

BAPTIZING HALLOWEEN

The celebration of Halloween has become a fixed part of our culture. It is also deeply embedded in our collective psyche. Let's face it: Halloween is lots of fun. Most people seem to enjoy dressing up in costumes, the "trick or treat" ritual visits to neighbors, and even the revival of the classic gothic tales and horror films. At its best Halloween takes on the magic of Disney even as the hours of darkness fall and the daylight recedes.

Halloween, or "All Hallows Eve", is directly related to the Christian high feast of All Saints (All Hallows) on November 1. On this day the great heroes of the church are honored and over the centuries it has become the custom to remember all the faithful departed. Halloween developed as an extension of the feast.

However, in truth, the origins of All Hallows extend well back into the centuries, to the pre-Christian arcane earth religion of the ancient druids. Primitive people maintained a autumnal vigil on the last night of October in response to the dark spirit world. As was the case with other pagan observances, the Church merely "baptized" the costumes and reinterpreted the symbols. Thus, the mystery of death in the old religion gave way to a celebration of sainthood in the new faith; the fear of evil was stilled by the vision of heaven.

In recent years many Christians have begun to question the traditional Halloween observance in light of the reemergence of satanic cults. With growing alarm, clergy, law enforcement officials, and social scientists have observed the sudden proliferation of satanic violence, ritual abuse, and desecration. Most of this activity is apparently confined to small cell groups and individual "dabblers" who have been attracted to the anti-social, angry and grotesque elements of Satanism. Yet, there is an undeniable congruence between substance abuse, pornography, suicide, vandalism and the "black magic" of contemporary Satanism. Halloween night provides a focus for some groups who identify with Satan as an object of worship and obedience.

Should we be concerned? Yes. Should we educate ourselves and attempt to rehabilitate these young, angry Satanists? Yes. Should we cancel Halloween? NO!

And in the face of growing concern and some opposition based upon "Christian" principles, many are advocating avoiding Halloween in schools and canceling Halloween parades. Some incorrectly assume that witches "worship Satan" when in fact, witches practice an earth religion and have no belief in Satan at all. Would we condemn all the fairy tales and Disney films which have filled the imagination with images of mystery and magic?

I would propose that the Christian community and the secular culture which has adopted the Christian calendar, including Halloween, do what we have always done. Baptize the observance! That is, let us be clear about what we are doing when we dress up in creepy, spooky, or fantasy costumes.

All Hallows is a celebration and affirmation of life eternal. It is a time to give thanks for those who have gone before us. We can laugh at the powers of darkness which always give way to the light of a loving and gracious God.

Our culture does not deal well with death and evil. Halloween is an opportunity at a basic level to address the dark side of life. We need not attempt to prohibit the fun. Nor should we allow

Satanists to take possession of this holiday. If we cancel Halloween, then Satan has indeed won the day.

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