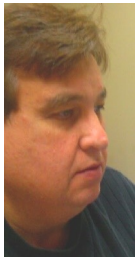




First Thoughts



Where will you be on Halloween? What do you think about Christians participating in Halloween activities? How do you feel about those who disagree with you on this topic?

These are just some of the issues that get discussed at this time of year. But, if the statistical data is correct, most people are more concerned about where to get the best buy on candy and what costume should they wear, or dress their children in.

I thought it might be of interest to share a few thoughts on Halloween and to hopefully get your thoughts in return - whether you agree with me or not. Which of course is one reason for looking at this topic since Christians so have different ideas about where Halloween fits into the home of a Christian.

What do you think? Should Christians participate in Halloween? Write us and let us know your thoughts.

Ministry Update - New Media Company

We are currently in the initial stages of launching a video production company as part of our work here at Crosswinds. I'll be sharing more about it in the future.

We are also in the planning stage of a new youth ministry as part of Crosswinds. I'll also be sharing more about this in the new future. If you would like to help us financially with these two important new ventures, you can donate online by clicking the link at the top of the left column.

Blessings,

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Who Is Celebrating Halloween By Bob Waldrep



“All Hallow’s Even” is upon us or, if you don’t speak Olde English, Halloween. October 31 is a day kids love to celebrate, as do many grown-ups. After all, it involves dressing up in a costume and pretending to be someone, or something, else and, then there is candy – lots of candy.

The celebration of Halloween has long been woven into the fabric of our culture. Most Americans can remember selecting, or making, a Halloween costume and going trick-or-treating. Many of us still hold fond memories of bags full of candy being gathered as we ran door to door holding out our container to be filled with those delicious morsels – detesting that one person in the neighborhood who always insisted on giving out “healthy” treats – and at the end of the evening emptying all of it into a big pile to cull out our least favorite brands and then negotiate trades with our fellow trick-or-treaters.

As we got older there were parties to attend, perhaps accompanied by innocent prank or two. But, the reality is, Halloween is about much more than just costumes and candy and it is the other elements, along with its origin, that trouble some people. For example, some pranks/”tricks” were not so innocent and brought out a “dark-side” to Halloween. Particularly notable was during the late 1960s/early ‘70s when hazardous items began to show up in some of the treats given to children. Another concern that has been raised, particularly by some Chris-

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tians, is the belief there is a spiritual danger that is inherent to Halloween.

Despite these deterrents, the evidence indicates Halloween continues to be a significant event in American culture. The National Retail Federation (NRF) estimates that Americans will spend 18 percent more on Halloween in 2010 than in 2009. And, this is in the midst of an economic turndown. The NRF estimates include Americans spending an average of \$66.28 (Gallup found the average spent on Halloween in 2007 was \$52) on Halloween related items.

Recently, I received an email from a national pet store chain offering 50% off “pet” Halloween costumes. If the fact that there is, apparently, a market for Halloween costumes for animals is not disturbing enough – this email offered the same discount on Halloween treats and toys for pets (I find myself conjuring up images of dogs and cats in clown suits and ballerina outfits going door to door with a little plastic pumpkin held in their mouth) and also offered matching costumes for owners, so you can dress like your pet.

Clearly, one thing Americans are not buying into, as it relates to Halloween, is the idea that one should not participate in it. When Gallup polled Americans in 2006, they found that 64% said they “usually” pass out Halloween treats to children (when you add those who “sometimes” pass out treats, this jumps to 83%); a percentage that has been consistent for several decades. For example, a 1999 poll, Gallup found 69 percent of Americans planned to give out Halloween treats – the exact same percentage found in a 1985 ABC/Washington Post poll.

From the amounts being spent on Halloween, it would appear that Americans have worked out any anxieties they may have had about hazardous materials being placed in the treats. But, what about the religious objections to Halloween – how strongly held are those?

When Gallup polled Americans about

this in 2006, they found that only 11 percent objected to Halloween based on religious beliefs. Among those who regularly attend church services, including Evangelicals, 27% objected. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of Americans, including Christians, do not oppose the activities traditionally associated with Halloween.

As in the past, this year will find many, including Christians, who hold or attend Halloween parties and/or take their children trick-or-treating and many Churches will hold festivals/celebrations as an alternative for Halloween. However, while these will typically involve children in costumes and the distribution of candy –lots of candy – Churches tend not to place the “Halloween” label on them; preferring to give them more acceptable



titles, such as, “Fall Festivals”. However, the reality is, these events simply move the features most often associated with Halloween on to the Church property – “a rose by any other name”, its detractors would claim..

Those who oppose Halloween as being inherently wicked and evil, naturally find any celebration of Halloween by a Christian as reprehensible. They would say, “The celebration is rooted in occultism, is a Pagan holiday celebrated by witches, and should be avoided by Christians”.

Christians who participate in Halloween celebrations counter, “It is all just in fun and no spiritual connection is being made”. Churches with “Fall Festivals”

defend them as being an appropriate alternative and an opportunity to make a positive connection with those in their community who attend the event. “People are going to celebrate this day so why not try to capture it in a positive way”, they might argue.

As is often true when Christians disagree over cultural influences and practices, factions develop over whether or not one should be involved in those things associated with the celebration of Halloween. As is also true, in many cases, each side has valid points to offer.

Is there an occult, or pagan, dimension to the origins of Halloween? Certainly, there is. It is commonly agreed that, what we recognize as Halloween, has its roots in ancient Britain in the Celtic celebration of the Festival of Samhain, referring to the end of summer. The pagan Celts believed that each year at the time of Samhain the border between this world and the spirit world became thin enough that spirits could pass through and enter this world.

Celts would prepare a place in their homes to welcome deceased relatives whom they believed were good spirits and might visit them from the other side. Some, in order to keep evil spirits from also coming into their homes, appear to have adopted the custom of wearing of masks and costumes to confuse those that were evil.

Naturally, as with any good celebration, Samhain also included food, which is integral to modern-day Halloween. Through the years the other elements and traditions of Halloween that are practiced today, such as jack-o-lanterns; bobbing for apples, etc. would be added. Undeniably, many of them would also have their roots in Paganism, or the occult.

The Church has long recognized this. And, just as today, many in the Church sought alternatives, or tried to capture the day in a different way. Long before “Fall Festivals” the Church tried to give a



more Christian emphasis to Halloween. In fact, the Church's influence can be found in the very name itself, a contraction of Hallow (Holy) E'en (Evening), which is what the day before All Saints Day – a time to remember faithful Christians of the past – was called. Protestants would later shift the emphasis from celebrating Halloween on October 31 to the celebration of Reformation Day, in recognition of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation on that same date.

While Halloween has always had some association with the supernatural – be it ghosts and goblins, or witches – it is especially true in modern times. There has been a growing interest in Wicca (witchcraft) in recent decades and those who practice Wicca generally embrace Halloween as one of their high, holy days. Some point to this as clear and undeniable evidence of a religious/spiritual dimension to Halloween.

The debate as to whether Christians should participate in Halloween, or not; the argument as to whether it is an inherently evil day, or simply a secular celebration, is nothing new. What does seem new is that it has become a much more embittered battle. All too often, which side one chooses seems to set the

tone as to whether or not those of the opposing viewpoint will accept you as a true follower of Christ – something that is, unfortunately, true of many debates within the Church today. However, where one stands on this issue is not nearly as important as the effectiveness and humility with which we are able to discuss our position with those who disagree.

Whether we want it to be or not, there is no denying that Halloween is one of our nation's most popular celebrations. And despite the evidence of an association with the supernatural and its identification with Wicca, it is clear that most Christians and non-Christians do not have a problem with it and view it as simply a celebration of the imagination. The overwhelming majority of Americans do not associate it with the supernatural; they do not celebrate it as a part of the practice of Wicca. That's reality. It seems to me that our goal should not be to convince them otherwise but to focus on creatively engaging them with the gospel.

I guess when it comes right down to it, I am Halloween-neutral. I can see good points in both sides of the argument. I think it is good to know the background of Halloween – it is certainly interesting. I agree that Christians should not involve

themselves in occultism, or pagan ritual. But, if that is our message it is severely lacking. Unfortunately, this is becoming another case of the culture hearing more about what Christians are against, than what we are for.

No matter how you and I feel about Halloween, the culture is telling us they want candy. When they come to my door to trick-or-treat, I can lecture them on the ills of candy, or I can take care of their sweet tooth. In the same way, I can offer something much more satisfying and substantial, as well – the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ.

Whether you should gain this opportunity by giving candy at your door, inviting a friend to a Church fall festival, or convincing someone Halloween is pagan, is not my call. That's between you and the Lord. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to be more gracious and encouraging with fellow believers as they work through this issue.

We would do well to remember that, all too often, the ones who get lost in Christians debating methodologies are "the lost" – those who need to hear the gospel. Now, when that happens, it is a sad trick indeed.

What do you think?

Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.

Percentage of Americans with Religious Objections to Halloween *

- 11% of all those polled
- 27% of those who attend church weekly
- 3% of those who seldom/never attend Church
- 26% of Evangelicals

Percentage of Americans Who Usually Participate in Halloween Activities *

- 65% dress their children in costumes (parents with children under 18)
- 64% pass out treats to children (54% of 18 to 34 year-olds)
- 43% display decorations in their home or yard (49% of 18 to 34 year-olds)
- 36% carve a pumpkin to make a jack-o-lantern (45% of 18 to 34 year-olds)
- 16% attend a Halloween party (28% of 18 to 34 year-olds)
- 8% visit a haunted house or go on a haunted hayride (12% of 18 to 34 year-olds)

Note: In every category but one the percentage of participation is higher among 18-34 year-old, indicating an upward trend.

* Gallup Poll 10-31-06. Read report at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/25282/Roughly-Americans-Religious-Objections-Halloween.aspx>



CrossTies Asia

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation



Dwight and Mary Kay Martin

Last month we took a mission group to Chiang Mai where they ministered to public high school students in Northeast Thailand. The objective was to teach spoken English to Thai students. Thai students know English grammar very well, they can read English and even understand it. What they don't have is the opportunity to speak English with a native English speaker. Combining this with a shame based culture where they are

afraid to make a mistake, spoken English is very difficult for them. Following is the report filed by Crossties Director, Dwight Martin:

"What we came to do was to let them hear us speak, and let them practice speaking to us. The amazing thing about this (comparing it with teaching in public schools in the U.S.) is that we are able to use Bible stories and our personal testimonies in our teaching. In fact they welcomed us to do this.

Before the trip I told team members to be prepared but in the end to just "be" and let God do His work. Even so, I still tried to get in front of God and started to get frustrated that I wasn't going to have time to teach everything I had prepared. However, each day God reminded me He was in control. Regardless of the plans I had, he had a better plan.

Since we had a month's worth of experiences in one week I can't describe everything that happened, but here are some highlights

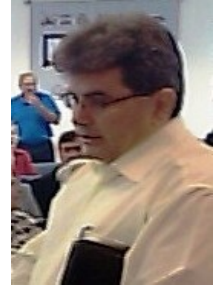
1. Hearing hundreds of Buddhist students sing "Jesus Loves Me".
2. Being able to share about the "Greatest Gift Ever Given" to 320 students in both English and Thai.
3. Having hundreds of students ask us to sign their own copy of the Bible we gave them. This makes them even more precious.
4. Being able to see Jesus in each of the team members. Teachers, students and administration were very appreciative of the work the team did. They can't wait until we come back.

I find it remarkable the school was willing to pay for our meals so we can share Jesus with them. Next trip they said they would pay for our housing. Think about that—a Buddhist school helping to pay part of our trip to teach them about Jesus. Amazing!"

Amazing indeed Dwight! We are developing a new website for Crossties. You can view it at: www.crosstiesasia.org.

Crosswinds Romania

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation



Nelu Filip

Our men who serve in Romania continue to serve not only in their home country but in other parts of Europe, as well. Recently, Nelu Filip was in Spain where he preached several times and participated in the graduation services at a Bible School in Vilanova (near Barcelona). Thirty students graduated. We are grateful for the impact both Nelu and Ieremia have in the lives of so many Bible School and Seminary students who will one day lead Churches and ministries throughout Europe.

In addition to all the speaking and other ministry that Ieremia does, he has also been working on his doctoral dissertation from the University of Bucharest. After several years of work, it is now complete and under review. In the midst of this, he filed this report:



Ieremia Rusu

"During this month, besides the work in the churches in Ploiesti and surroundings, I had a conference in Sibiu. Praise God that there are still people who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, even with tears in the middle of the church meetings"

We join with Nelu and Ieremia in thanking God for His work in the lives of the Romanian people. We also thank those of you who help in this work through your generous giving.

If you have a question about Romania, or the ministry of Ieremia and Nelu, they would welcome your email. They can be reached at:

ieremia@crosswindsfoundation.org

Nelu@crosswindsfoundation.org

Visit our new website in the Romanian language:

www.crosswindsfoundation.org/romania.html



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