

ORGANIZED RELIGION CAN **BE ROADBLOCK TO FAITH,** **SOME SAY**

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Note from Pastor Kevin: The prophets foretold that in the last days there would be a great falling away from the faith and that people would turn their ears to false teachers and doctrines of demons. It seems like these days are upon us.

HAMILTON, Ohio - When people become disenchanted with their parents' religions, they sometimes turn to the religions of their ancestors.

Annoyed by what they perceive as wrong-headed self-righteousness and people not living up to the tenets of their beliefs, gossiping and backstabbing, some find comfort in older, earth-based religious teachings.

"Church wouldn't be so bad if not for all the people who go there," said a Morgan Township, Ohio, man who identified himself by his "Indian name," Sky Hawk. "I still consider myself a Christian in a way because I believe in the message that Jesus had, but the way it is practiced -- or not practiced -- in the church left a bad taste in my mouth."

After hearing about his Native American ancestry when he was about 16, Sky Hawk, 28, stopped going to his family's Baptist church and began exploring the spiritual practices and techniques of the Woodland Indians.

Melissa Moore, 35, of Hamilton grew up in the fringes of the Catholic Church, raised by a single mother who had been excommunicated because of a divorce.

"She had to choose between the faith she grew up with or living in an abusive relationship," Moore said. "She's still a Christian, but she's been shown that the Catholic Church isn't what it's cracked up to be and spent the rest of her life going from church to church."

"Anything that comes between people and their God is just another roadblock to a complete life. It's a shame when the church itself is a roadblock."

As a young teen, Moore went to a Baptist church with an aunt for a few

months but found it lacking.

"It was interesting, but I shut myself off to it because it felt like they were trying to convince me that their way was the only way it's supposed to be," she said.

"Churches don't teach people to be open to possibilities, that people can come to God through Buddhism or Paganism or whatever other path they want to take. They take the Bible as a literal statement and can't separate it from the context of the times in which it was written and put the teachings in the context of modern times."

When she was about 14, Moore received a catalog in the mail offering books and other items associated with Paganism.

"I don't know how I got it because I wasn't on any kind of list," she said. "But I immediately ordered *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*."

That book, she said, gave her a framework on which to create her own spiritual beliefs.

"I started out seeking a structure, but it just didn't happen for me," she said. "My beliefs evolve constantly, but the important thing is to stay in touch with the earth and yourself, and in touch with the universe -- which can be difficult -- and to do your best to be a good person."

"I am a Pagan, but I'm not a Wiccan," she said. "I'm what we sometimes call 'a kitchen witch' because I use a lot of herbs and spices in my rituals, or a 'hedge witch,' an all-purpose healer or magician."

When she and her husband recently moved into their new home, the first thing she did was "smudge" the house with sage, to cleanse the house of previous and possibly bad energy.

"Our altars will just look like knickknack shelves to most people," she said. "We use items that have special meaning for us."

Moore and Sky Hawk say their beliefs are based on the idea that everything in the world and universe is somehow connected, and their practices are based on the cycle of the seasons, putting special significance on the solstices and equinoxes as holy days.

For the Native American, there is an emphasis on living in harmony with nature, Sky Hawk said.

"There is a saying that if you leave the Bible out in the rain, it will

disintegrate and the words will scatter," he said. "Our bible is the wind."

"All things are made of energy," Moore said. "Energy never dies; it just changes, and we have the ability to effect change. The universe is alive, and we can interact with it."

"If I cast a spell to help my finances, it helps me get into a financial state of mind. But I still have to practice my good money skills."

Moore said mainstream churches and Pagans tap into the same flow of universal energy.

"When you go to a church and the energy is high, things begin to happen," she said. People may be healed or enlightened. Lives may be changed. "That's magic, but they may not want to call it that."

It's the belief in magic, the manipulation of universal energy, that leads many to mistake Paganism for Satan worship.

Like Christianity, ancient religions also believe there are good and evil forces in the world, but Pagans don't personify it in the form of Satan.

"Pagans don't believe in the devil," Moore said. "He is not our guy. We didn't make him up. The general rule is, 'Don't hurt anybody and do what you're going to do.'"

Some Pagans believe in an after-life, sometimes referring to it as Summerland, but Moore has a different view: "I believe that when I die, I will become a part of whatever's growing above me."

II Th 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the **falling away** [from the faith] comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (NKJ)

2 Tim 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (NKJ)

Luke 18:8 "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"