

## FOLLOW-UP ON MY WAR COMMENTS

In my remarks on the monotheism-induced madness that is leading us to Gulf War II, I paraphrased a quote on the Roman Empire. Since then, I've found the original. If you like it, pass it on to others!

In 1919, Joseph Schumpeter wrote:

“There was no corner of the know world where some interest was not alleged to be in danger or under actual attack. If the interests were not Roman, they were those of Rome's allies; and if Rome had no allies, the allies would be invented. When it was utterly impossible to contrive such an interest - why, then it was the national honor that had been insulted. The fight was always invested with an aura of legality. Rome was always being attacked by evil-minded neighbors...The whole world was pervaded by a host of enemies, it was manifestly Rome's duty to guard against their indubitably aggressive designs.”

If that doesn't ring a bell, look at the news headlines.

Think. Question. Doubt what you are told. Search out the opinions that don't get a hearing in the mass media. “What would Odin do?” Well, he certainly wouldn't believe the evening news, would he?

Asatru is not about living in the past - it is about applying the traditional Way of our people in the present, to build the future we want. The crises of our time are very relevant to that process.

## BUSH AND GOD

George Bush made the cover of Newsweek again - not unusual, since he's the President, but this time the focus was on his religious beliefs. (You can learn more at <http://www.msnbc.com/news/878520.asp?cp1=1#BODY> )

Now, I don't care that George Bush is a Christian. I long ago quit blaming the followers of Christ for the shortcomings of Christianity. My parents were Christians, and a lot of the Christians I've known could teach Asatruar a thing or two about courage, honesty, and family.

Having said that, I do have concerns in this case. One problem, as I mentioned last week, is that monotheism - shared among various followers of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism - is leading the United States into a tragic war that cannot serve our long-term interests.

But there's a danger close to home, too. Bush is on record as saying that Wicca is not a real religion, and you can be sure he'd scoff at our own beliefs. I'm not suggesting that the government is going to round us up and put us in an American gulag - but we can expect Asatru and other religions to have a tougher time, considering the mood of the country. We're going to see a lot more emphasis on God in government, and a lot more suspicion of those of us who are proudly polytheist.

My point? Each and every one of us has a part to play in making Asatru a viable, strong entity. Let's never pass up a chance to strengthen our community...to hold ourselves and others to high standards of behavior and performance...to legitimize our religion, our Way, in the eyes of others...to sincerely and fervently call the power of the Gods and Goddesses into our lives.

It is not enough to believe, or to think. Ultimately it is what we do that matters.

## A HOLY RESERVE

From the very beginning of the revival of our ancient ways here in Vinland some thirty years ago, we have been open about our beliefs and our practices. We have given blot, or "honorings of the Holy Ones," in front of Wiccans and eclectic neopagans and before the staring glass eye of the media. We have been photographed while performing our rites. On more than a few occasions, people we hardly knew were invited to participate in our rituals.

Looking back, I think this policy has been a mistake.

I'm not pointing fingers in accusation as I say this, because I have been as much at fault as anyone. Indeed, am largely responsible for forming many of our Asatru customs, good and ill alike. That's the risk of leading the way into unknown territory. We did many things that were right - but this extreme openness is not one of them.

## Religious Exclusivity

Historically, native religions have been much more guarded about their religious practices. When the father of an Aryan household in ancient India performed the daily rite before the hearth, only family members could be present. Even good friends were forbidden to witness the rituals. Similarly, lower castes and outsiders were not even allowed to listen to certain verses of the Rig Veda. This was definitely not a "come one, come all" religion!

In more modern times, the Mormons maintain the privacy of their religion against the casual curiosity of others. If you're not a Mormon, you won't be allowed to watch

ceremonies inside the temple. Fraternal lodges like the Masons and their many offshoots keep the same policy of exclusivity.

American Indians may allow selected non-Indians to take part in some of their religious rites, but in most cases tribal membership is a prerequisite. Some Indian groups are very militant in stressing the proprietary nature of their practices - which of course gets them labeled “racists” by petulant New Agers who feel they have a right to practice the religion of any group whatsoever.

## The Holy

The Vedic Indians, the Mormons and all the rest practice what I call “a holy reserve.” The German theologian Rudolf Otto, in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, examines the essence of the “numinous experience” - the human encounter with the holy. This encounter cannot be adequately described in words because it lies beyond the life that we know. We can only approximate a description of the numinous through analogy and through the feelings of awe and majesty it induces in us. The experience of the numinous is one of overwhelming power, of inspiration and even of ecstasy; it is in this sacred state that we commune with the Gods and the ancestors.

Our encounter with the Holy Powers is set aside from the mundane world. The early Germanic word for the holiness, *Wihaz*, implies exactly this sort of awe-filled separation. The *ve-bonds*, or “sanctuary ropes” marking off the ritual area in Viking times, were a physical manifestation of this protected, enclosed, holy space in which every word and gesture took on a special significance.

It is inappropriate to invite the curious, the whimsical, the scoffing, or the alien into this space.

Quite apart from the essential nature of the holy in Germanic religion, there are other very good reasons to safeguard our rites from the eyes of the outside world. Our blots will look strange to most outsiders, inviting them to ridicule our rites and thus insult the Gods. We know why we do the things we do, and for us they make perfectly good sense, but to others they may simply look bizarre. It is our duty to protect the Gods and Goddesses from the scorn of non-believers.

On a more ordinary and practical note, there is the issue of public relations. We will not win men and women of quality by looking peculiar. If the Old Way is to grow - and it must! - we have to approach people in a way that does not frighten them off. Those freshly-scrubbed young Mormon missionaries on their bicycles don't tell you about some of the rather strange things that Mormons believe; they describe their religion in terms that do not violate your comfort level. Similarly, we must present our beliefs in ways that make sense to ordinary people.

If we insist on being known for dressing funny and doing strange things in the woods, we may or may not attract the kind of people we are seeking...but we most certainly will attract people who like to dress funny and do strange things in the woods!

## Conclusion

So what does this mean in terms of what we actually do?

We need to be choosy about the people with whom we blot. Strangers or outsiders can have my hospitality and my friendship, but this does not necessarily give them a right to share my connection with the Divine.

I will not allow my rituals to be photographed. Nor will I appear in public in ritual garb or anachronistic clothing. I have done this in the past and I was mistaken.

A dignified, reserved, reticent attitude toward the holiness of our religion can win us the respect essential for legitimacy in the modern world. Most importantly, it will deepen our contact with the Holy Powers.

Only in this atmosphere will native European religion blossom to its full potential!

Stephen A. McNallen

Drighten, AFA