
Origins of Valentine's Day

Various Authors

CHURCH OF GOD ARCHIVES

Valentine's Day - Christian Custom or Pagan Pageantry? by Herman L Hoeh

"Will you be my valentine?" That question is asked by millions about this time of year. Why? Is there any religious significance to February 14?

Where did St. Valentine's Day come from?

You might suppose schoolteachers and educators would know. But do they?

How many of you were ever taught the real origin of Valentine's Day — were ever told in school exactly why you should observe the custom of exchanging valentines?

Teachers are all too often silent about the origin of the customs they are forced to teach in today's schools. If they were to speak out, many would lose their jobs!

Today, candy makers unload tons of heart-shaped red boxes for February 14 — St. Valentine's Day — while millions of the younger set exchange valentines. Florists consider February 14 as one of their best business days. And young lovers pair off — at least for a dance or two — at St. Valentine's balls.

Why? Where did these customs originate? How did we come to inherit these customs? Isn't it time we examined why we encourage our children to celebrate St. Valentine's Day?

A Christian custom?

Many have assumed that the traditional Valentine's Day celebrations are all in connection with an early Christian martyr by the name of Valentine.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

Notice what one encyclopedia says about this idea: "St. Valentine's Day as a lovers' festival, the choice of a valentine and the modern development of sending valentine cards has no relation to the saint or to any incident in his life" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, article "Valentine, Saint").

Did you know that centuries before the birth of Jesus, the pagan Romans celebrated February 15 and the evening of February 14 as an idolatrous and sensuous festival in honor of one called Lupercus, the "hunter of wolves"?

The Romans called the festival the "Lupercalia." The custom, of exchanging valentines and all the other traditions in honor of Lupercus, the deified hero-hunter of Rome, was also linked anciently with the pagan practice of teenagers "going steady." It usually led to fornication.

Today, the custom of going steady is thought very modern and advanced. It isn't. It is merely a rebirth of an old custom "handed down from the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated in

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the month of February, when names of young women were put into a box and drawn out by men as chance directed." That's the admission of the Encyclopedia Americana, article "St. Valentine's Day."

The Encyclopaedia Britannica also points out that the custom of exchanging valentines arose from this "name drawing" during the Lupercalia. The "custom was introduced to England by the Romans and continued through the Christian era. In order to adapt the practice to Christianity the church transferred it to the feast of St. Valentine" (article "Greeting Card").

When Constantine in A.D. 313 made Christianity an official religion of the Roman Empire, there was some talk in church circles of discarding this pagan free-for-all. But the Roman citizens wouldn't hear of it! So it was agreed that the holiday would continue as it was, except for the more grossly sensual observances.

It was not until the reign of Pope Gelasius that the holiday became a "Christian" custom. "As far back as 496, Pope Gelasius changed Lupercalia on February 15 to St. Valentine's Day on February 14" (Lavinia Dobler, Customs and Holidays Around the World, p. 172).

But how did this pagan festival acquire the name of "St. Valentine's Day"? And why do little children and young people still cut out hearts and send them to "sweethearts" on a day in honor of Lupercus, the hunter of wolves?

Why have we supposed these pagan customs, in honor of a false god, are Christian?

Who was the original "St. Valentine"?

Valentine was a common Roman name. Roman parents often gave the name to their children in honor of the famous man who was first called Valentine in antiquity. That famous man was Lupercus, the hunter.

But who was Lupercus – and why should he have also borne the name Valentine among the heathen Romans?

The Romans identified Lupercus with the Greek god Pan (Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology, Vol. II, article "Lupercus"). Pan was an Arcadian god of light. As such he was equivalent to the Phoenician sun god Baal. Baal — mentioned so often in the Hebrew Bible – was a title of Nimrod, "the mighty hunter" (Genesis 10:9).

The Persian author Rashid al Din, in his History of the Franks, mentions that Nimrod extended his hunting expeditions even to Italy. The Apennine mountains of Italy also bore the name the Mountains of Nembrod or Mountains of Nimrod.

The hunter Nimrod pursued wolves in the Apennine mountains of Italy and acquired the title Lupercus, or "wolf hunter." Valentine's Day was originally a day set aside by the pagan Romans in his honor!

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But why should Nimrod have been called Valentine by the Romans? And why should the celebration of this day have been anciently limited to the city of Rome before Pope Gelasius' time? What part did the site of ancient Rome play in the life of Nimrod?

Valentine comes from the Latin word *Valentinus*, a proper name derived from the word *valens*, meaning "to be strong, powerful, mighty." Any connection with Nimrod?

We read in the Bible that Nimrod was "the mighty hunter" (Genesis 10:9). It was a common proverb of ancient time that Nimrod was "the mighty hunter before the Lord." Nimrod was their hero — their strong man — their valentine!

But why do we associate hearts with a day set aside in honor of Nimrod — the Baal of the Phoenicians?

The surprising answer is that the ancient Romans acquired the symbol of the heart from the Babylonians. Nimrod founded Babel. He was the first lord of the Babylonians.

In the Chaldean tongue, spoken in Babylonia, the word for "heart" was *bal*. The heart – *bal* — became, because of similarity in sound, a symbol of Nimrod — the Baal or Lord of the ancient Babylonians!

Later, professing Christians in Constantine's day associated one of their martyrs named Valentine with festivities honoring Nimrod — the Valentine of the heathen. In this way pagan Romans were influenced to "embrace" the church while still continuing their pagan customs.

Why February 14?

But why should the early Romans have chosen February 15 and the evening of February 14 to honor Lupercus — the Nimrod of the Bible? (Remember that days in ancient times began at sunset the evening before.)

Nimrod — the Baal or sun-god of the ancient pagans — was said to have been born at the winter solstice. In the 21st century B.C., the winter solstice occurred on January 6. Semiramis I, who ruled as queen in that century, ordered Nimrod's birthday to be celebrated on the day we designate January 6.

The Eastern Orthodox churches still commemorate this particular day, but now call it by the name Christmas instead.

Later, as the solstice changed, Julius Caesar ordered the Roman world to celebrate this birth date on the new date of the solstice — on December 25 on his reformed calendar. This day was called the *Brumalia*. Today it is labeled Christmas.

It was the custom of antiquity for the mother of a male child to present herself for purification on the 40th day after the day of birth. The fortieth day after January 6 — Nimrod's original

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birthdate — takes us to February 15, the celebration of which began on the evening of February 14 — the Lupercalia or St. Valentine's Day.

On this day in February, Semiramis, the mother of Nimrod, was said to have been purified and to have appeared for the first time in public with her son as the original "mother and child."

The Roman month February, in fact, derives its name from the februa, which the Roman priests used in the rites celebrated on the Lupercalia. The februa were thongs from the skins of sacrificial animals used in rites of purification on the evening of February 14.

This, then, is the origin of Valentine's Day.

Why should we continue teaching children these pagan customs, derived from ancient and out-dated pagan sex- and hero-worship? Why not teach them, instead, what history and the Bible really say? You need to know exactly what the Bible does say about what days God's true people should observe.

The Origin of St. Valentine's Day

Gerhard O Marx

Decorative hearts, winged cupids, drawing lots, exchanging names — what's it all about? Read of the surprising origin of this day.

WHAT IS the true origin of St. Valentine's Day? What significance lies behind the date of February 14th? What purpose is there in keeping it?

Have you ever wondered why it is called SAINT Valentine's Day? Why do people become each other's valentine for this particular day? Why are cards decorated with hearts and figurines of small nude boys — cupids?

The Bible — presumably the guidebook of all Christians — is silent about keeping such a day. Then how did we begin celebrating St. Valentine's Day? What is the source of our beliefs and practices?

The First Valentine's Day

Centuries before the advent of Christianity, the pagan population of Rome observed a "Valentine's Day" (handed down from the EAST) beginning on the eve of February 14th — although under a different name. It was a "love feast," based — not on any Christian principle of true love — but on free sex. The Romans were well noted for their sexual immorality on their festive occasions, especially so on this particular night in February. It was a religious festival dedicated to the goddess of love. The Romans called it their Lupercalia.

The superstitions associated with this Roman love festival were numerous. The priests, the Luperci, would clothe themselves with strips of skin from sacrificed goats and run through the streets in Rome. "They bore whips in their hand, made of strips of goatskin; with these they struck women who ran in their way, desirous to escape from the reproach of barrenness. The thongs bore the name of febrza, a word connected... with purificatory ritual" (Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, Vol. XII, p. 812).

Being one's valentine on this day was indulged in by all. "It was about the middle of the month that the names of willing young ladies were put in a box and well shaken up, so that each young blood could draw out one at random; the girl thus won was to remain his companion while the gaieties lasted" (The English Festivals, Whistler, p. 90).

This festival was dedicated to the goddess Venus and the feast was "characterized in the later Roman period by wanton raillery and unkindled freedom ..." (Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, James Hastings, Vol. 111, p. 226). In Roman mythology, this goddess of sexual immorality had sons, called "Cupids," who attended her on this festival. They were believed to cause love and also make it cease — a sort of love potion (Roman Antiquities, Alexander Adam, p. 279). This was done by shooting arrows at the hearts of the victims. Cupid was generally represented as a winged boy with bow and arrow, often shooting at a young man's or a young

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woman's heart. These cupids were naked, winged, and blinded, armed with a bow, arrows, and a torch. Any resemblance to the little nude boys on Valentine's Day cards? The cupids are often used as decorative symbolism in theaters, cards, signs on inns, etc.

Who was this Cupid? In later Roman times he was only one of many Roman gods. The Greeks knew him as Eros. But his history goes farther back than Greek or Roman times. In Egypt "this infant divinity was frequently represented with a heart, or the heart-shaped fruit of the Persea, in one of his hands" (The Two Babylons, Alexander Hislop, p. 189). "Thus the boy-god came to be regarded as the 'god of the heart,' in other words, as Cupid, the god of love" (ibid.).

First "Christian" Valentine

Seeing that the Roman love feast of Lupercalia was outright pagan, why then did the Christian-professing church accept and keep such a day — of course under a different name? Whatever possessed the leaders of the church to approve of this heathen fertility feast and keep it as a "Christian" festival under the name of St. Valentine's Day?

It all began at the time of Constantine the Great in the fourth century. It was this emperor who, it will be remembered, accepted orthodox Christianity. No longer considering himself a pagan, Constantine was encouraged to break with his pagan past. And one of several heathen feasts that had to go was the Lupercalia. But this produced problems.

It was one thing for the Christianized emperor to forego what the church considered a purely pagan festival, but to get the Roman populace at large to cease observing this love feast was another matter. In fact, it proved impossible. The Roman populace wouldn't hear of it.

It was hoped by church circles that the pagan populace would in due time be willing to give up this festival, but this proved to be a false hope.

The Christian-professing church then decided that the only way this matter could be resolved was to let the great masses of the empire — now members of the church — keep the Lupercalia feast, but by another name and for another purpose.

It was the year A.D. 496 when Pope Gelasius I "Christianized" the festival and renamed it "St. Valentine's Day." Here is why.

Church's Main Interest

Once the Roman emperors became Christians, the Orthodox church grew in numbers. Since her main concern was to convert the pagan populace within the empire as quickly as possible, she felt justified in making it easy on them. Church leaders "clearly perceived that if Christianity was to conquer the world it could do so only by relaxing the too rigid principles of its Founder" (Studies in the History of Oriental Religions, James Frazer, Book 11, p. 202).

One way of gaining an ever-increasing influx of members was to blend and incorporate pagan beliefs and practices with Christian ones. "Thus at the first promulgation of Christianity to the

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Gentile nations... they could not be persuaded to relinquish many of their superstitions, which, rather than forego altogether, they chose to blend and incorporate with the new faith" (Popular Antiquities of Great Britain, John Brand, p. xi).

Thus "for almost every pagan ceremony, some Christian rite was introduced" (Clavis Culendariu, John Brady, Vol. I, p. 196).

So, beginning with A.D. 496, the Roman populace could still come to their love feast, no longer dedicated to Venus, the goddess of love, but to the Virgin Mary. They could still draw lots for their valentines, but with the names of saints written on them. The attention of the populace on each February 14th was now to be centered on Christian saints instead of pagan deities.

St. Valentine Chosen

The church, in deciding to slightly alter the festival by giving it an acceptable name, went back to the third century. There she came upon a tradition about a certain presbyter who had married couples secretly against the edict of Emperor Claudius II. He was caught and beheaded in A.D. 270. To honor this bishop, it was decided to call the February festival of love and purification after his name — Saint Valentine.

Later, the Protestant churches rejected the Catholic concept of the Virgin Mary and the saints' association with St. Valentine's Day. Instead, the people went back to drawing the names of ordinary young men and women. It became a less religious ceremony — but still retaining all the pagan embellishments of the Romans, and then some.

All the pagan trappings were maintained — Cupid was still there, the decorative "hearts" continued to be displayed, lots were still drawn as chance directed, and the day was still the original Roman day. It was also believed that birds were said to mate on this day. It was further a widely held tradition that the first person of the opposite sex one encountered on the morning of St. Valentine's Day was to become the future spouse. And love potions were considered to be very potent on February 14th. People would let themselves go at parties, often disregarding the inevitable consequences of such revelry.

Both in England and Scotland, St. Valentine's Day was a welcome diversion from the otherwise dull, cold winter season. Referring to a traveler to these areas in the last century, we read, "'On the eve of St. Valentine's Day,' he says 'the young folks in England and Scotland, by a very ancient custom, celebrate a little festival. An equal number of' maids and bachelors get together; each writes their true or some feigned name upon separate billets, which they roll up and draw by way of lots.... Fortune [the name of yet another pagan god!] having thus divided the company into so many couples, the valentines give balls and treats to their mistresses, wear their billets several days upon their bosoms or sleeves, and this little sport often ends in love'" (Book of Days, Robert Chambers, Vol. I, part 1, p. 255).

No wonder that this "heathen, lewd, superstitious custom of boys drawing the names of girls, in honour of their goddess" (Clavis Calendaria, John Brady, p. 277) — as the Romans were wont to do — can easily lead to illicit love and dire consequences.

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Why, then do we allow our children to keep a festival that is shrouded in superstition, founded on rank pagan ideals, and based on a corrupting rather than an uplifting influence?

There is certainly a need to keep festive occasions and religious celebrations. In fact, God Almighty commands His people to observe festivals — His festivals.

Notice, however, what God says about Christians keeping religious festivals which do not emanate from His Word — the Bible. You read of it in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here God warns His people Israel not to use pagan means and ways to worship Him. "When the Lord thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and 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" (Deut. 12:29-31).

This warning is reiterated in Jeremiah 10, verses two to three. Here God commands, "Learn not the way of the heathen... for the customs of the people are vain"!

That is why God forbids keeping these pre-Christian festivals — they are vain, purposeless, and in the long run harmful. They blind us from the real purpose for mankind's existence. They prevent us from seeing God's Master Plan for His people.

It is not that God has left His people without meaningful festivals. On the contrary, instead of the traditional "Christian" festivals, which reveal very little if anything of God's Plan, God's people keep the genuine festival days of God. These are full of meaning. By keeping them we understand the entirety of God's purpose for us. Once we understand them — and keep them — we would not want to retrogress to the holidays the world offers.