

A Letter to a Pagan

by Dr. Ernest Steadman

We received an e-mail from the form submit system on this web site, from a person that follows a Pagan path and the following reply was submitted in reply. We have posted it here to answer questions that Pagans and Christians alike might have after viewing our website and feeling confused by what some might consider unlikely. Out of respect to the reader we have withheld their name and e-mail address.

The original e-mail follows first, then the reply which was submitted to the reader.

Original message:

The Church Of Interfaith Christians - I came here to become an Ordained Minister but the wording The Church Of Interfaith Christians throws me for a loop!

I am Pagan and while it's true you say you welcome my kind, the fact is we are not Christians. The use of the word itself is all wrong for us therefore how can we be welcomed?

My Reply:

As I read your e-mail, I see two questions – (1) you are seeking ordination and (2) you question how we can call ourselves Christians and still welcome those who follow a Pagan path. Let's first look at the second question.

You wrote;

"I am Pagan and while it's true you say you welcome my kind, the fact is we are not Christians. The use of the word itself is all wrong for us therefore how can we be welcomed?"

In reading this statement, it appears to me that you are basing your question upon three suppositions, or preconceived notions that you (and others) take for granted. Let us start at the end and work our way backwards to explore these preconceptions and hopefully arrive at a mutual understanding.

".... therefore how can we be welcomed?"

I am going to assume that the nature of this question lies in the old paradigm of Christianity in that Christians have traditionally tried to forcibly convert Pagans and failing to do so, literally condemned Pagans to death and more recently to at least an eternity of hell fire and suffering eternally in a figurative sense. This old paradigm is starting to change. I.E. "There Is Something New In Christianity."

Many Christians believe the church needs to change – perhaps return to that which existed in the faith before 1700 years of organizational enforced dominion. The author, Brian McLaren in *Generous Orthodoxy* writes:

"Often I don't think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian, were he physically here today. ... Generally, I don't think Christians would like Jesus if he showed up today as he did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I think we'd call him a heretic and plot to kill him, too."

A number of Christians, a number that is growing exponentially, perceive the Christian faith as having

turned away from the core teachings of Christ and adopted beliefs, doctrines, and principles not found in the Bible but rather in the hearts of mankind. Principles, beliefs, and doctrines that have little or nothing to do with Christ's teachings or even with spiritual growth of the individual but rather with the need for the organization or denomination to impose its dominion upon the individual and society.

We of the Church Of Interfaith Christians (COIC), see this imposing of organizational dominion over the individual as a denial of the right of the individual to seek out the true nature of the divine, to seek communion with the divine, to heed the call, or as we say "silence the Holy Spirit."

If we are to believe in the concept of a singular omnipotent divine entity that created the universe and we can assume that this entity also was the inspiration or the creator of all religions, but man in his lack of understanding, historically has referred to this commonality through many names or even many individual aspects or qualities of the same singular entity, then why can't we as a people celebrate this commonality rather than to focus upon differences in semantics and discernment? That is why we of the COIC state in our by-line, "One God --- Many Names."

While I might be more comfortable in referring to the divine as "God" in a masculine sense and you might be more comfortable in referring to the divine in a feminine sense such as "Goddess" or perhaps we both might see a duality in the divine, in our opinion, boils down to a sense of individual discernment, or a process of relying upon the spirit, that small inner voice to guide each of us in our decisions regarding spirituality. Therefore the concept of "to thine own heart be true" or allowing the "spirit" to guide us in all things becomes a de facto doctrine of the COIC although we officially do not seek to establish any doctrine.

A close examination of the synoptic gospels will not reveal Christ telling Pagans to become Christians but rather only asking Pagan and Jew alike to believe in his teachings and to put them into practice. In fact he often ministered to Pagans and found some to have more faith than his own people. In the same respect I have often been told by other Christian ministers that Pagans they have known were "better" Christians than most who profess to be born again Christians.

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the Roman Catholic Church issued this statement, "God uses other Christian churches and non-Christian religions in offering salvation to all humankind; the Catholic Church is not the only means of salvation."

With all this said, how can we (the COIC) not welcome Pagans or those that practice any other positive path?

"..... The use of the word itself is all wrong for us....."

The use of the word Christian, being appropriate depends upon your spiritual discernment and understanding. For example, many inside the COIC as well as outside of the same, who are a part of this emerging Christianity, left the faith and traveled many paths, including Paganism. Upon realizing that the mis- interpretation of the bible and the false teachings of mankind were misleading and that one could be a Christian without the trappings that had caused them to leave the church in the first place, (they) subsequently returned to the church via groups such as the COIC. Some of these now practice a Christian faith that more closely resembles what Christ originally taught, but devoid of the convoluted doctrines of man, while others practice a "blended" Path.

If you wish to proceed with ordination and can "somehow involve" the teachings of Christ in your ministry, then we have no problem and look forward to welcoming you as a member of our ordained clergy. However if you can't in good faith involve Christ in your path, you should reconsider your interest in ordination, but remember you are still welcome to become a part of our e-mail discussion group, where you can join in the fun and fellowship without being condemned or otherwise suffer through the rantings of proselytizing Christians.

“.....the fact is we are not Christian.”

Whether or not you are a Christian is a matter of your discernment, as noted some Pagans are better followers of Christ than most Christians. If you practice a lifestyle that is parallel to that inculcated by the “true” teachings of Christ, in some respects are you not a Christian in a broad sense of the word?

Isn't Love, in the sense of brotherly love, an unconditional love for the divine as well as our fellow man the goal that we as Christians and Pagans should aspire too. Can we not put aside our differences and together worship the divine and its multitudes of creations and mysteries as we seek to learn to love each other as we love ourselves?

With all this said, we do welcome you, and stand ready to answer any further questions that you might have. But the best piece of advice I can give you is; “To thine own heart, be true.”