

witches & pagans

PATRICK McCOLLUM'S

crusade for Pagan civil rights has taken him around the world. Now his pursuit of justice for Wiccan inmates may take him to all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

LAW & CHAOS

Kerr Cuhulain and the Way of the Pagan Warrior
Unlock the Power of Chaos Magick • My Thelema
Wandering Witch Crosses the Delaware • Damh the Bard

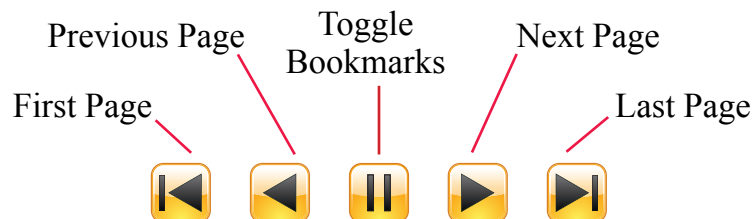


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If one of us are chained, none of us are free.¹

Our treatment of Pagan prisoners and ex-cons is a litmus test of a sustainable Pagan culture.

This was supposed to have been the “Law & Chaos” issue of *Witches & Pagans* but it turned out more like the “Law & Order” issue. I always imagined that — like the dual-themed *PanGaia* #37 (“Good and Evil”) which turned out to simply be the “Evil” issue — that one side of this topic would overwhelm the other, but I never imagined that the forces of Law would prevail.

Once upon a Full Moon, not so very long ago, Paganism² (at least on the West Coast) was all about “running nekkid through the woo-ids/drinking fermented fluids,”³ but everywhere I look today I see attempts to bring order to that juicy-but-hard-to-sustain chaotic culture. Whatever happened to Hippy-Dippy Paganism?

The simple answer is that our movement is in the throes of massive cultural realignment. To explain further, I’m going to use a bit of “value mode theory” a model based on the work of psychologist Abraham Maslow.⁴

According to this system, every new movement begins with the Prospectors, whom I prefer to call **Visionaries**. Visionaries enjoy “boldly going where no one has gone before” and feel no sense of loyalty to systems they regard as outdated (*cf* Christianity, capitalism, and monogamy). Visionaries “think big,” act like the normal rules don’t apply to them, and leave personal and organizational chaos in their wakes. However, if a Visionary is successful, everyone will know his/her name. Recognize any Pagan trad founders?

Pioneers (whom I call **Romantics**) make up the Second Wave. They prefer to make incremental advances into new territory while putting down roots and building community. Romantics prefer situational ethics to pre-defined rules, and will often deny any negativity in their chosen group, preferring to “see the good in everyone.” In Pagan circles White-Light Witches, inter-faith activists, and sparkly Faeries exemplify this group.

Settlers (whom I term **Survivors**) are the last to arrive on the New Frontier. Their values center on consolidating tribal (and/or familial) identity and on preserving/resurrecting the ways of the past. Survivors often have the attitude that “the best defense is a good offense,” prefer hierarchial leadership (or, conversely pure Randian individualism), and gravitate towards values like “simplicity” and “tradition.” Sound like any Heathens/ Reconstructionists you know?

Maslow believed that Visionaries were the (literal) peak achievement of humanity (after all, he was one) but I contend that all three perspectives are necessary to a healthy community. (Spoken like a true Romantic.)

Once one starts using the values-group matrix, examples pop up everywhere, but nowhere is the relevance of this model more obvious than in the case of how to treat incarcerated (or ex-con) Pagans. In issue #22, Ashleen O’Gaea wrote:

It is high time we recognize that no one is perfect, and open at least some of our meetings, festivals, and our hearts to sincere ex-prisoner seekers who wish to be part of our communities.

Her comments prompted a flood of letters, the most notable of which was a humdinger by the appropriately named “Eric Tyrsson.” It read (in part):

I was reading my copy of Witches & Pagans and one of the articles really got under my skin. Ashleen O’Gaea chastised people that don’t follow her view about coddling the useless societal waste that ends up in our various prison systems. . . . As far as I am concerned the rapists and child molesters should be rounded up and executed [emphasis added] because they don’t deserve to live on our planet. These (criminals) are useless pimples on the back side of our society, they deserve our contempt, not our compassion.

My initial reaction to this letter was outrage, but eventually I realized that it represented a classic case of conflicting values between a Survivor and a Romantic. Mr. Tyrsson (whose name references the unyielding Æsir god of law) values security and family above all else; his full letter (which I’ll be happy to send to anyone who asks at editor2@bbimedia.com) gives his concern for the safety of his wife as the primary reason for his animosity towards ex-cons. Ms. O’Gaea, on the other hand, is motivated by her desire to nurture community among all Pagans, even those deemed outcasts by society.

Why is this issue coming to a boil now? Two words: Culture War. North American Paganism has long been dominated by anarchic Visionaries and liberal-leaning Romantics, but after decades of anti-defamation work (as well as often-unintentional Pagan evangelism through pop culture) we are now at least marginally “mainstream.” As a result, even cultural conservatives know who we are now, and an unprecedented number of Survivor seekers are arriving in our (virtual and in-person) communities. They soon encounter “standard-brand” Paganism’s unspoken norms such as eclecticism and radical tolerance, values which directly conflict with their emphasis on tradition and tribe. Look around and you’ll see these forces colliding in the “Paganism vs. polytheism” debates³ as well as arguments over the value of unverifiable personal gnosis (UPG) vs. received tradition.⁴

But what does this have to do with Pagan prisoners? I’m almost there, but first, a bit of history:

In the first decades of the rebirth of Paganism, the movement was by-invitation-only (often literally). The earliest groups were dominated by white men; later, white middle-class women created the Goddess movement, but LGBT Pagans, Pagans-of-Color, working-class people, and non-Wiccans in general were largely ignored. Pagan prisoners weren’t even on the radar.


During the Second Wave, Pagan civil rights campaigns, based on Romantic values of tolerance and multiculturalism, became popular. Spearheaded by courageous activists such as Rev. Patrick McCollum (whose work is detailed in this issue), such campaigns began by protecting the rights of “mainstream” Pagans, but eventually even the incarcerated were included. Such battles are gradually turning the tide towards equal protection under the law for all religious minorities.

But relying solely on the “civil rights” argument in the case of incarcerated Pagans doesn’t wash with the rising number of Survivor adherents whose values swing in an entirely different direction. Lawful Pagans (such as crusading knight and ex-cop Kerr Cuhulain, profiled in this issue) have the perfect right to ask: why we should spend our meager resources ministering to those who have been found wanting in a court of law?

To that question I respond simply, “incarcerated Pagans won’t be locked up forever.” It is an unimpeachable fact that with the exception of the true “lifer” (and even such a sentence can be commuted due to a variety of factors) every single incarcerated Pagan is going to rejoin society sooner or later. Providing spiritual support to a prisoner (or ex-con) who has found the gods/God/dess is, to my mind, an investment in a better Pagan culture. Of course there are losers (but those are hardly confined to the ranks of the incarcerated!) and the poseurs, but honestly, if one wanted to fake a conversion, wouldn’t it be easier to simply “find Jesus” and collect the far richer support available to culturally-dominant Christians?

I have one more argument in favor of a vigorous prisoner/ex-con ministry: do we or don’t we believe that we possess superior forms of spirituality? Let me clarify: do we believe that our paths are superior, *at a minimum*, to the forces of cultural nihilism, anomie, and materialism that have pretty much bulldozed the planet? If we do, then why in the name of the Mother wouldn’t we want *more* professing Pagans, Heathens, and polytheists — and therefore *less* Lost Souls — roaming the planet?

Of course, there's a vast difference between compassion and trust; simple prudence dictates that each person, family, or group should put in place whatever barriers to entry (and ways to prove a seeker's worthiness) it deems appropriate. Blacklisting individuals who pose genuine threats or have consciously abrogated the norms of a group is a legitimate and necessary method of nurturing genuine community. But to scapegoat an entire category of people based on the legal verdict of an avowedly non-Pagan culture seems both mean-spirited and incredibly short-sighted.

After all, it wasn't that long ago that simply *being* Pagan was illegal; in some places around the world, it still is. Do we really want to let the government (who, after all, controls the courts and prison systems) to be the ultimate arbiter of who can — and cannot — join our ranks? ANNE NEWKIRK NIVEN. 

Endnotes

¹"None of Us are Free," sung by Solomon Burke on *Don't Give Up On Me* (2002).

²I use this word (and Neo-Pagan) as admittedly incomplete umbrella terms for the myriad types of pre- and post-Christian paths and adherents because I'll otherwise be forced to use some awkward neologism like "PanHeaTheist."

³<http://home.naxos.com/melaniet/religion.htm>

⁴For more on value theory or to see which group you belong to see <http://www.cultdyn.co.uk/>

⁵<http://www.patheos.com/community/paganportal/2011/05/27/link-round-up-is-the-pagan-labelcommunity-useful/>

⁶<http://www.patheos.com/community/hammerandboar/2011/01/23/upg—good-bad-maybe-even-ugly/>

EDITORIAL NOTES

GOOD WITCH/BAD WITCH RETIRES


As *Witches & Pagans* evolves, we're still making changes to more closely align the magazine with the needs of our readers. Recently, we've noticed a drop-off of the number of inquiries sent to GW/BW, and most of the letters we have get cover topics (primarily Christian/Pagan relations) which we have previously discussed. So we are bidding a fond farewell to our dynamic duo; in the place of GW/BW we are launching "My Path," a department where our readers can share their own personal faith journeys. We hope you enjoy it!



UPCOMING THEMES & DEADLINES

#25 "Element of Air." Submission deadline: 9-1-2011.

#26 "Element of Fire." Deadline: 1-1-2012.

Contact editor2@bbimedia.com for guidelines. 

Writer, interviewer, and all-around Renaissance man **SATYROS PHIL BRUCATO**



— aka Phil Brucato, SatyrPhil, or just plain Satyr ("Knight for Right," "Second-Class Faith?") has been Pagan since the late 1970s, and has written professionally since the late 1980s. Given the name Satyros by his tribe in Greece, Satyr also authored elements of the books *Love-Wisdom* by Dr. Shannon South, *Rites of Pleasure* by Jennifer Hunter, and *POP! Goes the Witch*, edited by Fiona Horne. An ecstatic dancer, fire-spinner, and hypercreative malcontent, he lives in Seattle, WA. Visit Satyr's blog at <http://satyrblade.livejournal.com>, his Facebook author page at <http://www.facebook.com/groups/126494504028229>, and his webcomic *Arpeggio* at <http://arpeggiothecomix.com/>.

Essayist **CHRISTIAN FITZHARRIS** ("My



Thelema") has been promulgating Thelema for over twenty years. A student of the occult since 1991, he was initiated into the Golden Dawn system and is a 32nd Degree Freemason. Christian's spiritual path has led him through Wicca, Kriya Yoga, Scientology, Islam, Satanism, and more. A professional writer and comedian, his stories and mystical experiences are all featured in his book, *Nothing Sacred. Nothing Holy: A Fool's Journey*. Christian lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his Soul Warrior, Pristine San Joaquin. He also writes and performs metaphysical hip-hop under the moniker, "SCHOLAR The Rapping Occultist." His music may be enjoyed at <http://soundcloud.com/scholar93>. He may be contacted at christianfitzharris@gmail.com.

Fiction writer **GERI LEEN** ("Lies, Truth, and the Color of Faith,") is celebrating the release of her first book, *Life Without Crows*, a collection of short stories published by Hadley Rille Books. She has over fifty stories and poems published in such places as *She Nailed a Stake Through His Head*, *Sword and Sorceress XXIII*, *Return to Luna*,



Sniplits, *Triangulation: Dark Glass*, *Footprints*, *Sails & Sorcery*, and *GlassFire*.

Gerri lives in Northern Virginia and originally hails from Seattle. Visit <http://www.gerrileen.com> to see what else she's been up to.

Interviewer **MICHAEL NIGHT SKY** ("Patrick McCollum: Pagan

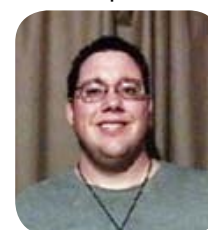
Ranger") is a Witch and student of Magick, currently Red Priest with the Circle of the Heartbeat's Drum and a longtime contributor to *Witches & Pagans*.

He lives in San Diego County, CA. Reach me at mysticism13@aol.com.



Interviewer **TIM SCHNEIDER** ("Spotlight on Pagan Music: Damh the Bard") has been a Pagan

for seven years, and is a Northern Tradition shaman and priest. He has written as well as edited articles for *RendingtheVeil.com*, an occult ezine. His passions include writing, reading,



drawing, martial arts, spirituality, and sustainable living. He lives in Michigan, where he is studying Psychology and Religious Studies. He can be contacted at Sarenth@gmail.com, or through his blog at Sarenth.wordpress.com

When she's not on the road seeking out Pagan communities, **NATALIE ZAMAN** ("Wandering Witch Crosses the Delaware") lives up central New Jersey with self-sufficientish organic gardening and a few free-range hens. She coauthored *The Graven Images Oracle*

with Kat Clark, and is editor of *Broomstix*, an e-zine for pagan kids and their families. Her first novel (co-authored with fellow Broomstixer Charlotte Bennardo)



will be published by Flux in 2011. Catch up with Nat at www.thewanderingwitch.com 