
P A G A N I S M

by

John Rowan

Many people in the human potential movement have moved out in recent years into the sphere of the guru. Some of the best therapists I know have joined up with Rajneesh or Sai Baba or Da Free John. Many others more informally adhere to Buddhism in some shape or other. There is a natural tendency, once one gets interested in the transpersonal, to specialise in it more and more, and to take up some kind of religious devotion. But I believe that there is an important political question to realise here. What is the type of religious devotion that is more helpful to the earth at the present time?

It seems to me that paganism has some claim to be considered, because of its close relation to the earth and its care for it. This connection has been well drawn out by Sjoon & Mor (1980) and I believe a new edition of this book is now in press. The group called Pagans Against Nukes has issued a very good brief summary of the pagan faith, which among other things says the following:

We consider as fundamentally pagan all folk who hold the Earth sacred, who try to live in such a way that no living creature need suffer that they might live,

regarding the plants and creatures as kinfolk, whose needs are to be treated with respect; who seek to prevent the exploitation and poisoning of our Mother Earth; who seek to re-establish a culture that will live lightly on the Earth, taking only enough for its needs, and living in peace and harmony towards the Earth, fellow creatures and other human beings.

One of the big advantages of paganism as compared to the monotheistic religions is that it is pluralistic. There are many names for the Goddess and many ways of approaching her. There are many names for her son and consort the Horned God. As the PAN statement again makes plain:

Paganism is not a dogmatic faith. We have no holy books, prophets or saviours. There is no One True Way with Paganism - rather a great diversity of approach to the faith, and a great variety of creative ways in which it finds expression, naturally arising from the infinite diversity of life.

This is perhaps the reason why paganism is becoming more popular today, as Margot Adler (1979) has described it with a wealth of

detail. Excellent authors like Starhawk (1979) and Barbara Walker (1983) have opened up a broad path on which we can now walk in our examination of these questions.

Furthermore, it is paganism which has become the most political expression of the women's movement. Not only the Greenham Common women, but also many of the strongest protest groups in the United States, use the pagan symbols of the spider's web, the snake, the ritual circle, the bird, the maze and so on. And so we get Starhawk (1982) telling us:

If we are to survive, the question becomes; how do we overthrow, not those presently in power, but the principle of power-over? How do we shape a society based on the principle of power-from-within?

This political concern is found in many places today where women's spirituality is being developed, as we find in Spretyna, (1982) and in McAllister (1982). I have argued strongly elsewhere (Rowan 1987) that men's spirituality also needs this kind of connection with politics if men are to come to terms with patriarchal consciousness - the biggest social problem of our time.

These are relatively new thoughts for me, and much has still to be done in working out how best to present them in print. The word 'paganism' has rather unserious connotations for many people, and it is hard for such people to take anything like this at all in the right

spirit. But it seems so important that we just have to take the risk of being misunderstood.

Political Aspects

It is enough to think of a few of the contenders in various parts of this field to see at once that not only are the various efforts very uncoordinated (for some excellent comments on this problem see Rowbotham et al 1979) but that also there are patriarchal elements still surviving within many of them. Probably the most consistent one, in avoiding all kinds of relapse into patriarchy, is the women's movement.

And with the women's movement we find the kind of eco-feminism which is very close to the vision of humanistic psychology, deeply concerned with the integration of all the forces in nature and society. As Kornegger (1975) says:

Together we are working to expand our empathy and understanding of other living things and to identify with those entities outside of ourselves, rather than objectifying and manipulating them. At this point, a respect for all life is a prerequisite for our very survival.

Radical feminist theory also criticises male hierarchical thought patterns - in which rationality dominates sensuality, mind dominates intuition, and persistent splits and polarities (active/passive, child/adult, sane/insane, work/play, spontaneity/organization alienate us

from the mind-body experience as a whole and from the Continuum of human experience. Women are attempting to get rid of these splits, to life in harmony with the universe as whole integrated humans dedicated to the collective healing of our individual wounds and schisms.

Coming back to our question then, what kind of change agency would be suitable for carrying on the struggle to question patriarchy? It seems that it must probably be an organization dominated by women, or at least the kind of vision which women have particularly been responsible for developing, and that it must be organised in such a way as not to set up all over again the social relations of patriarchy. There is a very good discussion of all this, with many practical hints, in Coover et al (1978) We know that organizations do not have to be hierarchies; so it is by no means impossible for such an organization to exist. But the men in such an organization would have to have been through the men's movement, or something like that, in order to be able to work in such a set-up.

The men's movement is something I have tried to describe elsewhere (Rowan 1987). Warren Farrell (1974) is quite informative, and the Pleck and Sawyer (1974) book has useful bibliography; another excellent collection of papers is Snodgrass (1977). It arose mainly as a result of the women's movement making it clear to men that their behaviour was not acceptable in certain ways. After a number of one-to-one struggles within

couple relationships, men began talking and finding that they had things in common. Their eyes had been opened to things about themselves which they did not know before. And so they started meeting to try to work things out, and see how they really felt about themselves. These meetings were often very tense because the men felt pressured into self-examination, and defensive about many things. The meetings were often unsatisfying because of this defensiveness, usually manifesting itself in a persistent tendency to go off into theoretical diatribes or compulsive activity rather than real attempts to get in touch with feelings and to critique daily actions. But imperfect as they were, and are, these meetings are seemingly the best way for men to find out at least something about how they are affected by the social relations of patriarchy, both internal and external. The Men's Antisexist Newsletter deals with these matters, and so does the magazine Achilles Heel.

However, if these groups are to be effective, they have, on the first level, to enable the participants to examine their current consciousness and actions. This is the basic consciousness-raising function which can work well in enabling men to change their assumptions as to what is proper masculine behaviour, and to enable them to relate to other men.

On the second level, they have to enable the participants to go into the unconscious determinants of their actions. This is more

difficult, and requires a commitment to some form of therapy or counselling. Only in this way can men really get down to their mother stuff, their father stuff and all that material which unconsciously prejudices them against women and all that is female. At the same time this process enables them to come to terms with the feminine within themselves, and this is also a useful and perhaps necessary step.

On the third level, they have to enable the participants to come to terms with female power. The only way I know for this to happen is that we find out about the Great Goddess and the Horned God and to understand something about paganism. The reason why this is so necessary is because there are very few images of female power in our present society, and we need to go back and pick them up if we are to believe in them. Unless men genuinely believe that there is such a thing as female power, and accept it as good, they will never hand over their male power.

It is for this reason that I do not really believe that there are any other ways for men to pick up this kind of thing. Those who have been through the 'hippie thing' often picked up something of it, though not at all reliably; those who have mixed a good deal with feminists have often changed quite substantially as a result. But none of these things is on a mass scale.

It seems, therefore, that the change agency for questioning patriarchy on any large scale is going to be rare and hard to find. Perhaps the nearest thing to it is the Green movement, particularly in West Germany, though it is now growing in other countries. But work has to be done at many different levels and it would not be right to leave everything to a political party, no matter how enlightened.

This means that we also have to consider change agencies which can challenge patriarchal attitudes and practices at the organizational level - what Kotler calls the 'protest' approach. This is obviously an easier, though never an easy, task. But it still entails having an organization which is not itself patriarchal, and aims at synergy.

Believing then in the importance of conflict and the possibility of integration, we can go out for what we want as individuals, as groups, as communities and even as members of social classes.

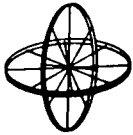
Out of this, then, what needs to be said is that the way of working through conflict and interaction favoured by humanistic psychology works best with reasonably small units which can be visualized and mentally grasped.

We have already seen that humanistic psychology can handle very

well the conflicts between management and unions, black and white races, gender opponents, teachers and students and opposed interest groups in local communities. Why should it not be able to handle class conflicts too, so long as these are expressed in terms of genuine demands for real needs? In fact, this outlook should make class

conflict more frequent and more productive, because of its emphasis on becoming aware of what is real for each person, instead of suppressing needs in favour of what is supposed to be felt.

There is only one way through: to become real, to learn to take a stand, to develop one's centre.



Astrological Psychotherapy

An introduction:

Saturday, 19 November '88, 10-5pm

For further information and application contact:

Ulrike and Jochen Encke 1 Grafton Road London W3 6PB Tel: 01-992 9514

The Psychotherapygroups for MEN

**THE
INNER
FATHER**

New groups commence on
2 November '88 and 25 January '89
Each groups runs for 7 consecutive
Wednesday evenings from 7-10 pm.
For further information see article
in S&S (May/June issue, page 119)
and/or contact:

**THE
WILD MAN**

Jochen Encke 1 Grafton Road London W3 6PB Tel: 01-992 9514