

History of Neopaganism and Druidry

Kirk S. Thomas
ADF Member no. 2296
Generalist and Clergy Study Programs

Question #1: Devine Paleopaganism, Mesopaganism and Neopaganism, giving examples of each. (minimum 100 words for each)

Paleopaganism – According to Isaac Bonewitz, Paleopaganism is the polytheistic, nature based faiths of all the original tribal peoples of the world. In Europe, this would be all of the ancients before the coming of Christianity, including the religions of the Celts, Germans, Norse, Romans, Greeks, etc. Indeed, any non-monotheistic religion predating Christianity would fit here. Elsewhere, this would include the great religions of Shinto in Japan, Hinduism in India (at least before Islam arrived), and Taoism in China. Many primal peoples, such as the Australian aborigines or some tribes in Africa, who still cling to their old, pre-Christian ways, would also be considered Paleopagans.¹

Mesopaganism – Again, according to Isaac Benewitz, Mesopaganism is a term for movements which were started by their founders as a means of re-creating what they *thought* were the best parts of Paleopaganism based on very shaky scholarship. As these movements began in or around the 17th – 18th centuries, archeology as a science was in its infancy. Examples of Mesopagan movements would be Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, those forms of Druidry influenced by the above, and the faiths created by the slave traffic of the period out of their home religions influenced by Christianity.²

Mesopagan Druidry is based on scholarship beginning in 1659 with John Aubrey with others continuing into the 18th century with Henry Hurle's "Ancient Order of Druids". In 1792, a stonemason named Edward Williams (who later took the name of Iolo Morganwg) held an Autumn Equinox ceremony on the top of Primrose Hill in London. He invented manuscripts that he claimed were real, and managed to get his stone circle and ceremony inserted into the legitimate Eisteddfod in Carmarthen, Wales in 1819, where it has thrived to this day.³ There are still Druid orders in existence today that could be thought of as Mesopagan Druid.

Neopaganism – This term generally refers to those religious movements beginning around 1960 or so which were started as a means of re-creating what they thought were the best parts of Paleopaganism based on more current scholarship and archeology, but which also included modern pluralistic and inclusionary ideals. Attempts were also made to eliminate as much monotheistic, puritanical and dualistic thought as possible.

Examples of Neopagan religions include the Church of All Worlds (whose founder, Oberon Zell, first coined the term, "Neo-Pagan"), most modern forms of Wicca, Druidry as practiced by ADF, the Henge of Keltria and O.B.O.D., and some Norse Paganism.

Neopagan thought often includes polytheism, with many Deities of both genders, both immanent and transcendent as well as a predisposition to the use of magic.⁴

Question #2: Name and describe several of the literary sources that contributed to Neopaganism in the first quarter of the 20th century, and discuss their impact on its development. (minimum 300 words)

James G. Frazer's "The Golden Bough" first came out in 1890, but its influence soared right into the 20th century, spawning a number of "fertility cults".⁵ One of Frazer's ideas included the sacrificial death of a divine king, sacrificed by his people at the first signs of a loss of his powers.⁶

This work greatly influenced a 60 year-old Egyptologist cum folklorist and anthropologist named Margaret Murray. Her 1921 book, "The Witch-Cult in Western Europe", and later work, "The God of the Witches" (1933), was greatly influential for a couple of decades. The thesis of these books was the idea that witchcraft could be traced back to Paleopagan times as an organized religion that may have been the "ancient religion of Western Europe"⁷. This supposed religion saw deity as incarnate in both the male and the female, though the male manifestation was more rare. This deity was a two-faced horned god, called variously Janus or Dianus. The female form of the latter name, Diana, gave Murray her name for the religion, the Dianic Cult. Influenced by Frazer, she saw this as a cult of the god who died and was reborn, with his birth and death reflected in the cycle of the seasons and crops. They celebrated 8 festivals she called *sabbats* and monthly meetings called *esbats* and they gathered in covens of thirteen members.⁸ Modern Wicca is still tied to these ideas. A modern historian, Norman Cohn in his "Europe's Inner Demons" (1975), thoroughly debunked her theories.⁹

Robert Graves and his book, "The White Goddess" were also very influential with people who would later become Wiccans. Following in the steps of Murray, Graves put forward the "idea of Goddess worship as a way to turn humanity from its destructive course."¹⁰ Isaac Bonewitz said that, "Graves is a sloppy scholar. 'The White Goddess' has caused more bad anthropology to occur among Wiccan groups than almost any other work." Graves' book was more of an inspirational work than a work of scholarship.¹¹

While Gerald Gardner's first book, "Witchcraft Today" wasn't published until 1954, it covered his experiences in Witchcraft starting with his claimed initiation into a coven with ancient lineage in 1939. His tradition of Witchcraft, the Gardnerian, was extremely influential in the development of modern Wicca.¹² In fact, it could be said that he popularized modern Witchcraft.

Question #3: Describe several examples of authentic folk customs absorbed into Neopaganism, and describe how they have been adapted. (minimum 300 words)

One example of a folk custom comes from Beltane, and that is the use of bonfires. This was a time of great purification, and the Druids in ancient Scotland used to drive the cattle between two fires kindled out of sacred woods, to drive off disease before sending the cattle up to the higher pastures after spending the winter penned in.¹³ In at least one ADF Grove (Sonoran Sunrise Grove, ADF), two small fires are lit at the end of the Beltane ritual and the people Recess out of the circle between them, for purification.

Similarly, at the Highlands Beltane, a cake was divided up by lot, and whomever got the burned piece had to jump over the fire three times. In Ireland, everyone jumped over the fire, first the men when the flames were the highest, then the women when the flames were lower, and finally the cattle were driven through when there was only smoke left.¹⁴ Many Neopagans like to jump over small fires on Beltane today.

Another Beltane custom is the May Pole. While it was probably a medieval custom, it was certainly known in Wales. A birch tree was used for this and called *y fedwen haf* (summer birch).¹⁵ The obviously phallic May Pole would have ribbons attached, which young people of both sexes would hold while dancing around it, wrapping the ribbons tightly. This custom is often danced at modern Beltane rites. Sometimes, the men would bring in the pole and plant it into a hole defended by the women, with great hilarity.

There are also folk traditions of holy wells. They exist in great number in the Gaelic areas, less so in the British (though there are quite a few in Wales), and are almost entirely missing in the Teutonic Southeast of Britain. In elder days, horse and fowl sacrifices were offered, though in later times trifles such as pin, rags and coins are all that are offered.¹⁶ In ADF rituals, the Well is a central part of the rite, connecting the hallows with the sea, the earth power, and the Underworld. Offerings of silver are made to the Well.

One other tradition comes from Lughnasadh. In Ireland and Scotland, this festival was a time of great joy since this was a festival of the first harvest. Up until the festival, food was in short supply, but after the harvest there was great feasting.¹⁷ When Lughnasadh is celebrated by Neopagans, the idea of the "First Loaf" may be celebrated, with a loaf of bread, ideally made from freshly harvested grain, being shared by all.

Question #4: Of the following names, identify and explain the importance each has had in Neopagan history and/or the magical revival. (minimum 100 words for each)

Gerald Gardner

Robert Graves

Dion Fortune

Oberon Zell

Starhawk

Isaac Bonewitz

(up to two other individuals of your choice)

Gerald Gardner – Gerald Gardner wrote a number of books about his experiences in a coven in England starting in 1939, which have had an enormous impact on Neopaganism. Due to the anti-witchcraft laws there, he didn't actually publish until the 1950's. But since then, his version of witchcraft, or Wicca, helped launch the religion we know today. His version of witchcraft was of a peaceful, happy nature religion. They would meet in covens run by High Priestesses and worship a God of the forest and a triple Goddess of fertility and rebirth. He insisted on nudity in their rites (most modern Wiccans no longer do this, though, unless they follow his tradition). He seems to have borrowed phraseology from the Masons in his rites as well as quotes by Aleister Crowley.¹⁸

Robert Graves – Robert Graves was a prolific writer of fiction, including the famous, "I, Claudius" and "Claudius the God". He is best known in Neopaganism, however, for writing "The White Goddess", a book written in a storm of passion over a few weeks, which he, himself, described as a poetic metaphor. Borrowing heavily from Frazer and Murray, his work did much to popularize the concept of the Great Goddess, which has become part of the Wiccan paradigm. Isaac Bonewitz wrote that while there may still be "a few groups of Neo-Pagans who use Graves" as sacred writing, his scholarship was sloppy and unreliable.¹⁹

Dion Fortune – Dion Fortune was an English Occultist who lived in the first half of the 20th century. She began her career in orthodox psychology but by 1919 was becoming more interested in other areas of the mind, becoming a Co-Mason and even joining Alpha et Omega, an order descended from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. She took the name, Dion Fortune, from her magical motto of *Deo non Fortuna* ("by God, not by chance") and wrote her books and articles using this name. She worked as a trance medium and carried out intensive "inner-plane" workings that would become the basis of her Fraternity of the Inner Light, a magical order she founded in 1924. This order had a Christian basis to it. While paper rationing during the Second World War cut down on her publishing, she and her Order remained active up to her death in 1946. The Fraternity still exists today.²⁰ Her importance in the magical revival was to keep the flame burning, as it were, bridging the time between the Golden Dawn and today.

Oberon Zell – Oberon Zell is the founder of the Church of All Worlds (CAW), a religion based on the famous Heinlein novel, "Stranger In A Strange Land", While they started out as a closed group, once they had reached about 100 members he decided to "do the 'church' thing"²¹ and become incorporated, opening up to the public. CAW become one of the first organized Neopagan religions, founded, according to Mircea Eliade, in 1961.²² It exists to this day. The publication Zell founded, *Green Egg*, was published up into the 1990's, and was very influential on the Neopagan movement as a whole. Oberon Zell, along with Morning Glory Zell and others, also popularized polyamory, the idea that people can have more than one partner, among Neopagans.

Starhawk – Starhawk is a writer best known for her mid-seventies book, "The Spiral Dance", a book written for the women's movement about how to be a witch, written before there were such

books. In 1986, Margot Adler estimated that this book had already been responsible for the creation of a thousand women's covens and spiritual groups,²³ and may be the most widely read book in the Neopagan community. Starhawk focused on women but included men, which increased contact between feminist women and men in the Neopagan community. She founded a feminist collective called Reclaiming and also got involved in political action, being arrested many times.

Isaac Bonewitz – Isaac Bonewitz is the founder of ADF and a writer of many books, including, "Real Magic", written in 1971 about the principles of magic, and "Rites of Worship", a guide to the construction of effective rituals. He joined the Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) while in college, but found that they were not Pagan, per se, but rather considered themselves more of a philosophical order. He tried to paganize the RDNA for many years before giving up. After a couple more years, he founded ADF as a Neopagan religion based in scholarship. He also saw the need to grow beyond what he calls Gerald Gardner's "Pagan house church movement" into one for large groups and congregations. He also emphasized the polytheistic nature of Neopaganism instead of the more usual duo- or monotheistic models of Wicca and others.²⁴ Bonewitz was ADF's first Archdruid until he had to resign for health reasons in the mid-1990's.

Ian Corrigan – Ian Corrigan is a bard and leading figure in ADF, primarily in the areas of magic, theology and music. He went to his first pan-Pagan festival in 1980 and got his training in Wicca shortly thereafter. When Stonecreed Grove was founded in Cleveland in 1990, he joined and eventually became Senior Druid.²⁵ Since then he has authored the ADF Dedicant Program and written books on Celtic magic. He developed and leads classes involving ritual and trance for groups. He also composed many of the chants used by both Groves and solitaries in ADF. He discovered Irish music in the 1980's and has continued to perform in that genre at Pagan festivals all over North America. In the mid 1990's he became acting Archdruid of ADF upon the resignation of Isaac Bonewitz, a position he held for some months.

Aleister Crowley – Possibly one of the most controversial magicians of his time, Aleister Crowley first joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898. He was denied advancement in the order due to his behavior but was advanced in Paris, leading to a schism in the order. In 1904, in Cairo, he claimed to hear a disembodied but audible voice communication from a spirit named Aiwass who dictated to Crowley the text of "The Book of the Law" over a three-day period, and also proclaimed him the Beast 666 from the Book of Revelation in the Christian Bible. Crowley ran a lavish magazine with the last of his inheritance called *The Equinox* in which he published many of the Golden Dawn's papers, bringing them to the attention of the public. In 1920 he established a commune devoted to sex, magic and drugs in Sicily but was thrown out of Italy by Mussolini. When a British sculptor, Nina Hammett, referred to Crowley as a "black magician", he sued her but lost spectacularly, using up his finances. He spent the last days of his life in cheap lodgings corresponding with a small circle of students.²⁶ He popularized Ceremonial Magic, bringing it to the public.

Question #5: Compare and contrast your understanding of three various forms of Neopaganism, such as Wicca, Asatru, eclectic Neopaganism, shamanism, and discordianism. (minimum 300 words)

I shall be writing on Wicca, Asatru and shamanism.

I see Wicca as a religion that is duotheistic (generally), revering a Goddess and a God. The Goddess is a sort of mixture of the Earth Mother and Brigit and is often seen as a triple Goddess in the guise of Maiden, Mother, and Crone rather than the Celtic triplicity of three sisters. Wicca is small group oriented, with from 3 to 13 members in a grouping called a Coven, and is usually headed by a High Priestess and a High Priest (who is often of lower rank than the Priestess). They have 8 High Days called Sabbats, which have been adopted by many other Neopagan groups. They also have minor holidays (often celebrating phases of the moon) called Esbats. Magic is very important in Wiccan rites, and can eclipse the worship parts. Wicca is generally very open to

variety in sexual orientation though there are some Covens where only women are welcome (often called 'Dianic' covens, after the Goddess' name). Wicca is probably the largest and fastest growing branch of Neopaganism and can have many different cultural foci, though Celtic Wicca is very popular.²⁷

Asatru, on the other hand, is a religion based solely in the Germanic and Norse cultures. While there may have been survivals of the original religion in Iceland,²⁸ the revival in the 20th century had little to do with them. Much of it comes out of the interest in the rediscovery of the old Norse myths by the Romantic writers of the 19th century. Unfortunately, the beginnings of Pagan worship began first in Germany and Austria among right-wing racists and were part of the basis of Nazism. Asatru didn't really get going until some decades after the Second World War. Asatru is family oriented and while some groups have adopted the 8 Sabbats of the Wiccans, others have been arguing for holidays more in keeping with Germanic scholarship. Rituals honoring the Gods have become more prominent, and Runic lore remains a strong component. Magical practice is also growing fast, and a form of trance work, Seidhr, introduced in the 1990's by Diana Paxton, is becoming very popular.²⁹

Shamanism, however, is not a religion at all. Traditional shamanism was practiced by the more primal stages of ancient cultures, and is practiced today among the Native American, Australian aborigines and tribes of South America, among others. Mircea Eliade says that although the word, "shaman" refers primarily and most accurately to the spirit practitioners of a specific Siberian culture, the concept seems to have been fairly universal.³⁰ Shamans are the medicine men, psychopomps, magicians and healers, but one thing they do that other magicians don't do is "magical flight".³¹ Shamans work alone (though they may have help by drummers, etc.) and travel in the realms of the spirit, retrieving pieces of people's souls that have been lost and otherwise dealing with totemic spirits in the Otherworld. Shamans are initiated in some sort of death-rebirth ceremony, which can require great physical hardship.³² Sometimes a person comes to shamanism after a sickness or psychotic break of some sort.³³

Michael Harner, among others, has developed modern shamanism as a spiritual practice. I have taken extensive courses with him, and can report that there is much traveling to the lower and upper worlds, that soul retrieval is practiced and that there is even an initiatory 'dismemberment,' which takes place on a soul journey. Shamanism, as practiced by Harner initiates, can be done by anyone of any faith, or no faith at all. Shamanic practices have also been incorporated into the spiritual practice of many Neopagans for healing and vision quests through the use of drumming, sweat lodges and other ecstatic practices. There are even some indications that the ancient religions of Europe may have had shamanistic roots.³⁴

Question #6: Discuss the origins and practices of hermetic or ceremonial magic, and how they have influenced Neopaganism. (minimum 300 words)

Ceremonial magic is one of the major divisions of Western magic, and uses ritual means as the main way of working with magical energies. There are many strains of ceremonial magic, such as Hermeticism, Cabalistic magic and Thelema.

Hermetic magic (Hermeticism) has roots going back to ancient Egypt under the Ptolemies and the fusion of Egyptian and Greek magical thought. While little is known of what was taught then, it is thought that it included ceremonial magic, mystical philosophy and alchemy, and written works from the early centuries C.E. survived due to attempts by early Christians to co-opt Hermeticism in support of Christianity.³⁵ The discovery of a single Greek manuscript, *Corpus Hermeticum*, around 1460 led to a magical revival during the Renaissance. It's influence remained small, however, until the 1960's when Dame Frances Yates re-introduced the works to the world as part of her work on Renaissance culture.³⁶

Cabala started out as a form of Jewish mysticism that eventually influenced Christian mysticism at about the time of the Jewish Expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Cabala was a new way of looking

at the nature of God and the world, with God himself totally hidden behind three veils with everything tied to the Tree of Life. The Hermetic version of Cabala was recognized by Eliaphas Levi in the 19th century and found expression in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.³⁷

Thelema was a religion founded by Aleister Crowley in 1904 after the breakup of the Golden Dawn when a spirit named Aiwass revealed the *Book of the Law* to him over the course of three days. The main tenant of belief is that the soul possesses a "True Will" that is the law it lives under. Normal morality is irrelevant if it contradicts what the soul is meant to do – "Thou hast no right but to do thy will."³⁸ Thelema is still found in groups such as the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO).

The most influential group that practiced ceremonial magic was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which was founded in 1888 by William Wescott and Samuel Mathers. They spent a good deal of time in the British Library, researching volumes of magical lore, including works on the Cabala and Hermeticism, and produced a great quantity of writings on ceremonial magic. While practical magic wasn't taught until the higher grades (they had 13 grades by the end), the second order of grades 6 through 10 had a curriculum that was far greater than anything else at the time. The Order broke up in 1900 over mismanagement and the works might have been lost except that some members (Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune and Israel Regardie, primarily) broke their oaths of secrecy and published them over the first half of the 20th century.³⁹ The OTO, formed in 1906, took much from the tradition of the Golden Dawn and is now one of the largest groups practicing ceremonial magic at this time.⁴⁰

The Neopagan movement in the second half of the 20th century, however, changed the relationship that ceremonial magic had with Paganism. Up to the 1950's, pagan elements were common in ceremonial magic, but efforts by Neopagans to define their religions as different have ended up splitting the occult community into two groups, Pagans and Ceremonialists.⁴¹ However, there have been attempts in recent years to bring ceremonial magic into ADF, revising the practice to conform with ADF cosmology, and this may bring the two practices together in some form in the future.

Question #7: Discuss the influence of the Pagan festival movement, and how the festivals changed Paganism in the 1980's. (minimum 100 words)

Before 1977, finding a coven or study group, getting involved in Paganism or even finding other people with similar beliefs was very difficult. There was much secrecy and groups were small and hard to find. But in 1977, the Midwest Pagan Council held the first pan-Pagan festival.⁴² These festivals grew in number and size until by the mid-1980's there were festivals all over the place. People could attend a festival and suddenly be exposed to hundreds of other Neopagans, see "four rituals in five days,"⁴³ and achieve ecstatic states in large groups. Suddenly, the world was much larger for Neopagans than just their local coven or grove. And this affected the way these groups operated. Knowing that there were lots of other groups out there, coven and other group leaders had less control over their members – if people didn't like what was going on they could just leave and go elsewhere. Before, people would try to work things out. Now that became harder to do.⁴⁴ But this flowering of Neopaganism created an actual nationwide community of Neopagans that had never existed before. While it was estimated that only 10% of Neopagans ever attended a festival, they brought what they experienced and learned back to their home groups.⁴⁵

Question #8: Discuss the influence of the Internet, and how it has changed Paganism in the 1990's. (minimum 100 words)

While the festival movement had created a national community for Neopagans, the spread of the Internet created an international one. Anyone with a computer and phone line could now find chat rooms, discussion lists, web sites, merchants and all kinds of information about Neopaganism without even needing to leave home. All forms of Neopagan spirituality could be accessed and learned about by anyone, easily.⁴⁶ For groups like ADF, communication with and between members was no longer confined to a periodic newsletter, but rather could be done on a large

scale, instantaneously. ADF has a large number of e-mail lists and pages and pages of articles on theology, cosmology, Druidry and other subjects on their web site.

But some of the dangers of the Internet are that people can be dishonest about who they really are, and there can be a tendency for people to retreat into their homes, stare at a computer screen all day and never go outside to experience nature in its true reality.⁴⁷ One can't hug a tree on a computer.

Question #9: Discuss the origins of the Druidic revival in 18th and 19th century England, naming its key players and describing their contributions. (minimum 600 words)

The translation of many classics into English in the 16th and 17th centuries got people thinking about the Druids once again after a millennia of ignorance.⁴⁸ While Inigo Jones was convinced that the Romans had built Stonehenge, in 1659 a scholar, John Aubrey, conducted some quasi-investigations there and concluded that the Druids might have built Stonehenge. His work inspired the imagination of John Toland who became very enthusiastic about the idea. In 1717 he held a meeting, it is claimed, of Bardic representatives from Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Anglesey, Man, York, Oxford and London to form the "Universal Druid Bond."⁴⁹

By the mid 18th century, though, England as at peace with the Celtic world (having finally pacified them all), and the public was finally ready and able to romanticize the Druids.⁵⁰ A Lincolnshire doctor, William Stuckley, was a passionate antiquarian who visited Stonehenge annually from 1719 to 1724. In 1740, having become an Anglican Priest, he published his book, "Stonehenge, a temple restored to the British Druids." This book fully endorsed Aubrey's theories. Stuckley's works brought the Druids into folklore and popular imagination and we still are dealing with the repercussions of this today.⁵¹

The poet William Blake was also intrigued by Stuckley's concepts. Druidic imagery appeared in many of his works, including his, "Jerusalem, the Emanation of the Giant Albion", and also in his illustrations, where even a wicker man appears.⁵²

John Wood, a Bath architect, was so taken with the romantic ideas of the Druids and Stonehenge that elements of Stonehenge may have inspired the Circus in Bath (a street lined with houses leading to the Royal Crescent), which he designed. The 300 foot circle with three, equally spaced entrances was nothing like the classical antecedents, and was a wonder of its time.⁵³

In 1781, Henry Hurle set up the "Ancient Order of Druids" (AOD), sometimes called the Druid Order (which is confusing as there were a few groups by that name over the years). A Protestant Christian mystic, Jacob Boehme, whose mystical writings tried to reconcile alchemy, Hermeticism and the Christian Cabala, heavily influenced Hurle. Boehme's influence would have a great impact on later mystical thinking.⁵⁴

While all this was going on in England, the strongest surviving Druid traditions had existed in Wales. Bardic courts had existed in the 12th century, which regulated performers and set the standards for competitions. An assembly had even been proclaimed in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and other Celtic places for an eisteddfod (or assembly) to take place for bards and musicians to gather in Wales for what would have been a pan-Celtic festival. But later English governments did their best to suppress the cultures of the Celts and these meetings were driven mostly underground. Queen Elizabeth, however, did grant a commission to some Welsh men to hold an eisteddfod in 1568 "in order to grant licenses to bards in order to distinguish them from the vagrant beggars."⁵⁵

In 1789, a great eisteddfod was held in Corwen, organized by Thomas Jones and Gwyneddigion, a London-based Welsh society, which published a paper, *Y Cylch-grawn Cumraeg*, which discussed social and political matters. This eisteddfod was a huge success, and later that year they organized another one at Bala.⁵⁶

A member of Gwyneddigion, a stone mason named Edward Williams (later known as Iolo Morganwg which means Iolo of Glamorganshire) held an Autumn Equinox ceremony on the top of Primrose Hill in London in 1792. He set up a small circle of stones and a stone altar and called it the *Mean Gorsedd*. This assembly, itself, he called the *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* (the Assembly of Bards of Britain).⁵⁷ He claimed that he could prove that the cult of the druids had survived in Glamorgan, and forged documents he claimed were ancient.

In 1819 Iolo Morganwg convinced the organizers of the Carmarthen Eisteddfod, one of the biggest gatherings, to include his Gorsedd as a main part of the assembly, and it has remained there to this day.⁵⁸ His dubious writings were taken at face value by later writers such as Robert Graves ("The White Goddess") and Gerald Gardner, who put forward theories that have launched many occult organizations.⁵⁹

The AOD split up in 1833 with the larger group of members forming a charitable organization renamed the United Ancient Order of Druids, which exists to this day. The remaining members kept the mystical version of the AOD going under the same name and also continue to exist. Other Masonic/Fraternal Druidic groups exist, and their attitudes of reverent skepticism fit in well with the origins of the RDNA and ADF. These earlier groups could be said to straddle the line between Meso- and Neopaganism.⁶⁰

Question #10: Discuss the origins of the RDNA, and the influence of Isaac Bonewitz, and the founding of ADF. (minimum 600 words)

The Reformed Druids of North America (RDNA) were formed in the spring of 1963 as a protest against Carleton College in Northfield, MN. The college had a requirement that students attend a certain number of religious services or meetings. One way of fulfilling the requirement was for students to attend the services of their own religion. So a group of students got together and formed a Druid church. Their goal was to get the requirement removed. "If religious credit were granted, the religious requirement could be exposed as totally ineffective. If, on the other hand, credit were denied, the college could be charged with bigotry."⁶¹ The school hoped the Druids would just go away, but instead they thrived. The religious attendance requirement was repealed in 1964, but to the founders surprise, the RDNA members wanted to keep practicing their religion.⁶²

The basic tenets of the RDNA's religion are, "1) The object of the search for religious truth, which is universal and a never-ending search, may be found through the Earth-mother, which is nature, but this is one way, yea, among many; and 2) And great is the importance, which is of a spiritual importance, of Nature, which is the Earth-mother; for it is one of the objects of creation, and with it people to live, yea, even as they do struggle through life are they come face to face with it."⁶³ These tenets have been boiled down to, "Nature is good" and "Nature is Nature".

As the graduates of Carleton College went out into the world, the Druids among them took their religion with them. One of these, Robert Larson, founded a Grove in Berkeley, California where one of its members, Isaac Bonewitz, came to think of himself as Neopagan. He, and others of like mind, agitated (to the annoyance of some of the others) for a more Neopagan outlook for the Grove.⁶⁴ But as time went on, Isaac became disillusioned (or maybe just tired) and he retired from the RDNA.

But Bonewitz kept finding himself going back to Druidry, even though he tried branching out into other areas. The hallmark of a Druid, as Bonewitz saw it, were the clear roles of "scholar and artist, poet and priest, philosopher and magician – the one who seeks, preserves and extends the highest wisdom her or his people are capable of handling safely, and who uses that knowledge and inspiration for the benefit of their community."⁶⁵

In 1983, Isaac Bonewitz published an open letter to the Neopagan community in an attempt to create a form of reconstructionist Neopagan Druidry. In it he announced the founding of Ár n'Draíocht Féin (ADF), a Druid Fellowship, which would be more than pan-Celtic, but rather pan-Indo-European in scope. He said it would be based on the best scholarship available and would combine what he had learned by practicing Neopaganism (like art, small-group dynamics, etc.) with his own knowledge of magic and religion. He also said he would create a handbook for people to found ADF Groves, and wanted \$20 a year to help with expenses. Anyone interested was to contact him.⁶⁶

Most of the promises he made back in 1983 have been kept. Groves have spread across the USA and Canada, and there's even a Protogrove in the UK. Instead of lots and lots of scholars, however, a few people did the research that the rest could then use. The Study Program that debuted to the howls of many other Neopagan groups was shut down after Bonewitz' resignation as Archdruid due to health reasons (though a new First Circle of the Clergy Program was adopted this year – 2005). And ADF has grown – from a few hundred only 10 years ago to over 1000 today. Isaac Bonewitz' dream of a vibrant, Neopagan Druidic religion is alive and well and spreading around the world.

Question #11: Describe the groups that have split off from ADF, their history and work.
(minimum 600 words)

There are two groups that I've been able to find that have broken away from ADF over the years. One of them was a return to a previous belief system, while the other was a full schism.

The Celtic Traditionalist Order of Druids (CTOD) was founded by Vickie and Howard Meith in 1986 (became a "living entity in 1987") dedicated to the preservation and rebirth of the worship of the ancient Gods and Goddesses, of the Celtic nations. After a successful public ritual, the Order grew quickly and a power struggle ensued among the leadership. The founders left the Order and it quickly dissolved.

The founders joined a Wiccan coven of the British Traditional/Green Circle lineage, but when that, too, dissolved, they became solitaires. ADF founder Isaac Bonewitz prodded Vickie Meith and she became a local Grove Organizer for ADF in the Phoenix, AZ area. She even rose to the rank of Vice Archdruid of ADF. But ADF was not to be her path. A former student of hers, the current Senior Druid of the Sonoran Sunrise Grove, ADF, David Foster, tells me that she was primarily of a Wiccan bent, and ADF was too Druidic for her. In any case, the old leadership of the CTOD asked her to come back, and she did so, leaving ADF.⁶⁷

The CTOD does not consider themselves to be Celtic Reconstructionists though they do consider themselves following an ancient path. Their study program includes 9 branches of study to enable their members to receive a well-rounded education in the skills and practice of their faith as well as the mundane skills needed to thrive harmoniously in the natural world. Their 9 branches are Health, Hearth, History, Creativity, Compassion, Communication, Magic, Musecraft and Management.

Another group to break away from ADF is the Henge of Keltria. In 1986, at the Pagan Spirit Gathering, a group of ADF members, Tony Taylor, Pat Taylor, Ellen Evert Hopman, Michael and Beth taped a list of concerns they had about ADF on to Isaac Bonewitz' van door. While being serious, this was a humorous way to make their concerns known, mimicking Martin Luther and his 95 Theses. The list, however, contained thirteen concerns.

Primarily, their problems with ADF were that they felt that Druidry was only a Celtic phenomenon and they didn't appreciate ADF's insistence on embracing the entire Indo-European spectrum. They also disapproved of ADF's insistence on ritual being public and held in public spaces. They felt that religion and spiritual attainment should be a private affair. Also, at that time there were no magical rites in ADF, and they felt that mysticism needed a place in religion.⁶⁸

The Henge of Keltria was formed shortly thereafter, and they say about themselves, "We call our religious organization a 'Henge.' The autonomous local groups working within the Keltrian tradition are called 'Groves.' Each Grove is free to compose and perform ritual and magick geared to its own particular focus, provided such work remains compatible with the beliefs, ethics, and ritual and structural framework of the Henge."⁶⁹ Their rituals are private, invitation-only affairs, held in members homes.

The Henge of Keltria also has a set of beliefs that they use as a moral compass. The following is from the Henge of Keltria web site:

- We believe in **Divinity as it is manifest** in the Pantheon. There are several valid theistic perceptions of this Pantheon.
- We believe that **nature is the embodiment of the Gods.**
- We believe that **all life is sacred** and should neither be harmed nor taken without deliberation or regard.
- We believe in the **immortality** of the spirit.
- We believe that **our purpose is to gain wisdom** through experience.
- We believe that **learning is an ongoing process** and should be fostered at all ages.
- We believe that **morality is a matter of personal conviction** based upon self-respect and respect for others.
- We believe that **individuals have the right to pursue enlightenment** through his or her chosen path.
- We believe in a **living religion** able to adapt to a changing environment. We recognize that our beliefs may undergo change as our tradition grows.⁷⁰

I have my own theories about why groups have broken away from ADF. I believe that people may join a group thinking that the group is something other than what it is, or that they can change it once they become involved. Successful groups are very attractive. Then, when the rest of the group refuses to go along with the changes, the frustrated people eventually leave. I also think that schisms are a sign that a group is becoming mature, and that this is actually a normal process.

ENDNOTES

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⁴ Bonewitz, "Defining Paganism:".

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⁶ James G. Frazer, "The Golden Bough", (London: Macmillan, 1890, reprinted New York, Avenal Books, 1981), pp. 213-215.

⁷ Adler, "Drawing Down the Moon", p.47.

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⁹ Adler, pp. 49-52.

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¹¹ Adler, p. 59.

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- ²⁶ Greer, pp. 115-117.
- ²⁷ Carl McColman, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Paganism" (Indianapolis, IN: Alpha Books, 2002), pp. 46-56.
- ²⁸ Greer, p. 39.
- ²⁹ Greer, pp. 38-39.
- ³⁰ Mircea Eliade, "Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, 1970), pp. 4-5.
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- ³² Eliade, Chapter IV, pp. 110-144.
- ³³ Eliade, pp. 33-35.
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- ³⁵ Greer, p. 223.
- ³⁶ Greer, p. 224.
- ³⁷ Greer, pp. 79-82.
- ³⁸ Greer, p. 478.
- ³⁹ Greer, pp. 202-204.
- ⁴⁰ Greer, p. 350.
- ⁴¹ Greer, p. 94.
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- ⁴³ Adler, p. 422.
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- ⁵⁰ Ellis, p. 260.
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- ⁵⁸ Ellis, p. 269-270.
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