

Paganism tarnished by propaganda

by Gilbert Bouchard

Witchcraft and other forms of pagan worship are valid alternative forms of worship that have been distorted by the media and public over the years, says a U of A psychology student and past practitioner of Wicca, Edward Sandberg.

"The original pagan beliefs have been tarnished by the propaganda of the Catholic Church," said Sandberg. "They associated pagan worshippers with black masses and devil worshippers, but that had nothing to do with paganism."

Sandberg added that most devil worshippers and celebrants of the black mass were mocking the Catholic Church and had no interest whatsoever with paganism.

The true paganism — or the old religion — according to Sandberg, is the nature-based, nature-oriented worship that predates civilization. Usually paganism has a birth/fertility goddess and is a naturalistic worship as opposed to the Christian view which separates man from nature.

"In paganism, we are a part of nature and we take pleasure in it," said Sandberg.

Pleasure, according to Sandberg, is vital to the pagan's worship. "Paganism, both original and new, advocates having a good time while participating in religious rituals," he said. "Enjoying self, enjoying others, and enjoying the beats of the universe. Why shouldn't you have a good time while worshipping?"

Another difference between Judeo-Christian religions and paganist cults is that pagan movements are very individualistic

Rituals differ from place to place, time to time, and coven to coven. There is no set dogma — many books on subject — but nothing that has to be followed.

and don't share a common dogma as, for example, Christians do. "Religion started as individualistic cults — individuals acting on their own beliefs. Although these people have some concepts of the nature of the world in common, each may express his worship in whatever way it suits him best. There is no pressure to conform."

Most pagans also believe in a Unified Godhead. In other words, the goddess — godhead — encompasses all of creation.

"We personify the universe into a godhead, but pagans accept personification as a function of our inability to comprehend the infinite and the mysterious forces of the universe," said Sandberg.

As for the accusations of the Christian churches that pagans were worshipping "petty" gods, Sandberg explains that while pagans believed in a major unified deity, they also worshipped minor deities and spir-

its as well.

"The many spirits — nature spirits, spirits of deceased ancestors, and specific spirits of various facets of nature — were seen as being integrated into the goddess, but these spirits could be addressed separately as well," he said. Spirits then were an aid in the focussing of energy. "The spirits are a part of the cosmos — part of nature."

Not only did Christianity belittle the beliefs of the pagans, they went as far as to take the consort of the goddess and turn him into the devil, said Sandberg. "The reason that the devil is personified as he is now — with horns and cloven feet — is that the devil was modeled on the consort of the female goddess."

While the pagans originally had only the female goddess as their godhead, a male consort was incorporated into the godhead later on in history. This male consort was less

powerful and was personified as a goatlike (or staglike) horned god.

"The Christians de-emphasized the female goddess into the non-sexual Virgin Mary (the simple carrier of the Holy seed) and made the male horned consort into the devil," said Sandberg.

"That's part of the suppression of paganism," he said. "What better reason to persecute a people for their beliefs than to make the god you believe in (the horned god) into the ultimate evil."

"Paganism in the original sense is not male dominated," said Sandberg. "Paganism is non-sexist. Both males and females can be witches. A witch is a male or female who uses a naturalistic approach to raise spiritual energy for worship and healing."

"One of the main attractions to Wicca (one of the many names given to pagan worship) is that it is non-sexist and non-paternalistic, and since this form of worship is still today very taboo in our society, it is easier for people, such as openly gay people and feminists who already defy certain social taboos, to also defy this one," said Sandberg. "This is a major factor, especially for people who, after growing up in traditional religions, are uncomfortable in much of this."


"Paganism is looking for alternatives and looking for places where they can be themselves and don't have to fit into a pre-ordained framework," said Sandberg. "In our impersonal society, it is very appealing to get together with a few people who share some of your ideas and with whom you can commune in a loving and nurturing way."

A lot of practicing witches practice, to varying degrees, other "conventional" religions.

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