The Contrary Christian
An Essay Memoir

I am one of the few who converted from Christianity to Wicca a neo-pagan religion. My beginnings as a Wiccan and a pagan began many years ago as a child. I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian household. My family is Pentecostal. It was understood that on Sunday we went to church and that was that. We often went to church during weekday services as well. My intention here is to finally voice my feelings, opinions, insights, and observations concerning the Christianity that I was raised to believe in. Also I would like to raise some of the questions of paradox with the teachings of the Bible. I also want to point out many of the misguided and hypocritical things I have heard taught and said throughout my life and never understood.

I very rarely felt the presence of God or any spiritual connection during church services. Although Pentecostal churches are very lively and exciting I rarely felt the presence of God. I enjoyed it much of the time, but was rarely spiritually moved. I felt too distracted by other peoples' energy and the noise, activity, and singing. I would however feel the energy/presence of a higher power most when I was on the lawn looking up at the clouds or when I was in my grandmother's garden or when I was taking a walk in the woods. I didn't see why so many people called the church 'the house of the Lord' when it was simply a building to provide shelter from the elements with the purposes. From a very young age I remember being confused by this. I also recall a conversation I had with my mother when I was perhaps 12. I told her that when I got married one day I wanted my wedding in a beautiful garden. She wasn't pleased. She told me that that was Pagan and that I should be married in a church because it was the house of the Lord. I responded that if God

made the plants and flowers and trees and people made the church isn't the garden just as good if not better? She didn't want to discuss it and simply dismissed it as she did with many things of that nature. But that was one of my most significant memories, which now I realize was my own natural inclination toward Paganism.

I was also never truly interested in 'spreading the word'. I loathed the idea of telling people that they should believe the way I did. Spirituality is something an individual has to discover on their own; no one can scare you into it. This awareness takes self-discovery and can't be learned from the Bible or any minister from any faith. I have a lot of unreleased anger, resentment, and frustration for this particular religious organization. I am not saying that there aren't good people that are Christian, but I just want to point out that in my opinion being Christian doesn't make a person better than anyone else spiritually or otherwise. I hope that a Christian will read this and gain some insight into themselves, their beliefs, and/or look differently at people with other beliefs. I feel stronger in my faith now with a spiritual path that I *chose* rather than following something that was essentially forced upon me. It was not easy to allay the anxieties and fears of Christian dogma. But, now I have had epiphanies and have achieved a spiritual peace, awareness, and openness that is beyond anything the limited world of my past could offer. I am truly more tolerant. I only judge others on how they treat me and other people. I believe in love, kindness, generosity, and tolerance (my favorite and most important). I don't believe in harming any living thing intentionally except for mosquitoes that bite me. I don't think that some big God-man in the sky is going to punish me; I just try to do what is right without harming anyone or anything.

I think Jesus is a god-form among the pantheons of mythical Gods and Goddesses. He has specific energies that many people find helpful or of comfort in

their lives. But as to whether he was an actual man who existed and performed miracles, I cannot say. Nor do I necessarily believe that even if he did indeed exist, perform miracles and such. He was perhaps an ordinary man who saw the world differently. But this is all speculation. I don't therefore pray to or believe in Jesus.

Wicca/Paganism has simply been a way to bring myself closer to the nature of creation rather than being influenced by the trappings of dogma. There is a more in-depth description of Wicca and my beliefs in my essay entitled The Pagan Principle.

I also by no means intend this to be a way of proselytizing my own beliefs; I am completely against the notion of spreading the word, any word. It is unfortunate that many will be unable to see my point of view for what it is: a point of view. Some people fear that tolerance or acceptance of another belief system, somehow challenges, weakens, or diminishes their own. I say if your faith is really that strong then it should stand up to challenging and questioning. There is an almost cult-like quality to those who take the word of the Bible as fact. Many Christians endlessly quote scriptures in order to make their points. They seem to lack the ability to actually analyze and evaluate their opinions and beliefs. This is quite hypocritical. I'm especially disturbed and fascinated by many peoples' acceptance of the Bible as fact and accept stories therein to be literal. My family did and I went along. Now I simply view the Bible as a beautifully written collection of myths that should be appreciated for its literary value, like something written by Shakespeare.

Furthermore I believe all fundamentalist, rigid religious views, teachings and organizations are harmful to individuals, families, and society as a whole; it is my feeling that any belief system which seeks to suppress ones natural desires, feelings, thoughts, opinions, and ideas is not allowing that individual to be just that: an individual. It is cult-like and wrong. I believe it is everyone's right to celebrate, to

choose, to live, grow, question and learn how they see fit for themselves. No one should be trapped by dogma and bound to things they don't see fitting their individuality.

I didn't become truly disinterested in going to church until around age 15. I was still forced to go at times. My mother would guilt me into going but then afterward chastise me because I looked bored the whole time. But, again I always felt better praying alone. Needless to say my mother was none too thrilled with my trying to get out of going to church. She would often remind me how much I enjoyed it as a child. At the time I had no response. Now, I do have an answer. I was a child. And children are pretty easily entertained. But, I digress.

I believe religious intolerance can be and often is as damaging as teaching your child ethnic prejudice. It is a form of prejudice to shun and/or scorn things because you don't understand them, or fear them because you have incorrect information. I had countless amounts of misinformation from my family during my childhood. But I had to grow up and learn about certain things on my own. We celebrated Christian holidays with Pagan derivatives and even used those decorations in conjunction with our other forms of celebration (i.e. Christmas). However, I wasn't allowed to participate in most Halloween celebrations because it was pagan and when my family spoke of it, it was with such disdain as if it were evil or something. But, now it is one of my favorite holidays. I was allowed to wear a costume at school Halloween parties (I went to Christian and Catholic schools), but my mom wouldn't even buy candy for trick-or-treaters. Instead she would give out religious tracts telling them how important it is to save their soul. Can you imagine Trick-or-Treaters coming to my house only to receive a religious pamphlet?! As if participating in a non-Christian holiday celebration automatically means that a

person's soul needs saving. How arrogant! Needless to say we rarely got any Trick-or-Treaters. Most Christians that I encounter don't have a good reason for this and many other behaviors and opinions. They simply tell me that the Bible says so. That's good enough for them. How cult-like does that sound? It sounds to me like a form of brainwashing. Plus much of what people think the Bible says is really a matter of interpretation. I couldn't blindly accept something just because some book said it was so.

I was also a very sick child, both physically and emotionally. But my mother simply ignored my emotional pain and depression. Or she would make me read the Bible until I felt better. This was probably the single most damaging message I received. Albeit irrational to do the same thing repeatedly and expect different results, she would make me repeat this process again and again. Her attitude was to do it until it worked. I soon learned to lie and say I was better and not complain as much about emotional problems. It is often in a teenager's nature to complain. My mother's dogmatic philosophy of 'do it 'till it works' was absurd, hurtful and irrational. Most people may have sought counseling or some such other method of helping their child when one thing failed to work.

That is another issue I must raise: the mental and emotional health of these individuals involved in such rigid unyielding belief systems. There are many unhealthy notions in these very fundamentalist belief systems. Such fundamentalists separate themselves from all things "worldly" including family and friends. The notion that the world is out there and the rest of us are apart from it is a little fanatical and illogical. We are all an integral part of the world and society and the planet. This is one of the reasons that I was drawn to Paganism because of its encouragement to be connected to Nature and the world around you. There is no

escaping the world. I heard a quote once that sounds very true to me: “There is nothing more dangerous than faith”. Faith in the wrong hands and for the wrong reasons can be very destructive. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 is a perfect example. That seems so extreme to the average reasonable person as well it should. And those fanatics that blow up abortion clinics believe they are meting out God’s justice. It is not murder that they have a problem with as they proclaim. They just can’t tolerate choices with which they don’t agree. They are often fine with the death penalty and shooting someone they disagree with who is alive and walking around. Many of these fanatical practices, opinions, and beliefs seem to me to be very mentally unhealthy. I personally feel that a person who is alive and walking around has the first choice at how to live their life as well as what to do with their body.

If the Creator is so omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent why would it care what you call it? Why would it care if you worship it or not? Why would it care what you did, said, or thought? I wouldn’t pray to a God who I believed would send me into eternal damnation for failing to believe, worship, or pray in a particular way. They also said that all sin is equal in God’s eyes. That isn’t at all logical to think stealing a candy bar is equal to raping someone. There is no way I would ever accept that. Some of you reading probably feel sorry for me, for being lost, for denouncing God, and probably want to pray for me to see the light. Well I have news for you; I have already seen the light. Don’t pray for me; find something useful to do with your time and energy. Send money to a worthy cause, help people, don’t wait on or count on Jesus to fix your problems or mine. The Bible is a book that is a collaboration of many people over the course of many years and has been translated several times before being printed in the form we have today. Plus there are more books known as the Gnostic texts not included in the current Bible. And Catholic

and Orthodox Bibles contain the Apocrypha, books which protestant Bibles leave out.

So I sincerely hope this little work has challenged you to look at yourself and your beliefs more closely and periodically question your beliefs, ethics, values, and morals. Sometimes these simple and fundamental things are the keys to our own personal growth. We should often take stock of ourselves and our ideals and how they affect our life and those we care about. Tolerance is an underrated virtue. And questioning your beliefs does not automatically mean doubting them. If you feel threatened by questions then maybe you need to reevaluate those beliefs, values, and morals as well as why you have them in the first place. One should realize that being religious doesn't predicate morality, and morality doesn't denote religiosity. I have known many agnostics and atheists who were the epitome of morality and who were kinder to me than most people of a religious persuasion. Our country's money has "In God We Trust" absurdly printed on it. In most if not all courts witnesses are still sworn in using a Bible, but many people commit perjury anyway. And what of Buddhists, Muslims and anyone else for whom the Bible has no meaning? No one addresses some of our most archaic and asinine customs.

In writing this I do not mean to rail against Christianity as a whole or to judge all Christians as religious fanatics. I only wish to point out the inherent flaws and abuses that I have experienced as a former Christian and part of a very fundamentalist belief system as well as the barbaric dogma attached to it. I also do not appreciate being told to pray or believe in God by Christians who know that my faith is not theirs. I would better appreciate it if people would first ask if I believe as they do before bombarding me with their religiosity.

Another thing which I find puzzling is the lack of feminine heroism compared to male in the Bible. The basis of Christianity and the paternalistic, misogynistic clergy who first put these books of the Bible together cannot be relied on for truth or salvation. That is why I find Wicca and Paganism so much more appealing: the recognition of both the male and female aspects of the Divine. These are things which I am sure many people have thought about but have perhaps been too afraid to voice. But it *is* OK to have questions and search for you own truth. That is the way we learn and grow as human beings by continuing to question even the things that we know.

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