

How is Witchcraft Related to Halloween?

By Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

After the idea of roaming spirits of the dead, witchcraft is perhaps the most common theme of Halloween. However, our image of witchcraft is changing from that of something evil to something spiritually positive. Unfortunately, witchcraft is no laughing matter.

Leading former witch Doreen Irvine reports how the proselytizing activity of modern witches is designed to recast their tarnished image historically: “It was important to give witchcraft a new look, and these guidelines were laid down: ‘never frighten anyone. Offer new realms of mystery and excitement. Make witchcraft less sinister. Make it look like a natural, innocent adventure... cover up evil with appealing wrappings....’”¹

One way children can be deceived about witches is through their attempt to recast themselves in a benign light. Those having this agenda use Halloween to teach children that witchcraft is good and witches are genuinely spiritual people, healers, and protectors of the environment. Of course, most witches today claim to be “good” witches, which causes much confusion. The truth is that in the tradition of witchcraft, so-called white witches can sometimes be just as evil as black witches. Regardless, from a biblical perspective all witchcraft is evil. Nevertheless, revisionist history continues to recast the witch and neo-pagan communities as those who would help both mankind and planet Earth itself.

In *The Anatomy of Witchcraft*, Peter Haining describes leading witch Raymond Buckland as “certainly the most important Gardnerian witch in America and perhaps the cult’s most level-headed and convincing spokesman.”² In 1994, co-author John Weldon had a radio debate with Buckland, who, in the early 1960s, was probably the one most responsible for reintroducing modern-day witchcraft to the United States. In that debate, Buckland claimed the following of witchcraft: “It’s just another religion... it’s not anti-Christian—it’s nothing like that. The main message is positive.... We hold pretty much the same ideas of doing good [as Christians].... I’ve spoken at Roman Catholic colleges on Long Island, New York, I’ve spoken for Methodists, for Baptists, for Episcopalians—many, many different groups. Generally, I would say that there’s been a very good reaction: ‘Now this is interesting. Tell us more.’ That’s the sort of reaction that I’ve gotten rather than anything antagonistic.”³

Buckland’s view of witchcraft as something that is not anti-Christian but something good and positive is contradicted by the facts, not to mention God’s own view of witchcraft. In Scripture we are told very clearly that anyone who “engages in witchcraft... is detestable to the Lord” (Deut. 18:10,12).

Not too long ago *Time* magazine estimated that there were about 160,000 witches in America and possibly half as many in Britain. Obviously, painting witchcraft in a good, positive, “white” light is part of the reason for the success of witchcraft—along with the general breakdown of Western culture.

But today, even some Christians don’t seem too convinced about the dangers of witchcraft. One evangelical scholar claims, “The majority of witchcraft and ritual magic appear to be relatively innocuous,” even going so far as to assert that ritual magic may be “essentially harmless.”⁴ Again, such attitudes are contradicted by the history of witchcraft and ritual magic and the testimony of current and former practitioners.⁵ And certainly Halloween has

a part to play in all this: “In the opinion of Dr. David Enoch, former senior consultant psychiatrist at the Royal Liverpool Hospital and the University of Liverpool, Halloween practices open the door to the occult and can introduce forces into people’s lives that they do not understand and often cannot combat... For too many children, this annual preoccupation... leads to a deepening fascination with the supernatural, witches and the possibility of exercising power over others.”⁶

As another example, consider the following information given in *Harper’s* magazine. In “Toward a more P.C. [politically correct] Halloween” we find excerpts from the teacher’s manual of the *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* produced by the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force of Early Childhood Educators in California and published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Washington, D.C. In this manual we are told that the Halloween image of the witch as old, wicked, ugly and dressed in black “reflects stereotypes of gender, race, and age: ‘Powerful women are evil; old women are ugly and scary; the color black is evil.’” The myth of the evil witch “reflects a history of witch-hunting and witch-burning... directed against mid-wives and other independent women.” We are told that this stereotype of witches as evil should be challenged by teachers today “because it is so offensive, especially to many women.”

An example is given of a teacher named Kay who did the following activities two weeks before Halloween. She first asks the children what they think about witches. She receives the standard responses of “bad, ugly, old.” The teacher then says, “Many people do think that. What I know is that the real women we call witches aren’t bad. They really helped people... They healed people who were sick or hurt.” This gets the children talking about doctors and the teacher replies, “Yes, the [witch] healers were like doctors.”

On other days, Kay brings in various herbs showing how they were used by witches in healing and she also sets up a “witch-healer” table “where the children can make their own potions.” At the end of the two-week course, children have a new consensus—that witches fall into two categories: “Some were bad, some good. So although the activities don’t completely change the children’s minds, they do stretch thinking by creating a category of ‘some good witches.’”⁷

With tens of thousands of witches in America and an undetermined number of them teachers of young children, who would think that a time such as Halloween would not be used by them to their own advantage? Of course, witches also have a lot of help from many religious liberals, radical feminists, those in the goddess movement and among adherents of the neo-pagan revival. All of them work together to support witchcraft as a benign and spiritually divine activity—but at what cost?

What is forgotten today is that witchcraft is increasingly appealing to a large number of people because of the manner in which it is presented and the community and power that it offers. For example, one former witch discusses why witchcraft was so appealing to her and has become so appealing to many others: “It all seemed so harmless and so beautiful. It was a beautiful experience.... Wicca builds community. It builds community because there are so many people out there seeking this oneness with the earth, this oneness with the universe, this oneness with the ultimate god and goddess aspect. Everybody wants love, everybody wants to get along, everybody wants peace, and in Wicca, when you are involved in a group, it starts off that way.”⁸

Yet Guadalupe Rosalez found another reality than the one she initially encountered. First, in contrast to the claims of Raymond Buckland cited earlier that witchcraft is not anti-

Christian, Rosalez found just the opposite. Having a Christian background, she wanted to use Christ in her rituals but the witchcraft council would not allow her to use the name of Christ—not even as one god among many. “They just said: ‘No, you are forbidden to use Christ.’”⁹ She was taken before the council several times for discussion or discipline.

(Incidentally, the modern perception that Christians were involved in the burning of witches at the Salem witch trials and elsewhere is highly distorted. For example, at the 1692 Salem trials “one of the greatest ironies of history is that Christians were accused, Christians died, Christians tried to stop the trials, and still Christianity gets the blame. Devout lay Christians ... as well as devout ministers [were accused].... Marion L. Starkey proves [in *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials*] ‘Far more ministers were making a stand against prosecution than were lending themselves to it.’... [and Chadwick Hansen in *Witchcraft at Salem* writes], ‘In fact the clergy were, from beginning to end, the chief opponents to the events of Salem.’”¹⁰ True, the majority who were executed were innocent but there were some who were genuinely guilty of witchcraft (although this did not justify their execution). In fact, Wallace Notestein observes that “good” witches would even accuse each other in order to destroy a rival witch’s business.¹¹)

Guadalupe Rosalez also eventually found that there was a great deal of envy and animosity among her coven members. And in the end:

I saw it all for what it really was when I was trying to leave and separate myself from them. They made it hard for me. I had nightmares and visions that nobody else had and sicknesses that were not accounted for physically.... I was being pressured into going into the art of necromancy, which is raising of the dead in witchcraft.... It is just too dangerous in both a spiritual sense and a mental sense. If you are not strong enough spiritually, it will drive you crazy.... I had to make a choice. It was either witchcraft or God.... To this day almost two years later, I am still being followed. I am still being attacked on and off. I think the worst came a couple of weeks ago. I ran into this person that appeared to be demonized, on the street, and she threatened my children. She said that if I did not go back [into witchcraft] my children were going to die by the 12th of this month.... It is now after that date. I was hit pretty bad. I was sick and there was a point of stagnation where I just could not seem to move. I had no will of my own but I had much prayer through the churches and I prayed myself.... Praise God my children are now fine.¹²

She soberly tells her former witch friends that should they, too, cross the line, “You will come to the conclusion that the people you thought loved you the most, that took you into the craft, your best friends, have become your worst enemies.”¹³

Certainly witchcraft is no harmless pastime and the use of Halloween to encourage witchcraft is terribly misguided. The former witch cited above recalls, “[A]s a witch you always seem to seek the counsel of a spirit guide.”¹⁴ Raymond Buckland, quoted earlier, says that the focus of witchcraft is “a belief in deities, and a worship of these deities, thanking them for what we have, asking them for what we need.”¹⁵ Witchcraft, poltergeists and other forms of spiritism tend to go hand in hand. Biblically, this means that witchcraft is involved with the powers of darkness. If these spirits and ghosts are really demons, no other conclusion is possible.

Montague Summers’ *Geography of Witchcraft and History of Witchcraft*, as well as many standard encyclopedias and compendiums on witchcraft, show the close connections between witchcraft and poltergeists. Consider the following discussion by leading occult authority Colin Wilson in his book *Poltergeist!: A Study in Destructive Haunting*. He discusses the historical connection between witchcraft, poltergeists, necromancy and spiritism

and points out that writing the text of an illustrated book about witchcraft “proved to be an excellent preparation for writing a book about poltergeists.”¹⁶

And *all* witchcraft has been based on the idea of magic: that the witch or magician can make use of spirit entities to carry out her will... the chief business of a witch in those days (about 1,000 B.C.) was *raising the dead*. And later tales of witches—in Horace, Apuleius and Lucan—make it clear that this was still true 1,000 years later on. After the beginning of the Christian era, the witch also became the invoker of demons.... In his notorious *History of Witchcraft*, the Reverend Montague Summers denounces modern Spiritualism as a revival of witchcraft. He may simply have meant to be uncomplimentary about Spiritualism, but, as it happens, he was historically correct. The kind of spiritualism initiated by the Fox sisters was the nearest approach to what Lucan’s Erichtho, or Dame Alice Kyteler, would have understood by witchcraft. It begins and ends with the idea that we are surrounded by invisible spirits, including those of the dead, and that these can be used for magical purposes.... Witchcraft is about “spirits”—the kind of spirits we have been discussing in this book.¹⁷

In conclusion, Halloween and witchcraft are closely connected. This means that however innocent Halloween may be at one level, at another level its innocence is lost altogether. Further, because of the modern revival of witchcraft and other forms of neopaganism, an article on the subject in *Christianity Today* correctly reported that “profound changes are underway in the religious climate of the West. They suggest that new religious forces are nibbling at the foundations of a society and a culture built largely upon a Christian world view.”¹⁸ Indeed, they are. This is why the Christian community should be more committed to prayer, sanctification and evangelism. If we do our part, God may indeed reverse the tide.

Notes:

¹ Doreen Irvine, *Freed from Witchcraft* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1973), pp. 101-02.

² Peter Haining, *The Anatomy of Witchcraft* (New York: Taplinger, 1972), p. 93.

³ “Getting Serious About Witchcraft in America,” interview with John Weldon and Raymond Buckland, *Rutherford Magazine*, Aug. 1994, pp. 16-18.

⁴ I. Hexham, p. v. “Satanism and Witchcraft” in Walter A. Elwell ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 974.

⁵ We have documented some of these in our *The Coming Darkness* (Harvest House Publishers, 1993).

⁶ Russ Parker, *Battling the Occult* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 35.

⁷ “Toward a More P.C. Halloween,” excerpts from the *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* by Louis Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Curriculum Task Force as given in *Harper’s Magazine*, October 1991, pp. 19, 21.

⁸ Aida Besancon Spencer, et al., *The Goddess Revival* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), pp. 198-99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

¹¹ *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718*, pp. 22-23 in *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 200-01.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 203. In *The Coming Darkness*, we spent over 300 pages documenting the dangers of occult practices.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Getting Serious” interview, p. 17.

¹⁶ Colin Wilson, *Poltergeist!: A Study in Destructive Haunting* (New York: Wideview/Perigee, 1981), p. 319.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 320-21.

¹⁸ Dave Bass, “Drawing Down the Moon,” *Christianity Today*, April 29, 1991, p. 14.