

**Nicholas**

Mavromagoulos

**Second Edition**

**IN SEARCH OF  
THE  
TRUTH**

**A BOOK YOU  
MUST READ  
BEFORE YOU  
ENROLL IN THE  
WATCHTOWER**

**The Royal and Stavropegial Monastery Machairas of Cyprus**

Imagine being born in the Watchtower organization and growing up nurtured by its precepts. You trusted and believed that this was God's organization on Earth. You would rather die than do without a single copy of the "Watchtower" magazine or be prevented from passing along to others what you thought was the "message of salvation."

Imagine being jailed for "righteousness" or for "neutrality" and having to undergo every kind of insult and ridicule through the course of your life for what you believed to be the only truth. The organization you trusted told you to follow the truth at all costs no matter what, and to eagerly deny even your parents or your wife for the truth.

At some point, however, you discover something dreadful! What you believed as truth suddenly proves to be a delusion! You come to the realization that there is a mistake somewhere.

But you have confidence in the organization, and say, "I will point this problem out to the brothers, and they will correct it because they are right before God and they love the truth." So you go and present your "findings" to the "presbyters." But to your great surprise you discover that they are not interested in the truth! Instead of rushing to inform the organization's leadership of your findings, they tell you, "It is not your job to search. This is the job of the 'Governing Body.' Your job is to believe, not to search!"

You are deeply distressed because suddenly you discover that the information you have uncovered is

already known and purposely hidden by your organization. By masking this knowledge, the organization continues to preach a lie in the name of God. Moreover, it disfellowships those who discover this lie. There comes a time when you must make your own decision. The time comes when you must do exactly what you had been preaching others to do for years: to abandon the lie and the hypocrisy.

How would you feel, my friend, if this happened to you? Have you ever lost all your friends and family in a single moment? Have you ever found yourself without work because you left an organization? Have you ever experienced the agony of such a situation? Have you ever experienced the trauma of having to make your way through a religious abyss?

You will read about such a TRUE story in this book. This is a guide for all those who have ever found or who may find themselves in such a **life tempest (life crisis?)**

# IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH

Nicholas Mavromagoulos

ANAZITONTAS TIN ALITHEA

Typesetting

The Holy Royal and Stavropegial Monastery Machairas, Cyprus

Theological Overview

Holy Monastery of Paramythia, Rhodes

Translation

Constantine Zalalas

Editing

Christina Bourgeois

Dedicated to my natural and spiritual parents, who taught me  
to love the Way of Life.

## CONTENTS

Foreword

Introduction

**Chapter 1** The story of Nikos  
*Carriers of a new religion*

**Chapter 2** The story of Nikos  
*Growing up with the organization*

**Chapter 3** The story of George  
*Flirting with the spider*

**Chapter 4** The story of George  
*Touching the web*

**Chapter 5** The story of Nikos  
*Preaching in class*

**Chapter 6** The story of George  
*In the nest of the spider*

**Chapter 7** The story of George  
*Increasing the contact*

## CONTENTS

**Chapter 8** The story of George  
*The first problems*

**Chapter 9** The story of Nikos  
*Luring others to the web*

**Chapter 10** The story of George  
*Tied on the web*

**Chapter 11** The story of Nikos  
*Baptism of dedication*

**Chapter 12** The story of Nikos  
*Foretaste of injustice*

**Chapter 13** The story of Nikos  
*Promise of marriage*

**Chapter 14** The story of Nikos  
*Preparation for jail*

**Chapter 15** The story of Nikos  
*Court marshalled*

**Chapter 16** The story of Nikos  
*In the military prison of Avlonas*

## CONTENTS

**Chapter 17** The story of Nikos  
*At Cassandra*

**Chapter 18** The story of Nikos  
*My life after jail*

**Chapter 19** The story of Nikos  
*The work of the street*

**Chapter 20** The story of Nikos  
*The first doubts*

**Chapter 21** The story of George  
*Persecution from the organization*

**Chapter 22** The story of Nikos  
*The disfellowship of a friend*

**Chapter 23** The story of Nikos  
*The turning point*

**Chapter 24** The story of Nikos  
*The beginning of the end*

## CONTENTS

**Chapter 25** The story of Nikos  
*Increasing the distance*

**Chapter 26** The story of Nikos  
*Crisis of conscience*

**Chapter 27** The story of Nikos

*The letter*

**Chapter 28** The story of Nikos

*Visiting a “Foreign” church*

**Chapter 29** The story of Nikos

*Laying the foundations of a new life*

**Chapter 30** The story of Nikos

*Terrorism*

**Chapter 31** The story of Nikos

*Taking advantage of the last opportunity*

**Chapter 32** The story of Nikos

*Disfellowship*

**Chapter 33** The story of George

*Progressing towards the truth*

CONTENTS

**Chapter 34** The story of Nikos

*Creating a new religion*

**Chapter 35** The story of George

*Searching for the church*

**Chapter 36** The story of George

*Leading others to Orthodoxy*

**Chapter 37** The story of Nikos

*Abandoning yet another congregation*

**Chapter 38** The story of Nikos

*Becoming used to the new state*

**Chapter 39** The story of George

*In the land of passion-fruit eaters*

**Chapter 40** The story of Nikos

*Problems and dangers*

## **APPENDIX 1**

The meaning of the name “Yahweh”

## **APPENDIX 2**

Are the holy icons idols?

### **APPENDIX 3**

Is veneration the same as worship?

### **CONTENTS**

### **APPENDIX 4**

Is it Christian to accept the Holy Scripture ONLY?

### **APPENDIX 5**

To whom should Christians not offer a greeting?

### **APPENDIX 6**

The successors to the apostles

### **APPENDIX 7**

The authority of the church

### **APPENDIX 8**

Was the church ever in apostasy?

### **APPENDIX 9**

The “Great Crowd”: In heaven or on Earth?

### **APPENDIX 10**

The sheepfold

## APPENDIX 11

### The desolation of 587 B.C.

#### FOREWORD

What was the great theological error of the Roman governor of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, when he asked Jesus Christ during his cross-examination, “What is the Truth?”

The determination of all the theologians of the 2,000 year history of Christianity unanimously points to the word “what” as the error, and in correcting it, they prove that the Truth is not a specific object or an abstract idea as the question suggests. The Truth is Jesus Christ **H**imself, the Son of the Living God. Therefore, essentially the question should have been posed as “Who is the Truth?” After all, this is testified **to** with absolute clarity from Jesus Christ **H**imself during a conversation with the Apostle Thomas. He tells him, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” (John 14:6)

Many times, however, our loving God allows some people’s search for Truth to be a painstaking and laborious struggle, lasting many years, through the plethora of contemporary heresies and all sorts of confessions created by the human intellect. A very moving case of such a man is the author of this book, Nicholas Mavromagoulos, who was born **into** and, for the first 24 years of his life, raised inside the perimeters of the totalitarian religious falsehood known as “Jehovah’s **W**itnesses.” This is the unfortunate case of a man who did not inherit his faith in Christ within the bosom of the Orthodox Church.

Nevertheless, if he was wronged by mankind in this regard, it was never the case with God. Because if all the gifts of God are given to all His creatures without exception and irreversibility, then this holds true for man, His perfect creation, who receives this inalienable gift, this unquenchable “thirst,” this unconquerable drive which He has planted in him, to search for the only true God and to be in ontological communion with Him.

Nicholas Mavromagoulos not only kept this gift, he **also** cultivated it. The Lord, being most righteous, led Nicholas to the calm port of His Church after the long-term tempestuous adventure within the embrace of this deluded totalitarian organization which calls itself “Jehovah’s **W**itnesses.” Nicholas reveals towards the end of his story, *Nothing was lost all these years. These are all useful experiences in the service of the true gospel for the deliverance of people, who were trapped in a cage and are searching for an exit.* (ch. 40, p. 271)

The Holy Monastery of Machaira, wishing to help all our Christian and non-Christian brothers and sisters who may be facing the danger of getting caught in the nets of the “Watchtower Society,” presents **the circulation of** this shocking and stirring biography for the proper orientation of all those who are seeking the Truth. This book is especially for those who may be searching within wide avenues which lead the soul to fossilization **by** human passions instead of the sanctification of the entire man, something offered only by the Orthodox Church through the lively participation in its Holy **M**ysteries.

Abbot of the Holy Royal Stravropolegial Monastery of Machaira

Archimandrite Arsenios along with my brotherhood in Christ

29<sup>th</sup> day of February 2004

Sunday of Orthodoxy

## Introduction

Dear reader,

What you are about to read in this book happens to be the fruit, the pain, and the love of its author for the millions of victims of the organization called the “**Biblical and Magazine Society Watchtower.**” The author himself, having been its victim for 25 years and wasting an important part of his life in it, had the opportunity to live just about all of the emotions, the expectations, the fears, and

the adventures experienced by everyone who searches for the truth in this organization and is greatly disappointed at some point.

Simultaneously, the author had the opportunity to follow closely the journey of other people who made the same or different choices with him within this organization and outside of it as well.

This book is a compound biography, and all references are real facts of actual people, primarily the real life experiences of the author. The names have been changed for obvious reasons, along with the order of some events as well as their chronological placement in order to be in agreement with the altered ages of the characters.

All episodes have been combined into two parallel stories in order to enable the reader to experience an “immersion” into the emotions and the psychology of the members of the organization. Thus, on the one hand, this book follows and describes the progressive enslavement of one man to the organization of the “Watchtower” and his life inside of it. On the other hand, it describes the life, habits, and idiosyncrasies of someone else who was born and grew up in this organization.

Every chapter of this book consists of a narrative of one of these two men. The chapters in which the first man speaks have the subtitle “George’s story,” and the chapters in which the second man speaks have the subtitle “Nikos’ story.” The book sees things from the perspective of these two people. The book’s main goal, however, is to analyze the difficult journey of their exodus from the “Watchtower” and their relentless search for the Truth.

I pray to God to give to every reader that which he or she may need. To give understanding to the “enemy” of the “witnesses.” To give the proper methodologies and techniques for all those who wish to reach them. To give sobriety, understanding, and noetic clarity to the “candidate victim” of the “Watchtower.” To give a motive for research to the fossilized “witness” who likes to believe that he found the “ark of salvation” inside the organization. **And finally**, to give **perseverance**, courage, hope, and direction to anyone who left the organization and who may still be in a difficult phase of restructuring his faith and his life. I pray to God to give strength to every man lost in the labyrinth of Protestant denominations and who is searching for that exit towards the light, searching for the only way towards God, through **His Son** Jesus Christ.

The author,  
Nicholas Mavromagoulos

## Chapter 1

### Carriers of a new religion

#### Nikos’ story

My story begins during the first half of the 20th century. During that time, my grandfather was a young man, residing in one of the villages of the island of Rhodes, the largest of the cluster of **the** twelve islands called **the** Dodecanese. He was a man especially drawn to reading, but with limited

Christian education and discipline he became one of the first victims of our country of the organization which called itself at the time “Students of the Scripture.” With the aid of the organization’s magazines, he spread this new faith to his island. He married my grandmother, a woman of likewise limited education, and **with her** he raised three children **according to** the principles of the organization.

My father was a rare man. Although the people of this organization, known today as “Jehovah’s Witnesses” are self-declared as **being** “pure” of sins, I know very well that this was not true back then nor is it true now. **They** simply paint a very bright picture for those outside, while they themselves are quite aware of their shortcomings and passions, much like every sinful son of Adam. My father, however, was a man who displayed an exemplary goodness and stood apart from many of those inside the Society, although he was not free from certain weaknesses.

He was raised to regard the Orthodox Church as “Babylon, the prostitute” and to believe that Orthodox Christians were deluded. Deep down, however, he must have been more reasonable, even from his childhood, compared to other heretics, as I will illustrate in the following accounts.

As a married man, while he shaved he often chanted Orthodox troparia.<sup>[1]</sup> On one occasion, my mother overheard him and asked in disbelief where he learned these hymns, since he had never stepped foot in an Orthodox Church. He confided in her that as a little boy, he had this curiosity about the services of the Orthodox Church, and he used to sneak behind the church’s windows and follow the Divine Liturgy until he memorized these hymns, all of this done behind his father’s back of course. My mother told him not to chant because it is a sin. His response was, “Why a sin? These hymns are correct, and they agree totally with the Holy Scripture!” He continued to chant!

After his death, I also discovered that while he had several books about other religions, the majority were about the “Students of the Scriptures,” the name of the mother denomination of the “Witnesses.” After the break up, the mother denomination was called “Evil Servant,” and all of its literature was banned from the circle of the “Witnesses.”

When my father was drafted into the Greek army, he refused to carry a weapon, which led to his incarceration. He was exiled to the remote island of Makronisos, and he was tortured by people who considered themselves “good Christians” and “patriots.” This situation not only failed to convince him that he was in the wrong religion, it led him to conclude that he was persecuted for holding on to the true faith.

I believe that if my father had been approached by even one true Christian in the course of his life, he may have taken a different path. When he was serving as a soldier in Athens, he met my mother. At that time the “Witnesses” did not refuse to become soldiers, but they refused to carry arms. Later on, while the government allowed them to serve weaponless, they began refusing not only the uniform, but the very identity of a soldier. In the end, they finally managed to somehow exchange their active duty for some civil service without further army responsibility.

My mother was born and baptized Orthodox. She was born a few days after the death of her father. My grandmother was a Greek from Asia Minor, and she came to Greece as an illiterate refugee. She gave birth to many children, but only three lived. She and her two boys survived the very difficult German occupation despite the privations. My grandmother was a rare human being. During the difficult years of the war, she helped many people, not from her excess but by sharing whatever little she had, despite being a widow with children.

Her firstborn son was also the first victim of the society of “Witnesses,” who unfortunately lacked the necessary ecclesiastical experience and knowledge to see their trap. My grandmother and my mother—a **mere teenager**—**followed**, not realizing or being knowledgeable of the existence of

heresies. Thus, my mother was heavily influenced by the organization from a young age. After the death of her oldest brother, she continued along with my grandmother to spread the ideas of the organization, fearlessly facing the persecutions and arrests. After my parents married, my mother became very ill, and I wasn't born until ten years later.

PICTURE  
OF  
RUSSEL

The first president and founder of the "Watchtower Society," K.T. Russel. Russel created a new branch in the Adventist religions which he named the "Students of the Scriptures." The "Jehovah's Witnesses" broke off from them after his death.

Chapter 2  
Growing up with the Organization

Nikos' story

One of my first words when I started to talk was "Jehovah." My parents exerted much effort to teach me as much as they could, to make me a "model child" according to the measures of the organization. In fact, they succeeded, at least as far as theoretical knowledge is concerned, but they failed miserably as far as conduct goes. Naturally, they had no clue about this last detail since I always tried to show my best colors to all those outside, always striving to put my best foot forward, just like

some other fellows of my faith whom I knew “well.”

In reality, I wholeheartedly believed in my faith, and I always had in mind to become a “very good child” and a “good Christian.” But despite my very young age, I had already developed many passions and all my attempts to live up to the outward picture I had painted were quite fruitless. Despite these personal failures, however, in the area of academics I was making great strides. Even at preschool age, I knew to analyze in great detail the book “Paradise,” a very basic supplement of the organization with many pictures. I knew almost all the stories of the Holy Scripture better than the average Orthodox and even some of the people of my own faith.

My daily concern was how I was going to guide others to my faith, believing that if they did not become “witnesses,” God would annihilate them during Armageddon since (according to my faith) God would lead to destruction everyone who failed to become a “witness.” On one occasion, a short time before 1975 (**a year which** the organization had prophesied **the coming of** the end of the world), having a burdened **conscience**, I had nightmares about the commencement of Armageddon, and I dreamed I was dying in the midst of flames and quakes.

I considered all of the doctrines which I was taught to be indisputable realities, especially since my parents had supplied me with dozens of scripture verses, which I had committed to memory in order to support these dogmas and to tear down any rebuttals of the opposition. Often my mother would take me to the “work of faith,” which were expeditions she carried out for the propagation of her faith. At the same time, she always took me to all the “gatherings,” which were a sort of catechism—a poor substitute of Christian churching. She also used to take me to the “assemblies,” congregations of a large number of followers.

While I was still an infant, Greece was governed by a dictatorship, so the assemblies were held in the forests in secret where we pretended to go on a field trip by bus. At different times, meetings were limited to two or three people because gatherings were prohibited. All these were instrumental in teaching me to take risks or to ignore the government, thus choosing to do what I considered to be the will of God. A basic sector of my proselytizing activities was aimed at my age group. I remember a mother who would not permit her son to be in my company so that I would not influence him. Not only the very young, but even adults were in danger from my activities. My mother used this ability of mine to let me speak instead of her, fully surprising those in our audience and drawing their attention.

When I entered school, my teachers quickly realized that in religion class<sup>[2]</sup> I knew more than they did, and I could easily put them in a difficult situation if they dared to disagree with my faith. On one occasion, I happened to converse with some unfortunate adult women catechists, and the poor things did not know how to justify their faith in front of a mere child. One of them resorted to disgraceful and anti-Christian threats, telling me that my father, who had just died, is boiling in the caldrons of hell, and how I would also end up there. Of course I responded that God is not a sadist and does not torture people! After this she left.

Growing up, I had conversations with more and more people, but I did not find anyone who could defend his faith satisfactorily. Thus, my confidence in my faith was soaring along with my arrogance! I used to challenge people saying, “Bring on anyone you want! Your best theologian! I will show him the truth.” I also made sure to add, “If he can show me based on the Holy Scripture that I am in the wrong, I will change my faith, because I am very much interested in the truth.” I was serious about this, as the future would prove.

When I entered junior high school, the theologian of my religion class treated the topic of faith with much fanaticism, and he faced me with much obstinacy and ignorance. His manner of conduct, however, did not go unnoticed by my classmates. Every time we would disagree and bring forth arguments in class, at recess my classmates would come to my aid saying, “Bravo, you told him well!”

Although I was not convincing him, I was victorious in the eyes of the class. Thus, my classmates, who were all impressed by my actions, were being well prepared to start up conversation with any “Witness” who might happen to knock at their door. I also had a field day with the students who did not believe in God. When they listened to my arguments with the theologian, they would ask me questions about my religion, saying that all religions are fraudulent. Then I would prove to them logically the existence of one creator, and I proceeded to develop the case of my faith as the only one capable of offering true answers.

I remember at some point in high school having a very long discussion with two friends about the existence of God and questioning whether the content of the Holy Scripture is truthful. **At** the time they could not respond to my arguments, plus, they did not wish to be convinced, so the discussion was forgotten. A number of months went by, and one day they came to tell me that they believed, that they had found the “Truth,” and that they were eager to also help me to come to know God!

As it turned out, they had joined a Pentecostal group, convinced from the “miracles” they witnessed there. I tried to persuade them that the miracles were the work of demonic powers and not of the Holy Spirit. Of course I had no doubt about this since I was taught from a young age that during the **J**udgment, some will say that they did many miracles in the name of the Lord, and the Lord will answer them, “I never knew you, go away from me you evil doers.” (Matthew 7:22-23)

Since I myself did not have some miracle to display from God, I was not convinced by any miracle. This did not present any problem to me, especially since the organization had provided me with another verse against miracles: “whether there be prophecies they shall be non-functional, whether there be tongues, they shall cease.” (**I Cor.13:8**) Above all, however, what convinced me against them was that those who performed these miracles believed in doctrines I was taught to consider demonic, such as the dogma of the Trinity and the immortality of the soul. Our discussions were not centered around the miracles but around doctrine.

Although these boys were coming up with very good arguments, their limited experience with the Holy Scripture and their having only studied for a few months made them weak opponents in a religious debate. I had the ability to throw difficult questions at them, causing them to fight against each other about some topics. At the same time, I could only see what I wanted to see. Consequently, I was “admiring” the unity and solid foundation prevalent to us the “Witnesses” compared to these totally confused “heretics.”

Notwithstanding all of this, I was left with some troublesome questions after hearing about their faith. Would God kill all these faithful children in “Armageddon”? While pondering this, I found some relief remembering the answer of the organization: “If they are worthy of salvation, God will provide for them to come to the truth before Armageddon.” Unfortunately, a year later these boys became atheists again, in spite of all the miracles they saw there, saying that the miracles were caused by “unknown spiritual beings” or “human powers of the soul.” From that point on, they began living as carelessly as they possibly could, enjoying the “day” or the “now” because as they claimed, “Who can really know the truth?” Fifteen years later I met one of them who became a faithful child of the Orthodox faith. Back then, however, their backsliding reinforced my belief in the righteousness of my faith.

At that time, I also met George, a person who would play an important role in my life. But let’s allow him to relate to us the way we met.

PICTURE HERE

Shortly before 1975, when the organization had prophesied the end of the world, I had nightmares about the commencement of Armageddon, and I dreamed I was dying in the midst of flames and quakes.

### Chapter 3

#### Flirting with the Spider

#### George's Story

It was a freezing Sunday morning. Snuggled in my bed, I was enjoying the last few minutes of warmth before facing the elements and my frozen room. I loved to take it easy on Sunday mornings, especially during the winter when all of my "parea"[\[3\]](#) had not made it to the neighborhood hangout yet.

My father worked on Sundays, and on this particular Sunday, my mother had gone to some memorial service even though she very seldom attended church. But there are some religious "duties" that need to be carried out. I don't remember her attending church any other days beyond Holy Week and a few memorial services of very close relatives, like on this particular Sunday morning. Fortunately, I was still too young to have to attend to such duties. Besides, who has the patience to endure all these endless, nonsensical chants, I thought!

With my eyes still closed, I orchestrated the activities of the day. Sunday was the only day I could dedicate to myself. The rest of the week I worked at a jewelry design shop, and in the evenings I attended a trade high school. This was my first month in this area, and I was just beginning to get accustomed to this full daily schedule. Sundays I wanted for myself.

The ring of the door bell suddenly interrupted my thoughts. I opened the door shivering. Two well dressed men in suits and ties were standing in front of me sporting hearty smiles. One of them was wearing a long rain coat, a hat, and a characteristic “Hitler” mustache. They were both holding briefcases with the zippers open, to make some books visible inside.

They greeted me very politely, and then the man with the mustache started the conversation.

“My name is Constantine, and I am visiting the neighborhood with my friend here to bring good news,” he claimed.

“Like what?” I asked.

“Would you agree that the state of the world is getting worse and worse, and we hear on the news...”

I began to lose my temper. I was still shivering with the door open, and they still had not said what they wanted.

“What exactly is it that you want?” I interrupted.

“We are advertising these two magazines, “Watchtower” and “Awake,” and today they have the very interesting topic of...” he began to explain.

I interrupted saying, “I’m not interested, thank you.”

He tried to talk me into it. “You know we also have an interesting book.”

“Thank you, but I’m not interested!”

They then went on to ask if they could come inside to discuss it, and I asked them who they were.

They responded, “We are Christian witnesses of Jehovah.”

Now I felt my blood boiling. How rude, I thought to myself. It is not enough that they step on the icons and the cross, that they refuse to serve our country as soldiers, and that they allow their children to die without blood transfusions, but now they are also coming to our homes!

“Get out of here, now! Before I call the police,” I said.

“But we are law abiding citizens,” they responded.

“That’s enough! I don’t want to hear anything from you,” I interrupted.

“But why? We are here motivated by love,” they claimed.

They had now become unbearable, and I slammed the door in their faces. I heard them go down the stairs, while I was getting dressed with mixed emotions. On the one hand, I felt bad for treating them in such a way because they were so polite, but on the other hand, I needed to do my duty as a Greek Orthodox. Thus, I felt proud for chasing them out since this is what they deserved, according to some adults who claimed that they knew them well.

The following evening I shared my Sunday morning “accomplishments” with the fellow who sat next to me in school. He was a boy a few years younger than I, whom I befriended a few days prior. Nikos and I were becoming good friends, and he seemed to be a very nice person. He did not like to curse or smoke as the other boys in school did, and he seemed to be quite satisfied with his life. He was one of the top students in school, and he seemed to “have his hands” in many different things. He listened to my experience with the “Witnesses,” smiling now and then.

As the months passed by, that Sunday morning incident was forgotten. I was quite busy with my daily routine, so I waited for the holidays to catch up with my friends who had just about written me off.

While they were out flirting at the plazas and cafés, I was working or listening to some boring

teachers. Fortunately, I had met Nikos, and I had some good company during recesses.

One evening during religion class, after the daily oral testing of the students, the teacher began a lesson on the topic of “The Jehovah’s Witnesses.” I listened very carefully much like my closest classmate who was also taking notes. I remember, among other things, the teacher saying that “The Chiliasts (Jehovah’s Witnesses) do not accept the Panagia<sup>[4]</sup>, the saints, or the cross. They defame the flag, calling it a “rag.” They claim that the faithful before Christ will resurrect and will be senators with Abraham who will be president, Jonah who will be secretary of navigation, Gideon who will be the secretary of defense, etc. They have designated many dates for the end of the world, including 1924, 1925, and others, and they are constantly ridiculed. They go to homes searching to find and lead astray the illiterate and old women.”

When he finished his delivery of the lesson, my friend Nikos raised his hand, asking for permission to speak. The teacher gave his consent.

“Mr. Teacher,” he said, “I’m sorry, but I feel the duty to point out the untruths written in our class textbook about the Jehovah’s Witnesses. It is not true that they deny the Panagia and the saints, nor do they defame the flag. About them believing all these things about the senators and presidents for the faithful before Christ is a ridiculous lie, and it is also a lie that they lead astray the illiterate and the women. I’m saying this because I’m neither illiterate nor a woman, and yet I am a Jehovah’s Witness.”

At the sound of these last words, the class fell into a deep silence. They all waited for the teacher to respond, but he also seemed to be at a loss for words. I was shocked! My eyes popped out, and I kept staring at Nikos with my mouth wide open. How is this possible, I wondered, my best friend is a Chiliast? How did it escape me all this time? I kept asking myself these questions, almost expecting him to have some kind of an identity display on his forehead or something! The school bell rang at the proper time and put an end to the teacher’s dilemma.

“Listen!” he said. “I’m supposed to tell you what is written in this book. We can discuss it if you wish, we can talk about it some other time.”

With these words, the teacher exited the room, while I, as though hypnotized, followed my friend outside. In the hall some other students were calling out to Nikos.

“Bravo! Great one! You told him off!” they cheered.

Nikos seemed very disappointed about the bell cutting him off. He seemed like he wanted to say much more.

“Another time,” he said, looking at me and smiling, probably from the dumb expression that was still stuck on my face.

“Are you really a Jehovah?” I asked.

“Witness of Jehovah,” he corrected me. “Jehovah is the name of God. It is not permitted for us mere humans to be called Jehovah. There is only one Jehovah, God. We only bring witness to his name.”

We were already at the front yard, and I found myself shocked and confused. My various biases were pushing me to get away from him. But since he was my friend, it would be rude to treat him this way! Not to mention that my curiosity was growing by the minute! All this time we had been together, we enjoyed each other’s company, and he was always friendly! I had told him my problems, and he had told me his. He was a normal human being, like all of us. He had no horns, nor did he show any signs of evil, as I had been forewarned about the people of his religion. On the contrary, he did not curse, did not “chase” after girls, did not smoke, and treated people around him with respect. Could all of these traits be superficial?

“What relationship could you possibly have with God?” I asked him, “since you and your people hold to the heresy of Arius, that Christ is a creation. **St. Athanasios** proved this to be a heresy!”

I came up with this, mobilizing all of the information I had learned in school. I wanted to “corner” him to prove that he was not right. I did not appreciate someone being inconsiderate of the religion I grew up with. Instead of stumbling on my question, he answered me with his own question.

“What is the meaning of Creation?”

I kept staring at him.

“I don’t know,” I answered.

“Is Jesus Christ not the Son of God?” he asked me again.

“Of course!” I said.

“If, in fact, he is the Son of God, at sometime He ‘begot’ him. In other words, ‘created’ him. Is this not so?” he concluded.

“It makes sense!” I replied, making my first dogmatic error.[\[5\]](#)

“Well then, this is exactly what we ‘Witnesses’ are saying, and that’s what Arius was saying. Does it seem unreasonable?” he asked.

“No! But then, what are we and **St. Athanasios** saying?” I asked.

“Although you should know, I will tell you. You are claiming Christ to be without beginning—*anarchos*—but isn’t it illogical to be beginningless since He has a Father? If he always existed, then how was he born?[\[6\]](#)

I was speechless.

He went on to say, “As you see, Arius was not the heretic, but **St. Athanasios**, and I’m pleased that you are able to see how illogical the dogma of **the** Trinity is.”

I had never attended catechetical school, nor did my parents take any special care to teach me the Orthodox Faith. I very seldom attended church, and when I did, it was not for the sake of being church-ed but for the fireworks of Pascha.[\[7\]](#)

Neither did my godfather ever teach me anything. He considered his only obligation to provide me with a gift during my name day once a year and a “lampada” during Pascha[\[8\]](#). Thus, I grew up without anyone explaining to me the difference between the word “Son” and the word “Creation;” without anyone explaining to me how the Father and the Son can exist pre-eternally, since they are found outside of the realms of time. I grew up without someone explaining to me that the sun, which though it gives birth to light, does not exist before the light, but sun and sunlight exist simultaneously and that sunlight is also “sun” and “begotten” of the sun. No one told me that the Son is the reflection of the “Light of the Father” outside of time. (Hebrews 1:3)

I had no idea that the Father was the origin, the source of the Son as to the cause. I thought He was His beginning as to time, being clueless about the Father creating time through the Son. (John 1:3; Hebrews 1:3)[\[9\]](#)

I now found myself weaponless in front of a man who was speaking to me about matters which he did not know as well as he thought he did. I was acknowledging before him not only ignorance of my **Savior**, but even denial **of** His own revelation. And while I was good at searching out and finding exclusive social spots with beautiful girls, I never had the same appetite for the search of my God! I never even questioned myself about Him and about my faith. To me it was a given that the faith I was

born into was the only true faith, just as I would have believed had I been born into some other religion.

And now this “given” was crumbling! I had a man in front of me who was more than ready to demolish and knock down whatever I held with certainty up to now. I was already greatly disturbed for having agreed to something opposed by my faith. What if Nikos was right? No! I didn’t even want to think about it! The rest of the evening in between classes we dedicated all of our free time to a theological discussion. What impressed me was that he had a **well-tailored** answer for each and every one of my questions. Many times he would even beat me to the punch, answering my question before I had a chance to pose it. He must have had these same discussions with many others before me. He knew in advance what my answer was going to be, and in reality he steered the discussion towards the direction he wanted.

Finally, when we finished school that evening, and we said our “good nights,” I left in deep thought, seriously perplexed. I always believed that discussions about God were pointless and boring imaginings of backward old men. Now, however, I had discovered for the first time that behind all this there was a secret fascinating charm, some thought provoking magnificence. In full amazement I was discovering that behind the word “religion” there was a world of enchantment, a complex and fascinating science that I wanted to get to know much better. As my train glided home through the dark, I sat engulfed in my thoughts, hardly noticing I was already at my stop.

At home, I greeted my parents, and we sat at the table to eat. I did not mention anything to them about my friend, about whom I had told them many good things up to now. I felt that they would ask me to part company with him if they found out that he was a “**Witness.**” That night, even though I was exhausted, it took me a long time to fall asleep. I could not stop thinking about the discussion I had at school. I learned so much!

## Chapter 4

### Touching the Web

#### George's story

From that day on, my friendship with Nikos changed. At every opportunity we discussed God and His purpose for humanity. Nikos was eager to answer each one of my questions, and I received satisfactory answers every time. With admiration, but not without some doubt, I listened to him happily talk about his expectations of the “eternal life.” I was totally convinced that his love for God was genuine, not hypocritical. His joy when speaking about God was real.

I was truly elated to see a young man “live” his faith and place it first in his life. This enthusiasm was contagious, and I was beginning to “catch it” **day by day**. What made a deep impression on me was that Nikos never resorted to his opinion. Whatever he thought was the opinion of all the “Witnesses,” he proved by referring to the Holy Scripture. I often wondered how he was able to find whatever he wanted so easily in the Scriptures. On my end, after our initial discussions, I searched for an old copy of the Holy Scriptures,[\[10\]](#) which I remember seeing somewhere in my house. After much effort, I discovered a small New Testament in the attic under a massive, dusty pile of books. A strong cough accompanied my discovery, as a cloud of dust overtook the room from the falling stacks of old books. I was overjoyed at this discovery because now I could confirm and check the validity of what I had heard. I would now see for myself if the Holy Scripture of the Orthodox is the same as the Scripture used by the “Witnesses” since many were claiming that the “Witnesses” have their own Holy Scripture, which is different from ours. That same evening I took my small New Testament with me as I went to meet Nikos.

“Now I will show you your delusion!” I said half-seriously, half-jokingly. “Let’s see how, in which verses you changed the Holy Scripture.” Nikos smiled and proceeded to help me compare sections of the New Testament I had brought along with the corresponding sections of his Holy Scripture. Although there was a slight difference in the language format, the overall meaning did not change.

“Your New Testament is the original text.” He went on to explain, “My version, however, is a

translation of the text in a more accessible language. Since the Greek language has changed over the last 2000 years, we use something more simple. The priests, however, prefer to use the difficult ancient Greek language to keep the world in the dark.”

After seeing the older form of the language in my own New Testament, I accepted his words without any reservation. I did not know to look in the front of his book to see the author of his translation, Archimadrite Neophytos Vamvas.<sup>[11]</sup> Afterwards, he explained that I only had one of the two sections of the Holy Scripture, the New Testament. He showed me his Bible, and referred to its “sixty-six” books, which he showed me in the contents of his translation. He told me that Christians must ONLY accept the Holy Scripture with its sixty-six books and must totally rely on this ONLY. I accepted these last words as axiomatic, assuming that this must be the common belief of all Christian confessions as advocated by Nikos. Unfortunately, I just made my second and biggest mistake to date. I failed to search and find out how many books my religion accepted as God inspired Scripture and the reasoning behind it. I never asked for proof of the axiom SOLA SCRIPTURA and why “we must ONLY rely on it as the ONLY **God-inspired** resource.”

From that day on I did not accept anything if I first did not see it written in the Holy Scripture. I asked Nikos to find a Holy Scripture for me like the one he was using, which he happily found very quickly. I was overjoyed since now I had in my possession the “entire” Holy Scripture with its sixty-six books.

I believed that I had the “entire word of God” in my hands. The next few days, I began reading the book of Genesis. Although this ancient script was rather tiring, I read with much joy up until I reached some difficult passages in Exodus. There, feeling tired from the plethora of names and technical descriptions, I made the mistake of discontinuing its “book-by-book” reading. In the years to follow, I read it selectively, like my friend.

One day my mother entered my room and asked me, “What kind of book are you always so busy reading?”

“The Holy Scripture!” I replied. “It was given to me by a classmate who is a “Jehovah’s Witness.”

“What! Throw it away immediately! It is not the same as ours!” she yelled.

Not missing a beat, I took the small New Testament she was also familiar with, and I showed her that the Holy Scripture is the same.

“Well, at least be careful not to fall in their trap because they are ‘thrice-cursed,’ and they are bribed to change their religion!” she cried.

“Don’t worry! Rest assured that I will not fall away! I know what I’m doing! But you should know that they don’t get paid, because otherwise Nikos would not have to work to support himself, nor would he have to attend night school. These are ill-imagined lies!” I told my mother.

From that day on, whenever she saw me reading the Holy Scripture, she would whisper things under her breath. I considered this an added sign that Nikos was justified because he made sure to forewarn me. He said that if someone is advancing in the Christian faith, his relatives and friends will oppose him, and they will not want him to study the Scripture. This is part of the persecution the devil will enact against him. My mother must have been greatly concerned because one day she entered the house holding a newspaper of some para-ecclesiastical organization.

“Here is proof!” she said. “Take it and read it to see for yourself that the Chiliasts get paid off!” I could not believe my eyes. I read a narrative about a woman who claimed that the “Witnesses” offered her a significant sum of money if she would step on the icons they had placed on the floor. I pulled myself together and ran to the phone. I dialed the number of the publishing office of the paper and asked the person who answered the phone to give me the address and the telephone number of the

woman in the article.

“I’m sorry,” they replied. “We are not permitted to give out that information.”

“But if this is true, I must know so I don’t become influenced by them!” I repeated, but to no avail.

“You are all liars and deceivers!” I cried out and hung up the phone.

My mother watched me in a state of hopelessness. “See?” I snapped at her. “I don’t believe everything they tell me. But you believe!”

From that moment on, I lost my trust in everything Orthodox. I considered all the Orthodox writers liars and deceivers. On a regular basis, Nikos also brought me similar ill-imagined “antichilias” articles showing me how much “the Orthodox and the priests like to lie.” Having been personally well-informed about certain things about the “Witnesses,” I was seeing the lies of some of their enemies and was outraged. I began to be ashamed of my religion. Nikos, on the other hand, reminded me of something very true. He told me, “The truth can stand by itself! It does not need the crutches of lies.” He went on to conclude, “If they had the truth, they would stand by it, and they would not need to lie. They would show our mistakes from the Holy Scripture. Since they don’t do this, this only means that they can only resort to speaking lies.”

Notwithstanding everything that was happening and everything he was telling me, what drew me towards his religion was his overall conduct. I compared Nikos’ conduct with that of my other friends on a daily basis. My other friends constantly blasphemed God and His saints, they did every kind of disgrace without any objection of conscience. Christianity meant nothing to them. On the contrary, I had someone here in front of me who lived, or at least he was trying to live, the Christian faith as fully as he possibly could.

However, I was willing to give Orthodoxy one more chance. I was waiting for the moment when Nikos would converse with the instructor of our religion class again so that I could finally determine who was in the right. But this did not happen for quite a while. The religion class was postponed, there were strikes, feast days came and went, and the weeks just passed by.

Finally, one evening when we resumed the lesson, the teacher said, “Nikos, I had promised that we would have a discussion concerning your faith. So let’s begin to expand beyond the information given in our course’s text book.” I rubbed my hands with excitement as the teacher took a book out and Nikos got out the Holy Scripture. But let me allow Nikos himself to narrate the events of that evening...

## **Chapter 5**

### **Preaching in Class**

## Nikos' story

That evening I found myself somewhat unprepared. After my experiences with my previous theologians<sup>[12]</sup> in junior high school, I did not expect my high school teacher to confront me in front of the other students. To my surprise, he kept his word. For me, this was a significant measure to help me appreciate him as a good human being. I used to always carry with me the Holy Scripture since I often discussed it with George and the others, so I pulled it out on my desk. The teacher opened the subject immediately and took charge.

“Can you explain to me why your religion does not accept the Holy Tradition of the Church?” he asked.

I stayed speechless for a few seconds. This question had never come up in the past. I knew nothing about the subject of Holy Tradition. I only knew to juxtapose verses from the Holy Scriptures or to converse about scientific matters pertaining to atheism. I was caught off guard, how would I answer now? The entire class was staring at me. Their first impression would be based solely on my answer, and this would influence their attitude not only towards the rest of the discussion but their overall disposition towards all the “Witnesses.” Of course, I knew some scriptural verses with the words of the Lord Jesus, which I believed to be befitting to the Orthodox, like the one in Mark 7:13, “You nullified the Law of God for your tradition,” but what would I come up with then? What would I say? Here I needed to improvise and do so quickly, so as not to appear that I was lost for words.

“We don't accept Tradition because it opposes Holy Scripture!” I responded with some relief, while all eyes now turned towards the teacher. I had bought myself a little time to think about how to bring him to my turf, to subjects I knew well, or so I thought.

“Where did you see this opposition?” the teacher asked quickly. Now I was ready.

“In many areas! For example in the subject of the Holy Trinity. While tradition says that God is Trinity, the Holy Scripture states that “unto us there is one God...” I began.

“Please do not attempt to avoid the subject!” the teacher interrupted me, catching my play.

“How am I avoiding? Our subject is how does Holy Scripture disagree with Tradition!” I answered using his own question. Thus, he was compelled to close his book and to continue the discussion on my grounds. Apparently, the teacher himself was not well schooled on the subject of the Holy Tradition, because if that were the case, initially he would never have accepted the dichotomy of the Holy Scripture from the rest of the Tradition of the Church, and he would have caused me many other problems, if he had told me that Holy Scripture is part of the Holy Tradition.

We spent the rest of the teaching hour disputing the subject of the Trinity while the class followed this **duel** with great interest. Neither one of us, however, was convinced from the arguments of the other since we simply juxtaposed verses of Holy Scripture without substantial interpretation. When we were interrupted by the recess bell, our debate did not result in any conclusion, and we both remained stuck to our positions. Realistically, however, I was the great victor, since all the listeners were Orthodox. All of them would surely be thinking, if a simple “Jehovah's Witness” can hold his weight against a high school theologian, then how much better would the “higher echelon” of my faith succeed in defeating any Orthodox?

After this discussion, the teacher and I developed a much better relationship. I really began to like this

man because he was the only faithful Orthodox with whom I had engaged in meaningful discussions up to this point. He did not display any fanaticism, and, moreover, recognizing my knowledge of the Holy Scripture, he began to show generosity with school grades. On the contrary, my junior high school religion teacher, acting out of fanaticism, would lower my grades, although he knew that I was more knowledgeable than he was. I also believe that the teacher of the evening class took a liking to me because he found in me a precious ally in his struggle against a particular atheist student.

This student mostly disagreed with the narrative of Genesis. He believed that man evolved from the ape by mere chance and was not created by God. For me it was quite a joy to join forces with the theology teacher to **tear down** and **outflank** the blasphemous theory of spontaneous evolution. Naturally, we proved him groundless at every discussion, but the atheist student still did not want to accept the existence of God.

My discussions with my teachers were not limited to the hour of religious studies. Other teachers initiated discussions with me during class hours. My Modern Greek, Biology, and Electronics teachers found it interesting to ask me questions about my faith in the presence of my peers. Some of them were atheists or agnostics, and many times they sided with my atheist classmate, attempting to prove the unproven. Another means by which I was able to propagate my religion was through my composition class. I always made my essays very interesting, and they were always read in class without fail.

Consequently my teachers were unwittingly becoming a useful means to advertise my religion in front of my classmates. Of course, with the exception of the theology teacher, in the presence of all others I monopolized the discussion. With all these endeavors, in spite of investing very little time, I managed to present a rich “activity report” to my organization, namely a registration of hours spent preaching and passing out pamphlets to everyone around me. Day by day, I gained their respect. I was making quite an impression, and I was winning over George, who already knew my religion better than his own!

PIC TURE HERE

One of the older congregation halls of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in New York.

PICTURE HERE

Enlargement of the frontispiece of the same building displaying the Masonic symbol used by the Watchtower in its early days.

PICTURE HERE

The Masonic symbol.

## CHAPTER 6

### In the Nest of the Spider

#### George's story

The months were passing by, and my knowledge of the faith of the “Witnesses” increased on a daily basis. It is so ironic that while I never showed any interest in discovering the faith I was born into, I now found myself zealously searching a foreign faith, which only a few days ago I knew nothing about. And while I had never dedicated even one hour in the search of Orthodoxy, for a foreign religion I was already dedicating countless hours!

I had also observed that some evenings during the week Nikos skipped the last two hours of school. They were always the same evenings and always the same courses. He was not afraid of absenteeism, because the person in charge of roll call was his friend and did not mark him absent. One day I could not hold back my curiosity, so I asked him what was going on. He told me that he left class to go to the “congregation” or to the “church” of the “Witnesses.” He invited me to go along with him some time to see what takes place there. In reality I was afraid, but my curiosity was unbearable. So the very same evening, after we worked things out with the roll caller, we gathered our schoolbooks and departed. We walked for a few minutes discussing, as always, various religious matters. I, however, although I did not show it, had much internal strife and anxiety. I was feeling embarrassed because I did not know what I would run into, and I was also feeling like a traitor to my faith, a faith that considered these people heretical.

We came near a building which housed a manufacturing plant in its lower level where machines were buried inside some objects arranged in rows. It was barely visible in the dark. Directly on top there was a balcony, and inside the balcony a glass patio totally covered with red curtains. After climbing the exterior concrete staircase, I noticed on the painted glass of the entrance door, a scratched area where the paint was purposely removed and an eye watched us from inside. My heart was beating very fast as we entered the half-opened exterior door that led into a small reception area. The “owner” of the eye was waiting for us there with a big smile. His name was John, and he was a very likeable young man with a wide mustache. He quickly approached us and greeted us with a very powerful and heartfelt handshake. We introduced ourselves, and then proceeded to ascend the circular concrete staircase. I attempted to walk as noiselessly as I could on the self-stick vinyl-covered stairs, even though the introduction of this most friendly doorkeeper had helped chase away much of my initial anxiety. At the top of the staircase, inside the opened door, about 20-30 well-dressed people occupied the neatly arranged rows of chairs.

I stared at the floor and observed that it was covered with a wood-**pattered** linoleum. I immediately thought of all the things I had heard in the past about such meetings of “Witnesses,” and I leaned over to Nikos and whispered in joking manner, “I hope there are no icons underneath the floor!” He broke out in laughter, then ran inside leaving me there at the doorstep. He relayed something to someone, and in front of my astonished eyes, Nikos and two or three others actually lifted up the vinyl flooring for me to check if there were any icons underneath.

In spite of the embarrassment that I felt for causing this scene, I looked under the floor from the corner of my eyes, ascertaining that the accusations I had heard were false. Soon after, all those present came over to introduce themselves, still laughing. I felt at ease since they had not gotten upset from lifting

up the vinyl floor. In fact, they were rather amused by it. Among them were people of all ages, from the very old to little children. There were men and women, some educated, others of few letters, and a few who were illiterate.

“If we stepped on icons, we would be ascribing some worth to them! For us, icons have no worth whatsoever and it would be a total waste of time to deal with them!” someone pointed out.

I sat down, and in a few minutes the teaching began. John, the likeable young man we met at the entrance, was the teacher. After a prayer, everyone opened a red book which had recently been published. The book was entitled, “You Can Live Forever in Paradise Here on Earth.” The “Witnesses” referred to it as the “Red Bomb.” It was a very colorful book full of pictures presenting the entire basic teaching of the “Witnesses” in a concise form. As a reader recited a few paragraphs, I curiously studied the meeting room.

The chairs were positioned in rows, and the room could accommodate about 70 individuals. In the front there was a raised, carpeted, wooden stage and on the center of this stage there was a speaker stand with a microphone. Behind the speaker stand there was a large, red curtain, and directly above it there was a plaque with a verse of the Holy Scripture. Directly across the other side of the room there were more red curtains, and I realized that these were the ones I saw from the outside as we entered the building. On two sides of the room there were four air fans placed on shelves, and throughout the room there were picture frames on the walls depicting events of the Holy Scripture and handicrafts of the tetragram “YHWH” or the “Watchtower.”

When the reading ended, John began to ask questions, and the rest raised their hands to answer. I lowered myself into my chair somewhat terrified, and I whispered in Nikos’ ear, “If he calls on me, what do I say?”

“He will not call on you if you don’t raise your hand!” he answered laughing. Then he showed me the questions at the bottom of the page in the red book, and he explained how to find the answers appropriated by the organization in each corresponding section of the book.

“If you want, you can answer too,” he told me. But I did not feel courageous enough until the very end of the first hour of our study. When the last paragraph had been read, I nervously raised my hand and offered a brief answer to a question.

After we finished with one more self-made prayer from a bystander, we remained for another hour to socialize. I questioned them constantly. The discussion was centered around icons, traditions, and priests. They “informed” me that the veneration of icons amounts to worship and that icons are “idols.” Moreover, they pointed out some passages of the Holy Scripture against “idols.” They also pointed out how Jesus Christ had condemned the Jewish traditions, and, consequently, we must only accept the Holy Scripture. At the time, I was not aware of the difference between “worship and veneration,” nor the difference between “icons and idols.” I was not at all knowledgeable of the difference between the “Jewish and the Christian tradition.” So I accepted **without** protest all those inaccuracies they were telling me.

Worse yet, after being influenced by the anti-Orthodox spirit of judgementalism existing among the “Witnesses,” I began to accuse the priests of every known and unknown scandal, of every sort of rumor that reached my ears without having any proof or direct experience of what I was saying. As I spoke to the crowd of “Witnesses,” I noticed that I had become the center of attention. Everyone listened to me, shaking their heads with satisfaction. I was feeling very good because I had people around me eager to listen, to discuss, and to share my views. As we left, I had the confidence that these gatherings were very “edifying.”



## Chapter 7

### Increasing the Contact

#### George's story

As time passed, I was becoming more and more involved with the faith of the “Witnesses.” Each week on a regular basis, I left school and went with Nikos to their gatherings. Even on Sunday evenings I avoided the company of my friends, and I attended the meetings. Even though I was Orthodox, I did not spend even one hour a week approaching my God, but I now spent at least five hours a week attending the meetings of a religion unknown to me a few days ago.

One day Nikos took me to his home and introduced me to his family. His mother was disabled, so she could not attend meetings regularly, as was also the case with his elderly grandmother. This explained why I had never met them before. They were two very hospitable women, taking great joy in offering all they could to welcome me as a visitor, while talking constantly about God. It seemed natural for Nikos to acquire love for God, living in this type of environment. My visits to their home increased, and every time I felt that I came away knowing more about God and His volitions. In the beginning I listened with much skepticism to what Nikos said, and I demanded proof. However, now I accepted everything he was saying without any hesitation. My skepticism was now turned toward every other source of information, except the “Watchtower.”

Nikos' method of teaching was also instrumental in this. When I asked him something, he replied promptly, but he did not stop there. Immediately he brought up the arguments used by various Orthodox on whatever topic we were discussing, and he proceeded to refute them. Thus, he gave me the impression that he had a complete picture of the subject “from both sides of the coin” while solidifying in my thoughts his own personal point of view.

One day he suggested that we start a “systematic Scripture study” at his house. I accepted with much joy, and from then on, on non-school days or during breaks, we went to his home and studied. In reality, however, our study was not directly from the Holy Scripture, but from some other book. Nikos was excited about my steady progress in “the truth” (as the “Witnesses” referred to their faith). Over time, I began to abandon all my hobbies, except chess. Nikos and I played chess equally well, and we played quite often. The rest of our hours, however, were devoted to studying the books and the magazines of the “Watchtower.” I considered them “spiritual nourishment” from God, through the “faithful and wise servants,” in other words those “anointed” of the society.

They had me convinced that the international publishing and evangelistic crusade of the “Witnesses” along with its “good fruit” served as the infallible proof that this is the “organization of

God” since “God always carried out His plan through an organization.” Little by little I began to adopt and use all the terminology used by the “Witnesses.” I called their faith “the Truth.” I referred to them as “brothers” although they did not consider me a brother yet. I referred to all those who were not “Witnesses” as “worldly” or “infidels.” Consequently, I felt that I already belonged to a special “elitist” group of privileged elect who would survive the “destruction of Armageddon.”

## Chapter 7

### Increasing the contact (cont'd)

One day I joined Nikos’ family as they attended a meeting in a private estate in Malakasa. Thousands of “Witnesses” flooded the space, and the entire day passed with compunction, as I listened to an endless number of homilies, demonstrations, and theatrical plays. That evening I returned home feeling “well fed.” This is how I always felt when I heard the homilies of a “journeying bishop” of the “Witnesses.” Inside of me, the decision was already at hand. Once I overcame my fears and weaknesses, I would become a **“Witness of Jehovah.”**

PICTURE HERE

Yankee Stadium

PICTURE HERE

Gatherings of a large number of “Witnesses” like the one attended by George, where he relates that, “Thousands of ‘Witnesses’ flooded the space, and the entire day passed with compunction, listening to an endless number of homilies, demonstrations, and theatrical plays. That evening, I returned home feeling ‘well fed’.”

Above: Gathering at the stadium in Nuremberg, Germany, August 14, 1955, the very place previously used by Hitler for the parade of his armies.

Below: Gathering at Yankee Stadium, New York, July 26, 1953.

## CHAPTER 8

### The First Problems

#### George's story

The “Witnesses” advised me to keep our contact secret until I became “sure-footed in the faith,” and until “the seed of truth takes root in my heart.” Otherwise, “the Devil would take the seed, and I would be lost.” They had forewarned me that “the enemies of a man will be those of his **household**,” and how at some point I would “suffer persecution” for the sake of “my” faith. In the beginning, I did not say anything to others (i.e., “non-Witnesses”) mostly because I was even ashamed. What would people say if they found out that I was keeping company with “Witnesses”? Later on, however, I remembered the words of the Lord: “Anyone who is ashamed to confess me in front of people, I will also be ashamed to confess him in front of my Father.” Matt. 10:33). This compelled me to slowly change my view, until the time came when this shame and cowardice gave way to boldness, and boldness turned to enthusiasm. The more I learned, the more enthusiastic I became, and the more I wanted to share my new views with my own people. Now I finally understood how Nikos felt and why he undertook so much struggle for his faith.

One evening, after spending a number of hours in the teachings of the “Witnesses” (an evening full of “blessings” I used to say), I returned home full of enthusiasm, and ignoring the forewarnings, I began to speak to my perplexed mother. It was an exceptionally rainy night, but I felt such euphoria that I barely noticed the weather. As I entered the house, I sang one of the hymns of the “Witnesses” in a low voice.

“Today was a wonderful day!” I shouted to my mother as I was taking off my leather jacket. “I did not have school, and I went with Nikos!”

“Why didn’t you have school?” she asked.

“The teachers were on strike,” I answered.

“And where did you go with Nikos?” she asked again.

“To the church of the “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” I answered in a most natural manner. “If you only knew how much I have learned there!”

“What! You have been there before?” she cried.

“Yes! Many times! When you come, you will see how good it feels! These last words I said amidst a pandemonium of screams and incomprehensible tones that exited her mouth. I was trying to speak to her rationally, but to no avail. She was beside herself.

“You will never step foot there ever again!” I distinctly heard her say among other things.

“I’ve already made up my mind! I will become a “Jehovah’s Witness. We ought to obey God rather than people,” I argued.

“You were born Orthodox, and you will die Orthodox!” she shouted.

“Precisely because I don’t want to die, I will stop being Orthodox! Now you remember your Orthodoxy? What did you teach me about God all these years! Nothing! And now that I’ve found the truth, you will hold me back?” At that point my father walked in.

“Why are you yelling?” he asked

“He wants to become a Jehovahite!” my mother tearfully responded.

“What! It would be better for you to become a transvestite! If you dare become a chiliast, I will disown you!” he added in an outrage.

“I have no interest in your money! I have already chosen my path!” I said with force.

“If you become a chiliast, you must leave my home!” he shouted to intimidate me.

I felt my blood boiling. This was the moment of trial, the moment of decision. Just then the words of the Lord echoed in my ears: “Anyone who leaves mother or father or brother or home for my sake, he will receive in this life and the life to come a hundredfold.”

With tears in my eyes, I put on my leather jacket, I bade them farewell, as my mother was crying, and I exited my home. Deep in thought, I walked through the torrential rain without an umbrella. Maybe the “Witnesses” were right. They told me not to speak openly yet, but I didn’t listen. They had told me that members of my household would go against the “truth,” but I didn’t expect it. I thought I knew better than them. Yet I found myself suddenly chased away by my own parents! After walking in the rain for a long time, I sat on a plaza bench, exhausted and wet. I sat there all night, worrying about how my mother and my father were feeling, seeking God’s intervention.

I wasn’t the only one who worried that evening. When my mother overcame her initial anger and she realized her mistake, she began wondering where I could have gone in the middle of the night in the rain. Her first impulse was to locate Nikos’ phone number in the telephone book and called his home. His mother picked up the telephone and asked who was calling. She heard a distressed voice.

“This is George’s mother! Where is my son? Where are you keeping him?”

“I don’t understand what you are saying!” Nikos’ mother answered. My mother explained what had

happened, and after she complained and threatened, she finished with these words.

“My child used to be good! Now, because of you people, he left home. I expect you to find him!” Nikos’ mother, after reassuring her that I was not there, attempted to calm my mother down, promising that the minute they saw me, they would send me home.

However, I did not return home that night, and they were all concerned. In the morning, I decided to go see how my mother was. My father was already at work. The minute she laid eyes on me she hugged me, crying, and told me what happened. I immediately called Nikos to put him and his family at ease. Afterwards, I made my position clear, telling my mother that I am now an adult and free to choose my life’s path. I told her never to bring up the subject of religion again. She replied by asking me for a favor. She told me that she wanted to invite over an archimandrite[\[13\]](#) relative of ours to help me see my mistake, and if he could not convince me, then I would be free to do whatever I considered to be the right thing. This was a fair and reasonable request, so I accepted it joyfully. My father did not seem opposed to this either. I continued my “Christian” activities, being relatively free, sensing a deep joy at being tried for the sake of Christ and for successfully overcoming this very first trial.

The day of the archimandrite’s visit drew near. I waited for him with the Holy Scripture on the table, while my mother, hardly able to hold back her joy, felt certain that at the end of this visit, I would cease all contact with the “Witnesses.”

When the archimandrite arrived, he sat and socialized with my parents, something very natural since they hadn’t seen each other in years. He asked me about my school, my work, and everything else except the subject of faith. I was desperately searching to find some opportune moment to start a Christian discussion with him; however, he did not give me a chance. After several minutes had passed and he had already discussed at length various family matters with my parents, I found the courage to intervene.

“Father, what opinion do you have about the Holy Scripture?” I asked.

“Why do you need to bring these things up now, especially since we haven’t seen each other for so long! If you want to hear the Gospel, go to church,” he commented leaving all of us flabbergasted![\[14\]](#) I could not believe my ears.

Nikos, a man my parents considered to be heretical, could not stop speaking about God, and his faith was affecting all of his actions. Yet now, right here in front of me, I had someone considered to be a liturgist of God, who was seeing the Holy Scripture as a subject not worthy of discussion. In spite of his answer, a few minutes later I took courage and asked him another question about the Orthodox faith. His answer froze inside me any further desire to converse with him.

“What do you want with these things now? My son, why don’t you forget about the Holy Scripture now! Here we have a more interesting discussion!” he replied.

This time I saw my mother and my father sink into a state of gloom. They began to understand that someone can be a priest, but this alone does not guarantee his love for God. When the archimandrite left, my mother was left staring at me in a desperate sort of way, since I did not manage to extract even one word out of him about God.

“Evidently he doesn’t want to take any of his work home!” I said ironically. “It seems that he considers Christianity a career, an occupation.”

This was the most opportune time to begin speaking to my mother about the faith of the “Watchtower.” I spoke to her about those people who took joy in listening to questions about God and who use the Holy Scripture during every one of their discussions. I asked her to study the Holy Scripture with me so I could show her why it was not to the archimandrite’s advantage to discuss the

Holy Scriptures. She accepted, more so to see what I had gotten myself into and to learn what they were telling me. From that day on, I began to pass down to my mother everything I had learned from Nikos. Nikos' family did not stay idle either. His mother would often phone my mother since Nikos was coming over to our house more often, and Nikos would speak with her about his religion. Occasionally my mother would say, "Nikos is such a good boy! The only bad thing is that he is a 'Witness'." She used to repeat this up until the time she stopped considering the "Witnesses" heretics.

As far as I was concerned, there was nothing holding me back. I had embraced my new faith with great fervor. I eagerly participated in every activity of the "Witnesses." Outside of their meetings, which I very seldom missed, I began to go out "to work the street." I would go from door-to-door and declare the "good news" of the "Witnesses." Nikos managed to teach me what I needed to know, following the directives of the school of the organization, along with the example and the mannerisms of those who had taught him.

PICTURE HERE

An old poster with photographs of Pastor Russell which displays the New Testament passage "Redeeming Time: The Use of Automobiles" (Ephesians 5:16).

## CHAPTER 9

### Luring Others to the Web

#### Nikos' story

From a very young age, I followed those who “worked the street” door-to-door. In the beginning, I only observed others as they began a discussion with the homeowner, and I spoke only when spoken to. Of course, I had observed many demonstrations and practice sessions at the “school” of the Watchtower,” and I had participated in a number of them, but in reality I did not have the courage to initiate a conversation with a stranger all by myself. This changed, however, one Sunday when I was assigned to collaborate with the traveling “area bishop” of the “Witnesses.” The bishop would come at different intervals to evaluate and bolster the activities of the local congregation.<sup>[15]</sup> In his territory he had about 20 such congregations, which he visited religiously, since he received a nominal fee from the organization for his living expenses and travel, being allowed to be the house guest of the local “Witnesses.” These bishops were replaced at different intervals, and they usually had their wife with them, who was also quite knowledgeable in the faith. I developed a special liking for this particular bishop because he was one of our distant relatives, and my mother constantly referred to him as a great role model, someone worth imitating. I admired him and I was also jealous of him in the good sense of the word. I thought of him as a true “spiritual brother.” The word “spiritual” I understood to mean a man who knew a lot and who possessed the ability to influence others, as most Protestants do. (This is totally unrelated to the Orthodox meaning of the term, which we see in the latter part of this book.)

As I said before, prior to this one Sunday when I began collaborating with the bishop, I had been reluctant to go door-to-door on my own. On this day, we studied the “**verse of the day**”, and then we were instructed on what to present at each of the households we visited. I was not aware of it back

then, but these were studied lessons of marketing and were presented to us every Thursday as the lessons of the “academy” and the “theocratic ministry.” Finally we set out to distribute “our products” in our “sectors.” The sector was the section of our territory we were assigned and for which we were responsible for “evangelizing.”

As we walked the streets, we discussed many things. We never missed an opportunity to speak to someone at the beginning of our journey because the walk could be included as “work” since this needed to be recorded in our monthly bulletin. When we drew near the large multi-housing complex of local workers assigned to me, we stood outside of the locked exterior door and pretended that we were ringing one of the bells. We repeated this several times, until someone coming out **of** the building opened the door. We entered the elevator, and on our way up to the 10<sup>th</sup> and last floor, we quickly sketched the position of the 20 apartments of the high-rise on a pad. In every “box” we would keep track of our progress by marking whether or not the man was home, if we had opened a discussion with him, if he accepted a pamphlet, book, or periodical, if he was friendly or polemic, his name or any information we could gather about him and so forth. Subsequently, we would transfer this information to a more permanent folder called the “archives of working the homes.” This folder would be used to remind us at our following attempt what we ran into, so we could have better results during “repeat visits.”

As we knocked on the doors of the upper floors, we realized that quite a few people were absent and the rest were totally indifferent. However, my companion had one more problem besides knocking on doors. He was instructed to convince me to also speak to the homeowners.[\[16\]](#) I also wanted this, but I was shy. At one door, when the householder came out, after we agreed for me to start up the conversation, I just stood there looking at him without saying a word. Fortunately, my companion intervened and spoke. At the next door, he tried another technique. He would speak first, and then I would take over. And this is what we did. When a woman opened her door, he introduced himself and after a brief prologue he said, “My friend here has something to show you.” I proceeded to display the magazines at hand, and I did rather well. We tried the same technique with the other householders as **we** were descending the building. In the **highrises** we always commenced our work from the top, working ourselves down, so if some fanatical householder came out with abusive intentions, we would have the exit open in front of us. If we started from the bottom, we could have been trapped on the upper floors by those underneath who would already have seen us and decided to react against us. Besides, it was less tiring to descend than to ascend. By the time we made it to the lower floors, I had already become **very self-confident**, and I was engaging in conversation all by myself. I remember having great joy because I had given away many magazines and one book. My partner, however, seemed to be even more content because he was observing one more of the “evangelized” become self-empowered to knock on doors. From that time on, I went out more often to “work the Gospel,” taking along others less experienced for whom I took responsibility to teach how to make “presentations” at the doors by themselves, using the method with which I was taught. Soon enough I taught my friend George how to make presentations.

I had a hobby from a very young age. I liked chess, and we often organized small “tournaments” with my neighborhood friends. During the same time that I began knocking **on** doors, I was also a member of an amateur chess team, and I would go and play every so often. That year my team advanced to the semi-finals and needed to hold ten matches every Sunday.

So I also began to officially participate in these organized matches. On half of the Sundays when the matches took place away from home, I went to “work the Gospel,” and on the other half, when we played at home, I went to the chess club. One Sunday my mother asked, “How can you abandon the “work of God” and spend your Sundays at the chess club?” I justified myself saying that I also needed some recreation, and I was already dedicating two Sundays a month to the “work of God.” Inside me,

however, I felt a real struggle. I did not feel good knowing that so many people around me would perish in the battle of “Armageddon” and instead of warning them, I was sitting down playing chess. Consequently, I made a big decision: I walked away from the team. From then on, every Saturday and Sunday morning, I went to the “start-up” meetings and then to the “work of God.” With this maneuver, my mother succeeded in isolating me from bad company which I might encounter at the chess club, and she was able to steer me towards beneficial spiritual activities.

Little by little, all of my other activities ceased, and I was dedicating all my free time to the “work.” The only hobby I held on to was the study of scientific journals, something that proved to be very helpful later on in my search for the true God. I remember some of the householders asking me, “If someone would prove to you that your religion is false, what would you do?”

“Of course I would abandon it!” I said with confidence and I continued, “Do you have any proof of this sort?” This man had no clue even about his own religion, so I challenged him, “If I prove that you have a false religion, would you abandon it?”

“I really don’t care about these things!” he replied. So we left him. Honestly, however, I was eager to consider all research without any fear, if someone contended that he could prove me wrong. Yet no such person was found, not then nor in the following years, and I interpreted this as proof that I had the true faith. At another time, a householder suggested, “Why should we listen to you and not have you listen to us?”

“Great! I’m ready to hear you! What do you have to say?” I asked. But these folks remained speechless for an entire minute while I waited for their answer. Obviously, they had nothing to say. All of this, along with the very bad approach of some hotheaded fanatics at a few homes, convinced me that there was no other religion like mine. I believed that I was persecuted “for the name of Jehovah” just because these persecutors did not have any serious arguments against me! Thus, they reacted forcefully and irrationally. If they had the truth, the simplest approach would be to try to convince me of it. In all the years of my membership with this organization, I knocked on thousands of doors, and I met all different types of people. However, I did not meet one person who could respond to my challenges and give me lessons of “truth” and “spirituality.” Those people would come much later...

PICTURE HERE

## CHAPTER 10

### Tied on the Web

#### George's story

In those days, when I first began knocking on doors, Nikos explained the method used by the international "Watchtower" organization to direct this work. He explained that the organization closely followed the work and progress of those sent out to evangelize by keeping track of monthly statistical data which showed any weak points. He showed me a report that needed to be filled out by every "Witness," showing specific elements of his monthly activities. If I wanted to, I could also report the statistics of my own personal activity to the organization, thereby contributing to the international data. Nikos also explained that by reporting my activities, I would officially be included among the "evangelizing." What he failed to impress upon me, however (something that he was not very conscious about either), was that by filling out such a report, the person evangelizing was acknowledging his full submission to the "Watchtower" organization. It was no longer permissible for him to have his own opinion, or any different opinions than the organization in matters of faith, nor could he act independently or use methods not approved by the organization. If he showed any disregard for these bylaws and acted or believed differently, the sword of "disfellowship" **hung** over his head. Disfellowship or expulsion was decided after one or more court hearings by a "spiritual court" convening "behind closed doors," thus excluding the presence of any spectators. This was the worst possible punishment for a "Witness." After his disfellowship (for whatever reason) from the society, this person would be an outcast. Not even a simple greeting was permitted from the rest of the "Witnesses" who would also be "penalized" with disfellowship! Anyone found with the stigma of disfellowship would suddenly lose all friends and relatives who were also "Witnesses," even his parents and children, who possibly lived at a different house. His marriage could possibly receive a deadly blow, and he could even lose his employment if his employer were a "Witness." Only a future re-enrollment in the ranks of the organization could restore the relationship of all other "Witnesses" with him. All of this was possible after he handed in even a single form with his personal statistics for the organization. Being ignorant of all these consequences, I began to hand in my activity report. At that time, and for a number of years to come, I regarded the society as the "loving" organization of God. It would be much later that I would come to know its true self.

At one of the organization's gatherings, I was approached by a "presbyter" and asked if I wished to enroll in the "school." I accepted the invitation, and in no time I was being notified to present a short sermon and to read and interpret a passage from the Holy Scripture. The goal of this school was to train "preachers" and "evangelists" for the organization. The students practiced giving small sermons, and afterwards corrections and suggestions would be offered by one of the "presbyters." The gatherings were held every Thursday and lasted two hours in conjunction with another meeting, the examination of "ministry," a small internal booklet given only to those who evangelized. On Sunday,

there was a common gathering for everyone to study the "Watchtower," the most basic periodical of the organization and to hear the public homily of the week. On Tuesday, there was a study of some designated book (I first started out on one of these meetings), where only a few people would gather in a family environment. This series of meetings took place in three separate homes because the local **Witnesses** were divided into three groups.

On the day designated for me to give my sermon, I prepared myself for the homily with some notes taken from several articles of the "Watchtower" magazine pertaining to the text I was assigned to read. I was overcome with stage fright when I stood in front of the microphone with 60 pairs of eyes staring at me. Fortunately, outside of a few mistakes in reading, everything went well. I finished one minute before my allotted time, and thus the alarm clock used by the "presbyter" to check the time of the homily rang shortly thereafter. Afterwards, my examiner came to the speaker's stand and marked my report in the "advice" section with a "G" for "good" in one part of my examination and with a "W" meaning "more work is needed" in another area of my examination. After the initial homilies that I was assigned to read, things became more difficult, because now I needed to expand on the subject quickly and from memory, without reading the homilies from my notes with the exception of the Holy Scripture verses. In a short while, I overcame my initial stage fright, and I delivered my homilies with confidence and without notes.

Throughout this period I continued to teach my mother about the organization by exposing her to some of the books of the "Witnesses." She had already espoused everything I believed, and she urged me to "progress in the organization." As far as my father was concerned, he also began to display some interest, influenced by the change in my mother. In the beginning, they attended the meetings to see me offer a homily. Later on they started coming to the weekly gatherings. In a short period of time, they developed acquaintances and their interest was intensified. Soon they too began to fill out "the evangelizing report" and to witness to others.

In the second year of our involvement with the "Witnesses," all three of us participated in the "baptism of dedication" of the "Witnesses." Although we had been baptized by the Orthodox Church, we believed that baptism to be invalid, because we received it when we were infants and lacked understanding. "An infant does not possess knowledge of its 'dedication'," they had told us, and they pointed out the verse in Mathew 28:19-20: "Go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep everything I have commanded you..." They emphasized, "You first become a disciple and then you are baptized! And we, like total idiots, never took the time to analyze this verse grammatically. This would have to wait a number of years to come to fruition; we were all made to feel confident that we would survive "Armageddon," and we would progress toward human perfection in a period of a thousand years, before the final tribulation. For us, this was a tremendous hope since we had never heard the true Christian Gospel.

Much like the merchant of the Lord's parable, we were searching for pearls without yet having discovered the most "precious pearl." We believed that the only thing needed for our Salvation was the adherence to the "organization" as an **ark** of salvation and to preach to others about all of these things. Woe to anyone who found himself "in the world" and outside of the organization during Armageddon. God himself would kill this person without any hope of resurrection. This instilled a deep sadness in us and we agonized for our friends, our relatives, and for everyone around us in general. This compelled us to speak "in season and out of season" for what we firmly believed, in order to have these people saved along with us. We were deeply saddened by the malice and bad attitude of certain individuals who accused us, claiming that somehow we were bribed or that we stepped on holy icons, while we were sacrificing much of our energy and time for their sake. Rather quickly, our relatives and friends began to avoid us. They asked us not to speak to them about our newly found faith. However, we

insisted on speaking to them about it.

When informed about my mother's change in faith, her godfather and uncle stopped speaking to us for years, up until his dying moments. We had almost succeeded in proselytizing him, but he died Orthodox. He could never understand that he was partly responsible for our ordeal because he never took care to teach my mother the Orthodox faith as a godfather should.

PICTURE HERE

Above: Morning discussion about the Holy Scriptures of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

PICTURE HERE

Left: The "school" of the Holy Scripture of the Jehovah's Witnesses in South Lansing, New York.

## Chapter 11

### Baptism of the Dedication

#### **Nikos' story**

In spite of my success in the “work of God,” I had not been baptized as of yet. Since my friend George was baptized before me, he kept asking, “When will you be baptized? I came to the ‘truth’ through you, and yet I was baptized before you?!”

“I’m not ready!” I answered. “But I will not take much longer.”

The reason for the postponement was that I was still drowned in sin. I constantly kept postponing baptism, expecting to first clean up my lifestyle. This is the same reason dozens of other witnesses had also postponed their baptism. At the time, I was teaching four different Bible study groups, and yet I did not dare to proceed with such an action. Some bad habits I had developed in my youth, which I still struggled with, were holding me back from being baptized. Being ignorant of the real meaning of baptism, I believed that I first needed to stop sinning. Then, in a state of “purity,” I would enter the “pure organization of God.”

In reality, I lived a double life. I was one person when preaching and someone totally different when I was flirting with my old girlfriends in secret. I felt terribly guilty every time I went out on a date, thinking that this would be my last time, but I kept doing it over and over again. Naturally, George had no idea about these activities since he considered me such a good example. Besides my shame in front of God, I was also feeling ashamed for something else. I kept thinking, what if I ran into one of my girlfriends while ministering door-to-door! I would ridicule not only myself but the Organization as well! Actually, one morning, as I was about to enter a high-rise with my partner, I saw one of my old girlfriends sitting on the balcony. I panicked! I made up an excuse, and my partner and I left, heading toward another section. I escaped being ridiculed, but this close call did some good. I was determined to avoid flirting publicly and to “cloister” my bad self only in the very secret sins. At least, I thought, if only God sees me, He will understand my struggle and He will not misconstrue my backslidings with my self.

However, to make my life even more difficult, members of the Organization asked me to hold a Bible study with a teen-aged “Witness” who happened to have an older sister. It did not take me long to realize that this young lady was flirting with me very provocatively and with unethical intentions. First, I couldn’t understand how it was possible for a Jehovah’s Witness to behave in such a way. Later, however, I thought that because she is also unbaptized, she may fall into the same mistakes I do. Amazingly, in the face of so much seduction, I controlled myself with much effort and much prayer so I could keep myself from backsliding into my old evil habits. She harassed me to the point that the Bible study became a nightmare. I was truly afraid that someday she would manage to get me alone, and I was afraid of how I would react.

Fortunately, nothing ever came of it. However, all of these adventures still prevented me from being baptized. Deep inside I knew that some day it would come to fruition. But that didn’t stop my mother from constantly questioning me as to why I was still unbaptized. I kept answering her that I wished to

complete some more studies first so the dedication of baptism would find me totally ready and well established in the “truth.”

About this time, I had come across an interesting book called *Encyclopedia of World Religions*. It summarized the most basic religions of the world, and it examined 100 heresies. The book described the origins and beliefs of each religion, but it failed to explain why they believe in such a way. Even though I thought that my study was fairly complete, I was unaware of the most basic points. I was searching to find in this book some religions that shared similarities with my own. Then I would consider them worthy of more research. The fact that I failed to find anything close further convinced me that I was on the right path. As I finished reading the book, I promised God that I would not repeat the sins that I kept doing up to that point, and I announced to my mother I would be baptized at the upcoming gathering.

The next day a “presbyter” began to prequalify me with the pertinent questioning in order to be convinced that I believed in all the things that would prove me to be a suitable candidate for baptism. Due to the great number of questions he needed to ask me, he came to my house everyday. Although I was found suitable based on my ability to answer his questions, in reality I continued sinning, transgressing against my promise to God up to the day of my baptism.

From that day on, and for quite a few months, I stayed clean, keeping my promise to God. I was baptized along with hundreds of others in the swimming pool of the Malakasa Estate of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I will never forget the emotional charge of that day. From the moment I found myself **under water** up until the time I fell asleep late at night, I felt that I had an **“open line” with God**. I prayed incessantly, and for the first time in my life, I kept all my senses and movements in check, fearing not to sadden God. Unfortunately, I did not manage to keep this “guarding of the senses” for very long. Little by little I began to return to the old agonizing struggle with sin.

My baptism of dedication was reason for much promotion in the Organization. I was given “privileges.” In other words, I was given much more responsibility within the congregation. I was now able to lead everyone into prayer during the opening and closing of the meetings, I could read the paragraphs of the quiz pamphlets, and I was able to participate in the different works of maintenance needed in the Kingdom Hall (the congregation hall). I could also help with the Hall’s sound system or serve as a doorkeeper or pass out different publications to those present. Outside of all this, I was also advancing in the knowledge of the dogmas of the Organization. Event though the Witnesses who read all the “current” publications were few and far between, I not only read all of them, but even the older ones. Thus, I progressed very quickly, and I exceeded in knowledge those much older than me.

In working my territory, I had covered most of the sectors so almost everyone knew that I was a Witness. I remember many times, when walking on the street, I was hearing from inside closed windows, “Look, the chiliast<sup>[17]</sup> is passing by!” This made me feel proud because I believed that I was being recognized as a servant of God. Consequently, I was also progressing in arrogance, judgmentalism, and fanaticism. I looked at my countrymen who did not belong to my religion as a crowd worthy of destruction as “children of perdition”.

I was feeling a certain sense of superiority about my religious knowledge, but I did not cease to be very concerned about non-Witnesses. Characteristic of my fanaticism was the following incident. One day my mother opened a discussion with an evangelical Christian who told her that our faith was false and in reality all the Christians will go to heaven, not just the 144,000 as we believed. He also proceeded to show her some verses, which she found very problematic. When she returned home, she told me what happened, and she expressed some doubts about the doctrine of our faith. My reaction was immediate and explosive.

“Aren’t you ashamed? I told her. “Instead of convincing him about the truth, he convinced you?”

“But he showed me verses from the Holy Scripture,” she protested.

“If you ever tell me again that you disagree with the Organization of God, I will turn you in to the “presbyter” to cut you off for apostasy,” I interrupted her. She was shocked at my words. Immediately she began to tremble and cry.

“You would turn in your own mother?” She said, weeping. I was unyielding. I did not pardon anyone who doubted the Organization, “the conduit of God” as I believed. I was relentless in this regard, even toward my own mother and my own self. Since then, my mother never dared to express any doubt for the Organization, so I did not need to turn her in. However, as it turned out, it was necessary to turn myself in! I will give an account of this ordeal, believing that it will offer much useful insight regarding my overall psychology at that time.

PICTURE HERE

The outer cover of the Watchtower magazine of older times displayed the cross in a very noticeable position.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Foretaste of Injustice**

## Nikos' story

A number of months passed from the time of my baptism. It was summer time now, and we had moved to our vacation home in Salamina where we generally spent our summers. Feeling weary from summer temptation and from the pressures of being young, I began to develop a strong desire for a particular girl, and according to the Holy Scripture, desire conceives sin. Blinded by this desire, I began to actively pursue different methods to develop a relationship with her. In fact, after applying these schemes and silencing the voice of my conscience, I succeeded in going out with her, ready to fulfill my plan. We were finally all alone, and I needed to make the first move. She consented immediately, and then all of a sudden I was inundated with guilt. I felt that I was betraying Him who "died on the cross" for me, He who left His glory to die for my sins. And I, the "baptized," the "Christian" was ready to throw away His sacrifice like a piece of dirt! I got up immediately, asked forgiveness from the astonished young lady, and I disappeared.

Months passed by, and by this time we had moved to our winter residence. I continued to live as I previously did, without confiding in anyone about my summer sins. I saw myself as a violator of the promise I had given to God during my baptism. It was only a matter of time before these pangs of guilt would find an outlet. One Sunday evening, we were participating in the study of the Watchtower, and, as always, I paid close attention to every detail of the lesson. At some point during the duration of this lesson, a section of the article was interpreted, which dealt with "hidden sins." Based on the "logic" of the Organization, I was somehow convinced from this article that in order to be forgiven by God, I needed to reveal my deeds to the "presbyters" who would provide me, the fallen brother, with "loving care."

It did not occur to me back then, but this was strange advice for an organization totally opposed to confession. Up until the end of that meeting, I wrestled with my shame, since I was not accustomed to "confessions." After the closing prayer, however, I came to the grand decision. I drew near to my favorite "presbyter", and I expressed to him that in obedience to the advice of the Watchtower, I would like to speak to him about a certain sin I had fallen into after my baptism. I briefly described what had taken place, and I bade him goodnight. He told me that we would discuss it again at another time.

The next day he came to my house with another "presbyter", asking me to attend a special meeting with them the following day. However, I felt extremely disappointed inside. I had confided to one "presbyter", now a second one knew my situation, and the following day a third one would get involved. If this was not enough, they told me that they would require the presence of yet another Witness who had been teaching me the Holy Scripture. When I originally revealed my sin, I did so for the sake of advice and for forgiveness from God. I did not expect this subject to spread to the point where I would suddenly find myself as the defendant in the presence of a judiciary committee! I didn't realize it at the time (nor did I have any knowledge of these matters), but it was obvious that the Witnesses confused punishment and trial with advice and reformation. Given no other alternative, I would go to this trial, hoping that my sin would not be publicized.

The "presbyters" visit to my home compelled my mother to constantly question me, to the point where out of sheer frustration, I told her not only the reason for the visit, but I told her exactly what I had done. After recovering from her initial shock, she said that I had made a mistake in revealing this to them because now I would invite trouble.

I answered her, "Since the Watchtower writes and confirms confessing these things, it is the right thing to do. Do you remember how upset you were when I told you of my intentions to turn you into the

“presbyter”? As you can see, sin is something that I don’t forgive very easily, not even for myself. So don’t take these words as lacking in love, but words of real concern.”

“Very well, but you will see that the confession you entrusted the “presbyters” with yesterday is something you will surely regret someday,” she replied.

From that day on and for many months after, I was ashamed to face not only the four men on the committee, but my own mother as well. The next day my stress level was at its highest when it came time to face the committee. The stress was much worse than the anxiety I felt during final exams because now I had feelings of shame. In the afternoon, I took my Holy Scripture and went to the Hall. As I entered, I noticed all four of them were sitting and waiting for me with the Scriptures opened in front of them. Their big smiles did not manage to put me at ease. I sat across from them trembling. I was constantly thinking of what I would say to them if they asked me details about my “adventure.” The presiding bishop broke the silence (the one I confided in initially). He congratulated me for having the courage to admit my sin to them, and then he asked me to describe what happened. I briefly, but with difficulty, related the incident to them all the while being very concerned that my voice would soon begin to tremble. As I was speaking, every so often they would interrupt with supplementary questions, compelling me to describe even the smallest details. When they seemed to be satisfied, they asked me why I did this.

I made a huge mistake in saying, “I imagine that since, before being baptized, these things were part of my lifestyle, they had become very powerful habits, which I once again succumbed to for a short while.”

“Please explain to us, what were you doing before you were baptized,” they quickly asked.

“What does it matter? Especially since I had not dedicated my life to God yet?” I protested.

“From the moment you were evangelizing, your conduct is of great importance to us!” they answered. Not having much choice, I began to give an account of the beginning and the continuation of my struggles with sin. I was totally red from shame. They did not seem satisfied with my general references, however. Surpassing every boundary of indiscretion, they were seeking to hear details of how I did everything! My situation was dramatic. I spoke with great difficulty, and I got the impression that one of them found great satisfaction in what he was hearing, and he pressed on with his insatiable questioning. I had difficulty controlling the muscles of my lower lip as I felt the ends of my lips pull downward. I had difficulty articulating words, a similar feeling when one is exposed to extremely cold conditions, and the chin becomes paralyzed and numb.

Across from me, I saw the fourth “presbyter” (the one who assisted me with biblical studies) lower his head, apparently feeling embarrassed by everything he was hearing. Suddenly, I came to the realization that the shame I was feeling was not towards God (knowing that He already had forgiven me), but I was ashamed because of people. My fear of punishment or for lack of understanding was not the fear of God, but the fear of men. I sensed that people across from me were not only being arbitrary in their approach, but worse yet, they considered themselves judges not only of the “Christian” period of my life, but of the period before my baptism! This last realization was something I was never able to come to terms with.

When I completed my narration, I felt totally humiliated because of all the indiscrete interrogation I had undergone. I felt some relief because having been able to sense their arbitrary attitude early on, I managed to conceal much more and even worse deeds from the ones they managed to get out of me. All these past events actions were of an unbeliever without any real relationship or dedication to God, and they were things I wanted to forget.

My judges asked me to step outside for a moment so they could decide my fate. Alone outside in the

hallway, I tried to understand how I had managed to fall into their trap. After a few minutes, they called me back inside and informed me that for a designated period of time, I would be “marked.” In other words, I would be deprived of certain privileges and functions held by the rest of the Witnesses. More specifically, I would no longer be able to participate in the functions of the Hall, I would not be a reader or help with the microphones, I would not lead the congregation in prayer or offer homilies, and I would not be allowed to answer questions at the meetings. To be exact, when someone was “marked,” it was forbidden for the other Witnesses **to keep company with him**. However, they did not bring this up in my case, only because I did not socialize with the other youth of the congregation. A group of about ten young Witnesses had already ceased identifying with the local congregation, choosing instead to enjoy the mundane pleasures of this world. I avoided their company even before, since their conduct was very unappealing to me. My four judges asked me what I thought about this punishment.

“I believe I deserve it since I transgressed against the oath of my dedication,” I said.

“Not quite!” they replied. “We are not punishing you for what you’ve done after your baptism. We are punishing you for what you did before!”

I did not say anything. **It** would have done no good anyway. These people could not distinguish between being baptized or unbaptized! They could not comprehend that this sin already took place since I was scheming to violate the will of God. They were under the impression that it would be a sin if I had completed the act. They could not understand, and neither did I at the time, that for the person who repents, there is no need for punishment, simply advice. Realistically, punishment was not a helpful, therapeutic aid, but a sort of “revenge” in the name of God for the sin committed. Before I left, I begged them to keep what I had said confidential, and then I bade them goodnight.

On the way home, however, I was struggling to comprehend this entire situation and how I had allowed myself to get into this. I saw the absurdity of the matter, but I was trying to justify everything in my mind for the sake of the Organization. “It seems that this punishment is God’s **will**. **So** I will not repeat this offense!” I thought. They may have punished me for a wrong cause, but I will humbly accept this as punishment for my sin. After all, the “presbyters” are human beings and certainly are not infallible.

The Organization cannot be blamed for this. I made it a habit to put the blame on people and not on the Organization. However, I did not keep the same measure for other religions. When I would hear something scandalous about a Greek priest, I did not accuse the priest but Orthodoxy. On the contrary, when I noticed any good qualities in an Orthodox person, I did not ascribe it to his faith but to his personal talent.

The Watchtower Organization, however, had a different policy; it took credit for every positive element. For everything bad or negative, it shifted the blame **onto** its members as individuals. As a good student, I learned to use this double standard, and in this way I always found the Watchtower Organization perfect. The imperfections I pushed **onto** the individual Witnesses. Yet I demanded perfection from the members of other faiths, and in the absence of it, I placed the responsibility on their religions. “Even the “presbyters” are not perfect!” I thought. If I can go directly to the perfect God, why should I reveal my sins to imperfect people? My sins are against Him, I ask forgiveness from Him and He understands me. Since the judicial committee would rather punish than advise, there is no clear reason for me to ever be in their presence again if I have repented about a certain sin. Since there are no perfect “presbyters”, I will never go back to them.

Thus, the words of my mother came true. She had told me that I would regret this confession. I remembered her words once more when I discovered that everything I had told them leaked out!

PICTURE HERE

Above: The governing council of the Watchtower Society in the beginning of the **50's**. One could say that it reminds the judges of the author.

PICTURE HERE

Below (from left): Rutherford, Knor, and Frans, the second, third, and fourth successive presidents of the Watchtower Society.

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Proposal for Marriage**

#### **Nikos' story**

I graduated from the four-grade night high school at last, and finally had much more free time at my disposal to do the “urgent work of the harvest,” working the Gospel door-to-door. I no longer saw George, my classmate, after graduation. There were more important priorities than social contacts. The important thing for him is that he was already in the “truth,” and I was informed that he was progressing well. Besides, I needed to evangelize others. The Bible studies that I conducted for

individuals interested in the Society were constantly increasing, and despite my internal struggle to bridle my passions, externally I gave the impression of being the perfect Witness.

The temptations of the world were many, and toward the end of my adolescent years, I felt ready to start a family. The only obstacle was the mandatory army service I needed to face in about a year (after the expiration of my postponement). I had but one or two summers free, and then I needed to face the consequences of my denial to carry arms.

As we did every year, this summer we also went with my mother and my grandmother to live in our vacation home in Salamina. This area was known for its high percentage of faithful Witnesses. Fifteen years ago in our neighborhood, there was only one woman Witness in the Society. Now we had grown to five families. But since we were quite a distance from the major local congregation, we used to organize some independent meetings in our neighborhood. That year, however, the Society announced that these types of private meetings should be discontinued, and we needed to go to the official ecclesiastical meetings only. Thus, we needed to find a local church to attend its gatherings.

With the help of a local Witness woman who came to our door to preach out of mere chance, we were led to one of the three local congregations rather quickly. They were all strangers to me, and despite the repeated introductions, I could not remember anyone's name. However, towards the end of the meeting, a certain well-dressed young lady wearing all white caught my attention. Although she seemed not to notice me, I very much noticed her, and I kept looking towards her as she was conversing with her girlfriends. Up to that point, several matchmakers had introduced me to a number of young girls, but in this woman, I saw the person with whom I could spend my **life**. I learned rather quickly that she was available, that her name was Roula, and that she was the daughter of the "presbyter" and owner of the Hall. I was not concerned about much else. The fact that she was a Jehovah's Witness and the daughter of a "presbyter", served as a guarantee of her overall conduct and personality. From that moment on, I began to put on the charm around Roula. I flirted with her at every meeting and every opportunity I got. I was present at the start of every meeting and sermon, and I accepted every invitation for volunteer work at the local **Hall**.

Despite this intense siege, however, the "city" was not falling. Worse yet, I sensed that she was beginning to avoid me. Toward the end of the summer, I tried a different approach. I asked my mother to intervene and discuss the matter with her mother. Although Roula's answer was negative, her mother presented it very politely, stating that her refusal was temporary mainly because of her young age. I still had hope. Meanwhile, I also felt that my appearance could also be a factor. I immediately replaced my bifocal glasses with contact lenses, and I lost some weight (I was over 200 lbs). Working methodically, I slowly began to earn Roula's affection, and by the end of the following summer, the "city fell."

We announced our intentions and celebrated the joyous event with **our** very close relatives. After a brief homily and a blessing given by one of the "presbyters", we were officially "spoken for." The few invited relatives who were not Witnesses observed with obvious indifference. For the next ten days, Roula and I had a wonderful period of getting to know each other. We both knew that we did not have much time ahead of us because on the eleventh day, I needed to sign in at the army barracks of Corinth.

PICTURE HERE

Official declaration  
of the Watchtower  
Society dated  
9/15/1943,  
proclaiming that  
Jehovah's Witnesses  
willingly submit to  
military service.  
Today, however,  
Jehovah's Witnesses

refuse military service for reasons of conscience!

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Preparing for Jail**

#### **Nikos' story**

As a Witness, I had only one choice: to refuse military service and to find myself in jail. In past years, the men of my religion were treated very brutally in jail. My father for example, was incarcerated at Makronisos and was subjected to many tortures. These tortures left indelible marks on him up to his death, and perhaps may have led to it. He often repeated the story of being struck by an Orthodox priest.

During our times, however, the conditions were better, almost rosy in comparison. Aside from the isolation and the separation from our loved ones, jail was less painful than the military itself. Before my registration in Corinth, we called one of our friends named Stamatis, who had just finished his jail term, in order to get a better understanding of what life in jail was all about. He was serving as a “presbyter” while in jail. We ended up meeting face-to-face, and he explained that in jail all the Witnesses are not necessarily good. Some of them are immature, and they annoy and scandalize the rest. Thus, I needed to be very careful in my choice of friends and to remember that I’m being imprisoned for Jehovah and not for people.

I found everything Stamatis said to be quite natural and normal. It did not cross my mind to question how it is possible for a society that monopolizes “purity” to have “bad Christians.” After preparing me for what I might encounter in jail and advising me how to deal with these different circumstances, Stamatis shook my hand and wished me well. Five years later when we would meet up again, we would both be on the outside and disfellowshipped from the Organization.

Before my registration, I also made it a point to visit Bethel, the central offices of the Organization in Marousi for further advice. During my visit, I met one more young man whom I would soon join at the Disciplinary Ward in Corinth. The office worker in charge of military matters briefly repeated what Stamatis had already told me.

He forewarned, “From the moment you pass through the door of the army camp, you will be on your own: you and God. To anyone who asks, you will reply that your refusal of military duty is clearly your personal choice and not your duty as a Witness. You must not give the impression that the Organization has an anti-nationalist agenda. They must understand that your choice to refuse the military is clearly your own.”

As far as I was concerned, what he was saying was the truth. Although the Organization had led me to espouse this decision, this was also my own creed, and I preferred to die rather than to transgress against my conscience on this matter. However, this was not the case with all the imprisoned Witnesses. In the following months, I met many young men who did not have a problem with their conscience when it came to military service. Some went to jail not to disappoint their families; others

went out of fear of being disfellowshipped by the Organization. For these last ones, their imprisonment was not the result of their own free choice: it was mainly due to coercion from the Organization. They did not necessarily find anything wrong with weapons training or serving their country in areas where weapons would be excluded (as mandated by law), yet they were compelled to undergo imprisonment because disfellowship from the Organization was something far worse.

Ten years later, the Organization adopted an even more stringent position against those who refused military service. In an attempt to present the image of the Organization as being impeccable despite some unruly actions of a few Witnesses, the Organization created committees which would determine whether or not someone should be imprisoned with other Witnesses or with the criminals. If one was deemed “immature,” the committee would not allow him to be with other Witnesses, disregarding all the dangers of being forced to cohabitate among criminals. Thus, they would compel him to enlist in the army, thereby meddling with his conscience by this cunning method.

To gain a better perspective of what disfellowship means for a Witness, I will relate to one specific incident. When I was in the jail of Avlona, they brought in a very nice, polite young man for refusal of military service. We lived together for a few months, and I observed how terribly he was affected by this jail sentence. I had seen him during visiting hours crying continuously while holding his wife in his arms. One day, quite unexpectedly, we learned that this Witness signed himself out of jail to join his army rank. We were all very surprised. I especially harbored some feelings of anger against him. We considered him a traitor of the faith, immature and a coward. A brief time later we were informed that he was disfellowshipped, and his wife wanted nothing to do with him.

I never learned what became of **him, although** now, in my mind, he is not a traitor. He is a man of free will and a very beloved person. However, I know exactly what he encountered. He lost relatives, friends, religion, and most likely his wife as well because of his decision to join the military ranks. I pray that God may protect him and strengthen him, wherever he may be.

PICTURE HERE

The third president of the Watchtower Organization, N. Knorr (right), with his successor and fourth president, F. Frans.

## **Chapter 15**

### **At the Disciplinary Ward**

#### **Nikos' story**

Eleven days after my wedding proposal, I was traveling with my fiancée and our families towards Corinth. I was feeling lost, unable to adapt to so many abrupt changes in my life. A few days ago, I promised to share my life with this young woman, and in just a few hours I would encounter the very loss of my freedom. I was no longer in charge of my destiny. From this point on, I would follow the unfolding events carrying me along as if in a dream.

We exhausted all the free time I had that day, showing up for enlistment at the last possible moment, striving to enjoy every last minute of my freedom. Finally, we entered the camp of Corinth. I embraced everyone who escorted me, and then after hugging and kissing my fiancée, I handed her a letter. Afterwards, I took my suitcase with my necessities and walked toward the guard. I told him that I was here for enlistment, and he directed me where to go. As I walked away, I glanced back at my fiancée who was busy reading my letter.

I asked a soldier for the whereabouts of the Commanding Officer, and he pointed at a certain building. I wanted to see him first, being uncertain of the reaction of his lower personnel toward my refusal of service. As I walked along, I prayed to God to provide me with the strength and wisdom to act according to His will. My mind was buzzing with an arsenal of thoughts, preparing to defend against every possible argument from the officer in charge. However, I had already been informed by the Witnesses at Corinth that the Commanding Officer was a man with understanding and this put me at ease.

Suddenly a very stern voice interrupted my thoughts: "Hey! Where do you think you are going?"

I turned and saw a soldier. "I would like to speak to the Commander!" I answered.

"It is forbidden! Go back with the others and wait for enlistment!" He told me abruptly.

"But I have something personal to tell him!" I insisted.

“Do what I tell you, unless you are looking for problems,” he said.

I returned and sat on a bench across from the entrance feeling discouraged. I was relieved to see that my relatives were still waiting outside. I waited a few more minutes until the enervating soldier stepped away. During this interval, while all my relatives were looking toward me, I observed that my fiancée had turned her back. Although she was afar, I sensed that she was crying and did not want me to see her, to spare me from additional pain. I stood up again and carefully walked toward the direction of the Commanding Officer’s quarters. I was stopped at the door by someone dressed in civilian’s clothing and asked where I was going. When I said that I was seeking the **commanding officer**, the man said, “I am he.”

“I came for enlistment, but I need to tell you that for reasons of conscience I must deny the military identity.”

“That’s ok my son. Go with the others and they will tell you what to do. We have others like you.”

I thanked him but left puzzled. I couldn’t imagine that this would be so easy! I was happy to learn that, except for the young man I had met in Bethel, there would be others like me. After the registration proceedings were completed, I advanced toward a table where they were handing out army uniforms. Naturally I refused, and they called a Corporal who was serving as a Warden to escort me to the Disciplinary Ward. The Disciplinary Ward was an old building, but well maintained on the outside. The interior, however, left much to be desired.

As I entered, I was greeted by Stathis and Thanasis, the other two “brothers” who had refused to enlist. The first one was the young man I had met at Bethel. The second one, Thanasis, had lived most of his early years like a man who does not care for God. Although he was the son of Witnesses, he lived without any Christian boundaries. This was the case until the day he went to Corinth to register. Then, while his entire family believed he would be “dressed” as a soldier, he suddenly changed his mind and decided to refuse and to embrace the religion of his parents, which he had neglected for so many years. His ignorance was overt, even in the most basic matters of the faith of the Witnesses. Along with being in prison, he also had to undertake a difficult struggle against some deeply rooted passions he had acquired from his previous lifestyle.

From the beginning, I noticed that both Stamatis and Thanasis treated the **warden** as a long lost friend and vice versa. George, the Corporal Warden, was a very nice young man who did all he could to make our stay more pleasant. During the month that I stayed at the Ward, he became my friend as well, and we even started a Biblical study together, going over one of the books of the Witnesses (in the future he never failed to visit us in the military prison of Avlonas). I was impressed by the fact that he left us free to roam around the courtyard of the **ward**, where we could easily have access to the main road. However, we never took advantage of George’s kindness, being careful not to create any problems for him.

When I first saw my new room in the **ward**, especially the bed, I wondered how I could possibly lay down there. The mattress and the blanket were full of all sorts of stains. I took a deep breath and sat on the filthy mattress. “Well, when you fall in the ocean you must swim,” I thought. I adapted rather quickly to these conditions, and I chose the cleanest military blanket found in the **ward**. In this place, the only consolations were the friendly **warden**, the visitations, and the generous portions of food. As every trained Witness should do, I immediately began to promote my faith to all those around me: the prison guards, the wardens, the drug addicts, and the deserters. Even the new-age guard nicknamed “Magician” by everyone did not escape my missionary efforts. During the month that I stayed there, I began two Scriptural studies, one with the **warden** and a second one with the drug addict named Dimitris. I also wrote my first letter to my fiancée, including a number of comments against military service, not knowing that all correspondence is screened. The letter vanished. However, the study with

the **warden** was so influential that one evening he summoned the soldiers at the Unit Recreation Center and began relating everything he learned about the future of the world as imagined by the Witnesses.

The month went by very slowly for me, so slow that it left me with as many memories as the entire year at the Military Prison of Avlonas did. I passed my days reading my new Bible, which I had bought a few months prior, and writing letters to my fiancée. I even subjected myself to a daily schedule to take advantage of every minute spent in jail for my “spiritual” progress. I had developed what the people of the Watchtower Society called a “deep sense of the urgency of time.”

Finally, the time came to go to Avlonas. They took me in the police wagon, and after two stops (one at the police station and one at the Office of Transfers), I saw the walls of the prison. Along the way, everything went well with the exception of the rude attitude of a high **ranking** police officer. He openly expressed that if it were possible, he would shoot everyone who refused to serve their country. He obviously considered himself a great patriot. While he was saying all these things, I thought about the totally different approach at the Disciplinary Ward, not only from the **warden**, but even from the **commanding officer**, the guards, and especially from the soldier who was sent to help us reconsider our stance. He was a very polite young man, but very ignorant in the matters of faith. It was easy for me to counter his arguments and even turn them against him. I remember that toward the end of the discussion, he had to seek help from another inmate, asking him, “You, **mister mustash**, do you believe the things he is saying?”

“Yes!” was the answer of mustash-Dimitri who already had a great number of Scriptural studies under his belt. After this, the soldier left and never returned.

PICTURE HERE

## **Chapter 16**

### **At the Military Prison of Avlonas**

#### **Nikos' story**

The military prison of Avlonas was a palace compared to the miserable Disciplinary Ward of Corinth. As we entered the outer yard, I felt much joy at seeing so many Witnesses waving at us. I stepped out of the police wagon, took my heavy suitcases, and was directed toward the prison offices. A young man with blonde hair was sitting behind the desk. Next to him was a man with darker skin. They were both dressed as civilians. They inspected my folder and then asked me in a serious tone, "Why do you refuse to join the army? Don't you want to serve our country?"

"No! This is not the case! Simply because my Christian-trained conscience does not allow me such action," I answered, a response I had heard a thousand times.

"Are you saying that we have no conscience?" they asked, precisely what I was expecting to hear.

"No, I did not say such a thing. You have trained your conscience differently!" I replied. Of course, I did not realize that I was simply attempting to avoid the issue. In reality, as a Witness, I believed that all soldiers belonged to the opposing camp of Satan, and they deserved to be destroyed in Armageddon. Thus, this was not an issue of different consciences as I told them, but of different camps. Subconsciously, I considered them worthy of death! They continued to question me, and I responded as a well-trained student. At some point the blonde one stood up and welcomed me with a broad smile and a handshake.

“Welcome, brother!” We are “presbyters” of the prison church!” he said and introduced himself. The other one did the same, while I was laughing mechanically in disbelief. Obviously, they not only amused themselves by posing these questions, but they also measured the quality of the new inmates by doing so. The administration had entrusted them with some routine bureaucratic tasks.

I entered my new environment with Nikos’ accompaniment (this was the name of the dark-completed one). I imagined the interior of the jail to be much different from what I actually faced when I entered the main building. The picture I had painted in my imagination was of a very narrow hallway with cells on either side. But what I saw in front of me was a huge, open space with three-story-high ceilings. The first two stories were lined with doors on both sides. Dozens of inmates were roaming freely in this entire space and in its yards. The only reminder of what I had originally imagined the place to look like was the iron bars everywhere.

While walking along the staircase, I could differentiate the Witnesses from the criminals by their clothing. The criminals wore uniforms, while the Witnesses were dressed in civilian clothes. I followed Nikos to the second level to see my new cell. It was numbered Z7. It was one of the larger cells and housed seven other “brothers.” I was informed later on that just about all the new inmates started their sentence in large cells, but eventually they would be transferred to smaller and quieter ones. Nikos showed me a bunk bed and told me that I would be sleeping on the top part.

“Do you fall out of your bed at night?” he asked.

“I don’t know, I’ve never slept on a high bed,” I said.

“Would you like to switch? My bed is at the bottom,” he said. I gladly accepted, not realizing that this was a sacrifice on his part. The lower beds were the more privileged, as I found out later.

The one year I spent at MPA was a year of social maturity and growth for me. I had the opportunity to meet people with varying personalities and every sort of idiosyncrasies from all over the country. Hundreds of others, like me, lived in a closed space, and everyone had to learn to tolerate each other and to cohabitate. In a short span of time, I saw and experienced everything Stamatis forewarned me about. I met excellent young men of my faith, but who did not differ in the least from those I used to call “worldly.” I met many groups of good people, but also cliques who imposed themselves in an anti-Christian manner, promoting their “own” even to the highest levels of the Organization. There were Witnesses who partied at the expense of those of their own faith, and Witnesses who did all they could to help others. There were ethical and homosexual Witnesses, **blaspheming** and polite Witnesses. Some would make the best impression everywhere they went, and some others the worst, like **the** group of five “brothers” who read pornography at the Disciplinary Ward, masturbated publicly, cursed, smoked, and vandalized the premises often. Naturally they were punished at the MPA, but at least one of them remained uncorrected up until his release.

Time passed very slowly, miserably slow, as I crossed off one-by-one the days on my calendar. My only consolation was the monthly visit by my fiancée and the weekly visits by my mother. Luckily, being the first-born son in my family, I only had to serve one half of the sentence, compared to the full sentence served by others.

In the beginning, I tried with much zeal to take advantage of every moment in jail by devoting time to studying. As time went on, however, I began to tire myself out. Despite this, I managed to read for several hours each day. My Bible was full of notes on the sides of its pages. My goal was to record all the interpretations of the verses, as published in the magazines of the Organization. This was a common practice among the Witnesses. During our meetings, we studied a booklet entitled *Worship* with the purpose of making the Witnesses enter much deeper **into** the knowledge of their dogmas. While all other books provided easy answers, this book challenged you to think. I can honestly say that

this book, in spite of its doctrinal errors, made me much more conscientious about my faith. For the first time, I paid great attention to the area of conscience. I practically memorized what the Watchtower had written in recent years on the subject. I even proceeded to write my first personal study on the topic: “Why I refused military service.” Notwithstanding the many reasons I referred to, today I know that there was only one real **reason**: I believed that I belonged to a different camp.

**During my stay in cell Z7**, a certain matter intervened in which I was involved. The jail administration, during its inspections, demanded all beds to be made with the provided military blanket. This was expected because according to the Greek government, we were considered soldiers, regardless of whether or not we were in denial of this identity. Thus, this was presented from our “presbyters” to the Governing Body of the Witnesses: using the military blanket is like an acceptance of the military identity. The Governing Body responded that this would not be a problem, since we already had clarified our position by choosing to be in jail. Some of us, however, were not satisfied by this outcome. We saw this response as a compromise, and since our conscience was not in full accord, we refused to make use of the military blanket. Only now, however, we did not have to deal with the administration, but with our own “presbyters”. When our decision to refuse the military was made known, the type of pressure imposed was unprecedented. The “presbyter” passed by our cell daily insisting, “The blanket will be used! The Governing Body allowed it!”

We continued to react negatively, presenting them with articles from the Watchtower, claiming that “in matters of conscience, no one can intervene, and the decision ultimately remains in the hands of the conscience-challenged individual.” I remember my precise answer, “I don’t care what the Governing Body said! From the moment I consider something to be bad, IT IS BAD. Even if Christ himself (whom I considered a creation at the time) would tell me that it is permitted, I would not do something contradictory to my conscience!”

Notwithstanding all this, when the day of inspection came, I may have been the only one of the objectors who decided to obey the “presbyter”. In the aftermath of this move, I felt defeated. I felt as though Satan had found a way to indirectly make me confess the very thing I had refused and was doing time for. As a result, I announced to Nikos (the “presbyter”) that this was the first and the last time I would compromise. During the next inspection, I would not use this blanket either. The following day, all the objectors, including myself, found ourselves in a new wing of the jail called the Recovery Ward. We would no longer present a problem since the administration did not expect the inhabitants of this wing to use military blankets. I stayed there until my transfer to the jail of Cassandra. The Recovery Ward was the quietest section of jail. The permanent noise prevalent in the regular cells was gone.

We also had other advantages in this facility. Most importantly we had private, clean bathrooms with a toilet, the lack of which was a real problem in the previous cells. There the toilet was inside the cells and its use was problematic. In our new facility, the toilets were outside of the cells and in the Recovery Ward they never locked the doors. We were forced to lock our door though. We even requested that the administration fence us in with iron bars because during our absence, the criminals would enter and steal our shoes. The Recovery Ward had three rooms: one for our meetings, one for ping-pong, and one for television. I will never forget the Homeric battles over which ping-pong move to watch and the many rats that seemed to favor this particular space.

The spiritual state of some Witnesses can be surmised by the following incident. One evening when we gathered for our meeting, the room was half empty. Being rather curious, they sent some of us to the cells to see what was happening. What we saw made us laugh and worry at the same time. Some were asleep, others were playing chess, some were reading newspapers, and others were listening to music or eating. After this intervention, however, those of some sincerity were compelled to join us at the meeting.

In the MPA, there was a disfellowshipped Witness, for reasons unknown to me. This man, although disfellowshipped, still refused military service at registration. Thus, he was sent to MPA, and after he spent some time in the criminal quarters, the Witnesses accommodated him in a cell. While there for many months, and up until his re-admittance in the Organization, all the other Witnesses refused to speak to him. I saw what he was going through and felt sorry for him, as did many others, but there was nothing we could do about his isolation. The cruel and relentless disciplinary system of the Organization was far worse than **that** used by the government.

In the beginning, my job was to mop. Later on, I was in charge of peeling potatoes for the common meals. By working in this manner, I was earning days off my sentence so I could be released from jail earlier. The Recovery Ward was quiet and more conducive to reading. It housed a library with a variety of books, and the religious section had some Orthodox anti-heretical books. One day I decided to read an Orthodox book pertaining to my religion. Afterwards, I found out this was not one of the better books. There were far more appropriate books compared to the one I selected. But even through this book, the Holy Spirit carefully began to prepare my future exodus from the heresy. The book included the correspondence of the Orthodox in charge of the anti-heretical struggle alongside the correspondence of the people of my faith. Their responses humiliated the Witness writers. Reading this book, I was scandalized to such a point as to assume that the letters of the Witnesses were mere forgeries, especially since I had no trust in the Orthodox writers whatsoever because I considered them all liars. This was even truer for this specific writer whom I despised because of an incident that had occurred a few months prior.

From long ago, I knew about a radio program where this man spoke against my faith on a certain hour everyday. I was always curious to hear what he had to say against us, but because I always worked and attended school, I didn't get to hear the program. In jail, however, I had the opportunity to tune in. One day I remembered this program and turned on the radio just as it began. The topic was about how the Watchtower Organization was a share-holding, profitable organization. If the host's arguments were sound, he would get my attention, and I would listen to him regularly. Unfortunately, however, he was trying to prove this by misinterpreting the title of an article of the Watchtower magazine, which said, "Become **shareholders** of the Kingdom!"

"Here you have it," the host of the radio program said. "Inside this issue of the Watchtower magazine they are advertising for others to become **shareholders** of the Wall Street **shareholding** company of Watchtower. I turned off the radio infuriated. I remembered the article well, and I knew that it had no relation to **shareholders** of companies, but it spoke about a share in the blessings provided by God and awaited by the Witnesses. From that point on, I never had any desire to listen to him again, and I considered him a liar and slanderer.

Consequently, much curiosity was needed on my part to decide to read his book. Even though I rejected it, believing it to be full of lies, I was unsuccessful in rejecting one verse pertaining to II Corinthians 6:7. This verse stated "...by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of the truth, by the power of God..." If the Holy Spirit was the power of God, as I believed as a Witness, then this verse would not be written this way! In a summary of dissimilar characteristics, the verse differentiates very clearly between the Holy Spirit and the power of God! This verse showed very clearly that the Holy Spirit was definitely not the power of God. I searched all issues of the Watchtower, but I did not find an answer. Thus, I kept this verse in my mind, waiting for the day that God would give me a satisfactory answer.

One of my hobbies from a young age was to read scientific journals. One of my favorite subjects was Einstein's Theory of Relativity. So one day while lying in bed in the Recovery Ward, I was reading about the essence of space-time. I was intrigued by the fact that space and time are expandable elements, much like a rubber band, and they are dependent on the matter they enclose. However, I was

even more intrigued by the belief that space and time were created simultaneously with the universe. I remembered at some point when I was younger, I had asked one of the “presbyters” the following childish question: “Where was God before the creation of the Universe?” He gave such a ridiculous answer, that even as a child, I considered it foolish. I had placed this question on the back burner all these years without discovering a satisfying answer.

On this particular day, however, my question returned more forcefully: “Where and when was God before He created the Universe? And did ‘where’ and ‘when’ even exist?” But now, for the first time, I felt that I had the background to give an answer. I began to delve noetically into the concept of God’s pre-eternity. Immediately I thought, “Since space and time are dependent on the material make-up of the world and they have their beginning from the creation of the universe, then God is ‘outside’ of space and time and space-time is His creation. Before the Universe, ‘where’ and ‘when’ simply did not exist. Only God existed.”

And while I could think so many things on this topic (all of which deeply touched me as I began to discover them later), my mind (by the grace of God) followed this train of thought, shocking my innermost being: “But then, if God made everything through Jesus Christ His Word, then He made space-time through Jesus Christ!!! I ran and opened the Holy Scripture to John 1:3 where it says about Jesus Christ: “All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made!” I panicked!!! “But then—I thought—Jesus Christ is also the Creator of time! This means that He has no beginning!”

Now I understood why the “worldly” believe in the Trinity! If this were known by all those who had previously tried to discuss Orthodoxy with me, they would have made things difficult for me! I pondered, “There must be some mistake in this conclusion, because if He had no beginning, He would not be a Son! Every son has his beginning from his parents! But if the Logos (Word) has a beginning, then it is not possible for Him to have created time!” I thought about this for a long time, unable to find a solution. Unfortunately, at the time, I did not know that the Son had His beginning from the Father in terms of the cause! Another source for this confusion was the verse that I had been taught, which stated that Christ is “the beginning of the creation of God,” and I interpreted this as “the first creation.” I did not realize that the Word “arche”[\[18\]](#) in this context means “authority.”

So at the time, I improvised a certain theory to satisfy the impasse I had found myself in. In my innermost being, however, I sensed that this could not stand up to serious critical thought. Thus, I was tormented because of this discovery, that some subconscious self-defense mechanism had removed it from my thoughts for many years. But I continued my studies and my daily activities, without losing much sleep over whether or not the Lord Jesus Christ had a beginning. Unfortunately, just a few weeks before I got word of a new transfer to the agricultural prison of Cassandra, jail got the best of me, and I began to have a variety of psychological problems. Day-by-day my depression was escalating to the point that I began to understand the phrase, “I’m about to lose my mind.”

If my transfer to Cassandra had been delayed any longer, the damage could have been irreparable. At the necessary time, God’s providence worked in such a way that I soon found myself in a new environment, which quickly cured my psychological problems. Now, after all these years, those unpleasant events have been erased from my mind and only the good memories remain. The only exception is the lingering image of my disabled mother, as she limped away from jail, permanently tired and grief-stricken.

PICTURE HERE

Left: The first issues of the magazine of the Jehovah's Witnesses, first published and circulated in the United States.

Right: The British edition of the contemporary magazine of the Jehovah's Witnesses entitled "Awake," which first appeared with the title "Consolation" and later with the title "The Golden Age."

## CHAPTER 17

### At Cassandra

#### Nikos' story

We were transferred to Cassandra by a public bus. We made a rest stop twice, and the guards left us free to walk around the nearby residential areas. I had not been let free like this for a long time, so this was a real treat. All the guards knew that none of us would escape, so they sat and relaxed at a small bar-restaurant. There was definitely no comparison between this trip and the short distance transfers in the police wagon on the way to MPA and to the court sessions.

Although Cassandra was much further from my house, I wanted to go there because my life would not be in danger. In case of war, we would be called to serve if we were found in the military prison. This meant certain death for anyone who refused to fight. All of us at the military prison of Avlona anxiously listened to the daily news to hear if there was any imminent crisis in the relations between Greece and neighboring Turkey. All this changed, however, when we entered Cassandra. Here we escaped this danger.

My first impression upon seeing the dilapidated buildings of Cassandra was disheartening. The only pleasantries were the country setting with a span as far as the eye could see. I was assigned to the Xenophon wing, which had four cells. As funny as it may be, in the last four months of my sentence, which I completed there, I never managed to remember my cell number. Each cell had about twenty beds, (if they could be called that), full of fleas. The food was almost always nasty and insufficient. That's why we would often shop from a mobile green-grocer who came by. Our work was harder compared to Avlona. It was farm work, which lasted four hours compared to only one hour of mandatory work at Avlona. Visits from Attica (the county of Athens) were scheduled once a month, at which time I got to see my family members. Visits were better than Avlona because they lasted longer, and they allowed us more privacy. Another pleasant surprise was that we met up with many of our friends who had been sent to Cassandra during previous transfers and whom we hadn't seen for a long time.

Here in this prison there was a fully organized congregation with "presbyters" and a meeting hall. We often had a visiting religious official of our faith provide us with homilies. There was even a courtroom for the spiritual committee. Here even the most unruly behaved themselves because the "presbytery" was very strict. This does not mean that there weren't any improprieties! I specifically recall a certain incident relating to the person next to me who happened to be my friend. He was a nice young man who really liked to keep all the rules of the cell very **scrupulously (?)**. These rules were certain agreements that we came up with to keep us from feuding. For example, we had agreed on a specific quiet time, a time the lights should be turned off, the order by which everyone would choose the type of music to play, and so forth. My friend demanded a **scrupulous** adherence to these rules, and his insistence created a strong sense of animosity among some of the cell residents, so they decided

to make his life miserable. They purposely walked with wooden shoes on the hollow floor when he was trying to sleep, they left him abusive and insulting notes, and they opposed all his requests.

This situation became explosive when his adversarial group accused him to the “presbytery” and piled a plethora of ungrounded charges against him. He came to me in a state of despair and said, “My accusers are many! The “presbyters” will never listen to me! I’ll try to explain all the things they do against me, but they’ll never believe me!”

“If you want my advice” I said, “do as I say, and you will win. When the “presbytery” comes, do not accuse your adversaries at all. Ask for forgiveness, and tell them that you are at fault for everything, even though this is not the case. Use the example of Christ who taught us to ‘overcome evil with good’” (Rom. 12:21).

He disagreed at first, but soon he realized that he had no other choice. When the “presbytery” arrived, my friend requested to be the last one to speak. His adversaries began to pile up a heap of accusations against him. He listened with exemplary patience. At the end, he was given the opportunity to speak.

“I ask forgiveness from everyone. I will try to become better from this point on. I am to blame for everything!”

A deep silence overtook the entire cell. This most unexpected answer froze them in their tracks. However, his most outspoken adversary became red as a tomato and began to go into a howling, trembling craze. “Now what do I saaay!” And he continued to howl with inconceivable words.

“All right! I understand who is at fault!” said the “presbyter”, and he turned towards the accusers warning them, “Be very careful not to create another incident because you will have major problems!” Then he walked out, leaving the entire cell speechless.

This “presbyter” was one of the best young men I met in my life. No one inside the walls of the jail would sacrifice their time and effort for the sake of others. But he was eager to give up his own work days in order to help others get out of prison early in full knowledge that every missed day of work would keep him one extra day in jail. We all loved him and respected him. According to a particular rule, someone could ask to be released early “under terms,” but he needed to count his days very carefully to avoid falling short of the absolute minimum, in which case they would call him back for military service, and he would be jailed all over again if he refused to serve. This happened to the so-called 12-40 rank who were released much earlier under this grace period. Since they had not fulfilled the minimum days called by the law, they were re-called and re-sentenced, thus spending more time in jail than all of us.

In Cassandra, I was in charge of the dining hall where three work days counted as two. While I estimated that it would take longer for me to be released, I was fortunate to escape the harsh work in the jail farms. When the response to my request to be released “under terms” came back positive, I still needed a few days to complete the number of days demanded by law. Thus, I risked being put out too early, something that could backfire as it did for those in group 12-40. Fortunately, they allowed me to stay in jail a little while longer with the understanding that I would work in the farms in order to catch up my workdays much faster. This took place in the middle of the winter, and not being conditioned to outdoor work, I became ill. During my final days, I was obliged to work with a fever to keep them from releasing me prematurely. Finally, the day of my release came, but it was much different than what I had been expecting.

All these months, I had been dreaming of my release day, the day that I would be free to live in the outside world again. That day was now upon me, and I found myself begging the guard to let me sleep there one more night. I had a very high fever and my head pounded unbearably. I only wanted a place to lie down and get some sleep, even in a jail cell. “I don’t have the right to keep you any longer!” the

guard responded with his usual indifference. “You must leave!” In a state of sadness, I pulled myself together and entered the van headed for the center of town, and from there a friendly prison guard took me to the nearest bus station in his car, and dropped me off at Moudania. I could hardly believe that I was leaving all by myself. Subconsciously, I looked around expecting to see some prison guard. I took a bus to Thessaloniki, but unfortunately I could not fall asleep on the way, afraid of sleeping through the airport exit. A few hours later, I landed at the Hellenic Airport in Athens where I was greeted by my fiancée.

I did not tell her that I was ill, and I pretended to be healthy. Even though I enjoyed her company after all this time, I could not wait to crash in my bed. A few days later, I went to Avlona to receive my prison release certificate. Upon entering, I rejoiced at seeing many of my old friends. I was received in the “presbyter’s” office. Bethel made sure to always have a “presbyter”, someone specifically sent by them, to provide immediate orientation to those incarcerated. They gave me a form that I needed to sign in order to validate my release. I took the paper and proceeded to read it, but for some reason they interrupted me.

“It’s OK! Everyone signs this or else they can’t get released!” By now I had read half of the form, and as I placed it on the table, I quickly read the other half. I was in shock! This paper referred to me as a “soldier,” and it was written in such a manner that by my mere signature, it would mean that I fully accept this identity. My mind worked very quickly.

“So, this was all? Everything was a fiasco? I sat in jail for a year and a half, and now I’m accepting that I’m a soldier by signing this paper?” I should not sign the form, yet at that very moment I thought of my mother, my fiancée, and all those who signed before me, and I considered it rather foolish for me to sacrifice my freedom and my life plans for a small compromise. In the end, I signed it. I was free from jail at last, but not from guilt. I remembered once more my earlier compromise with the military blanket, and with much sadness I realized that those in charge of the Organization were the first to make these same compromises, long before me.

## CHAPTER 18

### My Life After Jail

#### Nikos' story

I went back to my old job, but someone had been hired to take my position. Next, I went to an unemployment agency. They found me some temporary, but totally unbearable work. I was under pressure to save up some money for my upcoming wedding, which was only four months away. Up to this point I had adjusted fairly well to my new state of freedom. The only remnant from jail was my duty to report once-a-month for three years to the police station in my area. While I was in jail, my father-in-law opened a business in Salamina (a suburb of Athens), and we agreed that I would work there. However, I couldn't move there until after the wedding, and this was difficult because I couldn't leave my mother and my grandmother behind. They were not in the position to stay by themselves. We searched and found two homes in the same neighborhood, so we could be near each other. This was not easy, but by the grace of God we found the houses a few weeks before the wedding.

**Finally**, our special day arrived, and I found myself dressed in the groom's attire in one of the Witnesses' Halls in Pereus. The pastor who married us was a "presbyter" with special appointment who had been authorized by the state to conduct marriage ceremonies. He was also married, but I detected some sadness in his eyes when he told us that his wife was one of the "144,000" and that she would go to heaven. Therefore, she would not be next to him in the Kingdom of God because he belonged to the "great crowd," and he would remain on earth. Fortunately, my wife and I were both of the "great crowd" and of the "earthly hope" and we would live together eternally. The marriage concluded with a sermon about our duties and our responsibilities as a married couple. The pastor also took this opportunity to say a number of things in hopes of proselytizing some of the dozens of Orthodox Christians who had been invited. Finally, we departed for the customary celebration.

At the end of our honeymoon, I started my new job, and our family problems started along with it. My wife was reserved by nature, while my mother was an extrovert. My mother felt uncomfortable with my wife's shyness, and my wife was annoyed by my mother's outwardness. My mother expected more warmth from her daughter-in-law, and my wife considered my mother an unacceptable intrusion in her life. Consequently, their relationship was becoming progressively worse with very few intervals of peace and quiet in the first three years of our marriage, a painful time for all of us. I kept bringing up the example of Naomi and Ruth, but to no avail. They were both determined not to give an inch! My only consolation at the time was in finding out that this state of affairs was the rule and not the exception, according to the other couples we knew.

When I was about to transfer my church membership to Salamina, I kindly asked my new "presbyters" not to publicize that I was "marked." They explained that much time had elapsed from that incident, and I was no longer in that state. So when I came to my new congregation, I did not have any restrictions. I quickly assumed various tasks such as assisting in the congregation hall, and shortly thereafter, I became a "service deacon" (something like the Christian deacons). This meant that I needed to teach from the pulpit from **time to time**, or give public homilies wherever they sent me to preach. I was provided with homily outline formats from the Watchtower Organization, but I needed to expand and build up these outlined homilies to an approximate length of forty-five minutes. These

homilies were also under the absolute censorship of the Watchtower Organization, much like the fixed answers of its magazines. I also led one of the book studies, **served** as the treasurer of the congregation, and I was responsible for providing and making copies of profit-and-loss statements. I was also responsible for the distribution of periodicals to the congregation, and I often participated in the “Theocratic” meeting for the purpose of interpreting verses of the Holy Scriptures or analyzing sections from a book entitled *All Scripture is God-inspired and Beneficial*. Sometimes I participated in convention programs and often attended the Organization’s “deacon” seminars.

I was progressively becoming adept at whatever service the Organization asked of me, and I often took part in organizing the behind-the-scenes-work for the conventions. My presence was never lacking when the Society asked for volunteer work, and whenever time and my life circumstances permitted. The hours and the time spent in Bible studies I entered in my weekly report far exceeded the other members of my congregation, with the exception being the Pioneers, members who had as their goal to preach for two, five, and eight hours per day for one or more months. At times, I also hit the level of the Pioneers since I needed to present a good example as Deacon. I was always very eager to knock on doors and to work the streets (advertising magazines on busy street corners). However, a special event that took place while I was working the streets proved to be a turning point in my journey toward Orthodoxy.

## Chapter 19

### Working the Streets

#### The story of Nikos

When I was at the previous congregation shortly before my incarceration, the Organization made an announcement one Sunday informing us that because Greece now had a more democratic government, we could advertise our magazines on the streets. On that same Sunday two “presbyters” and I passed out seven hundred pamphlets. In Salamina, however, we ran into a militant priest who caused us severe problems. Every time we stepped foot on the street, within a few minutes, we were surrounded by a multitude of Orthodox, who prevented us from doing any work. Several large signs displayed slogans against us, and the priest was preaching through a megaphone, attempting to expose the heretical teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. At the time, I was very irritated, but today I understand these actions as his efforts to protect the flock of the Church. The mistake, however, was in their overall approach to the problem posed by the opposition. Instead of looking at us as lost sheep, they looked at us as ravenous wolves. Consequently, it appeared as though they were not concerned about our salvation, but only for the salvation of the Orthodox. The people around the priest would make all kinds of inaccurate remarks, calling us “employed agents of America” and “Jews” and saying that we stepped on holy icons, that we are antichrists and so forth. They tried to lynch us on three separate occasions. All these activities however, made us even more fanatical, and we returned each time even more obstinate than the last.

The majority of our opponents were very immature, as illustrated in the following incident. One day while advertising magazines with a man who held Bible study with me, we encountered two of the Orthodox people who annoyed us. One of them was a council member at a local church. The other one came up beside me and began to insult us with very coercive and unethical obscenities; he even cursed Christ and the Panagia!

“Do you hear what he is saying?” I asked the parish councilman who had come up close to me. “What sort of Christians are you?” I inquired.

“I didn’t hear anything,” the councilman replied, lying.

“I don’t believe in anything!” his companion yelled.

“Then why do you annoy us?” I asked.

“I don’t want any of this money to go to the Americans! I want it to go to our priests!” he said, and they both left.

On another occasion, when my wife was pregnant with our first son, we went out with two others to “work the street.” We were positioned on opposite sidewalks, and as was often the case, we were soon

surrounded by our opposition and the priest with the megaphone. At some point, someone from the rooftop of the high-rise threw a large soda container full of water, which landed next to my wife. If this had fallen on her head, she would be dead! A little later, another person lit some kind of fireworks and tossed it at her feet. She could have been killed or had a miscarriage. On another day, they came with censers and as they were censuring us with incense, someone else was showering us with unspeakable obscenities. And all this from the hands of people who considered themselves Christian!

On many occasions, our adversaries would come up to us and read excerpts from anti-Chiliasm books (apologetics) about the changes the Society had made to some of its basic doctrines. We were not too concerned about this, however, because we were instructed that this was “new light” and that God revealed the truth to his people progressively. The Orthodox could have been much more effective if they had shown us some of the thousands of verses in the Scriptures that escaped our attention; this would have been far more problematic and thought provoking to us at the time.

The reference to the doctrinal changes of the Organization are effective when they are revealed to newcomers, to people who have not suffered destruction of their critical thought by the methodologies of the Organization, to people who still use their discernment, or to people who had once again begun to think freely without blinders. “Triple contradictions” are especially effective, where the Organization changes some dogma and then regresses to its previous views, which it considered Satanic. Based on this, the intelligent seeker understands that such a journey cannot be labeled progressive when it goes back-and-forth showing that its “new light” turned to darkness again! Hopefully, he will understand that this overstrained verse about “bright light” is referring to a progressively bright journey of each individual of faith, and not to the dogmatic alchemies and immaturities of a religious organization.

In reality, we were organized and highly coordinated in our efforts. Along with those of us standing on the streets, we usually had others following at a distance so in the event of an incident, they would serve as eyewitnesses. In fact, many times we ended up pressing charges at the local authorities, complaining of some type of impropriety enacted against us.

Usually, when someone would purchase a magazine from us, members of our opposition would run and take it out of his hands. If this was done with the consent of the man involved, it did not present a problem. At times, however, when they took it from him without asking, he would get angry. We accused them of being afraid that people may learn the real truth, and we kept struggling with more zeal. On one occasion, a Witness from my previous congregation came up and bought a magazine, pretending to be Orthodox just to blow their minds. When they went to take it from him, he yelled and chased them away, treating them as pests. In such a confrontational climate of animosity and opposition, it was impossible for Witnesses to be helped by the Orthodox.

I often challenged my opposition to a discussion. However, no one ever seemed eager to discuss anything without the presence of the priest, whom I despised and had no desire to speak with because I considered him an ill-disposed enemy of God. In spite of all this, someone finally accepted my challenge, and I joyfully set up a meeting with him. When the rest of the Witnesses found out about the meeting, they tried to convince me to cancel.

“He has talked to us a number of times,” they argued, “but he doesn’t want to accept the truth.”

“You never know! Maybe God will help him this time around!” I said and went to meet him.

PICTURE HERE

The seventh issue of the monthly Watchtower magazine, June 1886.

The Zionist (Masonic) origin of the magazine and creator of the Jehovah's Witness organization, C.T. Russel, is quite overt here with the title "Zions."

## CHAPTER 20

### The First Doubts

#### The Story of Nikos

I took with me the Holy Scriptures, a New Testament concordance and some books of the Organization. Primarily however, I relied on a small booklet briefly referring to the history of the church full of negative scandalizing elements. The reason I used this particular booklet was because of its synod approval stamp on the first page. Thus I believed that whatever I would show to my **challenger** would be irrefutable. I was not aware that the Holy Synod approves books without always reading them, and that the approvals of the Synod of the Bishops are not always acceptable by the church.

“Before we begin our discussion,” he said to me, “we that need to establish our sources of truth. You must know then that we as Orthodox, along with the Holy Scriptures accept the Ecumenical Synods, and in short, the entire Holy Tradition of the Church. At this point I will agree to base our discussion solely on the Holy Scriptures out of concession, in order to help you out. Do you accept all the books of you organization in addition to the Holy Scriptures?”

“Only those, which were not reevaluated based on a newer and better understanding by the Organization!” I answered, to block him from bringing up all kinds of “new light changes” of the Organization over the years. However, I already had a problem. With his initial comments he already rendered useless my little booklet against the Church, because it wasn’t approved by **an** Ecumenical Synod! After this we began our discussion and I preferred to begin first, so I can always keep him on the defensive so he would not have an opportunity to structure an attack.

After I exhausted my time referring to all the negativities of the small book, **he** commented that this particular **author may be** a theologian, but he is not truly Orthodox, but of a very **Protestant** mindset. Consequently his book is seriously flawed and inappropriate for this discussion. After this, he began to answer **every one** of my arguments with very simple answers, often with one phrase, to the point where he refuted my entire argumentative procedure in a few minutes.

I was looking at him expressionless and he must have sensed this because he told me: “I’m sorry that I’ve destroyed your arguments so quickly, but these things are very simple!” Being that we had divided our discussion period in equal sections and his time was already finished, I needed to talk again, and I would continue to keep him on the defensive. So I began the attack, forcing him to defend **the** entire time. This went on for six hours! But since I kept him continuously defending his position, he did not find the time or the opportunity to begin to dissect some serious issues of my religion.

A few minutes before the completion of our discussion and while accusing St. Constantine for a number of things I had heard and read, I took out an encyclopedia volume. This volume was full of many bad accusations against the saint. “Do you believe everything you read in encyclopedias?” he asked me. “Yes, except about evolution”, I replied. “Then you must also believe this” he said, and he took a photocopy out of his briefcase from some encyclopedia. The subject was about Jerusalem. Among other things it **said** that the destruction of Jerusalem took place in 587 B.C., and not in 607 B.C. as I was taught **by** the “Watchtower Organization.” This has great ramifications on all the doctrines of this Adventist organization because this date serves as the foundation of its central dogma, holding that the second Presence of Christ took place in 1914.

## CHAPTER 20

### The First Doubts

Almost all the doctrines of the Organization—even its allegation of being the “organization of God” after 1919—are based on this dogma of 1914. Of course, at the time the significance of this had not struck me, so I looked at the dogma of 1914 as a date without any special importance. This was also true for my challenger, who simply looked at this as a cacodox dogma that needed to be refuted. Thus, when I took out a book of the organization “Thy Kingdom Come”, with the purpose of proving that Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C., he did not insist much, saying: “The **Organization** wants to pull the wool over our eyes, managing to lead us astray with such distorted articles, to keep us from discovering the truth.” I had not understood exactly what the book wrote, but I remembered this subject in a form of a footnote. What I did not know was that the author of this footnote, Raymond Frans, a member of the “Governing Body” and a nephew of President Frans, was accused of apostasy and expelled because he no longer believed in this date! When still in jail, I had heard that the nephew of President Frans was in apostasy and left the “Governing Body,” but at the time I did not pay any special attention to this; not even now was I aware that this was connected to the topic under discussion. However the fact that I was not very well versed on this topic was very upsetting to me. If I would have studied the footnote carefully I **would have been** able to answer him properly, so he could learn the truth, seeing that the Organization is worth far more than any encyclopedia.

Incidentally, he had squashed one more of my arguments against St. Constantine since I myself discredited all the encyclopedias as untrustworthy!

At this point we were forced to adjourn our discussion because my wife and my mother-in-law were knocking on my door, being somewhat alarmed **about** my six-hour absence. I was feeling empty, mainly because all my arguments against the Orthodox were answered quite unexpectedly, even though he did not have a chance to say much against my religion. So I was disarmed, yet I was not convinced that he was right in being Orthodox. I was eager to repeat this discussion and I was beginning to feel that we were friends. Unfortunately he did not share in these feelings. The next day I went out for “street work”. As it often happened, the man I **had discussion with** approached me. This time I was happy to see him and I greeted him with joy. His response was very shocking to me:

“You are not only an agent (of Brooklyn) but even a bribed one!” he yelled very angrily. Apparently he believed that he had convinced me of being in the wrong faith and despite all this I chose to ignore the truth. In turn I also became very angry against him, expecting more kindness after so many hours of friendly discussion. Thus, all the beneficial things he built inside me he demolished in a few seconds. The Orthodox took once again their old position in my eyes, as liars, worthy of destruction, people with every evil quality. However, the seed he planted about the date of Jerusalem’s destruction did not perish. This man could have been my enemy, but he touched on something that was an excellent topic for **research**. I needed to learn how to deal with this argument more appropriately the **next** time it would come up. So I began to research this topic using different resources within the organization. Not that I was able to understand everything, but I grasped some idea about the problem and I could at least now defend 1914 by repeating the arguments of the Organization like a parrot.

## CHAPTER 20

### The First Doubts

A new development however compelled me to continue this research. One day, my sister-in-law who worked with me at the time, told me that some “Witnesses” she was acquainted with informed her that the Organization had found proof that the dogma of 1914 was wrong, and a change was to be soon in the works. I considered this very possible without any bias, and I was ready to accept it as “new light”. But the fact that I had wrestled with this subject a few months prior, and being that I had seen a different date in the encyclopedia than the one held by the Organization, made me restless. I could not sit back and wait for the change to be publicized by the “Watchtower”. Therefore I began a new round of research on the subject with a different goal this time. The study needed to take into account only

the Holy Scriptures this time, so if there were some mistakes on this dogma, it would be made **overtly** and supported **scripturally**. Afterwards I would compare my findings with the articles of the Organization to see if there was a difference in the train of thought. In reality however, I did not expect to find a difference, hoping that the information of my sister-in-law's acquaintance was wrong. This study went on for six months on a daily basis. I studied and recorded important elements many hours every day. I was amazed by the complexity of the events of the period involved. I was under the impression that the Jews migrated to Babylon only once and here I discovered that there were four separate such migrations! This complicated matters, because I needed to determine at every point which migration was the text referring to. Confusing was also the constant change of Israel's Kings, as I was attempting to determine the years of their reign. And to make matters even worse, there were two different kingdoms, one with ten tribes and the other with two tribes, each having its own king. Another complexity was the difference of our calendar with the Hebraic and the Babylonian, which gave different numbers from book to book of the Holy Scriptures!

Toward the end of this almost six-month period, I had come up with some conclusions. I organized my findings in a chronological index, according to the order of events, and afterwards I opened the books of the Organization to compare notes. The comparison was highly disappointing. In the corresponding chronological index of the organization, I found much void and obscurity from which originated a great series of different chronologies. Strangely enough, in following the argumentation of the footnote of the book "Thy Kingdom Come" I could not even agree with the chronologies of the historians. After tormenting myself for some time to find some compromise for the differences, I reckoned: "It is impossible for me to find in six months something that the Organization of God did not find in a century. I probably made a mistake somewhere". So I placed a question mark on the dogma of 1914 and I glued my study inside the Holy Scriptures. "God, will solve this puzzle for me at the opportune time," I thought.

A document about the end of the World in 1914 as prophesied at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Russel, the founder of the “Watchtower Organization”.

(RIGHT)

\_\_\_\_\_

Russel with his wife  
Mary Ackley. The  
**Russels divorced**  
in 1897.

-----

----- (LEFT)

This photograph **describes well** the opinion held by the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” for the founder of the “Watchtower Organization.:

---

[1] Church hymns

[2] There is no separation of church and state in Greece; thus, religion is taught in public schools.

[3] buddies

[4] The veneration of the Virgin Mary

[5] Translator's Note: Rationalism (i.e., logic) is the mother of all heresies, the attempt of man to explain the mysteries of God logically.

[6] Translator's Note: Huge dogmatic error. If a snake "begets" snake, a sheep "begets" sheep, a man "begets" man, then God "begets" God. What is born of God is of the essence of God. Thus, Christ is God.

[7] An old custom in some Greek villages is to set off fireworks during the Resurrection service.

[8] Large, festal candle.

[9] Translator's Note: "Through whom (the Son) indeed he created the ages."

[10] Translator's Note: This sounds so familiar! After my initial discussions with "fire-breathing" Pentecostals, I began searching for a New Testament in the original Greek. God provided for a priest's son to be in my workplace at that very crucial time. He arranged for me to meet his father, Rev. Nicholas Kossis, in Easton, Pennsylvania. In less than an hour, I found myself in the crystal pure waters of our Holy Church. What a blessed reunion! He gave me an important book, "An Orthodox-Protestant Debate" written by Fr. Joel Gianakopoulos, which answered all of my concerns. Fr. Nicholas has been my father confessor ever since.

[11] Hired by sectarians to translate the ancient Greek text into the spoken Greek—not accepted by the official Church of Greece.

[12] Translator's Note: This term is used loosely and pertains to all religious educators in the Greek school system. According to the Church Fathers, a theologian is someone who has attained vision of God, not necessarily a teacher of religion.

[13] A celibate Orthodox priest, literally "the leader of the flock."

[14] Translator's Note: In some Christian countries there is the dilemma of "career" priests and bishops where the political machine "employs" the clergy intending to institutionalize the church. In Greece, clerics are employees of the government. This often motivates opportunist individuals to lean toward the ranks of clergy for obvious reasons, but God's great mercy leads many of them to repentance and salvation.

[15] Translator's Note: A very standard procedure for almost all direct sales, door-to-door organizations. A visiting regional director will make himself available once-a-month to instruct, motivate, and "pump up" the young and impressionable trainees with success stories and a "think-and-grow-rich" philosophy.

[16] Translator's Note: The effort of evangelizing is a mandatory activity for "witnesses."

[17] Chiliast is a prevalent term in Greece for the Witnesses. It is derived from the number 1,000, or "chilia" in Greek.

[18] The authority of God.