

Prompt: Think of a personal or public action, behavior, or activity that you engage in on a daily to weekly basis that has a local and perhaps regional or even global impact. Explain the reasons for your actions, the local or global consequences, and the challenges you encounter as you sustain or attempt to change what you do.

Imagine it: it is a cold and dreary Saturday morning. It is 7am, and the alarm is sounding. You do not have to report to work, you do not even have to go to school. It is the weekend, your “free” time. Considering the state of the weather outdoors, it is tempting to turn off the alarm, roll over, curled up in your warm, inviting blanket, and drift back off into sleep. Tempting, but still you get up, wash, dress in nice, formal attire, eat, assemble your book bag, and head out on this cold morning to meet up with others such as yourself. What are you and what are you doing?

If you are like me-you are a member of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and you are heading out on this cold, uninviting morning to engage in a volunteer work to encourage Bible reading. To encourage your neighbors to look to the Bible for answers for many of the ills present in the world and many of our lives today. Most people are familiar with Jehovah’s Witnesses-they see (usually) 2 well dressed individuals carrying book bags approaching their door-and are almost surprised if they are not Jehovah’s Witnesses, eager to share their Bible based beliefs. 9 times out of 10, those people we talk to in our volunteer work are not happy to see us standing at their door. We respect that. Yet, we feel our work of encouraging bible reading is such an important one, that any negativity we encounter is overlooked for the joy we experience when we talk to someone who is truly interested in learning more about

what the Bible says concerning what God requires of us- if we wish to be one of his followers.

So why, oh why, have I chosen this topic to focus this essay upon? For what the vast majority of those here in the United States do not know, or even appreciate is-that as annoying and irritating as our presence at your door may be, it has in fact benefited all of us living here in the United States. It has been Jehovah's Witnesses numerous legal battles, even up to the Supreme Court, in defending our right to religion, and our right to speak to our neighbors-that has also secured our neighbors rights in regards to the rights spoken of in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States in 1791. It is interesting to read exactly what it states:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Even though the freedom of religion and assembly is stated so clearly in this most beloved national document, it has not guaranteed the rights of its citizens. Laws can still be passed by its officials stifling the original intent. I have read public and government opinion described as, many times acts as a pendulum, swinging far right, and then far left in what is considered an acceptable interpretation of the law. In the case of *United States v. Schwimmer* in 1928, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr made

the statement in regard his thoughts on free speech, "If there is any principle of the Constitution that more imperatively calls for attachment than any other it is the principle of free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate."

It is because of these shifts from the law makers in government, as well as reversals in the Supreme Court decisions themselves, that Jehovah's Witnesses have had the privilege, repeatedly over the last century to stand in front of the Supreme Court of this land and defend our constitutional rights of free exercise of religion and freedom of speech. Professor C.S. Braden, in his book-'These Also Believe'- states: "They [Jehovah's Witnesses] have performed a signal service to democracy by their fight to preserve their civil rights, for in their struggle they have done much to secure those rights for every minority group in America. When the civil rights of any one group are invaded, the rights of no other group are safe. They have therefore made a definite contribution to the preservation of some of the most precious things in our democracy."

Though many of those we meet and talk to in our volunteer work at times seem to hate us and the work that we do in our Bible education work, it has been our repeated fighting for our rights to continue that work that has been a benefit for all citizens in this country, not just the minority groups, but in all Civil Rights causes. I sincerely hope that if more people were aware of the struggles we, as a group, have endured to cement our rights and freedoms that have ultimately worked to cement the rights and freedoms of all in this country, maybe those we meet will be less likely to slam the door- and maybe along with their "Not interested" can state "but, thank you!" How refreshing that would be, almost as refreshing as a hot cup of coffee on those cold dreary Saturday mornings!

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