



STATEMENT DO-025

NEOPAGANISM, FEMINISM, AND THE NEW POLYTHEISM

by Norman L. Geisler

In his best-selling book, *Megatrends*, social forecaster John Naisbitt noted "the widespread interest in Eastern religions" since the 1960s.¹ In the early 1970s Os Guinness, friend and colleague of the late Francis Schaeffer, provided an explanation for this interest: "The point is this: The East is still the East, but the West is no longer the West. Western answers no longer seem to fit the questions. With Christian culture disintegrating and humanism failing to provide an alternative, many are searching the ancient East."²

An extensive network of Eastern-oriented groups make up much of what is called the "New Age movement." A leading promoter of this movement, Marilyn Ferguson, wrote in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*: "A leaderless but powerful network is working to bring about radical change in the United States....Broader than reform, deeper than revolution, this benign conspiracy for a new human agenda has triggered the most rapid cultural realignment in history. The great shuddering, irrevocable shift overtaking us is....a new mind — the ascendance of a starting worldview...."³

Ferguson believes that the "old" world view of the Judeo-Christian heritage is decaying before our very eyes and its funeral service is about to begin. The "new" world view will raise from the ashes of its predecessor like the Phoenix of ancient times.

Many writers have noted both the Hindu and Buddhist origins of what is popularly known as the New Age-type religions, but less attention has been given to its Western pagan roots. Mark Satin's book, *New Age Politics* (1978), spoke directly to this point when he contrasted what he called "the new paganism" with more primitive forms of paganism. Citing Andrea Dworkin, he noted that "the Old Religion celebrated sexuality, fertility, nature and women's place in it...." Its "central figure was a hairy, merry deity who loved music and dancing and good food." It "was nature-centered and woman-centered. There were priestesses, wise women, midwives, goddesses, sorceresses." In addition, "there was no dogma; each priestess interpreted the religion in her own fashion."

Of course, "this Old Religion couldn't be reestablished in New Age society," notes Satin, "but we could adapt its nature- and woman-centeredness to our own new priorities and concerns." For example, "nature-centeredness has an obvious parallel in our growing recognition that the quality of our connection to the environment — both natural and people-made — has a lot to do with our spiritual health and spiritual growth."⁴ From this it is obvious both how neopaganism grows out of paganism and how it feeds into the New Age movement.

Two expressions of neopaganism are of particular interest. The first, by David Miller, describes neopaganism as arising out of the ashes of the "death of God" heralded by Thomas Altizer and others in the mid 1960s. The second form, by Margot Adler, shows its connection to the revival of witchcraft, the religion of Wicca.

MILLER — THE NEW POLYTHEISM

In 1974 David L. Miller, Associate Professor of Religion at Syracuse University, published *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses*.⁵ In this book Miller argues that polytheism is alive and well in the contemporary world. Believing this is a good thing, he urges people in Western society to get in tune with the gods

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

in order to liberate themselves and become the kind of people they really are.

The Death of God

According to Miller, monotheism represents an attempt to bring everyone's "explanation systems, whether theological, sociological, political, historical, philosophical, or psychological" under one all-embracing system. This system operates "according to fixed concepts and categories" that are controlled by an either/or kind of logic; that is, something is "either true or false, either this or that, either beautiful or ugly, either good or evil." But this kind of thinking, says Miller, "fails a people in a time when experience becomes self-consciously pluralistic, radically both/and."⁶ This is what Western society is today — radically pluralistic. Contemporary Western man finds himself in a world where truth and morality are relative. His "life often feels anarchistic: no horizons, fences, boundaries, and no center to prove one securely close to home."⁷ The contemporary situation is so pluralistic that its modern interpreters "have had to rely on a strange set of words" in their attempt to explain it. For example:

In tracing our psychology Charles Baudouin speaks of *polyphonic* meaning and being. In speaking of the nature of thinking required for contemporary understanding Philip Wheelwright points to *plurisignificative* knowing and communicating. Norman I. Brown talks about *polymorphous* reality as a key to our history, and Ray Hart names the deepest aspect of our literature articulations of reality with the phrase *polysemous* functioning of imaginal discourse. If we try to make sense of our society Michael Novak suggests it will help to think of America as a *pluralistic* community of radically unmeltable ethnics. Concerning government and political science, Robert Dahl speaks of *polyarchy*.⁸

Miller believes that this "poly" kind of thinking betrays the fact that "we have suffered a death of God." No longer is there "a single center holding things together." God is dead, as Nietzsche boldly declared. Western man has seen "the demise of a monotheistic way of thinking and speaking about God and a monotheistic way of thinking and speaking about human meaning and being generally."⁹

Man has been "released from the tyrannical imperialism of monotheism." As a consequence, "man has the opportunity of discovering new dimensions hidden in the depths of reality's history. He may discover a new freedom to acknowledge variousness and many-sidedness. He may find, as if for the first time, a new potency to create imaginatively his hopes and desires, his laws and pleasures."¹⁰

Rebirth of the Gods

"The Death of God gives rise to the rebirth of the gods. We are polytheists," declares Miller.¹¹ What is polytheism? "Polytheism is the name given to a specific religious situation," one that is "characterized by plurality, a plurality that manifests itself in many forms." For instance, socially speaking, "polytheism is a situation in which there are various values, patterns of social organization, and principles by which man governs his political life. These values, patterns, and principles sometimes mesh harmoniously, but more often they war with one another to be elevated as the single center of normal social order."¹²

Philosophically, Miller defines polytheism as "that reality experienced by men and women when Truth....cannot be articulated reflectively according to a single grammar, a single logic, or a single symbol-system."¹³ Thus, "a philosophically polytheistic situation....will break forth with principles of relativism, indeterminacy, plural logic systems, irrational numbers; substances that do not have substance, such as quarks; double explanations for light; and black holes in the middle of actual realities."¹⁴

Miller acknowledges that although "polytheism" carries these different meanings, "behind them is a *religious* situation. Religiously, polytheism is the worship of many Gods and Goddesses."¹⁵ These are not worshipped all at the same time. Rather, only one god or goddess at a time can be worshipped. In this way polytheism (the worship of *many* gods) includes monotheism (the worship of *one* God). "This implies that a polytheistic religion is actually a polytheistic theology, a system of symbolizing reality in a plural way in order to account for all experience, but that the religious practice is composed of consecutive monotheisms." And this "implies that our experience of social, intellectual, and psychological worlds is religious — that is, it is so profound and far-reaching that only a theological

explanation can account for it fully."¹⁶

At one time polytheism reigned in Western culture. But when the Greek culture collapsed, polytheism died and was replaced by Judeo-Christian monotheism. Although polytheism remained "in the underground or countercultural tradition of the West" throughout the 2,000-year reign of monotheistic thought, it did not have any significant effect in the West.¹⁷

Miller takes note of the connection of polytheism with the many New Age-type religions. He suggests that a need exists to revive polytheism in order to help Western man deal with his pluralistic experience. This need "may be behind the recent interest in the occult, in magic, in extraterrestrial life, in Hindu India and Buddhist Japan, in multidevoted China, in sorcery, in new forms of multiple family life, in communes, in the 'new religions,' and many other alternative life-styles and meaning-systems which have been hitherto foreign."¹⁸

According to Miller, the rebirth of polytheism is desirable because it has several advantages over monotheism. First, polytheism frees one from the monotheistic idea that he must "get it all together." Polytheism points "to the possibility that 'keeping it all apart' is a safe, a realistic, and an exciting way to 'go on.'" Second, polytheism better accounts for the nature of human beings. That is, humans are not monotheistic in consciousness, but polytheistic. Hence, "only a polytheistic consciousness will account realistically for our lives."¹⁹ Third, polytheism will help us keep in touch with the richness and diversity of life. Monotheism does just the opposite, for it encourages thought about that which lies *behind* life, namely "the essence, or substance, or principle of being," rather than thought about life itself.²⁰

We do not need, Miller maintains, a rebirth of the old polytheism for old purposes, but for new ones. In this sense we need a new polytheism: "A new function for the old Gods and Goddesses."²¹ He suggests that this new polytheism has three aspects. First, the new polytheism "is a modern sensibility." It is not just that "our contemporary society is pluralistic, nor that our roles are many, nor that our morality is relativistic, nor even that our political ideology is fragmented." These conditions "are manifestations of something deeper and more fundamental. The more basic feeling is that the Gods and Goddesses are reemerging in our lives."²²

Second, the new polytheism is "a way of rethinking the past tradition of thinking, and especially the orthodox tradition of religious thinking."²³ Since Western thought is rooted in the early Greek thinkers who were largely polytheistic, it follows Western Greek polytheism in its "ideas, concepts, and categories, which were once the images of Gods and Goddesses," and for its "formal structures of thought or logic, which were once narrative processes in mythic tales."²⁴

And third, according to Miller, the new polytheism "is a discovery of the polytheism of the psyche." It helps one to see the "many potencies, many structures of meaning and being, all given to us in the reality of our everyday lives."²⁵

Who Are the Gods?

Given the death of monotheism and the rebirth of polytheism, who or what are the gods and goddesses of this polytheism? Miller maintains that "the Gods and Goddesses are the names of powers, of forces, which have autonomy and are not conditioned or affected by social and historical events, by human will or reason, or by personal and individual factors." In other words, "the Gods are Powers" that transcend the personal, the historical, and the social. Yet they are also immanent in the world as potencies "in each of us, in societies, and in nature." Indeed, "as they manifest themselves in life they are felt to be informing powers that give shape to social, intellectual, and personal behavior." They are the basic structure of reality, "the names of the plural patterns of our existence." These powers are "the Gods and Goddesses of ancient Greece — not Egypt, not the Ancient Near East, not Hindu India, not Ancient China or Japan. Greece is the locus of our polytheism simply because, *willy-nilly*, we are Occidental men and women."²⁶

Do these many different gods act harmoniously? Miller says no. They often act in "contention." Life may even be characterized as "a war of the Powers."²⁷

Man — his self, his society, and his natural environment — is the arena of an eternal Trojan War. Our moods, emotions, usual behaviors, dreams, and fantasies tell us those rough moments when the war is no longer a cold war or a border skirmish, but an all-out guerilla conflict. These indicators also tell us, by feeling and intuition, when one God has absented himself and another has not yet rushed into the vacuum. We know the war well.²⁸

Man's contemporary acknowledgment of these gods is important and functional. It will help him to infuse new life into old ways of seeing and thinking. It will provide the structure through which man may be able "to speak and to think appropriately concerning" his "deepest experience."²⁹

Miller suggests many ways in which this new function of the gods and goddesses and the telling of their stories "all in terms of human reality" could work out. For example, he proposes that the tremendous growth in technology coincides with the stories of Prometheus who steals the fire and ends trapped in a rock, gnawed at by the very power he has himself supplanted by his knowledge.³⁰

Miller believes the work of the "ever-present" god Pan ("All") is seen in the "*ever-presence of outbreaks of the irrational*" (emphasis in original), such as "in the violent forms of Vietnam or rape on college campuses, or in the subtler forms of compulsive participation in mystical movements and black magic groups."³¹

At one time the view of the world was *Ptolemaic*: the earth was thought to be "an immovable sphere at the center of the universe, around which nine concentric spheres revolve." Thus, all that existed was "organized around a single center," the earth, with the end of the universe imagined to be "fixed and secure." This "monotheistic" view of the world collapsed with Copernicus (and subsequent scientists). Now the universe's horizons are neither fixed nor secure. Instead, it is seen as an "infinitely expanding universe whose center is.... unknown."³²

The "Playground" of the Gods

Miller believes that humans are "the playground" of the gods. They "live through our psychic structures" and "manifest themselves always in our behaviors." The gods parade "through our thoughts without our control and even against our will." We do not possess the gods, but the gods possess us. We do not grab the gods, but the "gods grab us, and we play out their stories."³³

"Psychologically, polytheism is a matter of the radical experience of equally real, but mutually exclusive aspects of the self." In this situation the "person experiences himself as many selves, each of which is felt to have autonomous power, a life of its own, coming and going on its own and without regard to the centered will of a single ego."³⁴

But no one person can be gripped by more than one god at a time. In this sense man is a monotheist, "or at least a henotheist (that is, worshipping one god at a time in a large pantheon of gods)." However, in order for a person to think and speak about the god who has gripped him at that moment, "he will have to be polytheistic, since the story [i.e., the mythology surrounding this deity] may involve marriages with other Gods, parentage by still others, offspring by Godlings and maiden Goddesses." In brief, because life and meaning are pluralistic, man must be polytheistic in order to think and speak about it. "To think differently is self-deception, a self-deception perpetrated by monotheistic thinking."³⁵

Miller asks, "What do the Gods and Goddesses want with us?" His answer is that "our task is to incarnate them, become aware of their presence, acknowledge and celebrate their forms, so that we may better be able to account for our polytheism." This can occur only when we redivinize our thinking, remythologize our lives; in short, see our world through polytheistic glasses.³⁶

All values, be they of truth, morality, beauty, or what have you, are relative. That is, in Miller's words, "truth and falsity, life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and evil are forever and inextricably mixed together."³⁷ The kind of thinking that separates values into either/or concepts and categories is monotheistic. But this way of thinking does not adequately account for the many-sidedness of man's experience. What does account for it is the polytheistic both/and sort of thinking, which recognizes the relativity of all values.

ADLER — THE RELIGION OF WICCA

Another source of neopolytheism is the neopagan revival of the religion of Wicca. This movement, popularly known as witchcraft, has a significant overlap with the feminist movement. They too have a deep-seated abhorrence of monotheism. National Public Radio reporter and feminist witch Margot Adler expresses this view in her book, *Drawing Down the Moon*. She agrees with historian James Breasted that "monotheism is but imperialism in religion." Adler also refers to monotheism as one of "the totalistic religious and political views that dominate our society." As far as neopagans are concerned, "Islam and Christian fundamentalism are seen as appropriate *individual* spiritual paths as long as each is seen as merely a flower in the garden." In this sense, she adds, "Polytheism always includes monotheism. The reverse is not true."³⁸

The Pantheistic Connection

Most polytheistic neopagans are also pantheistic, though strangely, a few claim to be "agnostic," attracted primarily on aesthetic grounds. At first this seems contradictory. How can everything be *one* (pantheism) when there are *many* gods? Within their system, however, this is perfectly consistent. Reality is *one* in the sense of one ultimate impersonal Force, but it is *many* in that there are numerous personal manifestations of this ultimate divinity.

Hinduism has long sported a belief in one ultimate impersonal deity ("Brahman") with millions of personal gods as lower manifestations of It. It is at this point that the pantheistic polytheism of neopaganism significantly overlaps with the New Age movement. George Lucas's Star Wars "religion of the Jedi" is a significant example. His acknowledged roots tap into both Buddhism and the Mexican sorcerer, Don Juan. In the Lucas biography, Dale Pollock notes that "Lucas's concept of the Force was heavily influenced by Carlos Castaneda's *Tales of Power*. This is an account of a supposed Mexican Indian sorcerer, Don Juan, who uses the phrase 'life force.'³⁹

Irvin Kershner, the director of Lucas's movie, *The Empire Strikes Back*, is a Zen Buddhist. Kershner admitted of the film: "I wanna introduce some Zen here because I don't want the kids to walk away just feeling that everything is shoot-em-up, but there's also a little something to think about here in terms of yourself and your surroundings."⁴⁰ In fact, Lucas's biographer, Dale Pollock, acknowledges that "Yoda's philosophy is Buddhist — he tells Luke that the Force requires him to be calm, at peace, and passive."⁴¹

Whatever the source of the Force of Star Wars, it is clear that it is similar to the pantheistic polytheism of neopagan witches. Lucas himself called it a "religion" three times in the first movie of his Star Wars trilogy,⁴² and he admitted to *Time* magazine that the Force was "God." He claimed that the simple message of the movie was that "there is a God and there is both a good side and a bad side [to God]. You have a choice between them, but the world works better if you're on the good side."⁴³ Not only are both the religion of the Force and the religion of Wicca pantheistic, but central to both is a belief in sorcery. Luke Skywalker, the hero of Star Wars, is a sorcerer. So, even more clearly, is the hero of Lucas's subsequent film, "Willow."

The Polytheistic Manifestations

Surely the apostle's statement, "there be gods many and lords many" (1 Cor. 8:5), is applicable afresh with the rise of neopaganism. According to neopagans, one is free to worship any gods or goddesses, ancient or modern, from the East or West. Some worship Apollo and Diana. Others, like Theodore Roszak, author of *Where the Wasteland Ends*, are admittedly animistic. As represented by Adler, he believes that "the statue and sacred grove were transparent windows....by which the witness was escorted through to sacred ground beyond and participated in the divine."⁴⁴

Most neopagans revive one of the Western forms of polytheism. While the names of the gods differ, "most often the names are Celtic, Greek, or Latin." Some neopagans debate about the ontological status of their "gods," assigning an idealistic or aesthetic role to them. But as one put it, "all these things are within the realm of possibility. It has been our nature to call these 'gods.'" She defines a god as "an eternal being, and in that sense we, too, are gods."⁴⁵

Margot Adler notes, however, that "the deities of most Wicca groups are two: the God, lord of animals, lord of death and beyond, and the Goddess, the Triple Goddess in her three aspects: Maiden, Mother, and Crone." Each of her aspects "is symbolized by a phase of the moon — the waxing crescent, the full moon, and the waning crescent." In

this sense Adler suggests that many neopagans "might well be considered 'duotheists,' conceiving of deity as the *Goddess* of the Moon, Earth, and sea, and the *God* of the woods, the hunt, the animal realm." She adds, however, that "feminist Witches are often monotheists, worshipping the Goddess as the One."⁴⁶

Indeed, some describe themselves as monotheistic polytheists. Morgan McFarland, a Dallas witch, declared: "I see myself as monotheistic in believing in the Goddess, Creatrix, the Female Principle, but at the same time acknowledging that other gods and goddesses do exist through her as manifestations of her, facets of the whole."⁴⁷ Obviously, by her own definition her use of "monotheistic" here is misleading; her belief is really the same as that of other neopagans, namely a many-faceted (polytheistic) manifestation of pantheism.

The Feminist Connection

There is also a close connection between neopaganism and feminism. Of course, not all neopagans are feminists, and not all feminists are neopagans. Nonetheless, neopaganism has a magnetic pull on many feminists. Margot Adler describes the dynamics this way: "Many feminist Witchcraft covens have....attracted women from all walks of life. But even there, most of these women have already been strengthened by the feminist movement, or by consciousness-raising groups, or by an important experience such as divorce, separation, or a homosexual encounter."⁴⁸

One neopagan feminist put it this way: "We have found that women working together are capable of conjuring their past and reawakening their old ascendancy.... This does not seem to happen when men are present....It seems that in mixed covens, no matter how 'feminist' the women are, a kind of competition begins to happen. Among the women alone, none of this occurs, and a great reciprocity develops, unlike anything I have seen before."⁴⁹

Some were witches before they were feminists. Z. Budapest, a famous Hungarian-born teacher of witchcraft, said: "I was a Witch before I became a feminist....I observed my mother talking to the dead. I saw her go into a trance and feel presences around her. She is an artist and her art often reflects Sumerian influences....She tells fortunes and can still the wind." But after coming to New York Z. Budapest experienced social oppression, ending up, as Adler relates it, "in a traditional role: wife and mother. After twelve years, feeling limited and enslaved, she was driven to make a suicide attempt. During this attempt she had a vision in which she died and death was not fearful."⁵⁰ At this point her awareness as a witch and the feminist perspective meet in the attempt to liberate her womanhood from her perceived oppression.

As far back as the 1890s Charles G. Leland wrote that whenever "there is a period of radical intellectual rebellion, against long-established conservatism, hierarchy, and the like, there is always an effort to regard women as a fully equal, which means superior sex." Further, he noted that in witchcraft "it is the female who is the primitive principle." That is, "the perception of this [tyranny] drove vast numbers of the discontented into rebellion, and as they could not prevail by open warfare, they took their hatred out in a form of secret anarchy, which was, however, intimately blended with superstition and fragments of old tradition." Adler notes that Leland is most popular with the feminist groups in the craft partly because he "places the feminine principle first."⁵¹

AN EVALUATION OF NEOPAGAN POLYTHEISM AND FEMINISM

There are many obvious condemnations of neopagan polytheism in the Bible, but my evaluation here will be strictly philosophical. In the interest of fairness I will limit my criticisms to questions of coherence or internal consistency. The first four criticisms apply to polytheism in general. The rest are directed at the neopagan feminist forms.

The Denial of Rationality. In keeping with their mystical orientation, many neopolytheists are at root irrationalists. Miller's dismissal of any system that operates "according to fixed concepts and categories" and is controlled by an either/or kind of logic is a case in point. He rejects the idea that something is "either true or false, either this or that, either beautiful or ugly, either good or evil."⁵² What he fails to notice, however, is that in contending that his own polytheism is true as opposed to false he has engaged in an either/or type of thinking. Everything cannot be true, including opposites. So, if it is *either* polytheism or monotheism, then one cannot deny the validity of either/or type thinking. In fact, the polytheist cannot avoid such thinking, otherwise his or her position cannot be made intelligible.

The Denial of Ultimate Unity. There is also a self-defeating nature to the polytheistic denial of ultimate unity. Everything cannot be radically pluralistic. We live in a uni-verse not a multi-verse. Indeed, the polytheistic position is offered as a unified system of thought. But in presenting a unified thought about ultimate reality, they deny the very philosophy they are advocating. If reality were radically polytheistic we could not even know it. Any claim to know ultimate reality betrays a more basic commitment to a unity of thought that denies the polytheistic view.

Failure to Ask the Ultimate Question. While some pagan religions speak of origins, few ask the ultimate question. There are gods acting, but — as C. S. Lewis noted — they fail to ask: "How does a play originate? Does it write itself? Do the actors make it up as they go along? Or is there someone — not on the stage, not like the people on stage — someone we don't see — who invented it all and caused it to be? — this is rarely asked or answered." If they did, they would see that nature is created. And, Lewis adds, "to say that God created Nature, while it brings God and Nature into relation, also separates them. What makes and what is made must be two, not one. Thus the doctrine of Creation in one sense empties Nature of divinity"⁵³ and thereby destroys paganism.

Failure to Submit to the Ultimate God. Furthermore, if the pagan realized that "Nature and God were distinct; the One had made the other; the One ruled and the other obeyed," then he or she would not worship the gods but rather *the* God. As Lewis observed, "the difference between believing in God and in many gods is not one of arithmetic. [For] 'gods' is not really the plural of God; God has no plural."⁵⁴ But herein is revealed the depravity of polytheism. For they prefer to worship a god they make, rather than the God who made them. As one neopagan concluded: "I realized it wasn't so outrageous, and that we could choose what deities to follow....[For] the element of Christianity that bothered...[me] was its requirement to be submissive to the deity." He adds, "Gods have similar characteristics to humans....To some extent they are flawed and that makes them more approachable."⁵⁵ In biblical language this is a vivid confession of the fact that they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness....and change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man...." (Rom. 1:18, 23).

Creedal Pronouncements. Many neopagan witches flatly reject the idea of *The Witches' Bible* (written by Gavin and Yvonne Frost), fuming at "the word *the*, since the book, in their view, had nothing to do with their religion." They claim that modern pagans "remain anti-authoritarian," taking pride in themselves as being "the most flexible and adaptable of religions, since it is perfectly willing to throw out dogmas...."⁵⁶

Their protests notwithstanding, neopaganism has its own creeds and dogmas. First of all, even a Wicca Priestess admits: "I've seen a lot of people in the Craft get hung up on fragments of ritual and myth. Some people accept these fragments as a dogma." Second, while protesting creeds Adler lays down a set of "basic beliefs" which she claims "most people in this book share."⁵⁷ She seems blissfully unaware that a creed is by any other name still a creed. The creed she confesses is informative. In her own words:

The world is holy. Nature is holy. The body is holy. Sexuality is holy. The mind is holy. The imagination is holy. You are holy....Thou art Goddess. Thou art God. Divinity is immanent in all Nature. It is as much within you as without.⁵⁸

There are several standard doctrines of neopaganism in this creed, including pantheism, polytheism, animism, self-deificationism, and — more covertly — free sexual expression.

On April 11-14, 1974 The Council of American Witches hammered out a creed they called "Principles of Wiccan Belief." It should be no surprise that they came up with a list of *thirteen* basic principles! These include practicing "Rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces," living in harmony with Nature (ecological balance), and belief in the "Creative Power in the Universe" manifest in male and female polarities. Interestingly, they disavowed Devil worship and the belief that Christianity is "the only way."⁵⁹ It is clear that they think this is the *only* way to believe about Christianity.

Reversed Sexism. It is ironic indeed that the very complaint that gave rise to the feminist movement is (for many) their own manifest sin. The admission that neopagan witchcraft appeals to feminists because it offers women a role as a "superior" sex is self-condemning. And the existence of many women-only groups is further condemnation of their sexist practices. Add to this the so-called "monotheistic" worship of only the female Goddess and we have, by their own standards, sexism on the highest level. Certainly, neopagan feminism has lost all ground to complain about so-called "sexist" language in the Bible. Morgan McFarland spoke of the desirably unique spiritual experience that women alone have, as opposed to what is possible when males are present.⁶⁰ What is this but *de facto* religious

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

sexism by their own definition? One can scarcely imagine a male-dominated group suggesting the same without the whole feminist movement coming down on its defenseless heads.

Spiritual Exclusivism. If there is one thing in which neopaganism prides itself it is inclusivism and diversity. They usually insist that they have no creeds and allow total diversity of expression. For example, in theory one can worship any god he or she wishes to worship. However, in practice it is a different matter, as is evidenced by several factors. First, the very existence of secret "covens" reveals the exclusivistic nature of the group.

Second, the existence of an initiation rite is an earmark of exclusiveness. In defense, witches claim "initiation is primarily a method to protect the institution of the Craft from people calling themselves 'witches' who are insincere, 'evil' or would give the Craft a bad name."⁶¹ However, why try to distinguish the "sincere" from the insincere or protect it from "evil" unless there is some genuine form to be preserved?

Third, many neopagans claim that "Witchcraft was once the *universal religion*, which has been driven underground to service in secret, with much being lost."⁶² What is this claim to universality but an implicit exclusivism — a claim to be the most legitimate or authentic religion?

Fourth, even the "Principles of Wiccan Belief" adopted by The Council of American Witches has a strong statement excluding the belief that Christianity is "the only way." They frankly acknowledge this as "our only animosity toward Christianity."⁶³ What most all-inclusivistic groups seem to not understand is that every truth claim is exclusive. For if C (say, Christianity) is true, then of necessity all non-C is false. Likewise, if P (polytheism) is true, then all non-P is false. The neopagan religion of Wicca is just as exclusivistic as any other religion that claims to have discovered truth about reality.

Fifth, neopagans affirm that "polytheism always *includes* monotheism. The reverse is not true."⁶⁴ "Includes" is not the proper word; "absorbs" or "swallows" would be a more accurate description. For while giving the appearance of being all-inclusive, it is extremely exclusive of all orthodox forms of monotheism. In other words, it is "open" to anything that does not oppose its *own* view. In short, it conceals its own exclusivism under a cloak of inclusivistic language. But down underneath it believes that the only way is to deny there is an only way.

Dr. Geisler is Dean of Southern Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina (704) 543-9475.

NOTES

¹ John Naisbitt, *Megatrends* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), 240.

² Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 195.

³ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980), 23.

⁴ Mark Satin, *New Age Politics* (New York: Dell, 1978), 113-14.

⁵ David L. Miller, *The New Polytheism: Rebirth of the Gods and Goddesses* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 64.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64-65.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6, 7, 60, 80-81.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 9.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 55, 34, 59.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ³⁶ *bid.*, 55, 63.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ³⁸ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and other Pagans in America Today*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), viii.
- ³⁹ Richard de Mille, in *The Don Juan Papers*, put together a collection of scholarly essays which argue that Castaneda is one of "the world's great hoaxers" (p. 10). They claim not only that no such sorcerer exists but that the teachings Castaneda places in his mouth are not native Mexican (Yaqui) but derive from Eastern religions. One Hindu monk, Agehananda Bharati, claims "there is nothing in Castaneda's mysticism that you cannot also find, sometimes in nearly the same words, in Hindu and Buddhist tantrism [mystical writings] or in the official Patanjali Yoga" (pp. 148-49).
- ⁴⁰ Irvin Kershner, *Rolling Stone*, 24 July 1980, 37.
- ⁴¹ Dale Pollock, *SkyWalking* (New York: Harmony Books, 1983), 140.
- ⁴² George Lucas, *Star Wars* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 37, 121, 145.
- ⁴³ Cited in *Time*, 23 May 1983, 68.
- ⁴⁴ Adler, 27.
- ⁴⁵ Adler, 112, 139.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35, 112.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 35-36.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 76-77.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ⁵² Miller, 7.
- ⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1958), 79-80.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, 82.
- ⁵⁵ Cited in *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 12 Dec. 1985, 2A.
- ⁵⁶ Adler, 126, ix, 135.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88, ix.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 101-3.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 98.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 66.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, viii.