

WITCHCRAFT: A REPLY FROM A CHRISTIAN

By JOHN NEULAND

I was very interested by Sheenagh Murphy's article on witchcraft and decided it really deserved a response. I might claim by virtue of my belief that what is written is inspired as it were, by the Holy Spirit. If he did descend on me, since I still have all my hair, he must have had his burners on low!

Leaving aside this wholly separate question, it seemed that the entire purpose behind the article was focused in a plea for freedom of expression and practise for "...those of another faith, who through methods as sincere and believable as Christian ones, attempt to reach the same conclusion."

Presumably, this "same conclusion" that both witches and Christians "are attempting to teach is the achievement of "self-purification".

To support this conclusion Murphy advances a long historical introduction which stresses the increasing Church antipathy and active persecution of witches, from the Middle Ages down to the time of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. It is true that no historian with any pretension to scholarship would argue that this did not take place in a physical sense.

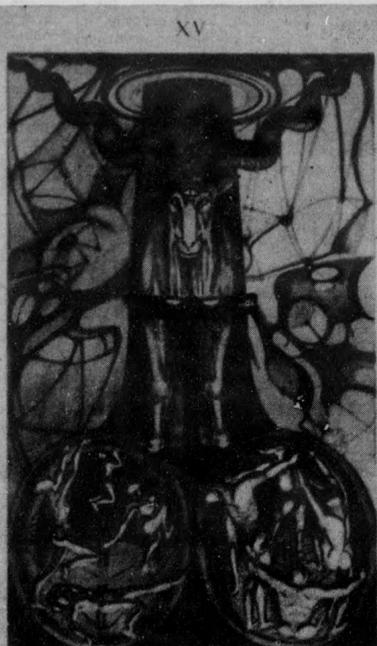
After setting the scene in this way the basis of witchcraft theology is discussed through a description of the attributes, functions, and symbolism associated with Cerennos and Habondia, the two primary figures in the witches' scheme of things. This is followed by further description outlining the stages a neophyte passes through as he-she becomes more proficient in witchcraft.

This account is then widened to include an explanation of the structure and organization of the coven and its activities, followed by a comparison of, and contrast between, the two devoted witch groups, the traditional Alexandrians and more reformist Gardianians. Murphy finally closes her article with her paralleling of Witchcraft and Christianity in underlying structure and purpose.

I have taken up so much time with my appreciation of what Murphy has written in her predominantly descriptive article, in order that it may be readily understood where the assumptions originate, that are the basis of both the analysis and the conclusions I reach. In this way, I will hopefully enable anyone who wishes, to verify my own line of reasoning for themselves.

In the few instances where the philosophical base of Witchcraft is mentioned, as opposed to the mass of detail on both ritual and procedure, it is claimed that "Witchcraft, unlike Judaeo-Christian doctrine, emphasizes the fact that no barriers are drawn between what consists of good and-or evil." and immediately following "There are no barriers due to the fervent belief that these classifications do not exist above and beyond man-made mores."

Earlier in the article, Murphy declared that "...the time has come to smash some of those myths and to replace with facts what witchcraft, the religion, actually entails." I accept as totally valid her rejection on behalf of Witchcraft, of the Judaeo-Christian conception that morality exists in an



absolute sense. That is, that good and evil are not values decided on by society but are permanent and fixed through time.

Witchcraft rejects the idea of an absolute morality while Christianity does not. This acceptance of Witchcraft philosophy would seem to undermine, rather than support, the "poor persecuted witches" argument used in the early part of the article. If morality does not exist in an absolute sense, since it is determined only by society, which itself is constantly changing, then surely it is hardly justifiable to claim that societies as far removed from our own, as the pre-industrial Middle Ages and Mercantilist seventeenth century, should operate according to the self-same set of moral values (given by society) as a twentieth century technological state.

If the societies are so radically different, so are the moralities. If this is so, and the moralities are radically different (which they must be by definition according to Witchcraft philosophy), how can we, without an absolute moral standard to refer to, condemn the actions of another society several hundred years ago?

Therefore, to speak of persecution of witches, except in the immediate present, it to raise a non-question. According to Murphy "Today witchcraft is becoming an increasingly popular and acceptable form of worship." Persecution may enhance the attraction of Witchcraft for some people, but I wonder if it would really promote its acceptance among society at large.

Furthermore, the concept of each society being responsible for its own moral values would seem to cause difficulties even in the contemporary world. Does this mean that the massive air bombardment, use of napalm, and widespread use of defoliants by the United States against a small South East Asian country, is neither good nor bad, but a meaningless question, since we are not a part of that society? Unless we are part of American society the question, according to the logic of Witchcraft philosophy, is meaningless. I will quickly pass over other such meaningless questions, as six million murdered Jews, and the position of blacks in South Africa. Since these questions are meaningless, why should I raise them?

As each society makes its own moral values, within it, morality does operate. So, presumably there is nothing wrong in itself about students being charged high rents by landlords, or women being given inferior status and salaries just because they are women. Again, these are just two applications of conclusions of Witchcraft philosophy, accepting that it is valid.

Getting right away from the question of morality to the goal of Witchcraft, involves an examination of just what "self-purification" means. I, myself, do not know, but it does seem that if a person is to aim at "purification" it suggests that he will be progressing from a state of "non-purification" or "taintedness". Immediately there is the implication that a moral distinction exists between the two states. But since "...classifications do not exist above and beyond man-made mores" there would appear to be a clear contradiction between the Witchcraft philosophy as such, and the witch's means of achieving his-hers while subscribing to his-her philosophy.

In addition, the object of Witchcraft is the individual practitioner; the "self". There is no word here, in any way, shape or form, of any requirement to act outside one's own needs. Nor does the power from which the witch draws his own strength and power demand moral action as an imperative. This would be impossible since this power is by definition detached from morality.

However, in Christianity there is this absolute moral imperative to act outside one's own needs. To quote from the Bible, which I do for the specific reason that it is accepted by Christians as giving binding moral directives. "... the Lord our God is the only Lord; love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second (commandment) is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-32)

This is the clear and unmistakable moral imperative Witchcraft seems to lack, the imperative that every Christian falls short off, again and again.

For these reasons I cannot agree that Witchcraft and Christianity "...attempt to reach the same conclusion". Nor can I agree with the bulk of Sheenagh Murphy's article where everything appears so very simple and clear-cut, perhaps, disarmingly so.