

History and Origins of Wicca

There is no exhaustive or authoritative source that traces Wicca back through ancient times. Wicca is mainly a 20th century manifestation of ancient nature worship systems based out of northern Europe that existed thousands of years ago.

“Wicca is a religion rooted in the mists of Neolithic history... it is basically a fertility and agrarian society. It is a religion of nature worship and the subsequent interaction with nature that is dissented from that practice by the Celtic clans of Western Europe and the indigenous peoples of the British Isles, the builders of such monuments as Stonehenge.”¹

“Wicca originated among the Celts and other peoples who lived in the area now known as Great Britain. Wiccans celebrate the Earth and believe all living things have a spirit. They espouse pantheism and claim to see the divine in everyone. Most celebrate monthly rituals, or "esbats," centered on the lunar cycles, and eight annual Wiccan holy days, or "sabbats," centered around the solar cycles, solstices and equinoxes.”²

These pagan oriented nature worship systems filtered down through history in countless ways, but were mainly practiced in secret (and still is today). The secrecy was a specially necessary during the European dominance of the Roman Catholic Church.

Basically, these pagan traditions developed out of agrarian societies where the environment had a profound effect upon survival. Those who studied the seasons and the stars sought to predict and understand the influences of the environment upon crops, cattle, rain, etc. and in so doing also desired to be able to influence these factors. It was from the desire to understand and control nature that gave rise to the various pagan and earth based worship systems. therefore, we can see when we study ancient European pagan writings, that there are countless deities.

Additionally, an important aspect of nature worship deals with the woman. It is the woman who was able to give birth to continue the race. In cultures where offspring were needed to work the land, to hunt, and to care for the elderly, women were, of course, vitally necessary. Therefore, the female became, in some cultures, mystically endowed with special powers and this mystical endowment was transferred into the various theological pagan worship systems.

At first, there were a great number of cultures located all over the ancient European landscape. Since Europe is a large area and since weather patterns, terrain, water supplies, temperature variations, animal types, etc., varied in those areas the development of nature worship (Druids, Celts,) also took on aspects that reflected those variables. Therefore, the ancient systems could be polytheistic, monotheistic, feminine focused, masculine focused, ritualistic, calendar based, hunter based, etc.

Because of the multifaceted and buried background, the nature based worship systems were not codified and there is no "official" pagan tradition. Nevertheless, today's Wicca is based upon these ancient and pagan roots.

The Burning Times

The Burning Times is roughly from the year 1000 to around the 1700s where countless numbers of which is were killed through the misapplication of biblical texts. Perhaps the most commonly cited biblical verse supporting the killing of witches is found in Exodus 22:18, “*You shall not allow a sorceress to live.*” The Roman Catholic Church which was in power in the Middle Ages in Europe, was often very oppressive. Wiccans today often identify themselves with the time of the witch burnings and Judge Christianity based upon the atrocities committed by the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, many Wiccans did not realize that the Roman Catholic Church also persecuted Christians, torturing many of them for not submitting to the authority and rule of Roman Catholicism. In Christianity, particularly in the Protestant Reformation, we refer to this time as "the Inquisition" which was begun by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 The point is that Roman Catholic Church does not represent Christianity and its atrocities committed upon both pagans and Christians is not the true representation of Christianity.

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Wicca Today

Aleister Crowley, an evil man involved in the occult, claimed to have channeled a book called "the book of the law." It focused on a new era of spirituality governed by the Egyptian God Horus. From this work, Crowley established the first group of modern witches.

It wasn't until recently that Wicca took formation as a loosely based system, mainly from the works of Gerald Gardner who formed the Wiccan tradition known as Gardnerian Wicca. Through Gardner the idea of the God and goddess were "solidified" and Wicca became a religious movement.

Wicca is now growing: "scholars have estimated that Wicca is the second-fastest-growing religion in the United States (after Islam)."²

Footnotes

1. Cantrell, Gary., Wiccan Beliefs and Practices. St. Paul, Minn: Llewellyn Publications, 2004 Pp. 16-17
2. What a Wicca Situation! By: Billups, Andrea, Insight on the News, 1051-4880, January 1, 2001, Vol. 17, Issue 1
3. RELIGION NOTES , Publishers Weekly, 00000019, 08/28/2000, Vol. 247, Issue 35