altogether we concluded, after seeking Divine guidance, that Brooklyn, N.Y., with a large population . . . and known as ‘The City of Churches,’ would, for these reasons, be our most suitable center for the harvest work.”

On January 1, 1909, the title of the magazine was changed to *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, in order to focus attention more clearly on the objective of the magazine.

The March 1, 1909, issue of *The Watch Tower* reported: “It certainly seems very remarkable that we should get the old

Beecher Bethel and then by accident get his former residence. . . . The new home we shall call **'Bethel,'** and the new office and auditorium, 'The Brooklyn Tabernacle'; these names will supplant the term 'Bible House.'"

The publications were translated into Spanish.

In May, C. T. Russell set out on his fourth international trip.

1910 C. T. Russell's fifth international trip began in the spring. Bible Students adopted the name International Bible Students Association.

1911-1912 C. T. Russell accomplished four additional international trips. Eventually, he circled the entire globe. (The total distance he traveled amounts to 56,000 kilometers.) The purpose of the journey was to understand "the state of Christianity and the prospects for its spread" in various countries, including India, China, the Philippines, and Japan.

1912 Bible Students appeared in the **Czech Republic, Slovakia, Trinidad, and Lithuania.** C. T. Russell gave public talks in **China (Shanghai and Hong Kong), and Japan.** Bible Students began preparing the "**Photo-Drama of Creation.**" Pictorial slides and motion pictures were synchronized with phonograph records of talks and music. It turned out to be an eight-hour-long photographic slide and moving picture production, divided into four parts.

1913 **Great work is accomplished to produce the "Photo-Drama of Creation."** Hundreds of people took part in reenacting Bible scenes that were captured on film, and even animals were involved. "The largest part of the population of one of the large zoological gardens," says a report from 1913, "was brought into use in order to reproduce in Motion talking pictures Noah's part in the big show." As for the hundreds of different glass slides used in the production, artists in London, New York, Paris, and Philadelphia colored each one by hand.

The Russian government officially recognized **the office of Bible Students in Finland, which was part of the Russian Empire.** (In 1912, C. T. Russell gave Finnish Bible Student Kaarlo Hartev the power of attorney, which authorized him to represent the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in Finland. On September 25, 1913, the representative of the czar, the consul of the Russian Empire in New York, attested this power of attorney with the state seal and his signature.)

The October 15, 1913 issue of *The Watch Tower* said: “According to the best chronological reckoning of which we are capable, it is *approximately* that time—whether it be **October 1914**, or later. Without dogmatizing, we are looking for certain events: (1) The termination of the Gentile Times—Gentile supremacy in the world—and (2) For the inauguration of Messiah’s Kingdom in the world.”

- 1914** First showing of the “Photo-Drama of Creation” in New York in January; before the end of the year, it was seen by audiences totaling over 9,000,000 in North America, Europe, and Australia. In *The Bible Students Monthly* (Volume VI, No. 1, published early in 1914), C. T. Russell stated: “If we have the correct date and chronology, Gentile Times will end this year—1914. What of it? We do not surely know. Our expectation is that the active rule of Messiah will begin about the time of the ending of the lease of power to the Gentiles. Our expectation, true or false, is that there will be wonderful manifestations of Divine judgments against all unrighteousness, and that this will mean the breaking up of many institutions of the present time, if not all.” He emphasized that he did not expect the “end of the world” in 1914 and that the earth abides forever, but that the present order of things, of which Satan is ruler, is to pass away. In 43 lands, 5,155 Bible Students were actively preaching; reported Memorial attendance was 18,243. They distributed

millions of books as well as hundreds of millions of tracts and other publications in 35 languages.

1915 Neutrality. In the article entitled “Christian Duty and the War,” the September 1, 1915, *Watch Tower* dealt with Christian neutrality. It said that “to become a member of the army and to put on the military uniform implies the duties and obligations of a soldier as recognized and accepted. . . . Would not the Christian be really out of his place under such conditions?”

1916 Acknowledgment of wrong expectations. *The Watch Tower* of April 15, 1916, stated: “We believe that the dates have proven to be quite right. We believe that Gentile Times have ended.” However, it candidly added: “The Lord did not say that the Church would all be glorified by 1914. We merely inferred it and, evidently, erred.”

Death of C. T. Russell. On October 16, 1916, C. T. Russell set off on a tour of the western United States, during which he planned to give talks. He never returned home. On Tuesday afternoon, October 31, at the age of 64, he died on a train in Pampa (Texas).

***Zion’s Watch Tower* magazine was published in seven languages: English, Danish-Norwegian, German, Polish, Finnish, French and Swedish, with a circulation of 45,000 copies.**

1917 J. F. Rutherford became president of Society on January 6, after an executive committee of three had administered the Society’s affairs for about two months.

July 17, 1917, a new book *The Finished Mystery* (the seventh volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*) was released. By the end of the year, supplies of the book were exhausted and 850,000 more copies were ordered from the firm that printed our literature.

1918 The discourse “The World Has Ended—Millions Now Living May Never Die” was first delivered on February 24, in Los Angeles, California. On March 31, in Boston, Massachusetts,

the title was changed to “The World Has Ended—Millions Now Living *Will* Never Die.”

On March 14, 1918, the U.S. Department of Justice **banned *The Finished Mystery***, claiming that its publication and distribution hindered the war effort.

J. F. Rutherford and close associates were **named in federal arrest warrants** issued on May 7; trial began on June 5.

On June 20, 1918, a jury found the eight brothers guilty on all charges. The next day, the **judge handed down his sentence**. He said: “The religious propaganda which these defendants have vigorously advocated and spread . . . is a greater danger than a division of the German Army. . . . The punishment should be severe.” Two weeks later, these eight brothers entered the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia, with sentences ranging from 10 to 20 years.

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

1919 J. F. Rutherford and his associates were **released** on bail on March 26. Prior to that, Bible Students circulated a petition calling for their release. More than 700,000 signatures were gathered. But the prisoners were released before the petition was submitted.

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

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

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

Bible Students legally recognized in France.

1920 Watch Tower Society undertook **its own printing operations** in Brooklyn.

On August 12, J. F. Rutherford and four other brothers set out on an extended tour of Great Britain and several other countries.

- 1921** The book *The Harp of God* was released in November (with a circulation of 5,819,037 in 22 languages). This was the first book published by Bible Students independently. Interested ones who accepted the book were also enrolled in a self-study course. When a person accepted a copy of the book, he received a reading assignment printed on a small card. The next week, he received a card with a series of questions based on that assignment. The card ended with a reading assignment for the following week. The course lasted for 12 weeks. (It is also noteworthy that in the USSR this book was very common among Jehovah's Witnesses, even many decades later.)

Activities in Moldova. A report from Bessarabia (as Moldova was then called) in the December 15, 1921, issue of *The Watch Tower* stated: "About 200 in this place, besides many neighboring places all around, have received the truth." This was remarkable, since the Moldovan Bible Students were among those who founded new communities of believers in the countries of Central Asia.

- 1922** Radio was first used by J. F. Rutherford on February 26, in California, to broadcast a Bible discourse.

On April 16, 1922, J. F. Rutherford gave his first radio broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. An estimated 50,000 people heard the talk "Millions Now Living Will Never Die."

The Watch Tower magazine was translated into 16 languages.

Pilgrims—ministers sent by the Watch Tower Society to give talks to the congregations and take the lead in the preaching work—recommended that a regular meeting be devoted to a study of *The Watch Tower*. This suggestion was adopted, and at first, *Watch Tower* studies were held either midweek or on Sunday.

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

- 1923** Construction of the WBBR radio station (the first radio station owned by the Watch Tower Society) began on Staten Island, one of the five boroughs of New York City.

On April 23, permission was received from the Federal Radio Commission in Washington to broadcast WBBR.

A branch was established in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

- 1924** WBBR began to broadcast on February 24. It was operated until 1957. *The Watch Tower* of December 1, 1924, said: “We believe that the radio is the most economical and effective way of spreading the message of the truth that has yet been used.”

- 1925** *The Watch Tower* was now translated into **Russian**.

- 1926** Thirty-six years after it first undertook publishing Bibles, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society **printed and bound a Bible in its own factory**. The first one thus produced was *The Emphatic Diaglott*, the plates for which had been owned by the Society for 24 years. In December 1926, this Bible was printed on a flatbed press in the Society’s Concord Street factory in Brooklyn. By 1992, 427,924 of these were produced.

House-to-house preaching with books on Sunday was encouraged.

- 1927** On February 1, **the Society’s factory** moved into a brand-new building (with twice the space previously had). It was well designed, with the work moving from the upper floors down through the various departments until it reached the Shipping Department at ground level.

Christmas celebration rejected. The article “The Origin of Christmas,” in *The Golden Age* of December 14, 1927, noted that Christmas was a pagan celebration, which focused on pleasures and involved idol worship. The article made it clear that the celebration was not ordered by Christ.

A branch was established in Japan.

1928 The cross-and-crown emblems were shown to be not only unnecessary but objectionable (assembly held in Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.).

Easter celebration rejected. “The prominent heathen festival of Easter was also brought over and engrafted into the so-called Christian church.”—*The Golden Age*, December 12, 1928, page 168.

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

1929 *The Watch Tower* of February 1929 contained the following announcement: “**Russian lectures will be given over the radio.**” Programs were broadcast from Estonia into the Soviet Union every second and fourth Sunday of the month. The broadcasts continued until 1934.

A branch was established in Mexico City (Mexico).

The German edition of *The Golden Age* magazine boldly stated: “The National Socialist movement is in the service of the enemy of mankind – the Devil.”

The book *Prophecy* was released, and it paid special attention to God’s name, stating: “Jehovah’s name is the most vital issue before all creation.”

1930 Bible Students became active in 87 countries around the world. A branch was established in Austria.

1931 The name Jehovah’s Witnesses was adopted by resolution at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A., on July 26, and thereafter at conventions around the world.

On October 15, **the title and the front-cover design of *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* changed.**

1932 Annual elections of elders and deacons were cancelled. The annual election of elders by the congregation was eliminated.

Instead, each congregation elected a service committee made up of men who zealously shared in the preaching work and who lived up to the newly adopted name Jehovah's Witnesses. One of their number, nominated by the congregation, was appointed by the Society or branch office to be the service director.

The June 15, 1932, *Watchtower* provided further direction on how meetings should be conducted. An elder should lead the meeting. Articles at that time did not include printed questions, so the conductor was told to ask the audience to raise questions on the material under consideration. After that, he would call on people in the audience to give answers to those questions. If further clarification were needed, the conductor was to offer a "brief and succinct" explanation. Each congregation was permitted to select the issue of the magazine that the majority wanted to study.

1933 Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Germany. During the intense persecution there and in Nazi-occupied countries up to the end of World War II, 11,300 were arrested and 4,200 were sent to concentration camps. Approximately 1,500 Witnesses died during the time of the Holocaust, out of some 35,000 Witnesses living in Germany and Nazi-occupied countries.

Transcription machines (some mounted on automobiles) were used by Witnesses to broadcast Bible lectures in public places. Beginning in 1933, Jehovah's Witnesses were encouraged to use testimony cards in their door-to-door ministry. A testimony card was about three by five inches (7.6 by 12.7 cm) in size. It contained a brief Bible message and a description of Bible-based literature that the householder could obtain. A publisher would simply hand the card to the householder and ask him to read it. The April 15, 1933, *Watchtower* suggested that all congregations use the current issue of *The Watchtower* in meetings. Legal registration was received in Estonia, Romania, and Latvia.

In Spain, Franco's dictatorial regime banned Jehovah's Witnesses. The ban lasted until 1970.

- 1934** Portable phonographs were used by Witnesses to play short, recorded Bible discourses for interested ones.

On February 9, 1934, J. F. Rutherford sent a letter of protest to Hitler stating: "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."

The February 28 issue of *The Golden Age* noted that the cross has pagan roots.

- 1935** In a convention discourse in Washington, D.C., on May 31, a new explanation of the "great multitude" (Revelation 7:9–17) was announced. There were 840 persons baptized at this convention. Now greater emphasis would be progressively given to the hope of eternal life on a paradise earth for faithful servants of God now living.

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

The Watchtower encouraged all congregations to base the Service Meeting on information published in the Director (later called *Informant* and still later, *Our Kingdom Ministry*). This meeting soon became a regular feature of each congregation's schedule.

The March 1 issue of *The Watchtower* denounced drunkenness and tobacco use.

- 1936** The November 4, 1936, issue of *The Golden Age* and the new book *Riches* noted that Jesus died on a stake, not on a cross. Jehovah's Witnesses began wearing placards as they paraded through business districts of big cities to advertise public talks. Jehovah's Witnesses stopped celebrating birthdays. "There are but two such celebrations mentioned in the Scriptures, one of

the heathen king Pharaoh of Egypt, in the days of Joseph, and the other of [Herod,] whose birthday cost John the Baptist his life. In the Bible there is no instance of celebrations of birthdays by any of God's people."—*The Golden Age*, May 6, 1936, page 499.

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

The instruction was given to conduct the *Watchtower* study on Sundays.

The Golden Age was renamed *Consolation*.

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

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

Advertising placards were augmented by the carrying of signs held aloft on sticks. These signs proclaimed: "Religion Is a Snare and a Racket" and "Serve God and Christ the King."

- 1939** On January 1, 1939, the *Watchtower* magazine was renamed (*The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom*), thus putting increased emphasis on the fact that Christ, in their opinion, was already ruling from heaven as King.

On March 1, 1939, the title was changed to *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*, in order to direct attention more prominently to Jehovah as the Universal Sovereign, the one who gave ruling authority to his Son.

The November 1 issue of *The Watchtower* contained an article entitled "Neutrality." As a result of the clear information presented, Jehovah's Witnesses around the world saw the need to maintain strict neutrality in the affairs of the warring nations. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in France.

The number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide reached over 72,000.

1939-45 In the British Empire and British Commonwealth, 23 nations banned Jehovah's Witnesses or placed prohibitions on their Bible literature.

1940 In February, Jehovah's Witnesses began street-corner distribution of *The Watchtower* and *Consolation* (now known as *Awake!*), calling out slogans to draw attention to the magazines and the message these contained.

On May 20, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Witnesses. It expanded the First Amendment protection of the right to the free exercise of religion so that no federal, state, or local government could lawfully limit religious freedom. In addition, the ruling clearly established that Jehovah's Witnesses were not disturbers of public order. (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*).

On June 3, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld compulsory flag saluting in public schools (*Minersville School District v. Gobitis*). This led to a nationwide outburst of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses. The decision would be reversed three years later.

The *Watchtower* magazine was translated into Arabic.

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

1942 J. F. Rutherford died on January 8, in San Diego, California.

On January 13, N. H. Knorr became the third president of Society. Total printing of *The Watchtower* for the year in all languages was 11,325,143.

Watch Tower Society printed the complete Bible, *King James Version*, on its own web rotary press.

October 1, 1942, *The Watchtower* announced that questions would appear at the bottom of each page of the study articles and that those questions should be used. Then, it stated that the meeting should be one hour long. It also encouraged those who would answer to express themselves "in their own words"

instead of reading portions of the paragraph. (This arrangement has continued to this day.)

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

On June 14—the nation’s annual Flag Day—the Supreme Court reversed itself as to its decision in the *Gobitis* case, doing so in the case of *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*. This allowed Witness children to continue their education in school. For the first time in U.S. history, the Supreme Court changed its position so quickly.

On May 3, 1943, in the landmark case *Murdock v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, the Supreme Court reversed its earlier decision in *Jones v. Opelika*. It declared that any license tax as a precondition to exercising one’s freedom of religion by distribution of religious literature to be unconstitutional. This case reopened the doors in the United States to Jehovah’s Witnesses and has been appealed to as authority in hundreds of cases since then. May 3, 1943, was truly a memorable day for Jehovah’s Witnesses as regards litigation before the Supreme Court of the United States. On that one day, in 12 out of 13 cases (all of which were consolidated for hearing and opinion into four decisions), the Court ruled in their favor.

U.S. Supreme Court rendered decisions favorable to Jehovah’s Witnesses in 20 out of 24 cases; High Court in Australia lifted its ban on Witnesses on June 14.

The congregations were introduced to the Theocratic Ministry School, with public speaking training aimed at preparing everyone to be skilled preachers.

1944 The Society began printing another important Bible translation—the *American Standard Version* of 1901. It had the most commendable feature of rendering God’s name as “Jehovah” nearly 7,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

After long negotiations, the Watch Tower Society was able to purchase, in 1944, the use of the plates of the complete *American Standard Version* of the Bible for printing on its own presses.

Ecclesiastical court and confession. *The Watchtower*, in its issue of May 15, 1944, reviewed the matter in the light of the entire Bible and showed that such matters affecting the congregation should be handled by responsible brothers charged with congregation oversight. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; compare Deuteronomy 21:18-21.)

The Watchtower of December 1 noted that transfusing blood would be tantamount to eating it.

- 1945** *The Watchtower* of July 15, 1945, reported: "In 1940 France had 400 publishers; now there are 1,100 that talk the Kingdom. . . . In 1940 Holland had 800 publishers. Four hundred of them were whisked off to concentration camps in Germany. Those left behind talked the Kingdom. The result? In that land there are now 2,000 Kingdom publishers."

In November, N. H. Knorr and his secretary, M. Henschel, traveled to Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia to survey the needs of Jehovah's Witnesses in the war-ravaged countries, to encourage the brothers, and to inspect the branch offices of the Society. Their objective was postwar reorganization. Arrangements were made for literature supplies as well as food and clothing to be shipped to the brothers in need. Branch offices were reestablished.

Average number of free home Bible studies being conducted each month was 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 had been arrested and sentenced to prison terms ranging from one month to five years because of their Christian neutrality. Over 470 Witnesses were taken before the courts in Greece for sharing Bible teachings with others.

The number of branches worldwide increased from 25 to 57.

Humanitarian aid to Europe. “From January 1946 onward, goods were sent to fellow believers in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, and Romania. This aid program was not a onetime effort. Relief shipments continued for two and a half years! During that time some 85,000 brothers and sisters sent more than 700,000 pounds (about 300,000 kg) of food, over 1,000,000 pounds (about 450,000 kg) of clothing, and more than 124,000 pairs of shoes to their fellow believers in war-ravaged lands. By August 1948, this huge relief effort was concluded.”

As of the August 22 issue, *Consolation* magazine was renamed to *Awake!*; that year, its annual circulation reached 13,934,429 copies. The book “*Let God Be True*” was released the same year, and until 1968, it was the main manual for Bible study with interested people. The book was published in 54 languages with a total circulation of 19,246,710 copies.

New Year’s celebration rejected. *Awake!* of December 22, 1946, stated: “The whole New Year’s celebration with its high jinks and drunken revelry is not Christian, regardless of the day on which it occurs. Early Christians did not observe it.”

1947 In September, Jehovah’s Witnesses received official registration in France. The period of ban was over.

Overseas trips. On February 6, N. H. Knorr and his secretary, Milton Henschel, set out on an overseas trip to various countries. They traveled 47,795 miles (76,916 km) and visited the Pacific Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Central and Western Europe, Scandinavia, England and Newfoundland.

Standards for marriage. *The Watchtower* of January 15, 1947, emphasized that Christianity makes no allowance for polygamy,

regardless of local custom. A letter sent to the congregations notified any who professed to be Jehovah's Witnesses but who were polygamists that six months was being allowed for them to bring their marital affairs into harmony with the Bible standard. This was reinforced by a discourse given by N. H. Knorr during a visit to Africa that same year.

On December 2, actual work on the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* got under way.

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

The number of congregations exceeded 10,000 and now stood at 10,782 worldwide.

1948 In July, the largest assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses in post-war Europe was held in the German city of Kassel. The highest attendance at that memorable assembly was 23,150, with 1,200 baptized.

1949 Sixty-three branches operated worldwide. The number of Jehovah's Witnesses reached 317,877.

Printing factory expansion in New York. A nine-story building was built which doubled the area of the printing factory.

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

1951 In early April, the USSR authorities launched Operation North. It was the largest confessional deportation in the history of the USSR, with 9,793 Jehovah's Witnesses and members of their families losing their homes and being sent to Siberia. Stalin personally approved the decision.

1952 A branch in Korea was registered in October.

Serious sins and disfellowshipping. The March 1 issue of *The Watchtower* laid out a Bible-based procedure for considering serious sins committed by believers and a procedure for disfellowshipping unrepentant sinners.

- 1953** The first Witness was imprisoned in South Korea for refusing military service on religious grounds. From then until the decision of the Supreme Court in 2018, more than 19,000 Witnesses spent a total of 36,000 years behind bars.
The first volume of the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Books of Genesis—Ruth) was published.
- 1954** **Motion pictures and filmstrips.** To give exposure to the organization, a motion picture titled *The New World Society in Action* was released. After the motion picture *The New World Society in Action*, other films followed: *The Happiness of the New World Society*, *Proclaiming “Everlasting Good News” Around the World*, *God Cannot Lie*, and *Heritage*. There have also been slide showings, with commentary, on the practicality of the Bible in our time, the pagan roots of doctrines and practices of Christendom, and the meaning of world conditions in the light of Bible prophecy, as well as slide showings about Jehovah’s Witnesses as an organization, featuring a visit to their world headquarters, thrilling conventions in lands where they were formerly banned, and a review of their modern-day history.
- 1955** The second volume of the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Books of 1 Samuel—Esther) was published.
In Nuremberg, Germany, at the very place where Hitler held parades and promised to destroy the Witnesses, 107,000 people were gathered for the “Triumphant Kingdom” convention.
The Watch Tower Society had 77 branches, and the Gilead School by this time graduated 1,814 missionaries serving in 100 countries and territories. Organizational improvements would be required to coordinate activities in the world.
The first documentary evidence of existence of the Communities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Uzbek SSR (the city of Angren and the village of Dzharkurgan, Surkhan-Darya region).
- 1956** Arrangements were made to divide the earth into ten zones, each zone embracing a number of the Society’s branches.

Qualified elders from the office in Brooklyn and experienced branch overseers were appointed to be zone servants and were trained for this work by N. H. Knorr. On January 1, 1956, the first of these zone servants inaugurated this new service of visiting branches.

Between the middle of 1956 and February of 1957, a petition addressed to the then Soviet premier Nikolay A. Bulganin was adopted at 199 district conventions held in all parts of the world. Among other things, the petition requested that Jehovah's Witnesses be freed and that they be "authorized to receive and publish *the Watchtower* magazine in Russian, Ukrainian and such other languages as may be found necessary, as well as other Bible publications that are used by Jehovah's witnesses worldwide." A total of 462,936 in attendance approved the petition. New facilities for printing were under construction in New York, which doubled the printery area.

- 1957** The third volume of the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Books of Job—Song of Solomon) was published. The radio station WBBR, located in New York, was sold. Jehovah's Witnesses registered their legal entity in Malawi. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in the Dominican Republic. In June, a memorandum to Trujillo was published, which stated: "I am planning a series of meetings to combat the pernicious, antipatriotic tendencies of Jehovah's Witnesses." Three years later, the ban was lifted.

- 1958** **The most famous and largest assembly in the history of Jehovah's Witnesses.** The Divine Will International Assembly in New York drew an attendance of 253,922 from 123 lands: 7,136 baptized.

N. H. Knorr announced establishment of various special training courses for both the believers themselves and for responsible representatives of the Society around the world.

The fourth volume of the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Books of Isaiah—Lamentations) was published.

On July 31, N. H. Knorr announced the release of the new book *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*. This book was extremely popular among the Witnesses in the USSR, and it was actively used until the ban was lifted in 1991.

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

1960 The fifth volume of the *New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Books of Ezekiel—Malachi) was published.

In May, the government of the Dominican Republic lifted the ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses.

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

The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was published in English—the complete Bible in one volume.

1963 Over a million of Jehovah’s Witnesses were now active in 198 lands.

The activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses were officially registered in Israel.

The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures was now translated into Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Portuguese, and French.

In *The Watchtower* of November 15, Babylon the Great was shown to represent more than just Christendom. The influence of ancient Babylon had not only penetrated into those countries where Christianity was practiced but had also spread throughout the earth. Thus, it was concluded that Babylon the Great is the entire world empire of false religion.

The book *All Scripture Is Inspired by God and Beneficial* was published. The new publication discussed each book of the

Bible. Each Bible book was reported as follows: who wrote it, when and where it was written, and how it was authenticated. This was followed by a summary of the content, followed by a section on “Why Beneficial,” which showed why this book of the Bible is of great value to its readers. This publication, which proved to be of great help in the continuous Bible teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses. (It is still relevant; it is being studied and used to this day.)

There was an official record of the activity of the Community of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the town of Bekabad, Uzbek SSR.

- 1964** On July 9, the Indonesian Ministry of Justice officially registered the Association of Bible Students, the legal entity of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The magazine was now issued in Russian under the name *The Watchtower*. (Before that, it was called *The Guard Tower*.)

- 1965** First Assembly Hall, a renovated theater, was used by Jehovah’s Witnesses in New York. As the number of congregations grew, finding suitable venues became increasingly difficult. This being the case, Jehovah’s Witnesses concluded that they needed to acquire their own buildings, that is, to reconstruct suitable premises or build new ones.

A decree was issued in the USSR on the release of all Witnesses exiled to Siberia. They were forbidden to return to their homelands; so, many of them moved to live in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, to join fellow believers residing in those areas.

In June, the Supreme Court of the Ukrainian SSR ruled the literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses to be religious, not anti-Soviet. Although this decision only pertained to one court case, in the future, it influenced court decisions throughout Ukraine. The authorities stopped arresting people for

reading Bible literature, although they continued to imprison Witnesses for their preaching work.

1966 Jehovah's Witnesses continued to receive official registration of their activities in Africa. In 1966, registrations were obtained in Benin, Zimbabwe, and Congo.

In addition to public talks at their conventions, Jehovah's Witnesses performed full-costume Bible dramas based on Bible subjects. Since 2014, these performances have been replaced by film screenings.

1967 Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Malawi under its dictatorship. Waves of prolonged and savage persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses swept across Malawi and continued for years thereafter. The ban lasted for 26 years, until 1993.

The complete Bible, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, became available in Spanish and Portuguese (Brazilian).

As a result of a military coup, a military dictatorship of "Black Colonels" was established in Greece. A ban was imposed on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. Prohibition continued until the fall of the dictatorship in 1974.

New expansion of the printing facilities in New York. A ten-story building was constructed, allowing connectivity across all the buildings into one printing complex—10 times larger in area than the original building.

1968 The book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life* was released (released in Russian in 1969) and was the main Bible study aid until 1982. This new Bible study course was designed to last six months and was intended to prepare a person for baptism. The total circulation of the book was amazing: more than 107,000,000 copies in 117 languages.

Zambia's dictatorial regime banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. The ban was lifted with the fall of the dictatorship in 1991.

Mozambique's dictatorial regime banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. The ban was lifted in 1974.

- 1969** *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures* was released, with a second edition issued in 1985. This volume provided a literal English translation of the Greek text edited by Westcott and Hort, as well as the modern-English rendering of the 1984 edition of the New World Translation. It thus opened up to the serious Bible student what the original Greek basically or literally said.

Trial of 14 leaders and active ministers of the Community of Jehovah's Witnesses took place in the city of Angren, Uzbek SSR. Home Bible studies exceeded one million; report showed an average of 1,097,237.

- 1970** Activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain were now allowed. There were over 11,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country.
- 1971** Governing Body was enlarged; on October 1, chairmanship began to rotate among its members on an annual basis.

Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The dictatorial government cancelled the official registration of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1971, at a series of conventions held throughout the earth, the talk *Theocratic Organization Amidst Democracies and Communism* was presented. On July 2, F. W. Franz delivered the talk at Yankee Stadium in New York City. In it he pointed out that where enough qualified men were available, first-century congregations had more than one overseer. (Philippians 1:1) "The congregational group of overseers," he stated, "would compose a 'body of older men'. . . . The members of such a 'body [or, assembly] of older men' were all equal, having the same official status, and none of them was the most important, most prominent, or most powerful member in the congregation." (1 Timothy 4:14) One elder would be designated chairman, but all the elders would have equal authority and share the

responsibility for making decisions. “These organization adjustments,” explained N. H. Knorr, “will help to bring the operation of the congregations into closer conformity with God’s Word.”

- 1972** As of October 1, congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses came under local supervision of the body of elders instead of one person.

Since 1972, under the supervision of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a procedure was established whereby brothers were recommended to serve as elders and ministerial servants. If the recommendations were approved, congregations would receive letters of theocratic appointments.

The Bible in Living English. In 1972, the Watch Tower Society produced *The Bible in Living English*, by the late Steven T. Byington. It consistently rendered the divine name as “Jehovah.”

- 1973** The release of the Japanese edition of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* was announced.

The dictatorial government of Kenya banned Jehovah’s Witnesses. This ban was lifted in this same year.

An additional printing facility was built in Wallkill (New York, U.S.A.). (It mainly would print magazines.)

The June 1 issue of *The Watchtower* asked the question: “Do . . . persons who have not broken their addiction to tobacco qualify for baptism?” The answer was: “The Scriptural evidence points to the conclusion that they do not.” After citing several relevant scriptures, The Watchtower explained why an unrepentant smoker should be disfellowshipped. (1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 7:1) It said: “This represents no effort to act in an arbitrary, dictatorial manner. The strictness really proceeds from God, who expresses himself through his written Word.” Over the following months, those directly involved in the production or sale of tobacco are helped to understand that they could not do so while remaining Jehovah’s Witnesses.

1974 Peak publishers worldwide reached 2,021,432.

In Mozambique, Greece, and Portugal, bans on Jehovah's Witnesses came to an end. Their work was legally registered in Portugal.

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

The new dictatorial government imposed a ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mozambique. The ban would continue until 1991.

By the end of 1975, the Society's printing facilities produced Bible literature in 23 countries around the world. Three of them printed books, and all 23 facilities printed brochures and magazines. In another 25 countries, the Society printed publications in a smaller format and volume.

In 1975, Jehovah's Witnesses were active in 212 countries and territories (according to the political map of the world in the early 1990s). There were 624,097 Witnesses serving on the U.S. mainland and in Canada. In Europe, excluding the territory of the former Soviet Union, there were 614,826 Witnesses. In Africa—312,754 Witnesses. In Mexico, Central America and South America—311,641; in Asia—161,598; in Australia and on numerous islands around the world—131,707 Witnesses.

1976 As of February 1, branch offices of Watch Tower Society each came under supervision of a committee of three or more spiritually mature men instead of one overseer.

Witnesses were prohibited from remaining a part of the congregation if they worked in gambling houses.

The military dictatorship imposed a ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Argentina (lasting until 1980).

- 1977** Nathan Homer Knorr died on June 8, 1977.
On June 22, 1977, two weeks after the death of N. H. Knorr, 83-year-old Frederick William Franz was elected to be president of the Watch Tower Society.
- 1978** The dictatorial governments of Angola and Togo banned Jehovah's Witnesses. The ban would last until 1992.
Audio recordings of the Bible were released.
- 1979** Military dictatorship in Paraguay banned Jehovah's Witnesses. This ban would last until 1991.
The ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Central African Republic and Uganda was lifted.
- 1980** In Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo), the president of the Republic signed a decree officially recognizing the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. There were approximately 22,000 believers in the country.
- 1981** A regular-sized edition of the *New World Translation* in English was released, with a concordance and other helpful appendix features. This was the first edition to be printed by the Watch Tower Society on a web offset press.
During all meetings, religious public talks (sermons) would now be given based only on the provided outlines.
On December 2, the Military Court in Istanbul, Turkey, ruled Jehovah's Witnesses to be a recognized religion with the same right to freedom of worship as any other religion in the country.
On December 12, the ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Argentina was lifted.
- 1982** The book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* became the primary book used in conducting Bible studies. This tool had over 150 visual illustrations on Biblical topics.
The *New World Translation* of the Bible in Japanese was completed.
On November 1, the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rwanda was banned. (This ban lasted until 1992.)

In Poland, the government allowed Jehovah's Witnesses to hold one-day conventions in rented premises.

- 1983** The July 15, 1983, issue of *The Watchtower* clarified the believers' position on the use of firearms. "Then Jesus said to him: 'Return your sword to its place, for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.'" (Matthew 26:52) According to this principle, mature Christians were advised to avoid employment that required carrying a weapon (the modern equivalent of a 'sword').

The Stanley Theater in Jersey City, New Jersey, U.S.A., was purchased. It was restored and used for religious meetings in 1985.

- 1984** At the "Kingdom Increase" District Conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses, held in 1984, a revised reference edition of the New World Translation of the Bible was issued in English. It included a complete updating and revision of the marginal (cross) references that were initially presented in English from 1950 to 1960. Designed for the serious Bible student, it contained over 125,000 marginal references, more than 11,000 footnotes, an extensive concordance, maps, and 43 appendix articles. Also in 1984, a regular-size edition of the 1984 revision, with marginal references but without footnotes, was made available.

On March 9, the Argentine government legally recognized the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious organization, nearly four years after the ban was lifted in 1980.

On April 21, an entirely new complex was completed at Selters, Germany, at the western edge of the Taunus Mountain. Today, this branch is called the Central Europe branch and oversees the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the countries of Central Europe.

In Hungary, prior to the ban being lifted in 1989, the authorities at times granted permission for religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses to be held, upon request.

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

- 1985** Arrangement for international volunteers for the Society’s worldwide construction work was initiated.
 In Poland, Jehovah’s Witnesses were provided with the country’s largest stadiums to host four large conventions.
 Report showed 3,024,131 shared in the work of Kingdom preaching in 222 lands; pioneers averaged 322,821; 189,800 baptized this year.
- 1986** Regional Building Committees were appointed to assist with the coordination of building Kingdom Halls.
 On May 26, Turkey’s Supreme Court upheld the right to freedom of religion for Jehovah’s Witnesses. This decision ended unlawful arrests for involvement in Christian activities and provided greater religious freedom to all Turkish citizens.
 In India, on August 11, the Supreme Court overruled the decision of the High Court of Kerala in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala*. The Court ruled that the expulsion of children from school because of their “conscientiously held religious faith” was a violation of the Constitution of India. The judge noted: “They [Jehovah’s Witnesses] do not sing the national anthem wherever, ‘Jana Gana Mana’ in India, ‘God Save the Queen’ in Great Britain, ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ in the United States and so on. . . . They desist from actual singing only because of their honest belief and conviction that their religion does not permit them to join any rituals except it be in their prayers to Jehovah their God.”
 In Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and the Central African Republic, the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses were banned for the second time. The ban was lifted in both countries in 1993.
- 1987** Ministerial Training School went into operation on October 1 with the first class in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
 The activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses were banned in Kenya. (This ban lasted until 1992.)

1988 Construction of the Watchtower Educational Center began in Patterson, New York, U.S.A.

1989 On May 12, Jehovah's Witnesses received official registration in Poland.

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

On June 27, Jehovah's Witnesses received official registration in Hungary.

The *New World Translation* was published in whole or in part in 11 languages.

1990 The number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide reached 4,017,213.

In that year alone, the Society produced 678 million magazines and over 51 million Bibles and bound books.

The Governing Body made changes to the distribution of religious literature. Beginning that year, in the United States, literature was now to be offered without mentioning or suggesting a donation amount.

The bans on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the GDR (German Democratic Republic), Romania, Myanmar, and Nicaragua were lifted, and their activities were officially registered. A video entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name* was released. By 2002, Jehovah's Witnesses would release about 20 different videos.

Completed audio recording of all books of the Bible in English was released.

1991 Bans were lifted in the USSR, Eastern Europe, and Africa, allowing another 390 million people to enjoy freedom of religion. The first convention in Central Asia was held in Alma-Ata

(Almaty), Kazakhstan, attended by delegates from all the republics of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan.

1992 The ban on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kenya, Zambia, and Rwanda was lifted.

Frederick William Franz died on December 22, 1992. After W.F. Franz' death, Milton J. Henschel was elected the Society's fifth president on December 30, 1992.

Religious associations of Jehovah's Witnesses received registration in Kazakhstan.

The construction of a branch in Russia began (at Solnechnoye village near St. Petersburg).

For the first time in history, Jehovah's Witnesses spent more than a billion hours for their volunteer service.

Jehovah's Witnesses' activities were legalized in Albania and Angola.

1993 Two international conventions were held in Moscow and Kyiv. On August 7, 1993, at the international convention of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyiv, 7,402 people were baptized in six pools. It took 2 hours and 15 minutes to baptize everyone. This was the highest number of Jehovah's Witnesses ever baptized during one convention.

On May 25, decision in the case of *Kokkinakis v. Greece*. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses and found, in the actions of Greece, a violation of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The Court recognized this to be an unreasonable infringement on the right of every person to share their religious views and confirmed Jehovah's Witnesses to be a "known religion."

Armenia began to imprison young Witnesses who refused military service because of their beliefs. This continued until 2013, when the government recognized the right of Jehovah's Witnesses to alternative civilian service.

1994 The genocide tragedy in Rwanda claimed hundreds of lives of Jehovah's Witnesses, who do not use weapons to defend themselves. Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe quickly donated and sent them \$1,600,000 worth of medicine, food, and other supplies.

The Society released in English the *Watchtower Library—1993 Edition*. It contained the text, in electronic format (CD-ROM), of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*, the annual bound volumes of *The Watchtower* from 1950 to 1993 and *Awake!* from 1980 to 1993, the two-volume Bible encyclopedia *Insight on the Scriptures*, and numerous other books, booklets, brochures, and tracts published by the Watchtower Society since 1970. In addition, it contained an index to all Watchtower publications from 1930 to 1993. (As of 2018, in place of disks, the Watchtower Library was made available for download directly from the jw.org website.)

October 1994. The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea began. By presidential decree, Jehovah's Witnesses were deprived of their citizenship and basic civil rights.

There were more than 5,000,000 Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. Jehovah's Witnesses received state registration in Uzbekistan. On May 3, 1994, the religious community was registered in the city of Fergana; and on December 17, 1994, the religious community was registered in the city of Chirchik (a suburb of the capital, the city of Tashkent).

1995 *The Watchtower* simultaneously published in 100 languages. School for Branch Committee Members inaugurated.

The book entitled *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* was published, which became the main Bible study aid used until 2005.

The Gilead School moved to the Watchtower Educational Center in Patterson, New York, U.S.A.

1996 On March 14, by decree of the President of the Russian Federation (No. 378), Jehovah's Witnesses were fully exonerated as victims of political repression.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled on the complaint of Titos Manoussakis (*Manoussakis and Others v. Greece*). The court emphasized that “Jehovah’s Witnesses come within the definition of ‘known religion’ as provided for under Greek law” and that it was not up to the government of Greece to “determine whether religious beliefs or the means used to express such beliefs are legitimate.”

Recognizing the difficulties faced by families in the modern world, Jehovah’s Witnesses published 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 was dedicated. It was located in Russia about 25 miles northwest of St. Petersburg in the village of Solnechnoye.

An anti-sectarian smear campaign against Jehovah’s Witnesses in the media began in Europe.

In Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Justice registered the Religious Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses. (Local religious associations had already been registered in the country since 1992.)

Jehovah’s Witnesses began using their own website. The following announcement was made in *Kingdom Ministry* for November: “In our technological age, some people obtain information from electronic sources, including the Internet. So the Society has put on the Internet some accurate information about the beliefs and activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Our Internet Web site has the address <http://www.watchtower.org> and contains a selection of tracts, brochures, and *Watchtower* and *Awake!* Articles in English, Chinese (Simplified), German, Russian, and Spanish, as well as in other languages. The publications on this Web site are already available through the congregations and are in use in the ministry. The purpose of our Web site is, not to release new publications, but to make information available to the public in electronic format.”

1998 Jehovah's Witnesses received legal registration of their activities in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Bulgaria.

In Lvov (Lviv), Ukraine, construction of a new branch facility was approved by the government, with work starting in early January 1999.

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

1999 Jehovah's Witnesses received legal registration of their activities in Azerbaijan.

In Russia, legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses underwent reregistration and confirmation of their status as recognized religious associations.

A new school for traveling overseers was initiated.

2000 On October 7, it was announced that members of the Governing Body who were serving as directors of the Watch Tower Society of Pennsylvania and affiliated corporations had voluntarily stepped aside. In this way, the Governing Body, representing the "faithful and discreet slave," would be able to give more attention to caring for the spiritual oversight of "the congregation of God" and its associates, the other sheep.—Acts 20:28.

Jehovah's Witnesses released a new video, *Transfusion-Alternative Strategies—Simple, Safe, Effective*. After viewing the video, the National Blood Service (NBS) in the United Kingdom sent a letter with a copy of this video to all blood bank managers and consultant hematologists throughout the country. They were encouraged to watch the program. The letter acknowledged "the general message [in the video] is praiseworthy and is one the NBS strongly supports."

European Court of Human Rights issued another ruling in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in Greece.

The number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide exceeded 6,000,000.

- 2001** Due to a new rapid building program organized by the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1,074 new Kingdom Halls were built in Africa alone.

The Supreme Court of Georgia annulled the registration of legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country.

The Romanian Supreme Court in its two judgments clearly affirmed the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses to be a legally recognized religion entitled to all the rights that the law grants to religion.

On June 15, the release of the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* in Russian was announced.

- 2002** New branch buildings were dedicated in the Czech Republic. Plaque unveiled in Buchenwald (Germany) in remembrance of Witnesses who suffered at the former Nazi concentration camp there.

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

- 2003** Jehovah's Witnesses in Kosovo were legally recognized. Romania issued a ministerial order officially confirming the status of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religion.

New MAN Roland Lithoman press installed at Britain branch.

On November 28, the Ministry of Justice of Georgia registered the local branch of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.).

- 2004** After 84 years of continuous printing, the Brooklyn printery closed down. Printing operations moved to Wallkill.

Jehovah's Witnesses were legally recognized in Armenia.

On March 26, Russia issued a decision to ban the activities of the Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed this decision to the European Court of Human Rights.

By 2004, the *New World Translation* of the Bible was available in over 50 languages.

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

The book entitled *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* was released. It became the next main Bible study aid followed by a simplified version *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* published in 2015, which was widely used until 2021. As of 2015, 237,600,000 copies were printed in 272 languages.

October—Jehovah's Witnesses were successfully registered as a religious society in Nepal.

2006 Beginning in January, *Awake!* magazine became a monthly publication with more emphasis on the Bible.

As of June 2006, Jehovah's Witnesses were registered as a religion in eight states in Sudan. They had built Kingdom Halls in these areas and had openly held large assemblies. Their literature was freely imported to their office in Khartoum.

On November 3, the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled that South Korea violated the rights of two Witnesses who were conscientious objectors to military service.

On August 24, 2006, the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Fergana (Uzbekistan) was deprived of state registration.

2007 The branch in Turkey received confirmation that the Association for the Support of Jehovah's Witnesses had been officially registered.

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

The complete *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was released in Russian.

On May 3, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (France) delivered a unanimous decision in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Georgia. The Court found that

the Witnesses had been subjected to inhuman treatment and that their right to freedom of religion had been violated. The Court also found the government of Georgia was guilty of failing to prosecute the perpetrators of the criminal offense which concerned the 1999 attack by a crowd of fanatics armed with sticks and iron crosses, led by a former Orthodox priest, who disrupted a peaceful meeting of believers.

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

In January 2008, the www.jw.org website introduced a new feature—the ability to download audio recordings of certain publications in 17 languages. Issues of *Awake!* and *The Watchtower* were made available in audio format on the Internet. In July, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Austria, followed by three more favorable judgments the next year, thereby confirming that Jehovah’s Witnesses to be, without a doubt, a religious society.

Two separate editions of *The Watchtower* began to be published—study and public editions.

The number of Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide exceeded 7,000,000.

2009 Family worship evening was initiated. Number of weekly meetings was reduced to make time for family worship evening. In May, the Federal Ministry of Education, Art, and Culture of Austria granted Jehovah’s Witnesses the highest possible level of recognition as a religious community. The Witnesses became the 14th religious society in Austria to enjoy this status.

Jehovah’s Witnesses purchased a 253-acre (102 ha) plot of land in the state of New York, U.S.A., with plans to relocate their world headquarters.

The Spanish government approved a royal decree concerning Jehovah’s Witnesses in special full-time service, such as members

of the Bethel family and traveling overseers. The official notice stated that special full-time ministers were recognized as “ordained ministers . . . who dedicate themselves exclusively to missionary or pastoral activity, to religious education or, additionally, to other necessary activities that serve to support the objectives of the religious confession.”

On September 25, the Ministry of Justice announced that the Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses was unanimously approved as a Long-Standing Religious Community in Portugal, giving Jehovah’s Witnesses there the highest judicial and religious classification possible, which helps them to carry out their activities. Their new legal status brought numerous benefits to Jehovah’s people. These included having authorized ministers to perform legally recognized marriage ceremonies at Kingdom Halls as well as authorization to enter hospitals and prisons to give spiritual assistance to those who request it.

2010 In 2010, the Ministerial Training School was renamed as the Bible School for Single Brothers. In addition, a new school was established—the Bible School for Christian Couples.

On June 10, the European Court of Human Rights declared that the decision to liquidate the Moscow Community of Jehovah’s Witnesses violated human rights.

The *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* was released in Uzbek.

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

On June 30, 2011, the European Court of Human Rights issued a decision in favor of the Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in France in the case of illegal taxation of religious donation.

When ruling in the case of *Bayatyan v. Armenia*, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights overwhelmingly (16 to 1) recognized a violation of the right

to freedom of conscience, protecting the rights of those who refuse military service on the basis of their convictions.

On November 22, the European Court of Human Rights delivered its ruling in *Erçep v. Turkey*, the first of three rulings against Turkey that recognized the right of Witnesses to conscientious objection to military service

The purpose of Gilead School was changed. Graduates would be assigned to branch offices, traveling ministry, or congregations in densely populated areas in order to strengthen the congregations.

- 2012** The children's animated series *Become Jehovah's Friend* was released. Branch offices around the world were consolidated. Thirty branch offices were merged with larger ones.

In January, the European Court of Human Rights issued two judgments against Armenia in the cases *Bukharatyan v. Armenia* and *Tsaturyan v. Armenia*, confirming the violation of religious freedom of two of Jehovah's Witnesses who conscientiously objected to military service.

On November 27, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the government of Armenia was required to pay 112,000 euros (\$145,226 U.S.) in compensation for non-pecuniary damage and legal costs and expenses to 17 conscientious objectors.

The UN Human Rights Committee acknowledged that the right to freedom of conscience of 388 Jehovah's Witnesses who conscientiously objected to military service was violated.

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

Agreement to sell six of the organization's buildings in Brooklyn was reached with other buildings to follow shortly in subsequent years. This sale was part of the effort to relocate the headquarters to the property at Warwick, NY, U.S.A.

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

Three websites managed by Jehovah's Witnesses were consolidated into one official website—jw.org. The other two, www.watchtower.org and www.jw-media.org, were discontinued. *The Watchtower Online Library* (wol.jw.org) reached a milestone of supporting 100 languages. Many publications issued by the organization in past years became available online at this website.

On November 12, 2013, Armenia released the last 14 Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned as conscientious objectors. Believers were provided with alternative civil service.

JW Library application was released to work on phone, tablet, or computer *JW Library Sign Language* application was released.

- 2014** Internet streaming channel JW Broadcasting® was launched (tv.jw.org).

The Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia was registered in accordance with public law. The religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses received a new status.

The number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide exceeded 8,200,000.

- 2015** Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a complex of buildings in the state of New York where they established their own film studio. Release of *New World Translation (Study Edition)*, which became available online on the official website of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On May 27, 2015, the Russian Ministry of Justice registered a new Local Religious Organization (LRO) of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Thus, the prescription of the European Court of Human Rights, which recognized the illegality of the liquidation of this legal entity in 2004, was fulfilled.

Georgia acknowledged violation of the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses. In its decision published on May 21, 2015, the ECHR stated that in September 2014, the government filed a unilateral declaration stating its "wish to express regretful acknowledgement of the violation" of the rights of Jehovah's

Witnesses. The declaration further admitted that Georgia's action to deregister the Witnesses' legal entities in 2000 "was not justified" and that the lack of proper legislation deprived those entities of the possibility to be registered.

The ECHR accepted the government's admission as sufficient grounds to settle the case. The ECHR observed that "either by denying registration to various religious groups or by annulling their registration, the relevant authorities had interfered with the applicant organizations' right to freedom of religion and association, in violation of Article 11 of the Convention read in light of Article 9." The government agreed to pay 6,000 euros for damages and expenses.

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

2017 The new world headquarters at Warwick, New York, was completed.

Announcement was made that the content of magazines was being changed, effective January 2018. Both the *Awake!* and the public edition of *The Watchtower* would feature only one topic. On April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled to liquidate the Jehovah's Witnesses' National Headquarters in Russia.

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, the first special convention in Central Asia was held, with the participation of delegates from different countries.

The release of the revised edition of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Uzbek was announced.

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

Awake! was translated into 195 languages and *The Watchtower* (public edition) into 337 languages.

On November 1, South Korea's Supreme Court ruled that conscientious objection to military service did not constitute a crime. This decision put an end to the 65-year long practice of incarcerating conscientious objectors.

2019 Jehovah's Witnesses announced their intention to build a new facility in Ramapo, New York, focusing on audio and video production. Construction would begin in 2022 with a projected completion date of December 2026. At the height of the project, about 1,500 volunteers would be required daily.

On February 28, the last of the imprisoned Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors was released in South Korea. Jehovah's Witnesses now would perform alternative civilian service.

On December 5, the European Court of Human Rights ruled unanimously in favor of 22 Armenian Jehovah's Witnesses who had been unjustly accused of evading military service. The court ordered Armenia to pay them compensation in the amount of 242,000 euros (over \$267,000 U.S.).

In Sweden and Norway, the national governments recognized Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious organization beneficial to society.

2020 During the pandemic, all religious buildings of Jehovah's Witnesses around the world closed, all branches quarantined and locked down. For the first time in the history of the organization, the *public* ministry and *in-person* conventions around the world were discontinued. However, all religious meetings continued to be held safely in virtual formats, either by video conference, or broadcast on radio or television stations. The programs of the main annual worship meetings (regional conventions) were broadcast online and translated into more than 500 languages.

On May 8, Turkmenistan released 16 Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for conscientious objection to military service.

The Governing Body announced what appeared to be the organization's largest film project, *The Good News According to Jesus* (designed to be a series of videos featuring gospel accounts about the life of Jesus Christ). Steven Lett explained the essence of the video: "This series will combine the strengths of all our preceding research and study tools with the power of the moving image and will enable the viewer to gain even deeper understanding of Jesus's life and ministry." Based on the canonical gospels, the ministry of Christ will be presented in chronological order. Filming would take place in Australia and would take several years.

2021 *The book **Enjoy Life Forever!*** was released, becoming the new primary Bible study guide for interested people. The July issue of *The Watchtower* stated: "The way that we conduct Bible studies has now changed. Our principle study publication, *Enjoy Life Forever!*, requires that we prepare for the study and conduct it differently from how we did in the past. We read fewer paragraphs and have more of a conversation with the student. When teaching, we use more videos and electronic resources, such as *JW Library*®."

The revised edition of the *New World Translation* of the Bible was released in Russian.

Jehovah's Witnesses confirmed their plans to launch construction on a new facility in Ramapo, New York, U.S.A., in 2022, focusing on audio and video production.

The celebration of the Memorial of Christ's Death was attended by 21,367,603 people around the world. (Meetings were held online or via broadcast due to the pandemic.)

2022 As of January 21, 2022, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that 26,813 of their fellow believers worldwide had already died from the coronavirus pandemic.

The website jw.org was available in 1070 languages.

The number of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide was 8,686,980.

As of April 1, meetings at Kingdom Halls resumed in those countries where it was permitted by the authorities. It was announced that major annual worship services (regional conventions) would be held online for the third year in a row (due to the ongoing threat of coronavirus).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Artur Igorevich Artemyev (Professor, PhD in philosophy) is known in Kazakhstan and abroad primarily as a religious scholar. However, the range of his scientific interests is much wider than that. Dr. Artemyev has published 250 research papers on history, philosophy of science, social philosophy, and social and political science, including eight monographs: *Atheism, Religion, Personality; Religious Environment and Personality: Theological and Philosophical Analysis; Study of Religion (published in Kazakh as Dyntanu); Islam: Past and Present*. He is the author of the first Sociology of Personality textbook used in the countries of the former Soviet Union (a second edition was published by ArbaT-XXI in Moscow and released in the Kazakh language with co-author/translator B. K. Beysenov).

Artur I. Artemyev is one of the authors of the unique anthology *Religions in Kazakhstan*. (A similar work was published only in the U.S.A.)

His research papers have been published in English, German, Japanese, Korean, and Ukrainian. He has visited about 40 countries and given lectures at universities in Quito (Ecuador), Prague (Czech Republic), and Rabwah (Pakistan).

He has also received the Order of the Badge of Honor, seven medals, government awards, plaques, and certificates of merit from several international nongovernment organizations and public institutions.

The works of Professor Artemyev on Jehovah's Witnesses:

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8) *Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe: Past and Present. Volume III.* / Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa–Newcastle upon Tyne, 2021 – p. 523 *Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan: History and Modern Realities. A Brief Analysis of the Religious History.* / Artur Artemyev– pp. 38-93.