

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/09/in_the_beginning_god.html

"In the beginning, GOD...."

ON FAITH - WASHINGTON POST - WILLIS ELLIOTT

What a *welcome* question!

"A question as we commemorate the anniversaries of Katrina and 9/11: Why would a merciful God allow disasters--natural or manmade--to happen?"

WELCOME, because--in our secular culture of God-repression--God is the subject of the sentence expected in answer to the question--as God is the subject of the Bible's first sentence and, indeed, the subject of the Bible.

As does the Bible's first sentence ("In the beginning, God created...."), the question assumes that the "Maker of heaven and earth" has the power and knowledge to rule over what he's made and to overrule any challenges to his authority. Who? God. What? Creation-Nature. How? Providence-Evolution.

WELCOME, because this question implicitly addresses the question, Is this a moral universe? Facing the mystery of good and evil, some have concluded that evil tops good, so the world's source must be evil: the creator was a demon (said Marcion in the 2nd century AD/CE). But the Bible doesn't even get through its first chapter before it says that the Creator was and is **"very good"** (*tov meod*, Genesis 1:31--said of what he'd made in his benevolence [good will]). So there you have it, and our question's problem, even before you get to the Bible's second chapter. In the words of an ancient Christian grace-at-meals, "God is great and God is good, and we thank You for our food." (Christopher Hitchens' current title, "God is Not Great", at least has the virtue of knowing where the starting point is.)

The question is WELCOME because of its realism about our species as both theotropic (Rousseau's word for our turning toward God as flowers are heliotropic, turning toward the sun) and puzzle-solving. The question's center is God, and the puzzle is why his goodness-driven power wouldn't mercifully exclude "disasters--natural or manmade."

Of course you could make the problem go away by *denying* God's existence or by *reducing* his power, his goodness, or his knowledge. But as Rilke said, it's better to live with an awkward question than to deny any of the realities within it. It's logically neat but simple-minded (in the bad sense) to "make it all right" by jettisoning all impediments to so-called "rational" sense-making.

Physicist Nils Bohr gave up trying to make the problem go away that light behaves both as waves and as particles. "*Complementarity*" was the philosophical term he devised (parallel with the physical term "quantum physics") to affirm the non-sense contradiction in light's behavior. In biblical religion (Jewish and Christian), "*faith*" is the term for affirming the non-sense that God is both powerful and good, both infinite and involved in finite affairs.

WELCOME because the question suggests that "God" is the correct sphere within which the puzzling mysteries of good and evil are best addressed. He is the Lord--whose will is creative, providential, directive, and (sometimes) permissive of what we call evil.

And WELCOME is the question because the answers it calls forth from the Bible are not philosophers or scientists but story-tellers. Notice how playful are the two very different origin-stories with which the Bible begins! And by the time you finish reading its third story (its third chapter), you should have concluded that this book (actually, archive) doesn't give a fig for either logical or ethical consistency. (So, how ignorant and unfair are the Bible-haters who demand that it be something it doesn't intend to be, and who commit the genetic fallacy of reading its upper evolutionary strata as though their perspective were really "nothing but" that of its lower strata.)

What *is* consistent in the Bible is that its stories converge, over many centuries, on what can properly be called **the Story**, which is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (First Corinthians 1:23-24). At the heart of the Story is the humble-joyful conviction that no matter how our heads manage to make sense of the mysteries of good and evil, including disasters, God Almighty (all-powerful) in his mercy, in these very disasters, and despite our rebellions from reality, suffers with us and even for us. So (and here comes the two-word signal of the Story, in the four words with which verse 23 begins), "we proclaim Christ crucified."

(This week's question is in the theological category, "theodicy." A classic formulation of it is at the beginning of Milton's PARADISE LOST, which he wrote [he says] to "assert eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men." Currently, a masterful exposition is David Bentley Hart's THE DOORS OF THE SEA: Where was God in the Tsunami?)

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007; 11:38 AM ETSAVE & SHARE:
PREVIOUS: [HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD?](#) | NEXT: [SHORT ANSWER TO A HARD QUESTION](#)

Agreed, Priver.

And so mote it be.

I notice one thing the Reverend seems to refuse to acknowledge that as much as he hastens to turn attention about Katrina away from the people in government who'd rather promote their religion and tie up the country trying to prosecute a peccadillo... toward 'Bible-Haters,'

...and calling *us* 'God-haters,' well...

What I notice is to him, he says this 'hate' exists cause of how he reads and interprets an old book...

We know what it's like, too often, to be on the receiving end of *real* hate, such as he ends up rather blithely teaching.

Maybe he should ask the Pagans and their relatives in Canada who were beaten, stabbed, and attacked with baseball bats because *someone* taught *someone* that they were 'white supremacists,' ...which is another idea often promoted by Christian media, ..particularly as regards certain quasi-Pagan prison gangs that in general, Pagan clergy are denied access to to try and teach em better.

I think the Reverend needs to understand that his inflammatory ideas have real effects on real people, and aren't so innocuous as he seems to insist.

Understand, Reverend? You present yourself as *so* ill-used by people here who speak up because *you don't get to define us.*

It seems, for instance, that you want to define us as Goddess-monotheists in the way you define yourself as a sky-father monotheist, then think the idea of a sacred marriage between God and Goddess, (actually a central rite and conception in Wicca, just not involving *your* view of the male part of Deity *as* a particular tribal deity: this is a concept also found in ancient times , contrary to your assertions.)

You claim on one hand we're ignorant of history, (actually, we'd assert you're the one making some erroneous assertions) ...and on the one hand claiming rightly that we have the benefit of modernity and our secular post-Enlightenment society, ...while on the other *insisting* on referring to us as though we were the Pagans in your Bible as described in the unfriendly *terms* of your Bible.

Now, to explicate a bit of the theology, we often see the 'Great Goddess' *as* the abstract 'God' of Everything, or the union of God and Goddess as such... You may find it frustrating in some ways that we *aren't* based on an authoritative claim in this matter and embrace many views of what we consider to be much bigger even than the binary genders we as humans like to apply.*

As Terra alluded to, really, the 'Bigger' the conception of the Divine we're looking at, the less* of human attributes we apply.

We still see the universe/multiverse as something which *birthed itself* and as *the living body and soul of the Great Goddess,* not something created from outside by a humanlike architect-intelligence.

Some will say that the Great Goddess, or what She was just before, saw in Herself the God and the two then birthed the universe in union...

It's not that unlike the Hindu view in very many ways. Or certain Gnostic ones:

We don't believe the Universe was created from outside by a lone male humanlike intelligence who 'designed' and controls everything, though. Certainly we don't believe that *one* tribal God just happens to *be* that Universal Godhead.

Whatever Godhead is supposed to mean. Head? :)

Your idea that we "must" find the idea that, say Baal and Asherah should be 'married' ...ridiculous, is itself ridiculous.

You won't find 'Ba'al' worshiped a lot by modern Pagans, particularly after what people are said to have gotten up to in that name in Carthage, (possibly *because* of ideas you hold that God and Goddess must be in conflict) ...but it's actually a root word for solar divinity.

Ancient peoples and priesthoods got all into ideas of 'sacrifice,' ...Christians are still bound to the idea: you have only made the sacrificial lamb a metaphor for people *obeying* things that may hurt them and others.

I see it as a central understanding to *modern* Paganism, going back a mere hundred twenty years in the continuity of thought, but also something that the ancient world was wising up to, if not in fact fully-conscious of, ...that the sacrifices are for *us* and for *our* needs as humans, and as moderns, we can see that... You *cannot* 'sacrifice' yourself or another, be that an animal or a human because that *was* never yours anyway.*

It's a central thing in Wicca: (rearranged a bit for emphasis) The Goddess says, "Nor do I demand anything of sacrifice, for behold, my love is poured upon the earth: all acts of love and pleasure are My rituals."

In so many ways, Christians are still bound to the idea of sacrifice: as much as you accuse others of bloody sacrifice, you still believe that *because of pain and suffering of one man,* everyone must 'sacrifice' themselves, and others, through abstract means, (or literal ones like beating or burning or hurting people) reinterpreted as humans 'acting out divine judgment.'

In so many ways, you've just transposed 'sacrifice' off of *food and survival* (ie animals and people) and onto *sex and love and power,* (ie, telling people that they can't do all these things without suffering.)

The gifts of the Goddess, though, like love and sex and even life and our power, are not ours to 'sacrifice,' and never were in the first place, certainly not as commodities to buy with suffering; our own or someone else's.

If we've got a 'new revelation,' it's that.

Though it's not so new. We're just unburdened by certain old social orders. You say our society was shaped by 'Bible+Enlightenment,' therefore people who don't see the world in terms of your Bible aren't really American or worthy or, apparently, people who count when your abstract 'hate' gets all too real.

Personally, I'd say Bible *vs* Enlightenment, which seems to be more like unto your tone, anyway.

People that don't live by your edicts are 'failing to make appropriate sacrifice.'

Shadows and nightmares are teachers. This doesn't mean they're our 'saviors.' You defend your accusations of hate and 'unAmericanness' by saying 'Bible is part of this, you must be a Bible-hater.'

No. That's not how this works.

I've done more than my share of contending with shadows and nightmares. A gracious Lady said, 'OK, sweetie, this is your religion, you go beating yourself against nasty stuff and limp back saying, 'Patch me up, Ma, Gotta get back out there.'

Gods, it was a long time ago. And not that I didn't have all the help I could call on, but...

Well, Reverend. I think your ideas of 'divine hate' and people needing to earn things serve no one.

This is not about 'hate,' or your book.

"Too long a sacrifice makes a stone of the heart."

Keep in mind that to my perception, reincarnation's an unglamorous fact of life.

I think the growing bitterness, aggression, and stridency I see in American Christianity has everything to do with people trying the same things over and over again and expecting different results. (and maybe a lotta people never done this human thing before taking their cues from what they see.)

You say you have this, Reverend:

"(4) Active opposition to your personal unseating of my monotheistic ("only") deity (viz., God) to seat your monotheistic ("only") deity (viz., the Goddess)."

Apart from having a distorted picture of Pagan theology, well, consider this:

The current state of affairs, your rhetoric and societal abuses, certainly result in more Pagan 'converts' than we know what to do with. If we were all so bad and trying to take over as you think, would we be giving you all these helpful hints?

See the pictures of us not giving a crap if you were to take this and make Christianity the best thing ever?

But. No shortcuts.

Stop hurting my people.
Stop hurting people.

On the Internet, I can do Al Jolson:

"Let my people go...."

:)

"4) Admiration for your courage in swimming upstream against America's prevailing (Christian) culture."

If we were really swimming upstream, would you need to say there was 'hate' involved? ;)

Maybe we're *out* of your stream and walking. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 11, 2007 2:20 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Wiccan,

What a gorgeous prayer! :)

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 7:19 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Maybe it's that Pagans see Godhood differently than the Abrahamic religions that we do not see God as a puppet master like being.

The Creatix does not pull the strings that cause disease or death, falling bridges or cities flooding. Man being negligent caused the failure of the bridge and again for the 1500th time..Katrina did not cause the horror that was New Orleans. Man did.

Do we learn our lessons? Right now there is a bill being brought up in the Senate to add the money to the Hiway funds to ensure that bridges would be safe. But then there is Senator of Missouri, Kit Bond, that does not want to take the money to do that. That is the scale....money wins against lives. Man's choice.

The wet lands desimated by oil and gas pipelines and left to dissappear, the levee funds were dipped into for the war in Iraq...the levees failed...global warming ignored because we are all too complacent in our own lives. So weather becomes extreme.....Man's choice.

Don't blame the Creator that gave us all this wonder and possibility for what we do wrong.
It's like buying a kid a toy that the child then destroys but you blame the manufacturer for the destruction.

I do not see the Creatrix as holding the strings on all creation. Things are formed to work in a certain way...if we want to change things to make everything more comfortable for us...and to hell with the rest of creation, well stuff happens. Nature and the laws of the universe will win.

It is our choice whether we will work with nature and commonsense to make sure we leave a future. But Gods Bless...stop blaming the Creator for our supidity.

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 1:02 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Wiccan,

So mote it be...)o(

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 12:28 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Willis

Thanks for responding to my comment.
You seem to agree that the supernatural
and the imagination are the same thing.
The Rev John Bryson Chane,on another thread,says
"God lives within each of us...not outside of us",
which says it again...God is a creature of our imaginations,
and exists where Harry Potter exists.
Like Voltaire said,gods are our invention.
That I truly believe.

POSTED BY: YOYO | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 11:34 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

You're right Sam, to say that "bad things happen in this world and therefore there is no god" is an illogical argument. But that's not the argument I see being made here. At least, it's not an argument I would make. The actual statement is a little more subtle than that. If there is unnecessary suffering in this world then if there is a God He is either a) powerless to stop it, or b) indifferent to suffering, or c)using human suffering for some mysterious purpose of his own.

The problem of suffering does not disprove the existence of God, but it is a powerful arguemnt against the existence of the traditional Western monotheistic idea of God as a loving, compassionate and all powerful deity.

Now at this point one could also conclude that there is a loving God who is powerless to prevent suffering or an omnipotent God who cruelly ignores suffering, or an evil God who actively causes suffering. None of those options are very satisfying to me, and of course raise other problems so for a lot of us it makes more sense to conclude that there simply is no God.

By the way, the idea that suffering is God's way of teaching us how to live is a particularly weak one, in my opinion. First of all, you contradict yourself in your first option by proposing a scenario in which everything is made "perfect"yet people are still free to "trash their environment, kill others, and get away with all this bad stuff with no consequences". You can't have both.

Secondly, the idea that if the opportunity to do evil is taken away we have no more choices in life is absurd. I make dozens of choices every day, but I've never been faced with a choice between killing an innocent person or not.

Third, and this is like the second objection, we can easily envision a world where mistakes and even consequences are possible, but unnecessary, gratuitous suffering is not. Christians often like to use the analogy of God as a loving Father, who lets us make mistakes so that we will learn. But, as a father myself, I can tell you that even while a give my children space in which too learn from their mistakes, let them experience failure, I am always there to make sure they are safe from unnecessary harm. Falling off a bike is one thing; playing tag on the roof is something else; I'll allow one, but not the other. If there is a God and he uses events like like Katrina or 9-11 to "teach us a lesson then he's a neglectful, or even an abusive, parent.

Regards

A Hermit

POSTED BY: A HERMIT | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 11:24 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Thank you Mr. Elliott for responding to most of the comments including mine. It takes a man with integrity to do that even with all these differences in opinion.

I am a straightforward kind of a person and I don't like to beat around the bushes. So I will say it to you plainly. What I meant by the mistakes that christians did 2000 years ago is that they "decided" to pick a new god and a new doctrine to push down our throats. The Bible did not support that. There isn't a single verse in the Bible, when put in context, indicates that Jesus "said" I am god, worship me. ALL christian scholars say that it is the later understanding of some actions of Jesus that led them to believe that way. I wonder when you read and studied the Bible without influence of others, as you said, did you read it with the assumption that Jesus should be treated as a god or did you come to this conclusion yourself? I believe you read it as a christian with all faith formulae in place. The influence was there. The fact that you are unaware of its existence is a testimony for what I have proclaimed earlier. Again, no offense intended.

POSTED BY: SOMALITRADE | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 11:17 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Reverend-

My sisters have taken you to task, quite correctly in my eyes, for your misconceptions (to put it charitably). I cannot improve on their postings, so instead, I ask you to pray with me. If you open your eyes and your heart, you just might learn something valuable. Blessed Be.

A Wiccan Prayer for Peace

Gracious Lady, Mother of all that lives, we call out to you to guide all of your children. Bless our eyes, that we may see each other with love. Bless our ears, that we may hear each other with understanding. Bless our mouths, that we may speak to each other with compassion. Bless our hands, that they may heal, not harm. Bless our feet, that we may walk beside each other in peace. Great Goddess, Mother of birth and death and rebirth, Goddess of the green Earth that feeds us, of the creatures that roam upon its surface, and the tides that lap its shores, Lady of the Cauldron, let all your children drink of its wisdom, and know that all names of the Divine are but one Name, and all worship but a dance to the singular music of Life.

POSTED BY: WICCAN | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 9:02 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Furthermore, Rev, your accusation that PriveR is hiding by not signing her posts is disingenuous. If you look, you will notice that she repeatedly comes back after and claims her posts when she forgets to re-type her screen name.

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 8:41 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

This message is very complex, so complex that it says nothing. "Double speak" is an attempt to make every thing right and merely confuses.

POSTED BY: MARY ANN WILLIAMS | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 5:54 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: MARY ANN WILLIAMS | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 5:54 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

While I commend the authors willingness to get in the mix with us lowly plebeians it's hard to see his point of view as anything but the dying whimper of a religion that for too long has pontificated from a pulpit to an unquestioning audience, never having to come face to face to the with fact that his worldview is myopic and that he has no answers. Or to put it another way it would appear that the emperor is buck naked.

POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 5:23 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I would like to first say that this blog completely lost all relation to the original question and has become a war of religions. Never will everyone believe in the same religion so please get over yourself and stop with the sap stories (everyone has been discriminated against for one reason or another...and that really isn't what this blog is supposed to be about anyways) and name calling.

So, to answer the question:

Personally, I do not believe in God. I believe that the majority of bad things that happen in this world happen because of us (every action has a consequence). If we are aware that there are hurricanes and earthquakes in certain areas AND STILL CHOOSE TO LIVE THERE...then yes, we contribute to those horrible natural disasters....I would like to ask: would we even think of them as natural 'disasters' if we (humans) weren't effected by them? If something like Hurricane Katrina happened in a place where none or few people lived, would we even think twice? Probably not (unless a side effect of the incident, in turn, effected us). A bunch of uprooted trees or a flooded valley is

not interesting until we find out that our own family and friends were washed away. Then, and only then, does it become a disaster (and we blame this on nature...not ourselves)...we are the reason these natural instances BECOME 'disasters'.

As far as man-made disasters go: we do it to ourselves. And really it's as simple as that. We either didn't conform to someone else's beliefs, and now they hate us, or we didn't have enough security, or we bullied someone in 2nd grade and now they are coming back to get revenge...the list goes on. We can not read into the future, and therefore we do not always see the consequences of our actions (especially in instances where people die just because they were a bystander caught up in the wrong scene). We are only human, and humans make mistakes, which have consequences. And with as many humans as we have in this world...all making their own decisions (good or bad)...we produce a lot of mistakes and harm to one another. There is no realistic solution to this problem.

And to all those people who think that there is no god BECAUSE of all the bad things in the world...think of this: God supposedly loves everyone (given there is a god...). Now, look at the people YOU love....would you want to
(a) magically make everything perfect for them all the time, allowing them to trash their environment, kill others, and get away with all this bad stuff with no consequences (because, remember, you are magically making everything better for them)?
(b) would you want to 'control' everything that they do so they can't ever make a mistake in their life?
or (c) would you rather watch them fall on their face a few times (or more) so that they learn from their mistakes?

I personally choose option (c). Therefore, "bad things happen in this world and therefore there is no god" is an illogical argument...and that's coming from someone who doesn't even believe in God in the first place!

Also: what's up with all the hate/love talk? How can u hate or love someone you do not know personally? That still beats me...

POSTED BY: SAM | SEPTEMBER 10, 2007 2:03 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

god is just another word and nothing more. The bible is just another book and nothing more. Elliot is just another foolish man and nothing more, except that he is pretentious enough to believe he understands what no man understands, or in the parlance of the semantic ledgermain that he practices, to sense what no man and sense except through his nervous system as coded in his DNA. The good doctor should start with high school biology and see if he can learn anything.

Doug Arnold

POSTED BY: DOUG ARNOLD | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 10:49 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The post on Sept 9 @ 9:48 am is me again. Forgot to sign it yet again.. grr. I'll get that right one of these days.

MMA Terra and Lepi!

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 8:36 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Willis Elliot's piece is unreadable. It may work as an utterance from the pulpit to the rubes in the pews, but as a piece meant for serious consideration by serious people, it is utter gibberish. It resembles a dog chasing its tail. Does the man not think?

POSTED BY: CHUCKMCF | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 7:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Did he answer the question? He certainly "Welcomed" it enough, but I can't seem to dig out the answer in all the fluff.

So Willis, why does god seem impotent in the face of natural disasters? Why does he stand idly by when pregnant women, infants, and children die by the thousands in a tsunami?

POSTED BY: FREETHINKR | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 7:34 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Elliot, you're way off base in more ways than one concerning your perception of Paganism. And quite frankly, I would find it highly amusing that you advise Terra to follow the advice of Ieshua and learn to love her enemies if it weren't so indicative of your inability to truly see any viewpoint other than the Christocentric.

While I hate no one, I also am under no obligation to love those who would do me harm. I am certainly not obligated to love the man who raped me, or the evangelist who grabbed me when I politely refused his offer of a Jack Chick tract, or the JW who stuck his foot in my door when I politely refused a copy of The Watchtower and attempted to close my door. My only obligation toward those who would make themselves my enemy is not to harm them except in self-defense. However, my gods do allow me to defend myself by whatever means are available and necessary.

The Bible and its exhortations and prohibitions are only binding for Christians and Jews.

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 6:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev. Elliot,

You really understand nothing about us. History as well as science (real science) are part of Pagan learning and natural leanings. Do you think we are ignorant because we are not Christian? That we must then be as dumb as a box of rocks because we choose not to believe as you do?

I understand that you really feel that you are being fair and honest with us Pagans... you feel that you really know what you are saying is true..sir, no. It's not. Would you be defined by those who are your enemies...we are not. But you are defining us and you mouth the words of love...while still not respecting us at all. Where is the love?

Earth Mother and Sky Father is "married". Stonehenge is a temple to that mating as well as other sacred sites throughout the world. From the most ancient of times Earth Mother and Sky Father has been a reoccurring theme in mythologies. In many Pagan traditions it was this couple that in fact created the Universe...Big Bang.

While the hebrews were traveling to their promised land they killed the people whose lands they then took. Then they married or enslaved the virgin daughters, leaving the murdered parents, the babies and the shrines, temples and incense altars in ruins. So tell me...who hated who? And who promised them land that belonged to other people? Your god...through the Mouth of Moses. It was not any Pagan Goddess that claimed the hebrew lands or lives...

See Rev. Pagans believe we are the hands, hearts and mouths of our Gods. It is up to us to separate personal ego from God. We know that killing and stealing is wrong. Our Gods, who created life, would not want us to harm it. So we can not get by with saying...God wills this so..or the devil made me do it. That is ego. So sir, what is hate? What are the acts of hate? Is it saying because we do not pray to the same deity as you, that we then must hate your's. That is crazy.

I do not pray to the same Deity as Paganplace or Wiccan or Lepi...but I do not hate them or their gods. I respect them and respect their gods...hate is not any part of worship...it is not part of being connected to the divine. How many ways can I say it?

I really think that you Christians are more polytheistic then most Pagans are...You have the thrine-Father, son and holy Ghost...you have the devil. Thats four separate and individual beings with powers of their own.

My trad believes that all Gods are One God, all Goddesses are one Goddess, and co joined they are the Initiator. All gods are parts of the One. Like our hands and feet are parts of our body. They are all One. We are all one.

So in a true sense we are Monotheistic as well as Polytheistic. We just happen to believe that That One is so big that our puny minds can not grasp it...so we need the smaller bites we call Gods.

Your god is just one more face... we do not hate it. But we are getting real tired of those who worship that face hateing us.

Get it?

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 4:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dear Dr. Elliott,

Thank you for your response to my last post.

I've always thought highly of Congregationalists and the Congregational Church, though I wish they'd retained their original distinctive and attractive name, rather than having merged into something-or-other with a government-sounding acronym [UCC] for an identifier.

My mother and father were Congregationalists in Massachusetts for a time, before they strayed off the reservation into Unitarianism.

I went (involuntarily) to the Congregational Sunday School there when I was very young. I recall at age six telling my Sunday School teacher that I couldn't accept what she was teaching (peddling, I thought - but didn't use that word). She very gently and kindly tried to persuade me to her viewpoint, but without success. My views on Christian teachings really haven't changed at all over the past seven decades.

We have a beautiful, classic, white, steepled Congregational church facing the town green in our Vermont town. My father's nondenominational funeral was held there. My former law partner gave up the law, studied divinity in Scotland, and came back to be the minister there.

So I'm really inclined to like all things Congregational.

Do you still come to Vermont? If you do, my wife and I would like to take you to dinner - only good food and quiet, pleasant conversation. Our town adjoins Hanover, New Hampshire and Dartmouth College. We're in the local phone book or you could probably find us by googling. My wife's name is Kathy.

It would be nice if this could come to pass.

All best wishes to you.

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 2:43 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The reality . . . No human has any knowledge of God, or even if there is such a phenomenon. All religious concepts and beliefs are speculations.

POSTED BY: LUTHER E. FRANKLIN | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 1:54 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

This is no doubt, historically accurate, "Facing the mystery of good and evil, some have concluded that evil tops good, so the world's source must be evil: the creator was a demon (said Marcion in the 2nd century AD/CE)." Whatever was that boy thinking to say something like that?

If evil does not top good then there is absolutely a creator God behind the universe? Not a chance. Good and evil, (should be good and bad) are relative. When a Jew was caught hiding that was good if you were a Nazi and really bad, (so bad it's evil?) if you were the Jew.

The evil theory of where it all came from simply says matter always was and always will be, cannot be created or destroyed. We think we know better now but way back when? The conflict is in the ignorance, the interpretation of the meaning of the words written way back when.

Evil - has a body. Holy - has no body. Good - you're gonna like it. Bad - you'll be sorry.

Lucifer was holy for he had no body but he was a BAD angel, not an evil angel with a body. Men are corrupted by matter, have evil bodies that are temples of the Holy Spirit.

There are two kinds of spirits, holy ones without bodies, exists in people's words for example and evil ones, exists in the demon rum that has a body. Spirits change people's minds. Guns are evil spirits, been known to change people's minds while the words of the minister contain holy spirits to change people's minds.

Methinks the word "information" most closely describes spirits. Information cannot exist without a body so holy information does not exist. There's the paper, the ink and the arrangement of the ink on the paper that produces the information but only when it's read. The information contained in the message is WRITTEN on the brain of the reader.

Writing information on closed minds is a laborious task. I've heard it said that in order to qualify as information someone must learn something. Learn anything yet?

POSTED BY: BGONE | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 12:49 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Exactly how is calling some Americans, Pagan or otherwise, 'NonAmerican, as you have in the past, defending my or anyone else's rights to believe as one wishes?

Are we different from early Pagans? You better believe it- but it has a whole lot less to do with your rubber band book that you might think. We have had advantages to living in the West- that is permission to actually think for ourselves.

Besides, many Pagans are *not* monotheistic. The Goddess is honored, yes, but so are various versions of her Consort, the God, who sacrifices himself at the end of the summer to be reborn in the dead of winter. Which, incidentally, is why Jesus's birth is celebrated on Dec. 25- Too may people were still honoring the cycles of Nature and the rebirth of the Sun God, that the Christians felt that they had to place his birthday to give any attraction to Christianity.

And you again leap to conclusions by saying that we don't study history. Try again, Sir.

Many Pagans are duotheistic or polytheistic. Depends on how the person experiences the Gods. Sometimes there is a sense of monism where some say that 'All the Goddesses are one Goddess, All the Gods are one God, and even Goddess and God are complementary parts of the same creative force.' So you see there is no conflict that you ascribe to "history vs. Nature" gods. The 'hate' that you're so fond of espousing has nothing to do with us. It isn't our god who said that other gods should not be worshipped because he gets jealous.

I doubt you are reading things correctly when reading those authors you mentioned. It seems to me that they have become popular these days as a response to an ever growing fear that America is becoming a theocracy, and that whether we like it or not certain types of people, including those in power are trying to get us into a religious war.

They question the use of a 2000 year old book that was designed for a culture that doesn't exist anymore as a sole guide to life. As they should.

The terrorists use a form of their religion as justification for terrible things because they know that that is the only way to really appeal to their trainees' emotions.. but their motives overall have always been political grievances against actions taken by our government's policies in the past. Ask everyday Muslims and I bet they will tell you that what the terrorists are doing has nothing whatsoever to do with what Islam is supposed to be about.

I have nothing against religion thriving.. but what does and should concern all of us is the coopting of those religions as an excuse to make up science, give one preferential treatment over another, and allow someone else to 'define' what they think we are.

If two people were fighting over me, I wouldn't be honored by that.. I'd be disgusted at the fact that two 'grown' people have to fight for something that in the end is pretty trivial. Since when is being forced to hurt another attractive?

Your use of 'love/hate' is divisive. It does nothing but show an arrogance on your part that you don't even know who we are and continue to tell us what we believe. Poor choice of words in any discussion.

We have enough of that from ordinary people. We had hoped for better from a self proclaimed 'teacher.'

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 9:48 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

To listen, learn, grow, write more helpful columns, & sometimes respond, I read carefully all the comments. Why, then, do some of you sometimes feel unread? (1) I may have misread you. (2) I have little time to respond, & you give me so much to respond to! (3) I respond to you with one eye on what I expect you to be writing about, namely, my current column. If you're off somewhere else, you can't expect me to wander off with you--e.g., into a discussion of something my column didn't deal with (e.g., just now, Paganism).

But since many recent comments have been by Pagans, I think it appropriate that I state what you can expect from me. Here goes: (1) A solid defense of your liberties and rights as an American citizen; (2) Respect for your human dignity as (here comes the Bible!) created in the image of God; (3) Appreciation for your commitment to enjoying & protecting the good earth; (4) Admiration for your courage in swimming upstream against America's prevailing (Christian) culture; & (4) Active opposition to your personal unseating of my monotheistic ("only") deity (viz., God) to seat your monotheistic ("only") deity (viz., the Goddess).

Now for a few comments on your comments, from the latest backward:

[ANONYMOUS] or PriveR or whoever: (What's with all this hiding, this self-concealment, this refusal to tell us who you are? I don't get it. I've never written anything anonymously; I'd feel cowardly.) You say "THE FACTS of good and evil are easiest explained as the random results of a natural world....It certainly explains Mother Theresa's funk." 9/11 was "random," & to be accepted as just one of those things which in this case happened to be evil? (Or did you just forget this week's question?) The great philosophers say we experience the world as both directive & random, not merely as one or the other. Further, we are sense-making creatures; & to say something is only random is a cop-out on the sweat of trying to make sense of it.

PRIVER (or PriveR?): I like your "the rubber-band Bible....to fit whatever someone wants it to." Some folks stretch it to include everything, so nothing else is needed--as though, for example, the Enlightenment hadn't occurred. The other extreme is folks who collapse it into a tiny mess & declare it useless to stretch over anything (examples: Tom Paine, Ethan Allen, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens).

YOYO says "I find it impossible to suspend my disbelief in the supernatural....No-one has shown that a supernatural world exists outside of the imagination." I find it impossible to believe in your disability to suspend disbelief in the supernatural: poor guy, you can't enjoy Harry Potter? Maybe it's a disease your reading of William Blake would cure ("the universe in a grain of sand,...the Trinity in an hour"). Your second sentence reveals your problem as self-contradiction: since the poetic sense, the metaphoric leap, the power of imagination, is our only access to any other consciousness human or divine, it is quite literally impossible (you don't have to "find" it) to "show" (how, pray tell?) "that a supernatural world exists outside of the imagination." Your imagination is captive to your reason, which you've falsely accorded the status of being the only path to knowledge. As a release from this confinement, you might try reading Montague's WAYS OF KNOWING.

NORRIE HOYT says "The Christians who burned pagans had the same intellectual equipment as today's Christians." No, they didn't have the Enlightenment, which was a rational emergent within Christian civilization. I'm often accused of saying that America's founding religion was Christianity. No way! Our Founder's were Enlightenment Christians ("Bible+Enlightenment" is my phrase for their religion)--some (Ethan Allen, e.g.) so Enlightenment as to be Christian only in the sense that their deism or atheism emerged within Christian civilization. Thanks for your paean to Ethan Allen (though he had no use for the rubber-band Bible, "offense to reason and common sense, and subversive of moral rectitude"). I can testify that he & his Green Mountain Boys are heroes to the Congregational clergy of his state: for several years, I was the continuing ed teacher at the annual study-retreats of the Congregational (UCC) pastors of Vermont--your state, & Ethan Allen's.

SOMALITRADE: Sorry you experienced church as constrictive, a "system of faith [so] imposed on the church" that "a christian today can only understand" of the Bible "what the church pastors tell them to." The diametrical of my experience! When I became a Christian, I was given a Bible & told to study it & never let anybody tell me what to make of it! So I immediately set out to teach myself Greek so I could read the New Testament FOR MYSELF. In my present church, every Sunday morning before & after worship 12 groups of adults gather to study the Bible, & NONE of the groups is taught by any of the church's clergy (though the clergy are members of the groups). As for Jesus & politics, thank God he left us Christians free to experiment toward optimal processes & institutions of church & state! Of course, as it is with us humans everywhere & always, mistakes were made. But I can't make much sense of this sentence of yours: "Christians made some devastating mistakes 2000 years ago and they never recovered from it."

TERRA: You ask "How shall I see your God with your words?" You should look for my God in my columns more than in my comments on comments--the former being more expository, the latter more argumentative.

You confuse historicity (religions grounded in history, as are the three naming Abraham as forefather) with antiquity (the worship of goddesses being, to our present knowledge, as old as the worship of gods). Dates, unimportant in Pagan religion, are crucial in the history religions.

As for my use of "hate," it's not too strong to describe the warfare between God & the Goddess (e.g., Baal-Asherah against the Israelite God, & Israel's King Hezekiah having the statue of Asherah dragged out of the Temple in Jerusalem). Do you know any Pagans who favor a marriage between the Heaven Father (God) & the Earth Mother (Goddess)? One wouldn't show up for the wedding: each denies the

other's existence. Monotheism's are, by definite, intolerant of rival deities ("mono" being Greek for "only" one). Knowing a lot about ancient polytheisms (many deities) is no preparation for understanding the warfare of the gender monotheisms. But--& of course I'm speaking mythologically--this upper-floor warfare between the rival deities is no justification for any (emotional) "hatred" between their devotees on the lower-floor (i.e., earth). The warfare should, however, give you some light on why some non-Pagans sometimes give you a hard time. Sorry about that.

Finally, you say "What is your spirit? All I have to go on is your attitude." True, & I hope your attitude toward me is improving with more understanding of my attitude.

PRIVER: Since you say it's "infantile" to speak of "Bible-haters," perhaps you think there are none--but how can that be if you've been reading today's celebrity atheists? (Sam Harris' column this week is a classic instance of Bible-hate.) But I've never pinned that label on all Pagans (though it would be appropriate on some). I do insist that "Pagan" means "Neo-Pagan" in the sense that present-day Pagans--advantaged by living in Western civilization (which is "Bible+Enlightenment")--are radically different from earlier pagans.

Here I agree with you: "Just because we don't follow something doesn't mean we hate it." Of course it doesn't mean you hate it emotionally. But hate/love are, emotionally, the strongest terms for rejection/acceptance & are therefore appropriate to our most radical life-decision, the choice of a particular way of seeing & living in the world (which is a definition of religion). In this ultimate sense, hate/love are decisional & may or may not become emotional.

Right, I couldn't have known that you are still in the "broom closet" in that you've not come out to you Jewish relatives on your transition out of Judaism into Paganism. (You are a rare exception to my dislike of anonymity, the use of a cover-name.) I pray they won't be hard on you! And I'm glad you don't "blame the Jewish or Christian religion."

Since people (as I said) fight for what's important to them, is that not an honor--in the sense of elevating the item--to what they fight for? In love triangles, the one being fought for is (in this narrow sense) honored: two guys think she's worth fighting for, & she understandable feels honored. How, then, can you say that "War is NEVER an indirect honor to religion" if religion is a factor in the war?

Secular humanism is shocked that religion in the postmodern world, instead of fading away as expected, is thriving. You seem under the old expectation when you say that 9/11 "was... political, using the 'cover' of...religion...." The Atta document, penned the night before, is as centrally religious as any passage in the Qur'an.

OBIJON: In healthy human life, faith & reason are coordinate, complementary, friends. "Fundamentalism" is a general term for the pathology of separation of them into enemies. When faith becomes all-consuming & irrational, we call it FAITH-fundamentalism. When reason becomes all-consuming & analyzes faith to death, we call it REASON-fundamentalism. Of course there are other terms for defining these diseases, & I sometimes use them.

Again, thanks to all who try to "dig" & improve me!

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 9, 2007 1:41 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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That way, God must not be defined as a contortion artist -- being all good, well but allowing such terrible things to happen.

It certainly explains Mother Theresa's funk.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 5:49 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 5:47 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Wow! Judging by the look of that statue, it seems like as soon as you turn your back, he'd flip you off but would change back to a wave when you turn around again. :)

Thanks for the info. I don't know if I'd buy it, necessarily, but maybe a library may be able to get one in for a lot cheaper. For me it's a curiosity factor.

Always good to hear from you as well. It's voices like yours that are much needed- always giving something valuable to a conversation like this.

You might like the kinds of stories that started popping up on the end of Susan Jacoby's thread. Much needed sense of humor pokes its head out on On Faith.

Namaste.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 2:16 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Priver,

Glad you liked the Ethan Allen piece.

Believe it or not, Amazon is selling a pricy (\$29 +) copy of Ethan's book, about which Amazon says:

"Book Description

1784. This work is alternately adorned with confutations of a variety of doctrines incompatible to it; deduced from the most exalted ideas which we are able to form of the divine and human characters, and from the universe in general.

"Due to the age and scarcity of the original we reproduced, some pages may be spotty, faded or difficult to read. Written in Old English.

"Product Details

"Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Kessinger Publishing (July 2003)"

I'm not sure you'd want to buy it, though; through the centuries it seems to have been universally regarded as virtually unreadable.

There's a good photo of the Ethan Allen statue at:

<http://www.dgolds.com/photos/newEnglandNewYork2003/images/touring/web/002EthanAllen.jpeg>

It was good to hear from you!

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 1:33 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hi Norrie:

I loved your Ethan Allan story. The funniest thing about those who call America a 'Christian Nation' is the more you really read about the founding fathers, the more, very specific instances you will find among so many of them where they specifically elucidate what they DO believe in, as well as their feelings on Christianity. All spelled out for people to see.

Ben Franklin was another notable example, and most assuredly not the last or least of them. The people who helped form this country were some of the most brilliant, and often most colorful, vivacious, interesting characters we've ever had. Most of them wanting little to do with Christianity in its forms.

I'd love to see that statue. Have any copies of his book survived to this day?

on this: "The biggest complaint of On Faith posters seems to be that the Panelists scarcely ever reply to their comments, which leaves them feeling that they've spoken into the vacuum of outer space."

Very true. It's just that with this panelist, even though he 'responded', it's doubly frustrating to see that he hasn't actually read or considered what we wrote. We're still speaking to a vacuum.

Somalitrade:

On this: "Because of this constant debate, the thought process behind the interpretation of the Bible has been kept away from the hands of the people and the church controlled effectively every aspect of Bible teaching in an attempt to remove any doubts regarding the Bible.... This defensive posture is a result of lack of knowledge of the scripture. Accordingly, that lead to the vulnerability of christians themselves."

I agree. As a result, through the years it has become the rubber band Bible. Stretched so long and hard enough to fit whatever someone wants it to. Stretch it too far and it's really in danger of snapping. Which seems to me is not what the authors had intended.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Bravo Dr Elliott

I admire you for at least engaging some of your critics on line, rather than commenting and just walking away, as so many do.

As a non believer who was never indoctrinated, I find it impossible to suspend my disbelief in the supernatural, which seems so unlikely to me, even ridiculous. It just seems much more likely that God is something we made up back

when we were ignorant of everything, and found comfort in pretending that there was someone somewhere who was looking out for us. If one assumes for argument sake, that there is no God, one would have to agree that in that event, then it is likely we would invent one, out of fear, or out of confusion, or out of hope.

I don't believe the religious are critical enough of the supernatural aspect of their beliefs, which would seem unlikely as no-one has shown that a supernatural world exists outside of the imagination.

It just seems fair to conclude that it is in the imagination that the "supernatural" exists, and God too.

POSTED BY: YOYO | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Sorry for the triple post.

The WAPO's crappy system said my post hadn't gone through.

As Ethan Allen would have said:

MAY THE GREAT JEHOVAH BURN OUT ITS INNARDS !!!

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 11:27 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 11:26 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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You wrote:

"NORRIE HOYT: You say, 'The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion.' Understandable. Undersandable, also, I hope, that we Christians are wary for the same reason. Pagans have slaughtered, burnt, even eaten thousands of us. We are afraid of what would happen to us if the U.S. becomes a Pagan Nation (as you fear the U.S.'s becoming a Christian Nation). (Of course you're not primitive Pagans but Neo-Pagans, meaning Pagans influenced by the Bible + the Enlightenment.)"

I do think it's a bit disingenuous of you to compare today's modern, educated, sophisticated pagans with primitive savages, even with the qualification you made.

On the other side, the Christians who burned pagans had the same intellectual equipment as today's Christians, and are psychological first-cousins to them, which is not true of the primitive and modern pagans.

Though I enjoy your essays and appreciate your responses, I rarely agree with you.

I live in Vermont, which, along with New Hampshire, has the highest percentage of any population group in the country that never attends any religious services, and also has the lowest percentage of any population group in the country which self-identifies with any religion.

I feel really at home in Vermont.

I believe that Ethan Allen, one of Vermont's founders, got it right on religion:

Ethan Allen (1999)
by John Patrick Michael Murphy

Ethan Allen (1738-1789) was the "Sooner" of our Founding Fathers. He started shooting at Redcoats long before the rest of them. As early as 1770 the British governor of New York put a price on his head. Allen and his Green Mountain Boys successfully defended their homesteaded farms in Vermont from British troops trying to enforce land grants New York had sold to others. They were well-seasoned fighters by the time it all became official in 1776.

They took Fort Ticonderoga after an epic march in fierce conditions that caught the British asleep. Allen awoke them by proclaiming that he was taking possession "In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress."

The Jehovah bit was all tongue in cheek, for Allen was a freethinker who thought Judeo-Christian-Islam-anity was a calamity. This swashbuckling hero then tried to take Montreal to teach the British to keep their hands off his beloved Vermont. This time he was captured and taken to England only to be returned in a prisoner exchange.

He is another of the founders the religious right doesn't speak about when they tell us of our "Christian nation."

Shocking people was Allen's specialty. He stopped his wedding ceremony when asked if he would pledge "to live with Fanny Buchanan agreeable to the laws of God." He wanted to know which god and whose god the marriage was supposed to please, stalling the proceedings until it was specified to be Nature's god and no other.

He was a constant stone in the sandals of the clergy and loved to publicly corner the parson with a list of biblical conundrums and contradictions. That was just the start. After the revolution he and Fanny settled back and raised a family in their Green Mountains of Vermont. In 1784 he wrote his landmark book, "Reason, the Only Oracle of Man."

This book should not have caused much commotion because his style of writing was abstruse, but fate or malice intervened when the publisher's building burned with most of the copies. Many preachers said it was "retribution from God."

The publisher repented and ran off to become a Methodist, but Ethan Allen remained a steadfast freethinker. He claimed god was no arsonist, nor a murderer, nor the unjust tyrant that the Bible made him out to be and asked people to read his little book.

He was the first of the Founding Fathers to be called the anti-Christ by the clergy. He simply pointed out the obvious and was castigated for it. He said the Bible "...[was] offensive to reason and common sense, and subversive of moral rectitude in general."

This was the first time in American history that a formal publication attacked the Christian religion. It attacked the creation myth, eternal punishment, revelation, miracles, prophecy, faith, the trinity, Jesus divinity, and imputation, but stood for natural morality based upon reason and kindness.

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After the mooning of Moses the two got into all sorts of mischief together. He recounts how Moses and the Almighty engaged in all sorts of land and virgin-grabbing raids together.

These two also conspired to place arbitrary laws on the tribes of Israel that had no basis in common sense or morality. He recounts god-ordained atrocities in detail. He finishes up with Moses where Moses left himself when he "wrote" the Pentateuch--describing his own funeral (Deut. 34:5-8) telling us who buried him, where he was buried, and how long the people mourned for him.

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Again, thanks for your posts and for your responses to ours.

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[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"NORRIE HOYT: You say, "The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion." Understandable. Understandable, also, I hope, that we Christians are wary for the same reason. Pagans have slaughtered, burnt, even eaten thousands of us. We are afraid of what would happen to us if the U.S. becomes a Pagan Nation (as you fear the U.S.'s becoming a Christian Nation). (Of course you're not primitive Pagans but Neo-Pagans, meaning Pagans influenced by the Bible + the Enlightenment.)"

I do think it's a bit disingenuous of you to compare today's modern, educated, sophisticated pagans with primitive savages, even with the qualification you made.

On the other side, the Christians who burned pagans had the same intellectual equipment as today's Christians, and are psychological first-cousins to them, which is not true of the primitive and modern pagans.

Though I enjoy your essays and appreciate your responses, I rarely agree with you.

I live in Vermont, which, along with New Hampshire, has the highest percentage of any population group in the country that never attends any religious services, and also has the lowest percentage of any population group in the country which self-identifies with any religion.

I feel really at home in Vermont.

I believe that Ethan Allen, one of Vermont's founders, got it right on religion:

Ethan Allen (1999)
by John Patrick Michael Murphy

Ethan Allen (1738-1789) was the "Sooner" of our Founding Fathers. He started shooting at Redcoats long before the rest of them. As early as 1770 the British governor of New York put a price on his head. Allen and his Green Mountain Boys successfully defended their homesteaded farms in Vermont from British troops trying to enforce land grants New York had sold to others. They were well-seasoned fighters by the time it all became official in 1776.

They took Fort Ticonderoga after an epic march in fierce conditions that caught the British asleep. Allen awoke them by proclaiming that he was taking possession "In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress."

The Jehovah bit was all tongue in cheek, for Allen was a freethinker who thought Judeo-Christian-Islam-anity was a calamity. This swashbuckling hero then tried to take Montreal to teach the British to keep their hands off his beloved Vermont. This time he was captured and taken to England only to be returned in a prisoner exchange.

He is another of the founders the religious right doesn't speak about when they tell us of our "Christian nation."

Shocking people was Allen's specialty. He stopped his wedding ceremony when asked if he would pledge "to live with Fanny Buchanan agreeable to the laws of God." He wanted to know which god and whose god the marriage was supposed to please, stalling the proceedings until it was specified to be Nature's god and no other.

He was a constant stone in the sandals of the clergy and loved to publicly corner the parson with a list of biblical conundrums and contradictions. That was just the start. After the revolution he and Fanny settled back and raised a family in their Green Mountains of Vermont. In 1784 he wrote his landmark book, "Reason, the Only Oracle of Man."

This book should not have caused much commotion because his style of writing was abstruse, but fate or malice intervened when the publisher's building burned with most of the copies. Many preachers said it was "retribution from God."

The publisher repented and ran off to become a Methodist, but Ethan Allen remained a steadfast freethinker. He claimed god was no arsonist, nor a murderer, nor the unjust tyrant that the Bible made him out to be and asked people to read his little book.

He was the first of the Founding Fathers to be called the anti-Christ by the clergy. He simply pointed out the obvious and was castigated for it. He said the Bible "...[was] offensive to reason and common sense, and subversive of moral rectitude in general."

This was the first time in American history that a formal publication attacked the Christian religion. It attacked the creation myth, eternal punishment, revelation, miracles, prophecy, faith, the trinity, Jesus divinity, and imputation, but stood for natural morality based upon reason and kindness.

He saved his best humor for Moses whom he saw as the only pal Jehovah ever had. He noted that no man could see god's face and live (Ex. 30:20) but Moses was allowed a "privileged peep up god's dress" (Ex.33: 23).

After the mooning of Moses the two got into all sorts of mischief together. He recounts how Moses and the Almighty engaged in all sorts of land and virgin-grabbing raids together.

These two also conspired to place arbitrary laws on the tribes of Israel that had no basis in common sense or morality. He recounts god-ordained atrocities in detail. He finishes up with Moses where Moses left himself when he "wrote" the Pentateuch--describing his own funeral (Deut. 34:5-8) telling us who buried him, where he was buried, and how long the people mourned for him.

Ethan Allen remained his own colorful independent self right to the end. He made sure the clergy couldn't make up pious lies about a "death-bed conversion" as they did to so many freethinkers.

A minister intruded during the death watch and said, "General, I fear the angels are waiting for you," only to hear his booming voice respond: "Waiting, are they? Waiting, are they? Well, goddamn 'em, let 'em wait."

Ethan Allen's religious views remain widespread in Vermont.

Alabama tried unsuccessfully to enshrine the Ten Commandments in its Supreme Court Building.

Vermont, by contrast, has placed a big, bold, larger-than-life statute of Ethan Allen in an aggressive posture by the main entrance door to its Statehouse.

Again, thanks for your posts and for your responses to ours.

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 11:20 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Regarding the comments made about the persecution of the christian majority by Bible-haters in this country:

I believe that the christian majority in this country (and around the world, for that matter) have truly lost their way. I am sorry if these words hurt some people but this is the truth as I see it. Christians over the ages tried honestly to find a strong platform and some unshakable belief system on which they can rest their faith. Yet, 2000 years after Jesus, theologians in the church corridors still debating the nature of Jesus' role on this earth. The debate extended to the Bible itself; which portion is the true word of God and which is not.

Because of this constant debate, the thought process behind the interpretation of the Bible has been kept away from the hands of the people and the church controlled effectively every aspect of Bible teaching in an attempt to remove any doubts regarding the Bible. In effect, a christian today can read the Bible but can only understand from it what the church pastors tell them to. This resulted in a generation of christians who do not fully comprehend the scripture, cannot argue about it or from it, and will always take a defensive posture when approached. This defensive posture is a result of lack of knowledge of the scripture. Accordingly, that lead to the vulnerability of christians themselves.

Back to the main point. The christian faith as it is today cannot support the building of a strong nation because Jesus himself didn't say much regarding his message and said absolutely nothing regarding building nations. Hence, the term "separation of church and state" forced itself on this society without much fanfare. The specific-points-based system of faith imposed by the church is now hunting them back. Christians, even as a majority, do feel somehow oppressed in their own country. This is actually true, but the cause isn't Bible-haters. The reason is that christians made some devastating mistakes 2000 years ago and they never recovered from it!

Sorry if I offended anyone!

POSTED BY: SOMALITRADE | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 2:46 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TERRA: ~After claiming that you don't hate my God, you describe him as a "god in the sky with a book of judgement and a disapproving look." To me that doesn't sound like indifference or even tolerance.~

Does that sound like hate to you? If it does you are extremely thin skinned. So how do you represent your god? How should I see your god with your words?

~Historically, your Goddess (of nature) & my God (of nature & history) have been bad news to each other. ~

So you give to your God nature and history, as The Goddess has no history? Really? Are you not a little bit educated to the history of religion???Your God is a rather new comer when it comes to Gods...

I know someone that insists that your god is the youngest sibling of the family of gods and is a angry trouble maker because of sibling rivalry. It's just a theory.

~Very bad news. Such bad news that it seems accurate to call it a relationship not of love or even of love/hate but only of hate, though each denies the other's existence. It's not gonna change. Get used to it. And try, as Jesus says, to "love those who persecute you." And, if you must, name me among your persecutors--though that is not my spirit.~

You do not know my Goddess...you have no name for her...or even what Pantheon I honor. But you think you know who I am. It is not so easy. You insist on hate. Why?

Do you think my Goddess is Asherah or Ishtar? maybe it's Sophia or Isis...or it could be Hathor or Rhea...you do not know. How about Bride also known as Brigid...the Goddess taken to be a Christian saint because the people would not turn away from Her.

Count you among my persecuters and yet you insist it is not your spirit. So what is your spirit? All I have to go by is attitude.

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 2:08 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Mr Elliot has not gotten my name right yet, and failed to see that I am also the one who accidentally posts as 'anonymous' who identified myself in the posts frequently after the fact. Much of these things get me going in such a way that sometimes I forget that I didn't put my name in and post anyway.

On this: 1) Some won't come to the table; (2) Some come, then leave when something irritates them; (3) Some who leave self-justifyingly curse the table!

Sometimes we have to leave the table because we don't get a word in edgewise, often because 'oh, they're just a minority who do 'kooky' things, let's not even bother asking them what they think or if it's ok to impose our laws on them-in fact, let's pretend they don't have a religion or don't exist at all'.

on this: a religion can be described from the outside--else (again) why would any great university hire me to teach "The World's Great Religions"?

Actually, it can't. Would you really want me, as a former Jewish person, to try to teach about Christianity to people who may or may not have another idea about it? The only way such a program would be fairly taught at all (since for some weird reason Paganism gets left out of ALL such classes when many of the traditions comprised and still make up aspects of the 'Great Religions') would be for a practicing Christian leader to teach about Christianity, a Muslim to teach about Islam, a Jew about Judaism.. etc. It's really interesting to me to know a whole group of Pagan people who are getting their degrees in religious studies who seem to really shock their Christian counterparts because they are not Christian.

What I'm saying is, stop trying to 'define' us. You cannot. Stop with the 'Bible haters' language and name calling. It's really quite infantile and does nothing to further any discussion. You seem to prefer calling people 'haters' in some form rather than actually reading what was said. Most Pagans I know, myself included, have read the Bible, and find some things worthwhile in it and other things not. Again, the term 'haters' do not apply to us.

On this: "Love/Hate" as I've been using them on this thread signal not interpersonal feelings but the battle & competition between religions which erupt from below (i.e., nature or Goddess religions) & religions which descend from above (i.e., history or God religions). Secondary cultic competition is among nature religions & among history religions (9/11 was a battle strategem in the competition among history religions--shocking the somnolent West into awareness of the war, perhaps World War III)."

There is no secondary 'cultic conflict'. That's in your own head. Evidently you didn't actually read what we wrote and try to talk down to people you don't understand. And call them names. "Reason Fundamentalists?" WWII?? Simple minds, indeed.

Pagans influenced by "Bible + Enlightenment"?

Um.. NO. You forgot to read where I mentioned before that we don't follow the Bible. Again, just because we don't follow something doesn't mean that we hate it. Why do you not get this? We don't follow Lucifer either and yet are told that we 'worship him'.

and especially on this:

"My heart goes out to you. You have stepped in on a conversation that seems strange to you (an experience we've all had). The Judaism you stepped out of did not fight your conversion, & your family did not disown you (& of course you were not threatened with death, which could have occurred had you been stepping out of Islam): your transition was quite & smooth, leaving you with no negative feelings toward Judaism. Most Pagans have stepped out of Christianity, the religion which in America surrounds them & beckons them back--so of course they have higher resistance to, & greater temptation to negative feelings about, Christianity. (And as at present I'm the Christian in the faces of "On Faith" Pagan commenters, I expect what I'm getting.)"

Sir, you make a whole lot of assumptions that have no basis in fact. What makes you think I've told my family any of this yet? My family has no idea I'm Pagan. The transition for me was smooth. My biggest pause in all of this is the distinct possibility that I could still very well be disowned. It's not unheard of in my family. One sibling of mine knows, but not the main members of my family, including one parent,

grandparents, close aunt/uncle, another sibling.. this is a very big risk I take. It's not Judaism's fault. If I get disowned or something when I do finally admit it to them, I would never think of blaming Judaism. That's called projection. This is who I am, period. For now I am in the proverbial 'broom closet' until circumstances are such that I can't hide it.

And please don't assume that I have never encountered people telling me that I'm going to burn forever.. Since my coming home to Paganism is new in comparison to others, I have not yet experienced the abuse that many of my friends have- but as a Jew there's still a special type of vilification out there, which still leads to horrible things. I don't blame the Jewish or Christian religion for it- I blame people who do not take the time to get to know their neighbors well enough to overcome suspicion. We see all too well what that leads to these days.

on this: The point I'm making happens to be easier for a woman to understand than for a man;

what? and your source for this is.... ???

and war is NEVER an 'indirect honor to religion'. 9/11 is and was all about political strategy, using the 'cover' of a twisted form of one religion to teach others to kill.

"And, if you must, name me among your persecutors--though that is not my spirit."

It is your action. Regardless of what your 'spirit' is, we see your reactions and non-answers to our questions.

Start using language less inflammatory and you may be surprised at how much can be agreed upon.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 2:02 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anyway, Reverend, since you've gone off justifying your 'hate' off on your own tangent, I'll presume you have no interest in actual dialogue.

Sad, but unsurprising.

Don't worry, we're used to it.

sniff Poor, poor, oppressed Christian conservatives.

My heart weeps.

You want more, read again.

Show some comprehension.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 1:09 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"This is quite a statement. It seems to be an educated person arrogantly using his education to browbeat folks that "don't know what they're talking about.""

Shhh, I wasn't gonna bring that up, Obi. They kinda don't want to know their own polytheistic roots. SHhhh! :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:59 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anyway, as to 'content, ' you say this:

"PAGANPLACE: You see me as "destructive" & as "justify[ing] violence and hate crimes" & as lacking "civility" of discourse and as being "unwilling to understand" you & as slandering you and "calling it love." What a tirade! And, as it is with tirades, so little objective content."

Funny, I seem to remember mentioning a lot of incidents that didn't seem so 'subjective' to me.

Yet, you still say 'I hate God' and say it's OK for you to say so, though presumable not OK for people to be 'Bible-haters' for pointing out how sucky the response to New Orleans' problems was while everyone was all spooled up about Clinton possibly getting head.

You haven't responded to or even acknowledged the kind of things that happen to those of us you say 'oppress' you poor rich white Christian male ...while you toss words like 'hate' around.

You still haven't acknowledged the fact you called us 'hypocrites' based on false premised that you were corrected upon, and then turned around and called us 'touchy' for calling you on....

You basically haven't shown any heart or brains just yet, Reverend. Throw us a bone.

"2 Mythologically, of theomachy as rejection of one deity by another, especially the mutual rejection of God and the Goddess. Of course God & the Goddess have never been married (as Baal & his consort Asherah have), have never even had a date, & hate each other so much that neither even believes in the other's existence. (If you deny this mutual hatred, you know little of the upper-stage mythological God/Goddess warfare or of its lower-stage historical counterpart."

This is quite a statement. It seems to be an educated person arrogantly using his education to browbeat folks that "don't know what they're talking about."

Let's break it down and get educated on the points we're unclear on. If I am wrong or inexact on any point, please correct me.

"Theomachy" -- war among the gods -- used primarily in the classical context of pantheons like in ancient Greece, where one god might actually make war upon another. One god doesn't reject another, deny its existence, but they might be fighting over something. The classical gods were all family, and kinslaying was the primal Greek sin, so they would not have sought to extinguish one another (merely dominate, perhaps.)

The "mutual rejection of god and goddess" seems to have roots more in the Fertile Crescent than in the Mediterranean. There folks were gung-ho for spirit vs. body wars.

As far as the god and goddess never being married. Where's the source for this stuff? Aspects of the goddess and god are being married and spawning each other constantly throughout world mythology.

"you know little of the upper-stage mythological God/Goddess warfare or of its lower-stage historical counterpart"

That is a very correct statement. Whatever does "upper level" and "lower level" mean? I've studied mythologies in some aspect from all over the world. In depth on the Greco-Roman, Norse, and Egyptian. Less on the Celts, indigenous Americans, African peoples, and assorted European folklores. I've never detected warfare of goddess vs. god in these stories. I'll keep a metaphorical eye out for such metaphors, though.

The point of discussion is to be clear and understandable to one's listeners/readers. Exact language is tempting, but often unintelligible, and don't assume the definition that you're using is THE definition. Telling someone that "they don't know what they're talking about" is just a cop-out, shutting down meaningful dialogue. Open up the discussion. Say what you mean, and back yourself up with primary sources. (Just not endless biblical quotes, please. I go numb. One or two that I can read, research, comprehend and perhaps rebut will be sufficient.)

To repeat what I said ten minutes after the *first* time your post went through, Mr. Eliot:

Try reading again, Reverend, being the short form.

If you hit 'post' once it does the job, btw.

A few remarks on recent comments, beginning with the last (with gratitude to all commenters:

SOMALITRADE: Shocking! Somebody's actually addressing the question, & making sense! Indeed, good sense.

TERRA: After claiming that you don't hate my God, you describe him as a "god in the sky with a book of judgement and a disapproving look." To me that doesn't sound like indifference or even tolerance. Historically, your Goddess (of nature) & my God (of nature & history) have been bad news to each other. Very bad news. Such bad news that it seems accurate to call it a relationship not of love or even of love/hate but only of hate, though each denies the other's existence. It's not gonna change. Get used to it. And try, as Jesus says, to "love those who persecute you." And, if you must, name me among your persecutors--though that is not my spirit.

NORRIE HOYT: You say, "The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion." Understandable. Undersandable, also, I hope, that we Christians are wary for the same reason. Pagans have slaughtered, burnt, even eaten thousands of us. We are afraid of what would happen to us if the U.S. becomes a Pagan Nation (as you fear the U.S.'s becoming a Christian Nation). (Of course you're not primitive Pagans but Neo-Pagans, meaning Pagans influenced by the Bible + the Enlightenment.) Thank God for the First Amendment!

I regret & denounce any violence used to resist or promote any religion. Jesus tried to persuade without adding violence; he'd rather die than use violence instead of or in addition to persuasion; & he did die.

PRIOR says "include everybody in the conversation." AMEN! That's the spirit in which I taught religion in the University of Hawaii, or they wouldn't have hired me. Not easy: (1) Some won't come to the table; (2) Some come, then leave when something irritates them; (3) Some who leave self-justifyingly curse the table!

ZAC: Right on! I welcome "questioning each other." But few are tough enough to take it, & instead accuse others of not understanding their religion. FACT: Like a marriage, a religion can't be understood from the outside. But also like a marriage, a religion can be described from the outside--else (again) why would any great university hire me to teach "The World's Great Religions"?

PAGANPLACE: Sorry you've been persecuted by "aggressive people" expressing hatred with my "words on their lips." You've been so hurt that you project (1) hate into my words & (2) me among the haters--& conclude that since I'm (thus) a hater, I'm a hypocrite in professing to love God/neighbor/enemy. (We know each other only by the feeble thing called language, & that only by logomachy [Greek, as you probably know, meaning "word-war"]; we might like each other, even be friends.)

You say I consider some Christians "Bible-haters." None! Tom Paine was a Bible-hater. Sam Harris almost makes a living off of being a Bible-hater. Bible-hate is widespread in the American secular community. In human relations, the most unfair thing--& so human!--is to dig up dirt about somebody you're determined to denigrate. Bible-haters treat the Bible not as what it is, a many-layered archive, but as a loaf of bread equally nonnutritious/poisonous wherever you bite. We Bible-lovers know how to read the Bible, & find it nutritious day-by-day.

PETER E. DERRY makes a false distinction between the Bible as "stories" & the Bible as "divinely inspired" ("divine inspiration"). We Bible-believers hold that the Bible is divinely inspired stories converging on the Story of Jesus, including his crucifixion & resurrection.

JPG insists the the "disasters" question exposes "a serious and disturbing contradiction in Christian theology." Why, then, would I "welcome" it (as I say six times in my entry)?

Contemplating any disaster (the whole experience, including its aftermaths), we Christians use all our sense-making resources, including our understandings (yes, from the Bible stories, & from our personal-&-church spiritual experiences) of the faith/reason, faith-doubt paradoxes & other complementarities; & we make THICK responses to thick problems, rather than THINning them down by rejecting God or reducing his power or knowledge or love. ("Contradiction" is a thin word limited to one mental mode, viz. logic.)

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DKON says "You can't believe in a personal god and in one that takes collective retribution [e.g., 9/11] at the same time." "The individual" is an abstraction from what a human being is, viz. a person-in-community. We monotheists see the one God as MULTI-TASKING: there isn't one god to love persons & another to maintain societal order. The point I'm making happens to be easier for a woman to understand than for a man; to put it in brain-structure terms, a man's corpus callosum is not as thick.

ANONYMOUS (an ex-Jew Pagan) says "I don't hate Christians. I just don't know a thing about it." My heart goes out to you. You have stepped in on a conversation that seems strange to you (an experience we've all had). The Judaism you stepped out of did not fight your conversion, & your family did not disown you (& of course you were not threatened with death, which could have occurred had you been stepping out of Islam): your transition was quite & smooth, leaving you with no negative feelings toward Judaism. Most Pagans have stepped out of Christianity, the religion which in America surrounds them & beckons them back--so of course they have higher resistance to, & greater temptation to negative feelings about, Christianity. (And as at present I'm the Christian in the faces of "On Faith" Pagan commenters, I expect what I'm getting.)

I hope you find these few brief notes helpful:

1 "Love/Hate" as I've been using them on this thread signal not interpersonal feelings but the battle & competition between religions which erupt from below (i.e., nature or Goddess religions) & religions which descend from above (i.e., history or God religions). Secondary cultic competition is among nature religions & among history religions (9/11 was a battle strategem in the competition among history religions--shocking the somnolent West into awareness of the war, perhaps World War III).

2 It's as sophomoric to believe we could get rid of WAR if we could get rid of religion as it is to believe that by getting rid of GOD our sense-making problems facing tragedies/"disasters"/evil would disappear. People fight over what's important to them; religion is important to almost everybody on earth; ergo, religion is often a factor in war (which therefore, though indirectly, is an honor to religion).

3 You ask a good question: "Why limit the Divine to just a book?" Islam comes first to mind, for its words are considered by Muslims to be literally God's words. In Judaism & Christianity, some people (let's call them BOOK-fundamentalists) seem to limit the Divine to a book; & in attacking the book, some atheists (e.g., Sam Harris) imagine they can dispense with God, who is the Bible's subject & center (let's call them REASON-fundamentalists). But most Jews & Christians see Scripture only as foundational to other evidentiary factors--personal-&-group spiritual experience, the mind of the religious community past (tradition) & present, reason, & nature as revealing God (e.g., in the New Testament's Romans, 1:20a).

3 As for what Christianity is, I hope you've found help in my recent "On Faith" entries--especially the last few paragraph's of this week's "In the beginning, GOD...."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:28 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:28 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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ZAC: Right on! I welcome "questioning each other." But few are tough enough to take it, & instead accuse others of not understanding their religion. FACT: Like a marriage, a religion can't be understood from the outside. But also like a marriage, a religion can be described from the outside--else (again) why would any great university hire me to teach "The World's Great Religions"?

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POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:28 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Try reading again, Reverend, being the short form.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:23 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | SEPTEMBER 8, 2007 12:17 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hi, again, Priver. I suggest a habit of filling in the name first. :)

It's funny how when Katrina struck New Orleans, the conservative media was all over *how the city deserved it cause it had looters in it.*

People start talking about 'Sodom,' and 'evil,' and, even Norrie's sympathetic 'arguments ad Hitlerum' as they're called.

This occurs to me:

You don't have to believe in or label 'absolute evil' to fight a Hitler or manage a disaster.

You *do* kind of have to believe in 'absolute evil' to justify hurting ...or neglecting ordinary people, though.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 8:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Sorry. Last post at 8:22 is mine again. One of these days I'll remember to sign these.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 8:27 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

SomaliTrade:

You said: "The question is what did you learn from that experience and will you change your daily routine based on that experience?"

If you even changed your life slightly after a big event (good or bad), then disasters did its purpose."

My question to you is why must it take a disaster or 'big event' to change a daily routine? Why do people take everything for granted until something happens and only THEN begin to really appreciate what/who we have in our lives?

Some of us figured out that it doesn't take a book, a disaster or a 'big event' to make a conscious effort everyday to make that happen.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 8:22 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

No, Joseph.

You start calling people 'evil,' well,

It never ends.

He just wants it simple.

That leads a lot of people to bad things.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 7:47 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The Rev. Mr. Elliott is, perhaps unconsciously and/or unintentionally, an evil being.

He should bathe in holy water as an exorcism.

POSTED BY: JOSEPH K. | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 7:27 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Or, Soma, we could stop listening to people who say it's a good idea to stir homophobia and false ideas that Christian majorities are 'persecuted by Bible-haters' in this society, so therefore you must elect who's said to be the 'Christy' candidates...

...who feed money to the greedy and 'Faithey' and say the science that predicts disasters like New Orleans and the social theory that says, "Yep, that'll piss some rich Saudi kids off, maybe you oughtn't *arm* them" ...is unBiblical and a threat to your marriages, oh-so-threatened sexualities and precious guns...

Yeah, just maybe if your lot hadn't been trying to associate anyone who said, "You know, you might kinda be wanting that Mississippi Delta back" with 'eco-terrorists,' or at least not put hacks in charge of FEMA and numerous other agencies...

Then, well.

Who knows what might *not have happened* for you to wonder where your mandatory God was.

Yaknow?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 7:14 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Perhaps we should ask this question first. Why we think of disasters as bad? I can only think of two reasons: (1) People get killed. (2) Other people lives become quite miserable (loss of jobs, houses, family members, meaning of life, ..etc). The next question, I imagine, is do people need disasters for (1) and (2) above to happen. The answer to this question, I imagine again, is no! So why we complain about (1) and (2) when they come with a bang (a.k.a disaster) but we take it for granted when (1) and (2) occur in our daily life as normal events?

That leaves one thing that we may look at. That thing is, may be God intentionally giving us signals that we all are vulnerable, and therefore should come to terms with His existence. It is a reminder that God is out there and He is either punishing or testing people. A person who is killed in an earthquake can be a good or a bad person. That judgement is left to God. The question is what did you learn from that experience and will you change your daily routine based on that experience?

If you even changed your life slightly after a big event (good or bad), then disasters did its purpose. Much like a devastating forest fire which takes the good and bad in its way but after a while, only the good remains and a new and a better forest is built out of the ashes!

POSTED BY: SOMALITRADE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 6:58 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

When I have people coming to me to learn about Wicca, the first thing I do is have them read What is Wicca and What it is Not...they then have to decide if they can take losing friends and family...can they withstand maybe being roused by the police or called nasty names by strangers. They have to think about those things and maybe having to hide a life time about their religion.

They then have 6 months to decide if it is the path for them.

I hear the Christians crying about persecution. I hear us being called hypocrites.

I have a student...a young woman who was raised Christian...she was sent to a Southern Baptist home for girls because her parents discovered she was Bi sexual as well as Wiccan. There this young girl gained 30 lbs, started taking drugs and started cutting herself. She had a deep hate for herself...and who created that hate? A religion that made her fearful and feel hate toward herself. When she came out of that place she was suicidal.

She is on her way to understanding she is a divine being, unique and purely lovable. She is back to being a funny, happy person with goals and hopes. She is being true to who she is and closer to being a whole person. I am blessed in knowing her.

Not all people are or can be Christian. We are not cookie cut outs...not clones. For those who are Christian and happy in that faith...great! wonderful! Superterrific! but not all are. I wasn't. My little student wasn't. That does not mean we are evil or hate the Christian view of god...We just see another face of god. We see and understand the universe in a different way. We honor life as sacred...all life.

When Rev. Elliot said he hated our Goddess...and then complained because we took it personal..well yes. I did. I would not disrespect his belief by saying I hate his god...Goddess is not the female clone of the Christian God, She is not a female god in the sky with a book of judgement and a disapproving look.. She is more. Hateing Her is hateing life. How can one do that? It was shocking. She is not seperate from the very breath we have.Or the Earth we stand on...or the spark of life in our own bodies.

But Rev. Elliot has a fixation on what he thinks we are,and what our Goddess is and is not willing to have an open mind to let in the light.

Paganplace, knows about the abuse Pagans recieve from those who "hate the sin" but love the sinner. So do I. It is hard to remain true to ourselves and our core values when we are pushed by so many outside influences. Not being something is not the same as hateing that thing. I am not a veggie but I like carrots. I am not a Buddhist but I respect that faith. I am not Christian but I love my parents, daughter and friends that are...and I respect the religion that has made them the loving, giving people they are.

I am Pagan...a Wiccan. A mom, a wife, a grannie, an aunt, a friend, a teacher and a student. I am an American....and I have every right to expect to be seen as fully American as any other. Rev. Elliot...

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 6:22 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I'll say one place you might confuse me and Terra, though, Reverend.

We've both had some pretty nasty things done to us by the 'pious.'

We do not deny that this may make us angry.

But we both refuse to apologize for *hate.*

You are not these nightmares you help create, Reverend. But you help create and enable them, nonetheless.

You keep trying to draw all these imaginary connections bewteen *not* speaking as you do about us, and many others, and all these 'evils' you fear will happen if you don't.

You support and rationalize and defend *real and present* evils ...in the name of your sense of 'greater good' and your well-nurtured persecution complex. While denying the effects of what you insist upon doing.

There are few things we Wiccans hasten to call 'evil,' but when we do, and long before we do, we look it right in the teeth.

You wish to speak of 'evil,' look at what you defend in the name of 'piety.' Your 'Christian Nation.'

I fail to see how what you think is a 'means to an end' is worse than what either your means or your ends are proven to bring.

We live in the *American* nation.

One that gives you the freedom to *forget* what it's like to *really* be hated, if you aren't careful.

No, we don't 'hate' you or your God, as you accuse.

As we bind, so are we bound.

This is an unbinding.

Don't tread on us.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 5:43 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, seriously.

blowing steam out nostrils.

That kind of stuff *does* add up, but even I don't indulge *hate,* never mind advocate it.

This crap filters down, Reverend. Just this week, well, wonder of wonders, a Wiccan hit the lottery, among three others: all of a sudden conservative commentators are in one breath saying, "Now the government's subsidizing Satanism," ...and in the next saying what a ripoff it is for everyone else to have to pay taxes on their millions of winnings.

I mean. Dag.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 5:09 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, one thing the 'poor, persecuted-by-"Bible-haters" Christians *just don't understand* is *this ain't a fucking metaphor.*

People do come after us. There are real hate crimes. They whine, 'Oh, the persecution' when Wal-Mart doesn't *force their religion on their employees,*

...Do. Not. Get. It.

Real violence and real nasty things are done to us by people who believe the lines of his that we 'hate God' and are 'satanic' and all the rest.

No one ever dragged his kids away, or took his home, or trashed his car or house, or killed his animal companions, or smacked him around in a basement, or told him not to look for health care on pain of arrest cause he was a Christian...

He was never raped or beaten or locked up or had to fend off zealots with swords and shotguns, hoping to the Gods it didn't escalate cause they'd rather prosecute your bloody corpse than admit Christians are led to violence by his ilk's talk of devil-worship and baby sacrifices.

For a more public example, no one ever made it take fourteen years to have a cross on the graves of Christian veterans.

It's possible that 'hate' has become such an abstraction to him that he's never been tortured by someone that 'hated the sin.'

This isn't medieval memory. It just sounds that way.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:56 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"DR. ELLIOTT,

"The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion."

Eh, I'm more touchy for being interrogated by Fundie cops in *this* life cause my pentacle slipped out of my blouse, after we'd been surrounded and barked at for having the temerity to be (ironically enough) dressed more traditionally than the regular folks around.

Surreal.

I still remember thinking, speaking of other lives, "Oh, Gods, I can't believe I'm being shaken down by the cops for *not* wearing jeans and a T-shirt."

:)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:48 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion."

You might say they have short fuses...>:-}

A (Punchy on a Friday Afternoon) Hermit

POSTED BY: A HERMIT | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:48 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"I must make two remarks (which here I address also to TERRA: you two get mixed up in my memory) about something that puzzles me, viz. the TOUCHINESS of you pagans as I've experienced you on "On Faith"..."

Quoted from Dr. Elliott's post above.

DR. ELLIOTT,

The Pagans are touchy because too many of them have been burnt to death by the adherents of your religion.

Zac: Thank you for your kind words.

I have learned much from this site. In that there are good people in all religions.

It's been my experience that a lot of those people I talk to who come to Paganism from Christian backgrounds can often point to very specific things said or done by their church that did not seem to hold up to what should be a universal ideal, namely to 'love everyone.' It's the classic 'do as I say, not as I do' scenario that never seems to go over well with parents and children, so why should it be any different with clergy and laity, regardless of denomination?

"Mankind's best bet in cooperating with different belief systems is not in accepting that all beliefs are created equal; that cheapens everyone, and actually reinforces illusionment. Hope is in tolerance, not acceptance."

The problem I have with this comes in the implications of the idea of tolerance. That someone only tolerates something or someone because of the consequences involved in doing outright harm to them. There is an implication of 'power over' there. My question becomes 'who gets to decide who is accepted and who is merely tolerated?' The promise, especially here in America is for freedom to practice any religion (or none at all) that we choose without worry of recrimination or arrest. When we pick and choose who will be 'accepted', we undermine the very things that we say we stand for.

As a Pagan I have learned some things about other belief systems that make me marvel at the similarities found in all of them. Which includes my own.

It wouldn't be right of Mr. Elliott or anyone else to believe as I do if they didn't feel it was right for them. I am not asking for him or anyone else to believe as I do. I will not even speak for all Pagans, I can only speak for myself. Oh, and learning more about what Christianity says does not threaten my belief system at all. Why assume that it would for Mr. Elliott? Is his faith that shaky?

What I am asking for is allow us to define ourselves if we choose to do so, and show that not only are there other points of view out there, but that they may actually want to have something to say about how best to include everyone in the conversation. We've been underground for so long that that's about all we know how to do. It's time to step up for all of us.

This forum is set up in a way that actually gives Pagans and people of all faiths a way to start a conversation, rather than just getting relegated to our own separate corners. I hope it's a beginning, at least, of much more cooperation on all sides. It provides us all that opportunity to let others know that we are here and may just have something to contribute.

It took a comparatively and remarkably small group of people to cause all the damage that has been done in the world today. Especially in the last six years. To fix it is going to take all of us.

Namaste.

I'd suggest, Zac, that you have a look at what we wrote under last week's column, in another discussion, then cross-reference that with what Rev. Elliot took away from it in further defending some nasty things he said, before judging it 'mere tit for tat,' which is actually kind of a standard tactic for religious conservatives when they get caught out on something.

He's still ...defending outrageous things he said, saying, 'You're too thin-skinned, when I say like a fact you 'hate,' but when I say I 'hate' it's OK, and, when the things I said out of what I self-proclaimedly 'mixed up in my head' turned out to be untrue, I'll say that's *your* fault without admitting my errors.'

He does throw slanderous and inflammatory things around, then acts all persecuted when called on it.

That's why 'we' are on his case right now.

If he's gonna portray himself as 'the big man' for even listening, then, he bloody well better hear.

"This is a great example of how we still don't, or won't, understand each other. Expecting Elliot to expand his perception of Paganism so that he understands it more is the reciprocal argument of him expecting Pagans to expand and open themselves to the righteousness and validity of Christianity so they can better understand it. The end result is an argument of lifestyle, no matter how it begins."

This is not true, because, frankly, he's the one who can only see things in terms of 'the righteousness and validity of Christianity,' ...we understand his terms perfectly well... But he's saying things about real people in public life based on false premises.

Without a thought for what people who believe as he teaches them to *about real people* *do to real people,* it seems.

We don't need him to believe as we do, and, frankly, if he professed to 'convert' right now, (say, to Wicca,) we'd probably tell him to go explore and come back when he's really ready and if he still thinks that's where he'd want to be.

"Basically what we have with that argument is what we've always had, "If you'd JUST see things my way..."

Actually, the only point I'm trying to bring home is that *we do see things our own way,* and that *this is not the way you are taught and teach that we do.*

If he's to talk to or about us, that's the least he can do.

But instead he's too busy characterizing us in terms of characters in his own book, and not who we are, (because *he* needs to believe his book has 'all the answers' in the form of what answers conservatives and only conservatives take from it.) ..which makes real communication impossible.

Not just with us, but with *anyone* he calls a 'Bible-hater,' ...which includes a lot more Christians than it does Pagans.

"Mankind's best bet in cooperating with different belief systems is not in accepting that all beliefs are created equal; that cheapens everyone,"

Why? How 'expensive' do you need belief to *be?*

That's as ridiculous an argument that gay people getting married 'cheapens' a straight marriage.

If marriage has anything to do with marginalizing other people, I submit that it's not *of the inherent value some propose to defend.*

I submit that in fact what some are trying to 'defend as sanctity' is in fact *defending the illusion that there *is* sanctity where they don't necessarily *honor* any, themselves.*

"and actually reinforces illusionment. Hope is in tolerance, not acceptance."

Here's where you're gonna have to bring some explication of *your* worldview, cause that appears to me to be... Well, that doesn't appear to make any sense whatsoever.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:19 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth what else do you need to know. The rest is faith and that is what really matters.

POSTED BY: DOMINIC | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:13 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"But the Bible doesn't even get through its first chapter before it says that the Creator was and is "very good" (tov meod, Genesis 1:31—said of what he'd made in his benevolence [good will])."

- Quoted from Dr. Elliott's essay, above.

COMPARE:

"Today is such a holiday. The whole nation joins in celebrating his 48th birthday. A flood of love, confidence, devotion, and thankfulness flows toward him.

"The mountains of letters and telegrams, the countless gifts that even today, and more so tomorrow, will pour into the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, give evidence of this love.

"They all carry the same wish, whether spoken or unspoken. One might almost say it is the prayer of the nation to the Almighty:

"May the Führer remain with us in strength, health, and power for many years as the flag bearer of the people, as the first among the millions of workers, soldiers, farmers and citizens, as the friend and protector of the youth, the patron of the arts, the supporter of culture and science, the architect of the united new nation!"

- Quoted from Dr. Joseph Goebbels' address on the occasion of Adolph Hitler's 48th birthday (1937).

It's easy to love and praise - hard to get things right.

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:09 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 4:09 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

So far, only Priver's comments on the topic have really impressed me. I'll be the first (or second, rather) to admit that the syntax in the Elliot's writing is hard to follow. However, it seems that the only element of the editorial people carried with them is Elliott's perception of Paganism. The result was a breakdown of ideas, in my opinion, to "No YOU have it wrong". Save Priver's remarks, anyways.

One thing Priver did say that I disagreed with was that of Elliot needing to more or less expand his perception of Paganism, instead of holding onto old ideas that have been the catalyst in declining numbers of religious followers.

This is a great example of how we still don't, or won't, understand each other. Expecting Elliot to expand his perception of Paganism so that he understands it more is the reciprocal argument of him expecting Pagans to expand and open themselves to the righteousness and validity of Christianity so they can better understand it. The end result is an argument of lifestyle, no matter how it begins.

Basically what we have with that argument is what we've always had, "If you'd JUST see things my way..."

Mankind's best bet in cooperating with different belief systems is not in accepting that all beliefs are created equal; that cheapens everyone, and actually reinforces illusionment. Hope is in tolerance, not acceptance.

That's what I carried Elliot's editorial, as difficult at times as it was for me to read it. That it's WELCOME to question each other.

Questioning is great. But those who slam Elliot and denounce him as yet another ill-informed and narrow-minded Christian theologian are only continuing the age-old legacy blocking tolerance rather than facilitating it. Disagree, question. There is a very thin line between disagreeing and outright undercutting a different belief, which may be why only Priver got it right.

Props again to Priver's post; I really enjoyed it.

POSTED BY: ZAC | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 3:25 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Our panelist writes: "The fundamentalist mind demands simple answers to complex questions & is incapable of understanding an answer whose size is appropriate to the question if the question is complex."

Is your desire for a simple answer to all of life's tough questions (why we are here, what is the point, where did we come from, etc.) why you chose to be a Christian?

POSTED BY: TJ | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 2:47 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Elliott:

How sure are you about that? "WELCOME, because—in our secular culture of God-repression—God is the subject of the sentence expected in answer to the question—as God is the subject of the Bible's first sentence and, indeed, the subject of the Bible."

So we can assume God lives in fire. <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> is a false interpretation of the Bible. Other than the use of the word God is there any other evidence you have to say that was really God in the ball of fire.

If I hear a voice coming from the sky can I assume it's God's voice? Would Devil lie and say He's God? Would a minister lie and say he believes in God when he really doesn't, just in it for other reasons? How can we tell?

POSTED BY: BGONE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 2:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

On this, though:

" Peter E Derry:

" Religion was invented for the express purpose of assuaging our concerns about the ultimate fate - death and extinction."

Personally, I think certain *forms* of religion were invented in a way that *creates, magnifies, *sells,* and then *directs* these 'concerns about' (and definitions *of*) "Ultimate Fate" both *as* such and as about 'death and extinction.'

They're quite used to and fond of the "God Vs Atheism" 'argument,' cause it's usually *all on their terms, anyway.*

We're spiritual creatures, whether that squares with what we call reason or not. Setting "faith" in terms of fear and control *vs* reason means that they'll have followers enough, and a lot of atheists to boldly tell the flock how scary it is outside the sheep pen, that they can seem to 'refute' with tired old arguments that still play into the same old assumption: "If any God exists, then it must be a Divine Ruler we just so happen to speak for."

There's more to spiritual life than obeying something out of fear of 'death and extinction.'

Though some may tell you different.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 12:57 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anyway, Reverend, I thought we'd been making some progress, here, let's see if we can get a little back on track:

"Thank you for saying "there's better" in me & you've "seen" it. Better than what? In much of what you've said of me, I can't recognize myself."

I'd say, better than accusing others of 'hate' and 'hypocrisy' while defending your own.

If you can't recognize yourself in the image the mirror-of-other-people shows... What are you expressing?

From your rationalizations of your often-incendiary language toward others, not just Pagans, but anyone who doesn't believe as you... including other Christians, I suggest that wanting to turn around and say, "I'm not saying hateful things, I'm really a nice guy" may mean you're not seeing your actions and attitudes clearly in the first place.

"As I'm a libertarian, your notion that I might be interested in "taking away" your "birthright" freedoms is a wild miss, a shocking misperception--revealing, I think, a will to misunderstand me, atop your will to disbelieve my (Christian) religion."

'Libertarian' can mean a lot of things: often it's a mere excuse to say you don't believe in fairness and equality when it's inconvenient. Libertarians are often egoistic, social-Darwinist, unchecked-corporate-capitalism 'Trust-busters should-be-shot' types, not committed to individual liberties unless it's *their own* in question.

Like when you tried to say that being of a 'majority' religion, you should have your own way, and any Christians who disagree with you are 'Bible-haters.'

"E.g., you say this of me: "You say 'God is love' in one breath, and in the next say he and you 'hate us'." I haven't said God hates pagans, & I haven't said I hate pagans--& I have said we both love you! God doesn't hate you, & forbids my hating you (or anybody: "Love your enemies," said Jesus)."

Funny how we're not feeling the love. We're feeling you *calling* how you treat your self-perceived 'enemies' '...love.' Saying, 'This slander must be 'love' cause I'm Christian.'

"On this blogsite, I've used "HATE" only in two connections:"

You left one out. Calling other people "haters," apparently not with the idea that's such an innocuous thing when you project the idea that *others* "hate."

Come *on,* surely you can't be so naive as to think all this calling people "God-haters" is some theological point you can redefine (while continuing to assert) when you're called on it?

You rationalize the hate-speech *you* spread, saying, "Other people are the haters, not me, even if I'm the one that keeps bringing it up and justifying it!"

Your redefinitions only serve to show you *don't* know what "hate" *is.* What it's like to be *subject* to hate.

Ask a queer person, or a Pagan.

We know what it is, cause we see it in the eyes of aggressive people with your words on their lips.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 12:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

again it all comes down to a single convergent point of "light" or "enlightenment". FAITH to you believe it or not.

POSTED BY: MICHAEL | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 12:07 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The Bible was composed by "story tellers". Divine inspiration - poppycock. Religion was invented for the express purpose of assuaging our concerns about the ultimate fate - death and extinction. And the ingrained teaching that somehow God is in charge relieves mankind from facing up to and challenging the evil that man does, to their fellow man and to the environment. Wake up! It's not about abortion or prayer

in our schools; it's about rampant genocide, an imperial presidency, and the ever present greed for money, status and luxury (for me, but not for you).

POSTED BY: PETER E DERRY | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 12:05 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Neat way of avoiding the question - typical of a religious man to use some misdirection and throw quotes around rather than actually addressing a serious and disturbing contradiction in Christian theology.

POSTED BY: JGP | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 11:59 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Well, Reverend, let's look at this:

"3 Defensively, you read me as though you were clearing a mine-field lest some word of mine--e.g., "unAmerican" (in context, "nonAmerican")--explode in your faith (I have the feeling that you read me until a word explodes on you--then stop reading & exposit the explosion.)"

Actually, the 'minefield' metaphor can work in some ways, ...in that among things you characterize as 'loving' are in fact a lot of words that are used to slander and harm us...

Casual assumptions we're Satanic, for instance, which when they get down to soundbytes and rationalizations, dehumanize.

Even arrogant presumptions that your religion is that violently-destructive to 'my faith.' What it *is* destructive toward, too often, is the very interfaith understanding this board is supposed to be about.

These statements are destructive toward civility, and often used to justify violence and hate crimes.

No, you don't have that kind of 'spiritual minefield' power, that you speak of.
As if we're not *used* to talk like yours..

Many of your assumptions are just *wrong*, and just because you say hateful things are really 'loving' doesn't mean they *are*.

They come around to hurt real people in real ways.

"A partial explation: One of you said that most pagans are ex-Christians. You want to make the negative case for your abandonment of Christianity & the positive case for your present commitment, & you resent hearing arguments for your former religion, of which I am a defender & promoter."

Actually, we're just tired of your religion using us for 'cartoon bad guys' in trying to 'defend and promote' *your* view of your religion.

Which isn't so tolerant a one as you claim, really.

You've argued for our exclusion from government, our marginalization in the media, our UnAmericanness, to the point of claiming that our presence in the military was undermining missions, and tried to label us with all manner of projected ideas that maybe make *you* comfy in your own beliefs and politics, but which intend to come at the expense of others you don't understand.

Seems you may just have given up on *trying* to understand, by taking things pretty ad hominem, even if you can't tell two of us apart. :)

Frankly, again, you can't seem to see any better motives in any of us, ...trying to reduce us to people with an unthinking grudge, still in terms of your own religion rather than as people with our own.

You say *this* now *after* really, calling us 'hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites,' ...and however 'narrow the sense was,' this was for apparently not living up to standards that we don't hold and never spoke. Especially since you began by saying you thought that we were especially *sensitive* to hypocrisy.

Now you say, 'Oh, stupid Pagans, I didn't mean, 'Hypocrite,' I meant it... Some other way Like we ever see *that* capitalised, or the word used 'lightly.'

So you go ahead and level unfounded (and falsified) accusations of it at us, which you still defend, now as us being 'touchy,' rather than as you having simply *been wrong again*.

I think the one who's afraid of things shaking their faith is *you*, sir. Since you defend so desperately, your lack of understanding and unwillingness to understand.

I've seen better in *Christians*, not you personally, I'm afraid. You still casually-slander us and then call it 'love.'

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 11:47 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I have yet to see a good reason to assume that God really cares about all individuals. The various fundamentalists such as the Graham's, Robertson and the rest have denied that God cares about individuals when they claim that he took vengeance on America on 9/11 by killing over 3,000 innocent people. You can't believe in a personal god and in one that takes collective retribution at the same time.

POSTED BY: DKM | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 11:32 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Oops. Forgot to put my name in. :)

POSTED BY: PRIVER | SEPTEMBER 7, 2007 1:17 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I find it interesting that this panelist doesn't even bother to find out 'what' we're all about, and then presumes to tell us what our 'will' is. There is no 'will to disbelieve' Christianity, in my case, anyway. I can't speak for anyone else. I was raised Jewish. (and am living proof, along with Starhawk herself, that not every Pagan came from some form of Christianity). I don't hate Christianity, I just don't know a thing about it.

It makes no 'sense' to use the word 'hate' when referring to one's former belief system. I found Paganism because, well, it found me. I realized I'd been a Pagan all my life and only recently found a name for it. I don't hate Judaism. I consider it a shell of the seed of the other. It gave me nourishment to a point- and then Paganism grew and bloomed in such beautifully unexpected ways that would never have happened otherwise. Why must something that one has no knowledge of, be labeled as 'hate', even 'metaphorically'? Doing so causes division, and an 'us vs. them' mentality that is causing much of the conflict we see in the world today.

To be honest, I never had to deal with the whole question of 'Jesus' and in that sense have not had to deal with the whole 'hell' concept (although I wasn't immune from hearing it from certain types of people as a Jew either) from clergy. In that sense, I am immensely grateful for happening to be born Jewish. My kids will know their roots one day. It is a link to my family.

You use a book that Pagans do not. Ours is our own 'experienced' religion.

on this: "That you take personal my impersonal remarks about paganism. When I say I love the Heaven Father (God) & hate the Earth Mother (Goddess), you read it as though I'd said I hate you!"

Interesting, then, that you do the exact same thing when we say 'Your religion isn't for me'. Automatically assuming that we somehow 'hate' Christianity. Hypocrisy, anyone? I doubt very much that people would agree with you on this point, especially given how much we're seen as 'devil worshippers'. Since we don't believe he exists either, does that mean we 'hate' Lucifer too? and could you please tell that to those people who blame us for everything from 9/11 to Harry Potter?

If you'd bothered to ask, we might have told you that since we generally believe that we (everything that resides here on Earth itself) are all a part of Mother Earth, that She and we, in essence all life, are inextricably intertwined, then yes, you are saying that by hating the Goddess, you do, in fact, 'hate' us. We are saying that such definitions are unnecessary, and do, in fact cause harm. Often in the name of 'loving your enemies'.

What you're calling 'mutual hatred' is the difference between a book of mythology and a 'revealed' religion. What about the times where it all overlaps? The stories were around long enough for someone to decide 'Hey, what if I wrote this down?' My question is: Why limit the Divine to just a book?

We are not 'competing' with anyone, just alarmed like many of the atheists are at such attempts to call some people 'nonAmerican' and pass laws to such an effect. Paganism just 'is' and will NEVER try to proselytize, because it is usually taught that there are many paths that lead to the same destination. Nobody has the one 'TRUE' way. But so many families are destroyed by people who believe really 'outdated' information and jump to conclusions without taking into account that people can and do think for themselves all the time without running their life off the rails.

and this: "In a very narrow contextual sense, I called you two hypocrites--but one or both of you took me to mean that I'd slandered you by, as it were, pinning a big "H" on you!"

Never bothered to say 'how does your belief system work', just decided to jump into name calling and petty accusations. We are people, Reverend, who will not be 'told' what 'we' believe. We are interested in DIALOGUE, not 'negative case for your abandonment of Christianity & the positive case for your present commitment'. You define religion as a competition. Why cannot it be the exchange of ideas? It doesn't have to be 'either/or.' It can be 'and'.

on that though, it does occur to me that maybe an attempt to understand why Paganism is growing so fast could be a catalyst for making congregations more inclined to change things enough to keep members around, because whatever is happening now- doesn't seem to be working, if the numbers are any indication.

There are plenty of reasons for such 'testiness' on the part of Pagans. We are rather used to having others try to 'tell' us what we mean, often by methods that would make your stomach turn.

Religions don't have to be 'enemies'. We don't have time for that anymore, especially now that we've seen the damage that thinking like that can do. There's too much WORK to be done. It's time to DO something.

How about it?

As usual, Willis Elliott's comments are as illuminating as they are pungent. I think that the Christian has certain paradigms from the Bible that illumine certain tragic events. E.g., ". . . we proclaim Christ crucified" means that the proclaimers see meaning and mercy in other "crucifying" events as well. E.g., when innocent Iraqi are killed, we see dimly and say that "Christ is crucified again and again and for our sake.

PAGANPLACE from "Bible guy"

Thank you for saying "there's better" in me & you've "seen" it. Better than what? In much of what you've said of me, I can't recognize myself.

As I'm a libertarian, your notion that I might be interested in "taking away" your "birthright" freedoms is a wild miss, a shocking misperception--revealing, I think, a will to misunderstand me, atop your will to disbelieve my (Christian) religion.

E.g., you say this of me: "You say 'God is love' in one breath, and in the next say he and you 'hate us'." I haven't said God hates pagans, & I haven't said I hate pagans--& I have said we both love you! God doesn't hate you, & forbids my hating you (or anybody: "Love your enemies," said Jesus).

On this blogsite, I've used "HATE" only in two connections:

1 Metaphorically, for the decisive feeling, in any convert from one religion (or manner of life) to another, of rejecting the former ("love," in this context, meaning passionate devotion to the new).

2 Mythologically, of theomachy as rejection of one deity by another, especially the mutual rejection of God and the Goddess. Of course God & the Goddess have never been married (as Baal & his consort Asherah have), have never even had a date, & hate each other so much that neither even believes in the other's existence. (If you deny this mutual hatred, you know little of the upper-stage mythological God/Goddess warfare or of its lower-stage historical counterpart. A few days ago on this blog, a pagan put it to me in words that made me smile: "Your god walks on water, my God is water.")

+++

I must make two remarks (which here I address also to TERRA: you two get mixed up in my memory) about something that puzzles me, viz. the TOUCHINESS of you pagans as I've experienced you on "On Faith":

1 That you take personal my impersonal remarks about paganism. When I say I love the Heaven Father (God) & hate the Earth Mother (Goddess), you read it as though I'd said I hate you! Religions compete & in that sense are enemies, so paganism is an enemy of my religion. But PP & TG are not enemies of mine unless they chose to consider themselves so, & I certainly have no personal animosity toward either of you.

2 In a very narrow contextual sense, I called you two hypocrites--but one or both of you took me to mean that I'd slandered you by, as it were, pinning a big "H" on you!

3 Defensively, you read me as though you were clearing a mine-field lest some word of mine--e.g., "unAmerican" (in context, "nonAmerican")--explode in your faith (I have the feeling that you read me until a word explodes on you--then stop reading & exposit the explosion.)

A partial explation: One of you said that most pagans are ex-Christians. You want to make the negative case for your abandonment of Christianity & the positive case for your present commitment, & you resent hearing arguments for your former religion, of which I am a defender & promoter.

On this, I hope, we can agree: Let's keep reading one another!

ROBERT

The fundamentalist mind demands simple answers to complex questions & is incapable of understanding an answer whose size is appropriate to the question if the question is complex.

There are many kinds of fundamentalism. I don't know enough about you to know your kind.

Wow! Rarely have I seen so much press devoted to a non-answer.

Next time, simply admit you can't answer the question and move on.

POSTED BY: ROBERT | SEPTEMBER 6, 2007 11:07 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Oh, though, Reverend: on this:

"At the heart of the Story is the humble-joyful conviction that no matter how our heads try to puzzle out the mysteries of good and evil, including "disasters," God Almighty (all-powerful) in his mercy, in these very disasters, and despite our rebellions from reality, suffers with us and even for us. So (and here comes the two-word signal of the Story, in the four words with which verse 23 begins), "we proclaim Christ crucified.""

Pssst!

It's *not about buying things with suffering.*

It's about where you stand and what you do.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 6:34 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

And, hey, Reverend, we left you some stuff on last week's thread, just if you're still wondering how we 'tick.' :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 6:30 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Funny how this turns around to trying to justify animus toward non-Christians... Again.

"Bible-haters," he blames, apparently for the question even coming up, while affording no solutions.

What if the reason it's a 'thorny question' is in fact because that's what certain forms of belief *set up,* and then expect people to struggle with it like it's a problem of the universe or themselves if it doesn't mean they just believe an authority like himself, offering no explanation but 'Circle the wagons and say "Don't look at the 'Godly' people we told you to unquestionably-support, who set these things up, just know, 'Secularists hate us!' Look over there!"

Not very productive.

Just like saying there's an inherent paradox to the fact one may observe light as either a particle or wave, depending how you look.

Some paradoxes, I'm sure some theologians will agree, are *true,*Maybe looking like a big paradox and mystery till you figure, 'At the velocity C, it isn't.'

:)

Like Zeno's Paradox, seemingly irreducible for thousands of years, ...the idea is it's logically-impossible for moving things to get anywhere because at any moment it must traverse a fraction of the distance.

Irreducible a long time, until someone plugged in, "There are no moments."

Sometimes, "Laws of Physics" can mess us up cause they're ill-labeled in the terms of a universal architect.

We rational critters say 'Laws,' but we're talking about... Shapes. Force and form.

Pagans are often challenged, "How can you worship a Nature-Goddess when Nature is so cruel."

Cruelty implies judgement and laws... Life is a different matter.

Nature's not *cruel.* Nature is *home.* It's not entirely *safe,* but that kind of world isn't what we're really "made" for, either.

We want safer, we have to *be* safer.

That means paying attention.

Not greeting challenges with helplessness and cries of, "Why, why?" But with what we *do* have.

And that ain't bad.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 6:07 PM
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"Of course you could make the problem go away by denying (1) God's existence, or (2) his power, or (3) his goodness."

Seems to me the problem of unnecessary suffering and evil makes one of those possibilities inevitably true. If there is a God, and that God is aware of unnecessary suffering and does nothing about it than that God is either limited in its power, indifferent to the point of being immoral, or nonexistent.

Suffering and natural disasters are explicable in the context of a natural Universe, or even in a Deistic Universe wherein God has ceased operating or in a Universe overseen by a sadistic demon, but not in a Universe ruled by a merciful, loving and all powerful deity.

Regards

A Hermit

POSTED BY: A HERMIT | SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 5:10 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Wow! Another horribly tortured and unreadable column by the minister. It's a syntactic nightmare!

I get the distinct feeling that Rev Willis writes his columns in a foreign language and then dumps them into a bargain counter translation program to generate an English version to post at this blog.

Are there no editors available?

POSTED BY: MR MARK | SEPTEMBER 5, 2007 5:05 PM
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