

« [A Guide to Politics at Patheos Pagan](#)

## Read This Before Patheos Deletes It

January 31, 2017 (2017-01-31T10:45:26+00:00) by [John Halstead](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/author/allergicpagan/)

### UPDATED (see below)

<http://wp.production.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/files/2017/01/PatheosPagan-300x300-1.jpg> I've been writing at Patheos for 4 years now (blogging for 6 years in all). In that time, Patheos has changed in some significant ways. The three editors of Patheos Pagan that I've known — Star Foster, Christine Hoff Kraemer (who hired me on), and Jason Mankey — we're each very different in their own way.



The biggest change, though, is that in the last couple of years, there has been increasing pressure to make Patheos profitable, and that has resulting in changes like increasing use of invasive ads (I still can't read my own blog on my iPhone 4) and pressure (albeit of the soft variety) from the editor to post more frequently. Most recently, [Patheos was purchased by Beliefnet](http://wildhunt.org/2016/09/beliefnet-acquires-patheos-pagan-bloggers-guardedly-optimistic.html), which is owned by an evangelical organization. Soon after that, the atheist channel was renamed the "Nonreligious" channel. ([As I've written before](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allergicpagan/2015/10/29/atheist-pagan-does-not-equal-secular-pagan/)), "atheist" and "nonreligious" are *not* synonyms, and the conflation of those terms reflects a Christian bias.

*Today, the other shoe dropped.* Our editor, Jason Mankey, gave me the heads up late last week that a new contract would be coming with a different pay structure, but what he didn't say was what else was in the contract.

Under my original contract I make \$50 a month. Twice in the 4 years I have been writing here, I made \$100 because of especially high page views. (Incidentally, neither of those posts was anything to be proud of.) Fifty dollars is not much, but I know it is a lot more than most writers at Patheos Pagan make. I have it on good authority that only three of us at Patheos Pagan make that much. Under the new contract, I would make a little less, but since I'm not reliant on the income from Patheos, I really don't care about that.

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Others Patheos Pagan writers would make a little more, which I am glad for. But while five or ten dollars a month is more than nothing, it is still a pittance. Jason has repeatedly told me that Patheos is suffering financially, the implication being that we should be happy with what we get. Of course, we haven't seen their books, so we don't know how much revenue Patheos receives from ads and other sources, or where it is going. Needless to say it is common for miserly employers to claim poverty when employees demand a living wage. (I do find it interesting, though, that Patheos can afford to fly its editors out to visit their corporate headquarters and to other events, but they say they can't afford to pay their writers more than third world wages.)

The new contract also requires writers to post with a certain frequency, two to three times a week. While I don't care that I will be earning less, it does irk me to have my income cut and then be told I have to write more in order to earn it. Jason has assured us this provision of the contract will not be enforced, but in my experience as a lawyer, the only reason to include a provision in a contract which you *say* you don't intend to enforce is so you can later spring it on the person. It's a classic way for employers to fire someone for a discriminatory reason, for example: They decide to suddenly start (selectively) enforcing a contract provision which was not previously enforced so they can claim to have a legitimate nondiscriminatory reason for the termination.

But the real problem with the new contract is the increased editorial control. The new contract reserves the right to edit any of our posts, and even to change the format of the post or to use the content to create a quiz (?). We are explicitly prohibited from using profanity (with some minor exceptions) and the "tone" (a very subjective term) is expected to resemble that of other online media with which Patheos compares itself, like Slate or Huffington Post. The contract also prohibits advertising or self-promotion. We are also barred from posting a "farewell" post without approval, and even approved farewell posts will be deleted after 7 days. (What is that about?) And Patheos can delete any post it deems, in its sole discretion, to be "offensive" — another subjective term.

Now, here's the thing, in the contract, Patheos compares itself to Slate and Huffington Post. But I write for the Huffington Post, and I didn't have to sign anything like this to write for them. Nor did I have to sign anything like this to write for [Witches & Pagans](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjKw5OV2uzRAhXLjVOKHewKBpkOFqgaMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwitchesandpagans.com%2F&usq=AFQjCNGq8JEU1PXxhpK3anbNAa6Js3ekvQ&sig2=HZTD9ZuNy-CvOU3obCX-Gw&bvm=bv.145822982.d.cGw)<<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjKw5OV2uzRAhXLjVOKHewKBpkOFqgaMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwitchesandpagans.com%2F&usq=AFQjCNGq8JEU1PXxhpK3anbNAa6Js3ekvQ&sig2=HZTD9ZuNy-CvOU3obCX-Gw&bvm=bv.145822982.d.cGw>>. Or [Gods & Radicals](https://godsandrationalists.org/)<<https://godsandrationalists.org/>>.

Finally, we are prohibited from "disparaging" Patheos "or any of its related companies". This is potentially the most problematic part of the contract. For example, one of the other writers here brought to my attention that the American Centre for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a group founded by the televangelist Pat Robertson, is a partner with [Affinity4](http://bnmediac.com/about), which is itself listed alongside Beliefnet and Patheos on the [BN Media page](http://bnmediac.com/about)<<http://bnmediac.com/about>>. [The ACLJ lobbies for the death penalty for gays in other countries](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-kapya-kaoma/making-anti-gay-christian-right-views-law-at-home-and-abroad_b_2901650.html)<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-kapya-kaoma/making-anti-gay-christian-right-views-law-at-home-and-abroad\\_b\\_2901650.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-kapya-kaoma/making-anti-gay-christian-right-views-law-at-home-and-abroad_b_2901650.html)>. Under the new contract, ACLJ could be considered a "related company" that we're not permitted to disparage. Well ...

**FUCK THAT SHIT!**

Oops, I used profanity. Actually, this whole post would probably be considered

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“disparaging” of Patheos. So don’t be surprised if this post is deleted soon.

**[UPDATE: And the ACLJ is just one group that could be considered “related” to Patheos. [Affinity is also related to <https://www.affinity4.com/npo>](https://www.affinity4.com/npo): Focus on the Family, American Family Association, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Promise Keepers, Concerned Women for America, and the National Rifle Association (among others)! A brief review of these groups reveals there is plenty to “disparage”.]**

While some of these contractual provisions are common in the industry, I’ve learned that “standard in the industry” is code for “we can screw you over and there’s nothing you can do about it.” And while some of these changes might be dismissed if considered in isolation, the fact that it all comes at once, the fact that it was sprung on most of the writers with little to no notice, the fact that it was written unilaterally by Patheos corporate without input from the writers, and the fact that it goes into effect tomorrow, makes it all seem pretty suspicious (not to mention draconian).

It’s difficult to avoid the observation that the situation at Patheos is a microcosm of some of what has been happening on the national stage recently, with the power of corporations expanding and those same corporations (through their political lapdogs) trying to put limits on our freedom of speech. It makes me wonder if the timing isn’t coincidental: An evangelical company acquires Patheos. Trump is elected and sworn in. A number of Patheos bloggers are critical of Trump. And now, the new owners of Patheos want to exercise more editorial control. Coincidence? Maybe.

Jason has assured us that Patheos will not be censoring its writers. But you know, it usually doesn’t happen ... *until it does*.

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