

Religion and the Return of Magic : Wicca as Esoteric Spirituality.

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Abstract

Keith Thomas' celebrated theory of the decline of magic during the seventeenth century, and its disappearance by the twentieth century, stands in stark contrast to the magia naturalis of the Renaissance and the later occult revival of the fin de siècle from which Wicca developed. In this thesis we contend that in the ferment of Renaissance Europe, magic remained an integral part of western esotericism, of which Wicca in the 1990s is a current manifestation. Using Antoine Faivre's characterisation of esotericism and Wouter Hanegraaffs historical emphasis on esoteric connections, we construct a framework to enable us to assess Wicca as an esoteric religious tradition in the 1990s. Within this framework, and running throughout the thesis, we investigate an apparent transformation in the understanding and practice of magic. We argue not only that Wicca is a specific religion and part of the Western Esoteric Tradition, but that the use and understanding of magic in Wicca is not divorced from, but part of religion; rather than a contra-religious, instrumental means of control utilised by individuals, magic may thus instead be understood as a participative group religious practice. This thesis thus seeks to go beyond the conflation of Wicca with other forms of witchcraft and paganism in order to uncover Wicca as a specific form of spiritual expression. The seemingly ever-increasing popularity of Wicca in the Protestant world suggests that Thomas' theory, whilst accurate for the restricted historical epoch with which he engages, in fact requires revision as a consequence of the development of Wicca as a religion in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, instead of religious changes causing a decline in magic, as we approach the twenty-first century it may in fact be more appropriate to speak of religion and the return of magic.

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Frequently Asked Questions About Wicca, Witchcraft, and Magic. What is Wicca? What is Witchcraft? Tools of Magic: Ritual Tools and the Wiccan Altar. Wiccan Altar. Athame. Since its initial incarnation in the mid-20th century, the religion of Wicca has expanded and evolved into countless individual forms. And since there is no official, authoritative text laying out exactly how people who practice Wicca are supposed to think, it's a bit dicey to be generalizing about Wiccan beliefs. Oftentimes Western spiritual seekers look beyond the religion of their childhood, usually to exotic Eastern traditions like Zen Buddhism or Taoism, because they perceive these traditions as being steeped in the esoteric—not realizing that Eastern spirituality is just as bound to the ritualistic trappings of

exoteric religion as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. liberation, and redemption out with the bathwater of myth and magic. The goal is not to supplant exoteric religion with the esoteric, but to create healthy exoteric institutions that can continue to carry and transmit the esoteric teachings into the modern and postmodern worlds. These are arguably the two most important tasks of religion in the 21st-century. For a closer look at the theoretical aspects of esoteric and exoteric spirituality, be Exoteric vs Esoteric religion today. This antagonism on a doctrinal and practical level has been maintained by the Church up to this day. Recently a priest in Poland publicly burnt Harry Potter books among others because of magic and witchcraft. The Church is simply afraid of dealing with any hidden knowledge, because it didn't assimilate it from the start. Now, any alternative spirituality is treated as a competitor on a spirituality market which exoteric Christianity had a monopoly on for over a thousand years. So I hope this has cleared some misconceptions and has shown the complexity of th Magical thinking in various forms is a cultural universal and an important aspect of religion. Magic is prevalent in all societies, regardless of whether they have organized religion or more general systems of animism or shamanism. Religion and magic became conceptually separated with the development of western monotheism, where the distinction arose between supernatural events sanctioned by mainstream religious doctrine (miracles) and magic rooted in folk belief or occult speculation. In pre WICCA AS ESOTERIC SPIRITUALITY CHARACTERISATION OF W ICCA Revived Religion Nature Religion WICCA AS ESOTERIC SPIRITUALITY The 'Hierarchy of f N eed s' M odel Wicca, Esotericism and the Hierarchy o f N eeds IMPLICATIONS OF THE THESIS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH. 291 296 298 300 300 302. 305. vi. Last words: religion and the return of magic. 310. Appendices: a p p e n D IX 1: appendix 2: appendix 3



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