

Fox Valley pagans seek self-identity, understanding from others

By Stacy Conner

BEACON-NEWS STAFF

In a society oriented toward Judeo-Christian traditions, the neo-pagan religions are often hidden behind a curtain of misunderstanding.

"(There is) the notion that we are Satanists," said Treva Rodemaker, acting priestess for a pagan circle which meets at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Geneva.

"Satanism is as much anti-pagan as it is anti-Christian."

She explained that one of the symbols of the pagan religion is the five-pointed star or pentagram with one of its points pointed upward. The "sacred" symbols of Satanists are the upside-down cross which is anti-Christian and also the upside-down pentagram which is anti-pagan.

In fact, the pagan religion doesn't have Satan or an equivalent personification of evil. According to Rodemaker, a Satan-figure isn't necessary for any divine retribution in paganism because they believe in something like Karma.

But Dr. Theodore Kisel, who teaches a world religions class at Northern Illinois University, disagrees. He said it people did not have to wait for the old testament to worship evil.

"The very nature of polytheism (worshipping more than one god) is that some gods and goddesses are good or have the qualities of good and others are evil or have the qualities of evil," he said.

Rodemaker said her group should not be perceived as a threat to other faiths.

"We also hear that we're anti-Christian or that we're trying to break down Christian beliefs which is not true," Rodemaker said.

"We have as much to do with Christianity as Confucianism has to do with Christianity.... It is no more a threat

to Christianity than Judaism, Islam or Shintoism (is a threat)."

Lauretta Wolf, a Fox Valley business owner and member of the same pagan circle as Rodemaker, points out that the fundamental law of Wicca, one of the denominations of paganism, is that everything you do to other people or the attitude which you have comes back to you three times.

Wolf first learned there was name for what she was, (a pagan) while attending a women's study circle at the church.

This is a source of responsibility for those who practice paganism: God does not punish people for their sins; everyone is responsible for the decisions he or she makes in life.

Nature-centered

In its very essence, neo-paganism is a religion which centers around nature and humankind's present existence.

Says Wolf, "The Neo-pagan movement - or whatever you want to call this thing that's going on - is people everywhere are trying to get back in touch with the earth and their feelings."

"People are trying desperately to become connected with ...'meaning' - meaning, earth and the validation of their feelings," she said.

"We're concerned with this earth that we see as a metaphor for the creator and as part of the creator,"

Rodemaker said.

Rodemaker says she believes that there is a fact which every religion seems to agree on: that there is an infinite power which is the source of life.

"The only means we have to understand this force is metaphor because it is infinite and we are finite," said Rodemaker.

"Judeo-Christian (doctrine) says that there is the son Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Pagans believe the creative forces are best represented as a mother goddess and a father god," she said.

Rodemaker said that pagan's Genesis is comparable to the Big Bang Theory. "The Goddess was one and was everything. When she felt love for herself she created the God."

The pagan Genesis says that from the love of the God and Goddess the earth, stars

and all life were created.

"So we and the stars and the bugs and everything are the sons and daughters of god. That gives us tremendous responsibility," she said.

"The trees and the rocks are our brothers and sisters. We're the louder and noisier sibling, so we probably get more of the parents' attention."