

In Jesus' name: taking up serpents



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

" Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. " (Psalm 137: 9)Read more at /list/top-20-bible-passages-to-use-against-fundamentalists/ivana-wynn? page= 3#X63UZMIZkY7ETEaQ. 99 " Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones. " (Psalm 137: 9)Read more at /list/top-20-bible-passages-to-use-against-fundamentalists/ivana-wynn? page= 3#X63UZMIZkY7ETEaQ. 99 Megan Gowler Cultural Anthropology MWF 10 a. m. IN JESUS' NAME: TAKING UP SERPENTS I've took cocaine, I've smokedmarijuana, drunk whiskey, and been high on all that, but this high you get on Jesus, it's nothin', nothin' compared to that... " The video was filmed in two churches in Alabama and Georgia in what looks like the 60's, but in reality was the late 80's or very early 90's, I believe the copyright date is 1991. In Jesus' Name: Taking Up Serpents heavily documents the practice of snake handling in this religious sect, but mentions the consumption of strychnine very minimally.

The people seem happy, but not particularly affluent. They are presumably in the Appalachian region of the states, where coal mining, poverty and a hard life are all too common. The whole thing is presented without commentary or criticism allowing the viewer to experience the culture and apply their own opinions. Taking Up Serpents shows us how literal interpretations of biblical texts are executed with fervor in the name of God. The filmmakers do not appear biased or like they have any hidden agenda.

It seems to be a straight-forward documentation of a church service. The filmmakers did not go out of their way to make these people seem simple or poor, which I am sure would have been easy to do with selective editing. Men are featured prominently in this video. They seem to be 'called upon by

the holy ghost' to 'take up serpents' more readily than the women are. The women are not left untouched by the 'spirit' as was made obvious by the shaking, sobbing and speaking in tongues that is also demonstrated in the video.

The women who do handle the snakes seemed to do so for a much shorter length of time and with greater caution than the men, who shake them and rub them around their faces and necks, almost as a challenge to the snake. Children are not permitted to handle any of the snakes in these churches. I found out online that usually (and for legal reasons) you must be 18 to begin taking part in this part of the ritual. Apparently, the Holy Spirit discriminates by not just gender, but age as well.

They do not go into any detail regarding the consumption of strychnine in this video, it only gets a brief mention and is hardly shown. Interestingly, when you look at the side effects of the consumption of strychnine, one of the less grievous effects is euphoria. Also, it should be noted that it acts as a stimulant and can cause muscle spasms and convulsions, which are exacerbated by bright light and loud noises (I assume that includes raucous religious music and bright overhead lights).

I wonder why they have chosen that verse specifically to focus all their energy on. Why aren't they burning male flock animals (sheep, goats) on altars in their yard or beating their children for self satisfaction (Leviticus 1: 9 and Psalm 137: 9, respectively). Why snake handling and poison consumption, I have a theory, but I will save it for now. Everything about this practice is bizarre, but is it only bizarre because of our distance from it?

Religious ceremonies of EVERY nature have incredibly odd practices, but they only seem bizarre to outsiders. The whole video made me sad, but I can't say exactly why. The filmmakers intention was to document the practice and according to the note on Youtube, help preserve their right to practice their religion, their way. I don't know how to explain how I feel without writing another 5 pages. Religion and religious freedom is and always has been a minefield of controversy.

Islam has the prophet Mohammed who took a six year old bride when he was in his late 50's, Christianity has a virgin birth and coming back to life (insert inappropriate zombie Jesus joke here), Scientology teaches us that we are all immortal aliens trapped in physical bodies, dinosaurs are a hoax put forth by Satan to fool us all, Mormons are in their 'magic underwear' prepping for the return on God in Missouri, putting a dirty milk glass and a plate from a roast beef sandwich in the same dishwasher can contaminate your soul, or most famously and least disputed the idea that when certain rites are performed bread and wine turn into human flesh and blood once in your stomach. I mean, there are plenty of genuinely weird ideas and practices in the United States, I mean, these are just off the top of my head. So even though this very specific sect of Evangelical Christians has the odd little habit of swinging snakes around and drinking poison really, who can judge them? I would like to mention that I did a little digging regarding this film, partly because I am fascinated by religion and partly because I wanted to know more about it and I found out that two of the men in the film have died, possibly a third, but without names, I cannot say for sure.

Also, the pastor in the film, whose name is Glenn Summerford was convicted of attempted murder for stuffing his wife Danielle's hand into a box of rattlesnakes when he was in a 'drunken rage' in 1991. Glenn was sentenced to 99 years in prison. There is a book about this titled, *The Serpent and the Spirit* and I now intend to read it as well. After some of the additional information I have uncovered and a lot of the stereotypes we have all heard regarding people living in this area, I wonder if these people live their lives in a more rowdy fashion than you would imagine given the scenes we are shown in the film, which is why I placed the quote I did under the title at the top.

The skeptic cynic in me says that the snake handling has less to do with God or the Holy Spirit and more to do with each individual using this fate tempting to make themselves feel better, maybe about indiscretions, financial hardships, poor decisions, who knows? Do something wrong, feel guilt, handle the snake, live through it, decide God isn't that mad at you after all because he is a forgiving God and you made a mistake, feel better... now repeat. I suppose that is what every religion is supposed to do for its followers, make you feel better, help you find peace, give you a sense of place, let you know that 'it' is gonna be okay. So as a non-judgmental observer with no plans of attending service or joining the Church of Jesus with Signs I say, ladies and gentlemen, turn up your amps, raise your cups of strychnine and shake those snakes!