

Debby Earthdaughter

## Non-christian: By Birth, versus the Privilege of Choice

I'm worried white pagans are recycling racist ideas — just changing them to apply to being european pagan instead of christian.

I am light-skinned, from european heritage, and grew up celebrating christian holidays. These three things combined mean I was raised with a huge amount of privilege. I've gone on to be a pagan. But I see myself and others who make that change still acting with a great deal of privilege. We had christian privilege. Even when we give it up, we still carry the effects of all those years of it.

That seems very different from never having had that christian privilege. Unless we do a lot of thinking, I see us as just continuing to do the same kind of cultural domination we were raised with.

### **Privilege stays, even when we give it up.**

There's been a lot of debate about whether male-to-female transsexuals should be at women only events. When men dress and live as women, they often are not aware of the male privilege that they still carry. Things like taking up space, expecting others to pay attention to them, not thinking about others' perspective, having others doing the daily work — all those male role things.

Some never-het lesbians have also talked about differences in privilege with women who have lived as het and are now lesbian. It makes a lot of sense to me, when you're also taking other privileges into account. Race, class, disability, age, size, etc. affect coming out and finding like lesbians.

I was actively het for 5 years. I was also thin part of that time through starving and compulsive exercise. I was treated so differently when I fit in — being "normal," having a boy-

friend. Men treated me better. And I fit in with women better too — I could talk about men. When I came out as a lesbian, I lost some of that. But part of that ease, of having been normal, of proving I could do that — that has stayed with me.

And that seems a lot the same as being raised christian, and opting to give it up. I may have been uncomfortable with christianity. It didn't fit me. But I still had that ease of gluing on Rudolph's nose in school as part of *my* holiday. Singing the carols as *my* songs. Talking about christmas presents and easter baskets with the other kids. Having decorations up in my neighborhood for *my* holidays. And, of course, having school and work off on *my* holidays.

My school sure never closed down for the Jewish High Holidays or Dia de los Muertos, even though there were a significant number of Jewish and Latino kids. And christmas and easter were only on the roman catholic/protestant schedule, even though there were Greek orthodox kids. We never built a sukkah on the school grounds. We didn't make hamantaschen or enchiladas in home ec.

This all seems to carry over into lesbian culture, often dominated by white raised-christian lesbians. Dykes like me, still acting out ideas like:

### **My holidays are the real holidays.**

We may expect solstice to have the same billing as christmas used to have. Now it's THE holiday. Of course the big events will be solstice parties, solstice gifts, solstice trees, solstice cards, solstice catalogs and shopping, solstice decorations.

As if every woman now celebrated solstice. And did it in a northern european way as well — complete with holly and wreaths and snowy scenes.

### **Everybody else's holidays are weird, extra.**

Sure, we can sing a song about a dreidel too at our solstice party. We may even acknowledge Kwanzaa. Just like we might have had a few token menorah pictures up at christmas and a token Hanukah song in the christmas concert.

### Everybody else's culture is inferior. (Conversion zeal)

Everybody used to have to be a christian (preferably protestant). Now everybody has to be a pagan (preferably northern european-style).

We still get to judge what religions are OK and what aren't. Of course we're still king — oops I mean queen — of the hill. Instead of other religions being primitive or "heathen," now it's that they aren't as evolved. We white pagans have it together, still the most pure and holy. Everybody else is clinging to their dirty patriarchal religions.

### The needs of my group are most important.

Product catalogs, holiday fairs and other special sales promotions in December are common in lesbian culture. While they are usually labeled "solstice" or generic "holiday," they still seem like christmas to many non-christian women.

When a Jewish woman objected to a "winter solstice" catalog\*, she got condescending responses like — yes, I too feel angry about christmas. But this isn't christmas. It's *solstice*. And it supports craftswomen. You're too angry. I'm a pagan — I'm a non-christian too. I'm like you. Being this angry doesn't help.

When the argument is — this allows craftswomen to survive doing crafts — I want us to look at who is getting to make their living doing crafts. I think the trend is that women with more privilege (class, race, etc.) get to work less in "the patriarchy," where they'd have the better jobs anyway. The women who have the shittiest jobs in "the patriarchy," due to fewer opportunities for education and connections, I think are the ones least likely to be getting to "leave the patriarchy." Sort of another version of white flight, instead of figuring out how we'll *all* get to live better.

I went to church for a while when I was a kid. I saw good stuff going on there. But what drove me away was the one-

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\*See Judith Stein's letter in *Lesbian Connection* (Jan/Feb 1994) and later responses (Mar/Apr, May/June 1994).

way thing. They couldn't just say "this is what I believe, my path, but many others are OK." I saw good people who weren't christians. So it just didn't make sense.

It's that one-way thing that I see carrying over into everybody having to be pagan. Pretty ironic too since a big thing in paganism is polytheism! I don't see a place for "my goddess(es) are the only ones." That's christian ideas smashed onto paganism. Really living out the idea of pagan polytheism means respect for other cultures, religions, ways of life.

TIRED OF PET NAME  
CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?



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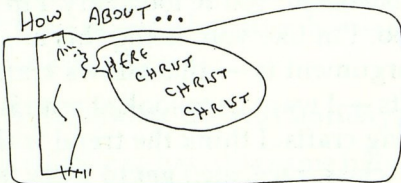


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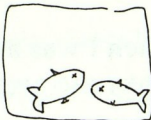


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