

# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *I was surprised to read recently that Paganism has been officially recognised as a religion by the Charity Commissioners. What should we make of that?*

**Answer:** I was also surprised. Apparently, they presented a case for their practises and theology in a manner which meant they had to be regarded as an official religion. I believe this is just another example of political-correctness which flies in the face of common sense and is an insult to the great strides made by Christian men and women in our country to make the world a better place by a commitment to justice, education, scientific and caring medicine and social security. We need to remember that these ancient religious ideas were supplanted by the major faiths around the world for some very good reasons.



The most obvious reason for not being involved with paganism is that it is fatalistic. Paganism reverts to the idea that the forces of nature are in control, either in their apparent form or in a form in which they are experienced as gods and goddesses. This tends to remove responsibility from individuals and creates reliance for human actions on things like spells. For example, they cast spells, using mumbo-jumbo, in the hope that something will happen to themselves or somebody else as a result.

What we know as Christians is that spells don't work. What people need to do is be in charge of themselves and their lives, taking their own decisions, not looking over their shoulder at signs and portents in nature or the result of spells. Humanity needs a sound moral compass to guide them and strong traditions of justice and laws, with a tradition of literature to show where we come from.

There may be little to fear from pagan practises which, as far as I can see, amount to individualism run riot, with people enjoying some nice communal nudity and allowing themselves the luxury of fending for

themselves as a first rule. It is selfish and quirky but perhaps not dangerous?

One of the elements of paganism is to worship aspects of nature, for example, trees. It was interesting to hear, therefore, that when the Under 5s Committee recently consulted the London Borough of Ealing about their proposed outdoor play area and associated pathway, someone from the "office" objected to the plans on the grounds that the pathway was "inhospitable to trees."

Perhaps this is the more serious and insidious face of paganism? The fact is that all humanity and civilisation is inhospitable to nature.

When we lived in caves, we were cold, so we chopped down trees to build fires and keep the family nice and warm.

When we built villages, we cleared away trees to create space for huts and communal areas.

When we developed animal husbandry as a way of preserving human life, we cleared trees away to graze our animals and felled trees to build fences to keep them in herds.

When we built cities, we used trees to build houses and temples and we mined the earth for iron and fossil fuels as our demands increased.

I know, the matter is about balancing our needs today with the needs of those who will come after us, but it is important to say that there is nothing sacred, as such, about trees. They are there for us to manage, to use well, to develop and ensure fruitfulness next year and for many years to come. Read this passage from Genesis 1: 28-29

"God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.'

This is not a manifesto for plunder, but it does put the matter in the correct framework. Humanity must come first, but must also be fully responsible.