

The Spirit of Mardi Gras

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Mardi Gras! The very word conjures up all sorts of images in our minds. We think of parades, floats, masquerades, balls, beads, doubloons, parties, kingcake and revelry. New Orleans promotes it as “the greatest free show on earth”, and it is considered by most to be a good wholesome time of frolicking and fun.

Most people think that Mardi Gras came to us from the French, and that its history dates back only a century or so (The first “REX” parade in New Orleans was held in 1872). There are also accounts of some sort of Mardi Gras celebrations dating back to the early 1700’s (though those celebrations were little more than drunken brawls).

Pre-Christian Origins

Actually, the Mardi Gras celebration originated in the pagan pre-Christian celebrations of spring. Ancient Greeks would sacrifice a goat, cut its hide into strips and run naked through the fields while their pagan priests lashed them with the goat-hide strips. This was a part of their spring fertility rite to insure a productive harvest for their fields and increase the fertility of their flocks and women. The custom was degenerate even by pagan standards, being a time of lewdness, immorality, drunkenness and revelry and was associated with the worship of the Greek god “Pan”.

Who Was “Pan”?

“Pan”, besides being the Greek god of fields and pastures, was even more closely associated with cattle, flocks and herds than with agriculture. He was a fertility god and therefore always represented as crude, wanton and lustful. He took the form of half goat and half man, having the legs, ears, and horns of a goat (the goat is the ancient symbol of satan), but the torso, arms and face of a man.

The Romans, too, thoroughly enjoyed this Greek festival. It was held each year in Rome during mid-February.

One writer says of this predecessor to our modern Mardi Gras:

“It became known as “Lupercalia”, after the grotto on the Palatine hill where the festivals of the god PAN were held. The Roman aristocracy of the time preferred debauchery and licentiousness to legality and morality. Men donned women’s clothing, the better to abandon themselves to orgy; thus the masquerade tradition began.”¹

Another writes:

“Most scholars see a relationship between present day Mardi Gras and the ancient tribal rituals of fertility that welcomed the arrival of Spring. A possible ancestor of the celebration is the Lupercalis, a circus-like orgy held in mid-February in Rome.”²

Obviously, the celebration was totally licentious. Though it is mistakenly believed that our present Mardi Gras celebration is of more recent descent, sociologists and historians trace the present celebration directly to these obscene pagan spring fertility rites. Of course, most of the elements attending the ancient pagan celebration: (i.e., the drunkenness, lewdness, men-masquerading-as-women, obscenity, nudity, etc.,) have survived and are still very much a part of the present Mardi Gras celebration.

Deplored by the Early Christian Church

Naturally, the early church considered the whole thing an abomination, and had nothing to do with it. However, as time progressed the purity and Godly intransigence of the early church deteriorated into an impure and ungodly tolerance of such things.

Laborde said:

“Leaders of the new Christian church deplored the depravity and tried to stop it. Unsuccessful, they switched tactics. What they could not suppress, they absorbed...the Church made the spring rites an acceptable feasting before the Lenten season of penance and abstinence. They called the celebration *carnelevare*- a Latin word that can be loosely translated as “farewell to the flesh”-in recognition of the period of fasting from meat that would follow.”³

If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em!

Unfortunately, by this time the church was deeply compromised in its faith, morals, doctrine and practice. Instead of resisting it actually began to absorb the blatantly pagan festivals that it had failed to suppress and adopted an “if you can't beat them, join them” outlook. For instance, in 325 AD the Council of Nicea fixed the date for the Easter celebration. It would vary each year but always fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox. They also fixed “Ash Wednesday” as the beginning of “Lent”, which was supposed to be a 40 day period of fastings, abstinence and self-denial in preparation for Easter.

But as one writer observed,

“During the medieval period, rules for abstinence became strict. Then it was the custom to refrain from all meats, milk, and its various products, and eggs; also a person was supposed to eat only in the evening.”⁴

Thus, the day before Ash Wednesday was **Carnival!** It meant “farewell to flesh” (at least for the Lenten season). The French called it **MARDI GRAS** or **FAT TUESDAY** because it was a day to gorge oneself on flesh and all milk and egg products. Not surprisingly, the symbol for Mardi Gras is a huge, fat bull; the “*Boeuf gras*” (the fatted bovine).

The Bull, an Old Testament Symbol of Baal

Christians should remember that Baal, the ancient Canaanite god (who once almost supplanted true worship in Israel, cf. I Ki. 19:18) was represented as a bull! BAAL the bull was to them a symbol of virility, strength, and fertility. Perhaps you may also recall that at least twice in her history, Israel was made to sin through idolatry when Aaron produced a “calf” (Lit. “a young bull”) of gold (cf. Ex. 32); and again when Jeroboam had two golden calves made (I Ki. 12:28). In both instances God condemned all who were involved not only in the production of these idols, but also in the worship of them.

Certainly we cannot believe that God in heaven is pleased today when the float carrying the huge BOEUF GRAS is drawn through the streets of New Orleans amidst a virtual sea of uplifted hands, and the “throw me something” cry of revellers who implore this modern BAAL for trinkets, doubloons, or other “tokens” of his favor.

Dear reader, the significance of all of this is unmistakable. The symbolism is all there. More than mere fun and frivolity is taking place. The **real** spirit of Mardi Gras is:

1. The Spirit of Idolatry! This is readily seen in the history of the holiday, which is richly steeped in Egyptian, Grecian and Roman fertility rites, and the lewdness, revellings, drunkenness and nudity that characterize them. As we have already observed, the very same spirit prevails today!

Undoubtedly, the idolatrous spirit of the celebration is exposed for all to see in noting that the titles of the carnival parades are named in honor of the very same ancient pagan gods that the Holy Scriptures condemn. In fact, over half of the parades are actually named after pagan deities.

GOD IS NOT AMUSED

Are Christians so spiritually blind to think that God would “wink” at Mardi Gras? Do we doubt His outrage over these practices? Is it possible that church goers actually believe the whole celebration to be “all in fun”?

This much is certain. The GOD OF THE BIBLE IS NOT LAUGHING. He never has and never will take the sin of idolatry lightly. In fact, He warns us in Exodus 23:13 to:

“... make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.”

With such direct Scriptural commands not to even mention the names of the pagan deities whose worship destroyed millions of souls, how can we who claim to serve Him be found attending balls and parades held in honor of the very same gods that have contended with our God through the centuries for the souls of men? And who else but Satan himself could have inspired men to resurrect these deities from out of the pages of history books, and promote their homage anew?

Christian, Should you be honoring:

SATURN-the Roman god of agriculture, time, and celebration. He was so important in Roman mythology that both a day (Saturday) and a planet were named in his honor.

ATLAS-who, in Greek mythology, was the Titan who carried the world on his shoulders.

PANDORA-who, according to Greek mythology, was the first woman created (not Eve as revealed in the Scriptures).

ALLA- the Muslim god.

OKEANOS-Greek god of oceans and fertile valleys.

RHEA-the “mother-god”, mother of mighty ZEUS.

HERCULES-the mythological son of Zeus, and legendary strongman of ancient Greece.

THOR-the Scandinavian god of rain and thunder (Our “Thursday” is named after him). He was depicted by ancient Norsemen carrying a great hammer and riding across the sky in a chariot pulled by goats.

PEGASUS-the white winged horse of the mythological Greek gods.

APHRODITE-Grecian goddess of love and sex. The Romans called her VENUS. In the Bible, this very same pagan goddess is referred to as “Ashtoreth”, “Ishtar”,

“Astarte”, or “the Queen of Heaven”. (Judges 2:13 and 10:6 reveal that Ashtoreth was worshipped by idolatrous Hebrews during the time of the Judges.)

MOMUS-Greek god of mockery and the son of night.

MINERVA-daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom.

HERMES-messenger to the gods, and god of travel. The Romans called him MERCURY. (Mentioned by name in Acts 14:12 when the superstitious pagans thought Paul was a god after the healing of the crippled man in Lystra.)

IRIS-goddess of the rainbow.

AMOR-god of eroticism and sensuality. The Romans called him EROS or CUPID (Valentines Day is actually held in his honor).

DIANA-the moon goddess. Mentioned in Acts 19:24, 27-28, she was a fertility goddess usually represented with numerous breasts. The temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

BABYLON-though not the name of a “god”, it still represents all that is false in religion.

GOD IS JEALOUS!

“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex 34:14).

Are we so foolish to think that our jealous God is not grieved when His people honor these gods each year at Mardi Gras? In Scripture, when His people forgot how jealous He really was for their affections and sought out other gods, His chastening hand quickly reminded them.

Can we honestly imagine Paul or any of the holy Apostles going to a parade in honor of these pagan gods? Can you imagine them raising up their hands to the passing floats of THOR, or DIANA, and yelling for trinkets? Diana was the very goddess over whom the riot erupted in Ephesus that nearly cost Paul his life in Acts 19! And the worship of these very deities were then dragging millions of souls into hell! Christian, how can we sit on two sides of the same fence, realizing all that Mardi Gras represents?

Scripture declares:

“Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?” (I Cor. 10:21-22)

And that’s not all! There is:

ULYSSES-god of bravery

ENDYMION-god of fertility and eternal youth.

ISIS-a fertility goddess.

THOTH-Egyptian god of wisdom and science.

POSEIDON-god of the sea.

BACCHUS-god of wine and inebriation.

PROTEUS-shepherd god of the oceans.

ARGUS-Greek god with 1000 eyes.

ZEUS-chief ruler of all the Greek gods.

And besides these, numerous parades named in honor of other gods, such as Aquarius, Adonis, Gemini, Electra, Midas, Nike, Orion, Pan, Phoenix, Juno, and Satan no longer parade.

The fact is, **the majority of Mardi Gras parades honor the demon gods that have sent countless souls to hell!**

The spirit of Mardi Gras is first and foremost **the spirit of Idolatry!**

Scripture says:

“Wherefore my dearly beloved, keep yourselves from idols.” (I Cor.10:14)

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (I Jo.5:21)

“But...idolators...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (hell).” (Rev.21:8)

Furthermore, there is a demonic and idolatrous significance lurking behind the custom of masquerading during Carnival. In a revealing article, The NEW ORLEANS TIMES PICAYUNE staff writer Margaret Fuller said in an article entitled:

What’s Really Behind the Mardi Gras Masks?

“But behind the sequins and war paint, and deep under the light-hearted Carnival spirit, is there some quirk in the human personality that makes people want to mask? And if so, is there some twist in each individual’s psyche that makes him choose the alter-identity he does?”

Enter the anthropologists and sociologists, who assure us that yes, there certainly may be a darker side to Carnival.

Joseph V. Guillotte, Ph. D., associate professor of anthropology at the University of New Orleans, says that maskers have been traced at least as far back as the Ice Age. The proof is a dated drawing from southwestern France of the Dancing Sorcerer, a man dressed in a reindeer costume.

Among early man, masking was considered a conduit to the supernatural, Guillotte says. A man donned a mask and believed he was possessed by the spirit of a god or dead ancestor who was trying to communicate with the living.

‘The individual becomes the character the mask depicts.... Masking (or costuming) altered the state of consciousness.’⁵

In the same article, Fuller quotes Fred Koenig, Ph. D., professor of social psychology at Tulane University:

“Masks are a way of being anonymous, and if you wear a mask, ‘you take on a different persona.’ Among the early tribes, men who wore masks were considered crueler toward their enemies than those who did not. Certainly nobody is claiming that masking at Carnival has anything to do with cruelty. But, Koenig says, ‘You can be a little drunker, a little wilder, a little more primitive.’ Furthermore, at Carnival ‘people will be more tolerant of you,’ he says. ‘Normal rules are gone. Traditional routines are put on hold.’”⁶

Thus there can be no doubt that dark, demonic, even mind-altering forces are behind not only masking, but most of our Mardi Gras celebration.

2. The Real Spirit of Mardi Gras is **the spirit of revelry and excess!**

God repeatedly warns us against such behavior, as in Gal.5:19-21:

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, **revellings**, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The Greek word translated “revellings” conveys the thought of “*letting go*”. It means *to cast off all restraints, to let go of all rules and principles of propriety, to cast off all inhibitions, and to overindulge* in everything. It means to be wild, riotous and excessive, displaying an “anything goes” attitude.

As anyone who has ever been to Mardi Gras would attest, this is the prevalent spirit of the celebration. **It is one, big, sensual, drunken party.** It is a time to publicly parade one’s sin through the streets and to flagrantly indulge in wanton behavior. Every kind of immorality imaginable occurs at this time of year, even to such a degree that one commentator called it **NAUGHTY-GRAS.**

MARDI-GRAS, Dream or Nightmare?

During Mardi Gras, crime and violence surge. Drunken brawls occur everywhere and riotous parade-goers fight, push, and punch each other over worthless beads and trinkets thrown from passing floats. Adults and children are crushed to death virtually every year as a result of falling or being pushed under the wheels of floats (During the Carnival celebration at Rio in 1982 over 16,000 people were injured in fights and accidents, and over 240 were killed). Over here, thieves, pickpockets, and prostitutes flood into the city in droves, all hungry for their “piece of the action”. Homosexuals come out of the closet and strut like peacocks through the French Quarter, staging their own parades and costume contests. It is one huge drunken orgy of sin, and New Orleans just loves it! Why? Because to New Orleans, perhaps more than **anything Mardi Gras means money!** (Over 300 million dollars was spent for Carnival in 1988!) It is not therefore, difficult to see why the Bible places the love of money as the root of **all** evil (I Tim.6:10).

The discerning Christian, however, readily recognizes that this is the very same spirit of the ancient pagan celebrations (The Lupercalia, the Bacchanalia, the Saturnalia, etc.)! This is hell’s holiday, not heavens, for it is against everything God is for, and is for everything God is against. As we read in the Scriptures above, these very sins send multitudes to hell.

3. It Is The Spirit of Hypocrisy! The day after Carnival, many of these sanctimonious Mardi Gras revellers attend church on Ash Wednesday (hangover and all), and have ashes smeared on their foreheads in order to be forgiven of their premeditated sins of the previous day (Actually, the ashes are to supposedly serve as a reminder of their eventual death, a death they hardly seem to fear). In abject ignorance they contemplate the personal sacrifices they plan to make during the unscriptural 40 day

Lenten season (i.e., to give up candy bars, ice-cream, X-Rated movies, or cut back on cigarettes or booze, etc.) failing to realize that **God demands holiness in the everyday lives** of His followers, and apart from such holiness, no one will ever enter into heaven (Heb.12:14).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor.6:9-10).

Furthermore, **it is hypocritical** for Christian parents to raise their children in church, have them attend Sunday School, Bible training, etc., and then turn around and bring them to sinful festivals held in honor of the pagan deities that Christ hates! But the most shameful parental hypocrisy of all is to encourage the children to raise their hands (as though in homage and worship) before the passing parade named to honor false demon gods, yelling for worthless trinkets!

The Bible warns:

“If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; Shall not God search this out?” (Ps.44:20-21)

“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (Eph.5:11)

“And I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.” (I Cor.10:20)

“Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (II Cor.6:17-18)

“But we can’t deprive the children!”

Parents who excuse their sinful participation in Mardi Gras under the guise of “not wanting to deprive their children of the fun of Mardi Gras parades”, etc. fail to realize that if we lack the backbone to preserve them from the sin of idolatry now, we’ll never restrain them from the sins of sexual immorality, drug addiction, and alcoholism later.

Unmistakably, Mardi Gras is the one day in which people abandon themselves completely to sinful behavior, wantonness, and excess. It glorifies the heathen gods that Christ hates, and its parades are a spiritual defilement to all who claim to love God.

Those who truly love Christ and want to please Him should have nothing to do with it.

“You spent enough time in the past doing what the world likes to do, when you lived in unbridled immorality, lusts, drunkenness, wild celebrations, drinking parties, and the abominable worship of idols.” (I Pet.4:3, BECK, N.T. In the Language of Today)

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” (Eph.5:8)

Notes

1Errol Laborde, MARDI GRAS! Picayune Press, N.O.LA. p.33.

2Arthur Hardy, NEW ORLEANS MARDI GRAS GUIDE, 1982 ed. p.9.

3Laborde, MARDI GRAS!, p.33,34.

4Maymie R Krythe, ALL ABOUT AMERICAN HOLIDAYS, Harper & Row, 1962 p.84.

5Margaret Fuller, WHAT'S REALLY BEHIND THE MARDI GRAS MASKS? N.O. Times Picayune, 1987.

6Ibid.

Other Publications by the author include:

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Apparitions at Medjugorie: Divine or Demonic

New Testament Survey Syllabus

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