



Simple Catechism Within the Experience of the Orthodox Church



St. Valentine, Bishop of Interamna
(modern day Terni, Italy)

An Orthodox Rejection of the Celebration of Valentine's Day

15

For Edification and Consolation
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■ Absolutely no connection with St. Valentine

An Orthodox Rejection of the Celebration of Valentine's Day*

An ancient pagan custom

As is well known, February 14 is regarded as St. Valentine's Day, namely the holiday of courtship and romance, since St. Valentine is supposedly the Patron of lovers!

This commercial holiday, which has absolutely no place in our Orthodox heritage, has been adopted worldwide by those who either are unaware of, or simply ignore, its true origin.

What really happens on this day? Why has it become fashionable? Where are its origins? What is its impact?

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Who is the real St. Valentine?



Roman martyrology mentions at least three Valentines who were martyred for their faith. St. Valentine, Bishop of Interamna (modern day Terni), Italy, is commemorated by the Orthodox Church on July 30. He was beheaded during a persecution of Christians, either at the end of the third century, during the era of Emperor Aurelian, or a century earlier. He is buried on the Via Flaminia in the outskirts of Rome. **St. Valen-**

tine the Presbyter of Rome († July 6) was beheaded between 268 and 270 and also buried on the Via Flaminia, although somewhat further from Rome.

As we will clearly see below, these Saints of our Church have no connection with the holiday.

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Pagan origins

If we take a brief look back in history, we will ascertain that this celebration is a remnant of ancient pagan customs.

Centuries before Christ, the Romans observed a pagan festival called Lupercalia (“Wolf Festival”) on February 15, which was partly in honor of Lupercus, the hunter of wolves.

The *Encyclopedia Americana*, in its article on St. Valentine’s Day, says that customs such as that of lovers exchanging gifts “have been handed down from the Roman festival of the Lupercalia, celebrated in the month of February, when names of young women were put into a box and drawn out by men as chance directed.” This was usually followed by orgies and general debauchery.

This custom was later introduced to the British Isles. The Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary, published more than a century ago, states: “February 14 in England and Scotland in olden times was accompanied by a peculiar custom. On the eve of the day dedicated to St. Valentine, young people gathered and placed in an urn a collection of tickets corresponding to their number that were designated with the names of young girls; later each removed one such ticket. The girl whose name was given in this manner to a young man became his ‘Valentine’ for the coming year, just as he became her ‘Valentine’; this entailed the young people having a relationship among themselves that was similar to the descriptions





in medieval romances of that between a knight and his 'lady of the heart.' This custom, of which Ophelia speaks so movingly in her celebrated song, in all likelihood is of pagan origin."

When Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire, efforts were made to abolish the pagan festival. What was eventually achieved, however, was only the replacement of the festival of Lupercalia with the day of... St. Valentine!

● **Let** us now examine how the name *Valentine* was chosen.

According to Smith's "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology," the Romans associated Lupercus with the Roman god Faunus, god of agriculture and fertility. Since Rome took its gods from those it conquered, we can trace Faunus to its Greek equivalent, Pan, who was worshipped in Arcadia (southern Greece) as the god of light. Within this context, Pan is associated with the Phoenician sun god Baal (also a god of fertility and nature), who is referred to in the Old Testament.

Baal, however, was also the title of Nimrod, the founder of Babylon and a deified hero, who established fire worship and idolatry. According to some traditions, Nimrod was given two more names: *Lupercus*, since he hunted wolves, and *Valentinus*, from the Latin adjective *valens*, meaning "strong, powerful, mighty."

The heart, a ubiquitous symbol of Valentine's Day, is actually a symbol for Nimrod. The Romans acquired the heart symbol from the Babylonians, who spoke the Chaldean tongue. In this language, the word for "heart" was *bal*. Due to its similarity in sound to "Baal," it became an emblem for Nimrod.

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Even the date of the celebration is of pagan origin

If one wonders why February 14 was determined as the date of the holiday, he will see that there is an explanation for this as well.

Nimrod—the Baal or sun-god of the ancient pagans—was said to have been born at the winter solstice, which, in the twenty-first century before Christ, occurred on January 6. Therefore, Nimrod’s mother, Semiramis, the foundress of Babylon and queen of Assyria, appointed that day for the celebration of Nimrod’s birthday.



In antiquity, however, every woman was considered to be unclean for forty days after giving birth. If we regard sunset as the beginning of each day, the fortieth day after January 6 is February 15 (or the evening of the 14th), which is the day of the pagan festival of Lupercalia or the present Valentine’s day. They believed that Nimrod’s mother, now purified, appeared in public holding her son on that precise day.

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Yet another celebration of commercialization

As we can see, this celebration, which we consider it to be “modern,” is nothing other than an ancient pagan custom, which the devil passed down to us veiled with a Christian name and contemporary forms of expression. It is a greatly commercial holiday.



The celebration of Valentine’s day is promoted worldwide by the corporate world and the custom is kept eagerly alive by local businesses (florists, confectioners, etc.), who advertise it everywhere, so as to promote their products.

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What impact does the celebration have on our youth?

What do you think? Is it possible for such a custom, with such a past, to have positive elements?

How could it not have definite negative consequences, given its profoundly pagan roots?



Let us enumerate a few of them:

a. It causes a sense of inferiority in those who are not involved in a relationship.

Indeed, it can create an inferiority complex in youths who are not involved in a sexual relationship. Whereas in reality, of course, those who are struggling to preserve their chastity are in no way inferior to those entangled in the nets of sin and fornication. Quite to the contrary! A completely backwards message is being sent out to our youths.

b. It encourages lustful passions in those who are in a relationship.

The ludicrous innuendos often written on Valentine's cards give the impression that sexual relationships are not only appropriate but should go even farther.

c. It intensifies the fire of pansexualism.

As if the sexually charged atmosphere in which today's youth live were not difficult enough, this celebration exacerbates the problem. It tries to make the chaste youth turn to fornication, while dragging the licentious deeper into the mud.

d. It dulls the conscience.

When the sexual relations of a couple are not within the appropriate context, the people involved certainly feel constant and oppressive pangs of conscience. The entire atmosphere of the holiday tries to sweep such feelings aside, however, by choosing a Saint as its Patron! For if a Saint supposedly protects such relationships, then why should they believe they are doing anything wrong?

This in fact also creates a perfect snare for those that are not



involved in such relationships. It gives them the impression that they have a backward view of things, since they reject what even a Saint supposedly protects.

e. And of course, not a word about the other kind of love...

This Love is Divine Eros, as the Fathers of the Church call it, which should be present in all of our lives, whether we are married or unmarried, before marriage and after marriage. Everybody, including young people, should be possessed by this Love.

Christ said to the young man who asked Him what he should do in order to inherit eternal life that he should first of all “ love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.”

- The entire celebration of so-called St. Valentine’s Day is similar to the custom of the ancient Greeks, who created gods and goddesses to provide protection for their good and bad customs, and in so doing they quieted their conscience.

Nowadays we see the same pagan tactics!

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Conclusion

You can now understand why such a celebration is altogether foreign to Christianity, and especially to Orthodoxy.

Even if you are involved with a person of the opposite sex in an appropriate way (e.g. by engagement), reject this diabolical custom, since by going along with it, we help to make it all the more entrenched, with all of its negative consequences.

(*) Adapted from the Greek religious periodical “*Ta Krina*” (“The Lily”), No. 281 (February 2009), pp. 16-18.

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