

Reclaimed Voices' substantive response to Expert Opinion

- by Raymond Hintjes

We have taken note of the Expert Opinion following the research report '*Seksueel misbruik en aangiftebereidheid binnen de gemeenschap van Jehova's Getuigen*' [Sexual Abuse and Willingness to Report within the Community of Jehovah's Witnesses] (van den Bos, et al., 2020) by Massimo Introvigne, Gordon Melton and Holly Folk (in this response called: the experts). They are scholars in the field of New Religious Movements and in this capacity they have been approached to give their opinion on the research report of Utrecht University.

We think it is unfair that these scholars are referred to as 'cult apologists' because they stand up for religious groups that are seen by many as controversial and even harmful, and are therefore referred to as 'cult' or 'sect'. We understand the concern for unnecessary stereotyping and discrimination, often fuelled by specific media coverage and choice of words (Hintjes, 2019).

We are aware that this Expert Opinion may have been written against the background of a conflict between (new) religious movements, critics, ex-members and scholars of religion about cults and sects as it has existed since the 1970s (Ashcraft, 2018) (Gallagher, 2017). At times this conflict has resulted in a fierce battle of words in which parties have been framed as 'anticult movement activists' (critics) and 'cult apologists' (defenders of freedoms for minority religions and scholars of religion).

We believe that framing scholars as cult apologists is a distraction from the content of their opinion, while it is precisely this opinion that requires a substantive rebuttal rather than an overruling of arguments because we don't like difference of opinion. Framing encourages carelessness, which leads to incorrect conclusions being drawn. For example, claims appear that Massimo Introvigne is a Satanist because he wrote a book about Satanism (Introvigne, 2016). Scholars of religion can have a professional interest in this subject. From this professional interest, they can study groups concerned with the occult. False conclusions are also drawn because of Massimo Introvigne's and Gordon Melton's membership of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula, a cultural-historical society made up of people who study vampire myths. Such membership does not mean that these persons are occultists or Satanists.

Just as these scholars should not be seen as cult apologists, we (Reclaimed Voices) do not consider ourselves as anticult activists fighting against the 'sect' of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Reclaimed Voices Foundation does not fight against Jehovah's Witnesses, but is committed to raising children in a safe environment, even if this happens in a religious group such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The board of the foundation works from the values of respect, dignity, freedom and honesty. We express these values in the way we speak about the (possible) problem of how Jehovah's Witnesses deal with sexual abuse among themselves. In our view, naming this problem and suggesting possible solutions can only succeed if we start from

compassion for individual Jehovah's Witnesses and the recognition that every human being has the right to fulfil his religious and spiritual needs as guaranteed in human rights treaties (ECHR, Article 9) and our national constitution. We recognize that children have the right to freedom of religion, even if they are a religious minority as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 14, 30). At the same time, we would like to remind the Dutch government of its obligation to make efforts to protect children against (sexual) abuse and to promote the physical and mental recovery of children who have fallen victim to this (CRC 34, 39).

Criticism of how Jehovah's Witnesses deal with sexual abuse is therefore not motivated by us being labelled as so called disgruntled ex-members, or self-proclaimed opponents of the beliefs and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses. It is motivated by a sincere concern for the wellbeing of children, after serious experiences were shared with us.

Raymond Hintjes works as a teacher of philosophy of life and social studies in secondary education. He holds a BA in religious studies, has a teaching qualification, complemented by courses in ethics and existential wellbeing counselling. He is a member of the professional association of teachers of philosophy of life and religion (VDLG), he organizes study days for professional colleagues and he is a member of the American Academy of Religion. Raymond teaches about world religions, ethics, human rights, the pluralistic society and the democratic constitutional state. Inspired by the philosophy of Levinas, he is committed to love and social justice, using his own experiences to feel compassion for others, including members of the Jehovah's Witnesses (Hintjes, 2019).

Aswin Suierveld holds a BA in theology of pastoral counselling, complemented by courses in social psychology, existential wellbeing counselling, politics and ethics, and the relationship between social norms and social change. Her experiences of joining the Jehovah's Witnesses in adulthood and the crisis of faith that followed after leaving the group, allows her to deal with the phenomenon of conversion in a nuanced way. Aswin prefers to get to the bottom of complex problems, as for example can be read in her report on clergy privilege and spiritual (pastoral) care of Jehovah's Witnesses (Suierveld, 2019).

Frank Huiting is a teacher of social skills (in training), works in the healthcare sector and coordinates projects to tackle social problems. He uses values such as trust, autonomy and freedom to bring a balance in society between the system world and human values. Frank is also an expert based on experience in the field of sexual abuse. He uses his experience and insights to break the taboo around sexual abuse, to help others to recover and gives guest classes, lectures and workshops on the nature and consequences of sexual abuse in relation to religious communities.

Our response to 'The Report: Methodological Issues

The expert opinion acknowledges the university's researchers integrity. Nevertheless, there are also a number of critical comments that we have taken note of. The report states that it's not about finding the truth. The report focuses on the experiences of dealing with alleged sexual abuse. The experts rightly note that the report does not mention what measures have

been taken to prevent the anonymous online survey from being manipulated by trolls that could be out to influence public opinion. The fact that the report does not mention this does not automatically mean that no measures would have been taken. The researchers are social scientists who have the necessary experience in their field of work with the use of online surveys to conduct empirical research. In addition, the report mentions an external supervisory committee that was set up to advise and critically reflect on the findings. Consultations with this committee took place during various phases of this research. In addition, at the start of the research, permission was requested and obtained from the ethics review committee of the faculty from which this research was accommodated (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 39, 191-2).

The experts write that there are well-organised groups that accuse certain religious groups of being cults (sects) and that there are certain governments that pursue their own interests. For example, an Italian anti-Jehovah's Witnesses website writes about the research as a bomb that is about to explode. The suggestion was made that the Dutch language would not be much of a problem for professional organisations. The experts draws attention to the Chinese and Russian authorities suspected of having fake accounts on social media in order to spread negative information about groups they consider to be cults. Although these possibilities should, of course, never be completely excluded, explicitly mentioning these possibilities casts unjustified doubts on the reliability of this research. We have every confidence that Professor Kees van den Bos and his team have insight into this kind of possible manipulation. His research programme and the many scientific and scholarly publications in the field of social justice, morality, tensions between groups and cultures support this trust (Universiteit Utrecht, sd). Furthermore, we would like to point out that the Reclaimed Voices Foundation has explicitly spoken out against the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, and the subsequent treatment of individual Jehovah's Witnesses (Reclaimed Voices, 2019).

One of the experts' criticisms is that the study does not contain any reference to literature on the sociology of religion which addresses the bias of former members. This research, however, was not a comparative religious studies research project that uses stories of ex-members to a large extent. Of the 10 respondents to the in-depth interviews, six were members of the Jehovah's Witnesses and four ex-members (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 89-91). Because of this, a good balance has been found between experiences of members and ex-members. In addition, 48% of the respondents who answered the question about membership in the survey indicate that they are still members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Although strictly speaking it is not possible to verify to what extent this self-reporting is reliable, it must be pointed out that the Jehovah's Witnesses' leadership in the Netherlands wrote a letter to all congregations, that was read during a meeting in the kingdom hall. In this letter it was stated that participation in the survey was allowed (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 46-7). There was also an extensive discussion with the Dutch leadership and a international representative of the Governing Body (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 119). Therefore, the possible bias of the information provided by former members is strongly compensated in this research by the support and participation of active Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses' leadership.

The Reclaimed Voices Foundation is aware that it does not have an independent position with respect to Jehovah's Witnesses. It explicitly mentioned this in its interview with the investigators (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 125). In addition, a board member honestly mentions in her publication that she is a former Jehovah's Witness, and that this was something that could speak against her (Suierveld, 2019). A publication by chairman, Raymond Hintjes, also shows that the foundation is aware of the way ex-members look at their former group and talk about their experiences (Hintjes, 2019). At the same time, the foundation believes that ex-members can provide information about a religious group that would otherwise remain invisible to outsiders (Chryssides, 2016, pp. 17-8) (Suierveld & Hintjes, 2018, p. 25).

The experts admit that it is theoretically possible that active members of the Jehovah's Witnesses may have filled out the anonymous survey several times, in order to create as positive a picture of the organization as possible. However, they consider this to be unlikely due to the results of the survey (point 10(a)). In our view, that's a rather naive point of view. Letters to bodies of elders in the United States and Britain show that the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses wants to ensure that an unambiguous and positive image of Jehovah's Witnesses is given to researchers. Scientific and scholarly research is seen as an opportunity to give 'a witness'. Preferably by referring to publications instead of allowing members of the congregation to take the time to complete surveys 'accurately and carefully'. If surveys are filled out by publishers, then 'it should certainly be avoided that they put forward their own views which are not in accordance with biblical guidelines' (Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, 2001) (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain, 2002). In relation to these letters, one may wonder what is meant by the 'accurate and balanced information ... about the way in which our organisation responds to abuse' as stated in the letter that was read out in all Dutch congregations following research by Utrecht University (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 46-7).

It also makes sense in this context to mention an experience of scholar of religion George Chryssides, who was asked to write an article about Jehovah's Witnesses in Great Britain. Nine months after his chapter was accepted for publication, he received an e-mail with the message that a proof-reader had made a number of adjustments. Parts of his text had been removed and large parts of new text had been added. Notes had been placed stating, among other things, that the British Branch would prefer not to mention a certain reference. This reference has been made to the description of a specific event in Glasgow in 1933, with Chryssides' description, based on source material that did not come from the Jehovah's Witnesses, differing from the branch's own version. According to Chryssides, this incident shows that there are significant differences between the methods used by Jehovah's Witnesses and those used by scholarly researchers. These differences can pose serious problems for cooperation and dialogue. Scientists and scholars try to be critical in their research, which can result in debate, different opinions and ultimately new scientific and scholarly insights. For Jehovah's Witnesses, their faith is central, referred to as the Truth. That means there must be consensus, an unambiguous understanding of what the teachings and practices of Jehovah's Witnesses are (Chryssides, 2015).

What does this mean? It is incorrect to say that only ex-members would benefit from a particular outcome of the investigation. It is one-sided to state that so-called anticult activists could do anything to influence the research by manipulating the survey. Active Jehovah's Witnesses and especially the directors of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses could also benefit from a certain outcome of the research. In the past, letters sent to elders in the United States and Great Britain show that consensus and witnessing are important principles for the organization. George Chryssides' experience shows that wherever possible, the organization tries to influence the image scholars describe on Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that the reason why Jehovah's Witnesses call the research of Utrecht University unscientific and factually incorrect, and even had the willingness to prevent publication of this research with summary proceedings, is strongly motivated by the fact that the scholars, independent from the Jehovah's Witnesses, drew their own conclusions. Where the outcome of these conclusions differs greatly from the image that Jehovah's Witnesses like to handle and convey about themselves.

The experts point out that in addition to a recent publication of Reclaimed Voices, only two scholarly works on Jehovah's Witnesses have been consulted, which, moreover, are several years old. It should be noted that it is incorrect that the publication of Reclaimed Voices deals with the subject of sexual abuse. The main subject of the publication is clergy privilege and the manner how spiritual (pastoral) care is given among Jehovah's Witnesses (Suierveld, 2019). We do share the view that references to the recent publication of George Chryssides (2016) and Zoe Knox (2018) would have been an important addition to the investigation. Both publications are in the possession of our chairman and have been read by him. It should be noted that Chryssides in his book devotes a paragraph to the problem of sexual abuse raised by action groups. Instead of trivializing or even denying the problem of child sexual abuse, he notes that it is for judges to determine whether Jehovah's Witnesses could have done more to prevent child sexual abuse (Chryssides, 2016, pp. 254-5).

Our reaction to 'The Findings: (A) A Uniquely "Closed Community"?'

According to the report of Utrecht University, Jehovah's Witnesses are a 'closed community'. The report defines a closed community as 'a group of people with a common identity that is highly closed to the outside world, for example to ideas and people from outside the group'. Standards and values within such a group are generated within one's own community, according to one's own logic. (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 26). The experts try to show that this characterisation would be problematic because all communities would follow 'their own logic' that outsiders would not understand. Examples are given of the Democrats and Republicans in the United States, Marxists and non-Marxists, believers and atheists. However, the experts are not very precise about the given definition of closed communities in the report. This definition is based on a *common* identity, which is closed to 'ideas and persons from *outside* the group', among other things. In such a group '*values and norms* are generated 'within one's own community'. In other words, there is little influence of ideas, values and norms from outside the group on the ideas, values and norms within the group.

It is important to note that the report indicates that communities may be closed to a greater or lesser extent (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 137). Furthermore, we can observe that when

discussing the Roman Catholic Church, Youth Care and Defence, the report speaks of '(closed) communities' because there are characteristics of closed communities to a greater or lesser extent. However, it is not possible in the context of this research to determine the degree of closeness (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 157-8).

In determining whether Jehovah's Witnesses are a closed community, the researchers used a definition such as given by Van Dam et al. (Dam, Eshuis, Aarts, & During, 2005). Contrary to what the experts claim, this is not a 'negative concept of this term' but a value-free definition of the term 'closed community' as used in the social sciences. The experts claim that the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses are a closed community was accepted at the beginning of the research rather than demonstrated at the end. I would like to point out that it was a starting point, which was precisely one of the subjects of this research. This has also been confirmed by the ruling of the judge in the summary proceedings brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses (Christelijke Gemeente van Jehovah's Getuigen in Nederland vs. de Universiteit Utrecht & de Staat der Nederlanden, 2020).

The experts are of the opinion that the conclusion that Jehovah's Witnesses are a closed community is also determined by the limited and old literature that has been used. As mentioned earlier, we agree with the experts that more recent literature on the Jehovah's Witnesses should have been included in the study. In our view, it is wrong to assume that more recent literature would not support the researchers' conclusions. In her book Knox extensively describes the relationship between the Jehovah's Witnesses and the outside world. The lifestyle of the Jehovah's Witnesses is very different from the majority of people around them. This is largely determined by four aspects: the emphasis on joint Bible study, the amount of time the organization demands from members, the limitation of contact with non-members, and the emphasis on spreading God's word. According to Knox, this means that Jehovah's Witnesses are in the broad society but are not part of it. Figuratively speaking, they're not part of the world, although they do live in it (Knox, 2018, pp. 48-9). Chryssides also shows that Jehovah's Witnesses live in the world, but are not part of it. They reject the prevailing human values of today's world, because according to them, this world is under the power of Satan (Chryssides, 2016, pp. 171-94). At this point we should point out, that at least one of the authors, was once of the opinion that Jehovah's Witnesses are a group that isolate themselves from their social context (Introvigne, 1990). Why and how Introvigne changed his mind is not clear.

The fact that Jehovah's Witnesses are a closed community lies in their beliefs and practices and is by no means unreasonable to state. According to the experts, real 'closed communities' live in communes on isolated farms. Van Dam and others, however, speak of spatial closedness in such a situation (p. 32). The experts have a limited view on closed communities. The research report describes both cognitive and social aspects of closedness (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 138-41) (Dam, Eshuis, Aarts, & During, 2005, pp. 30-3).

The experts try to show that certain beliefs and practices would not be unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. From a comparative religious studies approach, they try to demonstrate that these beliefs and practices are part of all world religions. As noted above, many communities may have characteristics of closed communities to a greater or lesser extent. It seems to have

escaped the experts' attention that the question is not whether these beliefs and practices are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses, but to what extent they contribute to an 'identity that is highly closed to the outside world', especially to ideas, values and norms outside one's own group (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 137).

The remark that statements like 'Jehovah's Witnesses believe they have the only true religion' are used in Russia to show that Jehovah's Witnesses are 'extremists' is irrelevant in this context. Just like the remark that most religions learn that they are the only way to salvation. After all, the whole report is not about whether or not Jehovah's Witnesses should be allowed to exist as a religion, but about the extent to which a certain degree of closedness affects the way in which Jehovah's Witnesses are willing to report sexual abuse and how complaints of abuse are dealt with internally.

The question of whether the disfellowshipping rules applied by Jehovah's Witnesses would be unique to them is also irrelevant, while the experts using the term 'cults'. Moreover, it seems that the experts interpreted the designation of Jehovah's Witnesses as a "closed community" as if the researchers had assumed that Jehovah's Witnesses were a dangerous cult or sect. Although opponents of Jehovah's Witnesses use these terms, the independent researchers do not use them anywhere in their report. This raises the question of the extent to which the experts themselves have read the entire report with a bias, interpreted from the context of the 'cultwars' (Gallagher, 2017).

It is remarkable that the experts pay a lot of attention to the question of whether persons are shunned because they have reported sexual abuse. Although a number of respondents in the survey mention this, we acknowledge that this is not an official position of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Of course, this does not alter the fact that at the level of ordinary members, this can be experienced in this way. Moreover, this does not detract from the fact whether there have been situations in the past in which this has happened (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 93-4). We note here that the religion lived by ordinary believers may deviate from the official viewpoints as expressed in publications and by official representatives of the religion (Mcguire, 2008).

To disprove the shunning of persons for reporting to the police, the experts refer to the Elders' manuals of 2010 and 2019 (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2010) (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Republic of Korea, Incorporated Association, 2019). These manuals are usually provided to elders, but are not available to ordinary members of the congregation. It is therefore remarkable that the experts refer to these manuals and quote freely from them, while it is questionable whether these manuals were made available to the researchers when they received a comprehensive information folder containing various policy documents and publications from the board of the Jehovah's Witnesses (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 120-1). It is very likely that this documentation folder only contained publications and documents that can be viewed by everyone, including study articles from *The Watchtower* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2019) and *the Biblical Position of Jehovah's Witnesses on the Protection of Children* (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2018). The researchers of Utrecht University come to the conclusion that the formalistic system used by 'Jehovah's Witnesses ... offers no guarantee that reports of sexual

abuse will be dealt with adequately (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 15, 177). It is therefore incorrect to refer only to the formal publications in order to demonstrate that reporting to the police never leads to shunning.

We therefore disagree with the experts' conclusion. The conclusion that Jehovah's Witnesses are a "closed community" is not based on bias related to discussions about sects or cults. No incorrect conclusions have been drawn because only older literature has been used. While it would have been strong if more recent scholarly literature on Jehovah's Witnesses had been used, more recent literature also confirms the view that Jehovah's Witnesses have characteristics of a closed community. It is also incorrect that the image of Jehovah's Witnesses is mainly determined by a synchronic and not a diachronic approach. The board has been explicitly asked what policy adjustments were made over time, and the report acknowledges that adjustments have been made. The Reclaimed Voices foundation also reports that adjustments have been made to the policy. Moreover, this was also discussed during the in-depth interviews (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 110-3, 124-5, 129-30, 177).

Our reaction to 'The Findings (B): Sexual Abuse Among Jehovah's Witnesses

We welcome the experts' acknowledgement that there have been situations of sexual abuse within the Jehovah's Witnesses and that some of them have not been properly reported to the authorities. The experts point to Anson Shupe's research into (sexual) abuse by religious ministers. His theory predicts that religious organizations with paid ministers are more likely to protect abusers.

The experts point out that the report shows that Jehovah's Witnesses more often report sexual abuse to the authorities than victims of sexual (child) abuse in general do. However, the study mentions that we should be careful when making comparisons between the willingness to file police reports among respondents to this study and the willingness to file police reports among the general public. There is no insight into the total percentage of sex crimes within the entire population of (ex-)Jehovah's Witnesses. It should also be reported that the percentage that reports to the police (30%) is much lower than the percentage of an internal report to the elders (80%). This justifies the conclusion that contrary to an internal report, a step to the police is often not taken (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 53-5).

Here too, the experts seem to draw the wrong conclusion. The research did not focus on sexual abuse by religious ministers but on all abuses within the circles of Jehovah's Witnesses and their internal handling. It strongly seems that the experts have been influenced by the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe that there has been no institutional abuse throughout the report. The report makes it sufficiently clear that this was not the subject of study either, but that it concerned the institutional handling of (reports of) sexual abuse in which the alleged victim was a member of the community of Jehovah's Witnesses. Comments about Jehovah's Witnesses' lack of official activities separating parents from children are irrelevant. Just like the remark about not showing that the extent of sexual abuse among Jehovah's Witnesses would be greater. The research clearly focused on the reception of and dealing with alleged victims of sexual abuse and not on the extent of sexual abuse (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp.

171-3).

Jehovah's Witnesses have written many articles on the problem of child sexual abuse in recent decades. The researchers received these articles in an information folder (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 120-1). The publication of articles on this subject does not automatically mean that there is an adequate response to a report of sexual abuse, in which sufficient attention and recognition is given to the victim. Practice is often more stubborn than theory. The fact remains that a formalistic system does not provide sufficient guarantees for victims of abuse (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 177-8).

Furthermore, the experts note that it frequently happens that victims of sexual abuse are dissatisfied with how their report of sexual abuse is handled, including by the government and the police. The research report shows that victims of abuse within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses appreciate the internal handling of abuse with a very low rating, while handling by the police is rated as very positive (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 59-65). Therefore, there seems to be a very large difference in valuation when both forms of handling are compared. The researchers indicate that it is unfair that Jehovah's Witnesses are picked out as if that dissatisfaction only concerned their group. But that's not what the research report says. It seems that the experts are not aware of the reason for this research and the developments that preceded it, so it is logical that this research pays attention to Jehovah's Witnesses. In the past there have also been investigations in the Netherlands into the Roman Catholic Church, the Military, Youth Care, Buddhist circles and Tantra Masseurs.

Our response to 'The Report: Recommendations

We are surprised that recommendations are read as obligations by the experts. Recommendations are tools to improve a number of things. Recommendations can be adapted at will to the possibilities and wishes within the own organisation. The recommendation that Jehovah's Witnesses should establish an internal report centre that annually publish a record on their activities is by no means unreasonable (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 180-1). It is a proposal that offers opportunities to deal with the problem of abuse openly and transparently, to bring in professional knowledge and to put victims of abuse centre stage. It is not uncommon for such a report centre to function within large organisations. This recommendation stems from experience and recommendations to set up such a report centre with other organisations (van den Bos, et al., 2020, pp. 158-64). We would like to point out that the General Synod of the Reformed Congregation recently decided to set up such a report centre (Reformatorsch Dagblad, 2020).

Furthermore, the experts state that they consider it unfair that the Education Inspectorate should ensure that children of Jehovah's Witnesses do not receive a lower school or study advice (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 184). Clearly, this is not about the school achievements of children of Jehovah's Witnesses. It concerns an advice for a level that is followed in further education. Nor is it about the Education Inspectorate, which is out to investigate this specifically, but about the findings during regular school inspections. This recommendation probably stems from the fact that respondents indicate that 'self-development in the form of (higher) education is not stimulated' (van den Bos, et al., 2020, p. 140). Although the publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses encourage children to be exemplary students, higher

education is strongly discouraged (Chryssides, 2016, pp. 176-7). The researchers are of the opinion that the education of children weighs heavily in the defence against undesirable behaviour.

The experts conclude their opinion by stating that Jehovah's Witnesses have often become the object of stereotyping and slander because of their special lifestyle. After the Second World War, they would have been the group most often targeted by anticult literature and propaganda. However, it is incorrect that this in itself should be reason enough not to publish the report. It seems that the experts are more concerned with the image of the Jehovah's Witnesses among the general public than with the specific problem described in the report.

Reclaimed Voices has never called Jehovah's Witnesses a sect or a cult in the media. The foundation is also of the opinion that such a framing distracts from the actual problem. At the same time, like the experts, we are concerned about the fact that some media seem to take this approach (Hintjes, 2019). However, it should also be noted that the choice of the Jehovah's Witnesses to prevent publication of the report through summary proceedings and, moreover, to characterize the statements of Reclaimed Voices as possible incitement to hatred, has contributed to the negative image that exists about Jehovah's Witnesses.

We reiterate our sincere wish to discuss the conclusions and recommendations with those involved, including the leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Netherlands. The report offers opportunities for Jehovah's Witnesses to improve their approach to sexual abuse within the congregation. It's our wish that individual members of Jehovah's Witnesses would also take note of the contents of the report written by Utrecht University (Reclaimed Voices, 2020).

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