

On Pagan Solidarity

Full Comment

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I agree that solidarity as defined by mutual "support" and not "necessity" is an extremely important issue for all Pagans right now fighting the conservative Christian Right and Political agendas especially. However, that said I feel that "Pagan" should apply to the entire panoply of Pagan spirituality. As an example we can, and have, as Neo Pagans, gained huge success in political issues that directly affect us through the work that the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and its Washington political offices have accomplished on its own behalf, and I support them financially every year in my own show of solidarity.

The two organizations of which I am a member and interfaith Rep have both issued statements of Repudiation against the DoD in support of our Indigenous brothers and sisters all over the world.

The term "community" in this sense is an open one basically defined by those who consider themselves a part of it. No one outside that group can do that on a community's behalf and particularly in the case of Pagans and their desired affiliations.

I do not believe, however that we will ever become institutionalized. Those who are drawn to think outside the box in expressions of spiritual freedom are not generally going to be ready to discard that freedom of thought for yet another set of doctrinal mandates (no matter how similar to their own); especially as many of us have fought so hard to hold our beliefs sacred against the onslaught of majority religious fervor. Many who left mainstream religions did so because they did not allow for a flexibility of belief/practice, and will not be willing to abdicate that freedom to any institutional process.

I doubt that institutionalizing a Pagan practice would be dangerous. I believe that we are far more susceptible to personality cults and charismatic leaders. I simply doubt an institution's ability to sustain itself in a Pagan setting. Certainly some individuals and small groups might come together for the sake of mutual interest and form an organization, but would that constitute an institution? I doubt it.

Hinduism is a good example as it's been around forever and ever. It is impossible to pin down what exactly Hinduism consists of because you are likely to get as many answers as people whom you ask. Yet organizations exist within the structure.

"Institutions" have rules, structure, and bureaucracy to maintain those rules and structure. The moment you remove any part of this triad you no longer have an institution.

The indigenous people of the Americas do not have institutions. They have a spiritual practice which is part of their way of living. Their solidarity comes through a shared set of beliefs and lifestyles. The elders all participate in guidance. It is a part of who and what they are and yet it is not institutionalized. There are no rules save those of ethical behavior, just ways of doing that are taught from birth as a child grows, if they are lucky enough not to have been taken from the home and institutionalized in "Indian schools". An institution implies rules that can be broken, and having been broken have

consequences. Running away from an Indian school could bring beatings and being chained to the bed. That is what an institution is at its worst.

At its best the institution is a rigid and inflexible structure that will certainly lead to dogma. If a Pagan decides to do something different and it works others pick up the practice. If it doesn't he or she will return to what works or at worst be considered eccentric so long as they do no harm to the community.