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**EVANGELISTS IN A SECULAR ENVIRONMENT: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN  
TARTU**

Bachelor's thesis

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## Introduction

Religion is a driving factor, a phenomenon that has the potential to shape the totality of one's worldview, an integral aspect of one's identity on a sociocultural level. It influences one's thoughts, practices and behaviours, determines one's goals and influences one's interaction with the world. Among those who identify first and foremost with their faith are Jehovah's Witnesses. Their religion functions to unite them together as a religious body and to distinguish them sub-culturally from society at large. Their commitment is to God above all, even above loyalty to their nation as they hold to both political neutrality and pacifism. Their distinct practices and beliefs differentiate them from both mainstream Christianity and from secular society. Jehovah's Witnesses are distinct from mainstream Christians on the basis of their unorthodox beliefs and from secular society on the basis of their customs. Jehovah's Witnesses are dedicated to evangelism in a world which they perceive to be full of immorality and false religion in which they view themselves as the only bearers of truth.

Since their arrival in Estonia, Jehovah's Witnesses have grown greatly in number, particularly from Estonian re-independence to the present. In 1993 there were approximately 1418 Publishers (All Witnesses are considered Publishers (e. k. Kuulutajad), as they publish the Good News (Jehovah's Will:13)) and 182 Pioneers ((e. k. Pioneerid) Those who are full-time proselytisers (Jehovah's Will: 13)) in Estonia and 15 congregations (1994 JW Yearbook:36-37). By 2016 the total number of Publishers in Estonia rose to 4031, the number of Pioneers to 504, the number of auxiliary Pioneers (Those who commit more time to evangelism than the average Publisher, yet do not do so full-time (Jehovah's Will:13)) to 228 and the total number of congregations to 55 (2017 JW Yearbook: 180-181). From 1993-2016, the number of congregations grew by 266%, the number of Publishers by 184% and the number of Pioneers by 177%. Although not a significantly large religious group, they are among the most active as proselytisers and therefore are among the most recognisable religious sub-cultures in Estonia. The likelihood of encountering Jehovah's Witnesses is therefore high, whether on one's doorstep or on the street. Therefore as Jehovah's Witnesses make up a unique religious sub-culture within Estonia, it is of a necessity to better understand their identity and culture and to examine what makes them distinct as a sub-culture. This case can serve as an example of the reception of proselytisers in a secular culture, the possible cultural barriers and favourable conditions which they may encounter and their own perception of their work and reception on the part of their host culture. During the course of this paper, we will examine the phenomenon of proselytism among Jehovah's Witnesses within Tartu.

## 1.1 Research questions and goals

The main question that I will be striving to answer is: How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive their interaction with what they constitute as the secular world while preaching?

This will be answered on the basis of the following sub-questions:

- How have the cultural peculiarities of Estonia influenced the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses? In what sense have they helped or hindered the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses?
- How do Witnesses perceive their reception while preaching in the Estonian field? What type of reactions have Witnesses been met with? How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive that they have been misrepresented or misunderstood in Estonia?
- What is the significance of preaching in the daily life of Jehovah's Witnesses? What is their motivation in evangelising?

The primary goal of this thesis necessitates the examination of the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses within Estonia. As a result I am hoping to establish the influence of Estonian cultural elements which serve to help or hinder the preaching work of Jehovah's Witnesses. To accomplish this task, the goal of this paper will be to analyse the phenomenon of field-service among Jehovah's Witnesses and the Witness' perception of their reception on the part of representatives of secular culture.

## 1.2 Previous research in this field

The topic of Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia has been previously studied by Ringo Ringvee in 2012 in a paper named *Jehoova Tunnistajad Eestis* (Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia), which gave a historical overview of the Watchtower Society, the Bible Students and Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia. As well Liisi Kanna dealt with the topic in 2014 for her master's thesis which bears the same name: *Jehoova Tunnistajad Eestis* (Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia), which focused on the topic from both a sociological perspective and from an anthropological perspective, as she researched the religious activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in an Estonian context and studied their customs, collective concepts and beliefs. My work will focus upon Jehovah's Witnesses from an ethnological perspective with an emphasis upon field-service, the perception on the part of Witnesses of their reception within Estonia and the cultural peculiarities which influence their preaching work.

## 2. Methodology

As the empirical content of this thesis will be built upon experiential data, namely the personal experience and opinions of the informants, this necessitates a qualitative approach to the subject at hand. This requires the observation of preaching work and interviewing of Jehovah's Witnesses. Because of time restraints, I will not be including non-Witnesses within my analysis, but this would be a worthy endeavour for future research. To achieve the paper's goal, I will use data that I collected from January 24th 2016-April 3rd 2016, November 20th, November 23rd and December 11th 2016. All empirical data were collected in Tartu from 8 interviews with 8 Witnesses, 5 visits to the Kingdom Hall, multiple Bible Studies and one instance of observing preaching work with a literature cart. Two interviews with Witness 1 and Witness 2 were not recorded, but notes were taken. Witness 1 also responded to the interview questions by email. Three of the meetings at the Kingdom Hall were English meetings (February 8th 2016, March 6th 2016, April 3rd 2016) intended for internationals and Witnesses from the local congregations, one was a regular Russian meeting (which was translated by Witness 1 and Witness 2. January 24th 2016) and the fifth meeting was the Memorial Evening (March 23rd 2016). To ensure anonymity, the title Witness will be used followed by a number ranging from 1-8. The numbers will be assigned chronologically based upon the order in which they were interviewed. Of the 8 Witnesses whom were interviewed, 4 were born into Witness families and 4 became Jehovah's Witnesses later in life. Three of the Witnesses are Estonians (A ministerial servant and pioneer [Witness 3], a circuit overseer [Witness 4] and his wife [Witness 5]), one is a Finn (A missionary [Witness 7]) and four belong to the Russian congregation (A ministerial servant [Witness 2], two pioneers [Witness 1 and Witness 8] and a publisher [Witness 6]).

Because of length restrictions for this thesis, the excerpts from the interviews will be edited to shorten them and to include data only directly relevant to the topic. As the informants are non-native English speakers, the interview transcriptions contain instances of code switching. In such cases I will edit the citations by translating these occurrences into English and put the original text in parentheses. I first met Witness 1-Witness 3 while they were preaching with literature stands on the Raatuse side of Kaarsild. Through Witness 1 and Witness 2, I became acquainted with Witness 6 and Witness 8. Witness 3 connected me with Witness 4, Witness 5 and Witness 7. The Witnesses were interviewed through semi-structured interviews focusing upon their background, conversion and enculturation into the community of Jehovah's Witnesses, their opinion of Estonian society's perception and reception of the Witnesses, their preaching experiences and preaching preferences.

My visits to the Kingdom Hall were for the purpose of better grasping the cultural space of Jehovah's Witnesses as a whole, as the Kingdom Hall serves as a sanctuary where the Witnesses both gather to be equipped to interact with the secular world and engage in fellowship with one another. Therefore this environment is central to their cultural space. Likewise it was important to examine the content of their public talks to determine important themes within their sub-culture. My reason for choosing to focus upon the topic of preaching is because it is both a central activity and one of the most remarkable phenomena within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses, in that they are forced to come into contact and interact with the secular world. As well, it necessitates the interaction between both the secular and spiritual and thus will prove to be an interesting and valuable topic especially as relates to the Estonian context. In particular it serves as an example of how a secularised society responds to active evangelists, their perception of their reception, of themselves and how they desire to represent themselves. Consequently it is important to examine the interaction and reactions that result from encounters between the secular and the sacred within Estonian society, so as to better understand these perceptions. I will also make use of Watchtower publications so as to properly represent how Witnesses perceive and represent themselves and their beliefs. This is essential for understanding the role of the centralised organisation of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society in the life of Jehovah's Witnesses, as the Organisation directs the entire body of Jehovah's Witnesses and dictates how they are to conduct themselves and what they are to believe.

### **3. Theory**

In this chapter I will lay the framework from which to approach this topic. Because of the stress upon both separation from the world and upon morality, we will examine these concepts and their influence upon the interaction of Jehovah's Witnesses with the world and their perception of secular society. In the subsequent subchapters, I will examine the following factors individually:

1. The role of cultural value hierarchies in the morality of Jehovah's Witnesses and their influence upon choice in a secular society (3.1).
2. The role of morality and separation in protecting oneself from moral contamination (3.2).
3. Biblical authority and a Bible-based worldview and their compatibility with a secular culture (3.3).

#### **3.1 Values as a framework for morality**

In this following section I will give an overview of Joel Robbins' model for value systems and value conflict, which will play an important role for the framework of this thesis.

Robbins makes note of James Laidlaw's reference to the influence of the dominant culture upon morality within a society as a means of ensuring that order is maintained. Morals are not mandatory norms, but serve to influence one's choices. Therefore morality plays an ever more important role as a culture becomes more individualistic. The freedom to make one's own choices demands a framework whereby said culture can guide individuals according to what is deemed socially acceptable. Therefore culture is responsible for the dictation of morality (Robbins 2007:294-295). Robbins mentions that according to Louis Dumont's model of values, morality operates within the framework of values, which are assigned according to the importance of a cultural element to a given culture. Values can therefore be categorised on the basis of their importance within said culture and determine which activities, ideas, beliefs, etc. are deemed as moral (Ibid:296-297).

According to Max Weber's model, cultural values are not homogenous, but vary by social sphere within a given culture. Therefore what may be regarded as moral within one sphere may not be so within another. This causes a cultural conflict and therefore requires the subjection of one sphere's values to those of another, dependent upon the individual's priorities and affiliations. The tension between contradicting values necessitates the choice of the individual and therefore is influenced by morality. Conflict between values gives rise to freedom, as the individual is forced to choose which

values are of greater importance to them (Ibid:298-300). According to Robbins, there are two types of value conflict: that of stable cultural conflict in which individuals need to reconcile or choose between a culture's conflicting traditional value systems which are given equal validity. The second conflict occurs when a culture experiences change through the emergence of new ideas and values or through the restructuring of value hierarchies. Inevitably this leads to conflict between the new and old value systems or between the new priorities within restructured value systems (Ibid: 301-302).

Robbins' model is also valid among Jehovah's Witnesses whereby morality plays a crucial role within their community. The Witness has the freedom to choose either a life of purity or of sin and this choice is conditioned by the expectation of consequences for one's actions. Purity will bring one closer to eternal life, keeps them in good standing with God and allows one to fellowship with fellow Witnesses. On the other hand, a life of unrepentant sin and immorality will result in expulsion from the Witness community and will place one on the road to destruction. Value conflict will occur in any nation as Witnesses identify with the value system of their sub-culture first and foremost. Therefore they will have to constantly choose between wider cultural values and Biblical principles. For Witnesses, anything which contradicts Biblical principles will be rejected. It is therefore worth examining the interaction between Jehovah's Witnesses and what they perceive as the world. In such a case there will undoubtedly be conflicting values which determine how the Witness interacts with the world. This will be primarily from the perspective of their preaching work, which brings them into direct contact with representatives of the secular world.

### **3.2 Morality as a basis for separation**

Holiness and separation are closely related in the Old Testament. As God is said to be Holy, so were His chosen people, the Israelites to follow suit. Maintaining separation and therefore cleanliness prevents the divine from being defiled (Douglas 1966:8). The Mosaic law's ritual elements served to separate and protect its adherents from disease through its dietary restrictions. Because of the spread of infectious disease through blood, the consumption of it was forbidden (Ibid:30-31). In a similar sense Jehovah's Witnesses have employed a new interpretation of the ban on blood to protect themselves from becoming infected by blood-borne disease through the forbidding of blood transfusions (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/bible-about-blood-transfusion/>). In a

sense Jehovah's Witnesses are following in the steps of the Israelites under the Old Covenant. Their distinctive practices and doctrines distinguish them from the secular world and from Christianity. Their rejection of holidays and pagan practices can be paralleled with Jehovah's commands to the Israelites not to participate in pagan practices when they entered Canaan. The Witness' stress upon a neat and tidy appearance can be considered a modern equivalent of the Levitical dress-code. God's commandments under the Mosaic covenant were enforced by blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The keeping of the commandments enforced holiness and separation from the neighbouring pagan peoples. Transgression of the law endangered the wellbeing of the transgressors (Douglas 1966:50-51). Likewise, for the Witness, disobedience could bring destruction and spiritual ruin and obedience maintains their standing before God. The consequences of the believer's actions influence their behaviour and choices. Because of incompatibility with the world, the Witness separates themselves to both distinguish themselves from others and to protect themselves.

The lifestyle of Jehovah's Witnesses reflects strict adherence to moral purity and rule keeping, which serves to maintain their loyalty to the Organisation, serves to keep them *in the truth* and differentiates them from the world system. These measures protect them from harm and grant them comfort knowing that following the rules will prevent them from falling into immorality or apostasy. The moral purity of Jehovah's Witnesses is manifest in their appearance, in that they dress modestly, yet well when preaching or attending meetings as taking care of one's appearance demonstrates a dedication to cleanliness (Holden 2002b:9-11). This in turn leaves a good impression as one of God's representatives, demonstrates respect toward both God and to one's neighbour and positively reflects the Christian lifestyle (Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today? 2012:8).

### **3.2.1 The secular divide**

Within secularised societies, religion becomes divorced from the public sphere and believers are forced to shift the practice of their faith primarily to the private sphere, which also functions as the stage to prepare oneself to interact with the non-religious public sphere (Holden 2002c:104). The nature of Jehovah's Witnesses means that they dwell between both social spheres. On the one hand their active proselytism brings them into the public sphere and their stress upon separation from the world means that they also spend a significant amount of time within the private sphere. To manage in the public sphere it is a necessity that much of their religion be relegated to the private sphere

(Ibid:105) The practices of Jehovah's Witnesses put them at odds with their socio-cultural surroundings. Because of their rejection of pagan traditions and activities, the Witness will feel some measure of exclusion and perceive themselves as different (Pietkiewicz 2014:162). Their frequent meetings and fellowship with other Witnesses prepare them for interaction with the world (Blankholm 2009:199). The Theocratic Ministry School and Service meetings prepare Jehovah's Witnesses for preaching, whereby they practice their communication skills and develop their presentation for door-to-door ministry (Ibid:202).

The greatest challenges that Witnesses will face in regards to opposition of their faith may occur in either the workplace or from family (Holden 2002c:111-112). The workplace can potentially be one of extreme moral pollution, as Witnesses may be exposed to people, language, situations or activities which are perceived as *worldly* and corruptive. This can be a great challenge as Witnesses have no control over the work environment (Ibid:119-120). Conflict may arise between Witnesses and their work mates as a result of their honesty, beliefs, neutrality or dedication to moral purity (Ibid: 121-122). According to Douglas, there is a necessity to divide the profane from the holy. This serves a threefold purpose: to prevent that which is holy from being profaned, to preserve the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the individual and to distinguish them from others. Therefore we can understand that for Jehovah's Witnesses, separation from behaviour, people and situations which are viewed as immoral is extremely important, as it protects them from bad influences and helps to maintain their loyalty and obedience to God's commandments.

### **3.3 Biblical authority and a Bible-based worldview**

As the Bible plays a central role for the morality, beliefs and worldview of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is necessary to examine its centrality and how it is perceived. In this following section because of similarities to the view of Jehovah's Witnesses in relation to the Bible, I will examine the Seventh-Day Adventists' position regarding the Bible and its authority. This will serve as an example of a group which holds the Bible as their highest authority and as the basis for their epistemology. Jehovah's Witnesses are not unlike the Malagasy Seventh-Day Adventists studied by Eva Keller (2006) in that they view the Bible as being scientifically accurate. There is a high regard for the Bible in which Biblical knowledge is greatly valued among Adventists. As the Bible is their highest authority, scientific findings and theories which do not line up with it are rejected. Those which are

in harmony with it serve to confirm what the Adventist already knows and believes. As it is assumed that the Bible is accurate and trustworthy from the start, scientific findings and theories must confirm the Biblical narratives to be viewed as accurate. Therefore Seventh-Day Adventists do not accept evolutionary theory as it is viewed as incompatible with the Genesis account of creation (Ibid:283-284). Although the Adventists see value in science, their worldview prevents them from considering alternate explanations of the universe and the origin of life. As the Genesis account is held as axiomatically true, the origin of man is settled (Ibid:286-287). Revision of what is regarded as truth is rejected, as the religious text from which Adventists derive their worldview is viewed as unchanging and objective. Therefore explanations or opinions which cannot be reconciled with the Bible are opposed (Ibid:288).

Jehovah's Witnesses are similar, but do not identify as creationists because they believe that it is often negatively associated with *Young Earth Creationism*, yet they do believe that Jehovah God created the universe. Jehovah's Witnesses are *Old Earth Creationists* meaning that they do not believe that the earth was created in 6 literal days, but that the days were potentially long periods of time and that there was a gap of time between the creation of the universe and the six creation days. In referring to the credibility of an old earth and its compatibility with the Genesis account of creation they make mention of not being opposed to "*credible scientific research*, that indicates the earth may be billions of years old." (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/creationism-belief/>). Because macro-evolution is not viewed as compatible with the Genesis account of creation, Witnesses reject it (Awake! October 2015:9). Witnesses therefore can take advantage of the creation-evolution debate as a springboard into their message. An example of this is the publication *The Origin of Life—Five Questions Worth Asking*. This publication attempts to convince the reader that evolution is not a valid explanation for the origin of mankind, but that God created man, leading into the topic of the Bible and directing one to Jehovah's Witnesses.

The arguments used by Jehovah's Witnesses to establish the veracity of the Bible are: The harmony of the Bible (Bible Teach:20:6-7), the Bible's scientific accuracy (Ibid:20-21:8), the historical accuracy of the Bible (Ibid:21:9) and the fulfilment of prophecy (Ibid:23-25:13-17). Witnesses hold the Bible and the Organisation to be their highest authorities and are the basis for their worldview.

### 3.3.1 Beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses reject many doctrines of mainstream Christianity which they regard as unscriptural and pagan in origin. Witnesses are not Trinitarians, but believe that only the Father (Jehovah) is God (Reasoning:199). Before he became a man, it is believed that Jesus existed as Michael the Archangel (Ibid:218), Jehovah God's first creation, through whom all other things were created (Ibid:209, Bible Teach:41). Holy spirit is Jehovah's active force (Reasoning:280-281). Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that God's personal name is Jehovah, which is a transliteration of the tetragrammaton (יהוה/YHWH), which appears in the Old Testament (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/gods-name/>). They believe that Jesus was nailed to an execution stake, not to a cross (Bible Teach:204-206) and that he did not rise bodily from the dead, but as a spirit creature (Reasoning:334-335). Witnesses do not believe that the soul is eternal or that it survives death, but that both the soul and all consciousness cease at death (Bible Teach:58-59). They do not believe in hell or eternal torment, but that the wicked will not be resurrected and that those who had no chance to hear about Jehovah will be resurrected and given a second chance on Judgement Day (Ibid:72-73).

Only 144,000 *anointed* Witnesses will go to heaven to be with, serve and rule with Jehovah. The rest of Jehovah's Witnesses (the *other sheep*), will live on a paradise earth (Ibid:200). Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays ("Keep Yourselves in God's Love":150-151) or holidays because of their pagan origins and overemphasis upon individuals and organisations (Bible Teach: 222-223). Witnesses are neutral in relation to politics, the state and armed conflict, as they believe that to be involved with either of them is to be part of the world (Ibid:122). Jehovah's Witnesses reject the use of the cross because of pagan associations and to avoid idolatry (Bible Teach: 205-206). For similar reasons Jehovah's Witnesses also shun the use of images (Ibid:155).

For Witnesses, salvation is defined as deliverance from sin and death, achieved by exercising faith in Jesus and proving this faith through keeping his commandments. Witnesses do not believe that they can earn their salvation, but believe that it can be lost (<https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/what-is-salvation/>). Witnesses must "endure to the end" to be saved, meaning that they must persevere in the faith to ensure their ultimate salvation (Reasoning:358-359). Faith for the Witness is therefore an active process which denotes not only belief, but obedience to the commandments. It can be rightly said that Witnesses do not earn their salvation, but that they maintain it through obedience.

### 3.3.2 The role of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (The Organisation) directs the body of Jehovah's Witnesses and therefore plays an important role for the Witness as it directs their actions and influences their beliefs. The Organisation is led by the *Faithful and Discreet Slave*, which is the group of *anointed* Christians who make up the *Governing Body*. The title *Faithful and Discreet Slave* originates from Matthew 24:45 of the New World Translation: "*Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time?*" As the Governing Body heads the organisation and dispenses spiritual food through their publications, they are regarded as the *Faithful and Discreet Slave*. The *Slave* directs all activities of the Organisation particularly in relation to preaching work and leadership (Who Are Doing Jehovah's Will Today?:19-20). It is believed that Jesus directs Jehovah's Witnesses through the *Faithful and Discreet Slave* (The Watchtower November 2016:15). As such, it is important for Witnesses to be obedient to the Organisation, as to do so demonstrates faithfulness to Jehovah (Ibid:18).

As it is believed that individuals cannot correctly understand nor interpret the Bible on their own, Jehovah's Witnesses are encouraged to be guided by the *Slave*, which is believed to have been chosen by Jesus in 1919, as the only channel which provides spiritual food for Christians:

*9 Some may feel that they can interpret the Bible on their own. However, Jesus has appointed the 'faithful slave' to be the only channel for dispensing spiritual food. Since 1919, the glorified Jesus Christ has been using that slave to help his followers understand God's own Book and heed its directives. By obeying the instructions found in the Bible, we promote cleanness, peace, and unity in the congregation. Each one of us does well to ask himself, 'Am I loyal to the channel that Jesus is using today?'*  
(The Watchtower November 2016:16:9)

Independent Bible study and independent thinking are strongly discouraged as it is believed that independent study can lead to apostasy:

*From time to time, there have arisen from among the ranks of Jehovah's people those who, like the original Satan, have adopted an independent, faultfinding attitude. They do not want to serve "shoulder to shoulder" with the worldwide brotherhood. (Compare Ephesians 2:19- 22.) Rather, they present a "stubborn shoulder" to Jehovah's words. (Zech. 7:11, 12) Reviling the pattern of the "pure language" that Jehovah has so graciously taught his people over the past century, these haughty ones try to draw the "sheep" away from the one international "flock" that Jesus has gathered in the earth. (John 10:7-10, 16) They try to sow doubts and to separate unsuspecting ones from the bounteous "table" of spiritual food spread at the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses, where truly there is 'nothing lacking.' (Ps. 23:1-6) They say that it is sufficient to read the Bible exclusively, either alone or in small groups at home. But, strangely through such 'Bible reading,' they have reverted*

*right back to the apostate doctrines that commentaries by Christendom's clergy were teaching 100 years ago, and some have even returned to celebrating Christendom's festivals again, such as the Roman Saturnalia of December 25! Jesus and his apostles warned against such lawless ones.—Matt. 24:11-13; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Pet. 2:1, 22.*  
(The Watchtower August 15 1981: 28-29, 14)

If one reads the Bible alone, they may come to conclusions contrary to the Society's, which is dangerous both for the Organisation and for the Witness. Independent thought is perceived as dangerous as it can lead one into apostasy and rebellion. Therefore the employment of the same study-aids ensures standardised beliefs and unity among Witnesses worldwide. Study-aids are therefore essential for Jehovah's Witness both in personal study and in field-service, as it is believed that one cannot correctly understand the Bible without the guidance of the Organisation.

### 3.3.3 The World

In this following subchapter, in addition to written sources, I will use relevant excerpts from the interviews which I conducted with Jehovah's Witnesses. The world is an essential concept to examine as it determines the Witness' understanding of, attitude and behaviour toward the secular world.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the world is currently under the rule of Satan, which is evidenced by the presence of evil and suffering in the world. Witnesses believe that he became the ruler of the earth when Adam and Eve obeyed him instead of God in the Garden of Eden. Mankind having been deceived by Satan, has followed a similar course in rebellion against Jehovah (The Watchtower May 1, 2014:16). According to the worldview of Jehovah's Witnesses, there is a great dichotomy between both *the truth* and *the world*. Jehovah's Witnesses are in *the truth*, while all non-Witnesses are viewed as of *the world* (Blankholm 2009:197). *The world* refers to all people who are under the influence of Satan and are estranged from Jehovah God ("Keep Yourselves In God's Love":50). *The world* is viewed as the opposite of Jehovah's Witnesses as much as they are the opposite of the world (Sprague 1946:138-139). The term *worldly* is synonymous with groups, activities and individuals which are viewed by Witnesses as being immoral or antagonistic. Religion, politics and business are the primary domains of what is considered as being *the world* (Ibid:136-137). The Witness is discouraged from associating with *worldly* people so as to maintain their moral purity and be separate from *the world* (Holden 2002b:9). Because of the possibility of bad influence and moral contamination through *worldly* individuals, activities and media, Witnesses seek out wholesome activities, associate primarily with fellow Witnesses and limit their association with non-Wit-

nesses (Holden 2002c:109-110). Although Witnesses are discouraged from befriending non-Witnesses, some maintain friendships with non-Witnesses as long as there is no potential of bad association (Ibid:111-112).

The Organisation maintains the right to expel Witnesses (disfellowshipping) who have fallen into immorality to preserve the purity of the congregation as a whole (Holden 2002b:9). Disfellowshipping is a form of excommunication and is reserved as a form of discipline among baptised Jehovah's Witnesses, whom are guilty of serious and unrepentant sin. As long as the guilty party does not turn from nor demonstrate remorse over their sin, they will be cut off from fellowship with other Witnesses. The purpose of disfellowshipping is threefold: it ensures that God is not dishonoured, it stems the spread of sin within the congregation and encourages the disfellowshipped party to forsake their sin, so that they may rejoin in fellowship with their fellow Witnesses. Said individual will be informed by the congregation's elders about which actions they need to take to rejoin the congregation and will be reinstated upon meeting said expectations. For the duration of the individual's disfellowshipping, the congregation will shun the disfellowshipped party (Watchtower April 15, 2015:29-31). Congregational elders will council Witnesses who become too lax in regards to separation from the world. Milder sins and transgressions will result in correction to prevent the guilty party from straying too far and falling into serious sin. Council functions both as a correction and as a warning to the guilty individual (Holden 2002c:77-78).

Publishers are accountable to their elders. If a Witness observes a brother or sister in serious sin, they will direct them to the elders. If they do not turn to the elders to seek aid and guidance regarding their sin, then the observing party will inform the elders, so that the proper course of action can be determined in the case of said individual. This is to ensure that the guilty party will correct their sinful behaviour (The Watchtower, February 15, 2012:22:14-16). The opinion of Jehovah's Witnesses as to what constitutes *the world* harmonises with the position of the Organisation, in that it is perceived that those of the world are both alienated from Jehovah and under the dominion of Satan:

*...the world can be the world, which is alienated from God or... or it has... many... it depends on the context a little bit but... but mostly it refers to people who don't have a good relationship with God or... don't... walk in the truth as we say sometimes. Oh, yeah, It's depends on the context I think... if we... t.... if we talk about religion, then I think Jehovah's Witness feel that the... the world or secular world starts... from the Kingdom Hall... or those who are not Jehovah's Witnesses, they are... others what are secular people in a sense, but... but of course we go to work and... and we contribute to the society, we pay taxes and... and it's part of... in... in that sense we... we belong to the... to the world, but...*

*but in religious thoughts or... so we... we... like... there is a line... ..Satan as Bible says is... is the main god of this world as the Bible says. So he has his own followers or... or maybe not everybody is Satanist or... or don't think that they follow Satan and then they even oppose his ideas, but the system as a whole, it's... led by him... (Witness 7. 23.11.16.)*

Those who do not belong to the community of Jehovah's Witnesses are considered as secular or of *the world*. This is because of their affiliation with the world system and its influence upon them.

The world system is perceived to be under Satan's control and therefore individuals are influenced by him either knowingly or unknowingly. Those perceived to be under Satan's power are unwilling to obey God, but want to do things their own way, yet are still held responsible for their actions:

*...I see that most people are secular in this world and as... as it says in 1 John 5, that this world's ruler 5:19... ruler is Satan; the whole world is under Satan's power (kogu maailm on Saatana võimuses). So, this means that, the most of the world is under Satan's control and most people do his will and we see the consequences, what happens in the world and I believe, as you said, that the Judgement Day comes and it's quite near... the judgement and... and there is the narrow road, which you have to walk to be in favour in... in the sight of God. Most people are walking in the wide road, no rules; I do myself what I want, I... I don't care what God thinks. (Witness 4. 01.04.16.)*

Those whom are disobedient are viewed as doing Satan's will by rebelling against Jehovah God.

However it is not perceived to be the individuals themselves, but rather the systems with which they are associated, which influence them negatively:

*But of course it's not personal as to some person, but... but more the systems or the religions as organisations which are... are from our standpoint are trying to... tell their own story, not... not what is the truth in the Bible, but... but as individuals we don't try to say that this guy is secular or... or bad guy or something, but it's more religious truth, what... which we believe in. Of course when we... when we choose our friends, our closest friends then... then we... when... we try to be a little bit cautious about those who don't believe... share our beliefs, as they may have other goals in their life, but it doesn't mean that we think they are dangerous or something, but... but more like using your... your brain to know that as... as we're walking maybe on the other direction... cannot be too close... I think every person has their own goals and own ideas about what is right and wrong and... and what is... who is your friend and... and impact on your... influence. So... so it's good to think where... who you're walking with. As... as sometimes... we say that if you're walking through... through the street and then this other guy coming and if o... he's going the other way and then you have to separate because he has his own... goal where he's going. (Witness 7. 23.11.16.)*

The demarcation between *the truth* and *the world* is necessary, as bad associations can negatively affect the Witness, therefore Jehovah's Witnesses tend to spend more time with fellow Witnesses.

### 3.4 Preaching

Preaching is a particularly interesting phenomenon in the sense of the interplay between both the spiritual and secular on the part of Jehovah's Witnesses. As well there is the necessity of coming into contact with an environment and people which are viewed as the opposite of Jehovah's Witnesses and are perceived as *worldly* and therefore as potentially morally corruptive.

Preaching/field-service (e.k. Kuulutamine/kuulutustöö/põlluteenistus), is the activity of proselytising. Every baptised Witness is expected to take part in field-service, although unbaptised publishers may participate if they choose to do so (Chryssides 2008:113-114). Preaching is conducted through door-to-door ministry, public witnessing (with a stand or table), Bible study and informal witnessing encounters. As well, Watchtower publications, tracts and JW.ORG serve as evangelistic tools.

The central message that Witnesses preach concerns Jehovah God's coming Kingdom.

The Kingdom is Jehovah's theocratic government, which is ruled by Jesus Christ. Christ as king is greater than all earthly rulers and will co-rule earth from heaven with 144,000 anointed Christians (Bible Teach:77-78). In 1914 Jehovah's Kingdom began its rule and Christ was made king (Ibid: 85). In the near future, God's Kingdom will conquer and destroy all earthly governments and wipe out all wickedness from the earth at the battle of Armageddon. God's theocratic Kingdom will then be established as the sole government for eternity (Ibid:81-82). The publication *Insight On The Scriptures* defines Armageddon under the heading Har-Magedon as: "the war of the great day of God the Almighty". Armageddon is the final battle between Jehovah and the kings of the earth, who are under the power of Satan and his demons. Jesus will lead Jehovah's army and all who oppose Jehovah God will be destroyed in this global cataclysm (*Insight On The Scriptures* Volume I 1988:1037-1038). Following this, creation will be restored to what it once was, humans will no longer die nor fall ill and the earth will be remade as a paradise. The 144,000 will spend eternity with Jehovah and the remainder of humanity will be blessed with eternal life on a paradise earth and all people will honour Jehovah's name (Bible Teach:84). The Good News of the Kingdom can be summarised as the coming and establishment of Jehovah God's theocratic Kingdom which will do away with all suffering and evil and restore creation to the paradise that it was in the beginning.

Public witnessing came into practice in 2011 and is conducted in urban areas either with literature carts or tables (*Our Kingdom Ministry* July 2013:4). Public witnessing is conducted by waiting for passersby who express interest and encouraging them to take Watchtower literature, answering their questions and offering them Bible Studies. Tables and stands are set up in areas with high pedestri-

an traffic, as this serves to reach those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to hear their message (Ibid:5-6). Bible studies are offered for free and are often conducted by reading through the Watchtower publication *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* (Which is available for free through both JW.ORG and from literature stands) in tandem with the Bible to serve as a framework for understanding the Bible topically (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/what-is-a-bible-study/>). Jehovah's Witnesses preach door-to-door, as this was the model set out by Jesus upon dispatching his disciples to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. While going door-to-door the Witness shares a message about the Kingdom and may offer either Watchtower literature or to start a Bible study (The Watchtower July 15, 2008:3-4). Informal witnessing is preaching within an informal context and therefore could potentially be conducted with anyone that the Witness may encounter. (Our Kingdom Ministry August 2010:3). Evangelism among Jehovah's Witnesses reflects a rationalist philosophy and methodology in that there is a great stress and dependence upon planning, experience, practice, training and skill. As a result intonation, tempo and the content of one's speech play a significant role in door-to-door ministry. Consequently a greater part of their meetings are spent preparing to better present their message (Holden 2002a:8). Rejection during field-service convinces Jehovah's Witnesses that they are Jesus' true disciples, as Jesus had said that his followers would be hated for his sake (Holden 2002a:9).

The ultimate goal of the Witness in preaching is to initiate a Bible Study with the prospective convert, which will lead to an invitation to meetings and potentially to the baptism of said individual (Holden 2002a:9). Field-service is conducted by both publishers and pioneers. Publishers are so-called as they publish or proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. This is the default role of the baptised Witness. The position of pioneer is voluntary and refers to those who commit more time to preaching than the average publisher. Because of their dedication to field-service, pioneers often only work part-time jobs (Chryssides 2008:109). Preaching is done to fulfil the Great Commission (Christ's commission given to his disciples to preach the Good News to all nations, to baptise, to teach and to make disciples of all nations.), because of love for one's neighbour and to proclaim Jehovah's name (The Watchtower September 1, 2015:7). The Witness has a high regard for Matthew 24:14, which they frequently refer to, so as to demonstrate their strong emphasis upon preaching: *And this good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.* (NWT 2013). Therefore the Witness is on a mission to preach the Good News of the Kingdom to as many people as possible.

A great emphasis upon foreign missions among Christians has historically stemmed from the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:44-48. As well as a literal interpretation of Matthew 24:14 wherein the end is to come when the Gospel is preached to all nations. This interpretation has encouraged missionaries to go far and wide to preach the Christian message in unreached areas. As Laur Vallikivi remarks, Russian Baptists through their literal interpretation of this verse have begun evangelising the Nenets of the Russian north (Vallikivi 2014:97). This is not unlike Jehovah's Witnesses who are preaching globally and have translated many of their publications into many languages which ensures a worldwide unity of beliefs.

In a literalist context based upon the assumption that the Bible is the unchanging, inerrant word of God, there is a tendency to treat the Bible as an instruction manual (Vallikivi 2014:98). Biblical interpretation tends to be influenced by the times. As in the age of the primitive church, when the known world was limited to the mediterranean, so for the Unregistered Russian Baptists, as Laur Vallikivi explains, *the ends of the earth* are interpreted as the territories of the former Soviet Union which had been previously neglected or unreached (Ibid:102).

Witnesses believe that the end will occur when the Great Commission is concluded (Awake! November, 2012:12). That is to say that Jehovah will bring about the end when the preaching work has achieved the scope that He has determined, which will be indicated by the arrival of Armageddon (The Watchtower February 1, 2006:22-23). Just as the Unregistered Russian Baptists believe that they are hastening Christ's Second Advent, so do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive that they are hastening the coming of Armageddon through their preaching work. Therefore preaching is a high priority for Witnesses as it is associated with both the coming of the end and reaching as many as possible.

### **3.5 Conversion**

As Witnesses spend much of their time proselytising, it is to be expected that individuals will convert. It is worth examining which factors influence individuals to decide to become Witnesses. For those who become Witnesses later in life, there is a necessity to be socialised into the Witness sub-culture. This can be a very difficult process as they are required to change their behaviours, attitudes, habits and traditions and very often need to disassociate from their former social networks. Therefore the decision to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses is not a light decision. This commitment is finalised through baptism (Blankholm 2009:204). Baptism among Jehovah's Witnesses is of

a credo-baptist persuasion, meaning that they only baptise those who express faith. In order to be baptised, the individual must have spent some amount time in field-service as this demonstrates their faith, convictions and commitment. They must also agree with the doctrines of the religion and of the Organisation before they can be baptised. Baptism therefore functions as a form of church membership (Pietkiewicz 2014:153). Conforming to the Watchtower's teachings and interpretation of the Bible ensures doctrinal harmony both in the congregation and the message preached. Therefore difference of opinion is strongly discouraged as it can cause division (Ibid:154). When an individual becomes a Witness, there is a necessity to distance oneself from previous *worldly* affiliations to better align oneself with Jehovah God's visible Organisation (Blankholm 2009:206).

Becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses demands enculturation into the sub-culture and affiliation with it above all. Within the sub-culture of Jehovah's Witnesses there is a great emphasis upon structure and planning, which is comforting to those desiring direction and routine (Ibid:160-161). Those who belong to the religion give their loyalty to both God and to the Watchtower Society, which they rely upon for their spiritual food (Holden 2002b:4). Those who feel isolated, have little interest in worldly success and are dissatisfied with society are more likely to become Witnesses (Holden 2002c:48). This is because the Witnesses offer stability both through strong community and through the reinforcement of one's identity (Holden 2002c:49). Those who work in low-profile jobs tend to be more likely to become Witnesses (Ibid:45). For those who feel isolated, the friendliness of the Witnesses can be appealing as well as their stress upon love for one another, which also reinforces their conviction that they are the true worshippers (Ibid:51-52). The Witness' ability to cite Bible passages to support all of their beliefs is very persuasive to prospective converts (Ibid: 55). The general conversion experience of the Witnesses is not so much an emotional one, but is of a more rational and intellectual nature, in that it is a process, whereby the individual takes in knowledge and then makes an informed decision to become a Witness (Ibid:60-61). There is no ecstatic experience, no glossolalia or sudden shift in one's consciousness, but conversion is gradual and culminates in baptism. However, conversion brings about a radical paradigm shift in cognition and cultural identification.

## **4 The Estonian context**

Before we delve into the topic of Jehovah's Witnesses within Estonia and how they perceive their reception, we need to first examine the historical and religious context and environment with which Witnesses will come into contact and interact. As with any environment, there are sociocultural peculiarities which influence the reception of religion. It is therefore necessary to examine the local factors behind sociocultural trends, which will influence the reception of Witnesses within Estonia.

### **4.1 The religious climate of Estonia**

Although religious organisations had been repressed during the Soviet era, during the final years before Estonia regained independence, religious groups continued to practice their faith in spite of restrictions, however this resulted in less than optimal conditions for religious proselytism (Ringvee 2011:43-44). At the fall of the Soviet Union, religious liberty within Estonia was restored and a period of intense and renewed interest in religion occurred. This aided locally established faiths in their proselytism and signalled the arrival of previously unknown religions within Estonia. This was a noteworthy change, as the traditional religious environment had divided Estonians and Russians primarily on the basis of their denomination, namely through identification with either the Lutheran or Russian Orthodox church, denomination serving as an indicator of ethnic affiliation (Ringvee 2011:79-80).

In spite of renewed interest in religion during the final years of Soviet rule and the renewal of Estonian independence, many Estonians do not identify with a specific faith or religious group. According to a church organised survey, only 3% of Estonians and 5% of Russians actively attended church services or other religious gatherings. A 2005 study by Eurobarometer indicated that only 16% of Estonian residents believed in a personal God, yet 54% of the participants believed in a higher power (Ibid:44-45). Approximately 1/3 of the Estonian population identifies with an organised religion, 1/3 is indifferent and the last third is unaffiliated with a religion. To an extent, faith and spirituality are seen as an individual affair (Ibid:46-47). The 2000 census showed that the majority of Estonian believers (98%) were Christian of whom 90% were either Lutheran or Orthodox (Ibid:49). Jehovah's Witnesses were the fifth largest religious group in Estonia and have experienced the fastest growth among religious organisations in post-Soviet Estonia (Ibid:69-71). The current scientific-materialistic worldview of Estonian society began to develop during the time of the

first Estonian Republic among the intellectual class, who pushed for secularisation so as to push for cultural progress. Scientific-materialism has become more and more predominant with the passage of time and religion came to be associated with foreign masters, being viewed as an impediment to progress. Therefore the shackles of religion had to be cast off (Altnurme 2005:54-56).

Within Estonia there has been a noteworthy shift from interest in Judeo-Christian beliefs to the new spirituality/New Age. The new spirituality is strongly influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism and emphasises spiritual progression, whereby with the aid of karma, through reincarnation one can spiritually evolve. It differs fundamentally from Christianity in that the focus is more upon the individual than upon God. The New Age offers the flexibility to tailor one's spirituality according to their personal tastes and offers more theological freedom (Altnurme 2005:48-49). Although Christianity is restrained and limited by the authority of both God and the Bible and therefore God's commandments, the New Age allows creative possibilities and spiritual freedom (Ibid:50). In conclusion to this section, the most noteworthy cultural trends within Estonia have been: greater religious liberty, secularism, growing interest in the new spirituality, preference of personal spirituality over organised religion and belief in a higher power rather than in a personal deity.

## **4.2 History of Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia**

To understand the unique collective experience and identity of the Estonian community of Jehovah's Witnesses, it is necessary to examine their origins and history within Estonia. This section will span from the arrival of the Bible Students during the first Estonian republic to the present.

### **4.2.1 The Estonian republic 1918-1940**

Jehovah's Witnesses' beginnings in Estonia go back to 1923, when two brothers: Martin and Hugo Kose, became acquainted with the Bible Students while in the United States. Having become interested in their teachings, upon his return to Estonia, Martin began to propagate them. In 1926, a branch of the Watchtower Society was opened in Tallinn (Ringvee 2102:164), which was located on Kreutzwaldi 17 and was run by an Englishman named Albert West. With it came the first translations of Watchtower publications into Estonian (2011 JW Yearbook:167). Colporteurs (Pioneers) were commissioned to serve in the Baltic states, arriving from England, Germany and Finland among other nations (Ibid:166). Colporteurs traveled by bicycle while preaching in the countryside,

as such they had to make do with any lodgings available to them. They would typically spend 150-200 hours per month in field-service (Ibid:170-171). Weather played a significant role in field-service as relates to productivity and the physical well-being of the colporteurs, as poor weather would slow them down, especially as they carried large quantities of Watchtower literature for distribution while in the field. Before World War II the Bible Students managed to preach throughout the whole country with only 30 colporteurs (Ibid:172-173). In 1927 an Estonian translation of one of Albert West's talks was broadcast on commercial radio in Tallinn, but because of controversy, Jehovah's Witnesses were not allowed to broadcast again until 1929. It was at this time that the talks were broadcast in multiple languages. In 1934, as controversy once again arose surrounding the broadcasts, they were banned (Ibid:175-176). In 1935 the Estonian Watchtower Society was closed by the government and its literature confiscated, however literature had been hidden away beforehand. The preaching work continued even with the crackdown and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to distribute their literature (Ibid:179-180). The confiscation of Watchtower publications occurred as the Society had been accused of stirring up panic in connection with the oncoming war and of spreading harmful political propaganda (Ringvee 2012:166-167).

#### **4.2.2 The Soviet occupation**

During the first Soviet occupation, the foreign Witnesses left Estonia and the local Witnesses were forced to fend for themselves (2011 JW Yearbook:182). The last official assembly of Estonian Jehovah's Witnesses until re-independence was in 1940 (Ibid:181). The German occupation forced the Estonian Witnesses further underground and the treatment of the Witnesses became more severe, yet in spite of this, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses grew. By the time that the Soviets reoccupied Estonia in 1944, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses had been greatly diminished and therefore the second occupation didn't bring any significant changes in regards to repression (Ringvee 2012:168). Contact with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was severed and Estonian Witnesses were forced to manage with limited resources (2011 JW Yearbook:188). From 1948 -1951 the Soviet government rounded up the Estonian Witnesses, arrested them and deported them as they were perceived as enemies of the state (Rahi-Tamm 2004:46). 382 Jehovah's Witnesses were deported to Tomsk Oblast on April 1st 1951. 21 of the deportees perished as a result of the forced relocation (Õispuu 2007:17).

While in exile, Jehovah's Witnesses had the opportunity to preach to other inmates and made the most of the opportunity. Bibles and Watchtower literature were smuggled into the prison camps through unexpected means such as in soap or jars of fat. Jehovah's Witnesses who were in exile would meet secretly, but these meetings were uncommon and their attendees had to be vigilant, so as not to be discovered (2011 JW Yearbook:204-206). Although the Soviet government wanted to crush opposition to their rule by crushing the spirits of Jehovah's Witnesses, the deportation had the opposite effect in that it allowed them to establish a network across the Soviet Union and to evangelize on a greater scale (Ringvee 2012:169). Deportation had increased the productivity for field-service, as Jehovah's Witnesses had the opportunity to preach freely to those who would not otherwise hear their message. When they were transferred to other camps they would continue to preach, reaching ever more people (2011 JW Yearbook:208). The exiled Witnesses were repatriated to Estonia from 1955-1965 (Õispuu 2007:17). In lieu of repression, Jehovah's Witnesses took advantage of weddings and funerals as opportunities to hold conventions (Ringvee 2012:171). Estonian Witnesses had to rely on old literature and were rarely able to get new literature (2011 JW Yearbook: 215).

In the 1960's the Estonian Witnesses were able to re-establish contact with international Witnesses and were able once again to obtain Watchtower publications, primarily through the Finnish branch office. Estonian Witnesses divided themselves into four congregations in 1967: Tallinn, Tartu, Tapa and Põlva-Räpina (Ringvee 2012:170). Watchtower publications were produced underground to serve the Estonian congregations and were disguised by binding them with unremarkable book covers (2011 JW Yearbook:217-218). Among the Russian congregants, publishers would witness in informal situations, often preaching to tourists in Tallinn who believed that they were tour guides. Some would buy train tickets from Tartu and Tallinn merely for the purpose of preaching to the passengers. Often one would start a conversation and lead it toward the topic of the Bible (Ibid: 219-220).

Jehovah's Witnesses had to be very careful when witnessing and had to be wise when choosing someone to preach to, so as not to alert the KGB. Often those to whom they witnessed were those unsympathetic to the Soviet regime (Ibid:221). Under perestroika Jehovah's Witnesses were given more freedom to preach and to hold public talks again (Ibid:224). Not only were Estonian Witnesses allowed to legally practice their faith anew, but more freedom meant that they could establish contact with foreign Witnesses (Ringvee 2012:171). Because of a lack of Biblical materials, Jeho-

vah's Witnesses would memorise verses from the Bible which was an asset while preaching as one wouldn't need to carry a Bible (2011 JW Yearbook:226).

### **4.2.3 Post-Soviet Estonia**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, translation teams were established in Estonia which simplified the means of obtaining Watchtower publications for local Witnesses (2011 JW Yearbook:227). In 1991 the Watchtower was officially published for the first time in Estonian (Ibid:231). On October 31st 1991, the first Estonian congregation of Jehovah's Witness was officially registered. With Estonian independence, missionaries arrived in Estonia and Witnesses could once again preach freely and legally (Ibid:233). In addition to missionaries, Finnish Pioneers also contributed to the preaching work, laying the foundation for many Estonian congregations (Ibid:240). The first Estonian Kingdom Hall to be built was in Maardu in 1993. In 1998 two Assembly Halls were built: one in Tallinn and the second in Tartu. In 2011 there were a total of 33 Kingdom Halls which served 53 congregations. By 1999 the construction of the remote translation office in Tallinn was completed (Ibid:250-252). In 2009 the *Greek Portion of the New World Translation* was released in Estonian followed by the 2014 release of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* in Estonian.

## 5 Empirical analysis

This following section will analyse portions of the empirical data which I collected during field work. This material is composed of excerpts from interviews, notes and observations from visits to the Tartu Kingdom hall, notes from observation of public preaching and from Bible studies. I will give an overview of the backgrounds of the informants, the content of the talks at the Kingdom Hall meetings, describe the experience of public witnessing and Bible study, examine the Witnesses' perception of their reception and the value systems of Jehovah's Witnesses. Sub-chapters 5.1 and 5.5 will include interview excerpts.

### 5.1 Ethnographic analysis of Estonian Jehovah's Witnesses

In this section I will give an overview of the backgrounds of the Witnesses whom I interviewed.

**Witness 1** is a pioneer from the Tartu Russian congregation. She was introduced to Jehovah's Witnesses through her mother who had been invited to study with the Witnesses by her aunt. At the time her mother hadn't wanted to study, but liked the Watchtower publications. However, Witness 1, her mother and father all began to study with them. As Witness 1 began to study with Jehovah's Witnesses, she had at first expressed that she wouldn't go to any meetings, but she began to attend them after the first study. She was baptised when she was 17. After conversion, she had difficulty with no longer celebrating holidays as it distinguished her from her peers, especially in the case of class celebrations. At the time she had wanted to participate, but as time has passed she became satisfied with her decision. **Witness 2** was born into a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. He belongs to the Tartu Russian congregation and serves as a ministerial servant. He is Witness 1's husband. **Witness 3** was born into a family of Jehovah's Witnesses and as his parents before him, he decided to become a Witness as well. He serves as both a ministerial servant and a pioneer and attends the Tartu Estonian congregation. He became a pioneer because he wanted to tell others about Jehovah.

**Witness 4** relates the circumstances leading to his studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses:

*...I was sixteen, I went to study to Tallinn and I was... I was... I met on the street in Old Town. Three men came to me and asked do I have time to talk or? I did and then they asked me about the future and I spoke about what I think about the future and they showed me some scriptures, what the future brings. I... I said "Wow, interesting. I never thought about that" and... and there was one younger boy at the same age as I was, with them and he showed the scriptures and he knew the Bible well. After this... when we had... we had like 10 minute conversation... 15 minute conversation and then they asked do I want to know*

*more about the Bible. I... I thought, "Well, in the crosswords, in our these memory games, there are often questions about the Bible, so if... if it's free, why not to get to know little bit of the Bible." And then I said "Well, why not" it's free and everything, then I gave my address... my school address where was my dormitory and later I regretted, said "I was so stupid give to right address, I should have giving them wrong address and now they come and I don't have time... I... I... I have studies and I have my trainings also." But then he came. This... this young boy and... and we studied and I liked it, I liked how he knew the Bible. I... I had questions, I was not very interested of the religion, but... but I was interested in the like overall and I had questions and I liked how he answered from the Bible and this impressed me, that he knew the Bible well and I was impressed that the Bible tells about so many practical things. But I was not inclining to religion, so it took three years of my life before I was sure that this is the thing that yes, is worth to do. This is... this waits more than anything other in the life because this is the future. If... if I tried to live my life here now, then it's short and full of misery anyway but... but if I put spiritual things first in my life, then I can... I can live full life now in... in a right way and... and I have hope for the better future anyway. And then i was baptised in '92; 1992, I was 18 when i got baptised.  
(Witness 4. 01.04.16.)*

While studying in Tallinn as a teenager, Witness 4 encountered Jehovah's Witnesses who spoke to him about the Bible and set up a Bible study. While he had at first desired to learn more about the Bible not out spiritual motivations, but out a desire to be more familiar with and knowledgeable about the content of the Bible, he immediately regretted his decision. However when he met the young Witness for Bible study, he was impressed by his knowledge and grasp of the Bible and was intrigued by the practicality and relevance of the Bible itself. Although he took some time to consider whether or not to become a Witness, he was convinced that it was ultimately the better choice out of the two options of either a fleeting life of despair or a spiritually fulfilling life with a promised better future on the horizon. As opposed to the secular individual who is involved with the material, the here and now, the Witness although dedicated to the spiritual, finds it fulfilling.

Upon conversion Witness 4 had difficulty breaking off associations with friends:

*...for me maybe the most difficult thing was association with my former friends. I lived... I grew up in a small place. I had friends since childhood and we have been doing everything together. When I went to Tallinn and started to study the Bible, I started to see life in different angle and the things I used to think were okay: like smoking or drinking or going to wild parties... and when I spoke to my friends that "Well, I'm not so sure about these things." I went with them for a while but I started to look things differently and... and step by step, I was less and less like them and them when my... my best friend told me that "**Witness 4**, you are wasting your life. When you grow older, you will regret the choices you do right now because you lose all your fun... you lose... you waste all your time, your youth, your time to have fun and everything." and I told him "Well, time will show. Time shows who is right and who is wrong." and I continued my way, but it wasn't easy because we were so close. And it went easier when I saw what the time showed, how they life went, what was their*

*choices and so... and what has been my life and choices I have brought, so. I have lost a lot of things... lot of painful things I have lost but not good things. And... and yeah, I... I think this was one of the most difficult things. Everything else was easy because I was... actually when I was studying the Bible, I was amazed that everything is so logical and everything goes to the place when I think why there is so many wickedness, why God hasn't done anything yet, what is the key to the happy marriage, what is the key to the successful family life and when I studied what the Bible said about that I said "That's so logical" it... it was so... so clear for me. When I had questions, I got the answers from... from the Bible and therefore putting this to my life, it was easy. (Witness 4. 01.04.16.)*

The transition was difficult as it required him not only to break off associations, but to change his behaviours as well. His best friend was pessimistic in regards to his becoming a Witness and tried to discourage him from continuing along this path. However Witness 4 stood firm and was later vindicated, having seen how his life diverged from his friends' lives. He was very impressed with Biblical teachings and didn't have much difficulty adapting to a Biblical worldview and he was quite satisfied with the answers that the Bible provided. Witness 4 currently serves as a circuit overseer.

**Witness 5** began to study with the Witnesses through a member of her high school basketball team:

*I was fifteen when I started to... to study the Bible and I had a... questions about life, about death, about future, about principles. I wanted to have a life that the basement would be strong already, that I wanted to build a normal, good, strong house. But... but I had seen very different families and principles and so... so I wanted to have my principles... my basement and it's a long story how I started to study Bible and so but... but on the basketball team one girl spoke about Bible and so I started to study more and more and I... I wasn't a good student or girl, listener because I had so many questions "Why so?", why so about the Bible and "Is it true, can I trust it?" about... and I started to study about archaeology and about history, is it like... everything is... it's not like story book or so. So, I wanted to be sure before I decide something. So I made, yeah... inquiries and everything I start... I learned about myself and studied and so. So... so it's like puzzle, one piece... history and everything so. It was... it was logical. It... it wasn't like emotional like "Oh, I saw something, it was... it..." My life was very normal, I was very active person like basketball and choir and... and communistic leader in our school, you know those pioneers and everything so... it wasn't like... I didn't miss anything but I had these questions, like everybody has. Why so and so I... I learned that Bible is like... historically true and also has principles and good... has... gives good counsel to be a better person. ...but she didn't come with me anymore, I didn't know where is going... she is going and she didn't tell me also because she thought that I am too proud, Bible things don't interest me. She was sure about it. ...But now she is Jehovah's Witness also but in this time she was studying and she was spoken to me what she has done... studied also in the evenings. Yeah, so... little by little, she told me. (Witness 5. 01.04.16.)*

She was at first skeptical as to the trustworthiness of the Bible, but upon looking into the topic, she became convinced that she could trust the Bible. Her teammate was at first hesitant to share with

her based upon her response, but eventually she did.

When she became a Witness, Witness 5 experienced great opposition and hostility from her parents because their reputation was at stake:

*...I was so many things already, that I was connected to. So, I started to study Bible and I saw clearly what is good, what is not right anymore. So, I started to cut this and it wasn't always easy, I was convinced, I was happy to tell to my choir leader or class... class teacher, I was also my... also in our class there were always halloween parties and Christmas parties or something. So I told to my teacher that "You know I'm studying the Bible and I... I have heard so many new things and now I know for myself now what is... what I want to do and no." But... and I said that I don't organise anymore these parties, that she can't rely on me anymore. But... she... it... it made her feel very... very... like to say, well, angry (noh, vihane)... angry... ...in school, in the beginning I was 15, I was already so many things. Now I have to correct all my things... ...for my mother was most important what others think, how we look like... ...So, now in my atheistic family one starting to believe in God. It's not good how it looks... ...So my parents and especially my mother was hoping for me a lot and she wanted... every parent wants to tell others good for his... her child. So it wasn't good like... prospect or project, what I chose. So they made everything possible to make my way very hard... ...Like... all other things, they cried, they stopped, they didn't speak, the first meeting... I went to the first meeting. So, I dressed myself and said I was at the door... already at the door "I go to the meeting." and my mother shouted to my father "Come to help!" I... I run to the meeting and my mother shouted "Don't come home anymore!" I came home, but one week they didn't speak to me. But it took time but... I understand them and understood this time also because they don't know what religion is or the Jehovah's Witnesses are. What... what to believe, what to accept. So, I just told them. I just wanted to show that Bible is good book and Bible makes me a better person. So, I tried to do the things at home that were my responsibility, just to do things well... ...I just wanted to apply Bible principals and it helped a lot. It took time, yeah. (Witness 5. 01.04.16.)*

Although Witness 5 merely wanted to follow the Bible, her peers and family made it difficult for her. She came from an inherently irreligious environment and went from unbelieving to believing. For her family which highly valued their reputation, her becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses brought about stigma for her family and for her mother in particular, it was perceived as a stain on the family's reputation. While her family perceived her conversion negatively, she was willing to sacrifice behaviours and practices which were incompatible with and discouraged by her faith. In this sense, her conversion had a high cost in the beginning, requiring her to forsake activities and associations with which she had previously been affiliated and straining her relationship with her family. Her motivations stemmed from a desire to be obedient to how she interpreted the Bible.

**Witness 6's** mother and brother are Witnesses. His mother became interested in the Bible and the religion through an English couple who were serving as missionaries. Witness 6 decided to become

a Witness in 2009 while at an international convention in Berlin. His reason for converting was because he wanted to serve Jehovah. He belongs to the Russian congregation at the Tartu Kingdom Hall. **Witness 7** is from a Finnish family of Jehovah's Witnesses and came to Estonia as a missionary when the Soviet Union collapsed. Witness 7 came to Estonia as there was a great need for more Witnesses to serve and because he wanted to be active in his faith. He arrived at a time when Estonians seemed to be more receptive to the Witnesses, therefore it was worth coming to Estonia to serve. He belongs to the Estonian congregation at the Tartu Kingdom Hall.

**Witness 8** is a Pioneer from the Tartu Russian congregation. He grew up in the Soviet Union and had not considered existential questions until the Soviet Union collapsed. He searched for the answers to these questions through religion, as he was convinced that there was a creator. He wasn't interested in Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism nor Russian Orthodoxy as he regarded them as only a tradition. He met Mormon missionaries and was impressed by how sincere they were, but felt that their beliefs were contradictory. He found out about the Witnesses through his uncle who had done electrical work in a hall which some Witnesses were renting. His uncle had commented that they seemed to be happy people and therefore Witness 8 decided to attend a meeting. He was particularly touched by the talk at the meeting wherein the present state of the world was compared to that of Pompeii before mount Vesuvius erupted, in that just as smoke from mount Vesuvius alerted the inhabitants of Pompeii of coming peril, so warning signs in the present point toward a cataclysm on the horizon. Ultimately he felt that the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses were the most consistent and logical among the religions that he looked into. Because he had been subject to Soviet propaganda he had to deprogram himself, having learned that he had been conditioned to be loyal to the Soviet state. He also had to come to terms with the unofficial history of the Soviet Union. Although he had to change his habits, Witness 8 didn't struggle with breaking off associations, as many of his friends disassociated themselves from him upon his conversion. Nor did he have much difficulty in conforming his behaviour to Biblical principles.

Among those who become Witnesses later in life, there is a perceived logic to their beliefs which other faiths lack. This helps to reinforce their own faith in that their religion is perceived as coherent and true, while all others are regarded as falling short by comparison.

## 5.2 The Kingdom Hall

To better understand the importance of field-service and the publishing of the Good News of the Kingdom, one needs to understand the motivations of Jehovah's Witnesses. For this I visited the Tartu Kingdom Hall to observe several meetings. I attended all of the meetings with Witness 1 and Witness 2. I was received quite well at the Kingdom Hall, likely because I am the friend of three Witnesses and have acquaintances within the Russian congregation. I visited the Kingdom Hall on the following dates: January 24th, February 8th, March 6th, March 23rd and April 3rd 2016. The first floor of the Tartu Kingdom Hall is divided into a foyer/cloak room and three halls: two smaller halls which are for the Russian and Estonian congregations and a larger hall in the middle for conventions. The halls had a stage with a pulpit, behind which were curtains of a yellowish tan colour and some scripture was on the wall, Hebrews 13:1: "Let your brotherly love continue". As Jehovah's Witnesses are very serious about their objection to paganism and idolatry, Kingdom Halls are very simple and are not decorated with crosses, icons nor other religious images. The chairs in the halls are folding chairs reminiscent of those found in a lecture hall or theatre. The typical Sunday meeting is highly structured and consists of prayer, songs, a Watchtower study and a public talk. The meeting begins with a song, which is followed by an opening prayer. Then the talk (sermon) is delivered which is followed by another song and marks the halfway point of the meeting, this is followed by the Watchtower study. The meeting concludes with a song and a final prayer. The Watchtower study is straightforward and highly structured and Witnesses prepare for it beforehand. The congregation reads through a Watchtower article collectively while it is read aloud by either a ministerial servant or an elder at the front of the hall. Following the reading of every paragraph or two, questions are asked of the congregation, which are located at the bottom of the page and numbered according to the paragraph to which they pertain. Congregants raise their hands and they are handed a microphone to provide an answer. Often, answers are simply the text recited verbatim.

### January 24th 2016

This was my first time attending a Kingdom Hall meeting. Upon entering the Kingdom Hall I was greeted by well dressed men, wearing suits and ties. Many were very friendly, approaching me, extending their hands and introducing themselves. I knew about a handful of congregants through previous acquaintance, mainly from the Russian congregation. Jehovah's Witnesses are a very close knit community and they need to be as they believe that they are the only practitioners of true reli-

gion in the contemporary era. This is demonstrated by their love for one another. The meetings for both congregations occurred simultaneously. I was in the Russian congregation with Witness 1 and Witness 2, who translated the talk for me. It was about true and false religion. The distinguishing features that demonstrate true religion which were stressed were separation from the world through objecting to political affairs and war, the imitation of Jesus through loving one's neighbour as oneself and by proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. As these characteristics apply to Jehovah's Witnesses, it was concluded that true religion is practiced only by Jehovah's Witnesses. All other religions are perceived to belong to "Babylon the Great"; the system of false religion. "Babylon the Great" is believed to encourage mankind to follow the ways of the world and will be destroyed with the old system. Ultimately to follow Christ's teachings, follow true worship, to be aligned and associated with Jehovah God's Organisation and representatives and to separate oneself from the world maintains one's standing with Jehovah God. These distinguishing features of their religion mark Jehovah's Witnesses out as a people set apart and simultaneously vindicate and convince the Witnesses that they are approved by God and are His people. The depiction of other religions as not meeting the standards set out by the Organisation and the labelling of other Christian religions as apostate because of their teachings and practices strengthens the identity of Jehovah's Witnesses.

#### February 8th 2016

The talk was primarily about worship of the one true God among many false gods. As was talked about in the previous talk, it is important to be in the true religion as it determines one's future. It is believed that knowledge of Jehovah, the one true God comes through creation, the Bible and Jehovah's Organisation and that He protects His worshippers through other Witnesses and Watchtower literature. This ensures that they don't fall into apostasy.

#### March 6th 2016

The speech was about standing against sin and Satan. Witnesses believe that Satan is a personal being who tempts believers to sin. In the talk there was a great emphasis upon avoiding secular and worldly media which contain inappropriate content, as they can tempt one to sin. Therefore it was advised to avoid anything that may cause one to be tempted, as avoiding worldly and secular media decreases negative influences and the likelihood of sinning. Rules and abstention act as safety nets to ensure that the Witness doesn't sin and therefore can achieve the goal of eternal life.

### March 23rd 2016 (The Memorial Evening)

The biggest evangelistic event for Witnesses is the *Memorial Evening* which commemorates the Last Supper or the *Lord's Evening Meal*. At this time of year Witnesses commit more time to preaching so as to ensure that as many people as possible are invited to the event. People are either invited in person or invitations are left for homeowners. The primary themes for the talk were related to *the ransom* (the payment made through the provision of Jesus' sacrificial death to deliver mankind from death and sin), the division of believers into *anointed* and *other sheep* and the necessity of expressing one's appreciation for *the ransom*. It is believed that Jehovah decides which class a believer belongs to and that those whom are *anointed* are informed of this through holy spirit. The *Memorial* is kept both as a sign of appreciation for *the ransom* and as a commandment, as Jesus had commanded his followers to observe it and partake of the *Lord's Evening Meal*. As it is believed that Jesus made the New Covenant only with the 144,000 *anointed* Witnesses, only they can partake of the bread and wine. The *Lord's Evening Meal* will be observed only as long as there are still *anointed* Christians on earth. The response to *the ransom* is the expression of one's appreciation for it through following the rules. The taking in of knowledge of Jehovah was a point that was stressed along with praying to Him and attending meetings regularly. The *Lord's Evening Meal* was a unique experience because of its peculiarity. The white plate of flaky cracker-like bread (prepared to be as historically accurate as possible) is passed from person to person, row by row with none partaking but the *anointed*. After the bread, a glass full of red wine made its rounds in the same manner.

### April 3rd 2016

The main content of the talk was about determining whether or not one is on the path to eternal life. The Bible serves as the guide to direct one onto the road leading to eternal life. Keeping the commandments brings one onto this path. As not all religions or denominations are perceived as pleasing to Jehovah, not all of them lead to eternal life. The Bible is perceived as trustworthy as Witnesses believe that it proves itself to be scientifically accurate, doesn't contradict itself and demonstrates its accuracy through fulfilled prophecy. As it is believed that the Bible is accurate, all of one's beliefs must harmonise with its teachings, as it tells the believer what Jehovah requires of them. To stay on the path to salvation, the believer must grow in knowledge and faith, make dramatic lifestyle changes, share their knowledge about Jehovah with others and dedicate oneself to Him and be baptised. Lifestyle changes are required in relation to behaviour and social associations as "*Bad as-*

*sociations spoil useful habits*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Exposure to bad influences is perceived to corrupt one’s character and lead to immorality. There are therefore two choices: to live under the safe and orderly rule of Jehovah or to live in the lawless and dangerous world of Satan. Nothing is required of those who choose to live in Satan’s world, but for those who desire to live under Jehovah’s rule, one is required to follow the rules and is therefore held accountable for their actions.

### **5.3 Field-service and Bible study**

The following section will give an overview of my observation of public preaching with a literature cart and participant observation during multiple Bible study sessions. I observed cart preaching on March 23rd 2016, from 12:00-13:00 by Kaarsild on the Raatuse side after I had encountered a Jehovah’s Witness literature stand with one man attending it (a boy and a second man arrived later). This was significant as this was the day of the *Memorial Evening* and therefore one of the final thrusts to invite people to the event. The stand was stocked with *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and invitations to the memorial (Usually the stand is stocked with Watchtower or Awake! magazines instead of invitations). It was a black stand, which functions as a two wheeled dolly for ease of transportation and a sign which says “What Does the Bible Really Teach?” was mounted atop it. On this particular occasion many people walked by and were either apathetic, uninterested or simply didn’t notice. Others would cast a curious glance at the stand but would continue onward having their curiosity sated. One man however stopped and gave a hard look at the stand and one Witness offered to help, but he just wanted to look. After a while he lost interest and walked away. One woman took an invitation to the memorial. Some took a look at the stand and the Witnesses and made sure to avoid them, venturing to the side of the path which the Witnesses were on only when they had passed them. Two foreigners: a man and a woman stood in front of the stand for a while, likely unaware of their surroundings. Another man almost walked into the stand but at the last minute stopped with surprise. The reactions likely resulted from apathy, disinterest or a lack of time.

The *Bible study* plays an important role in field-service and serves as one of the primary means of proselytism and conversion among Witnesses. *Bible studies* are very similar to Watchtower studies in that a Watchtower publication is read with Jehovah’s Witnesses and questions are answered from the text. Teachings within the text are substantiated by references to Bible verses. It is very common to read through *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, which functions as a Bible course. As with

Watchtower magazines, the paragraphs are numbered and questions are located at the bottom of the page and are numbered according to the corresponding paragraph. The questions can stimulate conversation about the read texts, however it is not uncommon for the discussion to centre around the text book answers. The book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* is divided into chapters topically. While reading through Watchtower publications, the student learns the official position and interpretation of the Organisation and learns to interpret the Bible in a similar manner.

## **5.4 An overview of the preaching experience of Jehovah's Witnesses**

The following data is from the interview with Witness 1 and Witness 2 on January 28th 2016:

Witnesses whom are physically able are expected to preach door-to-door, those who cannot are expected to preach in any capacity possible, including preaching over the phone. Preaching and phone territories are divided by congregation and language. The Witness decides how many hours that they want to dedicate to field-service. For Witness 2, the hardest moment while preaching is standing in front of the door, as one does not know what to expect, but one will have rehearsed and planned a presentation as they go door-to-door. In the experience of Witness 1 and Witness 2, foreigners have been more open to Jehovah's Witnesses than the locals. If one says that they do not want the Witnesses to stop by, they can tell them and they will make note of it so as not to disturb them.

Estonians tend to be informed about Jehovah's Witnesses through the media or friends, as a result some of their perceptions can be inaccurate and misunderstandings may result. Often people focus on the rejection of blood transfusions on the part of the Witnesses and the resulting deaths of children. A perceived misunderstanding that Witness 1 told me about was the case of a man who was afraid to go to a Kingdom Hall because he was afraid that the Witnesses would circumcise him. In another instance Witness 1 had simply greeted a passerby who replied by calling them idiots as he walked away. One of the better experiences of preaching for her was while preaching with a cart. A woman approached and looked at some of the magazines and was quite interested, Witness 1 explained how one magazine gives an overview of Biblical teachings. The woman however suggested that they study the Bible together, causing Witness 1 to be taken aback. The woman then offered to give her contact information and again she was surprised and looked at the sister with her, who told her to write down the information. The following information was sent to me by Witness 1 through

email:

Estonians tend to be calm and listen to the Witnesses' message, tending to be polite whether interested or not. Russians tend to be more hostile and may start yelling at the Witnesses upon seeing them. Russian Orthodox priests tend to be opposed to the Witnesses, as they see them as a threat.

## 5.5 Perception of reception

In this sub-chapter I will analyse the Witness' perception of Estonian cultural peculiarities and how they help or hinder their preaching, the public opinion and reception of Jehovah's Witnesses and the significance of preaching in their own words. It is necessary to examine these factors, as they will influence how Jehovah's Witnesses perceive and interact with their socio-cultural surroundings. Estonians seemingly tend to be simultaneously both open and closed to the topic of religion in that they are willing to listen, but tend to be unwilling to speak their mind. However in Witness 7's experience, Estonians have tended to be more open to discussing faith than Finns:

*This helps is it's free... it's freedom and Estonians are... in... in a way they are open. They... they listen to you sometimes, if... if they think they have time for... so... so they are more open to discussion than for example Finns. Finns are more closed, they... they... they are scared to discuss things of which they are not very sure about. Sometimes they are not sure about their own beliefs and if you start discussing them, they find "I don't know what I'm believing in." and... and they feel embarrassed or something, but Estonians are maybe more open to discussion in a way. They don't always explain what they believe in themselves, but they're... ready to listen about others. It's... "Let's think about things". So it's a good thing, but... but then again it's sometimes difficult to know what... what Estonians believe themselves... because they're not so open. They listen what you say, but they... they are not ready to... for example say that "I don't believe what you say." But they're just listening, but then the voices in their head saying "I'm not sure about it." But they don't express it, so you... it's not open, you have to guess what the other guy means or what believes. So it would be easier if they would speak up more... ...You don't know exactly what he is thinking. I don't know, maybe... ...it's Soviet legacy something where you are not supposed to say what you think, but supposed say what is right to thin... say... or something like that... (Witness 7. 23.11.2016.)*

This peculiar open but closed attitude may be caused in part by the Soviet influence and may be conditioned by taboos related to the topic of religion and of expressing one's opinion. However this is advantageous in that the Witnesses can share their message and their listeners are more likely to listen.

As established earlier, there is a growing tendency for Estonians to gravitate toward the new spirituality and to believe in a higher power rather than a personal deity. Witness 7 corroborates this phe-

nomenon and provides possible reasons that Estonians seem to reject organised religion:

*Estonians are... ..in general they don't want to... anything to decide over them.....they like the freedom and... and if somebody says that this is the right thing to do, then who are you to tell me... that's maybe the basic reason why they don't... why they don't want too much to know... they want to know too much. ...I think that that's the main... main thing... ..Individualism and people want to... decide themselves or be God themselves I... if you go to religion. ...I think that some deny a God, who'd have an... a purpose... but they... most of them believe in some supernatural powers or... so they are not pure atheist or materialist that would say that nothing more exist. Most... most of Estonians I think believe in something. Yeah, but maybe it's not so clear for them, but that something should be, but... but they believe in something. In... in sensitives, in horoscopes, in... in trees which may give you... power or whatever. (Witness 7. 23.11.2016.)*

Not only do Estonians tend not to gravitate toward total materialism or atheism, but there is an ostensible connection between the new spirituality and a desire to not be held accountable to a deity for one's actions. This may originate from a simultaneous desire to be spiritual and to maintain one's personal freedom. In this sense, accountability may come across as a threat to one's liberty.

For Witness 2, there are two perceived categories of people: those who are interested and want to learn and speak with them and those who do not desire to interact with the Witnesses:

*...So it's two type of people: one group start... think and... ..and go out of his comfortable zone... ..or this sy... system. Ju... just maybe he afraid or suspicious and so, so on, but he do this step and he start meditate and think. ...And another type people who is... don't want to think. They just moving in a circle and even though... if they feel that... they need to step out of this ring for some reason, some try to protect their zone... ..maybe somehow... prevent to receive to their zone and so on, so on. So it's kind two type of people. So, how we observe situation... second type of people... who in this circle, it's a main... group of people. Main s... yeah... and first group it's a... usually it's a people who we preach and who... who are interested. (Witness 2. 11.12.16.)*

Those whom are willing to leave their comfort zones are seemingly more likely to be willing to converse with the Witnesses, the rest may perceive the Witnesses as a threat and therefore desire to avoid them. This perspective however plays into the reality that one's cultural background doesn't necessarily dictate their opinion of the message, but that the individual paradigm exists simultaneously.

For Witness 4 the glory days for preaching were immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as people displayed greater interest in religion and were more receptive:

*In the... we starting preaching in 1990s, in the beginning when... all religious activity was growing in Estonia and this was the easiest time to preach because everyone was "Wow Bible ooo". Like this and they wanted to have the Bible and they wanted to read the Bible*

*and... and they were eager Bible students. But then... as years passed by, people get more materialistic and the ones who were interested, they already made their changes... many of them became Jehovah's Witnesses at this time. I... I know many from this time who were studying the Bible and who were maybe for years thinking about these things, but when the work was open, then they were quickly doing some changes in their lives and they got baptised and... and so... but then I think when the time passed by and people get materialistic, then they were... at first they were busy... no... no more time and then... then there... there was maybe next step was not interested. It was stranger... and why... why it's getting better for us I think... one reason is that we have changed also... ourselves. I... I remember... first years, we were quite straight... straight to the Bible... to the point and the Bible study and all very religious, but now we are maybe more tactful. I... I guess so. I... I can say it about myself, that I used to be maybe more straight but now I understand people, everyone can have their opinion and I don't have to change their opinion I just offer the... knowledge from the Bible, so they have a chance to choose and... and when they feel that its not pressured to them, then next time we come, they feel easier because they know that we don't pressing... pushing our religion or faith but we just... we're talking, we're interested about their religion, what they think, how do they view the future and... and Bible teaching and I think that this is... this is one reason why... why many people are friendlier, last years. Also... and one reason maybe why... why this has been also is that many people know... have... have someone among Jehovah's Witnesses who they know personally. When they don't know, they have only got information from media or from the friends of friends of friends, then their view may be quite negative because this is what media gives and what sells. But... but now when they have maybe some workmates... Jehovah's Witnesses or some... partners at the trainings where they go sporting activities or... or classmates maybe, then they have seen who are Jehovah's Witnesses and they... they're not so negative anymore. Sometimes they so that "Oh, Jehovah's Witnesses they are this and this and this." and we ask "Do you know any Jehovah's Witnesses?" and they say "Yes." "Are they like this?" "No they aren't but they are exceptions. All... all the others who I don't know, they are." (Witness 4. 01.04.16.)*

Although Estonians tended to be the most interested in religion immediately after re-independence, opinions as regard Jehovah's Witnesses have been generally positive in spite of a lack of interest. Just as receptiveness has changed over time, so have the Witnesses adapted their approach to preaching. Many have warmed up to Jehovah's Witnesses as they personally know some, however some still tend to generalise the Witnesses and treat the Witnesses that they know as anomalies.

There have been perceived misunderstandings about the Witnesses as Estonians tend to hear about them through the media, from acquaintances or friends and don't understand their motivations:

*People sometimes, not only Jehovah's Witnesses... ...religious people, they are like some... like crazy people. Why is that? Because they only see the action but they don't know what's behind that and... and that's... that's quite often they see that we come to knock their... on their doors Saturday morning. In their perspective they believe... for me it's the best to stay home and sleep long and also we... we don't knock their doors at 7:00 am or pm or the morning. We try to be like... also think about them but they... they see our actions and they don't understand why we do this. They don't know like, there's a God, there's a... better*

*hope for us and they... and because of that they believe “oh crazy people”. They don’t know what they are doing actually you are and quite often when we... see those people we ask that maybe they could explain because also there are different beliefs like for example one thing, you don’t celebrate birthdays or Christmas or the issue about blood, they know that we don’t do these but why is another thing and when they let us to explain... they... they are not like saying “oh, I am ok with you... with that and I am not doing it myself” but they are going to understand that we actually believe and we have a quite firm... ground we base on... on Bible and that actually Bible teach this... those things. But the thing is that media makes that picture telling only those actions but not that we are actually thinking before doing those actions. (Witness 3. 22.03.16.)*

Non-Witnesses tend to see the actions of the Witnesses, but often do not understand the reasons why they preach, abstain from blood transfusions and do not celebrate holidays. This demonstrates the necessity of the Witness having an opportunity to explain the motivations behind their actions. While Estonians may have preconceptions about the Witnesses, when one becomes acquainted with them personally, misunderstandings can be dispelled.

Witness 1 relates her experience with a non-Witness friend and her changing opinion of the Witnesses after spending time with Witness 1:

*I have one friend with whom I studied Bible here in Second Hand and it was before and I met with her and then after some times she realised that I was one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and she was like “What?!” like “How it’s could be?! No, no, no.” so and we started to communicate with her. She ended Bible study for some reason but still she came to us two weeks ago and she said “Every time when somebody says that Jehovah’s Witnesses are bad people or something, I was like ‘No, you just don’t know them. They are good people and so on and so on.’” But still, she’s not Witness and she doesn’t want to study Bible, but still she said that she started to defend us and others get angry, like “Why are you defending them? They’re bad people.” and even she was punished a bit... (Witness 1. 20.11.16.)*

One’s opinion of Jehovah’s Witnesses and any misperceptions of them that they hold are likely to change when one has the opportunity to personally interact with them and get to know them. Some don’t even realise that their peers are Jehovah’s Witnesses as they have certain expectations of whom they should be and may be shocked when they realise that they know some Witnesses.

The perceived reception of Witnesses within Estonia has varied by ethnic group, with African students and Russians tending to be more open to the Witnesses because of their religious background:

*In Estonia there is 900,000 Estonians I believe and some 300,000 Russians... 300,000 Russians... maybe a little bit more. But... Jehovah’s Witnesses is al... almost equal, 2000 Estonians and 2000 Russians. The Russians are more... more acceptable to the Truth and also the foreigners, it’s a quite new territory right now but we can see especially... people from... from Africa. They’ve... for them it’s okay to talk about the Bible and... and I also really enjoy talking with them because they have... when I start to preach to Estonian, you have to start*

*explaining, there is a God. Speak with a... an African person is so nice. He... he already knows there's a God. But Russian also, some... they are more believers than Estonians, that's also the reason there is more Jehovah's Witnesses in Russian... ...they believe something but... but not... for example: for Russians religion is quite important, even for the young people. (Witness 3. 22.03.16.)*

Because of the more religious nature of Russian culture, there tend to be proportionately more Witnesses among the Russian community than among ethnic Estonians.

By its nature the success of preaching depends upon external conditions: time, weather, method, location and the individual:

*Now we use these stands and so, effective is if we use these stands in right time. ...and it is effective so, similar if we preach door-to-door. I should preach in right time when I know I... when I look what time I can find this because if I preach... for example morning... ...it's not effective, yes. It's again, it depends what time it is and even use these methods. (Witness 6. 20.11.16.)*

Therefore there is the necessity for the Witness of recognising these factors and taking advantage of them to maximise efficiency while preaching.

However, while preaching, whether they find interested individuals or not, the Witness perseveres, knowing that even if one day is not fruitful, that the next could be, as every day is different:

*We try to be like busses, like they have their stops and we are always on our work, always on our schedules, we stop always at the stops but sometimes that people know, that we stop; the bus is there, that they have possibility to come when they want. So we are like regular, visiting once a year almost all... in all our Estonia. So we want to... to show and to let know that we exist and we are there if they want help, if they are ready. So we just... it's not always easy also, just nobody... nobody stops. Yeah, but we just keep going and sometimes we have the... it doesn't matter is it in Tartu, is it in Tallinn. It's not like so regular, sometimes five people in a bus stop yeah and sometimes no, but... but we have to grow our faith and to be... to be regular and to think that "maybe today is somebody there." (Witness 5. 01.04.16.)*

The Witness is devoted to their task and continues in spite of adversity.

In preaching, no matter the outcome, the Witness is obedient, serving Jehovah and making disciples:

*Sometimes I... people want know more about Bible. I... we study Bible with him but if after he say "I don't want study... continue... I don't want continue study Bible." No problem, I know that when I study I prepare disciples, if they don't want, I try prepare others, yes. And it doesn't matter. They do steps or don't do steps, I do this work. It is matter because I... when Jesus says that, Jehovah know what you do. (Witness 6. 20.11.16.)*

Ultimately the obedience and loyalty to Jehovah is what matters most in the preaching of Witnesses,

as He sees the intentions of one's heart. Results although important are not as important as intent.

The wide variety of mediums currently available to Jehovah's Witnesses help to ensure that the same message can be preached on a worldwide scale, wholly unlike preceding generations:

*...I see myself like this Matthew 24:14, that "the Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations and then the end will come (hea sõnumit kuningriigist kuulutatakse kogu maailmas tunnistuseks kõikidele rahvastele ja siis tuleb lõpp)". Only... only now is time that it actually could be done. At the same time, the same message to the all people. Like fifty years ago, how could you spread one message instantly to the whole world? But nowadays, internet, phones, everything, this makes it available; this makes it possible to give the same message to the same... to the all people and I think one... one excellent way to do this is... is internet and website, I think help many people, JW.ORG is... is very built up to... to show to people in different kind of... what the people... what the Bible teaches to the children, to the young ones, to the older... parents, to everyone... (Witness 4. 01.04.16.)*

These available mediums can be viewed as an almost prophetic fulfilment in that they can be perceived as a sign of the nearing end and the conclusion of the Great Commission and ensure that the same material is accessible to everyone through JW.ORG, with content available for all age groups.

## **5.6 Value hierarchies of Jehovah's Witnesses**

Following with Robbins' model of value hierarchies I will attempt to lay out the value hierarchies for Jehovah's Witnesses. Among the values and concepts that are of high importance to Jehovah's Witnesses are the following: Moral purity, obedience to the Organisation and to Biblical principles, separation from the world, neutrality, preaching, order and planning, doctrinal unity and standardisation, rejection of pagan beliefs and rituals, love for Jehovah and one another. These values are highly esteemed among Witnesses as they vindicate them as the true worshippers, the importance of true religion and worship are therefore significant concepts within the religion. There is often not the exaltation of the truth of the religion without contrasting themselves from other religions and their ostensibly false God-dishonouring teachings. As has been deduced, education and work are certainly on the lower end of the value hierarchy of Witnesses. By nature Witnesses will pursue choices which are in line with Biblical principles, conform with the guidelines of the Organisation and distinguish them from others. As well, these choices will be influenced by the imminence of Armageddon, the nearer that the end is, the more committed Witnesses will be to focusing on preaching.

Their religious identity takes priority over their ethnic or national identity and also overrides any loyalty to or affiliation with the state. However out of necessity they are required to come into contact with and interact with the secular world and are forced to be simultaneously separate from the world, yet in the world. Therefore the Witness is forced to practice the majority of their religion in the private sphere, however to fulfil their obligations to proselytise, they must also practice their religion in the public sphere. Consequently it is unsurprising that the majority of people recognise Witnesses primarily on the basis of their evangelism. The expression of love on the part of Jehovah's Witnesses toward both God and other Witnesses assures them that they are Jehovah's true worshippers. The standardisation of doctrine ensures that the Organisation can control the spiritual content which Jehovah's Witnesses consume and can therefore prevent schisms caused by difference of opinion. Obedience to not only Jehovah, but also to the Organisation and the Governing Body is highly valued. It must be noted however that the Witness' perception of their reception is dependant upon habitus while simultaneously being conditioned by their collective cultural identity.

## 5.7 Concluding analysis

In this section I will answer the research questions raised in the first chapter of this thesis point by point, based upon the data gathered from the interviews:

- *How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive their interaction with what they constitute as the secular world while preaching?*

Before we answer this question (which will be answered with the aid of the sub-questions), we need to re-examine how Jehovah's Witnesses perceive and define the secular world. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the secular world is under the influence of Satan. There are two formidable forces within the world which act as a parallel to trends within Estonian society, namely secularism which can be likened to *worldliness* and the false religious system of *Babylon the Great* which can be equated with the new spirituality (from a Witness perspective) which is growing in popularity in Estonian society. As has been previously mentioned, Jehovah's Witnesses strive to be a set apart people who do not participate in the secular world's affairs, however by necessity, they must interact with it. Therefore Jehovah's Witnesses strive to separate themselves both socially and morally from the practices of both the secular world by shunning sin and from the system of false religion by reject-

ing worship that dishonours God. The potential of moral contamination discourages Witnesses from leaving the religion, for it is believed that if they do, then they will fall into apostasy and immorality and perish at Armageddon.

- *How have the cultural peculiarities of Estonia influenced the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses? In what sense have they helped or hindered the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses?*

There are several factors to take into account when appraising the socio-cultural peculiarities of Estonia. One factor is the freedom of religion, which has been both a boon and barrier to Jehovah's Witnesses. On the one hand there is an openness to spirituality and freedom to proselytise without repression, but on the other, there has been a lack of interest in Christianity. The tendency for Estonians to not associate themselves with organised religion and the shift of interest in spirituality to the more individualistic and flexible New Age undoubtedly influences the reception of Jehovah's Witnesses within Estonia. For Russian Witnesses, the common religious background within the Russian community is an advantage, in that they are interacting with individuals who likely identify with a religion and believe in God. However it is also not uncommon to do so out of tradition rather than conviction. Yet, in the case that church members are dissatisfied with their church, there is a greater likelihood to find the active faith of the Witnesses appealing. We can expect that the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses will primarily appeal to those whom already identify with Christianity and accept the Bible. As well, their collective community can be appealing in an increasingly individualised culture where loneliness is common in spite of being surrounded by others. Therefore the friendliness and love which the Witnesses express toward one another is an attractive aspect of their sub-culture and peculiar considering the reserved nature of Estonians. Jehovah's Witnesses will for the most part be opposed to Estonian traditions and culture because of their pagan origins. This is important to take into account when considering the value systems of mainstream Estonian culture and the sub-culture of Jehovah's Witnesses, as their value hierarchies are constructed differently.

- *How do Witnesses perceive their reception while preaching in the Estonian field? What type of reactions have Witnesses been met with? How do Jehovah's Witnesses perceive that they have been misrepresented or misunderstood in Estonia?*

Not only does the spiritual climate influence the success of Jehovah's Witnesses in their evangelism, but the socio-cultural particularities of Estonia also influence the success and means of proselytism. To those who are unfamiliar with different Christian groups and denominations it may be difficult to distinguish Jehovah's Witnesses from mainstream protestant Christians. Apathy and disinterest are not uncommon reactions. Often individuals do not want to be disturbed or are too busy to listen to them. At the same time it tends not to be understood why they preach door-to-door, abstain from blood transfusions and why they don't participate in holiday nor birthday celebrations. The objection to celebrating holidays is still perceived as somewhat of an anomaly within Estonia which marks out Jehovah's Witnesses as different and even differentiates them from mainstream Christians. There is a perceived ignorance on the part of secular society, primarily as Witnesses are portrayed by the media. This is because Witnesses feel that they are often depicted in a negative light with a focus upon controversy, not upon their motivations.

- *What is the significance of preaching in the daily life of Jehovah's Witnesses? What is their motivation in evangelising?*

Preaching demonstrates one's love for God and neighbour and maintains the Witness' spiritual standing before Jehovah. Whereas Watchtower theology stresses separation from the world, preaching forces the Witness to interact with the world. This requires that they step into the public sphere and risk encountering and interacting with individuals, whom the Witness perceives as *worldly* in an effort to make converts and disciples. Under different conditions, Witnesses would not associate with said individuals, as there is the potential of bad influence. The Witness needs to be prepared for rejection and to answer both objections and sincere questions armed with their knowledge, Watchtower publications and their Bible. The distribution of Watchtower literature may leave the impression that they are door-to-door salesmen, yet these publications are free and for the Witness, the publications only serve as a means to bring one to the goal of eternal life; which they themselves consume as well. Just as the sales representative dresses well and works on their presentation, so Jehovah's Witnesses do their best to leave a good impression upon their listeners. Some

Witnesses only preach because it is expected, but others such as pioneers choose to do so because they enjoy it.

## Conclusion

During the course of this paper I have discussed the sub-cultural distinctions of Jehovah's Witnesses, their strong emphasis upon a Biblical worldview and Bible-based principles, the role of morality in their decisions and behaviour and the resulting separation. As well I have examined how Jehovah's Witnesses view the secular world, that being that it is perceived as under the dominion of Satan. This perception influences how they relate to the world, which results primarily in separation from it. This stems from the central role of the Bible and Biblical principles, which play a significant role within the sub-culture and worldview of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Bible influences their understanding and perception of the universe, life, morality and choice and serves as the basis for their value system. This influences their behaviour and how they relate to other individuals, groups, organisations and their surroundings.

Morality plays a significant role for Jehovah's Witnesses, in that morality for the Witness is not merely embodied as social norms to influence their choices, but functions as a countermeasure to protect their spiritual and physical welfare. However, for the Witness, their morality is not conditioned by society or the dominant culture, but is influenced by the Organisation. Their morality enforces separation from those who are deemed as part of the world. As well, their beliefs and practices distinguish them from mainstream Christianity and secular society. From the arrival of the Bible Students during the era of the first Estonian Republic, to repression under the Soviet regime, to the restoration of religious liberty after the fall of the Soviet Union, Estonian Witnesses have been active in their evangelism, which has proved to be a fruitful endeavour. The resulting religious liberty in Estonia ensures that Jehovah's Witnesses can preach freely without persecution.

However it is perceived by Witnesses that Estonians are apathetic toward or disinterested in their religion. This may be true to an extent as relates to waning interest in organised religion and growing interest in the new spirituality. However Estonians have begun to warm up to them, yet perceived misunderstandings and generalisations remain, as Estonians tend to be informed about Jehovah's Witnesses through the media or friends. The rejection of blood transfusions, active proselytism and abstention from celebrating holidays and birthdays tend to be seen as the defining features of the Witnesses. Yet simultaneously, there tends to be a failure to understand the motivations behind these practices. However in spite of possible misunderstandings, disinterest or conflict, the Witness out of duty and loyalty to God continues to preach the Good News of the Kingdom. This

demonstrates their obedience to God's commandments, their love for others and maintains their spiritual standing before God.

The rationalist philosophy of the Witnesses as regards their method of preaching has been discussed, in which they refine their presentation in a similar manner to a door-to-door salesman. However the experience of Jehovah's Witnesses has not been completely uniform, while there have indeed been common collective trends and experiences, the preaching experience of Jehovah's Witnesses does differ by individual. Therefore the preaching experience of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses within Estonia cannot be generalised, as multiple socio-cultural factors must be taken into account when examining the Witness' perception of their reception on the part of wider secular society.

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## Kokkuvõte

### Evangelistid ilmalikus keskkonnas: Jehoova Tunnistajad Tartus.

Antud töö eesmärgiks on analüüsida kuulutamistöö nähtust Jehoova Tunnistajate hulgas ja nende vastuvõtu tajumist Eesti ühiskonna poolt nende evangeliseerimise suhtes Tartu linnas. Sellele teemale lähenen vaatenurgast, mis võtab väärtuste, moraalide, piibelliku autoriteedi ja maailmavaadete rolli arvesse, mis mõjutavad Jehoova Tunnistajate interaktsiooni maailmaga ning nende hoiakut ilmaliku maailma suhtes. Vastuvõetuga seoses ma püüdsin püstitada mõned Eesti kultuuri eripärad, mis aitavad ja takistavad Jehoova Tunnistajate kuulutamistööd ja selle vastuvõttu. Seda ülesannet täites ma arvestasin Eesti ühiskonna trende ja tingimusi, mis mõjutavad Eesti religiooset kliimat. Nende hulgas on kasvav huvi uue vaimsuse vastu, organiseeritud usundite kahanev populaarsus, suurem usuvabadus, ilmalikkus ja usk kõrgemasse võimu pigem kui isikulisesse jumalasse.

Kuulutamistöö on märkimisväärne nähtus selle poolest, et Jehoova Tunnistajad usuvad, et ilmalik maailm on Saatana võimu all ja võimaluse korral ohtlik nii nende vaimulikule kui ka füüsilisele heolule. Ometi Kuningriigist Hea Sõnumi kuulutamise vajalikkuse tõttu peavad nad maailmaga vastastikku toimima ja kokku puutuma. Kuigi Jehoova Tunnistajate hoiak ja tajumine ilmaliku maailma suhtes nõuab, et nad eraldaksid ennast sellest, sunnitakse neid elama nii avalikus kui ka privaatses sfääris ning seal argipäevaselt hakkama saama ja kuulutama.

Nende identiteeti kujundatakse nii nende ajaloo kui ka kollektiivsete kogemuste läbi. Sellest ajast saadik kui Piibliuurijad saabusid Esimese Eesti Vabariigi ajal, on Jehoova Tunnistajad ja nende eelkäijad olnud väga aktiivsed evangelistid ja neil on olnud ainulaadne kogemus Eestis. Nad kogesid repressioone Nõukogude Liidu ajal, neid küüditati Siberisse ja nad kogesid suurt õnnistust kui Eesti sai taas iseseisvaks. Usuvabaduse taastamisega Jehoova Tunnistajatel oli taas võimalus kuulutada Head Sõnumit Kuningriigist vabalt ja ilma allasurumiseta ning kuna eestlastel oli suur huvi religiooni ja Piibli vastu, kuulasid nad nende sõnumit.

Empiirilised andmed, mille ma rakendasin selle töö käigus, koguti Tartus 2016. aastal 24. jaanuar-3. aprill, 20. novembril, 23. novembril ning 11. detsembril. Eesmärgi täitmiseks ma rakendasin osalusvaatluse, vaatluse ja pool-struktureeritud intervjuude meetodid. Osalusvaatlused viidi läbi Tartu Kuningriigi Saali koosolekutel ning piiblikursustest osa võttes ja vaatlus jälgis nende kuulutamistööd. Kaheksa intervjuud tehti kaheksa Jehoova Tunnistajaga, küsimuskava keskendus Jehoova

va Tunnistajate taustale, usuletulekule, sotsialiseerimisele Jehoova Tunnistajate kogukonnas, nende arvamusele Eesti ühiskonnast ja selle vastuvõttust Jehoova Tunnistajate suhtes ning nende kuulutamiskogemustele ja -eelistustele. Kuna antud töö keskendub Jehoova Tunnistajate tajumisele ja arvamustele Eesti ühiskonna vastuvõtu osas nende kuulutamistöö suhtes, siis välistasin need inimesed, kes pole Jehoova Tunnistajad, koondudes puhtalt Jehoova Tunnistajate seisukohtadele.

Nende kollektiivne ajalooline kogemus on omanud suurt mõju nende arusaama üle, arvestades käesolevaid hoiakuid eestlaste seas. See on olnud samaaegselt nii eelis kui ka takistus, sest kuigi Eesti Jehoova Tunnistajad saavad vabalt kuulutada oma sõnumit ilma tagakiusuta, on nende kuulajad näiliselt tihti väga apaatsed selle teema suhtes. Üldjuhul kogemus on olnud selline, et Eesti Jehoova Tunnistajad tajuvad ära, et tingimused on saanud paremaks, aga eestlastel kipub puuduma huvi Jehoova Tunnistajate sõnumi ja nende religiooni vastu ning tihti tunduvad olevat ükskõiksed selle suhtes. Seevastu ei saa üldistada Jehoova Tunnistajate kuulutamiskogemusi ega vastuvõtu tajumist, sest seda tingivad mitmed sotsiokultuurilised tegurid, nimelt Tunnistaja haabitus. Järelikult kuulutamiskogemused ja taju kuulajate vastuvõttust erineb Tunnistajate hulgas vähemalt individuaalsel tasemel, ometi kollektiivselt on olnud mõned ühised trendid ja kogemused, mis kerkivad esile.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: History of Jehovah's Witnesses

To better understand the culture of Jehovah's Witnesses, one must analyse and understand the context and history which gave birth to the religion. This section will be divided into three sub-chapters, which will explain both the early influence and context which brought about the religion of Jehovah's Witness and important events and changes which have shaped both the Organisation and the faith.

### I. The Millerites and the Adventist movement

What would come to be called the Adventist movement was started by a Baptist minister by the name of William Miller during the American religious revival dubbed the Second Great Awakening (Knight 2004:13-14). Miller had converted to Christianity from deism, which drew criticism from his contemporaries. In an effort both to build both his own faith and to be able to respond to their objections, William Miller began a serious systematic study of the Bible. During the course of his study, Miller became convinced that he had worked out the year of Christ's Second Advent, which was to occur in 1843 (Schwarz 1979:31-32). As a result, he became convinced that he needed to tell others about his discovery and began to speak about the coming Second Advent in churches across denominations (Knight 2004:15-16).

The Adventist movement made extensive use both of publications and media so as to alert others of the approaching Second Advent (Ibid:17-18). Their message was exported across the globe through Adventist literature deposited on international ships, which ensured that publications would be available in ports abroad. 1843 saw the gradual transformation of the Adventist movement into its own distinct denomination (Ibid:19-20). As the date approached, Miller narrowed down the date of the Second Advent to between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. To the disappointment of the Adventists, the date came and went and Jesus did not return. In August 1844 at an Adventist camp meeting, a minister by the name of Samuel Sheffield Snow announced that the Second Advent was indeed near (Ibid:21-22). He claimed that Christ would return on October 22, 1844 and this revived

the spirits of the Millerites (Ibid:23-24). However, to their great dismay, October 22nd came and went and Christ didn't return, this day was to be dubbed the Great Disappointment (Ibid:25).

Those who didn't completely walk away from the movement belonged to one of three camps of post-disappointment Adventists:

1. Those who acknowledged that the date had been wrong, yet still awaited the coming Second Advent.
2. Those who believed that the Second Advent of Christ had indeed occurred, albeit spiritually.
3. Those who held that the date was correct but that the predicted event was something else entirely. (Ibid:28-29)

The first group would influence Charles Taze Russell and the third would give rise to the Seventh-Day Adventists. Excitement continued among many Adventist groups who anxiously awaited the Second Advent and as such, were prone to set dates for the Second Advent. Witnesses although continuing in a similar tradition to the Adventists are not awaiting the Second Advent of Christ. As the Watchtower interprets the Greek word *Parousia* which traditionally is interpreted as referring to the second coming of Christ as presence, they are no longer awaiting the Second Advent as they believe that Christ is already present. Instead the battle of Armageddon has replaced the Second Advent as the event which Witnesses are expecting. As it is believed that we are living in the last days, Armageddon could happen at any moment, the end of the old system.

## **II. Charles Taze Russell and the Bible Students**

The founder of what would become Jehovah's Witnesses: Charles Taze Russell, was raised in a Presbyterian household which was influenced by the teaching of *double predestination* in which some are predestined by God to salvation and others to eternal torment, to which Russell was greatly opposed. Russell joined the Congregationalist church because he preferred it, but he eventually became disillusioned with mainstream Christianity. It so happened almost by accident that Russell stumbled into a Second Adventist church, an offshoot of post-disappointment Adventists who were still eager for the return of Christ and believed that the Second Advent was imminent. His experience with the Adventists renewed his interest in his faith (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:42-43). Charles Taze Russell was greatly influenced by the sermon he had

heard preached by Jonas Wendell when he had attended the Second Adventist service. Influenced by his contact with the Second Adventists, Russell began to focus his attention on the Second Advent of Christ, whom he believed would return invisibly (Knox 2011:159).

Russell formed a Bible study class in 1870, which would become the Bible Students: the predecessor of Jehovah's Witnesses (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:44-45). In 1879 Russell began to publish *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's presence*, which would later become the Watchtower magazine, which became a platform to promote his doctrine (Ibid:47-48). *Zion's Watchtower Tract Society* was formed on February 16 1881 with William Henry Conley as president and Russell as secretary and treasurer. The Society was registered as a corporation on December 15th 1884 with Russell as the second president (Ibid:210, 576).

In 1881 the Bible Students were first encouraged to share their teachings and faith with others. The Bible Students distanced themselves from mainstream Christianity, denouncing it as belonging to *Babylon the Great*, the false system of religion (Ibid:51). Russell predicted that the Gentile times would end in October of 1914 (Ibid:61-62) and that this would bring about the rapture of the Bible Students (Ibid:60). As October 1914 passed, it became clear that the Bible Students were not going to be raptured into heaven nor had the end come. Russell echoed the conclusions of the third group of post-disappointment Adventists 70 years earlier, that the predicted date had been correct, but that they had expected the wrong event. This meant that the harvesting work was to continue (Ibid: 62-63).

1914 however in actuality was one among a series of false end-time predictions (1874, 1914, 1918, 1925, 1975) on the part of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Holden 2002b:2). Like their Adventist relatives, the Bible Students would reinterpret false prophecies. For example: the failure of the earlier prophecy of 1878 to bring the rapture was reinterpreted to 1881. Because the Bible Students predicted that the end would occur in 1914, they believed that the rapture would occur before then (Zygmunt:1970:931-932). The failure of the 1914 prophecy was catastrophic, yet the organisational development of the Bible Students had softened the blow. However once again the Bible Students changed the date of their end-time prophecy to 1918. After the failure of 1918, it was predicted that 1925 would bring the end and this put an end to date setting for a time. The response by the Bible Students would begin with confusion and discouragement, (Ibid:933) then result in the reinterpretation of the prophecy, the assertion that something did indeed occur on the prophetic

date, the re-dating of the predictions that had not been fully fulfilled (Ibid:934) and the employment of world events and conflicts to refocus attention upon the imminent end. The need to define the events that occurred on the dates of the failed prophecies brought about new attitudes and doctrines which changed the identity of the Bible Students. Namely the rejection of Protestants on the basis that God rejected the nominal Christian churches in 1878 and the end of the Gentile times in 1914, which meant that secular governments and organisations were to be regarded as illegitimate (Ibid: 935-936).

### **III: From Bible Students to Jehovah's Witnesses**

On October 29th 1916, Russell passed away and the Bible Students found themselves in need of a new leader (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:63). His replacement was found in Judge Joseph F. Rutherford who was elected as the president of the Bible Students in 1917 (Ibid:65). As the presidency of Rutherford was a departure from the direction that Charles Taze Russell had led the Bible Students, opposition arose among those Bible Students who were loyal to Russell and refused to recognise the presidency of Rutherford (they are known as the International Bible Students Association). The most important features of the Watchtower Society had already been implemented by 1977 (Knox 2011:161-162). Under Rutherford, preaching efforts and resources were greatly increased (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:66).

Many of the distinguishing doctrines of the Witnesses were brought in under the presidency of Judge Rutherford, namely: the adoption of the name Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931 (Ibid:79), the re-naming of churches as Kingdom Halls in 1935 (coined by Rutherford) (Ibid:319), the cessation of celebrating Christmas (Ibid:199), the rejection of the use of the cross in 1936 (Ibid:200) and abstention from saluting flags in 1935 (Ibid:196-197). Likewise the doctrines of the 144,000 and other sheep were implemented in the 30s, creating a class system among Jehovah's Witnesses, distinguishing those who would live on earth and those who would rule with Christ in heaven (Zygmunt: 1970:937-938). July 26th 1931 was a remarkable date as this is the date that the Bible Students became Jehovah's Witnesses, being made official during Judge Rutherford's speech. The name Jehovah's Witnesses originating from Isaiah 43:10 in which Jehovah addresses His hearers as His witnesses (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:79).

Rutherford passed away on January 8th 1942 (Ibid:89) and was replaced by Nathan Knorr who was

elected the third president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society on January 13th 1942 (Ibid: 90-91). On September 24th 1942 Knorr proposed the founding of a missionary training school, this would become the Gilead School and was built in South Lansing, New York (Ibid:94-95). The ban on blood transfusions was first mentioned on July 1st 1945 in *The Watchtower*. It had become an important issue because of the war. Based upon Scripture which forbids the consumption of blood, the Witnesses concluded that blood transfusions did not honour God (Genesis 9:3-6, Acts 15:28, 29, Leviticus 17:11, 12, Hebrews 9:11-14, 22). In 1961 the doctrine was officially enforced and from this point onward, any Witness who received a blood transfusion was disfellowshipped (Ibid: 183-184). In 1950 an announcement was made for the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (New Testament). In addition, a new publication was announced in 1953: *Make Sure of All Things*, which was to serve as a go to book for field-service; to answer questions raised by homeowners during door to door preaching. A new ministry training program was also employed worldwide, which would better equip Witnesses for door-to-door preaching (99-100). *Make Sure of All Things* was eventually replaced by *Reasoning from the Scriptures*.

The *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* was released in 1951 and from 1953 onward the *Hebrew Scriptures* (Old Testament) were translated into English and were released periodically, eventually forming a five volume set (Ibid:609). In 1961 the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* comprised of both the *Hebrew Scriptures* and the *Christian Greek Scriptures* was released as a single volume (Ibid:611). The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* was revised in 1984 and most recently in 2013. As with all of their publications, the Bibles are standardised. The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* is comprised of the protestant canon. From January 1st, 1976 onward, in an effort to improve the conditions for both the teaching and preaching work of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, all congregations and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society were placed under the direction and control of six administrative committees of the Governing Body (Jehovah's Witnesses: Proclaimers of God's Kingdom 1993:108-109).

## Appendix 2: Interview plan

- Please describe your background. Are you from a Witness family? If so, how did they become Witnesses?
- When, how and why did you decide to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses? Did you explore or examine other religions?
- What convinced you that Jehovah's Witnesses have *the truth*?
- Which were the most difficult and the easiest aspects of adapting to life as one of Jehovah's Witnesses?
- What motivated you to become a pioneer/missionary?
- In your experience, what is the general opinion of Jehovah's Witnesses in Estonia? How are Witnesses perceived in Estonia? How have Witnesses been misunderstood?
- How has your experience varied within Estonia? How has preaching abroad compared to your experience in Estonia?
- In your experience, which elements/aspects of Estonian culture have made helped or hindered preaching?
- In your experience, how do people usually respond to your preaching? Who tends to be the most interested/receptive to the message?
- What have been some of your best and worst experiences while preaching?
- Which has been more effective in your experience: door-to-door ministry, preaching with a cart or one-on-one witnessing?
- Which aspects of field-service are your favourite and least favourite?
- Which method of preaching is most effective in your experience? Which is your favourite?
- In your opinion, which aspects of the Jehovah's Witness religion are the most appealing? What is most appealing to non-Witnesses?
- How have your interactions been with those of other religions? Have they been mostly positive or negative? Have they opposed your preaching?
- How would you define the secular world from a Witness perspective?

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