**Answering Neopaganism and Hedonism**

When grave persons express their fear that England is relapsing into Paganism, I am tempted to reply, ‘Would that she were.’ For I do not think it at all likely that we shall ever see Parliament opened by the slaughtering of a garlanded white bull in the House of Lords or Cabinet Ministers leaving sandwiches in Hyde Park as an offering for the Dryads. If such a state of affairs came about, then the Christian apologist would have something to work on. For a Pagan, as history shows, is a man eminently convertible to Christianity. He is essentially the pre-Christian, or sub-Christian, religious man. The post-Christian man of our day differs from him as much as a divorcée differs from a virgin. – C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock, 21

# **What is Hedonism?**

The underlying mindset of many who turn to new forms of religion and spirituality

**Hedonism**=the belief that pleasure is the goal of life and man’s highest good. i.e. I have desires; therefore I should, and have the right to, satisfy them. Believers in hedonism are unlikely to identify as such—in fact, they will probably be offended if you use the word because of its connotation of selfishness. However, hedonists are very common; they tend to excuse immoral behavior by saying, “I believe God wants me to be happy.” This claim can be difficult to address. Hedonism tends to deny that physical or emotional pleasures are lesser goods, especially if it accompanies disbelief in the afterlife or Hell (sometimes people only believe in Heaven). Of course God wants us to be happy. He wants us to enjoy perfect eternal bliss in the Beatific Vision. Sometimes that means sacrificing smaller pleasures—lesser goods—here on Earth.

# **https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/ac/Pagan_religions_symbols_-_4_rows.png/220px-Pagan_religions_symbols_-_4_rows.pngWhat is Neopaganism?**

**Paganism**=all non-Abrahamic religions (Abrahamic=Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

* **Traditional paganism** developed independently of Abrahamic religion, e.g. animism, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Sikhism, etc.
* **Neopaganism**=an alleged revival of pre-Christian religious practices in direct rejection of Abrahamic religion. There is little to no continuity between ancient and modern practice.

4 most common types in America

* **Wicca**=alleged revival of British nature religion involving witchcraft; invented less than a century ago, not based on historic British paganism
* **Druidism**=alleged revival of real British paganism, but with little resemblance to it (e.g. no human sacrifice with wicker baskets etc.) There is no record whatsoever of what the druids did; everything we know about the druids comes from the Romans.
* **Asatru/Odinism/Theodism/Heathenry**=alleged revival of ancient Norse religion; more accurate because we know more about ancient Norse religion. Because “heathen” is a Germanic word and “pagan” a Romance one, practitioners prefer the former.
* **Goddess worship**=syncretistic alleged revival of ancient goddess-centered religion from ancient hunter-gatherer times or before Christianization

New Age spirituality=more syncretistic and less formal blend of various pagan practices

* Distinct from new age music, which is harmless and has little to do with New Age spirituality.
* Practitioners often describe themselves as “not religious, but spiritual,” often meaning they do things like yoga.

## Common elements

* Aesthetic over theology: Many Neopagans don’t believe their gods literally exist, but identify with the religion’s imagery, culture, or perceived values.
* Decentralization: no magisterium, creedal statements, written authority, etc.
* Hedonism, including sexual license

Handfasting=in Wicca, the joining of hands to allow for cohabitation before betrothal; provisional marriage

There is a strong overlap between Neopaganism and the LGBTQ community.

* Lack of historical continuity
* The occult: astrology, divination, mediums, Ouija boards, séances, magick, etc.

All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.

All practices of magic or sorcery, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health - are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. Spiritism often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity. (CCC 2116-2117)

* Pantheism=the belief that the universe is in some sense divine and should be revered; identifies the universe with God but denies any personality or transcendence
* Polytheism=belief in multiple gods
* Relativism: the natural result of believing no religion is truer than another

The first and last lines of the Wiccan Rede: “Bide within the Law you must, in perfect Love and perfect Trust… These Eight words the Rede fulfill: An Ye Harm None, Do What Ye Will.”

* Syncretism=fusion of various belief systems and practices

## **Things that are NOT Neopagan**

Tolkien

* This should be obvious, but I have encountered people who say Tolkien had pagan leanings because he loved nature and enjoyed pagan mythology. These are the people who believe one does not have to believe in paganism in order to be a pagan.
* If love of nature made one a pagan, St Francis of Assisi was a pagan.
  + Point of contact: Most neopagans have great love of nature, of which Christians believe God made us the stewards.

Harry Potter

* The story treats divination as fake and ridiculous, and there is nothing of nature worship or channeling supernatural forces. Magic is a genetic superpower.
* J.K. Rowling says the only religion not represented at Hogwarts is Wicca. She sees the types of magic as incompatible.
* Neopagans deliberately spell magick differently to differentiate it from fantasy or stage magic.
  + It does not involve making things disappear, teleportation, levitation, or most of the other things we associate with the word magic.
  + Very few Neopagans use wands or cauldrons, and if they do, they are nothing like those in *Harry Potter*. More common magickal tools include mirrors, crystal balls, tealeaves, salt, water, and candles.
* A pair of Wiccan parents asked an elementary school librarian to take *Harry Potter* off the shelves because it was not an accurate depiction of witchcraft.
* A British wand-maker refused to sell wands to potterheads, who don’t understand that wands are spiritual tools.
* Just because Neopagans like something does not make it Neopagan. Neopagans like *Lord of the Rings*.
* The fact that Neopagans incorporate aspects of something does not make that thing itself Neopagan.

Satanism

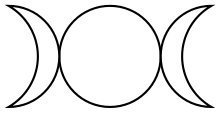
* Ultimate hedonism: embracing of pride and worship of self
* Ultimate sinister trolling
  + Push for equal protection and representation to get religion removed from public life: after-school clubs, prayer at political and sporting events, public displays alongside Christmas and Hanukkah displays
  + Claims abortion as a sacrament
* **Atheistic Satanism** denies the existence of the supernatural.
  + Much more common than theistic Satanism
  + Materialism, scientism, rationalism, hedonism
  + Uses demonic imagery to show its utter rejection of Christian morals and principles
  + Worship of self: “Thyself is thy master.”
* **Theistic Satanism**=devil worship
* Commonalities with neopaganism
  + Embracing of vivid imagery
  + Sexual license and sexual rituals
  + Rejection of traditional authority

# **Race and Ethnicity**

Some forms of paganism only accept members of the ethnicity from which the religion supposedly originated. Heathenry has a close relationship with white nationalism and the Alt Right.

Although Native American religions fall under traditional paganism, some non-Native Americans have adopted Native American beliefs and practices in a Neopagan way.

# **Gender and Sexuality**

Feminism finds a home in Wicca and other forms of witchcraft because of these groups’ focus on nature and Mother Earth. Dianic Wicca only accepts cisgender women (normal biological women).

The Triple Goddess=an archetypal triunity of 3 feminine aspects united in 1 being. Maiden, Mother, and Crone, they may represent 3 stages of life, 3 phases of the moon, or the rulers of Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld. They may also be sisters, like the Greek Fates. Her male consort is often the Horned God. Belief in the Triple Goddess may lead to openness to the Blessed Trinity, but it may also be a conscious rejection and feminization of it.

Norse Heathenry is one of the most conservative in this department, with well-defined gender roles, although LGBTQ Heathens find a patron in gender-bending Loki.

Many forms of paganism center around fertility, reproduction, male and female energies, etc., making it difficult to acknowledge nonbinary ideas of gender and sexuality. Embracing the binary is a point of contact with Christianity.

# **Questions to Ask a Neopagan**

Given Neopaganism’s relative youth (the prefix means “new,” after all), time has not yet told what apologetic strategies work best on it.

Some people turn to Neopaganism in a spirit of adolescent rebellion, leaving the faith of their parents, in which case they may return on their own after some time. It may be better not to engage at all, but simply to pray for them and set a Christian example. However, Neopagans put themselves at real spiritual risk by tapping into the supernatural.

1. Do all pantheons exist? If the Greek gods exist, why not the Norse? Celtic? Egyptian? Babylonian? Aztec?

There are 4 likely responses:

* 1. Different pantheons aren’t really different and should be identified with one another: Zeus=Jupiter=Odin.

There’s no problem with having multiple names for the same person. Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, and Our Lady of Guadalupe are all the same person. However, the reconciliation of pantheons quickly breaks down, especially when one moves beyond Europe. And if Zeus and Odin are one and the same (which a cursory examination of Greek and Norse mythology will show to be untrue), there ought not to be different religions, but different rites of the same religion. We have this in Catholicism, though for different reasons.

* 1. Different pantheons govern different peoples or different geographic areas.

If Thor governs the thunder in Scandinavia, why should American Neopagans of Scandinavian descent pray to Thor and not a Native American thunder god? And Apollo and Ra certainly arent’ gods of different suns.

* 1. The gods are projections of their worshipers.

If the gods are our own brainchildren, wouldn’t this be like Zeus worshiping Athena? These gods would also have little power given the fewness of their worshipers. Furthermore, this is a modern intellectual construct.

* 1. The gods are symbols or aspects of something else.

Why worship electricity in the form of lightning but not when it comes from a light socket?

If the symbols point to a person or thing that transcends nature, this is monotheism with polytheistic trappings.

Why not skip the personifications and worship that “something else” directly?

1. Why did the ancient pagans become Christians in the first place?

Not all conversions were forced. Clearly the ancient pagans found something compelling in Christianity.

1. Why believe in gods who couldn’t ensure the survival of their worshipers or liturgies?
2. How can hedonism coexist with eastern philosophies like Buddhism, whose goal is the elimination of desire?

# **Common Ground**

Neopagans share with Christians the natural human longing for the transcendent, divine, and supernatural. They have not submerged these longings in rationalism or scientism, instead pursuing them through a developed appreciation of imagery and sense of mystery.

Remembering Lewis’s thoughts on the reemergence of paganism, we might find our inspiration in the Book of Hosea, which shows God as a faithful bridegroom seeking His wayward bride and longing for her to return home.