

Halloween

By Rick Branch and James Walker

Founder: Celtic Priests of Druidism

Founding Date: circa 1000 B.C.

Other Names: *Samhain* (pronounced Sah-ween) is the Celtic name for the holiday Americans call Halloween. Other names include All Souls Day, All Saints Day, November Eve, Hallowe'en.

HISTORY

Every October 31st, hundreds-of-thousands of children dress in costumes which range from the cute and sweet to the macabre and Satanic. This custom is ritually repeated because, well, because its always been done. That is what makes it a ritual. After all, it is a great way for children to get candy, have harmless fun and pretend they are someone else.

But where did the rituals come from? Why do people carve jack-o-lanterns? Why do children dress in costumes? Where did the tradition of bobbing for apples at parties originate? Why when children approach a strangers door do they enthusiastically exclaim, "trick or treat?" How did the custom of orange and black as the colors of Halloween get started? Where did these rituals originate?

Druidism

Michael Judge, writing for the New Age periodical *Common Boundary* explains Halloween probably began between 1000 and 100 B.C. among the Celtic people. The actual holiday was a commemoration of the new year.¹ It was at this time of the year that Baal, the Celtic god of Spring and Summer, ended his reign. It was also when the Lord of the Dead, Samhain, began his reign.²

Proinsias MacCana writes, "During this interval the normal order of the universe is suspended, the barriers between the natural and the supernatural are temporarily removed, the sidh lies open and all divine beings and the spirits of the dead move freely among men and interfere, sometimes violently, in their affairs."³

As a part of the Druid festival, men and women had to fear not only the departed spirits, who were to return during the evening hours, they must also fear the Druid priests themselves. It was a time of mass human sacrifice.

Men and women, young and old, criminals and innocents, were forced into huge wooden and thatch cages. Often these cages were fashioned in the shape of giants – 'wicker men' – perhaps representations of Samhain himself. At a signal from the presiding Druids, these immense structures were torched, everything in them burned to cinders." After the sacrifices, the Druids held thanksgiving meals around "roaring bonfires."⁴

One of the cardinal reasons for this celebration was because of the Celt's belief in "life after death."⁵ While this belief in itself is certainly not an erroneous belief, their application of this belief leads them to several faulty conclusions.

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Because the Celtic day started at sunset, and ran to the following sunset, the festival began on the eve of November, when the souls of the departed were supposed to revisit their old homes in order to warm themselves by the fire and to comfort themselves with the good cheer provided for them in the kitchen or the parlor by their affectionate kinsfolk. All Hallows' Eve, as the beginning of winter and the dying time of the old year, was a night when the dead stalked the countryside. Offerings of food and drink were put out for the ghosts.⁶

It was believed by the Druids that during Samhain, the dead would play "tricks on mankind and caused panic and destruction. They had then to be appeased."⁷ Part of this appeasement process involved the giving of food to the spirits as they visited the homes. This formed the foundation of the modern practice of "trick or treat."

Another common belief of the Celts was the idea that those who had died the previous year "had been transformed into animals." Thus, to welcome the dead on this sacred night, the Celts "dressed as animals." Then, "As the dawn broke, they made a great parade to the edge of the settlement, in hopes of leading the ghosts into paradise."⁸

The ceremony of Halloween underwent an infusion of other pagan influences when the Celt homeland was absorbed by the Roman Empire. While Rome allowed the Druid priests to continue all their ceremonies, "except human sacrifice," new rituals of Roman origins were also incorporated.

Chief among them was the worship of Pomona, goddess of the harvest. Representing bounty and fecundity, Pomona was shown in art sitting on a great basket of fruits and flowers, a horn of plenty at her feet. Apples were the sacred fruit of the goddess, and many games of divination involving apples entered the Samhain customs through her influence. One of the most popular involved bobbing for apples.⁹

Centuries later, Pope Gregory III moved All Hallows' or All Saints Day, the day which commemorated the saints and martyrs, from 13 May to 1 November in an attempt to Christianize the pagan festival of the dead.¹⁰ On All Hallows, many churches staged pageants in which participants would dress up either as a patron saints or demons. This became a way to celebrate All Hallows or perhaps to scare away real demons.¹¹

Michael Judge gives the final historical link in the evolution of the name for this holiday when he writes, "Grafted onto one of the Church's great holy days, Samhain became All Hallows' Eve, contracted over years of usage to All Hallow's E'en and, ultimately, Halloween."¹²

As a result of time and external influences, the holy day of Druidism was beginning to wane. Judge explains, "The religion, Druidism, that had supported the original ritual had been destroyed. Parades were still held through the towns, but increasingly only children went about in costumes, and not to appease ancestral spirits but to frighten their neighbors into giving them sweets."¹³

In America

The many rituals of Halloween found their way into America through a most interesting set of circumstances. Judge writes, "Halloween might have died out altogether, but late in the 15th century something happened to ensure the survival and growth of the customs in lands far away from those that had created it. In 1492, Columbus landed in the New World."¹⁴

With the founding of America and its basic premise of Freedom of Religion, those who believed in the Druid traditions would once again be allowed to practice their customs. However, it was not an immediate rush to the shores of the New World. Rather, it took a potato famine to get things moving.

In 1848, millions of Irish emigrants poured into America as a result of the potato famine. With this sudden influx of people, the holiday of Druidism found its new home on alien shores. “Proudly Celtic, they called Halloween Oidche Shamhna (‘Night of Samhain’), as their ancestors had, and kept the traditional observances.”¹⁵

Just as the Celtic religion of Druidism had incorporated costumes from its Roman conquerors (Pomona worship, with her horn of plenty and sacred apples), so the Celtic religion adapted to its new environment. Things in America were different than they had been in Ireland. America possessed a bountiful harvest of a new product - the pumpkin.

The Irish also did something that has become the indelible symbol of Halloween in America - they made jack-o-lanterns. The original jack-o-lanterns were potatoes or turnips carved and illuminated by Irish children and used to light Halloween gatherings. They commemorated Jack, a shifty Irish villain so wicked that neither heaven nor the Devil wanted him. Rejected by both the sacred and profane, he wandered the world endlessly looking for a place to rest, his only warmth a glittering candle in a rotten potato.¹⁶

Hence, the jack-o-lantern finds its historical place in the history and religion of the Celtic people.

Further, the same can be said for the use of orange and black as traditional Halloween colors. “Even the traditional colors of Halloween reflect its Celtic origin. Orange is the color of the autumn harvest, black the symbol of death.”¹⁷

Another custom often associated with Halloween may find its roots in the religion of Druidism as well. Many children associate not only ghosts and goblins with Halloween, but also the witch and her black cauldron with it. There may be a historical reason for this.

Ross Nicholes, writing in *Man, Myth and Magic* states, “Samhain is a more mystical occasion, being concerned with the link between living and dead; the ritual is Breton and uses the cauldron, ancient symbol of the Mother, and the Four Foods of the Dead.”¹⁸

Thus, on October 31st of every year, children throughout America carry on a tradition that was begun in Druid paganism. They carve pumpkins to be illuminated by candles. They decorate their homes and class rooms in the colors of orange and black, generously strewn with witches and cauldrons. They dress as spooky creatures, the living dead or in other macabre images for the evening’s activities.

As they go door to door, gathering sweets, they exclaim “trick or treat,” which sometimes includes the harmless activities of pranks. Many adults place a horn of plenty on the kitchen table as a fall decoration or enjoy a game of bobbing for apples at a party. All of these rituals find their origins and historical significance in the religion of old Ireland – the religion of Druidism.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Because of its Occult history and symbolism, many informed Christians avoid any activity that would appear to support, promote or celebrate Halloween. Other Christians attempt to minimize the glorification of Halloween’s Occult roots by refusing to directly participate in costuming or activities where witchcraft, Satan, or demonic themes are prevalent. They feel that participation in Halloween and even trick-or-treating is acceptable if alternative costumes and themes are substituted or gospel tracts are given at the door. There is not total agreement among believers and churches concerning appropriate Christian responses to this pagan holiday. Knowledgeable Christians; at the very least will certainly want to avoid Halloween’s more obvious glamorization of the Occult. The Bible is replete with warnings and examples of involvement with the Occult. Occult practices are an abomination to the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) and Witchcraft was a crime

punishable by death in the Old Testament (Exodus 22:18). The New Testament gives several examples of proper Christian response to the Occult (Acts 19:19; 2 Corinthians 6:14).

Many Christian parents and churches provide alternatives such as Harvest Celebrations and “Holy-ween” evangelistic youth rallies. Some churches provide prayer meetings on October 31st to stand against the rise of crime and illegal activities that often correspond on this night. Christians can also pray for the salvation of the many Satanists, Neo-pagans and Witches who are celebrating this day as an important religious holiday. Some Christians have also taken steps to remove the celebration of Halloween from public schools. Christian holidays that celebrate the birth of Christ or His resurrection have been discontinued from practically every public school system. Only Halloween with its themes of the Occult, Satan, and witchcraft (often recognized by the IRS as non-profit religious organizations) is allowed in most public school districts.

Some churches and Christians also celebrate October 31st as “Reformation Day.” It was on October 31, 1517 that Martin Luther nailed the *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the Wittenberg Church in Germany. This event helped launch the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation helped millions turn away from Papal authority and salvation through “indulgences” or good works and turn towards biblical authority and salvation by grace through faith.

RECOMMENDED READING

Halloween by Phillip Arnn. This audio cassette teaching tape by Watchman Fellowship provides a through evaluation of Halloween from a Christian perspective.

Halloween and Satanism by Phil Phillips and Joan Hake Robie. This book discusses the Occult history of Halloween and its link to Satanism. Related activities such as Trick or Treat, Jack-O-Lanterns, and Bobbing for Apples are critiqued as well. Phillips and Robie also discuss Horoscopes, Ouija boards, Tarot Cards and other forms of divination popular among children and teens. 192 pages.

Like Lambs to the Slaughter by Johanna Michaelsen. An entire chapter (about 15 pages) of this popular book exposes Halloween and its related themes. Michaelsen also critiques Dungeons & Dragons, Saturday morning cartoons, Star Wars, Guided Imagery/Visualization and Storybooks on Witchcraft and the Occult. Index. 367 pages.

Notes

¹ Michael Judge, “In the Spirit of Halloween,” *Common Boundary*, Sept./Oct., 1993, 29.

² Ibid.

³ Proinsias MacCana, *Celtic Mythology* (New York: Hamlyn Publishing, 1973) 127.

⁴ Judge, 30.

⁵ *Mythology: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Richard Cavendish, Ed. (New York: Crescent Books, 1987) 171.

⁶ *Man, Myth and Magic: Vol. 1*, Richard Cavendish, Ed. (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1970) 67.

⁷ Ibid, Vol. 4, 440.

⁸ Judge, 30.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Man, Myth and Magic*, Vol. 1, p. 67.

¹¹ Phil Phillips & Joan Hake Robie, *Halloween and Satanism* (Lancaster, PA: Starburst Publishers, 1987) 36-37.

¹² Judge, 31.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, 30.

¹⁸ *Man, Myth and Magic: Vol. 6*, 722.



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