

*Question: Since Halloween originated in paganism, should we encourage our children's participation in it?*

In an effort to replace an ancient pagan festival of the dead with a celebration of dead saints, the Ninth Century Roman church proclaimed November 1 as "All-Saints Day" or "Hallowmas" (cf. Christmas). But over the centuries many pagan traditions for the evening preceding November 1 have been retained and developed into "All Hallows Eve" or "Halloween." The ancient Celts claimed that spirits of all who had died in the past year roamed the earth beginning at sunset on October 31. To ward off these spirits, they offered food and drink, built bonfires on sacred hilltops and performed rituals that included animal and human sacrifices to pagan gods.

Through the centuries, Halloween has become associated with an almost endless list of occult practices: sorcery, black magic, wizards, witchcraft, warlocks, astrology, horoscopes, divination, fortune-telling, tarot cards, palm-reading, crystal ball gazing, soothsaying, omens, Satanism and spiritualism. Many American customs such as the jack-o-lantern originated with our British ancestry. However, trick-or-treat seems to have developed with American young men who used Halloween as an excuse for mischief: turning over outhouses, breaking glass and doing other destructive things.

For most of us today, Halloween has become a time for children's parties, games and dressing up as cartoon or other playful characters. Churches sometimes have parties for dressing up like Bible characters. Participating in Halloween in this way no more endorses the pagan background than using the names of the days of the week endorses their ancient pagan and mythological origins.

While the innocent adaptations are appreciated, I do believe it is important to teach our children the difference between these adaptations and many of the activities often associated with Halloween. Just before entering the Promised Land, God said to the Israelites: "When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD" (Deut. 18:9-13).

Have fun on Halloween, but make a clear distinction between what is genuinely to be “hallowed” (kept holy) and what is not “hallowed.”

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