

Halloween: An Orthodox Christian Perspective



Today

- 2nd most popular American holiday after Christmas
- Over \$15 Billion is spent each year on Halloween related items



A Christian Actor on Halloween

- "Early on, Christians would dress up in costumes as the devil, ghosts, goblins and witches precisely to make the point that those things were defeated and overthrown by the resurrected Jesus Christ."
- "You should have the biggest party on your block...he told CP. "Halloween gives you a great opportunity to show how Christians celebrate the day that death was defeated, and you can give them Gospel tracts and tell the story of how every ghost, goblin, witch and demon was trounced the day Jesus rose from the grave. Clearly no Christians ought to be glorifying death, because death was defeated, and that was the point of All Hallows Eve."¹

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/kirk-cameron-on-halloween-christians-should-have-the-biggest-party-on-the-block-128345/>

History of “Halloween” starts with



Celtic lord of the dead
Literally means “summer’s end”



“In ancient Britain and Ireland, the Celtic festival of Samhain eve was observed on October 31, at the end of summer. (It) was the occasion for one of the ancient fire festivals when huge bonfires were set on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits...**The souls of the dead were thought to revisit their homes on this day,** and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, black cats, fairies, and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. In addition, **Halloween was thought to be the most favorable time for divination concerning marriage, luck, health, and death.**”



“Samhain was one of the most important and sinister calendar festivals of the Celtic year. At Samhain, held on November 1, the world of the gods was believed to be made visible to mankind, and the gods played many tricks on their mortal worshippers; **it was a time fraught with danger, charged with fear**, and full of supernatural episodes. Sacrifices and propitiations of every kind were thought to be vital, for without them the Celts believed they could not prevail over the perils of the season or counteract the activities of the deities. Samhain was an important precursor to Halloween.

Further Development

- After conquering the Irish and Celts in the first century, Roman and Celtic feasts began to blend
 - Roman feasts for the dead were Pomona Day and Feralia
 - Feralia was celebrated on Feb. 21st and marked drunkenness and fornication
 - Pomona Day, Nov. 1st, was a day to honor the goddess Pomona, the goddess of fruit trees and fertility. Her symbol? The apple



The Catholic Church

- Having multiple days for remembering the saints and martyrs, it was agreed by the Catholic church that there should be one day for “All Saints.”
- With the backing of the government, it was decided to whitewash the Roman days of the dead and turning it into a day of remembering the departed saints.
- The name then changed from Feralia to “All Saints Day” and the date was changed to kill two birds with one stone.



The Catholic Church

- May 13th, 609 AD, Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon in Rome in commemoration of all Christian martyrs.
(All Saints Day was born)
- Why May 13th?
 - Roman Lemuria Festival was a major pagan festival where the heads of household would rise at midnight to exercise the ghosts of their ancestors and fathers.
 - Date possibly chosen to Christianize and depaganize a already popular Lemuria festival.

The Catholic Church

- All Saints Day was later changed by Pope Gregory IV (827-844 AD) and further established by Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085).
- The new date = November 1st



All Souls Day

- In 988 AD the Catholic Church added another day (Nov. 2nd) to remember and pray for all the souls that were suspended in Purgatory.



“All Saints Day” to “Halloween”

- In 1556, the Scottish term “All Hallows Eve” was used.
- By 1745 it was pronounced in English as “Halloween.”



Origins of some Halloween customs

Costumes

- In the Samhain festival, the Celts would wear animal skin and dress up like ghosts, demons, fairies, and the like to “trick” the wandering spirits into leaving them alone.



Trick or Treat

- In the custom of the Samhain festival, families would put food and treats outside their front door to appease roaming spirits so they do not play evil tricks on them.



The Jack O'Lantern

“Irish (Stingy) Jack” makes a deal with the devil by tricking him to go up a tree.



A Christian Response

The Living and the Dead

“When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, **you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations**. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, **or one who calls up the dead**. For all who do these things **are an abomination to the Lord**, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; **but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.**”
(Deut. 18:9-14)

The Living and the Dead

- Ancient Celts believed that, during the Samhain feast, the spiritual barrier between the living and the dead was at its thinnest so that evil spirits of the dead return to the earth to wreak havoc among the living.
- Christian theology rejects any belief in ghosts.
- Ghosts – human spirits that return to earth to haunt people and cause turmoil.



St. Anthony the Great

The demons were not created as the figures we now identify as “demonic,” for God made nothing bad. They were made good, but falling from the heavenly wisdom and thereafter wandering around the earth, they deceived the Greeks [Here, the word “Greeks” is intended as a reference to all who follow things such as astrology, the occult, philosophy, and other things over Christ.] through apparitions. Envious of us Christians, they meddle with all things in their desire to frustrate our journey into heaven so that we might not ascend to the place from which they fell.



The Living and the Dead

- The Lord may permit legitimate apparitions of His saints.
- “...and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” (Matt. 27:52)
- St. Mary in Zeitun, Egypt
- St. Anthony the Great
- What is the difference between legitimate apparitions and ghosts?



Danger of Participating in Halloween

1) Changing the name of evil/sin

- “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Is. 5:20)
- Fall Festivals and the like
- Does changing the name of a pagan or evil festival make it acceptable?
- We have our feasts (e.g., Nayrouz Feast or Year of the Martyrs)
- If the roots are evil, changing the shape of the tree or its fruit will not change the roots.
 - “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” (Matt. 7:18)



2) Normalization and desensitization of sin

- *"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist."*
(Charles Baudelaire)
- Satan wants to be camouflaged



3) “It’s innocent fun”

- If we agree that nothing in the Halloween tradition and celebration brings glory to God, then...
- How do I justify calling something opposing God as fun?
 - If it’s about collecting candy and wearing costumes, this can be done on other godly occasions.
- “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thes. 5:21-22)

4) Feelings of depravity

- *“Why deprive our children of this popular social experience?”*
- What is the role of Christian living in this world?
 - “You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:14,16)
- What is the goal of raising children?
 - To make them children of God
- If living this life means that we will not be accepted by society, this should be a price we should gladly pay.
 - Given that our forefathers did not only accept social injustice but gave their lives for their faith and love for God.

5) Participation is approval

“And even as they **did not like to retain God in their knowledge**, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all **unrighteousness**, sexual immorality, **wickedness**, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, **evil-mindedness**; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, **inventors of evil things**, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that **those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**”

(Rom. 1:28-32)