

Hallowing Halloween

Why Christians should embrace the "devilish" holiday with gusto—and laughter.

By Anderson M. Rearick III

A few years back, our local Christian radio station ran a poll asking whether Halloween is spiritually harmful. The response from a predominantly evangelical audience here in Ohio was two-to-one against Halloween. This did not surprise me. It is now popular in some Christian circles to repudiate any celebration of All Hallows Eve—Halloween.

"We all know what day is coming," said a young woman in the choir of the Rhode Island church my wife and I attended when I was working on my doctorate. "And I think we need to be in prayer that the evil powers and principalities be held in check over this next weekend." Halloween fell on a Sunday that year, making the event seem all the more sinister. On the calendar of events for the Christian college where I teach, October 31 sits in a dark square with no acknowledgment that there is anything special about the date.

"It's Satan's Holiday, Dr. Rearick," affirmed one of my students. "Didn't you know?"

Well, no, I didn't know. And I am reluctant to give up what was one of the highlights of my childhood calendar to the Great Impostor and Chief of Liars for no reason except that some of his servants claim it as his.

Give up nothing

I have always considered Halloween a day to celebrate the imagination, to become for a short time something wonderful and strange, smelling of grease paint, to taste sweets that are permissible only once a year. How wonderful to be with other children dressed up as what they might grow up to be, what they wished they could be, or even what they secretly feared. All of us, dreams and nightmares, were brought together on equal footing, going from door to door to be given treats and admired for our creativity. How delightful to go to parties with doughnuts, apples, brown cider, and pumpkin cakes—and to hear spine-tingling ghost stories and feel our hearts skip a beat when the teller grabbed for us.

Now some are pressuring us to give this all up, and they use what is for some of us the most difficult argument to answer: it's the "Christian" thing to do.

Some Christians shun make-believe. Such believers feel that a young Christian's mind should never long to be in lands where little men have fuzzy feet, dragons breathe fire, and horses have wings. Instead, they maintain that a Christian should be caught up in the here and now of the "real" world. Defending the reality of fiction and the value of fantasy requires an entirely different essay.

Christians certainly may be leery of sharing anything with modern pagans and Satanists who claim Halloween as theirs. But who gave these individuals the right to claim the holiday? If they are Druids, they are celebrating Samhain, which is not Halloween but an even older holiday. As for Satanists, their calendar is a perversion of Christian seasons—there would be no Satanists if there were no Christians. Let them claim all they want. I give them nothing.

"But look at the roots of Halloween," some may say. "Don't you see how evil it once was?" I do, but the operative word in that sentence is was. Samhain was once a time of fear and dread, but at one time so was Yule or *Midvinterblot*, as it was called in Sweden. Toward the time of the winter solstice, the days became shorter and colder. The land was laid waste. In pagan times, to keep the fire of the life-giving sun alight, people often made sacrifices before a great oak tree. Boniface is supposed to have stopped one such sacrifice and instituted the indoor Christmas tree at the same time. The burning of such logs in the midst of sacrifice has come down to us as the traditions of burning Yule logs and enjoying Christmas trees.

I'm not suggesting fir trees and Yule logs be banned from Christmas; I'm only demonstrating what has happened time and again in history. For our pagan ancestors, the holidays that marked the great seasonal

changes were often fearful, terrible, and dark. But with the coming of Christ came a great light that reclaimed not only individuals but also the holidays they celebrated. In the case of Midwinterblot and Yule, the holidays that once marked the terrible price required to provide light instead began to express the joyous arrival of God's true light.

Laughing away our fears and foes

What would a reclaimed Halloween express? In our culture, Halloween traditionally has allowed us to look at what frightens us—to experience it, to laugh at it, and to come through it. So at the end of October, we are visited by cute Caspers, laughing pumpkin heads, and goofy ghouls.

Should the forces of evil be mocked? Should Satan be laughed at? He most certainly should be. At the beginning of *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis includes two telling quotations, the first from Martin Luther: "The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn."

The second comes from Thomas More: "The devil ... the proud spirit cannot endure to be mocked."

The one thing Satan cannot bear is to be a source of laughter. His pride is undermined by his own knowledge that his infernal rebellion against God is in reality an absurd farce. Hating laughter, he demands to be taken seriously. Indeed, I would say that those Christians who spend the night of October 31 filled with concern over what evils might be (and sometimes are) taking place are doing the very thing Lucifer wants them to do. By giving him this respect, such believers are giving his authority credence.

Not all believers should celebrate Halloween. For those who have been redeemed from the occult, Halloween in its foolishness may contain what was for them deadly seriousness. While their souls were in deadly peril, however, what they experienced were lies and illusions.

It is understandable that they look with horror upon what once enslaved them. Such sensitivity may be appropriate for them, but it is not appropriate for the majority of Christians. Holding their opinions as appropriate for most believers is like having a former bulimic dictate how Christians should regard church hot-plate socials.

Christians should instead celebrate Halloween with gusto. If we follow the traditional formula of having a good time at his expense, Satan flees.

In any event, I doubt the anti-Halloween party will prevail. This tactic was tried before—with Christmas. In the 17th century, because of its pagan ancestry and because it was a Roman Catholic holiday (Christ-mass!), many Protestants decided that true believers should not recognize Christmas. In 1620 our pilgrim forefathers purposely started unloading the Mayflower on Christmas Day to make the point to the crew that they were not going to observe such an evil day.

I'm glad those believers—however well-intended—failed. How bleak and desolate would a winter's December be without Christmas! We could have lost our chance to celebrate Christ's first coming and a chance to witness to the world, as I fear those pilgrims lost a chance to witness to those sailors.

If we give up All Hallows Eve, we lose the delight of God's gift of imagination and we condemn the rest of society to a darker Halloween because our laughter will not be there to make the devil run.

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