

THE KINGDOM THAT NEVER CAME

Joseph Wilting

Formerly a Jehovah's Witnesses for nearly 40 years

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Jellie and my children Ingrid, Eric, Eduard and André. I am deeply grateful for your support in spite of the traumatic period we experienced during our "exodus" from the Watchtower Society. I am particularly glad that you have found a life in the freedom of Christianity.

Part One

My Life as a Jehovah's Witnesses

Part Two

A Closer Examination of Significant Factors

The purpose of this book

First of all, I sincerely hope that neither my words nor my experiences will be interpreted as some kind of revenge, or the result of any bitter feelings, or a witchhunt aimed at Jehovah's Witnesses. However, I must admit to having such feelings when I discovered that I had been deceived for several decades by false and divergent teaching regarding Jesus and His so-called "Second Coming" in 1914. At first, during the period of change from the old to the new way of life, I felt bitterness, aggression and resentment for all those who had both misled me and presented me with a false hope, and these negative feelings must no doubt have been evident in the first interviews and talks I gave after leaving Jehovah's Witnesses.

All that is left now is a burning desire to help Jehovah's Witnesses. When I meet them on the street I greet them and I long to talk with them. But this I cannot do, for the Watchtower Society forbids all Jehovah's Witnesses to talk to former members. They are not even allowed to greet me!

Nevertheless I pray for them all, and I pray that God will open their eyes. The Watchtower Society depicts me as an apostate. Rumors are spread all over Norway that I have been guilty of embezzlement and "wife swapping", in fact that I have led a very debauched sex life. Since no one dares to make these accusations openly, I cannot "prove" that they are false by taking legal action, and although many Jehovah's Witnesses might wish to greet me, they dare not do so because this has been prohibited by the leaders, who have described me as an "evil servant". A Witnesses seen talking to me could risk being disfellowshipped.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that other people are informed about how the Jehovah's Witnesses cult is built up, how the system itself - the Watchtower hierarchy - is formed, and the effect on each individual member of the cult. Not least is this important for psychologists and other medical personnel who may have to treat Jehovah's Witnesses, who are riddled with phobia and misconceptions implanted by the Watchtower Society.

Therefore, it is my hope that this book will help to reveal the way a Witness thinks, and the sort of methods and tactics the Society employs to keep control over the minds of its members.

What is the book about?

This is not a textbook about the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. It seems unnecessary for me to delve deeper into the Watchtower's theology, as there are already a number of good books written which expose their doctrines. While touching on some of the Jehovah's Witnesses' most important dogmas in my book, I have purposely avoided a thorough examination of them, as this would be outside the scope of this effort.

This book is not only written for "believers", but also for all those who would like to know how indoctrination, not to mention "mind control", works in an organization, whether religious or political. In fact it is wrong to use the expression brainwashing, as this implies coercion. What we are talking about here is a subtle method of convincing people to stop thinking for themselves. What I want to concentrate on, and make the reader understand, is the kind of methods used to induce someone to experience a change of personality.

I felt a great need to describe what it is like, and how it feels, to belong to a totalitarian movement, and what negative and often-tragic consequences it can have for the individual.

A thorough appreciation of the psychological factors involved is required, as well as a knowledge of how mind control works, in order to understand how a person can survive in such a system for as many years as I have.

In the same way, in our own times we see that movements such as Jehovah's Witnesses and other modern religious cults pursue those who keep to the teachings of Jesus, and by continuous and deliberate criticism of other churches and congregations "convince" their own members that it is they - and they alone - who are the guardians of the Truth. God reveals His secrets and intentions to the people on this earth through them alone.

When people exalt themselves and choose to interpret the Bible according to their own viewpoint and preference, instead of humbly "dwelling in the revelation of Jesus", the result can only be delusion, false values and oppression of fellow human beings. To start with, being weak and imperfect creatures, we provide a very shaky foundation on which to build. Our own outlook will nearly always be controlled by short-sighted desires and aims.

The Watchtower Society's own opinions have become so paramount that they have begun to trifle with the word of God. In order to make the Bible "agree" with their own doctrines, they ignore the continuity, or mix together texts which have nothing to do with each other. This is particularly grave when absolutely no consideration is given to the period of time in which the words were written, as in many ways this has conclusive significance for the kind of figurative language used by the author. In fact, Jehovah's Witnesses (and others, f.ex. Mormons) have written their own "Bible translation", which they claim to be an exact translation of the original bible text, in order to establish credibility for their point of view. Of course the truth is very different, for in order to gain support for their opinions, the original text has been distorted to fit in with the Watchtower Society's own doctrines. The translation is therefore very biased, and proves how far some cults will go to maintain control over their members. There is not one acknowledged bible translator who supports the Witness's translation. On the contrary, it is severely criticized as being a very poor piece of work.

"An insult to the word of God" wrote the well-known British authority H.H.Rowley.

The leaders of the Watchtower Society have declared themselves to be an "oracle" in order to maintain control over the minds of their members, and they claim to be "God's channel" for

people on earth, and indeed the only channel. The organization's leadership keeps complete control over the behavior of every Witnesses, in order to hold people in its grasp, and it controls their powers of thinking, their emotional life and what information they are to be given about almost everything. An apparatus which follows every step they take keeps them under supervision from the cradle to the grave.

We can avoid making a similar mistake by seeing ourselves as imperfect human beings. We must accept the word and teaching of the Bible, not the doctrines of a man-made organization. Any humanly-inspired doctrine must be verified by the Bible, and we must be of the same disposition as was applauded by Paul in the congregation at Berea.

Not all traditional doctrines have an equally solid Biblical foundation. There is room for disagreement. Many honest and sincere Christians have reached diverging conclusions about such questions of doctrine, but when the matter is of minor importance, one should respect one another's opinions and not be critical. There is no doubt that there are parts of the Bible which are vague, obscure and indistinct, and provide difficulties for the inquiring Christian. Often it is particularly in these vague and difficult areas that Jehovah's Witnesses believe they can provide an exact answer, which impresses many people. Quick, rational answers to problematic questions are a trademark of the cult. In fact this is a common characteristic of all cults, not just Jehovah's Witnesses.

I have made use of my freedom

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we are saved by grace and faith. There are also other important points of Bible doctrine which have become clear to me. In this way we will honour the Father as well. I feel as though I am a member of a universal church, a church which recognises neither geographical boundaries nor barriers between the different congregations. Wherever Jesus is at the centre, and provides the foundation, I feel at home. If anyone thinks he is someone special, or that he alone is the guardian of the truth, I become worried. Jim Jones and Jonestown will always remain in the history of mankind as a terrible warning of what can happen when cults of this kind are allowed to develop unhindered.

I am glad that some years have elapsed from the time of my leaving Jehovah's Witnesses and my completion of this book. Time has dissolved the negative feelings I might have had about Jehovah's Witnesses, and given me a more compassionate attitude. I realize that many of the Watchtower's leaders have been misled, that also they are victims. We must not be guilty of presenting the individual members of the movement as being inhuman, or of regarding them as enemies. It is the movement itself, the creed, which is dangerous.

Therefore, we must be careful not to become inhuman. Remember that many cult leaders have at one time been respected church members. Neither must we forget that none of us are free from cultic tendencies. Regarding true evangelical anxiety for alien movements, we must admit that it is by the grace of God alone that we can have any hope of a cult being transformed or converted, and its members led to the freedom of Christianity. Remember that during the last century both Baptists and Adventists also repeatedly speculated about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, they soon gave up after a few unfulfilled prophecies. My heartfelt hope is that the Watchtower leaders will also admit their mistakes and recognise Jesus Christ as God's channel and intermediary, rejecting their self-composed doctrine that it is they who are "God's channel" here on earth.

Jehovah's Witnesses technique for enrolling new recruits reminds me of a hungry predator.

During the hunt the predator chooses its victim from among the old, weak or sick animals or an animal who has strayed from the main herd. In comparison one can say that Jehovah's

Witnesses find a more ready response, or "hunt out" people who find themselves in one of life's crises, or are experiencing a depression, are feeling lonely etc...

I consider it to be cowardly, malicious and bad moral conduct when cunning religious leaders in the Watchtower Society (and other sects) exploit people who for some reason or another are in a difficult situation and are unable to defend themselves. Instead of giving such unfortunates a helping hand to achieve a better life, they make them slaves to the service of a gigantic and affluent organisation. People such as I have described already have more than enough to cope with. They receive absolutely no material rewards after they are converted to being Watch Tower slaves, only a vague promise of a possible eternal life in "paradise". Provided, of course, that they loyally obey "big brother" in Brooklyn, New York. The Watchtower Society enriches itself financially at the expense of its adherents by requiring them to work for nothing.

Do you think I am agitating to controversy now? Well, yes, I am but regarding the poor souls at the grass roots. When I think about Jehovah's Witnesses and observe them carrying out their difficult task, I often have a lump in my throat. But with regard to corrupt leaders who have in a purposeful and demagogic manner exploited my life for around 40 years I provoke controversy with a clean conscience.

I am definitely of the opinion that a religious community becomes "destructive" when it controls its members' thoughts, behaviour, feelings and the information they receive. It is being destructive when it decides what kind of medical care you may or may not receive, or when it denies a person the liberty to take part in politics, elections, or give contributions to the Red Cross or similar social welfare causes.

Although a number of books and articles have been published about Jehovah's Witnesses' activity in different countries, this is no reason to relax and imagine that enough has been done. New generations grow up and need to be warned about their destructive work. Just because the Watch Tower Society has modified some of its more extreme demands and apparently appears to be more liberal, does not mean that there is any real change, in my opinion. The Watchtower Society still regards our community and all its propositions as being the work of Satan.

The Watchtower Society still proclaims itself to be the only true religion on earth. To renounce this attitude of supremacy and recognise other church communities as Christian, would mean that most Jehovah's Witnesses would throw down the heavy yoke which has been laid upon them and resign from the Society. But of course that would mean the end for the Watchtower Society. So in order to keep its hold on its members the Watch Tower society must desperately hold on to its extremely hard rules and regulations.

In order to impress the "world" and placate discontent within the organisation, the Watchtower Society sometimes opens the door a crack and makes so-called admissions. For example, it is now permissible for members to seek the help of psychiatrists and psychologists. Members are also now allowed to acquire higher education by attending an academy or a university. But if you were to investigate a local congregation and ask how many avail themselves of the new "liberties", you would be surprised over how few actually do so.

Something else which has forced The Watchtower Society to open the door a few inches and permit some "liberties" is the general public's vehement criticism of the Society's cold and merciless policy towards its own members. This has shocked many people. Several world-wide exposures of Jehovah's Witness's policy by former members have also forced the leaders to follow a different policy. But don't be too optimistic, because The Watchtower Society appears to publish two news bulletins, one intern and the other extern. Just as other

destructive sects, The Watchtower Society has *written and unwritten rules* which adherents must adapt themselves to, and outsiders should allow for. One can say to the world: "Look, I'm allowed to do this and that". But because Jehovah's Witnesses still propagate the fatalistic message that the world will soon disappear in Armageddon, and that millions of people will soon be slaughtered by Jehovah, there are few who make use of these new "Liberties". According to the Jehovah's Witnesses reasoning it would be foolish to mix too intimately with a world which is going under anyway.¹

A Dutch saying is that "A fox may lose his coat, but never his cunning trick". The same can be said of The Watchtower Society. In essence nothing is changed and therefore we need to keep on warning people and keeping a good lookout.

But it is not only in The Watchtower Society that regrettable things happen. Confusion often reigns in the Christian world as well so that inquiring souls no longer know where to go to find a sound and healthy community. A considerable number of Christian leaders are guilty of varying forms of tyranny against their fellow Christians. The Christian sociology professor, Ronald Enroth, says in the introduction to his book, **Churches that Abuse**: "*Those who make it hardest to be a Christian in this world are the **other Christians**.*" Christian communities should also remove the splint from their own eyes.

In conclusion I would like to point out that although I criticise the Catholic, Protestant and other churches in the book, I regard the ordinary Christians in these churches as my brothers and sisters in the faith. It is authoritative systems or people I want to warn against. When authoritarian leaders take over, can any congregation become an oppressive congregation within a very short period of time. A human being must never relinquish his right to think independently. On the contrary, if we build our faith on people, we will only be disappointed.

Joseph Wilting

Foreword by Arild Romarheim

Is it possible to imagine what happens inside a person who discovers the hypocrisy within the movement to which he has dedicated half a lifetime? Can we understand how it feels to lose the whole of one's social network? Would someone who had gone through all this know that it would normally be more than a human being could manage to overcome?

No one could avoid taking this book seriously. Joseph Wilting's book makes us wise. It is authentic, genuine and trustworthy, and fully substantiated by citation of both time and place, together with the names of other people involved.

But most important is the warmth with which the author writes, woven together as it is with pain over hurtful memories of being trodden on, sorrow over personal misuse of the power his position gradually gave him, and warm feelings for the many fine individuals within the movement whom he came to love. The book is at one and the same time an exposure of an inhumane system and an expression of devotion for the people who are imprisoned by that system. It becomes evident during the book that the author had to break out because he wanted to be a warm and genuine human being.

One of the first things Joseph Wilting said to me shortly after his break with Jehovah's Witnesses was "We must expose this false organisation, but it must be done in love". The church has been

¹ *Watchtower*, 11/1/92, p. 20-21.)

very much in the wrong in the condescending manner in which it has met Jehovah's Witnesses. Read Wilting's book, and hereafter you will look on these people differently.

Arild Romarheim
Ass. Professor

Chapter 1 My Background and Early Childhood

I was born in 1932 in the town of Heerlen, in the south of Holland, just a few kilometres from the German town of Aachen. My parents were Roman Catholics, as were most of the inhabitants of this region. I myself was the youngest in a family of six children.

Heerlen and the surrounding towns along the German border are in the middle of an industrial area, and over 80.000 people were employed in 12 coalmines. The whole district was permeated by black coal dust, and one could no longer see the colour of the roof tiles in the surrounding towns. They were completely covered by a thick, black layer of dust. High chimneys continually belched forth more dust and soot, and we could actually feel the particles of coal and dust falling down on us. We could feel how "something" suddenly fell into our hair, and because of this we all had to wash our hair very often in Heerlen.

The whole area was scarred by the coal industry and the constantly smoking chimneys. The undulating terrain in the area, if it is possible to describe any part of Holland as undulating, was spoiled by a number of large slag-heaps. Many of these were thirty or more meters high, and could be seen from far away. Others were levelled and built on, or in some other way made use of by the coal company as industrial sites.

It was never quiet here. Day and night the shunting of several hundred-metre-long trains transporting coal from the area to towns and ports in other parts of Holland could be heard. However, most of the noise came from the hoists carrying the full trucks up the mine-shafts, bringing out the coal. Each hoist had eight trucks, and these were divided between four different storeys in the hoist. When the first storey was empty, a worker pulled on a cord. This produced a screeching signal intended for the operator and indicating that the next storey was to be brought up to ground level. A long iron projection pushed the trucks out of the hoist, and the clash of iron against iron made an ear-splitting racket all round the clock.

In fact, I lived only about a kilometre from one of the many coal shafts where these trucks were brought up, and to this day I can still remember all the various deafening noises from the mine. But since I was born into this environment, I did not notice it. The noise had become a part of our existence, a fact of life.

Both my father and my two eldest brothers worked in the mines. Mining was continuous, and three shifts were worked, one week morning shift, one week afternoon shift, and one week night shift. Then the same again, week after week, month after month. This meant that my father or one of my brothers was nearly always on night shift, and of course we others had to take this into account. They needed all the rest they could get, but naturally enough, it was not always easy for us children to be as considerate as we should have been.

We lived in a comfortable, roomy house at that time. The ground floor consisted of a porch, living room, a small bedroom and kitchen. There were three bedrooms on the first floor. In addition there was a large loft, and a cellar where food could be stored. These houses had been rented out to the miners by the state, and this was one of the few advantages the mineworkers had at that time.

Work in the mines was very dangerous, and altogether unhealthy. The rate of accidents was high in spite of strict security measures. The problem of dust caused many workers to contract silicosis, popularly known as "stonecutter-lungs". For these reasons, those working in the mines had a short life span. However - when compared with other mining communities I have seen since - both in Belgium and England, the treatment, standard of housing, working conditions and wages were on a higher level. I well remember an experience I had in 1952, when I was staying in the town of Swansea in South Wales. Here I met the miners in the street, on their way home from work. They had not even washed after coming up from the mines. To me, this seemed unbelievable, and I realized that, in spite of everything, my father and brothers had better working conditions than these men had; even considering that the work was both dangerous and unhealthy in the mines where they worked.

The inhabitants of our district appeared to have been scraped together from all the European nations. In the next house lived the Tokarski family, who had come to Holland after the First World War. A few houses further up the street lived the Valino and Nemeth families, who had come from Italy and Hungary respectively. I well remember the Svaboda family from Tsjeckoslovakia as well, and Anna Winkelmann, the Jewish baker's daughter. She always drove round in her father's car delivering bread to his customers. Sometimes Mother invited Anna and her sister in for coffee, and I particularly remember the last time they visited us. They were both very worried and nearly frantic, weeping over the Germans' attack on Holland, and the fate awaiting them. They were not even aware of the gruesome fate, to which the Jews of Europe were to be exposed, but they went underground, and fortunately they were among those who survived the war. After the war I learned that the Marchal family, on the other side of the street, had hidden several Jews under their living-room floor right through the war.

South-Limburg contains a wealth of historical gems, including famous palaces, castles, forts, manors and estates. Family crests of powerful lords from feudal times crown the portals. In fact, the area is known as "the land of a thousand gates", and every little farm has its own special style of gate. It is these gates which give us the best indication of local standing among the many villages and hamlets, because these are the dominant features in the architecture.

Geologically, South-Limburg is different from the rest of Holland, as well. In addition to coal, there are other minerals not found in other parts of the country. Many houses, churches and other buildings are built of marl in addition to ordinary red brick. Quarrying this marl clay has left many underground grottoes, particularly in the towns of Valkenburg and Maastricht, which have now become important tourist attractions.

South-Limburg also differs in both its language and culture from the rest of Holland to the north. Heerlen, my home town, was a Roman garrison town as far back as the time of Jesus. Particularly those of us living along the German border spoke a dialect which included a lot of German, and much resembled what we called "Kölnisch" - a German dialect from the Rhine district near Cologne. The Dutch from the rest of Holland could hear at once that we came from Limburg, as we spoke with a German accent, and without the well-known Dutch "chh" guttural sound. Because of the strong Roman influence, and the conglomeration of immigrants from different Middle and East European countries, including the Balkans, the inhabitants of South-Limburg do not consider themselves to be Dutch. Therefore we talked of "the Dutch" when referring to people outside our own province. Furthermore, the people here are considered to be naturally very open. Being so outspoken, they often reveal what others keep to themselves.

My parents background and religion

My family attended mass every Sunday at the Catholic Church. Father was a faithful churchgoer, always setting a good example, but without pressing us too much if we did not want to accompany him to church. On the other hand, I cannot remember that my mother ever came to church. As a child I thought this was strange, and I remember once asking her directly why she

did not come to church with the rest of us. She replied that she was ill, and had spoken to the pastor about it. He had told her that God did not consider it necessary for her to go to church when she felt ill. Later in life she confessed to me on several occasions that she found it difficult to believe in God.

Mother had grown up under very difficult circumstances. As the eldest daughter, with many brothers and sisters, she had to work hard. Her father drank a lot, and this cast a depressing shadow over family life. When only twelve years old Mother was working as a maid for a middle-class family. By the time she was sixteen she was working at a hotel from six a.m. until six p.m. At only eighteen she got married. In many ways it seemed that the marriage was an escape from hard reality, a seeking after a security that she lacked. But the security did not last, for her husband died of tuberculosis after only three years. However, during these three years she had managed to have two children, a son and a daughter, and she lived alone with them until she married my father some years later. They had four children, of whom I am the youngest.

My father came from a somewhat similar background. The parents kept a little farm. There were six children here as well, and the happiness of the family was disrupted and ruined by a drunken father. My father had a particularly terrible experience at the age of ten. His father, my grandfather, had been to the pub again, and, drunk as he was, set out to drive the horse and cart home again as usual. The horse found his own way home, but Grandfather was sitting on the cart dead, when they arrived. He was only forty years old.

Father began working at one of the many brickyards along the banks of the Rhine at the age of about 12 or 13, after very little schooling. This was hard, tiring work and especially heavy for a child not yet full-grown. At the age of eighteen, he began to work in the coal-mines, first in Belgium and later in the province of Limburg in Holland, where he later met Mother.

When I heard Mother and Father talking about their childhood, their stories were usually bleak and depressing. Two of Father's sisters spent their whole lives in a Catholic convent, whilst two others were badly afflicted by epilepsy. In these difficult times, with little to manage on, and without any form of support from social services, perhaps it is not so surprising that there were many who found comfort in alcohol. This only led to more tragedy, and did nothing to solve the existing problems.

My parents' difficult childhood, and the grave social and economic situation in Holland in the period between the wars, left their mark. Both Mother and Father retained a very bad, negative impression of the society in which they grew up. When two such insecure people, with such a background, set out to bring up a family of children, it is difficult to avoid this influencing the children. In spite of kindness, warmth and love, it was obviously difficult to pass on any feeling of security or a set of values, which they had not themselves experienced. The fact that background and environment have a great influence on an individual's subsequent decisions in life, is a well-known phenomenon in modern educational science.

But I do not wish to make any accusations. It was not easy for Mother and Father to bring up a family of children when they had never known the security of a good home themselves. Father was unassertive and reticent, and he never took time to talk with me or read to me. Nor can I remember ever sitting on his lap. He brooded over his own thoughts all the time, and perhaps had little of himself left to give. Even when I was still a child I saw that he stooped, presumably due to harmfully heavy physical labour from the age of twelve onwards. When he was really angry with me because of some boyish prank, he hit me unrestrainedly and without a pause. My mother often had to come between us in order to stop him. However, I was not angry with Father, in spite of the beatings. Maybe even then I understood somehow that he acted in desperation.

Mother, poor soul, did as well as she could. She was a very good cook, which no doubt she had learned in her youth when she worked in a hotel. She was also a very beautiful woman, and

Father could not tolerate anyone making any attempt to flirt with her. This happened occasionally when we visited a restaurant, and several times ended in a fight. Then my otherwise so unobtrusive father turned into an aggressive monster, and had to be held down by 3 or 4 men.

Sometimes Father's friends came visiting with their wives. This meant a party in the living-room, with plenty of liquor. Parties could last well into the night, and sometimes go on until dawn. I remember one amusing episode when I sat eating breakfast in the kitchen and our neighbour, Mrs Tokarski stormed in, obviously in a very bad humour. There had been a party lasting all night, and my father and several others had played the accordion. My parents were fond of a drink, and always enjoyed having friends in for a good time together. There was usually a very festive atmosphere at these parties. Many of my parents' friends sang in a choir, and they declaimed, bawled and sang, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The music and singing had carried on until morning light as usual, and the Tokarskis' house was only four metres away. Insulation at that time was not what it is today, so it was quite easy to hear all that went on.

"Frau Wilting, we have not slept a wink all night!"

My mother replied dryly: "Neither have we, Frau Tokarski."

Naturally enough, the angry neighbour was not very pleased with this reply, but could do nothing but go home again. This was the pleasant aspect, but of course these parties had their negative sides. All the noise, drunken chatter and endless discussions between Mother and Father have left me with some sad memories. But in spite of these all-night parties, Father never shirked his work at the coalmine.

I often played truant from school. Not because I was not concerned about doing well at school, but because the circumstances around me at that time were so turbulent. I believe it was the situation at home which was the cause of my complete loss concentration and any feeling of enjoyment at school. The school's headmaster, «de Jong», frightened the wits out of me. Although a feeling of dread caused a lump in my throat every time I went to school, I really did want to do my best. But it was not every day that I managed to make it to school.

In spite of the virtue, kindness and love inherent in each of my parents, it was difficult for them to pass on something they had not received themselves. From as far back as I can remember, a negative outlook on the society around me was implanted in me. The attitude was: "It's no use, church and society are corrupt, just give up, you are worth nothing, and your very existence is governed by the powers that be". I believe that my background and environment had a great influence on my future attitude to politics, religion and society in general, and also on the choices I made later on in adult life.

The war comes

When I was four years old the family moved to Brunssum, a town even closer to the German border. When I looked out of my bedroom window on the first floor I could see right over to Germany.

The Germans marched over the border and took Holland completely by surprise in May 1940. I was then eight years old and very aware of everything that happened. Amongst a welter of disturbing events, I remember sitting beside the road leading to the border while tens of thousands of soldiers and masses of military equipment streamed into the country. It seemed as though the convoys would never end.

Everything that happened both on the ground and in the air made a tremendous impression on me. Every topic of conversation both at home and on the street was infused with feelings of anxiety, confusion and desperation. The Dutch were not prepared for a surprise attack from big brother in the East, and after only five days of decidedly weak resistance, Holland was forced to surrender. But many lives were lost in these few days. The Germans had given the Dutch

generals the ultimatum that if they did not surrender, Rotterdam would be bombed. Even so, after the army had accepted the conditions of surrender, the Germans sent a large number of aeroplanes and bombed the city of Rotterdam. The whole of the centre of the city was flattened by the fire storm caused by the lethal German bombers, and many innocent people lost their lives. This cowardly, ruthless and completely unnecessary act of war destroyed all sympathy for the German nation and its military power. Most people conceived a very strong aversion for the Germans, and thus an emerging opposition movement got off to a good start.

One of our neighbours wept because her husband was in the army, and I noticed how frightened many of our other neighbouring Europeans were, too. Many of them had fought against the Germans in the First World War, and were not at all happy to see history repeating itself. Our next door neighbour, Tokarski, still walked with a stoop due to a bullet in his back, and the Kramer family was numb with anxiety because Kramer himself had fought against the Fascists in Franco-Spain in 1937.

But not everyone was unhappy. The Schneller family and other German families in the neighbourhood hung out the swastika flag, thus creating a very tense atmosphere in our street. I remember that there were several occasions on which Mother just could not conceal her antipathy towards the Nazis. One day, as a result of this, Mother received a letter from a German lady in our street with a strict warning to watch her tongue, or else she would find herself on the way to one of the concentration camps in Germany.

Even my earliest memories from childhood include a relationship with God. I longed for a God who could create peace on earth and chase the Germans out of Holland. All too early, the meaning of life became an important issue for me.

Although Mother and Father were Catholics, I heard little about God at home, but this was to be changed by yet another tragedy. As Mother became seriously ill in 1942, I had to go into a convent, which was a children's home as well. My older brothers and sisters had also been sent to children's home several times, and Father had arranged this through the Catholic church.

I stayed at the children's home for a year, and at first I felt safe and happy, although I missed my mother, for the nuns were very kind and there was no lack of loving care. The war actually seemed quite remote, but this happiness did not last very long. One night we were subjected to a bomb attack on an industrial area only a few kilometres from the convent. Thundering bombers emptied their load, and whining bombs spread death and destruction wherever they hit the ground.

I came home again in 1943. Mother was better, and felt strong enough to look after us children. But not a day passed without a reminder of the war. The fortunes of war were now reversed, and our part of the world was no longer one of the allies' strategic targets. But Germany was not far away, and was subject to air attacks every night. We saw hundreds of American bombers, both early in the morning and late in the evening, on their way to German targets, where they dropped their deadly cargoes, wounding and killing soldiers, women and children in a storm of fire and steel. German fighter planes often attacked the allies' tight formations, and anti-aircraft cannon and flak batteries opened up every time the noise of approaching aircraft was heard. If this happened after dark thousands of light grenades were sent up, and huge searchlights sent their bright fingers over the sky, seeking out the planes. These released thousands of strips of silver paper to upset the German radar systems and fire control centres, which registered "echo" everywhere, and had difficulty in closing in on their targets.

Even so, a four-engined bomber was hit sometimes, and crashed whining to the ground in the neighbourhood where it spread death and destruction. This was a heavily populated district. As I have mentioned, about 80.000 people worked in the mines, and when a flying fortress, as these American bombers were called, crashed down with a full load of bombs, the result is not difficult

to imagine. Air battles could take place right over our heads, and German or British fighters could suddenly come tearing over the housetops with flaming machine guns spitting out fire. It was terrifying to see how the searchlights gradually pinpointed an aircraft, while the pilot lurched and swerved desperately to escape the deadly fire. Often the whole aircraft disappeared in one blinding explosion. At other times, small flames could be seen licking the wings or fuselage and the aircraft would fall towards the ground in a crazy dance, followed by a tail of smoke and sparks. We children often went out to see the wrecked aircraft. The bodies of pilots slashed in half did not make a pretty sight.

My home was some miles west of the so-called Sigfried-line, behind the river Rhine. Roughly six miles to the south lay the Ardennes in Belgium, where the allies fought a terrible tank battle. Attacks were frequent, and towards the end the air raid sirens sounded so often that we did not bother to run for the shelters.

My schooling with headmaster “de Jong”

My family still went to church, listened to the sermons, and assiduously took part in the rituals of the church. Even so, God was never a real presence for me. I found the ceremonies beautiful, but my strongest impressions of church life and doctrine did not come from here.

Learning the catechism of the Catholic Church by heart was an important part of the school curriculum right from the early years at the elementary school. We were taught that the Catholic Church was mankind's only way to salvation.

Schooling became more and more erratic towards the end of the war, with the fighting stifling all activity. The allies were approaching, the Germans assembled their defences, and the bombing became steadily more intense. The headmaster of the school, Headmaster “de Jong”, was also my form master. He was strict, ambitious and a disciplinarian. He hardly ever smiled, and I was often frightened when he walked between the rows of desks to inspect our work. His ruler could suddenly swish down like lightning from a clear sky on the boys' bare necks, or we could be hauled up to the blackboard and questioned about lessons we had never been taught. Learning at school was immaterial to me in the midst of war's insanity, and German soldiers were always doing something outside the school. Fear gradually caused me to lose my powers of concentration on school subjects, and in the end I just sat staring apathetically out of the classroom window.

One day “de Jong” sneaked down the rows. The class was quiet. I noticed nothing as I just sat staring out of the window as usual. German vehicles drove by in long convoys, and uniformed soldiers were buzzing around like bees round a beehive. The war front was coming back again, for the first time since the Germans occupied us in 1940. There had been rumours that American paratroopers had landed outside the town, but they had always been false. Even so, it looked as though the Germans were worried today, for I could not remember ever having seen so many German soldiers and vehicles outside our school before.

Suddenly headmaster “de Jong” was there.

"Wilting, stand up!" he bawled, and gripped me by the neck. I had no time to stand up, for the master had already lifted me up by my jacket collar, and I hung in the air with my toes just touching the floor.

"Wilting, you scoundrel. Aren't you paying attention? Go up to my desk, at once".

“de Jong” followed right behind me and I nearly stumbled. That would have been a scandal, and the whole class would have broken into a delighted roar of laughter until the master had silenced them, whilst I would have felt the master's anger on my fingertips. But I managed to keep my feet.

"Please don't hit me, master", I thought, but I dared not say anything, and all hope was quickly lost.

"Put out your hands, young Wilting!"

I knew what was coming. With arms outstretched and palms up, I waited for the ruler. It was 60 centimetres long, one and a half centimetres thick and had a steel strip along the edge. There it was! I could not manage to keep still, and it was a sheer reflex to pull back my hands.

The master missed completely and shouted in rage.

"Stand still, Wilting! Haven't your parents taught you obedience? I'll have to thrash it into you myself, then!"

The master struck me. I doubled up as the white-hot pain burned like fire. The palms are one of the most sensitive parts of the body and lend themselves well to torture.

"Stand up straight, you scoundrel!"

The master struck again. And again. And again. He did not stop until he had vented all his anger on me.

"Go back to your desk!"

"De Jong" had finished with me. I returned to my desk, my hands useless for the rest of the day. The pain hammered and drummed in time with my pulse, and I was oblivious to the rest of "de Jong's" teaching that day. I had more than enough with my own problems, and dreamed of a world without both Germans and headmasters.

I could not understand why I should be punished so severely. All I wanted, deep down, was to be a clever and conscientious pupil, and I could not see that I had done anything to justify such treatment. Since then I have realised that headmaster "de Jong" had little appreciation of what went on in the mind of a scared little boy, but it took a long time before I was able to separate the headmaster "de Jong" from the Catholic "de Jong"; and then it was too late.

Disappointed in my church

The headmaster was a zealous Catholic. In order to initiate illiterate child minds into the many blessings of the pope's church, one of his notions was to insist on the class visiting the Catholic morning mass at eight o'clock every day over a lengthy period of time. At this time school did not begin before nine o'clock. After prayers he took the roll call and noted the names of those who had not been present during mass.

Mother was often unwell at this time, and considering the chaotic circumstances under which we were living, it was not easy to be present at every mass. So after a while I had accumulated quite a number of "absences". "de Jong" found this very irritating, and one day the cup was full.

"Wilting, you are a Pharisee. You call yourself a Catholic, but you don't go to mass!" he snarled. I knew who Pharisees were from the catechism. They were false, dishonest men, who swindled people for money and were hypocritical about their faith. I felt very hurt, because deep down inside me I felt an enormous yearning for God.

The headmaster decided that the time had come for more punishment when, a few days after this eruption, I arrived at school at nine o'clock without having been to mass first. Soon after the class had settled down there was a knock on the door and in walked a police inspector. I had seen him before. The man in police uniform was one of "de Jong's" close friends, and a zealous Catholic. But even worse was the fact that the police cooperated with the Nazis who ruled Holland, as everybody knew, and for this reason I was very frightened of them.

"Wilting, come here!"

Once more headmaster "de Jong" called me to the front of the class. This did not promise well.

"Young Master Wilting. I have tried to teach you the fear of God and respect for the Catholic Church. Again and again I have given you another chance."

He drew a deep breath and glanced triumphantly out over the class. He seemed almost pleased, and the policeman had obviously had an effect on others besides me. He gave himself plenty of time before turning to me again.

"It has obviously not helped. The only language a scoundrel like you understands is punishment, and more and more of it. You are to go with the inspector to the station, and in order to give you time to think about your sins, you are to remain in the cell for a whole day. Go!"

With a lump in my throat I followed the inspector to the police station, and was thrown into a cell. It was very cramped in there, and the air was damp and cold. Apart from a wooden bunk along one of the walls the stone floor was the only place on which to sit. High up on one of the walls was an opening with a little air hole. There were just a few bars placed there as protection against the world outside.

I heard the bolt bang into place behind me, and there I was. Quite alone. Like a convicted criminal.

I wept. Why? Mother was ill, and I had to help at home. I was unable to go to mass. So why should I be punished in this way? What had I done to deserve this? I did so want to learn, and I had a great longing for God, but surely it could not be God's own people who treated me like this.

I became angry. Bitterness towards church, police and school grew strong, but I felt so powerless against the master and the others. Perhaps if I complained they would never let me out again. I had heard of many Dutch citizens who had died of hunger and torture in police and German dungeons. Maybe they would send me to the Gestapo. Oh no, then I would never come home again!

My class included several children of high officials in the mining company. I had not failed to notice that children from these so-called well-to-do homes were treated differently from the rest of us both at school and in church. Discrimination practised by the teachers could not be concealed. Although it was seldom expressed in so many words, it was continually evident both in their manner and actions.

Some of these upper-class children often shirked mass in the mornings. Even so, the master never made any comment about it. During lessons with other teachers we working-class children were often told off for not doing our homework, but the upper-class children were praised because they had at least tried to do the work, even if the answers were wrong.

That the world could be so unfair!

The police let me out at four o'clock in the afternoon, but I was not allowed to go home alone. A constable had been told to accompany me the two kilometres home in order to tell my parents what I had done wrong. He pushed a bicycle and I had to walk beside him. This proved to be the worst part of the whole punishment.

"Hey, Joseph, have the police caught you?"

"Joseph is a criminal!"

We walked along streets where nearly everyone knew me. The children were out of school and the men had already come home from the morning shift in the coalmines. I felt so humiliated, would this degradation never come to an end?

At last we reached home. The policeman waved me in, and I sneaked through the door with bowed head. Now it would all come out. But the policeman just got on his bicycle and pedalled away back to the station. I was saved from having to say anything to Mother and Father and did not tell them the whole story until later on. Of course my parents already knew what had happened, as did everybody else. There was not a soul in the whole town who did not know that Joseph Wilting had been in prison.

My parents did not make any complaint. No doubt they understood how unjustly I had been treated, but they dared not say anything. There was never any point in standing up to the

authorities, and under German occupation it could be perilous to complain about anything. One never knew who might make a report to the Germans.

Did I become a better pupil and churchgoer after this treatment? Just the opposite! Whether the punishment was illegal, or that my parents had not been informed, made no difference. The headmaster and the police inspector could do what they liked. My parents had no authority, and both the headmaster and the police inspector had the Catholic Church to back them up as well. One did not question the clergy or the authorities, apart from when people talked amongst themselves.

The end of the war is near

Supplies of food had been relatively good up until the end of 1942. But as the illegal opposition grew, and the Germans began to lose the war, the occupation authorities became more cruel, hard and ruthless. Several hundred thousand Jews were deported to extermination camps in Germany, and only about 6.000 Dutch Jews survived. Germany now confiscated most of the food supplies, and I well remember often suffering badly from pangs of hunger at this time. I repeated my prayer for peace more and more often.

By 1944 the situation was very precarious on all fronts, and the atmosphere was very tense. After the Germans lost the battle of Normandy in June 1944, our situation became chaotic. At that time something happened which made such a permanent impression on me that to this day I get a lump in my throat when I remember the sight. The German army was retreating and disintegrating. Many of the soldiers had thrown away their weapons, and ammunition lay scattered all over the place. I myself had got hold of a German Mauser rifle and played shooting at targets with it. Looking back on it now I realise it was completely "wild west".

I was sitting beside the same road to the border as in May 1940, when a group of German soldiers came by, escaping towards home. Many of them were really quite old, several over 60. They had divested themselves of all their weapons, and I could see by their uniforms that they were all privates. They realised that the war was lost, and as far as they were concerned it was all over. They wore long green overcoats which nearly reached the ground. Their faces expressed the most terrible anxiety, despair and hopelessness. They were dragging themselves along laboriously, as they had already walked for many days, probably without much rest, sleep or food. Almost certainly the only thought in their heads was the desire to reach home as quickly as possible. It seemed so incomprehensible, so pointless, that these elderly men had offered so much - and gained so little. Was war really worth this?

There was a viaduct, or sort of bridge, only 500 metres from our house. When the German troops retreated they set out mines over the whole of the valley under this bridge, as they expected the American troops to advance this way. But there were still several German units coming along behind, and one night a large convoy came thundering past our house. Soon after we heard a series of explosions, and men screaming. I shall never forget those screams as long as I live. The desperate wailing and crying carried on all night, but no one dared to go out while it was still dark.

The morning after, we boys ran out to see what had happened, and the sight was not of a kind intended for the eyes of children. Men and equipment lay scattered near the centre of the explosion, as though a crazy giant had gone berserk. There were bodies everywhere. Some still resembled people, others were burnt to an unrecognisable heap. Some lay with arms and legs torn off, but it was the bodies on the barbed wire that made the strongest impact on me. There was a high barbed wire fence along the bottom of the valley, of the kind with the top bent over to prevent people climbing over, and the violence of the explosion had thrown soldiers right up onto the fence. I remember one that hung there, completely burnt up, with head down, and just a few

tattered rags of uniform left. No child should be exposed to anything like this. Impressions like these leave a deep scar, and a child cannot forget the sort of horrors I experienced that day.

The Americans arrive

The American army invaded the district in the middle of September 1944, and the liberation of the south of Holland was a reality. But it took all of eight months to liberate the rest of our little land, where the Germans remained "dug in" in underground bunkers and trenches.

It was several months before the allies attacked the strongly fortified Sigfried-line along the Rhine, and I remember that at one time we had several American soldiers quartered at home. We gave up our beds to these soldiers as a gesture of thanks, while we lay around on the floor. During these months before the big offensive we got to know them quite well. I shall never forget a Mexican American soldier, Candido Chavez. The Germans had eliminated nearly all the soldiers in his own troop, and he had now been allocated to a new division. He just sat in the corner of the living room, completely apathetic. He sat for hours just staring in front of him. The terrible, inhuman experiences had made him blunted, listless, and without any initiative. He always gave me an answer when I spoke to him, but it was just "yes" or "no" followed by a warm smile. Presumably he was content and fairly happy when he was allowed to be with a family. Neither could we hide the delight and enthusiasm we felt for our liberators, and no doubt this had a positive and encouraging effect on the soldiers. In later years I have realised how depressed many of these soldiers must have felt under the chaotic and war-like conditions prevalent at the time.

The order to attack came suddenly one night. Thousands of infantrymen were loaded up onto huge G.M.C. lorries and large amphibean vehicles, with between 20 and 30 soldiers in each vehicle. It was night, and I heard some of the soldiers weeping aloud. While I stood in the street, twelve years old, and watched the soldiers leave to fight the enemy, I cried. I made a solemn promise to God that I would never, in the whole of my life, take part in any military conflict.

I start to lose my Faith in the Church

Early the next day there were already thousands of dead back again, piled onto trailers. My elder brother, Willy, who was then sixteen years old, helped to bury them. There are tens of thousands of allied soldiers buried in Brunssum, Margraten and other places in the area, as well as in our town.

These bitter experiences affected the development of my religious feelings for the great Catholic and Protestant churches. My encounters with the real, harsh world had stripped me of my illusions and faith in the church as the church of God. Deep inside me I had distanced myself from the Catholic Church and other large church communities. The fact that many of my American liberators were Catholic, as were many of the German soldiers as well, caused me to blame them for the war. I considered that the churches could have hindered their members from taking part in the conflict, but in fact they had done nothing so positive, quite the contrary!

Later on my doubts and assumptions were proved correct. I had come to realise that there was a great deal of corruption, and that the imperious Catholic hold over people was evident and indeed very noticeable in all parts of society. My impression was that being a zealous Catholic earned one certain social privileges.

For example, my brother-in-law received no advancement at work before he converted to Catholicism. If things went badly or one encountered opposition at work, it could be sorted out with the help of the Catholic priest. The church had enormous power, and in reality it was the church that pulled most of the strings and governed society, I reasoned. Most ordinary churchgoers also held this opinion.

Although it was abhorrent to me to see how the church, through its religious leaders, misused its position, it was impossible to do anything about this tremendous seat of power. However, the church had not yet become a real problem for me while I was still a child, although it would be wrong to say that what I felt for it was anything like respect.

War held the country in its grip. Wages were stopped, and there was little food in the shops. Rationing cards were rarely sufficient to obtain enough food for hungry children.

Out in the countryside to beg

Our family was poor as regards worldly goods. My clothes were worn out and I went barefoot all summer to save my shoes. I was ashamed of this, and felt that I was of no value whatsoever. At times food was short as well, both for us and for nearly everybody else. That others were just as badly off was no great help, and there was a period in 1944 when there was no food at all for working class families. Mother was desperate, and in the end she had to send me out begging for food from farm to farm. I loathed the position we were in, and I hated having to beg. I detested being humiliated in the eyes of the middle-class children. I felt that I had been humbled enough already. But an empty stomach provides eloquent persuasion, and soon removes any feelings of pride. In the end I had no choice but to set out from town, headed for the country to beg for food.

Although the thought of begging was repulsive, my hunger was so unbearable that I endured the degradation of going from one farm to another. Many of the farmers could give me nothing, saying that they had no food. They had not been able to produce more than the amount demanded by the Germans and the authorities, and were left with nothing for themselves. There were one or two places where I was given a crust of bread, but I had to eat it up straight away, to prevent me trying to sell it on the black market.

My faith in the church becomes even weaker

Something that happened in connection with some of my teenage friends caused me to lose what little confidence I had left in the church. The war was to blame for a great deal, including the fact that "Wild West" was not a description of child's play, but a terrible reality. As children, we got into the habit of stealing food, first from the Germans and later from the allies. I had taken part in several burglaries, with the exception of the last one where my friends were caught. They confessed to everything, including the fact that I had been involved in earlier raids. They were sentenced without delay and sent to prison, whilst I was acquitted because Father was a Catholic, and because he put great emphasis on the one burglary in which I had not taken part. However, considering I was just as guilty as my friends were, I felt that the whole system was rotten and unjust, and could not help being disappointed in the church.

I do not wish to imply that I was not happy to have escaped punishment, but I saw only too clearly the injustice being practised. While my three friends would be locked up until they were 21 years old, that is, a prison sentence of 5-6 years, I myself had been let off. Of course I was very relieved.

Something else that shook me happened when I was sixteen years old. The parents of some of my friends were either communists or socialists, and I helped a friend distributing the communist newspaper, "Freedom", since his father was a zealous communist. A policeman stopped us, and demanded to know my name, which he wrote down in his notebook. When I applied to enter a nautical college a year later, my parents received a visit from this same policeman. I was registered as a "communist". My parents had to convince him that on just one occasion, due to youthful arrogance and foolishness, I had helped a friend to finish his round quickly, and that I had absolutely no political interests in any direction whatsoever.

If the authorities had persisted in their "assumptions" regarding my "political views", my application would have been turned down. However, it was now accepted. This really shocked me, and once again I realised how powerless the individual was matched against the great Catholic hierarchy. For although my friend had no political interests either, for him the stamp was irrevocable. Neither he nor his parents were Catholic, and as a consequence of this stigma he was denied employment in the mines. The Catholic hierarchy's intention was to rule the whole of one's life, and it obviously had the means to do just that. I lost just about all my faith in the church, and suddenly felt that I belonged nowhere. At the same time I was at the mercy of the church.

As I have mentioned earlier, we were very poor. My clothes were worn and my shoes were in bad shape. I was ashamed of this poverty, and felt myself to be inferior. The fact that others were very little better off, provided little comfort. It did nothing to help our situation. I remember that my mother tried in every way possible to procure the essentials. I have mentioned that my father was of the calm and steady type, and one day, after she had just been to fetch new ration cards, my mother said to Father that it was time to go and fetch these at the municipal offices. Father went off, and of course was told by the official that his family had already been given their new cards. I have no idea what happened at the office, but when Father came home again, with a red face and mouth set grimly, he brought new ration cards with him. He would have been furious if he had realised that Mother had fooled him, and therefore he was not told about it until the war was over.

Although we went to church, heard the sermons, and took part in the rituals of the Catholic Church, it had no effect on our daily life. I could not understand a word of what was said, as the services were in Latin. However, I felt a sort of peace as long as I was in church, but as soon as we came out again we were ordinary, worldly human beings. Even at that time I felt the lack of a living faith, a hope, something to live for. My father was a believer, but my mother did not go to church. I felt lonely and lost. Life seemed so hopeless under the rule of such a tremendous power. It was useless to fight against it.

I cannot remember that we ever talked about God or discussed what had been said at the Sunday mass. We were not encouraged by the church to read God's word, in fact, at that time it was still forbidden for Catholics to read the Bible. We had never even seen a Bible in our home. The nuns at the convent had been kind to me, but the priest and the choir-master at church hurt me deeply when I was not allowed to become a member of the choir. I had plucked up courage to ask if I could join this choir, as I derived great pleasure from listening to choral singing. I thought that perhaps life would be easier if I could join in the singing myself, but this was not for me. Altogether the church did nothing but disappoint me, time after time.

The routine was familiar. We went to ten o'clock mass, as this was when the large choir sang. However far away God seemed in everyday life, I felt, or thought I felt, His presence during the glorious Gregorian chants. At the same time I always felt so hurt, because I had such a burning desire to be allowed to sing in the choir.

The insanity of war had created a fear of governments in me. The involvement of the great churches in these conflicts had weakened my belief that the church was an institution guided by God. At an age when I should have been enjoying a carefree existence, I had already begun to brood over things that happened around me in a troubled world. Why did God allow so many atrocities? Why did He not interfere to stop the fighting?

The last grains of faith in the church disappear

Another contribution to my negative opinion of the church was what I gathered from the way people referred to priests and the church itself. If one wished to achieve a goal of some sort,

and if one was a regular churchgoer and "in" with the priest, one could count on help from the church. Anyone who wanted to, and who was honest with himself, could discover all the corruption, double standards, hypocrisy and misuse of power. As I have mentioned, my brother-in-law was only given his longed-for promotion in the mine after he had gone over from the Protestant to the Catholic faith. The church's autocratic position of power frightened me.

I lived in a community where nearly all the different European races were represented, due to the coalmines and the traditional, liberal attitude, which had been held by the Dutch for centuries. For this reason we were kept well informed of what was happening in the rest of Europe, although most of us were only ordinary labourers. In particular, the church's attitude to war, and the combatants' interplay with the Vatican, was heatedly discussed. One of my neighbours, who had fought against the Franco régime in Spain, came home completely disillusioned. General Franco attacked the lawfully established republic, and overthrew it with the help of the Vatican's loyal sons - Hitler and Mussolini. The Italian Catholic Church spoke warmly of Mussolini's Fascist government, and regarded the Ethiopian war as a triumph for the cross of Christ, thus clearing the way for the liberation of slaves. As soon as Catholic Hitler came to power in 1933, the hierarchy entered into a concordat with the Nazi régime. The Catholic bishops and cardinals arrived bearing declarations of loyalty to Hitler, and thanked him for the victorious advance of the German troops.²

When I visited a large Jehovah's Witnesses convention in Nürnberg in 1955, a Jehovah's Witnesses from Oslo and I stayed with a German widow. Her husband had been one of the first to fall in the attack on Poland, and she was still quite convinced that her husband had given his life for a "holy" cause, that is, to liberate the Poles from oppression and slavery. This was what German propaganda and the church had taught her. All Hitler's soldiers carried "*Got mit uns*" on their belt buckles, and they all had the blessing of the Pope and the bishops. Of course, all the soldiers on the opposing side had the same, - the blessing of God, proclaimed by another bishop. Later on I was informed that not all the laymen and high-ranking priests and officials of the Catholic and Protestant churches were in agreement with Hitler. Many of them made themselves heard and in consequence were removed from their positions and persecuted. Several were thrown into German concentration camps and lost their lives.

Experiences later on strengthened my negative opinion of the Christian churches. In 1949 the army chaplain, Kjell-Petter Dahl wrote the following in a pamphlet called "Christianity and war":

"[...]but the best Christian must be the best soldier, that is, the most conscientious. [...] He must learn ways and means that are at variance with his finest feelings (for ex. the term so well-known from the commandos, "silent killing"), but he must go through with it. He must be absolutely consequent in his attitude. [...] If, during a war, a Christian takes life out of hate and the desire to kill, then he sins. But a Christian can overcome hate and the desire to kill even in the hardest conflicts. He can kill "objectively"."

As a result of everything I saw with my own eyes during the war, in addition to all that I heard and read later, the decision I made at the age of twelve, never to take part in a military conflict, was strengthened even more.

My experiences during and after the Second World War influenced my outlook concerning mankind in a very unfortunate direction.

Chapter 2 My First Encounter with Jehovah's Witnesses

² *New York Times Feb. 27th 1940; Philadelphia Record Aug. 28th 1940.*

It was on a beautiful summer day just after the war that I watched a little group of people who were knocking on the doors in our street. It came to our turn and my mother opened the door. I listened with interest to what went on. They talked of a kingdom that would come, and said that earth would become a paradise. They were not given much of a welcome, quite the contrary. I both heard and saw that my own mother made fun of them while others were listening. This encouraged some children, who began to insult them, and even throw stones after them. A lump came into my throat when I saw how badly they were being treated. At the same time I was ashamed of my mother for dealing with the Jehovah's Witnesses in such a derisive, scornful fashion.

There were two things I noticed particularly. I was very impressed that they had both the courage and enthusiasm needed to knock on all the doors, and secondly, it seemed to me that they must have been ready to endure derision and scorn, since they did not answer back.

Both these impressions were important factors in the chain of decisions, which later led to my becoming a Jehovah's Witnesses. In the years to follow I could not rid my thoughts of this experience. On the contrary I became more and more absorbed in speculating about these people, who were so different from all those I was accustomed to in my Catholic home town. In many ways these people reminded me of my own situation at school; they were persecuted, but they managed to endure it with their heads held high.

Then things started to happen. One day a new family moved into our street, and rumour had it that the husband held a high office within the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. This may have been due to the fact that the man's name actually was Bishop, but that was his name - not his title. The sisters Margje and Zanna and their elder brother, Thomas, from the neighbouring street, became Jehovah's Witnesses. I knew the sisters particularly well, as they were the same age as me. One of my old classmates, Tony Grunsven, also became a Jehovah's Witnesses. People began to talk, and after a while, criticism of Jehovah's Witnesses replaced the everlasting, and eventually boring, discussions about the Catholic priests.

Who were these people?

This I could not understand. I knew the priests and Catholics, and could appreciate the criticism levelled at them. But I knew these people who had now become Jehovah's Witnesses as ordinary upright human beings, and I could see no reason for all this slander surrounding them.

My family and I. the photograph is taken outside our house at Brunssum. My father and mother are sitting in the middle at the front, I am standing in the back row on the left of the picture.

When Jehovah's Witnesses arranged a convention in the nearby town of Venlo, a crowd led by Catholic priests tried to obstruct the event. Before this rally, Jehovah's Witnesses went round from door to door asking people if they could put up one or more Witnesses during the convention. This was one of the many tactics employed to come into contact with people, and thus gain a foothold for their mission.

The Catholic Church admonished people from the pulpit. "*Don't let Jehovah's Witnesses into your home,*" was the warning. But this type of caution, together with the demonstration at the convention, had the completely opposite effect. Most people knew what the church stood for, and had a critical attitude towards it. The newspapers took the matter up and people became curious. The Jehovah's Witnesses had hired one of the halls in the town for their meeting, and they had a written contract to that effect. But the owner of the hall had to break this contract due to pressure from the local priest.

As they were now unable to hire a hall, The Jehovah's Witnesses managed in the end to hire a big marquee. The local Catholic priests had collected together a large gang of hooligans, and during

the opening speech at this convention, they shouted and screamed and generally created a great deal of disturbance. The idea was to make it impossible to hear what the speaker was saying. The speaker, Herr Reintjes, who was also legal adviser to the Watchtower Society in Holland, announced over the loudspeakers that this was an offence according to Dutch law, and demanded that the police arrest the Catholic priests who were responsible for this criminal action. After this the priests were actually arrested and convicted for the offence. The demonstration dispersed after the priests had been taken away. Every mob must have a leader, and when the leader is removed the mob disintegrates.

In addition, a rumour began to go round implying that Jehovah's Witnesses wandered around at nights dressed in white sheets, asking people if they were prepared to die. Of course this story was quite untrue, and had been put out by Catholics who wished to give them a bad name. Those responsible for the rumour were in fact arrested and convicted. Naturally, all these events did nothing to encourage me to think of the church as "the church of God".

The result of all this was that fellow feeling for Jehovah's Witnesses increased, instead of diminishing, which was just the opposite of the Catholic church's intentions. After this, I too began to sympathise with the Witnesses.

"Everyone" persecutes Jehovah's Witnesses

My brother-in-law had become foreman of the explosives gang in the coalmines and he told me that during the occupation in 1942 the Gestapo had taken the trouble to go down into the mine to arrest one of his gang, Hennes Piper, who was a Jehovah's Witness. He was immediately sent to a concentration camp in Germany, as he was of German origin. However, it must be mentioned that he would have been sent there even if he had not been a German, as all Jehovah's Witnesses were being interned at that time. One did not necessarily have to be a Jehovah's Witness, it was enough if the Germans found a *Watchtower* or an *Awake!* in one's home.

About a dozen people in the neighbourhood were arrested and sent to German concentration camps just like Hennes Piper, because they had connections with, or were members of, the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. Those who survived and returned were usually incapable of working. I was told that this was due to the hardships in the camps, and that they had been Jehovah's Witnesses before they were arrested. As I mentioned, it was enough to possess a copy of *Watchtower* or *The Golden Age* (now called: *Awake!*), this being sufficient grounds for arrest. At first I could not understand what possible reason there was for arresting these people, but it gradually became clear to me. The Germans regarded the Witnesses as a threat, since they consistently refused to take part in the war. Not only did they refuse to join the armed forces, but also to take part in civilian service. This was because they considered it to be nothing more than a substitute for military service, and therefore taking part would be a violation of their Christian integrity. As this standpoint meant that Hitler could not employ Jehovah's Witnesses in his munitions factories, he initiated a vigorous persecution of both them and those in sympathy with them.

The real reason for the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses during the war was not primarily the fact that they would not join the armed forces. They were also forbidden by the Watchtower Society to approve civilian service, thus the authorities could not make use of them in any way. Naturally enough, this made these same authorities furious, and the Watchtower Society's policy resulted in thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses being killed in the concentration camps - quite unnecessarily. I did not know this at the time, but have later realized that this is the fact of the matter.

Later on I discovered that Jehovah's Witnesses leaders had driven thousands of people to death quite unnecessarily, due to their adamant demands that, for example,

members should refuse to accept blood transfusions and organ transplantation. In this way unscrupulous leaders have, succeeded in creating martyrs. In order to gain mere power, money and influence, hundreds of lawsuits are purposely instigated, often about quite insignificant matters. In order to attract attention it was considered necessary to create a hostile climate by provoking an indictment, at the same time giving the impression of being persecuted. It was, and is, The Watchtower Society's deliberate policy to incur everyone's hatred. Jehovah's Witnesses' many ridiculous prohibitions, such as celebrating birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and national holidays, appear to have been deliberately imposed. In this way the witnesses give the impression of being martyrs because of their faith. The habit of knocking on people's doors at the most unexpected times, such as early on Sunday morning, or just at dinnertime, appears to me to be another deliberately chosen method of keeping "hatred" alive.³

Jehovah's Witnesses' support of Hitler

It is a well-known fact today that Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted in Hitler's Germany. On the other hand *it is not generally known that the Watchtower Society tried to appease Hitler at first. That they even supported his attack on the Jews!* This is a fact that the Watchtower Society's perjurers of history have "forgotten" for some reason or another. Therefore, in order to jog the memory, I will include a short summary of what actually happened.

In 1929 President Rutherford wrote a book called "Life", which was pro-Jewish. However, he very quickly changed his attitude to the Jews, because he published a new book in 1932 called "*Vindication II*". The following is a citation from this book:

"The Jews were evicted from Palestine and "their house left unto them desolate" because they rejected Christ Jesus, the beloved and anointed King of Jehovah. To this day the Jews have not repented of this wrongful act committed by their forefathers. Many of them have been returned to the land of Palestine [...] because of selfish and for sentimental reasons. [...] The Jews have received more attention [...] than they have really deserved."⁴

In 1933 Rutherford and Knorr travelled to Berlin, where a "konvent" (convention) was hastily arranged. 7.000 German Jehovah's Witnesses were present, and a resolution was passed. In this document the Watchtower Society give a certain amount of support to the attitude to the Jews held by Hitler's National-Socialist government, and it includes statements which are quite definitely anti-Jewish. 2,1 million copies of this resolution were spread all over Germany after the convention, and it was sent to all the government offices.⁵ Today, the Watchtower Society claims that this resolution made a clear stand against Hitler and his administration,⁶ but this is incorrect, to put it mildly. The whole document was an attempt to appease Der Führer and his party, the idea being to get Hitler to allow the Witnesses to operate freely, as the church was able to do.

In spite of the Watchtower Society's claim that opposition to Hitler's Nazi party was made quite clear, the "*Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*" for 1974 writes that many of the Berlin convention participants were disappointed in the "Declaration", and that they wanted a much stronger denunciation of the Nazis. The truth is, whether Jehovah's Witnesses "remember" it or not, the Watchtower Society had always been very pro-German. The yearbook also quotes a letter the Society sent to Hitler, where it says, among others things, that the leaders of the Watchtower

³ William J. Schnell, *30 Years Watch Tower Slave*, chap. 12.

⁴ *Vindication II*, 1932, pp. 157-158. See also *Apocalypse Delayed*, p. 146

⁵ *Yearbook 1974*, pp. 110-111. (Translated from the Norwegian edition) *Yearbook 1934*, p. 134.

⁶ *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, p. 130.

Society had been given long prison sentences in the USA because they refused to allow two magazines to be used in an anti-German propaganda campaign!

In addition to a lot of other things that could be said about this statement it is also an obvious lie. It is true that the leaders were imprisoned, but the reason was not the one mentioned above.

The trial of the Watchtower leaders began on June 3rd, 1918 and they faced very extensive charges. Among other things they were charged with "in an unlawful and criminal fashion knowingly to have attempted to cause disobedience and disloyalty, and to have encouraged people to refuse participation in the USA's naval and military forces." A number of publications were named as providing proof of this accusation, including volume 7 of "*Studies in the Scriptures*", "*The Watchtower*" and others. Of course, it did not make matters easier for the Watchtower leaders that the presiding judge strongly opposed "religious pacifism", but this fact was unknown to the defence. Naturally, judgement in the case reflected the judge's attitude to the question, and in his summing up Judge Howe said the following, among other things:

"The religious propaganda spread by these people is more damaging than a whole division of German soldiers [1.200 men]. Not only have they expressed doubts about the law courts and the army's intelligence service, but they have also accused all members of the clergy in every church community. The sentence should be very severe".⁷

Indeed it was, for on July 22nd 1918 they were all sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.⁸

Let us take a closer look at this "Declaration" which was sent to Hitler, among others:

"It is falsely charged by our enemies that we have received financial support for our work from the Jews. Nothing is farther from the truth. [...] The greatest and most oppressive empire on earth is the Anglo-American empire. By that is meant the British Empire, of which the United States of America forms a part. It has been the commercial Jews of the British-American empire that have built up and carried on Big Business as a means of exploiting and oppressing the peoples of many nations. [...] This fact is so manifest in America that there is a proverb concerning the city of New York which says: "The Jews own it, the Irish Catholics rule it, and the Americans pay the bills."⁹

As if the above was not compromising enough, the Watchtower Society continues:

"The present government of Germany has declared against Big Business oppressors and is in opposition to the wrongful religious influence in the political affairs of the nation. Such is exactly our position. [...] Instead of being against the principles advocated by the government of Germany, we stand squarely for such principles, and point out that Jehovah God through Christ Jesus will bring about the full realization of these principles."¹⁰

However, Hitler obviously did not believe the Brooklyn prophets, perhaps due to the following statement in the book, "*Government*", published in 1931 (Danish edition). Rutherford writes on page 298:

"[...] The government of the United States (the most perfect government on this earth)"

⁷ *Faith on the March*, p. 99.

⁸ *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, 1959. chap.12.

⁹ *Yearbook 1934*, p. 134.

¹⁰ *Yearbook 1934*, pp. 135-136, 138-9.

It was only when Hitler initiated persecution of the Witnesses that the Watchtower Society began to make condemnatory statements about Hitler.

All this is included in order to present a correct version of the historical facts.

Chapter 3 The indoctrinating begins

I will not become a soldier

As I had made up my mind not to be a soldier, I felt that it was becoming urgent for me to make a stand. How was I going to tell the authorities that I would not join the army? What could I say? I would have to explain my attitude to war and my views about society, both seriously and truthfully, and I knew that I would be called up for military service in 1948 or 1949.

During the years following the Second World War, I had given so much thought to the pacifist standpoint I had taken, that I was ready to accept almost anything in order to avoid military service.

I kept on meeting more Jehovah's Witnesses. It was difficult to avoid them, as they were always going from door to door and stopping people in the streets to present their pamphlets. I went to sea in 1949, and sailed on Norwegian ships some of the time. I met Jehovah's Witnesses in different parts of the world, all zealously occupied in doing the same sort of work as I had seen at home in Holland. I once spent the night in a small hotel in USA, and I found copies of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* on the bedside table. I saw members of the movement in New York as well, just as absorbed in offering people their literature. These experiences convinced me that Jehovah's Witnesses had a strong international organisation, and my respect for them increased.

I had received my army calling up papers as soon as I was 18 years old, but as I was at sea I had not yet appeared before the draft board. But now I could not put this off any longer, and I had to go back to Holland to sort out the matter.

As soon as I was at home in Holland again after a short stay in Norway, I started looking for Jehovah's Witnesses. Where would I find them? The Bishop family, whom I knew to be Jehovah's Witnesses, and had previously lived in our street, were now living in another part of the town, but I managed to get hold of their new address.

As I have mentioned, I had already read several books and pamphlets before making contact with the Bishops. In addition to the Watchtower books I had also done a lot of Bible reading in the last three years, and this had given me a feeling of great joy and confidence. In spite of spending a lot of time in reading and studying the Bible and biblical literature, I still retained my fear of religion as an institution. All the larger churches had been a great disappointment to me, and I could not forget their role during the war. I was still on the outlook for the "true" congregation, and I believed the Bishop family could help me in my search.

One Monday morning I knocked on their door. Mr Bishop opened the door and let me in, and I saw at once that he had some other visitors who were familiar to me. Margje van Ling and her husband, Henk, were there. I already knew both Margje and the Bishops, since they had previously been neighbours in our street.

Although they were very surprised to see me, they made me very welcome. Margje was a sweet and charming person, and her pale blue eyes lit up when she saw me. We had not met since I left for Norway. Henk was also a fine person, but unfortunately he suffered from bad health.

It did not occur to me that these people could be Jehovah's Witnesses, at least not in the same way as the ones people talked about at home in our street. They were neither importunate nor did they approve of fanatics. Altogether they were very friendly and pleasant. For my part, there was so much new and interesting to talk and ask questions about that time flew by, and I soon had to leave for home again.

Henk and Margje told me that they had a book they studied at home every Tuesday, and they invited me to join them. I was intending to travel back to Norway soon after, but promised to come while I was still at home.

My first "Bible study"

The next day, Tuesday, I knocked on their door a few minutes after eight o'clock in the evening. I had spent the whole day wondering how this meeting would work out, and I felt very uncertain about it. But both Henk and Margje were so pleased that I had actually come, that I realised my fears almost certainly lacked foundation.

The van Lings had four children, all girls. Their living room could not have been more than 25 square metres, and it was sparsely furnished. Since Henk's health was bad, they were not very well off. They had drawn a dining table into the middle of the room and extra chairs had been placed round it. I realised that I was not to be the only guest that evening, and soon more people began to arrive and take their places round the table.

One of the things I noticed particularly was that they all carried a little brief case. In the end a group of ten had gathered, including two children of about ten years old. The last to come was a young man in a suit and tie, who could not have been much more than twenty.

He sat down in the most strategic place, at the head of the table, so I realised that he would be leading the study group. I was a little disappointed over this, as in my opinion Henk was both older, more mature and in addition a person with a gift for understanding other people's feelings. Later on I found out that the leader of the study group, or study conductor, as Jehovah's Witnesses say, had a better reputation among the Witnesses, because he was a more zealous door-to-door evangelist than Henk.

They all opened their brief cases and pulled out a red book, a Bible and a songbook. These were placed on the table in front of them. I noticed that there were more books and pamphlets in the brief cases. Henk told me later that all Jehovah's Witnesses owned a similar brief case, which they took with them when studying the Watchtower or other literature, or when they were out working from door to door.

They started to sing a tune completely foreign to me, without any instrumental accompaniment. Both the words and rhythm reminded me of the German battle songs I had often heard during the war, but I had never heard this one before. After the song the study conductor began praying to Jehovah, thanking him that he was permitted to be one of his warriors, and that he belonged to Jehovah's theocratic organisation.

Before he opened his book, he asked a couple of questions about the subjects studied the week before. Then he found a chapter in the book and gave us a short summary of that evening's subject before asking another question. Hands were raised, just as I was used to from school. The study conductor pointed at one and said: "*Brother...*" or "*Sister...*", and it was obvious that this was the form of address used among Jehovah's Witnesses.

One by one all those present answered questions concerning paragraphs in the book. Some formed the answers in their own words, while others read straight from the book. I noticed

that most of them had underlined the phrases containing answers to the questions in red or blue pencil.

One of the children sat beside me. Sometimes the mother put her finger on a paragraph in the child's book and whispered something in his ear. The child put up his hand and gave a brief answer, sometimes not more than a couple of words. At last the study conductor was obviously satisfied with the answers, and he asked one of the "brothers" to read the whole passage aloud. He then carried on to the next section, or paragraph.

The method reminded me very much of school, but when I saw the expressions on the faces of those present I realised that they took this much more seriously than an ordinary school lesson. Later on I understood that the leaders of the Watchtower Society were able to achieve several psychological objectives by using this method. For even before one came to the study group meeting, one had to read every passage several times in order to underline the right answers. Then all the material was thoroughly discussed at the "book study", until finally, when the study conductor was satisfied that all aspects of "the truth" had been covered, the passage was read aloud once more.

During this session we were continually reminded to be conscientious in our preparation (for the study group), for we would then be able to answer concisely and correctly (both at the group and outside from door to door), thus making the most effective use of our precious time. Time was important, since "the end was near".

One had a bad conscience if one was not sufficiently prepared. As I had had relatively little schooling and no knowledge of studying methodology, I swallowed all these admonitions whole. The study conductor kept strictly to the subject matter of the book and allowed no conversation about anything else. After an hour the meeting was brought to an end with another song and a short prayer.

Armageddon is depicted for me for the first time

Now that the book study was over, I noticed the study conductor standing talking to two girls who had taken part in the group. He was eagerly engrossed in a printed sheet of paper called *Informant*. From the conversation I gathered that the girls were being assigned tasks to be performed at another meeting later on in the week.

Margje turned to me and asked discreetly:

"Joseph, will you stay a little longer?"

"Yes, of course," I replied, picturing coffee and a piece of cake together with a pleasant conversation between friends.

Henk and Margje served the coffee, but the conversation developed into something rather different from an ordinary everyday tête-à-tête. I soon began to feel quite significant, to feel that Joseph Wilting was really important, and I gained the impression that this was something big.

"Joseph," Margje began, "you must be wondering why we have these meetings at home, instead of meeting in Kingdom Hall¹¹ on Sundays."

"Well, yes," I answered uncertainly. Truth to tell, I had not thought about it, but Margje's question was put in such a way that I began to wonder what was behind it.

"You see, we have meetings on Sundays as well, but these meetings are even more important. During the war many of us were arrested and killed by the Germans because we revered the

¹¹ *Kingdom Hall is the name given by Jehovah's Witnesses to the building where they hold their meetings.*

name of Jehovah. The congregation nearly broke down, and the organisation was almost completely obliterated in Europe during the war years. We had to do something about this."

Henk continued: "The world will be Witnesses to a war in the near future. The terrible battle of Armageddon will destroy all those who deny the name of Jehovah, and we may have to go into hiding again.

"Oh?" I did not understand what he meant.

"Private meetings are very important in case the congregation has to go "underground". If this should happen it is better to meet in small groups where meeting places can be changed quickly, sometimes one place, sometimes another."

"Persecution" makes the message more exciting

"Yes, but surely there is no more danger now?" I wanted to know.

"We never know when the enemy may strike again. For all we know, the church and authorities may be observing us at this moment."

This sounded like the first page of a cheap spy novel. Hysteria caused by the cold war, which was a reality after only two years of peace, coupled with fear of another war, was spreading into many parts of Europe. The atomic bomb was another peril, and everyone knew that Stalin presented the greatest threat to peace. But here were Henk and Margje warning me of danger from our own people! I really could not understand what they were talking about, but I was too shy to ask.

"I'm sure you noticed that the members of the study circle arrived one by one, Joseph, or that they came in small groups at intervals of a few minutes."

Margje had touched on something, for this I had noticed. But what was so special about people not arriving all together? When we had guests at home they never all arrived at the same time.

"Letting folk arrive at different times looks less suspicious to the "enemy". We put out food and drink, as well, although we don't usually eat at the study groups. In this way, it would appear to be just a pleasant gathering of friends if we were suddenly attacked by the "enemy"."¹²

This business about the food had already caused a reaction, because I had been looking forward to enjoying what was put out. I am quite willing to admit that I was disappointed when none of the others showed any sign of helping themselves, and as I was a guest, I felt it would be impolite of me to do so.

Henk and Margje went on explaining, without my being much the wiser. They gradually broached other topics. I was presented with one "truth" more incredible than another, but, looking back, I must admit to believing everything they said. I had seen with my own eyes how malicious both Catholics and Protestants could be, and war memories were particularly vivid.

During the weeks that followed I had many conversations with Margje, Henk, the study conductor, and other members of the congregation. There were several similar groups studying in private homes in the congregation, and each group was called a "Service Centre". The leader of each service centre (the study conductor) was responsible for his little group. One of the tasks given him by the congregation was to supervise the training programme,

¹² Steven Hassan describes this methodology in his book *Combating Cult Mind Control*, and emphasizes the need of an outside enemy in order to keep the group together. Since everyone in the group has a common adversary, a feeling of solidarity is strengthened and in this way the leaders succeed in undermining confidence in anyone not included in the group.

which involved making sure that a new Witnesses was assisted by a Witnesses with more experience "in the truth", during the work of "preaching".¹³ Every month the study conductor was required to report to the "ministerial servant" (the superintendent), who demanded a continual up-to-date progress report. He also collected weekly fieldwork reports¹⁴ from each one in the group, and these were submitted to the "vice-ministerial servant". After having carefully gone through every report form, the latter gave the study conductor feedback regarding those who needed "help" with their field service. Those requiring "help" were of course those reporting the least number of hours on door to door work.

At regular intervals, either the ministerial servant, vice-ministerial servant or the book study leader was required to visit the service centre to give personal advice to the study conductor. After three or four visits a little address was given to the study circle at the conclusion of a course of study. This address was often a summary of methods by which each of the Witnesses could prepare for his work, based on the reports submitted by each member, and of course, the reports made by the study conductor concerning each Witnesses.

The conditions of service are presented

The study conductor was also required to pay a visit to the home of every member of the book study group. The purpose of this was to give personal advice to each individual on the best way to plan his service for Jehovah, or in other words, give more time each week to selling *Watchtower* and *Awake!*

I remember that after the third or fourth visit, the vice-ministerial servant came to tell us exactly how many hours of service each person attached to the service centre had achieved on average. He showed us a large map as well, on which was marked the number of hours the congregation had put in on evangelical work in the different districts, how many Bible studies congregation members had led in the homes of interested people, and how many books and magazines had been sold each month throughout the year.

"*This chart is the congregation's barometer,*" he said. "*It shows how much love each congregation as a whole has for Jehovah.*"

Later on I found out how these "service charts" were exploited. Every month the "results" were sent to the Watchtower Society's Headquarters, and two or three times a year the congregation was visited by one of the Society's travelling "overseers". On the basis of these reports they knew exactly where to wield the whip. In addition, this practice reveals another phenomenon of Jehovah's Witnesses, and most other destructive cults. Salvation and eternal life are linked together with work for the cult, not with the mercy of God. Many of the congregation's members became very discouraged by all the criticism they were exposed to from these "pastors". They did their best, but it was never enough. They must always "work harder for salvation". *Mercy is a word foreign to Witnesses*, and today I doubt very much whether any of them know what the word means!

It was not long before I saw this chart again. The first time I took part in a meeting at Kingdom Hall, I had noticed a chart placed where it could easily be seen at the front of the hall. At the time I did not understand what all the red figures meant. But now this chart was a

¹³ *Jehovah's Witnesses never ask each other how long they have been members, but how long they have been living "in the truth".*

¹⁴ *This system was originally introduced by the Watchtower Society's president Rutherford and required each Jehovah's Witnesses to fill out a report form every week. The number of hours spent each week on door-to-door work and the number of copies of Watchtower and Awake! sold had to be noted. The type of books and pamphlets distributed had to be specified so that the Watchtower Society always had a complete picture of both the overall situation and the achievement of each member.*

reminder that we could always make a greater effort for Jehovah, and I was always furtively glancing up at the chart to see how the "service" was going.

The reader will realise that I was now heading full speed towards Jehovah's Witnesses, and I was entrusted with more and more of the community's "truths". I was also invited to attend the Thursday meetings, which were divided into two: the theocratic ministry school and the service meeting.¹⁵

If I wanted to, I could continue to take part in the book study on Tuesdays, but I must arrive a little before seven o'clock in the evening because they usually went round from door to door in the neighbourhood for an hour before beginning the study group. I was given the book currently being studied, entitled *This Means Everlasting Life*. Being on holiday I had plenty of time, so I read the book straight away.

"The Truth" is introduced

The contents of the book were based on a text from John 17:3. According to Jehovah's Witnesses' own translation of the Bible, *The New World Translation*, Jesus said:

«This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one you sent forth, Jesus Christ.»

The book gradually taught me which "truths" I was to believe in. The following is a summary of some of the most important doctrines in the book:

- * To "*know*" *Jehovah* led to eternal life in a paradise on Earth (not faith in Jesus, and accepting Him as Saviour, as the Bible teaches).
- * That Jesus' own knowledge of the only true God signified eternal life for him, as well.
- * Jesus was identical with the Archangel Michael, and he was God's very first creation.
- * *God's Kingdom was established in 1914.*
- * *Satan was thrown out of heaven in 1914.*
- * *The new covenant is not a personal covenant between God and those who believe in Him, but a covenant between God and a theocratic organisation, represented by the chosen 144,000 who will go to heaven.*
- * The "great multitude" or the "other sheep" *will live for all eternity here on earth*, and they are not included in the new covenant.
- * God has a theocratic organisation on earth so that everything shall be done in a seemly and orderly fashion. Jehovah God is the highest authority, and he has given Jesus a position of superiority. Jesus comes next after Jehovah in the hierarchy.
- * All "servants"(15) in the theocratic organisation are chosen by Jehovah and Jesus in the holy spirit*, and therefore these servants have the right to demand

¹⁵*The Service Meeting and the Theocratic Ministry School are both intended to teach members of the congregation to be better at selling Jehovah's Witnesses' books and pamphlets, and at propagating the message. Instruction follows the same principles as any other course in marketing and is run on similar lines all over the world. This is necessary in order to create a feeling of "unity" which again is of vital importance in order to maintain effective mind and thought control.*

obedience.

- * *"The last days" began in 1914*, and during the lifetime of the generation who were alive then (and were 15 or over that year) Armageddon, the battle of the great day of God Almighty, would come and destroy all who were not Jehovah's Witnesses.
- * Children must be trained to do door-to-door work from an early age. A child is never too young to be instructed. The parents are responsible for training, and they will be killed in the battle of Armageddon if they should neglect this duty. This applies to the children as well.
- * The enemies of God will be crushed to powder, and PERHAPS those who truly believe in Jehovah will be saved at Armageddon.
- * How can we survive the battle of Armageddon?
 1. By studying the Bible with the help of reliable biblical aids.
 2. By going to meetings.
 3. By sharing all one's acquired knowledge about Jehovah with others, which is done with the help of door-to-door work.
- (* Jehovah's Witnesses always use small letters for the holy spirit)

The New World's Planning Committee

Whilst I am on the subject of freedom, I imagine most people will automatically assume that Jehovah's Witnesses will have a certain amount of freedom in the New World, in God's Kingdom. However they are wrong, because this is definitely not part of the Watchtower Society's plans for the next life. I learned at courses for presiding overseers - both in Porsgrunn and Amsterdam - that no Witnesses would be able to decide for himself where we wished to settle down on the new earth, in God's Kingdom of perfect happiness. No, we elders would be "princes of the earth", as described in the Bible, and we would decide such matters - get everything organised. As early as 1928, in his book *Government*, President Rutherford makes this "fact" very clear. In chapter 9, p.262 in the Danish edition, 1931, (from which this translation is taken) he writes:

"These faithful men or princes will be the visible representatives of God's reign on earth. They will be the supreme leaders of the people..."

However it is pointed out that Jehovah's Witnesses would be able to *enjoy the radio for all eternity*, since it *"belongs to the Lord"* (pg.306). It is apparent that many in the "new world" will not know "the truth", and *therefore the Lord will make use of the radio to reach them all* (pg.306). People will not need to struggle under heavy tax burdens in God's Kingdom. Instead Jehovah's Witnesses can look forward to *"paying reasonable taxes"* (pg.307). Looked at from today's situation, they will also be pleased that there *will be no unemployment*, but that *"everyone will be required to do useful work"* (pg.309). *However, the Watchtower Society will have to get rid of its shares, as speculating will be forbidden* (pg.309). *All weeds will be rooted out* by the citizens of the super-state, the Lord will teach them this (pg.310). In addition it is reassuring to know that *"correct sanitary arrangements will be made"*, and that *"doctors and other quacks" will no longer be able to exploit the sick* (pg.311).

I could have included more "good news", as I am sure all this is new to the reader. Just think how fortunate we shall be to pay reasonable taxes forever, so that the Jehovah's Witnesses leaders can use it for the benefit of everyone! What fantastically good news!

From Door to Door

Next time I arrived at the book study just before 7 o'clock. Five others had also arrived, and we were now going to make use of the time before book study to work on door-to-door evangelising in the neighbourhood.

The study conductor said a short prayer, and after this I was given a "district" in which to work. The work was organised in such a way that each "publisher" was given his own district, or street, and he or she then had to visit each household in that district. I was both tense and anxious, but I steeled myself to the task, and thought: "*Press on Joseph, this concerns the truth about Jehovah's Kingdom!*"

It was very difficult for me to start going from door to door. True enough I had spoken to people about the Bible before, but then I had been speaking to people I knew, about things I had read and which had inspired me. This was a rather different situation. When I knocked on the doors of complete strangers I would be representing Jehovah's Witnesses, and I would be selling their books and pamphlets. Evangelistic work consisted of telling everyone about the Watchtower organisation's teaching concerning God's Kingdom, and I had never done that before.

As things were now, I really believed the message I preached, and that helped in the beginning.

During the following weeks I spent every Tuesday on "field service", as Jehovah's Witnesses call these door-to-door visits. However, not many weeks went by before I discovered that I no longer felt the same joy about this work as I had at the beginning. I was both surprised and disappointed about this, and took it up with Hennes Piper, who was the ministerial servant in our congregation. The reason I contacted him in particular was that I admired him because he had spent several years in a German concentration camp as a consequence of his convictions.

Monthly service report for					
					(Month)
Name					
					(Date)
_____	Books	Brochure	Time in	New Watchtower and	Return
visit					

Monday
 Tuesday
 Wednesday
 Thursday
 Friday
 Saturday
 Sunday

Total

An example of one of the Jehovah's Witnesses' "service reports". A report like this must be completed and submitted to the vice ministerial servant every month. This practice is in continuance to this day.

I told him of the joy I had felt when I told others about discoveries I made when I had been studying the Bible on my own, and that I felt I now lacked the same impetus which had driven me to talk to others about what I had read. Of course he had an answer to this, but I could not manage to feel completely reassured by what he said. I found his answer a little too impersonal to be advice applicable to inter-human relationships.

"Joseph, Gods spirit and active power has led you to his organisation. As you were alone, without contact with his visible organisation, he gave you a special strength and led you to it. This same joy will return if you study the literature thoroughly, and join God's people at all the meetings."

Even at this stage the prescription for waning enthusiasm was more work. This turned out to be the panacea for every problem in the years to come.

The importance of the Watchtower Society is made clear

I visited Hennes several times during my short stay in Holland. He had a wife and five children, but his wife and the grown-up children hardly said a word all the time I was there. On the other hand, Hennes was very talkative. I almost had to interrupt him in order to say anything at all. The man was very much wrapped up in himself and his own achievements, and I soon began to understand why some people had had more than enough of him. He was very assertive and terribly stubborn. On the other hand he was known to be a very knowledgeable and widely-read man who had the answers to most questions concerning the Bible, and I learned a great deal about the Bible and the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines from Hennes.

According to Hennes Piper Jehovah did not work through individuals but through "the faithful and wise servant"¹⁶. The Society's views were always being repeated in *The Watchtower*, and right from the time of Russell the Society had considered their literature to

¹⁶ *Jehovah's Witnesses believe that "the faithful and wise servant", described by Jesus, who would give "food at the right time", is represented by "the governing body" at the headquarters of the Watchtower Society in Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A. Any statement made by them is regarded as coming from God himself, and anyone refusing to accept it as God's word will be expelled from the organization. It follows that "the governing body" has a unique position since "God acts through them", and they are the only ones who can understand and interpret the Bible. Every dogma coming from "the governing body" is accepted, regardless of the Bible's viewpoint on the matter.*

be more important for the individual than the Bible itself. I include the following quotation from *The Watchtower* to illustrate this:

"Furthermore, not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the SCRIPTURE STUDIES aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them, after he has read them for ten years - if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the SCRIPTURE STUDIES with their references, and had not read a page of the Bible, as such, he would be in the light at the end of the two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures."¹⁷

Piper explained to me what part "*The Faithful and Discreet Slave*" in Brooklyn played for all the people on earth who wished to learn "the truth". He told me that this "faithful and wise servant", acted as "*God's Channel of Communication*" on earth. It was now absolutely necessary for me to remain near to "*God's organisation*", and this was much more important than reading and meditating over the Bible on my own.

Piper made it very clear to me that I should leave all the work of research and interpretation to the leaders in Brooklyn, who were the instruments employed by God for this purpose. They had the God-given responsibility to administer the word of God and give "spiritual food" at the appropriate time to all of us who belonged to the great multitude of those who would have everlasting life on earth. He told me that many of the Organisation's prophecies had already been fulfilled. Among other things he said that Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, had warned the world about the First World War forty years previous to its outbreak.

He advised me to absorb the Watchtower literature, acquire as much knowledge as possible, and become a zealous preacher for the kingdom of Jehovah. In this way I would find peace and joy again. I accepted his explanations and advice, since I could think of no reasonable arguments against them.

Indeed I did find a sort of pleasure in reading and studying the Jehovah's Witnesses' literature, as Piper had said, but it could not compare with the joy I had experienced earlier when reading the Bible. The pleasure I now felt I regard as being similar to that of a student when he realises that he is learning more and more while reading and studying secular literature that interests him.

I started to study Jehovah's Witnesses literature intensely. I had soon learnt what I was to believe and what could not be accepted concerning questions of faith.

Once again this shows the use of applied psychology to exercise mind control over the community's members. The control of information is a very important, if not the most essential, element in this process. By reading exclusively about only one side of the matter, whilst at the same time being kept busy serving the Society, I had no opportunity to receive "harmful" information. Or put in another way - information that could expose the Watchtower Society. A few bells may be starting to ring for those of my readers who have read George Orwell's *1984*.

I was longing to return to Norway at this time, and my intention all along had been to do so. However, I could not return before I had clarified my position regarding military service with the authorities, and in fact they contacted me straight away.

I had been registered at the border when I returned to Holland and after a few weeks I was summoned to report to a military camp. I spent three days here going through the usual

¹⁷ *The Watch Tower* 9/15/1910, p. 4685

physical and mental tests. However, I made it quite clear on the first day that I was a conscientious objector.

I was discharged after three days. During the time in the military camp I talked exclusively about the Bible and my feelings of frustration over the military system. I really do not know what actually determined the issue, but the fact remains that I was discharged.

Chapter 4 I Meet My Wife and Her Family

I came into contact with the Van Brug family directly after I was discharged from the army. Actually I intended to visit my old friend Paul van Komen, as we had been at sea together. He had remained in Stavanger when I travelled to Holland, as he needed treatment at the hospital there. But now he was back in Holland, and I wanted to see him before I left. In fact, I was hoping he would return to Norway with me. I travelled to Groningen in the North of Holland, where Paul lived. My companion on the journey was a Jehovah's Witness from Limburg, Hendrik Meex, who had been a pioneer for the Watchtower Society for several years. During that time he had stayed with the van Brug family, among others, and it was only natural to visit them since we were in the neighbourhood, so to speak. Groningen and Friesland are quite close to each other, so we set out for the van Brug's after we left Paul.

At that time, Jellie, who was later to become my wife, was 15 years old. As it is quite a long time ago, I cannot remember very much about what actually happened then. Most people have been in love in their youth and can remember how it "confuses" the mind. What I remember concerns Jellie for the most part, while other things have been forgotten. I was the Van Brug family's guest for a whole week, and during that time I got to know the household's youngest daughter very well. We spent most of the week doing different things together, including going for bicycle rides, and playing handball or whatever else took our fancy.

The truth is that I had already fallen in love with her during this first week spent with the family, but of course I realised that nothing more could come of it at that time because Jellie was too young. I well remember telling her jokingly that she must do her best to grow up as quickly as possible, so that I could come back and fetch her. But I do not mind admitting that there was a serious undertone to the remark.

Although I was so much enjoying Jellie's company, I did not neglect my work for the Watchtower Society. I made sure that I completed my required quota of Witnessing and I attended the congregational meetings and study groups. This was a very happy time for me, and I gained renewed strength and courage to carry on. My spirits and enthusiasm were now at their peak.

My wife's family

Both my parents-in-law belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, and my father-in-law served as deacon and elder in the local church. As an elder he was on call as assistant pastor, and he often took over the pastor's duties when he was absent for some reason or another. A chapter from the Bible was read every day when the family gathered round the dinner table, and a prayer was said before and after each meal.

The family led a sober, puritanical life. Religious practice had its influence on private life as well, and such things as knitting and cycling, for example, were not allowed on Sundays. The girls in the family were not allowed to wear trousers and were supposed to wear their hair in plaits. Members of the Reformed Church had large families, and Jellie's parents had 10 children, five boys and five girls, of whom Jellie was the youngest but one. My mother-in-law was 46 years old when her youngest child was born, and she was very relieved when nature put a stop to this productivity. However, Jan was a very conscientious person, and it was a

matter of honour to him to look after his family as befitted a Christian. Although he was strict, he was also very fair.

Both my parents-in-law had a Southern European look about them. Whilst the inhabitants of Friesland province were mostly tall with fair hair, they were both short and dark. Mother-in-law, whose maiden name was Boukje, was descended from the French Huguenots, and still retained the Latin name of Canrinus. She was a very gentle woman, and very good to her children.

Large areas of Friesland consist of land retrieved from the sea. There are many large dykes here, and about half the total acreage lies below sea level. These areas are very fertile, and cattle farming is the main occupation. At that time most farms had about eighty dairy cows.

Father-in-law, whose first name was Jan, was born in 1896, and had attended school until he was 19 years old. According to the standards of the time, this was quite a good education. He had intended to become a teacher, but broke off his studies, ostensibly because his parents could no longer afford to pay for his education. The truth was that the local farmers contributed a subscription each year towards the following year's school expenses. However, he had to collect these subscriptions himself, and he found this humiliating task more and more difficult each year. In the end he gave it all up, and started to work in a dairy laboratory instead.

Mother-in-law came from a middle-class background, and both her parents were believing Christians. When she was only two years old her father died of tuberculosis at the early age of 36. Tuberculosis had taken a heavy toll from the rest of the family as well, since four children had already died of the disease. As there was no form for social security at that time, my mother-in-law's mother had to take all kinds of heavy work in order to support her family. She still had four children left to take care of.

The Second World War was a very harrowing time for my parents-in-law and their family as well. In spite of the family living in a rich agricultural area, there was hardly any food for their own consumption. They were all more or less under-nourished; as the Germans requisitioned nearly all food produced by the Dutch, and transported it to their own country and to the soldiers fighting at the front. But people realised that the farmers kept quite a lot of food back from the Germans, and in order not to be found out, they kept it back from their compatriots as well. This greed engendered much bitter feeling towards the farming community.

As I mentioned, Father-in-law was a deacon in the Reformed Church, which entailed being responsible for distribution to the poor. Several of the other church deacons and elders were farmers, and greed often came to the surface in these difficult times. When my father-in-law saw how these elders and deacons refused food to the poor and hungry, he became more and more frustrated and bitter over the way in which the church treated its people, and he reacted very strongly to what he had Witnessed.

Two of the family's sons, aged 17 and 19, had to go to Germany, working on different farms. They both returned with varying degrees of mental disturbance, and had lost all faith in both society and the church. The younger of the two was so badly affected that he remained disabled for the rest of his life. The injuries incurred by the older son were of a different nature. War and violence breed many atheists, and he had become one of them at that time.

The insanity of war and the churches' direct participation in it had dispelled all faith in a loving God, as well as in both churches and politicians. According to him the church should have made itself heard. On this point he had in fact come to the same conclusion as I had done. They could have hindered upstarts and dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. When he came home at the end of 1945, broken down and frustrated, the family soon noticed what sort

of a transformation the boy had gone through. Although the parents had also experienced their share of disillusionment, they still went to church and kept their faith in a righteous God.

However, their oldest son nursed a violent hatred for both church and society, and declared that he would never set foot inside a church again. He banged on the wall, shouted and screamed, and cursed everything connected with both church and clergy.

At this particularly depressing moment Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on the door. To them he gave vent to his hatred and loathing for Christendom and society generally, and, seen from their point of view, they had come in the nick of time. The boy's hatred suited them admirably, for during its seventy-five years' existence the Watchtower Society's representatives have always been among the first to express hatred for both church and clergy, and to make use of other people's hatred and frustration to their own advantage. They agreed with his protests and fed the flames of my brother-in-law's fury with even more fuel. They told him that Satan guided the world, and Christendom in particular and that in the near future God would destroy the whole of this "ungodly world". The destruction would begin with Christendom, which the Witnesses claimed to be responsible for all the misery on this earth.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued their visits to the family. During the following weeks they fed my brother-in-law with a number of "pieces of information" to justify his bitterness. The Jehovah's Witnesses asserted among other things:

"So-called Christendom makes fraudulent use of the name of Christ, and the devil has chosen to employ this name with the obvious intention of misleading and deceiving folk and turning them away from God [...] Christendom is the most highly developed and the most seductive form of Satan's visible organisation [...] During the battle of Armageddon Christendom will be completely wiped out, without any mercy."¹⁸

How they were captivated by the Watchtower Society

Once a week the whole family of twelve plus two Jehovah's Witnesses sat down at the table in the living room to study the book, *Children*. However, Father-in-law soon found out how deep the theological schism was between the Jehovah's Witnesses' dogmas and the traditional Christian doctrines, and he tried to stop "the instruction" several times. But every time he tried to bring the studies to an end they all had pity on the man who was leading them. They were very impressed by his zeal, enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice himself. The roads could often be slippery with ice, or a terrible storm could be raging. Even so he walked the 15 kilometres to lead the bible study, and had to walk back again afterwards. This made an enormous impression on them, and so they allowed the studying to continue. They did not distinguish the man from his mission.

After a while this man, whose name was Jan de Jong, was transferred to another district, and another congregation. He was serving as a "pioneer"¹⁹ during the time he was studying with my parents-in-law, and being a "pioneer" he was subject to a sort of assignment system under the Watchtower Society. Later he became a "special pioneer", which meant he received a small pittance from the Society, but in return he had to Witness from door to door 150 hours a month, in addition to all his other duties and meetings etc. He advanced to "circuit overseer", but kept in close contact with my parents-in-law and their family the whole time. A few years later de Jong became very ill, and in fact died of a bleeding gastric ulcer. Since the

¹⁸ *The Watchtower*, 1937, pp. 105-276 and Feb. 1st. 1940.

¹⁹ A pioneer is a "publisher" who spends at least 100 hours a month (nowadays 90 hours) in unpaid evangelizing from door-to-door. Pioneers often have a part-time job in addition in order to keep themselves, or are dependent on gifts from kind folk and congregation members. The only support they receive from the Watchtower Society is purchase of the literature at a reduced rate.

Watchtower Society had no form of insurance for its pioneers and circuit overseers very few of them could afford to pay for an operation or hospitalisation. At that time all Dutch citizens had to pay such expenses themselves, unless they had taken out insurance to cover them. All those at work were covered through contracts with their employers, but the Watchtower Society's employees had no such agreements. Therefore, it was very dangerous for one of the Watchtower Society's representatives to be ill, since the possibility of medical treatment was considerably reduced due to financial circumstances.

In the same way as other Jehovah's Witnesses pioneers, he had supported himself by working part-time one or two days a week, and spent the rest of his time preaching the message about the Watchtower Society's Kingdom.

After Jan de Jong left the district the "bible study" was taken over by a preacher from the local congregation, and at that time the family also had two pioneers living with them. They had free board and lodging, in spite of the lack of space and very little money coming in. My father-in-law was a little annoyed about this, considering how tight the family budget was. However the eldest son contributed financially so that the family had something to live on, and paid a little extra to cover the cost of one of the pioneers.

One of these, Jan van de Berg, was a typical "fanatic". As a teenager during the war he was one of about 400 Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses who were arrested by the Gestapo and sent to concentration camps in Germany. Imprisonment and hardship in the concentration camp had turned him into a bitter enemy of both the power of governments and the church clergy. When he first came to my future parents-in-law he was so thin that he looked more like a skeleton than anything else. He could not sit on an ordinary chair without having a large cushion under him. As I mentioned, the other pioneer was Hendrik Meex, who later accompanied me to Norway.

My parents-in-law were impressed by the fervour of Jehovah's Witnesses, just as I had been. They were convinced by the fact that Jan had been willing to offer his life for "the truth concerning Jehovah's Kingdom".²⁰

Little by little the whole family was infected by the pioneers' zeal, and both my parents-in-law and nine out of the ten children became active Jehovah's Witnesses. Several of the children also became pioneers.

As time went on the children married other Jehovah's Witnesses and today, counting children and grandchildren, there are over fifty members of the family working actively for the cult. Some of the male family members hold leading positions in the organisation.

The tragic part of this story is that the Watchtower Society's "caring" policy makes it impossible for us to have anything to do with the family. The Watchtower Society forbids them to talk to us. Unhappily, as far as they are concerned we are dead. Not because the family wishes this to be the case, but because they have no choice if they wish to remain Jehovah's Witnesses. If they contact us, or allow us to contact them, they will themselves be cast out as "apostates".

The church pushed them into the embrace of Jehovah's Witnesses

To start with, my father-in-law attended both the Reformed Church and Jehovah's Witnesses' meetings. Presumably he did this because he was still troubled by a gnawing

²⁰ *Jehovah's Witnesses who were willing to sign a document denying their faith could be released from the German concentration camps. This was a very rare occurrence throughout the war; Witnesses were loyal to their faith.*

doubt. But here the church council now made a terrible blunder. They excluded him and the whole of his family from the church. Father-in-law was particularly upset over the fact that both his wife and all ten children had been excluded, without any form of consultation either with him or anyone else in the family.

This is an example of the church acting just as Jehovah's Witnesses had claimed in their vilifying propaganda, and in this way Father-in-law received confirmation of how "malicious" and "diabolical" the church was.

Just as in my case, Father-in-law could not see the difference between the "wheat and the tares", and repudiated all churches and congregations. Thus this reprehensible course of action on the part of the churches provided fertile soil in which the cult was able to germinate and grow strong, and we can perhaps give expression to this situation by saying that "Destructive cults are quick to take advantage of the weaknesses of the established churches".

Back to Norway

Directly after my visit to the van Brug family I decided to return to Norway. Another Dutch Jehovah's Witness, Hendrik Meex, made up his mind to come with me, as he was thoroughly fed up with the mining district in which he was living. In order to avoid travelling by train, with the number of changes this involved, we decided to travel by sea. I bought tickets on the passenger ship "Astrea", which transported us from Amsterdam to Stavanger, where I intended to stay for a while, and Meex had nothing against this. If I remember rightly the tickets cost about 400 Norwegian kroner at that time. As I have mentioned, I had lived in Norway the year before, and after that had sailed on several Norwegian ships, so now was the time to find somewhere different. Somewhere which could provide some new and exciting challenges.

I was still single, and had been happy in Stavanger the last time I was there. So to return there seemed the only natural thing to do. Immediately on arrival I went to the police station to get the address of one of the leaders in the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Stavanger. His name was Viggo Markussen, and he was the ministerial servant in the town.

Markussen and his wife were a very hospitable couple, and we stayed with them for the first few months. Both Viggo and his wife Karen were most ardent Jehovah's Witnesses, and very zealous in their service. They seemed to have inexhaustible resources of energy. They had three lovely children, all girls, but still they took part in some sort of activity to do with the congregation every single day. If it was not a meeting, or preparation for a meeting, then it was door-to-door Witnessing. Of course, we talked a great deal about "the truth", and during this period I became more and more indoctrinated.

Effective mind control is initiated

I can say a great deal that is positive about Markussen. He was a charismatic person, and had a very inspiring influence on others with his tremendous enthusiasm. He demanded a great deal of others, but exacted the same of himself, and in this way he was a typical leader. At that time I was very enthusiastic, and all this activity with meetings and preaching every day, in addition to my everyday work in a factory, caused me to become completely worn out. After three months I began to suffer from insomnia, and often lay awake until well on into the night. As soon as I went to bed my thoughts began to fly around in hopeless confusion, and I often felt the blood rush to my head, and I could break out in violent spells of perspiration. All this worried me, and I paid a visit to the doctor, who of course found nothing physically wrong with me.

Later in life I have learnt that this is one of the most effective methods which can be used by anyone wishing to exercise mind control over another person. Steven Hassan says:

"Disorienting a person psychologically can be very effective. The deprivation of sleep is one of the most usual and most effective techniques which can be used to break down a person."²¹

I mention Hassan's book because after having read it I can recognise the whole of my life as a Jehovah's Witness, and I shall be quoting from it at regular intervals where it is applicable to actual events.

In order to restore my equilibrium I decided to find my own lodgings, and was fortunate enough to find both a new job and some lodgings in Sandnes. Hendrik stopped on with the Markussens. I estimated that the situation would improve if I could plan my own time, and live my own life at my own tempo.

One day I lay down on the divan for a good rest after work, and how I relished it! It was so nice just to relax and be spared all the rush and bother. I could feel my peace of mind returning, and I felt sure that sleeplessness and exhaustion were things of the past.

There was a knock on the door. It was the ever-active Markussen. It was difficult for him to understand that anyone as young as I needed to relax, and he considered it more important to go "out on the field" now that the end of the world was near.

By doing this Markussen acted psychologically in the right way to maintain mind and thought control over other people. He did not allow me to be "let off", but kept up a strong psychological pressure. I was given no chance to have second thoughts, but was kept spinning on a roundabout of "theocratic" activities. And it was oh, so effective! I became increasingly more zealous, just like Markussen.

Jehovah's Witnesses held a huge international convention in New York in 1953. Over 165,000 people came together for this event, and there were many who wondered whether perhaps Armageddon would come since such a large number of "God's people" were gathered on such an occasion. Never before had so many come to a single convention. Therefore, Markussen thought that there was a possibility of Armageddon coming the year after, in 1954, since it would then be 40 years since Jesus had returned.²² He thought that a generation was about forty years, and that it would be a "suitable" time.

A young sister in her 20's fell in love and married a man who was about 40 years older than her. Since Armageddon was so near, and soon after that he would regain his youth, the age difference was no hindrance. Although there were many who shook their heads, no one could protest very much, since everyone believed that Armageddon would come soon, and then he would be young again. So the difference in age had absolutely no significance. I knew the man personally, and cannot speak well enough of him. He was an exceptionally loving person, and served as a circuit overseer at the time. I have not written down this story in order to criticise either him or her, but only to illustrate how deeply rooted this belief in Armageddon was, and it shows that we believed the war was coming in the very near future. It was more like months than years.

²¹ *Steven Hassan: Combating Cult Mind Control, p. 65.*

²² *Jehovah's Witnesses believed then, as they still do, that Jesus came back invisibly in 1914. However, up until 1929 the Watchtower Society declared that Jesus returned in 1874.*

Instead of the usual summer convention organised by Jehovah's Witnesses each July, Bergen was chosen for a so-called "echo meeting" (which means that the Society set up the same programme as had been run at the convention in New York). Many of the important addresses that had been given in New York would be repeated for the Norwegian brothers. As far as I was concerned the main theme was the address "The New World Society attacked from the far North". In 1958 the Watchtower Society made a detailed study on the subject of the king of the North and South in the book "Your will be Done on Earth".

Communism and the totalitarian powers represented the northern king, and these would soon attack Jehovah's Witnesses. However, they would then be tampering with Jehovah's chosen ones, and Jehovah would destroy them. The battle of Armageddon would then be a reality. All of us attending the convention, both in 1953 and in 1958, were thrilled about this good news, and were inspired to fight even harder during the short time left.

At this convention, which took place in September 1953, I was baptised as a Jehovah's Witness. The actual baptism took place at the baths in the centre of Bergen.

My time in Stavanger and Sandnes laid the foundation for further service for Jehovah, and I had got to know many wonderful people. Together with other members of the Stavanger congregation, I had travelled round to nearly every island in the Ryfylke Fjord, something that, apart from "spiritual growth" had been a delightful relaxation. On one of these trips I took part in my first open-air meeting. The congregation always held meetings on Thursdays, and as we were visiting "vacant districts"²³ where there were no Kingdom halls, we held the meeting outdoors. However, on this Thursday we had been busy preaching until late in the evening, so that the Ministry School, as it was called, had to be held on Sunday instead. I remember this very well, as it was where I performed my first "mission".²⁴

My first talk at the Theocratic Ministry School was an 8-minute sermon about the mortality of the soul, and naturally I was very nervous. It was one thing to be "new" in the organisation, but quite another that I was not Norwegian. Standing on a platform giving an address was very different from talking to folk. However, I got through it all right, and Markussen gave me his comments after the sermon. On the whole he was satisfied.

Markussen kept on emphasising the need to make use of the remaining time before Armageddon in a wise and sensible way, and referred to the fact that the Watchtower Society's literature made this very clear. The only matter of importance now was to spend as much time as possible in working from door to door. He also made a point of spending a lot of time persuading Hendrik Meex and me that we were needed to serve as "pioneers".

Chapter 5 Bringing Up Children in the "Theocratic" Spirit

As an elder I had to exercise pressure on parents and children. As they had to take the children with them to all the meetings from an early age, there was no order or symmetry in the children's lives as they grew up. There are no meetings especially for children, like Sunday school, for instance. The children are late to bed several nights a week because they have to accompany their parents to the Jehovah's Witnesses' innumerable meetings. Mothers are unable to create a stable continuity in their children's lives, and this often affects their

²³ *"Vacant districts" is a term used to describe areas not permanently "served" by any particular congregation. In order that the population of these areas can be given the opportunity of hearing the Witnesses' message, responsibility for evangelizing there is divided between different congregations.*

²⁴ *"Mission" is the term used by Witnesses for a talk given by a student at the "Theocratic Ministry School".*

powers of concentration at school. I often saw children *being spanked at meetings because they could not manage to sit still*, at a time when, under normal circumstances, they ought to have been in bed. I am not mentioning this just to criticise other people, as my own conscience is far from clear on this point. I am ashamed to admit that unfortunately this also happened to my own children.

We trained the children of the congregation to go from door to door selling literature, and we taught them different sales techniques, well aware that children could "sell" large quantities of books and magazines. As many people felt sorry for them, and thought that by buying from them they could help them, we elders encouraged parents to take their children round with them on the work of preaching, right from a very early age.

We longed for children

Jellie enjoyed being a housewife. But making my meals, washing floors and preaching from door to door was not in itself enough to satisfy her. She wanted to have children. The Watchtower Society's attitude to having children in these apocalyptic times caused our marriage to fray at the edges quite early on. Later on in the book I shall substantiate that the Watchtower leadership considered it unwise to bring children into the world now that Armageddon was so near. I had complete faith in the Watchtower's repeated assertion: "*Armageddon will soon be upon us!*" I thought that children would hinder us in proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of God which had been created in heaven in 1914, and which would come on earth in our generation. Jellie thought this too, but she could not hide her deep longing for children of her own. Of course, I really wanted children as well, but the Watchtower prophecies stood between us.

However, nature and a mother's instinct won the day. In the end we had four lovely children, first a girl and then three boys. As conscientious Jehovah's Witnesses we had to abide by the consequences and take the children along to all the meetings, without any consideration of their age. It followed that both the mental and physical strain on us increased. We were expected to be zealous in our service, and both in the literature and at meetings we were continually being reminded of opportunities for serving as holiday pioneers.

The Society took no account of the fact that family life could be an impediment to the work of Witnessing, but the children demanded our care and attention. Children do not ask permission to have needs. The needs are there, whether the Watchtower likes it or not.

In fact the Watchtower Society was double-faced in this matter. On the one side, people were required to look after their children properly, while on the other side so much work was imposed on each Jehovah's Witnesses that if the Watchtower Society's "work list" was to be followed, there was just not time to care for the children properly. This made us feel that we were between the devil and the deep blue sea: should we give the children the time we felt they had a right to, or should we put the work of preaching for Jehovah's Witnesses first.

Since the Watchtower Society did not recommend parents to put their children in nursery schools, thus plainly stating that not to bring up one's own children showed an irresponsible attitude, there was no form of help available to us. One's children should not be handed over to nursery school teachers who belonged to this world. Many nursery school teachers were religious as well, and thus a part of Babylon the Great, which was doomed under Armageddon. It was just as bad if they were not religious, since presumably they were then atheists, and under the power of Satan anyway. No Christian wishes his children to be brought up by atheists. Children were to take part in obligatory schooling only, and beyond this were to be educated in theocratic pursuits both at home and in the congregation.

Neither could our children go to any form of Sunday school, of course, since a different sort of religion was taught there than the one in which we had put absolute faith. The Watchtower Society's attitude to Sunday schools is very clearly stated in the *Watchtower*:

"Why organise a sort of annex or Sunday school for little children with some silly woman or other, without any knowledge of the Bible...it is an enterprise instituted by the Devil and carried out by his instruments with just the intention of turning children away from God and making them disobedient to their parents...Sunday schools have been injurious to Christian parents...causing children to lose respect for their parents."²⁵

But what was the real motive behind forbidding children to go to Sunday school? Let us read on in the Watchtower.

"You should teach your children that the great climax has been reached, and that it is God's definite intention in a short while to destroy all those who are evil...The reasons against holding Sunday schools are these: That Sunday schools [...] separate youth from adults and that children do not learn their parents' way of doing things [...] They have kept suitable people away from active witnessing from door to door. These children's teachers have grasped at this as an excuse for not taking part in the work of witnessing from door to door."²⁶

The above extract shows the real motive. Sunday Schools steal time! Children must be taught to sell literature! In *Awake!*, May 22nd 1957, the attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses is repeated in an article with the following title: "**Sunday school weighed and found to be too light**"

Even worse was the fact that children could not take part in any other form of activity for children or young people. This was considered to be offering one's children on Satan's altar, which could entail that we ourselves could go under at Armageddon, regardless of how great our service had been for Jehovah. So the only alternative left was to go from door to door with *Watchtower* and *Awake!*

Once again we see an example of psychology being used to control other people. The Society creates outside enemies, and repeatedly emphasises how "evil" and dangerous they are. The impression is established that everything outside the cult is under the control of Satan, and members are taught to fear such influences like the plague. This, says Steven Hassan, is the most important element employed by a cult to achieve emotional control. (36)

Children who do not go from door to door will be killed

It now seems incredible that I could be a party to threatening children with death if they did not take part in this work, but in fact this is what Jehovah's Witnesses do, and I myself participated in this detestable form of child abuse. If they did not take part in the "work", we told them, they would die! The Watchtower gives the following warning to parents:

"Parents who love their children and *who want to see them alive* in God's new world will encourage and guide them towards *goals of increased service* and responsibility."²⁷ (Italics mine)

²⁵ *The Watchtower*, April 15th 1938; *The Watchtower*, 1967, p. 491; *Awake!*, Sept.22nd. 1970, pp. 22-25.

²⁶ *The Watchtower*, May 1st. 1938; *Awake!*, May 22nd. 1957.

²⁷ *Watchtower*, March 15th 1962, p. 179.

Thoughtful people will naturally now imagine that we were more careful regarding the children themselves, but I am afraid they are wrong. Children were given the crystal clear message that they would be killed if they did not serve God, and in order to serve God, children must work in the "field", or in other words, go from door to door. The book we employed to prove this is called *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*. This book was used in studying with children, and it says on page 249:

"Only the preachers of God's kingdom, can expect to be protected during the end of this world and to live through Armageddon into the New World. We have to do more than merely accept the Kingdom message in order to be saved. We also have to preach it in order to show that we believe it. We are saved by more than just believing the Kingdom message with all our hearts; we must also publicly declare that Kingdom message to others, that they as well as we may be saved in God's New World." (Italics mine)

We also taught the children that it was the angels of God who would kill them if they did not serve God. In another of Jehovah's Witnesses' children's books, *"Listening to the Great Teacher"*, we can read:

"There is another big work that the angels will do too, and they are going to do it soon. *God's time to destroy all wicked people* is very near. All who do not worship the true God *will be destroyed*. [...] None of the wicked will get away. *The angels will find them all*. [...] There will be nothing to fear. [...] *if we serve Jehovah*."²⁸ (Italics mine)

We also taught the children that it was not enough to do this occasionally, but it was demanded that children, just as adults, should do it as a regular service, and the Watchtower Society supported this with "encouragements" in its literature. We can quote another example of this from *the Watchtower*:

"Activity in the Christian ministry cannot be confined to adults. It is a *privilege of service that you children* can Scripturally participate in and should engage in. If you want to obey Jehovah you will engage regularly in the ministerial activities that are arranged by the theocratic organisation. [...] Aside from weekly service in the ministry [...] serve your Creator *every day during vacation periods* by being a vacation pioneer out in the Witnesses field. [...] Do you obey him by zealously engaging in it regularly?"²⁹ (Italics mine)

A great responsibility was given to me in particular, as the father, and of course to all other fathers, since fathers were responsible for their families. As early as possible in the children's life I was to tell them about Jehovah, paradise and Armageddon. We took this very seriously. Long before they could read or write, they sat on our laps and were shown pictures from the Watchtower Society's "children's books".

In several of these "children's books" the whole of the Bible story was told in pictures as well as text. There were many terrifying illustrations included, depicting how Jehovah would kill all non-Witnesses at Armageddon. The pictures showed how burning buildings collapsed and buried people alive. Great crowds of people with the fear of death on their faces desperately sought help or a place to hide, but there was no hiding place amongst the ruins of buildings, falling masonry and fire from heaven. Huge cracks in the earth's surface swallowed up people, cars and houses.

Horrible pictures such as these can be found in all the Watchtower's books published during the last hundred years. As a Jehovah's Witness I did not believe in eternal damnation, but children, on the other hand, were continually being threatened with these frightening pictures "from Armageddon". At the time, neither my wife nor I interpreted these as threats, because

²⁸*"Listening to the Great Teacher, p. 102.*

²⁹*Watchtower, Aug. 15th 1962, p. 493.*

we really believed that it was right to teach children about these things. I myself had been taught this at a course for congregational elders. Looking back, it is terrible to think what I may have contributed to, regarding both my own and other children.

Every time my children went to knock at a door, I saw their tense little faces. They had been given the task without the necessary competence to carry it out, but I did not realise this at the time. I was convinced that they were equipped with "the armour of God", and that it was all for their own good.

Children are an unwelcome hindrance

In general, children were a "nuisance" for Jehovah's Witnesses, and the literature continually advised parents against bringing children into the world. When I had done this notwithstanding, I obviously had to tolerate continual snubs from the Society's official representatives.

While I was serving as the congregational servant in the Kragerø congregation in the 60's, I was visited by Willy Holgersen, who was one of the Society's travelling "circuit overseers". My wife and I usually invited these people to stay with us in our home, and our invitation was generally gratefully accepted. Holgersen did this too, but he obviously was displeased by the fact that we had children. He disliked children any way, and told my wife, Jellie that:

"Next time he came to Kragerø he wished to stay in a home where there were no children."

These terrestrial "representatives of God" and "princes of the earth" could enjoy our hospitality, eat our food and drink as much as they could get hold of. Even so, they were not above showing their gratitude for our hospitality by barefaced rudeness.

After the birth of my two youngest children, I was openly criticised by a circuit overseer, who reminded me that I must know perfectly well that it was very unwise to bring children into the world now, just before Armageddon, and that this was not recommended by the Watchtower Society. At the time I was the presiding overseer, and he considered me to be a bad example to the members of the congregation.

"How will you manage to fulfil your obligations to the congregation?", he wanted to know.

I felt completely let down, and a feeling of aggression toward the Organisation and its leadership began to grow deep inside me. I deliberately began to make a list over all I had done for God's cause, as opposed to all the important things I had been unable to take care of in my relationships with my wife and children, not to mention my own needs.

I felt that I had been misled, hoodwinked and made a fool of. Brooklyn had made use of the best years of my life, and deprived my wife and children of valuable time and energy that was rightfully theirs. In addition, the Watchtower had stolen much of my wife's precious time and energy, which could have been given to the children and myself. The worst of all was that the children were made to suffer due to lack of attention. The Watchtower Society demanded first priority in our lives, and when we had given our all, we were usually too tired to give our children and other members of the family the attention they had a right to expect.

Chapter 6

Judge and Executioner

In 1973 I was the presiding overseer for a large congregation and for the second time I took part in a fortnight's course for leading overseers. This course was held in Amsterdam. Several of the lectures were on the subject of keeping the organisation pure, and how we should acquit ourselves as elders in this respect. The Watchtower Society's practice of disfellowshipping was one of the principle themes at this course for overseers. Much of what I

learned frightened me, and showed how much importance the Society attached to retaining an iron grip on its subjects. They were now in possession of this control, and had no wish to relinquish it in any way.

Paul Kushnir, a Canadian who was conducting the course, quoted several examples from Jehovah's Witnesses' enormous records, which include information about every single person in the congregation who has "sinned".

"It's no use moving from one place to another in order to start a new life. Even if a "sinner" hides in the depths of the Brazilian jungle he cannot remain invisible from the Society's international network," said Kushnir. The Watchtower Society can keep track of every single member, irrespective of his whereabouts on this planet. If a Witnesses moves from one place to another, a copy of the register is sent to the elders of the new congregation.

The Jehovah's Witnesses intelligence system is particularly effective. Anyone coming to a congregation and claiming to be a Jehovah's Witnesses will immediately be checked. This is easily done, as the Watchtower Society's headquarters keep all information, and it can also be found at the head office of each country. Some particulars can be obtained from the person's previous congregation as well.

As overseers we needed to have access to this information, as it was our duty to "shepherd the flock". Paul Kushnir spent a lot of time teaching us how we should act in our position as judges in the congregation. The congregation's internal judicial cases follow in principle the same procedure as "ordinary" court cases, with a prosecution, possibly Witnesses and three judges. *However, the difference is that the accused will always be the losing party.* The accused will not be given the opportunity to make his own defence, or to present Witnesses. No defence for the accused can be nominated, and the evidence of Witnesses cannot be controlled. In most cases the accused will not be allowed to know by whom he is being charged, and will therefore have no knowledge of the nature of the accusation, apart from the "judges" version.

But neither is it the aim of these internal judicial cases to assess the question of guilt. *Guilt has already been established, and "the judicial hearing" only has two functions: to extort repentance and a penalty from the wrongdoer, and to serve the judgement.*

We were also given thorough training in different techniques of interrogation, and we were expected to make use of these in order to procure detailed information from the accused during the judicial hearing.

I already had several years' experience as "judge". I had taken part in the disfellowshipping of folk for actions that were not a sin according to the Bible. These people's "crime" was that they had sinned against the Watchtower Society's doctrine and rules, which was considered to be as serious as sinning against the commandments of the Bible. The indisputable fact is that we regarded sinning against the rules of the Watchtower Society as being equivalent to sinning against the Bible's commandments. *It was the same thing.* "The Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn was appointed by God, and God acted through the Watchtower Society. *Therefore, all decrees announced by the Watchtower Society, had come directly from God,* hence the attitude I have just related.

As examples of so-called "serious offences" I can mention such things as celebrating a birthday or a national day, or that the person concerned had visited a church. Or perhaps the Watchtower Society disliked the way in which a married couple practised sexual intercourse in their own bedroom, a common reason for being disfellowshipped during a certain period.

I feel very ashamed today when I think back to these so-called "judicial cases" in which I was involved, and I often pray to God that both He and those whom we abused can forgive me. I

have publicly asked our victims for forgiveness several times, among other things in newspaper articles in both Norway and Holland.

Legal protection - what is that?

In cases of a sexual character I can remember instances where "the sinner" had a complete mental breakdown. A few of my fellow-"judges" were not always satisfied with hearing that the accused had sinned due to lack of control. Particularly if a woman was being prosecuted, the judges - who were always men, would often want an "embroidered" version of every detail concerning how the fall from grace had begun and later degenerated, and they often insisted on a particularly intimate report of the sinful act.

Some of the "judges" appeared to have *a great deal of* pleasure and satisfaction in this sort of interrogation. The conception resembled the Catholic inquisition of medieval times where the accused, often young women, were hung naked in front of the "ecclesiastical judges". However, at that time they were in such a position of power and authority that they could allow themselves such "pleasures", an authority fortunately not invested in the Jehovah's Witnesses "court-martials".

I remember that on another occasion when I was acting as "judge" we were summoned to a man who was dying. He had previously been a Jehovah's Witnesses but had been disfellowshipped because he smoked. He had contracted cancer and was now lying at home on his deathbed. As he had been a Jehovah's Witnesses for over 30 years he felt sure that he would not be resurrected if he died without being reinstated in the congregation, which is why we had been sent for. He wished to be reinstated so that he could have a chance of being resurrected.

Right from the first moment I entered the room I had an uneasy feeling, and had no idea what to do or say. Here was someone, literally waiting for death, and our duty was - as we really believed - to decide whether this man could be resurrected or not! The Watchtower Society's doctrine on this point is as crystal clear, and now that I was suddenly confronted with reality in this way, my "judicial function" abruptly became deadly earnest. I believed that our "judgement" would determine the future fate of this poor soul! Even so, I could not avoid a feeling of shame over holding a "judicial hearing" at a deathbed. To be sure the man was reinstated in the congregation the day after our visit, and was able to die a Jehovah's Witnesses, but this episode was the first time I experienced difficulties concerning the power and authority we elders exercised over the congregation. *If the Watchtower Society's doctrines were right, it was up to us to decide whether a person should be given eternal life!*

Another instance that illustrates the quality of mercy shown by these "court-martials" to their victims is an episode concerning a man of 102 years old. This did not occur in "my" congregation, but was told me by my brother-in-law. He was a member of this committee, and told me later on that he had a guilty conscience regarding this incident. The congregation elders had found out that the old man chewed tobacco. As is the custom in Jehovah's Witnesses congregations, a "loyal" brother or sister discovered this awful crime and had - in accordance with instructions - exposed the sinner to the body of elders. The man was called in for interrogation, and of course disfellowshipped. A person aged 102 years who suddenly loses all his friends, in fact his whole life, is left with less than nothing. Consequently this old man died shortly after, broken down and mentally destroyed. In addition he was naturally terror-stricken, since his "death sentence" had been proclaimed. Readers must realise that this is what Jehovah's Witnesses believe. They are sure that disfellowshipping means death, unless they succeed in coming inside "the Ark", or being reinstated in the congregation before the end comes.

Although this was not included in the official instructions from the Society's leadership, Many went far, very far, in these degrading "judicial cases". I can safely say that many of these elders who acted as "judges" were, as the saying goes, more Catholic than the Pope himself. I consider that the origin of this can be found in the all-embracing power of authority that the Brooklyn headquarters allow the elders of a congregation to exercise. "The judges" always took plenty of time to present their views so that the accused had no hope of defending himself. The accused knew that contradictions would mean immediate disfellowshipping, which according to the Witnesses' terminology is tantamount to a death sentence in such cases.³⁰

The far-reaching power of "the judges" is well known to all Jehovah's Witnesses. The accused knows that it is no use protesting against perverse or intimate questions. Many of the Jehovah's Witnesses who were summoned to one of these interrogations by the "judicial committee" were terror-stricken, and *I myself have seen that folk have absconded, literally run away.*

On one occasion we visited a female member of the congregation, and when she saw who was coming she threw on her coat and ran out.

On another occasion when we were visiting the same woman, she panicked. She yelled and screamed, and in the end flew out of the room, ran up several flights of stairs, and hid herself in the loft.

Such "disrespectful" conduct was never tolerated. If anyone would not talk to the committee, the rule was that he was disfellowshipped. It was suspected that there must be a reason for not wanting to talk to us, and that it must be a guilty conscience.

In its literature the Watchtower Society claims that there is a "right of appeal", and that this provides a safeguard against erroneous judgements. In practice this right of appeal is a pure farce. During my time as an elder I know of only one case where an appeal was heard, and those attempting to appeal had to continue in fellowship with the local congregation. A complaint to the Society over blatantly unreasonable treatment would lead to reprisals with which it would be impossible to live. *The usual answer one who has been disfellowshipped can expect to any kind of letter addressed to the Watchtower Society, whether it is an appeal or anything else, is silence, absolute silence.*

Disfellowshipping must be avoided at all costs by someone who is a member of, and has become completely dependent on, a cult. Since fear of disfellowshipping is usually even greater than fear of the judges, these usually get an answer to every question, however personal it might be. The accused is very aware of the catastrophic effects of disfellowshipping, and naturally wishes to avoid it at all costs. At the same time he or she knows that if the "judges" have the least suspicion that anything is being kept from them, disfellowshipping will be the irrevocable consequence. Many of the accused dare not defend themselves, since any attempt at vindication is interpreted as lack of contrition, which also guarantees disfellowshipping. Bearing in mind the effect of disfellowshipping on oneself and one's family and friends, accused Jehovah's Witnesses are willing to admit anything.

³⁰ *In theory, one who is disfellowshipped can be accepted back into the congregation. Previously there was a time limit of one year but nowadays it is up to the elders to decide whether the "sinner" is repentant "enough"! True repentance can only be proved by not being absent from a single meeting throughout the period of expulsion and by displaying a particularly deferential attitude to any elder who might cross one's path.*

They find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea, and have no other choice than to throw themselves 100% on the mercy of the executioners. Although what they would really like to do is to scream out loud over the obviously unjust manner in which they are being treated, they dare not. The methods of terror used by the Watchtower Society are too effective. They just cannot take the risk at any price. This situation, which permeates the life of the congregation, creates grave mental suffering amongst Jehovah's Witnesses. Research that has been done into the mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses indicates that nerve problems can be 5 to 10 times more usual among Jehovah's Witnesses than in the rest of the community, depending on the type of criteria employed in characterising the nervous complaint.

For "judicial" cases in the congregation, we elders had a book we were to consult, *Pay Attention to Yourselves and All the Flock*. I am afraid I must say from my own experience that these "judicial courts" exercised unlimited power and seldom consulted anyone or anything. *Such power and the execution of it can only be compared with a totalitarian regime.*

Fear and terror keep the congregation together

Members who risk saying or writing anything other than the official policy, or who visit other churches or congregations, are summoned to a secret "judicial hearing" which takes place behind locked doors, and usually without the opportunity of meeting the accuser face to face. As I have mentioned, the accused has no one to defend him. Described in *Pay heed to yourself and to the whole of the flock* are the rights the accused is supposed to have, but these rights only exist on paper. I know all about this, having been a participant in the so-called "judicial committee", and a "judge" in several cases of this nature.

We elders did just as we liked, since the structure and hierarchy of the Organisation are such that it was our statements that carried the most weight. We were the "faithful" and the others were the "sinners". *Among Jehovah's Witnesses no one takes any notice of the words of a sinner*, and any complaint is only regarded as a confirmation of the "apostate's evil disposition".

Since the book *Pay heed to yourself and to the whole of the flock* is only available to the congregation's elders, the individual Jehovah's Witnesses knows nothing of its existence, and even less about any rights for the accused.

In an ordinary court case it is usual to make sure that the accused is aware of his rights, but in the Watchtower Society's "judicial hearings" no such humanity exists. The accused is there because he has committed a crime, and this a "fact" not to be forgotten. The elders perform the duties of judge, jury, prosecutor, defender (!) and executioner all rolled into one.

As I have indicated, the person convicted has the right to appeal against his sentence. However, the elders who have judged the case in the first instance have no small influence on the constitution of the appeal committee, since this usually consists of elders from the same congregation, or if there are not enough elders there, from the neighbouring congregation. Protection of the rights of the accused would be comical, if it was not so tragic.

This complete lack of anything like a fair handling of these cases can have a fatal effect on a person, particularly if the self-esteem of the accused has been thoroughly undermined, in addition to perhaps having actually done something reprehensible. I know of several such "committee cases", both in Norway and other countries, where someone who was in a state of mental distress was summoned to a judicial hearing, but committed suicide just before the meeting.

The fact is that this is such a crucial situation for a Jehovah's Witnesses, that I personally knew people who took their own lives in this way. Others survived the meeting itself, only to commit suicide afterwards. When the Watchtower Society's executioners pronounced the "death sentence", their victims just could not take any more. *I myself know of about 30 cases of suicide among Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway*, which ought to describe more than words how ominous was (and still is) the power wielded by us, the elders in the congregations of the Watchtower Society. It also says a lot about the prevailing type of morale, and the standard of knowledge displayed by the Society's executioners regarding everything except the Watchtower's own rules and doctrines. The American professor of psychology, Jerry Bergman, who is himself an ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, and has written several books on the subject, provides much sinister and disturbing information concerning this state of affairs.

The Society's dogmatic and arrogant attitude towards the judicial rights of the individual began to alarm me. So far, I had been judge and executioner, and escaped accusations against myself. On the other hand there was absolutely no guarantee that this would continue, as I had discovered to my cost earlier on in both Oslo and Kongsberg. Intense rivalry and internal intrigue amongst Jehovah's Witnesses, combined with the fact that the accused had no opportunity to refute any allegations, true or false, made it impossible for me ever to feel secure. Next time it could be me sitting there as the accused before one of these "judicial hearings".

Of course this was the same for all the elders, and the best way to avoid it was to maintain an iron discipline, where anyone likely to cause problems was effectively removed. Often a "tip off", founded on nothing but rumours, would come to our ears, and as the congregation's "shepherds" we considered it our duty to check on these, with all the entailing problems for the poor soul who was called in to stand "on the carpet".

The Organisation is described as, and is in fact, an independent state within the state. It has its own government in Brooklyn, with its own laws and law courts, just as a real state. However, the difference is that the Watchtower Society's self-constituted laws and law courts have pre-eminence over the laws and courts of the countries to which they belong. For this reason Jehovah's Witnesses are advised, among other things, not to tell the truth in a worldly court of law, even if this results in a sentence for contempt of court. The Watchtower Society decrees what it is "appropriate to say".³¹

One of the most important liberties of citizens in a democratic country is the right to an honourable and swift legal process that guarantees fair treatment. But when a person becomes a Jehovah's Witnesses he is deprived of this right, not by the country in which he is living, but by the Jehovah's Witnesses' own legal system. I realised that all contact with the outside world had been cut off completely.

The Society is above the laws of the land

After a while I began to feel uneasy about the responsibility I held as a Watchtower "judge". A few years after my sister became a widow she got married again to a barrister. My new brother-in-law was a judge in one of the larger towns in Holland for a number of years. It should be mentioned that my brother-in-law was not a Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand

³¹ *This is stated very definitely in the pamphlet Preparing for Child Custody Cases, in which the Watchtower Society recommends Witnesses, elders and children to "hide the truth" from the court, and lead the court to believe that the circumstances surrounding the child's upbringing are quite the opposite of the actual situation. This pamphlet is like "a gift of God" for the Watchtower Society's critics, for president Franz had never before published so many falsehoods and arranged them in such a consequent order, as he did here.*

he was a very able lawyer. During our conversations he told me that he had studied law for ten years before he had qualified to his present position, that is, the office of judge.

This prompted me to begin speculating about my own competence for the responsibility I held. Here was I, untrained and without knowledge of the law, psychology or pedagogic, presuming to act as judge over cases, although I had absolutely no professional qualifications to enable me to carry out my duties satisfactorily. My only "education" was the Watchtower Society's course for elders, and as readers will certainly have noticed, we were taught a form of procedure that neither a psychologist nor a lawyer would have been able to accept.

Many cases, which according to law should have been taken care of by the police and the courts, were handled amongst Jehovah's Witnesses by unqualified people behind locked doors. They could be cases of theft, drugs or incest. *Such crimes were never reported to the authorities appointed by the state*, but were to be taken care of by the congregation itself. Jehovah's Witnesses have no use for these authorities. *The Watchtower Society is above "worldly" laws, and therefore we paid no attention to the authorities' judgement on such matters*. We simply did not regard it as our duty to report such violations of the law, since the Society ordered us to sort the matter out ourselves, and not "disturb the waters" which could "be detrimental to God's Organisation".

The following is an example of the sort of grotesque deflection that could result from the indoctrination to which we had been exposed:

A case of incest requiring our judgement came up in one of the congregations where I served as an elder. It concerned a father in his early 30's who had often had sexual relations with his daughter. The relationship had been going on for quite a long time, and the daughter was about 10 years old when the elders were informed of the case. It was the mother who came to us with the information. She had had her misgivings for some time, but had lacked evidence, and had not told the elders of her suspicions. It pertains to the story that she and her husband were later divorced.

The significance of this story is that our only thought was to "keep the congregation pure", that is to say, to get rid of the man. *The mental state of the child had no bearing on our decision, neither was the advisability of arranging for an examination of the child considered*. We believed psychologists and psychiatrists to be in the power of the devil. The Watchtower Society had pointed this out several times in its literature, consequently we had no idea that the child might need this kind of help.

Neither was the possibility of the father being in need of help an issue that concerned us. *On the other hand, as the elders of the congregation we were most concerned that none of the parties involved should seek this kind of help, since the story could "damage the reputation and respect for the judgement of the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses"*. For the same reason the authorities were not notified of the situation either. I can honestly say that such an idea never entered the head of any one of us! It was never considered because it had simply never occurred to us. This had nothing to do with the authorities. It was a "matter for the congregation".

Looking back, I find it incredible that I could have been so completely without reasonable forethought and insight into the genuine needs of my fellow human beings. But such was the system. It was worst for the child, of course, but we honestly believed that she would take no harm as long as we made sure she remained within "the bosom of the congregation".

Crime, punishment and incrimination

In addition to such crimes, folk were often sentenced for a number of other "serious" matters, such as celebrating one's own birthday, or parents allowing one of their children to colour pictures in preparation for Christmas or Easter at school. This could lead to disfellowshipping, as it was regarded as idol worship. By allowing children to take part in heathen activities at school, they were guilty of "spiritual disloyalty", and at that time I myself was convinced that it was my duty to remove such folk from the congregation. The same applied to anyone allowing his child to join in the Lord's prayer at school.

One of the many cases in which I have been involved as judge, concerned a father who had been a spectator, together with his 10-year-old son, at some local sports held on May 17th, Norway's national day. This was an infringement of the principle of neutrality and could lead to disfellowshipping. The man was an elder in the congregation as well, and our first thought as judges was that he could hardly be fitted to continue as an elder. We wrote to the branch office to ask what we should do. Since the man had "repented" that he *had watched* the children's sports - *not taken part* - he was allowed to carry on as an elder, but *if others had been offended* by his "violation of neutrality" his position must be taken from him.

I still blush and feel ashamed when I think of the insane "judgements" I have taken part in pronouncing, and what consequences our "just sentences" have had for other people.

While I was a zealous Witness and believed absolutely in the Jehovah's Witnesses "truths", I was strict and without compromise with "transgressors". I tried my best to put the Society's rules and commands into practice, which in my opinion included carrying on a regular surveillance of the members of the congregation. I must draw attention to the fact that there was nothing special about this, as it was quite usual among the elders. *We also encouraged the ordinary members of the congregation to report all "irregularities" to us, including where there were "reasonable grounds for suspicion" regarding "grave" issues.* In the Watchtower Society's book for young people, *Questions Young people Ask, Answers That Work*, the Society says quite plainly on pages 68 and 69 that Christian youth *have an obligation to inform about the sins of others.* This is not "telling tales", the Society says, but a Christian duty.

I felt that I was almost like a kind of policeman, whose job was to keep the congregation free from sin and sinners, and I was always ready to punish all those who "sinned" against the rules and regulations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

This militant spirit by which we were possessed was a deliberate, carefully designed mutation of the personality, devised by the supreme leaders of the Watchtower Society in order to maintain complete control over every single member of the congregation. We were simply trying to tread in the Watchtower's footprints, and the militant attitude we had towards those whom we regarded as "apostates" was clearly expressed in an interview with a Jehovah's Witness in the German magazine *Stern* for March 8th 1984. A Jehovah's Witness said the following to the German reporter:

"Unfortunately we cannot kill the apostates. If God's government had been in operation now, we would have done so. Until this happens we treat these people as though they were already dead."

The Watchtower Society will claim that they have never either said or written this, and if anyone says to a Jehovah's Witness that this has been published in *Stern* he will immediately insist that it is a misquote. For this reason I will include a quotation from *The Watchtower*, which is more difficult for the Witnesses to explain away:

Nowadays we do not live amongst theocratic nations where such members of our earthly family can be exterminated as a punishment for defecting from God and his theocratic organisation, such as was both possible and decreed in the nation of Israel..."³²

Since at that time we were acting as judges for "God's theocratic organisation", we saw no reason for reflection over what we were doing, as long as we followed the rules of the organisation. *We knew little about what the laws of the land might have to say, since we had never been taught anything about this, neither did it bother us at all.* This has always been so among Jehovah's Witnesses, and still is.

I have seen the same fanatical spirit among many Jehovah's Witnesses. It is a spirit elicited by the organisation, with the help of cunning manipulation of the minds of its members, using something called "new light" in the literature. No Witnesses can escape the constant allusions to, and continual assault from, "the actual situation", which is that the Watchtower Society, according to itself, is acting on behalf of God.

I felt that I had power, and looking back I have to admit that this was a kind of obsession. After I began to break with the organisation I became fearful that I had been seriously affected by the change of personality I had undergone. I realised then that this could not have come from God, who would never allow such behaviour against his "sheep". There are not many people who can understand the fear and anxiety felt by many Jehovah's Witnesses with regard to the congregation's judicial committee. A couple of years ago, after I had left the Watchtower organisation, I was rung up by a disfellowshipped Jehovah's Witness who had once more been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Anxiety had driven him into a psychosis. He talked in a disorientated manner about the elders and the congregation. However, he had made contact with me, in spite of the fact that he knew he was forbidden to talk to me, and I thought this was a positive sign. After an hour's conversation I gave him some literature which exposed some of the Jehovah's Witnesses' doctrines. At that moment a nurse came in and this Jehovah's Witness tried feverishly to hide the literature so that the nurse should not see it. I understood the situation, recognising it from my own experience, for in such instances the fear is that the nurse might tell the Jehovah's Witnesses elders that one has received literature from an apostate.

Paranoid, the reader is surely thinking. But a Jehovah's Witness is used to an environment *where this really is the case*, and fear hardly diminishes when one's nerves are shattered. On the contrary! I reassured him that the nurse would not tell the elders, and in fact was interested in helping him free himself from the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Chapter 7 The Last "Great Prophecy"

Armageddon was so close, said the Witnesses, that Jellie, who was 7 years old at the time and went to the elementary school, would presumably not even complete her schooling before the battle of Armageddon was a reality. They told her that she might just as well leave school after her eighth year (which was the length of obligatory schooling in Holland at the time), since there was little point in taking further education. She was doing very well at school, and her teacher was very angry when he heard of the family's plans. She had a particular gift for mathematics, and wanted to do further studies herself. The school superintendent even paid a visit to her parents, since this affected the other children in the family as well. But he had to leave without having made any headway. For according to Jehovah's Witnesses this was the only sensible standpoint to take, schooling was a waste of time, and they produced more theories as well:

³² *Watchtower, May 15th 1953, p. 159 (Translated from the Norwegian edition); also referred to in the Norwegian national newspaper Verdens Gang, Sunday edition, Sept. 22nd. 1991.*

"Everything points to the fact that Armageddon is very close [...] The time is now short until the universal battle of Armageddon [...] The theocratic government is near at hand. The God-given mission now consists of preaching the good news to the world." ³³

How near was the end?

In 1941, according to Rutherford, the president at the time, there were only a few months left before Armageddon, God's war, and the Watchtower made use of expressions such as "in the few months that are left of the Old World."

Together with many others, I have now exposed the Watchtower Society's policy in this matter. They have always ridden high on a wave of eschatological prophecies, and these have always resulted in increased activity and growth in membership. The prophecies concerning 1914, 1915, 1918, 1919, 1925, 1941 and 1975 show this clearly. A later investigation, statistics for the 1970 - 1975 period, make it very plain why it is of the utmost importance for the Watchtower Society to keep Armageddon just round the next corner. Fear of death at Armageddon must remain constant, for if people began to think that they still had some time left, they might hazard a scrutiny of the doctrines of the Society. When they know that they will be disfellowshipped for so doing, and that Armageddon can come at any time, there are very few who dare take the risk of losing life for ever.

The end will come in 1975

1966 was an important year for me. I attended a fortnight's course for congregational servants in Porsgrunn. The co-ordinator for Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway, Thor Samuelsen, had just returned from USA with the Watchtower Society's latest publication, *"Life everlasting - In Freedom of the Sons of God"*. In this book it was claimed that the millennium would presumably be established in 1975. The basic idea behind the expectations connected with the year 1975 was that each of the seven days of the creation covered a period of 7000 years. God's "day of rest", which was also 7000 years long, began when God created Adam and Eve.

To this conception is connected the "thousand" years in the twentieth chapter of Revelations. This period of a thousand years, when Satan will be chained, and the anointed, the 144.000 Jehovah's Witnesses, will reign with Christ, is interpreted as the last period of God's day of rest. This day of rest can be regarded as a very special "week" for mankind as follows: After 6000 years of want and suffering, mankind will experience a Sabbath, and come in under God's grace by being a part of the seventh "day" of the "week".

According to the Watchtower's chronology, Adam was created in the year 4026 BC. Following this, the six thousand years succeeding Adam should be over in the year 1975.

Thus, the logical conclusion was that in practice mankind's time on earth coincided with God's day of rest, and that the millennium could be expected in 1975. Pronouncements expressed time and time again in the Watchtower literature during the years before 1975 supported this conclusion. Thor Samuelsen, who led the course, told us that the Governing Body in Brooklyn, New York firmly believed in the 1975 doctrine, and that they considered the year 1974 as being even more probable for the destruction of this world.

³³*The Watchtower, June 15th 1940.*

My brother-in-law, who took part in a similar course in Amsterdam, heard exactly the same wording used by one of the Society's leaders in Holland, Arthur Winkler.

He had received his information at the same one-year course in New York as Thor Samuelsen had attended. Besides the book I have mentioned, *Watchtower*, and *Awake!* magazines and the monthly "*Kingdom Ministry*" published innumerable articles after 1966 which pointed out 1975 as the year of destruction and the beginning of the millennium.

At regular intervals we were reminded that there were only so many years, months or weeks left until 1975. The literature gave glowing descriptions of those who sold their houses and property, and made up their minds to "serve" as pioneers for the rest of their days under the old chronology. These were commended because of their intention to make good use of "the short time remaining before this world would go under at Armageddon".

In the May 1974 issue of *Kingdom Ministry* we found the following article on page 3, (which was published throughout the rest of the world as well):

"Reports are heard of brothers *selling their homes and property* and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. *Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end.* - 1. John 2, 17." (My italics)

I was present in 1975 at one of the Jehovah's Witnesses' conventions in Holland, where the Watchtower Society's Dutch co-ordinator, Rob Engekamp, made a thunderous speech about the imminence of Armageddon which was expected in 1975. Let me repeat what he said at the convention in Utrecht:

"The Faithful and Discreet Slave, God's channel in Brooklyn, asks: Is it possible to gather four and a half million people to our meetings in September (1975) who will all survive the great tribulation? Is that what we all want, brothers and sisters? (Great applause)...Who knows what the next few weeks and months will bring us! When God's visible organisation sends out an invitation to 4,5 million people and asks them directly: "What is your status before the throne of God; start doing something! *And when we have reached the point where we understand this, well then you can sell your house, sell everything you own and then you can say: Can I live on the interest from my bank deposits? If so, how long? That long? Get rid of the rubbish! Start serving as a pioneer!*" (Interrupted by tremendous applause.)³⁴

This was the way in which we were all stimulated and inspired to look forward to the end during that year, 1975. We had all without exception to work hard and spread as much literature as possible. Rob Engelkamp went on:

"Brothers and sisters, we must all continue to stimulate the sale of *the Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines. We must make up our minds to order a regular quota to our congregation. Make this stipulation: In these last months of this system of temporal things I will drown people in Watchtower literature!" (Enormous applause.)

But 1975 passed by. Just as in 1914, 1915, 1925 and 1941, Armageddon became painfully obvious by its very absence. *Once again the Watchtower Society, "God's channel of communication," had revealed itself to be a false prophet.*

No, the end will come before the year 2000

³⁴ *A shocked discovery (Een schokkende ontdekking), pp. 6-7*
34 Watchtower 1/1-89, first printed edition s.8; 15/10 and 1/12 1995.

But "the prophet" risked making a new prediction. The Witnesses were told that their work of evangelising from door to door must be completed within the near future. The latest hope was that the end would come before the turn of the century, but this prediction was abandoned in 1995 when The Watch Tower Society were given a new "adjusted comprehension" concerning "the beginning of this generation."³⁴

Chapter 8 Exhibitions of power and frustrations.

A time of disappointments begins

The last half of the seventies was a time full of disclosures for me. The erroneous prophecies about 1975 forced me to analyse the organisation's eschatology. At the same time, as an elder and presiding overseer, I was given a deeper insight into what went on inside the organisation. What I both saw and met with behind the scenes frightened me. For a long time I had turned a blind eye to my discoveries of discrepancies in the doctrine, and to the ruthless way in which the Watchtower Society treated people. Both the erroneous prophecies and my discoveries concerning the reality behind the organisation's facade caused me to develop serious mental problems.

I noticed from the subject matter of the different addresses at the summer conventions in Jordal Amfi and Ekeberg Sports Arena in Oslo in 1973 and 1974, that the Watchtower Society was trying to tone down the anticipation regarding 1975 it had itself been inciting previously for almost 10 years.

As everyone knows, the year 1975 came and the year 1975 went, without the events "prophesied" by the Watchtower Society happening. Paul Bruun, one of the Watchtower Society's circuit overseers in Norway, gave an address at the convention at Ekeberg Sports Arena in which he referred to the words of Jesus in *Matthew 24: 45-51*. He claimed that the "bad servant", who starts to bully the other servants, signified the enemies of the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn, represented by "The Governing Body" of "God's visible organisation". *The "bad servant" was all those who criticised the doctrines of the Watchtower Society.*

I was not quite happy with this explanation and decided to speak to him personally. After the address I met him at the camping site and stopped him. I asked him if he meant that ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses who had a critical attitude also comprised the "bad servant".

"Yes", he answered, and hurried away.

It is my experience that the foremost leaders were always busy if I, or anyone else, wanted to ask them about something. The answer shocked me. I immediately felt that there was a connection between the non-appearance of the predicted events in 1975, and the clear warnings now coming from the Society against those who, contrary to supposition, might dare to criticise the false prophecies of the "Faithful and Discreet Slave". Preparations for a "witch-hunt" for the alleged "bad servant" were under way, and the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" was to be protected at all costs.

The Watchtower Society reveals itself as a false prophet

The Organisation was (and is) a demagogue who exploited all my resources as long as I accepted everything that was said, but who classified me as a rebel as soon as I started asking questions which for some reason or another were found distasteful to answer. I no longer blindly responded to any demand, and suddenly I began to have great difficulty in accepting everything the so-called "faithful and discreet slave" explained to me.

One of those present at a congregational book study I conducted criticised the Watchtower's "prophecy" about 1975. This Witness knew his Bible very well, and he proved without a shadow of doubt that the Watchtower's choice of language and grammar concerning the year 1975 could not be misunderstood. I had no other choice than to say that he was right. At that time the Society's leaders were beginning to give Witnesses the impression that it was we ordinary publishers who had misunderstood the statements about 1975, and that we had given the words a deeper meaning than the Society had intended. Many Witnesses apparently swallowed this explanation, perhaps mainly out of fear of reprisals from the leaders. However, I agreed with the grammatical evaluation of the man at the book study. This led to some "loyal" Witnesses denouncing me in front of the other elders, which resulted in my being called in "on the carpet" and warned to remain loyal to the Watchtower's doctrines.

Words and phrases often used by the Watchtower about 1975 were as follows:

"So we can expect," and "likely that the end of 6000 years of the rule of mankind will occur at the same time as the beginning of the seventh day of a thousand years in 1975." "Very probable." "A suitable time for Jehovah to introduce a Sabbath-millennium for the whole of human creation." "Within a few years at the most the remaining biblical prophecies will be fulfilled."

In all post-war literature considerable emphasis was given to the year 1914. That year was the very foundation of our preaching. We preached that God's kingdom was established in that year and that Jesus Christ came to his heavenly throne. The end of this ungodly world would come before the 1914 generation had died out, and 1975 was the year.

Mankind, including my family and myself, had the hope of not even having to die! Such a hope was really worth living and fighting for, I thought. As a Jehovah's Witness I believed that the kingdom would come within my own lifetime. This knowledge and anticipation engendered a spirit of enormous enthusiasm both within me and many other Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 1976 *the Watchtower* published an article which provoked disgust and nausea amongst some of the ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses, including myself. *The Watchtower* tried to save the situation by simply asserting that it was the individual Jehovah's Witness who was responsible for all the frustrated expectations concerning the year 1975. *The Watchtower*, December 1st, 1976 said on page 540:

"It is possible that some of those who have served God, have planned their lives according to a mistaken interpretation of exactly what was to happen on a certain date or in a particular year. But it is not advisable for us to set our sights on a certain date and neglect everyday things which we as Christians must take care of, such as things we and our family really need. If anyone has been disappointed...he should now concentrate on adjusting his viewpoint, seeing that it was not the word of God that failed or deceived him and brought disappointment, but that his own understanding was based on wrong premises."

Miscalculation, and the Society's deliberate attempt to evade responsibility, caused a crisis of confidence within the organisation. Several hundred thousands began to leave the cult. Due to the dramatic fall in membership the Society was forced to change its tactics, and make some small admissions. Raymond Franz, a former member of the governing body, now himself an ex-Jehovah's Witness, was given the task of formulating the acknowledgement. In his book *"Crisis of Conscience"* he says:

"It had taken nearly four years for the organisation through its administration finally to admit it had been wrong, had, for an entire decade, built up false hopes."

How had I actually arrived at such an interpretation, a belief in the end of the world in 1975?

Had I myself "devised" these false prophecies?
How had I arrived at the belief that it would be that particular year?
Was this idea my own invention?
Was it not the "faithful and discreet slave" who had given me this
"understanding" as "food at the right time"?
Who really was the one deserving most reproach for this?
Was it my own "insight" which had caused me to believe that Armageddon
would come in 1975?
Was it the congregation publishers who had "prophesied" the end in 1975, or
was it the Watchtower Society?

What particularly grieved me was that the organisation I had regarded as my "mother" had not been honest. It could not have been the individual members of the organisation who had thought out these "prophecies". For the Watchtower Society claims the following:

"It is through his organisation that God provides the light which Proverbs say is the doctrine or law of the mother. If we are to walk in the light of truth we must not only recognise Jehovah God as our father, but also his organisation as our mother."³⁵

Now that the Society was *blaming us* for having misinterpreted their articles about 1975, I considered them to be liars and hypocrites because they were not honest enough to admit their mistake. I heard how the leaders of the Society, who had themselves proclaimed the end in 1975, were now giving the ordinary publishers a thrashing. It was both sickening and revolting to observe such hypocrisy, an opinion I was obviously not alone in holding. After 1975 about 1 million Witnesses left the organisation, most due to disappointment. Had they all read incorrectly?

Here again I would like to draw attention to mind control, and what is usual for this type of cult. The psychologist Steven Hassan says:

"The doctrine is to be accepted, not understood. [...] Its power comes from the assertion that it is the one and only truth: that it encompasses everything. Since mind control depends on creating a new identity within the individual, cult doctrine always requires that a person distrust his own self. The doctrine becomes the "master program" for all thoughts, feelings, and actions. Since it is the TRUTH, perfect and absolute, any flaw in it is viewed as only a reflection of the believer's own imperfection. He is taught that he must follow the prescribed formula even if he doesn't really understand it. At the same time he is told that he should try to work harder and have more faith so he will come to *understand* the truth more clearly."³⁶

It is worth pointing out that Hassan is writing about his experience from the Moon-church in the USA and similar cults, but nevertheless, I find it appropriate to include his points of view and make use of them to throw light on the practices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Clear statement: You have been stupid

At that time I was feeling terribly let down and this was not improved by the Society's arrogant behaviour. Let us take a look at an address given by the Watchtower Society's representative Mr. Wijngaarden on Sunday July 18th 1976, in Rhinhallen at Arnhem. The title of the talk was:

Continue to wait for the end!

³⁵ Watchtower, May 1st. 1957, p. 274.

³⁶ Steven Hassan: *Combating Cult Mind Control*, p. 79.

Wijngaarden said, among other things:

"We must be more zealous than ever before. Do not work towards a certain date. You should not arrange your life so that on a certain date you have exhausted all your resources, at the same time you no longer have an income, no further reserves, and find yourself destitute, and perhaps dependent on help from other brothers.

Unfortunately, since we have not seen the fulfilment of our hopes, brothers and sisters are reducing their activities, and walking into Satan's trap with their eyes wide open, thus incurring a whole lot of extra burdens. And at this time, just before the end. One builds up debts, buys a more expensive car, buys a house, and is occupied for months or even years in the work of restoration. Other brothers go on courses in order to qualify for better-paid jobs. Families suddenly begin to attach importance to increasing their numbers. Now, just before the end, one grants oneself everything that has been sacrificed during these last years.

It shows common sense to do those things that you ought to do for yourself and your family, and not to put off such things. Does something in your home need repairing? Do it!

Does anyone in your family need medical treatment, an operation, for example? Do not postpone this because you believe Armageddon is coming now at once.

Have you made provision for your family in case of unforeseen occurrences like death?

A question to those of us who are single. Do you really feel that you ought to get married - or to put it in Paul's words - "burn with passion", and were planning to wait to get married until after the great tribulation? Well, do what it is necessary to do! It is not a sin. Look for a suitable marriage partner. Use your common sense."

When I received an account of this address from Dutch "friends" I felt both furious and disappointed. Before 1975 I had been called on to sell all I possessed, and hazard being a full-time pioneer "the short time that was left". Let me again quote the Watchtower Society's own statement before 1975 in *Kingdom Ministry* May 1974 page 3:

"Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end."

I myself did not sell my home, as I did not own a house to sell. What would have happened if I had owned one, I really do not know. However, I had refrained from building a house, since the time left was too "short". In addition, we were to calculate whether we could live on interest from bank investments, so that we could resign from our jobs in order to "serve" God full-time. Insurance policies were to be terminated, something I did, among other things.

There were other things that happened during the last half of the seventies, which helped to open my eyes to the truth about the strict and merciless system *The Watchtower* has built up, and to realise how little the individual really counts for the Watchtower Society.

The time around and just after 1975 was a period of growth in the congregation. We needed to extend Kingdom Hall, as there were a great many students at "the theocratic ministry school". Under these circumstances, the period between each time a student could be given a "task" was too long, and we planned to build an extra room. In this way we could hold two different "classes" at the same time. So we started to extend the premises by seventy square metres. As was usual in the Society, all the work was done voluntarily by members of the congregation. Many of them made a fantastic effort, and after three months of hard work everything was finished. We were pleased and proud over the excellent result.

In addition to this colossal building activity the around 100 publishers in the congregation had each spent 8,7 hours in door-to-door service, which was commendable. We could proudly welcome the visiting circuit overseer. *He showed no reaction whatsoever to the enlarged premises, but sharply criticised the fact that we had "only" spent an average of 8,7 hours per publisher during the last 6 months.* He told the congregation quite plainly:

" Looking at the report from the last six months it is obvious that the congregation does not value Jesus' offer of redemption. You are shutting your eyes to reality (Armageddon)."

Many were completely overworked after all the effort of the last few months. Some of the men were so tired that they burst out crying without reason. They had worked 40 hours a week at their ordinary jobs, and spent the evenings working at Kingdom Hall. In addition, they made sure that they spent 8,7 hours each month on preaching, and they kept up with all the congregational studies and meetings, including thorough preparation beforehand. The meetings and preparation alone demanded at least 10 hours a week. As a result of all this pressure there were many who had not slept more than 5 - 6 hours a night for long periods at a time.

The congregation received the circuit overseer's castigation in shocked silence. The members were stunned and shattered. When the elders, with myself as presiding overseer, had a meeting with the circuit overseer, I demanded that he apologise to the congregation for these rude and unkind remarks. At this meeting I showed him a list of about 28 names, of which half a dozen were people of around 80 years old. Some of these were suffering from serious illnesses, and several of them had been diagnosed as manic-depressives. Many were taking "nerve pills" or anti-depressives.

In spite of this, he completely rejected my arguments, insisting that we elders must make an "especially strong effort" in this "exceptional work" to which God had called us. I reminded him of the instance in Old Testament history when Jacob slowed down out of consideration for the sick and elderly, as well as women and children. But such arguments had no effect whatsoever on the Watchtower Society's representative, who firmly refused to apologise. On the contrary, he repeated that he had by no means changed his mind, and that his *criticism was final*.

I have encountered this type of disposition, this strict, relentless attitude, in most of the Jehovah's Witnesses circuit overseers. I even venture so far as to say that most of them showed psychopathic tendencies, because in spite of undeniable evidence, they would never admit to making a mistake. A psychopath can very often be recognised by this lack of ability to admit faults. In the organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses, it was (and still is) the practice to lay the blame on us, not the Society. Whatever the circumstances, it was we who understood nothing, and they who were always right.

Although the congregation and most of the elders were shocked over the thrashing they had been given, and although they agreed with me, none of them dared to support my statements openly, presumably through fear of reprisals from "Big Brother".

A week before this meeting another of the congregational elders had said in a talk that we must value the new premises and be zealous in service, otherwise it was possible that God would take the new building away from us. At this meeting I took up this statement with him, and pointed out that it worried me a great deal. To tell the congregation, after they had worked like heroes for three months, that God might decide to take the Kingdom Hall away from them if they were not active enough, was a form of pressure I was not happy with. However, he was right. Not God, but the Watchtower Society had shown several times that this is just what can happen. They do just what takes their fancy in these matters, without considering anyone else but themselves, something the next story clearly proves.

I went home terribly depressed after this meeting. I asked myself:
"Joseph, is it you or the circuit overseer who is wrong?"

I thought that if it really was I who did not understand these things, I who was the congregation's presiding overseer³⁷, then I could not be acceptable to Jehovah God, and I would not achieve eternal life in The New World.

From this time on I began to be preoccupied by thoughts of suicide. I was no good, I had the wrong motives, an "immature" attitude, as the Society's representative had told me. I thought that I had acted sincerely, with the best intentions, and with consideration of what was best for the congregation. Now suddenly white had become black, and vice versa. I was not sure that I could bear to live with the situation I could see beginning to emerge on the horizon.

Another event which happened at about the same time showed me how little the individual is worth in the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation, and that the elder in my own congregation had been right. What happened was as follows:

Our neighbouring congregation had been striving for over 25 years to acquire an assembly hall, or Kingdom Hall as it is called in "theocratic" terminology. At last they were fortunate enough to be able to buy an older property which could be converted to this purpose. Several times a delegation of brothers and sisters from our congregation went over to help with the reconstruction. An exuberant celebration was held when everything was finished.

Soon after, another large hall was built nearby, belonging to another Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in the district. When this was finished the Watchtower Society made up its mind that this congregation needed more publishers in order to cover the cost of these new premises. For this new Kingdom Hall was far too big for the one congregation alone, and the expenses were far greater than the congregation could manage to meet. If the congregation were to be in a position to meet its obligations the Watchtower Society would have to give it financial support, which would definitely be a flow of money in the "wrong" direction. So the congregation we had been helping had to be dissolved. There was no question of whether this would be propitious, or whether anyone was favourable to this type of solution. They were just told that from now on they belonged to another congregation, which was the one that had incurred such heavy expenses. I remember that the congregation's presiding overseer, who along with all the others had striven so long for a hall of their own, stood on the platform and wept as he read out the order from highest hold. Complete submission and absolute obedience without question or protest, are what count in the Watchtower organisation, not people.

In another congregation, which had a large hall under construction, a difference of opinion arose among the members concerning the building project. The Society solved the problem by simply dissolving the whole congregation without considering either personal feelings or the financial consequences for many of the members. They had to travel to another town to attend Jehovah's Witnesses meetings, which meant an increase in personal expenditure, not to mention the extra amount of time each member had to set aside for the Society's activities.

Hard work makes me more confused

In a way the seventies decade was a time of enormous activity for me - particularly in connection with our anticipations regarding the year 1975 -, but it was also a period of great conflict and frustration. For many years I had had great respect for my leaders, and I had confidently followed them without hesitation, and without questioning either their commands or their judgement. But due to my personal enthusiasm and expansive ideas as elder and

³⁷The "Presiding overseer" is the leader of the local congregation.

presiding overseer, I did things, or initiated activities, which brought me into direct opposition with the organisation's leadership. I was fond of the people in "my" congregation, and I often prayed to God to help me to do what was right for them.

For a number of years we were a happy, united group. Besides the Society's five weekly meetings we sometimes held an extra meeting where we praised those who worked hard, particularly the women in the congregation. Like most Jehovah's Witnesses very few of them had a job and instead they gave much of their time to working for the congregation.

Sometimes I organised an outing to an amusement park or a fun fair, for example, or we might visit different museums. We could join together for a boat trip, or have a game of football, or some other form of joint activity.

However, in doing this I "peed over the edge of the chamber pot", as we say in Holland. The Society had not recommended this type of enterprise, and there were definitely not any regulations covering extra meetings at Kingdom Hall. On the contrary, such ventures could "harm" the work of preaching. The reasoning amongst the leaders was that it was not possible to preach and sell books and magazines at a fun fair, and therefore such activity should not be encouraged. *The Society reprimanded me, giving me the clear, unmistakable order that I was not to arrange any other meetings than those imposed by the Watchtower leaders.* Our time could be better put to use going from door to door during the years that remained. There would be plenty of opportunity for spare-time activities in the New World, now was the time for work, not for carrying on futile, "meaningless" activities.

To put it bluntly, every time I prayed to God for guidance as to the way in which I could best take care of the well being of the congregation, and then acted as the Spirit guided me, the Watchtower Society reacted negatively. Time and again I was admonished that I must not do anything on my own, but wait until proposals and plans were discussed in the monthly magazine *"Kingdom Ministry"*. In their literature the Watchtower Society was fond of describing what I was doing as "running ahead of God's organisation".

Having my own ideas indicated independence of thought and that I was trying to walk "ahead of Jehovah's light". This made me more and more confused. The fervour and activity of the other elders and myself created a positive, contented atmosphere in the congregation. It engendered greater joy and enthusiasm amongst the members of the congregation, and an increase in the number of publishers. I asked myself: How can anything be wrong when it produces such good results?

Now, I understand! I as an individual was not to think that I knew better than "God's organisation". The Watchtower Society will not risk losing its control over each member under any circumstances, and *I could prove a dangerous element if I was allowed to carry on with my own enterprises.* The Society must do the thinking for each member, we were *not even supposed to study the Bible for ourselves.* Even this the Society was to do for us. They write:

"We may think of study as hard work, as involving heavy research. But in Jehovah's organisation it is not necessary to spend a lot of time and energy in research, for there are brothers in the organisation who are assigned to do that very thing, to help you who do not have so much time for this. These preparing the good material in *The Watchtower* and other publications of the Society."³⁸

³⁸*Watchtower, June 1st. 1967, p. 338.*

Factors such as those described above gradually resulted in an increasing state of conflict within me.

Chapter 9 Is the Watchtower Society honest?

I began to question seriously the Watchtower's integrity. Under different courses held for the congregational elders I had been trained to resort to "authentic" lies when those "hostile" to us, such as the police or other representatives of authority, interrogated us about anything connected with the "theocratic" organisation. We were taught to have thought out beforehand the answers we would give if we found ourselves in a situation where a direct answer was demanded. *In such cases we were to tell lies, which according to the Watchtower Society's use of language were not falsehoods, but "theocratic war strategy"*. When the work of preaching is forbidden in a certain country and people ask: "Are you a Jehovah's Witnesses?" you must answer: "No, I am a Christian."

Most people who know Jehovah's Witnesses will certainly not believe that the use of pure lies is part of "the education" in congregational life. *Not only are Jehovah's Witnesses allowed to make use of lies when it serves the interests of the organisation, they are directly encouraged to do so*. The Watchtower Society's massive propaganda machine has forced individual members to regard black as white, and "lies" as "theocratic war strategy" or aids to the service of God.

One of the many examples to be followed which have been published by the Watchtower Society over the years, is the story of a Jehovah's Witnesses who went from door to door in former Eastern Germany, where Jehovah's Witnesses were forbidden to preach. She had just rung on the door of one who opposed Jehovah's Witnesses, and realised that he would contact the police. So she sprang into the next doorway and quickly changed out of her red blouse into a green one. When she appeared on the street again a police constable had arrived, and the communist officer asked her: "Have you just seen a lady wearing a red blouse in this doorway?" She answered, no! "Did she tell a lie? "No, she did not," writes the Watchtower Society. "She was not a liar. Rather she was using "theocratic war strategy", hiding the truth by action and word for the sake of the ministry." Rahab, the harlot who ran the inn at Jericho, is normally condemned as a deceiver. She hid two scouts from Israel in her house and lied to the king's servants and said: "I do not know where they went."

Insight states the following on page 245:

"While malicious lying is definitely condemned in the Bible, this does not mean that a person is under obligation to divulge truthful information to people who are not entitled to it."

The Watchtower, June 1st. 1960, page 352 says:

"As a soldier of Christ he is in theocratic warfare and he must exercise added caution when dealing with God's foes. Thus the Scriptures show that for the purpose of protecting the interests of God's cause, it is proper to hide the truth from God's enemies. [...] When faced with the alternative of speaking and betraying his brothers or not speaking and being held in contempt of court, the mature Christian will put the welfare of his brothers ahead of his own, remembering Jesus' words: "No one has greater love than this, that someone should surrender his (life) on behalf of his friends."

It is easy to understand that it was only human of this woman, going from door to door illegally, to want to avoid any confrontation with the communist oppressors, but that the Watchtower in this way openly encourages both her and others to make use of "theocratic lies", is very serious.

Did Jesus defend Peter when he lied and denied that he knew Jesus? He was in the same situation as the lady in East Germany, who was in danger of being arrested because she was a true follower of Jesus. Did Jesus praise him for being a "good boy" and using "theocratic war strategy"? No, the Bible says that Jesus just looked at him, and Peter wept bitterly, repenting of his conduct.

How many hundreds of thousands of Christian martyrs' lives could have been saved if they had just used the Watchtower's so-called "theocratic war strategy", since their lives hung on the same question as the one the Witnesses in East Germany was asked: "Are you a Christian?"

A reply in the affirmative meant death for very many people.

The late president Frederick William Franz is presented in the Watchtower literature as an eminent student of the Bible, and according to a previous Jehovah's Witnesses leader A.C. McMillan he was a Hebrew scholar.³⁹ At a court case in Scotland president Franz claimed to know a number of languages, including Hebrew and Greek. However, when he was asked to translate a text in Genesis 2:4 from English into Hebrew, he had to admit that he could not do it.⁴⁰

My own experience of leading overseers in the organisation convinced me that they had no greater respect for integrity than their president. All Witnesses had to report their "ministry" each month, a written report covering how many hours they had spent on preaching, and how much literature they had distributed. It was a difficult task for many people to achieve the "quota" of between 10 and 12 hours a month, particularly for a father or mother with small children to consider. Pioneers were often people without family commitments, but they had a struggle to reach their total of 100 or 150 hours a month, dependent on whether they were "pioneers" or "special pioneers".

Swindling with the "report forms"

I could name many examples of deception among leading overseers, and of how other pioneers were invited to do the same. It is obvious that when making a report of the number of hours one has spent knocking on doors, one begins counting from the time of knocking on the first door. If a publisher drives two hours to arrive at the "district", preaches for two hours, and then spends two hours driving home again, he can only "report" two hours work. Since most people found it difficult to achieve the large number of hours demanded by the Watchtower Society, they resorted to trickery. I knew a circuit overseer who got up early every day and stood in front of the railway station with the Watchtower and Awake! magazines at about seven o'clock in the morning. But at nine o'clock he was due at an "attendance" to meet other Witnesses who were also going out in "the field". Together with the others he discussed the "text for the day", briefed them about the Watchtower literature they were to present that day, and gave some examples and perhaps a little demonstration of how a particular magazine should be proffered.

When all this was over, probably nearly another hour had gone by, and by the time he had started publishing again over an hour would have passed. Nevertheless, he counted all this time as "Field service". The time could be "reported", since he "had begun earlier".

³⁹ *Watchtower*, Nov. 1st. 1977; (Norwegian edition) *Faith on the March*, 1/1957.

⁴⁰ *Douglas Walsh Trial*, Scotland, 1954, p.91.

Obviously, this is particularly "effective" when Jehovah's Witnesses are assigned to a district where they spend, for example, an hour travelling to reach the area. Whilst "ordinary" publishers in a congregation loyally start "working" after their arrival, these others make one quick visit and deliver a couple of magazines, before continuing their journey towards their real destination. Thus these smart ones can report travelling time as active publishing. This bothered many people's consciences but was practised and recommended by trained and leading representatives of the Watchtower. It was only natural that some people suffered from a guilty conscience, as they knew very well that many of the hours reported had not been spent on publishing.

Another fact that bothered me for a long time was the Organisation's hypocritical encouragement of members to be honest in their dealings with all forms of authority in society. At the same time I knew through my pastoral work in the congregation that many were overworked, had mental problems, and were ill through living too stressful a life. Many were on sick leave for long periods at a time and lived off the state, or were accorded disability pensions. In my opinion this was also a form of deceit, since these people were not overworked due to their job, but because of the organisation's inhuman pressure and burdens. One would think that if someone was too ill to do his job he was also too ill to take part in voluntary physical work for the congregation, or too ill to go from door to door, but this was by no means always the case. The construction of the Watchtower Society's new headquarters in Norway serves as a glaring example of this.

A time to speak - when?

This was the heading of an article in *the Watchtower* magazine, a very significant article. The Watchtower Society explains here how "theocratic war strategy" can be used at work, against one's employer. The fact is that many people have access to confidential archives, and for this reason are under an oath of secrecy. *Not so Jehovah's Witnesses! Not that they are not under oath in the same way as everyone else, but that they disregard it! According to the strict rules of the Watchtower Society, opposition to its regulations means disfellowshipping, and the regulations say that a Jehovah's Witnesses must break his oath of secrecy.* The laws of the Society take priority over the laws of the community. Let me quote from the Watchtower, which writes of a hypothetical case about "Mary" who works in a hospital: (*Watchtower* September 1st. 1987, pages 12 - 15)

Mary works as a medical assistant at a hospital. One requirement she has to abide by in her work is confidentiality. She must keep documents and information pertaining to her work from going to unauthorised persons. Law codes in her state also regulate the disclosure of confidential information on patients. One day Mary faced a dilemma. In processing medical records, she came upon information indicating that a patient, a fellow Christian, had submitted to an abortion. Did she have a Scriptural responsibility to expose this information to elders of the congregation, even though it might lead to her losing her job, to her being sued, or to legal problems for her employer? Or would Proverbs 11: 13 justify keeping the matter concealed? This reads: "The one walking about as a slanderer is uncovering confidential talk, but the one faithful in spirit is covering over a matter." - Compare Proverbs 25: 9,10. [...] This command from the Highest Level of authority in the universe put the responsibility upon each Israelite to report to the judges any serious wrongdoing that he observed so that the matter might be handled. While Christians are not strictly under the Mosaic Law, its principles still apply in the Christian congregation. Hence, there may be times when a Christian is obligated to bring a matter to the attention of the elders. True, it is illegal in many countries to disclose to unauthorised ones what is found in private records. But if a Christian feels, after prayerful consideration, that he is facing a situation where the law of God required him to report what he knew despite the demands of lesser authorities, then that is a responsibility he accepts

before Jehovah. There are times when a Christian "must obey God as ruler rather than men". Acts 5:29.

While oaths and solemn promises should never be taken lightly, there may be times when promises required by men are in conflict with the requirement that we render exclusive devotion to our God. [...]

Anticipating the problem, some brothers who are lawyers, doctors, accountants and so forth, have prepared guidelines in writing and have asked brothers who may consult them to read these over before revealing anything confidential. Thus an understanding is required in advance that if a serious wrongdoing comes to light, the wrongdoer would be encouraged to go to the elders in his congregation about the matter. It would be understood that if he did not do so, the counsellor would feel an obligation to go to the elders himself.

There may be occasions when a faithful servant of God is motivated by his personal convictions, based on his knowledge of God's Word, to strain or even breach the requirements of confidentiality because of the superior demands of divine law.

Courage and discretion would be needed. The objective would not be to spy on another's freedom but to help erring ones and to keep the Christian congregation clean. Minor transgressions due to sin should be overlooked. Here, "love covers a multitude of sins" and we should forgive "up to seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18: 21,22) This is the "time to keep quiet". But when there is an attempt to conceal major sins, this may be the "time to speak".

The Watchtower, June 1st. 1960, on pg. 52 states:

"The Scriptures show that in order to protect God's interests lying to God's enemies is not really lying but war strategy."

The article goes on to say that if this standpoint leads to a Jehovah's Witnesses being condemned for contempt of court, "consideration of the brothers" must come first.

A time to speak was necessary in the following situation:

We were always encouraged to be loyal servants to the Watchtower, but the Watchtower was (and is) *not* loyal to its servants. 3 small children died from sunstroke at a big convention in America. Psychologist Jerry Bergman and a doctor were responsible for first aid at this convention. They approached the organisers and asked the leaders of the convention to announce over the loud- speakers that mothers should put their small children in the shade, due to the extreme heat. The organisers refused to pass on this important message, saying: "We cannot allow the loudspeaker system to be used for PERSONAL messages". Because such a "personal message" as this from the medical personnel (with their quasi-knowledge) was not made known, three children died!! The doctor was so deeply shocked by this that, in the same way as Bergman, he later left the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation.⁴¹ Was that honest?

A short commentary.

You may think that some of both Bergman's and my allegations seem incredible, far-fetched and even ridiculous. I must make it clear to readers that I am describing an international organisation. The doctrine is the same all over the world, but the comprehension and execution of the Watchtower's innumerable rules and regulations can vary from country to country. I would like to repeat something written earlier in this book, that is, that many Jehovah's Witnesses went much too far and were, as the saying goes, "more Catholic than the Pope". I found this to be particularly so where the people concerned had grown up in an

⁴¹*The mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses, by Jerry Bergman, Ph.D. Witnesses. Inc. Clayton, VA. 944.*

autocratic atmosphere and society. Extreme behaviour is to be found in every dictatorial and despotic system.

Research

About 1% of Jehovah's Witnesses has a university degree or is highly educated. Some of these have spent many years researching into biblical and other subjects. Other people without a formal academic education have done a considerable amount of research. One example is Carl Olof Jonsson, a Jehovah's Witness from Sweden, who had been an elder for many years. He spent 7 years studying and researching into a subject, and the document containing the results of his findings ran to several hundred pages. When he sent his manuscript to the Watchtower Society's headquarters in Brooklyn, he was told: "We'll look at it when we have time". After many months of waiting he approached Brooklyn again, asking if they had read the manuscript. The consequence was that he was forbidden to make his research public. The results must not be made known to other Jehovah's Witnesses. As Jonsson felt that it was immoral not to admit that an important part of the doctrine had been proved wrong, he was disfellowshipped. Was that honest?

An American researcher was also given the answer: "*We haven't got time*". However, he was furious and asked what people were to do when they discovered that the bread they were eating was poisoned. Should they put off removing the poison, hoping it would not kill them? Of course his efforts were of no avail, since the Watchtower will never back down over questions of doctrine. Was that honest?

Avoid Independent Thinking

«From the very outset of his rebellion Satan called into question God's way of doing things. He promoted independent thinking. "You can decide for yourself what is good and bad," Satan told Eve. "You don't have to listen to God. He is not really telling you the truth." (Genesis 3:1-5) To this day, it has been Satan's subtle design to infect God's people with this type of thinking. - 2 Timothy 3:1, 13. How is such independent thinking manifested? A common way is by questioning the counsel that is provided by God's visible organisation."⁴²

This is the Watchtower Society's dishonest attitude, and it is in fact even more extreme. The Watchtower Society demands that Jehovah's Witnesses must accept all doctrines, even if they are false! Salvation is dependent on following the Watchtower doctrine, regardless of what the Bible might say about the matter. As my assertion may appear to be rather drastic, I will include a few quotations from the legal record of the Douglas Walsh Trial in Scotland, where the Society's governing president at the time, Frederick William Franz, spoke for the defence himself.⁴³

Question: Is this the reason why Jehovah's Witnesses accept without question all the doctrines and interpretations coming from the Watchtower's Bible and Tract Society through its governing body?

Answer: Yes.

The Society's secretary at that time, Grant Suiter, was interrogated about the Watchtower's publications (this time the question involved was the significance of the year 1874)⁴⁴

⁴²Watchtower, Jan. 15th. 1983, p. 22.

⁴³Douglas Walsh Trial, Scotland, 1954 (1958 edition) p. 91.

⁴⁴Douglas Walsh Trial, Scotland, 1954 (1958 edition) p.504.

Question: Only by the publications (of the Watchtower Society) can he have a right understanding of the Scriptures?

Answer: That is right.

Question: Is that not arrogance?

Answer: No.

Question: You heard the evidence 1874 having been found to be wrong as a material and crucial date,...absolute acceptance as Truth was imposed upon all Jehovah's Witnesses at that time?

Answer: That is right.

An earlier vice-president of the Watchtower Society, Hayden C. Covington, was also questioned at this trial.⁴⁵

Question:A false prophecy was promulgated?

Answer: I agree that.

Question: It had to be accepted by Jehovah's Witnesses?

Answer: That is correct... Our purpose is to have unity.

Question: Unity at all costs?

Answer: Unity at all costs.

Question: ...unity based on an enforced acceptance of false prophecy?

Answer: That is conceded to be true.

On page 114 in the legal record F. W. Franz admits that the prophecies made by the Society at times had been wrong, but that notwithstanding this the Watchtower Society demanded that Jehovah's Witnesses the world over should accept them! The quotations above are, as I have said, taken from the legal records, and are therefore weighty evidence. It follows that they are both convincing and frightening proof that the Watchtower Society has an unrestricted position of power and dishonesty.

* A young man lost his hand in the printing press in Brooklyn. He was told to go home, since he was no longer any use to them. *"You can be a pioneer,"* the leaders told him. The man had to go home without so much as a cent in compensation.

* The continual nagging about fashion, hairstyles and the length of women's skirts, creates a nervous and unpleasant atmosphere. Certain types of spectacle frames were also forbidden. I was always asking my wife if my hair was short enough. I lived in constant anxiety as to whether my appearance would be approved. If you could tape record a private conversation between two Jehovah's Witnesses, you would notice that the conversation is often about clothes, appearance and outward impressions. A patient at the psychiatric hospital hit the nail on the head when she said: *"People with very short hair are either mentally disturbed or Jehovah's Witnesses"*.

* Another problem for Jehovah's Witnesses is that many of the thoughts and ideas printed in the *Watchtower* and other publications from the Society are so obviously stupid that as a Jehovah's Witness one is ashamed to acknowledge them in front of sensible, intelligent people. For example, *The Watchtower* of July 15th 1971 claimed that the origin of one's feelings and behaviour, and the source of one's likes and dislikes, is not one's mind but one's actual, physical heart. The heart is the seat of one's motives. You do not think with your brain, but with your heart, alternatively, with your kidneys. 20 years ago this was so-called "new light". If the heart contains your motives and feelings, and that heart is replaced by another, or

⁴⁵*Douglas Walsh Trial, Scotland, 1954 (1958 edition) pp. 347-348.*

an artificial heart, you will lose your feelings. Experiments have been done on animals, giving them new hearts made of plastic or metal. What happened? No change whatsoever was registered in the emotional life of the animals. But according to the Watchtower a heart transplanted from a criminal would make me into a criminal. No sensible foundation for such an assertion could be found either then or now. It is quite ridiculous and creates real problems for normally intelligent people. Jehovah's Witnesses blushed when people referred to this stupid claim. They also insisted that anyone who received a blood transfusion was injected with the personality of the donor at the same time. Because of this, they said, many people had become criminal. They claimed to have evidence of the fact that there were many blood donors in the prisons of America.

Can the reader imagine what it must have been like for a doctor, or any other intelligent person, to proclaim this sort of nonsense to people and even worse, say that the information was God-given? Is it surprising that this could be the cause a certain amount of mental strain?

* Jehovah ruled from the centre of heaven. *He lived on the star called Alcyone, in the constellation of Pleiades.* Nice to know! (*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 3, pg. 327; Watchtower May 15th 1895, pg. 1814)

* And here is another assertion: *White people living in China will eventually produce Chinese offspring* - without intermarrying - due to the influence of soil and climate. (*Watchtower* July 15th 1902, pg. 3043)

* *Negroes became black as a punishment from God.* This originates from the curse of Kanaan. Moreover the white race has qualities lacking in the dark races. However, it appears that the matter is being corrected now, since many years ago the Society was able to gratify the world with the information that believing Negroes were gradually beginning to go back to their "original" skin colour - as an answer to pray! (*Watchtower* Nov. 1st. 1900, pg. 2706; *Watchtower* July 15th 1902, pg. 3043)

* Chapter title: "The testimony of God's Stone Witnesses and Prophet, the Great Pyramid in Egypt" *Studies*, vol. 3, 1903 edition p.313.

* ...the Great Pyramid...seems in a remarkable way to teach, in harmony with all the prophets, an outline of the plan of God, past, present and future..." *Studies*, Vol. 3, 1903 edition p. 314.

* The Great Pyramid of Egypt, standing as a silent and inanimate Witnesses of the Lord, is a messenger; and its testimony speaks with eloquence concerning the divine plan." *the Watchtower*, May 15th 1925, p. 148.

* But 3 years later they completely changed their view: "It is more reasonable to conclude that the great pyramid of Gizeh, as well as the other pyramids...were built...under the direction of Satan the Devil." *The Watchtower*, November 15th 1928, p. 344.

* "Those who have devoted themselves to the pyramid...The mind of such was turned away from Jehovah and his Word." *The Watchtower*, November 15th 1928, p. 344.

The Watchtower expects Jehovah's Witnesses to defend their assertions until they are given "new light". To assert anything else can lead to disfellowshipping on the grounds of rebellion against "God's channel of communication on earth". This results in the intellect of the Witnesses being continually in conflict with the dishonesty and ridiculous assertions made by the Watchtower, which in itself is bad for mental health. Or put another way, how would readers like to have to preach "life-giving truths", of the sort I have mentioned above, to enquiring souls?

Watchtower Bible and literature "an insult to the word of God".

The Witnesses' "Bible translation" has been described by leading biblical students as "an insult to the word of God". This is also documented, and therefore I decided - being in complete confusion - to find out if this really was correct. Twisting dogmas was one thing, but to falsify the Bible itself - that was going a little too far - even where the Watchtower Society was concerned - I thought.

I was helped a great deal by reading the literature of Bible students such as William Barclay, Walter Martin, James W. Sire, F.F. Bruce and several others. I would like to quote what the well-known British authority, H.H. Rowley has to say about this:

"The translators have their own views on Hebrew tenses, but prefer to offer them to uninstructed readers before submitting their justification of them to the scrutiny of scholars. This is probably wise. They profess to offer a rendering into Modern English which is as faithful as possible. In fact, the jargon which they use is often scarcely English at all..."⁴⁶

Regarding the Watchtower Society's understanding of the "real" meaning, his opinion is very precisely formulated:

"...it is an insult to the word of God. [...] Even readers who know only English will wonder whether writers who are so poorly equipped to write their own language can really be authorities on Hebrew tenses! [...] From beginning to end this volume is a shining example of how the Bible should not be translated, and a reminder that the Bible is great literature, which deserves to be translated by those who have a feeling for style and who both understand the original and know how to express its meaning with elegance."⁴⁷

We were allowed to make use of lies or "theocratic strategy" to mislead our enemies. In addition to this I would like to mention a couple of things which bothered me when folk asked if I was saved, born again, or believed in faith healing. We had been trained to answer in the affirmative, but we knew this was a lie.⁴⁸ The following are some examples of how Jehovah's Witnesses teach their members to

- 1) Lie
- 2) Avoid the truth
- 3) Give the impression that they teach something other than is in fact the case.
- 4) "Waffle", that is, instead of answering the question asked, in fact answering something else.

The quotations are taken from the "theocratic" textbook *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, (published 1988) and describe the way in which Jehovah's Witnesses are to explain their faith to others. The commentaries [in brackets] are my own comments to the text. The rest is taken verbatim from the Watchtower's book⁴⁹

If Someone says... "I'm saved"

⁴⁶H.H.Rowley: "How not to translate the Bible", in *The Expository Times*, nr 65. Nov. 1953. p. 41.

⁴⁷H.H.Rowley: "How not to translate the Bible", in *The Expository Times*, nr 65. Nov. 1953. p. 42.

⁴⁸For those seeking the opinion of other experts, *The Christian Century*, vol. 70. Oct 7th. 1953, pp. 1133, 1134, and vol. 72. Oct. 5th. 1955, pp. 1145, 1146. are recommended.

⁴⁹*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pp. 360, 80 and 160.

[According to the Watchtower's doctrine they are not. On the contrary, everyone who "is saved" is a non-Witnesses, and will be destroyed by Jehovah and Jesus at Armageddon]

You might reply: "I am glad to know that, because it tell me that you believe in Jesus Christ. The work in which I am sharing is one that Jesus assigned his followers to do, that is, to tell others about the establishment of his Kingdom. (Matt. 24:14)" **Then perhaps add:** 1) "What is that Kingdom? What will its coming mean to the world? (Dan. 2:44)" 2) "What conditions will there be here on earth under that heavenly government? (Ps. 37:11; Rev. 21:3,4)"

Or you could say: "Then you appreciate what the apostle Peter said, here at Acts 4:12, don't you?...Have you ever wondered *by whom* the name of Jesus was *given* for us to put faith in it?" **Then perhaps add:** 1) "Jesus himself tells us (John 17:3)" 2) "Notice that Jesus said he had made his Father's name known. (John 17:6) What is His personal name? What associations does it convey to your mind? (Ex. 3:15; 34:5-7)"

"Are you saved?"

[According to the Watchtower's doctrine the answer is simply NO]

You might reply: "So far, I am. I say that because I am aware of the Bible's counsel not to be overconfident of our standing. Are you acquainted with this text? (1 Cor. 10:12)" **Then perhaps add:** "What is the reason for that? To persons who had been born again and had the hope of heavenly life (Heb. 3:1), the apostle Paul wrote...(Heb. 3:12-14) It is by growing in knowledge of God's Word that we fortify our faith."

Or you could say: "I could answer that by simply saying, Yes. But did you know that the Bible speaks of more than one salvation? For instance, have you ever considered the significance of Revelation 7:9, 10, 14?...So, there will be people who will be saved through the coming great tribulation, to live right here on earth. (Matt. 5:5)"

If Someone says...

"I've been born again"

[According to the Watchtower's doctrine they cannot be, since there are only 144,000 Jehovah's Witnesses who are]

You might reply: "That means that you expect someday to be with Christ in heaven, doesn't it?...Have you ever wondered what those who go to heaven will do there?" **Then perhaps add:** 1) "They will be kings and priests, ruling with Christ. (Rev. 20:6; 5:9, 10) Jesus said that these would be just a "little flock" (Luke 12:32)" 2) "If they are kings, there must be subjects over whom they will rule. Who will these be?...Here are some points that I found to be very interesting when they were drawn to my attention. (Ps. 37:11, 29; Prov. 2:21, 22)"

I could have made a lot comments about the above, but I have sufficient confidence in the reader's intelligence to let these quotations stand without further explanation.

Do you like to know more about Jehovah's Witnesses "War Strategy", please read the new book on this topic "The Teocratic War Doctrine: Why Jehovah's Witnesses Lie in Court", by psychologist Jerry Bergman, Ph.D. Published by Witness Inc. P.O. Box 597. Clayton, CA 94517.

Don Nelson has written the following in the foreword of this book: "Jerry Bergman has already published several books on the mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses issue. Drowning on his impressive background in psychology, biology and sociology—as well as his experience as an expert witness in some 150 court cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses--Dr. Bergman has called up, the heavy artillery against yet another tenet of the Watch-tower Society, this time, taking aim at the fascinating doctrine of 'theocratic warfare'. This doctrine

permits Watchtower adherents to dissimulate, misdirect, misinform and even lie with a clear conscience—under oath!

This informative booklet describes and defines the infamous 'Rahab technique,' which recommends that Jehovah's Witnesses distort and withhold truth in court (With the Society's full approval and blessing). 'The technique is based on the premise that Jehovah's Witnesses are "at war" with the world and the courts and that therefore they, the courts as enemies, do not need to be told the truth.

Dr. Bergman soberly traces the origin of unique Watchtower war strategy from its inception in 1936, during the regime of the Society's second president, Joseph Rutherford, to its current status in Watchtower court tactics (especially in child custody cases).

The doctrine was practised by former presidents of the Watchtower, Charles Taze Russell and Frederick Franz, both of whom lied under oath about their linguistic prowess.

Chapter10 I take Paul seriously

Over the years I had managed to get hold of some older literature from the times of Russell and Rutherford. Paul writes in the Bible that the Christians at Beroea were "more noble", since they studied the Scriptures to see if what they heard was correct. As I was now just beginning to use my own common sense, and allow myself to think independently, I made up my mind to take Paul's words seriously.

I started to study all this literature, and I could not avoid noticing the many misinterpretations, explanations and attempts to explain away things published by the Society in previous years. However, I had learnt to look at everything through the eyes of the Watchtower. In all the literature, the organisation's insight and understanding at the time the literature was actually written, is explained as "increasing light", and the Society referred to Proverbs 4: 18 to clarify this phenomenon.

"The course of the righteous is like morning light, growing brighter till it is broad day."

Using a cunning interpretation of this Bible verse the Watchtower Society tried (and still tries) to extricate itself from mistaken prophecy, and the fact that old "truths" are suddenly not true any more. They have not been wrong, but have later received "new light". Earlier mistakes are accounted for by saying "the light was not so clear at that time", and that "we see everything much more clearly today".

For my own part, I had completely accepted this explanation until the great expectations generated by the Society concerning the year 1975 proved to be totally wrong. This is not to say that I did not believe it after 1975, but only that a grain of doubt began to take root in my subconscious, not primarily because the Watchtower Society had been mistaken, but because they tried to explain away the fact. By saying that it was I who had misunderstood what had been said, they managed to jolt a sleeping brain, which after many years began to wake up again.

I had inherited some older literature from deceased Jehovah's Witnesses in the different congregations, and what I read here gave me good insight into the life and history of the Watchtower Society. I will not hide the fact that much of what I read disturbed me, but I still held firm to the Watchtower's explanation of "the progressive light". This was in spite of the fact that it was quite clear to me that the Watchtower Society had "prophesied" erroneously a number of times, and that many of the doctrines had been changed several times.

What the Society had actually taught its disciples

As I think about it now, there are two particularly important points to be made about this, both of which prove how brainwashed Jehovah's Witnesses are! Of course both other Jehovah's Witnesses and I read older literature from time to time. But as we believed the Watchtower Society's explanation about "new light" we were "comfortably detached" from what we read. We read about the old "prophecies", and roared with laughter to think that anyone could have believed such things! As an example of "amusing" stories I can quote some passages from just the one book, *Studies in the Scriptures, Vol. 7 (The Finished Mystery)*:

- In 1918 God will annihilate millions of congregations and members of congregations, and in that year Christendom will be forgotten.
- In the autumn of 1920 there will be anarchy over the whole world.
- The Lord's return took place in 1874.
- Behemoth (Job 40: 10-19) was an illustration of the stationary steam engine. For example, the loins were the boiler, and the tail was the smokestack. Other "physical" phenomena are also described in detail.
- Leviathan (Job 40: 15; 41:25) was a steam locomotive, on which, for example, the tongue was claimed to symbolise the coupling link, sneezes were supposed to be the engine's whistle, and there were other fantastic interpretations of this remarkable creature.
- The departed saints rose up from the dead in 1878.
- In 1918 demons will invade the minds of all Christians (not Jehovah's Witnesses), and Christians and Christian congregations were respectfully described as "the class of swine". These will do a number of different things which will cause raging mobs to annihilate them that year.
- The voice in Revelation 9: 13 was William Miller, the Seventh Day Adventist, during the period 1829 to 1844.
- The "little flock" of Bible students who were living at that time, will be "glorified" (taken up to heaven) in 1918.
- The male child in Revelation 12:5 was the Roman Catholic papal rule.
- Michael and his angels, in Revelation 12:7, were the Pope in Rome and his bishops.
- The seven volumes of the book series called *Studies in the Scriptures* were the seven angels in Revelation 15: 1.

I could have continued, and the list would have been very long, even if I had only confined myself to the one book. What is so unbelievable is that we could laugh at all this and find it amusing. When *Consolation* writes that a good way to make children stop crying is to hold them under cold water, we could laugh about that too.

The fact is that principal points of doctrine had been changed, and the grave part about it is that the Society pretends that today's version is really Russell's original doctrine. They are directly falsifying the historical facts.

The founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, Charles Taze Russell, taught that the year 1914 was the definite end of the Old World. Not, as nowadays Jehovah's Witnesses mistakenly say that he taught, that the time of the end would begin then. Neither did he teach that Jesus would come into his kingdom and return to earth that year. Russell claimed that this happened in 1874, and the Watchtower Society retained this doctrine right up until 1929.

Pretending that Russell's predictions came true, the Watchtower Society has often quoted *The World* magazine of August 30th 1914. (Most recently quoted in *The Watchtower*, April 1st, 1984, pp. 5,6.) In an article in this magazine headed:

"End of all kingdoms in 1914", it was claimed that:

"The terrific war outbreak in Europe has fulfilled an extraordinary prophecy." "According to the Calculations of Rev. Russell's "International Bible Students" This is the "Time of trouble" Spoken out by the Prophet David, the Year 1914 Predicted in the Book "*The Time Is at Hand*" (1889) of which Four Million Copies Have Been Sold as the Date of the Downfall of the Kingdoms of Earth."

The same article is also quoted in *Qualified to be Ministers*.⁵⁰
Russell himself wrote:

"Since the year 1878 is indicated as the year in which the Lord began to take over his great power, it is reasonable to suppose that his Kingdom began then, and that the first stage will be the establishment of his body, the Church, from which the sleeping members will walk on ahead. [...] Our Lord, the appointed King, is now present, and has been since October 1874, and the formal overtaking of his royal power is dated as April 1878, and the Kingdom, as revealed to us by the Lord in his parables and prophecies (the gathering of "his anointed"), is now happening".⁵¹

In spite of the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses claim that Russell predicted the year 1914 as the time of this event, he retained his doctrine of the Lord's return in 1874 until the day of his death.⁵²

"In this chapter we present the Bible evidence proving that the full end of the times of the Gentiles, i.e., the full end of the lease of dominion, will be reached in A.D. 1914; and that that date will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men. And be it observed, that if this is shown to be a fact firmly established by the Scriptures, it will prove:- Firstly, That at that date the Kingdom of God, for which our Lord taught us to pray, saying, "Thy Kingdom come," will obtain full, universal control, and that it will then be "set up," or firmly established, in the earth, on the ruins of present institutions."⁵³

"...the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16: 14), which will end in A.D. 1914 with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced..."⁵⁴

However, as 1914 came nearer the "prophet" in Brooklyn began to be more careful. Earlier confidence changed to doubt, and as early as 1907, Jehovah's Witnesses, who were then called "The International Bible Students", could read the following:

⁵⁰ *Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 3. p. 234. See also vol.2, p. 101 and vol. 4, p. 621. (Translated from the Danish edition).

⁵¹ *Jehovah's Witnesses retained the 1874 doctrine until the end of the 1920's, and it was passed on from Russell to "judge" Rutherford who took over the presidency from him.*

⁵² *Jehovah's Witnesses retained the 1874 doctrine until the end of the 1920's, and it was passed on from Russell to "judge" Rutherford who took over the presidency from him.*

⁵³ *The Time is at Hand*, 1889, pp. 76, 77.

⁵⁴ *The Time is at Hand*, 1888 (1911 edition) p. 101.

"...that we have never claimed our calculations to be infallibly correct; we have never claimed that they were *knowledge*, nor based upon indisputable evidence, facts, knowledge; our claim has always been that they are based on *faith*. [...] But let us suppose a case far from our expectations: suppose that A.D. 1915 should pass with the world's affairs all serene and with evidence that the "very elect" had not all been "changed" and that without the restoration of natural Israel to favor under the New Covenant. (Rom.11: 12,15). What then? Would not that prove our chronology wrong? Yes, surely! And would not that prove a keen disappointment? Indeed it would! [...] What a blow it will be! One of the strings of our "harp" would be quite broken! However, dear friends, our harp would still have all the other strings in tune and that is what no other aggregation of God's people on earth could boast."⁵⁵

Now "the prophet" began to intimate 1915, but history shows that neither did 1915 bring any battle of Armageddon to bless Jehovah's Witnesses. Russell died shortly after this, and "Judge" Rutherford took over as president of the Watchtower Society. He was no less a man than his predecessor, and as early as 1917, *The Watchtower* (15/10) wrote that Abraham, among others, would be resurrected in 1925, and just before 1925 one could read in the same magazine that "*We can expect the harvest to be finished fifty years after 1874, or at the end of 1924*".

Rutherford proclaimed that the end would come in 1925, and that the ancient saints, such as Abraham, Jephthah and king David would rise up from the dead that year. Many Jehovah's Witnesses sold their property and some farmers refused to sow corn because the end was coming. The Watchtower followed up Rutherford's prophecy:

"The date 1925 is even more distinctly indicated by the Scriptures...by then the great crisis will be reached and probably passed."⁵⁶

During the period between the two world wars Jehovah's Witnesses continued their attack on all Christian churches and evangelical congregations. They were still expecting the destruction of the world in the near future. Observe the following pronouncements in the Society's literature:

"The word of God shows clearly that this clerical system will be completely annihilated in the battle of Armageddon, which is near at hand."⁵⁷

"The day of the battle approaches [...] Christendom is a part of Satan's organisation."⁵⁸

"These established churches [...] constitute the visible part of Satan's organisation, which are symbolically characterised in the Scriptures as a beast."⁵⁹

"The facts show clearly that the time of God's mysterious act is near, and that a just reckoning will be demanded of the enemy [...] The destruction of the enemy is ominously near."⁶⁰

As I have mentioned, in between the two world wars Jehovah's Witnesses believed that the end would come soon, and Rutherford had presented the year as being 1925, after 1914, 1915

⁵⁵*Zion's Watchtower, Oct. 1st. 1907.*

⁵⁶*Watchtower, Sept. 1st. 1922, p. 262.*

⁵⁷*The Watchtower, June 15th. 1934.*

⁵⁸*The Watchtower, January 15th. 1935, para. 20, 21.*

⁵⁹*The Watchtower, June. 15th. 1934. (Translated from the Norwegian edition).*

⁶⁰*The Watchtower, Aug. 15th. 1935. (Norwegian ed.).*

and 1919 had proved erroneous. In 1920 his famous book was published *"Millions Now Living Will Never Die"*. The spreading of Rutherford's new "prophecy" was so comprehensive and intensive that it became a slogan, and many of the elderly Jehovah's Witnesses in this country can still remember this campaign.

1925 did not bring Armageddon to mankind's blessing either, and in 1941 Rutherford proclaimed in his last published book, *"Children"*, that there were only a few months left before Armageddon.⁶¹

This was the book that Jellie and her family began to study in 1946. At that time she was told that she would not even finish her basic schooling before the battle of Armageddon would put an end to this evil world.

After the war Brooklyn continued to claim that the battle of Armageddon would come in my generation, in spite of all the previous false prophecies. At the time, I searched the literature for statements concerning when this would happen, and believed implicitly that the Society could give me this information. After all, they were "God's visible organisation on earth".

What I forgot to make into consideration

However, we forgot one very important point! All these statements were there to read in the Watchtower Society's official textbooks - and at the time these "truths" were written also presented as "new light". The Society condemned to death at Armageddon all those who did not accept the doctrine. The Society demanded that everyone must believe these dogmas at the time, this was a condition of achieving eternal life!!!

What we did not realise at the time was that, as we sat reading all this, enjoying a good laugh and treating the whole thing more or less as a joke, the Watchtower Society had achieved its object. We did not take the earlier false prophecies seriously, but all the same we accepted the "new light" as it kept on appearing. In other words, we were trapped.

Some of the statements which kept alive my hope that the end of the present order of things would come in my generation, are listed below. The battle of the great day of Armageddon is always "very near". During the last 100 years the Society has made hundreds of predictions concerning the imminence of Armageddon. These examples from the period since 1946 show how they change their definition of the word "generation". They desperately need to gain a few years, as the sands of time are rapidly running out for the 1914 generation.

1946

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "The disaster of Armageddon...is at the door"⁶²

1953

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "Armageddon is so near at hand it will strike the generation now living."⁶³

1967

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "That time began in the autumn of 1914...Jesus says that

⁶¹Exactly the same announcement appeared in the Watchtower.

⁶²Let God Be True, 1946, p. 194.

⁶³You May Survive Armageddon Into God's New World, p.331.

"the generation" that saw the beginning of this time period in 1914 would also see its end. The generation that was old enough to view those events with understanding in 1914 is no longer young."⁶⁴

1968

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "Jesus was obviously speaking about those who were old enough to Witnesses *with understanding* what took place when the last days began...Even if we presume that youngsters 15 years of age would be perceptive enough to realise the import of what happened in 1914, it would still make the youngest of "this generation" nearly 70 years old today...Jesus said that the end of this wicked world would come *before* this generation passed away in death."⁶⁵

Raymond Franz, former member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, says in his book *Crisis of Conscience*, p.213:

"When the Awake! magazine of October 8, 1968 (pages 13,14) discussed this fifteen years ago in the pre- 1975 days the stress was on how *soon* the generation of 1914 would be running out, *how little time* was left for that generation's life span. For any of Jehovah's Witnesses then to have suggested that things might go on for another twenty or thirty years would have been viewed as manifesting a poor attitude, one not indicative of strong faith. When 1975 passed, the emphasis changed. Now the effort was made to show that the 1914-generation's span was not as narrow as one might think, that it could stretch for quite a long way yet. Thus, on October 1, 1978, Watchtower spoke, not of those Witnessing "*with understanding* what took place" in 1914, but of those who "were able to *observe*" the events beginning that year. Mere observation is quite different from understanding. This could logically lower the minimum age limit of the ones forming "this generation"."

1978

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "Thus, when it comes to the application in our time, the "generation" logically would not apply to babies born during World War I." ⁶⁶

1980

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "It is the generation of people who saw the catastrophic events that broke forth in connection with World War I from 1914 onward...If you assume that 10 is the age at which an event creates a lasting impression ..."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Watchtower, May 1st. 1967. p.262.

⁶⁵ Awake!, October 8th. 1968 p.13.

⁶⁶ Watchtower, October 1st. 1978, p.31.

⁶⁷ Watchtower, October 15th. 1980, p.31. where such an expectancy of life is referred to. The subject is dealt with in Vine's Expository Dictionary, p. 44.

1984

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "If Jesus used "generation" in that sense and we apply it to 1914, then the babies of that generation are now 70 years old or older...Some of them "will by no means pass away until all things occur."⁶⁸

1989

This generation: From 1914 until Armageddon. "He [the apostle Paul] was also laying a foundation for a work that would be completed in our 20th century." (*Watchtower* January 1st 1989, orig. magazine p.12)
The generation is limited under this formulation, but even more important is the striking conclusion. Armageddon has again been given a date, this time the end of the present century!

1989

"He [the apostle Paul] was also laying a foundation for a work that would be completed in our day."⁶⁹

We find by looking at the Bible that this gradual extension of the concept "generation" has removed itself further and further from biblical usage of the expression, since the Bible describes a generation as "thirty or forty years".⁷⁰ A century is also estimated as three generations.⁷¹ In other words the Bible interprets a generation quite differently from the way Jehovah's Witnesses do today, in spite of the fact that they claim to base their statements on biblical interpretation.

The Witnesses undergo «training»

As I have shown, the Watchtower Society has always been very engrossed in the end of the world, which has always been near at hand. This message continued therefore to be broadcast throughout the fifties and sixties. Nathan Knorr became the Watchtower Society's new president in 1942 after Rutherford's death. He started a comprehensive programme of education for all Jehovah's Witnesses, and among other things, established the Society's missionary college, Gilead, in the state of New York. Since the individual Jehovah's Witnesses was not all that adept at telling people about the Society's doctrines,⁷² Knorr started the "theocratic ministry schools" in every local congregation. Here, each member of the congregation was trained to hold a 3 - 5 minute presentation of *Watchtower* and *Awake!*, and in a slightly modified version, this type of presentation is still in use today. Textbooks in the techniques of public speaking were published, and the Society's literature included a wider choice of subjects. The magazine *Awake!*, in particular, began to deal with subjects such as medicine, sociology, geography, archaeology, and published popular scientific articles in a number of other fields. *Awake!* tries to give the impression of holding a high intellectual standard, but the subjects and citations in the magazine are often taken from other books and periodicals not belonging to Jehovah's

⁶⁸*Watchtower*, May 15th. 1984. p.5.

⁶⁹*Watchtower*, Jan 1st. 1989. p. 12. and *Watchtower*, Jan 1st 1989, bound volume, p.12.

⁷⁰This is mentioned many times in the Bible, among others in Numbers 14: 30-35,

⁷¹Colin Brown: *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, p. 35.

⁷²In Rutherford's time publishers went round with gramophones and played records of Rutherford's speeches. So-called "Witnesses cards", on which a short description of the message was written, were also used and shown to interested members of the public.

Witnesses, but reproduced and edited by the Watchtower Society in such a way as to give them the appearance of supporting the Society's own doctrines on the subject. In particular, the Society employs a very suspicious, if not directly fraudulent, use of quotations from original texts. One should always check the source, and if there are three dots in the text (...) one can usually be certain that the quotation has been taken completely out of its context.⁷³

Knorr expressed the following at a convention at Yankee Stadium in 1950:

"The field of labour to which we are going, is not a place in which to allow our arms to remain at our sides, and the future before us until Armageddon is not the time to allow our hands to remain idle, because of either laziness or fear. Of one thing we can be certain: time is short!"⁷⁴

In 1953 Knorr proclaimed to a crowded stadium:

"Because Armageddon is so close many will enter the New World without needing to go down into death. In view of this the question that confronts us all is, *"Before Armageddon - What?"* That is a question that each one of us must settle for himself," he pointed out. "If we hope to enter the new world just ahead, we must alter our lives now while this old world yet stands, and bring them in accord with the new-world standards. [...] Prepare now for that eternity of all new things, to live in it and be forever happy. Avoid perishing with this Old World in the 'war of the great day of God the Almighty'. Get ready now to live AFTER ARMAGEDDON in GOD'S NEW WORLD!"⁷⁵

Besides these innumerable allusions and insinuations regarding the imminent end of the world, I was often served with verbal hearsay and rumours. In addition to the years clearly named in the literature, - 1874, 1878, 1914, 1918, 1919, 1925, 1941 and 1975 there were rumours that the end could come in 1954 and later in 1958 and 1984. Although these dates were not officially named in the literature, naturally the Society was quite aware of the rumours being spread. I never found out who originally spread them, but the Watchtower Society never denied them. Presumably the organisation welcomed them as an important incentive both to keeping up the level of activity, and also the sale of literature.

Chapter 11 The dishonesty and arrogance of the Organisation results in a breakdown

What is Love?

In spite of the fact that by thinking for myself I began to discover serious discrepancies in connection with events prophesied earlier, in spite of the cold, unfeeling attitude shown by the leadership, and innumerable other incongruities, it was very difficult to free myself from such a subtly devised system, or to wrestle with the strong, throttling chains which bound me. I was still convinced that Jehovah's Witnesses were in possession of "the truth" and that the fault was mine. The Watchtower Society was "God's Organisation".

Those who have neither a personal knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses, nor in any other way some appreciation of what happens to a person exposed to change of personality techniques, are simply not in a position to realise how difficult it is to break with a religious cult such as Jehovah's Witnesses. Year after year I had been in their power, and to break out of this situation is such a traumatic experience that very few can comprehend it. Today I realise that

⁷³As an example can be mentioned the Watchtower Society's booklet *Should you believe in the doctrine of the trinity*, a booklet consisting of 32 pages including the front cover where over 80 adulterations of this sort can be found!

⁷⁴Watchtower, April 1st. 1951. (Norwegian edition)

⁷⁵Report of the New World Society Assembly. 1953.

in spite of the gloom in which I found myself, a guiding hand brought me out into freedom, and I willingly admit that I could not have managed it "alone".

During the eighties things happened in the congregation which once more threw me completely off balance. I had to proclaim a message in which I no longer believed wholeheartedly. A nagging doubt and a vague presentiment within me made me feel that there must be something seriously wrong with the Jehovah's Witnesses' organisation, but I could not put my finger on anything concrete, except perhaps one remarkable thing. "Everyone" complained that there was not enough genuine love to be found in the congregations. Because of this, many people kept changing over to new congregations, believing that it was their own congregation that was not good enough. But after they had been in the new congregation only a short while, they discovered that it was exactly like the one they had just left. Many people have continued moving from one congregation to another like this for years. The fault does not really lie at congregation level, but rather in the unbiblical structure of the Jehovah's Witnesses congregations.

My daughter's problems

Ingrid, the eldest of our four children had begun to question the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines when she was in her teens. She was very clever at school and always wanted to do her best, and she had the same attitude to her "ministry" for Jehovah. She continually tried to fulfil the exacting demands and goals set by the Organisation for its members. We had always taught our children with the help of the Watchtower literature, and in the books it is clearly stated that children and young people who do not go door-to-door visiting will die at Armageddon. No doubt this sounds brutal, but that is the way it is. Even in literature intended for the smallest children, consisting of little more than picture books, the statement is the same. Preach, do as the Watchtower says - or die!

Ingrid tried, but it was just too much for her. She began to suffer from anorexia nervosa. She disagreed with the congregation, something one just does not do unpunished amongst Jehovah's "loving" people. Therefore, she left the congregation of her own free will, and of course was treated as though she had been disfellowshipped. She was very frustrated and began to follow an irresponsible lifestyle, which further endangered her health. As we were living in Norway with our three other children, she had no one to turn to. The whole congregation regarded her as dead, as did over fifty relations as well. Some of her previous friends and relations lived only a few minutes walk away from her, but that was no help. Those who are disfellowshipped must be hated, and contempt must be made obvious. It made no difference that in fact she was not disfellowshipped, but had made the decision to withdraw from the congregation herself. No one was interested in hearing her side of the case. Brooklyn's prophets had spoken. Brooklyn's word is the law, and the order came from there.

After a while the loneliness became unbearable. Although Ingrid was regarded as disfellowshipped from the congregation, she decided to attend a circuit assembly, knowing that a number of uncles, aunts and cousins would be present. If she had hoped for some form of consolation or human contact, or at least some small sign that in spite of everything somebody still cared about her, the hope was soon extinguished. **(My wife and I were not at this convention and had already told Ingrid that we would still continue to keep in contact with her)**

None of them greeted her.

No one volunteered any expression of friendliness.

No one even sent her a friendly look or a wave.

As far as they were concerned, Ingrid no longer existed.

It is just not possible to believe that an organisation can make its members accept such a malicious and destructive policy. Ingrid returned home in despair, with an unbearably heavy heart. She had inwardly hoped for some faint sign of sympathy, but the hope was in vain. After this she had no wish to live any longer, and within a short period of time she made three attempts at suicide. One of these attempts occurred just after she returned home from this circuit assembly, and was a direct result of Jehovah's Witnesses' demonstration of "Christian love". She spent a whole year in a psychiatric hospital. In fact there were quite a few Jehovah's Witnesses in this hospital, which clearly indicates that there are problems in the "spiritual Paradise".

Not one member of the family visited her during this year, apart from Jellie and myself. For the rest of the family, who were all Jehovah's Witnesses, she was already dead. Today I am very thankful that I was unable to accept the Watchtower Society's policy in these matters. Ingrid was my daughter, and I just could not regard her as "dead". After all she was our own daughter, and there had to be a limit somewhere!

When Ingrid came home from hospital she was still oppressed by a feeling of loneliness. She decided to apply to the congregation to be reinstated as a member, as she could not bear to live in this way any more. Completely alone in the world, without friends or family, without any companionship, without anyone to talk to, amounted to a situation just too tough to cope with. This was when she experienced the greatest shock of all. Many Jehovah's Witnesses and the whole of the family suddenly became very friendly, and those who lived some distance away both wrote to her and telephoned her. She had yielded to the Watchtower's demands, although deep inside she still did not agree with the Watchtower's doctrines. How was it possible to recall all one's friends just by making a cringing appeal to a triple-manned "judicial committee"? What sort of friendship and loving concern is this? Who can feel any attraction for a friendship and love which is ruled over by Brooklyn?

Ingrid attempted suicide again, and this time she nearly succeeded in carrying it through. When she gained consciousness after many hours at the hospital the doctor said: "It is unbelievable that you have recovered, you must have had a guardian angel." **(Ingrid became a Christian soon after we left Jehovah's Witnesses. She is now a member of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. She also began a course of four years higher education at a college).**

While I was enduring all that was happening to our own daughter I felt such despair that I really cannot describe it in words. I wish I could, but I am just unable to do so. The hope given us by the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines gave no comfort or relief in these circumstances. Things were happening in the congregation that were incomprehensible to me. God was showing me the true countenance of the organisation, but at the time I did not realise what I was actually looking at. My prayers for help over the years were answered, but not in the way I had expected. I had been holding on tightly to the positive aspects of the organisation, but now "the evil" aspects became so obvious that I could no longer avoid noticing them.

The "spiritual paradise"

Jehovah's Witnesses had taught me that Jehovah was a loving God and that his loving spirit was at work in the organisation. However, through my pastoral ministry I saw how wretched the mental state of many of the congregation's members actually was, and questions began to pile up subconsciously within me. These were questions I did not even dare to pose to myself, but they were there. When I made a list over the members of the congregation, it came to light that about 70% had mental problems to a greater or lesser degree. Over 50% of the congregation's members took "nerve pills" or anti-depressives. Several had undergone

psychiatric treatment over a long period of time, and three had unsuccessfully attempted suicide.

This was a depressing revelation that actually surprised me, and I found these discoveries deeply disturbing. It was as though someone was trying to tell me something, but I could not quite discern the message.

I well remember a public address I held in 1984, in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses at Skien. The theme of the talk was tolerance towards one another, and the outline of the talk⁷⁶ (published by the Watchtower Society for the congregational elders) explained that whilst some members of the congregation could be physically ill, others could have nerve problems. At that time I had nearly finished my course in social pedagogy, and in this connection I had studied a lot of statistics. These statistics showed the average extent of mental illness among Norwegians. As a source, I used Professor Nils Johan Lavik's book: *A Healthy Mind in a Sick Society*, in which Lavik demonstrates that between one third and one quarter of the population of Norway has mental disorders of some form or another.

I referred to these facts, which were actually in accordance with the Watchtower Society's outline for the talk, except that they made no reference to statistics. This is because according to the Society, Jehovah's Witnesses are "the most healthy and mentally well-balanced people in the world". However, I then said to my listeners:

"Lavik demonstrates that 25 - 30% of Norway's population suffers from some form of mental disorder. We are no exception, for my own personal notes and inquiries show that our average percentage is higher than the one indicated by Lavik."

Being an elder and the presiding overseer, I had knowledge of the fact that at least 50% of the members of a congregation in which I served in Telemark took some form of nerve medicine or anti-depressive, something which by definition one does not do unless one's nerves are frayed for some reason or another. I knew of other congregations, both in Norway and Holland, where the figure was just under (in some cases over) 40%, which was also well over Lavik's figure.

On this special occasion there were several Jehovah's Witnesses present who came from the psychiatric hospital in the town. At that time I was working at the hospital, and these patients had been allowed "out" to listen to my talk. My knowledge of the subject was very good, both because of my being an elder and presiding overseer in the congregation for many years, and because of my being on the staff of the hospital. In addition, being based on my own problems and studies, the information I presented was well substantiated. Among other things I informed the congregation that people with mental or "nerve" problems ought to go and see a specialist, who would be able to assist them in finding a solution to whatever individual problems they might be suffering from.

To advise Jehovah's Witnesses to seek psychiatric help is as bad as "swearing in church" seen from the Watchtower Society's viewpoint. In the literature Witnesses are warned against

⁷⁶*Many people who attend the so-called "public addresses" believe that they are written by the speaker. Many congregation members make this mistaken assumption as well. The truth of the matter is that all public addresses are written at the Headquarters of the Watchtower Society in Brooklyn, N.Y. and translated into the required number of languages. In this way the Society makes sure that the same information, right or wrong, is presented everywhere and that a Norwegian Witnesses talking to a Danish Witnesses will be familiar with the same "truths". This is important in order to maintain the illusion of free will and the individual's ability to think "independently". In reality this is one of the most necessary elements in the process of indoctrination, a fact which can be verified by all the experts in this field.*

psychologists or psychiatrists, as it is regarded as "immature" to seek the help of such people. However, after the meeting several of the ordinary members of the congregation came over to me, thanked me for the address and said that they agreed with what I had said. While I was speaking I saw many people who nodded their heads, obviously in agreement with my approach to the problem. However, there were also those who took a strong dislike to my presentation of the actual situation, and these were of course the congregational elders. (Just to keep the record straight, I was not attached to the Gjemso congregation myself.) Gunnar Skarheim, who was one of the elders, completely disagreed with what I had said. He considered that Jehovah's Witnesses should not seek psychiatric help, and *he thought therefore that I ought to concentrate on being a "preacher", not a social worker*". To proclaim from the platform that people with mental problems should go to specialists could definitely not be accepted in "his" congregation.

"Skarheim," I said.

"Do you realise the nature of the responsibility you are taking on your shoulders by preventing someone who is ill from going to a doctor? If a person is suffering from a mental disorder, he is just as ill as anyone with a physical disorder. Lack of psychological treatment can at worst result in a personal and family tragedy, and that the person concerned takes his own life! Are you prepared to take on such a responsibility?"

It should be unnecessary to describe the face and reaction of this "conscientious" elder after such a question, and of course the outcome was that I was again reported to the Watchtower Society as being "rebellious", as being one who did not keep to the Society's rules.

The jungle telegraph began to buzz again and Walther Larsen, the circuit overseer, reprimanded me because once again I had "peed over the edge of the chamber pot" and not confined myself to the Watchtower Society's printed outline. Once more a comment had been recorded in my file in the archives at headquarters.

The Society's attitude to psychologists and psychiatrists has changed somewhat, and it appears that it is no longer the policy to "advise against" going to them. For example, in "*Awake*" of October 22nd 1987 on page 11, people suffering from depression are advised to go to the doctor or seek professional advice. However, it was very different in my day.

The story of "Trine"

Now I shall relate what finally proved to be the last straw for me. A young lady, whom we can call Trine, was disfellowshipped from our congregation because she was together with a "worldly" young man and had a child with him. Three years later her mother rang me to ask if I would pay her a visit because her daughter wished to talk to me, as I was an elder of the congregation at the time. She had come to Kingdom Hall a couple of times since she had been disfellowshipped, and I had clapped her on the shoulder and said that I thought it was nice to see her. It is possible that this is what prompted her to contact me in particular, since I was the only one who had shown any sign of sympathy. As Trine was visiting her mother at the time, I went to her straight away.

She expressed her desire to come back into the congregation, as she could no longer endure such a lonely life. Neither did she wish to find comfort in a worldly environment, she said. She wanted to live a pure life in accordance with the standards of the Bible, and wished for the congregation's support to help her stay on her feet in a difficult world. When she had been reinstated, she hoped that someone would study the Bible with her.

Trine asked me what she should do to be accepted as a member of the congregation again, and I told her that she must write a letter to congregational committee which had disfellowshipped her. She asked me to help her write this letter, which naturally I did. We

included in the letter everything she had said to me, and wrote down all her positive hopes and the quality of life for which she yearned.

Enthusiastic and happy, I delivered her letter to one of the elders, let us call him Sven Dalgren, who had taken part in disfellowshipping her, and I told him how pleased I was that she wished to return to the congregation. *However, Dalgren's reaction was not in the least positive, and there was not even a tiny glimpse of the attitude Jesus described in the parable of the prodigal son.* His completely negative reaction disturbed and disappointed me terribly. Once again I was confronted by the same arrogant attitude which had previously nearly driven me insane. Dalgren replied:

"There can be all sorts of different reasons for Trine's desire to come back. You can be sure that her motives are mixed, to say the least. She will have to prove that she is really repentant, which means she ought to attend all the meetings regularly for one year."

I felt shocked and asked him if he really meant it.

"Yes", he said.

Something happened to me that I had never felt so strongly before. However, it must be mentioned that Sven Dalgren's answer was perfectly correct according to the rules in "the book" regarding attendance at meetings, but at this point I had begun to see the injustice of the system. Another point was that I could not understand how Dalgren could know what motives she had without having even spoken to her! I explained that I completely disagreed with him, and that I would inform the head office of my opinion of the case. I asked Dalgren to try to put himself in Trine's place.

"To expect a disfellowshipped young person to sit on the back row at a meeting, suffering from badly frayed nerves and with a fidgety child, is absolutely inhuman. As if this is not enough, she would be in an atmosphere where no one would greet her or say a few kind words, and where everyone would treat her as though she did not exist. Can you imagine what this would be like, Dalgren?" I asked him.

Of course I received no reply to this; just a strange, calculating look.

I tried talking to the other two who had been responsible for disfellowshipping Trine, but it was obvious that all three elders in the congregation's "judicial committee" were alike in their stubborn and relentless attitude. Neither Bredesen nor Haglund (the names are fictitious) were willing to forgive her.

Since all three had a prejudiced attitude towards Trine, I recommended that an impartial committee should look into the case. This was her right according to the Watchtower Society's own rules and regulations, and I showed the Society's literature to Dalgren, Bredesen and Haglund to convince them that she really could claim to have her case handled by a neutral committee. In spite of the fact that I showed them what rights she had according to the Society's printed regulations, that is, the right to new consideration by an impartial committee, they simply rejected such a possibility. The Society describes this privilege in a book called *"Pay Attention to Yourselves and All the Flock"*, a book which is only available to congregational elders, and few "ordinary" Jehovah's Witnesses know of its existence. Neither do most elders inform the members of their "rights", but use their own discretion and dominate the whole proceedings.

I became really angry and wrote a letter to the body of elders in the congregation and to the Watchtower Society's headquarters in Norway. I had often wondered why we were not allowed to ask someone who was disfellowshipped how he or she was getting on, and I suggested to the leaders that perhaps the parable of the prodigal son provided a good example for us in the present situation.

Although this letter includes many different elements, I feel that it is right to reproduce the whole letter. One reason is that it gives a good impression of my feelings at the time, and I

can assure readers that it takes a great deal to make a Jehovah's Witnesses even dare to ask a question concerning Society procedure. As this letter also became so significant for my later "status" in the congregation, I consider it only right that the reader should be given the same opportunity as the Watchtower Society to evaluate my grave "sin". Having in mind any possible Jehovah's Witnesses who know the details of this case, I reproduce the letter exactly as it was originally written. As I have mentioned, I am not Norwegian, and therefore I allow my characteristic "grammar" to remain uncorrected.

To The Langesund Congregation Body of Elders
Copy to the Watchtower Society.

Langesund, November 4th 1983

Today, November 4th 1983, I received a telephone call from sister XXXX. She asked me if I could spare the time to pay her a visit, as her daughter, "Trine", wanted to talk to me. As "Trine" had been disfellowshipped several years previously, I assumed that her request to talk to me probably had something to do with her disfellowshipped status. This was confirmed during our conversation. Her attitude was humble. She said that she wished to sort out her life and live righteously according to the standards of the Bible.

Since the father of "Trine's" daughter is unwilling to accept his responsibility as a husband he has been told to stay away from her. As time has passed she has come to realise that she has done wrong and that no one else is to blame but herself. She feels that she is weak, and would like support from the congregation to stay on her feet in the future. Because of this, she wishes to take up Bible study as soon as she is received back into the congregation.

When I delivered her written request for a meeting with the committee, I was very disturbed and disappointed by the attitude shown by brother S. Dalgren. "There can be so many reasons for her wishing to come back." He had a very negative approach to the question. "First she must show us that she is repentant", was his opinion. This means that she must attend all the meetings. Brother S. Dalgren quoted Xxxx Xxxxxx as an example of someone who showed his repentance by attending the meetings. But is not this a serious misinterpretation of the words of Jesus? Where is Xxxx Xxxxxx? No more to be seen at the meetings. Must we disfellowship him again, since attendance at meetings is considered to be conclusive evidence of repentance?

No, let us take a closer look at "proving their repentance by deeds", or "prove your repentance by the fruit it bears". Acts. 26:20. Matt. 3:8. The point is, to what extent - distance - stage, in how great a part, has the guilty one born sufficient fruit to prove repentance?

1. Let me mention some "deeds" or "fruits", or we can also call them "stages". When someone who has been guilty of a grave sin approaches the elders of his own free will, he/she ("Trine") is showing both wisdom and humility. Proverbs. 28:13.

2. If someone voluntarily confesses her sin to "the congregational elders", it could be an indication of her state of mind. James 5: 14-15.

3. Has she ceased to associate with the company that tempted her to immorality? Yes, she says. She requests association with the congregation. This is "proof of repentance by bearing fruit". Proverbs 13:20, 1. Peter. 4:3-4.

4. Has she shown that she wishes with all her heart to praise God as his true worshipper? Yes, for this is why she has requested a meeting with the elders. Has she made an effort to come to the meetings? No, I am afraid not. Why not? Remember! Not everyone has nerve enough to meet a silent crowd of people, who are not allowed to greet one, or even "nod".

Let me add that no single one of the above-mentioned "fruits" is a conclusive indication of a sinner's repentance. Just as attending the meetings is not, and does not necessarily have to be, a sign of repentance - there are many who attend meetings without repenting bad conduct - so it is a mistake to assume that someone who is not at the meeting, is not repentant.

The point is to look at each visible "fruit" being displayed. Each one can give an indication of repentance. One cannot emphasise or give priority to one "deed" and ignore other positive "deeds".

We must show compassion and help sinners who are really repentant. We should all wish to "bring a sinner back from his crooked ways". James 5: 19-20.

Practically speaking this means that we must be like Jehovah as he is presented in the parable of the prodigal son. The father knew that the son had committed serious crimes. Was he cold and unmoved when the son returned? Certainly not! He had been waiting for his son. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him." The father ran to meet his son and embrace him. He understood that he had already paid dearly for his sins. The son had incurred emotional scars as a result of his "reckless living". He had felt the pain of being "friendless".

Should we not be like Jehovah and rejoice over "Trine's" positive efforts? Shall we run to meet her and show her how pleased we are, or shall we give her the cold shoulder and take away her courage to ask for help, so that she becomes lost in "grief"?

Just like "the son", "Trine" shows signs of "coming to his senses". Shall we just overlook the fact that she has become aware of her spiritual condition?

I must distance myself from such an indifferent attitude. Since there are so few who find their way back to the truth, I must ask the question, why? Are they frightened because of the severe atmosphere? To what extent are we ourselves guilty in this matter? In spite of the fact that in later years we have been given subliminal tuition regarding people's complicated behaviour patterns due to nervous illnesses or psychosis, there is still an appalling ignorance about such things amongst the elders.

I am often apprehensive of the power elders are in a position to give themselves. To be cold and merciless in one's dealings with others is a form of domination. What would I do myself if I was unfortunate enough to fall out with Jehovah's organisation? If I had managed to gather together enough courage to confess my remorse, only to be confronted by a mentality which involved making me "squirm" a while before being allowed to join again, because my remorse was not credible enough, if I was forced to remain even longer on the "rack", I can well imagine I might prefer to die under this torture.

Disfellowshipped people sometimes come to the meetings. Anyone noticing their expression would easily see the sorrow by which they are weighed down. After a few times they do not come any more. Disheartened? Resigned? We are not allowed to say one word to them. Why are we not permitted to visit them in their homes and ask if there is anything we can do to help? I just do not understand it.

Although it is conceivable that a sinner must be punished, I cannot see why we are not (or are allowed to be) a little more alert to interpret indications of repentance. We would at least be able to confirm at an earlier stage whether there really were signs of remorse or not. If the result was positive, then the path of suffering could be considerably shortened. If the opposite appeared to be the case, at least the sinner would be reminded of the consideration with which we regard his/her situation. A visit of this kind would not need to be interpreted as "associating with a disfellowshipped person". For example, it could be an isolated visit, designed to find out the validity of any symptoms that have been observed.

Today, November 10th 1983, I was telephoned by a despairing family. Yes, indeed, "Trine" had received a visit, but they could not offer any help. The elders said that she would have to help herself. According to "Trine's" statement the elders had behaved both coldly and harshly.

This impression given to "Trine" and her parents is absolutely comparable with the experience of both myself and others during the past three years. The hard fact is that up until now no one in the congregation has been given any personal help in the form of a pastoral visit. I have not received such a visit and I know that another brother has moved away from the congregation because of this. He had then been living here a whole year and was very depressed.

Up until now I have visited most of the members of the congregation several times, just a spontaneous visit without any special purpose. I consider the elders' attitude to be tepid, apathetic and unfeeling. You have found me willing to co-operate in everything, but when matters concerning people's lives are at stake, my conscience tells me it is advisable to resign as an elder and ministerial servant.

I cannot co-operate with brothers having this sort of attitude. My decision is irrevocable, I really mean this, for I will not be guilty of risking a person's life.

Joseph Wilting."

I had suddenly realised what had happened, what was really going on, the purpose of the whole procedure. The truth hit me like a bomb, and I felt as though my head would burst open. This poor girl had no significance, nobody cared about her! This matter was not about her at all, although even the elders thought so. I know they believed this, as I myself had been just as relentless. But now I realised what the clammy hand of the Watchtower Society was actually doing, what sort of bestial demonstration of a terror policy was being put into effect. This girl was being used to frighten the rest of the congregation to obedience!

No one must be allowed to think that he could make his own decisions, the power of "the faithful and discreet slave" must be made evident in this matter. Not one single person in the congregation must be in any doubt as to the consequences of not keeping his place in the ranks.

A little comment to my letter

It is interesting to note that since then the Watchtower Society has evidently decided that the ideas expressed in this letter were not so stupid, as a few years later my suggestion of annual visiting of disfellowshipped former members was put into effect all over the world. To be precise, it was initiated in April 1991. To be sure, not all congregations necessarily follow this up, and I know of many who have never heard anything from their congregation, although Jehovah's Witnesses stated in the issue of the Narvik newspaper, *Forward*, dated Saturday, January 24th 1992, that this practice is now followed.

The practice of disfellowshipping has gradually become a millstone round the neck of the Watchtower Society, and the article in *Forward* compares this practice to that employed by political parties. It is interesting that they say, word for word:

"[...] that is, to exclude members who do not keep to the ideology of the party."

This is a very good comparison indeed. It is as well that they did not lie again this time, and claim that disfellowshipping is based on the Bible. Disfellowshipping for not following the "ideology of the party" is in fact a brilliant comparison. For example, where does it say in the Bible that one must regard one's children and one's own family as being dead, and have nothing to do with them? Where does it say that one must prevent children from seeing their

grandparents - just because a person visited a church, watched a national day parade, or celebrated a birthday?

The Watchtower Society's Unbounded Arrogance

The unbounded arrogance of the Watchtower Society creates a feeling of impotency and depression among Witnesses. When I wrote a seven-page letter to the Watchtower Society headquarters in Norway, expressing my outlook and asking some questions to which I required an answer, I received no reply at all. About six months later, when I expressed my disappointment over this to a travelling circuit overseer, and asked why the Society had not sent me a reply, he said that he had been told to talk to me. A few months later I attended a district assembly where among others I met the head of Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway, Thor Samuelsen. However, he now walked right past me several times without so much as a greeting, his back as straight as a ramrod. He knew about my letter, and I nursed a hope that he would talk to me, perhaps enquiring how I was feeling.

But Samuelsen deliberately walked right by me, without saying a word, without so much as a nod. This incalculably arrogant attitude forced me to realise that this could not possibly be God's folk. The fact that I had dared to write a letter to the Watchtower Society, in which I had asked some searching questions, and expressed doubts concerning the organisation's methods, was interpreted as rebellion against "God's channel" on earth. Seen from the Watchtower Society's viewpoint, this was just about tantamount to sinning against the holy spirit. In Samuelsen's eyes I was already informally disfellowshipped, and it was then that I made my decision to leave the organisation.

There was no longer any doubt in my mind. The Holy Spirit had revealed the true countenance of the organisation.

I should mention at this point that I knew Thor Samuelsen very well. During our acquaintanceship of over thirty years he had been a guest in our home several times. Sometimes he had stayed as long as a fortnight at a time. The thought of living for all eternity with such arrogant, self-righteous people depressed me terribly. Jehovah's Witnesses promise a Paradise, and I found it difficult to imagine any "Paradise" ruled by such people. The Watchtower Society's elders, ministerial servants and other leaders, are promised that they will be "princes" in the new world, and they behave accordingly, not as rulers with a genuine concern for their people, but more like despots. I can safely say this, because at one time I myself was promised a "princely" title by virtue of my leading position in several congregations, and I well know what sort of "government" we practised in the different "bodies of elders" and "judicial committees".

If I had had no other alternative, I would have preferred death, I thought. However, I had spent several months in the psychiatric hospital, and I had met a number of fine Christian people who had shown me what Christian love really is, not in words - but in practice.

Many of the members of Jehovah's Witnesses congregations also feel that they are not taken seriously, but are treated like little children. This unbounded arrogance on the part of the Society creates a feeling of indescribable desperation. People who are genuinely convinced in their hearts that they have a heavenly hope, and in addition dare to partake of the bread and wine during communion, are firmly put in their place. The elders decide on their behalf that this cannot possibly be right, and conclude with the admonition that all the 144.000 intended for heaven have already been chosen. The door of heaven was shut and locked by the Watchtower Society's president Rutherford, after having first opened it slightly. In fact it was Russell, the Society's first president, who had originally shut it towards the end of the 19th century. However, in order to "let in" the Society's top leaders, it was "discovered" that there

were still "a few places left", and when these had been filled the door was slammed shut again - in 1935.

The consequences of the Watchtower policy

The names of Jim Jones and Jonestown are known to everyone today. We all remember the pictures on TV of 900 men, women and children lying dead after the tragedy in the People's Temple cult. But in this case all the victims were revealed to the TV cameras at one time. *The number of corpses left behind by the Watchtower Society is much larger*, but this fact rarely reaches the newspaper headlines or the TV companies. They are the fates of individuals, such as children who die because their parents deny them blood transfusions, medicine, transplants, vaccinations, or whatever "the faithful and discreet slave" in Brooklyn has decreed to be the current doctrine. In fact, looked at in a wider perspective, Jim Jones was a complete novice. One thing is that thousands of Witnesses, not to mention innocent children, have had to sacrifice their lives due to the Watchtower Society's policy about medicine over the years. The Watchtower Society forbids all Jehovah's Witnesses to let themselves be vaccinated, and they forbid transplants. More recently, the policy has mainly been concerned with the question of blood transfusions. But there is also another side to this policy, and that is suicide. Although the Society in Norway denies any knowledge of such instances, I myself know of over thirty cases! The following are just a few of these examples:

1 I knew one young man who had decided that he had the right to celebrate communion by partaking of the emblems, the bread and the wine. Immediately after he had committed this "sin" he received a visit from some of the congregational elders who told him that he was not entitled to take part in communion. The man took this so seriously that in desperation he took his own life.

2 Another instance concerns a man who was engaged to be married, and spent the night in the house in which his fiancée was living. There was no evidence of anything immoral having taken place, but according to the Watchtower Society's rules, if two people of the opposite sex spend the night alone together in the same house, it is concluded that an immoral act has occurred. The couple in question were disfellowshipped - although absolutely no evidence of immorality was presented. The man was so upset by this that he took his own life.

3 *Varden*, a Telemark newspaper, printed an article on October 26th 1991 about Jehovah's Witnesses, in which a woman is described who had rung my wife a week previously, without revealing her identity. However, she was obviously desperate, and she committed suicide shortly afterwards. A few weeks later I had a long conversation with the daughter of this woman.

4 The *Verdens Gang* newspaper described a number of suicides among Jehovah's Witnesses in an article on September 22nd 1991. Among others, the newspaper refers to a woman who had had a malignant cancer growth removed by operation. The operation necessitated a blood transfusion, and the elders assembled round her bed in hospital two days after the operation and disfellowshipped her. She took her own life soon afterwards.

5 *Verdens Gang* also mentions a 40 year old man who was found dead from suicidal inhalation of car exhaust fumes. He had been disfellowshipped, and this was the result.

6 A 54-year-old man from Telemark hanged himself. According to *VG* the man was a congregational leader, and had hanged himself due to a suspicion of tax evasion.

7 A 70 year old woman jumped out of a window and killed herself in Aust-Agder. She was completely worn out and run down after having spent her life in the service of the Watchtower Society.

8 VG also refers to a 20-year-old youth, also from Aust-Agder, who shot himself.

9 10 11 In the *Sandeffjords Blad* newspaper of November 5th 1991 a 45-year-old man reports that he knows of three cases of suicide among Jehovah's Witnesses in Sandefjord.

I could have continued, but I think the above is sufficient to illustrate that the problem exists and that it is considerable. Therefore, when The Watchtower Society's spokesman, Niels Petersen, published a denial of such cases in the *Drammens Tidende og Buskerud Blad* issue of Monday, February 3rd., he is a liar. I quote from his statement:

"We know about Joseph Wilting. He belongs to a group of one-time Jehovah's Witnesses who have organised themselves to oppose Jehovah's Witnesses, [...] and who attempt to manipulate the press and public opinion. [...] I have no knowledge of any suicides among previous Jehovah's Witnesses..."

My wife and I had been studying with a divorcee and her two teenage children. They became active Jehovah's Witnesses. While my family and I visited a convention in Oslo in 1974, and were therefore absent for several weeks from the congregation where I was the presiding overseer, something happened which caused this lady to be disfellowshipped. While I was in Oslo I received a telephone call from one of the elders who had disfellowshipped her.

Why?

When I returned from the convention I visited the lady, who gave me the following true account, which was in fact verified by the other elders in the congregation. She had met a gentleman, and had invited him for a visit in order to get to know him better. As Jehovah's Witnesses do not usually book their guests into a hotel, but ask other Jehovah's Witnesses to accommodate them, the lady asked if anyone in the congregation could give this visiting Jehovah's Witnesses a bed for the night. However, no one volunteered, so when the man arrived she had no choice but to entertain him in her own home, where she lived with her two teenage children.

On the same day as the man arrived the lady was taken ill, prescribed medication and ordered to bed by her doctor. Although the other elders knew of her difficult situation they did nothing to help her in her unforeseen predicament.

Without waiting until my return from holiday, three elders went to her home. One of the children opened the door and said that the mother was ill in bed. *However, at the same time the other two elders entered the house by the back door, without even asking for permission to enter. They went straight to the woman's bedroom* where they gave her a letter containing an ultimatum. This was that if the man did not leave the house that same day, she would be disfellowshipped from the congregation. The case was handled as "urgent", as the congregation's elders obviously regarded it as being too grave to keep for a few days until my return. A presiding overseer is supposed to be present at this type of meeting, and one was fetched from another congregation on this occasion.

Neither the man, the lady or the children are now Jehovah's Witnesses, but the elders were proud of themselves for acting so promptly to keep Jehovah's organisation "pure".

Verdens Gang Newspaper of September 22nd. 1991 also includes an interview with a 39 year old woman from Ålesund, Brit Amdam, who was subjected to an investigation by Jehovah's Witnesses elders regarding sex in her own living room. The reason was that a man had spent

the night in her home after a get-together of friends, and this was more than enough for the Watchtower Society's inquisitors. This had to be immoral. Of course she was disfellowshipped.

I could continue indefinitely, but I think the above is more than enough to prove my point. The policy of the Watchtower Society is very detrimental. The Society is a cult, and one that employs mind control, inflicting irreparable mental damage on its members. Damage which unfortunately sometimes literally leads to loss of life.

Arrogance knows no limits

This and other experiences of my own prove that many of the elders and other leaders in the Jehovah's Witnesses congregations reflect the boundlessly arrogant and conceitedly censorious attitude held by Brooklyn.

A Christian friend of mine, Hans Henrik Zimmermann, received an invitation towards the end of the eighties from a certain Olsen, who was an elder in a Skien congregation, to visit an assembly in that town. Zimmermann accepted the invitation and listened to many addresses. When the assembly was over Olsen asked him for his opinion. My friend thought that, among other things, there were many fine-looking young people present, and volunteered no criticism either of the assembly or of the participants. His surprise was so much the greater when Olsen proceeded to declare that it had been a very disturbed assembly where neither adults nor children had shown sufficient concentration. Whilst he dramatically pointed out over the people assembled in the hall with a sweeping movement of his arm, he said:

"Presumably about one third of all these people will not survive Armageddon."

The participants at the assembly were clearly not disciplined well enough to suit Olsen, and he was obviously already acquainted with God's intentions and knew what His judgement would be. Not everyone had sat quietly all the time, and perhaps some, both adults and children, had left their seats because it can often be quite an ordeal to listen to speeches that go on for hours on end. It did not occur to him that little children might find it difficult to sit like mice for hours on end. "Untheocratic" behaviour cannot be tolerated, and this type of person does not consider tender years to be an excuse.

The breakdown is complete

Things started to break up on all fronts after 1975. This was the year when it was revealed that the Watchtower Society had produced yet another false prophecy. Naturally enough, this caused considerable problems since we had staked everything and given up all our personal needs and requirements for the sake of "the truth". From as far back as the 1940's "the Faithful and Discreet Slave" had been sustaining me with promises that the kingdom of God was just round the corner.

I tried to comfort myself with the thought that the almost inhuman effort and sacrifice was only temporary, and that rest and reward awaited me after Armageddon. At the same time I had a problem which increased steadily. However much I tried to push it aside, it kept on becoming more and more apparent. When I saw how my wife and children had to suffer because their husband and father was completely immersed in the organisation's many commitments, it cut me to the quick. I often felt a violent aggression rising within me, and I wanted to cry out to Jehovah and ask Him if this really was the meaning of life, that we must work and work, first at our job, followed by almost as many hours attending all kinds of meetings, preparing for meetings and preaching from door to door.

But my aggression was still being extinguished by my fear of Armageddon. Every time I felt hostility growing inside me, fear crept up my spine, quickly "cooling me off". I had been taught that I must not oppose "God's Channel of Communication to earth", and the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn. If I did so I could expect the same fate as in ancient Israel when Datan, Abiram and Korak were killed by Jehovah because they had criticised Moses. Some were killed by fire, whilst others were swallowed up by the earth when it cracked open.

Those who criticised the organisation risked the same punishment, disfellowshipping first, followed by annihilation at Armageddon. For the "governing body" in Brooklyn was chosen by God just as Moses was. Thus feelings of desperate aggression were overtaken by a terrible fear of banishment and death at Armageddon. The result of this was that the aggression often turned inwards, undermining my self-confidence, and leaving me in a deep depression. It felt like an eternal fight between my feelings and my intellect. Although I could see for myself that "the grass was green", to use pictorial language, the Watchtower Society insisted on my both believing and teaching that this same grass was actually red.

Through its literature Brooklyn always pointed a threatening finger at me that said: "Be humble, it is you who are not good enough!" "It is you who are wrong!" The Watchtower Society's contemptuous attitude towards its members was very clearly expressed after the prophecy regarding the end of the world in 1975 was not fulfilled, and proved to be false.

The supercilious attitude taken by the organisation's leadership, and the way in which they handled the situation, caused many Jehovah's Witnesses to feel frustrated, and many left the organisation. The Watchtower Society would not admit its mistake. I was furious because I knew many leading members who had proclaimed to others that the Old World would end in 1975. Now I was Witnessing these same leaders reproving others who in good faith had proclaimed what had been printed in the Watchtower's books and magazines. Like me, these poor ordinary folk had only repeated what they had been taught. Not only did I lose faith in "Big Brother" in Brooklyn, but also in hundreds of elders and other leaders in the organisation. A travelling circuit overseer was so certain that the end would come in 1975 that he asserted that he would eat his hat if it did not happen. However, afterwards he reprimanded the ordinary publishers who had believed the Watchtower's prophecies. I hope he enjoyed his hat (unless this expression had to do with theocratic warfare).

Another travelling circuit overseer intended to throw away his Bible if Armageddon did not come in 1975. As he no doubt still needs a Bible, I hope the Watchtower Society has given him a new one.

I was filled with disgust at the hypocritical behaviour of most of the leaders of the organisation. They changed colour just like chameleons. They followed whichever way the wind was blowing from "the Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn. They were too cowardly to dare to show their real feelings. They hid behind different Watchtower clichés, such as: "Wait for Jehovah", and "even though 1975 was wrong, no doubt Jehovah had a reason for this, as well".

The ordinary Jehovah's Witnesses are normal, sincere and upright human beings, and when they build on Jesus as the foundation, perhaps God, who can see into their hearts and motives, will temper justice with mercy. However, their creation - false doctrines - which can be compared to hay and straw, will be burned up in fire, according to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3: 9-15. But neither can we ignore the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:14, "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." According to these words all Jehovah's Witnesses are in serious danger.

I am certainly inclined to believe this with regard to the foremost elders and the leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation. There are many elders who, just like myself, are in a position where they cannot avoid noticing and seeing through the duplicity of the

organisation. They certainly ought to be able to do so, since they know a great deal more about what goes on than the ordinary members of the congregation.

So what do they do with all the revealing facts in their possession? Perhaps, in order not to lose their family and friends, they choose to stick their heads in the sand. By doing this they quite deliberately choose the same side as he who preaches a different gospel and who "has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ". (2 Corinthians 4:4). With their eyes wide open, they choose to worship and exalt a man-made creation in Brooklyn, which has taken upon itself Divine power and glory, and claims to be "God's channel" on earth, instead of preaching the gospel of the Bible as described in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, which is just as relevant today as it was at the time of Paul. By elevating a human agency in Brooklyn they have rejected Jesus Christ as Lord.

What shocked me most in all that I experienced myself, and in other cases that I can substantiate, was the unfeeling way in which many Jehovah's Witnesses reacted on hearing about such things. There was only a shrugging of the shoulders and a remark to the effect that the person concerned was a "worldly individual". Moreover, he or she was an "opponent" of the truth, and such folk just do not count for Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Perverted Emotional Life

I am filled with joy because I no longer have to exalt a human instrument such as the Watchtower organisation, but can "proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour".

Those who reacted with desperation, depression, frustration and righteous anger in fact reacted quite normally. Therefore it is not so strange that so many hundreds of thousands left the organisation. They had read the message correctly.

They were not word-blind, but understood what was written - a clear prophecy that the end would come in 1975. For example, how would readers interpret the following statement from the Watchtower's monthly magazine "*Kingdom Ministry*" for May 1974:

"Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end."

Is it I who was mad, word-blind and over-enthusiastic, or does the Watchtower Society "indicate" that the end is near? The reader must also take into consideration that this statement was only one of a long line of similar expressions, and the year 1975 was common to them all.

For example, one Witnesses I know sold a flourishing knitwear factory, and another Witnesses sold a large camp site including chalets. Both are still members of the organisation, and possibly they still believe the insanity emanating from the false prophet in Brooklyn. After 1975 they were left destitute, empty-handed and disillusioned. The decades it had taken to build up these businesses were lost, and I do not intend to increase their burden by revealing their identities. They themselves are quite innocent, and are just two examples among millions sacrificed to the demagogues of the Watchtower Society.

No, these hundreds of thousands who left the organisation were neither word-blind nor evil, but because they knew something about the interpretation of words they soon realised that the Watchtower Society was lying when it afterwards denied having prophesied the end in 1975.

I was completely overcome by a feeling of disgust. At the same time I could see the frustrated faces of all those who had hoped so intensely, and who were now being reprimanded. I had a

feeling of solidarity with all those who had believed in the eschatological proclamations with such naïveness. I myself was one of them.

The bright drawings of happy, smiling people I was always looking at in all the Watchtower's books and magazines do not reflect reality. A poker face is hidden behind many a Jehovah's Witnesses's smiling exterior. The longer one remains in the organisation, the more severe becomes one's attitude and facial expression. The higher the position attained in the Watchtower hierarchy, the colder, sterner and more intractable becomes the personality of that individual. The higher the position, the more intense is the influence of the power and motivation, which is in fact behind this organisation which calls itself a prophet.

During the time I was myself possessed by Watchtower ideals, I interpreted my change of identity as zeal for Jehovah and "the truth". My firm and remorseless behaviour towards those who broke the rules and regulations was positively referred to by the leaders, and as a publisher in Mjøndalen put it:

"Joseph is theocratic from top to toe".

Now I am ashamed over this type of zeal and "compliment". I belonged to the category mentioned by Paul in Romans 10:2, that is.

"They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge."

I saw some of the unassuming people I had observed when they joined the organisation, being gradually changed into deformed characters. As time went by they took over the stern and unbending identity typical of the organisation. Let me mention a few examples known to me personally. (The names have been changed.)

Kari from Vestfold is 18 years old, and has been disfellowshipped because she could not manage to give up smoking. She lives in lodgings and her nerves are in a bad state due to the mental stress caused by being disfellowshipped. She is on sick leave. Her family will no longer talk to her, and all contact is broken. Kari yearns for her youngest sister, who is 6 years old, and rings to her father, who is an elder, to ask if she may meet her little sister. The answer is a cold, unequivocal "no". The father behaves in this way because his personality has been so much changed it has become unrecognisable. The Watchtower's unfeeling, remorseless and stone-cold spirit has taken possession of the parents, and driven out all natural feeling for their own flesh and blood.

30-year-old Bjarne grew up as a Jehovah's Witnesses, but was disfellowshipped because he could not accept the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines. During the last 8 years he has been in a mental hospital 10 times for periods varying from a few weeks to many months at a time (1991). He often feels suicidal. If he meet his parents on the street they do not greet him, he is nothing more than a puff of smoke to them. On one occasion his father, who is an elder in a congregation in Telemark, felt it right to ring his son to relate something encouraging he had read. He told Bjarne "that he had read in the Watchtower that those who took their own lives now, before Armageddon, would presumably be resurrected in the New World". Morbid remarks such as this are directly the result of The Watchtower's "either/or" philosophy. On one occasion Bjarne sent a gift to his parents while he was in the mental hospital. The present was returned because he had been disfellowshipped from the organisation.

As a father or a mother could you return a gift from your child, when he is in a state of deep depression and obsessed by thoughts of suicide?

As a father or a mother could you pass on the "encouraging" information that if your child commits suicide, he will still have a chance of being resurrected?

What kind of "cheering information" is this?

23 year old Anne, also from Telemark, grew up as a Jehovah's Witnesses. She read in the Bible that all those who opened their hearts to Jesus were God's children, and that she would have eternal life in heaven. The elders heard of her interpretation of the Bible and visited her in order to tell her that she could not possibly entertain any hope of going to heaven, since the number designated to go there had already been reached. She was reprimanded for her "self-assumptive" opinion. Anne was so confused that she took her own life only a few days after the visit of the elders.

How did her parents react? They said:

"She should have listened to the elders. Then she would still have been alive."

All these three cases are known to me personally, and I could name many others just as shocking.

Unbelievable you say, rubbish! This cannot be true!

I quite agree that such behaviour cannot be regarded as normal. But when you surrender your life to the service of an autocratic religious or political organisation, it is changed in such a way that it reflects the forces of darkness which are behind that organisation. When you examine autocratic administrations such as the Gestapo, KGB or the Watchtower organisation, you will find an ominous number of similarities.

When someone becomes a member of the church of God and is born anew, a metamorphosis occurs which changes that person in such a way that he/she begins to resemble God or Jesus. Stern hearts and faces soften, and radiate more and more of Jesus as they grow nearer to Him. It is just as Paul says:

"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

All this happens when the Holy Spirit takes up its abode in a person. When the Spirit is allowed to work in us, a new personality evolves which conforms to the image of God.

I have every desire to maintain a pleasant tone regarding the many splendid and innocent people who are Jehovah's Witnesses, but I will not refrain from exposing the system which is keeping them captive. Therefore one must distinguish between the situation and the people involved.

What was wrong with my emotional make-up since I reacted differently?

Another tremendous conflict developed within me regarding Jehovah's Witnesses' attitude to the taking of life. When I was only twelve years old I had made a resolution never to take part in any military action, or to kill anyone. But during many years with Jehovah's Witnesses some of the people I knew took their own lives. Many of them just could not bear the inhuman yoke of door-to-door visiting and other burdens placed on its members' shoulders by the Watchtower. They just cannot achieve the exacting goals that are demanded. Many were frightened of dying during a period in which they were doing less, since, according to the Watchtower leadership, they might not then be resurrected into the kingdom of God. I considered it hypocritical to refuse military service and at the same time put an impossibly heavy responsibility on the shoulders of congregation members, a responsibility so great that it caused neuroses, psychoses, mental breakdowns and even in some cases, suicide.

When I discovered that the organisation was not being humble or honest with us regarding the 1975 blunder, I began to study the literature in a different light. I gained a better insight into the Watchtower's real attitude and double standards. The leaders claim that God's organisation has a very high moral standard. Since as an elder and minister in the congregation I was always confronted by those guilty of immoral conduct or of having "sinned" against the

organisation, I was well aware that we were by no means any better than the rest of society around us. The actual situation just did not harmonise with the leaders' statements.

With regard to consumption of alcohol, I have often both seen and experienced many excesses. Pure drinking orgies would occur, particularly among elders and travelling overseers, which sometimes led to immoral acts. In my opinion, one of the reasons Jehovah's Witnesses drink so much is the constant pressure under which they live and the fact that they are not happy. They lack the underlying joy experienced by a child of God when he has surrendered his life to the Lord.

I felt, and still feel, very sorry for children growing up in a Jehovah's Witnesses environment. In the literature children are always encouraged to do well at school so that they can become good publishers and pioneers later on. However, in reality, the Watchtower put such a heavy burden of responsibility on their shoulders regarding attendance at meetings, field service, etc., that the children hardly found time to do their homework. Consequently there were few children who managed to keep up at school. Parents were told in the literature that it was *unwise to send four-year-old children to a nursery school. Children should not be exposed to the influence of "worldly" teachers more than was absolutely necessary during the period of obligatory schooling.* This put an even greater strain on those Jehovah's Witnesses who had several children from four to five years old. Later the leaders modified these rules a little and said that it was a matter of conscience.

For many years the Brooklyn leaders have had a negative attitude regarding further education at an advanced level. For example, read how youth are pressured to forgo higher education. *The Watchtower*, September 1st, 1975, p. 453 says:

«But how far should they go with a secular education? It would hardly be consistent for such a youth, of his own choice, to pursue extensive secular studies beyond what is required by the law and by his parents. [...] additional years of college education may present snares. One may become "brainwashed" by human philosophies so that faith in God and the Bible is destroyed."

Awake!, May 22nd, 1969, p. 15 says:

"If you are a young person, you also need to face the fact that you will never grow old in this present system of things. Why not? Because all the evidence in fulfilment of Bible prophecy indicates that this corrupt system is due to end in a few years. [...] Therefore, as a young person, you will never fulfil any career that this system offers."

Those Jehovah's Witnesses who had been hoping that the leaders in Brooklyn would take a more lenient attitude and now allow members to further their education to an academic or university level, were very disappointed. In *The Watchtower*, November 1st, 1992, pp. 19,20, "Big Brother" reiterates that to learn a trade should be sufficient for young people and that higher education is in opposition to the "sound teaching" of the Bible.

Thus we see that the Watchtower's attitude to higher and academic education is just as negative as it has always been, which is the reason why the organisation will never be able to boast many members with a higher education, unless some people can be "converted" who already have such an education.

In the same way adults are encouraged to be able and dependable workers at their everyday jobs. However, someone who works over 20 hours a week for the organisation cannot keep up such a pace for long. If we include all the "committee meetings" etc. an elder will often reach a total of 20-40 hours work each week for the congregation. For this reason they were often "off sick".

Over 50 members of my own family are active Jehovah's Witnesses. About one third of them have become physical or nervous wrecks, broken down by far too heavy a work burden. Some were put onto a disability pension at a very early age. Most attempts at rehabilitation do not succeed, because the spark of doing something positive for a "doomed world" is lacking, due to the Watchtower's constant undermining of world society. Since Jehovah's Witnesses always live with the hope of Armageddon in the near future, they are tempted to apply for disability pension, thus making it easier to fulfil the heavy demands of the organisation. My brother-in-law in Holland was told during a medical examination that an amazing number of Jehovah's Witnesses were on disability pensions, and that it had been suggested that an enquiry should be set up.

My brother-in-law, who is a congregational elder, was granted a disability pension at the age of 25!

Problematic marriages

Many couples among Jehovah's Witnesses toil under considerable difficulties. The Society is largely responsible for this. Particularly, I found many problems in marriages where both partners had grown up as Jehovah's Witnesses, or where they had both joined the organisation at an early age.

I consider there to be several factors which create a number of problems for Jehovah's Witnesses marriages. To begin with, continual speculation concerning the end of the world is very unfortunate. Armageddon is always just round the corner. Jehovah's Witnesses put a great deal of emphasis on an exemplary moral life previous to marriage and denounce sexual intercourse before marriage, a sin that is often punished by disfellowshipping. Disfellowshipping means certain death at Armageddon, unless the sinner can achieve reinstatement in the congregation before that time. Many get married too soon, due to fear of becoming guilty of immorality. Thus they have lost the opportunity of getting to know each other whilst they are engaged, which is absolutely necessary before making a final decision about marriage. A marriage between two people who hardly know each other is bound to encounter problems.

Later on it often becomes apparent that the two personalities do not go well together, although individually they are pleasant people in their different ways. Divorce is not permitted among Jehovah's Witnesses except in the case of adultery, and can entail disfellowshipping. In many cases this has resulted in tragically difficult marriages being preserved, and there are instances where this has led to suicide because the person involved has been unable to find any other way out of the deadlock.

If separation is chosen it means that the person involved has to go on living surrounded by Witnesses who are constantly staring at him or her with looks of condemnation, and it requires strong shoulders to endure this sort of degrading treatment by the congregation.

Some people were not too happy about some of their future partners' attributes, but since Armageddon was so near, just a few months or perhaps years, they thought it would be possible to overlook these "shortcomings" for a while. In any case the future partner would be made perfect after Armageddon, and all sorrow and anxiety would be over.

Another important factor is the limited choice of possible partners. Since Jehovah's Witnesses are not allowed to marry anyone outside the organisation it is obvious that the number of eligible candidates is restricted. This contributes to the choice of a person who is in "the truth", although perhaps really one has been in love with someone who was not a Jehovah's Witness. Seen from the Watchtower Society's viewpoint, the advantages definitely make up

for the drawbacks. By making sure that no Witnesses marries a non-Witnesses, a continuous hold on people is assured. The avoidance of undesirable influence, which could weaken the Watchtower's powerful position, is far more important than the happiness of the individual.

When, in spite of all this, a member of a congregation married a non-Jehovah's Witnesses, the person involved was constantly influenced and encouraged to become a Witnesses, which led to continual arguments and innumerable divorces.

The Watchtower's structure and autocratic form of administration quite often generates a type of person with little self-confidence. All independent thinking must be left to "big brother" in Brooklyn. When several children are born to a couple, both of whom are fairly weak personalities, perhaps all would still be well if their only responsibility was their children. However, among Jehovah's Witnesses such people are also required to slave for the organisation, whilst in fact they have enough to cope with in their private lives.

Couples who were married before they became Jehovah's Witnesses are often more successful, since at the time of marriage they were not influenced by the factors already mentioned. People who join Jehovah's Witnesses as adults are often stronger mentally, since they have often completed their education and experienced a normal upbringing, which is not so among most Jehovah's Witnesses. Such people often have a higher position in society, as well, since they have not suffered under the Watchtower's "taboo" attitude towards higher education.

No one must escape

For obvious reasons I cannot go into details about the following piece of information. But in spite of this my conscience will not allow me to refrain from mentioning the actual situation.

Like Paul I cannot keep silent about what I have seen and heard. The Watchtower Society in Norway has actually sent a letter to hospitals in this country, asking for co-operation when a Jehovah's Witnesses is hospitalised for one reason or another! Due to protection of the individual I cannot give any details concerning the contents of the letter. In this respect the Watchtower Society ought perhaps to be thankful that not everyone has the same moral attitude as themselves regarding professional secrecy. The Watchtower Society's doctrine on this point is crystal clear. In an article entitled "*A Time to speak*" - *When?*, the Watchtower Society maintains that when a Jehovah's Witnesses discovers that another Witnesses has been involved in anything regarded as sinful by the cult, it is his duty to show his love for God and tell the congregational elders about the situation. Should the information come from confidential sources, this is of no consequence. The law of God comes before man-made laws.

The article mentions a hypothetical situation where "Mary" works as a nurse in a hospital. While working amongst the records she comes over information concerning another Jehovah's Witnesses who has had an abortion. This is a situation quoted by the Watchtower Society as an example of a case which should be taken to the congregational elders. Further it states that "*even if this should result in her losing her job, being taken to court, or her employer getting into judicial difficulties*", it is still her duty before God to pass on such information to the Watchtower Society!

This information was printed in the *Watchtower* magazine of September 1st 1987, page 12. However, I respect Norwegian law on this point, and will only ascertain that if a hospital were to allow this sort of "co-operation", the result would be that not even psychiatric patients, people in hospital due to the Watchtower system, would be safe from persecution. Not even in hospital!

The desire to live begins to fade

I had not mixed with any other people than those belonging to the Watchtower organisation. All those "out there" were "bad company". However, what was striking was the fact that the leaders of the organisation with whom I had had most to do, and from whom I would have expected most understanding, were those who caused me the most sorrow. I had no friends out in "the world", at the same time I felt completely alone within the organisation. Both their body language and attitude towards me demonstrated their opinion very clearly. It revealed what they were thinking, and what they believed.

Since I expressed my "controversial" ideas, half a hundred members of the family also regarded me as a "peculiar" type. I had come to the end of the road. Either the organisation was false, or I was just not good enough. I asked myself:

"Why are you always getting on the wrong side of the leaders of the organisation, Joseph? Why don't the others say anything?"

I really did keep on trying to submit, but when I saw how unjustly people were treated, my soul rebelled. I felt I could not live any longer like a permanent hypocrite. I felt incapable of carrying on, day after day, saying the opposite of what I really felt and believed. I felt that I could not carry on giving my all to a cause that I no longer believed to be true. I felt it was impossible to go on standing on a platform reciting the Watchtower's many: You must! You ought! You shall! I felt I could not go from door to door any longer, telling people what a wonderful life we had in the organisation, and that we lived in a "spiritual paradise", when in fact it was a lethal system, and a spiritual hell.

The restraint forced upon me, the suppression of my mind and denial of my real self, had made me into a physical and mental wreck. The mental state affected the physical, and the long working weeks, from 50 to 80 hours - including my everyday job, plus a great deal of stress and little sleep, did not improve the situation. When I cried out for help in the form of a sensible conversation, or just a little sympathy for the way I felt, the fault was always mine. The solutions offered, and the advice I always received, was to "be even more zealous in my service to Jehovah" and "to work even harder on door-to-door preaching". *The recipe for "happiness" was in fact more stress; more work and even less sleep!*

However, this sort of advice solved nothing. I knew what the Watchtower Society taught about psychologists and psychiatrists, so there was no point in seeking help there either. I had arrived at a state in which I realised that as a person I should be capable of making my own decision about what to do, but at the same time I knew that to seek help from others would be tantamount to a denial of the organisation.

Earlier on I used to preach enthusiastically about Jehovah's New World, and my faith in this gave me colossal energy for the first two decades. But after I discovered that the Watchtower Society had made a number of false prophecies, and in addition I had gained a deeper insight into the Watchtower's secret KGB-type system behind the scenes, I lost my faith in the Watchtower Society as "God's visible Organisation on earth".

What held me in my position was the fact that I was indoctrinated in, and bound by, the teaching. However, the situation had gradually been changed, and I no longer felt that my system of values was the same as that on which the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines were based. This continual "on guard attitude" gave me a permanent feeling of insecurity. I could no longer live in this way.

The thought of self-destruction, of putting an end to it all by taking my own life, kept coming back to my mind. In this way I struggled on for months. In the end not a day went by without my thinking about suicide. I started to plan how I would do it. I realised now that if the "right" conditions arose, the "right" situation occurred with everything piling up at once, then the road to suicide would be a short one.

Dangerously short.

Short enough!

The thought of my wife and children and how they would get on without me had restrained me for a long time. Although even here a gradual change had taken place in my train of thought.

Perhaps it was for the best for all concerned that I, as a "rebel", no longer existed. Perhaps the family would be better off without me. I realised now that I had to seek help, otherwise I would carry out my plans. So, ignoring the organisation's opinion of psychiatry, I sought medical advice, something which I now know saved my life.

I was sent to the psychiatric hospital in Skien and stayed there several months. Here I made a clean breast of how I felt and what sort of plans I had been considering for some time. However, regarding the real reason for my problems I was still not quite honest. I was supposed to exalt Jehovah's Organisation! I should never wash dirty linen in public, at least, not if it could cause damage to the Organisation.

Consequently, I played a sort of cat and mouse game with the therapists. Neither was it difficult for them to find more than one reason for my condition, since my childhood in a home where there was so much illness, my time in a children's home and all the other negative things I had seen and experienced during the war, provided enough facts for the therapists. Of course they also had my records, which told them most of what they needed to know about my background. As far as doctrine was concerned, I was still bound and gagged.

However, I experienced something else. Being away from the Organisation, Jehovah's Witnesses meetings and activities, gave me a breathing space. Absence from the congregation had a stimulating effect on my ego, my identity and my real self. Little by little I began to realise why the Watchtower Society was always banking into the heads of all Jehovah's Witnesses that they must attend and take part in all the congregation's five weekly meetings, prepare themselves for these, read all the literature, tell folk about the "good news" printed in the latest magazines on weekly door-to-door visits, etc. A Jehovah's Witnesses who does all this just has no time for anything else but thinking about, and taking part in, the Watchtower Society's activities!

I began to understand why, before each holiday season, the Watchtower Society continually reminded members to attend the congregation at the place they were staying, and not to neglect attending meetings - in spite of being on holiday. I discovered that only 3 weeks rest, without the Watchtower Society's indoctrination, was enough to make my brain slowly start working again.

How I was saved by lack of «assistance»

In the hospital at Skien I met nursing staff from different congregations and churches. I often talked, particularly to a night nurse called Helene Torsell, who was married to the pastor of the Pentecostal church in the town. It gave me a feeling of great joy to talk to her about God. I was usually the one to start up a conversation. However, I purposely did not mention that I belonged to the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation. Now that I was physically separated from

the organisation for the first time in my life, and at the same time confronted by other Christians, something happened inside me. I began to miss Helene when she was not on watch, and I suddenly realised that this was the kind of spiritual fellowship for which I had always longed.

When I talked with those of the nurses who were Christians I could feel a spiritual contact. Their courage and frankness, the fact that they talked openly about how they felt, corresponded with my own faith and longing. For many years I had admired Christians who had tried to Witness to me. I had often avoided broaching controversial subjects in order to experience a feeling of fellowship in the spirit for just a few moments. I felt joy in my heart, and I began to long for these conversations with the Christian nurses. *I had no reason to fear being disturbed by Jehovah's Witnesses. They never came to visit me anyway.* I received visitors just twice during these months, and this was only because since they were there anyway they could hardly avoid seeing me. They had really come to see three other Jehovah's Witnesses who were in the hospital at the same time as me. Some of these were so-called "swing-door patients" who went in and out of psychiatric hospitals, and are still being treated there. The tragic part about it all is that they will remain "swing-door patients". They will never be well again unless they manage to escape from the spiritual captivity in which they are living.

As far as I was concerned, for the first time I was in the fortunate position of being able to study Jehovah's Witnesses from a distance, and at the same time I could see that people who were Christians were not evil. They were neither confused nor dissenting, but in fact possessed something I wanted to have as well. An attitude of indifference towards the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation began to develop within me. I began to regard the psychiatric hospital as a sanctuary, a refuge where I felt safe. It was a place where I was allowed to think for myself, and where I was surrounded by people who cared about me. They cared about Joseph, not just about what I could do for them. This discovery gave me a joy that I wish with all my heart I could have felt earlier.

The Watchtower Society knows all this. They know that their power is dependent on keeping Witnesses' thoughts concentrated on what they have decided Witnesses should think about. They know that if a Witness is given an opportunity to be alone, without the influence of the Watchtower, meetings, elders or other Witnesses, sooner or later he will begin to use his brain and think for himself again. They know that a Witness will then begin to have difficulties with the Watchtower's doctrine, and this they wish to avoid at all costs. This is why they strongly advise Jehovah's Witnesses against seeking the help of psychologists or others like them, as these can awaken the brain again. According to the Watchtower Society these people have no real knowledge, only "quasi-expertise", nevertheless accidents can happen - people just might begin to think for themselves in spite of everything.

Chapter 12 "Big Brother" is always right.

The breakdown is complete

Everything fell to pieces around me. I had longed so much for the kingdom of God, and it did not come. My upbringing in a relatively strict home and an even stricter religious system had convinced me at an early age that I was a nonentity. My teacher had called me a "Pharisee", the reason being that I had neglected to attend mass before school. My brother-in-law told me that I was "stupid" and would never go far in life. Now the Watchtower Organisation's leadership said that I was a "bad, seditious" person who had both wrong and selfish motives in my leadership of the congregation. I was completely torn to pieces inside. I loved the congregation and was very fond of all the people there. It gave me great satisfaction to be able to comfort and teach them. It made me tremendously happy to be able to help someone out of the gutter, and several times I had been fortunate enough to guide one of these

poor souls into the organisation. But if everyone is against me, I thought, perhaps they are right and I am an evil person. Either the organisation is wrong, or I am wrong. There are just no other alternatives.

Here is another example of applied psychology, - punishment by the leaders. Those who do not do as they are told will be penalised. And the punishment is severe, and very much feared by all Jehovah's Witnesses members.

But since everyone formed a solid front against me, failing me at the critical moment when I most needed support, I was completely let down. An extremely active daily life suddenly came to an end. I was overcome by a feeling of exhaustion and despair. I had to take sick leave since I felt that I was being met by insuperable resistance in everything I tried to do. I wanted to get started but could not take the first step. A heavy depression enveloped both our marriage and our children. I began to feel that I was destroying the atmosphere of our home, and that perhaps I lacked the right feeling of love for my wife and children. I thought that it must be demanding a great deal of them to live with a husband and father who was "seditious", and who would not conform to the "theocratic" orders coming from the Organisation.

Oh yes, they were right, it was entirely my fault. I was spoiling the home atmosphere and did not love my family enough. It would have been better if I had ceased to exist. A terrible anxiety overpowered me, and I could hardly sleep. I awoke after only a few hours rest, often with an awful feeling of dread. My thoughts kept on going back into the past, and I brooded over all the "mistakes" I had made both in the congregation and my life as a whole. I had never achieved anything really worthwhile. I had to thank the Watchtower Organisation for everything I had ever done. On my own I was nothing, a defective being who was quite incapable of managing without "God's organisation", and who would meet certain death if left to himself.

Thinking about the present was also a nightmare. I was a Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to subordinate himself to the "theocratic government" and who had had to be degraded due to "independent thinking". This implied "pride", a trait obviously coming directly from Satan, since it was also he who had enticed Adam and Eve into "thinking independently". I was unhappy when it rained, and even more unhappy when the sun shone. I was no longer capable of appreciating beauty in anything. Whenever I tried to do something it went wrong. Oh no, with my rebellious attitude I was going to have to learn to tread lightly and keep a low profile in future.

The Society had achieved its goal. I felt that it was I who was to blame, that it was I who had failed. The fault was mine. I did not understand what was best for me.

After I had been "off sick" for several months, some "sympathetic" members of the congregation told me that not only was I "seditious" but also lazy, and as if that was not enough, I was also simulating illness.

Yes, of course you are right, I thought, I'm not fit to enter the "New World".

I had a total breakdown.

For several decades I had lived a double life with up to 20 - 30 hours work a week in my position as elder and presiding overseer for the congregation, in addition to my ordinary job. If everything I had done had been carried out in a "spirit of opposition" then life was no longer worth living, since the terrible fate of absolute destruction at Armageddon awaited me, notwithstanding.

I had a feeling of both mental and emotional satisfaction in my work for the congregation, but the Watchtower Society did not share this feeling. Was my doubt, which had been caused by all the abortive prophecies, without foundation, unwarranted? How could a righteous God be

behind all the strict and merciless rules, laws and orders that characterised the organisation? I was completely thrown off balance. I often went for long walks alone at night. I kept on praying to Jehovah, but I received no relief. I had a constant lump in my throat, and I would often cry for hours. I carried on in this state for several long years.

When I took sick leave the doctor sent me to a psychiatrist. I told him of my despair, admitting openly that I was seriously considering committing suicide. Consideration of the consequences for my wife and children had so far hindered me from carrying out what I really wanted to do, but I had no idea how long this situation could last. He immediately put me on anti-depressives, and after only a few weeks I was on a daily dose of 225 mg. Tofranil and 75 mg. Nozinan.

Some of the elders tried to talk to me about taking medicine. *It could be dangerous* to take this medication, they told me. They regarded anti-depressives in the same way as narcotic drugs, and claimed that they could be used as a means of making contact with demons. Besides, they were *very much against my having sought the help of a psychiatrist*, since, according to the Watchtower Society, one should be very wary of such people. Of course this did nothing to improve my already hopeless condition. I just became more and more apathetic.

Once again, a method of mind control is being demonstrated here. At whatever the cost, create a feeling of guilt. Every failure, every disappointment, is caused by the sinful actions of the individual himself. He lacks appreciation of what is done for him, or he does not care enough, or understand sufficiently, etc. This is another feature common to cults such as the Moon church, the Mormons, the Krishna movement, the Children of God and Jehovah's Witnesses.

At the psychiatric clinic the therapists tried to find out all about my life. I fed them on information about my difficult childhood and adolescence, and the problems connected with my mother's illness, including my time in the children's home, etc. But as soon as I noticed that they were trying to guide the conversation towards the subject of Jehovah's Witnesses, I immediately assured them that it was quite inconceivable that the problem could be here. I had been taught never to say anything unfavourable about "Jehovah's Theocratic Organisation". One should always exalt the name of Jehovah. I had learnt "not to hang out dirty washing in public". Human beings can make mistakes, but God guides the organisation. I was afraid that if I talked about any of these things I would be condemning myself to death. I had been taught, and myself had taught others, that this would be the consequence of breaking the rules of "the governing body".

There I sat for months, talking and relating, without saying anything about the real causes of my condition. *I tried to make a fool of psychologists and psychiatrists because for nearly 40 years I had been taught that outsiders must not find out anything about the secret inner life of the organisation.* Although I was in doubt and frustrated by the abortive promises concerning God's kingdom, I was still an indoctrinated individual, who had no idea where to go, and who could see no way out of his problems. The only "safe" course was to stay with the Organisation - *cost what it might*. Hassan calls this "thought stop".

"Whenever the member of a cult realises that he has a "wrong" thought, he makes use of thought-stopping to drown the negative thoughts, and instead he focuses on himself, learning in this way to shut out anything which threatens his reality."⁷⁷

In the literature the Organisation is always being compared to Noah's ark, on the outside of which nothing but death awaited. There was nowhere I could go. When I was removed from

⁷⁷Steven Hassan: *Combating Cult Mind Control*, p. 62.

my position as presiding elder in the congregation due to my "seditious" attitude, rumours and gossip began to fly around as never before. I was watched over with "Argus eyes", and met condemning looks and attitudes wherever I turned. So I could neither expect any help or understanding from my own people, nor could I give vent to my frustrations to the doctors or psychologists. In order to have the least hope of surviving Armageddon I had to remain within the organisation, which meant that I had to placate the leaders as well. There was no other solution but to give in to the will and demands of the organisation. "Big Brother" in Brooklyn was always right. Seen mentally this was a situation I find very difficult to describe. Wherever I turned I hit my head against a wall, and the wall was immovable. The golden rule was: *stop hitting and your headache will disappear*.

As I mentioned, at that time I was taking very large daily doses of medicine and these drugged me so much that I slept a lot. My nerves gradually began to settle down, but it took a couple of years before I really began to feel better. We moved to another congregation, the Langesund congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and the new surroundings did me good. At this point I had accepted the fact that it was entirely my own "fault".

Although I did not feel very happy with the Jehovah's Witnesses view of mankind, I longed to serve my fellow human beings. I dismissed my own problems of conscience in connection with this point, and took it for granted that my difficulties were due to my "lack of understanding". One's own standards, points of view and evaluations just did not count. The vindication of the name of Jehovah was all-important, and personality must be sacrificed completely. I "realised" this now, and as a reward I was taken back into the favour of the Watchtower Society and looked upon as a loyal brother again.⁷⁸ I was appointed as overseer and elder, and was once more working at top gear. Now I had to make up for what I had missed while I had been ill. Later on it became clear that this was the last Jehovah's Witnesses congregation to which I was to belong.

It is perhaps incomprehensible for an outsider that I could renounce my identity, but it was a question of life or death for me. Through the Watchtower's ingeniously subtle process of indoctrination, I had been led to expect eternal life on a paradisaical earth, without war or misery. *I really believed this!* As I had little knowledge of the Bible when I first met the Witnesses, it was not difficult to manipulate me. With the aid of a complex combination of quotations from different parts of the Bible, they indoctrinated me with the interpretation that God had an organisation on earth that was led by the so-called "Governing Body" in Brooklyn, New York. They presented me with an idealised picture of the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation, which actually included calling the Watchtower organisation "*a spiritual paradise*", and claimed that Jehovah's Witnesses are *the happiest people on earth*.

But worst of all is that all Jehovah's Witnesses believe this! Maybe not because they are always so happy themselves, since both they and the world are imperfect. But this only makes even more frightening the thought of how terrible it must be for those living in "the world" without "the light from God's Organisation"! The fact that a person has to take tranquillisers in order to be able to go from door to door does not weaken that same person's belief that he is really living in a "spiritual paradise", which in itself says a lot about the type of control the Watchtower organisation wields over the minds its members.

⁷⁸*Rewarding" always has an encouraging effect on people and is an important element in the methodology of keeping people imprisoned within a cult, just as in the rest of society. This method is used within a cult as soon as anyone proves himself "worthy". Since everyone likes to earn privileges they are afraid of losing them again, and all Jehovah's Witnesses know that this will happen like lightning at the slightest divergence from official policy.*

I thought that all the texts and Bible quotations used by the Watchtower Society fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle. It seemed to me that they had watertight evidence based on the Bible for every issue, and it all appeared to be so very credible. Many Jehovah's Witnesses had had identical or similar frustrating experiences to my own, regarding the established churches and society in general. This provided many resemblances between myself and other members of the congregation. The Watchtower Organisation had managed to restrain my mind by using strong, invisible cords, and given me a glowing interest in something which, as time went on, manifested itself as a catastrophic delusion, a corruption of truly gigantic proportions.

I Found the Truth about Jehovah' Witnesses

One day I read in a local newspaper called *Varden*, that *the Watchtower* was built on a very dubious foundation. In his article the author, Hans Henrik Zimmerman, mentioned three books written by ex-Jehovah's Witnesses. The first was written by a Swedish ex-Witnesses, Carl Olof Jonsson, and was called: "*Slutade hedningarnas tider 1914?*". Another was written by James Penton and entitled: "*Apocalypse Delayed*". The third book mentioned in the article was written by Raymond Franz, and called: "*Crisis of Conscience*". All three writers had been active Jehovah's Witnesses nearly all their lives, and had held important positions. Raymond Franz had been a Jehovah's Witnesses for sixty years, the last nine of which he had been a member of the governing body in Brooklyn. Resolutions were taken over the heads of millions of Jehovah's Witnesses in this governing body. These resolutions had a great effect on every single member of the organisation. Sometimes the decisions were so dramatic that they meant life or death for the members. The responsibility for, and participation in, these dramatic decisions, led to a crisis of conscience for Franz, hence the title of his book.

This is just what I am looking for, I thought. These people were not just rank and file. They had not been disfellowshipped because of bad behaviour or immorality, but because they dared to expose the Watchtower's unbiblical doctrines. I had to read these books. As far as the dogma was concerned I was still a captive. My intuition told me that I had discovered a gold mine containing the kind of information about the doctrine that I badly needed to set me free. I obtained the books as quickly as I could and in considerable anticipation started reading them both night and day. I often lay in bed reading until four o'clock in the morning.

The first was Carl Olof Jonsson's book. The Watchtower's most important doctrine concerning 1914 collapsed like a pack of cards. *With overwhelming proof, both historical and scientific, Jonsson stated that the fall of Jerusalem occurred in the year 586/587 BC., and not the year 607 BC. as Jehovah's Witnesses claim.* The Watchtower's interpretation of the book of Daniel concerning the so-called "seven times", or "heathen times", in which Nebuchadnezzar's seven years' of madness is changed into a period of 2520 years, fell completely to pieces.

There is nothing in the book of Daniel to indicate that the story of Nebuchadnezzar has any prophetic meaning. The Watchtower has simply fabricated this in order to produce "evidence" for an unbiblical doctrine. That Jesus had come again and established himself on the throne of heaven in 1914, was proved categorically to be sheer imagination and free fantasy. The Watchtower Society have absolutely no proof of their contention, neither were they able to answer Carl Olof Jonsson's question. Instead they chose their usual routine, and disfellowshipped him in answer to his inquiries.

I went on to read Raymond Franz's book, where I found out that the Watchtower Society had discussed Jonsson's inquiry, and that they had no possibility of contradicting his evidence. Franz had himself written the section on chronology in the Watchtower Society's reference book *Aid to Bible Understanding*, and in this connection had tried to find evidence for the

year 607, but had not managed to do so. However, in the book *he admits that he still retained this doctrine, in spite of the fact that he himself knew that it was wrong!*

I was also very surprised to read, as Franz says in his book, that "the great host" also has a hope of heaven, and not just the 144.000, as the Society claims. I was even more astonished to read that of course the Governing Body knew this, but that the present doctrine is maintained because it suits the Watchtower Society's image.

Franz described things that happened at the Watchtower headquarters, and as he documented everything with quotations from the Watchtower's literature, I was forced to accept what he wrote.

Penton describes the whole of Jehovah's Witnesses' history, from the beginning to the present day. He uses a great deal of documentation, and has an incredible number of quotations from the Watchtower Society's own literature. I checked all the references myself - and they were correct. Penton draws a picture of the Society, and it is not a pretty one. It is as lurid Dante's inferno, which in fact is much more pure. Penton cites the Watchtower Society's innumerable "prophecies", and he documents how the Society tries to explain them away. He describes the so-called "new light", and proves that it bears more resemblance to serious short-circuiting than an increasingly bright light. The distance between "there" and "back" are not even the same for the Watchtower Society!

Part Two: A closer examination of significant factors

Chapter 13 Mental Suffering in the "Spiritual Paradise"

My studies in social education, psychology and psychiatry have helped me to a better understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses and their mental problems. The question for me is not *whether* Jehovah's Witnesses have mental problems, but rather how anyone can avoid mental problems in such an extreme, fatalistic and religious community. I am not here referring to inherited mental problems but problems that are directly caused by The Watchtower Society's hard and unfeeling policy regarding its members.

My discussions with various experts have been of invaluable help. Sometimes I was helped to find the right words, particularly to explain scientific investigations and my own innumerable personal experiences. Hopefully, the reader will also be able to form a more differentiated image of Jehovah's Witnesses and be able to see these people in a different light.

Source of my experiences

In my position as elder in several Jehovah's Witnesses congregations, and also as presiding overseer, I have talked to hundreds of Witnesses. These have given expression to feelings of despair, helplessness and doubt. Through my work (after I left the Witnesses) I have spoken to several of them in the psychiatric hospital. A great deal of grief was caused by the many conflicts continually afflicting the congregation. Most Witnesses go around for years nursing unsolved conflicts. They simply cannot solve them, because the organisation's power structure impedes a satisfactory solution. The elders, who put hard, severe, unbending and drastic rules into practice often cause the conflicts.

Therefore, with regard to Jehovah's Witnesses' mental problems, I rely mostly on my own personal experiences, hundreds of conversations with Witnesses, and many hundreds of conversations and letters from ex-Witnesses, all over a long period of time and in many different situations.

Right from the beginning of my nearly 40 year life as a Jehovah's Witnesses I have felt a great need for social intercourse with my fellow believers. For this reason I visited all those

who belonged to my community in their homes, as well as always keeping my own home open for other Witnesses. In spite of the fact that all the meeting activity was very strenuous for the whole family, I/we were in the habit of either visiting other Witnesses after these meetings, or inviting other Witnesses back to our own home. Because of this our home was certainly never dull, which our children very much appreciated. When travelling representatives (often husband and wife) from The Watchtower Society came to visit the congregation we liked to have them to stay with us in our own home.

I regarded social contact with other Witnesses as being an important part of my Christian service. To both receive and give encouragement was very important in helping to keep us going in the otherwise heavy task we had as “evangelists”. When, quite early on in my time with Jehovah’s Witnesses, I became an elder and superintendent, and really believed that we embraced “the truth”, my heartfelt wish was that other workers in the congregation should also experience the joy of social contact with other Witnesses. The official Watchtower name for this is “shepherding”. But the Watchtower Society has a different interpretation of the word than I have. What is the difference?

Unproductive “evangelists” mean financial loss for The Watchtower Society. Therefore the society wishes, by means of its “shepherding” to “encourage” evangelists to renew productive activity. The society’s universal medicine for all kinds of problems was that taking part in all the congregational activities would solve most problems and lead to improved mental health. The Watchtower Society’s motive was selfish and not a genuine desire to help the individual Jehovah’s Witnesses. On the other hand, I believed that an *unconditional* social solidarity and friendship was a Christian duty and it was this viewpoint which gradually brought onto a collision course with The Watchtower Society.

As I spoke to hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses, both at home and abroad, this “shepherding” supplied me with first hand material about the mental state of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Several hundred people confided in me about their frustrations and mental problems. Consequently, most of what is described in this chapter is based on personal experience, and I am therefore not dependent on official reports and investigations.

Mental problems as the result of an unsuccessful marriage

During my many years with Jehovah’s Witnesses I have been the superintendent and an elder in half a dozen congregations. Since I often preached to other congregations as well, I got to know even more people. I have seen hundreds of engagements and marriages break up. It is nearly impossible to live with a partner who is, or becomes, a Jehovah’s Witness, and acquires the Jehovah’s Witnesses extreme, fatalistic view of the community and other Christians. The Watchtower Society’s fatalistic message has proved to be a catastrophe for people who loved each other and have had a normal harmonious marriage. The reader can imagine the dramatic and mental problems these divorces have caused, both for the partners and the children. The following is one of many examples I have experienced.

Another episode in our congregation made me feel very worried and anxious. One of our elders was studying with a married man who had two children. The man was making progress, was present at all the meetings, made regular door-to-door visits and wanted to be baptised. His wife, who was a practising Christian and regular churchgoer, asked her husband if he could possibly spend a little more time at home, and if perhaps they could study the Bible together. She did not insist on his giving up his membership of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The man sought advice from one of the elders in the congregation who told him not to yield so much as an inch, nor show any respect for the demands of "the enemy". Of course the matter ended in divorce. The man was baptised at a circuit assembly, and his story was related

from the platform as being a positive experience in which he was presented as one who had given up his marriage for the sake of "the truth".

I just could not understand. How could a divorce be a "positive experience"? On the contrary, it is a tragedy. This man was very fond of his wife and two children, and was very unhappy about what had happened. I invited the man to my home and asked him why it had ended in divorce. He told me that his wife had demanded that he should cut out one meeting a week, and spend a little less time on door-to-door work each week. She had also suggested that they should discuss the Bible with her priest sometimes. I asked why he did not do what she suggested, since it would provide a wonderful opportunity to Witnesses about "the truth" to the priest!

"No," he said. "Both the elder who has been studying with me and some of the others said that we must give God's kingdom first place in our lives, whatever the consequences."

I told the man that I thought his wife's conditions were reasonable and that he should have accepted the offer to study with the priest, as it would have given him a fine opportunity to make his testimony. Moreover, a marriage is holy in the sight of God and I could not agree with the advice he had been given.

"I believe that you, and particularly the elders (who had in fact recommended divorce) have made a terrible mistake. Your wife was not unreasonable," I told him.

The man was surprised and at the same time very pleased. He went to his divorced wife straight away and admitted to having acted altogether too hastily. Fortunately it all ended well. According to law he had to wait a stated period of time before he could marry again, but they both solved this problem travelling to Scotland where they got married again.

How can the elders give so much foolish advice?

Why did they look upon me as a rebel, in spite of the fact that I was right?

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the elders have continually been led to believe by the Jehovah's Witnesses leadership that they will govern as "princes" over the many subjects on this earth when the new world comes. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that all the worldly kingdoms on earth will soon be destroyed and that the congregations and their leaders will take over all existing tasks in connection with the administration of society. Many elders are so obsessed by the thought of being appointed by God that they are already acting like "princes". Many have lost touch with reality, and as the saying goes, they are more Catholic than the Pope. However, the main reason for many of the elders' imprudent advice and conduct is their philosophy of life, and that has its source in "the governing body" in Brooklyn.

The above-mentioned marriage was saved, fortunately, but many others have had a tragic history. I began to ask myself:

"What is the matter with you, Joseph? Is the organisation on the wrong track, or am I a rebellious and headstrong individual?"

Another instance shows how catastrophic the consequences can be if one relies on "the good advice" of the congregational elders. This concerns a couple who had three children, where the mother began to study with Jehovah's Witnesses. The husband did not like this and told his wife that she must stop these studies. She refused to do so, and consulted the elders. Of course, the elders soon decided that her husband was an "opponent of the truth", and one day when the husband came home his wife and children had disappeared. He searched desperately for them, and found them at last with the family of one of the elders. He begged her to come back, telling her how much he loved both her and the children. However, backed up by the elder, she refused to return. The man was so broken-hearted that he went home and hanged himself

The Watchtower Society's stubborn and uncompromising enforcement of principles, without having the least empathy for the individual's particular situation, has undoubtedly lead to a great deal of mental suffering for thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses. One of our near friends, a young, pretty and happy girl, married a Witnesses who had previously been in a traffic accident. According to the doctor, the resulting brain damage should have healed gradually. Unfortunately this did not happen. He became very aggressive, started to ill-treat his wife and behaved abnormally towards those around him. The result of his injuries was that the man became psychotic and had to be looked after all the time. After trying to carry on with something which could hardly be called a marriage for several years, the girl found at last that the situation had become intolerable and she applied for a divorce. As there was no question of unfaithfulness in this case, The Watch Tower Society disagreed with her decision and threatened her with expulsion if she did not remarry this very sick man. That she was very unhappy and soon began to have considerable mental problems, caused no concern to the "shepherds" in Brooklyn.

Both before and after I left Jehovah's Witnesses, I have seen many tragedies where people have been offered on the altar of The Watchtower Society's stubborn and uncompromising enforcement of so-called "biblical truths". I know that these "biblical truths" have driven some people to desperate actions and even suicide.

Since I left Jehovah's Witnesses I have received hundreds of letters from ex-Witnesses which confirm my assertions about mental problems among Jehovah's Witnesses and the personality changes which take place with many of those who become victims of The Watch Tower Society's evangelising. I have included a few of these letters as follows:

Dear Joseph,

"I met you at a seminar you held about J.W.'s in Moss. I was studying with them at the time...My husband and all the rest of my family are overjoyed that I have finished with J.W.'s...I am in a state of complete mental collapse. I have spoken to several others who have been studying (with J.W.'s) and told them exactly what I have found out about J.W.'s (from you). I know that four of them are very uncertain. All of them are broken down mentally and have serious problems... My husband and I (+ all my family) are eternally grateful to you and if there is anything we can do for you here in Moss, please let us know..."

Inger Lene Sjøvik, Moss, Norway.

"Dear Joseph,

I have just finished reading your book *The Kingdom that never came*. It is very interesting and revealing, at the same time frightening...I feel that in my husband I can see the things you refer to in your book about change of identity and mental problems. He has been studying with J.W.'s for a while now. He says himself that he is quite all right. But I can no longer make any real contact with him...He has made many new friends amongst J.W.'s and leaves me and the children alone...I love my husband and he says he loves me, but at the same time I feel that we are drifting apart...Every day I become more and more convinced of the importance of spreading information about the J.W.'s destructive rules and doctrines. *The Kingdom that never came* does this."

The wife of a convinced J.W. Viola Nord, Gøteborg, Sweden.

Dear Joseph

I was surprised that you, as a previous J.W., could become a Christian. I had promised myself that I would never have anything to do with religion...but after only a few days I made up my mind definitely to follow Jesus. Think that this could happen to me! I am now the happiest person in the world! But I am sorry when I think about all the J.W.'s who are like slaves and think that it is all true...I don't usually write or entrust my feelings to strangers, but after

having read your book I feel that I know you. Like you, I feel compassion for J.W.'s and ex-J.W.'s and would like to help you to convert these to Jesus..."

Ingun Løken, Asker, Norway.

The reader will have realised that I am very concerned about the mental problems which in my opinion The Watch Tower Society inflicts on its members. Is it possible that this is just an illusion and that my conclusion is no more than the consequence of my own negative experiences? Of course this is a question I cannot just dismiss out of hand. But after the examples I have just quoted, and all the conversations I have had with many Witnesses and several hundred ex-Witnesses over the years about the kind of problems they have and *why* they have them, I can come to no other conclusion than that Witnesses and ex-Witnesses have more mental problems than most people, *particularly* ex-Witnesses.

Neither, when I look at what is typical of the literature published by The Watchtower Society, can I avoid concluding that the doctrine is at least part of the cause of their mental problems. However, it is true that I meet relatively many Witnesses and ex-Witnesses with problems, and there is a certain risk that I as an ex-Witnesses can have hidden motives (revenge, for example) and subconscious motives (bitterness, for example) which have a negative effect on my impressions. But even here I find a "freedom" and love for Jehovah's Witnesses which tends to make one belittle the problem, and I have no difficulty in seeing the positive sides of being a Jehovah's Witnesses.

Scientific documentation

It would be wrong and dishonest of me to paint a completely black picture of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Watchtower Society's criticism of the Christian world, corrupt politicians and a corrupt society, is often justified. I have enjoyed good times together with genuine Jehovah's Witnesses, who like me longed for a better world. I continue to have a great admiration for many Jehovah's Witnesses who like me were willing to offer everything for a "good cause". I had many good friends within the organisation, and I miss them very much. Together with many other Jehovah's Witnesses, I was so certain of the message we preached, that I (and the other Jehovah's Witnesses) were often near to tears when people would not listen to our message. The thought that many (good, fine) people would "soon" be killed at Armageddon, was very depressing.

For example, when I returned home after having attended the golden wedding anniversary of my parents (who were not Jehovah's Witnesses), I remember I was overcome by a violent fit of crying or you could also call it a nervous breakdown. The thought of losing both my parents in the imminent Armageddon was unspeakable. I could suddenly be overcome by these violent fits of crying wherever I happened to be, when I thought about the fate of my closest family and friends would suffer in the war of Armageddon. Consequently, for many years I bore these sad thoughts with me of having to lose many other (worldly) people who were dear to me. I know that, like me, many Witnesses are burdened with these terrible thoughts. This ought to increase our respect, love and empathy for Jehovah's Witnesses and the situation in which they find themselves.

As long as one did not give voice to dissent and faithfully proclaimed The Watchtower Society's message about the new world, there were no problems. Mental problems occurred when questions of a doctrinal or practical nature arose and one tried to get the leaders to listen to these queries. I know that many Jehovah's Witnesses struggle with the same unanswered questions as I did then, but the consequences for themselves, their family and their friends are so great that it is almost impossible for outsiders to imagine the unbelievably intricate network of invisible bonds which hold them captive.

In spite of the investigations previously referred to in this chapter, I know that at the moment it is not possible to provide documentation based on scientific methods proving that Jehovah's Witnesses are more prone to mental disorders than most other people, and that this is related to The Watch Tower Society's teachings. I realise that scientific investigations make strict demands regarding the presentation of proof to establish that some types of problems are more prevalent in a particular group than among the general public, and similarly to be able to prove a given causal relationship. Here are some examples of some of these methodical problems:

- (1) It is not sufficient to come to a conclusion based on what the individual Witnesses has to tell. For example, Weishaupt and Stensland⁷⁹ claim that Jehovah's Witnesses have a tendency to belittle, deny, or gloss over the truth about their own problems. Feelings of loyalty and a personal interest in depicting The Watch Tower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses in the best possible light, disqualifies them. The problem is not made easier when it appears that The Watchtower Society in its literature urges its members to hold back the truth. Special for J.W.'s is their definition of a "lie", which implies that "the truth" must sometimes be concealed from "the world", if this is to the advantage of the organization: On page 1.061 in the Jehovah's Witnesses book "Aid to Bible understanding" (1971) we can read the following:

"Whilst to tell malicious lies is clearly condemned in the Bible, this does not mean that a person is obliged to give information to people who have not right to it. Jesus Christ gave the following advice: "Do not give dogs what is holy; do not throw pearls to the pigs; they will only trample on them, and turn and tear you to pieces" (Matthew 7:6). This is why Jesus in some cases abstained from giving all the information or a direct answer to certain questions, which, if he had done so, could have caused unnecessary damage."

An example of this is a paperback entitled "Preparing for Child Custody Cases", which among other things gives a detailed description of how children and young people who are Jehovah's Witnesses should answer for themselves during legal proceedings, mental investigations etc. or in connection with child assignment cases. The point being to give a good impression, not to describe what they have been taught to do as Jehovah's Witnesses. The Watch Tower Society insists that they have never published this paperback (for their own members), but ex-Witnesses Magnani⁸⁰ claims he can prove otherwise.

- (2) So it is difficult to come to any conclusions based on the literature published by the Watchtower Society. One cannot be sure that the individual Witnesses's situation is in fact as it is depicted by the Watchtower Society. One can be more "moderate" because one disagrees with parts of the doctrine, or one can deliberately neglect keeping the rules of conduct (or some of them). One may lack interest in reading or studying the publications, or one can be more radical; for example, on several occasions The Watchtower Society has claimed that members have shown more impatience to predict "the day of Jehovah" than The Watchtower itself has done⁸¹ The degree of influence and scrutiny coming for The Watchtower Society can also vary from person to person, from congregation to congregation, and from country to country. Finally, their literature is primarily written to create positive expectations about the message for the future.

⁷⁹ Weishaupt M. S. and Stensland, M.D. *Wifely subjection: Mental health Issues in Jehovah's Witnessese Women. Cultic Studies Journal 1997 Vol 1*

⁸⁰ Magnani, D. (1990): *Refutation of Preparing for Child Custody Cases. Second Edition. Witnesses inc. Clayton, CA 94517. USA.*

⁸¹ *Watchtower September 1st 1997*

Therefore, the focus is not so much on each member's present situation, but on what one hopes the future situation will be.

(3) It is also difficult to come to any conclusion based on publications from sources other than The Watchtower Society. Unfortunately, such literature is often polemic and negatively biased, and is most concerned with deviations of doctrine from orthodox Christianity. Neither is it always updated on what The Watchtower Society actually affirms. Statements from ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, including myself, are only of interest in so far as they manage to be positive.

For a long time I have been thinking about relating what the everyday situation was like in a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation and why it had such a damaging effect on both mind and body. When you read this you may say: "I would never have allowed this to happen". But you must remember that just like you, we appreciated the unreasonableness of it all, but we were indoctrinated into believing that we would lose our lives if we protested against resolutions made by the Watchtower Society. However, I will try to describe, as well as I can, what things are really like in the "Spiritual Paradise" of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Psychiatrists and psychologists have become more and more aware of the fact that the number of mental disorders and suicides among Jehovah's Witnesses is higher than the average for the general population. Mental disorders among Jehovah's Witnesses have become so common that printed theses on the subject of religion and mental illness often mention Jehovah's Witnesses as examples. Some international, independent investigations have been made in the field of Jehovah's Witnesses' mental health. Jerry Bergman, a professor of psychology, is himself an ex-Jehovah's Witnesses. He has collected some of these international investigations into a book entitled "The mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses", and he has himself worked as a therapist with several hundred Jehovah's Witnesses. Some of these have taken their own lives.

There are a number of scientific investigations which for the most part indicate that Witnesses and ex-Jehovah's Witnesses have more mental problems than most people. It is possible that these studies include perhaps a number of weaknesses with regard to method. Even so, look at the following examples and judge for yourself.

Rylander's investigation in Sweden, 1946

The most comprehensive investigation of the mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sweden was carried out by the Swedish psychiatrist, Rylander, on behalf of the Swedish government. His conclusion was that the number of psychoses among Witnesses is about four times as high as among non-Witnesses.

Pescor's investigation in America, 1949

In the same way as Rylander's, his investigation was carried out amongst conscientious objectors. According to him about 7% of the Jehovah's Witnesses who were examined were diagnosed as being psychotic.

Janner's investigation in Switzerland, 1963

This psychiatrist carried out an investigation amongst 100 conscientious objectors, of which 85% were Jehovah's Witnesses. He discovered that a considerable number of them had an abnormally high degree of "agitation and anxiety", "were seriously introverted", and many were diagnosed as "lone wolves and critically neurotic". The investigation indicates that mental disorders are far too prevalent among Jehovah's Witnesses.

Montague's investigations in USA, 1972, 1977 and 1986

According to these investigations the number of mental disorders among Jehovah's Witnesses is 10 - 17 times higher than among the ordinary population generally. About 10% of all members of the congregations are in grave need of professional help, in spite of the fact that many Jehovah's Witnesses are very good at hiding this fact. The official Watchtower policy is to deny that such a problem exists. I can mention as an example that the Watchtower magazine is always printing assertions such as: "Jehovah's Witnesses are the most well-adjusted people in the world", in spite of the fact that they know very well that this is not the case.

The Spencer - investigation in Australia, 1975

According to this psychiatrist the instances of schizophrenia among Jehovah's Witnesses is nearly three times higher than among the rest of the population, and paranoid schizophrenia occurs four times more frequently among Witnesses than among non-Witnesses.

Although these studies are made at differing times and in different countries, they all indicate that the level of mental illness among Jehovah's Witnesses lies considerably higher than the average for the ordinary population. My own observations and experience are completely in line with these investigations. However, I believe that the average is higher than intimated by the different investigators, and that we are only seeing the top of the iceberg. The information about the investigations quoted above is taken from the book: *The mental health of Jehovah's Witnesses*, pages 24-37, by Jerry Bergman, Ph.D. Witnesses. Inc. Clayton, VA. 944.

I have two reasons for my theory

1. Firstly, the leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses have a very negative opinion of psychologists, psychiatrists and all other consultative establishments. The Watchtower leaders discourage Jehovah's Witnesses from seeking professional help, and instead recommend the members of the cult to seek out the elders of the congregation. Not only do they discourage the members of the cult from visiting this type of specialist, in addition they strongly challenge their professional qualifications. It is not expertise they have, the Society says, but "quasi-expertise". They are also usually accused of being atheists and strongly influenced by Satan. In this way they frighten the members of the cult from seeking specialist help, and there can be no other reason for this than to conceal the actual situation from the general public. The Watchtower Society's magazine *Awake!* states this very clearly in its number of March 8th 1960, pages 27-28:

Should a Christian consult a psychiatrist?

"...as a rule, for a Christian to go to a worldly psychiatrist is an admission of defeat, it amounts to " going down to Egypt for help" Isaiah 31:1 Why? Primarily because so few psychiatrists have any faith in God and in his Word. [...] Often, when a Witness of Jehovah goes to a psychiatrist, the psychiatrist will try to persuade him that his troubles are caused by his religion, entirely overlooking the fact that the Christian Witnesses of Jehovah are the best-orientated, happiest and most contented group of people on the face of the earth. They get along better with each other than do people of any other religion, tribe or social group. They have the least need for psychiatrists. Also, more and more psychiatrists are resorting to hypnosis, which is a demonic form of worldly wisdom. James 3:15. Many psychiatrists refuse to recognise any such thing as sin or a moral obligation. As De Grazia shows in his book, *Errors of Psychotherapy*, they see nothing wrong in adultery, fornication, sodomy and suchlike so long

as one can get away with it. [...] they are concerned with mental sanitation, not with moral principles."

(The following is translated from the Norwegian edition)

"When a Christian asks the question: "Should a Christian consult a psychiatrist?", it must be said that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he should seek out a mature Christian instead. [...] What is needed in these circumstances is not a worldly psychiatrist who may easily completely overlook the change that has taken place in your life, and who has no knowledge of the truth and power of God's holy spirit to help a person invest himself with a new personality. Rather, what one needs is a mature Christian in whom one can confide, who is actively interested in one's welfare, and who does not hesitate to give the necessary reprimand or advice, so that one can be cured."

Admittedly there were some issues of *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines in 1975 which included articles where the Watchtower Society conceded (!!) that seeking the help of a psychiatrist was a personal matter, but they maintain the same condemning attitude towards this profession as in earlier articles. Instead of expressing any pity, the *Watchtower* articles often lay the blame for mental disorders on the individual himself. An example of this can be found in the same *Awake!* from which I quoted above, where the following "scientific" explanation for this is presented:

"When a Christian is troubled by mental disturbance or emotional problems, it is often because he has not sought the fellowship of his brothers in the new world's society. In a self-centred way he allows his thoughts to be occupied only by his own problems, he is full of anxiety, and his thoughts are constantly circulating around these things. In all probability he has neglected to prayer, as well." (Translated from the Norwegian edition)

In the last few years The Watchtower Society has allowed Jehovah's Witnesses to seek professional help for really serious cases of depression. (See *Awake!* October 8th 1991 and *Awake!* July 22nd 1993). But because of their fatalistic view of "the world" they still regard professional health personnel with Argus eyes. As recently as in 1990 so-called "hospital committees" were established to guard patients against the influence of hospital personnel and other outsiders, a fact which strengthens my theory that in fact The Watch Tower Society has not changed its suspicious attitude to psychiatry. Their views about "the End" and separation of the "sheep and goats", which according to them should have begun in 1919 and reached its conclusion before the year 2000 (*Watchtower* January 1st 1989) has also been changed. Unfortunately this "new light" has not changed anything. Anxiety and fear is still kept alive with the threat that "the time of great trouble" is "knocking at the door". (*Watchtower*, October 15th and November 1st 1995). Permission is now given for J.W's to study at an academy or university, but since "the end is just round the corner", there are few who avail themselves of all these new "liberties".

2. The most important reason for my assertion that the prevalence of mental illness among Jehovah's Witnesses is greater than indicated by the investigations I have mentioned, is that most of these are from 10 to 40 years old, and during the last ten years the leaders' grasp on their adherents has become even harder and more ruthless. The Watchtower Society will not tolerate the least deviation or contradiction, and all doctrines must be accepted, without question. Consequently, many Witnesses live under the continual fear of failing, and they conduct themselves in an artificial manner in order to hide their real feelings. I have "lost" over 50 members of the family and hundreds of friends who are no longer permitted by the Watchtower Society to speak to me. In their eyes I am dead, - non-existent.

Fortunately I have found something better, and have been given the chance to experience the love of Jesus, and genuine loving-kindness among sincere Christian friends.

There are many who have not been able to endure the complete isolation they experience after leaving the Watchtower organisation, or after having been "disfellowshipped". As a direct result of this many have taken their own lives because of the treatment they have received in the hands of the Watchtower Society. By this I mean the way in which they have been treated by family and friends. Although these people believe that they are following the rules and commandments of the Bible, their unkind and unchristian behaviour is the direct cause of 30 or 40 suicides in this country during the last 20 - 25 years.

Some large demonstrations were held outside the Watchtower Society's headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, in the beginning of the 'eighties. On one of the banners was written in big letters: "*The Governing Body kills*".

A significant factor, which does not improve the situation for Jehovah's Witnesses, is that The Watchtower Society has almost completely isolated its members from the world around them. There are many who disagree with the doctrine and who would like to leave, but remain within the organisation out of fear of losing their family and friends, not to mention all the other very disagreeable consequences subsequent to resigning from the Witnesses. They are in captivity, where their family and friends are used as hostages.

I have served in a congregation where over 30% of the members took "nerve pills" or anti-depressives, and in a congregation where over 50% "were dependent on medicine for their "nerves".

In my position as elder I visited all the families in the congregation regularly. I had previously set up a kind of plan and visiting list together with the other elders in the congregation, and an elder, together with a ministerial servant, visited one or more families each month. I believed (and still believe) that pastoral work is a very important part of the responsibility incumbent on a Christian elder, but this type of pastoral work among Jehovah's Witnesses uncovered a great deal of suffering.

Depression due to exhaustion

Many of those I visited, particularly the old people, were suffering from apathy and spiritual exhaustion, and some of them had lost any interest in the congregation. Others were poorly, and used this as an excuse for not doing more for "the truth". There were also many who were completely burnt out emotionally.

Several of them asked me again and again when the promised battle of Armageddon would come. These were people who had previously been very enthusiastic in their "service", but who had now come to the end of their tether, both physically and mentally. Some of them had been Jehovah's Witnesses for several decades. Some had never married. They had loyally followed the Watchtower Society's "good advice", and sacrificed marriage in the interest of the Organisation's "urgent work", because "the end" was so near. For the same reason there were some who, although they were married, had not had children, and now here they were in their old age - alone, without either children or grandchildren who could have visited them. From the booklet *Face the Facts*, published in 1938, we read on pages 46, 47 and 50:

"would it be **Scripturally** proper for them to marry and begin to rear children? No, is the answer, which is **supported by the Scriptures.**""It will be far better to be unhampered and without burdens, that they **may do the Lord's will now**, as the Lord commands, and also be without hindrance during Armageddon."Those... who now contemplate marriage, it

would seem, would do better if they **wait a few years**, until the fiery storm of Armageddon is gone..."

In the same year *the Watchtower* of November 1st claimed:

"...**mark the words of Jesus**, which **definitely** seem to discourage the bearing of children immediately before or during Armageddon....It would therefore appear that there is no reasonable or **Scriptural** injunction to bring children into the world **immediately before Armageddon, where we now are.**"

Even as late as 1950, in *Time* magazine, of July 17th, we read, "Some Witnesses believe the coming is so imminent that they put off marrying or having children until Armageddon...." Here again we see that the Society's leaders have deceived sincere Jehovah's Witnesses into believing false prophecies, even to the point of putting off marriage to please the Watchtower. The Scriptures **did not** say to put off marriage before Armageddon **but they do** warn us about those who would suggest it.

I consider that the supreme leaders in Brooklyn, who cause suffering to others by their uncompromising behaviour, and by all their rules and regulations regarding marriage, ought to read what Paul says about them. They should read 1 Timothy 4: 1-3. Paul writes the following:

"[...]some will follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth."

Yes indeed, there was a very obvious feeling of bitterness among those who had taken heed of the Society's encouragement to abstain from marriage, and to renounce the joy that comes from bringing children into the world. Which, as Paul says "God created to be received [...] by those who [...] know the truth" so that they could enjoy these things, and I can easily understand that these people were bitter about what had happened. The "truth" proclaimed by the Watchtower Society is not in accordance with Paul's truth. As I wrote in the first part of this book, I myself laboured with these problems for a time, and it was definitely not popular when I married, in direct opposition to the wishes of the Watchtower leaders. When I brought children into the world as well I was really in trouble.

It sounds unbelievable that anyone would follow such incitement, but it is not so unusual when you consider that Jehovah's Witnesses (and members of other cults) are continually being primed with unrealistic expectations concerning the end of the world, and a dream that the kingdom of God will be a reality within a few years. We must not forget that Jehovah's Witnesses believe what the Watchtower Society tells them. However, Solomon says in Proverbs 13:12:

"Protracted waiting causes heartache, but a wish fulfilled is like a tree of life"

Other translations put it like this:

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick." (J.B.Rotherham)

"Hope put off makes the heart sick." (The modern language Bible)

"Hope deferred breaks a man's spirit." (Ronald Knox)

I know from experience that nothing is more bitter and hard to endure than the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations. Hope deferred makes the heart sick is one of

Solomon's really wise sayings. Life seems tedious, and one becomes irritated and morose. The greater the expectations, the more frustrating and disappointing is the setback. For this reason the leaders of the Watchtower Society have been very unkind and unwise, as since 1874 they have made hundreds of promises and speculated about the coming of the kingdom. They should have known that there was no basis for these speculations, and they have been guilty of exploiting people's natural longing for the Kingdom of God, and taking advantage of their strength and resources to profit the organisation.

After many years' experience of working amongst people I gradually became convinced that the Watchtower organisation's doctrine, and its autocratic structure, was producing sick people.

"An organisation which causes illness", I thought, particularly after the bitter setback of 1975.

The organisation has absolute control, giving it a great deal of influence on the life of every single member, and for the most part the effect on the family is negative. In families where only one of the partners is a Jehovah's Witness there are often considerable problems, since "work" for the Society, meetings and preparation for meetings, takes up most of the time of the one who is in "the truth". In addition there will be continual confrontations over holidays, festivals and other things which non-Witnesses enjoy, and which he or she would like the children to enjoy as well.

In marriages where both the parents are Jehovah's Witnesses the exhausting life led by the parents will have a negative effect on the children, and on marital relationships. There will be little time for family life, for one is never "free". There is always "something to be done". It is simply impossible to do enough door-to-door work.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be a "happy fellowship", living in a "spiritual Paradise", but the reality is somewhat different. *It is in fact so different that I could be tempted to ask the Watchtower leaders whether they have any idea what the word Paradise means!* Many Witnesses are very unhappy and, with a few exceptions, most people feel that they are forced into a situation in which they have no choice. As a result of the organisation's severe and unbiblical rules there is a great deal of depression, doubt, feelings of hopelessness, guilt and a number of other persistent situations of conflict. Just before one Witness resigned, she told me tearfully:

"Time and time again I have begged the elders to help me. Each time they tell me that I must study more and do more field work. Then everything will sort itself out, but it doesn't get any better. I am not the only one who complains about the lack of loving-kindness amongst us but where shall we go? When I am together with friends from the congregation I see a lot of dubious conduct. They drink too much and I notice married people flirting, and I know that there is a certain amount of immorality. I don't like mixing with people like this. I am so depressed that I have considered the possibility of hanging myself."

Something which created many conflicts and which made me feel very despairing was that the organisation would always give the outward impression that all was well, that everything was absolutely as it should be. But I knew perfectly well that this was by no means the true description of the actual situation. The world belonged to Satan, and nothing "out there" was worth our attention. "It is all emptiness" we were told all the time. We regarded everyone as being either homosexual, immoral, fraudulent or materialistic. In fact we met many decent friendly people, who often had a better relationship among themselves than we ourselves had in the Watchtower organisation.

We then had to tell these "evil" people about the fine organisation to which we belonged, and that they must join the Watchtower organisation if they wished to achieve eternal life. This

created a schizophrenic existence, and a continuous battle between my intelligence and the artificial reality.

Another reason for mental health problems among Jehovah's Witnesses is that the literature which they have to read all the time carries on a deliberate and continuous defamation of everyone and everything which is not connected with "God's visible organisation", and of all who are not Jehovah's Witnesses, whether relating to religion or people. Emphasis is continually being put on wars, earthquakes, crime and the churches' guilt with regard to all this misery. When Jehovah's Witnesses families meet for a pleasant time together, the conversation revolves constantly around what they have been reading in the Watchtower, and about all the terrible things happening in the world. There is never any question of finding out if what appears in the Watchtower or Awake! is in fact correct. War and misery are both presented and understood as good news for "God's people"!

How can one expect to have a healthy mind, when one is so completely engrossed in fitting the world's misery into prophecies about what is interpreted as being one's own times, and when all attention is focussed on the end of this world the whole time?

Consequently, I myself often came home feeling depressed after a meeting or gathering in which I had taken part due to my position as "presiding overseer" or elder, since we always received at least 90% criticism and seldom any praise. Neither we ourselves nor the "rank and file" members of the congregation had ever done enough, there was always more we could do "for Jehovah".

I also believe that another cause of mental problems is the protracted isolation in which many Jehovah's Witnesses live. The organisation creates a feeling of fear for the "wicked" world, and continually preaches that the world is after you. Everyone is "out to" persecute you. But within the organisation a feeling of belonging is conspicuous by its absence. Even if a Witnesses disagrees with something, whether it concerns a point of doctrine or something else, he dare not say so. This will entail sanctions and unpleasantness. Consequently, a sort of KGB or Gestapo mentality rules the Jehovah's Witnesses congregations. Because of this people are very suspicious of each other. One must be careful what one says and to whom one says anything at all. If the elders get wind of an "apostatical" opinion (¹), they come down on it severely and ruthlessly.

As a result many Jehovah's Witnesses feel completely alone in the world and have no one in whom they can confide. If they talk to anyone in the congregation, the conversation will most likely reach the ears of the elders, (²) and they cannot talk to people outside the congregation, since these are under the influence of demons. This is basically an appalling dilemma, which makes already existing problems even worse.

Always, absolutely always, emphasis is put on working even harder for "the kingdom of God", notwithstanding the amount of "work" already being done. Consequently, many people have isolated themselves from the "wicked" world, but are nevertheless living in a frigid system, where alienation is a reality. A person cannot exist without true friends, and one is not intended to make good friends in the Watchtower system. The loyalty of the individual must be to the Society, not to "friends" in the congregation. The consequence of this is that no one can trust anyone, or confide in anyone. *People are taught to report on each other*, and the whole system is uncomfortably like the one described by George Orwell in his book *1984*.

Let me give an example: while talking confidentially to some friends you mention that you and your partner have agreed to pay a visit to a "marriage guidance council office". "Everyone" in the congregation will soon get to know this and regard it as being a very immature thing to do. Perhaps (read: certainly) the elders (who will of course have been given a report on your "immature" and "foolish" attitude) will have a conversation with you to try to convince you that it is better to go to them with marital problems. It will be noted on your file,

and you will be under "supervision" for some time after a "blunder" of this nature. The consequence of this is that you refrain from confiding in anyone, since doing so quickly engenders problems.

A feeling that one *lacks esteem* also contributes to mental problems. Many Jehovah's Witnesses have had ideas or proposals, and some have sent different kinds of research work to the Watchtower Society. These are often projects that have taken several years of hard research to complete. Some of these projects have been carried out by qualified experts in different fields, some of whom have pointed out things that are wrong with the Organisation. But they are never listened to. Often the person concerned receives no reply at all, and has to enquire whether the Society has in fact received his work. The answer will often be: "*We have not had time to examine your work.*"

If a Jehovah's Witness does something like this, he or she is regarded by the Watchtower Society as attempting to push himself or herself forward, trying to "be somebody". To the extent to which the Society deigns to make any sort of reaction, it is always negative. The standard answer is that one must not "go before God's Organisation", but "wait upon the Organisation". It is quite typical that good propositions appear again after a few years. However they are often presented as "new light" on some subject or another, and without exception as a decree from Jehovah channelled through the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn. Earlier on in this book I mentioned an example of this, where I brought all sorts of recriminations down on my head through making a suggestion involving a system identical to the one now being used by the Watchtower Society. Presumably they count on people forgetting over a period of 5 - 8 years!

In the middle of the seventies I drew the attention of several of the Watchtower Society's travelling overseers to the large number of our congregation's members who were suffering from depression or other mental disorders. Some members had been hospitalised several times. Others were under treatment from psychiatrists or psychologists.

I remember that as overseer I wondered how such a thing could be possible in the "spiritual paradise". One day I made up my mind to talk to one of the leaders of the Society's branch office in Amsterdam, Willy Caron. He was one of the most important men leading Jehovah's Witnesses work in Holland and was also a qualified homeopath. Willy Caron had previously helped me to solve some problems in the congregation and he was a man in whom I had confidence. He replied that besides my enquiry there had been a disturbing number of other enquiries about this matter. Headquarters in New York had been informed and had promised to write a series of articles about depression and ways of preventing it. Apart from Caron, the answers I was given by most of the leaders was that people suffering from depression were not active enough in their service or that they must be carrying on some secret activity giving them a guilty conscience and inevitably, mental problems. Really serious problems were far too easily swept under the carpet. Nor in my opinion was the series of articles on mental disorders published in the seventies by any means satisfactory. I say this because the basic causes of much of the unhappiness among many Jehovah's Witnesses, which were the destructive structure of the Society and the inhumanly heavy demands made on its members, were not touched on at all.

The uncertainty over whether one will survive Armageddon or not, is obviously not conducive to emotional stability. In the same way as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses must deserve eternal life, by among other things taking an active part in door-to-door work, and in addition, living up to a myriad of other rules and ordinances. The regulations are similar to the law of Moses, and the Watchtower's doctrine has more affinity with traditional Judaism than with Christianity. For example, a point of resemblance with the law of Moses is that one would have to be perfect in order to fulfil every last detail of the rules. If a Witness is not

active in "field" work, or has a "poor»"⁸² record of attendance at meetings, he can expect annihilation in the battle of Armageddon in the "near future".

This continuous uncertainty causes anxiety, and a smouldering fear is always lurking just round the corner. The dread of "failing" always lies just below the surface. I personally know people who have been faithful preachers all their lives, but who have committed suicide in their old age because they could not manage to achieve even more!

In my opinion, the fact that the Witnesses' *esthetical needs* are not satisfied is also one of the causes of poor mental health among Jehovah's Witnesses. The constantly changing doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses contains no symmetry or order, although they claim that these are the qualities that characterise God and his creation.

Something that is proclaimed *today* as an absolute truth, will be condemned *tomorrow* as an absolute falsehood. Many of the things we learned previously were so comical that I am often ashamed to mention them. There are hundreds of these ridiculous dogmas, which are presented quite seriously as "truths".

I will mention a few examples of these so-called "truths", although I must constrain myself, otherwise they alone would fill a whole book.

1. "The next chapter will present Bible evidence that A.D.1874 was the exact date of the beginning of the "Times of Restitution" and hence of our Lord's return. *The Time Is At Hand, vol. 2, 1889 edition, p.170.* Jehovah's Witnesses now teach that Jesus returned in 1914.⁸³
2. The end of the world and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth was prophesied to take place in 1874, 1878, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925, 1941 and 1975.⁸⁴
3. That "The deliverance of the saints must take place some time **before 1914** is manifest," 1909 Edition. Ten years later they say that: "The deliverance of the saints must take place some time **after 1914** is manifest," 1919 Edition⁸⁵
4. In 1929...In that year Beth Sarim, or the "House of Princes" was built. This special place was to be the headquarters of the resurrected Old Testament prophets - returning soon.⁸⁶
5. "...since other Scriptures definitely fix the fact that there will be a resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful ones of old, and that these will have the first favor, we may expect 1925 to Witnesses the return of

⁸² *All those who fail to take part in all 5 of the weekly meetings are regarded as "weak" or as having a "poor record".*

⁸³ *Reasoning from the Scriptures, p. 95.*

⁸⁴ *These dates are predicted in many Jehovah's Witnesses publications and are well documented in the pages of this book.*

⁸⁵ *Thy Kingdom come, vol.3, 1909 edition, p.228. Thy Kingdom come, vol. 3, 1919 edition, p.228. Golden Age, March 19th, 1930, p.406.*

⁸⁶ *Golden Age, March 19th, 1930, p.406.*

these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death, resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representative of the new order of things on earth."⁸⁷

6. The end of the world in 1925.

"The year 1925 is here. With great expectation Christians have looked forward to this year. Many have expected that all members of the body of Christ will be changed to heavenly glory during this year."⁸⁸

7. According to the Watchtower Society, discoveries and inventions made after 1874, were evidence that Jesus had come again in that year. What discoveries and inventions indicated the presence of Jesus?

"[...] but mention is made of some of those that have come to light since 1874, as further evidence of the Lord's presence since that date, as follows: Adding machines, aeroplanes, aluminium, antiseptic surgery, artificial dyes, automatic couplers, automobiles, barbed wire, bicycles, carborundum, cash registers, celluloid, correspondence schools, cream separators, Darkest Africa, disk plows, Divine Plan of the Ages, dynamite, electric railways, electric welding, escalators, fireless cookers, gas engines, harvesting machines, illumination gas, induction motors, linotypes, match machines, monotypes, motion pictures, North Pole, Panama Canal, pasteurization, radium, railway signals, Roentgen rays, shoe-sewing machines, skyscrapers, smokeless powder, South Pole, submarines, subways, talking machines, telephones, television, typewriters, vacuum cleaners, and wireless telegraphy."⁸⁹

8. Between 1931 and 1952 vaccination was forbidden for Jehovah's Witnesses and their children. "Vaccination is a direct violation of the everlasting covenant that God made..."⁹⁰

9. Organ transplants were forbidden between 1967 and 1980, and were called "cannibalism" in the Society's literature. Jehovah's Witnesses were forced to choose blindness instead of undergoing a cornea transplant, and to die instead of accepting a new kidney.⁹¹

The fact is that this has had even more serious consequences, since many people have lost their sight because at one time it was forbidden to accept a cornea from another person. This was when such things were "cannibalism", and no doubt it is of little comfort to those who are now blind that it later appeared that they would not have been "cannibals" after all.

The number of children and adults who have lost their lives due to the Watchtower Society's prohibition of blood transfusions, can only be guessed at, but it must be tens of thousands. In 1945 Jehovah's Witnesses said the following about blood transfusions:

"God has never drawn up resolutions forbidding the use of medicine, vaccination or blood transfusions [...] Serving Jehovah with our whole mind means that we must not cut out our

⁸⁷Millions now living will never die, 1920. p.88.

⁸⁸The Watchtower, Jan. 1st, 1925, p.3.

⁸⁹The Harp of God, pp. 219, 220.

⁹⁰The Golden Age, Feb. 4th. 1931, p. 293.

⁹¹Awake!, Aug. 22nd. 1965, p. 20 and Watchtower, Nov. 15th. 1967, pp. 702-704.

sense of reasoning, especially when a human life is involved, one which is dedicated to Jehovah and therefore holy."⁹²

After this the organisation received "new light" and consequently innumerable people have lost their lives, and those who have accepted blood transfusions and saved their lives, have been disfellowshipped. "The thief", (John 10: 10.) the Watchtower, has driven thousands of people all round the world to death by refusing them organ transplants and other life-saving medical treatment. In addition, "the thief" has caused a considerable number of suicides throughout the world, and in Norway as well.

10. *The Watchtower* 1971 states on pages 133 and 152 that the heart of a human being is literally the centre of his feelings, behaviour and ability to evaluate. However, people with artificial hearts have not experienced any change in their emotional life after receiving this type of heart. The doctrine that a human being thinks with his heart and kidneys, and not with his brain, was retained by the Watchtower Society right up until 1986.

The very fact that such assertions are made indicates that there could be some foundation for them, at any rate as far as the leaders of the Watchtower Society are concerned. Others would perhaps employ a different phrase to describe what such people think with, but I prefer to abstain from using vulgar expressions.

11. If you asked a Jehovah's Witnesses if the people of Sodom will be resurrected you would have been given the following answer:

Yes-	<i>Watchtower</i> July 1879, pg. 8
No-	<i>Watchtower</i> June 1st. 1952, pg. 338
Yes-	<i>Watchtower</i> August 1st. 1965, pg. 479
No-	<i>Watchtower</i> June 1st. 1988, pg.31
Yes-	<i>Life Forever</i> (early ed.) pg. 179
No-	<i>Life Forever</i> (Later ed.) pg. 79
Yes-	<i>Insight</i> vol. 2, pg. 985
No-	<i>Revelation</i> pg. 273

If you asked a Jehovah's Witnesses if he was allowed to say "Hello" to someone who had been disfellowshipped, you would have been given the following answer:

No-	in 1972
Yes-	in 1974
No-	in 1981

What is most incredible, and the reason why these conditions cause such serious mental problems, is that Jehovah's Witnesses' worst enemy is themselves. It is their own brains (if they have begun to think with their brains - instead of their kidneys), since they must be continually "forgetting" "previous light" and accepting "new light". In addition lurks fear, - the fear of punishment. For it is not only highly probable that a Jehovah's Witnesses whose opinion is YES, when the "correct" opinion is NO, will be disfellowshipped for "apostasy", it is absolutely certain! Just as certain as the fact that the same person will be disfellowshipped for

⁹² *The Dutch Jehovah's Witnesses' monthly magazine Vertrouwing, Sept. 1945, pp. 26, 27.*

holding an opinion which a couple of years later he would have been disfellowshipped for not holding.

Several reasons for mental problems among Jehovah's Witnesses

The experiences many others gained are for the most part similar to my own, and I agree with the experiences described by a number of other ex-Witnesses. Causes of poor mental health among Jehovah's Witnesses are:

- Continual alterations in the doctrine.
- Unnatural emphasis on things which most people would regard as immaterial because everyone has the right to do such things.⁹³ Little, insignificant things are often blown up to unbelievable proportions. As an example of this kind of "storm in a teacup" I can refer to what can happen when a Jehovah's Witness is absent from meetings a few times due to fatigue or some other reason. Usually one or two elders come for a visit, saying: "We have not seen you at the meetings the last few weeks, brother Wilting. We are worried about you, brother Wilting. You can risk falling away from "the Truth". We think you need help."

What was in fact quite a normal occurrence, such as a person withdrawing a little in order to take a badly needed rest, is made into a problem. The reason why you have not been attending Kingdom Hall is of no consequence. The proof is evident: You were not there! Since you believe that the elders are appointed by God, you look on them as God's representatives. A reprimand from the elders is regarded as being almost like a reprimand from God. The "concern" the organisation really has for you, is that there must not be any interval in the regular weekly indoctrinating, since the leaders are aware of the danger of letting you begin to think for yourself. This is the reason why these rules about visiting are implemented.

Another example:

The case of the striped shirt

When the organisation decrees that black is white you must accept this as a fact, because the organisation has said so. I got myself involved in a hopeless situation where the harsh and obstinate attitude by which I was met was quite unbelievable. The organisation and its representatives rejected any form of dialogue. The fault was mine. I was "rebellious", - a dangerous element who was driving a wedge into the "body of elders". I was presumptuous and attempting to walk "in front of" Jehovah.

What had I done? What was it that caused the Watchtower Society to look on me as a rebel, and the other members of the congregation's council of elders to claim that I was "driving a wedge into the body of elders"? The story is as tragic as it would appear to be ludicrous, but behind the "absurdities" an ice-cold technique of manipulation can be observed. *Group mentality is essential* to maintain the Society's position of power, and I had dared to "challenge" this policy. What actually happened was as follows.

⁹³ For example it was/is forbidden to hang up a painting if there happens to be a church tower anywhere in the picture. I know people who became Jehovah's Witnesses and threw expensive paintings in the dustbin in accordance with their newly accepted "truths". A friend of mine (J.W.) bought an expensive clock. A figure of Atlas carrying a globe on his shoulders was mounted on the top of the clock. Since Atlas is a mythological god, the figure was unacceptable. My friend removed the "false god" and in so doing spoiled the aesthetic appearance of the clock.

In 1974 I took part in a meeting for presiding overseers and elders under the direction of the Watchtower Society, where one of the Society's Dutch representatives led the seminar. Steenkamp, who was the district overseer, gave a talk about fashions and attire, and among other things this subject included the Watchtower Society's prohibition of coloured shirts and sideburns for men, and other "biblical" rules. At the time I was conducting bible study with a drug addict, and he had started going to meetings. However, it was difficult for him to see why he needed to cut his hair according to the "theocratic" style, and even worse for him to understand why he could not keep his sideburns. I personally had an awful problem trying to give him a "biblical" reason for this, naturally enough, and I took the unprecedented liberty of asking Steenkamp about it. Now the reader will surely say that it is right to ask about things of which one is uncertain, but that is a fundamental mistake. One must accept what one is told, and not "waste the time" of the Society's representatives with "silly" questions.

I raised my hand, and Steenkamp paused in his lecture, pointed towards me and said. "*Yes, Wilting?*"

I explained the situation, and that I had some difficulty in seeing that we had the right to require folk to shave off their sideburns, or to forbid members of our congregations to wear coloured shirts, etc. This "revolt" resulted in complete silence. One could have heard the proverbial pin drop, and everyone wondered how Steenkamp would react to such a rebellious attitude towards the rules of the Watchtower Society.

Steenkamp just stood there looking at me for a while, before beginning to hold forth about Jehovah's Witnesses in Muslim countries who did not touch alcohol so as not to offend the Muslims. After a while he realised that the comparison was pretty thin, to put it mildly, as wearing sideburns in Holland can hardly be compared to "getting drunk" in Iran. So he suddenly stopped talking, drew a deep breath, went very red in the face - and exploded.

"I refuse to discuss such ridiculous questions!" he shouted. He pointed a shaking finger at me. "I know where you get these ideas from. In Scandinavia the outlook is far too slovenly about such things, and that's why we are making so little progress there," he thundered at me, and with that he considered the matter to be closed.

Seen from my point of view the matter was by no means closed, as the only reply my question had received was a fit of rage from someone incapable of giving me a sensible answer, however hard he might have tried. The words of Jesus regarding coloured shirts, bows or ties, the cut of the collar etc. are really quite vague - as you might say. However, all this resulted in a comment in "the file" about me, and such comments are never erased. They are brought out for regular review to make sure that the "sinner" concerned appears to be falling back into line again without causing any more trouble.

Out of a personal interest I often travelled to Denmark to take part in conventions in that country. One of the speakers at a convention in Denmark was wearing a coloured shirt, which I still remember as being dark brown, so I thought perhaps I could take the risk of stretching the white shirt rule just a little. I found a white shirt with a few thin red stripes on it in a shop, and I thought it was very smart compared with the plain white shirts I had been wearing for the last 20 years. In order to really defy the scruples of those present, I wore the new shirt when I held a public address. This I should not have done! Next day a committee turned up at my home, and one of the elders claimed that "he had not slept a wink all night" following this monstrous breach of the accepted rules of deportment.

Of course the matter was not improved by my insisting that this was not a crime, and even daring to assert that it was "up to my own conscience" to decide whether or not I should wear a striped shirt. The elders were obviously outraged by this almost heretical attitude, and it was

then that they found it appropriate to claim that I was "driving a wedge into the body of elders!"

The congregation's council of elders held a meeting about the matter. Five grave, respected adults spent a whole evening discussing how they should tackle this problem, and in the end they decided to send a "memo" to the Watchtower Society about the case of "Wilting and the striped shirt". They informed the Society that I "no longer abided by the rules of the Society concerning styles of dress and attire."

Behind my back the travelling circuit overseer warned the other elders that I constituted a disturbing element in the congregation. This spread like wildfire, and soon I began to sense that the whole congregation looked on me as a kind of apostate, even though I was still officially a member of the organisation.

Little did I realise at the time that this was a deliberate strategy on the part of the Watchtower Society in order to isolate anyone holding diverging opinions, and over whom they lacked absolute control. Since they knowingly allow their followers to employ falsehoods in connection with the work of preaching, it is hardly surprising that they can wilfully drive a person to distraction in order to protect the "theocratic organisation". The individual does not count.

What started as the "grave case" of the striped shirt, resulted, after doing the rounds of different councils and committees, in my being relieved of my position both as presiding overseer, and as one of the congregation's elders. Seen from the Society's viewpoint dissenters were unacceptable, not because of a few stripes on a shirt, about which the Society could not have cared less, but *because I did not show absolute obedience to every order without protesting.*

- The colossal social pressure on members to engage in unpaid work, that is unproductive from a financial point of view, such as door-to-door "sale" of literature. The fact that Jehovah's Witnesses know in addition that this literature is not usually read, makes the work largely unproductive from a "spiritual" point of view, as well. An investigation of the Watchtower Society's own statistics shows that far more than 5.000 hours of evangelising is required for every new member enrolled. When we also consider that a very large part of the so-called "growth" is due to the Witnesses' own children growing up and being baptised, we can estimate that more than 15.000 hours of evangelising is needed for each new proselyte in the cult, or putting it another way - 37.5 hours work a week for 9 years! This must be the all time low among cults, which are usually very good at recruiting members.⁹⁴

Distinct and serious doctrinal problems, which are obvious to well-read, intelligent members, or people who have gained their knowledge from other sources than the Watchtower Society. The reader must certainly be able to imagine what it must have been like for a doctor who was a Jehovah's Witnesses before 1986. Think how he must have felt when he had to announce that a human being thinks with his kidneys! I am sure that he was not over anxious to proclaim this "wonderful truth" to his surgeon colleagues at the hospital. This is the sort of thing which produces doubt and depression.

⁹⁴ *Neither is the main purpose of this work to recruit new members but rather to maintain a feeling of unity, or group identity. This is a very important element in mind control. Ref. Steven Hassan: Combating Cult Mind Control.*

- The fear that throughout life one's faith may have been based on false assumptions, can be very traumatic. Prophetic mistakes - such as 1914 and 1975, together with a myriad of others, are examples of this sort of religious "land mine". One must tread very carefully all the time or else the whole thing can explode in one's face.
- The complete lack of any form of appreciation by the Watchtower Society, as experienced by the Witnesses, and the continual "encouragement" they are given the whole time to yield more, increases the problems. They must serve the Society and its interests all the time, and their own individual needs and objectives must always be sacrificed in the "interests of God's kingdom".
- Outside pressures often create conflicts between the rules of the Society and the conscience of the individual Witnesses. The following are some examples: refusal to salute the flag, do military service, celebrate birthdays or Christmas, and attend a non-Witnesses wedding or a church funeral. Most Jehovah's Witnesses have no difficulty in refusing military service, and they have no qualms of conscience over that. Worse is the fact that they cannot join the crowds in the streets on a National Day, since this would be to "take part in" a heathen celebration. Children have great difficulties at school, since they are not allowed to stand while the flag is hoisted, or the national anthem is played. Neither are they allowed to remove their headgear during these events, as this would be construed as "taking part in" the worship of idols. This creates mental pressure, and the fact that the Watchtower leaders cannot understand this demonstrates who is really in possession of only "quasi" knowledge.
- Conflicts can also arise with regard to status within the congregations. To be appointed as an elder is considered to be a great honour among Jehovah's Witnesses. The same applies to pioneer service, and the road to an honoured position often goes via pioneer service. All the "mature" brothers take part in a kind of race to achieve this status. Backbiting and criticism are rife, and a more or less well-camouflaged hate often lies under the highly polished surface of the congregation. The result is often envy and bitterness over those who have achieved a leading position. The ladies of the congregation also achieve status when their husbands become elders. Consequently there is often a struggle between them to attract the most "spiritually-minded" husband, as this is the only means by which they can achieve any position for themselves. They can never "be anybody" in the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation, since women must "be silent in meetings" unless they are asked a direct question.
- Tedious; Many people find the five weekly meetings painfully boring. Witnesses are encouraged to take jobs carrying little responsibility, and they are advised against working overtime, etc. The explanation being, of course, that responsibility at work entails the risk of being time-consuming, and time must be used in the service of the Society, - not the worldly employer. Apart from the New World and the next Watchtower or assembly, there is little for a Jehovah's Witnesses to look forward to. Any surplus money can with advantage be lent without interest to the Watchtower Society, or of course given as a "voluntary contribution". The whole point is that no one shall have either the time or the money to carry on any other activity than those determined by the Society.

Something I found incompatible for many years, was the Watchtower's repeated assertions that "Jehovah's Witnesses are the most well-adjusted people, and the happiest and most contented folk on earth"⁹⁵

Likewise it is written in Psalm 144:15: "Blessed are the people whose God is Jehovah!"⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Awake! March 8th. 1960, p.27.*

On the contrary, I often felt miserable and wretched because of all the unanswered questions over which I brooded. The leaders in Brooklyn wanted me to believe that the problem lay with me, since I felt so unhappy. This is standard cult-procedure.

Other reasons why many Jehovah's Witnesses feel unhappy are:

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- They are always absorbed in the problems of the world, concentrating on negative and destructive events.
- They are suspicious of other people, including other Witnesses.
- They are frightened of other people, because these are potential thieves, drug addicts, homosexuals, etc.
- They are also alienated from the members of the congregation. Because of the systematic espionage and system of reporting, they dare not talk confidentially about their doubts, controversial opinions etc. Everyone watches over everyone else, and the elders receive reports about them all.
For example, not so many years ago it was forbidden to stand up to hold an address in a coloured shirt. Breaking this rule resulted in being deprived of one's ministerial privileges in the congregation. If someone declared in front of others in the congregation that he disagreed with the Society's views concerning fashion, clothes and hairstyles, this could lead to even more severe sanctions from the elders. Opinions such as these were interpreted as "rebellious" or spreading "discord" in the congregation. Even if the matter in question was immaterial, power must be demonstrated.
- They have no real friends. One needs friends in order to maintain a mental
 - balance.

Serious social problems among Witnesses

Witnesses move about much more often than is usual in the average population, and this a typical trait in many countries. The cause is often to be found in their social intercourse. When you first come to a new congregation you are enthusiastic about everyone and everyone is enthusiastic about you. However, after 6 months you have once more discovered each individual's weaknesses, and once more had more than enough of some of them. Similarly, the others discover your defects, and not everyone is so fond of you any more. Quite often so much animosity develops between Witnesses that moving seems to be the only solution. They think then: "there must be something wrong with that congregation". But after a short while in another congregation the same thing happens again. In the end they often isolate themselves completely, avoiding all intercourse with others in the congregation. This is when the problems really become serious. Since they are Jehovah's Witnesses, they cannot mix with people of "this world", as these are under the influence of Satan, and instead they stay at home.

The reason is obvious. The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses emphasises that salvation is achieved by doing the work of the Watchtower Society, therefore it is natural that everyone

⁹⁶ *The New World Translation, Danish edition (compiled by the Watchtower Society).*

keeps a vigilant watch on your conduct and actions. If you are not the ideal Watchtower type, many will be afraid to associate with you, and the elders will warn other members of the congregation against having anything to do with you. If anyone associates with you in spite of this, your "wickedness" and "independent opinions" can be the cause of their downfall as well, according to the committee of elders. Consequently they must greet you slyly with an artificial smile, pretending to be the best of friends, these children of God in the "Spiritual Paradise".

Because of this Jehovah's Witnesses are constantly under stress, and very sceptical - not to say hostile - to anyone who is slightly different. I remember well what is often said at assemblies and meetings: "Not all those within the organisation are genuine Jehovah's Witnesses". What happens after remarks like this? Everyone starts to scrutinise everyone else, thinking: "He or she is not a real Jehovah's Witnesses". The result is that no one trusts anyone and everyone is suspicious of everyone else.

What make one appear distinctive in the eyes of Jehovah's Witnesses? One difference can be a good education, or alternatively no education. This last is by no means unusual. A Witnesses is suspicious of anyone who has had an advanced education. Those who have been to university have a particularly hard time. There are not all that many of them, but how have they managed to survive their years at university with all those "immoral" people? It is almost tragic to have been university-educated or be in possession of a doctorate. Why? *Because this implies a threat to the Watchtower.* Anyone boasting a good education is a threat. The leaders find it difficult to associate with such people. Consequently, the Watchtower is always humiliating the well educated. They must be made more humble! This applies particularly to people who have done well, artists, musicians or actors, for example. They usually say: *You mustn't get any fancy ideas. I know you're an actor, but you are just like one of us*". What is the point of this constant degrading? It is to keep people down, and this is a practice the Society has to encourage. *Everyone must be as much part of a homogeneous mass as possible, which is a well-known concept for all who practise mind control. Just think of the smart uniforms in Mao's China.*

If you are rich you cannot be a Christian. You must be evil or very nearly so. If you had been a proper Christian, you would at least have given large sums of money to a good cause, as pointed out by the Bible. A good cause (read: the only good cause) is to support the Society. *Other evidences of a generous disposition, such as giving money to charitable institutions, can result in disfellowshipping. It is forbidden to finance Satan!* In this way, everyone who is, or who dares to be, different, whether he is rich, artistic or an individualist, is degraded, humiliated and look down on. In fact, at regular intervals in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*, suspicion is cast over people who have an advanced education. Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine puts a very heavy mental strain on this group of people.

Jehovah's Witnesses must not "be anybody"

Jehovah's Witnesses are strongly advised to avoid striving to gain any position of importance outside the congregation. This is regarded as negative, as it can devour valuable time that could be used in the service of the organisation instead. However, human nature demands that we are someone, or at least that we can achieve the right to be respected; a perfectly natural characteristic.

- * Advancement at work is wrong.
- * The practice of sport is wrong.
- * To sing in public is wrong.
- * To perform in a theatre is wrong.

These things are wrong because you are exalting yourself, and it is Jehovah who must be exalted. You are boosting your own ego, your own work.

Ordinary, normal activities practised by people are unceasingly criticised by The Watchtower, and this naturally becomes depressing in the long run.

The desire for approval is a part of human nature. We all enjoy doing something pleasant, and we enjoy doing it well. Someone who sings well can offer a great deal of enjoyment to other people by singing. Everyone likes to receive attention. But the Watchtower leaders do not look at things in this way. Instead they say: "The only possible motive you can have for wishing to drive a beautiful car, is that others will see you, and then you can think: "Look at me! See who I am!". *In other words, one is constantly being ascribed selfish motives, and this is destructive to mental health.*

Nowhere in the Bible is it stated that it is wrong to receive applause from the public for something one does or shows oneself capable of. It should be mentioned that Witnesses applaud after a speech and sometimes, particularly at large conventions, during a speech. But the applause is given in gratitude for the "spiritual" food and "encouragement" coming from "the faithful and discreet slave", in Brooklyn. Unfortunately, the Watchtower leaders do not feel the same way about receiving applause. *The only one deserving of reward and honour is the Watchtower*, and therefore one can regularly read praise being given to the "Governing Body" in Brooklyn. All glory must be attributed to God's organisation. This attitude is also expressed in the prayers of the congregation. The organisation and the "Governing Body" are continually being prayed for. If anyone has ever heard a prayer being said for a member of the congregation who is in trouble, this must be a practice that has been introduced since my time!

If you are gifted, you are put under pressure by being told: *"Well brother, you will be able to develop your talents and make use of them in the New World [...] but for the time being let us serve Jehovah"*.

On occasion, accomplished Jehovah's Witnesses have been asked to represent their country in the Olympic Games, for example, or they have been offered a scholarship to further their studies in some special field or other. The Watchtower Society and its elders have always strongly advised against accepting offers of this kind, saying: *"You will be bringing glory to yourself and to your country"*. The expression *"advise against"* means more than is usually associated with the words. The implication is that if the advice is not heeded, any privileges the person concerned might have, will be removed. The congregation will be made aware, either directly or by means of a whispering campaign, that brother or sister so and so has fallen a victim to selfishness. Association is strongly discouraged, "discouraged" having the same implications as "advise against".

Many people give up when they are met by so much negative influence and such a crude display of power by the organisation. But what often happens to a person who renounces all his talents? Unfortunately the result is often people with so-called frustrated egos, and all unsatisfied desires create mental problems. Later the person involved often bitterly regrets having followed the "good advice". *Just think of all those who terminated their education from 1968 onwards - since the world was to be destroyed in 1975. These people are 35 to 40 years old now, and are having to cope in today's difficult labour market without any qualifications.*

All rules have exceptions, and this includes Jehovah's Witnesses. It is quite permissible to be ambitious within the congregation, since it is not wrong to strive for positions in the Watchtower organisation. You ought to become an elder or a "servant". The reader must not misunderstand. It is the Society which is "served", not the members of the congregation. The consequence of this is often a fight for status, with the struggle for power and conflicts

between brothers in its wake, because in one way or another, people will and must satisfy their egos.

All male Jehovah's Witnesses would like to be elders (female Witnesses would like to be married to elders as this provides status). At social gatherings one remarks respectfully that "he is an elder", and the term "elder" is often surrounded by an aura of something rather special and desirable. There is a great deal of prestige attached to the position. There are many men who fight desperately to become "elders". I myself have been approached by "servants" (31) asking me if they would soon be nominated to the office of "elder". Quite often this led to disappointment, envy, frustration and bitterness towards the elders since these had not "nominated" them to the "office". Sometimes grown-up men burst out crying. Their anticipation (and that of their wives) had been so intense that their nerves were all keyed up. Taut nerves snap very quickly, and I myself have seen such people in a state of complete collapse more than once. *They were absolutely shattered, since they assumed* (as the Society wanted them to) *that they had not been working hard enough.*

Some of these refused to attend meetings after this, or they refused to associate with other Jehovah's Witnesses. Those who feel themselves by-passed begin to doubt themselves, and think: "I'm not good enough. I'm not mature enough". It has also been my experience that the little group of three or four elders was not always over enthusiastic about appointing any more elders. For this could threaten their privileged position and the status these elders had built up for themselves in the congregation! Where there were few elders in this, for most people, unattainable office, they were respected, and they did not like the idea of having to compete for esteem. Neither should the danger of perhaps having to play second fiddle be forgotten. So all in all, "newcomers" at the top were unwelcome.

The same rat race is often observed among Jehovah's Witnesses' pioneers. (These have to spend at least 90 hours a month on door-to-door work.) When you are introduced to one of these pioneers, you will often hear the assertion: "I am brother so and so. I am a pioneer!" The word is pronounced as though the assertion had been: "I am the Sheikh of Brunei". It is almost as though it is expected of everyone to bow deferentially, and to show the utmost respect. This is not only the way the pioneers wish it to be, but in fact a direct command from the Watchtower Society. The pioneers are "the cream" - as long as they do not begin getting ideas. That is to say there is no reason why they should not "lord it" over "ordinary publishers", but they are ill advised to put on airs in front of a district overseer! *For then they will soon be told how much they are worth.*

Too much "worldly" literature is a sign that something is wrong

Other than Watchtower literature, one is discouraged from spending much time reading most books and magazines. If your bookshelves contain such literature, you are exposing yourself to suspicion and criticism. Perhaps you are not in fact a genuine brother! This can also be a mental burden for many. If you study the literature referred to by the Watchtower, there must be something wrong with you. The Watchtower Society quotes references with the intention of making it unnecessary for you to check them! If you decide to check them anyway, you cannot fail to notice that quotations which the Watchtower Society have cited as being taken from such and such a text, in fact, often do not come from this source at all. This type of embarrassment is preferably to be avoided, and "bookworms" are soon told to subdue this "unhealthy" interest.

You run the risk of consuming spiritually poisoned food when you read literature that has not been approved by "his faithful and wise servant". We can read the following in *the Watchtower* of August 1st. 1950:

"Jehovah, and the Lord Jesus Christ [...] are the ones supplying the food[...] then why go nibbling at the table of those who are opposed to this wise steward of the Master's provisions? You might get spiritual poisoning for their food has not been Theocratically tested.[...] Those who are without are not cooperating with the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society and therefore cannot help you for they do not have the Lord's blessing, and you will be dishonoring God the Provider. [...] The safest way for the members of God's household is to be content with food of the Master's providing and as served by his "faithful and wise servant"."

In *the Watchtower*, July 1st. 1973, we read:

"Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. To it alone God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book. [...] How very much true Christians appreciate associating with the only organization on earth that understands the "deep things of God!"

In this connection I would like to repeat the quotation from *the Watchtower* of June 1st 1967. The leaders in Brooklyn say:

"We may think of study as hard work, as involving heavy research. But in Jehovah's organization it is not necessary to spend a lot of time and energy in research, *for there are brothers in the organization who are assigned to do that very thing*, [...] Often the very best and most beneficial studying you do is that done when you read a new *Watchtower* or *Awake!* or a new book."

So very kind and thoughtful of the Watchtower Society, is it not? We do the reading and studying for you. The organisation sounds like a dream paradise for weary housewives! You do not need to do any study yourself. The Society does it for you. Neither do you need to think for yourself, since "the governing body" has taken on that task as well! Your thoughts are chained. When your mind is steered by remote control, without any room for your own thoughts, can you expect to be happy? No, quite the contrary!

Chapter 14. Fact, or fiction?

Several years ago I took part as an expert Witnesses in the Norwegian Supreme Court in connection with a child custody case. After I had told the judges about the mental problems and suffering in The Watchtower Society, I summed up my assertions as follows: "I have absolutely no difficulty in understanding that a large number of J.W's suffer from mental problems due to The Watchtower Society's policy. However, I do have difficulty in comprehending that there can be any normal, mentally healthy people left at all in the organisation when they believe that 1) they are the only true Christians, 2) that millions of people will be "slaughtered" by Jehovah in the near future, 3) that only Jehovah's Witnesses will survive Jehovah's judgement etc, etc."

Are the assertions of both myself and others in the previous chapter on Mental suffering in the "spiritual paradise" too biased and too much tainted by my own and other ex-Witnesses' personal experiences? I do not believe that a number of scientists and thousands of ex-J-W's are just talking nonsense when they describe their experiences.

There are those who think that ex-Witnesses cannot be impartial because their negative experiences give them too one-sided a view of J.W's. On the other hand, I maintain that it is particularly these many ex-Witnesses who are best qualified to be able to say what The Watchtower Society really represents.

I can both understand and agree that many people can have had problems before they became Jehovah's Witnesses, but why should these problems become greater/ increase when The Watchtower Society proclaims itself to be a "spiritual paradise", and that J.W's are the

happiest people on earth? To me, this seems to be a paradox. Would it not be reasonable to assume that particularly a someone who has a tendency to suffer from mental problems, should feel encouraged, stimulated and uplifted to a higher spiritual level. That such a person should feel at home in a “loving environment”, where he is surrounded by the “happiest people on earth”.

Therefore, an objection can be raised against Jehovah’s Witnesses being qualified to express themselves without bias, because it is in their interests to present as positive a picture as possible to the outside world, and they can also be tempted to “idealise” their situation.

Should not objective, scientific research into the mental health of Jehovah’s Witnesses give us the right answers? I do not think so. Conducting research on Jehovah’s Witnesses is no easy task, and there are several reasons for this.

Up to now there are no controlled investigations of Jehovah’s Witnesses members according to the “random-free” principle (with the exception of Beckford’s sociological investigation⁹⁷). The “random-free” principle means that one allows an investigation of groups selected at random. Although a few writers assert that they have done a thorough psychological analysis of Jehovah’s Witnesses, I myself do not consider these analyses to be particularly reliable, because J.W’s doctrine and principle for the individual member to “not hang out the dirty washing”, and “always exalt Jehovah’s organisation”, make it impossible to carry out a scientific, objective analysis of the Witnesses’ mental condition.

The following is an interesting contention: That which has been written about Jehovah’s Witnesses is by and large characterised by anti-cult-authors who produce apologetic and belligerent publications, based on their own convictions, about what they understand as “sects”. The result being that they “find” the negative conclusions they are looking for.

With regard to Beckford, he has grown up as a Jehovah’s Witnesses. After leaving the movement, he studied for a university degree in psychology, later he took his Ph.D., and spent most of his life on research and therapy around the J.W.-movement. He went over to a normal evangelistic Christian faith. On the one hand, one can say that his childhood and new faith by definition disqualify him as a neutral investigator. On the other hand, one can contend that the combination of first his own experiences and later his qualifications, give him the best possible background to carry on research.

True science is based on serious research. Since The Watchtower Society claims to be the only true Christian movement on earth, they should certainly not be afraid of serious research or thorough investigation. Unfortunately the opposite has been the case. In the instances where an investigation has been carried out The Watchtower Society has pushed forward its own selected composite groups.

I believe that opposition to controlled investigations is an indication that J.W’s have something to hide. I interpret it as an expression that J.W’s do not want to be investigated by outsiders, particularly if there is any suspicion of can attempt at “disclosures”.

More facts

The Watchtower Society enforces definite rules to keep its members in check, whether it has to do with the family or with an operation/service. The ordinary men and women among Jehovah’s Witnesses are often not aware that they are being controlled by written and

⁹⁷ Beckford, J.A. (1975): *The Trumpet of Prophecy. A Sociological Study of Jehova's Witnesses*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. England.

unwritten rules. The leaders want to have the last word in all decisions. Let me illustrate this more clearly.

As I have previously mentioned in the introduction to this book, since the beginning of the 1990's Jehovah's Witnesses have been allowed to seek psychological and psychiatric help, and also to gain higher education at an academy or university. But many people are not aware that the Watchtower Society makes us of an "external public news relationship", and an "internal news relationship". In many countries during the last 15 – 20 years ex-Jehovah's Witnesses have driven an intense campaign and exposure of The Watchtower Society's hard and unfeeling rules and methods. Many books have been written, including many by ex-Jehovah's Witnesses. Several hundred thousand, indeed some people say nearly a million members have left the organisation since the 1975 blunder. In fact, in some western countries they have had very little increase in membership, or even a decrease. In order to encourage sympathy from outsiders The Watchtower Society has "softened" some of its bans and been forced to give a better impression to the outside. But these new "liberties" have been intended for an "external news relationship" only.

There has been no change for the individual Jehovah's Witnesses because the "internal news relationship" message is still: "since this evil world will soon go under at Armageddon, you must be stupid to rely on help or advice from worldly people or spend valuable time on a career".

At the same time as Jehovah's Witnesses, in the 1990's, allowed members to seek psychological or psychiatric help, and obtain a higher education at an academy or university, "hospital committees", were established. These were committees of elders whose task was to control hospital personnel, such as doctors and trained staff, to make sure that Jehovah's Witnesses were not treated against the rules and regulations of the Watchtower Society.

Therefore, there is a contrast between what is officially announced and what is said "internally" and how one behaves towards the members in formal as opposed to informal connections.

Spencer had to rely on personal statements.⁹⁸ Bergman's experience is that Jehovah's Witnesses members who are forcibly committed due to mental problems, tend not to admit to membership, and to state that they are "protestant" or of "no religion". This is because they fear that their membership will be associated with their problems, or because they are concerned about the organisations' "reputation", or because they are convinced that there cannot be anything wrong with Jehovah's Witnesses (many J.W.-members, according to Bergman, have a "I'm not okay, you're okay" attitude to their own organisation, which can be both chronic and disabling).⁹⁹

Macdonald and Luckett investigate a group of 7.050 patients at a psychiatric hospital in the Middle West (U.S.A.). They found that: "Psychoses were dominated by cults". Within the group of "sects" were included "Christian Scientists", "Jehovah's Witnesses", "Mormons" and "Seventh Day Adventists".¹⁰⁰ According to Bergman, other investigations have shown

⁹⁸ Spencer, J. (1975): *The Mental Health of Jehovah's Witnesses*. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. Vol. 126, 556-559. England.

⁹⁹ Bergman, J. (Ph.D.) (1985): *Community and Sosial Controll in a Chiliastic Religious Cult: A Participant Obsevation Study*. M.A. Thesis, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University. USA.
Bergman, J. (Ph.D.) (1992): *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Problem og Mental Illness*. Witness Inc. P.O.Box 597 Clayton, USA.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, C.B. & Lucett, J.B.(1983): *Religious Affiliation and Psychiatric Diagnoses*. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Mar. 15-37. USA.

that the other confessions have a lower rate of mental disorders (than the normal population), which would seem to indicate that the Jehovah's Witnesses group was mainly responsible for the large proportion of psychotic patients.

Casuistic studies have been made of Jehovah's Witnesses (casuistic: in the field of psychology, a summation of all the information about a person). Sack also (1985) arrived at a similar conclusion in a doctor's thesis, saying that J.W.-members have a larger number of mental problems than the normal population. The same is the case for Elmar K opl. ¹⁰¹ American psychologists who have been involved in child custody cases in U.S.A. have expressed concern about the mental pressure Jehovah's Witnesses' children are subject to, among other things, because they grow up as deviators within the school system. ¹⁰² In fact, child custody cases have been a "hot" subject in the U.S.A. in situations where only one of the parents is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jimmy drinks, but why does Jimmy drink?

We have a saying in Norway: "Jimmy drinks, but why does Jimmy drink?" My personal experience in the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation is that too much alcohol is consumed, particularly amongst the leaders. Several times I have Witnessed leaders who have drunk themselves out of their senses. Sometimes a superintendent would ask me to drive him in my car to a friend's house where a party was under way. I usually did as I was asked in order to avoid the risk of his being arrested for drunken driving.

There are a certain number of people who start drinking too much due to personal problems. I consider this to be a paradox. It should not be necessary to turn to drink in order to solve one's problems when one is surrounded by a "spiritual paradise"?

Jerry Bergman does not quote any systematic studies of this phenomenon, but he refers to Watters ¹⁰³ who claims that alcoholism is a greater problem amongst J.W.-members than mental disorders. The problem has been particularly serious amongst folk in leading positions. (Randy Watters has worked for 8 years as leader of the printing division at the Watchtower headquarters in Brooklyn. He had close contact with members of "The Governing Body" and other leading members).

It has also been claimed that The Watchtower Society centrally has an established "drinking culture" ¹⁰⁴ In fact, The Watchtower Society has shown a growing interest in this subject based on a non-judicial attitude, and has encouraged its members to seek help with this problem from experts outside the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation. ¹⁰⁵

No smoke without fire

It is possible that the investigations have several weaknesses with regard to method: Penton claimed that the conclusions of Pescor, Janner, Spencer and Montague are exaggerated. ¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, he fails to justify his claim. To make a comparison, I should mention that

¹⁰¹ K opl (1985): *Die Zeugen Jehovas; Eine Psychologische Analyse*. In: *Material-Edition 21, Arge for Religions-und Weltanschauungsfragen*.

¹⁰² Ward, P. (1988): *Mendez vs. Mendez: Liberty*. July/August, 20-23. USA.

¹⁰³ Watters, R.R. (1992): *JW's and Alcohol*. *Free Minds Journal*. Vol. 11, No. 4, July-Aug. s.5. USA.

¹⁰⁴ (Gruss E. C. (1983) s. 295). *Apostles of denial*. Baker Book House. Grand Rapids, Michigan. USA.

¹⁰⁵ *Awake!* 5/22/92.

¹⁰⁶ Penton, M. J. (1985): *Apocalypse Delayed*. University of Toronto, Toronto Press, Canada. s.292

Raymond Franz¹⁰⁷ gained most of his knowledge about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses as a missionary in other countries and many years' service at the headquarters in Brooklyn, where he was a member of "The Governing Body" for several years. On the other hand, James Penton, who was a fourth generation Jehovah's Witnesses, took higher education, in spite of the Watchtower Society's taboo attitude, went his own way and became a professor of history at an early age. My impression is that Penton, who belonged to the higher range of about 3% (20 years ago) of Jehovah's Witnesses who had a higher education, lacked near contact with the grass roots. The fact alone that The Watchtower Society's long standing policy denied us taking a higher education has caused intense mental problems later in life for both many other Jehovah's Witnesses, and myself. Consequently, I am sceptical to Penton's contention that Pescor, Janner, Spencer and Montague's conclusions are exaggerated.

Strictly speaking, I too think that only investigations undertaken according to the "Random free" principle are objective enough to allow conclusions of this nature. But, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, a stop mechanism will be set in motion by a Jehovah's Witnesses as soon as anyone asks searching questions about him/herself or the organisation.

A clear message: You are the one at fault

How does the Watchtower Society behave with regard to claims that there are perhaps more cases of mental problems amongst Jehovah's Witnesses members than among other groups? The Watchtower Society has reacted in several ways:

They have denied that Jehovah's Witnesses members have more mental problems than other people. Traditionally they have even contended the opposite: "Jehovah's folk are the happiest people on earth. We have less need for a psychiatrist than anyone else" (Awake!" 8.3.60). They have also claimed that becoming a Jehovah's Witnesses has given many members better mental health ("Awake!" 22.12.76 s.8-12). Two years later they presented a different view: "In most ways Jehovah's Witnesses are like everyone else. They have their problems – economic, physical, emotional. They make mistakes at times, for they are not perfect, or inspired or infallible".¹⁰⁸ They have said that they are in agreement, but at the same time explained themselves in such a way as not to place Jehovah's Witnesses in any compromising light:

They have contended that being a member of the organisation involves more "stress", because only Jehovah's Witnesses members understand what the imminent oncoming of Armageddon entails. For example, on one occasion they presented the following image of what it is like to live one's life as a Witnesses: "It is like finding oneself in a little rowing boat on a fast-flowing river and being driven towards a waterfall. We must row vigorously against the strong current to avoid a catastrophe. We may not appear to make much progress, but as long as we continue to strain ourselves to the limit, we will not go over the waterfall and be killed" (Watchtower 1.12.90 s. 17).

Jehovah's Witnesses' own comments about this image are something like this: "This is in fact how we must live if we are to survive Armageddon, and we are better off, at any rate in the long run, than the world which, carefree and unsuspecting, is being driven towards the waterfall".

Another cause of stress, according to Jehovah's Witnesses, is the persecution they sometimes exposed to.

¹⁰⁷Franz, R. (1991): *Samvittighedskrise. Kommentarforlaget, Birkevænget 1, DK 7130 Juelsminde, Danmark, 1993. (Oversatt fra Franz, R. (1983): "Crisis of Conscience" ommentary Press. P.O.Box 43532, Atlanta, Georgia 30336, USA.)*

¹⁰⁸ "Jehovah's Witnesses in the Twentieth Century" (1978) s. 3.

They have also claimed that Witnesses with mental problems are not “real” members, that is, they do not follow Jehovah and his organisation wholeheartedly, or that they have difficulty in getting their priorities right. Here is an example of this kind of attitude:¹⁰⁹

“I am so sad and disheartened”, Mary complained. The Christian woman thought about her Christian duties and added: “I know of several friends who feel that they are burnt out. I feel tired and under pressure. Please help me to understand why” – “Do you feel under pressure? Are you perhaps so worn out that you cannot manage to carry out your theocratic tasks as well as you would like to? Do you sometimes feel that Christian service is a heavy burden, too heavy a burden? The Bible makes it clear that Jehovah does not have unreasonable expectations of us...Jesus spoke in similar way to his disciples: “ Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in spirit and you shall find strength for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.

If the cause is not to be found in the Watchtower’s demands, what does The Watchtower Society think is the cause? Here is one answer from the same article:

“Take worldly tasks, for example. In many countries Christians are forced to work long hours because of the economic situation. But people often take on more work for the sole purpose of advancement or to be able to afford luxury articles”¹¹⁰

A similar explanation is the assertion that mental problems are a consequence of not all the family being loyal to Jehovah’s organisation. Bergman also claimed, based on his own clinical practice, that a relatively large number of mental problems amongst Jehovah’s Witnesses members was to be found where only one of the parents was active, as opposed to where both were active members.

Chapter 15 Joy begins to return

As a Jehovah's Witnesses I was used to quoting from the letter of James where he says that faith: *"...if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* (Jacob 2:17) I had been taught that this text meant that there must be action to "prove" that we had a living faith. This involved "working hard at salvation" going from door to door, and following all the other rules and instructions made by the Watchtower Society through the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn.

However, I had now begun to see this "action" of which James spoke as "fruits of the spirit", actions that are the direct expression of a person's faith. I started to look around me, both within the Watchtower organisation and outside it. I had been told that on the outside I would only find "horns and hooves", whilst great happiness and fervent love could be found among "Jehovah's people".

So what did I see?

I must admit to finding the revelation quite frightening, as I began to discover how I had been deceived in so many ways. I saw other Christians, not Jehovah's Witnesses, but people belonging to many other religious communities. These were people who showed genuine love, who cared about me, and wanted to do their best for me. *I looked at "Jehovah's people" and discovered that no one cared at all! No visits, no words of encouragement, no letters - in short - nothing.*

¹⁰⁹ *Vakttårnet 15.10.91 s. 22*

¹¹⁰ *Vakttårnet 15.10.91 s. 22*

Suddenly, an alarming association regarding what sort of "love" I was dealing with occurred to me. In my present position I could not "serve" the Society, I had nothing with which I could "pay", and I could not stop myself comparing this with the "love" which can be bought from a prostitute. One can have what one likes as long as it is paid for. The moment payment stops, it is all over. This is just how I was now experiencing the Watchtower Society and Jehovah's Witnesses! All the members receive a measure of "love" as long as they "pay" for it. That is, go from door to door, preach, attend meetings, prepare for meetings, show "spiritual maturity" in conversation with other members, etc. The moment something happens, whether it is a nervous breakdown or something else, causing a reduction in the flow of payment, the amount of "love" is reduced correspondingly.

Is it just by chance that the Bible, according to normal interpretation, calls false religion "the great prostitute"?

Gradually a feeling of joy over these new experiences developed within me. This was the joy of being able to reason, to think independently, and to evaluate things for myself, without having to refer to the Society's Index to find out what the Watchtower had to say about the matter. I had always longed to do something about my lack of schooling. I had only had four years of elementary schooling, due to the war, and this was not very imposing. I broached this subject with my psychologist, Jakob Gauslaa, and he gave me a lot of encouragement in my endeavour to do something about it. After only a short time I had completed the ordinary level of education, and full of courage and enthusiasm I went on to the advanced level. My thirst for knowledge was almost unquenchable, and under the auspices of Notodden Teacher Training College I began to study social education with psychology and psychiatry as supplementary subjects. I now experienced the three happiest years of my life so far.

Among thirty adult students I was the only one without any academic background. Most of the others were teachers from elementary or secondary schools, or folk with several years of university education behind them. Since at over fifty I was the eldest, my lack of education was to some extent compensated by the fact that I had more experience of life, which was a great help with some of the practical work. Moreover, a long period in a dictatorial system such as Jehovah's Witnesses had given me very clear insight into what was wrong, and possibly this gave me a deeper understanding of the problems.

During this time I specialised in the study of dogmatic, totalitarian attitudes and methods of education. These studies proved to be of great use to me, in that they opened my eyes to the totalitarian system which, both then and now, comprises the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation. I now understand and believe that in everything the Holy Spirit was leading me. I gradually began to realise that God works with all those who wish to serve him. This was an overwhelmingly joyful discovery, for I now felt both certain and confident that there was hope for people outside the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation, as well. I did not necessarily have to die after all, as the Watchtower had been telling me for years, and which I actually believed. Previously, fear had lain like a block of ice at the pit of my stomach, but now I had the wonderful feeling of a "new spring". The ice block melted! This was often confirmed during conversations with other Christians, when I felt a contact with the world of the spirit that made me very happy. Not happiness due to having done well, as I was used to, but simply the sheer joy of discovering that God cared about me. About Joseph! I had no need of any "Organisation" to guide me like a sheep being led.

I can thank social pedagogy for another important victory as well. Indoctrination had made deep, almost indelible marks on my mind. I was now convinced emotionally that Jehovah's Witnesses did not possess either the spirit or the truth. However, technically it was more difficult to reject their seemingly conclusive watertight dogmas. Although I had discovered many faults, I was by no means sure that I was on safe ground, on the contrary.

I was particularly engrossed in so-called humanistic psychology. I learned a great deal from the books of world famous psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Frederic Perls, Paulo Freire and several others. Humanistic psychology showed me that Jehovah's Witnesses have a completely erroneous system of values.

I began to realise that the Watchtower's autocratic leadership had a destructive effect on the Society's members. Their continual changes, the non-fulfilment of predictions, and the abundance of vague promises could hardly generate any feeling of security amongst the members of the congregations. Instead, this type of practice forces all Jehovah's Witnesses to dispose of yesterday's "truths" and replace them with "new light". The Witnesses' worst enemy is their own memory, which always has to be suppressed, thus creating serious mental problems.

The promises that we would survive Armageddon and would not have to die constituted a false system of values which could only lead to disappointment. I badly needed to hold on tight to something by which I could live and which would provide a basis for making judgements. But the Watchtower's values have never been stable. Standards, doctrines and values have been changing continually since the beginning of the Jehovah's Witnesses movement in 1879. My values were based on human thought and invention, not on the realities of life. The truth and the knowledge that we shall all die at some time is better than The Watchtower's vague, diffuse promises that perhaps we will be permitted to survive in God's war, an event which is supposed to take place within the lifetime of the 1914 generation.

All the same, the techniques of indoctrination and personality transformation are very cunning. The thought of Armageddon could still plunge me into the depths of fear and despair. For nearly 40 years these ideas had been hammered into my head, again and again and again.....until I could not turn round without remembering quite clearly what was "the truth". Readers can hardly imagine how terrible this really was!

Life is not always easy, and problems can be both varied and complicated. Nevertheless, we human beings are best served by being faced with realities, instead of being deceived by a dream of Utopia for years. A Fata Morgana in the distance, a false hope, an infamous dream, created by the clever cynical minds of unscrupulous people, has brought sorrow and corruption to mankind since the dawn of time. As a result of Jehovah's Witnesses' mistaken standard of values, things of vital importance were put aside, such as getting a good education and building a home when it is practical with a growing family, thus creating a stable foundation for the family as a whole. Some of the most normal functions in life have often been completely set aside among Jehovah's Witnesses, because "the end" has been just round the corner right from 1874.

Abraham Maslow says:

"It is our experience that to be in the state of being without a system of values leads to mental disorders."¹¹¹

However, if a system of values is to be of any use, it must be both stable and realistic. There is no longer any help in living on a dream, because when one suddenly wakes up the impact of reality can be uncomfortably brutal! In fact there is not a shadow of doubt that there was a crystal clear connection between my mental problems and the Watchtower's indoctrination of its beliefs regarding life and death.

My new knowledge about values gave me the courage to take further steps in my search for more information and knowledge. I was beginning to see clearly the difference between my

¹¹¹ *Toward a Psychology of being 1962*

life as it then was, and how it could be. I was now beginning to realise what I had missed by living for nearly four decades by a false system of values.

This exploration into my inner life demanded a great deal of me and at times caused me great pain, but it was also a joy to be able break out of my spiritual prison.

As well as this, striving to find the right values helped me to realise that my longing and aspiration for love, kindness and helpfulness, and my own desire to show consideration towards the others in the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, was by no means "rebellious" or "headstrong" behaviour, but a natural longing to give vent to what was within both myself and many other people.

I felt a sense of familiarity when I studied Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which illustrates the essential requirements which must be satisfied if a person is to live a comparatively normal, healthy and happy life. No other psychologist expresses himself in such definite terms as Maslow in this connection, and there appears to be a consensus of opinion among other psychologists regarding his theories. In fact, Maslow is taught at most of the schools and institutions for the training of salesmen, precisely because his "human hierarchy of needs" illustrates what criteria must be fulfilled before a person is in a position to take the next step, which in the case of the salesman is to buy his or her product.

Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs

Self-actualisation
needs: to find self-
fulfilment and realise
one's potential

Aesthetic needs:
symmetry,
order, and beauty

Cognitive needs: to know,
understand, and explore

Esteem needs: to achieve, be
competent, and gain approval and recognition

Belongingness and love needs: to affiliate
with others, be accepted, and belong

Safety needs: to feel secure and safe,
out of danger

Physiological needs: hunger, thirst and so forth

Apart from the physiological requirements (food, clothes and a roof over one's head), these needs are not covered by the Watchtower organisation. Most, if not all, Jehovah's Witnesses know this to be true. Unfortunately, the result of the indoctrination to which they are exposed is that they "all" say: "To whom can we go, for it is the organisation which has the truth"! As a consequence of the Watchtower's policy of disparagement regarding every person and every organisation except Jehovah's Witnesses, they can see no alternative.

To me it was like a gift sent from heaven. During the time I studied psychology I found out that the Watchtower's values and objectives were sheer dictatorship. The organisation could not possibly fulfil even the most elementary needs required by a human being in order to be happy. The Watchtower makes continuous use of such words as love, kindness etc., but only from a demagogic motive, and the Society's motive is the suppressing of its members.

Through my studies I was also helped by what I learned from Gestalt therapy concerning consciousness-raising and volition. Fredric Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, puts a great deal of emphasis on the primary importance of consciousness-raising for the development and maturing of the individual. He considers consciousness-raising in itself can bring about an improvement.

I became aware of something I had suspected for some time, but had been unable to put into words. I had been captive to other forces both inside me and around me. When my consciousness was aroused it became clearer to me why I found myself in that particular situation. I began to see a lot of things more clearly, things regarding my situation and personal circumstances that I had never noticed before. I became fully aware of my relationship with the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation and the nature of it became clear to me. Consciousness-raising helped me to choose without fear of the consequences, or at least with considerably less fear than I had had before. The clammy hand of the Watchtower had still not lost its grip!

It also helped me to see that the Watchtower Society had had control over the whole of my life. I now began to realise why the Watchtower was so vehemently opposed to academic education. If folk rediscover their ability to think independently, they automatically become a threat to the Society. The Society's power is based on preventing people from thinking for themselves. As long as the Society does all the thinking for its members there is no danger.

Educational science and psychology are their most dangerous enemies because both these expose the organisation's autocratic and dictatorial structure and mode of operation.

The Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire worked amongst the poor in particular and began to teach them to read and write. This elementary knowledge made them aware of their wretched situation. Before this they had apathetically accepted their circumstances, believing there was no possibility of escaping this wretched viscous circle. Now I could really understand the Watchtower's aggressive attitude towards intellectuals, and why they were always criticising them in their books. *Making people aware of their situation*, informing them about what is really hidden behind the secrecy of the Watchtower Society, is one of the best weapons to use against them and all other cults and sinister sects and organisations.

The arousing of my consciousness caused me to begin making my own decisions about what I intended to do for the first time after many years of mental imprisonment. As I was now over fifty years old I wanted to decide for myself the direction in which I should go. With regard to my family, finances and other circumstances, there was a limit to what I could do at my age, but at least I could now start off in the right direction and make a genuine attempt to achieve everything I possibly could, thanks to my new-found awareness and volition.

I now began to understand my own identity as well, and that I could say what I meant without being regarded as "rebellious" or "headstrong". God loves "every man" who believes in him without regard to status, rank or cultural background. It was a great comfort to know that God loved *my* identity, as well. *The Watchtower* had made all its members identical through its eschatological philosophy and prophecies. The fact that I dared to be myself constantly threw me onto a collision course with the Society. The Bible talks of nine different gifts of the spirit and several other forms of service. Some have the gift of speaking and are good at teaching,

whilst others do not have such gifts. Instead perhaps they are very hospitable. This is a very valuable quality and is of considerable significance if the entirety of a pluralistic congregation or society is to work as it should.

However, Jehovah's Witnesses organisation demands that every member must go from door to door, and connects the possible achievement of eternal life to the enthusiasm shown in door-to-door preaching. This is a serious sin against the identity of the individual, since it has created grave mental problems for many people. Therefore, one often sees personalities showing schizophrenic tendencies among Jehovah's Witnesses, that is, people performing a function for which they are not suitable, and one which they would not have chosen if they had been allowed to decide for themselves. Many people are forced to take on roles in spite of the fact that they lack the qualities necessary to perform them properly. This can cause serious problems for the individual.

Acknowledgement of my own identity resulted in my beginning to make my own decisions, to decide myself what I would or would not do. Of course, this sounds incredible to the reader. Here was I, a man in my fifties, suddenly discovering the joy of making my own decisions! Of course it sounds crazy, and it is, too. Nevertheless, this is the result of the Watchtower Society's indoctrination! No one in the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation makes his own decisions. No one forms his own opinions. No one decides what he should read, or see on T.V. or at the cinema. If other members of the congregation "discover" them and "report" them to the elders, they are in trouble. They know this, and refrain from doing anything that can endanger their position in the congregation. To use a biblical expression, it is not a "spiritual paradise". It is a spiritual hell.

Frankness Generates a Feeling of Liberation

Naturally enough, the fact that I decided to study social pedagogy was not looked on kindly among Jehovah's Witnesses. They informed me straight away that *what I had embarked on was "very dangerous"*. But I was now daring openly to do what I thought best. This frankness towards others, and not least towards myself, had a liberating effect on my health, both physically and mentally, and it gave me a feeling of pride, as I no longer had to conceal my real self. The fact that I quite openly stated what I wanted to do gave me amazing strength. I was indifferent to other people's thoughts or opinions. This attitude was unusual for me, but it made me feel free. For nearly 40 years I had lived in an atmosphere of fear because anything I said could be used against me, and in fact was, at the first opportunity. In order to be understood and accepted among Jehovah's Witnesses I always had to say what was consistent with the teaching of the "Faithful and Discreet Slave" in Brooklyn. But now I had the courage to say: "This is what I think".

By being frank I had no need to simulate any more. The Watchtower's authoritarian policy has created a host of compulsory "hypocrites". By treating their followers like children who are not allowed to think differently, they create individuals who "conceal themselves", with the serious personality problems which can be the consequence. Whether the reader believes it or not, Jehovah's Witnesses must not only tolerate being treated like children, they must also accept that this is exactly what they are! The following quotation shows very clearly the position in which they are placed by the Watchtower Society:

"God has not arranged for that Word to speak independently or to shine forth lifegiving truths by itself. [...] It is through his organization God provides this light which Proverbs say is the teaching or law of the mother. If we are to wander in the light of truth we must recognize not only Jehovah God as our Father but his organization as our Mother."¹¹²

¹¹² Watchtower 1. mai 1957, p.g.a. 274

The Watchtower Society clearly states here that *the Bible is not enough. It cannot enlighten the enquiring soul about anything.* Obviously the only thing it can inform us about without help, is that according to Proverbs *everyone needs the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation as "mother" in order to grasp the least little gleam of light. The Bible itself produces no "light".* This is the function of the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation!

Consequently I had a real feeling of liberation when I realised that I no longer needed to defy my own nature by trying to be something which I was not. Of course the situation was partly my fault since I had allowed myself to be indoctrinated by the Watchtower. Although it is a seductive doctrine, I had gone into it with my eyes open, but on the other hand I had had no idea that the "religion" and teaching to which I was exposed were sheer indoctrination. For many years I had an uncomfortable feeling that I was sinning against my true nature or against the real me. In my defence I can refer to the continual fear of losing my "life" at Armageddon. For many years I also had a feeling of guilt because I kept quiet about the things I saw behind the scenes of the secretive Watchtower system, and subconsciously I felt a kind of self-reproach because I did not act as I really ought to have done.

My time in hospital followed by my period of studies were both important pillars of support during my showdown with Jehovah's Witnesses. Acknowledgement and confession had a refreshing effect. The fact that I was now willing to confront both the Watchtower Society and myself, gave me a feeling of redemption. This confrontation was primarily concerned with myself because I had allowed them to subjugate my God-given freedom. In spite of the fact that The Watchtower proclaims an erroneous system of values, speaks patronisingly about further education, preaches a false gospel, etc. etc., I acknowledge that I have complete responsibility for all that has been done or, alternatively, not been done. In settling the account with both myself and the Watchtower system, I could not just make the Watchtower the scapegoat, for that would imply that I really give them all the blame, and am running away from my own liability in the matter.

Although the time during which I was extricating myself from the talons of the Watchtower has been both difficult, painful and wearying, learning about realistic values, being made aware of my actual situation, discovering and acknowledging my own identity etc. has led me to freedom. During about the last 90 years many thousands of people in this country have been indoctrinated into the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses. Several thousands have been disfellowshipped, others have left of their own accord. I have noticed that many ex-Jehovah's Witnesses are still mentally tied to the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation by an invisible (but terribly strong) cord. They have been, and still are, very suspicious of other churches and denominations. Although they appear to be completely free to go into a church, they still decline. This is due to the poison left in their minds by the Watchtower. A lady who had studied with Jehovah's Witnesses for two years told me, when I asked her how she felt,

I don't know what to believe any more."

Tens of thousands have studied the Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines in this country, and even if they have not made the decision to become a Witnesses, the Watchtower's view of the world remains with them. I am regularly being contacted by ex-Jehovah's Witnesses who are living in fear and trembling of being slaughtered during the war of Armageddon. Therefore I believe it is very important that an ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, or anyone who has had any connections with them, undergoes a process of reprogramming. They both must and ought to convince themselves that the Watchtower doctrine really is a false doctrine, a doctrine that lacks any support from the Bible. *Jesus promised eternal life to all those who accepted him and believed in him. Perhaps the path can be a painful and laborious one, but the reward will be a life in the freedom of Christianity.*

Chapter 16 Resignation, Change and Upheaval

When I resigned from Jehovah's Witnesses a few years ago, I was emotionally on the edge of a precipice. I was very much on edge and constantly being aggressive towards my surroundings. Everything I had hoped for and believed in had collapsed and revealed itself to be a fraud. I wanted to shout from the rooftops and expose this deception, but after a while a change came over me. Jesus, The Father and The Holy Spirit entered into my heart, and I began to feel an intense joy, peace and certainty. The most fantastic of all was that the bitterness I felt towards those who had deceived me for years disappeared completely. A feeling of tremendous love for Jehovah's Witnesses as human beings began to grow in me. I experienced a definite, positive change in my life.

All the same I must stress that this love is for the individual Jehovah's Witnesses as a person. I have no warm feelings for the Watchtower Society, which has been revealed as a false prophet, and for this it will be judged, according to the Bible. However the individual members of the cult are just as deceived as I was, and they are just as brainwashed as I was once. People who are indoctrinated, in fact really brain washed, are hardly responsible for their own actions, and therefore as Christians we ought to do what we can to help them. Not least does this apply to the children, of course, who really suffer in this venomous system.

As a Jehovah's Witnesses I was constantly being bombarded through the literature by the term: Jehovah's theocratic organisation. The word theocracy means the rule of God. What is so tragic is that the Jehovah's Witnesses' so-called "theocratic" rule has led to the suppression of several millions of people over the last hundred years.

This so-called "theocracy" has reigned over its subjects with unlimited power. The word theocracy has been, and still is, used as a sort of cover to give members the impression that it was, and is, God Jehovah personally who is leading the organisation, and using it to give spiritual "food and wisdom" to all people on earth.

In fact it has shown itself to be the rule of people with a lust for power. The governing body has performed as a kind of guru and oracle who misinterpret their erroneous and false prophecies as "adjustments" and "new light". C.S.Lewis says the following about theocracy in his book *Of this and other Worlds*, in the chapter "A reply to professor Haldane":

"I am a democrat because I believe that no man or group of men is good enough to be trusted with uncontrolled power over others. And the higher pretensions of such power, the more dangerous I think it both to the rulers and the subjects. Hence Theocracy is the worst of all governments. If we must have a tyrant a robber baron is far better than an inquisitor. The baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity at some point be sated; and since he dimly knows he is doing wrong he may possibly repent. But the inquisitor who mistakes his own cruelty and lust of power and fear for the voice of Heaven will torment us infinitely because he torments us with the approval of his own conscience and his better impulses appear to him as temptations. And since Theocracy is the worst, the nearer any government approaches to Theocracy the worse it will be. A metaphysic, held by the rulers with the force of religion, is a bad sign. It forbids them, like the inquisitor, to admit any grain of truth or good in their opponents, it abrogates the ordinary rules of morality, and it gives a seemingly high, super-personal sanction to all the very ordinary human passions by which, like other men, the rulers will frequently be actuated. In a word, it forbids wholesome doubt."

What I, and many others have experienced under the Watchtower Society's "theocratic rule" has more in common with the methods of a psychopath or an incestuous criminal. There are a surprising number of similarities.

The Watchtower Society has a hostile and anti-social disposition, just like a psychopath. By imposing innumerable "does" and "don'ts" on Jehovah's Witnesses, and by forbidding them to take advantage of the benefits and rights to which they are entitled as citizens of their country, it is guilty of violating the legal rights of its members.

Another aspect of the Watchtower Society's psychopathic character is the typical pattern of behaviour with regard to lies and theft. The leaders in Brooklyn have set themselves up between the individual and God, thereby robbing the individual of the opportunity to achieve a personal relationship with his Maker. The honour and worship that rightfully belong to God are given instead to an oracle and a human organisation. The Watchtower Society builds on a foundation of lies, deceit, falsifications, etc. in order to hold its emporium intact.

The unboundedly arrogant attitude taken by the leadership in that they can never admit a mistake, and the fact that they invariably put the blame on the members when prophecies are not fulfilled, and that it is always the rank and file who are at fault, exposes the Watchtower Society as being psychopathic. According to Steven Hassan, an American psychologist working in the field of destructive cults, the criteria mentioned above are among the most typical traits of a pernicious cult, that is, a cult that exercises mind control over its members.¹¹³

The attacker in a case of incest usually threatens his little daughter by saying: "If you say anything the whole family will be broken up. Daddy will go to prison, the house will be sold and you will have to go to a children's home."

This is very similar to the Watchtower Society's threats to its members. "Never tell anyone who is not "in the truth" about problems in the organisation. Don't hang out dirty washing! Always exalt the name of Jehovah! If not he will destroy you at Armageddon!" According to Hassan this is another typical characteristic of dangerous cults. Giving people phobias is a very effective way of "keeping the troops in line". Unfortunately the price for this is often a complete mental breakdown of the members because *this method works in such a way that every time an indoctrinated person allows himself to think something that is "wrong" according to the cult's leadership, a reaction of fear is invoked*. Spiritual terror and fear form a poor basis for good mental health.

Hassan recommends everyone to investigate the background of the leader or leaders of a cult. The Watchtower Society has always given its members "good advice" on how to live happily ever after in their married life. What can we learn from the leaders' own success in this area, since this is the source of experience on which these "wise men" draw? Russell, who was the founder, was divorced in a harrowing court case where it was pronounced that his wife was granted a divorce on the grounds of "inhuman treatment". The Society's second president, Rutherford, was also divorced from his wife. He also was too domineering, and this, in addition to what Penton in his book *Apocalypse Delayed* described as "a serious case of alcoholism" caused his son to leave him as well. The Society's third president, Knorr, married late in life, and had little to offer young people concerning marital experience previous to old age. Franz, the late president, was a 99-year-old bachelor when he died in 1993. The Governing Body consists of members who are all childless, and nearly all unmarried. What sort of "advice" can these old (the average age being "only" 82) men give to young people about marital relationships?

The way from the universal church of God, to the local church

¹¹³Steven Hassan: *Combating Cult Mind Control*.

It was a great day for me when I resigned from the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation in 1986. The books written by Raymond Franz, James Penton and Carl Olof Jonsson had convinced me that the so-called "truth" was just froth, that Jesus was the way, the truth and the life; and that I could go to Him, which I did.

It is difficult to describe the tremendous joy I experienced by simply saying yes to Jesus. However, I did not belong to any Christian community. I resigned from the organisation six months before my wife, Jellie, and at once began visiting other congregations.

I remember the first meeting very well. It was a community which calls itself "The Water of Life", an offshoot of the Pentecostal movement, which held its meetings in the local football clubhouse in Langesund. I noticed the amazed looks on the faces of those who knew me.

After this I visited other churches such as the Norwegian state church, the Baptist church and others. Some of the congregations had a calm, quiet atmosphere, while others radiated more life and enthusiasm.

My wife discovered the freedom of Christianity

Jellie had begun to accompany me to some of these meetings, although she still belonged to the Watchtower organisation. At the first meeting she attended with me she discovered at once a quite different spirit, one which warmed her heart, and a love she had never felt before. This convinced her that she was on the right track. I remember Jellie making up her mind to read the Bible alone - without the "help" of Watchtower literature. For days on end she sat on the sofa and read and read. When I came home from work I found her engrossed in reading the Bible. Before she started reading she said to God: "Now God, you must show me what is the truth". God did not keep her waiting long. The Holy Spirit illuminated her mind so that she saw the entirety of the gospel of Jesus. Tears ran down her cheeks as she read and her mouth formed words of thanks and praise to God for the revelation she had been given. All doubt was gone, she had found the genuine truth, Jesus Christ. She had been saved.

The tragic part about it is that this could have happened 40 years ago, and then we would have had this joy all the time. Instead, the biblical truths were hidden from us. We never studied the Bible - we studied the Watchtower.

The way I regard the church, the body of Christ

The church of God to which I now belong is no longer a source of apprehension, suspicion and manipulation. I no longer need to be anxious about what I must say or believe. No more fear of the leaders, of informers or of execution at Armageddon.

Our turbulent life after leaving Jehovah's Witnesses has been affected by serious mental repercussions at times. But the church of God on earth, the members of his body, have helped us through this difficult process, which is known to be hard for anyone who leaves a cult in this way. Without the fellowship of God's people I do not think I would have come through this distressing period.

The words of Jesus and particularly Paul's epistles have revealed to me the nature of the church.

1. The body of Christ is made up of those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour. Because of their faith they are justified, born anew, and have begun the process of being sanctified. We have done none of these three things by our own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit which dwells within us. 1 Cor. 6:17. Rom. 3:22. John. 1:12. and 3:3. Philippians 1.6.

2. The church or congregation is the bride of Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 15:9. Revelation 21:2.
3. The church or congregation was founded in the year 33 A.D. when the Holy Spirit came down. Acts 2:1-4.
4. The church will be in existence until Jesus comes again. Matt. 28:20.
5. Paul calls the church the church of God - Christ, the Lord's church and his property. 1 Cor.1:2. 10:32. 11:22. 15:9. Gal. 1:13.
6. The church is the body of Christ. Eph. 1:22,23. Col. 1:18 -24. 2:19. 1 Cor. 12:12-27.
7. The task of the church is to give guidance and support, comfort and correction, God's plan. Matt. 18:17. Eph.3: 9-11. Acts 2:1, 38-47.
8. The members of the body that is the church are to be "a faithful and wise servant" until Jesus comes again. Matt. 24:45.

The body of Christ or the church will remain on earth from the first to the Second Coming of Jesus. Right from the start, the church, or the body of Christ, had problems. The church at Corinth had moral difficulties. For a time the church at Galatia allowed false worship. The church at Pergamon ate food that had been sacrificed to idols and were guilty of sexual immorality. The church at Tyatira tolerated a woman claiming to be a prophet. But Jesus gave them all time to repent, and did not reject His people. It is foolish to repudiate Christianity because of a few bad examples. By rejecting it all we will be throwing the baby out with the bath water. Jesus allows the weeds to grow up alongside the wheat. God behaves differently from us. He is more merciful.

If you are in doubt as to whether a person is a Christian or not, do not ask him which church he belongs to, but ask him what he thinks about Jesus and what Jesus means to him. Among the members of the body, Jesus stands at the centre.

Chapter 17 WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO LEAVE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

The question of why it is so difficult to leave Jehovah's Witnesses is also relevant in connection with other religious communities that include many sectarian features. It appears to be a question often asked by those who manage to leave "at last", and, on looking back, cannot understand why it took such a long time to make the decision. The question is also often asked by "outsiders" who completely fail to grasp how members can bear to belong to such a community. It is impossible to provide a single answer to the question, because there are so many different factors that can affect the answer:

There are a number of reasons which often occur, and put together perhaps they can contribute to provide a general answer and one relating to the individual who had "left". The list of reasons is not meant to be complete and I am sure the reader will be able to find other reasons.

The Watchtower Society – a spiritual trap

A fish trap is an effective piece of equipment. The fish has to swim through a narrow opening to reach the bait, but since it cannot find its way out again it is trapped.

There are many different kinds of trap, but the mark of a good one is that it must be easy to enter, but difficult to escape from. In addition, the bait must be attractive enough to awake the victim's curiosity.

By comparison, one can say that The Watchtower Society is a spiritual trap. Their claim to be God's only "genuine" organisation on earth, and their promise of life in a future paradise, attract many people. The leaders demand absolute obedience as a condition of belonging to this organisation, which they also refer to as a "spiritual paradise". They induce loyalty to the organisation by the use of threats and intimidation. To leave the organisation is paramount to forsaking God and thereby losing his protection. Morbid distrust concerning the degree of wickedness outside the organisation makes people frightened to leave The Watchtower Society. They have ended up in the same situation as an animal caught in the iron teeth of a trap. The more the creature fights to free itself, the deeper the teeth cut into its flesh.

The carrot on a stick

Jehovah's Witnesses who have been disappointed again and again about unfulfilled prophecy overlook the fact that they never achieve the goal. Just as a donkey will walk faster and faster to reach a "carrot on a stick", so are Jehovah's Witnesses enticed deeper into the organisation. If they feel like giving up, an inner voice says: "Why give up now, just as the "the great tribulation" is on the threshold?"

The situation I have described is called *equity rescuing* in America. "When someone does this with a house, one calls it "a money pit". Endless restoration to make the house habitable uses up all the owner's money."¹¹⁴

More and more things needing attention are discovered while the house is being restored and consequently more money is needed. To prevent the loss of money already invested it is necessary to put in more and more money to save the whole project.

Most of those who are trapped in a tyrannical system such as Jehovah's Witnesses never escape. They may have a wife or husband who is also in the system. As time goes on they may have children, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren and many friends. One discovers cracks and falsehood in the system, but year after year goes by without anything being done about it, and it gets more and more difficult to react. In the end one has invested so much in the system that there is no escape. The way out is blocked.

The difficult situation for children

In this presentation of the reasons why it is difficult to leave the Jehovah's Witnesses I shall start by describing how it feels for a child to grow up among Jehovah's Witnesses.

¹¹⁴ The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, s. 185

A child often finds himself "between the devil and the deep blue sea" and has no idea what to do. Whatever the child does, it will be wrong. If the child shows interest in "the everyday world", he will lose favour with The Watchtower Society and his parents. If he remains loyal to The Watchtower Society and his parents, he must be prepared for criticism and opposition from other young people with diverging opinions and from society at large. In fact, the child finds himself in an intolerable situation where all roads to freedom are blocked. Consequently we owe them all the care and friendship we can offer them.

¹¹⁴ *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, p. 185.

Usually the parents hope that the child will have a life-long affiliation to the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation and identify himself with the organisation's vision throughout his lifetime. This necessitates The Watchtower Society being able to meet the child's need for a basic feeling of security, identity and attachment, and/or make use of rigorous techniques in order, if nothing else, to control the child and his development. For some children, growing up among Jehovah's Witnesses will be so natural that the use of various techniques of control or forms for tyranny will hardly be necessary. Thus it is wrong to assume without question that Jehovah's Witnesses indulge in "mind control" for example. But it is equally wrong to believe that a child who grows up among Jehovah's Witnesses can feel free to leave the organisation without compunction. Here are some reasons for this statement:

- ***The child's objects of identification are within the organisation.***

When a child is trying to find his identity as an adult, he will naturally use as models the people on whom he has been dependent and felt attachment to while growing up, that is, his parents. It needs fairly strong "forces" to cause a child to choose a different fundamental way of life than his parents, particularly if there are in fact no more than two alternatives: to submit to the ideology of the parents and Jehovah's Witnesses, or to break with "everything". In ordinary society it is usually easier to choose a different way of life than one's parents, without it necessarily causing a "break". But among Jehovah's Witnesses it is fairly normal to insist, both formally and informally, on a high level of conformity.

- ***The child finds the ability to master situations only among Jehovah's Witnesses***

The child has grown up and learnt to function only within the framework of Jehovah's Witnesses, with regard to values, interests, social competence and the cultures of language and concept. "Outside" cultures seem alien. Outside Jehovah's Witnesses the child experiences little confirmation of the value of the "spiritual accomplishments" he has been taught. Accomplishments which are considered important by Jehovah's Witnesses are regarded as unimportant or incomprehensible outside the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation.

- ***The child experiences social status and friendship only among Jehovah's Witnesses***

Children have a natural need to experience social status and friendship. "The codes" of behaviour to achieve this are primarily within The Watchtower Society's system.

- ***The child can only fulfil himself in relation to the objectives of The Watchtower Society.***

The Watchtower Society offers a meaningful life based on the society's central position concerning what "Jehovah now in these last days first and foremost will proclaim to the world" This is perhaps the most important element in the complete "package" The Watchtower Society has to offer.

The child grows up with a general scepticism (or fear of) "the community outside"

It is usual to define "those outside" as a part of "the world" (that is, controlled by Satan). They are spiritually blind, "rolling in sin", they practise false religions, and in different ways are "out to get" Jehovah's Witnesses. Children are also often warned against forming mutual relationships with "other" children, who should preferably be regarded as "objects of missionary effort".

- ***The child has no experience of acting as the result of his own independent thinking, but must always seek advice from people he trusts, respects, or is “afraid” of.***

Within The Watchtower Society’s central system of values it is very important to prevent independent thinking in areas where different ideas can result in “cognitive dissonance”. The development of a train of thought, based on experience, into doubt, scepticism and “disbelief” will not easily occur when there is no support in the environment for such a process. Supported by people in whom one trusts, any form of doubting will be “strangled at birth”.

The child has not been able to develop any alternative point of view from which he can critically evaluate what he is taking part in.

In order to critically evaluate one’s own activities or what is going on around one, it is necessary to have a system of values which makes it possible to observe all this from “outside” (a bird’s-eye view). Children among Jehovah’s Witnesses are not encouraged to such reflection and meta-cognition. One never hears that “we keep to our interpretation of reality”. Such a statement would only create uncertainty and doubt. It is so obvious that what Jehovah’s Witnesses believe is true, that one regards reality and the interpretation of reality as being equal.

The child invests “everything” in his affiliation to The Watchtower Society, and will shrink from renouncing this investment.

This phenomenon can be compared with someone who has invested “everything” in shares that keep on losing value. With a determination to “brave it out” because “it can’t possibly get any worse” the child chooses to carry on in spite of having many good reasons for not doing so. And The Watchtower Society keeps on promising that it is “just before Armageddon, when great things will happen”.

The sort of situation I have described is called *equity rescuing* in America. “When someone does this with a house, one calls it “a money pit”. Endless restoration to make the house habitable uses up all the owner’s money.”¹¹⁵ One shrinks from the idea of selling the house because one has invested so much money in it.

The Watchtower Society “satisfies” the child’s basic needs.

Generally speaking, children have three basic needs that are of vital importance for their self respect: the need for security, the need to function socially and the need to succeed in their aspirations. Due to the limits imposed on the child and the environment he grows up in, it is only The Watchtower Society that can completely satisfy these needs. “Outside” the child only feels insecure, socially clumsy and a failure in nearly everything. As a consequence of this it is only The Watchtower Society who can give the child the “reinforcements” he needs to feel self-respect and esteem.

The child dares not criticise his parents, even when he reaches adolescence.

If The Watchtower Society demands more or less complete obedience to both the organisation¹¹⁶ and the child’s parents, with brutal measures against disobedience, it will destroy the natural urge to “rebel”, which is necessary for a teenager in order to

¹¹⁵ *The Subtle Power of spiritual Abuse*, s. 185.

¹¹⁶ *The Watchtower Society’s publications often quote the bible text from Hebrews 13, 17: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive” Disobedience against The Watchtower Society or parents is the same as disobedience against God. The Watchtower June 1st 1983, 3. 18-23.*

develop a healthy and independent identity. This can incur a “delayed puberty”, depression and other mental problems. It also prevents the child from developing the ability to “observe” that people can experience reality in different ways, without it necessarily following that such people are inferior.

To summarise, all these points indicate that to leave The Watchtower Society, or any other religious community with obvious sectarian leanings, will be a dramatic, comprehensive and exhausting process. The younger the child, the more “impossible” it all seems. But to a certain extent, the same “breaking mechanism” applies to adults.

Is it hypnosis?

On the following pages I shall illustrate several other reasons why it is difficult to leave Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some people say: “Can’t you just leave? They can’t hold you against your will!” Have you ever tried saying this to some one trying to fight his way out of a manipulating sect or congregation? If so, perhaps what I have just written will help you to understand the mental and emotional control exercised by The Watchtower Society over both its children and adult members, and the roll played by many different mechanisms. What follows is a description of several elements that make it difficult to leave Jehovah’s Witnesses in spite of the knowledge that there is something seriously wrong with their doctrine.

In my opinion the indoctrinating techniques employed by Jehovah’s Witnesses have frightening similarities and parallels with hypnosis. I do not call it pure hypnosis, as I am not in a position to make such an assertion, but I cannot stop thinking about the similarities. As hypnosis is a very comprehensive subject, I can only touch on it briefly. From the beginning of the history of mankind, hypnosis had been used, deliberately or by accident, in order to *change the state of conscientiousness*. Ever since ancient times mankind has always nurtured a shaman or priest. The shaman discovered quite early on that those who were in pain were dependent on outside influence.

The hypnotist chooses the most susceptible subjects. The more a hypnotised person “absorbs” the hypnotist’s commands, the deeper he sinks into a hypnotic state.

The susceptibility can last for quite a long time if ASC (Altered State of Consciousness), as experts usually call it, takes place.

The hypnotist’s intention may be destructive or dangerous. His motive may be to put the subject into a *state of “post-hypnotic suggestion”*. A post-hypnotic suggestion is a command given under hypnosis that is carried out after the subject has woken up again. In this way the subject continues to be under the control of the hypnotist.

How Jehovah’s Witnesses are hypnotised

As I have mentioned earlier The Watchtower Society makes it a rule that the individual should abstain from independent or original thinking. Satan is pointed out as an example of one who began to think for himself, and the outcome was catastrophic.

Just as a professional hypnotist looks for a person who is easily influenced and vulnerable, Jehovah’s Witnesses make contact more easily with people who for some reason or other are experiencing some crisis in their lives, or are suffering from depression or are struggling with unsolved traumatic experiences.

The human mind is susceptible to several different kinds of influence, for example, *incited consciousness changes*, and this is known to the Watchtower Society leaders.

Some mentally suffering people are very curious about and “open” for the “paradise” offered by The Watchtower Society. It is understandable that people who have had bad experiences long for peace and a normal harmonious life. The Watchtower’s leaders exploit these yearnings in a very subtle way. Right from the first weeks that a person studies The Watchtower’s literature with a Jehovah’s Witnesses, the new recruit will be constantly reminded that he/she can achieve eternal life in “paradise”, but certain conditions must be fulfilled. The first is that the leaders in Brooklyn claim to be “*the mouthpiece of God*” and his “*prophet*”. Everyone must submit to the people Jehovah has chosen and obey them without question, for they know best. Jehovah has given them a special insight to lead “*the great multitude*”. Gods “*channel of communication*”, as these men also call themselves, are the “*intermediary*” between Jehovah and the individual.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are “*hypnotised*” with a number of conceptions or signs that disqualify other people straight away by revealing them as non-Christians and dangerous company. For example, this applies to a person’s language, clothing, hairstyle etc. If a Jehovah’s Witnesses sees a person wearing a cross round his neck, this item of “*hypnotic suggestion*” will immediately be applied and the Witnesses will think: “He/she cannot be a Christian because the cross is a heathen symbol”.

In many situations “*the channel of communication*” receives clear revelations or “*new light*” from Jehovah. And poor you if you dare to contradict God’s anointed! It is this indescribable fear of doing something against the wishes of this “*wise and faithful servant*” which keeps a strangling grip on the members. This is something which, in retrospect, ex-Jehovah’s Witnesses find incomprehensible.

Extortion of independent thinking makes them deaf while still hearing and blind while still seeing

If you have ever tried to reason with someone who is indoctrinated (or hypnotised), you will certainly have found that the person did not hear what you said, or see what you read. It was like talking to a brick wall. All your good argumentation fell on deaf ears. It was as though the person was blind while still seeing and deaf while still hearing. When a Witnesses is confronted by alternative reasoning, which is in conflict with what he has been indoctrinated (hypnotised) with, a mental blockage immediately takes over in his mind. He sees beyond you with a meaningless look in his eyes, does not listen to what you are saying and soon picks up the thread of his “set piece” where he had been interrupted.

The state of mind described here, which is very similar to a state of “*post-hypnotic suggestion*”, can often be observed among Jehovah’s Witnesses. Witnesses have no refutation arguments outside “Watchtower knowledge”. Therefore, when you try to discuss with an indoctrinated person it is usually a one-way conversation. You are not given a chance to speak.

Another characteristic which is very like a state of “*post-hypnotic suggestion*” becomes obvious with Jehovah’s Witnesses if you try to show them, by quoting from their own Watchtower literature, all the mistakes, falsification and abortive prophecies which have been made over the years. For example, if you point out a paragraph, they refuse to look at it or read it and reply: “*It can’t be true! “The governing Body” in Brooklyn has taught me something else*”. They are incapable of thinking for themselves or forming their own opinions. When a self-appointed leader has managed to make a person believe in his “god given” authority, he has taken over a dominant position between God and that person. Whatever you say will no impression whatsoever.

An indoctrinated stop-mechanism

What is it that prevents a person from thinking critically and choosing the path to a life in Christian freedom? Most Jehovah's Witnesses or people belonging to some form of tyrannical religious system have read, or heard, critical information about the system to which they belong. Why, therefore, do they not see it as a problem? It is because an indoctrinated stop-mechanism does not allow an objective enquiry or an analysis of the actual situation. When the question of their religious system becomes a topic of conversation, their mind has been taught to say stop. One reasons that "it is "the enemy", the "evil one" who "is out to get us" and "persecute" us!" A stone wall appears in the mind of an indoctrinated person. He dares not reason any more, but says: "So far, but no further". Steven Hassan, in his book "Combating mind control", page 62, calls this a "thought stop" and says:

"Whenever the member of a cult realises that he has a "wrong" thought, he makes use of thought-stopping to drown the negative thoughts, and instead he focuses on himself, learning in this way to shut out anything which threatens his reality."

The forces which keep them back from a critical enquiry are *fear and anxiety*. The problem is that they have no secure fundament on which to build. A personal relationship with God, and independent thinking are exchanged for the self-appointed leaders in The Watchtower. To disobey is paramount to disobeying God. There is nowhere else a member can go because all other churches are "dead, blind and Satanic". He is thus forced to remain within the system and continue to ignore factual information that can undermine his "security system". Every time he doubts, the built-in mechanism immediately says: Stop! As the years fly by and promises of a New World fail to materialise, Jehovah's Witnesses still continue to ignore the increasing amount of factual information that might undermine their creed. The spiritual blockage is still intact and prevents them from further thought. Every time they are confronted by facts that must be ignored ("suppressed") they have to make themselves stronger in what they believe in. This leads to an even more determined surrender to the leaders and "the cause".

Someone trying to help such people with some factual information should know that there is a protective mechanism which protects a person from losing his feeling of security. The victims of tyrannical religious systems must protect themselves with this form of self-deception. One is unable to bear the pain of losing one's "faith".¹¹⁷

Autocratic Watchtower leaders say that to doubt "*the wise and good servant*" is the same as to doubt God. It is true that the bible says that one must not doubt God, but we must not set the words "*the wise and good servant*" instead of God. This is one of the many stratagems of destructive groups and is a very nasty trick.

To imprint on a person the idea that doubt is the same as sin, blocks the mind from a critical evaluation of one's situation and will cause a denial of genuine feelings. The natural range of thought and action will be narrowed down. In this way a person is prevented from eliminating well-founded genuine doubt, which can be important and a help towards an objective evaluation.

A person who is thoroughly indoctrinated rejects the question of doubt *because he does not wish to commit a sin*. Just as a hypnotist's "key" word sends his subject into a subconscious state, so can an indoctrinated person react to "key" words such as: "This is doubt". Click! Don't think any more!¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷Understanding Mind Control by Randy Watters. S. 13 Free Minds, Inc. Box 3818, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266.

¹¹⁸Mary Alice Chrnalogar. Twisted Scriptures. A path to freedom from abusive churches. (Control Techniques, Inc. P.O. box 8021. Chattanooga, TN 37414-8021 USA) s. 85.

The demon doctrine keeps Jehovah's Witnesses in captivity

Since The Watchtower leaders consider themselves to have been given a "divine authority", it is not surprising that the organisation's sceptics, critics and opponents are met by dictatorial language and accusations of having demonic, or similar intentions.

People within the Jehovah's Witnesses movement are frightened of critic, or ransacking questions because they dread an accusation of being possessed by demons. This cuts off any sensible dialogue with those outside the movement. This overdriven emphasis on demons helps to bind people closer to the organisation and thus keeping them captive. A common enemy strengthens solidarity. If the idea of leaving the movement, or the possibility of being expelled presents itself, a feeling of dread looms up as to what may be lying in wait in "the wicked world".

The thought of losing family and friends keeps them captive

In order that you shall not strive unnecessarily in trying to help people to leave Jehovah's Witnesses, it is as well to know what subtle forces and mechanisms hold people together. In addition, you should realise what enormous and often unbearable consequences can follow when a person breaks out of a tyrannical system. In spite of having changed one's opinion about the movement's leaders and doctrine, the bonds of flesh which unite the family cannot be denied, any more than the close ties of personal friendship.

An incomprehensible paradox

Speculations concerning the end of time and utopian promises often bind people to a tyrannical system. Since I have been a victim for many decades of Jehovah's Witnesses' many prophecies concerning the end of time, based on these prophecies, I would like to illustrate why most people continue to believe in The Watchtower Society in spite of all these unfulfilled prophecies.

When repeated prophecies that the end is near are *not* fulfilled, but the member remains loyal to the system all the same, it is difficult for an outsider to understand. However, it is very important for those of you who have family or friends who are Jehovah's Witnesses to know what sort of mechanisms produce such paradoxical behaviour.

Predictions about the end of the world, or other prophecies, are only a small part of the forces that keep a person loyal to a movement. After having experienced mistaken prophecies, one would logically presume that no one would want to be burnt twice. But after unfulfilled prophecies and promises we will often see the following paradoxical phenomena.

1. Unfulfilled prophecies and promises do not incur scepticism.
2. Belief in the prophecies and promises becomes even stronger.
3. Members find an explanation for disappointment in rationalisation (refutation) and other forms of thought reorganisation.

There have been plenty of end-times scenarios that could be studied since the time of Jesus Christ. As early as the second century, the charismatic leader Montanus gained a following around the belief that the Second Coming of the Lord was at hand, and that this would occur at a specific location according to his «New Prophecy.» Harold O. J. Brown says:

«Montanus conviction that the end of the age was at hand led him to call on Christians to abstain from marriage, dissolve marriages already contracted, and gather in an appropriate place to await the descent of the heavenly city. The heavenly city did not descend when

expected, and consequently Montanus and his followers had to come to terms with its delay, as the whole church had to learn to deal with the postponement of Christ's Second Coming.»

What is interesting, however, was that the Montanists did not die out right away, but continued as a small cult for several centuries in Phrygia in Asia Minor.

In studying this phenomena, credit must be given to Leon Festinger for his cognitive dissonance theory, as developed in his book "When Prophecy Fails", originally published in 1956 and co-authored by Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter. The authors comprised a research team who conducted a study of a small cult following of a Mrs. Marian Keech, a housewife who claimed to receive messages from aliens via automatic writing. The message of the aliens was one of a coming world cataclysm, but with the hope of surviving for the elect who listened to them through Keech and selected other mediums. What Festinger and his associates demonstrated in the end was that the failure of prophecy often has the opposite effect of what the average person might expect, the cult following often gets stronger and the members even more convinced of the truth of their actions and beliefs!

Festinger observes:

«A man with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point..... We are familiar with the variety of ingenious defences with which people protect their convictions, managing to keep them unscathed through the most devastating attacks.

But man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it, finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: What will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed he may even show a new fervour about convincing and converting other people to his view.

"When Prophecy Fails" focuses on the failure of prophecy to come true, termed *disconfirmation* by Festinger, and the accompanied renewal of energy and faith in their sources of «divine guidance». His theory presupposed the cult having certain identifying features, such as, (a) belief held with deep conviction along with respective actions taken, (b) the belief or prediction must be specific enough to be disconfirmed (i.e., it didn't happen), and (c) the believer is a member of a group of likeminded believers who support one another and even proselytise. All of these characteristics were present in the sauer cult.

The followers of Mrs. Keech reacted to each disconfirmation (failed date). Little attempt was made to deny the failure. The strength to continue in the movement was derived, not largely from the rationalisations, but from the very energy of the group itself and its dedication to the cause. This explains why proselytising was so successful later in reinforcing the group's sagging belief system.

For whom that wish an explanation of Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory see footnote.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹«Dissonance and consonance are relations among cognition's – that is, opinions, beliefs, knowledge of the environment, and knowledge of one's own actions and feelings. Two opinions, or beliefs, or items of knowledge are dissonant with each other if they do not fit together – that is, if they are inconsistent, or if, considering only the particular of two items, one does not follow from

Application to the Watchtower

This paradoxical phenomenon is evident in the history of Jehovah's Witnesses. Predictions have been proved wrong time after time since the 1870's. President Rutherford made use of the same tactics as Montanus in the second century. In his book "Children" published early in the 1940's, the then president (Rutherford) of The Watchtower Society advised young members to refrain from marriage as the new world was only just round the corner. Those who were married already were advised to put off having children until they had entered into the new world. Several generations of Jehovah's Witnesses have not seen any of their leaders' prophecies fulfilled. The end of the world was expected in 1914, 1915, 1918, 1925, 1941 and 1975. As already mentioned in Chapter 7, it was hoped that the end would come before 20th century was over, but that prediction was abandoned in 1995 when The Watchtower Society was given a new "adjusted understanding" regarding "the beginning of this generation".

Several hundred thousand Jehovah's Witnesses left the organisation after the disappointment of 1975. Although the organisation has shed very many of its members due to unsuccessful prophecies, the total number in the sect has actually increased. The Watchtower Society has managed to hold on to the majority of its members, in addition they have gained many new recruits among folk who have been impressed by their message and expectations. (Jehovah's Witnesses have not increased in numbers in Scandinavia and several other European countries during the last few years.)

According to Festinger, three things often happen in the wake of unsuccessful predictions and unfulfilled promises:

the other. For example, a cigarette smoker who believes that smoking is bad for his health has an opinion that is dissonant with the knowledge that he is continuing to smoke. He may have many other opinions, beliefs, or items of knowledge that are consonant with continuing to smoke but the dissonance nevertheless exists too."

"Dissonance produces discomfort and correspondingly, there will arise pressure to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. Attempts to reduce dissonance represent the observable manifestation that dissonance exists. Such attempts may take any or all of three forms. The person may try to change one or more of the beliefs, opinions, or behaviours involved in the dissonance; to acquire new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced; or to forget or reduce the importance of those cognition's that are in a dissonant relationship."

"Alternatively, the dissonance would be reduced or eliminated if the members of a movement effectively blind themselves to the fact that the prediction has not been fulfilled. But most people, including members of such movements, are in touch with reality and cannot simply blot out of their cognition such unequivocal and undeniable fact. They can try to ignore it, however, and they usually do try. They may convince themselves that the date was wrong, but the prediction will, after all, be shortly confirmed, or they may even set another date as the Millerites did...Rationalisation can reduce dissonance somewhat. For rationalisation to be fully effective, support from others is needed to make the explanation or the revision seem correct. Fortunately, the disappointed believer can usually turn to others in the same movement, who have the same dissonance and the same pressures to reduce it. Support for the new explanation is, hence, forthcoming and the members of the movement can recover somewhat from the shock of the disconfirmation."

1. *“Flexible standpoints”*. A revision of attitudes. Jehovah’s Witnesses are taught to believe that “the light” shed on the organisation becomes more and more clear and therefore it is possible that false prophecies can occur sometimes. It is likened to a yacht sailing from side to side up against the wind, so-called tacking. As the boat puts about it is still going forward. Therefore, using this method, one is still a step nearer the brighter “light” in spite of the mistaken prediction.
2. *“Different forms of activity are started up”* After the 1975 prophecy fiasco, the Watchtower Society started an enormous building project. Kingdom Halls, convention arenas and new regional offices were built all over the world. A Kingdom Hall was often raised within a period of three days. The press often turned up to see the “unity” and “co-operation” shown by the Witnesses. Getting a large number of people to do something all together, creates a bond of unity and solidarity. “Activity” can also consist in studying a new book, or a change in organisation being introduced. As mentioned earlier in this book, it is now, for example, no longer taboo to go to a psychologist or a psychiatrist, or to study at a university. In order to divert attention from intern problems, one can start a big revival or make a heavy attack on an outside “enemy”.
3. *“Introduction of new hope”* After the 1914 fiasco President Russell gave his supporters new hope, and thus had them in the palm of his hand. In *The Watchtower*, December 15th 1914 he said :

The disconfirmation of the date did not deter the majority of the Bible Students. Russell had the ability to lift up their spirits with new fervor and hope as the December 15, 1914 issue of the Watch Tower illustrates:

«God has promised that He will give His true children the light at the time appointed, and that they shall have the joy of understanding His Plan at the appropriate season....If anyone knows anything better, let him take it. If anyone of you ever find anything better, we hope you will tell us. We know of nothing better now half as good as what we have found in the Word of God.»

Barbara G. Harrison, former member of the Watchtower’s Bethel family gives us a glimpse of the air of expectancy:

«That, of course, is one of the keys to survival of the organization Russell founded on soft mysticism, glorious visions and worldly disaffections. The Witnesses had nowhere else to go. Their investment in their religion was total; to leave it would have meant spiritual and emotional bankruptcy. They were not equipped to function in a world without certainty. It was their life. To leave it would be a death.»¹²⁰

Russell reworked his chronology and moved the date for the end of the world up to 1915. After the end failed to materialize in 1915, the end was set for 1918, when «God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by millions.»¹²¹

At the death of Russell in 1916 J.F. Rutherford took over the role of the «prophet», proclaiming in 1920 that «Millions Now Living Will Never Die» in a booklet and lecture by the same name. Rutherford set a new date for the end of 1925, also claiming that it would bring the resurrection of the ancient men of God to the earth, such as Abraham Isaac, David, etc.

¹²⁰ Barbara G. Harrison, *Visions og Glory* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978, s. 167.

¹²¹ *The Finished Mystery*, 1917 edition, p.g.a. 485.

The Watchtower of September 15, 1941 (p.288) even stated that we are «in the remaining months before Armageddon». The end came for Rutherford in 1942, as he passed away and Nathan H. Knorr took his place as the key member of the «faithful and discreet slave,» dispensing prophetic messages to the Witnesses. Frederick W. Franz, Knorr's Vice-president predicted the end of 1975.

In a lectures given to the members of the headquarters staff in New York, Franz stated (regarding the end) that «we don't know now if it will be weeks or months» before a crowd of 2000 Witnesses. Unlike the flying saucer cult, the Watchtower was at first unwilling to accept blame for the disconfirmation, shifting it to «overzealous brothers.

It may seem incomprehensible how Witnesses could ignore the implications of each disconfirmation. Outsiders view the Witnesses as lacking common sense for not leaving the organization after numerous failures. They fail to understand the dynamics of mind control as used by cults.

How can you help?

Some therapists think perhaps that it is not right to discuss theology because it is against their principles of professional ethics. Can one defend querying self-contradictory interpretations or statements, whilst agitating against a person's philosophy of life by insisting that a different interpretation is more "correct", "true" or "according to the Bible" is immediately considered unethical?

In my opinion and based on my own experience, a therapist who has some knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses theology will be better equipped to help the client. With regard to psychotherapy for people who have previously been involved in religious communities with sectarian features, Singer¹²² mentions the following principles:

1. The importance of some knowledge of the sect's doctrine, in order to understand what the client is trying to explain.
2. The importance of having access to methods which can influence the client's behaviour.
3. The importance of meeting the client with respect and openness, and without any personal prejudice.
4. The danger of being too intent on connecting the patient's problems to psychopathology alone, and in so doing paying too little attention to the harm the sect itself can have inflicted on the patient. (But of course one must avoid the opposite mistake: to think that "everything" is caused by the sect.)

"In the United States the psychiatrist Louis West and the psychologist Margaret Singer are the authors of a chapter on sects in a well known book on psychiatry. They explore various denominations and what they have in common and delve into their system of indoctrination. Among their findings we find personality disorders, atypical emotional reactions and altered physical bearing and appearance. These may include stereotyped facial expressions, and upon occasion, an absent-minded empty look. The individuals who choose to leave a sect are often plagued by a feeling of loneliness and depression, a sense of existing in a vacuum, and showing difficulty in making decisions. At times one can also observe psychopathological behavior characterized by obsessive-compulsive thinking, delusions, hallucinations, etc."

Singer stresses the fact that it is of paramount importance for the therapist, when treating these patients, to possess extensive knowledge of the mechanisms used by the

¹²² Singer Margaret, (1979): *Coming Out Of The Cults. Psychology Today*, 12: 72-82.

sect. There is also the question of whether individuals with certain specific personality traits are attracted to such groups. However, according to Singer, anyone may become a member of a sect. But involvement seems to occur at some point when an individual is more vulnerable. In psychiatry's diagnosis manual DSM IV there is a special section (300.15.3) devoted to the common factors that attract a person to a sect: "a dissociative state which may occur when individuals have been exposed to lengthy or intense psychological pressure under duress (i.e. brain washing, thought control, or forced indoctrination)"

Bergman claims the following in connection with Jehovah's Witnesses:

"In trying to help Witnesses, unless they have clear doubts about the Watchtower and consequently are open to new information, it is generally fruitless to discuss the validity of their theological and philosophical beliefs. Although it is generally best for the therapist (or anyone trying to help a Witnesses) to avoid theological discussions, *it may at times be necessary to investigate the individual's beliefs to see how they are being used to satisfy some unconscious need. Only if the Witnesses can be reasonable and rational, though, and the therapist has a good grasp of both Watchtower and orthodox Christian theology, is a discussion of theology appropriate.* Discussion of doctrinal issues invariably elicits strong defences, making it more difficult to reason and work with him or her. Becoming upset and emotionally defensive is especially likely if the Witnesses perceives that he or she may be wrong. Arguing, becoming extremely unreasonable or irrational, or simply refusing to talk further are not responses conducive to helping a troubled person."¹²³

As an example of a productive therapeutic technique Bergman mentions (1992, s 183): Encourage the patient to ask older members if Jehovah's Witnesses have also previously claimed that Armageddon was "just round the corner" This method of making the patient think more independently would not have been possible if the therapist had not had some previous knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses and their doctrine.

There are several things one can do as a fellow human being and Christian to help Jehovah's Witnesses. Among others:

- Don't "keep on" at them. It is difficult to help a Jehovah's Witnesses or a victim of tyranny who has not himself asked for help.
- They need a renewal of their minds.
- They need to hear the good news of a gospel based on mercy, not salvation through good works.
- They must experience the security of fellowship if they are to be helped with their mental and emotional sores. It is difficult to admit the need for help. To look at oneself honestly and without fear is very hard. Therefore they need a great deal of support from others.
- Within a secure fellowship it will be possible to train up spiritual feelings and learn to live a life in freedom

¹²³ Bergman, J. (1992): *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Problem of Mental Illness*. Witnesses Inc. P.O.Box 597 Clayton, USA.

- Do not weight down his/her shoulders with other or new burdens. They are scared enough already and it is a miracle that they dare to meet with other Christians. Let them live in peace.
- Look on professional expertise as a resource. Do not wait too long before seeking their help, especially when the victim has chronic emotional problems connected with his past. The specialist's own philosophy of life is not necessarily conclusive in judging his ability to help the victim.

But, in most cases you are completely powerless

The first point mentioned above says: "*Don't "keep on" at them. It is difficult to help a Jehovah's Witnesses or a victim of tyranny who has not himself asked for help*". I myself have been allowed to help several hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses out of the organisation. Characteristic for most of them I was able to help was that they themselves had begun to doubt The Watchtower Society's doctrines and had defied its ban on the reading of literature by so-called "apostates". Others disagreed with The Watchtower society's unsympathetic and autocratic attitude to its own members. Others again had been expelled for some reason or other. For example, tobacco smoking, celebrating of a birthday, observing "worldly" holidays or that they had dared to express diverging opinions etc.

But it is worth carrying on publishing pamphlets and books with information about Jehovah's Witnesses and other sects. This information can be very useful and a great help to those who are beginning to doubt and are searching for a life in freedom.

Translator's note:

Quotations from the Bible have almost without exception been taken from the "**New International Version**", copyright 1973, International Bible Society, 1982 edition, published by Hodder and Stoughton.

Appendix A:
Lifton's Eight Criteria of Mind Control Cults

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.MILIEU CONTROL | 2.MYSTICAL MANIPULATION |
| 3.DEMAND FOR PURITY | 4.THE CULT OF CONFESSION |
| 5.THE «SACRED SCIENCE» | 6.LOADING THE LANGUAGE |
| 7.DOCTRINE OVER PERSON | 8.DISPENSING OF EXISTENCE |

Brainwashing has become almost a troublehold word in the last three decades. Robert Jesus. Lifton wrote the definitive book on the subject, Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism, after studying the effects of mind control on American prisoners of war under the Communist China.

In chapter 22 of his book, Lifton outlines eight criteria of mind control, whether used by political, religious or psychological cults.

Milieu Control

«Milieu» is a French word meaning «surroundings environment». Cults are able to control the environment around their recruits in a number of ways, but almost always using a form of isolation. Recruits can be physically separated from society, or they can be warned under threat of punishment to stay away from the world's educational media, especially when it may provoke independent thinking. Any books, movies or testimonies of ex-members of the group, are to be avoided.

Information is carefully kept on each member by the «mother» organisation. All are watched, to see that they do not fall behind or get too far ahead of the thinking of the organisation. Because it appears that the organisation knows so much about everything and everyone, they appear omniscient in the eyes of the recruits.

Mystical manipulation

In religious cults, God is ever present in the workings of the organisation. If a person leaves for any reason, accidents or all what that may befall them are always attributed to God's punishment of them. The angels are always said to be working for the faithful, and stories circulate about how God is truly doing marvellous things among them, because they are «the truth.» The organisation is therefore given a certain «mystique» that is quite impressive to the new recruit.

Demand for purity

The world is depicted as black and white, with little room for making personal decisions based on a trained conscience. One's conduct is modelled after the ideology of the group, as taught in its literature. People and organisations are pictured as either good or evil, depending on their relationship to the cult.

Universal tendencies of guilt and shame are used to control individuals, even after they leave. There is great difficulty in understanding the complexities of human morality, since everything is polarised and oversimplified. All things classified as *evil* are to be avoided, and purity is attainable through immersion in the cult's ideology.

The cult of confession

Serious sins (as defined by the organisation) are to be confessed immediately. The members are to be reported if found walking contrary to the «the truth.» There is often a tendency to derive pleasure from self-degradation through confession. This occurs when all must confess their sins before each other regularly, creating an intense kind of «unity» within the group. It also allows leaders from within to exercise authority over the weaker ones, using their «sins» as a whip to lead them on.

The «Sacred Science»

The cult's ideology becomes the ultimate vision for the ordering of human existence. The ideology is too «sacred» to call into question, and a reverence is demanded for the leadership. The cult's ideology makes an exaggerated claim for possessing the right logic, making it appear as *absolute truth* with no contradictions. Such an attractive system offers security.

Loading the language

Lifton explains the prolific use of «thought-terminating clichés», expressions and organisation words that are designed to end the conversation and prevent controversy. We are

all familiar with the use of the clichés from former communist countries as «capitalist» and «imperialist» as used by anti war demonstrators in the 60's. Such clichés are easily memorised and readily expressed. They are called the "language of non-thought,» since the discussion is terminated and further consideration is not allowed.

In the Watchtower, for instance, expressions such as «the truth», the «mother organisation», the «new system», «apostates» and «worldly» carry with them a judgement on outsiders, leaving them unworthy of further consideration.

Doctrine over Person

Human experience is subordinated to doctrine, no matter how contradictory such experiences seem to the organisation. The history of the cult is altered to fit their doctrinal logic. The person is only valuable inasmuch as he conforms to the role models of the cult. Common sense perceptions are disregarded if they are hostile to the cult's ideology.

Dispensing of Existence

The cult decides who has the «right» to exist and who does not. They decide who will perish in the final battle of good and evil. The leaders decide which history books are accurate and which are biased. Families can be cut off and outsiders can be deceived, for they are not fit to exist!

APPENDIX B

Which Church shall I go to?

Are you seeking fellowship in a Christian church? Then you have to realise that not only the Watchtower society is a cult. There are cults that are practising the same characteristics for indoctrination as Jehovah Witnesses. But, I am afraid that the greatest danger for Christians today is not Jehovah Witnesses or other destructive cults - because they are easy to see through for a Christian who knows the Bible - but from inside the body of Christ. You have to realise that cultic thinking also thrives within the ranks of orthodoxy. Aberrant Christian churches are a big problem in the Christian world. An untold number of people have been spiritually damaged by those who subscribe to all the fundamentals of the faith. Ronald Enroth says: «Unlike physical abuse that often results in bruised bodies, spiritual and pastoral abuse leaves scars on the psyche and soul». Many leaders of these aberrant or «fringe» Christian churches refuse to hear complaints from distressed Christians who report deceit and pain from other Christians, brought to them while under the pastoral care of other Christian leaders. These complaints are often brushed aside and dismissed with the argument: «We preach the gospel», «See the increase of new Christians», etc. Many Christian churches today experience an invasion of cultic thinking.

Characteristics of aberrant or «fringe» churches

Ronald Enroth, professor of sociology at Westmont College and author of "Churches that abuse", has written extensively on the fringe group problem. These «fringe» churches are generally orthodox in terms of doctrine, but they possess other characteristics that set them apart from mainstream evangelicalism, including:

1. Control-oriented leadership. A great emphasis is placed on submission and obedience to group authority.
2. Spiritual elitism. A «we» vs. «they» mentality. These groups view themselves as either the only «true Christian,» or as the only ones who really have the current «vision.»

3. Manipulation of members. (environmentally and informational). Members are frequently told where to live or work, who to date, what to read, and even where to go for their vacations.
4. «Siege mentality» and perceived persecution. Any criticism is viewed as «persecution»- others seem to be out to get them.
5. Lifestyle rigidity. Structures are often enforced regarding sleeping, eating, exercise, and leisure time.
6. Emphasis on the subjective experience. Undue stress on «words from the lord,» «God showed me,» «the Lord told me,» and «I sense the Spirit.»
7. Denunciation of other churches. Those outside are viewed as «lukewarm,» not «spirit-filled,» «dead,» lacking vision or dedication, and lost.
8. Suppression of dissent. Criticism is viewed as faction, slander, rebelliousness, and evidence that one is lacking a teachable spirit.
9. Harsh discipline of members. Those who question teachings or practices of the group are often shunned and their reputations ruined by public exposure of their «sin.»
10. Painful exit process. Target members may be cut off without warning- this may include loss of financial support if employment is within the group; former close friends will break all ties.

APPENDIX C

BIBLE INTERPRETATION

Information on Bible interpretation is taken from the book: “Death and the Afterlife” by Dr. Robert A. Morey, s. 20-32. (Betany House Publishers. Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438)

If we wish to understand what the Bible teaches, it is necessary to appreciate the importance of hermeneutics. What is hermeneutics?

«Hermeneutics is the discovery, understanding and use of those linguistic and literary principles or rules of interpretation which should be followed when one seeks to understand the Bible. *Exegesis* is the practical application of hermeneutic principles to a special text in order to discover the intent and mind of the author. *Exegesis* is to read something in the Bible that is not in the Scriptures.

Why bother with hermeneutics? First, the Bible comes to us as literature (prose, poetry, historical narrative, apocalyptic literature, letters, dialogue, theological treatises, biography, etc). Since it is literature, we must treat it as such.

Second, hermeneutics is simply a reflection on the unconscious principles that we all follow when we are reading any piece of literature in general. When we take up a newspaper or novel we (1) observe grammar and syntax; (2) observe literary units such as paragraph and chapter; (3) seek to understand what the author was saying. These same things apply to reading the Bible.

Third, the Scriptures themselves warn us there are wrong ways as well as right ways to interpret the Bible. (2 Peter 3:16. 2 Tim. 2:15)

Some of the wrong ways are (1) partial quotation of text; (2) not observing who said or wrote it; (3) bringing together unrelated proof texts; (4) taking the verse out of context; and (5) taking a mystical approach to the Bible in which it is allowed to fall open at random and then a verse is picked by «chance.»

Principle 1- The clarity of Scripture

The Bible was written to be understood by the normal person who would take the words of the Bible in their simplest and most natural meaning. When the prophets, apostles and Christ spoke to common people of their day, they spoke in the common language using those words, figures of speech, idiomatic expressions, etc., which would most likely make plain their meaning. They did not seek to use mystical or occult terminology in order to hide their message from anyone. The exact opposite was true. The whole purpose of preaching was to proclaim the message loud and clear to the common man in the street. (Act 26:26)

Principle 2-Progressive revelation

The author of Hebrews stated in 1:1-2 that God spoke to the fathers through the prophets in bits and pieces and in many different ways. The entirety of God's revelations was not given to humanity in a single instant but was dispersed in different ways to different people over several thousand years. Each new revelation was like a piece of a cosmic puzzle. Even when the last of the Old Testament prophets had all the pieces that were given to those before him, hermeneutics still could not understand the total picture. It was only after the coming of Christ that the last remaining pieces were supplied and the puzzle completed....»

... «The principles of progressive revelation also means that biblical words will change in their meaning as the understanding of God's people deepens. Each new revelation meant a deeper understanding of some aspect of divine truth. Thus, we must not assume that a biblical word will have only one meaning which transcends the division between the Old and New Testaments.

Two errors are commonly made in this regard. Some read the vagueness of the Old Testament into the New Testament and fail to appreciate the final clarity of the New Testament.

Principle 3- The importance of the original languages

The importance of the original languages for the serious interpreter of Scripture cannot be over emphasised. That someone would write a book in which hermeneutics dogmatically stated what certain Greek and Hebrew words meant when hermeneutics had never studied such languages, is unthinkable. While the English text is basically clear to the average modern reader, the biblical scholar seeks to understand what a particular word meant in the original language in which it was written.

Biblical words must be studied, first of all, etymologically. Thus, we must refer to the lexicons or dictionaries which define words in their original meanings. In this way, some mistaken views are, at once, revealed. For example, while conversing with a Jehovah's Witnesses, hermeneutics informed us that the word for Hades in the Greek language meant «the grave.» Hermeneutics was quite dogmatic about this and said that the Watchtower had great Greek scholars who could prove this.

You can imagine his confusion when we pointed out that the Greek word Hades is a compound of two Greek words, one being the negative «not» and the other «seen» The word simply means «unseen» or «invisible».

Principles-4 Grammatical Interpretation

Grammar and syntax has to do with an understanding of the nature of words and how they function in sentences to convey the mind of the author. The importance of interpreting a

verse in harmony with its grammatical structure can be crucial in theological controversy. All languages have a grammatical structure whether or not an author is conscious of using it. A noun is a noun and a verb is a verb regardless of one's theological bias. There can be no disagreement over such things as identifying the subject and predicate in a simple sentence because grammar is not a matter of religious prejudice.

Principles 5- The principle of context

As we approach the Scripture, we must begin with the primary assumption that each text must be understood in the light of its own literary context. This means that we do not begin with the assumption that a text should be interpreted literally or figuratively. It is the context and the context alone that decides how we are to interpret the words of the author.

What do we mean by «context»? First, there is the literary context of the immediate paragraph or chapter in which the text is found. The verses before and after a text should be read to get the immediate context. Just observing this point alone removes ninety percent of the so-called «biblical» arguments utilised by the cults...Second, there is the literary context of the entire book in which the text is found. This means that we must remember that the Bible is a library of sixty-six books with each book having its own theme, focus and concern. Third, there is the context of the analogy of faith. This refers to the principle that a valid interpretation of a text will not produce a doctrine that is elsewhere in Scripture clearly condemned. Fourth, there is the historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic context. Great benefit can be derived from understanding what a word meant to the people of biblical times.

The principle of context means that we must interpret a text in the light of its own literary and cultural surroundings. The failure to observe this principle is one of the foundational problems in the hermeneutics of liberal and cultic theologians.

Principles 6- Figures of speech

Once we approach the Bible without initially assuming that we must interpret everything literally, we discover that the biblical authors used the richness of figurative language to convey biblical truth. The variety of the kinds of figurative language used in the Bible include such things as metaphor, simile, symbolism, parable, allegory, analogy, idiom, cliché, proverb, metonymy, hyperbole, and irony....The purpose of figurative language is to create mental images or pictures to illustrate ideas.

