

Modern Syncretism: Halloween Now Christened a “Fall Festival”

The general practice of nascent Catholicism was to convert pagans throughout the Roman Empire as quickly as possible. However, most pagans stubbornly held to their false gods and ancient practices. In response, Rome implemented a strategy of “appropriation”—accomplished primarily by *renaming* pagan holidays and adapting their symbolism to reflect “Christian” themes. For example, Louis L. Morrow, author of *My Catholic Faith*, writes: “In the history of the Church we find that she often christened pagan festivals ... and endowed them with an entirely new and Christian significance” (p. 416). In her book *Witches*, Erica Jong similarly writes, “Christian holidays were deliberately set at times that had been sacred since the earliest pagan days. The Christians knew the power paganism had over the people and usually *renamed* rather than reinvented holidays” (p. 124).

Christmas is a perfect example. Ever wonder about the strange customs associated with Christmas: Santa Claus, elves, flying reindeer, mistletoe, the exchanging of gifts, the colorful decking of trees and homes, all the merrymaking? What does any of that have to do with the *birth* of Jesus?

Obviously, *nothing*.

Indeed, true followers of Christ understand the *pagan origins* of Christmas—how it was “Christianized” by the Catholic Church via a process called *syncretism*. Simply put, syncretism is the blending or mingling of different religious or cultural ideas. Syncretism takes two or more concepts—even those diametrically opposed to one another—and repositions them as a single, innovative idea. While the “new idea” contains clear elements of the original concepts, previous points of opposition or conflict are “resolved”—typically by using clever *semantics*.

All of the familiar Christmas customs listed above were once part of the pagan mid-winter festival *Saturnalia*, which honored the god Saturn and was celebrated for centuries prior to Jesus’ birth. But the festival was eventually branded “Christian” by the Catholic Church in order to appease heathen converts. Rather than force these new “Christians” to surrender their pagan holiday, Jesus’ name was *attached to* the festival—giving it new “sacred legitimacy.” Then, in the fourth century, December 25—the day anciently set aside to honor Saturn—was officially decreed to be Jesus’ birthday. Eventually the “Christianized” festival’s pagan name was abandoned in favor of “Christmas”—Mass of the Christ.

This is a classic example of religious syncretism—something the Bible forbids. But such syncretism continues even to this very day—involving one of Christendom’s most celebrated holidays: *Halloween*.

For years now in mainstream Protestantism, there has been a shift away from the *overt* practice of keeping Halloween. To be sure, if parents want to take their kids out trick-or-treating, that is their business—and few if any churches are going to discourage it. But when it comes to church-sponsored activities, most churches today are shying away from hosting “Halloween parties” or similar events. Why? In the back of their minds, they know it smacks of paganism—even Satanism. So instead, they hold—*on Halloween*—a “Fall Festival.” In practice, these festivals still look like Halloween parties, complete with the scary costumes, the candy, etc. And instead of “trick-or-treat,” its now “trunk-or-treat”—as candy is doled out to kids from the trunks of church members’ cars in the church parking lot. This keeps the kids safe, off the streets. In other words, *they’re going to do it anyway*, so we might as well at least keep the kids safe. (Sounds a lot like the ancient pagans, refusing to give up their old ways. And isn’t it interesting

that this so-called “Fall Festival” falls very close to the biblical fall festival of Tabernacles as found in Leviticus 23?)

But in reality, this is only a modern attempt at religious syncretism. The cherished event has been cleverly *sterilized* by semantically removing the explicit association with Halloween. Thus, Halloween—now called a “Fall Festival”—has been subtly *Christianized*, made palatable for churchgoers who otherwise frown on kids pretending to be witches, goblins, or devils.

Unlike with Christmas, however, no mainstream church is using Halloween—or their “Fall Festival”—to actually *worship* God. But by sanctioning the event as a church-sponsored activity, they have now added Halloween to the Protestant collection of “acceptable holidays.”

For Christians, *everything* we do should honor and bring glory to God. Can Halloween, masquerading as a “Fall Festival,” measure up to that standard?

Hardly. The Bible says we are *not* to worship God according to the “customs of the heathen” (Deut. 12:30-32). Yet Halloween is based entirely on pagan, even satanic, customs.

So try as they may, they cannot make something unholy, *holy*. Especially Halloween!