

# Christians and Halloween

By: Andrew Micklefield

It seems to me that Christians turn bi-polar at Halloween: they love it or hate it. Some claim it's all evil, but others that it's innocent fun. Some take their kids trick-or-treating while others hide in their basements, ignore their front door guests, and offer no candy. How can the line between Satanic and innocent be so blurred? Below I'll attempt to spell out Halloween's origins, trace its evolution, critique its place in Canadian culture today, and offer some comments based on what I see in the Bible.

The origin of Halloween is far from innocent. Druidic priests across the British Isles and France held religious ceremonies for six weeks leading up to October 31 (then called Samhain) as early as 500 years before Jesus. It was on this night that the Druids believed winter's dark powers overcame the light of summer, which released the spirits of the dead to torment the living. Fearing the spirits, the Druids lit fires to ward them off, wore scary costumes to "blend in and hide" from evil, and performed magic ceremonies to appease the spirits' mischief. And thinking that these spirits were transferred into animals, animals and even humans were sacrificed to avert the pending evil. This continued for many centuries, even after Christianity arrived in England.

Yet as time wore on, growing numbers of Christians looked less favourably on their pagan roots and surroundings; and the sentiment grew stronger that something must be done. By now England's increasing rejection of paganism was taking on many forms: pagan temples were destroyed and rebuilt as churches, pagan folk-lore took on Christian overtones and biblical morals, and Christian take-overs were planned for various pagan celebrations, including Halloween. This culminated in the sixth century, when the Archbishop of Canterbury announced in response to Gregory the Great's request that the Christians' All Saints' Day would be moved from its traditional date in May, to November 1. This was a bold evangelistic move by the Christians who - the day after the Druidic ceremonies ended - now celebrated the lives of Christians who through Christ overcame all powers of evil and darkness; a message that flew in the face of Samhain's "darkness is rising" emphasis. As November 1st now honoured or hallowed all saints, the night before (October 31st) became known as "All Hallows Evening," which over time was shortened to "Halloween."

So why protest a modern holiday with such a bloody past? Well to begin, the blood is unfortunately not all past. Similar Druidic - now often called Satanic, occult or ritual - practices still occur today, including in Manitoba. I know two people who have recovered from ritual abuse. Children are preferred because of their innocence (and helplessness?) and in worst cases are sexually manipulated or exploited by groups of adults. Victims can also be forced to drink blood or urine, eat faeces, or have objects inserted into body cavities. Some cases report people being buried alive, placed into ovens or cages, being forced to have sex with animals, being burned or mutilated, and in extreme instances humans, though usually animals, are sacrificed. Not all of this is the work of every coven, but Satanism is not dead in Manitoba. Attempting to verify this rumour, I performed a google search for "ritual abuse" + "Manitoba" and turned up 2960 hits; a search for "satanic abuse" + "Manitoba" turned up 1740 hits. Interestingly, many of the hits linked to the University of Manitoba's Law department where this topic is in their program - despite claims that it's all make-believe. Another interesting incident occurred to me several years ago while walking through a Winnipeg park; I accidentally found a three-foot-tall concrete slab (alter?) with two white kittens laying dead on it, their throats cut and fur blood-stained. A call to the police verified my suspicions that Satanic groups were known to operate in the area, sometimes leaving mementos like these without cleaning up after themselves.

But wait! I know what you're thinking: this extreme sick stuff is a far cry from innocent trick-or-

treating! How can dressing your child up as a rabbit who asks for candy be wrong? Isn't it cute?

My first issue with taking kids trick-or-treating is that Halloween is a celebration of fear and evil, things not worth celebrating or exposing our kids to. The Bible says in Philippians 4 that "...you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious--the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse." A day emphasizing fear, evil and scaring people fails all counts; fear is not beneficial, desirable, or God's intention for anyone. The Bible says God doesn't want us to be afraid, but to be full of His power, love and all with a clear mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Are our kids likely to have clear and fear-free minds after a night of Halloween scare? So although the candy is great, Halloween exposes kids to fear and evil, which benefits no one.

My second issue with taking kids trick-or-treating is that children are extremely impressionable and less able to discern the real from pretend (just look at children's TV). Consequently, much of what is seen trick-or-treating has the potential to inject fear into their fragile minds. I remember as a boy seeing the play "The Wizard of Oz" and being absolutely terrified of the witch. I didn't see her as someone's sister dressed up with lots of makeup, but as scary, evil and undeniably real. Images (from the same root word as imaginations) stay in our minds, and it only takes one glance to get them there. Recognizing Halloween this way should make us less eager to send our kids onto the streets where they'll see not only silly stuff – super-heroes, fairies and cuddly animals – but also some serious stuff like axes through heads, bloody face wounds and creepy-looking masks. The Bible says, "You should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children... calling Him 'dear Father'" (Romans 8:15). When we expose our kids to Halloween-style fear and evil (even if it is "pretend"), we risk implanting fear that can negatively affect their relating to God and others. Furthermore, the Bible has no tolerance for people who overlook the impressionability of children; Jesus said in Mark 9 that "whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." Whoa Jesus! Cool off a little! It's just fun and candy! But the Bible's message is unbending throughout: "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11).

So should Christians boycott Halloween? Yes? Too bad - we can't, too many people enjoy getting free candy and won't listen to us anyway! Our boycott would be unsuccessful! And besides, once we commit to boycotting holidays with pagan origins, we'll have to stop buying Christmas Trees and presents and eating Easter Eggs, which I don't think any of us want to do.

Halloween is possibly the greatest untapped opportunity for positive Christian witness in the whole year

Instead of telling us to turn out the lights and hide in our basements, I think Jesus would challenge us with a perspective I've not heard much in Halloween discussions: "You are the light of the world... Don't hide your light under a basket! Instead, put it on a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:14-16) and, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). In other words: Christians get out there! Let's not add fear and avoidance to the list of things we're stereotyped for. I say we "make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil!" (Ephesians 5:16). I think Halloween is possibly the greatest untapped opportunity for positive Christian witness in the whole year. There is no other day on the calendar when your neighbors (you know, the one's you're supposed to love) are going to knock on your front door in droves, you literally can't keep them away! Yet we Christians often ignore them – or worse, drive to church to hang out with our friends! Let's make sure our kids have a fun-filled evening without exposure to fear or evil, but