



Magic, Paganism and Religion

A personal comment by Michael Freedman, S. G.

For most people in the European culture of past centuries, there was no difference between Magicians and Pagans. All occultists were the same; and all were into black magic, devil worship, and sex orgies. Gracious! I must leave too early when I go to Coven. In reality, from classical times to the 19th century, there were quite clear-cut distinctions. Today, Pagans and Magicians are getting more and more alike. Many Magicians are prepared to go so far as to not mind being called Pagans. Nevertheless, there ARE real, fundamental differences between Pagans and Magicians.

MAGICIANS ARE CITY FOLK.

Pagans and witches are country folk. Magicians do their rituals indoors in temples; Pagans and witches do their rituals out of doors. Magicians learn their rites by heart or use ritual books; Pagans and witches are spontaneous, which means, they make up their rites as they go along. Magicians wear vestments and robes; Pagans and witches take their clothes off and go sky-clad!

In reply to these statements, a wise Pagan Witch has said: "When we Witches get in touch with Nature, we stand sky-clad with our bare feet in contact with the Mother Earth. "When Magicians want to contact Nature, they sit indoors and look at pictures of trees!"

Both these comments are more or less true, and both focus on what many folk believe are fundamental differences in the styles of the two groups going back to the dawn of civilisation.

Their very names point to ancient differences between Magicians and Pagans.

(c) 1993, 2006 Et Custosi Tutelae

Magician comes from a Persian word meaning, Wise One. The Magi were originally the priests of one of the oldest religions in the Middle Eastern area, where cities first were built. From time immemorial, the Magi built temples, conducting their rites according to formal, structured traditions.

The word Witch was the feminine form of a Germanic word in western Europe, *Wys*, a Wise One. Nowadays, Witch, especially in its more recent form, Wicce, applies to both sexes. Most Witches are happy to call themselves Pagans or neo-Pagans to recall their ancient origins. The Latin word *Paganus* meant 'rustic' or 'country person' as opposed to a city dweller.

Any differences mentioned so far between Pagans or Witches, on the one hand, and Magicians, on the other, are superficial and not really significant.

Force and Form

It has been said the difference between the two is that Magicians emphasise Form, using

set rites, buildings and vestments to channel the Forces; while Witches and other Pagans emphasise Force, allowing the energies to build through spontaneous, natural human activities.

The danger for Magicians is that their use of written-down, generally fixed, Forms can stifle their Force, turning their workings into egotistic, sterile dressing-up and play-acting.

The danger for Witches is that their spontaneous, enthusiastic use of the Forces can blow their Forms apart, so that their rites get out of control, turning invocation and evocation into frenzied self-indulgence.

Even when Witches and Magicians set out to achieve a balance between Force and Form, they tend to go about it differently.

To a Magician, the Rite itself is the Form and the Force is usually provided by the thrust of the Magician's Will and Intention.

For Witches, the balancing of Force and Form is normally achieved through the natural union of male Priest and female Priestess in the Great Rite.

However, it should be noted that in the occasionally used, more advanced techniques of more than one outwardly dull Magical Order, the Rites can include a surprisingly broad variety of sexual acts.

But what we have said so far is still not the essential, significant difference between Pagans or Witches and Magicians.

More and more alike

In practice, as the 20th century draws to a close, Pagans and Magicians have become more and more alike. This is largely due to the extension of education to virtually all people in economically advanced countries.

Both Witches and Magicians nowadays come from similar cultural and educational backgrounds, and both now tend to draw much

**Paganism should be inclusive,
rather than exclusive.**

of their knowledge from books rather than from oral traditions. Any differences nowadays are

more likely to be as a result of differences in personal psychological styles, rather than in any significant differences in their actual practice or techniques.

I believe that all occultists, of whatever breed, should be prepared to call themselves Pagans, at least for census purposes. Pagan is surely as good a name to use as any other.

There is broad enough similarity of beliefs and practices among occultists. There is generally broad tolerance of other beliefs and practices. There is generally a similar enough approach in ethos from group to group. We are alike enough for the world not to pay much regard to the differences.

One Light, many colours

When dealing with the world at large, we need to emphasise that which we hold in common, rather than those matters in which we are different. As Thamris, a Companion of the Sun, has said, "When we know differences, show us the harmony among the differences, that the many colours of the Limitless Light might glorify the Universe."

I am a Pagan

When the Gummint Man comes round every so often, he will ask: "What is your Religion? C. of E.? Catholic? Atheist?"

All you Magicians, all you Witches, all you Oddbods and Occultists, you should all be proud to say, "I am a Pagan."

Magic Pentacle, whose collective is pretty well dominated by Magicians, (Shh, Alys Goldenthorne, everyone knows that you are a Witch) not only supports the Pan Pacific Pagan Alliance, but recently put its money where its mouth is and actually paid its subscription. We are really looking forward to getting the pagan newspaper, *Pagan Times*, that only paid-up members get.

So now, statistically and in writing, this makes all of us folk of the MP Collective, collectively Pagan.

I do not belong to any Pagan Religion

I will now also say sincerely and loudly that I am a Magician and therefore I believe that, in a very real sense, I cannot consider myself to belong to any kind of Pagan Religion, or any other Religion, for that matter. This is because there are fundamental differences between Pagan Religions and the practice of Magic.

Magicians are not religious

Magicians are not religious; or at least they aren't religious, if they are real Magicians and not just playing head games. In fact, Magic and Religion are at opposite ends of the polarity of surrender and control.

Devotion and surrender to the God/dess

In its purest form, the way of Religion is a way of devotion and surrender to the God/dess of the Religion. The religious person surrenders their life to the God/dess, invites the God/dess to take them over, to enter into them, to possess them totally, as a lover possesses the beloved; and the beloved surrenders to the lover.

Some Religious folk go this way so far, that they cannot even recognise that there is any God/dess but their own. They become monotheists, One-God/dess folk, like the Jews, Muslims or Christians.

The secular, non-spiritual, form of Religion is, of course, Politics.



Et Custosi Tutelae

Controlling the God/dess

In the purest sense of the word, the way of Magic is a way of control. The secular, non-esoteric, form of Magic is Science. Prediction and control are fundamental to both magicians and scientists.

Both say, "Do this and that will happen. Do this again and that will happen again." Both say, "Believe nothing; test everything. Discover the truth for yourself."

Any difference between Magic and Science lies in the fact the Magic always seems to be working at the very limits of human experience and knowledge; and then goes farther! And sometimes Magicians say,

To some extent, we are discovering the universe, and to some extent we are creating it.

"Heere be dragons", when they are only seeing natural gas flares for the first time.

Magicians are so non-religious that some of them go so far as to say that there is no God/dess, that we are continually creating god/desses, and that ultimately we will create The One God/dess ourselves; that God/dess is not Alpha, Creator, the beginning of the universe, but Omega, Goal, the End of the Universe.

I just made God/dess up

How can you believe in, trust in and surrender your being to a God/dess that you just made up and created half an hour or half a decade or half a century ago.

Worse, how can you believe in, trust in and surrender to a God/dess that some other person

made up and created half an hour or half a decade or half a century ago. No more second hand God/desses!

Richard Smoley, editor of *Gnosis, a Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* and the world's leading esoteric magazine, recently said, in an article *Man as God and Creator*, "Each of us may be the God of a world created by our own thoughts and intentions."

As a Magician, I solemnly say, "Each of IS the God of a world created by our own thoughts and intentions."

So, how can any Magician be a member of a religion that worships God/dess? Am I to worship myself? I might respect myself, and even give worth to myself. But bow down and worship? No way.

Religion in the Sanctuary

After all this tirade against Religion, any of you who drop by the Sanctuary of which I am the guardian, to witness one of the monthly Solar rituals will get the shock of your lives. They look like religious services. They sound like religious services. You aint hardly ever heard so many chanted prayers and praises to so many gods and goddesses. There are Persian gods, Greek and Roman gods, Jewish gods [but we call them archangels], even an Egyptian, Norse, Celtic or Chinese god drops by now and then. Here, at last we get to the crux of the difference between pagans and Magicians.

**Paganism is a religion,
but Magicians use religion.**

Magicians use the powerful collective images and energies built up by centuries of religious worship and devotion to the God/desses.

This is also why we do not at all mind calling ourselves Pagan, or going to Church either, if that suits our Magical purposes, just as real Western Magicians have never minded calling themselves Christian or going to Mass, if that meant they could get on with the Great Work.

Coming out

Many Pagans are so enthusiastic and happy with their Religion, that they "come out" for Paganism.

Then they are shocked when equally enthusiastic members of some rival Religion attack them. If such a Religion is also long-established, politically powerful and intolerant of any God but their own, can you blame them for trying to get rid of these upstart rivals, the Pagans and all their 'false' God/desses.

After all, within Australian Paganism, one kind of witch [heterosexual] has recently tried to excommunicate another kind of witch [transsexual]. The fault lies not in these witches, but in the very nature of Religion itself, which demands a devotion that leads too easily to jealousy. How can that [different] person dare to claim to worship my God/dess?

Current disputes within Paganism are no different to the persecution of those who believed that Jesus was similar to God [Arian homoiousians] by those who believed that Jesus was the same as God [Athanasian homoiousians] and vice versa. There was only an iota of difference between them, but thousands died in the wars that followed.

Pagans beware!

If you follow the path of Religion, there are many dangers. Protestants fight against Catholics in Ireland. Orthodox Serbians fight against Catholic Croats in Yugoslavia. Sunni Muslims fight against Shi'ite Muslims in Iraq. Will Pagan also fight against Pagan?

Religion does not have to be like that, but the danger is there, in its very nature. As long as paganism emphasises its religiosity, it is always a possibility.

Magicians beware!

Magicians do not have to be egotistic chauvinistic, arrogant bullies setting out to control and dominate everyone they meet, that that danger is also there, in the very nature of Magic. Magicians, beware!

made up and created half an hour or half a decade or half a century ago. No more second hand God/desses!

Richard Smoley, editor of *Gnosis, a Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* and the world's leading esoteric magazine, recently said, in an article *Man as God and Creator*, "Each of us may be the God of a world created by our own thoughts and intentions."

As a Magician, I solemnly say, "Each of **IS** the God of a world created by our own thoughts and intentions."

So, how can any Magician be a member of a religion that worships God/dess? Am I to worship myself? I might respect myself, and even give worth to myself. But bow down and worship? No way.

Religion in the Sanctuary

After all this tirade against Religion, any of you who drop by the Sanctuary of which I am the guardian, to witness one of the monthly Solar rituals will get the shock of your lives. They look like religious services. They sound like religious services. You aint hardly ever heard so many chanted prayers and praises to so many gods and goddesses. There are Persian gods, Greek and Roman gods, Jewish gods [but we call them archangels], even an Egyptian, Norse, Celtic or Chinese god drops by now and then. Here, at last we get to the crux of the difference between pagans and Magicians.

**Paganism is a religion,
but Magicians use religion.**

Magicians use the powerful collective images and energies built up by centuries of religious worship and devotion to the God/desses.

This is also why we do not at all mind calling ourselves Pagan, or going to Church either, if that suits our Magical purposes, just as real Western Magicians have never minded calling themselves Christian or going to Mass, if that meant they could get on with the Great Work.

Coming out

Many Pagans are so enthusiastic and happy with their Religion, that they "come out" for Paganism.

Then they are shocked when equally enthusiastic members of some rival Religion attack them. If such a Religion is also long-established, politically powerful and intolerant of any God but their own, can you blame them for trying to get rid of these upstart rivals, the Pagans and all their 'false' God/desses.

After all, within Australian Paganism, one kind of witch [heterosexual] has recently tried to excommunicate another kind of witch [transsexual]. The fault lies not in these witches, but in the very nature of Religion itself, which demands a devotion that leads too easily to jealousy. How can that [different] person dare to claim to worship my God/dess?

Current disputes within Paganism are no different to the persecution of those who believed that Jesus was similar to God [Arian homoiousians] by those who believed that Jesus was the same as God [Athanasian homoiousians] and vice versa. There was only an iota of difference between them, but thousands died in the wars that followed.

Pagans beware!

If you follow the path of Religion, there are many dangers. Protestants fight against Catholics in Ireland. Orthodox Serbians fight against Catholic Croats in Yugoslavia. Sunni Muslims fight against Shi'ite Muslims in Iraq. Will Pagan also fight against Pagan?

Religion does not have to be like that, but the danger is there, in its very nature. As long as paganism emphasises its religiosity, it is always a possibility.

Magicians beware!

Magicians do not have to be egotistic chauvinistic, arrogant bullies setting out to control and dominate everyone they meet, that that danger is also there, in the very nature of Magic. Magicians, beware!