



## **EASTER: ORIGIN and CHARACTER**

Modern thought and belief are shaped to no inconsiderable degree by the faiths and customs of the past. The influence of old pagan philosophies and superstitions is still felt in many observances called Christian, observances which are generally supposed to trace their origin to Bible teaching or apostolic authority. Particularly is this true of the Easter festival, which, with much show and ostentation, will soon be celebrated in many churches throughout the world in honour of Christ's resurrection.

During the last few years, much has been made of this service, and its claims are being urged anew upon the attention of Christendom. The Scriptures nowhere enjoin the celebration of Easter, or any other day, in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. The Bible gives one memorial, and one only, of the burial, and resurrection of the Lord, and that is found in the one true mode of baptism; namely, by immersion. Rm. 6:1-6. The effort of the enemy has been to set aside this true memorial, substituting therefore sprinkling or pouring, and then to substitute as a memorial of the resurrection his own invention, the Easter observance. The reason why he has done this will appear in considering the origin of the festival.

The word Easter is from the Anglo-Saxon Oestre or Eoster and the German ostern. Ostara was an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring. She was called "goddess of the morning light," or "goddess of the return of the sun." The fourth month of the year, corresponding to our April, was dedicated to her worship, and was called Eosturmonath. The worship of Ostara was derived from that of Baal, Ashtaroth, Ishtar, Astarte, Tammuz, etc. These were sun deities, the worship of which extends back through all pagan history. The early Britons were sun-worshippers, so that the veneration of Ostara in their experience had a very direct relationship to the worship of the heavenly bodies.

For long ages, antedating the Christian era, the pagans celebrated a great annual spring festival in honour of the sun, under the name of Tammuz. When the sun returned in the spring of the year, bringing new life and causing vegetation to revive, a great feast of rejoicing was held. The worshippers decked themselves with evergreen and flowers, and engaged in parade and gorgeous display. The worship of Tammuz, as was all sun-worship, was the worship of nature, the worship of life or reproduction. Hence this worship was attended with lascivious rites. In consequence the egg came to be used as

the most fitting symbol of this nature worship. The pagans also believed that Astarte, one of the sun deities, was hatched from a large egg which fell down from heaven.

Preceding the Tammuz festival, the pagans celebrated a fast of forty days. This was a time of lamenting and weeping. Surrounded by these conditions, and receiving into its communion half-pagan converts, the church of the third and fourth centuries became leavened with heathen superstitions. There was developed a marked spirit to cater to the prejudices and customs of their heathen associates, hoping thereby to win the favour of the unconverted, and bring them within the fold of the church. Expediency rather than principle became the controlling motive.

A tendency was manifested in the church to perpetuate the old Passover celebration with special reference to its Christian signification in the sacrifice of Christ. This was called the Pasch service or festival, and occurred at the same season of year as the heathen festival. Seizing upon this spirit of celebration as a pretext to bring about closer concord between professed Christians and the heathen, the work of transformation was insidiously entered upon. Pagan temples were reconsecrated as Christian churches, and little by little the church sought to make its services conform to the spirit of heathen celebrations. In this way the heathen festival of Tammuz was taken, and on the pretext of commemorating the resurrection of the Lord, it was transplanted to the Christian church. This was a transformation in name only; the character of the festival was but little changed. It was still celebrated with display and ostentation. The flower and evergreen adornment was retained, as was also in various ways the employment of the pagan symbolic egg.

This prayer was used by Pope Paul V, and taught by him to his adherents: "Bless, O Lord, we beseech thee, this thy creature of eggs, that it may become a wholesome sustenance unto thy servants, eating it in remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Nor was the forty-day fast period used by the heathen omitted in this work of amalgamating Christianity and paganism. This was made the Lenten period preceding the Easter festival, the same as it was the period of fasting preceding the festival in honour of the sun god's son Tammuz. Of this work of moulding the church after pagan models, Hislop, in "Two Babylons," speaks as follows:-- To conciliate the pagans to nominal Christianity, Rome, pursuing its usual policy, took measures to get the Christian and pagan festivals amalgamated, and by a complicated, but skilful adjustment of the calendar, it was found no difficult matter in general, to get paganism and Christianity, now far sunk in idolatry, in this as in many other things, to shake hands.

This, in brief, is the history of Easter. It was a combination of the old so-called Pasch with the heathen festival in honour of the sun. The period of lent was copied wholly from pagan practice. The whole was given a Christian setting, but with a retention of old pagan forms and symbols. The reason for this, as already suggested, was to win over to the church the favour of the heathen. Possibly a worthy motive prompted the effort; but a most questionable and costly method, for in thus lowering her standard to heathen ideals, the church corrupted her own morals. As to the relationship which Bible

Christians should sustain to this festival, there can be no question. They must reject it the same as they reject other ordinances and observances founded only upon the tradition of the church and the carnal commandments of men.

The revival of the Easter celebration only shows a decline in vital godliness. As the church backslides from God, and turns a deaf ear to his truth, it naturally reaches out for something to take the place of its lost power. It again seeks by ritualism and imposing services to attract the multitude as the church of the past has done. These may satisfy the thoughtless and indifferent, but they can never give to the hearts of true worshipers the portion of spiritual food for which they seek. God's children should conform their beliefs and church observances to the purity and simplicity of the Bible standard. Tradition and heathen philosophy should make no appeal to Christian duty. The Scriptures only can be taken as the basis of faith, the rule of conduct, and the standard of morals.

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