

The unlikely concord between paganism and christianity

[Religion](#), [Jesus](#)



Since early Christianity spread from locale to locale, with the assistance of indoctrinating traditional pagan beliefs as a way of making the new religion more acceptable to those indigenous people they wished to entice, to explore the beginnings of Christianity, one needs to study how regional native myths affected and altered Christianity to assist in its evangelism. We'll first compare the similarities of doctrine between the new system of beliefs and the ancient axiom. Next, one needs to consider how age-old allegories correlate to Christianity. The association of the primal virtues of the pagans and the new Christian canon as applied to morality shall be reviewed. We'll examine how aged customs influenced Christian celebrations and idolatry. Finally, we'll conclude the aforementioned dimensions of religion on how paganism influenced the social structure and its adaptation from the ancient myths to the conversation of the new established religion — Christianity. These comparisons will not be made to the whole of Christianity, although it would be applicable on many facets, but rather of how traditional and regional myth assimilated into the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church since in a number of cases, Roman Catholic saints became successors to familiar deities giving an abundance of similarities between gods and saints. Remember, to understand a culture, you must first grasp the mythical characteristics associated within the context of that civilization — both past and present. Before we begin however, we would be remiss if we did not provide a brief overview of the history of Christianity and its beliefs from the beginning. More than two millennia ago, a child was born to a virgin mother named Mary in Judea in the city of Bethlehem, under the authority of Roman dominance, named Jesus Christ. He, Jesus Christ, sermonized to the masses

and died as a felonious malefactor after only little more than thirty years of a mortal existence. How did a Jewish peasant from humble beginnings, who never authored any document, never commanded a legion nor held any type of political office, become so revered as the savior of mankind and known throughout the world as the Son of Man and the Son of God? How did this new school of thought of Christian-Jews elevate to global prominence? What occurred when the new order happened upon other religions? Was conversation to the new and unfamiliar system of beliefs violent, or was it peaceful? Christianity altered cultures as it evangelized while adapting itself by the civilization they desired to convert. Prior to disputes and separations, the Roman Catholic Church was the sole authority on Christianity. The Roman Empire challenged the expansion of its inevitable successor, but after the Church gained recognition from Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, the new religion was then confronted against the clout of paganism while attempting to grow in numbers. The message was delivered throughout the former Empire by the early Christian missionaries, most notably by Saul who we would later know as Saint Paul, expounding upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The birth of Christ, also known as The Nativity, is recounted within the Gospel According to Luke in 2: 6-7, and also within The Gospel According to Matthew in 1: 21-25 ²¹She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' ²²Now all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: ²³Look! The virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. ²⁴ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had

told him to do: he took his wife to his home; ²â€”he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus . Later, at the approximate age of thirty, Jesus Christ conducted His ministry to His disciples with the fundamental precepts of humility and love towards all while respecting God's Law. He was then betrayed by one of His Apostles and condemned to death through a painful execution by crucifixion. On the third day, He rose again from the dead as stated within Scripture. Christ prophesized the rise of the Church after His death in The Gospel According to John, 2: 19, ¹â€”Jesus answered, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up . One of the better summations of the beliefs and the life of Christ is recited during every Catholic mass within the Nicene Creed: We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born to the Virgin Mary and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died and was buried. On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. The concept of three shared entities coexisting is a shared doctrine that has no geographical boundaries. There's only one creator, but manifested in three parts. Whereas the functions of doctrine in the early West with classical Roman mythology has their own version of a trinity with the Capitoline Triad — with the chief deity Jupiter, supreme ruler and king of the gods; Juno, Jupiter's sister and incestuous wife who is the goddess of marriage and the patron of the Roman Empire; and finally, Minerva, the daughter of Jupiter, and as well as the virgin goddess of wisdom and destiny — in the East, Hinduism has Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the protector; and, Shiva, the destroyer — and, the Roman Catholic Church also venerates the more well-known modern day Holy Trinity of God, represented as the Father, the Creator; Jesus Christ, as represented as the Son, God in the flesh, the Redeemer; and, the Holy Spirit, God is the presence among Christians that manifests from heaven through Him.

Polytheist Roman mythology and Hinduism, and the monotheist Roman Catholic Church, all place significance upon their relationship with the Divine. Jupiter was worshiped as the supreme Roman deity in temples throughout the empire by soldiers, the elite and emperors, and the masses as their protector and source of all power. Hinduism, the oldest living religion in the world and being an all-inclusive term for a diverse set of religions and practices, has a multitude of gods while believing in the spiritual being of Brahma, as the creator and the first god of their trinity of gods. Finally, the Abrahamic monotheist religion of Roman Catholicism views God as omnipotent, with a personal relationship with God. When it comes to the

second part of the trinity, life of the son of the Absolute Being, there are striking parallels that cannot be disregarded. Bacchus is the son of Jupiter in Roman mythology and the god of wine ; Jesus Christ, the only divine son of God. For example, we can draw our first similarity between the two with the first miracle performed by Jesus Christ, the Wedding at Cana, as stated in the Gospel According to John, 2: 1-11: ¹On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. ³And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' ⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶¶ There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast.' ⁹¶ They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from -- though the servants who had drawn the water knew -- the president of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.' ¹¹¶ This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. We can actually see more than one association here between Christ and Bacchus as it relates to wine. First, of course, Bacchus is the Roman god of wine, and Christ symbolically changes water into wine. Secondly, at the Last Supper,

Christ presents wine as representation to his blood, which most likely, was done to show the superiority of Christ over Bacchus — Christendom is better than any pagan thought. As it is written in the Gospel According to Matthew, 26: 26-28, ¶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat,' he said, 'this is my body.' ¶ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them saying, 'Drink from this, all of you, ¶, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. We looked at the larger scale of fundamental doctrine and briefly the relationship of how stories of myth related to Catholicism with passages from the Gospel and a devotional from the Sunday Missal; now, we will direct our attentions more upon the communities and how this conversation applied to the people themselves. " The culture common to all people in a pre-class society becomes the culture of the ' common people' in a class society, counterposed to the ' official' clerical culture; it becomes a persecuted culture driven back to the periphery of spiritual life. Paganism, which has permeated myth and epic, degenerates into ' superstition'. The traditional vision of the world is broken into fragments under the blows of ecclesiastical ideology and is only partially absorbed by the new world-view. The triumph of the new culture does not imply the total defeat of the archaic. In many respects popular culture retains its ' pre-medieval' features. " The traditions of aboriginal pagan people and Christians differed on approach of ethical code of conduct. Both offered instruction and organization for resolving moral circumstances, but differed in its application. " Conflict between the sinful and uncivilized homo naturalis and the homo Christianus

— man as he should be according to Christian teaching — was inevitable. They saw this conflict as an expression of the dichotomy between the heavenly and the earthly, a contradiction which would be resolved only with the end of human history. " The ethical code of conduct for the pagans could be described as of moral philosophy. Their myths often depict the consequences of making mistakes, or living an immoral life, while the protagonist is dealt with to suffer an ironic destiny. For example, a greedy King Midas desires to have all that he touches turn to gold, only to find himself unable to live without the fundamental comforts of everyday life since his food, drink, etc., turns to gold when he touches the item . The new Christian church, served as a moral compass and shepherd of the people during a time of conflict and ignorance, approach to ethics would be described as moral theology since it centers itself upon reasoning and revelations of faith while seeking a peaceful human experience after life. The example for this moral guide would be found within the founder of Christianity itself, Jesus Christ, since the teachings offers salvation to His disciples. " Ideals of Christian humility preached by the church were embodied. Devotion to Christ, renunciation of earthly pleasures, mortification of the flesh, [and] complete concentration on saving the soul and serving God. " Both disciplines share the hope of fulfillment, as well as both moral philosophy and moral theology, have the tendency of producing happiness from our right actions. Throughout the Middle Ages, while taking advantage of traditional pagan beliefs, the Church exploited the importance and experiences of imagery, idolatry, and ceremonies to serve their own purpose to augment their congregation. Naturally, there was resistance from the

people when the Church began the conversion of the pagan worshipers, since the skeptics were used to their own heritage and customs; and, were convinced their talismans and feasts brought forth bountiful crops, prosperity and stability. Thus, why tempt fate and endeavor upon the unknown by worshiping a single God the Jews glorified? Many elements of the pagan ceremonies were being introduced, into the practice of Christianity, and the festivals later became modern day celebrated holidays. The desire for sainthood was met with zeal and over time, angst was replaced with adaptation. " Veneration of a saint often covered a definite area, and saints had regions of primary influence. In the later medieval periods the tendency towards the ' specialization' of saints intensified: to each of them a particular function was attributed. " Therefore, " the saint was the most popular hero of mediaeval society...as compared to the barbarian age with its heroes and the ancient age with its cult of the body of civic virtues. " All of the new found faith created an " excessive spread of the cult of saints and the veneration of relics, seeing in them a rebirth of pagan idolatry. " The relationship between the advent of saints had similarities with paganism. " Themes from folk-tale and themes from hagiography were unconsciously mixed, and pagan motifs were assimilated into ...saints' lives. " As the Church was growing, it was also changing from the pagan practices it was incorporating as much as the Church was changing the spiritual needs of those they were converting. " The cult of relics...acquired enormous popularity in the West... [and] the church encouraged it...According to one modern historian, the cult of the saints was imposed on the church by common believers, and popular influence determined the clergy's attitude

towards miracles. " For an individual who is not Roman Catholic, venerating a saint may appear to worship " graven images" and cause confusion that conflicts with the First, of the Ten, Commandments, " I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them." We Roman Catholics call upon any saint to request his, or her, intercession with the Lord since they are in favor of, and near, Him. " The observer needs to understand that although the Italian [Catholic] may call on St. Anthony, or San Pellegrino, or the Virgin Mary for help, he or she does not mean to worship them as gods: He or she calls on them because they, being close to God in heaven, can serve as helpers in petitioning God. " The Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian Church with far reaching power and has influenced Western Civilization throughout history. During it's time, the Church has flexed its political power, built universities and hospitals, influenced the development of the arts, and established religious communities; while proclaiming the Gospels and developing the individual's personal relationship with God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic Church has lived up to its name, translating to " universal, " by having a foothold on every continent and extending itself to the masses. It can trace itself back to ancient Palestine, making it one of the world's oldest institutions. How did they succeed and evolve? In part, they grew from the lack of educating the masses. There were two social classes during this period, and the feudal system was not yet

practiced. " Accordingly, the division of people into literati and illitterati, a notion of late Antiquity, remained decisive. The former were the educated, those who new Latin; the latter were the illerati, the idiotae. Idiota was understood as a person knowing merely his crude native tongue, given him in childhood, while Latin could be acquired only by persistent, extensive study. " The only members of society then that were literate were the clergy since they would painstakingly transcribe each and every bible by hand; literacy was a privilege; and it was a means of having a social advantage . " He who is educated [i. e. knows Latin] is a natural lord over the ignorant. " Remember, this is roughly a thousand years before Johann Gutenberg and his printing press would have an impact upon civilization, and history, by enabling the masses to become educated. Therefore, the educated clergy would infuse oral tradition of the local myths with Christian doctrine to have the new religion appeal to the masses since they were none the wiser. The " clergy maintained a vivid interest in epic literature, heroic poetry and tales of chivalry...If the heroes of pagan poetry, far-removed from Christian piety and orthodoxy, captivated the minds of monks and priests, this must have been all the more true of laymen. This is one more aspect of that interaction of different layers of culture, from archaic beliefs to Christian ecclesiastical culture, which characterized medieval men, from peasant to bishop. " "The reason for such wide influence lies in the psychological predisposition of early medieval people to perceive a ' Messiah' or ' saint', in the need for a spiritual leader and in the craving for the miraculous. " Since the beginning, man has needed to account for why certain things happen in everyday life and to provide answers to the unknown. The challenges the Roman Catholic

Church faced were numerous and varied. Although Christianity is based upon the life and teachings of one man, Jesus Christ, it is fused with a variety of cultures and traditions spanning time and geography. The evangelism could have only succeeded with the assimilation of those same cultures and traditions. They are not opposing, but rather complimentary of each other. There can be absolutely no doubt that pagan traditions played a substantial role in developing Christianity and improved the ways of worship. Let's conclude from Ninian Smart when he stated, " The study of religion and worldviews is a study of the realities human of life. "