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**Witchcraft & Christianity**

**By Kathryn A. Graham**

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Why Do Some Christians Fear Witches?

During my 28 years as a practicing Wiccan, or "witch" if you prefer, I have had occasion to ask myself this difficult question many, many times. With the recent political controversy over the United States Army permitting pagan services to be held on military bases in Texas and around the world, the question suddenly has more than its usual immediacy for me and for my brothers and sisters in Wicca.

First, let me get the usual questions out of the way. Wicca is a real religion, born in the 1950s as a recreation of the Old Religion of Northern Europe, which some believe dates back about 25,000 years. In the mid-1980s, the U.S. Courts accepted Wicca as a legitimate religion and granted us 1st Amendment rights and freedom from taxation. So the point is moot, really. The same U.S. Constitution that protects Christianity protects our religious freedom - and a good thing, too. We are the fastest growing religion of the 20th Century.

We do not believe in an evil deity, and would not worship one if we did. We do not practice human or animal sacrifice. The most sacred commandment our religion demands of us is to harm no one. If you think about that last statement carefully, it pretty well covers most of the Biblical Ten Commandments - the important parts, anyway. Even more important, we do not attempt to convert our friends and neighbors to Wicca. Our faith teaches us that when they are ready for what we have to teach, they will seek us out.

What about me, personally? Am I a New Age nut? Well, that depends on what you mean. I'm an environmentalist, certainly. I am also a feminist. On the other hand, I do not do illegal drugs of any kind. I am a computer technician working for one of the largest employers in the United States. I am a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer. I am an aspiring science-fiction writer and screenwriter, actively peddling stories and novels to the publishing industry in New York and motion picture scripts to Hollywood. I am a licensed pilot and a licensed aircraft mechanic. I am a licensed private investigator. My favorite hobby is reading physics textbooks, and I apply such knowledge to my science fiction. I am a veteran of the United States Air Force, the United States Air Force Reserve, and the Texas Army

## Witchcraft & Christianity

National Guard, and during the time I served, I held a top–secret security clearance. I served my country well and was honorably discharged. I've been arrested only once in my entire life, as a 17–year–old runaway, and I've had a grand total of three traffic tickets in almost thirty years of driving. In what way am I such an evil and dangerous neighbor?

Why have I been forced to practice my religion in secret for most of my life? Why, during my active duty years (early to mid 1970s), was I forced to record "No Pref" on my dog tags? Am I a pacifist? Hardly! Women have never been drafted in the United States, so why would I have enlisted voluntarily (and during the Viet Nam war!) if I were a pacifist?

Why does publishing my real name on this article cause me to risk the loss of my job, vandalism to my home and my car, harm to my animals (and children if I had any)? Does this make any sense to a

rational human being?

Where does the knee–jerk hostility to the word "witch" come from?

Not from the word, certainly. "Witch" is a corruption of "witcraft," or "craft of the wise." In fact, my religion is sometimes called "The Craft of the Wise," or just "The Craft." There is nothing sinister there. Do we practice magic? Yes, most of us do. Do we have supernatural powers? Of course not. Oddly enough, those who believe the practice of magic is so evil are often those who most sincerely believe in faith healing. Just think about that honestly for a moment, and try to explain the difference to me. I'm waiting . . .

Let's get back to the Craft of the Wise. During the Christian Inquisition, nobody really knows how many accused witches were burned at the stake. It is known, however, that a number of village wise women were accused of witchcraft and burned for curing fevers with nasty stuff like moldy bread. Were they followers of the Old Religion? Probably – although I wasn't there, and I honestly have no idea. Were they wise? You bet they were! Did you ever hear of penicillin? How many centuries of medical knowledge were lost because of a bunch of frightened priests?

So where did the idea come from that we were (and are) Satanists?

The most obvious answer is that the moldy bread cure worked, and was unexplainable. A number of other herbal and common sense remedies were surprisingly effective, as "alternative" medicine is re–discovering today. The only way the church could admit these cures worked (and it was a little too obvious to deny) without admitting this was a really good thing was to make the claim that the women practicing these cures had made a pact with the Devil. Heavens, they couldn't be physicians! Medicine was firmly in the hands of the priests, and the practice of medicine was expressly forbidden to women. At the time I write of, formal medicine consisted mostly of applying leeches to the sick.

Were the village wise women the only problem? No. During this early medieval period, when the Christians were converting Northern Europe at sword point, a lot of dirty tricks were played. The country folk, whom we believe to be the ancestors of modern Wicca, worshiped a Goddess we consider the Mother of Life, and a God we call the Horned Hunter, or God of Death. For us, death is

merely a door to rebirth, so there is nothing at all fearful for us in a God of Death. In an effort to make non-Christianity something horrible, the monks who drew the medieval Biblical illustrations "borrowed" our Horned Hunter when they drew depictions of the Christian Devil. You needn't take my word for this. Any educated person knows that the Greek Pan predates Christianity by some considerable period of time. Take a good look at a drawing of Pan in your nearest encyclopedia. Look familiar? He should. You've been looking at him in biblical illustrations dating back to your first Sunday school. Pan is the Greek form of our Horned Hunter. They are one and the same god. Read your mythology. Pan was never evil, just playful.

If all that weren't enough, Exodus 22:18 was horribly mistranslated in the King James Version of the Christian Bible. The original "Suffer not a poisoner to live among you" became "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Some pretty bloodthirsty fundamentalist preachers want to enforce that mistranslation literally, even today. In August of 1999, Rev. Jack Harvey of Killeen, Texas, was quoted as stating publicly that all witches should be killed. He organized a "March Against Wickedness" for that Labor Day Monday in Killeen (which flopped pitifully), and I believe he was hoping and praying it would erupt into real violence, because he advised members of his congregation to carry guns, in case some of us witches decided to snatch his kids.

Can you spell "bizarre?" We would never, of course, kidnap children, but could someone please explain to me why we are supposed to want them? And, in particular, why we would want his offspring? I thought the idea of sacrificing Christian babies was discarded when the Nazis falsely accused the Jews of it. This is more of the same bigoted excrement.

In terms of our current century, Hollywood hasn't helped us much, either. Sick, twisted individuals who worship evil have always existed, and sadly, I'm afraid they will for a very long time to come. They pervert the Christian cross by inverting it, and sometimes, they invert our sacred symbol, the pentagram, as well. Hollywood directors just can't seem to get it right, though. They consistently show evil ceremonies prominently displaying the pentagram right side up.

When the pentagram is displayed properly, the symbolism is that of a man standing upright within a circle, meaning uprightness and spirit over flesh. In other traditions, the five points represent the four elements (fire, air, earth, water) surmounted by aether - or spirit. In any case, spirit is on top. Needless to say, the symbolism of an inverted pentagram is obscene to us, just as the symbolism of an inverted cross is obscene to you if you are a Christian. Because most Christians have seen movies in which evil ceremonies were presided over by an upright pentagram, they are upset and frightened when they meet a Wiccan wearing one. That's understandable enough, but it should be corrected by education.

Other reasons for fear again date back to medieval times. The reasons have mostly been forgotten, but the fear remains. During medieval times, life was unpleasant. In fact, it was downright horrible for the peasants. Christianity taught the peasants that it didn't matter, that the material world was to be shunned in favor of a reward in the Christian Heaven. Wiccans did not, and do not, agree. I can still remember my first teacher telling me that it would be difficult to cultivate my spiritual nature until at least my basic physical needs – as in food, shelter, warmth – were met. We are taught that achieving success at another's expense is wrong (remember we are permitted to harm none!), but success in itself is actually a virtue. In medieval times, daring to hope and work for success was dangerous

thinking. It might even have led to a collapse of feudalism. So the Christian hatred of that tenet of Wicca was one part envy, one part fear.

Another envy/fear combination had to do with the fact that Wicca is fun. The Old Religion is filled with laughter and playfulness. Our ceremonies are wonderful parties, full of happy tipsiness and flirtation. By comparison, medieval Christian practices were rather grim. Somehow, the Christians who were trying to convert us had to convince us that slipping off into the woods for a bonfire and a roaring good time wasn't such a good idea. Do what they would, though, they couldn't get us to give up our fun. Quite logically under the circumstances, they "borrowed" from us. The use of song and chants in ritual (although why the church couldn't manage happy song, I can't say), incense (borrowed from Mithraic ritual)- even some actual elements of ritual itself. You can hear echoes of our cakes and ale ceremony in Christian Communion. Oh, I don't doubt that Jesus of Nazareth had bread and wine during his Last Supper! That's as may be, but I don't think the contents of his last meal became a central part of Christian ceremonies until Christianity clashed with the Old Religion in Europe.

Where did Jesus get the idea in the first place? Mithras, who died following a ritual meal of bread and wine? Or the cakes and ale of the Old Religion? Scary question, isn't it? For the record, I believe it was Mithras, as he was the secret god of many of the Roman troops occupying Palestine at the time of Jesus of Nazareth. Nevertheless, enough Roman troops were European "barbarians" that it is just possible that some elements of our faith were known to Jesus himself.

20th Century Christian practices never struck me as being a barrel of laughs, either. Wiccans are still having fun. So there is bound to be some ongoing envy, if not outright fear.

Please do not misunderstand. I am not bashing Christians! Those who practice their faith honestly have no part in this hatred and fanaticism. Most are decent men and women, and I am proud to call many of them my friends. When the Rev. Jack Harvey called for a Christian boycott of the Armed Forces over this pagan worship controversy, Rev. Pat Robertson had the courage to publicly withdraw from the boycott and state it was wrong. I refer only to the dignified lack of humor in the Christian faith as it has been practiced down through the centuries. It does not speak to my heart at all.

Also, if I am to be completely honest, I must admit that pagans aren't completely innocent in the dirty tricks department. The so-called Cult of Mary, which existed within Roman Catholicism for so many centuries, was actually a secret form of "safe" Goddess worship.

I wonder how many Christians know how many of their holidays were originally ours?

Samhain, our New Year celebration, when the walls between the worlds are at their thinnest and our beloved dead walk and feast among us, became Christian All Hallows or Halloween. One ceremony used by pagans to encourage a rich crop (although not at Samhain, which is after the harvest) was the sweeping of brooms over the planted fields. To early Christians watching from a distance, it must have looked like the witches were riding on the brooms or trying to do so. Since Samhain was known to be the witches' most important holiday, witches riding on broomsticks became the symbol of Halloween. Not so surprising at all.

Yule, or the winter solstice, when we celebrate the birth of the Sun God to Mother Earth and Father Time, was borrowed for the birthday of the Christian Jesus. Most Christian scholars agree that Jesus was actually born in the spring. The Yule log, the tree, and even the Nativity Crèche were originally pagan customs. If you have Wiccan friends, and you thought they were only protecting themselves by displaying a Nativity Crèche at Christmas, you were wrong. We had Nativity Crèches long before you came along to convert us!

Imbolc, our festival of light, when we celebrate the start of the Mother's return to us, along with the birth of new lambs and flowers awakening under the snow, became Christian Candlemas.

Beltane, our famous (and infamous) fertility celebration when we leap the bonfires in joy at the arrival of summer, became May Day, famous for playful fertility celebrations throughout the Christian world.

Lammas, or August 1st, when we celebrate the fruitfulness of the land – well, how many Christians have celebrated the rich harvest to come down through the centuries?

There are many, many more examples of "borrowing."

And therein lies the real root of the problem.

The thing a few fanatical Christians fear most of all is being forced to admit our kinship, because after nearly 2,000 years of borrowing, we aren't so very different anymore.

At a tiny 5'1", Kathryn A. Graham is a licensed private investigator, pilot, aircraft mechanic and

handgun instructor in Texas. Also a prolific author, she has written numerous articles, short stories and a science fiction novel. <http://www.kathrynagraham.com/>

### **Telling People You Are A Witch (How To Deal With Intolerance)**

**By Rose Ariadne**

Whatever path you choose in witchcraft will be padded with challenges (like in everything). One of these challenges may happen early on – people are going to ask questions about your beliefs, and it's important to know how to "put it" without turning them off...

You may feel uneasy about other people discovering your beliefs, no matter which path you follow in Witchcraft.

You may even have people close to you that you already know would not accept your beliefs.

The first thing you need to understand is that there is nothing that says you even have to come out with your beliefs. You don't have to tell anyone if you don't want. It is easy to keep it a secret.

## Witchcraft & Christianity

There are many people with different beliefs that never tell anyone what those beliefs truly are.

Your beliefs are very personal, and they are not for anyone else's ears if you don't want them to be.

But, if you feel as though you want to tell the world that you are a Witch (or if somebody does some snooping, and finds out and confronts you), here are some guidelines to follow:

½ It is best to wait for the other person to bring it up. Avoid bringing it up yourself.

½ Know what that person's beliefs are first. Have a good understanding of their beliefs before you talk about yours.

½ Once you know what the other person's beliefs are, find a common ground between yours and theirs ½ focus on the similarities. (Example: Christians believe in helping others, and do those following the Wiccan way ½ etc.)

½ It is best to prepare for this discussion beforehand by making a list of the people in your life that you may talk about this with. Along with their names, write out what their beliefs are as best you can, and write down the things you will say in your discussion with them.

½ Never try to change anybody's view. You can't do it, especially if they are older. You are just looking for them to accept you for who you are.

Note: I haven't included any specific things that you should say, word for word because it is important to actually hear me say them, so that you can practice how you would say them. I provide a detailed video demonstration of exactly what (and how) to tell intolerant people in my Witchcraft Home Academy. It is my job to make sure you can gain acceptance of your views, and reduce the risk of people looking down on you.

Rose has been practicing different forms of Witchcraft for over 27 years. ½ For more information on

visit her site



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