CHRISTIANS

and

Hallowe'en

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In recent years we have started to hear some Christian groups encouraging Christians not to observe Hallowe'en, not to let our children trick-or-treat, not to go to costume parties. Many of those groups urge churches to have "harvest parties" as an alternative, or even just ignore the day entirely and pretend it doesn't exist. Why do they feel this way?

Background

Many sources will tell us that Hallowe'en is an old druid celebration called *Samhain* that is associated with appeasing a Celtic deity of the dead called by the same name. The day was observed by lighting bonfires, carving faces in turnips (pumpkins are native to the New World and thus wouldn't have been available), dressing up as goblins and ghosts, and going from door to door asking for a "treat" to prevent being dragged down to the underworld of the dead.

History

The facts are quite different from the assertions above. Although the popular tale told above is quoted even in encyclopedias, no reputable historian reports that about druid or Celtic practices. In truth, the Romans were very efficient in their methodical destruction of druidic practices, wiping them out entirely. There is no accurate record of anything they did, nor is there any record of either a deity or a celebration called *Samhain*. There was a celebration at the end of October, but they had a celebration at the end of nearly every month.

In short, it is revisionism, not history, to say that modern Hallowe'en has its roots in druidism.

There were however, some leftover pagan celebrations of the harvest around this time of year. The ancient Romans had celebrated a harvest festival that included centerpieces of apples and nuts, drinking cider, and believe it or not, bobbing for apples! But that doesn't make Hallowe'en a Roman festival, either.

Hallowe'en falls on October 31 for the very simple reason that it is "All Hallows' Eve," the

vigil of All Hallows' or All Saints' Day. (At one point, nearly every major festival in the Christian year had a vigil, or a day of preparation before it.) In 834 the Church moved the celebration of all the martyrs from May 13 to November 1 and renamed it for all the saints. A century later, the Church added a celebration for all the faithful departed, on November 2.

One Vigil, Two Feasts

Hallowe'en, or All Hallows' Eve, then, is the vigil for not one but two major feasts of the Christian calendar.

All Saints' Day is when the Church remembers all those countless saints who are in the nearer presence of God but remain, as we confess in the creed, in communion with us. These are the souls we refer to with the phrase, the *Church Triumphant*. (The living are referred to as the *Church Militant*.)

All Souls' Day is when the Church remembers all the faithful departed who, like most of us, are not saints, and we pray for them. These are the souls we refer to with the phrase, the *Church Expectant*, as they are the souls in purgatory, or "the intermediate state," as some Anglicans prefer to call it.

The Irish took these observances of all the saints and all the departed souls and added one more—they banged pots and pans on the vigil of All Saints' to let the damned souls know they hadn't been forgotten.

But this still doesn't bring us to Hallowe'en as we know it in modern North America.

In the 14th century, the Black Death swept through Europe, and nearly half the population died. In France, pictures of the *danse macabre*, or "dance of death," were commonly painted on cemetery walls showing the devil leading a line of people into the tomb. Sometimes the dance was actually performed on All Souls' Day, with people dressed up as the dead and skeletons.

In North America in the 19th century the French costumes combined with Irish hallowe'en, and now we're getting closer to our modern Hallowe'en.

The final piece of the puzzle comes from the English celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day, November 5, which featured, among other things, bands of revelers wearing masks and visiting neighbors at night demanding they be given cakes and beer.

A Pagan Day?

There are some who think Hallowe'en is connected with ancient pagan religions, including most wiccans. But the truth is that wicca is not an ancient pagan religion, it's a new age phenomenon, an invention of an English civil servant in the 1950s, and has no connection with ancient paganism. Do modernday witches celebrate Hallowe'en? Yes—but as we have seen, it wasn't their holiday to begin with, it was ours, and it would be irresponsible to abandon the day to them.

A Christian Holiday

So now we have all the pieces. Far from being a pagan or satanic day, Hallowe'en is a Christian holiday from Roman, French, Irish, and English sources, a valuable part of our heritage.

In addition, Hallowe'en can remind us about Hell and how to avoid it. Hallowe'en can still prepare us to remember those who have gone before us in Faith.

The next time someone claims Halloween is a cruel trick to lure our children into devil worship, tell them the real origin of Hallowe'en, and how it is a Christian holiday. Don't let Satan steal our holiday!

A Final Warning

Are there things about Hallowe'en Christians should avoid? Absolutely! Christians are forbidden to indulge in astrology, charms, divination, fortune-telling, magic, ouija boards, sorcery, spells, witchcraft, and other occult activities, even if they are treated in a trivial or jesting fashion.

Christians also ought not glorify violence in any way, as that is contrary to our calling in Christ. Christians who have been converted from satanism or neo-pagan fake religions like wicca may find Hallowe'en uncomfortable, for although they had followed lies and deception, their souls still were endangered. Such Christians may find it better to avoid Hallowe'en. But for the rest of us, we can feel free to mock the father of lies all we want. As St Thomas More said: "The devil … the proud spirit cannot endure to be mocked." So mock away—happy Hallowe'en!

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