

The Penumbra Series (5 of 6): Christianity and Other Religions

2

For my final Penumbra point that specifically addresses Christianity and other religions, I want to talk about how those who claim that Christianity stole all its ideas from other religions. As I explained in the previous paper, there are those who, in the Penumbra, think that Christianity is just another religion. While most people prefer to disregard history altogether, they are fascinated with science and accept the cause-effect relationship necessary for Evolution. With what little history they will accept, they realize that Christianity is a relatively new religion while the paganism it replaced was much older. They assume, then, that Christianity Evolved from paganism. Neo-pagans will even call this "stealing." But, as I also mentioned before, sometimes when two things look alike, it is not because one copied another, but rather that both were copied off a third.

It is true that many of the rituals Christianity uses today have come from pagan cultures worldwide. In the Catholic Church, travelers love to visit Cathedrals and local Churches in foreign countries to see how local customs and cultures have been incorporated into Catholic teachings. And they are never disappointed. Some local interpretations go beyond the diocese and are incorporated by the whole Church worldwide. God wants all mankind to know of Him, and made efforts to make it so. As a result, we can find evidence of God in every religion the world has seen, as well as many ancient philosophies. Without exception, successful missionaries have sought out these "seeds" of Jehovah's teachings and used them as a foundation for a clearer and more complete understanding of Jehovah. And the Church is that much more wonderful for it. But this is not the same as claiming that Christians stole anything. There are many things radically different between Christianity and paganism, and I want to focus on a few of the more important ones here.

First of all is the sacrifice - specifically, *what* is sacrificed. Many pagan gods are depicted as animals, and most of the others are closely associated with animals. Yet the Hebrew ancestors of Jesus were called to sacrifice animals. And not just any animals, but the very animals worshiped as gods by their neighbors and former masters, the Egyptians. This was not by accident. While the specific sacrifices were performed for one reason or another, the animals to be sacrificed were chosen so as to show both Jehovah's and man's superiority over the animal gods. It was the Light of Jehovah that placed man above animals out of the Darkness of paganism that placed animals before man.

Christianity added yet another twist to the Sacrifice. We see throughout the world that all non-Christian cultures placed the focus of the sacrifice on those performing the sacrifice. Christians placed the focus on the sacrifice itself. Pagans would offer food, treasure, children, slaves and prisoners of war for the good of the people as a sacrifice. Jews would offer animals to purify themselves in the sight of God. But a Christian seeks to *be* the sacrifice for the sake of others. It was the Light of Jehovah that taught man to help others out of the Dark of doing for oneself.

We also have the matter of miracles. We find the miraculous in both the Pagan and Christian myths, but they are anything but the same. Pagan miracles are chaotic, and performed at the fickle whims of the gods. Such miracles usually did more harm than good to the humans in the story. Jehovah has a plan and *all* His miracles are made to further this plan. Even when Jehovah is portrayed as being destructive, there is a clear sense that all of mankind, including those so destroyed, will ultimately benefit from it. Pagan miracles are abominations of nature, such as turning humans into animals. Christian miracles are proof of God's mastery over creation, such as walking on water. When a pagan god wants a human to go somewhere, something like a flying horse or a magic portal might

appear to get them there. In Christianity, doors may open and water might allow safe passage, but the human still has to make the trip under his own power. We see that Jehovah shines the Light of mastery over our universe against the Dark pagan gods who delight in perverting the universe. While the children of pagan gods certainly encountered earthly trials, they were invariably born and lived like the royalty that they were. Jesus was born in a cave, slept in a food trough, lived as a humble carpenter's son, and was crucified as a common criminal or slave. It was the Light of Jehovah to humble himself to share in our humanity out of the Dark paganism crushing humanity.

But perhaps the easiest way to see just how much Paganism and Christianity differ is to look at two examples of controversy over Christian teachings compared to pagan cultures, specifically the Nordic myths (of which, nearly all surviving copies were found in Iceland, "unmolested" by Christian teachings) and Arthurian Legends (which were supposedly so "corrupted" by Christian teachings that the original stories are lost to history). If the Icelandic myths give us a true idea of what paganism was like, then I am hard-pressed to see what Christians stole from their European brothers. We see "evil" giants not only keeping their word but honoring it in good faith, even to the point of death. Meanwhile, the "good" gods will stop at nothing to worm their way out of their oaths when it is not convenient for them, often to the point of murder. In the Light of Jehovah, we see a God who, in His humanity, suffered the most humiliating and painful death known to man in order to keep His promise, which is in sharp contrast to the way the pagan gods of the Dark kept theirs.

While there are those who accuse Christianity of destroying the "true" legends of King Arthur in their effort to Christianize it, we see only one truly Christian ideal portrayed: the inherent evilness of man. Despite all the bravery, valor and honor of the knights, their destruction invariably came from a character flaw born of Pride. They would not compromise their values, even when it would be just and right to do so. In contrast, every Christian scripture either reveals God's glory or points our way to salvation. It is the Light of being given a complete and comprehensive moral system compared to the Dark of blindly following one's own inclinations.

In the Penumbra, all religions appear similar. When we separate what is Christian from what is pagan, we find that they are much more different than they are alike.

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