

**140 Years Strong: A Historical and Critical Analysis of the Primary Mechanisms Employed
by the Jehovah's Witnesses to Grow in a Hostile World**

Donald Parkhurst Allen

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University of East Anglia

Department of Art, Media, and American Studies

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Abstract

For most of their existence the Jehovah's Witnesses have rarely been the subject of academic study. The works resulting from the little interest they have received have focused on how the Witnesses have affected the world around them through their constant proselytizing, their prohibition on blood transfusions, their strident conscientious objection and other beliefs and practices. Several nations around the world have attempted to destroy the Witnesses' very existence within their borders. The internal aspects of the Witnesses however are given little thought and the question of why they have been able to survive in what is often a hostile world has remained unanswered. A close study of the history and development of the major mechanisms they continue to use is necessary to fully comprehend how they were able to have this impact. This work answers that question by focusing on the history of the Witnesses and analyzing how they developed and use three key mechanisms to combat any issues that arise from their often contentious relations with the world at large: the Governing Body; the concept of "new light"; and their constant preaching work and what it means to their unity. Here the lens is turned from focusing on the impact that the Witnesses have had on the world to focusing on the internal mechanisms that have allowed them to continue to grow. This work provides a deeper knowledge of the Witnesses than only looking at the results of the events can. In turn it will allow for better understandings of the events themselves by future scholars, who will have a greater understanding of how the Witnesses work and a better realization that without this understanding of what allows the Witnesses to continue to impact the world, many of their achievements appear to come from nowhere.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	P. 4
Introduction	P. 5
- <u>Who are the Jehovah's Witnesses?</u>	<u>P. 5</u>
- <u>Literature Review</u>	<u>P. 10</u>
- <u>Methodology</u>	<u>P. 17</u>
- <u>Contents</u>	<u>P. 24</u>
Chapter One: Mechanisms to Grow	P. 28
- <u>Governing Body</u>	<u>P. 31</u>
- <u>New Light</u>	<u>P. 51</u>
- <u>Proselytizing</u>	<u>P. 78</u>
Chapter Two: Historical Development of the Jehovah's Witnesses	P. 104
- <u>C.T. Russell: Founding to 1916</u>	<u>P. 108</u>
- <u>Joseph Rutherford: 1917 to 1942</u>	<u>P. 121</u>
- <u>Nathan Knorr: 1942 to 1975</u>	<u>P. 140</u>
- <u>Governing Body: 1976 to Present</u>	<u>P. 156</u>
Chapter Three: Relations with the World	P. 175
- <u>Government Troubles</u>	<u>P. 177</u>
- <u>Local Problems</u>	<u>P. 199</u>
- <u>Internal Conflicts</u>	<u>P. 218</u>
Conclusion	P. 233
Glossary of Terms	P. 237
Bibliography	P. 240

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Introduction

Who are the Jehovah's Witnesses?

In Allegheny, Pennsylvania in the late 1870s Charles Taze Russell, a young haberdasher, tired of the hellfire and brimstone of his Calvinist upbringing and unable to find any other organized religion that satisfied his spiritual needs, began a small Bible study group with close friends and family.¹ Wealthy from the business he ran with his father and with plenty of time to study Russell quickly became the leader of the small group. Heavily influenced by Adventist thinking, particularly on end-time date setting, Russell calculated that the end of the world would be in a few short years.² Nearly one hundred and forty years later this group has grown to be one of the most well-known, yet least understood, religions in the world. They are known today as Jehovah's Witnesses. This thesis seeks to understand how the internal mechanisms that have been devised by the Witnesses have allowed them to prosper despite hostile actions, both internal and external, that have occurred during their existence.

By the time of Russell's death in 1916 his teachings and constant preaching work around the globe had grown his movement from a handful of friends to over twenty thousand adherents. While he never intended his movement to become an established religion, Russell's creation of the primary legal corporation that the Witnesses use, the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter the Society), has allowed his successors to have immediate and direct impact on the movement while presenting an unbroken continuation of the religion's publications and proselytizing even when internal issues arose. While many of Russell's specific doctrines have come to be revised or

¹ James Parkinson, *The Bible Student Movement in the Days of C.T. Russell* 3rd. Ed. (Self-published, 1999), 1 (Preliminary Copy provided to author).

² George D Chryssides, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Continuity and Change* (Farnham, Surrey England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2016); see Chapter 2: Origins for a greater discussion of the Adventist beliefs Russell adopted.

eliminated his impact can still be felt on several important beliefs including the focus on the year 1914 as the year of Christ's invisible return, although the significance of that year has been redefined from Russell's original ideas. His use of the concept of continuing revelation, which Russell called "meat in due season" and today is referred to by Witnesses as "new light", is the primary evolutionary tool used by his successors to continue to expand.

Russell's immediate successor, Joseph Rutherford, experienced a contraction of members initially as a result of legal and organizational problems. However, his reshaping of the movement into an organization controlled completely by one man and his push to get every member to preach the movement's message resulted in an overall membership of just over one hundred thousand by the time of his death in 1942.³ Rutherford created or solidified two key mechanisms, those of new light and preaching, that the Witnesses use today to continue growing in what is a hostile world in many places. There is no question that without Rutherford's leadership the Witnesses would not be what they are today. While his adherent numbers were small in comparison to his successors, Rutherford's success as head of the religion is shown by what those successors were able to accomplish using his mechanisms. Rutherford took a fledgling movement based on the teachings of a single man and left it the tools needed to thrive in a hostile world.

Nathan Knorr succeeded Rutherford and turned Rutherford's system, reliant primarily on Rutherford for most things, into a well-run bureaucratic machine that, while Knorr still held all the final decision-making power, could run without his direct involvement. He turned the Witnesses from mere deliverers of Rutherford's message into well-trained speakers who were able to get across the organization's teachings in an

³ 1943 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1942), 221.

effective and personable way. While Knorr's power was stripped from him during his final few years by the Governing Body that he created, his creation of the Body itself was his biggest contribution to the future of the movement. No longer would the religion be controlled by a single individual, but rather by a group of faithful men who would seek to improve the Witnesses and to gather more adherents. While the Body is no longer heavily involved in the day-to-day operation of the religion's many legal organizations, they run the movement and decide all doctrinal issues, as well as any pressing legal and business decisions that may come along that affect the religion.

The Witnesses have, like any religion that lasts any length of time, many beliefs and doctrines that have evolved over the years of their existence. Within this multitude of doctrine lie several key beliefs that underpin most of the system. The primary belief is that the year 1914 marked the beginning of the end of "this system of things", as Jesus Christ had invisibly returned and would shortly take control of the world for his millennial reign. This reign of Christ would see the restitution of a perfect, Edenic world, with the faithful living forever under God's rule. The explanation behind exactly what 1914 signified and when this system was to end has been changed several times since then, but the date itself has remained. It is a date that, barring a complete overhaul in how Witnesses view their interpretation of the Bible, is the bedrock belief on which all others are built. While the reason why it is there may change, the fact that it is there is immutable.

One belief many non-Witnesses have heard about but fail to fully understand is that 144,000 chosen, or "anointed", are the only ones who will be going to heaven. This is often thought to mean that only 144,000 Witnesses will be "saved", but this is a misunderstanding of the belief. While it is true that only 144,000 Witnesses will go to heaven, the rest are not to be cast aside but will instead live on a paradise earth as God intended with Adam and Eve. This is an important belief not because of the number itself,

which while unchanged numerically has been reinterpreted several times, but because it means that there is a class of believers, the anointed, who are given special prominence in the community and the organization. For example, only the anointed can be members of the Governing Body, and no rank-and-file Witness, regardless of ability or faith, can ever reach that level. And even within the anointed, which currently numbers around ten thousand, only eight men comprise the Body, setting the Body on a higher level even among God's chosen class.

Undoubtedly the most familiar aspect of the Witnesses worldwide is their constant proselytizing, often door-to-door. To modern Witnesses preaching is not just a recommendation as it was under Russell but is in fact necessary to remain in God's grace. Preaching is the hallmark of the Witnesses and has led to both explosive growth and immense hostility around the world. The Witnesses currently number eight million five-hundred thousand adherents, in large part due to their door-to-door work.⁴ These adherents spend nearly two billion hours a year in the preaching work, known because the Society keeps meticulous records that are published on a yearly basis.⁵ Other statistics, such as the number of Witnesses per country, the growth or decline rate in numbers, and the increase or decrease of hours spent preaching are similarly reported. All these numbers however can be maintained only by continuing to publicly preach, and increase in membership is given as quantitative marker of successful preaching.

At different times and in several countries members of the movement have been attacked and beaten while going door-to-door. Nazi Germany placed members of the religion into concentration camps and marked them with purple triangles.⁶ Witnesses were

⁴ Michelle Lipka, "A closer look a Jehovah's Witnesses living in the U.S.", Pew Research Center, 26 April 2016, *Pewresearch.org*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/26/a-closer-look-at-jehovahs-witnesses-living-in-the-u-s/> accessed 3 December 2018.

⁵ *2017 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Walkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 2017), 177.

⁶ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 115.

beaten, arrested and imprisoned in many countries, including the United States and Canada, during World War II.⁷ This persecution does not simply belong to the past but is in fact ongoing. In Russia Witnesses' emphasis on preaching their message has led to them being labeled a subversive and extremist organization, and as of this writing the Russian government has outlawed the Witnesses and seeks to remove any vestige of the organization, including confiscating property. Lost in the details of other writings on the Witnesses, which focus their attention primarily on the results of Witness conflicts with the world, is how the Witnesses survived those conflicts. This dissertation will answer those missing parts of the Witness story. The focus of events will be inverted to show, not how the Witnesses have changed society and affected the outside world, but how those events pushed the Witnesses to become stronger in their beliefs, developing new mechanisms in order to continue to grow.

Rather than merely looking at the events of any given situation, such as the Witnesses in Nazi Germany, this thesis will dissect how three key mechanisms that the Witnesses have created work to give them a blueprint to survive any situation, and to come out the other side stronger than before. These three mechanisms are: the leadership of the Governing Body over the past forty-plus years; the concept of new light, or progressive revelation; and their constant and tireless preaching work. Each of these ideas, developed at different points in their history and evolving to their present status, has allowed the Witnesses to grow for over a century. That they have done so despite external and internal resistance and opposition speaks to how important and secure these key mechanisms are. They do not do anything haphazardly but instead rely on these mechanisms to get a favorable outcome for their organization. By understanding how these mechanisms developed and how they work the Witnesses become more than just

⁷ M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, 3rd Ed. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2015) 203-205.

participants in these events but are shown to be the driving force behind how they progressed.

Literature Review

Writing on the Witnesses typically comes in three forms: a small but increasing number of studies and books by academics, the publications of the Witnesses themselves, and writings by former Witnesses about the organization. The first area of literature regarding the Witnesses is studies written by academics about the movement. Most academic studies have been written by non-Witnesses, and fall into three main categories: legal, historical, and sociological. The legal impact that the Witnesses have had on religious rights, focused predominantly on cases in the United States during World War II, is the largest in terms of number of works. The knowledge of the Witnesses' impact on constitutional law has been sustained through articles and books written since the 1940s, particularly about the flag-salute cases, such as *West Virginia State Board of Education v Barnette*, and freedom of religion.⁸ Even in most books and articles written about the impact the Witnesses had on the law, the focus is mainly the law and how it changed, with the Witnesses, to the authors, being decidedly of secondary importance. This often leads to minimal or superficial background information on the Witnesses, with the focus being the events rather than the participants.

M. James Penton's work *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, originally published in 1985 and now in its third edition, is the most complete work

⁸ See Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000); also Merlin Owen Newton, *Armed with the Constitution: Jehovah's Witnesses in Alabama and the U.S. Supreme Court, 1939-1946* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1995); and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Plan to Expand First Amendment Freedoms" *Journal of Church and State* Vol. 46 (2004) 811-832, <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jchs46&id=823> Accessed 8 December 2017.

currently available on the Witnesses. Penton traces in detail the history of the movement as well as its doctrinal growth and community processes. It is structured in a way that lends itself to academic study, divided into three accessible parts that are clear: the history of the movement; their concepts and doctrines; and their organizational structure and community. It does however have weaknesses. While it has in some areas been updated these typically take the form of additions, rather than changes, to the previously written material. Because of this, even though it is in its third edition, published in 2015, it is still heavily weighted towards pre-2000 sources and information. Like most academic works on the Witnesses it also largely overlooks the importance of the key mechanisms that will be brought out in this thesis. When they are mentioned it is in a straightforward way that describes the actions and results of the mechanism's use, but with little to no analysis of how it has affected the Witnesses ability to adapt and grow.

Penton is also an ex-Jehovah's Witness and was excommunicated, or "disfellowshipped" to use the Witness term, from the movement in the early 1980s. Penton is a respected scholar, and his work reflects his training and dedication to education and academia. There are several areas however where Penton's individual experiences with the Witnesses appear to affect his response to certain issues. For example, he makes the insinuation that Nathan Knorr may have had homosexual tendencies, although he provides no evidence other than noting that Knorr "...seems to have had a fixation on sexual sins..." including homosexuality, and a single unverified story that does not actually implicate Knorr in any sort of homosexual relationship.⁹ But a personal connection to the subject does not necessarily rule out the academic value of the work. While the Knorr insinuation is petty, and he at times leans more towards the negative aspects of his subject than is strictly necessary, Penton has written a rigorous,

⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 308.

academically solid work that occasionally reveals his own biases as being a former member of the Witnesses.

Recent scholars have taken more interest in the Witnesses. Zoe Knox has appraised the scholarship on Jehovah's Witnesses in an article in the *Journal of Religious History* and in her book *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Secular World* addresses the history between the Witnesses and secular governments and organizations.¹⁰ Because Knox's book focuses on the contentious history between Witnesses and the secular world, it largely overlooks how the internal mechanisms created and strengthened by the movement over its existence have allowed it to thrive. Emily Baran's excellent work *Dissent on the Margins* looks at how the Witnesses survived in the Soviet Union during the Cold War.¹¹ Even within its Cold War setting however the book focuses dominantly on Moldova and Ukraine, limiting its value to any researcher outside of those two nations.

A three-volume work, of which two have so far been translated into English, edited by Professors Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa, titled *Jehovah's Witnesses In Europe: Past and Present*, with contributions from academics regarding the Witnesses in Italy, Belgium, and Greece among other nations, was published in 2016. This work allows for a more worldwide examination and understanding of the struggles of the Witnesses in countries with which the researcher may not be familiar. However, its focus is on breadth, not depth, and its subjects are not equally treated, with countries like Spain and Belgium getting less than thirty pages with Italy and Portugal each over one hundred.¹²

¹⁰ Zoe Knox, "The History of the Jehovah's Witnesses: An Appraisal of Recent Scholarship" *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 41, No. 2, June 2017, 257; Knox, *Jehovah's Witnesses And The Secular World* (London, England; Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹¹ Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach about It* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹² Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa, eds. *Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe: Past and Present* (Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

The scholar whose work is leading the drive to bring the Witnesses to the attention of more academics is George D. Chryssides. Chryssides is a scholar of the New Religious Movement (NRM), who has written on Sun Myung Moon and other NRMs, as well as the Witnesses.¹³ In 2008 he published the *Historical Dictionary of Jehovah's Witnesses*, an A-Z guide with several hundred topics regarding the Witnesses briefly explored and explained. In 2016, Chryssides published *Jehovah's Witnesses: Continuity and Change*, which gives a brief history of the movement and then discusses several topics such as the Bible and the ethics and lifestyle of the Witnesses.¹⁴ Chryssides here attempts to present an empathetic account of the Witnesses, which he succeeds in, but at some cost to his critical look. This is apparent the most in Chapter 10, "Prophecy", where he ignores evidence, such as Raymond Franz's work, about a failed prediction for the year 1975.¹⁵ He also downplays how forcefully the organization pushed certain other predictions and the subsequent re-writing by the organization of what they meant.

The works mentioned above, along with other academic studies not specifically mentioned, are useful and important when studying the Witnesses and their history. Understanding only the events without the underlying causes behind them however allows for only a superficial understanding of the Witnesses. This work contributes to the literature on the Witnesses by delving deeper into the internal structure of the Witnesses, which has been largely overlooked by the secondary literature. This thesis brings out not only what happened, but how the Witnesses were able to have the impact that they have had and to continue to grow throughout the 20th century and beyond.

The largest body of literature available is Witnesses' own writing, as they have published tens of thousands of pages about themselves, being from the beginning of their

¹³ For a list of Chryssides publications, see <http://www.religion21.com/publications/>

¹⁴ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 145, 171.

¹⁵ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 239-240; for a fuller discussion of this failed prediction, see Chapter One, page 56.

movement a publishing religion. Their primary medium for doing so has been their magazine *The Watchtower*, published continuously since 1879. *The Watchtower* is used to reinforce doctrine and provide “spiritual food” to its current and prospective members. It is also the primary way in which doctrinal adjustments are disseminated, with new or updated understandings of previous teachings being clarified through its pages. This is important to understand for potential scholars of the religion for several reasons. One is that their doctrines are constantly in flux, and the only way to keep up with them is by consistent reading of *The Watchtower* magazine. Indeed, periodically *The Watchtower* publishes a segment called “Do You Remember?”, reiterating important doctrines and teachings and often including recent doctrinal changes, although the fact of that change is not mentioned, just the new teaching.¹⁶ The doctrines are published and changed through *The Watchtower* magazines so determining what the past teachings were is, while not simple, rather straightforward: read the old *Watchtowers*. With thousands of issues available, *The Watchtower* is without question the largest source for Witness history and doctrinal studies available to any researcher. Current issues of the magazine are available for download from the Witnesses’ official website, and digital copies of back issues of the magazine are available online or in CD-ROM format. The easy access to the entire catalogue of the magazine makes it possible to accurately show what the movement was teaching during any time in its history.

Few of the religion’s founding beliefs survive in their original form today, although several have been modified over the years and continue to play an important role. The researcher must determine not only which beliefs are relevant to their work, but also if the past incarnations of that belief are worth examining. The researcher must search through past publications if they are going to be able to understand how the belief evolved over

¹⁶ See for example *The Watchtower-Study Editions* of December 2013; June 2015; and June 2016.

time. However, because the new teaching will not include information regarding when the doctrine was formulated or in what years it was updated and changed, the only recourse to the researcher who wishes to track the history of a doctrine is to search past issues and publications manually. Tracing a doctrine through the numerous publications of the organization can mean finding a single article a decade or two removed from when the doctrine was formulated or last changed. The methodology used to help combat this will be explained later, but it is an important point to note when discussing the abundance of Witness work available to the researcher.

The organization has not solely relied on *The Watchtower* to spread its message. From the beginning, pamphlets, tracts and books have been used to help supplement the magazine, typically speaking to more specific issues and allowing for greater detail on a certain topic. The number of books and pamphlets published by the organization runs well into the hundreds. Added to this already large number of pages is the movement's secondary magazine, currently known as *Awake!*, which has been published continuously since 1919. While not as doctrinally or theologically dense as *The Watchtower* and written predominantly for newer or prospective members to slowly introduce Witness teachings, it covers themes such as health and safety, current world problems, and scientific and historical topics.¹⁷ These pamphlets, books, tracts and the *Awake!* Magazine, together with the voluminous pages of the *Watchtower*, represent a substantial body of archival material.

The third category of writings are ex-Witness writings about the religion. These authors have inside information and experiences, and writings by former Witnesses often fall into one of two categories. The first category can be described as little more than

¹⁷ George D. Chryssides, *Historical Dictionary of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, Inc.; 2008), 12.

polemics against the organization.¹⁸ While an awareness of the bias inherent in these works can be useful for the researcher who is aware of it, they are often so vehemently negative as to render even the personal stories suspect. The second category are works that can be informative about a certain time, place, and/or events that occurred inside the organization. *Visions of Glory* by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison is an example of this, as Harrison lived and worked in the Brooklyn headquarters in the mid-1950s.¹⁹ The book is dense, being part history, part commentary, part autobiography, and as it has now been forty years since its printing is quite out of date. It remains valuable however as one of the few inside looks at the headquarters of the organization in the mid-1950s and its then leader, Nathan Knorr. David A. Reed, a former Witness elder, describes in detail his history with the organization.²⁰ Reed's book can at times be vitriolic and it ends with him claiming that the Witnesses have become more cult-like since he left.²¹ Its primary use to scholars however is that Reed's time with the religion, from his 1968 conversion to his expulsion in 1981, was mired in both organizational and spiritual upheaval. Similar writings by Barbara Anderson through her website watchtowerdocuments.org offer information and access from inside the organization that would otherwise be impossible to get.

One ex-Witness book of immense importance is Raymond Franz's *Crisis of Conscience*.²² Franz was a member of the Witness organization for over forty years, from the late 1930s until the early 1980s, serving in many roles in the organization including overseas missionary and, starting in the mid-1960s, working at the headquarters as part of the research and writing teams for the movement's publications. His most significant role

¹⁸ See for example Daniel Clark, *I. Witness: The Shocking insider's Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Meridian, Idaho: Villa Press; 2007); Alexis Davies, *Toxic Faith: Yet another tale of leaving the cult of Jehovah's Witnesses* (self-published; 2018)

¹⁹ Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, *Visions of Glory* (New York, New York; Simon and Schuster, 1978), 347.

²⁰ David A. Reed, *Blood On The Altar: Confessions of a Jehovah's Witness Minister* (Amherst, New York; Prometheus Books, 1996).

²¹ Reed, *Blood*, 258.

²² Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, 4th Ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Commentary Press, 2007).

was as a member of the religion's ruling Governing Body from 1971 to 1980.²³ The Body is not a secret group, its members are known and when one leaves or joins it is announced to the movement, but its deliberations on doctrinal matters are secret, with only the decision being reported. The Governing Body is one of the keys to the success of the Witnesses over the past half-century and will be discussed in Chapter One.²⁴ Franz, as a member of this body for nearly ten years, gives an unprecedented and otherwise unknowable look at the inner workings of this group and the decisions that were made throughout the 1970s. First-hand accounts of working with key figures such as Nathan Knorr as well as the deliberations that led to massive changes in how the organization was run are invaluable. It is a work that any student of the Witnesses must be familiar with.

Methodology

Researching the Witnesses presents a unique challenge. On the one hand the Witnesses make it their point to be seen and heard, as preaching their message of salvation is one of their primary internal mechanisms and has been historically emphasized via the printed word. It is unavoidable that anyone looking to understand and study the Witnesses will have to read their publications. The sheer number of pages written by the organization however makes this incredibly daunting. Modern technology and the ability to search for keywords is an incredible help, allowing for faster identification of key texts and cross-referencing than ever before. But even with this helpful tool the researcher still needs to read the publications. This is particularly important for the research on the Witnesses because when a new doctrine or teaching is introduced the old is forgotten. Older teachings are not highlighted, and often the fact that the teaching has changed is not

²³ Franz, *Crisis*, 44.

²⁴ See Chapter One, page 31.

even acknowledged. The only way in which a researcher will be able to determine what the old teachings may have been is to read the old publications. New publications will rarely refer to old teachings that are no longer followed, and there is no handbook or encyclopedia that lists the evolution of the doctrines.

This thesis therefore relies heavily on Witness publications to track these mechanisms and their history and evolution. However, to understand this completely, other works must be considered. The research presented here therefore uses a wide range of secondary materials to fully understand both the Witness reaction to events and the secular world's reaction, and how these helped shape internal methods of survival for the Witnesses. The works by Penton and Raymond Franz provide inside knowledge and data that can simply not be found anywhere else, and more recent academic works also help to illuminate the story. In addition, newspaper articles, legal transcripts, governmental information and other materials have been scoured.

This thesis also draws on two interviews conducted by the author in writing via email. The first was with James B. Parkinson, an elder and historian within the Dawn Bible Students Association, hereafter referred to as the Dawn. The Dawn are the largest of the splinter groups that still follow Russell's teachings, but their estimated worldwide membership numbers in the very low thousands, and they have had no impact on secular or religious matters. In many ways, the Dawn represent what the Witnesses were originally intended to be. Through this interview, I was able to compare the Dawn with the Witnesses to observe and better explain how the Witnesses' leaders moved their organization forward. The mechanisms that allowed for the growth of the Witnesses do not exist, or were not as forcefully used, within the Dawn organization. Parkinson also provided a copy of his biographical work on Russell and the early days of the movement

which was helpful in establishing a non-Rutherford based view on how the changes to the movement effected those who left.

The second interview conducted was with the founder and head of the Advocates for Jehovah's Witness Reform on Blood (AJWRB), pseudonymously known as Lee Elder. Mr. Elder has been published in medical journals arguing against the Witness policy on blood transfusion, and his work has been mentioned in books by Chryssides and Knox. However, he was not personally interviewed by either of those academics, who relied solely on his past works and his website. The interview with Mr. Elder allows for a more complete picture of the blood doctrine and its impact on Witnesses. It is a highly contentious issue that has led to many legal issues for Witnesses around the world, and the interview with Lee Elder allows for a look at how internal dissent within the Witnesses is currently conducted. Lee Elder uses his pseudonym because he claims to have at one point been an elder, or leader of a local congregation, who is still a current Jehovah's Witness. This identity is accepted as such within the academic community.²⁵

Both interviews were conducted via email, using a text document with questions that the interviewee's filled out and returned. Both documents were tailored to specific areas of enquiry for the interviewee. The interviews were conducted this way because both expressed a desire to do the interview via the email-document method, which allowed them to answer the questions when they had spare time to devote to them. Given his status within the Witnesses Lee Elder also preferred the email method to ensure that his anonymity was maintained.

Doing the interviews this way had both advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage was the lack of ability to immediately follow up with lines of enquiry that the

²⁵ Zoe Knox, *Jehovah's Witnesses And The Secular World* (London, England; Palgrave Macmillan: 2018) 179.

answers may have elicited in an in-person interview. Another is the idea of honest or real-time answers being given, as compared to the time and thought in responding to the questions in written form that could lead to self-edited answers. However, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages for these interviews. With James Parkinson the ability to answer the questions when his schedule allowed was particularly convenient, as it would have been months until he was able to dedicate time to a live Skype interview. Lee Elder's wish for anonymity was incompatible with an interview in person, and had I insisted on any type of interview that would have possibly allowed for his identification I would not have given one at all. The written nature of his answers allowed him to give as much or as little personal information as possible, while also allowing him to give full responses to other questions. In both cases, the ability to feel comfortable and complete the questions without worrying about the time-component necessary with live interviews was a distinct advantage. I was able to ask follow-up questions where appropriate via e-mail.

This research is also informed by though does not include any data or stories from my personal history with the Witnesses, which raises the question of exactly where I am positioned as a scholar within the classic insider/outsider debate. I have several relatives, including my mother, who are currently Witnesses, and I was raised within a Witness household off-and-on throughout my childhood and then more regularly during my teen years. I attended three meetings a week between the ages of thirteen and eighteen almost without fail and was expected to answer questions in front of the congregation during these meetings which would require study of the material. I completed a full Bible-study with a local elder and was encouraged rather heavily by members of the congregation to eschew higher education for more practical employment, so I could dedicate myself to the religion. In my later teens I was even subtly informed that, should I desire to date, there were several Witness girls my age in our local congregation who would be appropriate choices. Despite this I was always honest with my mother and others that I did not believe

in the Jehovah's Witnesses teachings and had no desire to become a member of the religion.

This duality of being in but not of the religion places me in a unique position. As described by George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg in the preface to their edited collection *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion*, the debate on what constitutes an insider or outsider has historically focused on the "...binary distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider': either the researcher is a member of the religion under study or, perhaps more usually in this field, he or she is studying an unfamiliar worldview and lifestyle."²⁶ Even were the debate limited to this binary distinction I would still be an outlier as I have been an insider within the Witness community and subsequently left that community, but have returned in order to study the religion as an academic outsider. However, Chryssides and Gregg also question whether it is still relevant to describe people as either of these terms, and suggest that to "...think simply in categories of "insider" and "outsider" is unduly simplistic and unrepresentative of the relational constructed religious lives that we are examining."²⁷ With this understanding of the terms of insider and outsider as proposed by Chryssides and Gregg it became even harder for me to firmly place myself within the theoretical concept.

My claim to "outsiderness" at first appears to override any claim to being an insider. From a strictly theological perspective, I was never an insider. I never believed in the religion, or for that matter any concept of God, and always said as much. My experiences were not colored by any faith in the Witness teachings, with the idea of faith

²⁶ George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, "Preface", in *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion*, George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, eds., (Sheffield, South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Equinox Publishing, 2019) VII (pre-published manuscript provided by authors in August 2019).

²⁷ Stephen E. Gregg and George D. Chryssides "Rational religious lives: Beyond insider/outsider binaries in the study of religion" in George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion*, George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, eds., (Sheffield, South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Equinox Publishing, 2019), 19.

in the religion being a key part of describing the classic insider.²⁸ But from a cultural and practical perspective I was engrossed within the Witness community and I was an active participant in nearly every other day-to-day activity as detailed above. But does this practical experience give me a claim to being at one time an insider, or does the lack of faith mean that I was always an outsider? Gregg and Chryssides argue that ... “[there] is not a simple binary matter of being “inside” or “outside”, but [rather] a fragmented, contextualized, and sometimes contradictory, set of dynamics...which is performed in the negotiation of everyday etiquette.” According to Gregg and Chryssides there can be a shifting of where one stands within the insider or outsider debate over time, and the oversimplification of those terms lacks a nuance that allows for a more complete understanding of where the scholar stands.²⁹ My experience in doing this research, and the opening up of the framework of scholarship, has helped me define the insider/outsider debate in regards to myself, but also in such a way that others may find useful.

Rebecca Moore notes that “[when] we attempt to combine the insider and the outsider perspectives – the emic and the etic – we get an emetic, a purgative that leaves us either empty and wasted, or freed of our illusions.”³⁰ Her appropriation of the medical term emetic seems fitting in the context of describing where I currently stand. I left the Witness community over fifteen years ago, and yet have decided to make my return to it, in a fashion, as an outsider. I recognize however that my previous emic experience has contributed in no small part to my interest in them as an etic scholar. I have come to think and define of myself therefore, in relation to the Witnesses, as an “emetic scholar.” Unlike writers such as Chryssides, who acknowledges his position as an outside observer, I occupy a unique position among academic writers of the Witnesses in that I have firsthand

²⁸ *Ibid* 4.

²⁹ Stephen E. Gregg and George D. Chryssides “Rational religious lives...” 26

³⁰ Rebecca Moore, “Taking sides: On the (im)possibility of participant observation”, in George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, *The Insider/Outsider Debate...* 154

experience from within the Witness community. At the same time, unlike other writers with firsthand experiences and knowledge such as Penton and Raymond Franz, I was never baptized, and because of this I do not have the label of apostate and am not shunned by Witnesses, who see me as more of a lost opportunity that may one day return to the religion. I have good relations with my family and am welcomed warmly by other members of the congregation when I return to visit with my mother. Because of this distinct lack of animosity, I have developed no animus toward the Witnesses or their beliefs, which can often be detrimental to the neutrality of the author.³¹

With the Jehovah's Witnesses my knowledge and experience from years of being an insider allows for a fuller understanding of the religion, as I am capable of comprehending concepts and events in ways that a Witness would. At the same time, my training as a scholar and natural inclination towards outsidership provides me with a necessary level of detachment in order to be objective. This duality can only reasonably be used when researching and writing about the Witnesses. Were I to study any other religious community I would be firmly an outsider, as I have no knowledge of any other faith beyond an academic one. But, when studying the Witnesses, being an emetic scholar of the community allows me to better observe and analyze their history and actions to understand how they have managed to grow in a world that can be quite hostile towards them.

Finally, the terminology used in this thesis must be defined to understand what is meant by growth and hostility. Growth in the context of my research refers heavily to the strong numerical increase of the Witnesses throughout their existence. However, it also refers to the success the Witnesses have had around the world in expanding their ability to

³¹ George D. Chryssides, "Moving out: Disengagement and ex-membership in new religious movements", in George D. Chryssides and Stephen E. Gregg, *The Insider/Outsider Debate...* 371

worship and preach in the manner they see fit, as can be seen in their legal victories in the United States, South Korea, and the United Nations Court of Human rights. It also refers to the strengthening of their internal mechanisms, which allows them to grow even further, and evidence in support of this will be presented throughout the thesis. Hostility is defined as active attempts by an agent to curtail the religious beliefs, practices, or in many cases the actual physical freedom of the Witnesses to worship. Specific examples that will be provided include their treatment at the hands of mobs in Georgia, the Russian government of modern times, and the history of internal dissent within the organization.

Contents

This research seeks to understand how the Witnesses have managed to grow despite decades of hostile actions taken by individuals and even entire nations to subdue or eliminate them as a religion. Other writings on the Witnesses tend to focus on the details of who, what, where, why and when these events have occurred, and reference to them will be made throughout this work. However, this research is not meant to be a history of those events, but a study of how the Witnesses have created internal mechanisms to overcome the issues that they have faced. The focus here is not on the events, it is on the Witnesses and how they were constructed and endowed by their leadership to be able to handle friction with the world. Often this is in response to those events, but the events are not the subject, they are the lens through which the Witnesses can be understood.

Chapter One will examine three key mechanisms that have allowed the Witnesses to survive and grow against these differing types of troubles. First is the newest mechanism, the Governing Body. Created by Nathan Knorr the Body took operational control of the organization in 1976, and while it has been the subject of much criticism

there can be no question of the impact it has had on the movement. A far more steady presence than the individual leaders that dominated the movement before them, the Body allow for a continuity in leadership and a bulwark against sudden changes that may throw the organization into turmoil. At the same time the Body is slow to act in many instances, letting years pass before a doctrine that is no longer tenable is changed.

The second mechanism discussed will be the concept of continuing revelation, or the belief that God continues to reveal his plans as time passes on, which the Witnesses refer to as new light. This concept will be discussed by examining how, despite two predictions that went very wrong involving the years 1925 and 1975, the Witnesses were able to move forward. It will also discuss the interpretation of a key concept known as the “generation” doctrine that, thanks to the use of new light, has been updated several times to allow possible problems to be avoided. The chapter will end with a look at how the Witnesses’ third and most well-known key mechanism, that of the door-to-door preaching work, has allowed them both to solidify their personal connection with their beliefs and gather new adherents. While this has caused them much hardship, it is also the most important mechanism in their theological arsenal.

Chapter Two is a history of the Jehovah’s Witnesses from their founding until the present day. It will focus on how each succeeding leadership change focused and fine-tuned the organization and its mechanisms for dealing with adversity. It splits the history of the Witness leadership into four parts. The first looks at the founder, Charles Taze Russell, and shows how he created the base for a religious movement that would outlive him by over a century, despite his clear intention of not doing so. The second president, Joseph Rutherford, took this loosely organized religious movement and, through many hardships and the use of an iron will, formed it into a cohesive organization, in many respects creating the Witnesses. Rutherford’s successor, Nathan Knorr, was able to turn

this newly created cohesiveness into focus for the worldwide preaching work, leading to a period of incredible expansion and solidifying many of the mechanisms. The final section will focus on the current leadership, the Governing Body, which was created by Knorr and is now the power behind the religion.

It is also necessary to understand exactly what types of events have led to the Witnesses devising and using the mechanisms that they have. These mechanisms did not spring from a void but were the result of events pressing down on the Witnesses and the need for them to press back. Just as it is not possible to fully understand the events that the Witnesses have engaged in around the world without an understanding of the mechanisms, it is not possible to merely discuss the mechanisms without understanding how they were created. However, discussing every type of issue would be the work of several books, therefore Chapter Three will be split into three larger themes to more concisely highlight the troubles the Witnesses have faced. First will be the interaction between the Witnesses and secular nations and governments, which have often been contentious and at times outright hostile, through the Witnesses' blood doctrine, conscientious objector status, and publication of printed material. The second section will look at how local communities and the press have managed a rocky relationship with the Witnesses, and how local violence against Witnesses has been an unfortunate result. The chapter will end with the internal struggles that the Witnesses have faced, as internal dissent has plagued them from the very beginning of their existence. Their schism with the Dawn Bible Students will be highlighted here, as will the Witnesses' issues regarding modern internal dissent.

Throughout the entire work, comparison will be made when appropriate to the Dawn Bible Students. The Dawn are what Charles Russell envisioned his movement to be, a small, tightly knit yet informal collection of believers in his message that focus on personal

development over adherent numbers. The Dawn have had no impact on any religious or secular issues, and this is precisely what makes them a perfect contrast to the Witnesses. If they are mentioned at all in works on the Witnesses they are typically relegated to a few sentences and have generated no academic interest.³² By using them to compare to the Witnesses this work will highlight why this needs to be rectified and how useful the Dawn can be in studying the Witnesses and the work of Charles Russell in particular.

As of this writing, the Witnesses boast of adherents in 240 lands around the world.³³ Over twenty million people attended their yearly Memorial Service in 2018, celebrating the Last Supper of Christ. They produce millions of copies of their magazines on a yearly basis, in over three hundred languages. Witnesses have been beaten, arrested, and outlawed in many nations both in times of war and peace, and continue to be so today. They have helped to define religious freedom in the United States and around the world. And yet they were supposed to do none of these things, but rather they were to be a small fellowship used to study the Bible until the imminent return of Christ. The mechanisms they created allowed them to grow and accomplish those feats while they continue to await the return of their Lord.

³² See for example a brief mention in Penton, *Apocalypse*, 94. Chryssides, *Continuity*, doesn't mention "Dawn Bible Students" at all, and neither does Knox, *Secular World*.

³³ "How Many of Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?" jw.org <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-many-jw-members/> accessed 5 December 2017. Jehovah's Witnesses do not always limit the count of "lands" in which they preach to recognized international designations. For example, Micronesia contains four states- Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap- which the Witnesses regard as four distinct "lands" in their official count, rather than as one nation. Thus their "land" count is significantly higher than the 195 internationally recognized list of nations as counted by the United Nations.

Chapter One: Mechanisms to Grow

Given the often-contentious history of the movement that Charles Russell founded in the late 1870s and the power struggles that occurred after his death, it can be surprising to think that it has grown from a handful of people gathering in a young haberdasher's house in Pennsylvania into a religion that has members in nearly 120,000 congregations across 240 lands.¹ Their primary publication, *The Watchtower*, has gone from a local publication produced in English to the most widely circulated magazine in the world with twenty-five million copies distributed each month in 190 languages.² In some areas the number of Witness adherents are equivalent to the mainstream religious denominations, such as the United Reform Church in England.³ And yet despite this massive presence the Witnesses, except when in conflict, are overlooked by academia, especially when it comes to how they have used the internal mechanisms that they have created to overcome these conflicts.

The Witnesses have had to contend not only with internal issues but external problems as will be discussed in Chapter Three. Local and state governments have often created laws and ordinances that specifically target the religion, sometimes by name, to stop the Witnesses from proselytizing. Local mobs have beaten Witness adherents and run them out of towns, while local police have arrested Witnesses for breaking laws that had not been used in years or for disturbing the peace. National governments have been no

¹ "How Many of Jehovah's Witnesses Are There Worldwide?"; see Chapter One, page 24, footnote 25, jw.org <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-many-jw-members/> accessed 5 December 2017; their founding will also be discussed in Chapter Two beginning page 108.

² "The Watchtower—No Other Magazine Comes Close" jw.org <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/publishing/watchtower-awake-magazine/> accessed 5 December 2017; see also Joe Pompeo "Did You Know The Most Widely Circulated Magazine In The World Is The Monthly Publication Of Jehovah's Witnesses?" *Business Insider* September 30 2010 <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-most-widely-read-magazine-in-the-world-is-the-monthly-pub-of-jehovahs-witnesses-2010-9?IR=T> accessed 15 August 2016.

³ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 7.

better, even in ostensibly democratic countries, where Witness persecution has either been an open secret allowed to happen or even officially sanctioned by the government. Thousands of Witnesses have been imprisoned for refusing military service, which often leads them to be identified as unpatriotic traitors despite their conscientious objector status.

Despite these issues the Witnesses have managed to thrive in nearly every situation that they have encountered. This is not to say there have not been setbacks for the organization, or that they have not suffered big losses in different areas. But overall the Witnesses continue to move forward at a remarkably steady pace, growing their religion through new converts, forcing governments to acknowledge their rights and beliefs, and even settling religious freedom questions that have affected not only them but entire nations. This chapter will look at three key internal mechanisms the Witnesses have created and refined over their existence that allows them to sustain themselves in challenging times and continue to grow in a world that can be decidedly hostile to them. Rather than looking at the events through the lens of the Witnesses, as most academic work on them does, the events will be used as the lens to focus on the Witnesses and show how they developed these three key mechanisms. Throughout I will also examine how the Dawn Bible Students have handled similar issues, and yet have not been able to grow in the same way. The Dawn allow for a comparison of how, without the evolution and creation of the mechanisms developed after Charles Taze Russell's death, the Witnesses could have looked today.

The first way that Witnesses have been able to maintain their forward momentum is the organization's Governing Body. The Body was founded in the early 1970s and was in full control of the movement, both religiously and organizationally, by 1976.⁴ They have

⁴ This will be further highlighted in Chapter Two, see page 157.

made critical choices and decisions that have affected the Witnesses in large and small ways and have at times had a negative effect on Witness growth. As will be shown however, the Governing Body is one of the primary reasons for the Witnesses' incredible increase in adherents in the past forty years. By looking at how the Dawn has fared over the same period, without the structure, organization and mechanisms that the Witnesses have, the guidance of the Body is even more apparent, as the Dawn have faded into obscurity despite having the same origins of belief as the Witnesses.

The Witnesses believe in a version of continuing revelation, or the idea that God continues to give his faithful followers more information by way of greater understanding of Biblical predictions, which they commonly refer to as "new light." new light often results in a change in Witness belief, sometimes to major ideas and doctrines that have been believed and taught for decades. Because of new light, Witnesses are often charged by critics and former members with making false predictions regarding certain eschatological dates, and then changing those predictions when they do not come to pass. This charge is a valid one, and part of this chapter will examine two such dates, 1925 and 1975, that have caused Witnesses major problems in the court of public opinion. A discussion of the doctrine of "this generation" will follow, as well as an examination of the criticism that has been directed towards the religion by its detractors regarding the use of "new light." And yet, despite these failed predictions, Witnesses have been able to overcome the temporary setbacks created by them and emerge stronger than before. The Dawn will be used as a comparison throughout as they still follow Russell's teachings, with some slight changes, but no outright doctrinal commands. While new light has led to much criticism, it has also been a key reason as to why the Witnesses have managed to consistently grow.

The final mechanism employed by the Witnesses' to thrive that will be examined is easily the single most known aspect of Witness faith, and that is their door-to-door and

public proselytizing. Witnesses see their door-to-door ministry as the key to salvation, and it is through this work that their individual faith is strengthened, while simultaneously allowing them to recruit new converts to their religion. Recently, Witnesses have increased the time spent preaching in public spaces, such as in parks and outside train stations, typically standing with a display or table full of Witness literature. In comparison, the Dawn hold to the original Russell belief that it is personal Bible study and worship that leads to salvation, and that while one should be willing to teach others, it is of a secondary importance when compared to personal growth with God. However, this has led to the Dawn experiencing no growth, and in fact suffering a severe decline in membership over the past several decades. While the door-to-door preaching of the Witnesses has often led them into tense and sometimes violent confrontations, they have taken to heart Rutherford's injunction to advertise the kingdom of God and could never have achieved their current levels of membership without it.

Governing Body

Created by Nathan Knorr in the early 1970s, by 1976 the Governing Body was in control of the Witness organization spiritually and organizationally after it had successfully convinced President Knorr to devolve his autocratic powers to the Body, ending the nearly century long tradition of single-person rule that had begun with Charles Russell. With the advent of the internet and the creation of Jehovah's Witnesses Broadcasting, a specialized secondary site developed to offer video programming rather than the text based primary website of jw.org, the Body members are far more visible today than they were in years past, recording individual talks and producing a monthly news-like program that is available to watch on their website, along with other videos regarding matters concerning

the religion.⁵ The idea of a theocratic hierarchy, with the Body at the top, has been a source of major contention among former and even current Witnesses. However, it has also been a primary force behind the Witnesses' growth and their ability to survive, and it can be highlighted even more by comparison with the Dawn.

While the Body does not officially claim any direct contact with God, and they do not ever explicitly say that they are modern-day prophets or infallible, critics argue that with the power they have given themselves they are *de facto* claiming the same position and power as the Pope within the Roman Catholic Church.⁶ Witnesses have used the term "theocratic hierarchy" to define their leadership structure since the days of Rutherford, but what is a theocratic hierarchy and how does it work within the modern Witness religion? It is essentially a theocracy, a form of government run by God's chosen, ostensibly to further His plans, and from whom all power derives. The official hierarchy in the Witness religion is straightforward with God at the top, followed by his chosen son Jesus Christ, who in turn uses the Body to direct the work on Earth.⁷ From there it trickles down throughout the organization, with the rank-and-file Witnesses at the bottom.

The Governing Body itself is self-perpetuating, as only members of the Body may select another to join them when there is a vacancy or a perceived need for another member. To be on the Governing Body a man must be of the anointed, although with a reported anointed of 18,013 and only eight members on the Body the group is even more highly specialized.⁸ While technically any member of the anointed can join the Body, in practice it is far more difficult. Simply being of the anointed is not enough; devotion to the

⁵ See Jehovah's Witness Broadcasting <https://tv.jw.org/#en/home>.

⁶ See Penton, *Apocalypse*, 239, 292-294.

⁷ Donald R. Jacobs "Unofficial Jehovah's Witness Apologetics: The Rise and Fall of a Precarious Community" in the conference proceedings *The Jehovah's Witnesses in Scholarly Perspective: What is New in the Scientific Study of the Movement?*, Acta Comparanda: Subsidia III (Antwerp: Faculty for Comparative Study of Religion and Humanism, 2016) 1; see also "'What is Governing Body....'".

⁸ "2016 Grand Totals" *2017 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Walkill, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract of New York, Inc, 2016), 177.

religion and the organization is paramount. The mini-biography given for one of the newest members to join the Body, Mark Sanderson in 2012, is a virtual roadmap of how a career within the organization should go to be noticed by the Body.

Mark Sanderson was born in San Diego, raised a Witness, and after moving to Canada began serving as a pioneer, or full-time evangelizer, in late 1983.⁹ In 1991, after years of being a pioneer and not long after graduating from the Witnesses Ministerial Training School, he was appointed to serve as a special-pioneer in Newfoundland.¹⁰ The differences in these assignments is quite large, and helps to prove devotion to the organization, as a pioneer will preach for a minimum of seventy hours a month while typically working a part-time job to support themselves, whereas a special pioneer dedicates one hundred and thirty hours a month, receiving a small stipend from the organization.¹¹ Sanderson then served as a substitute circuit overseer before becoming a member of the Canadian Bethel in 1997.¹² According to the Witnesses, “Bethel, a Hebrew name, means ‘House of God.’ It is a fitting designation for the complexes that Jehovah’s Witnesses have established around the world from which the preaching work is directed and supported.”¹³ Being accepted for Bethel service is a high honor within the Witness movement, and being a former “Bethelite” carries with it prestige in the community.¹⁴ By 2010, after going through more specialized Witness training, Sanderson became a member of the Service Committee, one of the six committees the Body uses to run the organization,

⁹ “A New Member of the Governing Body”, *The Watchtower* (July, 2013) <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/w20130715/new-member-governing-body/> Accessed 12 February 2017; for more on the Training School see page 144.

¹⁰ “A New Member....Body”.

¹¹ “What Is a Pioneer?” Lesson 13 *Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will Today?* (New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 2014) Downloaded from JW.org <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/jehovahs-will/>.

¹² “A New Member....Body”.

¹³ “What Is Bethel?” Lesson 21 *Who Are Doing Jehovah’s Will Today?* (New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 2014) Downloaded from JW.org <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/jehovahs-will/>.

¹⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 307.

before being elected to the Body in 2012.¹⁵ While within the religion everyone would know he is of the anointed, no mention is made of this fact within the biography. The entire article, while admittedly short, focuses on his work for the organization in differing positions. Other than his baptismal date, no mention is made of the religion or God.

This might strike those unfamiliar with the Witnesses as strange. When other religious leaders are chosen or appointed, where they stand within the religion's beliefs is often a major focal point.¹⁶ Because only the Body can choose its new members, they will elect those who conform to current beliefs in virtually every way. Former Body member Raymond Franz provides particularly keen insight into this, noting: "it is the concept that controls the men, the concept that the Watch Tower organization was divinely chosen by Christ Jesus...."¹⁷ While it is not entirely inconceivable that some future Body members may influence the religion in a more progressive way, it is highly unlikely. However, this also lends itself to stability and consistency for the Witnesses, who need not worry about a new leader, such as when Rutherford took over, changing seemingly at will doctrines and beliefs that have held steady for years or even decades.

Until the year 2000 the Body had both spiritual and legal power over the Witnesses, as its members sat on the Board of Directors for the Witnesses' legal organizations as presidents, vice-presidents and other officers. In that year however the Governing Body decided that its members would no longer hold these positions in their numerous legal organizations, not even in the overall headquarters of the Pennsylvania

¹⁵ "A New Member....Body".

¹⁶ For example, when the Roman Catholic Church elected then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to become the Pope, Bergoglio's doctrinal conservatism, his stances on abortion, gay marriage, and traditional values was widely reported to be a deciding factor for his election; see as one example Rachel Donadio "Cardinals Pick Bergoglio, Who Will Be Pope Francis" *New York Times* 13 March 2013, <http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/2013/03/14/world/europe/cardinals-elect-new-pope.html> accessed 19 December 2018.

¹⁷ Franz, *Crisis*, 384.

organization.¹⁸ This did not however weaken the Body's power because "[n]o matter where they are located or who serve as directors or officers, these entities are theocratically guided and used by the Governing Body. Hence, such entities have assigned tasks to perform in furthering Kingdom interests."¹⁹ The Body handpicks who shall become the new president or who fills other offices through a provision of the organization's charters. In 1944, voting rights in the organizations were limited to no more than 500 members who were Jehovah's Witnesses and who were deemed to "show the spirit of the Lord."²⁰ As these 500 voting members show the "spirit of the Lord" as defined by the Body, they will duly elect anyone the Body chooses or approves to the Directors positions of the organization.

While the legal responsibility and overseeing of the organizations have officially been placed in the hands of others, the religious responsibilities are still under the complete control of the Body. The Body announces any changes in the pages of *The Watchtower* and at conventions, and the changes are often given with little commentary about what the past teaching was. When the "generation" teaching was changed to its current understanding as discussed later in the chapter, it was given as a completed picture, not yet another reworking of a nearly one hundred-year-old teaching.²¹ The Body claims that it is "being used by God to do his will.... [and] is responsive to the direction of God's spirit."²² This phrasing is very important, as the Body has been heavily criticised for acting as if they are modern day prophets and stating that they are "responsive to God's spirit", rather than they are directly linked to God, is a key part of their defense.

¹⁸ "How the Governing Body differs from a Legal Corporation", *The Watchtower* (15 January 2001) 28-31, <http://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2001051#h=13> Accessed 12 February 2017.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See Chapter One, page 60.

²² "How Does the Governing Body Function Today?" Lesson 20 *Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?* (New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 2014), Downloaded from JW.org <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/jehovahs-will/>.

In comparison, the individual Bible Student groups, which include the Dawn, still take a more early-Russellite approach to their worship. Russell believed in each congregation electing their own leaders and the meetings were to be a place that welcomed discussion and debate on matters of faith. In Bible Student groups this is still how it is done, as “each individual Christian is to decide on a change of idea, while he does not have a right to force his opinion on others.” The onus is on each individual person to square their beliefs with their own consciences and what the group studies, and if they find they cannot there is no repercussion from the group. The Dawn do not push the idea that you must be a member of their organization to be saved, in keeping with Russell’s teachings. There is not a central organization that has complete control of either doctrine or administrative matters. A total of around one hundred elders, taken from the worldwide ecclesias who are members of the Dawn, are elected annually to oversee the work of the movement. From this group of elected elders, twelve are selected to oversee the work of the Dawn’s magazine.²³

There are both positive and negative effects of having this type of belief system and organization. On the positive side the Dawn do not seem to have the internal struggles that many ex-Jehovah’s Witnesses have when they have left the religion or are thinking about doing so. There are no ex-Bible Student groups on social media platforms like Facebook, whereas there are dozens for former Jehovah’s Witnesses.²⁴ The Dawn belief that it is not necessary to join them to be saved also leads to less pressure on potential adherents, indeed “[those] who are satisfied where they are [*i.e. people who are happy with their religion*], are not urged to leave those fellowships. If anyone is uncomfortable

²³ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

²⁴ See for example: Ex Jehovahs Witnesses <https://www.facebook.com/groups/17019945116/>; No Nonsense ex Jehovah's Witnesses <https://www.facebook.com/groups/670432286393014/>; and Empowered ex- Jehovah's Witnesses (Empowered Minds) <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1412960118760984/>.

where he is, he may inquire for individual Bible Students or ecclesias in his area for his own evaluation... so one is free to begin attending or free to cease attending.”²⁵ There is no policy of disfellowshipping or shunning as there is within the Witness religion, which can lead to families breaking up and having no meaningful connection with each other. Joining and leaving do not affect relationships or friendships, something the Witnesses cannot claim, and while the numbers may be far lower, so is the pressure.

Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone have examined ten propositions that allow for the rapid growth of a movement, focusing specifically on how the Witnesses fair in each proposition.²⁶ Stark and Iannaccone’s fourth proposition highlights the difference between the two religions: “Religious movements will succeed to the extent they have legitimate leaders with adequate authority to be effective.”²⁷ The Governing Body provides this for the Witnesses. The Dawn’s adherence to Russell’s basic teachings, especially after the death of W. Norman Woodworth, means the Dawn had no leadership that pushed them into maintaining relevancy or a desire to perpetuate their beliefs. Without a centralized apparatus to conduct a concerted effort, the Bible Student groups do not attract many converts, and as a consequence their membership has remained low, with only “a very few thousand in the U.S. and Canada, and perhaps a comparable number overseas.”²⁸ And while criticism of them may not exist in any noticeable measure, this is primarily due to their complete lack of influence in world or religious affairs, and thus society at large remains largely unaware of the Dawn and their teachings.

²⁵ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016 [emphasis mine].

²⁶ R. Stark and L. R. Iannaccone, “Why the Jehovah’s witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12, no. 2 (1997), 133-157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537909708580796> accessed 29 June 2018.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 146.

²⁸ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

Criticism

In order to justify its existence and control over the organization, the Body relies on four Bible passages, Acts 15:2, 25 and 16:4-5, as examples of a body of elders and apostles making decisions on behalf of and for the entire congregation.²⁹ The Body bases its power on its interpretations of Scripture, and since none in the organization question the Body's decisions, the matter is rarely, if ever, argued within the religion. Critics of the Body have however made several arguments, including citing other Biblical passages, that they believe show the Body to be in error. One argument revolves around the passages that the Body uses to justify its existence. According to this argument, Acts 15:2 does not in fact show that a small number of "apostles and elders" made decisions for the group. Critics argue that Acts in fact shows that many people, including those who were not apostles, gathered to decide on the issue at hand, not merely a select few.³⁰ As the Body sees itself as the discreet and faithful slave whom God has appointed this is a serious challenge to their power, as it undermines the lynchpin that only they should decide what happens, not the entire religion's adherents. Critics also use the history of the apostle Paul to argue that there was not a governing body in the first century. In Galatians 1: 17-19 and 2: 1-3, Paul states he never met with any of the other apostles except for Jesus' brother

²⁹ Acts 15:2, 25: "But after quite a bit of dissension and disputing by Paul and Barnabas with them, it was arranged for Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem regarding the issue....we have come to a unanimous decision to choose men to send to you together with our beloved Barnabas and Paul." 16:4-5: "As they travelled on through the cities, they would deliver to them for observance the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and the elders who were in Jerusalem/Then, indeed, the congregations continued to be made firm in the faith and to increase in number day by day"; "How Does the Governing Body Function Today?"

³⁰ "Governing Body" JWfacts.com <http://www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/governing-body.php> accessed 10 March 2017; Edmond C. Gruss, *The Four Presidents of the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses)* (United States; Xulon Press, 2003), 41.

James, nor did he travel to Jerusalem at all for fourteen years but went about his own way preaching.³¹

Even the term governing body comes under fire from critics as being unscriptural. Nowhere in these passages is “governing body” used, and indeed the term itself appears nowhere in the Witnesses’ own translation of the Bible, the *New World Translation*. However, as noted by Chryssides, the 2013 version of the *New World Translation* does include “explanatory material... [that shows] the Society clearly wishes to ensure that having a Governing Body was a feature of the early Church.”³² The 2013 printed version of the Witness translation of the Bible, known as the *New World Translation (NWT)*, connects the idea of a governing body with Acts 15 in a subtle but direct way.³³ While the text itself does not include the term, the “Outline of Contents” section that appears at the beginning of every book in the *NWT* and highlights key points of what can be found in every chapter, describes Acts 15: 22-29 as being a “letter from the governing body”.³⁴ The *Study Edition* of the *NWT*, which is available online, has more in-depth notes. For Acts 15: 2, the note provided explains that

Here the Greek term pre-sby'te-ros refers to those who held a position of responsibility in the early Christian congregation. The elders of the Jerusalem congregation are mentioned together with the apostles as the ones to whom Paul, Barnabas, and some other brothers from Syrian Antioch went in order to get the matter of circumcision settled. So just as some elders served in fleshly Israel on a national level, these elders together with the apostles formed a governing body for all the Christian congregations in the first century C.E. This indicates that the original group serving as a governing body, the 12 apostles, had now been enlarged..³⁵

³¹ “Governing Body”, JWfacts.com.

³² Chryssides, *Continuity*, 169.

³³ All Biblical references throughout will be taken from the *NWT* unless otherwise noted, except when quoted in another source.

³⁴ “Outline of Contents” *NWT*, 2013 edition, 1459.

³⁵ Acts 15: 2, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (Study Edition)* (Wallkill, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; 2019) available online at <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/books/> accessed 24 August, 2019.

Not only is the governing body associated with leaders of the early church but is now explicitly identified as a continuation of the apostle's positions. This note is referred to for Acts 15:22, and the note for Acts 15:23 again mentions the first-century governing body. Links to other Biblical verses that reinforce this idea, such as Matthew 16:21, strengthen the apparent Biblical legitimacy of the Governing Body. While this does not specifically say that the modern Governing Body is divinely inspired the clear succession from the apostles, who were, appears to place them on a level that is more than simply a "small group of mature Christians who provide direction for Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide."³⁶

The most effective Biblical argument against the idea of a Governing Body however comes from a member of the Governing Body itself, and indeed the organization's own "oracle" and vice-president, Fred Franz. As reported by Raymond Franz in *Crisis of Conscience*, when the Governing Body was attempting to seize complete control of all aspects of the religion in 1975, Fred Franz gave an impassioned talk at that year's graduation of the Bible School of Gilead that laid out the Biblical case against the idea of a Governing Body.³⁷ Using Acts 14, Fred Franz argued that God had called Paul and Barnabas to their missionary activities not through Jerusalem but through Antioch, and that in fact the reason why Paul and Barnabas had travelled to Jerusalem was not on a summons by a ruling body but because Jerusalem had caused an issue within the Antioch congregation. Franz also pointed out that Christ did not act in concert with any group of people, not even the apostles, but rather as the sole head of the early church whose power was complete. Fred Franz ended his talk by referencing Charles Russell, and how Russell had founded the Society and the *Watchtower* magazine as an individual under the guidance of Christ, not as a member of a ruling body.³⁸ Raymond Franz notes that Fred Franz's "points were

³⁶ "What is the Governing Body..." JW.ORG

³⁷ The Society's missionary training school, see Chapter Two, 144.

³⁸ Franz, *Crisis*, 92-97; 94; 97.

completely valid. They were also completely contrary to the view presented in the Society's publications...[for] any individual Witness to present such an argument today would be counted as heretical, rebellious speech...[but] all that he said in this area was true, perfectly true."³⁹ While Fred Franz cannot be considered a critic of the Witnesses in any real sense, his criticism of the idea of a Governing Body is a powerful one that would seemingly hold a lot of weight given his prominence within the organization.⁴⁰

As it is however Witnesses will never learn of this speech because, inexplicably, it does not appear to have been recounted much outside of Raymond Franz's book. The Society has never reprinted it, unsurprising given that it puts into question the very legitimacy of the Body by easily the most well-known member of the organization in the past fifty years. Given Fred Franz's honoured status as the "oracle" and former president of the Society, along with his having been most likely the last living member to have been with the organization since the days of Russell, the speech is one that the Body would like to erase from history. What is surprising however is that even recent academic works make no mention of Fred Franz's speech and arguments. Chrysides makes no mention of it at all, and Penton relegates it to one sentence and an endnote.⁴¹ Edmond C. Gruss, one of the most prominent critics of the Witnesses and a former Witness himself, mentions the speech in his *The Four Presidents of the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses)*, although only briefly and with no critical analysis, leaving the fact that Fred Franz gave the speech as evidence enough.⁴² Online it is rarely talked about, although recordings and transcripts of the speech can be found.⁴³ This lack of analysis or even emphasis among critics of the Governing Body is glaring given Fred Franz's reputation and power within the

³⁹ Franz, *Crisis*, 95.

⁴⁰ See Chapter Two, page 149.

⁴¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 296; endnote 12, 458

⁴² Gruss, *Four Presidents*, 41.

⁴³ "Was There a 1st Century Governing Body Jehovah's Witnesses" audio recording of Fred Franz speech, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yfvr2Zx1w1w>.

movement during his life, and the continued influence that many of his teachings and doctrinal decisions have on the Witnesses.

It is not merely the Body's existence that critics have commented on: the decisions made by the Body have also been scrutinized. One of the most common criticisms of the Governing Body, as was indeed the case when the presidents of the corporation were in charge, is that when the Body changes a doctrine or other concept it is to be believed immediately and without question. There is no debate within the organization, except perhaps on the Body itself, and questioning of new doctrines is not allowed by rank and file members.⁴⁴ Through the concept of new light, discussed fully in the next section, when the Body makes a doctrinal change they often do not indicate that it is a departure from a previous teaching in the pages of the *Watchtower*. The new teaching is now doctrine and to be accepted immediately and unconditionally. Members who do question official teachings can be subjected to disfellowshipping, even if the teaching is later changed or abandoned outright.

One final criticism of the Governing Body is that they are more interested in promoting unity and themselves rather than true Biblical teachings. According to Raymond Franz, Governing Body meetings were most often concerned with whether an offence was worthy of disfellowshipping, with little to no attempt to consult the Bible.⁴⁵ He offers three reasons for this: Body members were often busy with other works and so could not do more than a cursory inspection of the issue at hand; the Body members were not Biblical scholars and not particularly well-versed in the Bible; and the Bible was sometimes silent or not explicit on a particular issue.⁴⁶ On the second point in particular Franz makes an interesting observation, stating that he felt as if the Body was not interested in doing

⁴⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 238.

⁴⁵ Franz, *Crisis*, 111.

⁴⁶ Franz, *Crisis*, 112-113.

research because the policies and teachings that had come before were sufficient to guide them in most matters.⁴⁷ Penton concurs with this thought, saying, “it can hardly be said that the Jehovah’s Witnesses have anything that can be described as a systematic method of...biblical interpretation. If they have anything it is a tradition ...that allows them to be arbitrary in using the Scriptures to explain what is wanted in terms of Witness doctrine or the notions of the dominant figures on the Governing Body.”⁴⁸ As long as their decision does not weaken their own power and allows for the organization to appear to be in agreement and doing God’s will, the Body will employ very little Biblical explanation.

Critics also point to a trial held in Scotland in 1954, called the Walsh Trial, as proof of the organization’s history of promoting unity over Biblical fact. This trial concerned whether Douglas Walsh, a Jehovah’s Witness, met the criteria of an ordained minister and was thus exempt from military service. The prosecution questioned several high-ranking members of the organization, including Vice-President Fred Franz and head legal counsel Hayden Covington. It is the questioning of Covington that critics use to show that the organization is more concerned with pushing unity rather than correct Biblical interpretation:

Prosecutor: Assume from me that it was promulgated as authoritative by the Society that Christ's Second Coming was in 1874?

Covington: Taking that assumption as a fact, it is a hypoethical (*sic*) statement.

Prosecutor: That was the publication of false prophecy?

Covington: That was the publication of false prophecy, it was a statement or an erroneous (*sic*) statement in fulfilment of a prophecy that was false or erroneous (*sic*).

⁴⁷ Franz, *Crisis*, 113.

⁴⁸ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 256.

Prosecutor: And that had to be believed by the whole of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Covington: Yes, because you understand we must have unity, we cannot have disunity with a lot of people going every way...

...

Prosecutor: Back to the point now. A false prophecy was promulgated?

Covington: I agree [to] that.

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

Covington: That is correct.

Prosecutor: If [a] member of Jehovah's Witnesses took the view himself that that prophesy was wrong and said so he would be disfellowshipped?

Covington: Yes...Our purpose is to have unity.

Prosecutor: Unity at all costs?

Covington: Unity at all costs...⁴⁹

It is enlightening to compare the above statements, just as true today as they were then, with the response I received in an interview with James Parkinson, a member of the Dawn Bible Students. When asked who decides on new doctrinal changes or ideas amongst the Dawn, the reply was succinct: "Each individual Christian is to decide on a change of idea, while he does not have a right to force his opinion on others. An ecclesia has a right to vote on what that ecclesia publishes."⁵⁰ The Dawn stresses a personal relationship with God, and adherents within the Dawn, indeed even within individual ecclesias, are free to

⁴⁹ *Douglas Walsh v The Right Honorable James Latham Clyde*, Court of Session, Scotland; Pursuer's Proof, 23rd November 1954, 346-348 PDF Downloaded from Archive.org 20 April 2015, available online at https://ia802706.us.archive.org/24/items/WalshTrial/Walsh_Trial.pdf.

⁵⁰ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

differ on many beliefs and still be considered part of the group. The criticism of “unity at all costs” that follows the Witnesses does not have an existence within the Dawn.

With the advent of the internet, the Governing Body has received more public scrutiny from critics. As an example, the recent new light on the teaching of “this generation” has come under fire from numerous online critics of the Witnesses.⁵¹ Some go into detail about not just the most recent change but also the history of the teaching in general, pointing out that the new teaching was specifically ruled out in the past.⁵² Others, such as one from the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry (CARM), point out where they feel the Body has erred with its Biblical interpretation.⁵³ They almost all however have the same criticism of the Body, that they are more interested in promoting themselves and keeping together their followers rather than adhering strictly to the Bible. While this has been argued in the past, mostly through books by former adherents and the limited academic work done, the internet is far more accessible and easier to use. A Google search for Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses returned 220,000 results, with six of the nine on the first page of results being critical of the Governing Body.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See for example: “THIS GENERATION” - The September 2015 JW Broadcast” at AnointedJW.org <http://www.anointedjw.org/tk-this-generation>; Hemant Mehta “Here’s How Jehovah’s Witnesses Rework Their Own Theology When It Stops Making Sense” at Patheos.com <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/09/14/heres-how-jehovahs-witnesses-rework-their-own-theology-when-it-stops-making-sense/>; and “Generation” at jwsrefined.com <https://jwsrefined.com/2012/12/16/generation/>.

⁵² See “Faithful and Discreet Slave” at JWfacts.com <https://jwfacts.com/watchtower/faithful-discreet-slave.php> accessed 02 July 2017.

⁵³ Mike Felkner, “New light on the Watchtower’s faithful discreet slave” ed. Matt Slick at Carm.org <https://carm.org/new-light-on-faithful-discreet-slave-watchtower> accessed 02 July 2017.

⁵⁴ Google search conducted on 03 July 2017.

Going Forward

The impact that more frequent and available criticism of the Governing Body has on the Jehovah's Witness organization appears to be minimal at best. Since 2001, the Witnesses' membership has grown by nearly two and a half million, or almost two hundred thousand per year.⁵⁵ The numbers lead to the conclusion that while some individuals may have left the organization, most either still trust the Governing Body and the organization and believe in the work that they do, or they are afraid of being disfellowshipped from the life they have created. Either way, the Body has continued to succeed in promoting unity and itself. The primary way that the Body does this is to continue to stress that the organization is the only way for someone to know God and be saved.

The Body however has managed to simultaneously disengage from the legal aspects of the organization and yet emphasize its own power over the entire movement. They have placed themselves above the rank-and-file members, and yet without terms such as president and vice-president attached to their names they seem to be more like regular people, albeit of the anointed and now the "faithful and discreet slave" class. Past leaders of the movement, Knorr included but especially Russell and Joseph Rutherford, were always the visible sign of power. Everyone knew that when the final decisions were made regarding the Society, they were the ones to do it. The Body can promote itself as being a group of faithful Witnesses, making decisions under the direction of God's spirit. No one of them has any overriding power, and decisions made by a group, whether right or wrong, always have at least the veneer of being respectable and thought-out rather than reactionary.

⁵⁵ 2001 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses "Grand Totals"*, 31; 2017 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses "Grand Totals"*, 177.

The Body has even utilized the internet to its own purposes. Beyond the Witnesses' official website, the Body has created JW Broadcasting, where they create professional quality videos about numerous subjects. The flagship part of JW Broadcasting is the monthly hour-long video that is produced in a journalistic style. The productions generally begin with some point of doctrine or religious subject being discussed by a Body member. These are filmed on a television news looking set, muted but pleasant, and while the Body members have differing levels of appeal and some are clearly more comfortable in front of a camera than others, they all speak in soothing tones, are well dressed, and are modestly telegenic. The rest of the broadcasts are typically stories from around the world of Witnesses, and sometimes a brief look into the history of the movement, although a very selective history. They quote regularly from the Bible to justify their teachings on the doctrines. These broadcasts serve to increase the image of the Body as an august and wise group of spiritual leaders, and thus help instil more confidence in and respect for the members of the organization's leadership.

The July 2017 monthly program is a perfect example of how the Body continues to promote itself. Body member Anthony Morris III spends the first fifteen minutes discussing the topic of "Organized to Do God's Will." He opens with the words, "There are people who believe that there is no need for a religious organization. They feel they have their own personal relationship with God and that is enough." His tone leaves no doubt that this is the wrong view, and he uses the next several minutes explaining how the Bible says that God would in fact use an organization to run the earthly ministry. He highlights a Witness publication, *Organized To Do Jehovah's Will*, and recommends that not only should it be studied by newer members, but also by older members to remind themselves how Jehovah's organization is run, by Jehovah's theocratic arrangement. After explaining that God appointed Christ as head of the congregation of Christians on Earth, Morris then

explains, at the seven-minute mark, “And how does Jesus direct the organization here on Earth? Matthew 24: 45 says that Jesus has appointed a faithful and discreet slave to serve spiritual food at the proper time. Today, seven anointed men make up the faithful slave and collectively they are known as the Governing Body.” He continues to press the book, mentioning that the Index of the book will allow for a quick search on many topics. He ends the segment with a seemingly modest reminder that the Body are imperfect men and doing their best.⁵⁶

The segment is effective, its primary purpose being to highlight God’s organization as run by the Governing Body and to promote the *Organized* book. In looking at the Index of the book, as suggested by Morris, the term Governing Body does appear as a searchable term. It highlights three specific areas related to the Governing Body: “demonstrating trust in”; “identifying”; and “reasons to follow direction of.”⁵⁷ All three of these topics are meant to emphasize that the Governing Body is to be obeyed, and of the sixteen appearances of the term in the book, both capitalized and uncapitalized, thirteen of them highlight the Body and its power.⁵⁸ With the repeated emphasis on the book being studied by all members that Morris placed throughout the segment, the Body is promulgated and brought up not just through the broadcast itself, but in the weeks that will follow if Witnesses do as suggested and study the book.

With the power of the internet, critics will attract more notice from current Witnesses who have questions that the Body and the organization are not able to answer, and there will be members who leave the organization because of what they are so easily

⁵⁶ “JW Broadcasting-July 2017” accessed online at tv.jw.org, https://tv.jw.org/#en/mediaitems/StudioMonthly2017/pub-jwb_201707_1_VIDEO.

⁵⁷ *Organized To Do Jehovah’s Will?* (Walkill, New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 2015), accessed online at Jw.org <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/Organized-to-Do-Jehovahs-Will/>.

⁵⁸ Of the remaining three, one is a letter to the Witnesses from the Body; one is a review of Chapter Three of the publication; and one is the Index term.

able to find online. For many others the Body's broadcasts and increased presence will reconfirm the belief that so many have in them and the organization. They will develop a more personal connection with the Body, perhaps even developing a favorite Body member. The battle will continue, with both sides making some gains and losing some as well. The question of who will win the war however, at least for the foreseeable future, is pretty much decided.

There are far more critics than Body members, and every social website from Facebook to Reddit, not to mention the sites mentioned in this section such as jwfacts.com and watchtowerdocuments.org, contains sections and groups dedicated to everything anti-Witness. But therein lies the critics' primary problem in convincing current Witnesses to question the organization: there is no true concerted effort. The production values, if any, are low, and the writing and articles are more often filled with anger and hate than convincing arguments. The more convincing arguments by Penton and former members like Raymond Franz have been around for decades, and the Body has been able to convince its members that writings like those are apostate in nature and should not be read at all. In my conversations with Witnesses the Body appears to be rather successful in convincing them of this idea, as most have no idea who Raymond Franz is and among those few who do the immediate response is that Franz is an apostate and the Witness would never read a word he has to say. Other critics, such as Penton or Edmund C. Gruss, get similarly dismissed when they are recognized, which is far less often than Franz given his significance in the organization during the 1970s.

The Governing Body has spent over forty years solidifying its power, discussed in further detail in Chapter Two, and it is entrenched, continuing to focus its energies on increasing its influence. It has a publishing empire at its disposal and has mastered the art of creating fast and effective books, booklets and magazine articles that can usually stop a

perceived problem long before it becomes a major issue. They also have faith on their side, something the critics are rarely able to counter efficiently. Their most effective tool however is the success of their mission to increase the number of adherents and running an efficient organization. While Penton has argued, not entirely convincingly, that the organization is not as efficient as it looks, the organization continues to grow under the leadership of the Governing Body.⁵⁹ The number of adherents has increased by over six million in the forty years that the Body has wielded control, which is three times the number of adherents it had in total in 1975.⁶⁰ There is no evidence to suggest that, barring some near cataclysmic and unpredictable change in the Body or the Witnesses as a whole, this overall trend will not continue into the foreseeable future.

The Governing Body, despite the criticism it has received, is in many ways the lynchpin for the Witnesses. Yes, doctrine and faith in God is important, and there is no doubt that even were the Witnesses to fold some would continue to believe and to propagate the current teachings, much like the Dawn do with Russell. But without the organization, as run by the Governing Body, believers would be a shell of what they are, again much like the Dawn of today. In a world that has at times attempted to eliminate them as an organization, even in supposed safe havens for religion like the United States and in places like Russia that still actively do so, it is impressive that the Witnesses have continued to grow, not merely survive. The Body are one of the biggest reasons why and will continue to be so for some time to come.

⁵⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 339-341.

⁶⁰ *1975 Yearbook*, 30; *2017 Yearbook*, 177.

New Light

The concept of new light, or continuing revelation, has been arguably the most important non-eschatological doctrine in Witness history. The idea that God “give[s] forth Truth during the Gospel Age gradually” has been central to Witness evolution.⁶¹ The doctrine gives the leaders of the movement both incredible power and a built-in excuse for any failures in the past. Dates however are also a source of major criticism of the Witnesses, with many believing that the Witnesses continue to set a date for the end of the world and then backtrack when that date has inevitably passed. Witness eschatology has resulted in specific years being identified as of immense importance. Russell, highly influenced by the Advent style of predicting future events, made predictions himself and preached and fully believed in his own conclusions. This is a role that his successors have also, to varying degrees, taken for themselves, and this eschatology is what underpins the entire Witness belief system. A full discussion of every date that the Bible Students/Witnesses have ever written about is outside the scope of this research, and indeed would take several volumes to explore thoroughly. This section will present two key dates, 1925 and 1975, as well as the “generation” doctrine, and more specifically their importance to the Witness community both at the time and in the present, and how, after the failure of each one, they were able to handle the aftermath by using “new light.” These are of importance because, unlike some of the other dates that have passed by with little to no comment, these dates, along with the doctrine of the “generation”, are most often cited by critics as examples of Witness backtracking and still impact the religion and its public perception today.

⁶¹ Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures Volume I: The Plan of the Ages* (Allegheny, Pennsylvania: Tower Publishing Co, 1891), 3.

While the reality is that their predictions have been more complicated than simply the end of the world, criticism of Witness date-setting is not unfounded, and has led to serious ramifications both within and outside the movement. New light can, and often has, been used to completely rewrite Witness beliefs as the leaders of the movement have seen fit, some of them preached for decades as being the absolute truth.⁶² It also allows the average Witness to believe that their leaders have never claimed to be prophets, a claim that critics argue is dubious at best, while at the same time counter-intuitively believing that their leaders have special directions given to them by God. But rather than acknowledge the change in doctrine directly, it is often just published as if it had always been, with no real indication of what has changed. This has led to charges that the Witnesses forget their own history when it becomes inconvenient, or simply rewrite it as if what they are saying now is what they have always said. After describing the three concepts mentioned above, this section will then evaluate the critics' arguments and end with a discussion on what the future holds for the Witnesses.

In comparison, the members that associate with the Dawn have continued to regard Russell's interpretations and writings as basically correct. While they believe in the concept of new light, the Dawn have used the concept as a suggestion for change rather than for direct doctrinal changes that all must follow. They continue to view each ecclesia as its own distinct entity, and while differences of opinion do occur from ecclesia to ecclesia, they agree on most issues, with some light suggestions of modifications occasionally occurring but no outright doctrinal commands. On the one hand this allows for a greater continuity with their past, strengthening the feelings of correctness in their doctrines as they stand the test of time. On the other, it has meant looking to the outside world as a religion standing still, unable or unwilling to evolve with the ever-changing

⁶² See for example the changes Rutherford made, Chapter Two, page 121.

world. As a result, their numbers have remained limited, and their influence on the world has been negligible. The Dawn keep their beliefs and have barely survived. The Witnesses change their beliefs and have thrived, despite the criticism that this has brought.

1925: The Faithful Ones Return?

Throughout his tenure as leader of the movement Joseph Rutherford had no difficulty making bold proclamations as loudly as possible. Two of the boldest he ever made came in his book *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, published in 1920 and based on a talk that he had been giving at conventions around that time. The first claim came with the title of the book, that millions of people that were then living in 1920 would not die, and that specifically they would live through Armageddon and receive immortality on a paradise earth.⁶³ But it is the second proclamation that critics claim proves that Witnesses change or forget about their history: Rutherford stated that, "...since other Scriptures definitely fix the fact that there will be a resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other faithful ones of old, and that these will have the first favor, we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death."⁶⁴ Rutherford had predicted that 1925 would see the actual physical return of ancient "faithful ones" who had been dead for millennia.

The eschatological reasoning behind 1925 came with Rutherford's changing of the "Great Jubilee" from 1875 to 1925.⁶⁵ This was not an open-ended or subtle prediction, it was a flat-out statement that 1925 would see something that had not been seen since the days of Christ and the apostles: that of resurrection of the dead. It was to be proof beyond

⁶³ Rutherford, *Millions*, 91.

⁶⁴ Rutherford, *Millions*, 88.

⁶⁵ See Chapter Two, page 127.

any shadow of a doubt that Christ had returned, and that God was going to begin his restoration of the earth. Unsurprisingly, this helped lead to a substantial increase in spirituality and expectation among members of the movement, who preached this new message with renewed vigor after the troubles of the years since Charles Russell's death. From 1920 to 1925, memorial attendance rose from approximately twenty thousand to nearly ninety thousand.⁶⁶ The movement was achieving numerical heights it had never reached, and while that cannot be attributed solely to this specific proclamation, it was a major factor.

If only one book, Rutherford's *Millions*, had contained the prediction it would be unreasonable to assume that 1925 could really have been perceived as that important. But Rutherford pushed his prediction for 1925 hard. Between March 1920 and February 1925, *The Watchtower* referred to the prediction of 1925 no fewer than thirty-three times. In the movement's secondary magazine, *The Golden Age*, between July 1920 and December 1924, reference to the prediction was mentioned an additional thirty-eight times. W.E. Van Amburgh, a member of the board and a loyal Rutherford follower, authored a book published in 1924 titled *The Way to Paradise* that heavily reinforced 1925.⁶⁷ And as late as October 1925 Rutherford published a book that emphasised the prediction.⁶⁸ Even secular newspapers transmitted the message, such as the *Los Angeles Herald* of February 7, 1921, which reported, more than a bit tongue in cheek, that,

According to Judge Rutherford, 1925 is to be 'the year of restoration.' When it arrives doctors will go out of business, undertakers will have to find some other business, baldheaded men will regain their lost hair, teeth long missing will return to replace the false variety, and wrinkles will be ironed out of faces to which youth will return. 'If you are living on this

⁶⁶ Penton, *Apocalypse*, chart, 83.

⁶⁷ W.E. Van Amburgh, *Way to Paradise* (Brooklyn, New York: People's Pulpit Association, 1924) 224.

⁶⁸ Joseph Rutherford, *Comfort for Jews* (Brooklyn, New York: International Bible Students Association, 1925), 86-88.

earth five years from this date, and you ever die, it will be your own fault,' said Judge Rutherford.⁶⁹

For five years 1925 was pushed heavily, across a variety of publications, and it is likely that WBBR, founded in 1924, would have occasionally carried the message during Rutherford's broadcasts. Clearly the 1925 prediction was not one that Rutherford made in passing and then forgot about. At least, not until it had failed.

The movement's reaction to the failure of 1925 was swift, with *The Watchtower* quickly shifting any faulty reasoning from the Society to the members. The February 15, 1925 edition said, "[i]t seems to be a weakness of many Bible Students that if they locate a future date in the Bible, immediately they center as many prophecies upon that date as possible. Many can remember how 'absolutely sure' some were about 1914...did they have a Scriptural basis for all they expected to come to pass that year?." ⁷⁰ By July 1926 they were even more emphatic in response to a question about 1925: "[t]here is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that the Lord will reveal to his church just how soon the work is going to end....." ⁷¹ A.H. Macmillan made no mention of it in his *Faith On The March* published in 1957, and the *Divine Purpose* book published in 1959 reduced 1925 to less than half a page and primarily focused on how the members had gotten it wrong. ⁷² In their 1993 publication *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, the Society acknowledged the 1925 prediction, but drastically downplayed the importance that had been placed on it, and how hard it had been pushed by Rutherford and the organization. The Society indicated that it was the members of the religion who had expected too much and, importantly, that new light since then had shown that it was an incorrect

⁶⁹ *Los Angeles Herald* February 7 1921, A-6 accessed via California Digital Newspaper Collection (<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH19210207&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>) accessed 19 November 2016

⁷⁰ "The Year of Jubilee", *The Watchtower* (15 February 1925) 57.

⁷¹ "European Conventions", *The Watchtower* (1 July 1926) 196.

⁷² *Divine Purpose*, 107.

assumption.⁷³ And in their 2014 book *God's Kingdom Rules*, which purports to help Witnesses “appreciate [their] spiritual heritage as never before”, the Society made no mention at all of 1925.⁷⁴ Today none but the oldest of the Witnesses know of 1925, and even when they do they have been firmly convinced that it was an overreaction that has since been corrected by new light.

1975: The End is Near

Fifty years later, under the presidency of Nathan Knorr, the Society again was looking forward to the time of another bold prediction, this time concerning the possible end of the world. In 1966 the Society published a book titled *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*, a typical Witness book that gave Biblical reasonings behind Witness beliefs such as marriage and the proper power structure between men and women, ending with a hopeful outlook toward the future when God's rule returns. Were it not for the section titled “Six Thousand Years of Human Existence Closing” from pages twenty-six to thirty-five, it would be a forgettable book. But those ten pages, and the continuing focus over the next nine years on what was predicted there, led to a similar experience to 1925 and further charges that Witnesses predict the “end of the world” and then forget about it when it does not come to pass.

Witnesses rarely use the actual phrase “end of the world”, preferring most times to use the term “end of this system of things” or a variation thereof. It is a confusing term when not understood in a Witness context, as it both does and does not mean the end of the world. The Witnesses do not believe that the earth itself will be destroyed, because since most Witnesses do not claim to be of the anointed, and therefore do not have a

⁷³ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 632-633.

⁷⁴ *God's Kingdom Rules*, 3.

heavenly hope, they will instead live forever on a paradise earth. What is meant when Witnesses say the end of this system of things, or even the rare occasions where the actual words “end of the world” are used, is “...the time when God will get rid of wickedness on earth...[when] Satan and his demons will no longer mislead the nations...[and] those having the approval of Jehovah God and [Jesus Christ, will] have the prospect of surviving the end of Satan’s system of things and of living forever in the marvellous new world that is so close to hand!”⁷⁵ Therefore, to say the end of the world and have it mean the earth’s destruction would be factually inaccurate to a Witness. However, it does mean the complete destruction of this world’s political, economic, social and religious institutions and the beginning of Christ’s millennial reign. Understandably, this often equates to “end of the world” to non-Witnesses who do not understand the minutia of Witness thinking, and the distinction given to it by Witnesses is lost in translation.

Life Everlasting, published in 1966 as was Witness policy by that time with no author’s name but later revealed to be written by the Society’s “oracle” and vice-president Frederick Franz, provided a very specific date for the coming of Christ’s millennial reign.⁷⁶ Much like Rutherford’s 1925 prediction, Franz left very little doubt of what was to happen, and it is worth quoting him here in full to see how fervent his words were:

The time is fast drawing near for the reality that was foreshadowed by the Jubilee of liberty to be proclaimed throughout the earth to all mankind now oppressed by many enslaving things. In view of the earth-wide situation and the world's condition, it appears most urgent for the liberation like that of the Jubilee to come soon. Most certainly the near future would be the most appropriate time for it. God's own written Word indicates that it is the appointed time for it.... The Holy Bible, which gives us the authentic account of man's creation, gives us a timetable running all the way back to his creation....

Thus we can connect up the Bible's count of time with the world's count of time down to this date. By doing this it becomes evident that man is nearing the end of six thousand years of his existence and the beginning

⁷⁵ *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 2014), 94-95.

⁷⁶ Franz, *Crisis*, 238.

of the seventh period of a thousand years of his existence.... According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E. So six thousand years of man's existence on earth will soon be up, yes, within this generation....

How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years a sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout the earth to all its inhabitants!...Consequently there is now every reason why the human creation will yet be set free, not by men, but by Almighty God. The long awaited time for this is at hand!⁷⁷

Nowhere in *Life Everlasting* does it say that 1975 will definitively be the year that Christ returns. As noted, correctly, by Witnesses today, the Society nowhere claimed in its writings that it was beyond doubt that events in 1975 would occur exactly as described above. Critics however, as will be discussed in more detail below, argue that even though the words used were not definitive, the overall impression left by the Society's writings and talks left little real doubt that it was expected and "...many, if not most, accepted the new date uncritically."⁷⁸

The publication of this new date led to a similar increase in zeal for proselytizing that had been seen when the prediction of 1925 had been promulgated. Between 1968 and 1975 memorial attendance nearly doubled from approximately 2.4 million to nearly 5 million, and peak publishers, or those Witness members who were active in proselytizing on a day-to-day basis, went from 1.2 million to nearly 2.2 million.⁷⁹ The push for 1975 was just as hard as it had been fifty-years earlier for 1925, with one difference. Rather than focus on the year of 1975 itself, the *Watchtower* and other publications emphasized that six thousand years of existence were ending and that there was therefore only a very short time left before the seventh "day" of creation began and Christ returned. Phrases such as

⁷⁷ *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1966), 26-30.

⁷⁸ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 125.

⁷⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 126.

“few remaining years”, “a short time remains” and “soon to end” were repeatedly used in Society publications.⁸⁰ As quoted by Edmond C. Gruss, Frederick Franz stated as late as February 10, 1975 before a gathering of twenty thousand Witnesses that they should not believe that there is enough time left to “...realize my human aspirations, getting married and raising a family—kids; or, going to college for a few years and finding...[a] prominent, fine paying job. No! The time does not allow for that dear friends....”⁸¹ Clearly 1975 was expected to bring important things, things so important that the vice-president of the organization was telling people to not raise families, to not get an education, and to not find jobs because there was not going to be time.

When 1975 passed and nothing occurred, the Witness leadership quickly pivoted to its now standard operating procedure of placing the blame squarely where it belonged, not on themselves, but on the individual Witnesses. Frederick Franz very specifically told the Witnesses in 1976 that it was their fault that nothing had occurred because God was essentially punishing them for believing they could know His plans.⁸² The July 15, 1976 *Watchtower* vaguely acknowledged that something had gone wrong, but essentially echoed Franz’s sentiments, though not quite as harshly, saying:

But it is not advisable for us to set our sights on a certain date, neglecting everyday things we would ordinarily care for as Christians, such as things that we and our families really need... If anyone has been disappointed through not following this line of thought, 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.⁸³

⁸⁰ Edmond C. Gruss, *Jehovah’s Witnesses: Their Claims, Doctrinal Changes and Prophetic Speculation. What Does the Record Show?* (United States: Xulon Press, 2007), 290-293.

⁸¹ Frederick Franz, February 10 1975 speech as quoted by Gruss, *Jehovah’s Witnesses...Record Show?*, 296.

⁸² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 131.

⁸³ “A Solid Basis For Confidence”, *The Watchtower* (15 July 1976) 441.

According to Raymond Franz the Society's hierarchy was afraid to admit they had erred and hoped that the problem would simply disappear.⁸⁴ The resulting decline in membership numbers experienced during the next few years finally forced them to acknowledge some responsibility, and in the March 15, 1980 *Watchtower* a slight mea culpa was printed by the Society.⁸⁵ It was not until 1993 however, in *Proclaimers*, that the Society took on more responsibility for the prediction and admitted that some statements that had been published were "likely more definite than advisable" and that they were "sometimes stated as a possibility, sometimes more firmly", although they still put the majority of the fault on everyday members.⁸⁶

1975 was only forty-four years ago, as compared to the ninety-plus years since 1925, and yet the resultant feeling among Witnesses is largely the same. Penton writes that at the time, "many Witnesses, particularly those in responsible positions, seemed to suffer from some sort of collective amnesia which caused them to act as though the year 1975 had never held any particular importance to them at all."⁸⁷ In informal conversation with Witnesses today who were not around for the 1975 failure the most common reaction is a complete ignorance of the event and its aftermath. For those few newer members who do know of 1975 a vague sentiment prevails that even if something had been believed, it was most likely the Witnesses at the time overreaching and that regardless of what may have been said, new light has continued to shine, and Witnesses know more now of God's plan than they did then. Once again the concept of new light has been used effectively by the Governing Body to move the Witnesses forward rather than allow them to focus on past failures. This allows for a continuity and strength that binds the Witnesses together and spurs their growth.

⁸⁴ Franz, *Crisis*, 250.

⁸⁵ "Choosing the Best Way of Life", *The Watchtower* (15 March 1980) 17-18.

⁸⁶ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 104-105, 633.

⁸⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 132.

The “Generation” Continuously Evolving

The Witnesses have placed an emphasis on the year 1914 since the early days of Russell, and it is still emphasized today, albeit in a modified form. In many respects it is difficult to call the 1914 date a “failed” prediction, at least since the 1930s, as the events that are said to have occurred in 1914 by modern Witnesses are unprovable and unfalsifiable. This would seem to leave little room for debate, as critics can claim that the Witnesses are wrong and the Witnesses can claim to be right, resulting in a theological stalemate. The trouble that Witnesses can find themselves in regarding 1914 is a doctrine known as “this generation”, which states that people who were alive at a certain time would live to see the new system of things that God will create. This doctrine is based on events that are said to have already occurred, but the interpretation of this generation to a Witness of the 1930s, 1970s or even early 1990s, is different than the one that is placed today, even though the events that happened in 1914 are the same.

The events of 1914 as the Witnesses see them will be more deeply covered in Chapter Two, so it is sufficient for now simply to note that prior to 1914 Russell had taught that 1914 would be the end of the times of trouble and that Christ would have finally reached his full power after beginning his return in 1874.⁸⁸ When this did not happen, Russell changed his predictions slightly, but it was not until the early 1930s that Rutherford would remove 1874 as being the year of Christ’s return, and instead teach that Christ’s return occurred in 1914 which then began the last days of this system of things. Modern Witnesses do not believe that Christ had to wait a certain number of years, like Russell taught, but was immediately enthroned as king in October 1914.⁸⁹ These events, the return of Christ, his enthronement as king, and the beginning of the last days, as they are said to

⁸⁸ See Chapter Two, page 110.

⁸⁹ *What...Teach?*, 215-218.

have happened invisibly, are not the issue. As stated they can be neither proved nor falsified and thus are left up to the individual to believe or not.

What the generation doctrine means to the Witnesses has however changed several times since Rutherford's day, and indeed has changed a few times within the last twenty years. The doctrine, which is irrevocably tied to the events of 1914, has concerned a group of people described in Matthew 24:34 as "this generation": "Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things happen." The previous few verses describe different signs that will occur just before Christ's reign begins. In 1927 Rutherford, in response to a question from a reader, stated that the generation mentioned in Matt. 24:34 meant that some of the anointed who had seen the events of 1914 would not die before Armageddon.⁹⁰ While Rutherford appears to have not given a specific length of time that a generation encompassed, it was apparently viewed by the Society's leaders as being a period of between 30 and 40 years, meaning that they expected the end of this system by the mid-1950's.⁹¹

By the early 1950's this interpretation of the generation was no longer seeming plausible to the leaders of the movement, and between 1951 and 1952 several changes were made regarding the meaning behind the generation teaching. In the June 1, 1951 *Watchtower* the Society reverted to Russell's teachings that the generation included anyone, not just the anointed.⁹² It also again stated that the generation countdown began in 1914.⁹³ The next month they were even more emphatic, stating that:

The length of time is indicated by [Christ] when he said, "Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur." ... *The actual meaning of these words is, beyond question, that which takes a "generation" in the ordinary sense ... or for those who are living at the given period. ... This therefore means that from 1914 a*

⁹⁰ "Interesting Questions" *Watchtower* (February 15 1927) 62.

⁹¹ Franz, *Crisis*, 255.

⁹² "Why the Bible Is Specially Practical for Our Day", *The Watchtower* (1 June 1951) 335.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

*generation shall not pass till all is fulfilled, and amidst a great time of trouble.*⁹⁴

The following year the length of the generation was suggested as being around seventy or eighty years, with the possibility that it could be slightly longer.⁹⁵ This had the effect of lengthening the amount of time until the end of this system of things by several decades. The Society had made no announcement that a teaching had changed, either regarding who the generation were or how long a generation was. They had also created an internal deadline that, if God's system had not begun by then, would require that they reinterpret what the generation meant.

This reinterpretation began in 1968 as the age of the generation as determined in 1952 began to reach its limit. Until then it was commonly assumed that the members of this generation would not have been children or young teenagers in 1914, but fully-grown adults who would have understood what 1914 meant. While no specific age was pointed to as being the age one became an adult, it can be reasonably assumed that someone twenty years of age would qualify, and thus someone who was twenty in 1914 would be seventy-four in 1968. In the October 8 *Awake!* of that year the Society revised who could be considered part of that generation to someone who had been fifteen years old in 1914.⁹⁶ Interestingly this was not an attempt to expand on the lifespan of the generation to grant more time until the end of the system but to instead prove that time must be running short. In that same *Awake!*, indeed in the same article, the 1975 prediction was still being pressed by the Society, effectively linking the generation doctrine with the 1975 prediction.⁹⁷ If this generation was fifteen in 1914 and would live to see the end of this system, and a generation was approximately seventy to eighty years, in 1975 this

⁹⁴ "Vision of the 'Time Of The End'", *The Watchtower* (1 July 1951) 404 (emphasis added).

⁹⁵ "Questions from Readers", *The Watchtower* (1 September 1952) 543.

⁹⁶ "What will the 1970's Bring?" *Awake!* (8 October 1968) 13-14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 13-16.

generation would be seventy-six years old. The Society had effectively turned the generation into additional proof that 1975 would be the end by making the age of the generation match with its 1975 prediction. It was a brilliant coupling of two major ideas then being promoted by the Society and one which, within the logic and theology of the religion at the time, was unassailable.

After the failure of the 1975 prediction the generation doctrine was not immediately changed. It wasn't until 1980 that the generation doctrine was again revised, this time down to ten years old as being the age a member of this generation could have reasonably been.⁹⁸ By 1980 a ten-year old in 1914 would be seventy-six years old. When looked at between 1968 and 1980, a period of twelve years, and if a twenty-year old would have originally been considered an adult as was suggested above, the age of the youngest possible member of this generation had changed by only two years, effectively erasing an entire decade of aging for the generation. Four years later the Society, in the May 15, 1984 *Watchtower*, whose cover has become famous among critics as it declares in bold letters "1914—The Generation That Will Not Pass Away" with a picture of elderly people in the background, erased another decade from the generation, changing the age to anyone who had been born in 1914. In the main article of the same title as the cover, the Society stated that,

If Jesus used "generation" in [the way of the new interpretation] and we apply it to 1914, then the babies of that generation are now 70 years old or older. And others alive in 1914 are in their 80's or 90's, a few even having reached a hundred. There are still many millions of that generation alive. Some of them "will by no means pass away until all things occur." — Luke 21:32.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ "Questions from Readers", *The Watchtower* (15 October 1980) 31.

⁹⁹ "1914 - The Generation That Will Not Pass Away", *The Watchtower* (15 May 1984) 5 (emphasis original).

In the sixteen years from 1968, when the age of the generation of 1914 was determined to be fifteen, to 1984 when the birth date of the generation was changed to 1914, the age of the generation had decreased by nearly four years.

By 1995 even the youngest of this generation were in their eighties, and the Society needed to change the definition again if it was to keep the doctrine relevant. They did this in a couple of ways, one direct, the other very subtle but by no means less powerful. In the November 1, 1995 *Watchtower* the age of the generation was not changed but deleted in its entirety. In that *Watchtower* it stated that rather than a specific number of years, “‘generation’ as used by Jesus refers principally to contemporary people of a certain historical period, with their identifying characteristics.... ‘this generation’ apparently refers to the peoples of earth who see the sign of Christ’s presence but fail to mend their ways.”¹⁰⁰ Taken to its logical extreme, this change effectively made the idea of a generation an open-ended one, for as long as there are people who see the “sign of Christ’s presence” which first began manifesting itself in 1914 and continues to do so, but do not turn to God as defined by the Witnesses, the generation will still be around. Essentially this meant that as long as one person was alive after 1914 who was not a Witness then the generation will not have passed.

Emphasizing this even more the November 8, 1995 issue of *Awake!* contained a change that was not highlighted but was in line with the *Watchtower* published the week before. Since 1982, the masthead of *Awake!* had contained a brief description of why the magazine was published that ended with “...this magazine builds confidence in the Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world *before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away*.”¹⁰¹ This was changed to “...new world that is about to replace

¹⁰⁰ “A Time To Keep Awake”, *The Watchtower* (1 November 1995) 17-19.

¹⁰¹ Franz, *Crisis*, 268 (emphasis added).

the present wicked, lawless system of things.”¹⁰² It is not a large change in terms of wording, and it was not mentioned as having been changed, but the implication was pretty clear: the “generation” that saw 1914, despite the teachings of the past seventy years, may not see God’s return.

The two newest changes made to the generation teaching occurred in 2008 and 2010 respectively, and both reflect a return to pre-1995 teachings while still allowing the generation to continue moving forward. The 2008 change is a return to Rutherford’s teachings that the generation referred to are the anointed ones.¹⁰³ This means the generation is a specific sub-set of people within the faith, not humanity in general, moving more towards the specific-ness of the pre-1995 teachings. The second change made to the generation doctrine also hearkens back to past teachings, and while not allowing for an open-ended time frame the way that 1995 did, it settles the question for the foreseeable future. While the 2008 article that reinstated the anointed ones teaching of the generation doctrine did allude to the most recent change, it was not until 2010 that it was clarified.

The 2010 change, which is currently the version taught, of how long the generation consists of is understood to be: “...the lives of the anointed who were on hand when the sign began to become evident in 1914 would *overlap with the lives of other anointed ones who would see the start of the great tribulation.*”¹⁰⁴ What this means is that the anointed who had witnessed the start of the “great tribulation”, meaning those who had been confirmed as being of the anointed class no later than 1914, would overlap, or be alive at the same time, with those anointed who are now considered to be part of this generation. The September 2015 edition of JW Broadcasting contains the best explanation of how this overlapping works. In it, Governing Body member David H. Splane gives the example of

¹⁰² “Why Awake! is Published” *Awake!* (8 November 1995) 4.

¹⁰³ “Christ’s Presence- What Does It Mean To You?”, *The Watchtower* (15 February 2008) 24.

¹⁰⁴ “Holy Spirit’s Role In The Outworking Of Jehovah’s Purpose”, *The Watchtower* (15 April 2010) 10 (emphasis mine).

Frederick Franz, the former president and “oracle” of the Witnesses. Fred Franz lived to be 99 years old, being baptized and becoming a part of the anointed class in 1914 at the age of twenty.¹⁰⁵ He died in 1992, and while Splane acknowledges that there may have been other anointed who saw 1914 who lived beyond 1992 it would not have been for significantly longer, so he uses Franz as a reference point.¹⁰⁶ As Splane explains it “...in order to be part of ‘this generation’, someone would have had to have been anointed before 1992, because he would have to have been a contemporary of [Fred Franz]...anyone anointed after 1992 would be of the anointed but not of ‘this generation’.”¹⁰⁷ This overlapping of generations, while not a specific number of years as in earlier understandings, does once again limit the amount of time left before the end of this system.

But what does this new light on the generation teaching mean to Witnesses and to the Society? It firstly allows for a new sense of urgency, because there is again a limited and measurable, if not yet fully known, time left before the end comes. One of the anointed who had been twenty in 1992, the same age Franz was when anointed, would now be in their late forties. Even if this anointed one lived to be ninety-nine years as old as Franz did, that means that the end of this system will occur within approximately the next fifty years. For many of the newer, younger Witnesses this means that within their own lifetime God’s perfect rule could begin, so that while it is no longer stated as emphatically as Rutherford once did, the general feeling is that they may not ever have to die. As the years pass and more young people are born into or convert to the faith closer to the end of the generations perceived limit, the feeling will become even stronger just as it did in the years leading up to 1975. While it is not possible to say for sure what will occur, if the

¹⁰⁵ JW Broadcasting-September 2015
https://tv.jw.org/#en/mediaitems/StudioMonthly2015/pub-jwb_201509_1_VIDEO .

¹⁰⁶ JW Broadcasting-September 2015, minute mark 10:30-10:56.

¹⁰⁷ JW Broadcasting-September 2015, minute mark 10:59-11:28, transcript mine.

Society starts to emphasize this teaching in the same way that it pushed the other dates discussed in this chapter, a boom in membership would not be unexpected. But if 2071 should pass without incident a new understanding may be needed. This is a task that the Society has shown itself to be incredibly adept at.

Criticism

While some of the criticism that the Witnesses face has been acknowledged in previous sections, they are most heavily criticized for their “failed predictions” and end-time date setting. When dealing with criticism it is necessary to look at the motives of the critic, especially regarding a religion. Former Witnesses, especially with the advent of the internet, have been more vocal in recent years regarding nearly every aspect of the religion and care must be taken to separate those with valid religious criticism from those who are merely ranting at a religion they believe has slighted them. However, at the same time, merely being a former member does not make the criticism any less valid, even if it is sometimes seemingly harsh. The judgement as to what constitutes “valid” criticism is not an easy one, and agreement on that score will not be universal, even among academics with no direct connection with the Witnesses.

One of the primary criticisms of the Witnesses is that they continuously set the date for the world’s end and, when that does not happen, they change it. Critics maintain that although Witness publications never explicitly state that such an event will happen, they do not “...admit honestly and frankly the *intense importance* and *constant emphasis* placed on these dates, in many cases for more than 50 years, and the *positiveness* with which assertions and claims were made.”¹⁰⁸ In essence, critics accuse the Society of using

¹⁰⁸ Franz, *Crisis*, 199 (emphasis original).

plausible deniability towards their predictions: if they predict that something will happen and it does not, they can, without technically lying, say that they never specifically stated that anything was going to happen.

One example of this is the August 15, 1968 *Watchtower* which had an article titled “Why Are You Looking Forward To 1975?” The article is dedicated to proving why 1975 is in fact the end of six thousand years from Adam’s creation, and why that means that Christ’s millennial reign will therefore begin in 1975 when the seven-thousandth year begins. As a piece of writing the article is heavy and difficult to read due to its mix of Biblical exegesis, history and math. The relevant statement comes five pages in, where it states “[this] means, in the fall of the year 1975, a little over seven years from now...it will be 6,000 years since the creation of Adam, the father of all mankind!”¹⁰⁹ The remaining sections of the article say that “possibly” the battle of Armageddon will be over in the autumn of 1975, but then states that if the end of six thousand years and the beginning of Armageddon should occur at the same time it would be “...according to Jehovah’s loving and timely purposes.”¹¹⁰ It goes on to state that while their chronology is “reasonably accurate... ([and it is] admittedly not infallible)”, they end that bit of analysis with it “may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years.”¹¹¹ So even if the autumn of 1975 prediction is not completely accurate, the difference between the prediction and the actual events may only vary slightly, a few months at most. The last two paragraphs contain a brief admonishment essentially saying that while there may be work to be done beyond 1975, which as a date is mentioned four times, the Witnesses should not begin to slack in “...the short time ahead in which to finish the work....”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ “Why Are You Looking Forward To 1975?”, *The Watchtower* (15 August 1968) 499.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 499.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 499.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 501.

One last Society statement that critics point to is a statement that was published in the *Kingdom Ministry* of May 1974:

Yes, the end of this system is so very near! Is that not reason to increase our [preaching] activity? In this regard we can learn something from a runner who puts on a final burst of speed near the finish of a race...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.¹¹³

Nowhere in this statement does the Society say that the world is going to end in 1975. But, say critics, how else should the phrase, "Certainly this is a fine way to *spend the short time remaining* before the wicked world's end" be taken? Since the late 1960s the year 1975 had been pointed to as the end, and "[m]any, if not most, accepted the new date uncritically."¹¹⁴ If the time when the world will end is so short in May 1974 that selling one's home will give a person and their family enough money to live out that remaining time, then clearly the end is coming quite soon. While they do not pinpoint 1975 as the end date there is no doubt, say critics, what the Society meant.

While the *Kingdom Ministry* quote is an example of the rare extremes that can happen, and critics almost gleefully highlight it, more common issues plague the rank-and-file Witness after failed predictions. An obvious one is a loss of faith, with Penton noting that after 1975 many Witnesses felt disillusioned and left the organization.¹¹⁵ Similar disillusionment and drops in membership occurred after other dates such as the original Russell prediction for 1914 and Rutherford's 1925 prediction. Raymond Franz, speaking of 1975's failure, said that, "I have seen people very greatly harmed...men who had given up good jobs having bouts with alcoholism due to the difficulty in finding new employment, elderly persons who faced a bleak future due to using insurance or similar funds

¹¹³ "How Are You Using Your Life?" *Kingdom Ministry* (May 1974), 3.

¹¹⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 125; see also Franz *Crisis*, 247-253

¹¹⁵ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 130.

prematurely, persons whose physical health was seriously damaged due to putting off surgery or other treatment.”¹¹⁶

Older Witnesses are not the only victims, say critics, of the Society’s failed predictions. They also point out the detrimental effects that Witness teachings and failed predictions have on younger Witnesses. Young people are being constantly told to put off life events because of the imminent end of this system. In 1941 Rutherford published a book, *Children*, whose purpose was to convince young people to not get married or have children because Armageddon was coming and there was no time. He advised married couples to not have children because the end was near saying “...those who would have infants during Armageddon would suffer much greater woe because of their care of the same. It is a great responsibility to rear children and care for them now, and it would be far greater difficulty to care for them during the time of the great tribulation upon the earth.”¹¹⁷ Raymond Franz cites this book as being a key reason why did he not marry until his late thirties.¹¹⁸ Fifty years later Fred Franz, as previously shown, echoed Rutherford when he told a convention of Witnesses that they should not have children, get jobs, or pursue an education because there was not enough time left before those things would be pointless due to Armageddon. Noted Witness critic Edmund C. Gruss recalls a conversation he had in 1971 with a gentleman whose grandchildren had been offered scholarships to college but had refused them because they, as Witnesses, expected the world to end in 1975.¹¹⁹

One final issue that critics also note is that Witnesses do not have history on their side, especially with the most important date, that of 1914. The details of the complicated

¹¹⁶ Raymond Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom* 2nd Ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Commentary Press, 2007), 567.

¹¹⁷ Rutherford, *Children*, 313.

¹¹⁸ Franz, *Crisis*, 15.

¹¹⁹ Gruss, *Jehovah’s Witnesses...Records Show*, xi-xii.

exegetical calculations that the Witnesses use to determine the year of Christ's return as 1914 are outside the scope of this research.¹²⁰ For the purposes here it is sufficient to note that the Society interprets numerous Biblical passages to determine that a period of 2,520 years after the fall of Jerusalem pinpoints the year that Christ would return. Witnesses put the fall of Jerusalem at 607 BCE, and counting from there arrive at 1914 as the end of the 2,520 years.¹²¹ What critics point to is the apparently erroneous use of 607 BCE as the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, an event most historians date twenty years later around 587 BCE.¹²² The Society acknowledges that most historians date the fall of Jerusalem to 587 BCE, not 607 BCE, but believe that the Bible pinpoints 607 BCE as the fall and, because the Bible is the word of God, secular historians are therefore incorrect.¹²³

It should be noted that the "generation" doctrine has not been as closely studied or criticized as the specific end of times predictions such as 1925 and 1975 have been. The reason for this is easily identified, as the generation doctrine is both difficult to understand and not as explosive as predicting a specific date as the end of the world. It has also not been as highly pressed by the Society as the earlier versions were, with the 2008 and 2010 *Watchtowers* and the video from 2015, plus another small section of the January 15, 2014 Study Edition *Watchtower*, being the only substantial references to the new teaching.¹²⁴ M. James Penton's fourth edition of *Apocalypse Delayed*, published in 2015, briefly mentions it and notes that the new change "created a situation in which it not only left the future

¹²⁰ For a detailed explanation see Chryssides, *Continuity*, "Chapter 10: Prophecy", 229-234.

¹²¹ *What...Teach?*, 216.

¹²² Franz, *Crisis*, 265.

¹²³ "When Was Ancient Jerusalem Destroyed? —Part Two" *The Watchtower* (November 11 2011) accessed 18 December 2016, Watchtower Online Library <http://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2011810#h=3>.

¹²⁴ The June 15, 2010 *Watchtower* makes note that a talk was given on the subject at the annual meeting but doesn't go into detail about the teaching. The April 15, 2013 *Watchtower* has a "Is Your Teaching Up-To-Date" box on page 9 that mentions the teaching but refers the reader to the April 15, 2010 edition that explained it rather than give any details. The 2014 publication *God's Kingdom Rules* provides a brief section on the new "generation" teaching, but it is essentially a reworking of the 2010 *Watchtower* clarification.

timing of those events to the indefinite future but...provided for the ongoing existence of the Governing Body...whether Armageddon came shortly or not.”¹²⁵ Most of Penton’s analysis on the “generation” teaching however still focuses on the pre-2008 change. Surprisingly the 2016 book published by George D. Chryssides, *Jehovah’s Witnesses: Continuity and Change*, makes no mention of the doctrine change, ending with the 1995 teaching.¹²⁶

One thing that critics fail to understand however is that the generation doctrine is a prime example of how the idea of new light can strengthen the Witness faithful and allow them to grow. It is not simply or only a way for the Body to extend its date-setting chronology or even to maintain its own power, but allows for a sense of unity, coupled with a sense of urgency, that gives Witnesses a stronger belief in their faith. The idea that those living today will be of the generation that will not have to experience death is a strong personal motivator, and it is a potentially powerful message for when the Witnesses are preaching. The doctrine also highlights how the three key mechanisms the Witnesses use strengthen and support one another. They combine in a very effective way, allowing them to continue their growth, even as the years progress without the expected end to this system of things occurring.

Going Forward

Given the amount of criticism Witnesses face regarding new light and their failed predictions, it would be reasonable to think that their future would be bleak. The evidence and arguments presented by critics in response to 1975 alone would seem to bring the Witnesses’ Biblical interpretations into disrepute. Anyone with a computer can find

¹²⁵ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 179.

¹²⁶ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 241-242.

information on the many times that Witness beliefs have failed, and academics have recently been taking more interest in the Witness religion, making their views and beliefs a little more familiar. The ever changing “generation” doctrine, combined with the idea of new light and a wilful forgetting/rewriting of their own history would not seem conducive to an increasing membership. And, according to a 2014 Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Group, Witnesses in the United States have the third lowest retention rate among religious groups, with only 33% of current Witnesses having been raised in the religion.¹²⁷ So the question that arises is how are the Witnesses able to grow despite their failed predictions and changing doctrinal positions?

Understanding the concept of new light is instrumental to answering this question. By utilizing distinct aspects of this idea, they can adapt to the changing landscape of the world. One aspect is the idea that new light portrays them as a religion willing to admit their mistakes and continue to learn from the Bible. While in practice this is often not the case because the Society rarely admits it has made mistakes, the veneer of humility can be an attractive one. If asked about past doctrines and beliefs they can say, completely honestly, that thanks to new light from God those past mistakes have been corrected. It also reinforces the idea that the Governing Body is God’s ruling elite on earth, as new light must be given to them to be transmitted to the world.

Another aspect of new light that the Society uses to significant effect is that each new teaching brings the Witnesses closer to the “new system” and an earthly paradise. Each new teaching or clarification means that the time is nearing when the entirety of God’s plan will be revealed and the path to that new world is becoming clearer.¹²⁸ Many Witnesses that I have talked to over the years have expressed wonderment and thanks

¹²⁷ “America’s Changing Religious Landscape: Chapter Two: Religious Switching and Inter-marriage” *Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life*, accessed 5 February 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-2-religious-switching-and-intermarriage/>.

¹²⁸ *2016 Yearbook*, 25-27.

that God is showing them the way, looking at past beliefs as being what God wanted them to know at that time. While the critics may charge them with forgetting or whitewashing their history, Witnesses simply do not view it that way. They see the changes as being part of their growth in God's eyes, and the past as being just that, the past. What need is there to look at the path behind if the way forward is constantly being illuminated?

The sense of urgency that the nearness of the end of the path brings spurs the Witnesses on to continue to get their message spread across the entire world. It is that sense of urgency that is arguably the greatest aspect of the idea of new light as it regards the Witnesses continuing to grow. Rather than viewing the successive end date setting as failures, they are merely stepping-stones, but with each step the end is getting nearer, leaving less time to complete God's work of preaching to the world. Because they do not talk about past events new converts do not hear about them unless they go looking for them. The same Pew poll mentioned above also showed that, while the retention rate in America is low, Witnesses in that nation also have the third highest conversion rate, with 65% of their American adherents being new converts from other religions.¹²⁹ With the impetus to convert and spread the message, the "old light", so to speak, will continue to be driven into the background. These converts will almost certainly never learn of 1925, and are unlikely to learn of 1975, leaving the new light that is currently taught as the only light they know. Even the generation doctrine, which has been changed several times over the past couple decades, seems to have found a solid footing for the foreseeable future.

If religious doctrinal purity and consistency were a major contributor to success, the Dawn Bible Students would seemingly be better positioned than the Witnesses. With a few exceptions the Dawn's beliefs have remained static for over a hundred years, the most notable change being the recognition of 1914 as the beginning of the end of this world and

¹²⁹ "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Chapter Two: Religious Switching and Inter-marriage" *Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life*, accessed 5 February 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-2-religious-switching-and-intermarriage/>.

not the end like Russell originally taught.¹³⁰ In the interview conducted with James Parkinson, when asked which of Russell's teachings were still integral to worship and which had been discarded, he replied

A majority of ecclesias hold C.T. Russell's original teachings in high regard, but not of equal value as the inspired word of the Bible. (Nevertheless, there are some ecclesias which appear to regard his word as equal to it, or even superior. There are some others which appear to detest whatever he says; although these have largely distanced themselves from the Associated Bible Students. Comment: I cannot endorse either attitude.) There is no mandatory creed. ... On when to date the smiting of Nebuchadnezzar's image, or the beginning of Restitution, or the thousand-year reign of the church with Christ, or Armageddon, there are differences of opinion as to what C.T. Russell taught.¹³¹

The response itself is worded in a very "Russellite" tone. As will be shown later, Russell did not enforce a strict set of codes or rules that his followers had to adhere to. He taught that, with a few exceptions such as Christ is the Lord and saviour of mankind, doctrines could be argued and discussed with members of the ecclesia in order to determine what to believe.¹³² The Dawn still adhere to this philosophy of Russell's, in marked contrast with the Witnesses, with Parkinson stating that each "individual Christian is to decide on a change of idea, while he does not have a right to force his opinion on others."¹³³

Their literature and publications also highlight this strong connection with Russell's teachings, and they continue to print and sell copies of Russell's works including not just the *Studies* series but also other works such as *Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices* and *Hymns of Dawn*.¹³⁴ The main article of their monthly magazine, *The Dawn*, often reads as if Russell had penned it for a modern audience. One recent article, "Atonement: What is It?", reads as a very condensed version of the fifth volume of Russell's *Studies*.¹³⁵ The

¹³⁰ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

¹³¹ *Ibid*

¹³² See Page 118.

¹³³ James Parkinson interview with author, 04 October 2016.

¹³⁴ "Dawn Publications" <http://www.dawnbible.com/dawnpub.htm> accessed 24 August 2019.

¹³⁵ "Atonement: What is it?" *The Dawn*, August 2019, PDF, downloaded from <http://www.dawnbible.com/2019/dawn1908.pdf> 24 August 2019.

article doesn't just use the same Biblical verses, which would be expected as its teachings are the same as Russell's, but also uses similar phrasing. For example, Russell writes

The close of the Millennial age will come after it shall have accomplished all the work of mediation for which it was designed and appointed. And there the mediatorial office of Christ will cease because there will be no more rebels, no more sinners. All desirous of harmony with God will then have attained it in perfection...¹³⁶

Compare this with *The Dawn's* phrasing of the same teaching:

It represents the climax of God's great plan of salvation, marking the moment when the earthly creation will have been fully purified and brought back to the perfection lost in the fall. Christ's mediatorial reign will then have accomplished its objective, and thus the need for the mediator will have ceased.¹³⁷

While not all the articles in *The Dawn* deal with issues or topics that Russell would have specifically written on, the clear influence of Russell, in both tone and teachings, can be discerned throughout many of them.

But this has not led to any increase in membership. Indeed if you consider Russell's original Bible Student groups as the predecessors of the Dawn their numbers overall have gone down, with a current membership at an estimated in the low thousands.¹³⁸ Because the concept of new light is one of subtle persuasion rather than forced change for the Dawn, its members can choose to essentially ignore it. The relatively spare use of even the subtle form of new light limits the ability of the Dawn to adapt and remain relevant in a changing society and so grow in membership. As George Chryssides has noted, "[breakaway groups] may well have proved more faithful to the teachings of Charles Taze

¹³⁶ Charles Taze Russell *Studies in the Scriptures Volume V: The At-one-ment between God and Man* (Allegheny, Pennsylvania: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1899) 31.

¹³⁷ "Atonement: What is it?" *The Dawn*, August 2019, 14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Russell, but the price of authenticity has proved to be obscurity, and in many cases oblivion.”¹³⁹

New light has been instrumental in most of the doctrines that the Witnesses have held to over the years, but to discuss all of them would take several volumes. The three ideas presented here are arguably the largest however and give a perfect example of how well the Witnesses have used new light to thrive throughout their history. When critics of the organization assail the religion for their end-time predictions or teachings like the generation, they inevitably find numerous examples of how the Witnesses were misled, or how they are wrong about their history, or how the predictions were just flat-out incorrect. Some of these have been presented above, and they are valid points.

But their criticisms have never been able to touch the heart of why new light works so well for the organization. The simple reason for this is that they cannot argue against an idea. It is an unassailable concept that cannot be reasoned with, that cannot be attacked with facts or disproven. The Witnesses believe that their doctrines are from God, and if God wishes to update them from time to time it does not mean that they were wrong in their past beliefs, merely that God had not yet chosen to reveal everything to them. They quote Proverbs 4:18, “But the path of the righteous is like the bright morning light/That grows brighter and brighter until full daylight” and continue to preach.

Proselytizing

When asking a non-Witness about the Witnesses the first thing that springs to mind for virtually all is the preaching work that the Witnesses do. Indeed, if they know little else, a person’s first response to hearing the name Jehovah’s Witnesses will often be

¹³⁹ George D. Chryssides “Finishing the *Mystery*: the Watch Tower and ‘the 1917 schism’”, in *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide*, eds. James R. Lewis and Sara M. Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 127.

“oh yeah, they’re the ones who knock on the door.”¹⁴⁰ It is the most recognizable aspect of their organization, with only the distinct beliefs of the 144,000 anointed going to heaven and their refusal to accept blood transfusions coming close, although it must be said that most non-Witnesses have an incomplete understanding of both those doctrines. What they may also not realize is that the preaching work is more than just a way for the Witnesses to make new converts, although that is a large part of it. Preaching, whether it be door-to-door or standing outside busy areas with a magazine rack, is the most important aspect of a Witness’s faith. One cannot be a Witness without preaching, unless they are physically unable due to age or disability, and records of that preaching are sent from local congregations around the entire world to the New York headquarters every month.

This section will analyze three ways in which the Witnesses’ preaching work has helped them to grow in a world that, paradoxically, tends to dislike the Witnesses evangelizing. The first aspect discussed will be the practical implications of the Witnesses’ proselytizing on their adherent numbers and how the preaching work is conducted. Conversion is the main way in which the Witness organization grows numerically, and the number of hours that are spent in attempting to achieve converts is staggering. Through their preaching work, and despite the relatively small number of converts achieved per hour preached, the Witnesses have a steady growth rate.

The second key function that the preaching work achieves is to separate those who are content with being rank-and-file Witnesses from those who seek a leadership role within the organization. As has been seen with the elevation of Mark Sanderson to the Governing Body in 2012, dedication to preaching and the organization is paramount in

¹⁴⁰ “The Jehovah’s Witnesses new tactic” *BBC News Magazine* 8 July 2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28166192> accessed 27 June 2018.

order to continue to move into higher positions.¹⁴¹ The possible roles within the organization will be discussed, as will possible paths for rising higher. Also discussed will be the differing levels of full-time preaching and what each entail in terms of hours preached and responsibilities given. However, whether the desire ends at serving as a local congregational elder or to reach a higher position in the organization, the primary way in which to achieve this is to prove a complete dedication to the work of proselytizing.

The final aspect of the Witnesses' preaching cannot be quantified but is in many ways more important to the Witnesses' success, and that is the belief that by heeding God's call to preach they are doing the only thing that can lead to everlasting life. Simply proclaiming oneself a Witness is not enough, nor does baptism into the Witness faith mean that a person has reached the end of their spiritual journey. Preaching is a requirement for every member for as long as they are able, and it is not uncommon to see a Witness in their seventies, eighties or even older out in the preaching work. The impetus to do everything that one can is a lifetime commitment that is constantly reinforced by the Governing Body.

Hours and converts

One of the goals of any religion that wants to last for more than a few generations after its founding is to convert as many people as is possible to their beliefs.¹⁴² Without new adherents a religious movement will fade and eventually disappear, especially after the inevitable loss of the typically charismatic founder. Christianity itself grew in the same way, with the followers of Christ, most notably Paul, not merely sitting back and waiting for what they believed to be the imminent end of the world but traveling thousands of miles

¹⁴¹ See Chapter One, page 33.

¹⁴² Stark and Iannaccone, 147-148.

spreading their messiah's message. The book of Matthew ends with a final injunction from Christ to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you."¹⁴³ Despite this direct order from Christ himself, however, the Bible Students as founded by Charles Russell were not meant to last for more than a couple generations. The adherents of Russell were not expected to preach but were instead supposed to focus on their own character and being upright in the eyes of God. Were it not for the changes made by Rutherford and Knorr the Witnesses as currently constituted would not have existed.¹⁴⁴

While the differing levels of preaching responsibilities will be discussed further in the next section, for now it is necessary to highlight that evangelizing work is not a suggestion but a requirement to remain a Witness in good standing. A Witness must be an active "publisher", i.e. active in the door-to-door ministry or setting up a mobile display in busy areas of a town, if they wish to remain a Witness.¹⁴⁵ In fact the movement does not count its membership in terms of how many persons attend its meetings or profess belief in its doctrines but rather by how many are active publishers throughout the year.¹⁴⁶ To be considered an active publisher, a rank-and-file Witness is generally expected to do around ten hours of preaching, colloquially called being "out in service" or doing "service work", every month.¹⁴⁷ Some exceptions are made for those physically unable to preach, although they are still encouraged to "...spend as little as 15 minutes each month on the doors, and for those who are completely unable to undertake house-to-house work, there are other

¹⁴³ Matthew 28: 19-20, *NWT*.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter Two discussions on Rutherford's (p. 121) and Knorr's (p. 140) respective leadership eras

¹⁴⁵ Knox, *Secular World*, 108.

¹⁴⁶ Zoe Knox, "Writing Witness History: The Historiography of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania" *Journal of Religious History* Vol. 35, No. 2, June 2011, 158.

¹⁴⁷ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 137.

opportunities for publishing...[such as writing] letters, which others can put through letter boxes.”¹⁴⁸

Keeping track of how many hours a Witness has spent in the door-to-door ministry is the personal responsibility of each Witness but is recorded and handed in to the congregation. Every month, the Witness fills out a *Field Service Report* slip with information on what they did for that month including how many hours they preached, how many publications they placed, and how many different Bible studies they conducted.¹⁴⁹ This information is then recorded on the congregational level for each Witness on a *Congregations Publisher Record* card, which is kept by the Witnesses’ home congregation and follows the Witness should they move.¹⁵⁰ In this way the dedication to preaching work is known to the elders of the congregation, who can determine if the Witness has been doing sufficient work to remain a member in good standing. Any Witness who falls below what the elders believe to be an acceptable amount of time spent out in service risks being labeled as “spiritually sick” and faces possible disciplinary action and disfellowshipping should they not immediately increase their work.¹⁵¹ This information is then collected in an overall report and is eventually sent to the organization’s headquarters, allowing for worldwide numbers to be tallied.¹⁵² This number is then published in the organization’s *Yearbooks*, and is used to show how well, or poorly, the work of preaching and gathering adherents is being done.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ “Chapter 8: Ministers of the Good News” *Organized to do Jehovah’s Will* (Walkill, NY; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc; 2015), 75-77.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

¹⁵¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 335-336.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ In 2017 the Society announced that it would no longer be publishing *Yearbooks* but would instead report its worldwide service numbers on their official website. See the video “Annual Meeting 2017-Talks and Adjustments to the Ministry”, https://tv.jw.org/#en/mediaitems/pub-jwb_201801_11_VIDEO, minute mark 36:52, accessed January 5 2019.

The organization justifies its meticulous record keeping in several ways. They argue that the keeping of such records is consistent with God's actions as reported in the Bible, stating that God kept an accurate record of how many days Noah was in the ark, the number of years that the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, and the accomplishments of faithful followers among other things.¹⁵⁴ Indeed they argue that the very existence of the Bible itself is proof of "...his view of keeping accurate records."¹⁵⁵ On a more practical level the information is justified as being necessary in order to better organize the worldwide preaching work so as to fulfill Christ's order to preach to everyone. The information provided allows for a better understanding of where resources, such as magazines and other publications, are needed the most.¹⁵⁶ One final reason given is that it encourages individual Witnesses when they see the impact and advancement that their work contributes to the global expansion of the religion.¹⁵⁷

Given the expectation of ten hours a month in the service work at the minimum for every Witness, the sheer number of hours spent preaching becomes apparent when you look at how many people are counted as active publishers by the organization. The latest figures reported by the Witnesses worldwide was for the year 2016, in which they had an average of 8,132,358 active publishers at any given time.¹⁵⁸ Simple math would place the hours achieved by this group at over eighty one million per month if every member did the bare minimum of ten hours. If extrapolated over a year, the number reaches over nine hundred and seventy-five million hours spent in the field in the ministry, equivalent to over two and half million hours every day. These numbers are simply staggering, and yet they still pale in comparison to the actual number of hours spent in

¹⁵⁴ *Organized*, 78-79.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

¹⁵⁸ "Grand Totals" *2017 Yearbook*, 177.

preaching that the Witnesses recorded: 1,983,763,754.¹⁵⁹ This is an average of two hundred and forty-three hours per Witness per year, or twenty hours per month, double the expected number of hours. It should be noted that although all statistics are from the organization itself, the transparency and public availability of the numbers, as well as a historical track record of providing both increases and decreases in membership numbers, has led to an acceptance by scholars of the accuracy and reliability of the data.¹⁶⁰

The incredible number of hours spent in the preaching work is highly impressive, but what does it mean for the actual number of conversions to the religion? While the organization does not keep publicly available numbers on the kinds of baptism, for example children already raised in the religion being baptized compared to adults converting to the religion, they do give the total number of baptisms: in the same year as the numbers above were given, the Witnesses baptized 264,535 people into the religion.¹⁶¹ Again performing simple math, this means that on average it took nearly seven thousand five hundred hours of active proselytizing to acquire each new member of the religion. Expressed in another way, if a convert spent ten hours a month without fail for fifty years in the preaching work, they would still be fifteen hundred hours shy of what it took to convert them. It is not hard to see why M. James Penton described the Witnesses' preaching work as "extremely inefficient" from a numerical perspective.¹⁶² Penton also claims that "many first learn of Witness teachings through relatives, schoolmates, workmates, and neighbours... [therefore] Witness growth probably owes more to 'informal witnessing' than to formal door-to-door evangelism."¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 177.

¹⁶⁰ Knox, "Writing Witness History...", 166.

¹⁶¹ "Grand Totals" *2017 Yearbook*, 177.

¹⁶² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 330.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*.

What Penton misses is that while the numbers may appear to work against the Witnesses, their preaching work is in large part what allows them to continue to thrive. Despite all the hardships the Witnesses have faced they are a growing religion. But it would be nearly impossible were it not for their preaching efforts, as can be shown by the Witnesses' statistics. As already stated, the average number of active publishers for 2016 was 8,132,358. The average number of active publishers in 2015 was 7,987,279.¹⁶⁴ This results in a net increase of active publishers of 145,079 over the course of the year. What this number also shows however is that the Witnesses lost 119,456 active publishers over that same period. While these numbers cannot be taken as exact figures, they clearly show that without active conversions the Witnesses would currently be just above breaking even in the number of active publishers.

A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, while focused on the movement in the United States, also helps highlight this issue of recruiting and attaining converts: 66% percent of people raised in the Witness faith were no longer associated with Witnesses.¹⁶⁵ Retaining younger people is also an issue for the Witnesses, according to the poll. From 2007 to 2014, the percentage of Witnesses between the ages of 18 and 29 fell from 21% to 15%, while the percentage of Witnesses between the ages of 50 and 65+ rose from 39% to 52%.¹⁶⁶ Considering the fact that in the United States the number of average active publishers rose by over 100,000 from 2007 to 2014, the loss of younger people is even more apparent, as more of these new active publishers had to be older converts.¹⁶⁷ Another sobering statistic regarding the number of potential younger adherents the poll

¹⁶⁴ "Grand Totals" *2017 Yearbook*, 177.

¹⁶⁵ 2014 Religious Landscape Study, *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/26/a-closer-look-at-jehovahs-witnesses-living-in-the-u-s/> accessed 27 June 2018.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid* <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/jehovahs-witness/#age-distribution-trend> accessed 27 June 2018.

¹⁶⁷ "Grand Totals" *2008 Yearbook*, 31; "Grand Totals" *2015 Yearbook*, 176.

brings to light is the shrinking percentage of Witnesses with young children. Only 29% of Witness parents had children under the age of 18 in 2015, down from 37% in 2007.¹⁶⁸

That same poll however also showed why the Witnesses continue to grow: 65% of all American adults currently in the organization had been converted from other religions.¹⁶⁹ Specific numbers for the percentage of how many were recruited using the door-to-door preaching and how many were “informally witnessed” to are not recorded or are at least not publicly available, and studies or polls by academics are few and far between. James Beckford reports in his sociological survey published in 1975 that 46% of British Witnesses had been converted via door-to-door ministry, with 44% being introduced by a family member.¹⁷⁰ Penton mentions a survey in Japan where 58% of Witnesses had been converted by door-to-door work.¹⁷¹ With the Witnesses’ increased presence in town centers and train stations over the past several years, silently standing next to a display with copies of the *Watchtower* and other publications, this could also affect the number of converts made from traditional door-to-door work.¹⁷² However this work, whether door-to-door, “informal”, or standing in a town square, falls under the rubric of preaching and counts towards the hours that a Witness claims in their monthly reports. And even if town square methods are less direct, it is still a method of active preaching of God’s word, which the Witnesses note reaches people that they normally would not be able to, such as those who live in gated communities.¹⁷³ And the only

¹⁶⁸ “Religious Landscape Study: Jehovah’s Witnesses” 2014 Pew Poll, *Pew Research Center* <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/jehovahs-witness/#parent-of-children-under-18> accessed 27 June 2018.

¹⁶⁹ “A closer look at Jehovah’s Witnesses living in the U.S.” 2014 Religious Landscape Study, *Pew Research Center* <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/26/a-closer-look-at-jehovahs-witnesses-living-in-the-u-s/> accessed 27 June 2018.

¹⁷⁰ James Beckford, *The Trumpet of Prophecy: A Sociological Study of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Mott Ltd., 1975), 160.

¹⁷¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 330.

¹⁷² “The Jehovah’s Witnesses new tactic” *BBC News Magazine* 8 July 2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28166192> accessed 27 June 2018.

¹⁷³ “A Letter From the Governing Body” 2016 *Yearbook*, 6.

difference between preaching to members of your family and going door-to-door is the ease of access, not in the message itself or indeed most of the techniques used to convert strangers.

Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone posited, as one facet of many, that “religious movements will grow to the extent that they can generate a highly motivated, volunteer religious labor force, including many willing to proselytize.”¹⁷⁴ The Dawn still hold to the belief of personal character development that Charles Russell taught during his lifetime. The Dawn will occasionally set up stands at county fairs, but they proselytize “in the spirit of tolerance and good will to all, and without high pressure... the Dawn does not proselytize for its own membership.”¹⁷⁵ While this is definitely in keeping with the tradition of Russell it has led to the Dawn, once one of the bigger breakaway groups from the Rutherford-era, currently having no more than a few thousand members worldwide.¹⁷⁶

Since Rutherford changed the focus from internal character development to one focused on preaching, the public evangelizing of the Witnesses has been their primary method of attaining converts.¹⁷⁷ It is without question the single most recognizable aspect of their faith, which in and of itself can be considered a preaching technique. This allows in many cases for easier conversion and growth of the movement, as some questions that would otherwise need to be answered were the Witnesses an unknown religious group are already known. If everyone knows your *modus operandi*, then everyone knows to at least some extent who and what you are. This then bypasses general introduction and allows the Witness to get right to the heart of the selling points of their religion such as no eternal

¹⁷⁴ Rodney Stark & Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Why the Jehovah's witnesses grow so rapidly: A theoretical application” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* Vol 12. No. 2 1997, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537909708580796> accessed 29 June 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Parkinson, interview with author. 04 October 2016.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter Two, page 128.

damnation in hell and everlasting life. When you can lead with your best product the sale becomes much easier.

Promotion: A preaching man's game

The Witnesses refer to each other, regardless of rank or position within the organization, as “brother” or “sister.” Whether a Governing Body member or a newly baptized Witness, there are no titles such as bishop or cardinal when speaking to each other, projecting the image of near equality within the organization. This is of course a façade, as certain members of the organization are clearly superior to others and are treated reverentially by the rank-and-file Witnesses when they are around, especially if they are of the anointed class. I remember my mother getting very excited when we had a member of the anointed come to our house, with a frenzied cleaning and dressing up in my best clothes as if we were going to a service. But except for the Governing Body, who can only be made up of the anointed, there are virtually no positions that a sufficiently motivated Witness cannot attain, if they follow the rules of the organization and have some ability in management or writing or some other useful skill. Regardless of how skilled someone may be however they are always expected to have at one point been a pioneer, or a person who has dedicated themselves specifically to the preaching work for a set amount of time.

Before discussing the types of pioneer roles within the organization, a quick overview of the basic structure of the Witness hierarchy is needed to understand what moving up in the organization means. At the lowest level is the rank-and-file Witness, the active publisher who is expected to perform ten hours of preaching, often called service work, per month as well as attend all meetings. Above them are the ministerial servants

who act as clerks and attendants to their superiors, the congregation's elders.¹⁷⁸ The elders report to the circuit overseers, who are responsible for overseeing about twenty congregations.¹⁷⁹ From there several different positions in local branch offices exist, eventually leading to working in a managerial role at one of the primary legal entities.¹⁸⁰ Finally, the most prestigious position that a non-anointed Witness can attain is that of a "Helper" on one of the Governing Body's committees that it uses to run the worldwide organization. Often, though not always, these "Helper" roles come with an official officer position in one of the main organizations, for example Robert Ciranko is both President of the Pennsylvania corporation and a Helper on the Writing Committee.¹⁸¹

There are several types of pioneers within the organization, with varying degrees of commitment depending on which type of pioneer a Witness is. The pioneer position is not an appointed position but is applied for by a baptized Witness and can be denied if someone is not considered to be of good moral standing.¹⁸² It should be noted that while women can serve at all three levels of the pioneer position, they are not allowed to become anything other than a rank-and-file Witness, and therefore the pioneering work is the highest position available to them in the organization. An auxiliary pioneer dedicates between 30 and 50 hours a month to preaching.¹⁸³ These positions can last for as little as a month or with no set expiration date and are recommended for people who will have vacation time from their secular job or similar free time.¹⁸⁴ Although at the lowest level of

¹⁷⁸ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 327.

¹⁷⁹ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 207. Another position, that of district overseer which oversaw circuit overseers, was abolished in 2014, see John Cedars, "Governing Body discontinues the role of district overseer" jwsurvey.org, <http://jwsurvey.org/cedars-blog/governing-body-discontinues-the-role-of-district-overseer>. Accessed 05 May 2019

¹⁸⁰ Either the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. or its parent company, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁸¹ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 143; "What is the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses" JW.ORG <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/governing-body/> accessed 30 June 2018.

¹⁸² *Organized*, 101.

¹⁸³ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 138.

¹⁸⁴ *Organized*, 101-102.

pioneering, these Witnesses can set themselves apart in their local congregations as potential future elders by auxiliary pioneering as often as they can. They are expected to support themselves secularly as no special remuneration or housing is provided while they are pioneering.

Regular pioneers are expected to do 70 hours of service work a month for a minimum of one year while still maintaining their own homes and secular lives as, just as with the auxiliary pioneers, no housing or monetary stipend is given.¹⁸⁵ At approximately 18 hours per week this can often mean that a person with a full-time secular job who becomes a regular pioneer is working nearly 60 hours per week. Because of this time commitment the organization limits the acceptable regular pioneer status to someone who is "...currently in the position to reach the yearly hour requirement...[and] must be an exemplary publisher who has been baptized for at least six months."¹⁸⁶ Because of the special status that a regular pioneer has in their congregational area they are expected to encourage others to pioneer. They are also on track to become elders, if they are male, or if already elders they have a chance to move up in seniority to the level of circuit overseers.¹⁸⁷

The final level of pioneer is that of special pioneer which, unlike the other two, is not decided at the congregational level but is instead chosen by the branch office that oversees the region.¹⁸⁸ These pioneers are chosen from the ranks of the regular pioneers and dedicate themselves to 130 hours a month of service work for at least a year.¹⁸⁹ They must be able to serve wherever the branch office sends them, often to an area that has few or no congregations where they are expected to help create a larger Witness

¹⁸⁵ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 138.

¹⁸⁶ *Organized*, 102.

¹⁸⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 326-327.

¹⁸⁸ "Chapter 10" *Organized*, 102.

¹⁸⁹ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 138.

presence.¹⁹⁰ Because of the relocation and the time commitment, these special pioneers do get a small allowance for living expenses.¹⁹¹ Married couples with either no children or adult children will sometimes enter the special pioneer service at the same time in order to work together.¹⁹²

After serving as a pioneer, especially a regular or special pioneer, the male Witness's next step is to become first a ministerial servant and then a congregation elder, neither of which are open to female Witnesses. These two higher positions are not strictly dependent on being a pioneer, as regular active publishers can attain these positions if they show they are mature, responsible Witnesses and they are active in the Witness community. David A. Reed notes that some people, "drawn through the desire of personal importance...through hard work, friendships, and favors in high places," attain the position of elder regardless of whether they are qualified or not.¹⁹³ Leaders in the hierarchy "love men like [this] and gladly exploit their craving for importance."¹⁹⁴ However, to advance to the next position, that of circuit overseer, requires more than mere glad-handing and friends in the right spots. As part of the description of who can undertake circuit work for the organization, the requirements state that "[such] men love the ministry and love their brothers. They are *zealous pioneers*, diligent students of the Bible, and effective speakers and teachers. If a brother is married, *his pioneer wife* is exemplary in her conduct and dealings with others. *She is an effective preacher*."¹⁹⁵ Not only must the male Witness be a zealous pioneer, but so must his wife, if he expects to move up. As shown in the announcement that made Mark Sanderson a member of the Governing Body, heavy

¹⁹⁰ "Chapter 10" *Organized*, 102.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Chryssides, *Continuity*, 138.

¹⁹³ David A. Reed, *Blood On The Altar: Confessions of a Jehovah's Witness Minister* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 184.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁹⁵ "Chapter 10" *Organized*, 103 [emphasis added].

emphasis on pioneering and preaching is also typically a requirement for becoming a member of that group, as well as being of the anointed class.¹⁹⁶

Pioneering is a very heavy and exacting form of the typical Witnesses door-to-door work, and those who undertake it must be very sure in the beliefs and goals of the movement to meet the requirements. It is also the only way to advance within the organization. The position functions as a perpetual motion machine. Those who pioneer and show dedication to the preaching work are promoted while at the same time convincing others to join the preaching work. These others then become the new generation of leaders, who then encourage more people to pioneer. This allows for continuity and continued expansion within the organization, as well as weeding out those who may have a more liberal bent and who seek to make change. Because the process is so highly bureaucratized, with the people above making the decisions on who will join them, the Witness who aspires to become a leader in the organization must show that he is completely behind the status quo. Promotion within is a preaching man's game, and the preaching game can only be played one way.

Preaching: The only way to God

The final aspect of the preaching work that allows for the organization to survive and expand is not as quantifiable as the previous two. While the number of converts added on a yearly basis or the prospect of promotion are clearly definable and measurable objectives, the personal belief that Witnesses are doing something that will bring them closer to God is a factor that can be, and is often, easily overlooked. The other aspect of conversion also affects how Witnesses view the preaching work, and that is the knowledge

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter One, page 33.

that by convincing another person to become a member, the Witness has saved them from everlasting destruction and brought one step closer the time of God's judgment. And one last motivator, although it is a negative one, is that if a Witness does not preach, despite being a perfect adherent in every other way, they risk destruction and oblivion in the next world and disfellowshipping and shunning in this world.

From the very beginning of Rutherford's call to "advertise the king and his Kingdom", preaching became one of the most important ways that an adherent could get close to God.¹⁹⁷ No longer was a personal connection to God or character development the primary focus of the members of the organization. Zoe Knox states that, "their time and energy is largely directed towards proselytism rather than revering Jehovah."¹⁹⁸ This however is an oversimplification of how the Witnesses' preaching work functions. The proselytizing is itself the way in which Witnesses revere God, showing their devotion and submission to his will by following the Biblical injunctions found at Matthew 10:1-11:1, 28:19-20, and Luke 4:43 among others.¹⁹⁹ The impetus to glorify God's name is a strong motivating factor for many. One Witness, Rune, is quoted by the Society as saying, "knowing that I have been given the opportunity to be a witness for the Creator of the universe makes me grateful. It gives me the desire to keep on preaching."²⁰⁰

Andrew Holden writes that, "witnessing means knocking on doors with the sole purpose of recruiting more members."²⁰¹ But once again this misses the mark on how Witnesses are taught to view the work. Recruiting is, without question, one of the primary goals of every Witness who knocks on a door. As already explained in this chapter, on a

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter Two, page 128.

¹⁹⁸ Knox, *Secular World*, 108.

¹⁹⁹ *Organized*, 67.

²⁰⁰ "Why We 'Keep Bearing Much Fruit'" *The Watchtower-Study Edition (Simplified)* JW.ORG, (May, 2018) <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/watchtower-simplified-may-2018/why-we-keep-bearing-much-fruit/> accessed 29 June 2018.

²⁰¹ Andrew Holden, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Portrait of a Contemporary Religious Movement* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71.

practical level it is necessary for the organization to recruit more converts to continue to grow. But preaching is also a personal rejuvenation for the Witness and their faith and the way that God knows that the Witness is following His rules. As explained by the *Watchtower* of 29 June 2018: "...bearing fruit cannot mean making new disciples. (Matthew 28:19) If it did, faithful Witnesses who have not helped someone to become a disciple of Jesus would be like the branches that do not bear fruit...Jehovah will reward us for our work, **not** for the **results** of our work."²⁰² It is the preaching work itself, hopefully and preferably tempered by success in recruiting new members, but the service is the way in which Witnesses worship.

This rejuvenation of their faith is often buoyed by the knowledge that a successful witness has been made and a new member has joined God's organization, and thus been saved. David A. Reed describes feeling that the approximately twenty-five people he and his wife conducted Bible studies with that led to baptism were "not only our spiritual brothers and sisters, but also our spiritual children in that we... helped them find everlasting life."²⁰³ With each new baptism brought about because of the diligent preaching they performed the Witness becomes more convinced that this was God's plan. They look to Matthew 24:14, which says, "This good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."²⁰⁴ For every new convert baptized, the work of preaching to all the inhabited earth gets that much closer to being finished, hastening the day that the new perfect system of God's rule will occur. While many view the idea of Armageddon as a day to be feared, the Witnesses rejoice that the more fruitful their work is, the faster that day comes.

²⁰² "Why We 'Keep Bearing Fruit'" <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/watchtower-simplified-may-2018/why-we-keep-bearing-much-fruit/> accessed 29 June 2018 (emphasis original).

²⁰³ Reed, *Blood*, 130.

²⁰⁴ Matthew 24:14 *NWT*.

Finally, the organization's teachings make it very clear that failure to join the Witnesses means everlasting oblivion. However, "one of the peculiarities about the Watch Tower Society is that faith in its millenarian position is not enough in itself to constitute being a Witness. Belief in the doctrines must also be expressed in religious participation...."²⁰⁵ This belief that faith is not enough involves a very long and complicated history regarding a doctrine known as the New Covenant.²⁰⁶ In short, the only people who have direct access to God's forgiveness without having to do any major works are the anointed. The rest of the Witnesses are not guaranteed to be saved, only that they, along with any others who died before being able to hear the message of the Witnesses, will be the only ones with the opportunity to be saved and live on a paradise earth. During Christ's millennial reign they will learn how to perfectly serve God, and then they will be challenged by Satan a final time. Those who fail will be cast into oblivion with Satan and his demons, while those who pass will achieve everlasting life.²⁰⁷

This teaching, while not hidden, is certainly not emphasized, especially when out in the door-to-door work. Instead the image is created, and often pictured in the books and magazines handed out, of people running happily through fields of grain, playing in peace with deadly animals such as the lion and tiger, and in perfect health and happiness. The Witness book *The Road to Everlasting Life – Have You Found It?* has several of these pictures and describes the perfect world in which faithful Witnesses will live.²⁰⁸ The book states that, "only those who draw close to Jehovah and serve him will live in Paradise...Those who stubbornly refuse to obey God's righteous laws will lose their lives forever... They will be no more. They will join Satan and his demons in everlasting death.

²⁰⁵ Holden, *Portrait*, 71.

²⁰⁶ For a fuller explanation, see Penton, *Apocalypse*, 265-267 and 274-276.

²⁰⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 275.

²⁰⁸ *The Road to Everlasting Life – Have You Found It?* 2012 printing (Wallkill, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 2002), 30.

...But those who learn about Jehovah and serve him will find exquisite delight in Paradise on earth.”²⁰⁹ With this wording paradise seems to be guaranteed to anyone who follows God’s laws, which the rest of the book makes abundantly clear means becoming a Jehovah’s Witness and following all of their doctrines. What they do not mention is that even if a person joins the Witnesses and follows their rules, they still might end up joining Satan in everlasting death, though this doctrine is taught to potential converts before they convert and are baptized.

The doctrine makes the preaching work even that more important, because they are not saved simply by believing in the teachings of the organization. They can only be saved by preaching door-to-door and glorifying God’s name with “with innocent hands and a pure heart.”²¹⁰ This negative doctrine is not stressed very much, but even when it is it helps the movement to thrive. It motivates Witnesses to continue with the preaching work, which has all the benefits to both the organization and the individual that have been discussed. Indeed, it could be considered a base for all the preaching advantages as failure to preach will lead to everything about the organization being less. Converts will be harder to make and, as the numbers show, without new converts the Witnesses begin to lose adherents and start to become more like the Dawn, unable to support a large worldwide organization. The impetus to move up in the organizational ranks would be far less, leading to a dearth of qualified and passionate leaders and managers, breaking down the movement’s capabilities even more. And if there was no punishment for not preaching, if the consequences were so minor as to be virtually nonexistent, the order to preach would lose most of its effectiveness, becoming more of a suggestion than a requirement. This could lead to even less proselytizing, becoming a self-perpetuating cycle. In the end, no

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

²¹⁰ *Organized*, 68.

one would be saved if the Witnesses are correct, because no one will have done the necessary works to get close to God.

Going Forward

The sight of well-dressed, clean-cut people walking around neighborhoods and offering religious literature and Bible studies is one that is known throughout the world as being the trademark appearance of the Jehovah's Witnesses. For the past several years a concerted effort has also been made to distribute literature and offer answers to today's hardest questions about life on the streets, town centers, and train stations across the world. Proselytizing and Witnesses have been permanently linked, at least for the foreseeable future, in the public mind. But very few of them realize exactly how important the preaching work has been to the survival of the Witnesses.

Door-to-door work can be long and arduous for anyone, and yet many Witnesses do it daily, and all Witnesses do it monthly if they wish to remain Witnesses. Converts to the religion are a driving factor behind the impetus to preach. Without converts to the movement the Witnesses would barely have been able to maintain their numbers over the past couple of years. Despite the astronomical amount of time preaching for what is, by the numbers, a relatively small conversion rate, the Witnesses continue to steadily grow. While they do lose a sizeable number of active publishers per year, the growth rate not only manages to compensate for that loss but in fact overtakes it to add a net number of adherents every year. When compared with the Dawn Bible Students, who actively do not preach, the Witnesses' achievement in maintaining a steady number of fresh converts every year becomes even more impressive.

Through the pioneering work the upper levels of management and responsibility are continuously filled. With an organization as large as the Witnesses, reliable and faithful people must be found to keep the mechanism running smoothly. Those who have already proven willing to dedicate a year of their lives to preaching between 70 and 130 hours a month show such initiative and responsibility are traits they possess. They also set the example for anyone else in the organization to follow, encouraging more people to become pioneers and generating an even larger class of people from which the organization can draw from should it need to. This process ensures that at the very least the status quo can be maintained for some time.

Finally, the preaching work continuously refills the spiritual battery of the members of the religion. It is the only way in which members not of the anointed class are able to get closer to God and prove that they are worthy of salvation. Indeed, they are proving that they should get the opportunity to prove they are worthy of salvation during Christ's millennial reign. And yet, despite the very real fear of failing being ever present, the risk of failing is what pushes so much of the success of the preaching work. That constant drive to preach to the known world to bring forward the time of the end is stabilized as a significant force by the fear of not measuring up and losing the opportunity to live in paradise.

Whether determined using tangible figures such as number of converts for the year or the amount of hours preached in the service, or more holistically measured by the rejuvenation of faith or the promotion to a higher level of responsibility, there is no doubt that preaching the good news of the truth has allowed the Witnesses to not only survive but thrive. As Zoe Knox states, "the emphasis on public ministry brings rank-and-file Jehovah's Witnesses into the public arena to an extent that is unique to this religious

community.”²¹¹ And in the public arena they have managed to not only hold their own but to continue to gain throughout the entire world.

Chapter Conclusion

While other factors have contributed to the ability of the Witnesses to grow, such as their printing empire and the fact that they were founded in a country where freedom of religion is written into the law of the land, the three areas discussed above are the primary internal mechanisms that have allowed the Witnesses to thrive. Without these, their ability to continue to make new converts and to affect the world around them to any degree would be severely weakened. Without even one of the above, it would have been exponentially more difficult, as the three complement each other very well, strengthening other areas when needed, and able to draw strength from them as well. However, given the way they do complement each other, getting rid of any one of them would be a challenge.

Stark and Iannaccone contend that, for a religious movement to succeed, one thing they must have are legitimate leaders with adequate authority to be the driving force behind growth, leaders who have solid doctrinal justification for their existence.²¹² This the Witnesses have in the form of the Governing Body, which will continue to run the organization for the foreseeable future. This steadiness of leadership, carefully cultivated over forty years, allows for a hegemony in thinking and action throughout the entire organization, and the results of this leadership cannot be denied. Growth for the movement in the number of adherents has only had one negative period, the years immediately following the failed prediction of 1975. By 1980 the upward trend had

²¹¹ Knox ...*Secular World* 108.

²¹² Stark and Iannaccone, 146.

returned, and while the specific rate may be lower than it used to be, growth is still happening. The Body is not perfect, and its decisions have not always been positive for the organization, but they have allowed for the growth of the Witnesses throughout a world that can be at times be very hostile. Their ability to label any dissent as apostasy and thus keep their adherents from even reading such material also strengthens their power, allowing for less disruption in their authority and meeting Stark and Iannaccone's contention perfectly.

The Governing Body would be hamstrung without the very useful theological tool that is "new light." New light is used as an example by critics of how the Witnesses rewrite their own history, and they try to paint the Witnesses as hypocrites or liars. But the concept of new light is one that, to a believer, makes perfect sense. If God is continuously providing new teaching on a doctrine, then it does not matter what the old teaching was. God has given more information, clearly it is important, so the past does not matter because God has provided what is needed in the moment. Witnesses call this concept "present truth", which is being constantly updated by God using new light. Had Russell not introduced this concept and had Rutherford not taken it and used it to create what is almost an entirely new religion, which will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter, the Witnesses would have been stuck in the past, relics of an 1870s self-styled Biblical prophet who had been influenced by Adventism. At the same time the idea of new light, without a strong centralized leadership that can enforce the new teaching through either constant repetition of the changes or the threat of disfellowshipping, would often not be accepted by most of the movement. These points are clearly discernible when they are compared with the Dawn Bible Students, who have been relegated to the past and who modern academics, and the public at large, routinely ignore even when they do know of them.

Of all the ways that the Jehovah's Witnesses have managed to spread their beliefs throughout their existence, preaching is the most important and the most well-known. As can be shown by comparing the Witnesses' proselytizing with the Dawn's rejection of attempting to increase their numbers through preaching, nearly everything that the movement has accomplished has been supported by the baseline of constant preaching. Without the constant fresh influx of converts the movement would have dwindled as retention rates are very low, especially with the young. The requirement to be a pioneer to advance within the organization's ranks pushes the desire to preach to even new heights as those who have attained higher levels of responsibility encourage those below them to do so as well. And the desire to be closer to God by fulfilling his commandments to preach to the world, as well as avoiding the punishment of being consigned to oblivion for not doing so, puts constant pressure to preach squarely in the back of Witnesses.

There can be little doubt that if preaching were to somehow decline in intensity the Body would redouble its efforts to highlight its importance. Similar tactics were used for the stressing of the 1975 prediction and the generation doctrine.²¹³ An early indication that this is currently happening can be seen in their more recent publications, especially in the pages of *The Watchtower-Study Edition*, which are to be used and studied for specific weekly worship services. The August 2019 edition of *The Watchtower-Study Edition* stresses preaching throughout, with the article for one service, "'Those Who Listen to You ' Will Be Saved", even having the song "Preach The Word" as the song for that week.²¹⁴ In the October 2019 edition every article again reinforces the idea of preaching, with the primary push being in the article "Keep Busy During the Last of 'the Last Days'", which at the end asks the question "What have you learned about the urgency of the Kingdom-

²¹³ Franz *Crisis*, 237-272.

²¹⁴ "'Those Who Listen to You ' Will Be Saved" *The Watchtower-Study Edition*, August 2019, 14.

preaching and disciple-making work?”²¹⁵ Young people as well are being specifically pressed to engage in the preaching work both now and in the future. In the August 2019 *Our Christian Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*, a section titled “Young Ones—Be ‘Zealous for Fine Works’” is geared toward teenagers becoming full-time pioneers. They are told to watch a four-minute long video titled “Youth’s Honoring Jehovah”, and then answer questions based on the video such as “What blessing’s come to those who serve as pioneers?”²¹⁶ The video links to over half-a-dozen other videos that are geared towards teenagers taking up Bethel service or pioneering, nearly all of them including interviews or stories of teenagers who did take up pioneering and because of that drew closer to God. If preaching hours and numbers begin to decline, the Governing Body will become even more dogmatic to remind adherents that proselytizing is the road to salvation.

When combined these three aspects make a continuously self-strengthening base where the power can flow in any direction that is needed. When a doctrine becomes untenable and needs to be changed, the concept of new light as regularly used over the entirety of the movement’s existence allows the organization to make that change, and more importantly to cast it as part of God’s plan. The Witnesses continue to have success in a hostile world because no one aspect can be removed by itself, as the others are there to strengthen it. All three aspects would need to be removed simultaneously to cripple the Witnesses as they are now constituted. While their headquarters is in the United States, the lands that they preach in nearly all have publishing capabilities or could quickly be fitted to have them. The Governing Body need not meet in the United States, it does so because the majority are American, and it is where the seat of their power has traditionally been. At the same time, new light can be delivered anytime, and with the Body’s history of

²¹⁵ “Keep Busy During the Last of ‘the Last Days’” *The Watchtower-Study Edition*, October 2019.

²¹⁶ “Young Ones – Be ‘Zealous for Fine Works’” *Our Christian Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*, August 2019, 5, downloaded from [file:///C:/Users/don84/Downloads/mwb_E_201908%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/don84/Downloads/mwb_E_201908%20(1).pdf), 29 August 2019.

using it to strengthen their message and their adherents' beliefs it could be pointed at surviving nearly any attack. It would take a prolonged and powerful act of wilful destruction by the world's powers to accomplish the goal of removing the Witnesses in any meaningful way. Understanding these mechanisms is key to understanding how they have shaped their history and continued to grow. Whether they are liked or hated, tolerated or persecuted, the Witnesses are here to stay.

Chapter Two: Historical Development of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witness history is not commonly known and attempting to explain or discuss current theology without an understanding of what originally motivated them and their ideas is akin to studying the American Civil War without understanding the effects of slavery. The underlying history of Jehovah's Witnesses is one of pragmatic shifts in course as the need arose. The organization has developed the mechanisms discussed above that not only built the foundation for their religion but also allow it, when necessary, to change. In discussing the history of the Witnesses, Chapter Two will show how each era helped create, define, and sharpen the key mechanisms they have used to continue and expand their work. It will also show how each successive leadership change moved the Witnesses farther and farther from their heritage, bringing them into greater contact, and often conflict, with the world.

Throughout the chapter a comparison will be made between the Witnesses and the Dawn Bible Students. Looking at the Dawn allows for a much fuller picture because the Dawn represent to a far greater degree what the Witnesses were originally designed to look like. Information on the Dawn is scarce because there are only a few thousand members worldwide and they are not nearly as visible as their spiritual cousins, leading to no academic interest.¹ The Dawn however represent what any historian would love to have when talking about how something could have been, and that is evidence of what the Witnesses could have looked like had they stayed their original course theologically, doctrinally and organizationally.

The history of the Witnesses can be broken down into distinct phases, each with its own contributions to and challenges for the movement which helped shape it into the

¹ Charles F. Redeker, *Pastor C.T. Russell: Messenger of Millennial Hope* (Pacific Palisades, California: Pastoral Bible Institute 2010), 356; James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

worldwide religion that it is today. To this end, Section One will highlight the original theology of its founder, Charles Taze Russell, who held complete control of all doctrines until his death in 1916. Initially his movement had no official name, although the term Bible Students would later be used to describe Russell's organization and has become the term used when speaking about the movement before 1931, when the followers of the Watch Tower Society began calling themselves Jehovah's Witnesses.² It will argue that the movement was not designed or intended to last for more than a few decades at most and yet also, paradoxically, was given the tools necessary to allow it to be transformed into a thriving enterprise. Although well-known during his life he has been all but forgotten today, and the modern Witnesses have modified or outright dropped many of his teachings. Despite this Russell cannot be simply glossed over, as his contributions to the future of his movement go beyond mere theology to the practical needs of his Earth-bound followers. In addition to the founding theological ideas, Russell instituted the idea of new light, which as shown is one of the key mechanisms that the current organization has made excellent use of.

Section Two moves the focus to Russell's successor, Joseph Rutherford, and the major changes he made to the movement until his death in 1942. Much of the scholarship about Rutherford's presidency tends to focus on the administrative changes he made that led to a doubling of adherents and on the Supreme Court cases of the 1940s.³ The focus here will instead be on the movement away from Russell's theology and doctrines towards

² The original name given was "Jehovah's witnesses" with a lower-case "w". It would not change to its current spelling with a capital "W" until 1976. However, to avoid confusion, the capitalized version will be used when referring to the Witnesses throughout, except when in a quotation.

³ See for example M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, 3rd Ed. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 69-103; Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000); William Kaplan, *State and Salvation: The Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Fight for Civil Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); and Merlin Owen Newton, *Armed with the Constitution: Jehovah's Witnesses in Alabama and the U.S. Supreme Court 1939-1946* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

the recognizably distinct beliefs that the Witnesses hold now. One of the mechanisms used by modern Witnesses was essentially created by Rutherford, the idea that constant proselytizing is necessary to both grow the movement and show faithfulness to God. These changes helped define the Witnesses for decades, allowing them to grow seemingly against all odds, while at the same time bringing them into more constant and even violent opposition with the world, with such conflicts being discussed further in Chapter Three. Rutherford was in many ways as dogmatic as Russell, and it is not hyperbole to say that while Russell founded the Bible Students, Rutherford was the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The period between 1942 and 1975, which saw many changes in the Witnesses' administrative processes and an increase in the control over the daily lives of Witnesses, is the focus of Section Three. President Nathan Knorr was responsible for several changes to the administration during this period, including stricter rules on personal morality and the commission of the Witness translation of the Bible, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT). His Vice-President, Fred Franz, was the "oracle" of the organization and the primary lead on changing doctrinal stances and translating the NWT. Knorr was also responsible for creating the Governing Body, one of the primary mechanisms in the organization. The institutional changes of this era affected many who are still alive today and continues to have an impact on new members.

Section Four covers the period starting in 1975, when the Body took control of every function of both the legal corporation and the religious movement. While no one person any longer controls the doctrines and business dealings of the Witnesses, it has been no less a transformative period for the movement. The Body has greatly expanded its power over the years, at times exerting near complete control over what their members can do, not only in their religious activities but also in their personal lives as well. Near

century old beliefs have been redefined, discarded, and in some cases revived to continue the remarkable growth that has been occurring during the last forty years. Chapter One highlighted the power that the Body wields in order to do its work as a key mechanism in the Witness organization. The section here therefore will explain the process in which they originally took that power away from a one-person rule and evolved it.

Throughout this chapter, the history of the Dawn will continue to be used as a comparison. The Dawn were created during Rutherford's tenure, splitting away from the organization over what they felt were unconscionable changes to the eschatology and doctrines that Russell had provided. While the Dawn as an organization would not exist until over a decade after Russell's death, they represent to a far greater degree the type of organization that Russell had originally envisioned. The Dawn, in keeping far closer to the original organizational structure and teachings of Russell, have no real hierarchy, although they do have individuals who take the lead in publishing their magazine and writing their articles. This allows them to be more faithful to Russell's ideas, and allows for greater autonomy and individual reflection in the congregations, but it does nothing to perpetuate the religion. Eventually the Dawn also began to make changes to their original hard-line adherence to Russell's teachings, moving away from some of the specific prophetic dates Russell had used that decades later were simply unable to withstand the scrutiny of time. However, unlike the relatively similar changes that were made to the Witness organization during the Rutherford era, this did not lead to any increase in adherents or notoriety for the Dawn, but instead led to a further schism that reduced the Dawn's membership. This is important to understand as it shows in a clearer light how the mechanisms that the Witnesses developed, mechanisms that the Dawn have eschewed, have allowed the Witnesses' to grow.

C.T. Russell: Founding to 1916

Charles Taze Russell was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1852 to Ann Eliza and Joseph Russell, who owned a haberdashery shop.⁴ Raised in a devout household, Russell was a religious-minded young man who was encouraged by his mother to become a minister.⁵ After her death in 1861 his father began training him in the haberdashery business, and by 1867 Russell was a full partner with his father.⁶ Russell was clearly a good businessman and administrator as by the late 1870s he had helped his father expand their haberdashery business by opening several additional stores and had acquired a sizeable fortune for the time.⁷ This shift of parental emphasis from a ministerial career to a secular one did not however lessen his devotion to religious matters and studying, and by 1868 Russell had left his parent's church for the Congregational Church and joined the Y.M.C.A.⁸ During this time however Russell began to lose faith in the creeds and doctrines of the established religious institutions.⁹ In particular, Russell found it impossible to reconcile the idea that a God of love would also torment people eternally in hell.¹⁰ In 1870 he formed a Bible study class with several others, reading and studying the Bible and the writings of religious leaders of his time, notably George Stetson and George Storrs, both of Adventist backgrounds.¹¹ In 1876 the work of Adventist writer Nelson H. Barbour caught Russell's

⁴ Fredrick Zydek, *Charles Taze Russell: His Life and Times* 2nd Ed. (Connecticut: Winthrop Press, 2010), 5.

⁵ M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses* 3rd Ed. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 14.

⁶ Zydek, 19.

⁷ Zydek, 54.

⁸ Parkinson, *The Bible Student Movement*, 1

⁹ Russell, *Studies... Volume I: The Plan of the Ages*, 3.

¹⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 14.

¹¹ "A Sketch of the Development of Present Truth", *The Watchtower* (15 July 1906) 229-230, Reprint 3821.; For a more detailed discussion of how Adventism affected Russell's views and teachings see Chryssides, *Continuity*, 25-49.

attention, and Russell and Barbour became partners, with Russell writing for and funding Barbour's magazine *The Herald of the Morning*.¹²

Like his spiritual and theological predecessors in the Advent movement, Russell believed that Armageddon was imminent, and that it was incumbent on people to prove themselves worthy of God's love and benevolence before the impending end of days. Russell, following in the Adventist tradition of end-time date setting, and agreeing with some of their findings, identified several key dates for events of momentous import, with the most prominent during his lifetime being 1874 and 1914. Neither of these dates were originally Russell's, as Barbour had mentioned both dates in his magazine.¹³ According to Barbour, 1874 was the year that Christ returned to earth to begin his work in preparation for the end days and the return of God's kingdom.¹⁴ However, unlike earlier Adventist predictions for the return of Christ, which were predicated on being able to actually witness his return and resulted in widespread loss of faith in Adventist ideas when it did not occur, Barbour sidestepped the issue of being disproven about his date by stating: "...that Christ has come the second time and that he was due in the autumn of 1874, *his appearing in the clouds being yet future*."¹⁵ Barbour had been convinced that the Greek word *parousia*, typically translated as "coming", was in fact better translated as "presence" and that, "...if Jesus needed signs like 'great tribulations,' the gathering of the elect, etc., to indicate his presence, then Jesus himself must be invisible."¹⁶ Russell became firmly convinced that Barbour was correct, and even their acrimonious separation in 1878 did not

¹² "A Sketch of the Development of Present Truth", *The Watchtower* (15 July 1906), 230-231, Reprint 3822.

¹³ "A Sketch of the Development of Present Truth", *The Watchtower* (15 July 1906), 230-231, Reprint 3822.

¹⁴ Nelson H. Barbour, *Three Worlds and The Harvest of This World* (Rochester, NY: N.H. Barbour & C.T. Russell publishers, 1877) 175, Accessed 15 January 2016 (Archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/TheThreeWorlds>).

¹⁵ Barbour, *Three Worlds*, 175 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Tony Wills, *A People For His Name: A History of Jehovah's Witnesses and an Evaluation* 2nd Ed. (Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu Enterprises Inc., 2006), 7.

shake his faith in Barbour's understanding of the significance behind 1874 as being the invisible return of Christ.¹⁷

Russell expected to live to be drawn into heaven as one of God's faithful. The idea that this would not have taken place by 1916, when he died, would have been inconceivable to Russell and was reflected in his teachings. Barbour's eschatology, which Russell adopted, concluded that 1914 would be the end of the "time of the Gentiles", when "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and the judgment age introduced."¹⁸ Following the split from Barbour, Russell began publishing his own magazine, *The Watchtower*, in 1879.¹⁹ As important as 1874 was, the future was forefront in Russell's mind and teachings, and in the first edition of *The Watchtower* he stated outright that:

... we are living 'in the last days' - 'the day of the Lord' - 'the end' of the Gospel age, and consequently, in the dawn of the 'new' age, are facts not only discernible by the close student of the Word, led by the spirit, but the outward signs recognizable by the world bear the same testimony... 'To him that hath an ear to hear what the spirit saith unto the churches,' ZION'S WATCH TOWER hopes to give assistance and encouragement.²⁰

Russell held no doubt that this would occur, and he stated just as emphatically as Barbour that "the full end of the times of the Gentiles, i.e., the full end of their lease of dominion, will be reached in A. D. 1914; and that that date will be the farthest limit of the rule of

¹⁷ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 51.

¹⁸ Barbour, *Three Worlds*, 83.

¹⁹ Russell first published his magazine, *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, in July 1879, and it has alternated between being published monthly and bi-monthly throughout its history. The magazine has also had several different names throughout its publication: *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1879-1908); *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1908- October 1931); *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (November 1931-1938); *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom* (January 1939-February 1939); and *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* (March 1939-Present). For the sake of simplicity and continuity, it will be referred to and referenced as *The Watchtower* throughout, with the month (and if needed day) and year of publication given for each reference.

²⁰ "Prospectus", *The Watchtower* (July 1879) 1, Reprint 3.

imperfect men.”²¹ Russell would give a more specific time-frame, specifically October 1914, as the end of the times of the Gentiles in later writings.²²

Russell referred to the time between 1874 and 1914 as the “harvest”, where events including the overthrow of the Antichrist and the resurrection of the “saints” would occur.²³ Russell taught that there were three classes of people who would each have a different experience during the harvest work. The highest class was the anointed or 144,000 faithful saints, members of the true church that had been gathered slowly since Christ’s time with the last few to be gathered in the final years before 1914, and who would go to heaven to rule with Christ. Russell himself was a member of this anointed class. A second class, which Russell referred to as “the great multitude” or “great company”, would be rewarded with a heavenly existence but not as rulers with Christ and the anointed but rather as helpers or assistants to them. He taught that all others who were not part of the 144,000 true church or “great multitude” had not proven themselves during their lives to be worthy of the heavenly reward and would be resurrected during Christ’s thousand year reign.²⁴ At the end of Christ’s reign, they would be tempted by Satan one final time to see who had true faith in God. Any that Satan was able to turn away would be eternally destroyed, as would Satan and his demons, and the rest of mankind would live forever on a paradisiacal earth.²⁵ As one of the members of the true church, Russell himself would be one of the co-rulers, and he wrote that the call to heaven of the living faithful would occur before 1914.²⁶

²¹ Charles Taze Russell, *Studies In The Scriptures Volume II: The Time is at Hand* (Allegheny, Pennsylvania: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1902), 76-77; For further discussion of the significance of 1914, see Chapter One, page 61.

²² Charles Taze Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures Volume VI: The New Creation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1904).

²³ Russell, *Studies... Volume II: The Time is at Hand*, 16.

²⁴ Wills, 58; 58: 42.

²⁵ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 38.

²⁶ Russell, *Studies... Volume II: The Time is at Hand*, 77.

Throughout the rest of the late nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries Russell continued his work. Using primarily his own resources from his very successful haberdashery stores and unsolicited donations from his followers, he expanded on his operations while also traveling and writing.²⁷ Between 1886 and 1904 he published the six-volume Bible study work *Studies in the Scriptures*, which would become his magnum opus.²⁸ This series contained the primary teachings of Russell, covering topics ranging from end-time chronology and the book of Revelations to the rejection of the concepts of hell, the Trinity, and the new scientific theory of evolution.²⁹ These books, along with *The Watchtower* magazine, were the main ways that Russell's followers reinforced their faith. Due to his earlier partnership with Barbour and his magazine, Russell had a subscriber list that he knew he could use to get his magazine and books out to interested people.³⁰

Russell was a prolific proselytizer and was estimated to have "travelled a million miles, [giving] 30,000 sermons" during his lifetime.³¹ But while Russell believed that personal Bible study should be the primary goal to grow closer to God, he also felt that it was incumbent on people to spread the message of God as much as they were able.³² Russell did not teach that everyone was to be converted however. The goal of preaching was not to gather in those of the third spiritual class, who had hopes of life on earth, but rather the anointed and great multitude class, collectively termed "the remnant."³³ Apparently believing however that a more professional preaching apparatus was needed to get his message to as many of the remnant as possible, in the April 1881 edition of *The*

²⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 38-39.

²⁸ *Studies* was originally called *Millennial Dawn* but was changed to *Studies* in 1904.

²⁹ George D. Chryssides, *Historical Dictionary of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, Inc.; 2008), 129.

³⁰ Zydek, 60.

³¹ Wills, 35.

³² "Wanted 1,000 Preachers", *The Watchtower* (April 1881) Reprint 214.

³³ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 98.

Watchtower he advertised for 1,000 preachers, or colporteurs to use his favored term, to spread the message of God's word as he saw it.³⁴

While he would fall far short of that number, reaching a peak during his lifetime of just over 600 colporteurs in 1909,³⁵ it was one of the earliest of Russell's activities that, though he taught that the end was near and to expect it by 1914 at the latest, would allow for the continued expansion of one branch of his movement, the Witnesses, in the years after his death. As shown in Chapter One, the idea and practice of public preaching would become the hallmark of Witnesses worldwide, with their door to door ministry being the most recognizable symbol of the Witness faith. Given that Russell believed and taught that the current world would end in 1914 when Christ returned, it is not surprising that he would want his views published and spread in the short time he thought remained. This attitude has never left the Witnesses, permeating the very faith in their religion and themselves and becoming the driving force behind their ministry.³⁶

In 1881 Russell started the Watch Tower Tract Society, buying his own printing presses to publish his works and limit his reliance on outside publishing houses, financing it primarily from his own funds and with the donations he received from followers. At first it was not used to publish his magazine, but rather as a means to publish tracts outside of *The Watchtower* that might get people to subscribe to the magazine.³⁷ The printing power needed to publish *The Watchtower* was initially too great and he continued to use an outside publisher. In 1884 he legally incorporated this small printing organization, now known as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, in order to have greater control over his movement by allowing him to publish both his tracts, which had

³⁴ "Wanted 1,000 Preachers", *The Watchtower* (April 1881) Reprint 214.

³⁵ Wills, 14.

³⁶ For more on the Witnesses' preaching activity and its effects on their growth, see Chapter One, page 78.

³⁷ Chryssides, *Continuity and Change* 56.

outgrown his original printing operations, and *The Watchtower*. At first glance, this would seem to be counterintuitive to what Russell was teaching. If the world as he knew it was going to end in 1914, and before that he himself was going to be called up to heaven as one of God's faithful, there did not seem to be much need for a legally incorporated organization. It would become unnecessary when Christ returned and was another connection to a world that was soon going to end.

But looking deeper, it makes sense for what Russell was hoping to accomplish. Russell wanted to spread his message as far as possible, to as many people as possible, to gather in both the remaining members of the remnant who were to rule in heaven with Christ and to teach others about what to expect within the next few years. Incorporating the organization to take control of the physical and legal aspects of his religious movement allowed him to more easily perform certain functions that, as an unincorporated printing house or an individual, would have been hard for him to do. In the October 1884 edition of *The Watchtower*, he gave a few of these reasons.³⁸ By incorporating the Society Russell attempted to ensure that, should he suffer an unexpected death before being called to heaven, the work of printing his teachings and disseminating them would be able to continue. In addition, incorporation also allowed for his followers to will the Society their property or money rather than directly to Russell himself, thereby helping to guarantee that the work of the Society would go on, and to help avoid potential issues with families of the deceased claiming that Russell was taking advantage of their belief to enrich himself. Russell would eventually gift virtually all his wealth and property during his lifetime to the Society, living at the organization's operating facilities along with many of the workers, and having his traveling expenses paid for by the Society.

³⁸ "Legal Incorporation", *The Watchtower* (October 1884), reprint 671 (emphasis original).

The idea of incorporation did not sit well with all his followers. Indeed, to reassure them that the incorporation of the organization was not simply for the benefits that it would receive, Russell directly responded in the pages of the magazine. In the December 1884 edition of *The Watchtower*, published only days before the organization was legally incorporated, Russell printed the following:

A few have evidently misunderstood the matter of obtaining a Charter and feared it was either an attempt to obtain protection or recognition, from a government of this world; or an evidence of lack of trust that God could and would carry forward his own work no matter who lived or died. These are mistaken ideas. While we trust fully to the Lord's care of His own cause, it is our duty to so arrange our affairs and His, that in case of one death it would not require miraculous interposition to prevent disputes, and law suits from swamping the Society and annoying our successors in its management. So far as the Government is concerned we ask only those rights which it accords to aliens as well as citizens. And a charter such as we are asking for is such a right; it brings us under no obligation whatever.³⁹

Russell followed this incorporation procedure again in 1909 by incorporating a second organization in New York, originally called the People's Pulpit Association and now known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Incorporated, and in 1914 he incorporated the International Bible Students Association in Britain to handle the bulk of the overseas printing and shipping operations.⁴⁰

Even with this corporation building, preaching, writing and publishing, Russell expected Armageddon to occur by October 1914. He firmly believed that everything he was doing was temporary and merely a place-holding action until the return of Christ.⁴¹ However, it is an excellent example of how, though not intentionally, he set up his organization to expand at a rate he never dreamed possible. Russell lived in the era before

³⁹ "Zions Watch Tower Tract Society", *The Watchtower* (December 1884), reprint 705.

⁴⁰ Because both of these later corporations are subservient to the Pennsylvania one, and to avoid any confusion caused by the similarities between the names of the Pennsylvania and New York organizations, whenever the Society is referred to in this thesis it will always refer to the Pennsylvania corporation, except where specifically noted otherwise.

⁴¹ Redeker, 152-153.

radio broadcasting had become widespread, and the only mass media of his day was the printed word. The zeal and forcefulness with which Russell used this medium set the standard for future leaders of the movement. The world was shortly to end, and everyone needed to know. While the theological impetus formed the base of the drive, the practical issues in spreading the word were also strongly focused on, with the underlying idea of using the available methods to get the message spread as far and wide, and as quickly, as possible.

This is further evidenced when towards the end of Russell's life moving pictures exploded in popularity. Taking advantage of this new opportunity to spread his message, in 1912 Russell began work on the *Photo-Drama of Creation*, a staggering eight-hour long production that was finished in 1914. Combining hundreds of colored slides with audio records of spoken words and song, and including a brief motion picture that introduced the production, the *Photo-Drama*, was "shown in homes, churches, opera houses and especially in theaters and auditoriums around the world", typically in sections over the course of several days.⁴² According to the Witnesses it was seen by over nine million people in the first year, showing around the world including North America, Europe and Australia.⁴³ By 1915 the Society was printing a widely-read magazine in many languages, had produced a popular moving picture, and owned property in several countries. The future leaders of the Society had both a clear mandate and example of how to continue the work and would use it to usher in unprecedented growth.

In contrast to the expansion of the legal corporations and publishing business, Russell's religious movement, reflecting the belief that it was to be temporary, was not originally organized in the same business-like fashion. Each congregation, or to use

⁴² *Ibid*, 40-41.

⁴³ "A 100-Year-Old Epic of Faith", *The Watchtower-Study Edition* (15 February 2014) <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/w20140215/photo-drama-of-creation/> accessed 14 March 2018.

Russell's preferred term *ecclesia*, was to have a more or less independent existence, and each elected their own leaders, called elders, by democratic vote of the *ecclesia* as a whole.⁴⁴ They owed no specific loyalty to Russell himself, nor did they have to follow any specific rules and regulations to be seen as brothers or sisters in the movement.⁴⁵ In the sixth-volume of his *Studies* series, entitled *The New Creation*, he offered four suggestions as to how a typical meeting of an *ecclesia* would best be run. The third suggestion sheds light on how Russell viewed the *ecclesias* and their understanding of his teachings. It stated that there "should be frequent regular meetings at which reasonably full opportunities would be given to anyone to present what he might believe to be a different view of truth from that perhaps generally held and approved by the *Ecclesia*." He then expanded on this statement, saying "[no] matter how confident we are that we have the truth, it would certainly be unwise for us so to shut and lock the door of interrogation and contrary expressions as thoroughly to exclude all that might be considered error by the leader of the meeting or by the entire congregation."⁴⁶ The only thing Russell insisted should not be challenged were what he saw as the founding principles of Christ: "that all were sinners; that Christ Jesus, our Leader, redeemed us by his sacrifice finished at Calvary that we are now in the School of Christ to be taught and fitted for the Kingdom and its service; and that none enter this School except upon full consecration of their all to the Lord."⁴⁷ Russell taught that other "advanced doctrines, which must be fully in accord with the foundation principles" could be discussed and argued.⁴⁸ Teachings such as the Great Pyramid being the witness of God, which he interpreted as being mentioned at Isaiah 19: 19-20,⁴⁹ and

⁴⁴ Redeker, 284.

⁴⁵ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 42.

⁴⁶ Russell, *Studies... Volume VI: The New Creation*, 315 (emphasis original); Russell *Studies... Volume VI: The New Creation*, 317-318.

⁴⁷ Russell, *Studies... Volume VI: The New Creation*, 327.

⁴⁸ Russell, *Studies... Volume VI: The New Creation*, 318.

⁴⁹ "19: In that day there will be an altar to Jehovah in the middle of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to Jehovah at its boundary. 20: It will be for a sign and for a witness to Jehovah of armies in the land

baptism by water were not necessary to be considered a brother.⁵⁰ Unlike the Society, which he ran with a kind but iron fist, his followers were not expected to kowtow themselves to his every whim. They were held together by their belief that what he was teaching was the truth, not by any official dogma that stated they had to follow all his teachings to the letter or risk being shunned.

In another example of how Russell would help his successors expand, in his later years he moved away from the idea of autonomy for each ecclesia, essentially instituting the idea that the Society was the religion's overseer, not just its publishing arm. As his followers read his magazine on a weekly basis, and believed in what he was teaching, he was to all intents and purposes the leader of the ecclesias, much like the Pope who, while not present in every Catholic church, is the earthly leader of Catholicism. In the years leading up to his death, he exerted far more control than he had originally taught in his writings. Because of his complete control over the Society, both legally and from the force of his personality and personal reputation, he would, until the day he died, be the final decision maker of what was printed in *The Watchtower* and the books that would have the stamp of the Society. As M. James Penton notes, while Russell "did not intentionally use the [Society] as a centralizing agency... it nonetheless did tend to become the vehicle through which the Bible Students came to be welded into a more cohesive religious community."⁵¹ While none of his successors would be as loved as Russell by the members of the religion, they would be far more powerful because of the institutions that Russell had unwittingly begun by consolidating more power into the Society itself. This

of Egypt; for they will cry out to Jehovah because of the oppressors, and he will send them a savior, a grand one, who will save them."

⁵⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 42.

⁵¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 42.

consolidation of power is still used by the modern Governing Body, allowing them to continue to make decisions that allow the Witnesses to grow.⁵²

As explained in Chapter One, the idea of continuing revelation, commonly referred to in Society publications as new light, is the idea that God unveils more of his plans for humanity as time passes and is a key mechanism in the growth of the Witnesses. It has been around for centuries and is used most notably in modern times by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons, and the Witnesses. Russell certainly believed in continuing revelation, as his entire ministry was based on the idea that he himself was God's chosen channel through which the final revelations, what he called God's "meat in due season", would be made known before Armageddon.⁵³ Rather than set his eschatological dates and doctrines in stone, however firmly he may have believed in them, he was willing to acknowledge that he could be wrong on certain aspects of his ministry, even his eschatological computations, at least to a point. While seemingly a humble idea, and no doubt one that Russell held honestly, his use of continuing revelation was the last foundational base that he left, unintentionally, for the Witnesses to grow in the coming years. The idea of new light would be highly influential in the future of the one chronological claim that was the lynchpin of Russell's entire system of belief: that October 1914 "is not the date for the *beginning*, but for the *end* of the times of trouble."⁵⁴

As 1914 came and went however, and the end times did not occur, Russell put the practice of new light into use several more times. In the November 1, 1914 issue of *The Watchtower*, Russell ignored the emphasis that had been placed for years in not only his *Studies* but also the magazine's own pages, and stated "[we] did not say positively that this

⁵² See Chapter One, page 31.

⁵³ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 46-47.

⁵⁴ "Can It Be Delayed Until 1914?", *The Watchtower* (15 July 1894), reprint 1677 (emphasis original).

would be the year.”⁵⁵ 1915 also passed, with *The Watchtower* mostly ignoring 1914 with the exception of another “we never said” statement and a small notice detailing changes to the new editions of volumes two and three of *Studies* regarding 1914.⁵⁶ In the September 1, 1916 issue of *The Watchtower*, in what would be one of his last articles, Russell lukewarmly suggested that 1918 could be the end of the “harvest.”⁵⁷ While this did not occur, Russell himself would be spared the embarrassment of yet another prediction going unrecognized as he died in the middle of a speaking tour on October 31, 1916.

Russell’s organizations had been set up not to live and expand beyond him into a worldwide publishing empire but, in the event he should die, to continue to spread his teachings for the short number of years before the end of the world and Christ’s return. Russell taught that by 1914 all the modern governments would be destroyed, and Christ would begin his rule over the world. These were not the teachings of a man who believed that Christ’s return was still due at some indeterminable date in the future and time was still on humanity’s side. Because of this belief, his organizations were not intended by him to last. But while his intentions had been merely to continue the preaching work for the very little time that remained, his practical actions, such as incorporating his organizations and spreading his influence worldwide, had created the foundation that, if properly utilized, would allow it to become much larger than he had originally planned. By modifying the tools that Russell had created as a stop-gap measure between his own death and the return of Christ, his successor would begin the transformation of many of Russell’s followers into a striking example of how to prosper in a hostile world.

⁵⁵ “Making Way For The Reign Of Righteousness”, *The Watchtower* (1 November 1912), reprint 5565.

⁵⁶ “Changes in ‘Scripture Studies’”, *The Watchtower* (1 March 1915), reprint 5649.

⁵⁷ “The Harvest Is Not Ended”, *The Watchtower* (1 September 1916), reprints 5950-5951.

Joseph Rutherford: 1917 to 1942

Joseph F. Rutherford was born on a small farm in Missouri in November 1869.⁵⁸

Rutherford desired to become a lawyer, and, although poor, worked his way through school, studied under a judge in the apprentice system that was common at the time, and passed his bar exams in 1892.⁵⁹ Rutherford's first contact with the ideas of Russell came in 1894, when after "two young women from the Society called at [his] law office...[he] accepted the three copies of Russell's *Millennial Dawn* which they offered, and on reading them found himself persuaded by the ideas."⁶⁰ In 1906 Rutherford was baptized as a Bible Student, and in 1907 was named as legal counsel for the Society and served as Russell's personal lawyer.⁶¹ Why it took Rutherford so long to be baptized is unknown, as are most of his actions during the twelve year period between 1894 and 1906. He was married, and in his secular life he continued to practice law in Missouri, serving as a trial lawyer for a law firm and then as a prosecutor for four years.⁶² It was also during this time he earned his sobriquet "Judge", after he was appointed a special judge in the Fourteenth Judicial District of Missouri, where his duties were to fill in for any judge who was temporarily incapable of serving.⁶³ His spiritual life during this time period is even less clear. In the *1975 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* it states:

Meetings of the Bible Students were not held in the immediate vicinity of the Rutherford home. However, Clarence B. Beaty says: 'From 1904 on, meetings were held in our home. Sister Rutherford and Judge Rutherford came up from Boonville, Missouri, for the Memorial [of Christ's death] ... He partook of his first Memorial and gave his first pilgrim talk to the

⁵⁸ A.H. Macmillan, *Faith On The March* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1957), 71

⁵⁹ *Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., 1993), 67 (info box).

⁶⁰ Chryssides, *Continuity and Change* 78.

⁶¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 69.

⁶² *Jehovah's Witnesses In The Divine Purpose* (Brooklyn, New York; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., 1959), 65.

⁶³ *Divine Purpose*, 65.

friends in our home. They had no one in the truth in Boonville except themselves'.⁶⁴

Beyond this information, it is unknown how exactly Rutherford continued in his studies of the teachings of Russell, although it can be assumed that he had a subscription to *The Watchtower* magazine and purchased other publications as they became available.

After joining the Society as legal counsel in 1907, Rutherford quickly became popular amongst the Bible Students as a speaker and lecturer. The 1 November 1907 issue of *The Watchtower* records his participation at a convention in Norfolk, Virginia.⁶⁵ In 1908 he was the chairman of a convention in Put-In-Bay, Ohio, as well as serving as opening speaker and giving a discourse entitled "The Great Counselor."⁶⁶ He traveled around the world as a Bible Student lecturer, attracting thousands of listeners to his addresses.⁶⁷ He participated in a four-night debate against a Baptist preacher in 1915 to defend the teachings of Russell, where, according to his own account, he convinced many of the Baptists in the audience of several of Russell's teachings.⁶⁸ Continuing his defense of Russell in writing, in 1915 Rutherford penned an apologetic book titled *A Great Battle in the Ecclesiastical Heavens*.⁶⁹ In September 1916, a month before Russell's death, Rutherford served as the chairman of a convention in Los Angeles that drew a crowd of nearly four thousand people, with another thousand reportedly turned away.⁷⁰

Rutherford was as adept in his role as legal counsel as he was at public speaking. In 1909 alone he was admitted to the New York bar, was also admitted to argue before the

⁶⁴ 1975 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, New York; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1974), 82.

⁶⁵ "The Norfolk Convention", *The Watchtower* (1 November 1907), reprint 4082.

⁶⁶ "Put-In-Bay Convention Report", *The Watchtower* (1 September 1908), reprint 4238-4249.

⁶⁷ 1975 *Yearbook*, 83.

⁶⁸ "The Rutherford-Troy Debate", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1915), reprint 5684-5685.

⁶⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 70.

⁷⁰ "Los Angeles-Seattle-Milwaukee Conventions", *The Watchtower* (15 October 1916), reprint 5976.

United States Supreme Court, and had a role in moving the Society's headquarters from Pennsylvania to Brooklyn.⁷¹ He also represented Russell in lawsuits against several newspapers for libel.⁷² Rutherford's popularity increased during the early years of World War I "as the man who fought for the legal rights of Bible Students who would not take up arms, and for those who were attacked and mistreated as 'pacifists' by mobs of Americans."⁷³ He did not limit his legal advice to American situations. In 1916, Rutherford wrote a statement, printed in *The Watchtower*, for Bible Students in Canada to fill in the blanks to declare themselves conscientious objectors because of their religion.⁷⁴ Due to both his personal charisma as a speaker and proven excellence as an administrator and lawyer, by the time of Russell's death in October 1916, Rutherford was one of the seven members of the Board of Directors for the Society.⁷⁵

The story of Rutherford's election as President of the Society after the death of Russell and his rise to power from 1916 until about 1920, as well as the legal and administrative changes he made along the way, is a very long and complicated one, with different sides holding opposing views as to what was legal, proper, and in the spirit of Russell and his teachings. The first several years of Rutherford's presidency led to few major changes in the doctrinal beliefs of the Bible Students, as he was caught up in numerous battles both within and without the Society. Most significant during this time period was Rutherford's publication in 1917 of *Studies in the Scriptures Volume VII: The Finished Mystery* (hereafter *The Finished Mystery*), presented by Rutherford as the posthumous work of Russell and as volume seven of Russell's *Studies* series.

⁷¹ *Divine Purpose*, 66; While the physical headquarters moved to Brooklyn, its name was retained as the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷² "Judge Rutherford's Spicy Defense", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1915) reprint 5685.

⁷³ Alan Rogerson, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die: A Study of Jehovah's Witnesses* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd, 1969), 30.

⁷⁴ "Militia Laws of Canada", *The Watchtower* (15 February 1916) reprint 5860-5861.

⁷⁵ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 65 (footnote).

The Finished Mystery was primarily written by Clayton J. Woodworth and George H. Fisher, whose influence and input was so substantial that, as George D. Chryssides puts it, “[whether] or not Russell would have endorsed the contents of the book, it was certainly not a posthumous work of Russell’s.”⁷⁶ *The Finished Mystery* is a verse-by-verse commentary on the Biblical books of Revelation, the Song of Solomon, and Ezekiel. When first read it does not appear to be a major shift in doctrine from Russell’s teachings. Indeed, it affirmed several of his key teachings: 1874 as the year of Christ’s return; that *parousia* is more accurately translated as “presence” rather than “coming” and therefore Christ’s return was invisible; Russell’s revised teachings of 1914 as the end of the times of the Gentiles; and the Great Pyramid of Giza as a witness of God.⁷⁷ What it did was to obliquely suggest that some of Russell’s teachings may have been close but not quite exact, and that a re-examining of them had led to the conclusion that some predicted events had to be pushed forward by three years from Russell’s calculations.⁷⁸ The three years was very helpful to Rutherford, as it pushed several of Russell’s predictions to 1917, the year *The Finished Mystery* was published, or later, allowing continued adherence to the belief that the end times were fast approaching. Many also saw *The Finished Mystery* as being “much harsher [and in a] more condemnatory spirit against governmental powers and the clergy than that which had characterized [Russell’s] ministry.”⁷⁹ These shifts however were merely the foreshocks of what was to come under Rutherford’s leadership.

The Finished Mystery allowed one other piece to fall into place for Rutherford. As originally published in 1917, *The Finished Mystery* contained seven pages that were removed from future editions (original pages 247-253) that were highly critical of

⁷⁶ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 85.

⁷⁷ Charles Taze Russell *Studies in the Scriptures Volume VII: The Finished Mystery* (Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1918), 167; 54; 268: 60.

⁷⁸ *The Finished Mystery*, 62.

⁷⁹ Redeker, 280.

governmental efforts around the world to wage war, including by the United States:

“While ten thousand boys and girls in Tokio [*sic*] were singing loving greetings to our naval officers, there were men in the United States rushing from city to city urging the people to prepare for an American-Japanese war.”⁸⁰ This and similar passages, combined with the strict conscientious objection that Rutherford held his followers to, led to Rutherford’s trial and conviction, along with seven other ranking members of the Society, under the Espionage Act of 1917 on charges of:

unlawfully, feloniously and willfully causing insubordination, disloyalty and refusal of duty in the military and naval forces of the United States of America when the United States was at war...through and by personal solicitations, letters, public speeches, distributing and publicly circulating throughout the united [*sic*] States of America a certain book called ‘Volume VII. Bible Studies. The Finished Mystery’.⁸¹

Though they were found guilty in June 1918 and sentenced to twenty years in prison, Rutherford could not have planned a better opportunity to consolidate his power.⁸² The Witnesses would again be charged with espionage during World War II in Australia, highlighting the hostility, especially in war time, that the Witnesses have operated under throughout the world.⁸³

By serving jail time Rutherford was able to cultivate the image of being a martyr to the cause which allowed him to overcome earlier resistance and he was re-elected by the ecclesias as President in 1919 despite being in jail.⁸⁴ It also gave him the confidence and desire to continue, in a far more straightforward way, to erase Russell’s influence over the Bible Students. Referring specifically to Russell’s prophet-like status within the movement,

⁸⁰ *The Finished Mystery*, original page 248.

⁸¹ *United States v Rutherford et al* U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Trial Transcript, 12 Accessed 16 July 2015 (Archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/RutherfordVTheUnitedStatesTrial>).

⁸² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 79.

⁸³ See Chapter Three, page 191.

⁸⁴ Macmillan, 106.

A.H. Macmillan quoted Rutherford while still in prison and after the 1919 election results were known, as saying “[you] made a remark yesterday that is working in my mind; about us being put in Brother Russell’s place... Why, brother, if I ever get out of here, by God’s grace I’ll crush all this business of creature worship if I have to get kicked out for doing it.”⁸⁵ Rutherford’s changes to doctrine, including the publication of *The Finished Mystery*, and his legal fights with several members of the Society over the previous years had allowed him to claim most of the power over the Society. The enemies that he had not managed to remove from the organization before his imprisonment were now completely powerless after his re-election while in jail, and those who did not leave after his return fell in line. Russell’s imprisonment had, in an ironic twist, allowed him to complete his monopoly on power over the Society’s legal organizations.

Russell’s teachings however still held sway over the religion, even if Rutherford had power over the legal apparatus used to print and distribute the literature. It was not possible to simply declare Russell wrong and start changing the doctrines around wholesale. Rutherford would lose his control faster than he had gotten it and such a complete rejection would have merely strengthened the power that Russell’s memory still had for most in the movement. Rutherford would have to disintegrate Russell’s credibility and influence piecemeal, finding Biblical justification for each doctrine that he changed or eliminated to not seem arbitrary. Russell himself had instituted the mechanism to do this with the concept of new light. By claiming that each new change was a result of God continuing to reveal his plan to his chosen people, in this case the Society and its believers, Rutherford was able to essentially change what he saw fit provided he could find a reasonable, or at least sellable, Biblical explanation for the change. Two months after Rutherford’s victory in the 1919 election, he and the others were granted bail by the

⁸⁵ Macmillan, 106.

Supreme Court, and by 1920 the war was over and the charges were officially dropped.⁸⁶

Rutherford was thus able to regain direct control over the organization and put his plan to remove the influence of Russell into effect.

Rutherford began his post-jail erasure of Russell in 1920, with the publication of a book entitled *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*. Based on a talk he had given in California just before his imprisonment in 1918, *Millions* was still deferential to Russell, but unlike *The Finished Mystery* it directly changed one of Russell's teachings, albeit without actually saying that it was changing.⁸⁷ In essence, Russell had taught that 1875 was the beginning of the "Great Jubilee" and Christ's restoration of the Earth after his return the previous year.⁸⁸ Rutherford recalculated Russell's earlier dates and changed the date of the Great Jubilee, teaching that rather than 1875 it would be "1925 [that] will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the Apostle in Hebrews chapter eleven, to the condition of human perfection."⁸⁹ The specific date of 1925 had far reaching consequences as was highlighted in Chapter One, and the change was a massive success in the short term, with speaking tours supporting the book and helping it become a bestseller.⁹⁰ Rutherford's control over the Society was complete and he had started his takeover of the religion, and while he still had a way to go, he had proven he could exorcise Russell from the religion.

Rutherford's ambition to remove Russell's influence over the Bible Students would not be successful if esoteric doctrines such as 1875 were all that were revised. To accomplish his stated goal of "crushing out" his predecessor's influence, Rutherford needed to make wholesale changes in how the movement saw itself and its mission.

⁸⁶ *Divine Purpose*, 86.

⁸⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 81.

⁸⁸ Russell, *Studies... Volume II: The Time is at Hand*, 197.

⁸⁹ Joseph F. Rutherford, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* (Brooklyn, New York: International Bible Students Association, 1920), 89-90.

⁹⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 81; For more information see Chapter One, page 53.

Russell had concentrated his teachings on the individual and their relationship with God and had stressed that while spreading of the message was important, it was far more important for a person to develop his own character towards a more God-pleasing manner. Rutherford began changing this emphasis in 1920 when he required any ecclesia members who participated in evangelizing, known as class workers to distinguish them from the full-time colporteurs, to submit weekly reports to the Society regarding information including the number of books and booklets sold and how many houses were called upon.⁹¹ As shown previously, this idea is in essence still used today by the Witnesses in their preaching work, a key mechanism in their sustained success to attract more converts throughout the world.⁹²

The 1920 report on the class workers' progress printed in *The Watchtower*, the first year it was reported, was lukewarm at the results. It claimed there were 8,052 class workers who submitted reports stating, "[w]hile we are pleased indeed with the work done by the local workers in the classes... [and are] thankful to the Lord and glad for such a showing, we hope that the year now beginning will show a much greater record."⁹³ The following year did see an increase of reporters to 9,013, but once again called for "more strenuous witness in 1922 than heretofore."⁹⁴ Rutherford expounded on the idea of strenuous witnessing in 1922 to more completely break away from Russell's character development during a convention in Cedar Point, Ohio.

September 8, 1922 marked the eighth and final day of the Cedar Point convention. Since the first day banners had been placed around the grounds with the letters "ADV" written on them, but no further explanation was given.⁹⁵ Rutherford gave the opening

⁹¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 80.

⁹² See Chapter One, page 80.

⁹³ "Annual Report for 1920", *The Watchtower* (15 December 1920) 372.

⁹⁴ "Annual Report 1921", *The Watchtower* (15 December 1921) 379-381.

⁹⁵ *Divine Purpose*, 101.

address of the final day which would be reprinted in full in the 1 November 1922 edition of *The Watchtower*. The address began as a fairly standard one with common points being reinforced: the invisible return of Christ in 1874; Christ taking his seat as King in 1914; and a denunciation of the governments of the world and the League of Nations.⁹⁶ The final part of the discourse however switched focus from what had already occurred to what must be done in the future by the Bible Students in order to continue God's work. Rutherford continued with the message that preaching should be the focus of all members of the religion, not simply colporteurs and class workers. After asking a series of rhetorical questions about whether the audience believed that Christ had come and had begun his reign, Rutherford ended his talk by saying:

Then back to the field, O ye sons of the most high God! Gird on your armor! Be sober, be vigilant, be active, be brave. Be faithful and true witnesses for the Lord. Go forward in the fight until every vestige of Babylon lies desolate. Herald the message far and wide. The world must know that Jehovah Is God and that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the day of all days. Behold, the King reigns! You are his publicity agents. Therefore advertise, advertise, advertise, the King and his kingdom.⁹⁷

As the final words of his talk were spoken, a thirty-six-foot-long banner that had been hung behind Rutherford was unfurled to reveal the message "Advertise the King and Kingdom."⁹⁸ The banners around the convention that had the letters "ADV" were now understood to mean "advertise." While Rutherford was very careful to make sure Russell was still being publicly honored, this discourse and change in doctrine was a definitive attack on the Russell idea of personal character development taking precedence in one's personal life, substituting instead the idea it was the duty of all to preach the message of

⁹⁶ "Discourse by Brother J.F. Rutherford", *The Watchtower* (1 November 1922) 332-337.

⁹⁷ "Discourse by Brother J.F. Rutherford", *The Watchtower* (1 November 1922) 337.

⁹⁸ *Divine Purpose*, 102.

God's kingdom. Rutherford's call to preach would eventually become not only one of the main mechanisms in the religion's ability to grow but also its primary public calling card.

By 1926, Rutherford no longer felt the need to be subtle, and published an article in the 1 May *Watchtower* that stated directly and forcefully that anyone who focused on character development without witnessing was not only wrong but was in fact acting in opposition to God's stated commands.⁹⁹ The doctrinal change from character development as the primary personal focus to preaching as the main focus was one of the most important that Rutherford made during his presidency. The immediate impact on the Bible Students was an exponential increase in literature sold and hours spent preaching, but not on actual number of adherents. As M. James Penton explains, "[there] was practically no permanent growth at all before 1928...Rutherford's great proselytizing campaign had probably alienated far more members of the public than it had attracted...[and] while numerous new converts were being made, almost as many old-time Bible Students were severing association with [the Society]."¹⁰⁰ From Rutherford's point of view it was his first major coup over Russell. Before the relegation of character development to the movement's proverbial dust-bin, Rutherford's doctrinal changes had been small ones to relatively insignificant ideas such as the Great Jubilee. The change from emphasis on character development to preaching however was not only a reflection of his power but also in and of itself expanded Rutherford's control over not only the Society but the religion as well.

Rutherford did not merely have to rely on the printed word to spread his message globally, as he lived in the era of radio's ascendancy, and he took to heart Russell's example of using all available media options to spread the word. In 1924 Rutherford

⁹⁹ "Character or Covenant-Which?", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1922) 131-137.

¹⁰⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 93-94.

established a Society-operated radio station, WBBR, which at its height was heard on four hundred and eight stations around the world.¹⁰¹ The station featured several programs, including addresses from Rutherford that lasted about fifteen minutes. While many thousands of Russell's followers had heard Russell speak on his nearly continuous travels, with the radio station it was possible for Rutherford to reach millions of homes in an instant, as by 1930 in America alone over twelve million homes had radio sets.¹⁰² The new technology allowed Rutherford to connect with the Bible Students in a way that Russell had not, as they not only heard his voice directly but consistently, helping to solidify his cultivated image of being God's chosen leader. It also allowed thousands of potential new converts, who had little to no knowledge of Russell or his teachings, to hear Rutherford's sermons. While Rutherford's adherent numbers were static, the turnover worked in his favor, as those leaving would not have the resources of the Society and would thus be unlikely to mount any major challenge, and the newer adherents would not have the same ideas about Russell as the older Bible Students did.

Like many others, the Dawn viewed as unacceptable the changes that Rutherford was making to doctrine and what they saw as an attack on Russell's teachings and character. W. Norman Woodworth, who for years had been a member of the Society's headquarters staff, had developed a program for WBBR called "Frank and Ernest", wherein "an 'earnest' seeker after Truth would ask questions about the Bible, and a mature, knowledgeable Bible scholar would provide 'frank' answers." When he was removed from the Society for associating with a splinter ecclesia of Bible Students in Brooklyn, Woodworth continued the program on WOR in New York City.¹⁰³ Transcripts of the

¹⁰¹ Rogerson, 55.

¹⁰² Stephen Smith, "Radio: The Internet of the 1930s", *American RadioWorks* 10 November 2014, <http://www.americanradioworks.org/segments/radio-the-internet-of-the-1930s/> accessed 15 March 2018.

¹⁰³ Redeker, 282-283; 318; 318.

dialogue produced on the radio show proved popular, and a monthly journal, titled *The Dawn*, was shortly being published.¹⁰⁴ The Dawn would also republish Russell's works, including *Studies*, as well as publishing new tracts and books that "were harmonious with [Russell's] writings and especially designed for the newly interested."¹⁰⁵ The Dawn attracted disenfranchised members of the Society who rejected Rutherford's growing control and became a group to which more traditional "Russellite" Bible Students gravitated.¹⁰⁶

Continuing his goal of erasing Russell's spiritual memory within, and thus influence over, the movement at a convention in Columbus, Ohio on July 26, 1931, Rutherford once again made a direct attack on Russell's teachings when he introduced a resolution to the congregants that called on them to accept a new name: Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁰⁷ Russell had explicitly stated in the *Studies* that, "we deprecate the taking of any human name, [and] we deprecate any name that is or might become a sectarian or party name, and thus separate some of the Lord's people from all others who are his."¹⁰⁸ While Russell had come to accept the term Bible Students to refer to his movement primarily as a matter of practicality as its operations grew, he rejected any specific denominational name.¹⁰⁹ By the 1930s however many individuals and ecclesias had split from the Society, and most of these groups used "Bible Students" in some form of their new name.¹¹⁰ This created problems for Rutherford and the Society, as they also used the term Bible Students to refer to themselves. One problem was the confusion of the public about which group of Bible Students were connected to the Society, and Rutherford wanted to be able to more

¹⁰⁴ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Redeker, 319.

¹⁰⁶ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 94.

¹⁰⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Russell, *Studies... Volume VI: The New Creation* 83.

¹⁰⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Wills, 172.

definitively identify his group as distinct from the others.¹¹¹ Another problem was that many individuals who remained with the Society still considered schismatic groups as being brothers in faith, even if they disagreed on some of the particulars, a notion which Rutherford saw as tantamount to heresy.¹¹² The new name served as a way to solve both the issue of confusion among the general public and as way to further sever any perceived relationship with dissident groups from inside the religion. The public at large would know that the Jehovah's Witnesses were an organization distinct from others who continued to use the term Bible Students, even if they had a shared history and similar doctrinal beliefs. And the adherents who had remained from the time of Russell would no longer refer to themselves as Bible Students but as Jehovah's Witnesses, marking both a symbolic and actual change.

On a larger scale the change also represented "a major psychological break with Russell and the Bible Student past" that helped sever the remaining hold that Russell's teachings had on the Society and those who stayed committed to it.¹¹³ Many of the changes to doctrine that Rutherford had initiated to this point were primarily internal in nature, meaning only those inside the movement would readily know that a change had been made and even then would only understand the radical departure from earlier teachings if they had studied them. In just under fifteen years Rutherford had dismantled many of the religious doctrines that Russell had spent his life creating and cultivating, ironically using the Russell approved mechanism of new light. The name change was by far the most outwardly visible sign of this dismantling and has been called "a bold stroke of genius on Rutherford's part."¹¹⁴ The new name furthered Rutherford's goal of exorcising the ghost of Russell and his hold over the hearts and minds of the movement's followers.

¹¹¹ *Divine Purpose*, 125.

¹¹² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 86-87.

¹¹³ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 87

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

No longer were they simply Bible Students, a rather generic name that could be used by several disparate groups. They were now Jehovah's Witnesses, a distinct entity that set them apart and gave them a specific purpose before God.

By 1931, Rutherford had a religious movement that was nearly where he wanted it to be: he had complete control over the legal organization; had changed doctrines, both big and small, to further cement his power over the movement and its adherents; had pushed out most of the dissenters; and had changed the name to one that made a loud and definite separation from the teachings of Russell. Another doctrinal change shows clearly the difference between Russell's Bible Students and Rutherford's Jehovah's Witnesses. As shown above Russell believed that there were three classes of people that would exist when Christ's rule began, the second of which was the "great multitude" that would go to heaven but as servants to the anointed, not as rulers.¹¹⁵ In 1935, Rutherford re-interpreted who the "great multitude" were, and taught that they were not a secondary heavenly class but rather were part of the class that could expect the chance of an earthly reward and everlasting life.¹¹⁶

This change accomplished several of Rutherford's goals. First it gave those who were already a part of the Society further clarification about what their future held. Unless one was of the anointed, they could look forward to a life on earth, rather than wondering who the "great multitude" were. The change "greatly simplified Biblical doctrine and teachings", and with a lessening of uncertainty on their role in God's plan adherent minds were eased a bit.¹¹⁷ It also had the benefit of even further reducing reliance on Russell's teachings and increasing Rutherford's pre-eminence in doctrinal matters. The primary impact of this doctrinal change regarding the "great multitude" was on Rutherford's now

¹¹⁵ See Chapter Two, page 111.

¹¹⁶ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 83; *Divine Purpose*, 140.

¹¹⁷ *Divine Purpose*, 140.

decade-old injunction that proselytizing should be paramount to all Witnesses. In a rare instance of agreement with Russell, the class that could expect an earthly reward were not the target of Rutherford's original call to preach in 1922, just as they had not been for Russell. The primary goal was to recruit and find members of the 144,000 anointed and the "great multitude." With the merging of the two secondary classes into one, this emphasis changed:

...Not only must the spiritual food provided for God's people be directed [at the remnant of 144,000] but it must also now supply nourishment fit to strengthen those whose Scriptural hopes were entirely earthly. No longer were the remnant going into the field looking for just the scattered sheep of Jehovah's anointed ones. Now these ministers must begin to look for the 'other sheep'.¹¹⁸

This was the logical completion of Rutherford's call in 1922 to "advertise the Kingdom." The focus of the Witnesses would no longer be the numerical minority of the anointed, who by their very nature were already saved, but the rest of the world that needed this "spiritual food."

Between 1932 and 1938, Rutherford worked on his final major doctrinal change to the Witnesses' teachings, involving the power and influence of elders in each individual ecclesia. Until 1932 those ecclesias which had remained with the Society had retained a substantial portion of autonomy. They still elected their own elders, organized their own meetings and conventions, and could technically choose to ignore Rutherford's changes and still remain a part of the Society and movement, although this was increasingly difficult to do.¹¹⁹ In a two-part article titled "Jehovah's Organization" published in the 15 August and 1 September 1932 editions of *The Watchtower*, Rutherford refuted the idea of elected elders. He claimed that according to Scripture elders had been selected by the apostles to

¹¹⁸ *Divine Purpose*, 140.

¹¹⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 87.

serve as leaders of the congregations according to their “age and advancement in faith and knowledge of the Lord”, not by a vote of the congregation.¹²⁰ At the end of the second part of the article a resolution was printed that the ecclesias were prompted to copy and return to the Society. This resolution stated that the ecclesia agreed to end the practice of elective elders and set up what were known as “service committees” made up of actively proselytizing members of the congregation. Although the members of the service committees were initially elected by the congregation,¹²¹ the requirement that they be made up of “active service workers of this company”¹²² guaranteed that they would be primarily Society men, as it was the “active service workers” who would be pushing Rutherford’s teachings, especially the call to actively preach, the hardest.

By 1938 however even this arrangement had run its course and Rutherford was able to implement what he referred to as “theocratic organization.”¹²³ In another two-part article, titled appropriately “Organization”, published in *The Watchtower* editions of 1 June and 15 June 1938, Rutherford systematically eliminated the last remaining vestige of democracy from the movement. Rutherford began this article with “JEHOVAH'S ORGANIZATION is in no wise democratic. Jehovah is supreme, and his government or organization is strictly theocratic. This conclusion is not open to successful contradiction.”¹²⁴ He devoted the remainder of the article’s two parts to proving that no system of democracy could ever be in harmony with God’s word, and that only a theocratic organization was Scripturally justified. He once again included a resolution that he pressed the ecclesias to accept, which read in part: “We... recognize that God's government is a pure theocracy... and that ‘THE SOCIETY’ is the visible representative of the Lord on earth,

¹²⁰ “Jehovah’s Organization (Part 2)”, *The Watchtower* (1 September 1932) 262.

¹²¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 89.

¹²² “Jehovah’s Organization (Part 2)”, *The Watchtower* (1 September 1932) 266.

¹²³ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 218.

¹²⁴ “Organization (Part 1)”, *The Watchtower* (1 June 1938) 163 [emphasis original].

and we therefore request ‘The Society’ to organize this company for service and to appoint the various servants thereof....”¹²⁵ While they did not know it, the ecclesias’ voluntary surrender of their remaining autonomy was the result of decades of maneuvering by Rutherford. He was, after nearly twenty years of doctrinal changes, finally able to bring the complete control of both the religion and the Society under the same umbrella. He had successfully erased the memory of Russell and gained total authority over the entire movement.

By using the idea of new light Rutherford was able to continue to press the importance of the preaching work, not only on a personal level, but more forcefully on an institutional level by requiring the service committees be constituted of those who actively proselytized. After this successful change he was again able to use new light to show that only a theocratic organization could truly be considered God’s instrument, a view that would have been strongly emphasized by the committees that were already holding much power within each ecclesia. This theocratic organization could only be run by the Society, specifically within the power of the presidency. While the Governing Body would come to replace the power of the office of president in the future as will be discussed below, here the harmony of the three key mechanisms brought out in Chapter One can be seen to already be working to reinforce each other, beginning the drive to the rapid expansion that was to come under Rutherford’s successors.

In comparison, the Dawn specifically highlighted their connection to Russell and his teachings. Besides reprinting Russell’s works, they held to the idea that each individual ecclesia was self-contained, and continued the practice of electing elders.¹²⁶ In 1944 they published an article in *The Dawn* magazine specifically stating that their function was not

¹²⁵ “Organization (Part 2)”, *The Watchtower* (1 June 1938) 182 [emphasis original].

¹²⁶ James Parkinson, email to author, 1 July 2016.

to act as a controlling organization but “to offer assistance and cooperation in the work of the Lord to any ecclesia that felt such would be helpful in the interests of the Truth.”¹²⁷

While they did encourage public proselytizing in keeping with Russell’s legacy of travel and speaking, they believed in Russell’s teachings that personal character development was more important, and consequently they would not institute the type of massive scale preaching of the Witnesses.¹²⁸ While this kept them in line with their tradition, it inevitably did little to institute any real growth in the movement. The Dawn, by the time of Rutherford’s final changes, were what Russell had intended the Bible Students to be: a small group of believers who concentrated less on preaching and more on character development, reveling in the Truth, and waiting for the return of Christ.

Despite his best efforts and his continuous calls to preach, by the end of Rutherford’s life he had seen only a moderate increase in worldwide adherent numbers: from approximately 21,500 in 1917¹²⁹ to a reported 106,000 in 1942.¹³⁰ These numbers do not quite do justice to Rutherford’s success in creating new converts. Until 1938, when Rutherford had finally been able to erase the influence of Russell’s memory, nearly as many of the old Russell followers were leaving as new ones were joining, and “Jehovah’s Witnesses began to expand and, in the last few years of [Rutherford’s] life, thousands of new converts joined them.”¹³¹ While this increase would pale in comparison to his successor’s explosion of growth, it was a remarkable achievement during a period of incredible difficulty throughout the world, with the Great Depression sandwiched between two world wars. As Penton notes: “...it is probable that only someone like [Rutherford]

¹²⁷ Redeker, 319.

¹²⁸ Redeker, 320.

¹²⁹ “Memorial Supper Reports”, *The Watchtower* (15 May 1917) 155-158, Reprint 6088-6089.

¹³⁰ *1943 Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1942), 221. It should also be noted that due to World War I and World War II these numbers are incomplete because of the difficulty of getting reliable numbers from certain countries. However, given the accuracy with which Witness numbers are respected by the academic community, I am using them here as a baseline to show definite, even if incomplete, growth.

¹³¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 94.

could have created the basis for making Jehovah's Witnesses the important, world-wide sectarian movement that they are today."¹³²

By the time of his death on 8 January 1942, Rutherford had essentially created a new movement, and could be viewed as the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Penton has compared Rutherford with Brigham Young, the second leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, more commonly known as Mormons, calling them "hard-bitten pragmatists who gave a degree of permanency to the movements they dominated."¹³³ While this is no doubt true, in the case of the Witnesses Penton understates Rutherford's impact, as he did far more than just solidify his predecessor's movement. Russell is considered the founder of the Bible Students, even though he borrowed from the Adventist writers George Storrs and especially Nelson H. Barbour, from whom Russell took actual lists of potential readers for his work in addition to theological ideas. However, despite this obvious debt to men such as Storrs and Barbour, neither are considered co-founders of the Bible Students.

In the same way, while Rutherford used the legal organization that Russell had founded and used the theological basis that Russell had left behind, Rutherford created what should be considered a new religion from that base, much like Russell had with Adventist ideas and Barbour's list of subscribers. While Rutherford did not change every doctrine that Russell had taught, the move away from Russell was far more complete than Russell's rejection of Barbour and other Adventist ideas had been. When comparing the Dawn, who can reasonably be looked upon as a continuation of Russell's Bible Students, with the Witnesses, the difference between the two is striking. It was however Rutherford's Witnesses using the mechanisms he helped develop, not Russell's Bible

¹³² *Ibid*, 103.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 103.

Students who lack them, that would continue to thrive despite the challenges that were to come.

Nathan Knorr: 1942 to 1975

Rutherford, almost certainly remembering the difficulties that accompanied his own rise to power, had chosen a successor rather than leave it open to a vote of the members upon his death. He chose a relatively young man by the name of Nathan Homer Knorr, a Witness who had only known Rutherford as leader and who had risen quickly within the hierarchy of the Society.¹³⁴ Knorr did not have any significant impact on the theological aspects of the Witnesses, leaving most matters regarding doctrine to his long-time vice-president Frederick Franz. Knorr's impact as the third president of the Society was administrative, with his reforms of Witnesses' preaching and worship being key to the growth experienced by the movement. In stark contrast to his predecessors however, who gained greater control of the movement throughout their terms, it was during Knorr's presidency that the office of the president was relegated to an administrative position.

Knorr was born in 1905 in Pennsylvania, and raised in the Dutch Reformed church.¹³⁵ At the age of sixteen he became associated with the Bible Students, by this time under the leadership of Rutherford, and in 1923 he became a full-time colporteur and moved to the Brooklyn headquarters.¹³⁶ Rising quickly within the organization, by 1934 Knorr was a member of the board for the New York organization, and by 1935 was listed in the *Yearbook* as being vice-president of the People's Pulpit Association, which would later be renamed the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York.¹³⁷ Knorr's "zeal for

¹³⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 105.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 105.

¹³⁶ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 105.

¹³⁷ *1935 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: People's Pulpit Association, 1934), 4.

Rutherford's policies endeared him to [Rutherford], who made him a sort of second-in-command whenever he visited the San Diego office or took sick."¹³⁸ With Rutherford's death in 1942 Knorr was elected president, essentially a formality as Rutherford had named him his successor, and quickly began to have an impact on the activities of the Witnesses.

Given that Knorr was a firm believer in Rutherford's leadership it is seemingly ironic that one of Knorr's earliest actions was to remove from any future Witness publications the name of the primary author or authors. Rutherford himself was a prolific author who wrote on average one book per year, with other tracts and pamphlets being written in between the major works.¹³⁹ As with Russell, Rutherford's name was listed as the author of his works, belying to some extent Rutherford's emphasis on ridding the organization of "creature worship." Knorr's removal of all author names from Witness publications shortly after taking office in 1942 was the culmination of Rutherford's stated goal. Penton has suggested that Knorr may have had another underlying reason for this change, namely his own ego. Penton writes Knorr, "knew that he would not be able to gain the prestige that both Russell and Rutherford had obtained as authors...[and] may very well have wanted to hide his own inadequacy by having practically all Watchtower literature published anonymously."¹⁴⁰ Raymond Franz, a former member of the Witness hierarchy who worked with Knorr for over a decade, also describes Knorr as having little skill in writing or Biblical exegesis,¹⁴¹ but Penton provides no direct evidence for this "face-saving" claim.

Regardless of the reasons behind Knorr's removal of author names from Witness publications it was significant. Never in Bible Student/Witness history had the president of

¹³⁸ Wills, 225.

¹³⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 83.

¹⁴⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 106.

¹⁴¹ Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, 4th Ed. (Atlanta, Georgia: Commentary Press, 2007), 72.

the Society not been the visible figurehead of the movement. Russell's name and likeness were well known due to his many travels and his works were without question the basis for all that was taught in the movement. While the Society has attempted to downplay Rutherford's power since his death, *The Watchtower* magazines at the time referred to him with titles such as "Chief", "Generalissimo", and the "visible leader."¹⁴² The president had always written much of the spiritual food that the adherents were fed, letters to *The Watchtower* were more often than not addressed specifically to the president, and the president was seen as the final authority on all matters by most members of the movement. Knorr's change firmly cemented the idea of the Society as God's "theocratic" organization. Knorr still held complete control over every aspect of the movement but, at least for all outward appearances, the Society itself now became the symbol of the movement, rather than the president being God's representative on earth.

Continuing to build upon the concept of a "theocratic" organization, Knorr reinstated the visits of a traveling Society representative to each congregation which had been discontinued under Rutherford in favor of appointing permanent regional servants to oversee each "zone" of about twenty congregations.¹⁴³ These traveling Society representatives, called Circuit Servants, were responsible for ensuring that the congregations were up to date regarding back-calls, financial accounts, stock counts of magazines, and other administrative records.¹⁴⁴ It was another step in emphasizing the role of the Society over that of the individual, creating a more bureaucratic "theocratic" organization in the process. Even the Circuit Servants had an immediate overseer, called a District Servant, whose job was to report on the progress and actions of the Circuit Servant directly to the Society.¹⁴⁵ On its own this appears to be a minor change. The Society was

¹⁴² Franz, *Crisis of Conscience* 68-71.

¹⁴³ *Divine Purpose*, 189, 199.

¹⁴⁴ *Divine Purpose*, 199.

¹⁴⁵ Rogerson, 68.

already in control of the individual congregations due to Rutherford's machinations, Knorr just made it more direct and obvious. The importance of this change goes beyond merely the façade of the organization however and was one of the first steps taken in the eventual dissolution of the president's power and the transference of that power to the modern day Governing Body.

Knorr continued to follow Rutherford's path in stressing the preaching work, with several important and far reaching decisions increasing the size and impact of the Witnesses and leading to the exponential growth experienced during most of Knorr's term. In 1943, Knorr introduced a two-hour meeting, called the Theocratic Ministry School, in addition to the two regular meetings each week held by congregations:

The first hour was called the *Service Meeting* and was wholly concerned with improving the Witnesses' techniques of advertising their beliefs; the second hour was the *Theocratic Ministry School*, a speech-training course open to all brothers in the congregation. The overall effect of these meetings was that all the (male) Witnesses became reasonably capable of giving talks in public and arguing for their beliefs on people's doorsteps. Every Jehovah's Witness began to think of himself as a 'minister'—a line of thought initiated by the Society.¹⁴⁶

Rutherford encouraged the Witnesses to use portable phonographs that played brief versions of his sermons and speeches in their preaching work,¹⁴⁷ effectively relegating the Witness himself to a mere delivery person. Knorr eventually discontinued the phonograph, replacing it entirely by 1953 with sermons, lasting from three to eight minutes, that were outlined by the Society but prepared in more detail by the Witness themselves.¹⁴⁸ With the two-hour meetings every week teaching Witnesses how to defend their faith and how to speak in public, rather than simply telling them they must do so, they became a far more potent evangelizing force. While Knorr did not create the mechanism of actively

¹⁴⁶ Rogerson, 68.

¹⁴⁷ Rogerson, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Wills, 235.

proselytizing, Knorr's change made the individual Witness responsible for arguing for their beliefs and greatly strengthened the power that preaching had within the organization.

The Theocratic Ministry School was the logical extension of Knorr's creation a few months earlier of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, known simply as Gilead, at the Society's farm in New York state. Rather than merely a weekly meeting for the general improvement of door-to-door canvassing efforts, Gilead was a five-month long course that was by invitation only, and only if the Witness had already completed two years of full-time pioneer preaching. Gilead was also open to female students, with forty-nine of the first 100 student class being women.¹⁴⁹ In contrast, the weekly Theocratic Ministry School instituted in the individual congregations later that year would not be open to women until 1958.¹⁵⁰ The course was intense, with nearly every hour of the weekday scheduled for some purpose relating to being at the school:

[most] of the subjects were Biblical...studies were conducted in theocratic records, missionary service, theocratic ministry, Bible truth, public speaking, Bible research, Scriptural facts, history of worship, Kingdom prophecies, Supreme Law, Bible themes and a foreign language [initially Spanish]...[the] schedule called for...schooling each of the five weekdays, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., with one hour off for lunch at noon...every weekday evening the hours from seven to ten were also devoted to study. In addition to the lecture and classroom study each weekday, students devoted three hours in the afternoon to performing domestic and farm duties.¹⁵¹

Weekends were filled as well, with a lecture on Saturday morning followed by private study or personal instruction from the lecturers, and then preaching work in the surrounding towns and villages, which also occurred after the regular worship service on Sunday. They were provided food and lodging, a small stipend, and travel expenses to and from the school by the Society. Gilead was not for the everyday Witness to preach to his

¹⁴⁹ *Divine Purpose*, 203; 204; 203.

¹⁵⁰ Wills, 232.

¹⁵¹ *Divine Purpose*, 205.

neighbors door-to-door but was specifically created in order to send Witnesses to other countries in order to spread Witness beliefs. While members of the organization had gone to different countries to promote the movement's teachings, following the example set by Russell's travels and speaking, they had not before been trained for that purpose. While there was no direct monetary charge for Gilead's training, the students were expected to put in heavy days which included working on the Society's farm, and after graduation were required to "accept an assignment of service any place in the world the Society decided to send them."¹⁵²

Knorr had a much larger view of the world and possible converts than Rutherford, who had focused primarily on the work being done in the United States, British Commonwealth and Europe. As Tony Wills notes, Knorr came into power in the middle of World War II, which left him with Central and South America as the only viable options for expanding.¹⁵³ Knorr wasted no time in setting up the foundation for this expansion, creating the Gilead school and having the first classes learn Spanish as a second language. Educating the Witnesses through the creation of Theocratic Ministry Schools within the congregations and Gilead for more intensive training was a two-fold idea. It first allowed for the Witnesses to play a more personal part in the preaching work, while also making them more invested in the work and giving them the skills necessary to be more effective at it. But, secondly, Knorr was also a firm believer in the "theocratic" government that he had inherited from Rutherford. By teaching the Witnesses what to say and how to say it, he paradoxically gave them both a more personal role and yet less autonomy within that role. They were taught how to teach the message of the Society, rather than simply passing out books and playing phonographs that did it for them. The plans were the same, but now the Witnesses were the tools. Twelve members of the first graduates of Gilead

¹⁵² *Divine Purpose*, 205; 204; 204.

¹⁵³ Wills, 225.

were sent to Cuba in 1943 and by the next year all would be praised by the local Witnesses for their devotion and energy.¹⁵⁴ By 1944 the reputation of the missionaries trained at Gilead had spread widely within the organization, as evidenced by the Branch Servant in India, the Society's primary representative in the region, specifically requesting that a "Gileadite" be sent to help with the preaching and organizational work in that country.¹⁵⁵ In 1949 Gilead graduates sent to Brazil were being credited with a sixty-five percent increase in active members over the previous year.¹⁵⁶

After the first decade of Gilead graduates being sent out to nations around the world, the number of adherents had risen from 115,420 in 1942 to 519,982 in 1953.¹⁵⁷ Knorr had overseen an increase of four hundred thousand members in ten years, over four times the number that Rutherford had in twenty-seven years as president. Earlier calls to preach and "advertise" the message of Jehovah's Witnesses resulted in surprisingly little growth given how hard it was pushed by Rutherford and in the pages of *The Watchtower*, so while Rutherford could claim that the message was being spread, it was not happening very quickly. Part of this can be attributed to a few factors: nearly as many leaving the organization during his first twenty years in office as were joining; the initial turmoil of his rise to power decimating the Society's leadership; two world wars surrounding the Great Depression; and limited technology for mass distribution. But these factors alone cannot account for all of what was at best a modest increase given the amount of effort put into it. Rutherford gave his followers the plans but not the tools with which to carry them out. Phonograph records of Rutherford speeches, numerous books and *The Watchtower* and *Golden Age* magazines were impersonal methods of preaching, leaving the individual

¹⁵⁴ 1945 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1944), 128-132.

¹⁵⁵ 1945 *Yearbook*, 147.

¹⁵⁶ 1950 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1949), 102.

¹⁵⁷ 1954 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1953), 273.

Witness adherent a passive component in spreading the message beyond being the physical carrier of the items.

This increase in membership also occurred in part due to the increased frequency of conventions within the organization. In 1946, Knorr held the first international assembly in the post-war period in Cleveland, Ohio, attended by over eighty thousand Witnesses.¹⁵⁸ Knorr made smaller conventions a regular occurrence, instituting circuit conventions in 1946 and annual district conventions in 1948. Conventions had always been a part of the movement's operations, with new publications and new light often being announced at them. But they had been sporadic in nature, as the onus for holding a convention was left to the congregations themselves, and only rarely organized by the Society. These conventions were necessarily local affairs, with few if any international members of the organization being able to attend, especially during the war years. Over the next decade more international conventions would be held, mostly in the United States, with a few being held in Europe.¹⁵⁹ The final international convention was held in 1958 in New York City, and attracted the largest audience. Housed in and around Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds, Knorr's speech attracted 253,922 listeners.¹⁶⁰

The most important convention however was the international convention held in late July and early August 1950 in New York City. Knorr's speech attracted the largest audience of the convention, with 123,707 people filling Yankee Stadium and the surrounding area.¹⁶¹ It was at this convention that Knorr introduced *The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures (NWT)*, the Society's own version of the New

¹⁵⁸ "Glad Nations Theocratic Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses", *The Watchtower* (1 October 1946) 294.

¹⁵⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 112; 114.

¹⁶⁰ *1959 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1958), 44. After 1958's convention it was determined that the international conventions had simply become too large to continue to hold, so instead more localized conventions were held.

¹⁶¹ *1951 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1950), 39.

Testament, translated by the anonymous members of the New World Bible Translation Committee.¹⁶² The *NWT* is important because for the first time it gave the Witnesses a Bible that was specifically designed for their beliefs. The *NWT* replaced the King James Version as the translation of choice for Witnesses, and it had several distinct features. It replaced the style of speaking that was prevalent in the KJV with a more modern style, arguing that the original writings would have been in the style of speaking for the time and thus should be done so again.¹⁶³ It also was designed to be as close to a literal translation as much as possible, which due to the sometimes clunky results has led to it being described as “a literary monstrosity which is wooden, cold, and filled with curious American jargon which often comes straight out of Madison Avenue.”¹⁶⁴ The most distinctive feature of the *NWT* however is the use of “Jehovah” throughout the work. The Witnesses replaced the tetragrammaton, the four-letter abbreviation of the name of God typically rendered in Latin as YHWH, which appears 6,823 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, with “Jehovah” in every instance.¹⁶⁵

The *NWT* was not only a surprise to the Witnesses, but had only been revealed ten months earlier to the Society’s board of directors.¹⁶⁶ Knorr had commissioned the New World Translation Committee to translate the *NWT* outside of the organization, thereby skipping the need to inform the directors, and presented it to the Society as a gift at a meeting of the board on 3 September 1949.¹⁶⁷ The New World Translation Committee’s identity has never officially been revealed by the Witnesses, in following with Knorr’s 1942

¹⁶² Work on the Old Testament, which the Witnesses call the Hebrew Scriptures, would take until 1960, and the entire Bible has been printed since 1961 as *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

¹⁶³ “Foreward” *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 1950), 9-10.

¹⁶⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 252.

¹⁶⁵ *Divine Purpose*, 258. Although the tetragrammaton doesn’t appear in the New Testament writings, the *NWT* also uses Jehovah 237 times in the New Testament.

¹⁶⁶ *Divine Purpose*, 257.

¹⁶⁷ *Divine Purpose*, 257.

policy of anonymity for Witness publication authors. In his book *Crisis of Conscience* Raymond Franz, former member of the hierarchy of the Society and nephew to Knorr's vice-president Frederick Franz, identifies Knorr, Frederick Franz, Albert Schroeder and George Gangas as the Committee.¹⁶⁸ Of these only Frederick Franz had "sufficient knowledge of the Bible languages to attempt a translation of this kind."¹⁶⁹

Frederick Franz was a rare person within the Society, having joined when Russell was alive and prospered under Rutherford. Born in 1893, he had become convinced of Russell's teachings in 1913 and in 1914 had dropped out of the University of Cincinnati to become a Bible Student colporteur.¹⁷⁰ Franz professed himself to be of the anointed that same year.¹⁷¹ While at University he had become proficient in German and could read both Latin and Greek, and would later learn Spanish, Portuguese, French and be self-taught in Hebrew.¹⁷² Rutherford brought Franz to the headquarters in 1920 and by 1926 Franz had joined the Editorial Department.¹⁷³ By the time of Rutherford's death Franz was recognized as the Society's foremost biblical exegete and in 1945 had been chosen to be Knorr's vice-president upon the resignation of the previous vice-president.¹⁷⁴ It was Frederick Franz that Knorr would task with the interpretation of new doctrine throughout his presidency, with Raymond Franz commenting that, "Knorr relied on Fred Franz...as more or less the final arbiter on Scriptural matters and the principal writer of the organization."¹⁷⁵ While a practical idea at the time due to Knorr's lack of Biblical exegesis skills, it was another step on the road to turning the presidency into a powerless position within the Society.

¹⁶⁸ Franz footnote 16, 56.

¹⁶⁹ Franz footnote 16, 56.

¹⁷⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 107.

¹⁷¹ *JW Broadcasting-September 2015*. Video. United States, Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2015 https://tv.jw.org/#en/video/VODStudio/pub-jwb_201509_1_VIDEO.

¹⁷² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 107.

¹⁷³ Chryssides, *Historical Dictionary*, 57.

¹⁷⁴ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 107; "Events of Gladness at Cleveland and Pittsburgh", *The Watchtower* (1 November 1945) 335-336.

¹⁷⁵ Franz, 72.

Knorr and Franz continued to lead the Witnesses through a tremendous increase in membership throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Knorr's focus on education and administration coupled with Franz's handling of most doctrinal matters was a potent one. Between 1948 and 1960 average growth was 12.7%, and by the mid-1960s the Witnesses had over one million adherents.¹⁷⁶ Such incredible rates could not be expected to continue indefinitely however, and by 1966 growth had slowed to 2.2%.¹⁷⁷ But 1966 was to be a powerful year, as the Society published the book *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God*. In keeping with the anonymity policy it was published without an author credited, although Raymond Franz identifies the author as Fred Franz, and it is mostly a typical book in the Witness style.¹⁷⁸ It would however set in motion the final stage of the loss of power of the president.

The Witnesses had a history of their leaders setting dates for events to happen, with 1914 being the most prominent, and the last coming in 1925 with Rutherford's expectancy of the return of the old prophets. After the 1925 failure, no more dates were set for events, with the standard line being "it will happen soon" or some variation thereof. Franz, now the doctrinal leader of the movement, determined through his studies that 1975 would be a pivotal year marking the end of 6,000 years of human history.¹⁷⁹ In *Life Everlasting* he left no doubt that great things, even the millennial reign of Christ, was upon them:

According to this trust-worthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man's creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E. So six thousand years of man's existence on earth will soon be up, yes, within this generation...How appropriate it would be for Jehovah God to make of this coming seventh period of a thousand years a sabbath period of rest and release, a great Jubilee sabbath for the proclaiming of liberty throughout

¹⁷⁶ Wills, 238; Penton, *Apocalypse*, 113.

¹⁷⁷ Wills, 238.

¹⁷⁸ Franz, 72.

¹⁷⁹ *Life Everlasting in Freedom of the Sons of God* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1966), 26.

the earth to all its inhabitants! This would be most timely for mankind. It would also be most fitting on God's part, for, remember, mankind has yet ahead of it what the last book of the Holy Bible speaks of as the reign of Jesus Christ over earth for a thousand years, the millennial reign of Christ...there is now every reason why the human creation will yet be set free, not by men, but by Almighty God. The long-awaited time for this is at hand!¹⁸⁰

Raymond Franz described the resultant excitement and expectations among Jehovah's Witnesses as surpassing that of the 1940s, when it seemed that World War II would bring about God's kingdom.¹⁸¹ The Society never outright stated that 1975 would be the end, as Fred Franz had been in the organization for both Russell and Rutherford's failed predictions and understood that this was a bad idea. But the publication of articles in the Society's magazines over the next few years and Society representatives stressing that the end was very near so as to push preaching there was little doubt in the mind of the average Witness that 1975 was the end of this system of things and the beginning of Christ's reign.¹⁸²

1975 was ultimately the last major error for Knorr and Franz as the power in the organization.¹⁸³ In 1971 Knorr had allowed the creation of the Governing Body, a group of anointed Witnesses who were to decide on matters of religious doctrine and other spiritual decisions.¹⁸⁴ Until 1971 the members of the board of directors of the Society's legal organizations had served as an advisory council, but because these were technically elected officers it essentially put the leadership of the movement in the hands of the members who had a vote in the election of officers. The new Governing Body was to be self-perpetuating, with the Body itself picking their members from amongst the group of

¹⁸⁰ *Life Everlasting*, 29-30.

¹⁸¹ Franz, 73.

¹⁸² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 124-125; see also "Why are you looking forward to 1975", *The Watchtower* (15 August 1968) 494-501; "A Contrast-Missionaries with an Urgent, Lifesaving Work", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1975) 285.

¹⁸³ See Chapter One, page 56 for a fuller discussion of 1975.

¹⁸⁴ Chryssides, 141.

anointed Witnesses when it was deemed necessary. But from 1971 until 1975 it was little more than a way for Knorr, and typically Fred Franz, to put a sense of theological firmness on their decisions, as they were perceived as having gone through the Body and been given a stamp of approval from God's chosen.

This changed in 1976, shortly after the failed 1975 prediction, and while both kept their official roles as President and Vice-President, these roles were now primarily administrative, subject to the Governing Body's decisions. The Governing Body was able to pressure Knorr and Fred Franz to essentially give up their autocratic theological powers to the Body, ending the nearly one hundred-year-old role of President as the final decision maker that had started with Charles Russell. Raymond Franz, a member of the Governing Body during its first nine-years of existence, gives an account of the arguments, meetings and eventual acquiescence of Knorr and Fred Franz to the Governing Body, which absorbed the power of the President officially in 1976.¹⁸⁵ Nathan Knorr and Fred Franz, for over thirty years the administrative and theological powers in the Witness movement, were now merely two votes in a larger system that, though it still respected them, no longer abided by their decisions alone.

Ironically, while his decision to remove all names from Witness publications may have been one of the greatest changes for the future of the Witness movement, it was detrimental to his own power and that of the office of President. Russell and Rutherford had maintained their power through the sheer force of their personalities. Even though Rutherford had vowed to stop what he called the "creature-worship" of Russell, his prolific writing coupled with the radio sermons and phonograph records kept his own name front and center in the minds of most of the Bible Students and later Witnesses. Letters published in the *Watchtower* magazine during Rutherford's tenure

¹⁸⁵ Franz, *Crisis*, 80-110.

featuring questions or comments were almost always addressed to “Brother Rutherford.” In contrast, letters to the *Watchtower* during Knorr’s Presidency were addressed to “Brethren”, “Brother”, “Friend” and the like. Without the near-messiah like presence of either Russell or Rutherford, Knorr could not present himself as being God’s chosen leader through his writings and public presence.

Knorr’s Presidency should not be dismissed quickly however, as the changes he and Fred Franz made to both administrative and theological systems within the movement endure to this day. The Theocratic Ministry School, along with the Gilead Bible School, has taught generations of Witnesses how to confidently speak to people in the world, moving away from being mere deliverers of someone else’s message to being believers who can articulate their beliefs in their own words. Knorr’s greater focus on the world at large, rather than just the North American and European continents, without question allowed for greater increases in membership and active members.¹⁸⁶ His creation of the Governing Body as an official mechanism for dealing with theological issues, even if he never intended it to be more than a rubber stamp for his policies, is clearly felt today as the Body has been the ruling class of the Witnesses ever since.

Running parallel with Knorr’s presidency, the Dawn began a slight shifting away from the teachings of Russell, mirroring to an extent the changes that the Witnesses had made earlier. During the first few decades after the Dawn broke away from Rutherford’s changing Bible Students, the Dawn adhered to the original teachings of Russell. While there were some differences of opinion on doctrine, “each individual Christian is to decide on a change of idea, while he does not have a right to force his opinion on others.”¹⁸⁷ In

¹⁸⁶ For example, in examining the *Yearbooks* for 1942 and 1975, the beginning and effective end of Knorr’s presidency, the following growth rates were seen: Argentina-1942, 227 adherents-1975, 27,800; Australia-1942, 2,880 adherents-1975, 27,943; and India-1942, 317 adherents-1975, 4,357. *1942 Yearbook* (Argentina, 122; Australia, 138; India, 190), *1975 Yearbook* (Argentina, 24; Australia, 24; India, 26)

¹⁸⁷ Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016

1966 however the Dawn published a pamphlet, entitled “Oh, the Blessedness”, that suggested that several of Russell’s teachings may have been in error. Specifically, it looked at Russell’s teachings that 1874 was the beginning of Christ’s millennial reign and that 1914 would be the year when those who had been chosen to rule with Christ would be brought to heaven. Regarding 1874, long since abandoned by the Witnesses, the pamphlet stated that though it was expected that Christ’s millennial reign would begin when he returned, the fact that ninety-two years had passed since then and the world was still under Satan’s control showed that it must not have occurred.¹⁸⁸ The explanation given for the millennial reign not having begun was that though Christ did in fact return in 1874, “we know of no scriptures which indicate that the thousand-year reign was to begin *before the glorification of the complete church*, nor did Brother Russell ever quote any such scriptures.”¹⁸⁹ Because the church has yet to be glorified, or visibly brought to heaven, this change allows the Dawn to put off indefinitely the beginning of Christ’s millennial reign. This reinterpretation of what Christ’s return meant, and when his millennial reign would begin, fit nicely with their change regarding 1914.

Russell had himself recognized that 1914 was not, as he had predicted, the end of the “harvest” of the faithful followers.¹⁹⁰ It appears however that members of the Dawn continued to hold to this belief that most, if not all, of the members of the “harvest” had been chosen by 1914 and that very shortly God would bring them to heaven. This is shown by the 1966 publication of “Oh, the Blessedness”, which quoted liberally from Russell’s later writings where he cast doubt on his previous prediction that the “harvest” would occur in 1914. Were Russell’s later writings the dominant belief within the ecclesias such a publication would not have been necessary, and the fact that the Dawn felt the need to

¹⁸⁸ “Oh, the Blessedness”, Dawn Bible Students Association, 1966, last accessed 14 March, 2019, <http://www.dawnbible.com/booklets/blessedness.htm>.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, emphasis added.

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter Two, page 120.

bring this to their adherents' attention is a good indication of where their beliefs stood at the time. The Dawn summed up this teaching succinctly in the pamphlet:

Jesus came to be the Chief Reaper in the harvest, but not until the harvest work is complete, and 'the children of the kingdom' are all gathered to be with him in the kingdom, will they 'shine forth as the sun,' in the kingdom, as a part of that glorious 'Sun of Righteousness.' (Matt. 13:43; Mal. 1:3) Since we do not know how much longer the harvest work will continue, we do not know when the church will be fully glorified, and when the sunlike shining of the kingdom will begin. We had supposed the year 1914 was to be the date for this, but time has proved it otherwise.¹⁹¹

1914 was not completely discarded however, its meaning was simply reinterpreted and updated. It is still believed to be the end of the "Gentile Times", and the beginning of the end of Satan's rule on earth, which agrees with what the Witnesses teach in that regard.¹⁹² What it does is remove the idea that no new members of the "harvest" can be added, effectively pushing to an unknown future date, although it is always imminent, the full return of Christ. By tying the idea that Christ's millennial reign will not begin until after the harvest is complete, the pamphlet also allows 1874 to retain importance to their beliefs without being an anchor that would hold them back. They can say that 1874 was clearly the year that Christ began to return, but not when he started to assert his full power, which will come in time.

These changes made by the Dawn seem to resemble those made earlier by the Witnesses and, in some respects, they are. However, there is one crucial difference between the two which has led to the growth of the Witnesses and the stagnation of the Dawn, and that is that the Dawn's publication was decidedly a recommendation rather than a change in doctrine that all of those associated with the Dawn had to believe.¹⁹³ Rutherford and Knorr made it clear that in order to continue to be one of Jehovah's

¹⁹¹ "Oh, the Blessedness".

¹⁹² Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

¹⁹³ Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016

Witnesses all doctrines must be followed and differences of opinion would not be tolerated. The Society, as represented by the president and later the Governing Body, must be obeyed. Preaching the good news is the only way to salvation, and new light is to be accepted without question or comment. The Dawn's publication ended with a section titled "Other Views" and contained the admonition to "Let us, above all, continue to love one another, even though in our study of prophecy we do not all arrive at exactly the same conclusions."¹⁹⁴ By allowing for differences of opinion on even major doctrinal ideas the Dawn cannot present a unified message that, at least on the surface, harmonizes the Bible and appears to give solid answers to the problems of living in the world.

In this way the Witnesses have an advantage, especially since Knorr's decision to remove all personal names from Witness literature and the creation of the Governing Body. According to Raymond Franz, Knorr continued to share in the discussions and meetings of the Governing Body held, and "though clearly not happy with changes made, showed a generally cooperative and helpful attitude."¹⁹⁵ Knorr however died in 1977, and his long-time Vice-President, Fred Franz, succeeded him as President of the organization, albeit one with far less power than his predecessors. No longer would one man dominate the teachings of the religion, but rather a group of anointed would hold the reins and attempt to continue, using the mechanisms they had been provided, Knorr's great increase in membership.

Governing Body: 1976 to Present

By 1976, the Governing Body was in complete control of the organization and continue in that role today. They are the theological and administrative power of the

¹⁹⁴ "Oh, the Blessedness".

¹⁹⁵ Franz, *Crisis*, 110.

Witnesses, and their decisions are final. Like their predecessors who held the office of President they have made their mistakes and been severely criticized for them, but they have also led the Witnesses to incredible growth, a number possibly nearing twenty million if you add in those who are empathetic with the Witness beliefs but do not actively proselytize.¹⁹⁶ They have solidified their power for the foreseeable future with the changes in doctrine and organization that they have introduced. Not all the Body's decisions have been positive and there have been times of major loss of adherents, but the Body has consolidated its power throughout the years and is unquestionably the ruling elite of the movement.

The immediate crisis facing the Body upon its assumption of power in 1976 was that of the failed prediction of 1975. Although it had been Fred Franz who had pushed for the date being highlighted, few outside the inner circle knew this, as officially from 1971 it had been approved by the Body as being correct teaching. The Body's initial response was to hope that the failed prediction would fade from the Witnesses' collective memory while simultaneously placing the blame, not on themselves for teaching it, but on the Witnesses themselves for expecting too much to happen. It was a bigger problem however than they had anticipated, and disappointment over 1975 began to tell in their overall proselytizing numbers. Analyzing the *Yearbooks* published by the Society from 1968 to 1976, the Witnesses saw an average annual growth of 7.7%, with a high of an astounding 13.5% in 1973. The data contained in the 1977 through 1981 *Yearbooks* tells a different story and highlights the effect 1975 had on membership. The average annual growth for the Witnesses was 0.85%, with the years 1976 and 1977 showing a loss of members at -1.0% and -1.4% respectively.¹⁹⁷ In 1980 the Body realized that they had to say something about

¹⁹⁶ 2017 *Yearbook*, 177.

¹⁹⁷ *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, 1968-1976 editions (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania).

the failed prediction and published a pseudo-apology in the March 15, 1980

Watchtower.¹⁹⁸ The apology has been described by Raymond Franz, who claims to have been assigned to write it, as a statement that could not be as candid or truthful as it should have been regarding the Society's error in the teachings of the 1975 prediction because, "...I had to be governed by – not what I would have liked to say or even what I thought the brothers needed to hear – but by what could be said that would have some hope of approval by the two-thirds of the Governing Body when submitted to them."¹⁹⁹

1980 however brought its own problems and saw a major upheaval that threatened to leave the Witnesses broken from within. After the failure of 1975 and the Body's refusal to apologize or even really acknowledge the issues that it had caused, dissent within the ranks of Jehovah's Witnesses began to rise. As documented by Penton, "...by 1979 there were undercurrents in many parts of the world among Jehovah's Witnesses...unorganized groups of Witnesses began to question the teachings of the Watchtower Society."²⁰⁰ Disfellowshippings took place across the entire world, although typically in such low numbers in a given area that only locals knew about them.²⁰¹ What really threatened the organization was dissent from inside the organization itself. Several members of the Brooklyn headquarters began to question various teachings of the Society, including a member of the Governing Body, Raymond Franz.

Raymond Franz had joined the Governing Body in 1971 after serving at the headquarters in the Writing Department since 1965. Shortly after being assigned to the Writing Department he was tasked to help create what would become *Aid to Bible Understanding*, a nearly seventeen hundred page, A to Z reference work that focused on seemingly every topic that appears in the Bible, regardless of importance or general

¹⁹⁸ "Choosing the Best Way of Life", *The Watchtower* (15 March 1980) 17-18.

¹⁹⁹ Franz, *Crisis*, 253.

²⁰⁰ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 152.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 152.

usefulness, from the history of Babylon to the use of “waw”, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. While working on this, he became convinced that the Society’s teachings on some subjects were not based on Scripture, such as the arrangement of elders in the congregations, the “faithful and discreet slave” teaching, and even the Biblical exegesis that led to the identifying of 1914 as the year that Christ returned.²⁰²

A loyal, life-long Witness, whose parents had joined the Bible Students when Russell was still President, Raymond Franz was convinced to go along with the Society’s teachings on these points, and the book was finally published in 1971. According to his account though, the questions never really left him, and he continued to search for what the Bible taught, even when that went against what the Society had decided. He identifies himself as being one of the members to push hard for the Governing Body to be more than a rubber-stamp for Nathan Knorr.²⁰³ He recalls being concerned with the pushing of 1975 and attempting, in his public talks and his duties as editor in the Writing Department, to “[caution] the brothers about becoming unduly excited over 1975.”²⁰⁴ And he was among those members of the Body who originally wanted to issue some sort of statement regarding the failed prediction, and was in fact assigned to write the article that appeared in the 15 March 1980 *Watchtower*.²⁰⁵

Even with these doubts however Raymond Franz remained a loyal member of the Witnesses and the Society. The entire story of his resignation from the Governing Body in 1980 and his eventual disfellowshipping in December 1981, along with several other members of the headquarters, is told in remarkable detail in his book *Crisis of Conscience*, and need not be retold here.²⁰⁶ It is sufficient to note that his doubts regarding numerous

²⁰² Franz, 21; 27-31.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 81-83.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 248.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 253.

²⁰⁶ See Franz, Chapters 11 and 12, 273-377.

teachings of the Society had grown over the years, he had talked about them privately with several members at the headquarters who also had doubts, and these doubts became known to the Governing Body, who charged him and several others with apostasy and disfellowshipped them. What is notable is how public the entire affair became and the impact it had for the next several years. After mentioning some other events, including picketing and a small schism in Canada, M. James Penton notes that:

...the revolt against [the] society continued to grow and receive more publicity. By the first six months of 1982, more than 250 North American newspapers and magazines – including *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Christianity Today*, and *Maclean's* – had reported the growing upheaval among Jehovah's Witnesses and ex-Witnesses. In addition, more than one hundred television and radio programs aired the matter...several leading ex-Witnesses, including Raymond Franz...went on radio and television throughout North America to tell their stories and condemn the society for the 'spiritual oppression' of those Jehovah's Witnesses who dared to differ with it.²⁰⁷

This period was one of the most difficult that the Witnesses as an organization went through, following only the trials of 1918 and the Supreme Court cases of the 1940s. Major news organizations reported on the crisis across the world, causing it to turn from what was initially an internal incident to a globally known one. In many respects it was the first real test of the Governing Body's leadership for a situation that they had created rather than inherited.

The Body's handling of the situation could have gone in several directions. The first, and without question least likely, was for the Body to admit that they had made mistakes, reinstate many if not all the people who had been disfellowshipped, and begin instituting changes in policy to repair their image. But to do so would have damaged their hold on power, as they had positioned themselves as being God's chosen among the anointed to lead the movement into the future and to decide on theological issues,

²⁰⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 157.

including punishment and disfellowshipping. While the Body did not claim to be perfect they did claim that they were “being used by God to do his will... [and are] responsive to the direction of God’s spirit.”²⁰⁸ But to admit that they had made mistakes would be to undermine their power in the future, and having so recently become the power in the movement they were unwilling to relinquish any of it, instead resorting to “shrill name-calling and reprisals against ‘apostates’.”²⁰⁹

Another course of action would have been for the Body to completely ignore the dissidents and act as if nothing untoward was happening. They had already determined to not acknowledge any real culpability in the failure of 1975 and the consequences to adherents, other than the 1980 *Watchtower* article, and could have done the same here. Rather than fan the flames by continuing to highlight the apostasy they believed was happening at headquarters and in many places around the world, they could pretend that it was not an issue and hope that time would eventually kill the problem. While certainly a possibility, as shown by the non-response for the five years following 1975, it also was highly unlikely. Even with the failure of 1975, the Body still taught that the end of “this system of things” was right around the corner.²¹⁰ Even if the specific year of 1975 had come and passed the world was still near its end and that was the important thing to remember. There is a large difference however between the Body calming disappointed or disillusioned adherents and going so far as to ignore what they saw as apostasy against the organization and a challenge to their power.

The Body instead took the most confrontational option and decided to fight back in the pages of the *Watchtower* magazine with articles promoting itself and directly

²⁰⁸ “How Does the Governing Body Function Today” <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/jehovahs-will/jehovahs-witnesses-governing-body/> accessed 10 May 2017.

²⁰⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 161.

²¹⁰ “Conclusion of the system of things” <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/bible-glossary/conclusion-system-of-things/> accessed 9 May 2017.

attacking apostate actions, without naming any specific apostate. In the three years of *Watchtower* magazines from 1978 to 1980, the term governing body appeared only fifteen times. In comparison, in the three years from 1981 to 1983 at the height of the crisis, the term appeared forty-six times in its pages. The appearance count alone however does not tell how much stronger the push to reinforce the idea of the Body's power had become. Of the fifteen times that the term appeared throughout the *Watchtowers* of 1978 to 1980, only four times was it mentioned in connection with having oversight of the movement.²¹¹ From 1981 to 1983, the term related to power over the movement eighteen times, a nearly five hundred percent increase over the previous three years.²¹²

Along with the increase in appearances of the term, the titles and contents of the articles in the magazine had also become more focused to reemphasizing the Body and its power. Article names like "Co-Workers in the Harvest", "Confident in a World Beset by Doubts", and "Remain 'Solid in the Faith'", the only three articles where the term governing body was used as a controlling entity from 1978 to 1980, were benign and even reassuring. And within those articles the governing body's power was not put forward as being a key tenet, but almost as an afterthought, worth noting but not overly important. The article names and content of those mentions of the governing body in the articles from 1981 to 1983 were significantly more forceful. Titles like "Do We Need Help to Understand the Bible?"; "Be Wise—Conduct Yourself as a Lesser One"; "Who Are God's Ministers Today?"; and "Remember Those Taking the Lead Among You" left little doubt as to who was in charge. "Who Are God's Ministers Today?" included a list stating that to be a

²¹¹ See *The Watchtower*: "Co-Workers in the Harvest" (1 June 1978) 23; "Confident in a World Beset by Doubts" (1 August 1980) 13-14; "Remain 'Solid in the Faith'" (1 August 1980) 19.

²¹² See *The Watchtower*: "Do We Need Help to Understand the Bible?" (15 February 1981) 17-18; "Be Wise—Conduct Yourself as a Lesser One" (1 June 1981) 20; "Good Health to You!" (15 June 1982) 22; "Who Are God's Ministers Today?" (15 November 1982) 18-20; "Paul's Letter to the Galatians" (15 November 1982) 28-30; "Titus Tackles a Tough Assignment" (1 February 1983) 18; "Honor Godly Marriage!" (15 March 1983) 30; "Remember Those Taking the Lead Among You" (1 September 1983) 22; "'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism'" (15 September 1983) 20.

minister one had to constantly study the Bible, associate with other ministers, be baptized, and followed with a fourth identifying marker: “and by accepting guidance and direction from the Governing Body of the Christian congregation [i.e. Jehovah’s Witnesses].”²¹³ Unlike the earlier articles, obeying the Governing Body was now just as important as studying the Bible and baptism.

It is important to remember that the *Watchtower* is not just a magazine the Society prints for public consumption. It is how doctrines are taught, changed, and emphasized within the movement, with the articles printed in the magazine used as the basis for a one-hour question-and-answer session at their Sunday meetings designed to reinforce the primary lesson of the article.²¹⁴ There are instructions given in *The Watchtower* about which articles were to be discussed on which dates. Of the nine articles from 1981 to 1983 mentioned above, four of them were chosen to be the articles discussed in a future meeting.²¹⁵ This meant that during the week the Witnesses would specifically study the article, determine the answers to the questions at the bottom of each page, discuss it with their friends and family who were also Witnesses, and then on Sunday have it reinforced through a one-hour session where the only answers accepted were the ones they had been provided in the *Watchtower*. As an example of the type of question that would be asked, in the article “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism” this question was put forward: “How is unity maintained among Jehovah’s Witnesses today, and how does this compare with the organizational arrangement in the days of the apostles?” The answer given in the article was quite explicit: “...today, a group of anointed Christian elders make up the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. And just as the decisions of the first-

²¹³ “Who Are God’s Ministers Today?” (15 November 1982) 20.

²¹⁴ Franz, *In Search of*, 420.

²¹⁵ These four were “Be Wise—Conduct Yourself as a Lesser One”; “Who Are God’s Ministers Today?”; “Remember Those Taking the Lead Among You”; and “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”.

century governing body were communicated to the congregations, so today the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses receive instructions from the Governing Body...."²¹⁶

As Raymond Franz notes, this "...does not encourage genuine mental effort or frank discussion but merely the repeating (even if in one's own words) of the thinking of the headquarters organization."²¹⁷ In attending Witness meetings, children and teenagers are not exempted from this rote recital, with many parents encouraging, and sometimes making, their children give the answers during the meeting. They are rewarded during the meeting with a kindly "yes, that is correct" from the study leader that week, and by the other members with acknowledgements of a "good job" after the meeting has concluded. They thus learn from an early age that the *Watchtower*, and by extension the Governing Body, are always correct.

Coupled with the emphasis on the Body as having power over the movement during this time was an increased focus on apostasy. From 1978 to 1980, the word apostasy appeared forty-two times in the *Watchtower*, where from 1981 to 1983 it almost doubled to seventy-eight. The key here however is not the increase in the appearance between the two periods, but when that increase was at its highest during each. In 1978 and 1979 apostasy appeared a total of sixteen times, with these references being to the apostasy of either the first-century Christians after the apostles' deaths or other religious organizations, but not within the Witnesses. In 1980 apostasy appeared twenty-six times, sixty-two percent of the total for the previous three years, with most of these appearances in an article concerned with apostasy within the organization. In 1983 it appeared forty-nine times, or sixty-three percent of the total for the previous three years. These two years

²¹⁶ "'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism'", *The Watchtower* (15 September 1983) 20; see also Chapter One, page 31.

²¹⁷ Franz, *In Search of*, 420.

help highlight the Body's habit of focusing on anything that appeared to be a challenge to their power.

Raymond Franz notes that he believed that the Body had already developed an "iron hand in a velvet glove", but it was the events that "... took place in the spring of 1980...[that caused] the velvet glove to be removed, exposing the unyielding hardness underneath."²¹⁸ The year 1980 marked the start of the apostasy of Raymond Franz and several others, with five such apostates from the headquarters in Brooklyn, along with others from the local congregations, being disfellowshipped in August for "apostasy against the organization and the promoting of sectarian divisions...."²¹⁹ In the *Watchtower* of that month was also published an article titled "Remain 'Solid In The Faith'." In this article "apostasy" appeared seventeen times, sixty-five percent of the total number of times the word appeared throughout all of 1980's *Watchtower* magazines. The article was specifically about apostasy, instructing the reader how to recognize it both in themselves and in others, and how to protect against it.²²⁰ Published the same month as the disfellowshippings, the article reinforced the image of the Body as primarily reactionary, especially when they felt threatened. This was further shown by the choice of the article for discussion at a future meeting.²²¹ The Body wanted to quickly rid themselves of the apostasy within their midst, and the timing of the article and the notice of those who had been expelled from the organization was an attempt to do just that.

The Body reacted to perceived threats to their power just a couple years later, once again dealing with apostasy. As in 1980, the use of apostasy dominated an issue of the *Watchtower* in 1983, with twenty-five appearances, out of forty-nine for the year, in

²¹⁸ Franz, *Crisis*, 338.

²¹⁹ "Letter" *Our Kingdom Service* Vol. 23 No. 8, August 1980 (Brooklyn, NY; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York), 1 & 4.

²²⁰ "Remain 'Solid in the Faith'" *The Watchtower* (1 August 1980) 17-22.

²²¹ "'Watchtower' Studies for the Weeks'", *The Watchtower* (1 August 1980) 31.

the April 1, 1983 issue spread out over three consecutive articles.²²² The central theme of these articles was for adherents to reject apostasy and stay loyal to God and the organization. Were they spread out individually over several issues the impact would have been minimal, but combined they left little doubt how seriously the Body took apostasy. The second article in this issue, "Reject Apostasy, Cling to the Truth!", was a direct condemnation of the recent apostasy taking place and was chosen to be a study article.²²³ It said:

Some who once served as Jehovah's Witnesses have rejected various Scriptural views based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles... these self-seeking heretics have no "sharing" with the Father and the Son, no matter how much they may boast of having intimacy with God and Christ. Instead, they are in spiritual darkness. (1 John 1:3, 6) Lovers of light and truth must take a firm stand against these promoters of false teaching. In no way do loyal witnesses of Jehovah want to be accomplices in the "wicked deeds" of such unfaithful persons by supporting their ungodly words and activities in any manner.²²⁴

The last article of the three answered the inherent question thus presented, how can "lovers of light and truth" resist apostasy? They must, as the article title made clear, "Serve Loyally as 'Fellow Workers in the Truth'." According to the article this meant working together with fellow Witnesses to spread the message of God. Since the message of God is deciphered by the Body in the pages of the *Watchtower*, the article also handily reinforced their power. This hard-nosed response to any dissent within the movement makes clear why someone like Lee Elder, head of the AJWRB which has as its goal the complete removal of the Witnesses' policy on blood transfusion, continue to use pseudonyms.

After this period of growing pains for the Body, which greatly resembled Rutherford's contentious rise to power sixty years earlier, a period of relative internal calm

²²² *The Watchtower* (1 April 1983): "An Apostle's Stand Against Apostasy", 17-19; "Reject Apostasy, Cling to the Truth!", 20-25; "Serve Loyally as 'Fellow Workers in the Truth'", 25-31.

²²³ "'Watchtower' Studies for the Weeks'", *The Watchtower* (1 April 1983) 2.

²²⁴ "Reject Apostasy, Cling to the Truth!", *The Watchtower* (1 April 1983) 24.

followed. From 1984 to 2000, the Witnesses went from just over 2.6 million members to 5.7 million.²²⁵ The Body was secure in its power, and when Fred Franz died in 1992, the last connection to Charles Taze Russell and one of the few to Rutherford, the Body's power was absolute. In 1993 the Society published the book *Jehovah's Witnesses – Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, often referred to simply as the *Proclaimers* book, a history of the movement which included a stronger acknowledgement of the failed prediction of 1975 following the death of Fred Franz, the president of the organization and driving force behind the original prediction.²²⁶ While Franz as president did not have the power that his predecessors did, his personal appeal as the "oracle" of the organization and nearly eighty years of faithful service would not have allowed for the publication of this admission before his death. Some doctrinal adjustments were made, with the largest being a change to a doctrine known as "the generation" doctrine in 1995.²²⁷ But overall the Body was content with the power it had, and no major changes or events occurred during this time period.

It was not until the year 2000 that the Body made its next major move regarding its power in the movement. Since its founding the members of the Governing Body had sat on the Boards of Directors and held offices such as president and vice-president in the legal corporations used by the movement. In 2000 the Body members resigned their official positions in the corporations, seemingly ending any legal authority over the movement.²²⁸ However, that same year there was a change made to the Articles of Incorporation for the Pennsylvania organization, specifically in the Second Article. This change, only half a sentence in length, effectively granted the Body all the powers they had as members of the board with none of the legal responsibilities. Before 2000, the Second Article had

²²⁵ 1985 Yearbook, 30; 2001 Yearbook, 30.

²²⁶ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 104-105, 633.

²²⁷ This doctrine was discussed in Chapter One, page 61.

²²⁸ Chryssides, *Continuity*, 143.

described the work that the corporation was to do as a religious and charitable organization, and ended with “...and do any and all other lawful things that its Board of Directors shall deem appropriate in harmony with these purposes.”²²⁹ As amended in 2000, the article read, “..and do any and all other lawful things that its Board of Directors, *in accordance with the spiritual direction of the ecclesiastical Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses*, shall deem appropriate in harmony with these purposes.”²³⁰ The Body no longer needs to worry about running a day-to-day organization, and in fact gives this as a reason why they did it, to concentrate more on spiritual matters.²³¹ But the Body, by placing the Board of Directors under their “spiritual direction”, have not in fact given up any control at all. They retained all their power while simultaneously turning over most daily responsibility to a handpicked group of Directors.²³²

The most recent change to the Body’s power came in 2012 with the changing of the definition of a doctrine known as the “faithful and discreet slave.” At its core the doctrine is essentially one of power through teaching, as it is the “faithful and discreet slave” who God has appointed to deliver the necessary teaching and spiritual guidance that his followers need.²³³ Dating from the very beginning of the religion, for some time it was widely believed that Russell was himself this “slave”, being stated as such as late as 1923 in the *Watchtower*.²³⁴ Since 1927, the “slave” had been identified as all of those who were anointed to rule in heaven with Christ, of which the Governing Body was a part.²³⁵ At the

²²⁹ Articles of Incorporation, 2000 Barbara Anderson watchtowerdocuments.org. date last accessed 15 July 2019.

²³⁰ *Ibid* (emphasis added).

²³¹ “What is the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses?” JW.org [https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/governing-body/#?insight\[search_id\]=c2a6b90d-7a10-4ba7-9aaf-b27600ded2c9&insight\[search_result_index\]=14](https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/governing-body/#?insight[search_id]=c2a6b90d-7a10-4ba7-9aaf-b27600ded2c9&insight[search_result_index]=14) accessed 12 February 2017.

²³² For greater detail, see Chapter One, page 34.

²³³ “Who Really is the Faithful and Discreet Slave” <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/w20130715/who-is-faithful-discreet-slave/> accessed 30 May 2017.

²³⁴ “Loyalty The Test”, *The Watchtower* (1 March 1923) 71.

²³⁵ *Proclaimers...Kingdom*, 626.

2012 annual meeting of the Pennsylvania corporation it was announced that the “faithful and discreet slave” was not in fact the entirety of the anointed, but instead only the Body.²³⁶

This change seems to have been made to consolidate the Body’s power against any future challenge to it. On a purely practical level its impact will be that, in the unlikely event that someone who is of the anointed attempts to seize power, the Body can say that the Scriptures point to only the Body as being the “slave.” But the nearly instant disfellowshipment of the said anointed, combined with the label of apostate that the Body knows how to use so well, would render this at best a very minor incident for most Witnesses. As Penton explains, “...through the Watchtower Society, the Governing Body demands almost absolute obedience from Jehovah’s Witnesses. Ordinary Witnesses and even senior Watchtower officials must not disagree with the society’s policies or doctrines openly.”²³⁷ The changing of the “slave” to mean only the Body is therefore mostly a façade, adding another layer of prestige to the position without actually increasing its power by more than a minute amount.

Chapter Conclusion

The Witnesses are approaching nearly a century and a half of existence and show few signs of slowing down. Indeed, their 2017 *Yearbook* shows a growth of 1.8% around the world, with nearly two hundred and sixty-five thousand new converts being baptized.²³⁸ The numbers themselves may seem relatively small, but the fact that this religion is expanding at a steady pace, with hundreds of thousands of new converts per

²³⁶ “Annual Meeting Report” <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/activities/events/annual-meeting-report-2012/> accessed 30 May 2017.

²³⁷ Penton, *Apocalypse* 332.

²³⁸ “Grand Totals” 2017 *Yearbook*, 77.

year, is rather amazing. And while the amount of work required to achieve these numbers is immense, the Witnesses have proven they are more than willing to do it.²³⁹ Like Rutherford wanted, spreading the word has become not just a primary goal, but a key component in the Witnesses growth and success.

But the Witnesses do not do this work in a vacuum, going out with Bibles in hand and seeing how many will listen to their message of salvation. Their techniques and materials did not appear out of nowhere, ready-made to win humanity over to God's chosen organization and "the Truth." The Witnesses are the result of decades of constant effort to find the best way to spread the word and their faith. Mistakes were made, schisms occurred, and people were angered. Legal organizations were founded, magazines and books were printed by the millions, and doctrines were changed. Their leaders believed that the time of God was at hand, and yet still provided the necessary mechanisms for their followers to continue the work after they were gone. Each era of leadership fortified the movement by creating or setting more firmly in stone the use of key mechanisms, sometimes by destroying the past to set a better foundation for the future.

Charles Taze Russell's theological questioning and reasoning are what set the modern Witnesses on their path, though few of his ideas survived his successors unadulterated to this day, if they survived at all. His visions of heaven, the Second Coming of Christ, and emphasis on personal improvement in the eyes of God have been changed or discarded by the Witnesses, and strictly theologically speaking he is a minor, though respected, figure in the religion's doctrines and beliefs. Were his theology still practiced by the Witnesses today they would not be growing, as evidenced by the fact that while the Dawn have evolved slightly over the years, they have stuck to Russell's idea of personal

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

growth towards God, never developing the drive to gain converts or the belief that proselytizing is the only way to salvation. This has resulted in their numbers being low and their impact on society minimal, if not non-existent. However, in a slight twist of irony, the one theological idea that Russell promulgated that the Witnesses continuously use, and the Dawn tend not to, is that of new light. It is new light that has often allowed for the Witness leaders to make a change necessary to continue the growth of the religion.²⁴⁰

But Russell did far more than just create a convincing theology and gather adherents. He founded the major organizations that the Society continues to use to run its worldwide operations. These organizations have allowed the Witnesses to have a centralized point for their writing, printing, and doctrinal changes to develop, eventually being spread across the globe. Even though it was unpopular with some of his adherents at the time, Russell had the foresight to see that, should he die before the expected return of Christ, some structure needed to be built to continue the work. He never expected that a structure he believed to be a temporary stop-gap would be around a hundred years in the future. But there is also no question that if he had not created it, the Witnesses would never have developed. The Dawn provide proof of this, as they have held onto the idea that the ecclesias should be autonomous, with no truly settled foundation for building on as a worldwide organization. While they do have a headquarters in East Rutherford, New Jersey, it is a minor printing operation, and they have recently required significant help from other ecclesias for funding and printing their booklets and magazines.²⁴¹

J.F. Rutherford made a sharp turn from Russell's theology, limiting and eventually almost erasing Russell from the movement's collective memory. By changing the focus of the religion's adherents to proselytizing and creating more adherents, away from Russell's

²⁴⁰ See Chapter One, page 51.

²⁴¹ "The Dawn, Its Ministry" *Dawn Bible Students Association* Part 1
<http://www.dawnbible.com/dawn.htm> accessed 18 March 2018.

personal improvement approach, Rutherford was able to fill the organization with people who knew only him as the leader and had little knowledge of Russell. It also provided a template for how the movement would grow in the future by spreading its message as far and wide as possible. And by giving his followers a name, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Rutherford created a permanent break from the Russell era and his Bible Students. Theologically speaking, Rutherford's changes still have a much greater impact on the Witnesses and their beliefs.

Unlike Russell, however, Rutherford was not able to accomplish this through convincing Biblical exegesis talent, but as president of the legal organizations that Russell had founded. Because he had complete control over the magazines and booklets that the Society printed, he was able to dispense, or withhold, the "spiritual food" that the members received. Indeed, it was with this power that he made one of his most significant changes in the organization by instituting what he called "theocratic organization." While ostensibly a theological change in how the ecclesias were to be run, it was a brilliant organizational change that allowed him to consolidate power over any ecclesia that wanted to remain a member of the Society. They would have to agree to abide by the Society's rules and teachings, and because he ruled over the Society with an iron fist, they were agreeing to any change that Rutherford decided to make. He evolved his position as president from that of a persuasive religious leader to that of an autocratic one. And it was those powers that he bequeathed to his successors.

Nathan Knorr had few theological abilities and recognizing this he left doctrinal changes to Fred Franz. He was however an excellent administrator, and it was Knorr who took the powers that Rutherford had accumulated and used them to turn the Society into a smooth running and efficient organization. While Rutherford had pushed for more adherents with limited results, Knorr was able to accomplish this through fine tuning how

the proselytizing work was to be done. Rutherford had created a Witness organization that was every bit his, completely dominating it and with his personality at the center with radio station broadcasts and the use of phonographs for his sermons. Knorr focused on molding a more personable and better educated Witness who would be able to not merely recite their beliefs but argue them with conviction. Knorr also had a more global outlook than Rutherford, and with his founding of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead created ministers who could travel the world and spread the message of the Witnesses. Indeed, while there had been Witnesses in a few nations before Knorr's presidency, it was Knorr who created a truly international Witness organization. Given that most of their current growth comes from outside English-speaking nations, Knorr's impact on the Witnesses far outweighs his fame and recognizability.²⁴²

Ironically Knorr's most impactful creation would be the Governing Body, who would strip Knorr of his powers and assume control of the organization. While debate over the Governing Body and its power continues, there can be little doubt about their effectiveness in growing the organization and its adherents.²⁴³ In terms of sheer numbers the Witnesses have quadrupled in number since the Governing Body took over. In contrast to Knorr, who focused on the administration rather than the theological, the Governing Body has focused on the theological and delegated administrative tasks to others. Because they choose their members internally there has been an aura of stability around their decisions, as they typically choose members who will follow the status quo. While mistakes have been made, this image of a group of God's chosen running the organization has had a calming and positive impact on the Witnesses.

²⁴² "2016 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide", *2017 Yearbook*, 177-187.

²⁴³ See Chapter One, page 31.

Without knowing the history behind the Witnesses, their growth appears to spring from nowhere. The demanding work and dedication of their leaders and the rank-and-file Witness gets taken for granted, rather than acknowledged as a fervent commitment to their beliefs. Each era strengthened the mechanisms that they had been bequeathed, and the impact that each of their leaders has had is important to know as well as it allows for an understanding of how the religion has been able to evolve and thrive, and at the same time provides a guide to the Witnesses on how this can be further accomplished in the future. This adaptability has become a hallmark of the Witnesses over the past century and a half, allowing them to survive threats both internal and external. The ability to adapt as an organization is not an inherent one, but one that is taught and learned over the course of many trials and errors, successes and defeats. Each leadership era has added to this knowledge, and today the Witnesses do not have just a solid foundation from which to build, but several stories of examples to draw from. They have not just a few general ideas and beliefs, like the Dawn, but mechanisms that have withstood not only the test of time, but the hostility of the world.

Chapter Three: Relations with the World

When discussing the Witnesses, authors tend to focus less on the Witnesses themselves and more on the events and the impact that they had on the world around them, making the Witnesses secondary players in their own story. The Witnesses become yet another way to retell events, most commonly those that took place during World War II or the Cold War. Rather than use the Witnesses to say something about the larger event, the purpose here is to use larger events to focus on how the Witnesses were able to expand by adapting. With the key mechanisms discussed in Chapter One, and the foundation of Witness history explored in Chapter Two, this chapter will look at three types of hostility the Witnesses have faced: conflicts with national governments; problems with local governments and citizens; and internal dissent that has plagued the Witnesses. The onus is not on the event, such as World War II, but on how these events affected and continue to affect the Witnesses.

The issues Witnesses have faced from their conflicts with national governments will be the focus of the first section of this chapter by examining three of the most common issues that arise. First will be how their blood doctrine has caused problems on a national level around the world as it is a major reason for problems with the state. Second, the Witnesses have always been known as conscientious objectors, which can lead to incarceration by nations for being unpatriotic, especially during times of war. This stance still sees hundreds of Witnesses around the world imprisoned for refusing to serve in the armed forces of their native lands. Finally, the section will end by considering how Witness publications, numbering in the thousands with tens of millions of copies in print, have led to national governments banning their publications and sometimes their existence.

The second section will examine tensions that have arisen between Witnesses and their local communities. While the Witnesses have been an international organization

since 1900, they have always been headquartered in the United States and their early conflicts in America led to the development of their key mechanisms. Two key factors will be explored here. The first is that of local press and their reactions to the movement in the United States, as their portrayal by media in the early 1900s has led to a reputation for being odd and in some cases harmful and malicious. In the 1910s Russell had an ongoing issue with the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which consistently minimized him and his position by referring to his adherents as a cult and to him personally as a “pastor”, with quotation marks, indicating he was a fraud. This highlights the beginning of the idea that the movement was made up of foolish people. This idea then evolved into the “fifth column” or “un-American” idea that newspapers spread during the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, leading to a reputation that still hounds Witnesses to this day of cult-like and brainwashing activities. The other key issue looked at here will be that of actual violence perpetrated against the Witnesses by local communities. Caused in part by the press’s constant referral to them as a cult, and a key Supreme Court decision against them, Witnesses endured a brutal time of beatings, mob attacks and destruction of property just before and during America’s entry into World War II. Witnesses around the world still suffer from beatings and mob violence, and this section will end with a look at the most egregious recent example of this in the country of Georgia.

The last section of this chapter will focus on internal dissent within the organization. The first part will delve into what was the most damaging period of internal dissent in the history of the movement during which the Dawn Bible Students were formed, whose history will be used as a comparison to the Witnesses. Thousands of adherents were unhappy with the changes that Rutherford was making and left the Society to continue to follow the teachings of Russell with other independent ecclesias. As with the other issues however, internal dissent is not just an event of the past. The second part will focus on recent and current internal dissent, highlighting specifically the AJWRB. Using the

writings of Lee Elder, the founder of the AJWRB, as well as an interview I conducted with Elder via email, I will show how internal dissent has affected the religion in recent years.

Mechanisms that allow for survival do not merely come into existence on their own. They are designed to handle a problem that has arisen in the most effective way possible given the desired outcome. If no conflicts arise, or there is no reason to believe that a conflict will occur, there is no need to create a way to handle the conflict. Looking only at the mechanisms designed to solve the conflict, or at the results of the events where the mechanisms were used, only forms part of the picture. To understand the entire story, and the impact that the mechanisms discussed in Chapter One have had on the ability of the religion to grow, it is therefore necessary to understand the conflicts with which they were presented.

Government Troubles

Trouble for Witnesses often extends beyond the immediate community in which they live and proselytize, with state and national governments expressing their hostility for the Witnesses' seemingly unpatriotic preaching and message. This can manifest itself as more than simple annoyance and public excommunication, leading to laws that specifically seek, sometimes by name, to curtail the Witnesses' from worshipping and preaching in their preferred manner. Imprisonment is a common result. And this is not done only by totalitarian or dictatorial-leaning regimes, nor is it merely a product of the past, such as in the United States during both World Wars, but continues to occur in countries that are ostensibly democratic in governance. Imprisonment is happening currently in Russia for "extremism" and until very recently was a common result in South Korea, mostly for conscientious objection, which will with other examples be discussed throughout this section. Because of the sheer number of nations that have had, or continue to have, harsh

and violent attitudes towards Witnesses, a full examination of them is a practical impossibility.¹ This section will therefore discuss three key areas over which states and Witnesses find themselves at odds, often regardless of geographic area and even governmental systems. It will end with a discussion of how the Witnesses have attempted to counter these hostilities to secure the ability to worship how they wish.

The blood doctrine is a matter of serious contention between the Witnesses and the state. While most western states attempt to allow a person's religious beliefs to have a controlling interest in how they live a battle can commence when a state's legitimate concern to preserve life, especially that of children, conflicts with the Witnesses' beliefs on blood transfusions. Witnesses are also famously known as being conscientious objectors when it comes to joining the military. From World War I on, they have come into direct conflict with nations spanning the globe, from the United States to South Korea, about joining the military and alternative service. The final aspect discussed here will be Witness publications and their interpretation by governments, who often see them as being subversive or unpatriotic in nature and thus a detriment to national pride and morale.

Blood Transfusions

Outside of preaching and the belief that the world will soon end, the rejection of blood transfusions is the most commonly known aspect of Witness faith by the public.² It has engendered headlines in newspapers around the world, often when a Witness adult dies from their refusal to have a transfusion or when parents refuse to allow what medical professionals deem to be necessary blood transfusions for their child.³ This creates conflict

¹ For an example of such scholarship, see the multi-volume work by Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa, eds. *Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe: Past and Present*.

² Chryssides, *Continuity*, 105.

³ See for example stories from Mexico- "Blood transfusion case before Supreme Court" *Mexico Daily News*, 21 October 2017 <http://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/blood-transfusion-case-before->

between an article of faith that the Witnesses believe impacts their chances at eternal life and what the secular world views as negligent and harmful parenting. It is one of the most heavily criticised aspects of the religion, not only for the stance itself, but for the perceived vacillating of that stance throughout the years by the leaders of the movement.

Blood transfusions were not always seen as against Biblical law by the Witnesses or their Bible Student predecessors. In a 1925 edition of *The Golden Age*, for example, a Mr B.W. Tibble of London is specifically praised for having, without accepting compensation, "...on forty-five different occasions given a pint of blood, for transfusion to patients in the London Hospital."⁴ In an edition of the *Watchtower* of 1930 blood transfusions are mentioned in a list of blessings that God has "...permitted selfish and imperfect, fallen men to try their hand at bringing..." to the human race in order to help prevent suffering and death.⁵ No further mention is made of blood transfusions in the *Watchtower* until 1944, when the soon-to-be change in doctrine was hinted at briefly in a longer article.⁶ By the July 1, 1945 issue of the *Watchtower* however the new teaching was made crystal clear. After several pages of reasoning as to why God had made animal blood sacred, and how this means that human blood could not possibly be any less sacred, the section of the article dealing with blood and blood transfusions ends with a vehement statement. It is worth quoting at length here to show that the new thought was not a slight adjustment in

supreme-court/ (accessed 24 October 2017); the United States- Matt Miller ""Family of Jehovah's Witness who died after refusing blood transfusions can't keep suing doctors" *PennLive*, 21 July 2017 http://www.pennlive.com/news/2017/07/court_nixes_lawsuit_by_family.html (accessed 03 November 2017); Russia-"Jehovah's Witnesses broke law on extremism — Justice Ministry" *TASS Russian News Agency*, <http://tass.com/world/939781> (accessed 03 November 2017); and India-"Doctors perform rare surgery on a Jehovah's Witness patient" *Deccan Chronicle* 4 May 2017, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/lifestyle/health-and-wellbeing/040517/doctor-perform-rare-surgery-on-a-jehovahs-witness-patient.html> (accessed 03 November 2017).

⁴ "Flotsam and Jetsam-Gives Eleven Gallons of Blood", *The Golden Age* (29 July 1925) 683.

⁵ "God's Kingdom Is Here", *The Watchtower* (15 October 1930) 315.

⁶ "The Strangers Right Maintained", *The Watchtower* (1 December 1944) 362.

doctrine, but was to be recognized as a change that affected the possibility of eternal life, the primary promise of the Witness faith to its followers:

Seeing, then, that the most High and Holy God gave plain instructions as to the disposition of blood, in harmony with his everlasting covenant made with Noah and all his descendants; and seeing that the only use of blood that he authorized in order to furnish life to humankind was the use of it as a propitiation or atonement for sin; and seeing that it was to be done upon his holy altar or at his mercy seat and not by taking such blood directly into the human body; therefore it behooves all worshipers of Jehovah who seek eternal life in his new world of righteousness to respect the sanctity of blood and to conform themselves to God's righteous rulings concerning this vital matter.⁷

In articles published in 1961 this was reinforced, and it was made clear that willingly accepting blood transfusions was not only wrong in God's eye but was in fact a disfellowshipping offense.⁸

This prohibition against blood was unequivocal until 1978, when a change was made that allowed hemophiliacs to accept some treatments that contained blood fragments.⁹ This was further expanded in 1982 when changes allowed the individual Witness to decide on whether some specific components of blood, such as albumin, were acceptable as a matter of conscience.¹⁰ The current teaching on blood transfusions, fully explained in the 2008 publication *Keep Yourselves in God's Love*, expands even further what is acceptable. It maintains a prohibition on whole blood transfusion and identifies four main components that are also entirely prohibited: red cells; white cells; platelets; and plasma.¹¹ However, it now says that any Witness "...while refusing transfusions of whole

⁷ "Immovable For The Right Worship", *The Watchtower* (1 July 1945) 201.

⁸ "Questions From Readers", *The Watchtower* (15 January 1961) 65; "Using Life in Harmony with the will of God" *The Watchtower* (15 September 1961) 559-566.

⁹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 287.

¹⁰ "Jehovah's Witnesses-The Surgical/Ethical Challenge" *Awake!* (22 June 1982) 25.

¹¹ "Appendix," *Keep Yourselves In God's Love* (Wallkill, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract of New York, Inc, 2016 printing), 215-218, downloaded from [jw.org](https://www.jw.org) at <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/?contentLanguageFilter=en&pubFilter=lv&sortBy=1> 04 November 2017.

blood or its major components, might accept treatments involving a fraction... [and they] may reason that at some point fractions that have been extracted from blood cease to represent the life of the creature from which the blood was taken.”¹² It also states that some surgical techniques that temporarily remove blood from the person’s own body but quickly return it, for example cell salvage, which essentially catches and cleans the person’s own blood before returning it, are also a matter of conscience.¹³

Criticism of the blood transfusion doctrine of the Witnesses is exceptionally easy to find. When a case involves an underage child, who doctors believe needs a blood transfusion to save their life, it often goes to court. Even in countries that generally respect religious convictions, these cases can go against Witness parents.¹⁴ These cases can also go against the wishes of even Witness children themselves, as in the recent case in Canada of a fourteen-year old Witness who was forced to undergo a blood transfusion despite her adamant opposition.¹⁵ One doctor, from the division of medical ethics at the New York University School of Medicine, has stated that he favors prosecuting those cases where a child dies or is harmed from the parent’s decision to withhold medical care, and that “...child welfare and the child's best interest can override parental discretion and parental choice, and in some instances, it has to.”¹⁶ On rare occasions courts have even permitted

¹² *Ibid*, 215-216.

¹³ *Ibid*, 217-218.

¹⁴ “Judge rules Jehovah’s Witness boy can receive blood transfusion”, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/08/judge-rules-jehovahs-witness-boy-blood-transfusion> accessed 20 December 2014.

¹⁵ “Jehovah's Witness, 14, ordered to receive blood transfusion despite beliefs”, *CBC News*, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/jehovahs-witness-blood-transfusion-1.4299992> accessed 19 October 2017.

¹⁶ Arthur L. Caplan, PhD, “Parental Authority Should Be Overridden for a Sick Child”, *MedScape* https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/887406#vp_1 accessed 03 November 2017.

the forced transfusion of adults who have minor children, on the grounds that the children need their parents in order to survive.¹⁷

The state views these cases as part of their responsibility to protect children from harm. States, and courts, often conclude that the child's "...best interests, and the interests of the state, outweigh the parental and religious rights."¹⁸ This is an argument from the state that is very hard to challenge. It is a commonly held notion that nations have a responsibility to protect the lives of children, as can be seen in numerous child protection laws around the world, even if this goes against the specific beliefs of their parents. A nation that allowed parents to do whatever they wished with their children would face near immediate and worldwide condemnation, and even nations like the United States that purport to value individual rights and self-determination have laws that seek to prevent ill treatment of children by their parents, regardless of sincerely held religious beliefs.

To Witnesses however, the outlook is much different from that of the state and critics. They believe wholeheartedly that "this is a religious issue rather than a medical one."¹⁹ It is not just a matter of life and death for Witnesses, but a decision that can affect their, and their children's, relationship with God. Anything that a doctor or a state does that forces them to in any way jeopardize that relationship is persecution based on their faith. It is no different in their view from creating laws that stop their door-to-door proselytizing or forcing their children to salute the flag in school. Indeed, the Witnesses

¹⁷ Julie A. Koehne, "Witnesses on Trial: Judicial Intrusion Upon the Practices of Jehovah's Witness Parents", *Florida State University Law Review*, Vol. 21, 205 (1993) <http://ir.law.fsu.edu/lr/vol21/iss1/7> accessed 05 July 2017.

¹⁸ "Court Says Ill Child's Interests Outweigh Religion", *New York Times* 16 January 1991, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/16/us/court-says-ill-child-s-interests-outweigh-religion.html> accessed 03 November 2017.

¹⁹ "Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Accept Blood Transfusions?", [jw.org](http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jehovahs-witnesses-why-no-blood-transfusions/) <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/jehovahs-witnesses-why-no-blood-transfusions/> accessed 04 November 2017.

have been specific about how they see such attacks, saying “the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses is under attack from all sides...by medical authorities who want to impose blood transfusions on us and our children.... All this opposition is orchestrated by Satan....”²⁰

The Body has not sat still on the issue of blood transfusions for its adherents, as can be seen from their latest teachings on expanded use of blood fragments shown above. All three of their internal mechanisms have been used in order to make the process smoother for both themselves and the authorities of the nations. The most obvious use of these mechanisms is the Body using its authority, along with the concept of new light, in order to make the taking of fragments and other treatments a matter of conscience, prohibiting only full blood transfusions. By doing so they not only confirm their power to do so, making both themselves and the concept of new light stronger, but they also are able to help lessen any spiritual restrictions on their members and at the same time help defuse some of the hostility that they face from nations by appearing to be reasonable and flexible. They have also utilized their skills as preachers in order to argue, quite successfully, that not only are their beliefs Biblical in nature but that other opportunities and treatments are safer and completely compatible with God's law.

Their battle against blood transfusions has garnered them some positive press in recent years. One three-part series by Amanda Schaffer, published in *The New Yorker* in 2015 titled “Medicine Without Blood”, specifically looked at how “Jehovah's Witnesses have changed the way that doctors think about blood transfusion.”²¹ In the third article of the series, an example was given of the impact that Witness refusal to accept blood transfusions, and the medical community's subsequent search for alternative treatments, has had on application of bloodless techniques even for non-Witnesses. Dr. Patricia Ford of

²⁰ “Why We Need Accurate Knowledge”, *The Watchtower* (1 December 1989) 12.

²¹ Amanda Schaffer, “How Jehovah's Witnesses are changing medicine”, *The New Yorker* 12 August, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-jehovahs-witnesses-are-changing-medicine> accessed 25 November 2017.

Pennsylvania Hospital, after developing techniques for Witnesses who refused transfusions, became “convinced that non-Witness patients received donor blood more often than necessary. She began to apply techniques she’d honed on Witnesses, and the number of transfusions she ordered dropped almost ninety per cent.”²² While the article also acknowledges that not accepting blood transfusions can increase the rate of death in some procedures, for example citing Dr. Ford’s data of a 6% death rate among Witnesses during one bloodless stem-cell procedure as compared to the national average of between 1-3.5% for the traditional blood transfusion method, overall the series is favourable to Witnesses.²³

Internal dissent within the organization also appears to be growing, as will be discussed later in this chapter, and when combined with national government objections may force the blood doctrine to once again be modified by the Body.²⁴ Court cases in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada move ahead whenever medical experts believe that a blood transfusion is necessary to save the life of a patient, especially a minor child. In Russia the blood transfusion doctrine was one of the charges used against Witnesses to argue that they are an extremist organization.²⁵ Much like the concept of civilian service in the armed forces, discussed next, the Body may eventually use the concept of new light to make it a matter of personal conviction rather than an outright prohibition. Until the Body makes these changes however the battles with court and medical personnel will continue, leading to further conflict and hostility with nations around the world.

²² Amanda Schaffer, “The Ethics of Bloodless Medicine”, *The New Yorker* 14 August, 2015 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-ethics-of-bloodless-medicine> accessed 25 November 2017.

²³ Schaffer “Ethics”.

²⁴ This will be discussed further in the *Contemporary Internal Dissent* section on page 223.

²⁵ Jeffrey Cimmino “Russia convicts six Jehovah’s Witnesses” *Washington Examiner* 19 September 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/russia-convicts-six-jehovahs-witnesses> accessed 25 September 2019

Conscientious Objection

The reason for which most Witnesses around the world are currently imprisoned is for their steadfast refusal to perform any type of military service. Unlike some other religions that will accept a non-violent military position that does not require them to kill or carry weapons, such as Seventh-Day Adventist Desmond Doss who famously worked as a medic during World War II and received the Medal of Honor for his actions, Witnesses completely reject any service in the military regardless of position.²⁶ This has been their position since the days of Russell, and Witnesses proudly acknowledge that “in all the warfare and massacres seen in recent decades—from Bosnia to Rwanda, from Vietnam to the Middle East—no Witness of Jehovah has taken up arms.”²⁷

Not all governments have reacted well to this stance by the Witnesses. The United States arrested and imprisoned the key leaders of the movement during World War I in part because they instructed their followers to conscientiously object to serving in the military.²⁸ During World War II, over seventy-two thousand men registered for the draft as conscientious objectors, with about twenty-five thousand accepting non-combat roles, twenty-seven thousand not passing the physical inspection, and twelve thousand opting for civilian work in the United States.²⁹ Of the six thousand who went to prison for refusing any service, sentenced to terms of five years, over four thousand were Witnesses.³⁰ During the Vietnam War some Witnesses were again arrested and brought to trial for draft-dodging and refusing to perform civilian work ordered by the Selective Service Board.

²⁶ “Conscientious Objection to Military Service”, *jw.org* <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal-resources/information/packet-conscientious-objection-military-service/> accessed 08 January 2018.

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ See Chapter Two, page 125.

²⁹ Anne M. Yoder, *Conscientious Objection in America: Primary Sources for Research* Swathmore College Peace Collection, 2007 <http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/conscientiousobjection/co%20website/pages/HistoryNew.htm> accessed 12 January 2018.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

However, there appears to have been a middle ground that was unofficially agreed to by the Witnesses and the government in many cases. In the case of *United States of America v. Harry William Daniels, Jr.*, the 6th Circuit noted that Harry Daniels was willing to perform the exact same service that had been ordered by the Selective Service Board if it was conditioned as being part of his sentence imposed by the judiciary.³¹ Part of the 6th Circuit's decision mentions this unofficial agreement:

Jehovah's Witnesses cases such as this are common in this circuit. In the Western District of Michigan and the Northern District of Ohio District Judges have been sentencing in these cases, and then suspending sentence in order to place the defendant on probation, subject to his actual performance of the identical conscientious objector work which he had refused to perform on the order of the Selective Service Board. *We take judicial notice that Jehovah's Witnesses are responding to court orders to perform the identical conscientious objector work which they will not perform in response to a Selective Service Board order.* At appellate hearing the court was assured by appellant's counsel that appellant would obey any such order entered by the District Court.³²

While this decision and the mention it makes of the District Court decisions cannot be taken as proof of a nationwide understanding, it does coincide with a decrease in Witness prosecutions regarding military service.

The Witness stance against performing non-military civil service remained until 1996, when it was officially deemed to be a matter of individual conscience whether to perform such non-combat activities.³³ While it had taken the Governing Body quite some time, the change reflects the ability of the Body to adapt when necessary for the good of the movement. It also gives a glimpse into the more subtle use of new light, for while the article in which the change was announced does not specifically invoke the concept of new light, the body is interpreting their Biblical justifications in a new way. The two mechanisms

³¹ *United States of America v. Harry William Daniels, Jr.*, 429 F.2d 1273 (6th Cir. 1970) <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/429/1273/433780/>.

³² *United States of America v. Harry William Daniels, Jr.*, 429 F.2d 1273 (6th Cir. 1970) <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/429/1273/433780/> (emphasis mine).

³³ "Paying Back Caesar's Things To Caesar", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1996) 19-20.

play well with each other and once again strengthen the ability of the Witnesses to adapt to hostile situations.

This change to allowing civilian service appears to be paying dividends throughout most of the world beyond the United States. A report submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (herein OHC) by the Society in February 2017 highlighted this advance. Their relationship with Greece, which had a history of imprisoning Witnesses, has gotten much smoother with the Society reporting that in 2010 Greece adjusted the final parts of their conscientious objector laws to the satisfaction of the Witnesses.³⁴ Particular praise has been given for the situation in Taiwan, with the OHC stating that Witnesses have been “taking part in an alternative service program and have been making a meaningful contribution for more than 15 years. Taiwanese authorities have expressed their appreciation over the years for the effective cooperation of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”³⁵ Similar progress has been reported with, among others, the governments of Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine.³⁶

However, the report is not entirely positive. It also mentions several countries that still do not acknowledge the conscientious objector status of Witnesses. According to the report, at least sixteen of the imprisoned Witnesses in Eritrea were specifically jailed for conscientious objection, with six imprisoned for at least ten years, and astoundingly three being imprisoned since 1994.³⁷ According to the Witnesses’ updated webpage that tracks imprisonments around the world, Eritrea currently has fifty-three Witnesses imprisoned.³⁸

³⁴ “Information on conscientious objection to military service involving Jehovah’s Witnesses”, downloaded from OHCHR.org <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/ConscientiousObjection/JehovahsWitnesses.pdf> accessed 13 January 2018, 5.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 4-5.

³⁸ “Jehovah’s Witnesses Imprisoned for Their Faith—By Location” *jw.org* updated January 2019 <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/world/jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison-2/> accessed 13 January 2019.

Singapore is especially harsh on conscientious objectors: after being imprisoned for their first violation of the law for fifteen months, when released they are told to start participating in military drills, and if they refuse they are given another sentence of twenty-four months to begin immediately, bringing the total time in prison to just over three years.³⁹ The current number of imprisoned Witnesses in Singapore stands at nine.⁴⁰ And while Turkmenistan no longer imprisons those convicted of violating their anti-conscientious objector laws, they do enforce a penalty of twenty-percent of the monthly salary, paid directly to the State, of those convicted.⁴¹

For years the Republic of Korea, more commonly known as South Korea, was widely recognized as being the country with the highest number of prisoners incarcerated for conscientious objection, with the majority of those cases being Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴² According to Witness figures, since 1950, "19,060 of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Korea have been sentenced to a combined total of 36,389 years in prison."⁴³ This is on average nearly five hundred and fifty years of prison sentencing each year since 1950. South Korea has received international condemnation for its policies regarding conscientious objectors and has lost numerous cases before the United Nations Human Rights Commission.⁴⁴ The media has taken note of South Korea's actions as well, discussing how the imprisonments affect the prisoners not just with the time served but also after their release. Because of their convictions, Witnesses have trouble securing jobs when they

³⁹ "Information on conscientious objection ...", 8.

⁴⁰ "Jehovah's Witnesses Imprisoned..."

⁴¹ "Information on conscientious objection 9-10.

⁴² Ashfaq Khalfan, "From Vietnam to South Korea: Muhammad Ali and Conscientious Objectors Today" *The Diplomat*, 13 June 2016 <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/from-vietnam-to-south-korea-muhammad-ali-and-conscientious-objectors-today/> accessed 13 January 2018; Jake Kwon and James Griffiths "South Korea's top court legalizes conscientious objection after decades-long fight" *CNN*, 1 November 2018 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/01/asia/south-korea-conscientious-objectors-intl/index.html>.

⁴³ "Information on conscientious objection ...", 6-7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6-8.

are released, as “government and big companies discriminate against ex-convicts, especially those who avoided the draft.”⁴⁵

The South Korean government defends its process by claiming, not incorrectly, that they are still at war with North Korea, and says that if it were to allow for a type of civilian service it would weaken their army and increase the number of those attempting to shirk their military duty by claiming conscientious objector status.⁴⁶ Despite these objections however, on 1 November 2018, the Supreme Court of South Korea ruled that conscientious objector status was a justifiable reason to refuse to serve in the military. The immediate effect of this landmark ruling was to halt, with the expectation of dismissal, over nine hundred cases against conscientious objectors, with most of these cases involving Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁴⁷ Later that same month fifty-eight imprisoned Jehovah’s Witnesses were released due to the ruling.⁴⁸ This positive outcome does not mean that Witnesses no longer have to worry about their stance within the country however. It has been reported that many South Koreans believe that conscientious objectors should be jailed, and that the stigma surrounding those already convicted remains. Witnesses also need to worry about a more conservative government passing laws that would overrule the Court’s decision, with several lawmakers in South Korea already putting forth such measures.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Choe Sang-Hun “South Korean Jehovah’s Witnesses Face Stigma of Not Serving in Army” *New York Times*, 3 October 2015 <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/world/south-korean-jehovahs-witnesses-face-stigma-of-not-serving-in-army.html> accessed 13 January 2018.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Jake Kwon and James Griffiths “South Korea’s top court...”.

⁴⁸ Choe Sang-Hun “South Korea Frees 58 Conscientious Objectors in Wake of Landmark Ruling” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/world/asia/south-korea-frees-conscientious-objectors.html>, accessed 13 January 2019.

⁴⁹ Jake Kwon and James Griffiths “South Korea’s top court...”.

Witness Publications

A third area that gets the Witnesses into trouble with national governments is their seemingly ubiquitous publications, including not only the magazines as previously discussed but also many hundreds of pamphlets, books and booklets.⁵⁰ Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures* series and other books he published, such as *Tabernacle Teachings* and *Food for Thinking Christians*, were published in the millions.⁵¹ Rutherford during his presidency wrote on average a book a year with thirty-six million copies of his publications being printed.⁵² And while Knorr discontinued the practice of having the author's name on the publications, he by no means stopped producing literature outside of the magazines, a task which the Governing Body has continued, as can be seen from the eighty web-pages of material on their official website.⁵³

These publications have been used by national governments to show that the Society and even rank-and-file Witnesses are "subversive" or "extremist" in their teachings and that they are a threat to national security especially, though not exclusively, during times of war. Australia's ban of the organization in the 1940s shows how Witness literature can be used against them to help paint them as unpatriotic in the public eye. Using the literature of the Society as proof of their supposed treasonous deeds, however, is not relegated to the past. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian government has tried several times to declare the organization illegal, using their literature distribution against them every time. In 2017 this finally succeeded, with the Russian Supreme Court upholding

⁵⁰ See Introduction, page 13.

⁵¹ Penton, *Apocalypse*, 35-39.

⁵² Penton, *Apocalypse*, 83.

⁵³ "Books and Brochures for Bible Study", jw.org, at <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/> accessed 9 January 2018.

the ban in part, at least officially, because of the Witnesses' "mass dissemination of extremist literature."⁵⁴

Much like the arrest and imprisonment of Rutherford in the United States during World War I, Australia used an espionage law against the Witnesses for printing subversive material.⁵⁵ According to Roger Douglas, the relevant regulations:

...made it an offence to obtain, record, communicate, publish or possess information about the Commonwealth's defence forces or weaponry, or information which might be directly or indirectly advantageous to the enemy. On its face, it reads like an attempt to discourage the printing of information which might be of military use to the enemy. Yet in reality it had little to do with espionage or disclosure of military information, and more to do with attempts to influence public opinion. Its purpose was to give teeth to the censorship system for which provision was made in [Regulation] 16 of the General Regulations.⁵⁶

The Witnesses were also accused by the government in late 1940 of using their radio stations in Australia to transmit "coded messages on the movement of troop ships."⁵⁷

Charging the unpopular religion with espionage is a popular way to attempt to limit their actions, which so many find so offensive. Espionage or "fifth column" accusations had been lobbed against the Witnesses in the United States in World War I, and would again be in World War II, primarily for their printed magazines. The same type of charges would occur, rather ironically, in the Soviet Union during the Cold War.⁵⁸

In reality, nowhere in the *Watchtower* from the years 1937 to and including 1940 was anything directly attacking Australia written, nor were any military secrets leaked.

⁵⁴ Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, *Case No. AKPI17-23820*, April 2017 https://www.academia.edu/34294283/Translation._Russian_Supreme_Court_Decision_on_Ban_on_Jehovahs_Witnesses.

⁵⁵ Roger Douglas "Law, War And Liberty: The World War II Subversion Prosecutions" *Melbourne University Law Review*, *MelbULawRw* 3; (2003) 27(1), Section C: Censorship Offences, accessed online at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbULawRw/2003/3.html> 26 September 2019; see Chapter Two, page 125.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Knox, 75.

⁵⁸ See Chapter Three, page 213.

Indeed, other than Australia being listed as having a branch office of the Society the only mentions of Australia during this time were references to conventions that were held there.⁵⁹ However, the magazine did continuously attack the governments of the world, including democratic ones, as being ruled by Satan, either directly or through the Roman Catholic Church. An example is this quote from the *Watchtower* of 1 March 1940: "...royalty and aristocracy, democracy and every other element of Satan's organization shall perish, because that is the decree of doom or penal announcement written against them by Jehovah."⁶⁰ While other articles make it clear that the totalitarian rules of Hitler and Mussolini were even farther from God, and were also linked heavily with the Roman Catholic Church, democratic nations were still described as the lesser of two evils, and as being not of God.⁶¹

It was not only in the pages of the *Watchtower* however that this message was printed. Many books and pamphlets, distributed in Australia and elsewhere, left no doubt of the fact that Satan was running the world, and both sides of the war. In the book *Religion*, published in 1940, all world governments were repeatedly linked to Babylon and Satan: "That chief demon, Satan, from then till [sic] now claims Babylon (including all the governments of the earth) as his own, and this Jesus did not deny, but admitted, when he was on the earth."⁶² Later on the book claimed that the actions of the various governments to attempt to stop the work of the Witnesses proved that they were scared and that Satan was directing their work in order to stop God's plan.⁶³ The book *Salvation*, published in 1939, using the flag-salute issue as a stand-in for forms of patriotism that would violate God's law, stated: "It is impossible for the child of God to say that and at the same time

⁵⁹ See for example "Instruction", *The Watchtower* (15 July 1940) 217.

⁶⁰ "The Pay-Off", *The Watchtower* (1 March 1940) 78.

⁶¹ See "Theocratic Organization In Operation", *The Watchtower* (1 December 1940) 367; "Neutrality", *The Watchtower* (1 November 1939) 324.

⁶² Joseph Rutherford, *Religion* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society; 1940), 18.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 199-200.

remain true to God, because the Christian knows that the government for which the flag stands will soon go down at the battle of Armageddon and that the Lord will destroy every vestige of Satan's organization."⁶⁴ This was not simply an attack on governments in general, but a direct statement that all governments would soon be destroyed. It is not difficult to see why Australia's government could see these types of works as a threat to the war effort and national security.

On 17 January 1941, after several years of local governments and individuals calling for an end to the Witnesses, Bill Hughes, Australia's Attorney General, announced that the Witnesses had been declared illegal by the government for the preaching of "subversive doctrines, deliberately calculated to destroy the national war morale..." and declaring that "...any person printing or distributing literature passing any matter containing any doctrine advocated by Jehovah's Witnesses is guilty of an offence, and liable to very severe penalties."⁶⁵ With this announcement, the organization "...thus joined the likes of the Communist Party of Australia, the Revolutionary Worker's League, and a handful of other socialist organizations that had already been made illegal."⁶⁶ Australia seized the property and assets of the Witnesses across the country, even though they apparently bungled the process and gave the Witnesses nearly eighteen hours warning in which to move a large quantity of materials.⁶⁷

Witnesses however did not shrink from their beliefs, and using the same legal tactics learned and sharpened in the United States, brought their case before the Australian courts. Arguing that the ban violated the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Australian Constitution, on 14 June 1943, just over two years after the ban had been placed, the High Court ruled that the government had overreached its authority, effectively

⁶⁴ Joseph Rutherford, *Salvation* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society; 1939), 262.

⁶⁵ 'JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES', *Daily Advertiser (Wagga Wagga, NSW : 1911 - 1954)*, 18 January 1941, 1. , viewed 15 Apr 2018, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article144524099>.

⁶⁶ Knox, *Secular World*, 76.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

overturning the ban.⁶⁸ The Witnesses recovered much of the material, which had been stored at state expense and had been well cared for, and the relationship between the Witnesses and the Australian government improved.⁶⁹ While it would take several years until the Witnesses were fully organized again in Australia, they have continued to grow, with the 2017 *Yearbook* reporting over sixty-five thousand Witnesses in the country.⁷⁰

The Witness publications are not only seen as a threat during war however, as the case of the Russian government can attest. Initially, in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union, the primary legal enemy of the Witnesses was the Russian Orthodox Church, which four times between 1995 and 1998 filed an official complaint with the Russian government alleging issues such as putting an undue monetary burden on members and inciting hatred towards other religions.⁷¹ Until 1998 these complaints were dismissed by the investigators, who found that no harm could be proven to have been caused by the Witnesses, with one investigator in 1997 flatly stating that the “[Russian Church’s] statements are based upon their active hostility towards this particular religious organisation, whose members they [the Church] deny the mere possibility of exercising their constitutional rights because of their religious beliefs.”⁷² Finally, in 1998, the fifth complaint partially succeeded, for while the investigator of that complaint determined that no criminal charges could be brought, she also found that the Witnesses did incite religious discord, civil disobedience, and the break-up of families, among other charges. Based on this, she recommended to the prosecutor of the Northern District of Moscow that they bring civil charges to try and dissolve and ban the Witnesses.

⁶⁸ Knox, *Secular World*, 79.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ 2017 *Yearbook*, 178.

⁷¹ *Case of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Moscow and Others v Russia*, 2-4, [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22tabview%22:\[%22document%22\],%22itemid%22:\[%22001-99221%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{%22tabview%22:[%22document%22],%22itemid%22:[%22001-99221%22]}), accessed 18 March 2018.

⁷² *Ibid* 3.

The initial court ordered a review of Witness literature be undertaken in March 1999, and it was completed in February 2001.⁷³ Four of the five experts tasked to review the literature found that the prosecution's concerns and allegations were valid, and in a fifteen page report to the court, stated that, "...the texts of Jehovah's Witnesses do not contain direct coercion into destroying the family but apply and propose for application direct psychological pressure which risks causing the destruction of families."⁷⁴ The fifth expert, the only one of the five who had studied the Witnesses to any degree, wrote a one hundred and thirty nine page dissent. The court saw through the flimsy findings of the four, noting that "...not one of the [four] experts...could explain to the court on the basis of what objective information or research they came to this conclusion regarding the influence of the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses on people's perceptions."⁷⁵ While this court ruled in favour of the Witnesses, finding no grounds for any of the charges against them, it was quickly appealed and a new trial was convened, with the Witnesses losing that trial. In 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against the Russian government, holding them in violation of several articles of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and ordering them to reimburse seventy thousand Euros in legal fees to the Witnesses.⁷⁶

Bizarrely, one piece of evidence that was used to show how Witness literature disrupts the freedoms of other citizens was a case where the husband of a woman who had been handed literature at her home was convicted of beating the female Witness who had given his wife the literature.⁷⁷ According to the court the fault did not lie with the husband attacking and beating the female Witness, but rather the Witness for daring to distribute literature to his wife. A charge of encouraging suicide, due to the Witnesses'

⁷³ Baran, *Dissent*, 231.

⁷⁴ *Case of Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v Russia*, 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 5-6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 55-56.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

well-known prohibition against blood transfusions, was also upheld.⁷⁸ And the court also found that the Witnesses' literature incited people to not fulfil civic duties such as military service, saluting the flag, and celebrating State holidays.⁷⁹

Emily Baran notes that by the late 2000s, "the systematic nature of attacks on Witnesses' freedom of conscience cannot be explained by local initiative alone...thus, while the Witnesses remained legal on the federal level, the state made clear its intent to restrict the organization's ability to engage with the public."⁸⁰ In 2017, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the Justice Ministry could declare the Witnesses an extremist organization, outlaw their existence, and seize all assets of the organization.⁸¹ The official registry of banned extremist material that is kept by Russia includes ninety-five Witness publications, including the children's book *My Book of Bible Stories*.⁸² This book contains one story which tells of Christ's execution, including that the Jewish priests called for his death. In 2009, a report ordered by Russian officials described this story as making clergymen seem cruel and mercenary, a result which has been noted as "[bordering] on the absurd."⁸³ Much like in Georgia during the Soviet regime, the Russian Orthodox Church appears to be playing a role in the harassment of Witnesses, with Zoe Knox noting "...the interests of the Russian government and [Orthodox] Church leaders have converged to lead to the case against Russian Witnesses. This has gone hand in hand with an effort to mute, if not silence, voices deemed hostile to Russian national interests."⁸⁴ The final outcome is still to be determined,

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁸⁰ Baran, 233.

⁸¹ "Russia: Court Bans Jehovah's Witnesses" *Human Rights Watch*, 20 April 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/20/russia-court-bans-jehovahs-witnesses> accessed 18 March 2018.

⁸² Amanda Erickson, "Russia just effectively banned Jehovah's Witnesses from the country" *The Washington Post* 20 April 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/04/20/russia-just-effectively-banned-jehovahs-witnesses-from-the-country/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.71635d9dd48b accessed 18 March 2018.

⁸³ Baran, 232.

⁸⁴ Knox, "Jehovah's Witnesses as Extremists", 156; see also Chapter Three, page 214.

as the Witnesses are exhausting all legal options and appeals, and have stated that should they lose in Russia, they will again appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.⁸⁵

The Future

There can be no question that the Witnesses' beliefs and forms of worship anger and seemingly threaten the governments of many nations. Whether during times of war or peace, the Witnesses' actions make them targets of governments that would greatly prefer little to no dissent within their ranks. In countries that have strong protections for religious freedom the Witness practices are, with the notable exception of war time, tolerated and allowed, if not necessarily respected. Even when they are infringed, such as in the United States during the Vietnam War and Australia during World War II, the system eventually corrects itself within a few years, the Witnesses fighting through the court systems the entire way.

In their attempt to separate themselves from the world at large, to as much of an extent as possible, Witness relations with the world have at times been antagonistic. In some cases, however, what Witnesses view as attacks on their religious faith is not as clear cut as they would like to believe. The argument over when a sincerely held religious belief can override the interests of the state is not a simple one, and the state can have a legitimate interest in not allowing Witness belief to have precedence over a situation that the state is involved in. What the Witnesses perceive to be challenges to their religious convictions the secular world sees as protecting an aspect of society that they are charged by their people to protect.

⁸⁵ "Court to Hear Appeal Against Russian Government Seizure of Witnesses' National Office" *jw.org*, 17 April 2018 <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/government-seizure-appeal-20180417/> accessed 01 January 2019.

The real danger to Witnesses comes from those nations that do not have protections for religious freedoms in place, or those nations that choose to ignore what protections they do officially have. Nations like Kazakhstan, Eritrea, and Singapore still arrest and imprison Witnesses for violating laws against preaching and conscientious objection that are considered inherent rights by many other nations. Even ostensibly democratic nations like South Korea can severely restrict the rights of Witnesses, imprisoning hundreds. Added to this the stigma of being a convicted felon, which hurts in getting and maintaining employment and housing, and the price that Witnesses pay to uphold their beliefs can be severe.

The biggest threat currently facing Witnesses however is in Russia, with nearly 170,000 adherents being named instant criminals with the ban enacted in 2017. Any display of their faith, public or private, that the Russian government discovers can be prosecuted. Dennis Christensen, a Witness elder, was recently convicted for organizing meetings of a banned extremist organization and was sentenced to six years in prison.⁸⁶ Even with their past loss in the European Court of Human Rights, it is clear that the Russian government has no intention of reversing the ban or discontinuing the search and seizures that they have been conducting since January 2017. While time will tell what the outcome will be, if the Russian ban proves to be successful, other countries may follow suit with similar bans and actions against the Witnesses. The precedent set by the Russian government could have disastrous effects on the organization.

The Witnesses' current situation in Russia is a precarious one and depending on how long it takes them to pursue their legal options may not be settled anytime soon. However, the Witnesses will not be sitting idly by while the case winds its way through the

⁸⁶ Anton Troianovski "Danish Jehovah's Witness sentenced to six years in prison", *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/danish-jehovahs-witness-sentenced-to-six-years-in-prison-in-russia/2019/02/06/415f0b98-29f7-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98_story.html?utm_term=.033a136b6465 accessed 23 August 2019

court system. The mechanisms that they have developed to counteract these problems will be instrumental in galvanizing the Witnesses, and they will continue to preach their message door-to-door and on the streets in public areas, guided by the continuing message spread by their Governing Body of the new system that is soon to come.

But not only the Russian Witnesses will be uplifted, as the Body will ensure that all their adherents see the events in Russia not just as an attack on Russian Witnesses, but on all Witnesses around the world. Regular updates are posted on the jw.org website, along with videos such as one posted in June 2017 that showed Russian police forces raiding a Kingdom Hall.⁸⁷ The video starkly portrays the image of peaceful Witnesses being accosted by the armed, flack-jacket wearing and mostly masked officers. Another video, published the day after the Russian Supreme Court decision to uphold the ban, involves Governing Body member Mark Sanderson meeting with several Russian Witnesses before attending the trial. At the three-minute mark, two Russian Witnesses are shown stating how important and empowering it was to have a member of the Body there.⁸⁸ The video ends with a statement by Governing Body member M. Stephen Lett, who says, in part:

As we have seen in Russia, and many other lands, we can expect persecution for simply wanting to worship Jehovah in peace. But do we need to fear such persecution? No. Jesus Christ and the heavenly armies are ready to take the lead in defending Jehovah's people. We can rest assured that according to Isaiah 54:17 no weapon formed against us will have any success. And why? Because Jehovah is on our side.⁸⁹

M. Stephen Lett is not a great speaker, but the conviction with which he says the above is compelling, and perfectly sums up why the Governing Body are a key part of the Witnesses

⁸⁷ "Video of Russian Authorities Raiding Peaceful Religious Meeting" Jw.org June 21 2017 <https://www.jw.org/en/news/releases/by-region/russia/russian-authorities-raid-religious-meeting-video/> accessed 03 December 2017.

⁸⁸ "Russian Supreme Court Renders Unjust Decision" jw.tv.org, https://tv.jw.org/#en/mediaitems/StudioNewsReports/pub-jwb_201704_12_VIDEO accessed 10 November 2017.

⁸⁹ *Ibid* 27:35-28:30.

ability to grow even in the hardest of times. It also strengthens the mechanism of preaching, as worshipping Jehovah by necessity includes the door-to-door work, and if Christ and his heavenly armies are defending such action they cannot fail.

Local Problems

Witness relationships with their local communities have often been contentious, with the Witnesses' proselytizing and adherence to political neutrality being particularly irksome to many. Throughout the world Witnesses have been subject to harassment, even violence, often either encouraged by decisions at the national level or because of the national governments' unwillingness to help protect an unpopular group. Even in nations with strong protections for religious freedom, such as the United States, local groups and people have taken it on themselves to punish the unpatriotic and, especially during times of war, "treasonous" Witnesses. In nations without the protections of the United States, it has been even worse. To be sure this is not the case everywhere, and Witnesses are able to co-exist in many regions in which they live, even if they are viewed as annoying or bothersome. However, their method of worship and often vitriolic message against anyone who disagrees with them has instigated its share of problems for the Witness community.

This section will examine several ways that local communities have reacted to Witnesses. The first will be a look at how the movement was covered by the local press in the United States during the presidencies of Russell and Rutherford. Russell was a particularly favorite target of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which continuously mocked his role leading the Bible Students by referring to him as "Pastor" Russell. Local newspapers' portrayal of Witnesses during the 1930s and early 1940s was little better. Taking newspapers from New York as a case study, a state generally considered liberal and tolerant of opposing views, will show just how widespread the dislike of Witnesses was.

Rather than focus on national stories, such as the Supreme Court cases of the 1940s, the onus here will be on what local newspapers reported about events that were happening in their areas.

Secondly, violence against the Witnesses for their beliefs has been a worldwide problem, not limited by either geography or time. Two examples will be focused on here: the United States and Canada during and shortly after World War II, and the country of Georgia more recently. Violence in the United States and Canada during World War II increased dramatically after both countries effectively declared the Witnesses traitors. This was not federally sponsored violence by the state but local communities who, often interpreting the actions of their government more broadly than was intended, took it upon themselves to become “patriots” against the “unfaithful” Witnesses. Attacks on the Witnesses in Georgia have been a consistent problem, with little to no action being taken by the national government allowing for local communities, even police officers, to harass and beat Witnesses with little fear of reprisal.

Press Relations

Current press relations with the Witnesses in the United States are cordial if not necessarily strong, but this was not always the case. The press was not always kind to Bible Students/Witnesses, and this can be seen in Charles Taze Russell’s battle with *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. While many newspapers did carry his sermons, these have largely been forgotten, as has for the most part Russell himself. But the attacks that were lodged against Russell, especially by the *Eagle*, have had a lasting effect, in many cases defining how Russell is remembered and, by reflection, how the early years of his movement is remembered as well.

Russell's relationship with the *Eagle* before 1909 appears to have been essentially non-existent, as his name almost exclusively appears in advertisements for upcoming talks that he was going to be giving in the area.⁹⁰ This is not surprising as Russell did not move his organization to Brooklyn until that year. What is surprising is how quickly the *Eagle* appeared to take a dislike to Russell. In the 2 February 1909 edition, the *Eagle* announced that Russell would be moving his organization's headquarters to Brooklyn. The bulk of the article, however, focused not on his moving of the headquarters nor his preaching work but on his acrimonious divorce from his wife a few years earlier.⁹¹ It repeated the charges against him by his wife of treating her poorly and of transferring all his property to his legal organizations in order to avoid paying her alimony.⁹² In an article dated 14 February 1909, it was reported that an infatuated girl had entered Russell's home looking to speak with him, and had been arrested for trespassing by the police.⁹³ The final three paragraphs of the brief article went out of its way to again paint Russell in an unflattering light. The article mentioned that he had been divorced and had "domestic troubles which have kept him in the public eye more or less."⁹⁴ It then mentioned that he had failed to pay his court appointed alimony, and that an order for his arrest had been issued in Pittsburgh, but that his associates had paid the money owed for him and the arrest warrant was rescinded.⁹⁵ This was all true, but its place in the articles is curious as it reads as if the *Eagle* had a long-standing grudge against Russell, when in fact these were two of the first articles about him printed in their paper, and the events they mention had happened several years prior.

⁹⁰ A search of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* online archives for the years 1900 to 1915, using the search parameters "Millennial Dawn", "Charles Taze Russell", "C.T. Russell", "Pastor Russell", "Watchtower" and "Bible Students" returned no results for anything other than advertisements before 1909. Search dates: 16-20 April 2018 <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/search/>.

⁹¹ "Pastor Russell Returns" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 2 February 1909, 3 <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/54328976/> accessed 16 April 2018.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ "Girl's Midnight Visit to Pastor C.T. Russell" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 February 1909, 2 https://bklyn.newspapers.com/clip/3072272/charles_taze_russell_p1909/ accessed 16 April 2018.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

The *Eagle* continued its denunciation of Russell for the next couple of years, with the paper largely ignoring him in 1910, although one article in 1910 referred to his organization as a cult.⁹⁶ The true animosity between the two flared up in 1911 and would continue even beyond Russell's death in 1916. In 1911, Russell sued the *Eagle* for libel, alleging that articles written about him and a cartoon they had printed portrayed him as a fraudulent hawker and led to injury of his reputation.⁹⁷ The entire incident, known as the "Miracle Wheat" controversy, has been covered elsewhere and need not be discussed in detail here.⁹⁸ Here it is enough to say Russell lost the suit in January 1913, with the jury reaching its verdict in forty minutes.⁹⁹ The *Eagle* was clearly not happy with this lawsuit, and starting at least as early as November 1911 began placing quotation marks around "Pastor" when they referred to Russell. They also began to include articles that were far more directly critical of Russell than they had before. An article in the 7 November 1911 edition not only mentioned again his divorce from his wife, but also a previous lawsuit against *The Washington Post* in which Russell had been awarded one dollar in damages.¹⁰⁰ Articles written about Russell continued to be entirely negative, with dozens of articles written about him in 1912 alone. One article in 1912 even connected him to the arrest of a drunk man for the sole reason that the man was purportedly one of Russell's followers.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ "Pastor Russell's Plan Arouses The Heights" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 28 May 1910, 1 https://bklyn.newspapers.com/clip/15944496/pastor_russells_plan_arouses_the/ accessed 16 April 2018

⁹⁷ "Pastor Russell Sues Eagle For \$100,000" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 19 October 1911, 1 <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/54453593/> accessed 16 April 2018.

⁹⁸ For a fuller discussion of the "Miracle Wheat" controversy see: Penton, *Apocalypse*, 63-64; Redeker, *Pastor C.T. Russell*, 183-186; and Chryssides, *Continuity*, 64-65.

⁹⁹ "'Pastor' Russell Loses Libel Suit" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 29 January 1913, 16 <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/54381877/> accessed 16 April 2018.

¹⁰⁰ "Russell Got A Dollar In Washington Post Suit" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 07 November 1911, 7 https://bklyn.newspapers.com/clip/15928881/russell_got_a_dollar_in_washington_post/ accessed 16 April 2018.

¹⁰¹ "'Pastor' Russell Follower In Toils" *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 14 November 1912, 3 <https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/55376243/> accessed 16 April 2018.

The *Eagle* continued to publish articles that were critical of Russell and his organization in the years following his death. When Joseph Rutherford was arrested and sentenced to jail, the *Eagle* gleefully declared the end of the “sect founded by Russell.”¹⁰² The article was exceptionally long, taking up three full columns on the front page with an additional column on page four, and was particularly harsh. It was essentially a denunciation of everything that Russell had ever done, coupled with bringing up every mistake and controversy he had been a part of. Nothing was missed: his divorce and failure to pay alimony; the “Miracle Wheat” controversy; his failed libel suit against the *Eagle*, which according to the *Eagle* had essentially ended his preaching career; the article also accused him of having swindled “thousands of sincere people” of their money and property; and declared that Russell had attained millions of dollars through his unscrupulous and borderline illegal property holdings and that even the best lawyers in Pittsburg were unable to untangle it.¹⁰³ It ended by confidently predicting that “Russellism” would be able to survive for a little while but that it would be not be very long before it was as “dead as the 999 other religious fads that served to delude simple minded people for a little while.”¹⁰⁴ The *Eagle* was so wrong on this fact that it almost feels like a “Dewey Defeats Truman” moment.¹⁰⁵

Russell was the primary target of the *Eagle*, with the individuals who adhered to his teachings receiving no attention. However, during the 1930s and 1940s the Witnesses as a group came under fire from local press. While Rutherford himself certainly received quite of bit of this, his followers were not isolated in the same way that Russell’s were. A

¹⁰² “Conviction Deals Death Blow To Sect Founded By Russell” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 23 June 1918, 1 https://bklyn.newspapers.com/clip/15928875/conviction_deals_death_blow_to_sect/ accessed 16 April 2018.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* 4.

¹⁰⁵ “Dewey Defeats Truman” is a famous headline from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of 3 November 1948. It incorrectly stated that Thomas Dewey had defeated Harry Truman in the US Presidential election.

lot of this is due to the more overt nature of the Witnesses' preaching activities that Rutherford had started in the 1920s. But the primary cause behind the increase of bad press for the Witnesses were acts like the refusal to salute the flag and join the military in a time of war. These were construed as unpatriotic and led to Supreme Court cases that would change the face of religious freedom in the United States and Canada.¹⁰⁶

On 24 August 1940, the *Kingston Daily Freeman* of Kingston, New York made sure to announce to its readers that, "[cavassers], who described themselves as members of the 'Jehovah's Witnesses' cult, were operating in this community and vicinity this week."¹⁰⁷ The word cult, universally considered a derogatory term, is used twice in the span of little more than forty words. The *Mid-Island Mail* of Medford, New York, in 1938 mockingly described a young woman who had refused to salute the flag as a "classroom rebel" who belonged to the "religious cult" Jehovah's Witnesses.¹⁰⁸ And the *Suffolk County News* on 19 July 1940 reported that a member of the "cult" had been convicted of violating a local ordinance prohibiting the distribution of pamphlets.¹⁰⁹ They also helpfully added that her defense had been that she "had been commanded by God to distribute leaflets under the doormats of local residents on the morning of June 30th."¹¹⁰ The lack of quotation marks surrounding the words in the article indicates this was not a direct quote.

The mocking and dismissive tone of these three examples at first glance appears to be of no significance or importance. Witnesses getting in trouble or annoying people in the

¹⁰⁶ See Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses*; also William Kaplan, *State and Salvation: The Jehovah's Witnesses and Their Fight for Civil Rights*.

¹⁰⁷ "'Jehovah's Witnesses' Cult Reported Active In Area" *Kingston Daily Freeman*, Kingston, New York, 24 August 1940, 8 <https://newspaperarchive.com/kingston-daily-freeman-aug-24-1940-p-8/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹⁰⁸ "Seek Readmission Of Young Salute Rebel At Lake Ronkonkoma" *The Mid-Island Mail* 16 February 1938, 1 & 3 1938 <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn95071326/1938-02-16/ed-1/seq-1/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹⁰⁹ "Held For Distributing Leaflets" *Suffolk County News* 19 July 1940, 9 <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84031477/1940-07-19/ed-1/seq-9/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

area with their preaching and literature is not worth much column space. But that very attitude is dangerous, as mocking can quickly turn to condemnation and anger. Although written before the above examples, an anonymous article published in the 18 October 1935 *Syracuse Herald* provides an excellent example of this. Under the title “Perverting Religious Liberty”, a title which alone implies deviation from a core American belief, the anonymous author stated in no uncertain terms that refusing to salute the flag results in “...a contagious example of folly, insubordination and un-patriotic irreverence.”¹¹¹ They compared the Witnesses’ refusal to salute the flag under the guise of religious freedom as akin to the Mormons’ original practice of polygamy, and noted that that practice was outlawed because, “the fallacious idea that religious freedom can be used as a shield for fantastic practices or dogmas [is] repugnant to the massed sentiment of the nation.”¹¹² The author ended by directly challenging whether anyone who refuses to salute the flag can be considered American.¹¹³

The modern-day organization has developed a strong information department in order to help deflate such issues.¹¹⁴ On their website they keep a dedicated page, “Newsroom for Journalists”, that is easily searchable for information regarding the Witnesses in different countries that is meant to allow journalists to quickly retrieve the organizational stance and understanding of current issues affecting the religion. These typically take the form of short articles written by the Witnesses about the issues in those nations.¹¹⁵ They pay close attention to what is written about them in major newspapers around the world, sometimes responding directly when they believe it is necessary to

¹¹¹ “Perverting Religious Liberty” *Syracuse Herald* 18 October 1935, 22
<https://newspaperarchive.com/syracuse-herald-oct-18-1935-p-22/>_accessed 20 April 2018.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Zoe Knox “Jehovah’s Witnesses as Extremists: The Russian State, Religious Pluralism, and Human Rights”, *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 46 (2019) 133.

¹¹⁵ “Newsroom for Journalists” *jw.org* at <https://www.jw.org/en/news/releases/>

correct a misapprehension about their beliefs or practices.¹¹⁶ The Society also sends out regular press releases and statements, often unsigned so as to appear to come from the entire religion not just an individual department.¹¹⁷ Sending the statement unsigned strengthens the legitimacy of the Governing Body by not allowing for any one member, or as in the past the president, to be attacked or defamed as Russell was. This also allows for the Governing Body to maintain its power, as they are speaking not just on behalf of but indeed for the Witnesses in their role as the head of God's theocratic organization.

Local Violence

While national governments like Australia and Canada were banning the Witnesses and their activities during World War II, local populations were not simply sitting back and watching. The patriotism that was one of the keywords of the time led many people to take the law, or at least how they perceived the law, into their own hands in their communities. The same thing occurred in the United States which, although it never officially banned the Witnesses, did rule against them in a few high-profile cases which led to many people viewing them as traitors or a fifth column. The flag-salute issue in the United States led to a rash of violence against Witnesses for several years, until the ruling was overturned.¹¹⁸ But much like the issues faced by the Witnesses against national governments, the issue of violence against them is far from relegated to the past. Numerous attacks against the Witnesses have been reported around the world, but the

¹¹⁶ See for example Stephen Bates "Witness on the watchtower", *The Guardian*, 26 January 2002, accessed online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jan/26/religion.uk> access date 25 September 2019.

¹¹⁷ "Jehovah's Witnesses ordered by jury to pay \$35M to abuse survivor" *NBC News*, 27 September 2018, accessed online at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/jehovah-s-witnesses-ordered-jury-pay-34m-abuse-survivor-n914146> access date 25 September 2019

¹¹⁸ For more on these cases see Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses*.

most systematic in recent years appears to have been in Georgia, with hundreds of attacks reported in the past several decades.

In the United States such attacks occurred even before the entry of America into World War II. The 1 May 1935 *Watchtower* mentioned that Witnesses had been “violently beaten” in places like Italy, Austria, Germany and Canada.¹¹⁹ It also mentioned that in “...New Jersey and other parts of the United States during the past few years hundreds of Jehovah’s witnesses have repeatedly been arrested, assaulted and imprisoned....”¹²⁰ Local press stories from the time reinforce the Witnesses’ claim. One story from a Pennsylvania newspaper described how twelve unidentified men had resorted to mob violence to drive the Witnesses from town.¹²¹ A paper in Ohio reported one hundred and forty seven Witnesses, almost entirely women, had been jailed in cells designed to hold only eighty four people, accompanied by a photo showing at least six women crowded into a cell clearly designed to hold at most two.¹²² Another Ohio article described a lawsuit that the Witnesses brought against a local town for not being allowed to distribute handbills and that “spoiled vegetables, stones and eggs...” had been thrown at them.¹²³ A final article from a Maryland newspaper described how, because they refused to salute the flag, they were beaten, choked and kicked before being run out of town by five men.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ “Seeking Knowledge”, *The Watchtower* (1 May 1935) 133. The quote reflects the pre-1976 naming of the religion as “Jehovah’s witnesses” with a lower-case “w”, see page 26, footnote 2.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ “Cannot Find Persons Who Beat ‘Witness’”, *The Charleroi Mail*, (Charleroi, Pennsylvania) 11 September 1936, 1 <https://newspaperarchive.com/charleroi-mail-sep-11-1936-p-1/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹²² “147 Jehovah’s Witnesses Penned In Small Cell”, (Picture with caption) *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio) 26 May 1936, 1 <https://newspaperarchive.com/evening-independent-may-26-1936-p-1/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹²³ “City Officials Are Sued For Damages”, *The Evening Gazette*, (Xenia, Ohio) 27 July 1939, 1 <https://newspaperarchive.com/xenia-evening-gazette-jul-27-1939-p-1/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹²⁴ “Assault Charged By Religious Sect”, *Evening Times*, (Cumberland, Maryland) 11 September 1936, 2 <https://newspaperarchive.com/cumberland-evening-times-sep-11-1936-p-2/>.

The above examples show how unpopular the Witnesses were throughout the United States, though not all communities nor local officials had negative reactions to the Witnesses. *The Daily Independent*, from Murphysboro, Illinois noted that the mayor of that town had encouraged people to treat Witnesses as a Christian group and that "...a thorough check of the activities of the Jehovah group failed to reveal any activity on its part tending toward the much talked up 'Fifth Column' activity."¹²⁵ But even then it was noted that the mayor had warned the Witnesses it would be better to be elsewhere, and the fact that the idea of the Witnesses being a "Fifth Column" had to be expressly debunked shows how widespread it had become even by 1940.

After the Witnesses' loss in the Supreme Court decision in *Minersville School District v Gobitis* (hereafter *Gobitis*) in June 1940 things changed quickly for the Witnesses.¹²⁶ To understand the violence that the Witnesses endured after the decision it is necessary to highlight the major points of the case to see how it was then interpreted, incorrectly, by local communities. In *Gobitis*, the question before the Supreme Court was whether a student could refuse to salute the American flag in school on religious grounds. The case involved two Witness children who had refused because Witness belief teaches that nothing should be put before loyalty to God, and that by saluting the flag they would be placing loyalty to the United States above that which is owed to God. The Supreme Court determined in an 8-1 decision that school districts could force children to salute the flag as it was an acceptable way to build loyalty to the nation and did not infringe on religious beliefs.¹²⁷ With this decision, many people believed that the Witnesses had been

¹²⁵ "Mayor Bids People Treat Jehovahs as Christian Group", *The Daily Independent*, (Murphysboro, Illinois) 12 August 1940 13 <https://newspaperarchive.com/murphysboro-daily-independent-aug-12-1940-p-13/> accessed 20 April 2018.

¹²⁶ *Gobitis* has been written about quite often, especially in law articles. More recently it was the subject of Shawn Francis Peters' *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses*.

¹²⁷ *Minersville School District, Board of Education of Minersville School District, et al. v. Gobitis et al.*, 310 U.S. 586, 588 (1940).

officially revealed as traitors to the country. This started a backlash and wave of violence against the Witnesses that was immediate and severe. One Witness described an encounter while preaching door to door after the ruling:

[The homeowner started using] slanderous language, stating we were Communists, traitors, Nazis, and worse than rats; further, we should be kicked out of the country. He then enumerated various newspapers from which he had read the Supreme Court's decision and stated that any man that would not salute the American flag should be killed or kicked out. There was murder in his eyes, and he proceeded to kick me out. I asked the man to be gracious and permit me to explain why our people will not salute a flag. He stated he was going to go into the house and bring a flag, and if I refused to salute, he would kill me.¹²⁸

While thankfully this story had a safe ending, the homeowner listened to the Witness and even subscribed to *The Watchtower*, not everyone was so lucky. The ACLU reported that between May and October 1940, 1,488 Witnesses were attacked across the United States.¹²⁹ The Court would overturn the *Gobitis* decision several years later in *West Virginia v. Barnette*, partially in response to the violence.¹³⁰

But just like with national persecution by modern state governments, these attacks are not just a product of the past. In Uzbekistan in 2016 local police officers beat and tortured a Witness, leading to the man losing hearing in one of his ears. Local and state authorities have reportedly not punished the officers involved.¹³¹ In the United Kingdom in 2017 a man admitted to striking his wife, a Witness, in the face several times with a

¹²⁸ "Soft Answer Turns Away Wrath On A Back-Call", *The Watchtower* (15 August 1940) 256.

¹²⁹ ACLU, *The Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses*, (New York: ACLU, 1941) 3, downloaded from Indiana State University, http://debs.indstate.edu/a505p4_1941.pdf accessed 16 August 2015.

¹³⁰ Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses*, 247-251; Examples of the Witnesses being attacked and imprisoned in the United States and around the world are numerous, especially during World War II, and have been quite well documented. For examples see: Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses* (USA); Emily Baran, *Dissent on the Margin* (USSR); M. James Penton, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Third Reich: Sectarian Politics under Persecution* (Germany); M. James Penton, *Jehovah's Witnesses in Canada: Champions of Freedom of Speech and Worship* (Canada); and *Jehovah's Witnesses In Europe Past And Present*, Eds. Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa Volumes 1 & 2 (Italy, Belgium, Spain and others).

¹³¹ Mushfig Bayram, "Uzbekistan: Torture and death threats unpunished" *Forum 18 News Service*, 1 May 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2374 accessed 25 May 2018.

magazine and burning her literature, apparently because he was afraid she would cancel Christmas in their household.¹³² Also in the United Kingdom in 2018 a woman was given a suspended sentence after attacking three Witnesses with a hammer when they came to her door, hitting one of them in the shoulder and another in the face, though she caused no serious damage.¹³³ While the perpetrator(s) have yet to be caught, in the United States state of Washington in 2018 six Kingdom Halls were attacked, several by arson, one with a bomb, and one had thirty-five rifle rounds fired into it.¹³⁴ And in a particularly frightening attack, over four hundred Witnesses were poisoned with gas while attending a convention in Angola in 2017, though no deaths were reported.¹³⁵ The attack was apparently perpetrated by local members of a political party who were upset that the Witnesses did not vote in previous elections, and three men were arrested.¹³⁶

The most egregious recent example of Witnesses being assaulted by residents and police officers regularly and with no real recourse comes from the country of Georgia. This type of harassment is not new however, as Georgia has had a problem with religious minorities being persecuted for decades, starting in the Soviet era. In *Dissent on the Margins*, Emily Baran looks at Witness relations with nations in the Soviet Union, which while not specifically including Georgia can allow for a greater understanding of how the movement would have been regarded and treated in a Soviet satellite state at that time. Baran reports that many "...illegal groups were concentrated in the western borderlands.

¹³² "Jehovah's Witness was attacked by husband who feared she was going to cancel Christmas" *The Telegraph* (UK) 30 April 2017 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/30/jehovahs-witness-attacked-husband-feared-going-cancel-christmas/> accessed 25 May 2018.

¹³³ Joe Roberts, "Woman walks free after attacking Jehovah's Witnesses with hammer" *Metro* (UK) 12 April 2018 <http://metro.co.uk/2018/04/12/woman-walks-free-attacking-jehovahs-witnesses-hammer-7463212/> accessed 25 May 2018.

¹³⁴ Carol Kuruvilla, "Cops Investigate Attacks Against Jehovah's Witness Buildings In Washington State" *HuffPost*, accessed via Yahoo! News, <https://news.yahoo.com/cops-investigate-attacks-against-jehovah-192735715.html> accessed 11 December 2018.

¹³⁵ Inemesit Udodiong, "Poisonous gas affects over 400 members in Angola" *Pulse.ng* 28 August 2017 <http://www.pulse.ng/communities/religion/toxic-gas-attack-affects-400-jehovahs-witnesses-in-angola-id7217084.html> accessed 25 May 2018.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Their elimination, therefore, was seen as a necessary part of the Sovietization process...[and] authorities actively worked to root out and destroy potentially subversive religious communities.”¹³⁷ Atheistic Soviet propaganda would emphasize that the Witnesses were an illegal organization under Soviet law, and that their true goals were not religious but were instead political, ironically the same charges made against them during World War II in the United States.¹³⁸ Witnesses were regularly sent to camps in Siberia, and stories of reformed Witnesses who had realized the error of joining the movement were headlines in Soviet media.¹³⁹

This time period highlights the power of the Witness mechanisms to reinforce each other and even, when necessary, bear the brunt of the Witnesses’ needs alone for a time. Proselytizing during this period was a way in which the religion was able to not only uphold the beliefs of the individual but to continue growth even in a regime that was not just hostile but actively attempting to destroy the organization within its borders. In the Soviet Union, despite the need to smuggle in literature and with no regular contact with headquarters in Brooklyn, Witnesses were formed into “circles” of about twelve people, typically family and close friends. These circles were the smallest part of larger districts, and each had an elder who was responsible for delivering information up the chain until it eventually reached Brooklyn.¹⁴⁰ Preaching the good news was of paramount importance, as was recording the information, just like it was around the rest of the world where the Witnesses were able to preach openly. Despite the difficulties, adherents submitted “regular tallies of their preaching work to appointed elders who consolidated this information and passed it up the hierarchy for use in monthly and yearly country

¹³⁷ Baran, 47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid* 145.

¹³⁹ Baran 151; also Knox “Jehovah’s Witnesses as Extremists” ... 134.

¹⁴⁰ Baran 35.

reports.”¹⁴¹ The rigid hierarchy, makeshift though it was, still led to the leadership in Brooklyn, first Nathan Knorr and later the Governing Body, strengthening the belief that the Society, and those in charge, were doing God’s work.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, and the move to more democratic government, Witnesses had a hope of more religious freedom with less persecution in Georgia. This however has not entirely been the reality. A United States State Department report, the 2001 International Report on Religious Freedom, specifically and repeatedly mentioned the Witnesses and began its report by stating that:

The [Georgian] Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local authorities sometimes restricted the rights of members of nontraditional religious minority groups...Local police and security officials at times harassed nontraditional religious minority groups and were complicit or failed to respond to attacks by Orthodox extremists against Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional religious minorities. Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional religious groups; however, there is growing suspicion of nontraditional religious groups, and an increased number of incidents in which Orthodox extremists harassed and attacked such groups, especially Jehovah's Witnesses occurred.¹⁴²

The report does mention other religious minorities that have faced problems in Georgia, but none are as heavily represented as the Witnesses. The Witnesses appear by name thirty-six times in the report, with the next closest minority religion being the Assemblies of God with five mentions. The report specifically highlights instances of attacks against Witnesses: in 2000 an assembly of 700 Witnesses was broken up, with over 50 being beaten; in 2001 several dozen Witnesses were assaulted and robbed while police looked on; in another attack that year the mayor and police not only looked on but warned that future attacks would occur; and a mob of thirty Orthodox priests attacked a gathering of

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² “Georgia: International Religious Freedom Report” *U.S. Dept. of State*, 2001, last accessed 15 July 2019, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2001/5649.htm>.

Witnesses, beating one woman with a stick and striking another across the face.¹⁴³ These attacks from the Georgian Orthodox Church also have Soviet roots, where Orthodox Churches in the Soviet Union were granted legal recognition and special status in return for political support of Soviet initiatives.¹⁴⁴

According to the Witnesses things seemed to become much better after 2004, when they were allowed to register again as a religious organization after having that officially stripped from them in 2001.¹⁴⁵ After bringing several cases to the European Court of Human Rights they unanimously won two of them, in 2007 and in 2014, that condemned how the Georgian government had handled the violence against them, in effect by doing nothing about it.¹⁴⁶ In 2015 the Georgian government acknowledged that its forced deregistration of the Witnesses in 2001 had been unjust.¹⁴⁷ And in 2017 they agreed to pay damages to ten Witnesses who had been attacked between the years 1999 and 2003.¹⁴⁸ The Witnesses have even stated that “Jehovah’s Witnesses in Georgia are no longer victims of mob attacks and State-sponsored religious persecution. They now enjoy freedom of religion.”¹⁴⁹

Recent data however suggests this may be a far more optimistic outlook than is warranted. According to the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), attacks and crimes committed against Witnesses have seen a marked increase over the past several years. According to their data, physical assault, verbal assault, and property damage crimes against Witnesses from 2010 until 2012 numbered 12, with the number

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Baran 45

¹⁴⁵ “Georgia Overview” jw.org, last accessed 15 July 2019, <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/georgia/jehovah-witness-facts/>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ “The European Court of Human Rights Accepts Georgia’s Admission of Guilt” jw.org 24 October 2017 <https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/georgia/echr-accepts-georgias-admission-of-guilt/>.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

going down every year from 6 in 2010, to 4 in 2011, to only 2 in 2012. In 2013 this number jumped to a total of 17. And from 2014 to 2016, one hundred and three known crimes were committed against Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia, with at least two dozen of those being physical assault. The report ends by stating that although prosecution rates for crimes committed against Witnesses has improved, it is still not a priority for many local authorities and that "[it] is particularly important that in many cases, the authorities' attitude is loyal towards the perpetrators of criminal acts and is not aimed at preventing future criminal acts."¹⁵⁰

The 2018 International Report on Religious Freedom found that the Public Defender's Office of Georgia's government (PDO), which is charged with monitoring religious freedom violations, noted "...19 accounts of violence on the ground of religious intolerance during the year, 14 more than in 2017 ... [the] 2018 cases all pertained to Jehovah's Witnesses, and [Witness] members accused the relevant authorities of lacking the will to investigate these cases."¹⁵¹ It reported that of the "...140 instances of religiously intolerant statements on television, online, and in printed media by media representatives, political parties, clergy, public organizations, and others...", 29 of these were specifically against the Witnesses, second only to those against Muslim migrants, who had 35. It also noted that, other than the LGBT community, Georgian citizens believed that Witnesses were the group most likely to face discrimination.¹⁵² Despite this however the Witnesses continue to preach, and in 2018 held the first ever special convention in Tbilisi, with over seven thousand attending in person, while over twenty thousand watched as it was live streamed. The Body also made its presence known, with Body member Stephen Lett

¹⁵⁰ "Analysis of the crimes against Jehovah witnesses in 2016" *EMC.org*, 06 March 2017 <https://emc.org.ge/en/products/2016-tsels-iehovas-motsmeta-mimart-chadenili-danashaulebis-analizi>.

¹⁵¹ "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Georgia" *U.S. Dept. of State*, 21 June 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/georgia/> last accessed 25 September 2019.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

concluding every day of the three-day event with a talk.¹⁵³ The mechanisms are alive and well in Georgia, helping its people there to grow despite continuing hostility.

The Future

The Witnesses have, almost since their beginning, been a high-profile religious organization. Russell was a famous religious teacher during his day, with sermons published in hundreds of newspapers, debates against prominent members of other denominations being given national coverage, and a popular orator who drew thousands to hear him speak. Since the early 1920s, the Witnesses have been engaged in a massive public preaching campaign that has shown no signs of slowing down, using everything from phonographs and radio to soundcars and books. Their primary method of worship, preaching door to door, has led to them being one of the best-known minority religions in the world. And with thousands of issues in hundreds of languages being printed in the tens of millions of copies per issue, their magazines are nearly ubiquitous.

However, despite the old saw that “no press is bad press”, Witnesses have often found that being high-profile is not always a good thing. Russell may have been well traveled and drew huge crowds, but that fame also made him an easy target for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, who from the moment he set foot in Brooklyn continuously dug into his personal life and attacked him at seemingly every chance they got. They labeled him a crook and a fraud, and while the exact impact this had on his standing in the local community is unknown, the repeated denunciations of his group as a cult and of himself as a huckster has followed the organization down to the present day. His remaining defenders

¹⁵³ “First Special Convention Held in Tbilisi, Georgia” *jw.org*, 22 November 2018, <https://www.jw.org/en/news/jw/region/georgia/first-special-convention-held-tbilisi/> access date 26 September 2019.

still must answer the attacks that the *Eagle* made, with one book having an entire chapter dedicated to answering those attacks among others.¹⁵⁴

Even more than Russell, the Witnesses under Rutherford and until today have faced even more trials and garnered a lot of negative press. From being called traitors and fifth columnists, Nazis and communists, Witnesses during World War II were not well received. Newspapers reported almost gleefully on Witnesses being arrested, and some even went so far as to warn residents if they knew that Witnesses would shortly be making an appearance in their town. The constant use of labels like sect and cult fed into this and created an image of the Witnesses as being traitors to their country, regardless of what country it was, that they have yet to completely rid themselves of even today. Recent events in Georgia and Russia bear this out.

Violence against the Witnesses has also been a common part of their history, from destruction of their places of worship and literature to physical beatings and being run out of town by mobs. Whether the country is democratic or not rarely seems to matter, especially during a time of war. Even in the United States, whose First Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of religion, Witnesses have been declared traitors, and local communities have taken it upon themselves to punish these traitors for reasons mostly unknown, and almost always at least misinterpreted. Countries without strong religious protections, such as Georgia over the past two decades, continue to see hundreds of assaults on the Witnesses and their property.

And yet, despite these issues, Witnesses have continued to proliferate throughout the decades, growing at a steady pace. They continue to travel the streets of their communities, knocking on doors and promising to give knowledge that will lead to eternal life on a paradise Earth for those who will follow. They continue to publish their magazines,

¹⁵⁴ Redeker, *Russell*, 165-211.

print their books and spread their message further and further. Their leadership continues to give them spiritual guidance and uplifting promises that the new system of things will soon be at hand. Without an understanding of the trials they have been through it would almost seem a miracle, this tiny organization growing from a small gathering to a worldwide religion. But it is not a miracle, but rather the result of very hard work against incredibly difficult opposition at every level of modern society.

Internal Conflicts

Like many large organizations, the Witnesses have had their share of internal conflicts throughout their century and a half of existence. Ignoring these would be denying the impact they had on shaping the movement into its current form and the mechanisms that have allowed them to thrive over the decades. The largest and most visible of these internal conflicts came during the first fifteen years of Rutherford's reorganization of the Society into a "theocratic" one, with numerous small groups separating from the main body, most notably the Dawn Bible Students. The first section will therefore look at this period in further detail to show just how close the organization came to being relegated to a short lived religious movement that barely outlived its founder-leader.

However, much like issues with national governments and local communities, internal conflicts are not a thing of the past but continue today as well. The most organized and public contemporary dispute within the Society today is against the stance that the Witnesses take regarding blood transfusions. This stance, and the Society's response to it from both internal sources and the public at large, has been one of the areas in which the Society has been able to further their agenda despite the backlash.¹⁵⁵ Here, the focus will

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter Two, page 99.

be on the Advocates for Jehovah's Witness Reform on Blood (AJWRB), who for over twenty-years have been advocating for a complete change in the policy. The founder of the AJWRB goes by the pseudonym Lee Elder and claims to have been an elder in the religion and an active Witness, a claim which while unverifiable "...is widely accepted by analysts outside the community."¹⁵⁶

Before moving on it is prudent here to observe that the Society rarely directly acknowledges internal disputes. Most of the information about these disputes comes from outside the organization, typically published by those in conflict with the Society. As these tend to be current or former Witnesses, the Society labels them as apostates and instructs its adherents to ignore completely anything written or said by them. Using this material therefore becomes a judgement call on the author's part, as the question arises about the reliability of information from someone who has a clear agenda against the Society. The reasoning behind the use of so-called apostate works was outlined in the Introduction, but a brief reiteration of two key measures of acceptance is key here. The first is the acceptance of the material by the academic community. While writers such as Raymond Franz and Lee Elder are technically apostates, their work has been acknowledged by the academic community as being reliable sources of information for the topics on which they speak. The second measure is the intent and knowledge of the source. Raymond Franz and Lee Elder are measured in their approach and while critical do not attempt to "convert" anyone to their way of thinking but rather use evidence to back up their claims and initiate conversation. Because of these factors, I feel confident in using Lee Elder and his AJWRB organization's writings and publications. In addition, I was able to interview Lee Elder, and this interview allows for a clearer and well-defined look at internal dissent.

¹⁵⁶ Knox, *Secular*, 179.

Early schisms and the Dawn

Rutherford's re-forging of the legal society and the religious goals of the Witnesses during his twenty-plus years as head of the movement were successful. He set in motion or cemented several of the mechanisms which the Witnesses have used to continue to grow, and his importance should not be understated. But his presidency also saw the most internal strife and the very public breaking away of several groups, including the Dawn Bible Students, who believed he was moving too far away from the teachings of Russell. The number of conflicts during Rutherford's two decades of leadership is quite high, and a reflection on all of them would be an entire research project itself.¹⁵⁷ For this section the focus will be on the last and largest of the schisms within the organization, primarily spearheaded by the Dawn.

During the end of his first decade in power, the internal conflicts and disagreements over the changes that Rutherford was making had taken its toll on the Society. Stark evidence of this is provided by the publications of the Society itself, which had to defend its practices and changes repeatedly. Dozens of articles referenced opposition to God, through opposing his chosen instrument, the Watchtower Society. An article in the 1 May 1929 issue of the *Watchtower* told its readers that some within the organization had opposed the idea of preaching the message, leading many others onto the same course, and warned that those who have "become so thoroughly impressed with their own importance and their solemn attitude which they strike to impress others, are not pleasing to the Lord."¹⁵⁸ That same article called "spiritually sick" those who valued Russell's teaching that self-improvement in the eyes of God is more important than the

¹⁵⁷ For example, the Layman Home Missionary Movement and the Pastoral Bible Institute are both older than the Dawn by over a decade but have moved further away from the teachings of Russell than the Dawn have. For that reason, the Dawn make for a better comparison and so will be used here.

¹⁵⁸ "Delight Thyself in Jehovah", *The Watchtower* (1 May 1929) 133.

house-to-house work.¹⁵⁹ The transcript of a radio lecture printed in the 1 September 1930 *Watchtower*, which dealt mostly with Satan's repeated opposition to God, at the end decried those who had at one point followed their message but had turned away, and said: "[these] opposers who once had the truth and were associated with others who had the truth are like Judas, traitors to the Lord and to his cause."¹⁶⁰ And the opening article of the 15 September 1930 *Watchtower*, entitled "The Man Of Sin", stated unequivocally that, "Jehovah has made it clear to his people that the 'great sin' is disloyalty, rebellion and opposition to the Most High."¹⁶¹

When reading these years of the *Watchtower* magazines there is no denying that there were internal issues affecting the movement. The salient issue is how large the opposition must have been for the *Watchtower* to continuously and repeatedly rail against the issue of Judas-like traitors opposing their teachings. The 1930 and 1931 *Yearbooks* were so worried about it that they each dedicated a separate section of the book specifically entitled "Opposition", which did not appear in the 1927 to 1929 editions.¹⁶² This time period, unsurprisingly, coincided with the creation of the Dawn Bible Students, with W. Norman Woodworth being the primary source of inspiration and the "leading light" for the Dawn until his death in October 1975.¹⁶³ The Dawn collected the bulk of those Bible Students who felt that Rutherford had gone too far away from the teachings of Russell which, until the final few years of Rutherford's presidency, meant that the Witnesses' adherent numbers remained static, with as many old believers leaving as new ones coming in. This growth for the Dawn however was not to last.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ "Opposition To God's Truth", *The Watchtower* (1 September 1930) 208.

¹⁶¹ "The Man Of Sin", *The Watchtower* (15 September 1930) 275.

¹⁶² 1930, 21-22; 1931, 17-21.

¹⁶³ Interview with James Parkinson by author, 04 October 2016.

During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, which the Dawn have referred to as the “peak harvest time” of their organization, many media including radio, television, traveling speakers and *The Dawn* magazine were utilized.¹⁶⁴ Since the Dawn do not keep membership rolls, it is not possible to give an exact number of adherents at any given time as it is with the Witnesses. However, the sharp decline after the death of Woodworth can be glimpsed by comparing some of the magazine numbers reported then with what the Dawn stated in January 2019. During this peak time, the Dawn printed “approximately twenty-five thousand copies of *The Dawn* magazine...each month at the Dawn plant in East Rutherford, New Jersey... *Most of these magazines were sent out to regular subscribers but extra copies were on hand to use in the witness work. In addition, other copies were printed in several foreign languages.*”¹⁶⁵ This is still not quite indicative of total number of adherents as a family of four would only have one subscription to the magazine, or conversely a family may not have a subscription but still attend meetings and be recognized as members, but magazine subscription is the only number that is reported by the Dawn with anything resembling consistency.

For 1967, which would have been near the end of the “peak time” for growth as described by the Dawn, the Witnesses reported their total magazine subscriptions as 1,809,065, with their adherent numbers being given as 1,094,280.¹⁶⁶ This disparity has increased exponentially since the 1960s, as in January 2019 the Dawn reported that their total subscription numbers, which includes the issues printed in nine foreign languages, totals six thousand three hundred worldwide.¹⁶⁷ This represents an approximate loss of nearly fourteen thousand subscribers in the past fifty years while the Witnesses have

¹⁶⁴ “The Dawn Magazine 75th Anniversary 1932–2007” *The Dawn* October 2007, found online at <http://www.dawnbible.com/2007/0710-hl.htm> accessed 10 January 2019.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid* (emphasis mine).

¹⁶⁶ *1968 Yearbook*, 42.

¹⁶⁷ “Statistical Report For the year ended September 30, 2018” *The Dawn* January 2019, 55, PDF downloaded from <http://www.dawnbible.com/2019/toc-1901.htm> 10 January 2019.

exponentially grown. While the initial impact of the Dawn forming in 1932 was jarring for the Witnesses, with the mechanisms that the Witnesses developed, mechanisms that the Dawn does not have, the overall impact proved to be irrelevant.

Contemporary Internal Dissent

Modern schismatic groups appear to be even less successful than the Dawn was when it initially broke away. As an example, former Jehovah's Witness Greg Stafford, who authored several apologist works defending the Jehovah's Witnesses before disassociating himself, founded the Christian Witnesses of Jah around 2007, describing the group as "...Jehovah's Witnesses who reject traditions of men that invalidate the Word of Jah Jehovah."¹⁶⁸ They believe that while many of the beliefs of the Witnesses are correct, they disagree with the policies set up by the Governing Body, with Stafford specifically mentioning his issues with the blood doctrine.¹⁶⁹ However the response to Stafford's group appears to have been minimal, although exact adherent numbers are not available. A Christian Witnesses of Jah website has been "Coming Soon" since 2008 according to a sample homepage found on Stafford's site.¹⁷⁰ His blog posts are sporadic at best, with the most being nineteen in 2010 and between 2011 and 2018 averaging four a year, with 2016 and 2017 having one each.¹⁷¹ In November 2018 he created the CWJahTube channel on YouTube, which currently has just over sixty videos and fifty-five hundred total views.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Greg Stafford, "Christian Witnesses of Jah" *In Medio* volume 2, Issue 8, July 2008 downloadable online at http://www.elihubooks.com/content/in_medio.php accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁶⁹ "About Us" http://www.elihubooks.com/content/about_us.php accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷⁰ "Christian Witnesses of Jah-Homepage" http://www.elihubooks.com/images/CWJ_homepage_final.j accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷¹ "Watching the Ministry" <http://elihubooks.blogspot.com/> accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷² "CWJahTube-About" <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMtjmoHN6DIQOHEK2HCvEBQ/about> accessed 14 January 2019.

Modern dissent however rarely takes on the form of groups seeking to call away former Witnesses to join them in a new denomination, such as the early years of the Dawn and other movements during the Rutherford era. Instead the advent of the internet has allowed for people who leave the Witnesses to give their views as to why they believe the organization is in error in its teachings and actions.¹⁷³ These include JWfacts.com, founded and run by disfellowshipped Witness Paul Grundy, who wanted “to assist people [to] find objective and factual information in an easy to follow format, in the hope of helping other Witnesses avoid the confusion I felt for the 10 years prior to leaving.”¹⁷⁴ The Advocates for Awareness of Watchtower Abuses (AAWA) seeks to teach the public “about several policies of the Watchtower Society that violate basic human rights”, including child abuse, domestic violence, suicides, and the practice of shunning.¹⁷⁵ And AvoidJW.org presents articles on different topics, as well as being a resource for downloadable scans of *The Watchtower* magazine back to 1880, as well as other publications by the Society that are no longer in print.¹⁷⁶ AvoidJW.org also provides links to over fifty websites in several languages that revolve around the Witnesses. While most of these sites and organizations are run by former Jehovah’s Witnesses, they acknowledge, even seek, help from inside the religion to more effectively reach those who need help.¹⁷⁷

The best-known internal dissent group however is the Advocates for Jehovah’s Witness Reform on Blood (AJWRB). The AJWRB was founded in 1998 by the pseudonymous

¹⁷³ See also Donald R. Jacobs “Unofficial Jehovah’s Witnesses Apologetics” for an interesting discussion on a short-lived online community dedicated to defending Witness teachings.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Grundy, “Paul Grundy: My Story” on JWfacts.com at <https://jwfacts.com/watchtower/experiences/paul-grundy.php> accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷⁵ “Mission Statement” AAWA.co at <http://aawa.co/mission-statement/> accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷⁶ “Publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses” AvoidJW.org at <https://avoidjw.org/en/publications/> accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷⁷ See for example the “Volunteer Questionnaire” on the AAWA website (<http://aawa.co/volunteer/>) which states “AAWA seeks to work with competent and committed individuals both inside and outside the organization who are willing to volunteer”, and which asks on their questionnaire what the current status and position the person holds within the religion, if any.

Lee Elder, who claimed to be an elder within a Witness congregation but did not want to reveal his identity as it would cause him to be disfellowshipped.¹⁷⁸ The AJWRB includes several medical experts who sit on their Board, most notably Dr. Osamu Muramoto, who has written several articles in medical journals, including the *British Medical Journal* and *the Journal of Medical Ethics*, regarding the Witnesses' use of blood transfusions.¹⁷⁹ Lee Elder has published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* as well, and is also the Vice-President of the aforementioned AAWA.¹⁸⁰

Scholars who have reported on the AJWRB have predominantly used these articles, as well as the AJWRB website and other writings, when discussing the group's arguments and impact on the Witnesses.¹⁸¹ While valuable for scholars, the journal articles are now eighteen years out of date, and the publications on the AJWRB website are inconsistent, with at times six months or more between posts.¹⁸² In order to present a clearer picture of the history of the AJWRB and have more up-to-date information, I contacted the AJWRB and after a few emails I was able to conduct an interview via email with Lee Elder. This allows for a fuller picture of Lee Elder and his history with the Witnesses and where he currently stands within the religion, as well as more information on the history, future, and impact of the AJWRB.

Elder's maternal grandmother began studying with the Witnesses in the 1930s and raised her children as Witnesses. Elder's mother raised him as a Witness, and some of his

¹⁷⁸ "FAQ-Frequently Asked Questions" AJWRB.org at <http://ajwrb.org/faq-frequently-asked-questions> accessed 14 January 2019.

¹⁷⁹ "Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood" AJWRB.org at <http://ajwrb.org/physicians> accessed 14 January 2019; Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

¹⁸⁰ Lee Elder, "Why some Jehovah's Witnesses accept blood and conscientiously reject official Watchtower Society blood policy" *Journal of Medical Ethics* 2000; 26: 375-380; "About AAWA" AAWA.co at <http://aawa.co/about-aawa/> accessed 14 January 2019; also see previous paragraph.

¹⁸¹ See for example Knox, *Secular*, 178-181, 186; also Chryssides, *Continuity*, 266-267.

¹⁸² As of this writing, 18 April 2019, the last article posted on the AJWRB site was from 27 July 2018, "Hematologist Helps Open the Eyes of Pregnant JW" AJWRB.org at <http://ajwrb.org/hematologist-helps-open-the-eyes-of-pregnant-jw> accessed 18 April 2019.

earliest memories were of “attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall as a small child, going in field service, and attending assemblies.”¹⁸³ He left school at the age of 14 to begin pioneering, believing the world would end in 1975, only a couple years away.¹⁸⁴ Despite the failure of 1975, Elder became an elder in his congregation in 1987, being responsible for giving talks, conducting Bible studies and sitting on judicial committees, which are responsible for disciplining wayward Witnesses, among other duties. The position of elder is an appointed one that requires a strong history of faithful obedience to the religion. As such, he would have taught that the blood policy was sound doctrine and was to be followed to the letter. That Elder attained this position shows that he was well-respected and highly thought of within his community and with his superiors in the religion.¹⁸⁵

Elder first started to question the legitimacy of the blood policy in 1995 after talking to a physician in an online forum and conversations with his own doctor. Before this he had personally been affected by the blood doctrine policy. His grandmother had died after refusing blood while fighting leukemia. When he was sixteen a friend in the congregation, Candy, also passed away from leukemia at only fifteen years old. She had asked Elder if he would be one of her pallbearers, an action that “left a deep impression on me.”¹⁸⁶ After researching for about a year the Society’s literature regarding blood policy and comparing that with medical information, Elder decided that he had to speak out, so he started the AJWRB website, originally known as “New Light on Blood.” Elder says: “Within weeks I was contacted by many JW’s with similar concerns, dozens were elders like myself. Some of them were HLC [Hospital Liaison Committee] members who specialize in the blood issue. The issue was larger than any one person, so the following year we

¹⁸³ Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

¹⁸⁴ Lee Elder “Saving a Thousand Lives a Year: Reforming Watchtower’s Policy on Blood – Part One” Open Minds Foundation, 11 September 2017 <https://www.openmindsfoundation.org/saving-thousand-lives-year-reform-watchtowers-policy-blood-transfusions-part-one/> accessed 18 January 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

changed the site to AJWRB.”¹⁸⁷ According to Elder this caught the Governing Body by surprise, as the idea that so many would openly, if anonymously, challenge them and the blood doctrine was unthinkable before the rise of the internet.¹⁸⁸ Although records are no longer kept for security reasons, Elder stated that at one point the AJWRB had members from around the world at various levels of responsibility within the religion, including the above mentioned elders and HLC members, as well as pioneers, former circuit overseers, and at the headquarters.¹⁸⁹

It is important to understand the history of Lee Elder’s move into internal dissent, what he terms “loyal opposition”, for a couple reasons. The first is motive. Elder does not wish to bring down or destroy the Witnesses or to draw members from the religion into one of his own making. Unlike the Dawn, or even the other groups mentioned above, Elder considered himself a Jehovah’s Witness who disagreed with the Biblical justifications for what he saw as a harmful policy. In the twenty years since he started the AJWRB his views have evolved, as “over time one starts to wonder if the organization has made important mistakes on other issues”, and he is no longer an elder. Indeed, while he states that he never formally left the Witnesses nor was disfellowshipped, he describes his status as technically a Jehovah’s Witness, but inactive and “[practically] speaking, I am no longer associated beyond occasionally attending a funeral.” However, despite this slow move away from the Witnesses, and his belief that they are wrong on several other issues, he still does not wish to bring the Society down. When asked directly if he would cease the

¹⁸⁷ Hospital Liaison Committees, according to Elder, are “groups of elders with special training on non-blood alternatives. In complicated cases they will often be called in to lobby for special treatment for JW’s. They also have lists of doctors who have agreed to treat JW’s without blood regardless of the outcome. Finally, they serve as a reporting mechanism for non-compliance with WT policy.” Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Lee Elder, “Saving a Thousand Lives...”.

¹⁸⁹ Lee Elder interview with author, 26 October 2018.

activities of the AJWRB were the blood doctrine to be discontinued, his answer was just as direct: “Absolutely.”¹⁹⁰

The second reason is that a blueprint for how modern internal dissent can be effectively used to initiate change within the Witnesses is being created by the AJWRB. Elder’s personal story is a common one for Jehovah’s Witnesses who end up questioning the religion. It is a slow realization, not a fast decision, one that involves fears of being shunned by your family and friends and cast out from the religion you believed in. Elder has sought to teach Witnesses about the errors that he sees in the blood policy, a goal that he believes is being accomplished through the AJWRB: “These days there are a significant number of JW’s who are aware of the history, largely due to the work of AJWRB, and others who have made an effort to shed light on the evolution of the policy. That was not always the case.” Elder recognizes that even if change is made to the blood policy however it will be slow in coming. He also believes that the impact on Witness adherents and membership will be minimal, as the “majority of JW’s simply accept whatever they are told and are grateful they do not have to sort things out themselves.”¹⁹¹

A 2016 survey by JWsurvey.org, a website founded by then Witness Lloyd Evans under the pseudonym “John Cedars”, provides evidence of the opinion and knowledge change that Elder talks about.¹⁹² In the 2016 survey questions forty-seven through fifty-two dealt with the blood policy, and according to the survey were only available to those who had identified as current or former Witnesses. Those who identified as never having been baptized were not given these questions.¹⁹³ Of the six questions asked about the blood

¹⁹⁰ Lee Elder, interview with author, 26 October 2018.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² JWsurvey.org has done an annual survey since 2011 involving the beliefs, doctrines and policies of the Witnesses. This survey is geared toward current and former Witnesses and done online to ensure anonymity of the respondents. It is done through SurveyMonkey, an online survey website.

¹⁹³ “The Results of the Sixth Annual Global Survey of Jehovah’s Witnesses 2016” JWsurvey.org, 5-7, downloadable pdf available at <https://jwsurvey.org/global-surveys> downloaded 18 January 2019.

policy, two are particularly relevant for the discussion here. Question forty-seven asks: “What is your personal stance on blood?” Nearly eighty percent (80%) of the over four thousand responders to the question answered that they would, openly or secretly, take treatments that involve blood. Only about three percent (3%) indicated that they would absolutely refuse any blood treatments. Question fifty-two asks: “If you had the power, would you remove the prohibition on blood transfusions?” This question is just as decisive, with eighty three percent (83%) of respondents saying yes, and just over five percent (5.67%) saying no. Even given the limitations of the survey, these numbers are a definitive example of Lee Elder’s assertion that not only has the knowledge of the blood policy grown from when he founded the AJWRB, but that opinion of the policy has also sharply turned negative.

One final impact the AJWRB has had is to help make the blood policy known even outside the organization, helping to turn what was purely internal dissent into internal dissent with outside help. Lee Elder has stated that:

The Watchtower’s blood policy has gradually come to be seen by most of the world for what it is. The internal and external pressure will continue to increase through a variety of factors, not least of which is withering financial support. Eventually, governments will become involved and enforce new coercive control laws. Insiders will leak documents, lawyers will win massive judgments, and the Watchtower will have no option but to let this deadly prohibition go like previous bans on vaccines, organ transplants, blood serum, clotting factors, albumin, hemoglobin, and so on.¹⁹⁴

Clearly dissent within the Witnesses is not just a thing of the past and continues to the present day. Its form however has changed drastically. The organization will have to adapt,

¹⁹⁴ Lee Elder “Saving a Thousand Lives a Year: Reforming Watchtower’s Policy on Blood – Part Two” Open Minds Foundation, 18 September 2017 <https://www.openmindsfoundation.org/saving-thousand-lives-year-reform-watchtowers-policy-blood-transfusions-part-two/> accessed 18 January 2019.

possibly in ways that it would not want to, if it is to successfully halt or at least slow down future calls for change.

But as explained in Chapter One, the Witnesses have created the mechanisms needed for such adaptation and have shown that they are capable of not only surviving any dissent, but indeed to continue growing after the fight is concluded. The Body will continue its teachings in the literature of the Witnesses, which when being spread through their constant proselytizing will be part of what convinces new members to join the religion. Even if Lee Elder's efforts to get the blood doctrine removed from Witness belief is successful, the Body will frame the decision as new light from God, portraying it as another way that God, through his representatives on earth, is constantly watching out for the Witnesses.

Chapter Conclusion

The Jehovah's Witnesses did not evolve in a vacuum, and they have been affected by, and affected, their local communities and the nations they resided in. They have often had to endure attacks, and these hardships have allowed the Witnesses to develop mechanisms that allow them to survive. The battles with national governments have only strengthened their resolve as a religion, whether it be in the United States during World War II, or currently in Russia with the legal dissolution of their entire organization.

At the same time individual believers have been made into the scapegoats for a country's perceived problems or during a time of war, leading local communities to exact revenge on the perceived traitors within their midst. Even in places where their existence was not illegal the local press would "warn" when there would be Witnesses around. Or take it upon themselves to be the arbiter of who was or was not a "pastor", or what group

constituted not a legitimate religious denomination but rather a cult, like the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* did during Russell's day. The violence that this later engendered was terrible in the United States during World War II. And violence continues in communities around the world, with Georgia being the most extreme contemporary example.

Witnesses have endured internal upheaval that has at times shaken them to the core, with many thousands leaving the Society over their disagreements. Some of these dissenters have founded other religious organizations, such as the Dawn Bible Students, and continue to practice their beliefs today. The Dawn represent to a far greater degree what Russell had intended his Bible Students to be: a collection of independent ecclesias, united not by a common organization or even a common creed but by their belief in God and their attempt to become worthy of Him. The Witnesses in many respects are the outlier of the Bible Student movement, their massive size and control of the legal associations notwithstanding. However, with that size and notoriety have come at times extreme hardship for the organization and the individual adherents.

Internal dissent among a religious organization is common, and unsurprisingly there is coordinated dissent within the Witnesses, most notably the Advocates for Jehovah's Witness Reform on Blood. But internal dissent can lead to even stronger beliefs, and new mechanisms to deal with dissent in the future. The Witnesses have had their share of internal dissent but, while sometimes seemingly being in danger of becoming a former religious organization, have always bounced back stronger than ever. With the advent of the internet, people can more easily express their dissent in an anonymous forum, but change, if indeed it comes, will be slow, and likely on the organization's terms using the mechanisms they have developed.

But each new hardship only spurs the Witnesses on to greater levels of belief, greater levels of certainty that the hardships are themselves God's answer to if they are on

the right path. And with each new difficulty comes the chance to further develop their mechanisms with which to combat it, both at the time and in the future. More than this, each of these tools has allowed them to grow into one of the most significant minority religions in the world. Despite the hostility that the Witnesses have faced from opponents both inside and out, they continue to grow using the mechanisms that they have honed.

Conclusion

The expansion of religious freedom throughout much of the globe, especially in western countries, has certainly helped religious organizations to survive without having to be overly worried about legal attempts to destroy them. In the United States the Witnesses had an enormous impact on this with their cases before the Supreme Court in the 1940s, expanding First Amendment protections to many of their beliefs and in so doing also expanding them for others. Their battles for conscientious objector status, the right to preach door-to-door, and to have their persons and properties protected are important for their ability to survive and thrive in the secular world. Recent scholarship has helped to expand on these battles and show they have affected not only the Witnesses but also the world.

However, more is required for any religious organization that wants to continue to grow beyond the initial fervor created by their founding than simply legal protection and status. They need to be able to adapt internally to an evolving world or they risk fading out. The Dawn never moved much beyond Russell's beliefs and practices, and steadfastly remain a nineteenth century religion that is unlikely to survive the twenty-first century. As of this writing there are no more than a few thousand members of the Dawn throughout the world, and while some minor attempts are made to proselytize, this number will not be increasing.¹

In stark contrast, the Witnesses have not shied away from adapting their organization when they have needed to. From their very beginning the Witnesses were slowly molded into a worldwide religion. While each era of leadership had their problems, every era has left the Witnesses stronger, with new mechanisms created or honed to a fine point. From Russell and Rutherford to Knorr and the Governing Body, the hands of each

¹ James Parkinson, interview with author, 04 October 2016.

can still be seen within the Witnesses today. Whether it be the legal corporations and concept of new light under Russell; the emphasis on preaching and creation of a single identity under Rutherford; Knorr's solidifying of the proselytizing techniques to create a more harmonious and continuous message; or the Governing Body's steady stewardship after the days of single person power ended within the organization. These mechanisms were not created from nothing for no purpose. They were responses to perceived needs in order to continue spreading God's word in the face of internal and external threats as big as nations or as small as splinter groups and dissidents. They were necessary to save the people who believed in their message.

These internal mechanisms are the true driving force behind the success of the Witnesses throughout the world, layering with each other to create a solid foundation that has allowed them to not only survive but indeed continue to proliferate. The future will not be without its challenges for the Witnesses, as their current battle in Russia to quite literally survive as a legal religion attests. The Witnesses will use the courts to try to secure their rights as they did in America in the 1940s, as they will do with their conscientious objector status in South Korea and with other issues around the world.

But while the courts and legal systems of the countries in which they operate are important to the ease in which their future endeavors will occur, they are not the primary nor decisive factor in whether the Witnesses will continue to expand. If the Witnesses had relied primarily on the court system in their early years in the United States, they would not have lasted long after Russell's death when the major influencers behind the religion, including Joseph Rutherford, were imprisoned.² Their fate in the Soviet Union would have been sealed as they had no legal protections nor could they even fight to get them. And

² See Chapter Two, page 125.

because they eschew any attempt at political office or lobbying, they will never have representatives within the governments that will fight for their specific beliefs or rights.

When combined, the mechanisms discussed here reinforce each other so well that the Witnesses appear to be unassailable. If one mechanism were to prove unstable and fall, the others are more than strong enough to continue with the religion's growth even if they inexplicably fail to replace the missing piece. This is not however blind devotion to a specific set of rules or rigid and inflexible doctrines that must never be questioned. Indeed, why the Witnesses have continued to thrive in what has been a hostile world is because one of their key mechanisms is new light, which when boiled down is change itself.³ What will determine whether the Witnesses continue their forward momentum will be the reliance on, and when necessary evolution of, the mechanisms that they have created that allow them to adapt to the situations in which they find themselves. The strength of the Witnesses is their belief in their own internal processes to allow them to overcome nearly any obstacle.

Despite the significance of these mechanisms they have not been fully observed or explained in academic scholarship. More recent scholarship has focused on some aspects of the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example the legal cases in the United States and Canada and the impact of the Witnesses interaction with the secular world in numerous other areas. While these works describe the details and results of these clashes, the primary internal mechanisms that have allowed the Witnesses to survive and thrive beyond them have been mostly ignored in favor of the more readily understandable legal processes used by the Witnesses.

While these legal battles are important, understanding the mechanisms they have created is far more important to fully understand the Witnesses and their fight to grow and

³ See Chapter One, page 51.

preach in the manner they see as being demanded by God, a fight that they are winning despite their continuing troubles. It is like watching a silent movie in black and white. Yes, you understand the events and story and get the information. But when viewed with sound and in color, it comes alive and a greater depth of understanding can be attained. The focus on the mechanisms that this research has brought out allows for the Witnesses to be viewed in color. Indeed, the mechanisms demand that such a view be obtained when they are studied.

Glossary of Terms

144,000- refers to the number of anointed that will rule in heaven with Christ during his millennial reign.

Anointed- a member of the Witnesses who believes they are part of the 144,000 who will go to heaven to rule with Christ during his millennial reign. All members of the Governing Body are of the anointed. Women can be of the anointed, although it is exceptionally rare for a woman to claim to be of the anointed. Anointed members are the only Witnesses who partake of the Memorial.

Christ's millennial reign- millennial reign; Witness belief that Jesus Christ will rule with the 144,000 anointed for a thousand years, to teach all those who are to be given a second chance at eternal life the proper way to worship God. After this reign, when those who proved unfaithful have been destroyed, Christ will hand rule back to God.

Disassociate- disassociated; to voluntarily remove oneself from active participation in the religion. Disassociated persons can typically return without question, although any position held within the religion (such as that of elder or pioneer) is lost when one disassociates. Disassociated members are not actively shunned, although caution is given to active Witnesses to be wary of someone who has disassociated themselves.

Disfellowship- disfellowshipping; disfellowshipment; disfellowshipped; to be removed from being a Jehovah's Witness due to some sin against God or the organization. Equivalent to excommunication in other denominations. Disfellowshipped members are typically shunned.

Elder- leader at the congregational level within the religion. Elders are always men, deemed to be strong in faith and chosen by the organization, not the congregation. Several

elders, typically five, are appointed to each congregation and perform various day-to-day tasks. Elders are also the first step in disciplinary actions such as disfellowshipping.

Governing Body- the ruling council of the Jehovah's Witnesses. All doctrinal changes and new light is determined by them. All members are of the anointed and all are men. The number of Body members at any one time has fluctuated, and currently there are eight.

Memorial- the only celebration of the Witnesses, equivalent to the Last Supper. This memorial commemorates Christ's ransom sacrifice. Only those of the anointed are to partake of the emblems of wine and unleavened bread.

New Light- Witness term for the concept of continuing revelation, the belief that God is continuously giving new understandings of how he is to be worshipped and how the organization is to be run. Was in the past also called "meat in due season".

New system- new system of things; refers to the future perfect world that all those who are faithful to God will live for eternity.

New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures- *NWT*; the translation of the Bible used by the Witnesses. First published in 1961, it is regularly updated.

Pioneer- auxiliary pioneer; regular pioneer; special pioneer; a person (man or woman) who dedicates a specific amount of time, depending on position taken, in the preaching work that goes beyond the minimum expected of all Witnesses.

Publisher- Witness term to describe someone who is active in the preaching work. Is equivalent to adherent or member. Publishers may also be of the anointed, although typically it refers to rank-and-file Witnesses.

Shunned- shunning; those deemed unrepentant for sins against the organization or God are disfellowshipped and are to be shunned, or not engaged with by any member of the

Witness community except when unavoidable (such as legal disputes, employment, and familial ties).

System of things- this system of things; old system; refers to the present world that is under Satan's control.

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