

Petition to Capitalize "Pagan" – Chicago Manual / AP Stylebook Letter

DECEMBER 2, 2013 / CHRISTINE KRAEMER

If you are a scholar or author and would like to add your name to this petition, [click here](#) (<http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-chicago-press-associated-press-capitalize-pagan-in-chicago-manual-of-style-ap-stylebook>) for an electronic version at Change.org (set up at the original organizer's request).

FROM:

Coalition of Scholars in Pagan Studies

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Contact: Oberon Zell (Oberon@mcn.org (<mailto:Oberon@mcn.org>))

TO:

Chicago Manual of Style

ATTN: Anita Samen, Managing Editor

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AP Stylebook
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**To the Editors of the Associated Press Stylebook
and the Chicago Manual of Style: A petition**

November 30, 2013

Dear Editors,

We the undersigned are a coalition of academic scholars and authors in the field of religious studies, who have done research into contemporary Paganism, and written books on the subject. Pagan studies represents a growing field in academy and the American Academy of Religion has had "Contemporary Pagan Studies" as part of its programming for more than a decade. We are approaching you with a common concern.

The word "Pagan" derives from *pagus*, the local unit of government in the Latin-speaking Roman Empire, and thus *pagan* referred to the traditional "Old Religion" of the countryside, as opposed to Christianity, the new religion with universal aspirations. Paganism, therefore, was by definition pre-Christian religion. Over time, with the expansion of the Roman Church, "pagan" became a common pejorative by Christians toward any non-Judeo-Christian religion.

In the 19th century, the terms *pagan* and *paganism* were adopted by anthropologists to designate the indigenous folk religions of various cultures, and by Classical scholars and romantic poets to refer to the religions of the great ancient pre-Christian civilizations of

the Mediterranean region (as in the phrase, “pagan splendor,” often used in reference to Classical Greece).

Today, the terms *Pagan* and *Paganism* (capitalized) refer to alternative nature-based religions, whose adherents claim their identity as Pagan. Pagans seek attunement with nature and view humanity as a functional organ within the greater organism of Mother Earth (Gaea). Contemporary Pagans hearken to traditional and ancient pagan cultures, myths, and customs for inspiration and wisdom.

Thus contemporary Paganism (sometimes referred to as “Neo-Paganism” to distinguish it from historical pre-Christian folk traditions) should be understood as a revival and reconstruction of ancient nature-based religions, or religious innovation inspired by them, which is adapted for the modern world. Paganism is also called “The Old Religion,” “Ancient Ways,” “Nature Worship,” “Earth-Centered Spirituality,” “Natural Religion,” and “Green Religion.”

The Pagan community is worldwide, with millions of adherents in many countries. Moreover, increasing numbers of contemporary Hindus, First Nations activists, European reconstructionists, indigenous peoples, and other polytheists are accepting the term “Pagan” as a wide umbrella under which they all can gather, distinct from the monotheists and secularists. They are using it positively, not to mean “godless” or “lacking (true) religion.”

Therefore it is understandably a matter of continuing frustration to modern self-identified Pagans that newspaper and magazine copy editors invariably print the proper terms for their religion (i.e., “Pagan” and “Paganism”) in lower case. Journalists who have been confronted about this practice have replied that this is what the *AP* and *Chicago Stylebooks* recommend.

But names of religions—both nouns and adjectives—are proper terms, and as such should always be capitalized:

Religion: *Christianity* *Judaism* *Islam* *Buddhism* *Hinduism* *Paganism*

Adherent: *Christian* *Jew* *Moslem* *Buddhist* *Hindu* *Pagan*

Adjective: *Christian* *Jewish* *Islamic* *Buddhist* *Hindu* *Pagan*

This list could be expanded indefinitely for every religion in the world. As you can see, Paganism, like all faith traditions, should be capitalized.

Pagan and Paganism are now the well-established chosen self-designations and internationally-recognized nominal identifiers of a defined religious community. The same terms are appropriately lower-case only when they refer to ancient "pagans" since, in that context, the term does not refer to a discrete movement or culture. In short, "Pagan" and "Paganism" now function much as "Jew," "Judaism," "Christian," and "Christianity" do.

(—Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, NYUP, 2nd edition 2011)

The current journalistic convention of printing lower case for these terms seems to have originated with the *Associated Press Stylebook*, first published in 1953. However, a new era of religious pluralism has emerged over the past sixty years. The terms "Pagan" and "Paganism" are now being capitalized in a variety of publications, texts, documents, and references, including religious diversity education resources such as *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, The Pluralism Project, Harvard University, and *Inmate Religious Beliefs and Practices, Technical Reference Manual*, Federal Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Department of Justice.

In order to assure greater accuracy in 21st century journalism, we hereby petition the AP and Chicago Stylebooks to capitalize "Pagan" and "Paganism" when speaking of the modern faiths and their adherents in future editions.

Thank you.

Signatories

1. Cairril Adaire (founder, Our Freedom Coalition: A Pagan Civil Rights Coalition; founder, Pagan Educational Network)
2. Margot Adler, M.S. (National Public Radio; Nieman Fellow at Harvard University in 1982; author: *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, 1979, 1986, 1996, 2006)
3. Eileen Barker, PhD, FBA, OBE (Professor Emeritus in Sociology with Special reference to the Study of Religion at the London School of Economics; Founder and Chair of INFORM [Information Network Focus on Religious Movements]; author of over 300 publications on the subject of minority religions)

4. Carol Barner-Barry, Ph.D. (Professor Emerita, University of Maryland; author: *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian American*, 2005)
5. David V. Barrett, Ph.D. (London School of Economics and Political Science; British sociologist of religion who has written widely on topics pertaining to new religious movements and western esotericism; author: *The New Believers: A Survey of Sects, Cults & Alternative Religions*, 2001; *A Brief Guide to Secret Religions*, 2011)
6. Helen Berger, Ph.D. (resident scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University; Professor Emerita of Sociology, West Chester University, PA; author: *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism & Witchcraft in the United States*, 1999, 2013; with Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: Neo-Paganism in the United States*, 2003; *Witchcraft and Magic in the New World: North America in the Twentieth Century*, 2005; with Douglas Ezzy, *Teenage Witches: Magical Youth and the Search for the Self*, 2007)
7. Jenny Blain, Ph.D. (Recently retired from Sheffield Hallam University, previously taught at Dalhousie University, Canada, and now on faculty for Cherry Hill. Co-editor with Graham Harvey and Doug Ezzy of *Researching Paganisms*, 2004; author of *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic: Ecstasy and neo-Shamanism in North European Paganism*, 2002; with Robert Wallis, *Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights*, 2007; also numerous articles and chapters on Heathenry and Seidr, and on Pagan engagements with Sacred Sites.)
8. Jon P. Bloch, Ph.D. (Professor, Sociology Department, Southern Connecticut State University; author of *New Spirituality, Self, and Belonging: How New Agers and Neo-Pagans Talk About Themselves*, 1998)
9. Raymond Buckland, Ph.D., D.D. (founder of Seax-Wica; Originator Gardnerian Wica in America; author: *The Witch Book: The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft, Wicca, and Neo-Paganism*, 2002; *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft*, and more than 50 other titles.)
10. Dennis D. Carpenter, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Psychology, University of Wisconsin; author: *Spiritual Experiences, Life Changes, and Ecological Viewpoints of Contemporary Pagans*; co-founder, Pagan Academic Network.)
11. Chas Clifton, M.A. (Colorado State University-Pueblo (retired); Co-Chair of Contemporary Pagan Studies Group, American Academy of Religion; editor: *The Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies*; author: *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca & Paganism in America*, 2006; with Graham Harvey, *The Paganism Reader*, 2004)
12. Vivianne Crowley, Ph.D. (Formerly professor at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College, University of London, specializing in psychology of religion. She is on the Council of the Pagan Federation where she focuses on interfaith

- issues. She is the author of many books on Wicca, Paganism and spiritual psychology, including *Wicca: A comprehensive guide to the Old Religion in the modern world.*)
13. Carole Cusack, Ph.D. (Professor of Religious Studies, Chair Studies in Religion, Arts and Social Sciences Pro-Dean, University of Sydney, Australia; co-editor, *Journal of Religious History*; co-editor, *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*; author: *Invented Religions*, 2010)
 14. Marie W. Dallam, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor, Honors College, University of Oklahoma; Co-Chair, New Religious Movements Group, American Academy of Religion)
 15. Frances Di Lauro, Ph.D. (Lecturer, Undergraduate Coordinator, Writing Hub, School of Letters Art and Media, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney, Australia)
 16. Maureen Aisling Duffy-Boose (President Emeritus, Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans (CUUPS) 2005-2010; VP Emeritus, Pagan Pride International 2003-2013; Board Chair, Utah Pride Interfaith Coalition 2002-2005; Founding Priestess, Four Dragons Clann, 1734 Witchcraft, 2011)
 17. Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., Ph.D. (Emeritus Professor of Religion, University of Southern California; author of *Religious & Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, 1974, 1988; *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, 1976; 10th edition with Barbara McGraw, 2014)
 18. Douglas Ezzy, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Tasmania; published extensively in academic journals and academic monographs on contemporary Paganism, Witchcraft and religion)
 19. Holly Folk (Associate Professor of Liberal Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA)
 20. Rev. Selena Fox, M.S. (Senior Minister, Circle Sanctuary; founding editor, CIRCLE Magazine; co-founder, Pagan Academic Network; diversity educator, U.S. Department of Justice; author: *When Goddess is God* (1995); contributor to *Religions of the World* (2002), *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* (2006), *U.S. Army Chaplains Manual* (1984), other works)
 21. Elysia Gallo (Senior Acquisitions Editor for Witchcraft, Paganism, and Magic at Llewellyn Worldwide; Vice President of Twin Cities Pagan Pride)
 22. Wendy Griffin, Ph.D. (Professor Emerita and Chair of the Department of Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies at California State University, Long Beach; Academic Dean, Cherry Hill Seminary; Founding Co-chair of the Pagan Studies Group for the American Academy of Religion; Co-editor of the Alta Mira's Pagan Studies Series; editor: *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, identity and Empowerment*, 2000)

23. Raven Grimassi (Director of the Fellowship of the Pentacle, author: *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, 2000, and other award-winning books on Pagan-related themes)
24. Charlotte Hardman, Ph.D. (Honorary Fellow, retired senior lecturer, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University; co-author: *Paganism Today* 1995; *Other Worlds* 2000)
25. Graham Harvey, Ph.D. (Head of Department of Religious Studies, The Open University, UK; President, British Association for the Study of Religion; co-author: *Paganism Today*, 1995; *Contemporary Paganism*, 1997; with Chas Clifton, *The Paganism Reader*, Routledge, 2004; *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding religion as everyday life*, 2013)
26. Irving Hexham, Ph.D. (Professor of Religious Studies at University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada; author with Karla Poewe: *New Religions as Global Cultures*, 1997; *Understanding World Religions*, 2011; and many other works on new religious movements)
27. Ellen Evert Hopman, M.Ed. (Druid Priestess; Co-founder and Vice President for nine years, of The Henge of Keltria Druid Order and co-founder and Co-Chief for five years of The Druid Order of White Oak; author with Lawrence Bond, *People of the Earth: The New Pagans Speak Out*, 1995; with Lawrence Bond, *Being a Pagan: Druids, Wiccans, and Witches Today*, 2001; and other volumes)
28. Lynne Hume, Ph.D. (Associate Professor and Research Consultant, University of Queensland, Australia; Faculty, Cherry Hill Seminary, Bethel, VT; author of *Witchcraft and Paganism in Australia*, 1997; *The Religious Life of Dress*, 2013; co-author, with Nevill Drury of *The Varieties of Magical Experience*, 2013)
29. Ronald Hutton, Ph.D. (Professor, Department of Historical Studies, Oxford University; author: *Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, 2000)
30. Christine Hoff Kraemer, Ph.D. (Instructor, Theology and Religious History, Cherry Hill Seminary; author of *Seeking the Mystery: An Introduction to Pagan Theology*, 2012 and *Eros and Touch from a Pagan Perspective: Divided for Love's Sake*, 2013)
31. James R. Lewis, Ph.D. (co-founder of the International Society for the Study of New Religions and editor-in-chief of the *Alternative Spirituality & Religion Review* (ASSR). Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Tromsø in Norway; Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Wales, Lampeter; author: *Magical Religion & Modern Witchcraft*, 1996; *The Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects, and New Religions*, 1998; *Peculiar Prophets: A Biographical Dictionary of New Religions*, 1999; *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions*, 1999; with Murph Pizza, *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*; *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*; with Jesper

- Petersen, *Controversial New Religions; The Encyclopedic Sourcebook of New Age Religions; Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy; Legitimizing New Religions*)
32. Scott Lowe, Ph.D. (Professor, Philosophy and Religious Studies at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; Co-General Editor, *Nova Religio*)
 33. Sabina Magliocco, Ph.D. (Professor of Anthropology and Folklore at California State University, Northridge; author: *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, 2004; *Neopagan Sacred Art & Altars: Making Things Whole*, 2001)
 34. Ven. Rev. Patrick McCollum (Director of Public Chaplaincy, Cherry Hill Seminary; Chaplaincy Liaison, American Academy of Religion; Minority Faith Chair, American Correctional Chaplains Association; Executive Director, National Correctional Chaplaincy Directors Association; President, Patrick McCollum Foundation; Religion Advisor, United States Commission on Civil Rights; Recipient, Mahatma Gandhi Award for the Advancement of Pluralism; publications: *California Department of Corrections Wiccan Chaplains Manual*, 1998; *Courting the Lady*, 2000; *Religious Accommodation in American Jails*, 2013)
 35. J. Gordon Melton, Ph.D. (Institute for the Study of American Religion; *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 1991; with Isotta Poggi, author of *Magic, Witchcraft, and Paganism in America: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed., 1992; *Religious Leaders of America*, 1999)
 36. Brendan Myers, Ph.D. (Professor at CEGEP Heritage College, Gatineau, QC, Canada; faculty, Cherry Hill Seminary; author of *The Earth, The Gods and The Soul – A History of Pagan Philosophy: From the Iron Age to the 21st Century*, 2013)
 37. M. Macha NightMare/Aline O'Brien (American Academy of Religion; Nature Religions Scholars Network; Marin Interfaith Council; United Religions Initiative; Interfaith Center of the Presidio; Association for the Study of Women and Mythology; Biodiversity Project Spirituality Working Group. She also serves on the Board of Directors of Cherry Hill Seminary; the Advisory Council of the Sacred Dying Foundation; former Adjunct Faculty at Starr King School for the Ministry. Books: *The Pagan Book of Living and Dying: Practical Rituals, Prayers, Blessings, and Meditations on Crossing Over* (with Starhawk) 1997; *Witchcraft and the Web: Weaving Pagan Tradition Online*, 2001; *Pagan Pride: Honoring the Craft and Culture of Earth and Goddess*, 2004)
 38. Joanne Pearson, Ph.D. (co-author with Richard H. Roberts & Geoffrey Samuel of *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, 1998; (ed), *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, 2002; *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism*, 2002; *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual Sex and Magic*, 2007)
 39. Christopher Penczak (faculty member at North Eastern Institute of Whole Health; founder of the Temple of Witchcraft, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit church; co-owner of Copper

- Cauldron Publishing; author: *The Living Temple of Witchcraft*, 2008; 2009—and over two dozen other books)
40. Sarah M. Pike, Ph.D. (Professor of Comparative Religion, California State University, Chico; author of *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and The Search for Community*, 2001; *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 2004)
 41. Richard H. Roberts, Ph.D. (Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies, Lancaster University; co-author with Geoffrey Samuel & Joanne Pearson of *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, 1998)
 42. Kathryn Rountree, Ph.D. (Professor of Anthropology, Massey University, New Zealand; author of *Embracing the Witch and the Goddess: Feminist Ritual-makers in New Zealand*, 2004; *Crafting Contemporary Pagan Identities in a Catholic Society*, 2010; *Archaeology of Spiritualities*, 2012)
 43. Michael Ruse, Ph.D. (Lucyle T. Werkmeister Professor of Philosophy, Director of the Program in the History and Philosophy of Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL; author: *The Gaia Hypothesis: Science on a Pagan Planet*, 2013)
 44. Geoffrey Samuel, Ph.D. (Cardiff University, UK, as well as an honorary attachment at the University of Sydney; author: *Civilized Shamans*, 1993; co-author with Richard H. Roberts & Joanne Pearson of *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, 1998; *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra*, 2008; *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West*, 2013)
 45. Bron Taylor, Ph.D. (Professor of Religion & Nature, University of Florida; Fellow, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society; Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München; Editor, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture*; author of *Encyclopedia of Religion & Nature*, 2005; *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, 2010; *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*, 2013; *Civil Society in the Age of Monitory Democracy*, 2013)
 46. Robert J. Wallis, Ph.D., FRAI, FSA (Professor of Visual Culture; Associate Dean, MA Programmes, School of Communications, Arts and Social Sciences; Convenor of the MA in Art History and Visual Culture; Richmond University, the American International University in London; author of *Shamans/neo-Shamans*, 2003; and numerous articles on contemporary Paganisms, neo-Shamanisms and their engagements with prehistoric archaeology in Britain)
 47. Linda Woodhead, M.B.E., D.D. (Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University, UK. She studies religious change in modern societies, and is especially interested in how religion has changed worldwide since the late 1980s. Between 2007 and 2013 she was Director of the "Religion and Society" research programme in Britain, which involved 240 academics from 29 different disciplines working on 75

different projects. Her books include *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe* (2013), *A Sociology of Religious Emotions* (2011), *Religions in the Modern World* (2009), *The Spiritual Revolution* (2005) and *A Very Short Introduction to Christianity* (2004). She is a regular commentator and broadcaster on religion and society.)

48. Michael York, Ph.D. (Faculty, Cherry Hill Seminary; retired Professor of Cultural Astronomy and Astrology with the Bath Spa University's Sophia Centre; he directed the New Age and Pagan Studies Programme for the College's Department for the Study of Religions and co-ordinated the Bath Archive for Contemporary Religious Affairs. He continues to direct the Amsterdam Center for Eurindic Studies and co-direct the London-based Academy for Cultural and Educational Studies. Author: *The Roman Festival Calendar of Numa Pompilius*, 1986; *A Sociology of the New Age and Neopagan Movements*, 1995; *The Divine versus the Asurian: An Interpretation of Indo-European Cult and Myth*, 1995; *Pagan Theology: Paganism as a World Religion*, 2003; *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements*, 2004)
49. Oberon Zell, D.D. (co-founder and Primate, Church of All Worlds, 1962 [incorporated 1968; 501(c)(3) 1970]; co-founder, Council of Themis, 1968; Publisher Emeritus, *Green Egg* magazine, 1968-ff; co-founder, Council of Earth Religions, 1974; founder, Universal Federation of Pagans, 1990; founder, Grey Council, 2002; founder and Headmaster, Grey School of Wizardry, 2004; Secretary, Sonoma County Pagan Network, 2010-2013; author: *Grimoire for the Apprentice Wizard*, 2004; *Companion for the Apprentice Wizard*, 2006; with Morning Glory Zell, *Creating Circles & Ceremonies*, 2006)

Signatories Appended after Initial Submission

1. Thomas Baurley, B.A. (Archaeologist, GIS Specialist 2006, and Curator/Data Manager Fort Carson Cultural Resource Program, U.S. Army–Ft. Carson, CO; Independent writer, blogger, and publisher. Published various articles in the *Florida State University Anthropology Quarterly* on Neo-Paganism, 1991-1994; *Ethnography of Wicca in the Southeastern United States*, 1990; NEPA packets, memorandums of record, and reports for Fort Carson Cultural Resource Management Program 2007-2011 for protection and evaluation of various Archaeological sites on Fort Carson and Pinon Canyon, GIS/Curation Manual for Fort Carson Cultural Resource Program 2011; SAA Public Education Papers and online archive with Smith, KC and Miller, James. "The Neo-Pagan Explosion"—*FSU Anthropological Quarterly* Fall 1995; *Tree Leaves' Oracle Folk Journal* (Editor and Author of numerous articles); Editor/Author of *Ethno-Facts* Issue 1, Fall 1993)

2. Dana D. Eilers, J.D. (1981 cum laude graduate of New England School of Law; 1978 graduate of Smith College; licensed attorney MA, IL, and MO; author of *The Practical Pagan*, 2002; *Pagans and the Law: Understand Your Rights*, 2009)
3. Stephanie Taylor-Grimassi (Co-Director of the Fellowship of the Pentacle, and author of divinatory oracle kits)
4. Rev. Jerrie Hildebrand (Ordained Minister, Circle Sanctuary, Massachusetts)
5. Timothy Miller, Ph.D. (Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas at Lawrence; author of *America's Alternative Religions*, 1995)
6. Rev. Luke MoonOak, Ph.D. (Professor, Religion & Humanities, College of Central Florida; Minister, Church of All Worlds, Florida; author of *Radiant Circles: Progressive Ecospirituality and the Church of All Worlds*, 2010 and *Solantis*, 2012)
7. Jeff Rosenbaum, B.A. (Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Association for Consciousness Exploration LLC; B.A. in Sociology; Co-Director & creator of the Starwood Festival)
8. Mike Williams. Ph.D. (maw@globalnet.co.uk (<mailto:maw@globalnet.co.uk>)) (BSc (Hons), MA, PhD, MRICS. Tutor for the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids. Author: *Follow the Shaman's Call*, 2010; *Prehistoric Belief*, 2010; *The Shaman's Spirit*, 2013)
9. Laurie Kelly-Pye (Director of Sales & Co-Publisher at Career Press/New Page Books)
10. Benjamin E. Zeller, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor, Dept. of Religion, Lake Forest College; Co-General Editor, *Nova Religio*; author of *Prophets and Prottons: New Religions and Science in Late-Twentieth Century America*, 2010; co-editor of *Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements*, 2014)
11. Stuart A. Wright, Ph.D. (Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Criminal Justice at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. He is known internationally for his research on religious and political movements, conflict and violence. He has published five books, including *Armageddon in Waco*, 1995; *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, 2007; *Saints under Siege: The Texas State Raid on the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints*, with James T. Richardson, 2011)
12. Starhawk (Graduate Theological Seminary; Reclaiming Collective; author of *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess*, 1979, 1988, 1997; *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics*, 1982, 1988, 1997; *Truth or Dare*, 1988; *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, 1993)

[[Change.org: Petition to Capitalize "Pagan" in Chicago Manual and AP Stylebook](http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-chicago-press-associated-press-capitalize-pagan-in-chicago-manual-of-style-ap-stylebook)
(<http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-chicago-press-associated-press-capitalize-pagan-in-chicago-manual-of-style-ap-stylebook>)]



34 thoughts on “Petition to Capitalize “Pagan” – Chicago Manual / AP Stylebook Letter”

1. *StephanieAndDavid*

DECEMBER 2, 2013 AT 3:32 PM

I am a professional journalist and I agree. The term Pagan should begin with a capital letter. It is true – it’s not one religion but a group of religious traditions, however, both the AP Stylebook and the Chicago Manual capitalize ‘Protestant’ and ‘Christian’ which fit into the same category.

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:05 AM

You’re inadvertently making exactly the opposite point from the one that you are apparently espousing.

The word ‘Christian’ refers to one single religion, with many distinct sects or denominations – such as Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, etc. It’s proper and fitting that the name of a specific religion should be capitalized, as well as the names of its various sects or denominations. But we already have that: ‘Wicca’ as one specific religion is capitalized; and so are the various sects of Wicca, such as Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Georgian, Majestic, Cymmry, Stregheria, etc.

But the word ‘pagan’ is an umbrella term – just like monotheist, pantheist, polytheist, mystic, etc. Paganism does not refer to one single religion, like the words Judaism or Wicca or Asatru or Hinduism do.

If someone is advocating the capitalization of the term ‘pagan’ then logically they should also be advocating for the capitalization of words like pantheism and monotheism and many others. There are many umbrella terms out there; where would it all end?

- ***Christine Kraemer***

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:09 AM

> The word 'Christian' refers to one single religion, with many distinct sects or denominations – such as Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.

Hmm, you might need to better familiarize yourself with the history of Christianity. Christians have not always considered themselves all of one religion, or even considered other denominations to be legitimately Christian; the initial split between Protestants and Catholics, for example, was just that deep. There are many other examples (The Church of Latter-Day Saints being the latest), but suffice it to say that history doesn't support your statement.

Additionally, there's the simple grammatical argument that "the Pagan movement" is a proper noun in the same way as "the New Age movement." If there were a "Monotheist movement," in the sense that people were calling using it as a label for a religious identity and a specific historical movement, it would also be capitalized.

- ***DonnaBianca***

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 9:41 AM

I'm well aware that some Christians don't consider other Christians to be following the same religion; but that is their misconception, and it's not generally shared by scholars of religion. (Assuming that we're speaking of standard trinitarian Christianity here. There are other offshoots, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, that don't follow the trinitarian theology; and those might arguably be considered to be different religions.) Hinduism is also a vast and sprawling religion with many different beliefs and practices; as is Buddhism, to perhaps a slightly lesser degree. But we still regard Hinduism as one religion, generally; and we regard Buddhism as one religion with many diverse sects.

If we start trying to label each and every single denominational difference as a different religion, then once again that's a very slippery slope with no apparent end to it. There are core features of theology and philosophy and history and practice that we can look at, in determining where to draw the line between a different denomination and a different religion. Sure, there will be some marginal cases that fall into a grey fuzzy area; there always are, whenever we try to set up distinctions in the midst of vibrant and organic messiness.

(It's true that sometimes people tend to draw distinctions and boundaries in ways that make little sense. For example, Stregheria (as Raven Grimassi practices) and "Traditional Witchcraft" (as in the Robert Cochrane trad, and/or The Clan of Tubal Cain) both have a lot in common with Traditional Wicca as derived from Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente; including theology and ritual practice. Yet they don't use the word 'Wicca' to refer to themselves, and they seem to consider Wicca to be a different religion. But I regard them as essentially the same religion as Wicca, with only minor variations. On the other hand, some feminist trads of pagan witchcraft do call themselves 'Wicca' when they have very little in common with traditional Wiccan religion. In particular, they usually honor only the Goddess and not the Horned God; or else consider Him to be a much lesser deity; whereas the God and Goddess are equals in traditional Wicca. To me that makes them an entirely different religion; similar to the distinction between Judaism and Christianity, even though both religions worship Jehovah. So there will always be differences of opinion on where to draw the boundary lines; and some ways of defining the difference may make more sense than others. But nevertheless, boundary lines must be drawn separating one religion from another; because ideas rely on language, and language relies on creating distinctions and definitions.)

But whatever way we slice it, Wicca and Asatru and Thelema and other pagan religions are NOT merely different denominations of one single religion called 'Paganism.' Pagan religions do share a few features in common, usually; but their differences are much greater than their commonalities. As paganism continues to grow in the future, I can well imagine the pagan movement slowly petering out. It's more of a coalition of this moment in history – diverse parties with different interests and aims, all of whom want minority religions to be treated better. And that's a worthy goal, certainly. But it does not make us all members of one big uber-religion.

- *yewtree*

DECEMBER 4, 2013 AT 10:23 AM

Actually, many Hindus will tell you that there are many different philosophies and worldviews and practices within Hinduism, which are mutually exclusive too.

- *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 7, 2013 AT 2:50 AM

If you read what I wrote above, you'll see that I already made that very same point. Yes, Hinduism has an immense amount of diversity within it, many very different sects and beliefs and practices; but most scholars still regard it as a single religion.

That is the essential and critical point to be made here:

There are sensible ways to draw boundary lines and create definitions, and there are also some less sensible ways. So we want to draw some sensible boundaries around single specific religions; and we also want to draw boundaries within the religion to distinguish the different sects of one religion.

And then we also want to be able to group together distinct religions that share some commonalities, under a larger umbrella: so that Wicca, Asatru and Druidry are all under the 'paganism' umbrella; and Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all under the 'monotheism' umbrella; and Taoism and Buddhism and Hinduism are all under the 'eastern mysticism' umbrella. (Although both Hinduism and Taoism would also fit the category of 'pagan' – because it's a larger category that contains other sub-categories such as shamanism and eastern mysticism.)

You could, in principle, choose to define Hinduism as a loose collection of a hundred different religions – instead of one religion with a hundred different sects. But what would that really accomplish? Not much. It would obscure all the many things that all Hindus do share in common, which is a lot more than any of them share with Christians or Wiccans or Muslims or even Buddhists. It would be like saying that Lutherans and Episcopalians are following two different religions; when in reality they are both following a single religion, which is standard trinitarian Christianity.

It seems to me that the first thing to get sorted out in any kind of debate – especially debates over categories and language, which is what we're having when discussing the possible capitalization of modern 'Pagans' as distinct from ancient pagans – is to understand just how we're defining our terms. And this petition makes an attempt to do that, certainly, by outlining what the petitioners assume the term 'Pagan' includes. But I'm not sure that all or even most pagans would agree with where they're drawing their lines. I don't

personally relate to the 'Gaia' vision that Oberon Zell has long espoused, for one thing. And my bigger fear is that the way paganism is being presented, it could easily cause it to be mistaken for a single religion, instead of a group of religions.

So we need to think carefully about definitions and distinctions. Some people just don't like semantic arguments at all; or they think they're pointless, or something. But ideas are very powerfully shaped by language; so we need to be careful how we use words and how we define them. And some people – including, apparently, many pagans – don't like using 'labels' at all. But language consists of words, and words are nothing but labels; and if we eschew the use of labels – or if we refuse to define the words we use – then we have nothing meaningful to talk about.

So definitions are essential. Defining a word is like drawing a ritual circle; it determines what things will be inside the circle and what will be outside. There can be no defining of terms without the act of excluding some things from the definition. And some people are made uncomfortable by that, because they think that excluding anyone or anything is always bad. But it's no more 'bad' than drawing a ritual circle. Of course, we will probably not all agree on how to define terms; and that's ok too. If we are using terms differently from someone else, then we can get that sorted out up front by defining our terms in the way that we use them; so the other person can 'translate' an idea into their own preferred terminology. But ultimately, some kind of definition is always necessary in order to have meaningful communication.

And as the first order of business with regard to the term 'pagan' I think we want to make it very clear that 'paganism' is not a religion. Whether the capitalization ultimately happens or not, it will always remain the case that paganism is NOT a religion.

o *Alder Lyncurium*

DECEMBER 4, 2013 AT 1:59 PM

The fact that Paganism isn't a single religion with the same beliefs/practices, but rather a group of religions with several similarities (and generally sharing the same community) doesn't make it less eligible to be capitalised...

On the other hand we have to have in mind that nowadays the word Pagan has

acquired a different meaning.

If we are to be strict, then Wicca shouldn't be a religion either, but rather refer to "The Wicca" as a collective.

Communication, terminology, changes with time, in order to be -effective-.

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 7, 2013 AT 2:04 AM

If you're referring to the term "the Wica" as originally used by Gerald Gardner, then he spelled the word with only one 'c' – and yes, he used it to refer to the people who practiced the specific religion that he called 'witchcraft.' But for well over fifty years now, the word 'Wicca' with two 'c's has been used to refer to the religion. That's a good and necessary change of terminology, because the word 'witchcraft' refers to a kind of magic; and thus it really cannot be used to refer to a specific religion at all.

So Wicca is very much a single, specific and unique pagan religion with a well-defined duotheistic theology centered on divine gender polarity and our worship of the Moon Goddess and her consort the Horned God. That was very clearly laid out over sixty years ago by Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente, who were the founders of our religion. As with almost any religion, there are of course various sects or denominations. In Wicca the different sects are usually called 'trads' – like Gardnerian, Alexandrian, etc. But it still remains one religion, given that we share a common core of beliefs, rituals and practices.

The only issue there is that quite a few eclectic neopagan witches have taken to using the word 'Wicca' to describe what they do, even when they are not actually following the religion of Wicca at all. (That is, when they are not honoring both the God and the Goddess of Wicca as their supreme deities.) But the solution there is not to keep on expanding the definition of 'Wicca' until it's an utterly meaningless word; the solution, rather, is to be willing to draw the line at a reasonable place, and say that if you're not worshiping the Wiccan God and Goddess, then whatever it is that you're doing, it's just not Wicca. (Although it can still be a valid spiritual path, of course, as some kind of eclectic pagan witchcraft.)

Religions do grow and evolve over time, of course; and Wicca is no exception to that. But the natural evolution of a religion should never involve ripping the whole thing up by the roots and then planting something else in its place. Therefore, Wicca will always remain a duotheistic nature religion centered on the worship of the Moon Goddess and the Horned God as divine Lovers. But the liturgy and the structure of rituals and magical practice, and even our myths and symbols, will no doubt change and evolve over time.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiccan_ditheism

Another point with regard to the petition: I notice that it says that paganism is sometimes referred to as "The Old Religion." As far as I'm aware, it was originally only Wiccans who used the phrase "The Old Religion" to refer to the religion of Wicca — not to refer to any other neopagan religion. As a traditional Wiccan, I must object to pagans of other religions "borrowing" so much from Wicca, and then claiming it as their own. Yes, it's true that religions have historically always borrowed symbols and practices and terminology and even deities from other religions; and then reinterpreted them to fit into a new context. Mostly it doesn't bother me too much.

But the term "The Old Religion" is so closely identified with traditional Wicca that it seems disrespectful at the very least to see it being proclaimed as a term that could refer to any kind of pagan religion. (And that point stands, regardless of whether or not someone happens to believe that Wicca has roots that go back to ancient times, etc.) If it's used without the capital letters, and with specific reference to an ancient pagan religion — such as "the old religion of the Germanic tribes" or "the old religion of the ancient Celts" — then I have no complaint. But capitalized as "The Old Religion" it refers specifically to traditional Wicca, and not to any and all pagan or neopagan religions.

o *Alder Lyncurium*

DECEMBER 7, 2013 AT 6:17 AM

I am sorry, but if you are going to admit that "That's a good and necessary change of terminology...", which is a completely subjective point of view, I don't see the point on discussing the same evolution on the term Pagan. Yes, as an umbrella term.

About this:

“single, specific and unique pagan religion with a well-defined duotheistic theology centered on divine gender polarity and our worship of the Moon Goddess and her consort the Horned God”
 “Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente, who were the founders of our religion”
 I don’t know what kind of religion you practise...but it sounds nothing like the Craft...

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 18, 2013 AT 1:33 AM

I don’t know where your ideas about the Craft come from, but the religion of Wicca was founded by Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente, and it is indeed a duotheistic religion centered on divine gender polarity and the worship of the Moon Goddess and the Horned God. Check out “The Witches’ Creed” by Doreen Valiente. It’s a lovely liturgical chant that summarizes the basic creed — yes, creed, as in doctrine — of Wicca.

It seems very odd to me that so many who claim to follow Wicca appear to be so unaware of its roots and its traditional core beliefs. Even those who practice some form of “Traditional Witchcraft” — such as Cochrane trad — are basically following the same basic belief system. They also worship a Goddess of the Moon and stars, and her consort the Horned God, so I consider their beliefs to fall within a reasonable, traditional definition of Wicca. But those who do not worship the Horned God I do not regard as Wiccan.

Regarding the use of the word “Wicca” to refer to the religion that was founded (or revitalized, if you believe in The Old Religion) by Gardner and Valiente: that was a good and necessary — and useful and sensible — change of terminology for some very good reasons: First, Gardner did not have any specific name for the religion that he founded, other than “Witchcraft” — a term that Doreen Valiente also preferred over “Wicca.” But the word witchcraft refers to too many other things — magical practices in cultures all around the world, most of which have little or nothing to do with the beliefs and practices of Wicca. So there was clearly a need for a new word for the “witch religion” of Gardner and Valiente; and it made sense to use a variation of the word “Wica” — which he used to refer to the witches — as the name for the religion. And it made sense to

restore the spelling with the two c's, because of its historical etymological link to the word 'witch.' It might have been nice if we had pronounced it as "wee-tcha" instead of "wicka" – but that's a minor quibble.

Is it just my own subjective opinion that the evolution of the word "Wicca" to mean the religion of the Gardner and Valiente was a good thing? Sure, it's a subjective judgement call. Any judgement or opinion on anything is necessarily subjective; there is no such thing as an objective opinion or evaluation. But there can be good reasons or bad reasons for our opinions, and sorting those out is what a good debate is all about. The use of the word "pagan" to refer to a religion would be a bad thing, because it's already in use to describe a grouping of many different religions. And that is my opinion too. You may take it for granted that, if I express an opinion, then it is my opinion that I'm expressing. (What else would it possibly be?)

- *Alder Lyncurium*

DECEMBER 18, 2013 AT 9:45 AM

So, it is your personal opinion and the other opinion is "bad" because it's already in use to describe a grouping of many different religions. Wonderful. About "my ideas" of the Craft, they come from practice, which is what we do. And, as far as I am concerned, and never got an "official definition" and even less, one limiting the nature of the divine to the word "duotheistic". That along with "specific", "well-defined" ... Still, I don't know what you practice, sorry.

- *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 18, 2013 AT 7:39 PM

Alder:

A rational debate calls on people to offer reasons for their opinions, and to listen to and understand the other person's reasons for their differing opinions, and to argue about those reasons. Because what makes an opinion 'good' or 'bad' are the reasons used to justify it. But you seem to think that all you need to say is "well, that's only your opinion" – without giving any reasons why your own opinion differs from mine. No, that's not a reasonable way to debate any issue.

I gave you my reasons for my preferred usage of both the words "Wicca" and "pagan", and in both cases it's that I prefer language to be CLEAR and not confusing.

Using the word 'witchcraft' to refer to a religion is confusing, because it has long been used to refer to many other things – a diverse array of magical practices around the world. Using the word 'Wicca' to refer to a single religion is more specific, therefore much less ambiguous and confusing. Likewise, using the word 'pagan' to refer to a single 'religion' is also confusing, given that it has been used for centuries to refer to many DIFFERENT pantheistic and polytheistic religions. So in both those cases, I am advocating for the use of language that is clear and unambiguous. That is my reasoning.

By way of contrast, you have offered no reasons at all, that I can see, for your own preferred choice of terms. I take that to mean either that you have no good reasons for your opinion – other than habit, perhaps – or else that you have no idea how to debate an issue. Either way, that pretty much means that I won that round.

Regarding your ideas of "the Craft" (a term that was first imported into Wicca by Gardner): Yes, of course your ideas relate to your practice. That's true of all of us. And you are entirely free to follow whatever pagan path you choose, including that of eclectic neopagan witchcraft. Wicca has no monopoly on the use of the words 'witch' or 'witchcraft' and witches may follow many diverse sorts of spiritual paths.

My point was NOT that witchcraft is duotheistic, but rather that WICCA is duotheistic. (Which is to say, the theological core of Wicca is based on gender polarity, and the Great Goddess and the Great Horned God as divine lovers, and the two supreme beings in our religion. Many Wiccans also honor a diverse assortment of pagan deities; but we still regard our Goddess and our Horned God as supreme. In that, the practice of Wicca can become similar to other religions where there's a pantheon headed up by one main male god and one main female goddess, who are lovers.)

The word 'witchcraft' (or "The Craft") cannot refer to a single religion of any kind – much less the specific duotheistic religion founded by Gardner and Valiente. It is for that reason that I prefer to use the term 'Wicca' to refer to my

religion. You are entirely free to NOT use the word 'Wicca' to describe your own pagan witchcraft practice; and indeed, I would encourage you to avoid using the word 'Wicca' to refer to your path, if you do not actually worship the Moon Goddess and the Horned God of Wicca as the supreme deities of your religion.

You say that you "still don't know" what I practice. I made it clear that what I practice is traditional Wicca, as founded by Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente. That is, I'm a Gardnerian priestess. If you don't know what traditional Gardnerian Wicca is, then I suggest that you might want to read a few books on the topic. It might not be the path for you – and it probably isn't – but given that Gardnerian Wicca was the founding religion in the neopagan movement, and thus the main taproot from which many other contemporary neopagan religions borrowed, it's probably worth learning about, at least. Even if only to understand what practices you follow actually had their origins in traditional Wicca, and which do not. And that understanding may enhance your own path, wherever it takes you.

o *Alder Lyncurium*

DECEMBER 18, 2013 AT 8:15 PM

Donna, my arguments have already been stated endlessly here, not by me though: "Paganism" is an excellent term that defines a group of religion/practised that have several points of similarity and influence; and, above all, share the same community.

It isn't historically accurate, definitely. But so isn't Wicca (that's why my stress on you wielding Wicca as THE term).

When I was referring to the Craft (or Wicca, whatever you prefer) I wasn't referring to pagan or innovative witchcraft but, yes, what you call "a religions founded by Doreen and Gardner", also known as Gardnerian Witchcraft (Again, Wicca, if you prefer so).

Thank you very much for the book recommendation but, as far as I know, that isn't something I will learn outside the Circle!

So, we both are Gardnerian priest/priestess but I still don't recognise that stiff definition of the tradition I practise! And that's, again, the best of it, we don't

have to agree after all. It's just that sometimes (and I'm sure is a completely subjective impression) it feel like you are generalising too much, about what "IS" and "ISN'T".

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 10:10 AM

Your point about "the New Age movement" is a good one; perhaps the first good argument I've seen for capitalizing 'pagan' by way of parallels. But I presume the capitalization there originated because the phrase "new age" without capitals could mean almost anything; so the capitals were necessary to designate a single spiritual worldview (with many variants).

When it comes to other social movements, it can be hard to say why some tend to get capitalized (the Beat movement) and others don't (the labor movement). But it often appears that the capitalization appears when the word is being used in a very different sense ('beat') from the standard usage; and not when it's being used in its normal sense ('labor'). (Sometimes 'Labor' is capitalized; but I think that's usually when it becomes an actual political party.)

However, the word 'pagan' has — or should have — a clear and distinct religious meaning already. Yes, it started out meaning something different; and yes, through history it came to mean other things, such as "secular" even. But if we can truly reclaim the word 'pagan' to refer to pantheistic and/or polytheistic religions, then the capitalization won't be necessary to distinguish the religious meaning. Because while "new age" can mean a thousand different things, "pagan" is already pretty specific.

Actually, I tend to think that far too many words in English are already capitalized; such as 'Republican' and 'Democrat.' There, again, I can understand it, in order to distinguish a political party from the more generic meaning of the uncapitalized words. But sometimes I worry that we could be heading the way of the German language, where pretty much every single noun is capitalized for no apparent reason.

2. *P. Sufenas Virius Lupus*

DECEMBER 2, 2013 AT 5:59 PM

Is it possible to add our names to the petition, particularly useful perhaps if we have Ph.D.s and have written on the subject (as I have)?

- ***Christine Kraemer***

DECEMBER 2, 2013 AT 8:35 PM

I believe a paper version has already been sent, but you could certainly follow up with a letter supporting the petition. (I just barely got to sign myself, since I was home with baby and not at AAR.)

- ***Christine Kraemer***

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:07 AM

Update! Oberon asked me to set up an electronic version, and it's now here:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/university-of-chicago-press-associated-press-capitalize-pagan-in-chicago-manual-of-style-ap-stylebook>

You can also e-mail him to be added to the master document (information above).

3. ***OberonZell***

DECEMBER 2, 2013 AT 8:49 PM

Thank you, Christine, for putting the petition and signatures up in such a nice format, with room for people to comment. Folks are posting the link everywhere!

The one thing everyone is asking is, how can they add their own names to the petition? Can you make it possible for others to sign on to a master copy just as with other petitions that circulate?

Meanwhile, I'm still adding names to my own master copy. So if anyone reading this wishes to be added, please email me your signature line. Include degrees, credentials, positions, affiliations, and relevant books published (with year).

Send to: Oberon@mcn.org

4. ***Kevin EarthSoul***

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 7:23 AM

Excellent! I really like the educational content of the petition, as well.

5. ***DonnaBianca***

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 7:51 AM

Quote: "The Pagan community is worldwide, with millions of adherents ... accepting the term 'Pagan' as a wide umbrella under which they all can gather, distinct from the monotheists and secularists."

Right. "Pagan" does not refer to a religion; as an 'umbrella' term it refers to a CATEGORY of many different religions. Just like the term "monotheist" includes a number of different religions, and "secularist" includes a number of different non-religious philosophies or worldviews.

So are we also advocating for the capitalization of Monotheism and Secularism??

I'm a longtime pagan, but I generally do not capitalize the term. I'm more concerned about the increasing tendency (especially in America) for eclectic pagans to regard paganism as a religion in its own right. No, it clearly is not.

Wicca is a religion; Thelema is a religion; Asatru is a religion; Druidry is a religion; etc. The term 'pagan' refers to any and all of those religions. Paganism is not a religion in and of itself; and I think that it's important for safeguarding the vibrant diversity of the pagan movement that we all keep in mind that paganism is not a religion.

It's true that some eclectic pagans don't belong to any specific pagan religion, but rather subscribe to the "salad bar" approach of borrowing whatever religious motifs and ideas happen to appeal to them, from any and all pagan religions. But that does not mean that we should say those people are all following a religion called Paganism. Because those eclectic pagans don't hold very many beliefs and practices in common. They honor different Gods and Goddesses – or sometimes none at all – and they have very different beliefs regarding philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, magic, and just about everything else. By what possible reasoning would we claim they're all following a single specific religion called 'Paganism'?

So we must not confuse the eclectic salad-bar approach to pagan spirituality with a religion. Those pagans who choose not to subscribe to any specific pagan religion still have valid spiritual paths, of course. But a religion refers to a group of people who hold a core structure of religious beliefs, symbols, ideas, myths, experiences and practices in common. If there is no such common core, then there is no religion.

My sense of this debate is that many pagans are longing for more consideration and respect for their religion or spiritual path, and they see this capitalization issue as one way to achieve that. But I don't think this is as an ideal way to push for more recognition from the mainstream or even from academia. While the quest for more mainstream acknowledgement is understandable, I think it's more important to

maintain the inner religious integrity of the pagan movement. And that requires that we always keep in mind that we belong to many different religions, and not one single religion called paganism.

Besides maintaining our own understanding of the many diverse religions within the pagan movement, I would not want academics and mainstream media and the public at large to get the mistaken idea that paganism is a religion when it clearly is not. There's probably not much risk in academia of making that mistake, because historians and scholars of religion are well aware that there are many distinct and unique pagan religions, and they can never be compacted into one single religion. But the public can very easily get the wrong idea from mainstream media; and then that would likely lead to more influx of new pagans who have the mistaken idea that paganism is a religion.

Let's push for greater respect and recognition of our religious and spiritual paths, by all means. But I don't think this is the way to do it. The dangers of presenting paganism as if it were a single religion far outweigh any potential advantages that might come with the dubious granting of a capital 'P.'

- *Christine Kraemer*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:14 AM

No. The term "Pagan" is more like "New Age," as in "New Age movement." Both are proper nouns, names of religious movements. There is no "Monotheist movement," but if there were, it would be capitalized. Simple rules of grammar for anything that is used consistently as a name (in this case, for a religious identity and a specific religious movement at a specific historical moment. Note the petition goes through the history of the term's use, but specifies it should be capitalized for *contemporary* Paganism).

- *Donna Bianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 10:22 AM

See my reply to your point on the "New Age" movement, above. While it's a good point, I think ultimately it's not a parallel for the pagan movement. The capitalization there serves to distinguish one specific and nonstandard meaning from the generic phrase "new age" — which could mean almost anything. The same is not the case with the word 'pagan' because it already has (or should have) a well-established religious meaning.

Capitalization makes sense in regard to a historical social movement when the name of the movement would be ambiguous without capitalization. Examples: "the Beat movement" and "the New Deal" – versus "the women's movement" and "the labor movement" and "the civil rights movement."

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 11:38 AM

And yes, I did note that the capitalization is being advocated only for contemporary pagans (neopagans) and not for the pagans of ancient history. But that's one more thing that I find troubling about this proposal; because it seems to set up an artificial distinction between the pagans of yore and the pagans of today.

Yes, there is the classification scheme devised by Isaac Bonewits for distinguishing different kinds of pagan worldviews, that relates them to different historical time periods. And it's undoubtedly true that pagans today have needed to be flexible and creative in adapting their spiritual paths to the modern world, with all the changes wrought by science and technology and changing social mores. But to call ourselves 'pagan' at all means that we see and feel some deep connection there, some ancient tidal current that puts us in the same stream as pagans long ago.

If we were to poll today's Hellenic pagans or today's Norse pagans, then I think we would find that they consider themselves and their religion to have more in common with the ancient Greek pagans and the ancient Norse pagans than with other religions in the neopagan movement, such as Wicca or Thelema. But if we start making distinctions between 'pagans' and 'Pagans' – purely on the basis of what era they lived in – then we are ignoring or downplaying or discounting what we have in common with our ancient pagan forbears.

As I understand it, one reason why Norse and Germanic pagans took to abandoning the word 'pagan' in favor of using 'heathen' instead seems to be that they felt that too many neopagans were trying to cram all pagan religions into a generic one-size-fits-all-pagans mold that presumed far too much in common and did not acknowledge the deep differences between us. In particular, the liberal, egalitarian, pacifist, feminist, nouveau hippie, ecocentric 'Gaia' vision of many eclectic pagans today did not fit very well with a proud

masculine warrior tradition. But the Norse and Germanic 'heathen' folks rightly do belong in the big tent umbrella of the pagan movement; so long as we don't keep trying to redefine 'paganism' in narrower and narrower terms that exclude them.

The seemingly arbitrary distinction that's being created in the petition, between ancient pagans and modern 'Pagans' seems more than a little, I don't know... precious? Like we're a very special kind of pagan today, and we deserve the capital letters that our ancient pagan ancestors don't deserve. It also seems like maybe an attempt to mollify or pander to the current academic mood or fashion trend that aims to deny or minimize the continuity of paganism from ancient times into today, while simultaneously beaming open-minded tolerance and acceptance at all pagans who are willing to relinquish all claims to their own mythic history and instead define their faiths in the academically-approved terms of "new" religious movements.

(All religions change and evolve over time; and sometimes go through periods of crisis and upheaval, and later restoration and revitalization, with perhaps some very significant changes. When that happens with the religions of indigenous peoples like Native Americans, then they call it "revitalization." But when it's white folks aiming to rekindle the religion of their ancestors, then it does not get nearly as much respect; and historians are all too keen to deny them that ancestral connection. Interesting, that.)

Let's not create artificial distinctions between pagans today and our pagan ancestors; and also let's not create a forced and artificial 'unity' between the various pagan religions that are blossoming today. Socially, we may have more in common with our contemporaries; but spiritually, we may well have more in common with the ancients.

- ***Henry Buchy***
DECEMBER 4, 2013 AT 2:29 AM
yep Pagan is exactly like New Age... or more like a subset of it.
and yeah, there definitely is a need to distinguish Pagans from pagans.
- ***Christine Kraemer***
DECEMBER 9, 2013 AT 3:18 PM

I think they're parallel but distinct. The philosophical idealism of the New Age (i.e. the idea that the spiritual is the ultimate reality, and that the physical is subordinate to it, maybe even an illusion) isn't usually part of theologies calling themselves Pagan. Other than that, there's a fair bit of overlap, though there are some strong cultural/socioeconomic differences.

o *Henry Buchy*

DECEMBER 11, 2013 AT 9:44 AM

hmmm, not sure New Age can be assigned a single philosophical idealism, any more than the Pagan Movement can.

"The philosophical idealism of the New Age (i.e. the idea that the spiritual is the ultimate reality, and that the physical is subordinate to it, maybe even an illusion) isn't usually part of theologies calling themselves Pagan."

Which is probably why most Vedantic derived practices don't identify or wish to be identified with the label 'Pagan', and are hardly 'new age'.

there may be some social or cultural differences, but no strong economic differences. they share the same economic culture.

But I am quite content to be written out of the big P paganism as defined in the petition

6. *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:22 AM

The battle over capitalization that pagans SHOULD be having, to my mind, is the one over theological terms. I find it abhorrent that the deity of the Abrahamic faiths gets honored with a capital 'G' but our pagan Gods are almost always 'demoted' — by mainstream media, academia and often even pagans themselves — to a lower-case "gods."

I know that some feminists have pushed for the capitalization of 'Goddess' as a parallel to 'God' and that's a worthwhile cause, of course. And within Wicca we traditionally capitalize both Goddess and God, when referring to our own two supreme deities. But really, there should be complete parity of language and capitalization regarding all pagan and monotheistic deities.

The excuse that is sometimes offered for why pagan deities get described with the lower-case "gods" while Yahweh and his fellow monotheistic deities (Allah, Jesus, etc.) get a capital 'G' is that pagan deities are not omniscient, omnipotent, etc. And that's

true, of course. But then, the tribal war god of the ancient Hebrews is not omnipotent or omniscient either. That bizarre idea is just *their* peculiar religious mythology, not mine and yours; so we should not be granting it any sort of legitimacy with the capital letter 'G.' And that should not be the assumed stance of supposedly unbiased academic scholars or journalists, either. If they're truly unbiased, then they should be treating Yahweh, Thor, Hecate and ALL other deities in the world's many polytheistic religions on completely equal terms.

7. *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 9:06 AM

Paganism is not a religion. The idea that paganism is a religion is a huge misconception that we need constantly to be on guard to prevent. And if we push for the capitalization of the words 'pagan' and 'paganism' — "just like all the other religions" — then that only increases the confusion and the chance that people will confuse paganism with being a religion. No. Paganism is an umbrella term, describing a very large and diverse GROUP of distinct religions.

If paganism came to be regarded as a religion in and of itself, then what would that imply, logically, for the many different and unique pagan religions?

The logical corollary to "Paganism is a religion" would be that all those very different pagan religions are all just "sects" or "denominations" of the one religion called Paganism. Now just try to imagine that: Wicca and Asatru and Thelema all being just different denominations of the same religion. WE all know that's an absurd and ridiculous idea, right?? But the mainstream media and the general public don't yet know enough about paganism to realize that. So we want to avoid giving them any excuses for harboring the misconception that "Paganism is a religion."

As bizarre as it sounds, I have actually heard neophyte pagans make this kind of claim, usually by way of analogy and usually to non-pagans. Their explanation goes something like this: "Just as there are many different sects or denominations of Christianity, there are also many different sects or denominations of Paganism — like Wicca, Asatru, Hellenism, etc." My jaw dropped open for a moment before I could rush to correct that grievous misconception.

Christianity is one specific religion; paganism is not. A more fitting parallel for this analogy would be to compare paganism to monotheism, and to compare Christianity to Wicca or Asatru or Druidry; and to compare Baptists, Lutherans and Methodists to

Gardnerians, Alexandrians and Georgians. (All 'trads' or sects within traditional Wicca.) So the analogy would then go like this: "Just as there are various monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha'i, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism, so also there are various pagan religions like Asatru, Druidry, Wicca and Thelema. And just as there are various denominations within one monotheistic religion – like Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, and Renewal Judaism – so also there are various denominations or 'trads' within one single pagan religion like Wicca."

Because if we start comparing paganism with a single religion like Christianity or Judaism, then we're comparing banana trees with apples.

So there are only two possible interpretations of this argument for capitalizing the words 'pagan' and 'paganism' as I see it. And neither interpretation leads to anything good. Those two possible interpretations would be:

1. We should capitalize 'pagan' because "Paganism is a religion."

Well, that's simply wrong; and it carries the dreadful implication that distinctly different pagan religions like Asatru and Wicca and Kemetism are all just slightly different 'denominations' of the one big smoochy and ill-defined religion of 'Paganism.'

2. We should capitalize 'pagan' even though paganism is not a religion, but rather a group of related religions that often share some ideas in common.

That carries the logical implication that we should also capitalize other umbrella terms and categories such as 'monotheism' and 'polytheist' and 'henotheism' and 'mystic' and 'shamanic' and maybe even 'atheism' and 'agnosticism' too. And that's a very slippery slope to start sliding down, because there will be no end to it.

That's a fork in the road of the capital 'P' where both routes are unacceptable, and just plain wrong.

So let's not go pushing for the capital 'P' in 'pagan' – because the logical implications of that capital 'P' are much worse than most pagans would even want to consider.

8. *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 10:45 AM

One other thing about this petition that I would take exception to is that it seems to present a rather specific vision of pagan religions, one that not all pagans would be inclined to agree with. For example, do Thelemites consider Thelema to be a “nature religion”? Somehow, I doubt it. And is Asatru an “Earth-centered spirituality”? (Given that the Aesir dwell in the sky, maybe not.)

Even as a Wiccan who very much favors an ecocentric vision of Wicca as a pantheistic Nature religion, I find that I don’t agree with or relate to all of the language in this petition that supposedly describes what all of us pagans supposedly share in common. For example, this sentence:

“Pagans seek attunement with nature and view humanity as a functional organ within the greater organism of Mother Earth (Gaea).”

Umm, no. I regard the Earth as sacred, yes; but I don’t relate at all to the duality of “Mother Earth” and “Father Sky.” In traditional Wicca it is the Goddess who is the cosmic creatrix, and thus the Star Goddess, the deity of the vast night sky; while the Horned God is more of a chthonic Earth deity of the woods and the underworld. While I relate to many archetypes of the Goddess, including that of the Earth Mother, that is a different idea from seeing planet Earth itself as a feminine deity.

So this again relates to my earlier concern: that there is a misguided tendency among some neopagans to see all pagans – or at least all neopagans – as sharing in a single religious vision, or even as belonging to a single religion. But that is far from the case, of course. There are vast differences between many disparate pagan religions – differences in theology and metaphysics and ethics and ritual practice and pretty much everything else.

Even Margo Adler’s definition of pagan religions — which I had long considered very useful and complete — seems to be getting challenged all over the pagan movement today. She defined pagan religions as sharing three main features: Pantheism, polytheism, and animism. (I might also add animatism there too.) But now there are pagans saying that they’re pantheists but not polytheists, and other pagans saying that they’re polytheists but not pantheists. There seems to be some kind of pantheist vs. polytheist shootout going on in cyberspace; and it’s getting harder and harder to see just where the unity lies.

So let's be very careful that we don't go sliding down the road of assuming that pagans all share one big religion. Because there are already some pretty vociferous protests against that idea, as seen in current debates within the pagan movement.

◦ *Aine*

DECEMBER 3, 2013 AT 8:26 PM

Maybe you should write up a whole post about this? It's getting a bit dizzying to see so many of your comments, and they're all rather long. I think they'd work better as a separate post entirely.

◦ *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 7, 2013 AT 2:08 AM

Thank you for the feedback. Your suggestion to write it up as a single essay is a good one; but it's not really feasible for me at this time. The result would be a very long essay, and perhaps unlikely to be read unless I posted it on my own blog – a thing which I don't yet have. So until I can get more time in my life, I can only post bits and pieces here and there, when and where it's easy to do.

◦ *Christine Kraemer*

DECEMBER 9, 2013 AT 3:14 PM

Generalizations are necessary to begin to educate people; if you try to present the whole picture of contemporary Paganism at once to people who aren't familiar with it, it's overwhelming and confusing.

9. *OberonZell*

DECEMBER 17, 2013 AT 7:09 PM

I think "DonnaBianca" is perhaps intentionally missing the point here. "Animism," "monotheism," "shamanism," "polytheism," "pantheism," etc. are theological or philosophical premises, not religions in and of themselves. I am not aware of any organized (let alone legally incorporated) bodies of adherents who claim any of these terms as the name of their religion.

But Paganism is a religion, not a theology or philosophy. Certainly Paganism includes many Paths or Traditions within it—but these are essentially denominations, just as there are in such broad categories as Christianity and Hinduism—all of them still consider themselves to be Pagans. Even Buddhism, Islam and Judaism have various

separate and often violently opposing sub-categories, sects and divisions (such as "Orthodox" vs. "Reformed"). But that doesn't mean that the overall groupings are not religions!

Besides, we capitalize Communism, Fascism, Jihadism, Nazi-ism, Spiritualism, New Age, even Secular Humanism, as these are all regarded as movements deserving of proper term status. What is the resistance to capitalizing Paganism?

I have sought out Pagan references in many older texts from the early 20th as well as former centuries, and I find that "Pagan" and "Paganism" are routinely capitalized, as they are recognized as the terminology referring to pre-Christian, indigenous, and Classical religions, and therefore proper terms. Here is a famous example, quoted verbatim (with "Pagan" capitalized):

"I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."
–William Wordsworth (1770–1850) "The World Is Too Much with Us" (l. 10–14)

Since being "Pagan" in this context includes a "creed" to be "suckled in," however "outworn," the implication is clear that Paganism is here understood to be a religion. If it has a creed, it must be a religion! And one that Wordsworth looks back upon with fond nostalgia.

Perhaps, then, it would be worthwhile to have a clearer definition of how we should understand the word "Paganism" as applied to Classical, pre-Christian, and indigenous societies—particularly when it is used in contrast to Christianity: "Christians vs. Pagans in ancient Rome;" "The Last Pagans," etc. (There are at least two books in print with the title Pagans and Christians. Robin Lane Fox is discussing the Roman Empire, while Gus diZerega is concerned more with the present.)

This seems to me to be specifically a religious distinction, not merely one of philosophy, culture, or lifestyle. In that common context, isn't Paganism being referred to as the religion of the ancient Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Celts, etc.—or the "old religion" as opposed to the "new religion" of Christianity? If so, shouldn't it be

capitalized just like other ancient pre-Christian religions, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Shinto, etc.? If not, is there another term for ancient pre-Christian religion that we should be using instead?

How should we understand "Paganism" in relation to its theological/cultural aspects, such as pantheism, polytheism, animism, fetishism, shamanism, panentheism, etc.? Isn't "Paganism" the religion in that context?

From the anthropological perspective, I have the wonderful *Man, Myth & Magic* set of encyclopedias, published in 1970 by the Marshall Cavendish Corp. in New York. In the first volume, "Aberdeen Witches to Astrology," the entry on "Africa" (pp. 22-35) has the following (regrettably using lower-case for "pagans" and "paganism"):

"Paganism: Gods of Nature

"...In earlier times, before the true character of African traditional beliefs was understood, these people were called simply 'heathens.' They were poor benighted savages who 'bowed down to wood and stone.' The more acceptable term used today is 'pagans,' from the Latin *paganus*, a word which originally meant a peasant or countryman.

"The African pagan (like the pagan everywhere for that matter) believes in a polytheistic system in which a chief god presides over lesser deities rather as a king ruled over his domain in ancient times...

"From the dawn of time primitive man discovered objects of reverence and fear all around him. The former had to be thanked,; the latter placated. This was the origin of all religious activity and remains the cardinal principle of African paganism...

"Nature worship, then, is perhaps the most significant aspect of African paganism, and it is found in a hundred different forms throughout the continent...

"Another fundamental fact of African paganism is the firm belief in life after death...

"Summarizing the main tenets of African paganism, we can conclude that there is an underlying concept of a Supreme Being who made the world and presides over the destiny of mankind; that this world is full of spirits enshrined in natural phenomena

and dead ancestors; and that there is no final 'death,' but an active after-life together with an eventual return to earth in a reincarnated body." –James Wellard

As this is a discussion of traditional African religion, which is here specifically designated as "paganism," I can see no justification for not capitalizing the terms. Especially as the same article goes on to discuss the advents of Christianity and Islam into Africa—and those religions are capitalized.

But all that ancient stuff notwithstanding, the issue here is about modern Pagans, who clearly and specifically do identify ourselves as a religion—with adherents, beliefs, and incorporated 501(c)(3) churches and organizations with religious exemptions. It seems to me that it would be hard to argue that modern Paganism, at least, is not a religion, and therefore deserving of capitalization. Which is really the entire point of this appeal to the Stylebooks.

BB/NT-OZ

o *DonnaBianca*

DECEMBER 18, 2013 AT 2:42 AM

Hi Oberon,

I realize that I posted a number of replies here, and you may not have read them all. But in essence, my main objection is to the idea that paganism is a religion. That idea seemed to be oozing out of the petition in strange ways, without being made entirely explicit there. But with your reply here, you have made it explicit; so that makes things considerably more interesting (and dangerous).

The capitalization issue is a minor one, to my mind; but it carries a very real danger that a capital 'P' might lead some to conclude that paganism is itself a religion, and that would be a Very Bad Idea. (For reasons I detailed in a few previous posts.) And it is because of that danger, mainly, that I'm not in favor of capitalization. I think it needs to be made very, very clear that the many diverse religions of the pagan movement are NOT just one big smoochy religion with minor 'sectarian' variations.

Thus, I was both fascinated and horrified to see by your reply here that you essentially are indeed propagating the idea that paganism is, in itself, a religion. This following statement that you made is, to me, both shocking and abhorrent:

“Paganism is a religion, not a theology or philosophy. Certainly Paganism includes many Paths or Traditions within it — but these are essentially denominations, just as there are in such broad categories as Christianity and Hinduism — all of them still consider themselves to be Pagans.”

No. NO. I thoroughly and utterly reject and repudiate such a gross misrepresentation of the many very different religions within the neopagan movement. And I’m pretty sure that I’m far from alone in that. Wicca and Asatru and Thelema are entirely different religions, with very different belief systems and practices; and to regard them as merely “denominations” within “one religion” called Paganism, seems to me to be incredibly disrespectful to the people in those diverse religions — and even to the Gods Themselves.

Wicca is one distinct and unique pagan religion, with well-defined core beliefs and practices. There are different denominations or sects within Wicca – different ‘trads’ – such as Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Majestic, Blue Star, and even (I would say) Stregheria and Tubal Cain / 1734 / Cochrane trad. And Asatru is an entirely DIFFERENT pagan religion, within which there are also a number of sects or denominations. And Thelema is yet another distinct pagan religion, one that has very little in common with either Wicca or Asatru. By what possible reasoning — and for what possible motives — should we lump together all of these very different religions and try to make them only ‘denominations’ of one single, ill-defined religion called ‘paganism’??

The only reason, to my mind, why there is a cohesive religious community that has joined together around the idea of paganism in the present age is because we are in the very *early* stages of the rebirth of paganism, and thus still such a small minority that it makes some sense to find “safety in numbers” by grouping with pagans who follow very different religions and spiritual paths. But I see pagan spirituality of some sort as the natural and innate religious inclination of humans. And we can see this by observing how quickly pagan spirituality rebounds in the absence of laws and coercion against pagan religions.

Therefore, I expect the return of pagan religions to continue, until paganism is once again the predominant form of spirituality and religion on Earth. (Barring some sort of nuclear shootout between Muslims and Christians; as Stewart Farrar had prophesized in a novel he wrote.)

I fully expect that, within the next century or so, pagan religions will have blossomed and been revitalized to such an extent that paganism will once again become the majority of the world's religions, with the majority of the world's spiritual adherents. And when that happens — a healthy, vibrant diversity of hundreds of different pagan religions, as mainstream as the monotheistic faiths are today — then it would look more than a bit absurd to try and lump all the pagan religions together as "one religion."

Indeed, this idea that the entire world should all follow "one religion" with minor variations, has been to blame for much of the religious violence and destruction in the past. (And people are often more inclined to fight over sectarian differences within their religion, than fight over differences between religions.) The goal of "one world religion" was a bad idea when monotheism was predominant, and it will also be a bad idea when paganism is once again predominant. When monotheism has once again shrunk to become a very small minority viewpoint — nearly lost amidst the hundreds of thriving pagan religions — then it will make no sense at all to try and make "one religion" out of all that wonderful pagan diversity.

So anyway: Let me suggest that you try floating this idea of yours — the notion that paganism is "one religion" and that Wicca and Asatru and Thelema and Druidry are all just "denominations" of one and the same religion — past a few religious elders and leaders in various pagan groups. See what kind of response you get to that idea. Neophyte pagans can be confused enough to go along with almost any idea; but I don't think too many elders in any pagan religion would be inclined to go along with that grand scheme of smooshing together all the many diverse pagan religions into "one religion" called "Paganism." You might also solicit input on that from scholars in religious studies. I doubt they would agree, either. The ancient Greeks and the ancient Celts and the ancient Egyptians were not all following "one religion" — and neither are pagans today.

Let me also add here that — while I disagree vehemently with this idea of paganism as "one religion" and while I do not relate at all to the idea of Gaia in terms of our planet being a goddess of some sort — I do appreciate the many creative contributions that you and the Church of All Worlds have made to the

revitalization of pagan spirituality over the last several decades. So, despite our deep differences, let me wish you a Merry Yuletide season: May you and yours be well and blessed.

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