Critics of Scientology[10] have attacked the movement on several fronts. The official biography of its founder, they argue, is filled with distortions of fact and outright lies and amounts to little more than a hagiography of an almost mythical figure. In reality, they insist, L. Ron Hubbard was nothing like the hero of the mind portrayed in movement literature but a scheming science-fiction writer whose cravings for power and wealth led him to fabricate a mock religion of mental health. As for the E-meter—used to detect the presence of engrams in the pre-clear mind—it is no more effective, these critics charge, than an ordinary lie detector (which it resembles) in eliminating the reactive mind or in tracing the effects of negative mental energy. Counseling of practically any kind, they point out, can accomplish much of what Scientologists attribute to their methodology, and without the trappings of a science-fiction cult. Scientology's struggles with the Internal Revenue Service to have itself recognized as a legitimate religious organization were at least provisionally resolved in the church's favor by 1993. Still, the testimonies of former Scientologists to the authoritarian nature of its leadership and to the suppression of criticism within the movement seem to indicate a fundamental discrepancy between the aspirations of the church and its actual policies.

In response to such critics, Scientologists point out that apostates from any religious movement often bear tales of deception and mistreatment and just as often misrepresent the very teachings they have come to reject. The ultimate goals of the Church of Scientology, its defenders insist, have not changed in the half-century or so in which the movement has existed; its goals, they claim, clearly reflect the redemptive mission of its founder: to achieve "a civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where man is free to rise to greater heights." At present there are well over 100 Scientology churches worldwide, in at least as many countries, and the influence of Scientology's teachings can be seen in a variety of public health and educational programs, most especially Narconon, a drug-treatment organization whose protocol was (according to organization literature) established by Hubbard in the 1970s. The precise number of members still actively affiliated with the church is difficult to determine, but its presence within the contemporary religious landscape appears to be growing.

An E-meter and a display of Hubbard's *Dianetics.*

Wicca

In the popular imagination, and in much of Western folklore, "witches" have been around forever, but the contemporary nature religion known as *Wicca* is a far cry from the various literary incarnations of the archetypal embodiment of evil that Shakespeare, for example, drew upon in *Macbeth.* Contemporary witches, or *Wiccans*, as they prefer to be called, do not cast harmful spells, do not

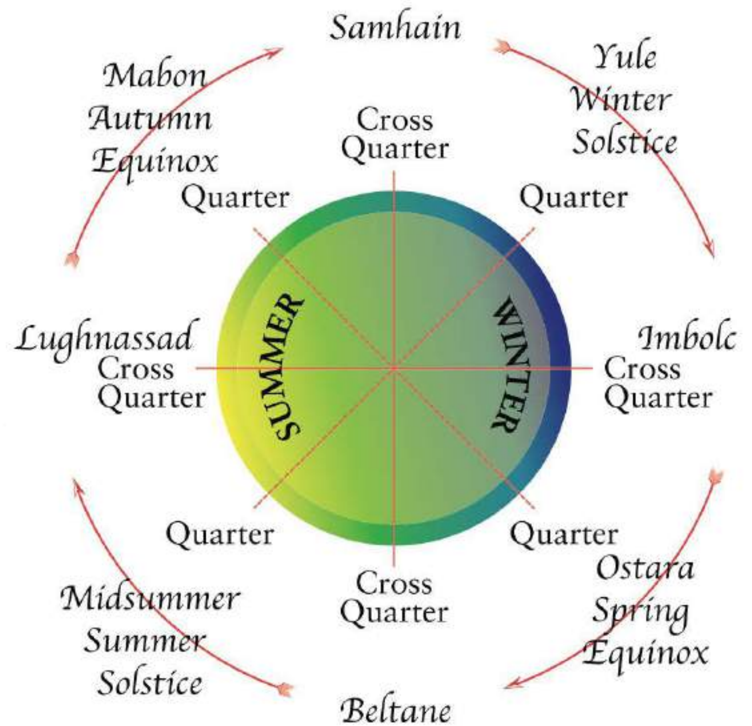
communicate with spirits of the underworld, and most especially do not worship the Devil. They do claim to practice various types of magic, however, and they often worship various pre-Christian deities, particularly those associated with natural forces and phenomena. Contemporary Wiccans prefer to be thought of as pagans, though the ensemble of beliefs and practices that characterizes witchcraft today is often so eclectic that no direct link between Wicca and pre-Christian religious cultures can be said to exist.

The Wiccan movement appears to have been the brainchild of one British enthusiast, Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964), who, after a lifetime as a civil servant in Southeast Asia, returned to England to pursue an interest in folklore and esoteric religious thought. In concert with Margaret Murray (1863–1963), an anthropologist and Egyptologist (as well as a prominent early feminist) whose book *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921) argued that the witch cults of medieval Europe were survivals of an indigenous fertility religion, Gardner sought to prove that remnants of these ancient pagan rituals could still be found in the modern world. And although professional anthropologists have rejected, decisively, both Murray's research and Gardner's more extravagant claims, the modern form of Wicca seems to have been born out of their collaboration. Following the repeal in 1954 of England's 1735 Witchcraft Act, Gardner set out to revive contemporary interest in "the Craft" by describing ancient pagan beliefs in his landmark book *Witchcraft Today* (1954), which both legitimated the pursuit of once-forbidden practices and opened the door to future development of basic Wiccan principles and ritual acts. Gardner's critics have since cast doubts on the authenticity of his claims to have recovered the secrets of ancient witch cults; nevertheless, his work has inspired a generation of Wiccan writers and practitioners whose varied interpretations of Gardnerian lore have led to the proliferation of distinct schools of Wiccan thought.

At the heart of Wiccan teachings is the belief that divine magic and mystery lie within ourselves and within the natural world. The Wiccan concept of the sacred is almost entirely immanental—that is, dwelling *within* Nature rather than outside or above—and although many Wiccan communities have chosen to worship a variety of pre-Christian deities, these "gods" are generally viewed as personifications of the power and grandeur that resides within Nature and within the human imagination. When Wiccans speak of "the God" or "the Goddess" they are not referring to the transcendent Creator of the Abrahamic faiths but rather to a creative force that lies within all existing things, to which human cultures attribute gender and personality. Wiccans are not content, however, simply to worship the powers that permeate our universe; they also seek to access those powers through ritualized acts of magic (or "magick" as most Wiccans prefer to spell that word). It is this more assertive aspect of Wicca that places it within Melton's "magical" family of new religions. The only constraint that Wiccans acknowledge upon the exercise of such power is embodied in the **Wiccan Rede**—that is, those principles of ethical behavior that virtually all modern witches accept as binding—which teaches: "An it harm none, do what you will."

For Wiccan communities, however, that rule entails the use of "magick" to achieve positive ends, and many Wiccan authors urge their readers to practice deeds that will be of benefit to humanity. In addition, many versions of the Wiccan "Rede" (or "rule" in modern English) teach a belief in some form of karma; thus Wiccans are cautioned to expect that harmful acts will return to afflict the witch who inflicts them on others.

As indicated in the vignette with which this chapter began, Wiccans celebrate the change of seasons, as well as the phases of the moon. Two very common ceremonies within the Wiccan community are the *Esbat* and the *Sabbat,* which are designed, respectively, to pay honor to the Goddess of the Moon and the God of the Sun. Esbats most often occur when the moon is full, though custom varies from community to community. Sabbats, on the other hand, are seasonal and mark the occurrence of equinoxes and solstices, or midpoints between them. There are eight Sabbats within the Wiccan calendar, the most familiar of which is Yule (or "Yuletide," as it is known in many Christian cultures). The ceremonies associated with Esbats and Sabbats differ considerably: during an Esbat celebration, for example, some attempt to "draw down the moon" (that is, draw the moon's energy into oneself) is the ritual's focus; on a Sabbat, however, it is customary to light bonfires and to decorate an altar in a way that pays tribute to the character of the particular god who is being honored that season. In each case, Wiccans hope to align themselves with the hidden energies of Nature and to confer blessings on themselves and their loved ones through such acts of natural communion.



Wiccan wheel of the year.

A Council of American Witches was held in 1974, and though it succeeded in drawing up a set of basic principles for the Wiccan movement in the United States, the council itself no longer exists, and Wicca remains today one of the most decentralized of new religious communities. Wiccans generally gather in small groups known as **covens**, though some witches prefer to practice their "Craft" in isolation. One of the more influential schools of Wiccan thought is the "Reclaiming" Movement, founded by Miriam Simos (b. 1951; better known in Wiccan circles as "Starhawk") in the 1970s. The Reclaiming philosophy is more openly political than most varieties of Wicca, and in her writings Simos blends an eclectic mix of feminist, anticapitalist, and ecological concerns in an attempt to "reclaim" the earth from political forces that have despoiled the planet and oppressed its population. Most Wiccans, however, prefer not to align their communities with a specific political agenda, though the formation of the Witches' League for Public Awareness in 1986 and other lobbying organizations (such

as the Alternative Religious Education Network) have received widespread support in the Wiccan movement. One of the more organized Wiccan communities, the Church and School of Wicca (founded in 1968), estimates the number of its adherents to be around 200,000, and although it is impossible to extrapolate the number of Wiccans worldwide, the movement has clearly benefited greatly from court decisions in the United States that conferred legal status on the practice of witchcraft, allowing individuals to claim Wicca as their legally acknowledged faith.

VOICES: An Interview with Rev. Lucy Bunch

Rev. Lucy Bunch is the Assistant Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, California.

Lucy Bunch

You were ordained in 2012. What led you toward the Unitarian Universalist ministry?

The Unitarians and the Universalists both had a strong tradition of promoting gender equality, going back to the nineteenth century, and the combined Unitarian Universalist Society has consistently exhibited particular sensitivity to the LGBT community—an issue that has particular resonance for me. More than that, however, the Unitarian Universalists are deeply committed to the cause of social justice and to the pursuit of social and personal transformation. Prior to entering the ministry I had worked as an academic administrator, but I felt a calling to minister to people who held progressive values as strongly as I did. I was convinced that I could contribute something to the spiritual life of this community.

How would you describe the Unitarian Universalist Society today?

Unitarian Universalists are, as I perceive them, people who are trying to find themselves within the continuum of religious experience and belief—or unbelief—and therefore their spirituality can best be described as "evolving." Ours is an essentially tolerant community, a community of "seekers," and particularly welcoming to those who have become "unchurched," either because they could no longer accept the dogmas of their previous faith communities, or because they had found the social values of those communities unacceptable.

That said, I have found, more recently, a desire on the part of the younger generation of Unitarian Universalists to explore various forms of enhanced spirituality and a corresponding movement away from the more assertive humanist orientation that has characterized this community in decades past. For some, the reclaiming of spiritual connection entails the introduction of more traditional modes of prayer and ritual, whereas for others it takes the form of an awakened interest in various types of mysticism. Our challenge, then, as a community is to find a way of satisfying both those who need to be constantly asking questions and those who are seeking answers.