



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

No Witches, Please

With the increasing interest in supernatural things — among all people — the spotlight now focuses on Halloween. Is there some kind of spiritual danger which accompanies children dressing up as witches and goblins to parade the streets on Halloween? Or is it just harmless fun?

Halloween is actually the eve of All Saints' Day — a day in the early church calendar as sacred as Christmas and Easter. It began back in the 6th century when Pope Gregory III consecrated a chapel in St. Peter's Basilica to all the saints. Later, in 834, the feast of All Saints was extended to the entire Roman Catholic church as a hallowed day.

As with most holidays, however (Christmas venerates Santa Claus and Easter the bunny rabbit), Halloween soon gave way to a veneration of the saints. Celebrants made masks of the various saints and wore them on the streets to "honor" them. Or dressed in ghost costumes to depict those who had gone on before. Especially was this done on the eve of All Saints Day causing it to be

called a "Hallowed Eve" or, for short, Halloween. This was later mixed with the agrarian and pagan rites of the Druids and Celts, plus a celebrated European "witches' sabbath" which fell on the last day of October. Witches were said to fly to the meetings on broomsticks accompanied by black cats. Eventually the two forms of ritual, sacred and demonic, were mixed. Even churches gave way to practicing divination on Allhallows Eve, and priests were known to take off their frocks and dress as goblins to entertain their parishioners.

Immigrants from England and Ireland brought secular Halloween customs to the USA — including the figures of witches, black cats, pumpkins cut in the "death's head" grin, masks, pranks, and the "trick or treat" which grew from wandering groups of celebrants who went from house to house demanding food in preparation for the evening's festivities. Those who didn't contribute had their chimneys stopped up, fences torn down, or wheels removed from their wagons.

Today Halloween is a prime example of what happens when the church becomes religious rather than spiritual, puts its trust in rites rather than repentance and righteousness, and honors celebrations rather than Christ.

As to whether Halloween presents a real spiritual danger... that's up for each one to decide. It's interesting that what began as a veneration of the saints, now becomes the one night of the year when even churches hold parties honoring their arch-enemy: Satan and his demons.

I have to confess. Satan has never approached me in a devil's suit. His favorite costume is that of a financier with a get-rich-quick-scheme, or a shapely blond. But to little kids he comes differently. None of us knows much about the spirit world, but some things are a bit too "spooky" to be classified as "harmless fun."

So, all you trick-or-treaters have a grand time on Halloween. I look forward to seeing you at my door, dressed as clowns, animals, even saints. But not as witches and goblins, okay? There's too much at stake to fool around.