

Why The Strange Customs Of
HALLOWEEN?



Where did Halloween come from? Should it be observed? Few realize just how enlightened twentieth century man came to observe such a superstitious custom.

HALLOWEEN is the strangest holiday of the entire year.

On the eve of November 1, children in many lands dress as goblins, or as witches, knock on doors, announce "trick or treat," soap windows of schools and stores. Some tear down mailboxes, and give the police a great many headaches with their juvenile vandalism. It is a time when young people "let off steam."

To perpetuate this spirit of Halloween with its frolicking fun, stores are filled with black and orange masks, with pumpkins and other gaudy decorations to attract the eye. Even some older people enjoy these games and frivolity.

In this "enlightened" age, with ignorance and superstition supposedly banished, we find nations still celebrating the old holiday, with its goblins, fear of black cats, and children masked as demons and witches. In schools, the children march in weird processions during the day, anticipating a hectic night of fun and foolishness.

The Strange Origin of a Strange Holiday

Is this the way in which children should be brought up? WHY is this holiday celebrated anyway? Where did the custom of "trick or treat" originate?

It is time that people who think themselves intelligent began to look into the origin of this spirit of frivolity and understand how it entered a supposedly Christian society.

How did we get Halloween?

Do you know that Halloween was introduced into the professing Christian world centuries *after* the death of the apostles? Yet, it was celebrated by the pagans *centuries before* the New Testament Church was founded!

Here is the intriguing answer from history: "The American celebration rests upon Scottish and Irish folk customs which can be traced in direct line from pre-Christian times" — from paganism! "Although Halloween has become a night of rollicking fun, superstitious spells, and eerie games which people take only half seriously, its beginnings were quite otherwise. The earliest Halloween celebrations were held" — not by the early church, but — "by the Druids in honor of Samhain, Lord of the Dead, whose festival fell on November 1." (From *Halloween Through Twenty Centuries* by Ralph Linton, p. 4.)

Further, "It was a Druidic belief that on the eve of this festival, Saman, lord of death, called together the wicked souls [spirits] that within the past 12 months had been condemned to inhabit the bodies of animals" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., v. 12, pp. 857-8).

When the Spirits Walked About

Read what this November celebration was like. It was a pagan belief that on one night of the year the souls of the dead returned to their original homes, there to be entertained with food. If food and shelter were not provided, these spirits, it was believed, would cast spells and cause havoc toward those failing to fulfill their requests. It was *spiritual* trick or treat. And the "trick" was not especially cute.

"It was the night for the universal walking about of all sorts of spirits, fairies, and ghosts, all of whom had liberty on that night" (*Highland Superstitions*, Alexander Macgregor, p. 44). Literal sacrifices were offered on this night to the spirits of the dead, when,

so the belief went, they visited their earthly haunts and their friends.

There was a reason why November was chosen for that particular event. The Celts and other northern people considered the beginning of November as their New Year. This was the time when the leaves were falling and a general seasonal decay was taking place everywhere. Thus it was a fitting time, so they reasoned, for the commemoration of the dead.

Since the northern nations at that time began their day in the evening, the eve leading up to November 1 was the beginning of the festival. According to the Roman calendar, in which days began at midnight, it was the evening of October 31 — hence, Halloween, or *All Souls' Eve*, was kept throughout the ancient pagan world. The observance was widespread.

"There was a prevailing belief among all nations that at death the souls of good men were taken possession of by good spirits and carried to paradise, but the souls of wicked men were left to wander in the space between the earth and moon, or consigned to the unseen world. These wandering spirits were in the habit of *haunting the living* . . . *But there were means by which these ghosts might be exorcised*" (*Folklore*, James Napier, p. 11).

Exorcising Ghosts

To exorcise these ghosts, that is, to free yourself from their supposed evil sway, you would have to set out food — give the demons a treat — and provide shelter for them during the night. If they were satisfied with your offerings, it was believed they would leave you in peace. If not, they would "trick" you by casting an evil spell on you.

"In Wales it was firmly believed that

GUY FAWKES DAY

In Great Britain, Guy Fawkes Day is celebrated annually on November 5. This holiday has its origins in a religious conflict involving the banishment of Roman Catholic priests from England. In protest, several laymen plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament at the time when King James I was to open the new session. Nearly 40 barrels of gunpowder were prepared and secreted in a cellar underneath the Houses of Parliament. Authorities discovered their intentions and the conspirators were legally executed in 1606. Guy Fawkes — an apparent ringleader — had been chosen to set off the ill-fated explosion. This whole episode is commonly known as “the Gunpowder Plot.”

Guy Fawkes Day in England is also reminiscent of the Halloween celebration worldwide. Marguerite Ickis tells us: “Guy Fawkes Day has many customs in common with a Halloween celebration in the United States” (*Book of Festivals and Holidays World Over*, p. 120).

Young people in England observe this holiday somewhat like their American counterparts observe Halloween. The *Book of Days* sheds some light on the subject.

“English juveniles still regard the 5th of November as one of the most joyous days of the year. The universal mode of observance through all parts of England, is the dressing up of a scare-crow figure, in such cast-habiliments as can be procured (the head-piece, generally a paper-cap painted and knotted with paper strips in imitation of ribbons), parading it in a chair through the streets, and at nightfall burning it with great solemnity in a huge bonfire. . . . The pro-

cession visits the different houses in the neighbourhood. . . . One invariable custom is always maintained on these occasions — that of soliciting money from the passersby, in the formula, ‘Pray remember Guy!’ ‘Please to remember Guy!’ or ‘Please to remember the bonfire!’ [The common expression now is ‘penny for the guy’]” (pp. 549-550).

In times past, Guy Fawkes Day was celebrated by many of the adult generation. “In the old days the festival was celebrated heartily with bonfires and parades of masqueraders, who carried aloft ‘popes’ or ‘guys’ of straw. . . .” (Dorothy Gladys Spicer, *The Book of Festivals*, p. 14).

But as Marguerite Ickis explains: “Today Guy Fawkes Day is mainly a holiday for children, who observe it by dressing up in funny costumes, having parades, lighting firecrackers, and making straw dummies of Guy Fawkes” (*Book of Festivals and Holidays World Over*, p. 120).

Like Halloween, Guy Fawkes Day has its religious overtones. *The Book of Days* informs us: “Till 1859, a special service for the 5th of November formed part of the ritual of the English Book of Common Prayer; but by special ordinance of the Queen in Council, this service . . . has been abolished” (p. 549).

Guy Fawkes Day, like Halloween and many other days observed the world over, has no biblical basis as a religious holiday. If you are interested in discovering what Holy Days God approves of in the Bible, write for our free Ambassador College publication titled *Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days — Which?* Worldwide mailing addresses are on the inside back cover.

on All Hallows' Eve the spirit of a departed person was to be seen at midnight on every crossroad and every stile” (*Folklore and Folk-Stories of Wales*, Marie Trevelyan, p. 254).

This sort of Halloween festival was strenuously observed throughout the ancient world. Pagans would pray to their false gods to prevent “demons” and “witches” from molesting them.

In Cambodia people used to chant: “O all you our ancestors, who are departed, deign to come and eat what we have prepared for you, and to bless your posterity and to make it happy” (*Notice sur le Cambodge*, E. Aymonier, p. 59).

In the New World, too, the custom is found, “The Miztecs of Mexico believed that the souls of the dead came back in the twelfth month of the year, which corresponded to our November. On this day of All Souls the houses were decked out to welcome the spirits. Jars of food and drink were set on a table in the principal room, and the family went out with the torches to meet the ghosts and invite them to enter. Then, returning to the house they knelt around the table, and with their eyes bent on the ground, prayed the souls to accept the offerings” (*Adonis*, Frazer, p. 244).

This, then, is the way the heathen world celebrated their Halloween, their *All Souls' Day*. Although some aspects of the Halloween festival varied with each country, the overall pattern and purpose remained the same.

Halloween “Christianized”

But how did the professing Christian world come to accept and keep such a day?

Here is how.

For numerous years prior to the 6th century, Rome was invaded and ruled by Barbaric tribes from the north. But in 607 A.D. the Roman Emperor Phocas defeated the Barbarians. The Roman Pantheon, a pagan edifice which had been wrestled from the barbarians, was given to Pope Boniface IV.

Emperor Hadrian rebuilt the Pantheon around 100 A.D. He dedicated it to the pagan goddess Cybele and to the other Roman deities. This temple then

became the central place in Rome where the pagans honored and commemorated their gods.

With this splendid edifice now falling into the hands of the professing Christians, the question was, what should be done with it? After several ideas were put forward, this is what was finally decided.

Whereas the pagan dedication had been to Cybele and all the gods, the Roman bishop now consecrated it to the Virgin Mary and all the saints of both sexes. (See *The Mysteries of All Nations*, Grant, p. 120.) Thus, this pagan building became a "holy" structure. No more did the pagans use this edifice to pray for their dead. It was now the Christ-professing Romans who employed the Pantheon in praying for their dead.

This rededication of the pagan temple to Mary and others occurred in 610 A.D. Now converted into a Christian shrine, an annual festival was instituted to commemorate the event. The day chosen was May 13.

The Christian-professing populace now paid homage to the consecrated Pantheon and to those for whom it was dedicated. The masses were encouraged to pray to Mary and the other saints. This day became known as "All Saints' Day" - a day on which prayers were offered for the souls of saints who had died. The more prayers were offered, the less they would suffer the interim time in "purgatory." Later, even money was solicited for expiation purposes, thus curtailing the saints' suffer-

This commemoration of the dead saints, going by the name of "All Saints' Day," continued to be held in May within the Empire until 854 A.D. At this time, the *name* and *date* were changed. "The time of celebration was altered to the *first of November*, and it was then called *all hallo*" - from where we get the name Halloween; *all hallo* merely meaning *all holy*, and the "even" is a contraction of "evening" (*Booker*, p. 177).

Thus in 854 A.D., the church at large kept Halloween on the first of November for the first time. And yet, this was the very same day the Druids

in Britain, the Norsemen in Scandinavia, and the pagan Germans among others were keeping their festival of All Souls' Eve, in commemoration of Saman, lord of death and his demons.

Reason for Change

Why did the Roman church change the date to November 1st, thus coinciding with the pagans' feast of All Souls? Here is the reason.

It was a general practice of the Christianized Roman Empire and the church at Rome to convert the pagans within the Empire as quickly and on as large a scale as possible.

Ever since the time of Constantine - who made Catholicism the state religion - the Roman emperors realized how essential it was to have a unified Empire, where as many as possible would be of one mind. The civil and

religious leaders saw how important it was for the sake of unity to allow only one religion within the Roman domain.

It became, therefore, a stringent state policy to force all non-Christians to accept the orthodox faith. The condition for "conversion," of course, made it very easy for the pagan population of Rome and elsewhere to accept Christianity. If "acceptance" of Christianity was made simple, refusal was made difficult. This plan of action led vast numbers of the heathen population within the Empire to flock into the fold of the church.

Conversion of Germans

When the German Frankish king Charlemagne invaded and conquered parts of Eastern Germany, he compelled the conquered German Saxon



king, Wittekind, to be baptized and to accept Christianity.

Wittekind's Germans, now professing Christians, and other conquered peoples, had a profound influence on the ecclesiastical affairs of the church in the early 800's A.D. These uncultured people brought with them many outright pagan practices and celebrations, Halloween merely being one of them. They were fervent in clinging to their past ceremonies and observed them openly — yet supposedly converted to Christianity.

What was the church to do? Excommunicate them and thus reduce her membership? This she would not do. Was she to force them into discarding their heathen practices and adopt Italian or Roman ones? This, as she had learned in past times, was not possible.

There remained only one other way.

Let the recently converted pagans keep certain of their heathen festivals, such as Halloween or All Souls' Day — but label it "Christian." Of course the Germans were asked not to pray to their ancient pagan gods on this day. They must now use this day to commemorate the death of "saints."

If a pagan practice or festival could not be forbidden, it was reasoned, "let it be tamed." Thus many were persuaded to *transfer* devotion from their former gods to the Christian God. So it was with the festival of All Souls' Eve. Notice:

"Thus, at the first promulgation of Christianity to the Gentile nations . . . they could not be persuaded to *inquire* many of their superstitions, which, rather than forego altogether, they chose to *blend* and *incorporate* with the new faith" (*Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, John Brand, p. xi).

And — In Our Day!

Now come down to the twentieth century.

What about you and your children? What comes to your mind when thinking about Halloween? Weird and frightening masks — persons portrayed as witches and demons. Pumpkins and turnips hollowed out in the shape of eerie-looking faces. Lighted candles are placed inside to help bring out the more frightful side of these carvings.

Dough is baked into small figurines resembling witches, and spider's web cakes are baked by the dozen for this occasion. Children, dressed up in revolting costumes, are let loose on the neighbors.

The *Good Housekeeping Book of Entertainment*, on page 168, has a section on what to do on Halloween. Notice the astonishing advice given.

"Halloween decorations are quite as important as the food. When planning them, remember that if the room is to be dimly lit (preferably by candle and firelight) the decorations must be bold to be effective.

"Orange, black and red, *the devil's colors*, are the colors associated with Halloween and this scheme should be carried out as far as possible . . . Have paper streamers and lanterns hanging from the ceiling, or, if you would like to have something less usual, you could make a giant spider's web with black and orange strings, or in narrow strips of crepe paper coming from the four corners of the room, complete with a large spider — one of the *devil's favorite followers*."

Notice where the stress lies.

Read further of the black magic associated with this festival. "To decorate the walls, make large silhouettes of cats, bats, owls and witches on broomsticks . . . For the supper table small *witches with broomsticks* can be made by using lollipops on 4-inch sticks."

Weird lanterns, witch balls, and witches' cauldrons are some other objects, the book suggests, which must fit into the evening somehow.

No Biblical Basis

Halloween and other common festivals which people observe in the Christian-professing world have no Biblical basis.

Nowhere does the Bible — which should be the foundation of our beliefs — command us to pray to anyone except God the Father and His Son or to make intercession for the dead. Praying for the dead is not Biblical (Psalm 49:7). None of God's people in the Old or New Testaments has ever prayed for so-called departed souls. There is a reason for this. Man just does *not* have an immortal soul.

Nowhere does the Bible speak of a person having an "immortal soul." In other words, there is no such thing mentioned in God's divine Word as souls leaving the body at death. This erroneous idea also stems from paganism.

The Bible does speak, however, of a "soul." But by the word "soul," it merely means a person, a human being, or a living being. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"! (Ezek. 18:20.) If man had an immortal soul, he could not possibly die. All this is explained fully in our free booklet entitled *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* Write for your free copy.

Halloween and several other annual festivals people observe in the Christian-professing world have no Biblical basis, but rather originated in paganism.

The testimony of history stamps Halloween as a festival with a pagan foundation. And the Bible warns, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11).

Of course, right here many people might say, "Well, what *difference* does it make even if it is pagan? We don't worship any demons. It's all harmless fun for the kiddies."

Yet, it is a "religious" holiday. And religion is the obedience, service, adoration rendered to the object of one's worship. It presupposes profession, practice or observance of whatever belief and practice — in this case Halloween — as required by some Superior Authority. Since this holiday is called "Christian" one assumes that the authority cited would be the Superior Authority of the *Christian* faith — Jesus Christ. The shocking point, however, is that *NOWHERE* can you find His commands, sanctions or alludes to this holiday in the Bible.

It is time we discover the source of our religious beliefs and find out whether we ought to observe them. To understand where our religious, political, social ideas have come from — and whether we ought to follow them — you need our free article "Why God Is Not Real to Most People."

This article explains why we need to be careful what we carelessly take for granted and offhandedly practice. □