

The Spiritual Pilgrimage of One Former Jehovah's Witness

I was born in the summer of 1942. Right after the end of World War II, my father joined the Communist Party. My mother had been raised in an evangelical family and although she was herself not a religious person, after my birth I was baptized as an evangelical. In the first and second classes of elementary school I attended religious education from the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

In second grade I stopped participating in religious education after a visit in our class from a young atheist agitator who claimed that God was scientifically proven to be non-existent, and religion was obscure. That was sometime in 1950. Over time I became a convicted atheist.

Otherwise, I lived in such a way that I considered the world around me to be a place for comic and humor. My classmates considered me a "class clown," teachers an intelligent Svejka*. Because of this, they almost "poured" me out of college. During military service, I became a Communist (1963), and for the first time I realized that I needed a deeper meaning in life. I felt that my military service was senseless and boring.

I enrolled at the Czech Technical University in the field of technical cybernetics at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. I studied this field while I was employed. I believed then that cybernetics can correct the world. I was a deeply devoted communist¹. I became profoundly more materialistic while studying communism, which included a more thorough understanding of the basics of Marxian philosophy, including dialectical materialism. I remember sometime at that time that I was arguing with my grandfather, an educated farmer and an evangelic, about the existence of the Creator. I told him that both the universe and life were governed by the laws of matter that are inherent in matter (that is, the law of natural evolution to higher forms, as claimed by dialectical materialism). Grandpa told me this: Where there are laws, there must be a Legislator, but I refused to accept this concept. No, I reasoned, the laws governing matter are its internal components.

During my studies, in the years 1963-1969, I experienced a rather happy period of my life during the awakening freedom of the late 1960s. I was increasingly aware of the price of more freedom of thought, freedom of information, and freedom of expression. I was gradually advocating the view that "enlightened" socialism is the best way to a happier future for mankind. When foreign armies invaded our country in August 1968, communism died in me that day and I realized my deep desire for freedom.

My wife and I considered emigration, but we were not able to do so because of my wife's medical complications after the birth of our first daughter. What was next? How do we experience the "rest" of life? Everything was lost! That was my deep feeling, a real existential crisis.

I sought solace in books, among other things, because I was born a bookworm. Before censorship started to arise again, I bought many interesting books in bookstores and some secondhand books. After a while, I was surprised at where I found the answer to the most important question of life. It was where I'd never looked for it – in physics and cybernetics. In the end, my thoughts led me to a surprising conclusion: there is a law in the physical, chemical and information processes that, as a consequence, points to the direction of development: decomposing more complex structures to simpler, reducing the "quality" of energy as stated in the Second Law of Thermodynamics (entropy). Information does not arise, on the contrary, it lessens!! The arrow of time goes directly against the "natural tendency of matter to organize." I couldn't believe it,

* an irreverent but lovable character in a 1920's novel about Eastern European anti-authoritarianism

¹ I never held any office in the Party. I studied remotely and just founded a "family," attending local organization meetings at my workplace and paying membership fees. On the other hand, I fervently promoted the ideas of socialism "with a human face," often with ironic comments from opponents.

but the counterarguments just don't exist, I haven't found them (yet !!!). In the beginning there was the Information, the Superinformation – in the beginning was the Word! When I realized the existence of the Superior Power that created everything, I experienced an indescribably deep feeling of peace. During my military service, I experienced two crises, Berlin and Cuban; rockets, nuclear weapons, etc., but above all *Someone*, the originator of life, who will not allow destruction here on earth, who can even give us eternal life!!! That was SOMETHING!!!

But how to get in touch with Him? I began to dabble in yoga, which promised it. We also tried to evoke ghosts once. The idea of a church, let alone Roman Catholic, did not occur to me. The Church for me, was of the Middle Ages, containing only superstitions².

One classmate from my university, a former Catholic and then Jehovah's Witness, invited us to attend a Bible study. First, he sent us a brochure made by photocopying *This Good Message of the Kingdom*. Perhaps we, my wife and I, didn't understand a single sentence, nor then did we know the Lord's Prayer. But I did not want to be mistaken again as in the case of communism, so I myself took over half a year to read the entire Bible. I was particularly impressed by the personality of Jesus. Witnesses, according to my opinion at that time, were well documented by the Bible³. My wife and I were baptized on September 8, 1971 after a year of studying the book *Truth, which Leads to Eternal Life*.⁴

Maybe it is worth asking: why the Witnesses? At that time, in 1970, I did not know of any people claiming Christianity. Witnesses were perhaps the only ones in Czechoslovakia who not only claimed to be Christians, but they were even eager to share their faith with others, which was not very cautious. (Everyone else was cautious?) When I read the Bible, I did not find the words “parish priest,” “church,” “mass,” or “holy water” in it, nothing that could be associated with the churches in any way. Moreover, Witnesses acted illegally and met in homes, a situation quite similar to that of an early church⁵. Addressing members as “brother” and “sister” was not merely their form, Witnesses clung to each other in a glaring sense of belonging, which I have never seen anywhere else (never before!).

I still have to mention the staffing of the Witnesses of that time, because there is a widespread belief that Witness faith is only for the simple-minded. After 1968, the Witnesses movement in then Czechoslovakia grew several times. I personally knew dozens of university-educated Witnesses, some of whom were at the top in their fields. I also met several people who had not “broken” under many years of hardship, sometimes even torture in communist jails in the 1950s. Most were average people, and it is astonishing how these people of totally different education and social origin clung to each other throughout various persecutions.

² The Czech nation is mostly anti-clerical. But most people believe that there is something between heaven and earth and some form of life after death, of course without the concept of resurrection. If one professes to be a member of the Christian church (barely 10% of the population), he is almost always a supporter of the Trinity.

³ When one Witness visited us for the first time, I was fascinated by his personality (probably the first time in my life I met what I considered to be a balanced man) and by his explanation of the importance of the year 1914 and how this year was supported by “biblical chronology”.

⁴ Our closest relatives were fundamentally against our decision, in particular, they feared political persecution ... but we were excited about the sense of life we just found, and without worrying about the consequences, we shared our views with the people around us. The time was sadly renowned for its harsh political cleansing, with some people not accepting the "fraternal assistance" in August 1968 ending up in prison. It was a time of breaking an individual's spirit.

⁵ Witnesses belonged to several groups who believe in creationism, thus rejecting evolutionary theory. Both Catholics and Protestants believed in evolution, as I can confirm from personal experience, and do not take the Bible seriously.

Witnesses selflessly produced literature that was largely based on the Bible, while other literature so conscientiously dedicated to Scripture was inaccessible in our country. It was almost impossible to get a Bible, and if so, it was a Bible of Kralice (from AD 1613) that was hard for us today to understand.

And what about unfulfilled prophecies? Often quoted dates were 1914 and 1975, which were about the end of the current bad world. *In 1970, the world looked completely different than it seems today.* It was a world of "cold war" that burst into real wars in local conflicts, a world of struggles between two hostile political camps armed with weapons of mass destruction, strategic bombers, and long-range missiles with multi-heads and atomic submarines, both seeking world government. According to scientists from the 1975 "Roman Club" scientists, natural resources were being depleted, oil supplies were to dry up by the year 2000. "Oil shock" was shaking the very foundations of the world economy.

So we decided to become Jehovah's Witnesses. While being aware of various risks associated with belonging to the Witnesses (constant monitoring by members and omnipresent assistants of State Security), I stood strong in my faith, and held fast to the concept that this wicked world, which is dominated by Satan, would soon come to an end. Although the end still did not occur, we found our new family in the persecuted community of the Witnesses of the district town in eastern Bohemia. When I looked into my StB-led writings after the 1989 coup [StB was the plainclothes secret police in Czechoslovakia], I found one review in the rest of the documentation (most of it was shredded), saying that the activity of the Witnesses had revived significantly around the time we moved to the city 47 years ago. I really enjoyed a happy time in the family of Christian brothers and sisters, while the vast majority of other people were raised by various political trainings, and they gradually believed them more and more!!! I learned this from the preaching conversations. (At that time a large part of the population was trained by the so-called VUML, the evening university of Marxism-Leninism; and that may explain many of our fellow citizens' contemporary "philosophy" even today!)

We were very active and well-known in our neighborhood as Jehovah's Witnesses. I had the opportunity at my workplace to help several individuals and whole families "know the truth that leads to eternal life". We also produced the Society's literature. Our daughters were both baptized as juveniles at the age of 15 and 17, both serving as pioneers; the older even served several years with her husband as a special pioneer. During the totalitarian regime in Poland, we were in contact with Polish Witnesses.

In 1980, an attempt was made to destroy Witnesses in East Bohemia. Elders of several congregations were gradually being sentenced. This attempt culminated in May 1984 when we, a total of 5 brothers and one sister of our small congregation, some 50 people, were arrested. In September, a monstrous trial was held before the organized public, and we were all sentenced to unconditional penalties – the loss of our freedom for ten months. During the investigation, custody and imprisonment, I experienced God's presence very closely. I know I got special help in prison. Several strange, almost mysterious⁶, circumstances occurred and these caused the oppression of Witnesses in East Bohemia to be greatly weakened. After returning from prison, many fellow citizens from our city welcomed me, even the company director (who was communist), where I worked.

⁶ At the beginning of the pre-trial detention, I was welcomed in the cell by one of the already sentenced prisoners, awaiting escort to a forced labor camp; allegedly he was involved in military intelligence, adept at the laws. He helped orient me in the knowledge of my rights. After his relocation, an Italian high school professor appeared in my cell. After two weeks he was released and after returning home to Naples he caused the "free world" to be informed about the persecution Jehovah's Witnesses in East Bohemia.

Right after returning from prison, the Company sent me to one Witness congregation, where personal problems broke out among the elders which were so insoluble that the local council of the elders was dissolved.

Our government regime collapsed at the end of 1989, which I had been expecting since 1984. Finally, we were free to preach and assist our fellow citizens from "being destroyed in Armageddon."

To complement the picture of my connection with the Witnesses, I mention my "career". I got into different positions within the church leadership because there wasn't a better candidate. I never pushed anywhere. In several churches in East Bohemia, I served as the chairman of the council of elders. In our congregation I served in several positions (which no one wanted to do) i.e. chairman, secretary, overseer of preaching service, overseer of school.

After the coup at the end of 1989, I was a member of the hospital contact committee, as well as a military and substitute service advisor, a treasurer at regional congresses, and an assistant to a regional overseer where I trained service assistants. I had a point at every regional congress program; when we visited the International Congress in Michigan in June 1998, I was the leader of one of the three groups. I visited the Czech branch only once, even though I knew some of the members of the service committee personally from the totalitarian period, and only because of the necessary agenda. I hate "polishing door handles in ministries".

But at the beginning of 1990 I was ill with a mysterious disease that lasted 10 years, accompanied by nearly intolerable fatigue. Because of my health issues, I was suddenly not able to lead my brothers by example, which made me feel guilty. That was when my second deep crisis began, a real existential crisis.

I wanted to resign from the position of elder, but one very close brother encouraged me not to give up, telling me: "You have been named by Jehovah, and the disease does not disqualify you." During that time, I realized that my religion, instead of helping me to live as it did for many years, was increasingly killing me. I deeply felt that there was a terrible mistake somewhere!!!

Over time⁷, new district overseers, who seemed to me to be young boys, ascended to leadership roles, and made short work of us who were "merited". I gradually lost all of my "privileges" in congregation. My "career" ended. In actuality, I was glad because the guilt was gone. I was still sick, so I was looking for an activity that would entertain me and also relieve me. I embarked on a study of world history (I still believed that it was possible to calculate the occurrence of the Lord's Day⁸, hoping to find some definition of "times and periods" set by God from world history)⁹. I also studied sociology. In doing so, I realized that Witnesses

⁷ After the collapse of the totalitarian regime in our country, the totalitarian features of the leadership of the Organization Watch Tower became increasingly apparent. At the same time, the spirit of Christian fraternity gradually disappeared.

⁸ The fact that Armageddon already has been delayed so long made me quite anxious; after all, the logical connection of all blocks (doctrines) was wonderful and certainly flawless. Until October 22, 1995 header of magazine *Awake!* states why the magazine is published: "But above all, this magazine encourages confidence in the Creator's promise that a peaceful and safe new world will be created during the life of the generation that has experienced events in 1914." I did not notice this until several years later, however.

⁹ As a result of unfulfilled prophecies, the legitimacy of all the claims made by the Watchtower Society was undermined. Has Jehovah God not fulfilled his promise? It shouldn't even occur in mind of anyone. Is it possible to prophesy in God's name and yet "the word will not happen"? According to Deuteronomy 18: 20-22, it is possible: "But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak ... And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?' when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has

are just one of many organizations working on a bureaucratic principle, with all the ailments and insensitivities of such organizations to individuals. Bureaucracy and fraternity do not go together – they are mutually exclusive; however, they help to push through the standards set at headquarters to individuals¹⁰.

I realized how the results of our preaching activity was quite cruel. If a candidate was found, the tenets of the church were studied with him. In order to become a baptized Witness, he had to give up all his friends, and sometimes be renounced by his relatives. He had to adhere to all the dictated restrictions supposedly necessary to a pure way of life, some being to restrict the celebrations of name day, birthday, Christmas and all “worldly” holidays, etc. This means the person will be totally separate from one’s social environment.

During his studies, he has a warm interest in both the Witness who leads the "study" with him, and the elders of the church. But if he becomes a Witness, then he is also a "preacher" just like the others, and suddenly no one has time for him. He is pushed to the extent that he will have no time to develop friendly relationships with anyone in his new "community". He has lost his original friends, and he cannot establish new relationships because of the excess of "theocratic" activities he is involved in. Perhaps if he is lucky enough to lead his studies, at least for a while he will have a relationship with the learner, but he is very manipulative on his part, because "leading to the Organization" is part of the study! This cannot be called anything but absolute heartlessness, but they call it “love!!”

Our assembly designed to prepare us for the so-called Preaching Service was very, very similar to motivational meetings of US business organizations. Moreover, the signs of the coming of the Lord, as shown by the Witnesses, completely faded through our fingers. For example, instead of driving a horseman of the Apocalypse proclaiming hunger, we preached in front of shopping centers to people who were riding with full baskets of food, even delicacies. In terms of material security, this world has never been better. The biggest shock to me, however, was the realization that our literature was by no means objective, as I believed and taught for years. In addition, it is manipulative and strongly hypocritical and induces feelings of guilt.¹¹

After this disclosure, I began to regard Jehovah's Witnesses "just" as a Christian community that could not be easily built, and I appreciated this aspect of the Society. I attributed human imperfections to the fact that there were occasional misunderstandings, for various ruptures and other nasty things had previously taken place in the churches that the Apostle Paul had looked after. Thus I tried, at least, to encourage my brothers with my biblical comments on the gatherings. But that almost always triggered an alarm among the "responsible" brothers.

One brother, who once encouraged me to persevere in the position of elder, begged me to send him a letter about my feelings, during the time that I was still ill. But when he got the letter, he burned it! It made him fearful (and our families had been personal friends for 30 years!) Then I visited him at work, and here again I explained my, now liberated, view of "brotherhood" in the Organization. Then this "significant" Witness

spoken it *presumptuously*. **You need not be afraid of him.**" I realized it only later but this knowledge freed me from the sacred fear of what the disobedience of a "faithful and sober slave" would mean to me. I realized that people only have power over me as much as I allow them.

¹⁰ But this is nothing new. This system of management was devised by the Romans concerned with the legal system. This recipe made it possible to create a “Christian Europe” when rejecting the inconceivable doctrine of the Triune God meant almost certain death. From the grip of this, Europe gradually came out after the gruesome experiences of the 17th century religious wars and arose out of the darkness of superstition (as evidenced by plague pillars in the squares) to rational reasoning, and ultimately to drinking water and sanitation in the communities where it had already existed in the cities of the Roman Empire, but then for no more than one and a half millennia.

¹¹ I stopped reading this literature almost immediately after my exclusion, I did not want to let myself continue to pollute my mind.

met with one of the elders of our congregation during the summer congress in 2001; he was amazed that elders could have suffered such a “renegade” in their congregation. And so our elders who, apparently, would not have come to this decision themselves because we had been "comrades" for decades, eventually summoned one uncompromising Witness (whose name is not worth mentioning), and through his manipulation of Bible texts by the Watchtower, excommunicated me. The Appeals Committee confirmed this.¹² That happened at the very end of 2001. When one of the members of the Legal Committee escorted me out of the Kingdom Hall, he said to me, "Oh, I'm so sorry this happened. You were the only brother who really encouraged me." "But you have a number of brothers who can encourage you," I responded. "You know me enough when Lord Jehovah encourages me." Sad testimony of "brotherhood" in the contemporary Witnesses (2001). Inside, I felt a huge boulder fall from my heart. (But I never became an anti-Witness.)

I can compare the objectivity of the Legal Committee of Witnesses in 2001 with the course of the investigation and trial with the Witness group of our congregation in 1984. The Witness accused by the Organization has far less opportunity to defend himself than the person accused in the totalitarian system of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Within the government, he would have an attorney, could have filed various complaints and supplements, had access to the investigation file and could object and add evidence to his advantage. Finally, he could be rehabilitated by the same state, while the Watchtower Society did not once do this in its history¹³, although it appeared that the ideas for which some Witnesses had been excommunicated were accepted eventually by the Organization Watch Tower!!! In addition, the committee keeps a careful record of all those who are excommunicated, even after their deaths!!

In the years 2002-04 memories of the faithful Jehovah's witnesses who were alone and away from their own nation, were a consolation for me - Joseph in the Egyptian prison, Moses in the desert, the anointed King David persecuted by Saul, the prophet Jeremiah, and finally Jesus Himself delivered by His own nation to death. With some doctrines, I broke up as a formal Witness, especially about the 144,000, but some doctrines I continued to share, such as [not having] blood transfusions. I was almost desperate to find answers to some questions, and almost I came to the conclusion that Christianity could not be understood by reason, but rather in some mystical way. From 2002 to 2005, one teacher invited me to several lectures and discussions in her class at the University of Pardubice.

Fortunately, at the end of 2005, I found on the internet an article "Blood and Life, Law and Love," where I finally found a biblically sound reasonable explanation about blood transfusions without any mysticism. This article is a chapter of the book *In Search of Christian Freedom* by a former member of the governing body of the Watchtower Society, Raymond Franz. Immediately after that I borrowed the book in the National Library, I scanned it, transferred it to OCR and then gradually translated it. I was most interested in Chapter 14 "A People for His Name", and while reading it I realized my truly filial relationship with the Father. I have come to accept much of the book's conclusions because of my rich experience and thinking about it. That is why I accepted this discovery work almost without reservation.¹⁴

¹² I sent my letter, referring to the result of the local legal committee, to every member of the then service committee of the Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Czech Republic. In it, I warned them that there is a "witch hunt" in East Bohemia directed against experienced and dedicated Witnesses who have shown their purity with all their lives even in times of persecution. Interestingly, one of the committee members had risen a few months after my warning. Finally, as the whole work in the Czech Republic turned out, judge for yourself. I am not pleased with it and I am very sorry for those who do not perceive who they actually serve.

¹³ It is nothing special in the churches, Jan Hus was rehabilitated by the Roman Catholic Church after almost 500 years!

¹⁴ Today, after more than 10 years, I realize any mistakes made in the approach itself and in the conclusions of the author, whom I highly respected.

Then I learned from www.straznavcz.cz that the book would be published in Czech. As a result, I became more familiar with the translator and proofreader of the Czech translation of the book *In Search for Christian Freedom*, and I could, for the most part, participate in the visit of brother Raymond Franz in the Czech Republic. I spent 3 hours with him in a car, a pity that I don't understand English very well. Then I attended a press conference and a meeting in a narrower circle. However, the questions asked at both meetings were opposed to Witnesses, and there was questioning of how Mr. Franz could have been involved in the Organization's activities for so many years. Quite sad, although Raymond did continue to have a positive attitude towards the audience.

The translated version (quite unknowingly) of the aforementioned book, I made available to a number of ex-Witnesses or still formal Witnesses. I downloaded all the R. Franz' essays from CommentaryPress.com and translated them into Czech¹⁵. I also searched the internet for more suggestions for home churches, for I realized that I could hardly connect with any church professing the so-called Apostolic Confession.¹⁶

Soon after Brother Franz's visit, we started to meet in a small group of four (all former Witnesses) with the confidence that Jesus was among us. We had lunch together, conversing about a variety of topics, including anecdotes, stories, memories, personal issues, and in particular we discussed Paul's epistles and so on. To understand some of the verses, I used Barnes and Guzik's comments. We met on average every two weeks. After several years, the young brother became seriously ill and sought help from the internet. He found some good treatments, but eventually felt addressed in a special way by the story of a Czech philosopher and writer who had turned from atheism to "Christianity"; suddenly, Jesus became just one of the more materialized Gods (avatars) for him, and soon after our little group fell apart.

It has always been clear to me that one cannot remain alone as a Christian for a long time. My lack of personal contact was counterbalanced by reading the books of several authors I met in search of ideas about the Christian Church. I read quite a bit from the well-known Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng and Protestant publicist Philip Yancey. Most of their thoughts helped me to have a more diverse view of Christianity, some of whom I had to reject. When looking for a well-founded view of the Christian Church, I have studied and translated (I gradually understood the English language over the internet) three books about a truly Christian community.¹⁷

¹⁵ *In Search of Christian Freedom* was published in 1991 and in aspects of Scripture revealed many of the tragic outcomes that resulted from the enforcement of some doctrines of the Society. The basic doctrines of Christianity, namely, who is God, hope for the dead, etc. were mentioned only at the end in the Epilogue on pages 594 to 597 of the Czech edition of *In Search of Christian Freedom* (published 2007). In particular, it advocated freedom in free Christian churches. In 2007, a number of essays written largely by Raymond Franz appeared on *CommentaryPress.com*. (After his death in December 29, 2013, this content changed a lot.) Apparently Brother Franz was perhaps becoming confused, as he was probably surprised that some of the implications of his book contributed to the place where many Witnesses came after leaving the Organization.

It is a sad fact (for me) that the author and the proofreader of the translation (the names in the printed book are mere pseudonyms) standing for www.straznavcz.cz and www.rozcesti.org have a completely different outlook than Raymond Franz had. See **Appendix**. They both had access to the contents of the published essays. For the sake of interest, I name one: *The Only True God*, see:

<http://www.christianmonotheism.com/media/text/Jay%20Dicken%20%20Trinity%20Study.pdf>, and <http://docplayer.pl/3979268-Biblijne-studium-o-trojcy.html> in Polish, I can make it available in Czech

¹⁶ For people who adhere to it unconditionally, I recommend reading the 190 pages book *Credo. Das apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis – Zeitgenossen erklärt* written by Hans Küng, one of the most educated Roman Catholic theologians.

¹⁷ *Paul's Idea of Community* by Robert J. Banks, *Church Comes Home* by Robert & Julia Banks, and *When the Church was a Family* by Joseph H. Hellerman.

While I was absorbing the thoughts of these books and a few others, an ALPHA course took place happily in our city – it was held in the fall of 2015 by the local Roman Catholic Church. During the introductory lesson, we were organized into small groups, our group was led by a local priest, and we discussed why we chose to attend that course. I told them quite openly a few sentences about our past involvement with the Witnesses: "I'm looking for such Christians for whom I could lay down my life, and who would be willing to lay down their lives for me." I think I got closer to a few people during the lessons, perhaps to the leader of our group who was the priest I mentioned. I just found a number of people that I love, though I don't share some of their spiritual views; they also like us, my wife and I, even if we're from another hatchery. I am convinced that ecumenism begins at the bottom, not at the top.

It follows from this testimony that I consider the Bible to be God's Word. I understand there may be some contradictions in it. I certainly do not understand some things, and until the end of my earthly pilgrimage I am sure that I shall not understand, but the explanation will come when God's promises are fulfilled, and true Christians attain the rewards they have been anxiously expecting for almost 2000 years. Many doctrines of different churches and denominations are based on the considerations of some "wise men" when they thoughtfully deal with the broadest shared views of their time. But the feelings about the importance of their wisdom led to disruptions, even to fighting in bloody encounters – certainly not something that the message of Jesus and his apostles and early disciples clearly, (and not in a mysterious way), communicates: *So as long as we have time, let us do good to all, especially to those who belong to the family of faith.* How unfortunate the results brought by these often violent encounters "solve" some supposed mysteries of God.

I don't mind people who believe in the Trinity. I can not only like them but even love them. I am looking, however, for people who can have the same attitudes toward me – toward a person who does not accept the Trinity doctrine, but can appreciate and accept my years of experience and my proven intimate relationship with both the Father and the Son.

After being "thrown out" from the Witnesses, my wife remained faithful to me spiritually, and from that moment she stopped attending Witness events and only occasionally looked into their literature, although she was directly involved in its production during the time of totalitarianism. At the beginning, my sister, also a Witness, did not understand my attitude and considered it a betrayal, but she continued to contact us with her husband, a former elder of a congregation. He had also been excommunicated, and his wife, my sister, once a pioneer, stopped participating in Witness activities. However, *for though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.* As Christians we lead the match, we fight. Though our weapons are supernatural, it does not mean that we are not wounded. Our two daughters, once devoted to the Witnesses, did not interrupt their contact with us. The elder daughter and her husband served as pioneers, even several years as special pioneers. Because of the birth of their first child, their concern for livelihood gradually diverted from spiritual interests, and after 25 years their marriage fell apart. The track of the younger daughter, though having a good start, has become tangled several times. She eventually married a service assistant of another congregation. Although they had one daughter, their marriage broke up after 10 years. Today I can only say that our descendants, daughters and four grandchildren, do not share the Christian faith. I feel my own responsibility for it¹⁸. Another part of the responsibility lies in the Witnesses' churches,

¹⁸ Perhaps not everything is lost. After my bitter experience, I can recommend to every Christian to ask themselves: Do I want my children to inherit my belief in the church I am associated with, or do I want my children to have a personal relationship with God? I preferred the first option (without realizing it, for I was deeply convinced, perhaps more indoctrinated, that my church was an extended "hand of God"), therefore I led my daughters to the Organization.

where the questioning members are given a spiritual “beating” rather than understanding help and guidance. I myself held the same condemning attitude for a long time, and I consistently rid myself of it last year¹⁹. I was surprised how a loving approach can bring beautiful results, and I hope the situation is not irreversible.

Today I look at my religious experience with an understanding of the unfortunate sacrifices I’ve made because of being involved in a harsh legalistic system, which is far removed from actions of God's holy spirit, whose primary fruit is love. This attitude in various sects of Christianity is far from being unique, but is replaced by "polite" ignorance. For the Jehovah Witness organization, legalism is probably the toughest, extending almost beyond the grave. In doing so, their functionaries dare to say that their organization is guided by God's spirit. No, no, God's holy spirit can affect only the individual who is worth it, never institutions.

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(40 years after the predicted Armageddon?)

Continued (33 months later)

During this time, I have finally come to a much deeper understanding of the message contained in Scripture, but the path to it has not been entirely straightforward²⁰.

The above description I wrote after completing the course ALPHA, and I was pleased to have found so many good people, professing to be Christians. However, as time has shown, friendship is a delightful experience, but if at least the respect (if not love) of the Bible as the word of God is not at the heart of the relationship, the essence is lost; there remains only a hazy "spirituality".

Several times I attended a Bible study for more than an hour at the local Roman Catholic rectory. However, the Bible was not the basis of the teaching, but *Biblical studies*. These are the lecture notes of the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové, which basically deny God's inspiration for the scriptures. In a similar vein, a public lecture was held on "Is the Bible True?" which was brilliantly presented by a very educated teacher from the Theological Faculty. He concluded that the Bible does not contain factual truth, but its content is spiritual truth. This reminded me of the "explanation" of a theology doctor, in which I tried, even during totalitarianism, to teach Hebrew, to no avail. This very pleasant and friendly man (we have been in contact for several years), the pastor of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, told me this about the content of the Bible: "It did not happen, but it is true."

After the ALPHA course, a beta course took place in the rectory, the content of which could be called pouring boiling water on the previous course. The fourth theme was called "What it means to do God's will". There was not one word about Scripture! According to this course, in order to do the will of God, it is necessary to pray, contemplate, expect God's answer or inspiration, or expect a hint from a fellow believerjust feelings, autosuggestion, the influence of supernatural powers... but not Scriptural advice.

Over the past year we have been meeting for almost a year to study Mark's Gospel with a family of devoted Adventists. There was a huge difference in meeting with them—they showed a very deep and warm relationship to Scripture and to us!

The answer to this question is not easy, it concerns the core of the personality itself. All I can recommend is how young Jesus was led during his childhood and adolescence; surely his parents followed the order of Exodus 6:4-7.

¹⁹ If I have hurt any of you by pursuing the "politics" of the religious society, Jehovah's Witnesses, I know that I regret it today and I beg your forgiveness. You can let me know!

²⁰ Here, I must point out that the knowledge I gained, especially among Jehovah's Witnesses, through decades of study, and meeting with them, helped me a great deal in this deeper understanding of Scripture.

As mentioned above, my interest was on home churches as a platform where one can be considered a Christian without sharing the belief in the so-called Apostolic Confession of Faith. On the Internet, I found the *HomeChristian.net* website, which contained interesting articles dealing with various biblical principles; some of them were from former Witnesses, others from anabaptists, etc.

While studying and translating some articles, I found the booklet, *What Happens When We Die?* [by Sir Anthony Buzzard] in the spring of 2017. While translating, I found that it complies with Scriptures more than anything else, including the interpretation of some of the "more difficult" texts we encountered in our small home group meetings. This booklet is published by Restoration Fellowship and is available (today and in Czech) at <http://focusonthekingdom.org>. While studying other materials from this movement, I cured my doubts about the contradictions in the Scriptures. Today I am happy to say that all articles and books are available in Czech at the address listed. Since October 2017, I have been trying to spread the ideas in another book by Sir Anthony Buzzard called *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus* to people I know are sincere but searching Christians.

Finally, I can convey my emotions as follows:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on *finding one pearl of great value*, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:44-46)

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And *when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors*, saying, '*Rejoice with me*, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' (Luke 15:8, 9)

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Note at the end:

The Jehovah's Witnesses local church, where I spent 30 years of this life, no longer exists. The crushing attack led by the repressive authorities of the totalitarian state failed to destroy the fraternity and evangelistic zeal of its members. Ironically, the once-alive congregation was destroyed by the leadership of the Watchtower organization for which members worked so loyally. It has not existed for several years.

The Czech branch of the Organization Watch Tower was liquidated several years before; therefore, the service committee, to whom I sent my appeal against the 2001 local legal committee judgment, no longer exists.

Appendix (to page 7, footnote 15)

Over the past year, I have met with several former Witnesses who have been sadly influenced by the two websites www.straznavez.cz²¹ (“watchtower” in Czech is straznavez) and www.rozcesti.org²² (“crossroads” in Czech is rozcesti). It is a sad fact for me that behind both sources are the persons who edited and translated the book *In Search for Christian Freedom* by Raymond Franz, hiding their real name behind the pseudonyms.

At the end of 2008 I sent the article *What can I do?* which was written in 2006 by Raymond Franz about issues related to leaving the community of Witnesses, to this individual who translated and edited the book *In Search for Christian Freedom* and the founded the website, rozcesti.org. Not only has he never heeded the information in the article, the entire focus of that website is in direct contradiction to the advice of this mature, honest Christian (Franz) who has confirmed his trust in God and His written Word, the Bible, with all his life. Out of more than 12 pages densely described, containing remarkably encouraging and warning thoughts, I only take a few sentences:

Upon discovering serious flaws in a particular group or movement, one may become angry and feel deeply hurt about having been deceived. One may be inclined to see the decision-making members of the movement as sinister, deliberate manipulators....“ Our Master called upon us to pray for those who seek our injury, not to vent expressions of ill will toward them.” (Matthew 5:44, 45) Heeding Christ’s teaching, Stephen made his appeal, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (Acts 7:60, *NIV*) ... Then, too, aloneness can benefit us. We may find that we have more time for reading the Scriptures and for undistracted reflection, drawing us closer to our heavenly Father.

.....

Our aim should be to have a strong, firsthand faith based on our personal examination of the evidence contained in the gospel accounts. Some who have become embittered by treatment received from members of a particular group never have given, nor do give, careful thought to the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. While perhaps expressing belief that Jesus is God’s Son, they do not have a strong personal conviction based on the evidence and are easily influenced by unscriptural teachings.... Individuals who have undergone any kind of mauling within a movement professing to be Christian are in a vulnerable condition. They can ill afford not to put forth effort to confirm and strengthen their faith.

Let anyone who contacts those sites on the web compare their content with the above quotations. Some have obeyed many of these pages and, in the urgent search for "community", have fallen into the trap of modern wonderworkers. Perhaps most have joined the "proven" theology of which sectarian disputes lasted over one and a half millennia, where a huge number of people bled, thinking of themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. What I am writing here is not some abstract ideas, it concerns people who have left the Witnesses' congregation from which I was excommunicated 17 years ago and who I know personally!

²¹ Here, cases of ill-treatment of some individuals have been disclosed. Often there were also secretly noted recordings of legal action due to apostasy and the like. For example, the renegades were those who prayed to Jesus rather than to Father, Jehovah, at the assembly.

²² The authors of this website were very concerned about the excluded Witnesses, and they wanted to help them get in touch with some "Christian" community as quickly as possible and not stay alone. The webmaster, a former county overseer, became a keen Catholic. Published articles encouraged people to believe in the Trinity, Mary as the mother of God etc.