

# Baptized Paganism

## Psalm 119:34

So new to the world, so unaware of the danger, the tiny newborn is secure, nestled in the warm cradle of his mother's arms. Yet now he senses a strange tenseness in her body. Tightly, ever so tightly she clasps him to her breast as they approach the sacred grounds. He has never heard the rumble of so many voices or the mystical sounds of the chants. His mother's arms have begun trembling and drops of tears mixed with sweat are dampening the swaddling cloth that covers him. Wild sounds of flutes and timbrels begin to echo down the mountain into the valley below. His mother's grasp weakens and suddenly the large, strong hands of a man garbed in white lift him into the night air and lay him high upon a hard, metallic surface. Insecure, the baby whimpers, seeking the comfort of his mother's arms. His eyes are not yet strong enough to focus upon the large, bronze calf's head above him. His whimpers turn into cries as smoke stings his eyes and the sculpted bronze hands supporting him become unbearably hot. His mother's cries join his but are soon muffled by thundering of drums and the rhythmic shuffling of ten thousand feet. Suddenly he is pushed, and slides down the sloping arms into the fire below. He gives a painful shriek. His mother's hysterical cries only add to the discordant shrillness of the flute and timbrels as the dance becomes more frenzied. When only the crackling of the fire and the mournful, lonely cries of the mother can be heard, the priest announces that the sun-god is pleased.

Throughout history the practice and horrors of sun worship have reached every region of the world. The Babylonians called the sun-god Shamash; the Egyptians, Ra; the Assyrians, Baal; the Canaanites, Moloch; the Persians,

Mithras; the Greeks, Helios; the Druids, Hu; and the Romans, Sol Invictus-the Unconquerable Sun. The list continues down through history and encompasses cultures as diverse as the Hindus, the Japanese, and the Aztecs and comes as close to home as virtually every Indian tribe in North America. Most scholars trace the beginnings of sun worship to Babylon.

Babylon, the first metropolis, was founded by Nimrod soon after the flood (Genesis 10:8-10). There were giants walking the earth in those days, ancient men of renown from the earlier world; but as they slowly died, the new race seemed markedly inferior. Nimrod, however, retained all the physical and intellectual earmarks of his ancestors. At first Nimrod had been only a hunter but in the passing of time his escapades became the stuff of legend among his followers. Countless recitations of his mighty exploits elevated his status to superhuman proportions, and the rapidly expanding society at his feet finally began not only to honor him as their king, but to worship him as their god.

Nimrod's arrogance was ultimately surpassed only by that of his wife, Semiramis. Notoriously beautiful and cunning beyond imagination, she wielded her own power with an iron hand. Like Nimrod, Semiramis was deified by the common people. To the superstitious minds of a race that had separated itself from worship of the one true God, Nimrod and Semiramis in their terrible strength and beauty were exalted as the sun and moon in human form.

Though historical accounts of Nimrod's actual death are vague, it is certain that he left Semiramis with a large dominion and an equally large dilemma. How was she to maintain her hold on the empire he had built? There was but one solution, and she pursued it with diabolical zeal. Nimrod's spirit had ascended into the sun itself, she claimed. With breathtaking eloquence she described to the people his new and elevated role as their benefactor and protector.

Each morning he would rise, bringing light and life to the land as he traveled across the sky. In the evening he would plunge below the edge of the earth to battle the subterranean evil spirits and demons that would otherwise crawl over and annihilate mankind. At times the battle would be bloody, and the red-streaked sky bore witness to the fray. Each morning the people were to lay their offerings before the rising sun and worship it as their departed leader and victorious protector.

The plan was only too successful. In their self-imposed isolation from the worship of the living God, Nimrod's followers had also forfeited the only living link with the knowledge of their ancestors. Left with nothing but their physical senses to inform them, they readily accepted the preposterous fabrications of Semiramis. Unbeknownst to them, they had become pawns in the sinister plan of Satan, the archdeceiver, as he laid the common foundation for every heresy of paganism.

It was decided that the first day of the week would thenceforth be dedicated to the worship of the sun-god, and in like manner the rest of the weekdays would be dedicated to worship of the lesser heavenly bodies. Remarkable enough, though Mithraism later reshuffled the order of several, our own weekdays today retain the Tuetonic names of these same planetary deities. The first day of the week remains Sunday; Monday commemorates the moon; Tuesday, the planet Mars (Tiu); Wednesday, Mercury (Woden); Thursday, Jupiter (Thor); Friday, Venus (Frigg or Freya); and Saturday is obviously named for Saturn.

As generations passed, religious leaders began to add doctrines and ceremonies to sun worship. They declared that if the sun gave life, it must require life in order to strengthen it in its journey across the sky. In response, hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children were sacrificed to the sun-god. Of such worship, God declared through Moses,

"Every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods." Deuteronomy 12:31. Deceived by self-serving leaders and knowing no other religion than their own, the people blindly adhered to the doctrines of devils.

One spring not many years following Nimrod's death, the voluptuous Semiramis was found to be with child. Calling the scribes of Babylon together, she issued a most remarkable press release. Nimrod had impregnated her, she claimed, through the lively rays of the sun. As the offspring of the sun-god, the anticipated child would itself lay claim to deity, and by proxy, she, Semiramis, would henceforth be the "mother of god." Such blasphemy seems transparent in our day, but to a nation that had departed from the living God the absurd became commonplace. The superstition of the masses was fertile ground for Satan's deceptive schemes and like noxious weeds, they flourished.

On December 25 Tammuz, the child of the sun-god, was born. His birth was hailed as a great miracle. Falling as it did during the slowly lengthening days immediately after the winter solstice, it was also seen as an omen of the sun's rebirth and was heralded by tumultuous rejoicing. December 25 was thereafter observed as the birthday of the son of the sun-god, and became a yearly feast day throughout the kingdom.

Like his supposed father Nimrod, Tammuz was reputed to have been a great hunter. Perhaps his greatest conquest of all, however, was his mythical union with Ishtar, the mother goddess who embodied all the reproductive energies of nature. Also variously regarded as the moon goddess and the queen of heaven, Ishtar was the principal female deity of the Assyrians. This same goddess, with certain variations, can be identified in other cultures as Ashtoreth (Phoenecian), Astarte (Greek and Roman), Eostre

(Teutonic), and Eastre (Saxon). Her counterpart in Egypt was Isis, wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus. Rabbits and eggs were both symbols of life and fecundity that early came to be identified with Ishtar. The yearly celebration honoring her took place around the first full moon after the spring equinox, when all of nature seemed to be bursting with reproductive vitality.

Unfortunately, the youthful Tammuz (also known as Adonis, meaning "lord," in classical mythology) met an untimely death at the tusk of a wild boar. Here legend overtakes history altogether. Some accounts say that after three days Tammuz miraculously resurrected himself; others say that the grief-stricken Ishtar journeyed far into the netherworld to find him. After many days she succeeded, but during her absence the passion of love ceased to operate and all of life on earth languished in mourning. By all accounts, when the lamenting was over, Tammuz was firmly ensconced as the new god of the sun, and his renown eventually exceeded even Nimrod's.

Every year following Tammuz' tragic death and presumed ascension to the sun, the forty days preceding Ishtar's festival were set aside for fasting and self-affliction to commemorate his suffering and death. (It was this practice, "weeping for Tammuz," that God called an abomination in Ezekiel 8:13, 14.) At the end of this period of mourning the people would waken early on the first day of the week and travel to the highest hills near their homes. There they would present their offerings of wine, meat, and incense and prostrate themselves before the rising sun, exclaiming "Our lord is risen!" Then would commence the festivities of Ishtar, queen of heaven and goddess of fertility. In preparation for this high celebration, the people would make small cakes, inscribing them with a cross (a pagan fertility symbol), for baking in the sun and eating as part of their ritual. The day would conclude in orgiastic revelry of a most debasing sort, and often included human sacrifices.

The practice of these ancient perversions was so widespread that even the nation of Israel, a people sanctified by worship of the one true God, did not escape their baleful influence. Ever compromising with their pagan neighbors, the Jews allowed their own pure worship to be adulterated with one heathen custom after another until at a last it was almost wholly corrupt. In Jeremiah 7:17-19, the prophet revealed God's clear displeasure at the idolatry of His people." Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto their gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the Lord: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?"

Indeed, confusion was the inevitable result of every compromise by God's people with the ways of the unsanctified world. And confusion was the legacy left to the generations who came after.

It may be unsettling to learn that virtually every religious holiday now observed throughout Christendom originated in paganism, many hundreds of years before Christ, but ancient history proves it beyond a doubt. The birthday of the sun's child, Tammuz, became the alleged birthday of the Christ child. The season of mourning for Tammuz became Lent, and the resurrection legend of Tammuz conveniently lived on as the resurrection story of Christ. The cakes to the queen of heaven became hot cross buns, and the disgraceful fertility rites of Ishtar evolved into the celebration of Easter, (Incidentally, Easter is still a movable festival that finds its date each year from the cycles of the moon. It is always celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox.)

Even the lesser pagan holy days, or "holidays," were absorbed into Christian culture. During autumn, the season of decay, spirits of the dead were believed to be hovering nearby. If they were not prayed for and provided with adequate food and shelter, the people feared they would remain and haunt them with misfortune. In other words, trick or treat. Today we are left with All Soul's Day; the evening before is called Eve of All Hallows, or more commonly known as Halloween.

St. Valentine's Day is what remains of Lupercalia, an early spring purification rite in which the priests would run through the streets with whips made from strips of goatskin. With these whips they would strike women, insuring them of fertility for the coming year. Matchmaking between young people would occur later in the day by random selection of names. The goatskin whips evolved into little arrows shot by Cupid, and matchmaking today occurs through the more purposeful exchange of Valentine cards.

Many other examples might be given, but suffice it to say that our religious and secular culture today is littered with pagan traditions, large and small. How did it happen? After all, we are a Christian nation in an enlightened age, aren't we? The first question is probably easier to answer than the second.

Life was difficult at best during the early years of the Christian church. The pagan world was ruthless and powerful, and it sought to stamp out the little sect of worshipers who revered Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. But the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church, and as time passed it became clear the Christianity would prevail.

When Satan failed to destroy the church by violence, he resorted to a new strategy—he would join the church himself, and corrupt it from within. This prove to be a far more

successful plan. By the fourth century A.D. the Roman Empire had invested the growing church with its own wealth and a large degree of political power, thinking to extend its own domain. Unfortunately for the world, this blend of religious and temporal power was an intoxicating mix that forever changed those who tasted it. No longer the meek and harmless body of Christ, the church devoured the hand that fed her, and in 538 A.D. Emperor Justinian decreed that the Roman Church now ruled the world. Henceforth, its reign would be known as the "Holy Roman Empire."

The world staggered under the oppression of the Roman Church during the dark ages that followed. In her thirst for ever greater power and domination, she absorbed all other religions into herself and adulterated the pure doctrine of Christ with an amalgam of superstitions and heresies. This characteristic itself was typical of all the pagan nations, which by conquest perpetually added to their list of deities. Says Durant in *The Story of Civilization*: "There were gods who presided over every moment of a man's life, gods of the house and garden, of food and drink, of health and sickness." The Roman Church gathered these gods into her bosom and gave them saints' names. Prayers for the dead, instead of ascending to Cybele were now offered up to the Virgin Mary. The use of idols and amulets was preserved, as were offerings of appeasement (penance and indulgences). The pagan kings were believed to be incarnations of the sun-god, and the Roman Church had its counterpart in the pope as the vicar of Christ.

The earliest Christians had denied all compromise with false doctrine and had gladly suffered horrible martyrdoms for refusing even to place a pinch of incense at the feet of pagan altars. Yet in just a few generations of time, a curtain of moral blackness shrouded the church. Ever anxious to assimilate and conquer, she integrated virtually every feature of sun worship into her own rites. To spite the Jews whom they hated and to accommodate the legions of sun

worshippers that were entering the "faith" through conquest, church leaders very early presumed to transfer the sanctity of the Sabbath to the first day of the week. Sunday was proclaimed a holiday in honor of Jesus' resurrection, a cunning perversion that eventually brought scorn upon God's great moral law, the Ten Commandments. In time this master stroke also effectively obliterated the worship of God as the literal Creator of the universe, which in turn prepared a wide path for the emergence of evolutionary philosophy, centuries later.

Today evolution is only the tip of a massive, many-headed iceberg. From the words we use down to the way we wear our clothes, our culture is thoroughly steeped in pagan traditions. Stripped of their original significance, however, many of these customs appear to be relatively harmless and some, updated with their Christian dressings, seem actually wholesome. But how should the Christian of today relate to Christmas, or Easter, or Sunday keeping? Not many people are really aware of the history of these things, so should we even be concerned?

These questions are reasonable, and they deserve thoughtful consideration. The best place to begin looking for answers is in the Bible itself. God strictly commanded Israel, Saying "Take heed to thyself . . . that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God." Deuteronomy 12:30, 31.

Why were God's words so strong? Because He was utterly unlike the heathen deities, whom the people regarded as capricious and in need of continual appeasement. God Himself was just, loving, and above all, holy. He required a different, higher kind of worship, based on a holy relationship with His people. The very forms of sun worship and idolatry precluded any kind of relationship between God and His people, and degraded their conceptions of Him.

Moreover, these forms encompassed the most debasing practices, including human sacrifices.

We must ask then, is there anything wrong with commemorating the birth and resurrection of Jesus? Of course not. These events are filled with deep meaning for every true Christian. The only problem is that neither the Bible nor history has preserved the dates of these events for us. Consequently, there is no biblical command to observe them on any particular day of the year. God in His wisdom left us free to remember them any and every day of the year, including December 25 and Easter Sunday.

At this point it should be evident that Heaven places no religious significance on Christmas or Easter. The selection of these days was based solely on pagan considerations; men later contrived the means by which to incorporate them into the Christian religion. It is impossible simply to ignore the holidays that have become such a staple in our own culture, yet we should not invest them with a sacredness that they do not deserve. At least we may be thankful that these days do not seek to displace or nullify any part of God's holy law.

But now how about Sunday keeping-isn't that a legitimate commemoration of Christ's resurrection? Ah-here is where Satan's plot has been leading all along. Sunday observance is the fox that slipped into the chicken coop along with the pigeons. The pigeons may not be real chickens, but it's the fox who will destroy the whole brood if he stays.

What in the world does this mean? In Romans 6, the Bible gives us the symbol of Christ's death and resurrection for the Christian, and it isn't Sunday keeping. It is baptism and a subsequent "walk in newness of life." Verse 4. But most importantly, Sunday keeping is the one remnant of paganism that is placed in direct opposition to God's authority. We have not been told merely to pick one day out

of seven for worship. Rather, we are told that God specifically blessed the seventh day and made it holy—a fact we dare not disregard.

The Sabbath is a sacred memorial of the creative power which distinguishes God from all false deities. God has always required His people to put a difference between the sacred and the profane, between the holy and the common. Satan has unceasingly sought to blur this distinction. His final goal is to make sin appear righteous, and righteousness to appear profane. Has he succeeded? Look at modern Christianity and decide for yourself.

Nowhere in the Scriptures is any mention made of transferring the Sabbath's sanctity to another day. Nowhere does the gospel of Christ nullify any portion of God's law, though the gates of hell have raged against it. It was only by hiding the change within a mass of pagan ritual and "baptizing" the whole lot, that Satan succeeded in causing the entire Christian world to break God's holy law while thinking to honor Him. Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of "The Baptist Manual," made this candid admission before a group of ministers:

There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. Earnestly desiring information on this subject, which I have studied for many years, I ask, where can the record of such a transaction [change of the Sabbath] be found? Not in the New Testament, absolutely not. There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week. Of course I know quite well that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history. ... But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by papal apostasy and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism! (In a paper

read before a New York Ministers' Conference, November 13, 1893.)

There is a serpent hidden in the bundle of colorful customs handed to us from paganism. Satan well knows that sin is the only thing that can separate us from the joys of eternity with Christ, and thus he has laid his snare. Will we be taken in the net of our adversary? Or will our prayer, like David's, be "Give me understanding and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein do I delight"? Psalm 119:34, 35.