Rebecca Buchman- Jehovah’s Witnesses

Being a Jehovah’s Witnesses is often a misunderstood religion to which many stigmas are attached. My hope is that through interviewing individuals who practice this religion as well as delve into scholarly sources, I will shed light on the practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses in order to alleviate ignorance and create an understanding of their way of life. In addition, this research will show the impact religion can have over the ways in which individuals view their world and deal with societal strife.

After interviewing Bob and Carmela and conducting in-depth research using various scholarly sources on the practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses, it is evident that the Bible is the primary source for managing one’s life again. “We recognize the Bible as God's inspired message to humans” (JW.ORG 2015). The scriptures in the Bible provide the answers needed to guide followers through current events as well as future ones. The Bible also serves as a basis to how an individual must live their life. According to Muramoto (2008:416), “Many unique religious rules govern their lives. The following are strictly prohibited: participation in politics and the military, association with other religions, celebrations of holidays and birthday, pledging allegiance to a national flag, singing national anthem, smoking and medical use of blood products” (Muramoto 2008: 416). The reasons many of these strict rules are put in place is because they are never mentioned in the Bible. If it is not mentioned, it is not practiced. For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe solely in God and His Kingdom, therefore they choose not to be a part of society and want to be different (Munter 1971:90).

Jehovah’s Witnesses themselves are a unified religion. “We come from hundreds of ethnic and language backgrounds, yet we are united under common goals” (JW.ORG 2015). There are practicing Jehovah’s Witnesses from all parts of the world (the map you used looked like China was blank…) some of which cannot openly practice their religious freedoms, unlike countries like the United States. According to JW.org, there are currently 8,201,545 Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide and 239 lands nations in which Jehovah’s Witnesses worship. If a practicing Jehovah’s Witness from the United States went over to Africa to study with other Jehovah’s Witnesses, there would be no discrepancies in teachings because everyone is learning from the same scriptures – the teachings of the Bible and how it molds the individual to be the ideal person.

Because there is so much emphasis placed on the Bible, it is important that all Jehovah’s Witnesses are educated in its teachings. According to Iannaccone and Stark, “To remain a Witness in good standing one must be a “publisher” of God’s word, which, generally speaking, means attending several hours of meetings each week and devoting another 4 hours or so to distributing Witness literature door-to-door every week” (Iannaccone and Stark 1997:134). More specifically JW.org says, “At these meetings, which are open to the public, we examine what the Bible says and how we can apply its teachings in our life” (JW.ORG 2015). These meetings are conducted at their Kingdom Hall, which is the official name for their place of worship. The meetings are conducting much like a classroom at a school – there are open discussions about the readings, questions are asked and thoughts are shared in regards to the assigned readings. It is also highly recommended that the Bible be read every day. Upon arrival at Bob and Carmela’s, two Bibles were carefully placed on the dining room table. When asked questions about current event issues such as terrorist attacks in Paris and political debates, they could be seen flipping through the Bible to find the scripture that best corresponded with that event.

To an outsider, these beliefs can appear to be outlandish and against the norm. This pushed my curiosity of whether or not Bob and Carmela felt separated from the world, to which they both replied in the affirmative and referred to John 17:16 in the Bible. Although they have a feeling of separation from the world, they embrace it. Munter refers to Werner Cohn’s idea of a proletarian movement — comparing Jehovah’s Witnesses to radical groups, Nazi’s and Marxists, explaining how they choose not to be a part of society and want to be different (Munter 1971:90).

In conclusion, Jehovah’s Witnesses ideals hold strong values on the Bible when it comes to living one’s life. It is clear that religion can have a strong hold on the ways in which individuals view their world and how they live it. This was generally a nice overview. It would have been nice to see a bit more anthropology and references to course readings.

References:

JW.ORG


Iannaccone, Laurence R. and Stark, Rodney


Munters, Q.J


Muramoto, Osamu
