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## GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER

**FOR reasons purely spiritual, the God’s Kingdom Society (GKS) observes neither “Good Friday” nor Easter. The appellation of ‘good’ by which the day of Christ’s passion and ignominious death is identified is irreconcilable with scriptural facts. And Easter, which is derived from paganism, ought not to be associated with Christianity at all!**

*Good Friday* is the Friday before Easter Sunday which is observed by the Churches of Christendom in commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ. According to the *Catholic Dictionary,* “It is, of course, a day of fasting, abstinence and penitence…. It is the only day of the year upon which Mass may not be said.”

**Ceremonies**

The religious observance of "Good Friday" is marked with ceremonies which are reminiscent of the deep sorrow and depressed state of the disciples of Jesus Christ during the period of his suffering and death. On this occasion a three-hour service is usually held with the altars stripped of decorations, the candles unlit and the priests dressed in black robes. During the protracted service, the successive stages of the passion are recalled in the liturgical ceremonies with all the accompaniments of the deepest and tenderest mourning.

There is no doubt that the death of Jesus Christ was a remarkable event in human history. Although Satan the devil, with evil intention, inspired it, God Almighty in His infinite mercy turned it to the good of mankind in pursuance of His purpose of salvation.

The day is qualified as "good" because, according to the clergy, it was on that day Jesus Christ our Redeemer obtained salvation for fallen mankind. This assumption, in men's often faulty opinion or reasoning, appears to be reasonable but viewed against the background of the Scriptures it cannot be justified.

To those who were the enemies of truth and righteousness in the days of Jesus, that day of his crucifixion was good. It was the day they saw the fulfillment of their conspiracy. Their joy was not because they realised or believed that his death was for the redemption of sinful mankind; rather they hoped that it would mean the end of the man whom they called a "deceiver".

Anyone who reads the Bible well will find no difficulty in seeing the contrast between the disposition of the wicked Jews who were the enemies of light and the state of mind of Jesus Christ and his disciples at the time of the crucifixion. While the conspirators revelled in their acts of atrocity, Jesus Christ whose innocence was not in dispute, as well as his followers, was grief-striken.

## Sorrow

Before the arrest of Jesus, he had forewarned his disciples concerning the events which would result in anxious moments and distress for them. He told them pointblank that they would be plunged into sorrow and that the world would rejoice, yet he gave the assurance that their sorrow would revert to joy. Said he: "A little while, and ye shall not see me because I go to the Father." His disciples did not understand what he meant, and when he realised that they wanted to know the meaning of his statement, he declared: **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy”**-John 16: 16-20.

On the part of Jesus Christ himself, he knew that the hour for him to bear the griefs of mankind had struck and he was prepared to submit to his Father's will and damn the consequence of the worst his foes could do. Yet in an outburst of human feeling, he said to Peter, James and John: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death…." (Matthew 26: 38) He moved forward a little from them and fell on his face in prayer, saying "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Matthew 26: 39) Then he returned to the three disciples and found them asleep, exhausted from grief. - Luke 22: 45.

From all indications, this was a very trying moment for Jesus Christ and his disciples. He was in such agony of spirit that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. It was in this state he went away again the second time, and prayed: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." (Matthew 26: 42) The upshot of the whole affair proved that it was the Father's will that he should drink the cup, and so "taste death for every man"..-Hebrews 2: 9.

It is on record that the disciples of Jesus Christ continued to be under the grip of sorrow until the gladsome news of his resurrection was broken to them. -Mark 16: 9, 10.

In the light of the foregoing facts dished up out of the Scriptures, it does not stand to reason for those on the side of Christ to call or regard that day of his anguish and death as good. If it is a good day all because the death of Christ redounded to man's salvation, why do "church-goers" indulge in fasting, abstinence, wearing of black robes and in ceremonies suggestive of mourning on "Good Friday"? Why do they not go about merry-making?

Concerning "Good Friday", Benjamin Vincent in his *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates and Universal Information* stated: "Its appellation of good appears to be peculiar to the church of England; our Saxon forefathers denominated it **Long Friday**: on account of the length of the offices and fastings enjoined on this day." (Page 448)

## Judas Iscariot

On the other hand, can it not be taken to mean that those who regard the day of Christ's crucifixion as good are in effect giving support, wittingly or unwittingly, to his betrayer and all the evil men who contributed to his death? Was the killing of Jesus Christ a good act? It was not! But if we go by the trend of reasoning of the clergy, then they themselves cannot stand any ground against the sceptics who justify Judas Iscariot for betraying our Lord and Saviour into the hands of sinners.

The Holy Bible is quite clear on the point that Judas Iscariot was condemned because he sinned against the Holy Spirit by betraying innocent blood. And the consequence was grievous. He was deposed from his high office of heavenly calling and was stamped with the ominous title of the "son of perdition."-John 17: 6, 12.

Jesus Christ had long ago been resurrected and glorified by the Almighty Father- never to die again! He himself said: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." (Revelation 1: 18) To indulge in fasting and mourning still for the risen and glorified Lord, as certain Churches are doing, is not only unnecessary but also contrary to the principles of Christianity. Jesus did not say that his followers would mourn for ever, rather he said, "your sorrow shall be turned into joy". And he added: "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh away." (John 16: 19-22) This he said because he knew that his resurrection would be victory over death and that it would strengthen the faith of Christians and give them cause for great joy. The Churches are therefore not justified for their "Good Friday" abstinence, mourning and formalities.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Thessalonians, exhorted the Christians about the dead thus: "But would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that **ye sorrow not**, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."- 1Thessalonians 4: 13-14, 18.

The point we are making is this, if we are not to be in sorrow for those who die in the Lord because of the hope of resurrection, is there any reason why anyone should mourn for Jesus Christ -the author of that hope- who had since been raised from the dead?

Let no one, therefore, deceive himself as to think that all his self-afflictions and mourning of "Good Friday" are of any spiritual significance before God and Christ.

## Easter

With regard to Easter festival, the fact that it originated from paganism cannot be disputed. Students of ecclesiastical history are sometimes baffled as to why those who claimed to be the successors of the apostles and custodians of God's word after the death of the early apostles of Jesus Christ should with relish adopt pagan institutions, customs and practices.

**Easter was a pagan festival originally celebrated by the Anglo-Saxons in the spring equinox in honour of a Teutonic goddess known as Astarte or Eostre**. The well known ecclesiastical historian, Alexander Hislop, in his book, *The Two Babylons,* stated that Easter "is not a Christian name". He went on, "It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven…. That name as found by Layard on the Assyrian monuments, is Ishtar…. The festival, of which we read in Church history under the name Easter, in the third or fourth centuries, was quite a different festival from that now observed in the Romish Church, and *at that time* was not known by any such name as Easter. It was called the Pasch, or the Passover " (Pages 103-104).

The use of "hot cross buns" and "dyed eggs" as a custom that still attends the celebration of Easter is but a confirmation of the testimony of history as to its origin. The ill*ustrated World Encyclopedia* has this to say: "Before the time of Christ people used to worship many gods and goddesses. One was named Eastre. Because Easter comes in the spring, we have named it for this goddess. We have brightly colored eggs at Easter, because eggs stand for the beginning, or birth, just as spring itself is a birth each year. Christians celebrated Easter as the New Year . . ." (Vol. 7, page 1732).

**Mistranslation**  
 The word *Easter* appears once in the Holy Bible at Acts 12: 4. All accredited scholars agree that it was a wrong translation of a Greek word for *Passover.* On this point, Alexander Hislop commented: "Every one knows that the name 'Easter', used in our translation of Acts xii. 4, refers not to any Christian festival, but to the Jewish Passover. This is one of the few places in our version where the translators show an undue bias

In the *Bible* S*tudent*’s *Companion,* William Nicholson wrote: "EASTER-An improper translation: for the feast of the passover is meant, Acts xii. 4. Easter was the name of a Pagan festival observed in spring by our ancestors, in honour of the goddess Astarte or Eostro, a saxon goddess, the Ashtaroth of Syria. In all other places *pascha* is rendered p*assover,* the true meaning."

The word *Easter* in Acts 12: 4 in the Authorised Version, is rendered "Pasch" or "Passover" in other translations. The Douay Version (sometimes called Roman Catholic Bible by some) uses the word *Pasch.* The Revised Version, Moffatt Translation, Diaglott, New English Bible, Living Gospels and others render it *Passover.*

About Easter the *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* states: "Originally the spring festival in honor of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring known in Anglo-Saxon as Eastre. As early as the 8th century the name was transferred by the Anglo-Saxon to the Christian festival designed to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In Authorised Version it occurs once (Acts 12: 4), but is a mistranslation. The original is pascha, the ordinary Greek word for Passover. Revised Version properly employs the word passover.”(Page 145).

## Pagan Origin

Coming back to the origin of Easter, historians are unanimous on the point that it was all a pagan affair. It was nominal Christianity that gave it a gloss of respectability by associating it with the resurrection of Jesus Christ without any authority or commandment either of Christ himself or any Apostle. About Easter, E. Royston Pike, in his *Encyclopedia of Religion and Religions,* wrote: "According to the Venerable Bede, the name is derived from Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring whose festival was kept at the Spring equinox…" He went on: "There is no mention of the celebration of Easter in the New Testament and the Apostolic Age

…..From the first there was confusion over the date. In 325 the Council of Nicaea decreed that henceforth all Christians should observe Easter on the same day, which must be a Sunday; but for long there were wide differences in practice." The historian then added: "Many times the proposal of fixing Easter has been ventilated, and in 1928 the British Parliament passed an Act providing that it should fall, on the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April." (Pages 132-133).

However, we do not intend to stretch into the details of Scripture as to why an issue of a Christian practice (if indeed it is) should not be decided by the Parliament of a worldly government. But we must emphasise that Easter has no connection whatsoever with true Christianity.

Further confirmation of the pagan origin of Easter can be obtained from the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* which says: "The English name Easter is of uncertain origin; Bede in the 8th century derived it from that of the Anglo-Saxon spring goddess Eostre . Around the Christian observance of Easter as the climax of the liturgical drama of Holy Week and Good Friday folk customs have collected, many of which have been handed down from the ancient ceremonial and symbolism of the pagan spring festival brought into relation with the resurrection theme." (Vol. 7. pp. 864- 866).

And what has *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* to say? "Many of the popular observances of Easter are pagan in origin. Some may be traced to the feast of the goddess Eostra..." (Vol. 7, page 483).

It is our candid opinion based on the Bible that no matter how glamorously Easter on the surface is vested with the garments of Christianity, its pagan image remains the same. In the early centuries, the Romish Church was notorious for its tendency of conciliating the pagans into nominal Christianity, which it stood for, by wallowing in the mire of idolatry. This tendency was one of the factors, the Reformation campaigns notwithstanding, that led Christendom astray.

## "Memorial Supper"

What was instituted by Jesus Christ was the "Memorial Supper" and NOT Easter. In doing it, he gave the bread and wine - representing his body and blood-to his apostles. (Matthew 26: 26-29). Not a/1 believers in Christ ought to take the bread and wine; it is only those who belong to the group of Christians St. Paul called "the church of the firstborn" (meaning Christ's cabinet ministers) that should take the bread and wine emblem. To serve the bread only and leave out the wine is incomplete and wrong; to mix the bread with wine as some churches are doing is a deviation from the Lord's instructions, and is a sin; and to serve the supper on all disciples indiscriminately - men, women and children-instead of the spiritually matured faithful like the apostles, is a greater sin. Women and children ought not to take of the bread and wine. Jesus Christ had many faithful women disciples and also children followers but not one woman or child he made to take of it in his time. Why? And how many people know that to take the bread and wine unworthily is a curse? Think of these seriously. The answers are in the Bible. We shall treat them in a subsequent issue of the *Weekly Sermon*.

The celebration of Easter is not authorised by the Holy Scriptures. Even the Passover festival had no connection with the resurrection of Christ. And if any Christian wishes to do anything in honour of Christ Jesus our Lord and Redeemer, he must abstain from all appearances of idolatory otherwise he worships in vain.