

COFFEE WITH OLY – BLOG RADIO TOPIC – AUGUST 29th 2010

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We call ourselves Pagans as a collective title. But what does that really mean? The root of the word Pagan is *pagani* meaning country-dweller. In the ancient times, people did not call themselves Pagans; rather they were the followers of Isis, the soldiers of Mithra, the priests of Jupiter, etc... There was no one, defining title. They were not lumped together.

Jump to modern times...

How is Paganism defined? We've allowed others to define us. Pat Robertson lumps us in with atheists and gays; declaring we are the reason his God sent hurricane Katrina and behind all the ills of the nation and world. We are defined as those who hurt animals and children, and responsible for tearing down the US.

We are denied entrance into organized religious affiliations, access to correctional systems, and public ministering in general. As a result, we fight individual battles; but not the war.

And what is the one core element of the war? We have no collective foundation. The Christians have the resurrection of their Messiah, the Jews have Moses and the Torah, and the Muslims have Mohammed and the Quran. We, collectively, have nothing.

We all know the disadvantages of being considered a minority, or as I am suggesting, a non-recognized religious entity. Check out the daily news stories especially concerning the Muslims and the center they want to build in Manhattan for a current example. Or the physical dangers including death experienced by the Christians in Orissa, India; or the witch-children of Nigeria. The dangers are very real; even here in America, with exclusion being a minor issue in comparison with being lumped in with atheists. I can't tell you how many times I have been asked, "So you don't believe in God?" as the first question. We are perceived as an enemy of religion; all religion. So much so that when we stand up in the individual battles, the unease of others is unmistakable.

And what are some of the individual battles? Holidays off for ourselves and our children. Including using the 'Christmas argument' as an explanation. You know the, "Would you hold a football game on Christmas day?" The answer is usually, "No". Followed by the immediate and negative response of how can

you equate your devil-worshipping ways to Christianity? We can't. You can't fight that; nor should you have to.

Another battle, why are Pagan clergy omitted from public prayer or the National Day of Prayer? Why is there so much resistance against having a minister of any Pagan tradition opening a session of city council meetings or state assemblies? Other religious clergy are invited. Or meeting with the President? Why is this all denied to us? Because we are less than a minority religion. We are not seen as a religion. If anything, Pagans are considered the anti-religion. So to the majority religions, we are seen as atheists at best and heretics more commonly. Meaning, we're in rebellion against their God. Not followers of any legitimate and defined religious way. This is the result of allowing the majority to define the minority.

And why do we allow this perception? Because it's easier and we, as individuals, feel very much alone in our battles. We are unsure if the Pagan coalitions will really come to our aid (and rightly so). We don't have Pagan security or a safety net to save or rescue us. The fear is a good one. And history bears out that those who stand alone, usually get singled out and hurt. This alone keeps many in line and silent.

So, we continue to fight individual battles and take the wins to battles in other cities and states such as being admitted as acknowledged clergy in hospices, correctional facilities, in the military and wearing our jewelry out in the open. And these are victories. This also makes the majority more uncomfortable.

We are demanding equality. But equality of what? For each and every Pagan and announced tradition to be on the same level as the majority religions? The majority throws down the 1st Amendment (Freedom of Religion) real quick for themselves; and a whole lot less for others. We have the legal right to worship as we wish; but not be too open, too public. That is denied. We work twice as hard to get half the recognition (much like the civil rights and women's equality movements).

So...should we just shut up? Or as one good Christian said to me, "Just go away and die." Should we be content and satisfied with the progress we have made and wait for time and the swaying of individuals opinions to expand our cause for us?

Are you tired yet of talking down the weirdoes in Paganism as I am? Ones like a the woman in Albuquerque who stabbed a man to death claiming he was her Wiccan sacrifice? You know more incidents like this are bound to happen;

which raises more questions and fear in the majority religions. There is no happy medium. Are you tired of being perceived as religious and social outcasts? I am.

So what do we do? I think one critical issue is to define what it is to be Pagan. WE define it collectively. We need a central core list of what we believe. We must have a foundation. For instance:

- We are people of faith and believe in the divine
- We believe in interaction with our “Gods” in the world
- We are religious people
- We believe in an afterlife
- We believe in human rights
- We believe in ethics and morals
- We believe in personal responsibility and accountability

See, there is NO real difference in our basic tenets as with the majority religions.

What are we NOT:

- We are NOT atheists
- We are not “Nones”
- We don’t have a single, holy text (they were written by men anyways and therefore NOT divine)
- We are not devil worshippers (we don’t believe in a devil)
- We are not at war with the God of the monotheists
- We are not out to destroy the majority religions or their beliefs or followers
- We do not torture or murder animals, children, people
- We are NOT the anti-Christ

Some will never accept us or what we believe or say. And we don’t waste time with this group. They will never change their opinions.

So do we silently slink back into the darken corners and hide? I say NO! This is a defining moment for us and history, let our movement begin!