

The 2003 Conference on Contemporary Pagan Studies: An Evaluation

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Contemporary Pagan studies is a field with a bright future and the potential for exponential growth. To help further that growth, a group of scholars came together on November 21, 2003 to share information and experiences. The 2003 Conference on Contemporary Pagan Studies (CCPS) was a success for those involved, and undoubtedly a harbinger for future gatherings to help expand the field. CCPS was held as an additional meeting to the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Because of the venue, a majority of the scholars attending focus their work in religious studies, although not all fit that category.

CCPS 2003 was inspired by two traditions of gathering scholars to discuss Pagan studies. The first tradition was that of the Nature Religions Scholars Network session (NRSN) preceding the AAR annual meeting. For the past several years NRSN has hosted a gathering on Saturday morning and it has been a great help to those of us in Pagan studies as a place to gather, make contacts, and hear new ideas and information. The second strand of influence came from my time in the United Kingdom as a PhD student. I was lucky enough to attend some of the conferences on Pagan studies held in the UK, and to get the opportunity to talk to Marion Bowman and Joanne Pearson about how they organized them. With encouragement from those two, I decided to create a full day conference in the US, and since the AAR meeting was in my hometown in 2003, I decided to take advantage of that. So, with help from Chas Clifton of NRSN, CCPS 2003 got off the ground.

A full day conference requires a number of papers in order to fill the available time with useful discussion and presentation. Luckily, we have a number of good scholars in our field, and many of them consented to joining us. The papers were presented by both graduate students and senior scholars, with a great range of perspectives and some good critical scholarship. The day did seem to be weighted towards feminist witchcraft

and goddess worship. This was unplanned, but seemed to fulfill the attendees' expectations.

By focusing on contemporary Pagan studies, CCPS allowed us to share our work in this specific field and to discover new ways to not only connect current work within the field, but also to form new connections with the other disciplines that we used to frame our discussions. I was very happy to see that people were talking and that new concepts seemed to be developing out of the day. Those of us who attend the AAR meeting regularly have always found time to talk, and adding an additional day to focus on our work has just enhanced that.

The day ended with a panel discussion entitled "Where Do we Go from Here? The Possible Futures of Our Field." The panel covered a broad range of academic areas and experiences. With Chas S. Clifton, Michael York, Jone Salomonsen, and Lucie DuFresne sitting at the front of the room and fielding questions, the discussion was insightful and interesting. One of the key aims of the conference was achieved as scholars shared information and ideas. Setting aside time to specifically discuss and debate issues raised by the day's papers helped to set a cap on the day and inspire some of us to consider new concepts and projects.

One theme that emerged from the day's discussions was the idea that Pagan studies has a lot of space to expand, and many theoretical stances to examine and possibly engage with. The broad spectrum of theoretical and personal perspectives embraced by the presenters was a fascinating example of the range that occurs within Pagan studies as a field. The fact that the majority of the attendees and presenters were willing, and even eager, to hear about and engage with differing viewpoints helped to reinforce the stereotype that scholars in Pagan studies tend to be open minded about the work and experiences of others.

A majority of those attending the 2003 conference expressed interest in seeing another in 2004. There will be a CCPS 2004, held on Friday, November 19 in San Antonio, Texas. The 2004 conference will build upon the foundation built in 2003, and the papers published here in *The Pomegranate* will serve as a teaser to the critical discourse of the conference itself. The theme for 2004 will be "Making a Place for Ourselves: Contemporary Pagan Studies and Current Theory." The focus on the relationship between contemporary Pagan studies and the current theories in academia is an outgrowth of the interests expressed to me during and after the 2003 conference, and will be, I think, helpful in showing that this field of study is quite cognizant of, and fluent in, the cutting edge of modern academia.

For further information about the 2004 conference, visit <http://www.paganstudies.org> or <http://chass.colostate-pueblo.edu/natrel>.