 Reading time: 7 min.

Wise men tell us that to understand an event, one must know what its origin is and what its purpose is.This is also the case with the now widespread phenomenon of Halloween, which rather than a holiday to celebrate is an event to reflect upon.This is to avoid celebrating a culture of death that has nothing to do with Christianity.

Halloween, as it stands today, is a holiday that has its commercial origins in the United States and has spread throughout the world over the past three decades. It is celebrated on the night between 31 October and 1 November and has some symbols of its own:
– **The costumes**: dressing up in scary clothes to represent fantastic characters or monstrous creatures.
– **Carved** pumpkins: the tradition of carving pumpkins, inserting a light inside to create jack-o'-lanterns.
– **Trick-or-treating**: a custom of knocking on doors of houses and asking for sweets in exchange for a promise not to trick-or-treat.

It seems to be one of the commercial festivals cultivated on purpose by some interested parties to increase their revenue. In fact, in 2023 in the US alone, $12.2 billion was spent (according to the National Retail Federation) and in the UK about £700 million (according to market analysts). These figures also explain the widespread media coverage, with real strategies to cultivate the event, turning it into a mass phenomenon and presenting it as just a casual amusement, a collective game.

Origin
If we go looking for the beginnings of *Halloween* – because every contingent thing has its beginning and its end – we find that it dates back to the polytheistic pagan beliefs of the Celtic world.
The ancient people of the Celts, a nomadic people who spread throughout Europe, were best able to preserve their culture, language and beliefs in the British Isles, moreover in Ireland, in the area where the Roman Empire had never arrived. One of their pagan festivals, called *Samhain*, was celebrated between the last days of October and early November and was the 'new year' that opened the annual cycle. As the length of the day decreased and the length of the night increased at that time, it was believed that the boundary between the world of the living and the

world of the dead became thin, allowing the souls of the dead to return to earth (also in the form of animals) and also allowing evil spirits to enter. That is why they used frightening masks to confuse or drive away the spirits, so as not to be touched by their evil influence. The celebration was compulsory for all, began in the evening and consisted of magic rites, ritual fires, animal sacrifices and probably also human sacrifices. On those nights, their Druid priests went to every house to receive something from the people for their sacrifices, under penalty of curses.

The custom of carving a turnip in the shape of a monstrous face, placing a light inside and placing it on the doorstep of houses, in time gave rise to a legend that better explains the meaning. It is the legend of the Irish blacksmith Stingy Jack, a man who tricks the devil several times and, upon his death, is received neither in heaven nor in hell. Being in darkness and forced to look for a place for his eternal rest, he asked for and received from the devil a burning log, which he stuck inside a turnip he had with him, creating a lantern, the Jack-o'-lantern. But he found no rest and continues to wander to this day. Legend wants to symbolise the damned souls that wander the earth and find no rest. This explains the custom of placing an ugly turnip in front of the house, to instil fear and drive away any wandering souls that might approach on that night.

The Roman world also had a similar festival, called *Lemuria* or *Lemuralia*, dedicated to keeping the spirits of the dead away from homes; it was celebrated on 9, 11 and 13 May. The spirits were called 'lemurs' (the word 'lemur' comes from the Latin *larva*, meaning 'ghost' or 'mask'). These celebrations were thought to be associated with the figure of Romulus, founder of Rome, who is said to have instituted the rites to appease the spirit of his brother Remus, whom he killed; however, it seems that the holiday was instituted in the first century AD.

This type of pagan celebration, also found in other cultures, reflects the awareness that life continues after death, even if this awareness is mixed with many errors and superstitions. The Church did not want to deny this seed of truth that, in one form or another, was in the soul of the pagans, but sought to correct it.

In the Church, the cult of martyrs has been there from the very beginning. Around the 4th century AD, the commemoration of the martyrs was celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost. In 609 A.D., Pope Boniface IV moved this commemoration to the feast of All Saints, on 13 May. In 732 A.D. Pope Gregory III again moved the feast of All Saints (in Old English 'All Hallows') to 1 November, and the preceding

day became known as **All Hallows' Eve**, from which the abbreviated form ***Halloween*** is derived.
The immediate proximity of the dates suggests that the shift in commemoration by the Church was due to a desire to correct ancestor worship. The last shift indicates that the Celtic pagan festival *Samhain* had also remained in the Christian world.

Diffusion
This pagan celebration – a primarily religious festival – preserved in the vaults of Irish culture even after the Christianisation of society, reappeared with the massive migration of the Irish to the United States following the great famine that hit the country in 1845-1846.
The immigrants, in order to preserve their cultural identity, began to celebrate various festivals of their own as times of gathering and recreation, including All Hallows. Perhaps more than a religious festival, it was a festival without religious references, linked to celebrating the abundance of harvests.
This encouraged the revival of the ancient Celtic use of the lantern, and people began to use not the turnip but the pumpkin for its larger size and softness that favoured carving.

In the first half of the 20th century, the pragmatic spirit of the Americans – seizing the opportunity to make money – extended this holiday nationwide, and Halloween costumes and apparel began to appear in the markets on an industrial scale: ghosts, skeletons, witches, vampires, zombies, etc.

After 1950, the holiday also began to spread to schools and homes. The custom of children going around knocking on houses asking for treats with the expression: 'Trick or treat?' appeared.

Driven by commercial interests, this led to a true national holiday with secular connotations, devoid of religious elements, which would be exported all over the world especially in the last decades.

Reflection
If we look closely, the elements found in the Celtic rites of the pagan festival Samhain have remained. These are clothes, lanterns, threats of curses.
The clothes are monstrous and frightening: ghosts, creepy clowns, witches, zombies, werewolves, vampires, heads pierced by daggers, disfigured corpses, devils.

Hideous pumpkins carved like severed heads with a macabre light inside.
Kids walking around the houses asking ‘Trick or treat?’ reminiscent of the ‘curse or sacrifice’ of Druid priests.
We first ask ourselves whether these elements can be considered worthy of cultivation. Since when have the frightening, the macabre, the dark, the horrific, the hopelessly dead defined human dignity? They are indeed outrageously outrageous.

And we wonder whether all this does not contribute to cultivating an occult, esoteric dimension, given that these are the same elements used by the dark world of witchcraft and Satanism. And whether the *dark* and *gothic* fashion, like all the other decorations of macabrely carved pumpkins, cobwebs, bats and skeletons, does not foment an approach to the occult.

Is it by chance that tragic events regularly occur in conjunction with this festival?
Is it by chance that desecrations, grave offences against the Christian religion and even sacrilege occur regularly on these days?
Is it by chance that for Satanists the main holiday, which marks the beginning of the Satanic year, is Halloween?
Does it not produce, especially for young people, a familiarisation with a magical and occult mentality, distant and contrary to Christian faith and culture, especially at this time when Christian praxis is weakened by secularisation and relativism?

Let us look at some testimonies.

An English lady, **Doreen Irvine**, a former Satanist priestess converted to Christianity, warns in her book *From Witchcraft to Christ* that the tactic used to approach occultism consists precisely in proposing the occult in attractive forms, with mysteries that incite, passing everything off as a natural, even sympathetic experience.

The founder of the Church of Satan, **Anton LaVey**, openly declared his joy that the baptised participate in the Halloween festival: ‘I am glad that Christian parents allow their children to **worship the devil at least one night a year.Welcome to Halloween**’.

Fr Aldo Buonaiuto, of the Anti-cult Service of the Pope John XXIII Community Association, in his paper, *Halloween.The devil’s trick*, warns us that ‘Satan’s devotees consider the “energies” of all those who, even if only for fun, are evoking

the world of darkness in the perverse rites practised in his honour, throughout the month of October and in particular on the night between 31 October and 1 November, to be a gift to him'.

Fr Francesco Bamonte, exorcist and vice-president of the International Association of Exorcists (former president of the same for two consecutive terms), warns:
'My experience, together with that of other exorcist priests, shows how Halloween, including the period of time that prepares for it, in fact represents, for many young people, a privileged moment of contact with sectarian realities or in any case linked to the world of occultism, with even serious consequences not only on a spiritual level, but also on that of psychophysical integrity. First of all, it must be said that this feast imprints ugliness at the very least. And by imprinting ugliness on children, the taste for the horrid, the deformed, the monstrous put on the same level as the beautiful, it somehow orients them to evil and despair. In heaven, where only goodness reigns, everything is beautiful. In hell, where only hatred reigns, all is ugly.' […]
'On the basis of my ministry as an exorcist, I can state that Halloween is, in the calendar of magicians, occult practitioners and Satan worshippers, one of the most important 'holidays'; Consequently, for them, it is a source of great satisfaction that the minds and hearts of so many children, adolescents, young people and not a few adults are directed towards the macabre, the demonic, witchcraft, through the representation of coffins, skulls, skeletons, vampires, ghosts, thus adhering to the mocking and sinister vision of the most important and decisive moment of a human being's existence: the end of his earthly life. ' […]
'We exorcists do not tire of warning against this recurrence, which not only through immoral or dangerous conduct, but also through the lightness of entertainment considered harmless (and unfortunately hosted more and more often even in parish spaces) can both prepare the ground for a future disturbing action, even heavy, on the part of the devil, and allow the Evil One to affect and disfigure the souls of the young.'

It is young people in particular who suffer the widespread impact of the Halloween phenomenon. Without serious discernment criteria, they risk being attracted by ugliness and not beauty, by darkness and not light, by wickedness and not goodness.

We need to reflect on whether to continue celebrating the feast of darkness,

Halloween, or the feast of light, *All Saints*…