

The Hijacking of Hallow's Eve

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WE KNOW THAT CHRISTMAS is the holiday which brings the most income to business, but do you know which holiday is second most profitable? Valentine's day? -- No. Easter? -- No. Thanksgiving? -- No again. The answer is Halloween. Halloween has become both very popular and very profitable in the U.S. So where did Halloween come from?

"Hallow" in Old English means "holy" or "sacred" (as in the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed by Thy Name"). "Hallow's Eve" or "Halloween" simply means the "evening of holy persons" and refers to the evening before All Saints Day, which is November 1 on both Anglican and Roman Catholic calendars.

In the early years when Rome persecuted Christians, so many martyrs died for the faith that the Church set aside special days to honor them. In 607 Emperor Phocas presented to the Pope the beautiful Pantheon temple in Rome. Originally built in 27 BC by Agrippa in honor of Augustus' victory at Actium and dedicated to Jupiter and the planetary divinities, the Pantheon was one of the few remaining old heathen temples. Pope Boniface IV quickly removed the statues of Jupiter and the pagan gods and consecrated the Pantheon to "all saints" who had died from Roman persecutions in the first three hundred years after Christ. During the dedication on May 13 in the year 609 or 610, a procession of twenty-eight carriages brought the bones of martyrs from the various cemeteries to the church. In following years, a festival of All Hallows or All Saints Day honoring all martyrs spread throughout the western part of the Roman Empire.

Pagan Practices

In the eighth century Pope Gregory II moved the church festival of All Saints to November 1. The move in part offered a substitute for the popular pagan celebration of the Celtic New Year, which honored both the Sun god and Samhain, Lord of the Dead. The Celts believed at the New Year the dead came back to mingle among the living. As the ghosts thronged about the houses of the living, they were greeted with tables loaded with food. After feasting, masked and costumed villagers, representing the souls of the dead, paraded to the outskirts of the town leading the ghosts away. Horses, sacred to the Sun god, were often sacrificed, and there are some records of human sacrifice during the festival.

Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) moved to restrict such pagan practices and told the people that

"They are no longer to sacrifice beasts to the Devil, but they may kill them for food to the praise of God, and give thanks to the giver of all gifts for His bounty."

Many, however, held on to pagan beliefs along with Christianity. Sometimes ancient gods were transformed into Christian saints, angels, and heroes. Scriptures were allegorized to allow for many of these beliefs. Even into the eleventh century, many pagan beliefs were accepted by Christians--beliefs such as the fear of Fate, the use of medicinal herbs with incantations, sacrifices at springs and crossroads to the spirits of the place (still observable in Mexico, for example), and the night flight or Wild Ride of the spirits, led by Diana. The devil became absorbed into the magical world of fairies, goblins, dwarfs and imps. Demons were said to appear in animal forms. Such beliefs, of course, diverged markedly from the Scriptural account of the devil and his demons as cosmic personalities conquered by Christ on the cross.

In the tenth century, Abbot Odilo of Cluny began celebrating the November 2nd following "All Saints' Day" as "All Souls' Day" to honor not just the martyrs, but all Christians who had died. People prayed for the dead, and many other superstitions continued. Food was offered to the dead, and it was often believed that on these two festivals souls in purgatory would take the form of witches, toads or demons and haunt people who wronged them during their lifetimes.

Though the church was able to destroy the pagan temples, it never fully eradicated pagan beliefs. In the Middle Ages, witchcraft and the worship of Satan continued to find followers, even in some places of "Christian" Europe.

Banned in Boston

During the first two hundred years in America, Halloween was not observed; many of the Protestant settlers rejected the holiday along with other feasts on the calendar of the Roman Church.

With the large Irish immigration in the 1840's, the holiday became more popular. Many of the old Celtic beliefs and practices were perpetuated in its celebration. Now at the end of the twentieth century, Halloween has become an important holiday to the growing number of believers in Satanism and practitioners of the occult.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

- **Jack o'lantern** --Druid priests instructed followers to extinguish their fires and light and make sacrifices to the Lord of Death. They gathered around a fire of sacrifice--thought to be a sacred fire--and took fire from that to rekindle their own hearths. A vegetable was carved out and used to carry the fire home.

- **And there is a strange tale of Mr. Jack O' Lantern.** For Halloween Irish children would carve large rutabagas, turnips or potatoes and place candles inside of them. (In America, the pumpkin became the vegetable of choice.) The legend goes that a drunken man named Jack tricked the Devil into climbing into an apple tree to get some fruit, then carved a sign of the cross into the trunk of the tree to prevent the devil from coming down. Jack made the devil swear he would never come after his soul. But, when Jack died, he wasn't good enough to go to heaven, and the Devil wouldn't take him to hell, so Jack was left to wander about. The Devil had thrown Jack a coal, and Jack put it in a turnip he had to help light his way as he searched for a place to rest.

- **"Trick or treat"** is derived from the Druid superstition that souls of the dead in the world of darkness were hungry on the festal day, and the souls had to be appeased or else risk the tricks and curses of Samhain.

- Costumes reflect the pagan belief that the god Samhein allowed the souls of the dead to return on that festal night, and the living entered a ritual imitation of them by dressing up to wander about with them.

- Popular superstitions have deemed that children born on Halloween had unique powers of contacting and conversing with supernatural beings.

LUTHER'S HALLOWEEN BOMBSHELL

The sixteenth century Reformation was in part a call to put aside the pagan beliefs and practices which people had long accepted. It was a call to purify the Church and its doctrines. Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 theses on the church door is often noted as a pivotal point in the Reformation. The timing and place of Luther's posting is significant -- Halloween -- October 31, 1517, on the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

That Church held one of the largest collections of supposed relics outside of Rome. Pieces of bones from saints, locks of hairs from martyrs, a piece of the true cross, a twig from Moses' burning bush, bread from the Last Supper, a veil sprinkled with the blood of Christ -- all were venerated and held in holy awe. The relics were kept in special reliquaries, ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones. They were exhibited on All Saints Day. By 1518, 17,443 pieces were on display in twelve aisles! The church taught that paying the special fee and viewing the relics would shorten a soul's stay in purgatory by 1,902,202

years and 270 days! This was one teaching Luther challenged in his 95 theses. On Halloween, the day before All Saints Day when the relics would be specially exhibited, Luther nailed his theses on the church door, challenging scholars to debate the virtue of indulgences, the church's teaching that by certain works a person could hasten his entrance into heaven. Luther publicly professed the free and gratuitous remission of sin, not by relics, papal pardons, or indulgences, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

A CONFESSION and an ALTERNATIVE (EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK)

So what are we, as Christians, to make of Halloween? Are we to be spoilsports and deprive children of fun enjoyed on Halloween?

First, I will confess that my wife and I allowed our children to participate in the usual custom of dressing up, going door to door for candy, and living through the necessary regiment of regulating the consumption of goodies gathered. We also enjoyed, as I would expect most of you do, having the neighborhood children come to our front door, trying to guess who was behind the masks, and giving them some candies.

All harmless fun, or at least it seemed so to me until editing this issue (done at the time of the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult). Thus, we include a sober warning from an Orthodox publication. We at Christian History Institute mourn the loss (in many of our Protestant churches at least) of any meaningful celebration of the earlier observance of Hallow's Eve. Our mission is to remind the Body of Christ of our heritage, and surely a day a year to recall the great leaders and martyrs of the faith is one small way to celebrate how God has worked across the ages, surely more important than encouraging kids to gorge themselves on candy.

It's one thing to complain, another to do something. We have prepared a new series of video programs, "Children's Heroes from Christian History." These would serve well for a "Hallow's Eve" gathering for kids as an alternative to Halloween. Besides, it would be better for their teeth.

One final thought: The All Hallow's background to Halloween was set forth in recognition, celebration, and gratitude for all of God's saints, known and unknown. We can only rejoice in their wisdom of realizing many of the Lord's choicest servants live in obscurity only to be revealed at the last day.

SOME CHRISTIANS JUST SAY "NO."

[A periodical from the Eastern Orthodox Church cautioned its readers to have nothing to do with Halloween, saying:]

"With regard to our non-participation in the pagan festival of Halloween, we will be strengthened by an understanding of the spiritual danger and history of this anti-Christian feast. The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall (on the eve of October 31 and into the day of November 1), when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity, whom they called Samhain, was believed by the Celts to be the lord of Death, and it was he whom they honored at their New Year's festival...."

"From an Orthodox Christian point of view, participation in these practices at any level is impossible and idolatrous, a genuine betrayal of our God and our holy Faith. For if we participate in the ritual activity of imitating the dead by dressing up in their attire or by wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose lord is not Samhain, as the Celts believed, but Satan, the Evil One who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of "trick or treat," we make our offering not to innocent children, but rather to Samhain, the lord of Death whom they have come to serve as imitators of the dead, wandering in the dark of night."

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