

Paganized, Baptized, and Christianized

Throughout history one culture has adopted customs gleaned from a different culture. When one nation conquered another nation, they eventually integrated the conquered nation's religion, values, technology, etc. into their own culture. The Roman Empire was a great example of this, conquering nations and amalgamating the religions into a whole; thus the Pantheon was built to celebrate all the gods, even an "unknown god".

The faithful referred to Mithra as "the Light of the World", symbol of truth, justice, and loyalty. He was mediator between heaven and earth and was a member of a Holy Trinity. According to Persian mythology, Mithras was born of a virgin and given the title "Mother of God". The god remained celibate throughout his life, and valued self-control, renunciation and resistance to sensuality among his worshipers. Mithras represented a system of ethics in which brotherhood was encouraged in order to unify against the forces of evil. The worshipers of Mithras held strong beliefs in a celestial heaven and an infernal hell. They believed that the benevolent powers of the god would sympathize with their suffering and grant them the final justice of immortality and eternal salvation in the world to come. They looked forward to a final day of judgment in which the dead would be resurrected, and to a final conflict that would destroy the existing order of all things to bring about the triumph of light over darkness. Sundays were held sacred, and the birth of the god was celebrated annually on December the 25th. Mithras later was referred to by Roman worshippers as "Sol invictus", or the invincible sun. The sun itself was considered to be "the eye of Mithras".

However, it would be a vast oversimplification to suggest that Mithraism was the single forerunner of Catholicism. Aside from Christ and Mithras, there were plenty of other deities (such as Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis, Balder, Attis, and Dionysus) said to have died and resurrected. Many classical heroic figures, such as Hercules, Perseus, and Theseus, were said to have been born through the union of a virgin mother and divine father. Virtually every pagan religious practice and festivity that could not be suppressed or driven underground was eventually incorporated into the rites of Catholicism as it spread across Europe and throughout the world. (Information taken from <http://www.vetssweatshop.net/dogma.htm>)

Devotees of Mithra followed a leader called a 'papa' (pope), who ruled from the Vatican hill in Rome; and celebrated sacramenta (a consecrated meal of bread and wine), termed a Myazda (corresponding to the Mass). Mithra was supposedly born of a virgin in a stable on the winter solstice--frequently December 25 in the Julian calendar (the emperor Aurelian declared December 25 to be the official birthday of Mithra, circa 270 CE). Constantine was a follower of Mithra until 313 when he declared December 25 the official birthday of Jesus. (Gleaned from <http://www.atheist-community.org/mithra.htm>).

The cult of Mithra had similarities to the religion of the Christians, and in order for the Catholic church to convert the pagans, they decided on a clandestine way--coalesce the pagan religion with the Christian's religion. By synthesizing the two religions the church became more powerful and later the dominant power in the world. History proves this fact.

Another pagan holiday incorporated into Christianity was Easter. “ ‘Ostara’ or ‘Eastre’ was the goddess of Spring in the religion of the ancient Angles and Saxons. Every April a festival was celebrated in her honor. With the beginnings of Christianity, the old gods were put aside. From then on the festival was celebrated in honor of the resurrection of Christ, but was still known as Easter after the old goddess.” (The Britannica Encyclopedia)

Then there was Halloween, “a dreaded occasion, since it was thought that time stood still, and the souls of the dead walked the land. Gifts, especially food, were left outside for these roaming ghosts, with the hope that no harm would come to the households. The Druids chose certain children to be burned alive on ‘bones-fires,’ as offerings to the sun_ The fat left over from the child was fashioned into a candle, and placed into a carved-out pumpkin, or a hollowed-out vegetable with a ‘round’ sun-shaped design. The victim was called the Jack-of-the-lantern.” (Lew White, Fossilized Customs, p 39).

Although not a festival but a doctrine, the idea of hell as a place of eternal torment also was a crossover from paganism. The Grolier Universal Encyclopedia (1971, Vol. 9, p. 205) under hell says: “Hindus and Buddhists regard hell as a place of spiritual cleansing and final restoration. Islamic tradition considers it a place of everlasting punishment.” The idea of suffering after death is found among the pagan religious teachings of ancient peoples in Babylon and Egypt. Babylonian and Assyrian beliefs depicted the “nether world... as a place full of horrors,... presided over by gods and demons of great strength and fierceness” (The religion of Babylonia and Assyria, by

Morris Jastrow, Jr., p. 581). If one were to do a study of the word "hell" one would find, in the bible, that it *does not* mean an everlasting torment, *but rather* an eternal death, Constantine wanted power. He wanted to assimilate the world under his rule and he realized the way to do this was to not only fuse governments, but religions. Since Christianity was the fastest growing religion, he saw Christianity as the medium to dominion.

Edict of 351 issued by Constantine: "Let all judges and townspeople and occupations of all trades rest on the venerable day of the Sun [venerabili die solis: also the day the mystical Mithra was worshiped]; nevertheless, let those who are situated in the rural districts freely and with full liberty attend to the cultivation of the fields, because it so frequently happens that no other day may be so fitting for ploughing grains or trenching vineyards, lest at the time the advantage of the moment granted by the provision of heaven may be lost. Given on the Nones [seventh] of March, Crispus and Constantine being consuls, each of them, for the second time." (The Code of Justinian, Book 3, title 12, law 3) This edict was lauded by Pagans and Christians alike. However, many Christians still kept Saturday holy as the early Christians did. Many groups, a thousand years later, were persecuted because they kept Saturday as the Sabbath, such as the Waldensians in the Alps.

It is interesting to note that in the same year, Constantine made several decrees maintaining pagan practices. The very next day after giving his Sunday Law quoted above, Constantine made another law for pagan soothsayers. When lightning should strike a public building, the heathen prophets were to be consulted as to its meaning. It

is a historical fact that when Constantine issued this first imperial Sunday edict of A.D. 313, enforcing the observance of Sunday by the people of the Roman Empire, he himself was still a worshiper of Sol Invictus, "the Invincible Sun" of Mithraism, as well as being the Pontifex Maximus, or supreme pagan pontiff (priest) of Roman heathen worship as the state religion. (gleaned from <http://www.lis.net.au/~jjaniuk/sundaylaw.html>)

Published in May of 1995, a Catholic newsletter stated: "'The Day of the Lord' (dies Dominica) was chosen, not from any directions noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church's sense of its own power. The day of resurrection, and the day of Pentecost fifty days later, came on the first day of the week. So this would be the new Sabbath. People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become 7th Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy." (The Sentinel, St. Catherine Catholic Church, vol. 50, May 21, 1995, Number 22, Algonac MI)

In AD 325, the COUNCIL OF NICEA met and Church leaders decreed that "all honor the resurrection of Christ by keeping the Easter festival--and only on a certain Sunday of each year." Immediately following this ruling, Constantine issued an edict commanding all Christians everywhere to obey the decree of this council. Church and state had united. Although controversy about the subject of Passover versus Easter had continued since its beginning in about AD 135, the decree of Constantine essentially laid the matter to rest. From that point on, open debate or resistance about the subject was dangerous and basically useless. His momentous unification of Church and state set the stage for over a thousand years of religious intolerance and bloodshed.

"Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ." (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, p. 148, by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace)

Interesting to note that the current Pope John Paul said, "In our own historical context there remains the *obligation [of the State]* to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day of the week on which people can both rest and celebrate."

(The Pope's Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini* or Day of the Lord issued July 7, 1998, p. 74)

After this letter of the Pope was issued in 1998 A.D., many people of different faiths were upset that the Pope was advocating civil legislation decreeing that Sunday be the holy day for everyone. By so doing, the Pope made a similar decree to the one that Constantine made when he decreed that Sunday was to be observed as a holy day.

Most Christian and non-Christian faiths celebrate the same festivals that the pagans initiated and the Mother Church baptized. Paganism is now firmly integrated within most of Christianity [however it did not start out that way]. Like conquering Rome, the Christian world has conquered and amalgamated ancient religions and fused it with their own ideology. As King Solomon aptly said, "Nothing is new under the sun".