Michael Jackson and Jehovah's Witnesses

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Paul Blizard has been a longtime friend of Watchman Fellowship. He is a former third generation ex-Jehovah's Witness who today preaches the gospel as the pastor of one of West Virginia's largest churches. His comments on the recent death of Michael Jackson are not only very interesting but also will give you insights into life as a Jehovah's Witness.

"There but for the Grace of God go I"

This past week a great talent and a giant in the music industry died at fifty years old. What a tragic loss! Yes, I'm talking about Michael Jackson. Like many of you, I grew up with his music that spanned almost forty years. I realize that cable news is giving his death wall-to-wall coverage. But I also have some things to say about him. You may not know this, but those of us who are former Jehovah's Witnesses have some insight into his life and know why he was so strange. The Jackson children were all taken to the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall when they were young. As far as I know, only his sisters, Latoya, Janet and Michael became official Jehovah's Witnesses. If it hadn't been for their mother Catherine they would not have been exposed to the religion. Their father, Joseph, was not a Jehovah's Witness and was the driving force who pushed them into the music industry. They were torn between two worlds. Imagine the life. Jehovah's Witnesses prohibit any kind of lifestyle or career in the arts, yet here they were, totally involved in the music industry. Their lives caused quite a stir in the Jehovah's Witness religion. In fact, as teenagers we would always point to Michael and the contradictions of his life. On one hand, he claimed to be a Jehovah's Witness on the other he was doing what we could not do. It was not only hard on the Jehovah's Witness leaders; it was difficult for every family within the community. Parents were always trying to explain why we could not be recording artists and performers. Yet, Michael was the problem they could not escape from.

The Watchtower officially took no stand because of the notoriety of Michael and of course his money. I remember in the late 1970's when Michael was a becoming a superstar. I was at the Watchtower headquarters in New York. He and his family came through the headquarters on a tour of the facilities. It was all the buzz. We were ordered not to ask for autographs, but many did. I only saw him from a distance as his group passed through our building. Years later, when I was a guest on the Oprah Winfrey Show, she asked me during the commercial break about some of the things I was saying about the restrictions in the Jehovah's Witness religion. Oprah asked me, "Paul, I know Michael Jackson, he is a Jehovah's Witness, he gives birthday gifts and celebrates Christmas. What about that?" I said, "Well, Oprah, I wouldn't say this on the air, but it has to do with his millions and what he gives to the organization. He lives by a different standard. That's the hypocrisy of the religion." As soon as we came back from the break, in front of millions, Oprah put

me on the spot by asking me the same question. I framed my answer carefully and made a hand gesture about money rather than directly making that claim. I certainly didn't want to be sued by the Jacksons. A few months later, Catherine Jackson, Michael's mother, wrote a book, My Life With The Jacksons, where she made reference to my comments as being false.

The weirdness of Jackson came later. He never did have a childhood because of the religion and his contradictory life in the music business. Not many know this, but being a good Jehovah's Witness, he would put on disguises and go from door-to-door selling Watchtower magazines and books. He had several outfits he would wear. On the set of "Thriller" he had a Watchtower elder present who would approve of every move. Of course the occult themes were certainly over the top and we protested. The original "Thriller" album had printed warnings stating, "I do not endorse or promote the occult. " Again, the contradiction. Finally, because of the tremendous pressure, Michael resigned from the Jehovah's Witness religion. I prayed for him often to find Jesus Christ as Savior, yet it did not happen. Contrary to the rules, he kept in touch with his mother and other family who were Jehovah's Witnesses, again the hypocrisy. If any of us who have left the religion had contact with our families they would be disfellowshipped (shunned).

I have observed his life and have prayed for him often. Again, the weirdness was due to his involvement with the religion and the constant guilt he lived with. Without Jesus Christ we are empty. He is the only One who gives us fulfillment and peace. Michael did not have it. He gave millions to causes, probably trying to relieve the guilt of trying to please the God of his mother, yet could not. Last year, for whatever reason, he finally converted to Islam.

What would his life been like if he knew Jesus? We can only say he would be in heaven today. He also would not have had to live through the torment of trying to serve a god and a religion, which demands so much. He would have been able to live life knowing that God loved him just the way he was. Jesus makes all the difference.

Yet, we dare not judge…"There but for the Grace of God go I"

Paul's is the senior pastor of Memorial Baptist Church in Beckley, West Virginia.

http://www.memorialbaptistbeckley.com/

Paul's testimony and many resources on the subject of Jehovah's Witnesses can be read at his website. I highly recommend you read his testimony.

http://www.paulblizard.org/