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FROM THE NATURE GOD TO THE GOD OF NATURE: REACHING OUT TO WICCANS

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Implicit in Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations is the command to evangelize. Carrying out that command invariably brings us into contact with a wide variety of people whose beliefs and lifestyle may seem quite foreign to us. Often we may find ourselves feeling uncomfortable with such encounters. The temptation is to take the easy way out and leave any evangelism to someone else. It can be too easy to shelter ourselves from the world and shirk our God-given responsibility to reap the fields as they become "white for harvest" (John 4:35). Those feelings of discomfort may be a signal that it is time for us to become more informed both about our own Christian worldview as well as the worldviews and religions of others. We need to do so in order to "always be ready to give a defense" (1 Pet. 3:15) to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in us. As the religion of Wicca¹ becomes more mainstream in America, the chances become greater that we will encounter in our normal course of events a practitioner of this faith. Being prepared in advance is the best way to take advantage of witnessing opportunities that God, in His sovereignty, may bring our way.

The task of sharing the gospel has both universal elements and specific strategies. In an important sense, witnessing to Wiccans is no different from witnessing to anyone else. It requires a comfortable knowledge of the gospel message and a preparation to defend that message with the measure of faith that God has given. The specific strategies create an additional challenge. I would like to suggest some specific strategies. Do not expect to be able to get through all these steps in just one encounter. Be prepared to invest enough time to become informed of the Wiccan worldview and be willing to develop a relationship that will enable you to engage Wiccans in fruitful dialogue.²

Creating Credibility. There is no substitute for being informed about the belief system of those you are attempting to reach. This is no less true for Wiccans. There are several reasons for this. First, being informed goes a long way in creating credibility. If you come across as being ignorant, they might dismiss your rejection of their views as being the product of that ignorance, thinking that if you only knew more about the issues, you would embrace their views just as they did. Demonstrating an understanding of their viewpoint signals that you care about these matters and may lead them to consider that you perhaps deserve a hearing.

Overcoming Obstacles. Second, being informed can go a long way in overcoming obstacles to fruitful communication. Many Wiccans are hostile (in attitude, not actions) to Christianity (at least as they perceive it). They resent the notion that they need to be converted and reject the idea that there is anything morally wrong with them. There is no real concept of sin in their worldview; instead, they think in terms of ignorance and enlightenment.

Wiccans will expect you to be hostile (in attitude, not actions) toward them. Try not to contribute to any stereotype that they may have of Christians. You can avoid coming across as condemning without compromising the Christian stance of the seriousness of sin and the danger of judgment. Only the Holy Spirit can convict of sin and enable one to see one's need for a Savior. This is not to say that He does not use other means in bringing one to this awareness; but it is to say that it is easy for us to become an impediment to that awareness. Try to be disarming by being kind and respectful; but do not feign kindness. Most people (including Wiccans) can see through phoniness. If your attempt to reach out to

them is not attended with a genuine Christlike love and kindness, then it would be better for you to find someone else to witness to. To be kind and accepting in the manner of which I am speaking does not mean that you approve of their beliefs, but treating them with dignity and respect can go a long way. After all, they are humans before they are Wiccans. Being willing to be a friend can begin to tear down unnecessary obstacles. If you display this kindness and respect, then they are more likely to consider your Christian perspective on life.

Minimizing Misunderstandings. Third, being informed can go a long way in minimizing the chances of being misunderstood. Do not assume that Wiccans are familiar with Christianity. In fact, the chances are that many Wiccans have a distorted view about the Christian faith. This is particularly true concerning the gospel. Many Wiccans have a misunderstanding not unlike that of other people in that they assume that becoming a Christian means trying to be as good as one can. This leads to many Wiccans believing that they themselves are more “Christian” than many Christians, since they pride themselves on their belief in the sacredness of all life, their conscientiousness about the environment, and their adherence to other Wiccan values. They will undoubtedly be aware of the failings of the institutionalized Christian church in these and other areas. They may even have an exaggerated perspective about the harmful effects Christianity has had in history, believing that the church is at the root of many or most of the world’s problems. They may express contempt for what they see in Christianity as an unhealthy patriarchy, an overemphasis on private property, an unjustified allegiance to capitalism, and more.

Should you respond to these or other points? There is no one answer that will apply to every situation. It is a judgment call you will have to make. On the one hand, dealing with such weighty topics might be problematic if you are not informed enough to give a reasoned response to their concerns or misperceptions. Further, it could cause you to alienate yourself from them, and pursuing such topics could become a distraction from getting at the heart of the matter—the gospel. On the other hand, if the Wiccan truly has a problem considering the claims of Christ because of these or other issues, being ready to engage thoughtfully and respectfully might signal that Christians can be informed about such matters too. Sometimes it will not be possible to discern in advance which is the wiser course. Pray for wisdom and learn from your experiences.

All in all, there is no reason for you to shy away from your own failings as a Christian or the failings of the Christian churches. Being able to admit to our own hypocrisy will further undo many misunderstandings that Wiccans may have of Christians and Christianity. In fact, owning up to one’s own failings will help move the conversation along the path of why we all need a Savior in the first place.

Developing Dialogue. Fourth, being informed will make it easier for you to pose the right kinds of questions. Your goal will be to develop an open dialogue that entitles you to share your faith freely. Many Wiccans will be happy to share what they believe. If you have conducted yourself in a Christlike manner up to this point, you should have opportunities to present and defend the gospel.

Occult expert and Christian apologist Marcia Montenegro suggests a number of questions you can pose to engage a Wiccan in a fruitful discussion.³ Wiccans regard all of life as sacred. Questions about whether humans should be regarded as more special than insects or other life forms can press the issue of the uniqueness of human beings. Some Wiccans may try to maintain consistently that all life forms are equally sacred, but many will recognize that human beings are unique. Such questions can establish a connection with the truth that resides within all humans concerning objective morality. Romans 2:14–15 tells us that the moral law of God is written on the heart. Here, the Wiccan’s own sense of morality can work to your apologetic advantage.

Most Wiccans will hold that the universe is either indifferent or is benevolently disposed toward humans, and yet they have no real hope about their own destiny. Inquiries about death, reincarnation, and the afterlife can sometimes bring to the surface the concerns many humans have about what happens after death. Ask them what the goal is to living many lives, how many lives they think they will need to live in order to achieve that goal, and how certain they are that they are on the right track. The hope that is in the gospel will stand in sharp contrast to the uncertainty of self-improvement.

Questions about the origin of the universe can give you an opportunity to show the intellectual superiority of the theistic worldview over the pantheism of Wicca. Against their backdrop of an ultimately impersonal universe you can contrast the reality of a loving personal God who stands ready to embrace them with His love.

There are, of course, many more issues that can serve as points of dialogue for you to compare and contrast the Christian worldview and gospel with Wicca. Try not to chase too many issues at once. Stay focused and be prepared to engage in lengthy conversations. With practice, you can become increasingly skilled at bringing the gospel to bear on most topics of conversation. Let your defense of the truth be attended with love.

— *Richard G. Howe*

NOTES

1. I use the terms "Wicca" and "Wiccan" throughout even though there are distinctions to be made between Wicca, witchcraft, and paganism (or Neo-Paganism). For the most part my comments here should apply to the practitioners of any of these occult groups.
2. For a Christian discussion of the belief system of Wicca, witchcraft, and paganism, see Richard G. Howe, "Modern Witchcraft: It May Not Be What You Think" *Christian Research Journal* 28, 1 (2005) and Brooks Alexander, *Witchcraft Goes Mainstream: Uncovering Its Alarming Impact on You and Your Family* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004).
3. Marcia Montenegro, "Witchcraft, Wicca and Neopaganism," CANA, http://cana.userworld.com/cana_wicca.html.