***Paganism - CA-028***

We are living in a revival of paganism. So it is fitting that, in order to be ready to give an answer to any man that asks us the reason for the hope that is in us, we look at the subject of paganism here. The word "pagan" comes from a Latin word meaning "civilian." In the early days of Christianity, if you were not a Christian, and you were not in the Lord's Army, then you were referred to by believers as a civilian. So the word "pagan" came to mean a non-Christian – any member of any religion other than Christianity.

Paganism, by and large, disappeared from the Western world during the great revivals of the centuries. So today, what we're faced with is the rebirth of paganism in the post-Christian age, and we refer to that as neo-paganism. The old paganism was partially based on ignorance because people didn't know about Christianity. When missionaries came and taught them the truth of Christianity, their own beliefs were revealed for what they were, and many gave up these beliefs in favor of the truth of Christianity. So for centuries, paganism was an underground current that had largely disappeared in the Christian world.

I'll give you an example of what has happened to us since the early 1970s. When I first came to Berean Memorial church, James Simmons was one of the first people who greeted me, and he invited me to a Halloween party here at Berean Memorial church. We celebrated Halloween back then. We could afford the luxury of laughing at this silly superstition of Halloween, and we could poke fun at it, and laugh about it, and actually celebrate the holiday. But something happened in the next few years, and many of us, at the same time, without even talking it over with one another, began to have conviction that this is serious stuff, and we shouldn't even celebrate it. We shouldn't have a Halloween party. If we want to do something in the autumn, let's call it Reformation Day. Celebrate the Protestant Reformation.

What had happened was that back in the 1960s, there was a movement among theologians. That's where these bad things usually come from – from theologians, from the people who should know better. I received a letter last week from a man in Canada, and he had somehow gotten word about Berean Church, and that we are a ministry that puts out the truth to people. He said, "To whom it may concern. I need to ask a question. I was in church last Sunday night and my pastor said that he wasn't going to bring us the message *from* the Bible. He was going to teach us something *about* the Bible. What he taught was that the Bible was full of errors and contradictions. I need some help. He really messed up my mind."

You expect to hear this in the liberal universities, but a believer doesn't go to church expecting to hear that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions. So I'm going to send this man some tapes and refer him to some books. But this is usually where these evil teachings come from – from theologians, and then they filter down.

**Carlos Castanuela**

Anyway, back in the 1960s, there was a group of theologians who started a movement called "The God is Dead Movement." It taught that the belief in the God of the Bible was outmoded, and modern man needed to look elsewhere for truth rather than in the idea of God. About that same time, there was a Hispanic man in California who was doing his thesis or dissertation. He was doing graduate study at UCLA, and he wanted to write his paper on Mexican Indian mysticism. His name was Carlos Castanuela. Supposedly, he went to Mexico, and he spent several weeks with a witch doctor, a shaman named Don Juan. So for several weeks, he followed Don Juan around (this Indian witch doctor), and he wrote down everything he told him. So he wrote a book called The Teachings of Don Juan. It became a very popular book in the 1960s. College students all over the place were reading about Don Juan and mysticism.

One of the things that Don Juan recommended was that if you want a religious experience, then you need to take some drugs. The Indians supposedly would take different mushrooms that had this kind of hallucinogenic property. So the drug craze was born. All of this filled the gap that "The Death of God Movement" had created in the minds of so many people. Carlos Castanuela was later challenged, "Who is this Don Juan, and where can we find him to talk to him ourselves?" He was very evasive with his answers. So there's really no proof that there actually was a Don Juan, so this may have just been some figment of Carlos Castanuela's imagination.

**The Life Force**

But be that as it may, one of the terms he used in his book on Don Juan is "the life force." Don Juan supposedly taught that there is a life force that is neither good nor evil. It's just pure energy, and it can be harnessed to work for good or for evil, whatever your motives are. One of the people who was influenced by this was George Lucas, and he really spread this belief in his movies. So by the mid-1970s, there was a belief in a life force, or a force that some people might choose to call God, and if they do, that's OK, but it is really neutral. You can use it for good; you can use it for evil; or, you can use it for personal advancement or whatever, as long as you know how to plug into it. This encouraged the rebirth of paganism.

**Wicca**

Neo-paganism is the unofficial religion of Hollywood. If you watch the new movies that are coming out, and the new TV series, they're filled with non-Christian religious ideas. Probably the leading neo-pagan religion today is called Wicca, which acts as a spokesperson for the neo-pagan movement. They have many covens all over the United States. They have even gotten Wicca chaplains in the United States Armed Forces. This is a big movement. It also finds expression in the New Age movement. The next time you go to Barnes and Noble or Borders Bookstore (one of the big bookstores), just look around, and you'll see a section called New Age and Spirituality. It will be one of the most popular sections in the whole bookstore.

**No Official Dogma**

We're going to look at some of the things that all of the different neo-pagan movements have in common. They're all different. In fact, the first thing we can say about them is that they have no official dogma; no official creed; and, no statement of faith. Every coven is supposedly free for their priest or priestess (and they really prefer female religious leaders) to dispense the truth as they see it, and as they want it to be. In fact, there is a book called The Satanic Bible, which they, as a group, endorse. There's another one called The Witches' Bible. But many of them object to the fact that they are called *The* Witches' Bible or *The* Satanic Bible. They want them to drop the "The" because, according to them, you can believe anything you want to. There is no "the" official belief of the neo-pagan movement. You can believe whatever makes you happy, except for one thing that they are all united 100% vehemently against. That is Christianity. According to a statement that the Wicca organization released in April of 1974, they officially repudiate Christianity's claim of being the only way to God. They admit that this goes along with their animosity (and they actually use that term) toward Christianity. So their only dogma is that Christianity is not true, and that Christianity is the great enemy.

**Hinduism**

Another common feature of all of the neo-pagan groups is that they all have common roots in Hinduism. You remember Edgar Cayce. Back in the 1930s, Edgar Cayce was a Methodist Sunday School teacher who claimed to be a born again child of God, and he might have been. I believe that Satan uses believers probably more than he does unbelievers, when believers fall out of fellowship, and start getting in areas that they have no business getting into. But Edgar Cayce would go into a trance, and he would visit the spirit world, and bring messages back from the spirit world. Edgar Cayce, being the Christian that he was, was really disturbed that some of the things that he brought back from the spirit world seemed to contradict Christianity. So he asked the spirit one time, "Of all the religions in the world, which one is the truth?" And the answer was, "Well, all religions have some truth in them, but the one that has the most truth is Hinduism." So Hinduism has been infiltrating the Western Christian world since the days of Edgar Cayce, through Edgar Cayce's teachings and through yoga. But it really hit the big time in the United States with the Beatles – when the Beatles became involved in transcendental meditation. Again, this was back in the 1960s. So all of this stuff had been building up for decades, but it really found its freedom of expression in the mid-1960s, and by the mid-1970s, we had experienced a neo-pagan revolution.

**Nature Worship**

Another thing that all neo-pagan groups have in common is nature worship. We appreciate nature as God's handiwork. We believe that the dominion mandate in Genesis, in which God gave man authority over the earth, means that we are God's stewards, and we shouldn't destroy nature, but we should be God's stewards of nature. So we support some of the ideals that are coming forth now in regard to taking care of and being stewards of the environment. But Christians have always done this. This is a far cry from the radical environmentalism that we see today: a worship of nature just for the sake of nature, whether there are people around to enjoy it or not – a worship of nature for its own sake. This is nothing but a return to the religion of Mother Earth.

**Public Sex**

Another thing that all of these groups have in common is that they all practice, as a part of their religion, illicit and perverted public sex. They support homosexuality as a rule. They support homosexual marriage and the reversal of sex roles. They're really into radical feminism. This is not simply supporting the fact that if a man and a woman are doing the same job, they should get the same salary. That's just common fairness and decency. But they are actually supporting the superiority of women; the subjection of men to females; and, the deification of feminine goddesses.

**Polytheism**

This leads us to another area that they all agree on, and that is polytheism. You can believe in as many gods that you want to. You just create gods. Again, this is idolatry. You can choose your gods. If there isn't a god that you want to worship, then you can make up your own. You can create gods in your own image. This leads to pluralism, because they say all religions are basically true, except, of course, Christianity. So they claim to be able to embrace all religions. This is called inclusive-ism. They say, "We include all religions."

If you'll just think about this for a moment, you'll see that this is a self-defeating claim because they can't all be true. Every religion in the world has, at its core, some belief that all other religions are false. If you believe that Jesus is the virgin born Son of God, the preexistent second member of the Trinity, then you cannot believe that there is no God, and you cannot believe that we're all gods. If you believe that Muhammad is God's prophet who supersedes all others, then Christianity cannot be true. You cannot believe that Buddhism is true. So, at its core, inclusive-ism, along with pluralism, falls by the wayside, because it is not a valid truth claim. They can't all be true. And when you say that all religions are true except Christianity, then you have a self-defeating truth claim, because if all religions are true, that means Christianity is truth, which would mean that all the other religions are false.

Anyway, they spoil their own claims of inclusive-ism by having exclusive areas of neo-paganism. For example, they have secret initiations that make you a better pagan. There are secret covens that just the common neo-pagans can't go to. You have to have arrived at a certain level before you can attend these covens. So their claims of inclusive-ism are countered by the reality of exclusive-ism.

Something else they all have in common is a belief in hedonism: that is, pleasure for its own sake, and not only for its own sake, but pleasure as a form of worship. They worship their gods through feasting on food; through illicit sex; and, through certain kinds of music, dancing, drinking, and drugs. In fact, they're probably the people who invented the phrase, "If it feels good, do it. Not only do it, but it's a religious experience." They enslave people through their claims for liberty – that anything goes. But they're all united, basically, with a hostility toward Christianity. Neo-paganism teaches that Christianity is the great oppressor, and that paganism was the ancient religion of mankind, and Christianity came along and oppressed paganism. So their main desire is to throw off the yoke of Christianity.

Now, there's one thing in particular that we should probably talk about. Every once in a while, you hear somebody say that Christianity is based on the truths that were found in the ancient mystery religions. They say that the apostle Paul and the others just get together, and they saw these common truths going through the mystery religions, so they incorporated these into Christianity, and made the new religion.

**The Mystery Religions**

Let's look at the mystery religions for a moment, and then we'll look at one in particular. These were called the mystery religions because they were secret. Just like some of the covens today, you couldn't just go down and join one, because their rights and initiations were secret. They believed that the common person just didn't understand the truth that they were trying to teach. So only select individuals were invited to join. Then you must never tell anyone what took place at your initiation.

This survives to some extent in Freemasonry today, and in some other forms of secret societies. So the point is that since they were secret, we don't find many written records in history about what actually went on in these. But we can piece together hints here and there, and through the surviving elements of mystery religions such as Masonry. We can put together that at a person's initiation into one of the mystery religions, you experience something in which you pretended to die, and then you came back to life. So, since you had been dead, you would never fear death again. Since you had gone through a play in which you pretended to be dead, you knew what happened to people when they died, so you would never fear death. You were one of the initiates. You were in the know. You knew what happened to people after they died, because you've had seen a play about it, and you had even been involved in the play.

This really sounds silly, but I want to tell you, if you know a Mason, he has been through this. The night that I became a Mason, I was blindfolded so I couldn't see what was going on, but somebody was with me, and they led me through it. They pretended to hit me on the head with a hammer. It was a leather hammer, so it didn't hurt. Then they pretended that I was dead, and then I was raised. So as part of the mystery religions, I knew what happened to people when they died.

This is basically what the mystery religions taught. This satisfied people's need for religion; for a feeling of security; and, for some kind of secret spiritual knowledge. It satisfied their need for some kind of ritual that would somehow assure them of life after death (what we would call salvation). Some people felt like they found these things in the mystery religions.

**Mithraism**

Now, one mystery religion is called Mithraism. It was named after a legendary person called Mithra. In all seriousness, a Muslim scholar has written a book. His name is Yusef Salaam ... He has written a book in which he says Christianity came right out of Mithraism. He says that Mithra was supposed to be virgin born. He was the son of god. He was crucified, and he rose again on the third day. So he says, "See, it's all right there. This is where the apostle Paul got the idea for the Christ myth. So Jesus was just a prophet. The apostle Paul came along and stole all these teachings from Mithraism, and here you have the origin of Christianity." He also says that the God in Mithraism was a Trinity. So he says. "There's another area where Christianity stole their belief about God from Mithraism.

I've heard this before, only I heard it about Buddha. When I was in college, I remember I had a professor who said that all of the things that were said about Christ had been said about Buddha: about walking on water; feeding thousands of people; rising again; being born of a virgin; and, all this stuff. But even then, I noticed something very interesting and very conspicuous. That is that this professor didn't give us any references. He didn't say, "Now, if you want to check this out yourself, I recommend the following books." He just made these claims and then went on. Years later, I heard that this professor had become a Christian, and I certainly hope that is true. But this Muslim gives no references in his book. He doesn't say, if you want to check this out for yourself, then check these authors, these books, or, this original source. He just makes these claims with no sources.

On the other hand, Christian writers have taken his challenge, and they've investigated Mithraism, and they found some interesting facts. One is that a Mithraic writer in the third century (a Greek writer) says there is no such thing as the resurrection. He says. "When a man's blood is absorbed by the earth, the man will never live again. There is no such thing as the resurrection. The resurrection does not exist." He also goes on to say that the supposed resurrection of Mithra was only a myth that illustrated another truth – some kind of spiritual truth that we can have a bad experience and get over it. It's like the story of the phoenix: after it was destroyed by fire, it flew up from the ashes. There is no literal physical resurrection.

Also, it's interesting that the religion of Mithraism was a military cult in the Roman army that had no appeal to Christians historically. Also, Mithraism came along about a hundred years after Christianity did. So if Mithraism did teach a virgin-born savior and a death and resurrection, then who got what idea from whom?

However, they didn't really teach this. They taught that Mithra, whoever he was, was not born, but he emerged fully grown from a stone, wearing a fortune teller's cap, a knife in one hand, and a torch in the other hand. So much for the virgin birth. Then Mithra, rather than being executed or crucified, it was Mithra who killed the primeval bull, which, in Greek mythology, was the first created being. So by shedding the blood of the bull, somehow Mithra had accomplished something. If you wanted to be initiated into the Mithraic cult, a part of their mystery religion initiation was that you would take a bath in the blood of a bull. Not only that, but the trinity is not found in Mithraic doctrine. But tri-theism is: three gods – not one God, but three. This belief was all over the place in Hinduism. Hinduism believes in many, many gods, but the three main gods are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (three gods). And many religions taught this and teach it (tri-theism).

That is why, in the early years of the church, the council at Nicaea very specifically spelled out the doctrine of the Trinity, because these beliefs about tri-theism were very popular, and they wanted to make it very explicit and very clear that Christianity believed in three persons who share one essence – not three gods.

Someone wrote that Mithraism is based on "a nebulous figure of a mythical past." What a contrast that is from the historical truth of Christianity. The gods of paganism never existed. They're built on imaginations of a nebulous past. They are a desperate attempt of satanic forces to discredit the absolute truth of Christianity.

1 Corinthians 15: "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel, which I preach to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which you are saved if you hold fast the Word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you, as of first importance, what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (according to the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures). We have gone through, over the past year, many of the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah. Do you know what? We could spend many more years on it, and we wouldn't be finished, because Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic prophecies, some of which were in great detail about the Messiah. So Christ died for our sins according to the Old Testament Scripture: "And that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures." And, listen to this: "That He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve."

Now, twelve guys could conceivably get together and cook up a story about a dead man coming back to life. But listen to this: "After that, He appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep." The apostle Paul says, "If you don't want to believe the twelve, He appeared to 500 at one time, and most of them are still living. Just go talk to one of them." No other religion in the world would make a claim like that. "Then He appeared to James, and then all of the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."

No religion in the world, not even neo-paganism, can make the claim made in Colossians 2: "Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink, or in respect to a festival, or a new moon, or a Sabbath day; these things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." All of those rituals, and all of those laws in the Old Testament that the rabbis used to wonder about, "Why is God having us to do this? What does it all mean?" They came up with some ideas. Some of them were really close to the truth. But Colossians 2:17 says, "These were shadows." These were visual aids. They were like a shadow of someone's body casting a shadow. The body is Jesus Christ. What would you rather have: a picture of the one you love, or have that person actually here with us? The apostle Paul says, "All these things in the Old Testament (all of these rituals, and all of these sacrifices) were a shadow that happened hundreds of years ago (and now it's thousands of years ago), the substance belongs to Christ."

Everyone knows that all religions in the world teach that man has a problem. We call that problem sin. The religions of the world, including paganism, teach that if you do have a problem with sin (or karma – they like to use the term "karma" instead of sin), you can work it out. You can do enough positive things. (They don't really believe in good or bad. It's all relative.) But you can do enough positive things to work out the negative karma that you have created, and then your reward will be someday you won't have to come back anymore. You can just become annihilated and lose your consciousness by becoming like a drop of water drops in the ocean. You can become a part of the great whatever it is.

However, Christianity says, in John 8:24 (Jesus said), "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins. You do have a problem. You've got a guilt problem. You've got a sin problem. You know what? You're going to die in your sins and go to the lake of fire unless you believe that I am He." So Jesus said, "Yeah, you've got a problem. All you have to do is believe that I've taken that problem on Myself. I am the Messiah. I am the Savior." No other leader or founder of any religion has ever made a claim such as that.

In Ephesians 2:1, it says, "Yeah, you've got a problem, okay. You're dead. And the only way you can be raised to spiritual life is to be quickened by the Spirit of God. And you can be quickened by believing."

1 Corinthians 5:7: "Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed." The sin problem is settled. You can be forgiven of your sins. You can receive the imputed righteousness of Christ. You can spend eternity with God, and until you go into eternity, you can have His Spirit live inside you, and enjoy intimate one-on-one fellowship with Him, because the sin problem is settled. The Passover of Exodus 12 was a picture of the reality. Christ has been sacrificed. No other religion in the world can make such a claim.

There's one more claim that no other religion can make, and that is that salvation is not by initiation into some cult. It's not going through some ritual. It's not taking part in a play. It's not taking a bath in bull's blood. It's only by grace. The apostle Paul says in Romans 4:5, "To the one who does not work." Do you know what you have to do to be saved? Nothing. In fact, anything you try to do will just cancel anything else. You can't do anything to earn your salvation: "Not to the one who works, but to the one who does not work, but believes" – who trusts in God's gift of salvation through His Son. The one who believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.

Leon Adkins, 2003

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