

Roberto di Stefano (Switzerland), brought up since childhood within the Jehovah's Witnesses, baptised at the age of 12, in charge of a small group at 17 and appointed "elder" at 29. He left the organisation in 2004, aged 59. His talk traced the history of predictions on the end of the world made by this organisation. The pressure on the followers in 1975, with 66 apocalyptic articles and terrifying pictures, was so strong that many of the witnesses sold their house, lost their jobs, got into debt, laid in stocks of food, abandoned their education, postponed medical treatments and operations, delayed their plans to start a family. The number of ministers in the world increased by 23% over the two years 1974-75. Their loyalty to the organisation was unflinching and they were blindly committed to their faith. Since 1975, the message has not really changed, "1994 was abandoned in silence", a new precise date is no longer topical, a new chronology is suggested; as the advent of the Armageddon was supposed to occur with the generation which had known 1914, the year of Christ the King's return on Earth, and as God allowed Noah to live up to 120 years (Genesis, 6:17), the Watch Tower is already suggesting that 2034 will be the year of Armageddon. "Only the contemporaries who have faith and faithfully support the earthly part of Jehovah's universal organisation will be able to survive". The Watch Tower continuously reminds one that time is short (15 articles since January 2012) and that the present signs bring us closer to the end. Roberto di Stefano concludes: "End of my talk... not the end of the world!".

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