

Witchcraft: A religion in

By SHEE

Colin Wilson in *The Occult: A History*, said, "The word 'witches' arouses visions of women on broomsticks, stirring cauldrens with toads and henbane, or offering obscene homage to the devil."

This is a traditional view, one which is held even today by supposedly liberated people. It is both erroneous and detrimental in its conclusions. Today witchcraft is becoming an increasingly popular and acceptable form of worship. Witches are beginning to be accepted as people with a sincere and honest belief in their religion, with as much if not greater basis, to support their views. Witchcraft is not a new concept. It has existed since the dawn of mankind, when he first attempted to control nature to ensure and aid his own survival. It is *pagan* only in the sense that it existed before Christianity, not in the sense that it was an organized opposition to Christian doctrine.

The history

Prior to the thirteenth century, with the entrance of Christianity, witchcraft was punishable by death only if some concrete injury was the result of divination, healing or the use of herbs.

With the advent of the increasing power of the Christian Church in the fourteenth century, the noose began to tighten. Deterioration was rapid at this point. The Church began to differentiate between the "miracles" of saint and those they considered worked by, or with the aid of demons. Heresy was a by-word, and a staggering number of people were subjected to the terrors of the Inquisition. An estimated minimum of 30,000 "witches" were burnt in a period stretching from 1450-1598.

The zeal with which arraignment of witches was pursued can be attributed in one way by considering the nature of the two religions.

On the other hand, Christian monotheists possess one supreme ruler, whose reign encompasses all that is good. There was no method of adapting to a polytheistic belief, unless something was done with the extra deities. As the god of the church was all good, the other deities must be evil, for there was no room for other gods. This is where the demons of the Christian church received their baptism.

Prior to Christianity, religion had been largely of a polytheistic kind, monotheism being the advocate of the Judeo-Christian doctrine. Polytheists are able to adopt the gods of another culture merely by drawing a parallel between the gods of either religion.

At the time of the witch persecutions of the 16th and 17th centuries, witchcraft had outgrown its association with sorcery, though this was still used to calm public dissent. Witches were primarily punished for entering into a pact with the devil to deny the Christian god. During the onset, power and decline of witchcraft persecution it remained an intellectual, not a popular movement.

The Medieval Period, the so-called Dark Ages was relatively free of witch persecution. In the Middle Ages, the condition was more or less stable; in the 16th and 17th centuries ideas were fermenting and the established social order felt a greater need to maintain itself against potential overthrow. The terror occasioned by the executors of the Inquisition was an attempt to inspire conformity in the population.

With the gradual dissolution of feudalism and the onset of capitalism, witchcraft mania reached a peak. After the Protestant Reformation England, under Elizabeth was the scene of a severe rash of persecutions, followed shortly by persecution under the Commonwealth.

The Age of Reason was now gaining control. Commerce, an essential aspect of a capitalistic society needed a steady basis in



Traditional Sabbatical Garb

Photo by Jack Trifis

order to survive. At this point in time the notoriety associated with witchcraft began to fade. There is little reference in any journal about what exactly transpired between that period and our present century. It is known however that various offshoots of witchcraft appeared in several areas. Magical orders and sects whose adepts used practices similar to those of witchcraft were prevalent in some societies especially in the latter part of the 18th C and the earlier half of our present century.

The development

The advent of witchcraft in our society is a process which has been taking place for some time. Today the old beliefs and taboos still exist, even if in a somewhat less obvious manner. The North American person is literally breast fed on prevalent

Judeo-Christian ideals. It is not surprising therefore, that certain prejudices exist even now. But the time has come to smash some of those myths and to replace with facts what witchcraft, the religion, actually entails.

"Closely associated with nature, witchcraft can be classified as a religion of fertility. The belief is polytheistic in origin possessing two major deities. Habondia is female, and her horned consort Cerennos, also known as The Lord of Misrule or the Goat of Mendes.

Cerennos, on the other hand waxes strongest at mid-winter, for as the active force he controls this season of passion and desolation. He is also known as the Lord of Misrule or Lucifer, the light bearer. The latter name is especially relevant for Cerennos rules the sun. The goat, evergreen boughs and fire are all symbols of his more active and wild nature.

Habondia, the trinity represents the three faces of the moon, the Virgin, new moon, the Matron, the full moon, and the Hag, the last quarter. The virgin is young beauty, the matron a more mature type of beauty, and is usually depicted as pregnant. The Hag, is devoid of beauty but possesses wisdom. The night is her domain. She is the passive force in the duality, some of her symbols are myrrh, poplar leaves, water and similar objects. Habondia is at her most powerful at the mid-summer solstice, for the summer is associated with her more placid fertile nature.

The rituals involved in the invocation of these deities are also of a dissimilar nature. Those used concerning Habondia are usually drawn out over a more extensive period while Cerennos is invoked in a more active and animate manner.

A point must be made here which could influence greatly the manner in which the reader judges this religion. Witchcraft, unlike Judeo-Christian doctrine, emphasizes the fact that no barriers are drawn between what consists of good and-or evil. There are no barriers due to the fervent belief that these classifications do not exist above and beyond man-made mores. The two deities, Habondia and Cerennos are not, and should not be labled as either bad or good, they are two supreme forces, whose respective characters form a ying-yand type of liason. They possess an equal amount of power, differing in certain respects concerning what aspects of the world they control.

Symbols & rituals

The symbolism involved in any ritual, whether for these specific deities or for forces of another aspect, are intricate and deeply symbolic to the witch. The traditional witchcraft group believes that the symbols used, originated from a people whose sensitivities were superior to those that modern man utilizes. They are a necessary part of any invocation and are prevalent in most areas of witchcraft.

Learning this symbolism is a small part in

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