

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.

by Herman L. Hoeh and Gerhard Marx

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, the 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 understood 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 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.

The German Influence

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.

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 adopting 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.”

“Thus, at the first promulgation of Christianity to the Gentile nations . . . *they could not be persuaded to relinquish* 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. You’ll be surprised to what extent we have inherited pagan rites and ceremonies from our forefathers, so obvious in the celebration of Halloween.

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.

How pagan can you get?

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

The testimony of history stamps Halloween as a *heathen* festival. It’s built on a *pagan foundation*.

It’s time we question the *origin* of the practices we follow.

The Origin of Our Ideas

Of course, right here many people might say, “Well, what *difference* does it make? 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 He commands, sanctions or alludes to this holiday in the Bible.

It is time we discovered the SOURCE of our religious beliefs and found out WHETHER we ought to observe them. To understand where our religious, political, and social ideas have come from — and whether we ought to follow them — you need to write for 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. □

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