THE RASTAFARI MOVEMENT

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For hundreds of years, religion has always been a huge conflict between cultures and has resulted in public outbursts, protests and even war. Therefore, it’s hard to find a religion, cult or sect that has a clean background check. It seems a lot of them have had their not-so-nice moments in history where they were forced to fight for what they believe in. The Rastafarian religion however, decided to take a more relaxed approach and is considered to be one of the world’s most peaceful religions.

The Rastafari movement began in the 1920’s. Jamaica at the time was experiencing a period of great depression and poverty and so began a small stir among the poor. A stir that was sparked by a man named Marcus Garvey. He preached that the blacks were the true Israelites and was quoted in saying: “Look to Africa, for a king shall be crowned”. After many years of believing they were only meant as slaves, this brought new hope to the Jamaican people. ("Religoin and Spiritual Belief Resource")

Their hopes and prayers didn’t go without an answer too. In 1930, three years after Marcus Garvey’s speech about returning to Africa, a new emperor was crowned in Ethiopia. Haile Selassie, formerly Ras Tafari Makonnen, is said to be the predicted messiah of the Rastafarian culture and is considered Jah or the presence of God on Earth. Although the original messiah has passed away, Rastafarians believe he lives on through individual Rastafarians making the religion still strong today. ("Religion and Spiritual Belief Resource")

Today, Rastafarian culture has grown and developed into a religion with estimates of over 1 million followers. What started as a movement for change, Rastafarianism is now a civilized religion with its own “Black Man’s Bible” called the Holy Piby. It is a version of the Christian bible modified to not include readings that are believed to have been added by the whites during translation. ("Religion Facts")

In the beginning, Rastafarian beliefs were all depicting revenge against the white population. The Jamaicans were angry and outraged that white people had enslaved them for so long and this was their way to fight back. Originally they believed in 6 basic principles: 1) to hate all white people 2) members of the black race are superior to the whites 3) revenge needed
to be taken against the whites 4) fight back against the government 5) making plans to go to Africa, the promised land and 6) recognizing Emperor Haile Selassie as Jah. These beliefs over time have changed and a more peaceful bond between Rastafarians and the white population has formed. ("Rasta-man")

Many beliefs have developed over the years and are now commonly associated with the religion. They do not believe in an afterlife but rather believe that true Rastas are immortal or ever-living. Because they do not believe in an afterlife, Jah is said to be the presence of God on Earth and Africa is Earth's heaven. Rastas also believe in the concept of "I and I" meaning all humans are equal. ("Religion Facts")

Another important aspect of the Rastafarian religion is the many different practices they carry out. Rastas are known for smoking marijuana, or the "Holy herb", wearing their hair in dreadlocks and rejecting the use of alcohol. Reggae music is also commonly associated with the religion with Bob Marley as one of the most famous and committed Rastas in history. All these are common in the Rastafarian tradition and keep their faith strong. Rastas also follow the Ital diet which preaches to eat and drink foods in their most natural form and refrain from eating meat which is why most Rastafarians are vegetarians. (Payne)

After researching Rastafarianism, I have learned a lot about a religion I knew nothing about a week ago. I think a lot of people get the wrong idea about Rastafarianism and don’t understand that it is an actual religion and should be taken seriously. I never realized how hard it must have been for the African people who were forced into slavery and how hopeless they must have felt. I think what I like most about this religion is that it doesn’t have strict rules and guidelines and that it continues to empower people with the freedom they need like it did at the very beginning.

Rastafarianism is essentially a religion that began based on the need for freedom from slavery. It began as a thirst for revenge against the whites that enslaved them, but has turned into a much more peaceful religion that doesn’t get in the way of other beliefs. It is backed by no political party and has had very little conflict with society since the religion first began. As many Rastas claim, Rastafarianism is not a religion so much as it is a way of life. ("Religion Facts")
References


