

On Pagan Solidarity

Full Comment

Chas Clifton

Editor of *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*

Practitioner of American Eclectic Craft

January 2013

1. Is Pagan community solidarity important? If so, why? If not, why?

In order to answer that, we probably need to define both "community" and "solidarity." As to the first, I think that we often say "community," but what we really mean is "network" or "association." By "network" I mean connected individuals who have voluntarily joined the network on the basis of one or more shared interests, whereas "community" is not so controllable. You might move into a town, but you have no control over who else lives there. Or as the saying goes, you don't pick your family. By my definition, you can withdraw from a network, but it is harder to not be part of a community, because those are the people (and non-human people) that you have to deal with because they are your neighbors, like it or not.

(For sociology students, this is Max Weber's "Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft" distinction restated as best I can.) <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemeinschaft>>

Right now, what we mainly have are networks — or subcultures — that you can join or leave, participate in or not, according to your individual desires. Right now, a second-generation Pagan is still remarkable and a third-generation Pagan is still rare. We may be moving toward community, but I don't think we are quite there yet.

"Solidarity" is tricky too. Does it simply refer to religious freedom under the broadest umbrella, like you are a Druid, and I am a rootworker, but I respect you as a Pagan practitioner, and you respect me?

Or does it mean that I have to support everything that you do and all your struggles, like union workers not crossing each other's picket lines? If the Phoenix Goddess Temple (www.phoenixgoddess temple.org/) gets in legal trouble over prostitution and the Maetrum of Cybele (<http://gallae.com/>) gets in trouble over zoning, must I — or we — support them both under the principle of "solidarity"?

(Let me say that I am pretty much of a small-I libertarian about these things, but "religious freedom" is a flimsy shield when you go up against government — look at Hobby Lobby's fight over Obamacare and the contraception mandate. You had better get real good legal advice before you play the "religious freedom" card.)

Does the principle of solidarity just mean that the stronger voices will drown out the weaker, who will be told to sit down and shut up because they are not showing solidarity?

3. A concern was raised about the legitimacy of Pagan Solidarity. Is is a Solitary Solidarity an oxymoron?

As members of networks, solitary Pagans can certainly act to express solidarity — or sympathy — with others. As an American, I have a multitude of voluntary associations to chose from, whether they are obviously Pagan or not, and I can work through those associations to support causes that are important to me. But I am not sure how the issue of "legitimacy" comes in. If I, as someone now mainly solitary these days, participate in small or large-group ritual at a festival, how is that not legitimate? Are my feelings of religious solidarity not the right kind of solidarity? What is the question?

4. Does Solidarity naturally mean institutionalization of our religion (in Judeo-Christian terms)?

Will Pagan end up sitting in pews in rectangular buildings? Maybe not, but our desire to be seen as a legitimate religion by government entities has forced us to change to fit their definitions, which, in the United States at least, were designed for Protestant Christians.

We have been dealing with this issue since the mid-1970s, when the Covenant of the Goddess was created to issue ministerial credentials, among other reasons. It is much easier to be governmentally recognized as a religion in the United States than in those countries that have government-supported official religions, but on the other hand, dealing with government means that you must shape yourself to be acceptable to them. Your version of being a "religious minister" must be recognizable to some bureaucrat.

On the other hand, if you see yourself primarily as a priest/ess and magic-worker, then you relationship is with the gods first and human society second. I think that that is an important distinction. There is the priest and/or witch function (I don't separate them here) and there is the pastoral function. A "pastor", literally, is a shepherder: He moves the flock along, and if any of the sheep break away, the sheep dogs fetch them back. I don't need a pastor, nor do I want to be a pastor.

Our network — which might qualify as a community after another generation or two — needs to sort these issues out.