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The Misconceptions Of Pagan Symbols

Most of the symbols used in Wicca remain obscure to the uninitiated, the uninformed and the uninterested. There are some however that have become fairly well known but because of mis-understandings, mis-associations and mis-interpretations, have fallen into bad repute. Religious intolerance and dogmatism on the part of some non-pagan groups exacerbates the matter.

The Pentagram, the Moon and the Mano Cornuto (Horned Hand) are probably those best known by the general public and will be discussed in this article. All of these Wiccan symbols are erroneously associated with Satanism in spite of the fact that Wicca and Satanism are two completely different religions. Many a treatise has been written on the differences and I recommend that those interested in informing themselves of the facts visit the following two Religious Tolerance web pages for an objective overview of each: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/satanis1.htm> & <http://www.religioustolerance.org/witchcra.htm>

Pentagram and Pentacle

The Pentagram is a five pointed star surrounded by a circle. As a symbol, it is ancient and was widely used over millennia by different cultures (as far afoot as the Mayans) and different religions (including Christianity). In Wicca, the Pentagram is a sacred symbol and representative of the earth aspect during ritual. It contains all the elements that give life. The circle surrounding the five pointed star represents the sacred space where Spirit (Deity, the Divine) rules over the four mundane elements of earth (work, home & hearth, etc), air (intellect, thought, etc), fire (action, energy, etc) and water (emotions, love etc). The pentagram is considered a protective symbol in most traditions, just as the cross is considered a protective symbol by Christians.

The upright Pentagram, as used in Wicca, is often confused with the inverted Pentagram and the Baphomet Pentagram. The latter is an inverted





pentagram containing the head of a goat. Anton La Vey, who was the founder of the Church of Satan (mid 20th Century), used the Baphomet Pentagram as the main symbol of his church. The Christian Church condemned the pentagram as a symbol of evil soon thereafter. No distinction was made between the Wiccan pentagram and the Baphomet Pentagram.

The Moon

The Moon is a sacred symbol of the Goddess and representative of cycles of rebirth, maturity, old age and death, followed by rebirth. The waxing crescent moon represents a young woman (maiden) and symbolizes new beginnings and growth. When the moon moves towards full, the woman enters the "mother" phase of her life. When the moon wanes, and the woman enters her "crone" years. For Wiccans, this stage is associated with wisdom and knowledge. In Wicca all stages of a woman's life are valued and respected.

Witches celebrate the phases of the moon as a representation of life and make use of the different phases to lend power to specific spells. In example, the waxing moon could be used to lend power to a spell to aid the recovery of someone after illness, whereas the full moon could be used to lend power to a spell seeking to maintain good health and the waning moon to reinforce a spell seeking to destroy a disease.

The misconceptions around the Wiccan moon symbol stems from the fact that Satanists describe their symbolism of the moon as death and blood. This is illustrated from the following excerpt by Vexen Crabtree, a known and published Satanist:

"Primitive religions, sun worship, has recognized the moon for what it is: A symbol of death and blood. [...] The moon, the symbol of the night, symbolizes the victory of everlasting darkness and of sexuality. [The Moon has] always perturbed Humanity. [...] But this fear, in modern Satanism, is faced and accepted full on without the barriers that other religions erect."
"The Sinister Left & Fear of the Moon" by Vexen Crabtree 2002 Oct 26

The contrast is self explanatory.

The Mano Cornuto

The Mano Cornuto is a hand gesture where the index and ring fingers are pointed upwards and the rest of the fingers held down by the thumb against the palm of the hand. In Wicca, the Mano Cornuto is used in some traditions as the sign of the Horned God and is used during ritual when invoking the God. The God is the masculine aspect of Deity and the Goddess the feminine





aspect of Deity. The horns of the God – which appears to be the greatest problem for Fundamentalist Christians - stem from His dominion over forests, animals and the earth.

This Mano Cornuto is misinterpreted as a satanic recognition signal in many books on Satanism. In Lou Sloat's Texas Ritualistic Crime Information Network Occult Crime Manual it is described as "A satanic salute or sign among members; represents devil's horns." In the context of the Satanist Church, Lou is not wrong. Anton LaVey did adopt the Mano Cornuto as a satanic salute.

What Lou Sloat refrained from mentioning in his Manual, is that some Wiccans use this gesture as well, that Wiccans do not believe in Satan and as a result, that the use of the Mano Cornuto by a Wiccan could not possibly be Satanic.

Conclusion

Liberal Christians, which nowadays represents the majority, endorse the principles of religious freedom and show religious tolerance towards those who hold non-Christian beliefs. The remainder however, comprising of fundamentalist Christians do not differentiate between Wicca and Satanism, and concomitantly between the symbols used. All are viewed as symbols representing evil, violence and lawlessness.

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