

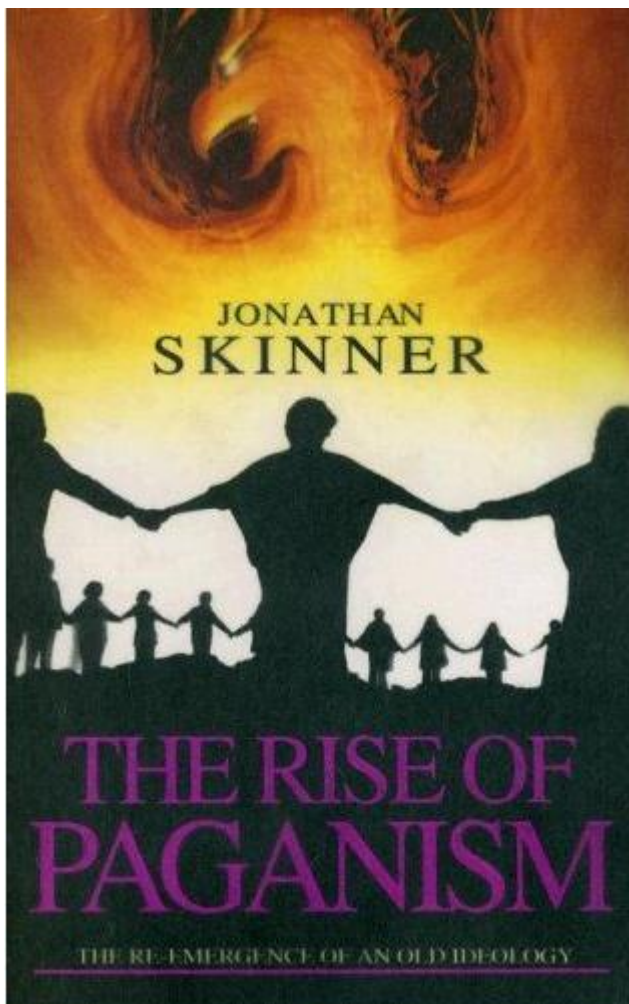
The Rise Of Paganism

How do you boil a frog alive? If you your throw it in a pot of bubbling water it will jump straight out (so I am told – I've never actually tied this!)

The only way is to place it in the pot of cool water before you turn on the gas and then heat it gradually. The frog, unaware of its danger, will not notice the rising temperature, even finding the warm water pleasant, until it is too late.

Paralysis comes before death. This exactly parallels our present situation concerning the rise of paganism that we are seeing all around us.

The greatest danger concerning paganism is that it is totally misunderstood by most Christians. We tend to see it in terms of witchcraft, Satanism, the occult, black magic and the like. These are the



'boiling' forms, which most people would want to jump away from – and generally, these are the far rarer forms. The real danger comes from the 'tepid' types, which are often seen as reasonably acceptable in 21st century Britain. And it's these that are numbing us to the terrible dangers as more and more flagrant manifestations arise, each rise in intensity dulling our reaction to the next even more virulent form. Our society has become numbed, is becoming paralysed – and could ultimately be destroyed by this escalating inferno.

So, what essentially is paganism? What are the underlying assumptions and perspectives that make up this increasingly popular world view? Only once can we understand this can we begin to perceive the subtle varieties that are the precursors to the approaching maelstrom.

Before we start we need to note two things. First, we must recognise that what follows is a synthesis, a pulling together, of what appears as contradictory mass of information. This

should not surprise us as paganism does not claim to be a consistent, rationalistic philosophy. But what we can do as we join the dots is to note a general pattern or picture, and discern the underlying principles. Second, we need to grasp that what we call paganism includes overlapping and intimately related labels. There is ancient paganism, the following of the old pre-Christian religions and gods. There is neo-paganism, the repackaging of the old faiths for modern minds. There is imported Hinduism, the following of eastern gods. Then there is eastern philosophy, the adapting of far-eastern belief systems. There is idolatry, the symbolic use of artefacts of creation to connect with spiritual reality. There is mysticism, the belief in direct experience of spiritual illumination. There is shamanism, the belief in getting power and knowledge by contacting the spiritual world, including the dead. There is occult, the hidden underground movement that connects with the demonic world and claims to have hidden secrets. There is the New Age Movement, the current spiritual exploration that yearns for humanity to make an evolutionary leap to a new level of consciousness. Then there is a mystical interpretation on the new, post Einsteinium physics, as well as various approaches to environmentalism and some perspectives of alternative medicine.

So, let us now pull together the threads that connect many of the ideas from these movements, religions and ideologies, particularly as they are being expressed today.

Everything is One

The whole of reality, God, gods, spiritual beings, energy, matter, planets, galaxies, trees, animals, rocks - and us, are all part of the One interconnected Ultimate Reality. This One Reality expresses itself in a whole gamut of manifestations; therefore people can talk of having God within them, or the Earth being divine. For some, therefore, green issues take a religious dimension. People worship creation.

Connecting into spiritual power, knowledge and energy

Through using various techniques, or rituals, people claim to receive direct power and insight, and even an altered state of consciousness. It is often held that direct knowledge, or illumination, can be experienced through an encounter with some spiritual being or the Ultimate Reality of the universe.

There is a plethora of spiritual beings

Most, but not all, forms of paganism believes in the reality of supernatural beings, whether it is gods, demons, angels, spirits, ghosts, or whatever. It is held that they can be contacted, and for a price, wisdom and power can be imparted.

Reincarnation and ‘ascended existence’

A wide range of contemporary pagans believe in some form of life after death, either by re-entry into this world, or by becoming a spiritual being in another dimension. Others hold that we become absorbed into the Ultimate Reality, perhaps losing our personal conscious existence.

One World Religion

As everything is simply a form of the One, the Ultimate Reality, all religions are seen as essentially various manifestations of the same human endeavour. Gradually, all will coalesce into One.

A New World Order

Many pagans hold a grim parody of the biblical world-view. They feel that in the distant past humans once had a far greater spiritual and powerful existence, which we lost, and that we are now heading for a new higher consciousness and existence again, the New Age, the Age of Aquarius. In this exalted state, all religions and governments will be subsumed into one global empire.

Infiltration

These elements are being expressed today, not primarily as religions for people to follow, but in aspects of every area of modern life. Scratch beneath the surface and you will find these threads in many alternative medicines, in counselling practices, in areas of environmentalism, in self-help guides, in management training models and educational practices. The ideas are often presented in non-religious terminology.

Biblical Enemy No 1

For a couple of generations Christians have had to fight an enemy that the Bible hardly recognises: atheism and secularism. But as paganism rises again we must turn to fight biblical enemy No 1: paganism and idolatry. The magic arts of Pharaoh's magicians are being re-sought; the religion of Canaan is on the march; Elijah's adversary is gaining ground; the mysteries of Babylon are resurfacing – a new Babel is being built. People have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and are worshipping and serving created things rather than the creator (Romans 1:25). 'The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons' (1 Corinthians 10:21).

The good news is this: the Bible is full of counsel on how to fight this enemy. The best news is this: 'God exalted Jesus Christ to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:9-10). Jesus is Lord.