

20th October 2011

Halloween

Halloween only started being a major event in the 1960s and many welcome it, saying that in our all-too-divided society we need festivals that cross cultural, racial and religious boundaries. However, as Halloween gets bigger and darker in emphasis, even people with little or no religious faith feel uneasy.

In pre-Christian Europe a pagan festival around the end of October marked the shift from the light six months of the year to the dark six months; some modern pagans wish to reclaim this. The church, however, designated 1 November, still celebrated in some churches as All Saints Day, for celebrating the saints in heaven. The evening before became All Hallows Eve – Halloween – always followed by declaring Jesus Christ's triumph over evil. But today's Halloween comprises various elements: the magical (or supernatural); the macabre (or scary); and the malicious (the trick or treat aspect).

Most Christians are uneasy about the magical – dressing up as witches, wizards, vampires etc. For us, the spiritual world exists, having both good and evil components, and we are involved in it. The Bible goes beyond condemning evil powers, pointing out that Jesus Christ destroyed the powers of evil through his death on the cross. Although evil powers are ultimately defeated they still have potential for harm. However, two sorts of people are likely to object to this argument. First is the atheist, who says that there is no spiritual world and so Halloween poses no risk. To deny the existence of the spiritual world is as much an act of faith as to say that it exists. And historically the vast majority of people have believed in spiritual forces of some kind or another. Second, those who acknowledge a spiritual world but see it as harmless would also be unhappy with the Christian rejection of Halloween. But what is celebrated is not the good side but the very darkest side of the supernatural.

Celebration of the ugly, scarred and horrific is the macabre aspect of Halloween. Why should ugliness be associated with evil? We need to say clearly that being ugly and being wicked are two very separate things.

Finally, the malicious element in Halloween. Trick or treat would normally be called 'demanding with menaces'. Is this something we want to teach children?

So Halloween is a dark celebration that focuses on evil, horror and wrong and there is no element of good triumphing over the darkness.

Think through the issues surrounding Halloween. Do we really want to celebrate evil, glorify the macabre and encourage the malicious?

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