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TABOO OR TO DO?

*Is Christianity complementary with yoga, martial arts,
Hallowe'en, mindfulness and other alternative practices?*

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Foreword by John Drane

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To Beverley and Ruth

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HALLOWE'EN –

Trick, treat or harvest?

How many of us have met a witch? Phil Wyman puts that blunt question to all Christians. Most of us would probably have to say that we haven't. Phil cannot avoid witches because he lives and works as a pastor in Salem, Massachusetts. Salem was the place where witch trials were held in colonial American times, and several people were executed for allegedly being witches. Phil was asked to leave his denomination because he was spotted at a witches' gathering, and it was believed that he had compromised his faith. Funnily enough many of his congregation agreed to join him in exile.¹

Life in Salem for Phil also means that Hallowe'en is unavoidable. He reveals it is a month-long season, and anywhere from half a million to a million people visit the town. He enjoys the fact that the whole community is so open to interacting:

What other day of the year will people happily open their doors to a knock from a strangely dressed stranger saying funny things to them? In fact, they will be so happy to see you, they will give you a gift of candy. How often does that happen? You couldn't get that to happen on Christmas Day.²

Phil knows that many Christians are understandably disturbed about witches and sometimes believe the worst about them. The negative folklore is pretty strong including the absurdity that they sacrifice 'kittens and babies.' As an evangelical pastor he has

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found little evidence that witches curse churches and individual Christians. Instead he has found the witches he knows are not devil worshippers but are 'generally kind people who want the world to be a better, more peaceful place'. That's why, he says, 'I do not have to hide on Hallowe'en to pray the darkness away.'

During the month-long season in Salem, Phil and his church 'provide live music on the streets, give away free hot cocoa, free hugs, and will set up booths to offer a variety of spiritual counselling'. He believes that this is an opportunity to genuinely and positively connect with all kinds of people who are on a spiritual search:

I believe that Halloween is the most open and community oriented holiday in our culture. It is filled with wild creativity, and offers Christianity the best moment in the year to shine with its own creativity, love and giving. Don't let that moment pass you by, because you are afraid of some bogey man of urban myth in fundamentalist garb.³

The Scottish theologian John Drane has shared with us his childhood memory of Hallowe'en is of the churches in Scotland having parties along the American lines of kids dressing up, and telling fun spooky stories. In fact the dark folklore side of Hallowe'en has developed over the last thirty years. He believes English and other western churches have been heavily influenced by the spiritual warfare model we outlined in the introduction. As one Lutheran has observed we have shifted to a belief in a dour kill-joy devil, and lost confidence that Christ is in control.

Phil's position is definitely not going to be the same for all. Many feel very strongly that the crass commercialism and Pagan origins make the festival unrecoverable for Christians. No doubt what upsets many of us is the perverse way that everything to do with Hallowe'en is overrun by commercial interests. In most western countries it is now one of the three biggest shopping days and rivals Christmas for its appeal. Sociologists have noted that the child's collection bag of goodies is an icon for the future

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consumer-shopper at the mall. So much money changes hand with the festivity that it sickeningly reinforces selfish values about me, me, and me. As one Catholic leader has said of the trick or treat ritual:

As a boy I grew up with the custom in the US, where it was completely harmless and lots of fun for everyone ... What I do not like about it is the fact that it introduces children to what in adults would be called a protection racket: threatening people with harm if they do not pay a sum of money.⁴

A survey in England

A limited qualitative survey was undertaken in two parts of England – London and Lincolnshire. It was among primary school pupils in years two and six. The findings in some respects were quite predictable and not surprising, and corresponded to results found in other global surveys. The survey supplies some interesting insights into what families perceive about this day. It was intriguing to discover the extent to which children from differing backgrounds were participating in Halloween activities.

The survey disclosed that 88.6 per cent of children participate in some way in these activities. Of those surveyed 93 per cent of non-religious pupils, and 74 per cent of religious pupils were actively involved. When the children surveyed used adjectives to describe Halloween, 33 per cent called it 'fun-scary' and 19 per cent 'exciting' with just 2 per cent calling it 'boring' and 1 per cent 'dangerous'.

A substantial number of pupils enjoy the festival particularly in receiving treats/gifts (60 per cent), the opportunity to dress up (46 per cent), and meeting friends (11 per cent). It was also noted that the range of activities covers games, walking the streets, parties, dressing up, making pictures, and watching scary movies.

For children dressing up as the latest Disney characters is very much a part of growing up today. Halloween is one festival that really embraces fun. It is also an opportunity for adults to dress up in character and tap into the 'child within'. Also noted from the

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survey is that the perceptions held by parents and teachers are not necessarily shared by the pupils.⁵

The divide over Hallowe'en is fairly intense among Christians and churches. Do we prohibit it, Christianise it, or just let it be as it is? We will look at the background, discernment, and case studies that come from a variety of approaches.

BACKGROUND

In light of the intense and passionate convictions that are held about Hallowe'en everyone, no matter how pro or anti we are about this festival, needs to take some time to get our facts straight concerning its origins. It is fair to say that in the last twenty to thirty years that a lot of anxiety has developed among Christians who have voiced alarm in various contexts such as youth groups, school boards, and in media campaigns. British historian Ronald Hutton has claimed that evangelicals stick to two basic points: One is that this is a day that glorifies evil; the other is that it is an unchristian festival that is to be opposed because it does not fit in a Christian culture.⁶

It appears that there are really three versions of Hallowe'en – Christian, Pagan, and Secular Commercial.

Christian Hallowe'en

There was a festival that emerged specifically to remember those who had been martyred. The evidence traces back to St Ephrem the Syrian in the fourth century who had a specific day set aside in May for honouring all those who had been martyred by the Roman Emperors. Another kind of festival developed related to commemorating all dead Christians in medieval Europe and the Near East. In Syrian churches the time for this was in Easter week, while in Greek churches it was the Sunday after Pentecost. In Rome the preferred date was in May, and Pope Boniface IV fixed that date in 609.

However, in both England and Germany the practice of

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what is called All Soul's Day developed in the ninth century and this was celebrated on 1 November. Other celebration days were celebrated throughout the year in different regions.

What emerges in the liturgical calendar are two days for commemoration. The first is All Saints' Day (1 November) followed by All Souls' Day (2 November). The uniform celebration with the specific naming of All Saints' Day or All Hallows' Eve, is attributed to Pope Gregory IV in 835. He settled the day of observance as 1 November. Hallowe'en simply means Hallows' Eve, where the term Hallow refers to the officially recognised saints. The evening before All Saints' Day is of course the night of 31 October. In classic liturgical practice the various prayers began at sunset and a midnight vigil was held on important feast days (such as Good Friday, Christmas, and All Saints' Day).

In the medieval Catholic system we have the liturgical calendar giving rise to the observance of All Saints Day which refers to all those (including martyrs) who were sanctified and went directly to heaven. The feast of all souls or All Souls' Day was for everyone else who had gone to Purgatory for a time of purging prior to final entry into heaven.

In the Anglican/Church of England, and in other Protestant churches, the liturgical calendar recognises both days for observance. The tradition of All Souls Day is a time for remembering dead family members and friends who are part of the communion of saints or family of God.

We know of liturgical churches that celebrate All Saints' Day where they gather on the night before. The liturgy has a basic structure like this:

- Service commences at 7.30pm
- Hymn honouring all the Saints, which may include a ceremony of lighting incense.
- Sermon on the meaning of All Saints' Day.
- Prayer and hymn
- Lighted candles are distributed.
- A procession – the Procession of Peace – begins led by a

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priest, minister or deacons carrying palm leaves and the congregation carrying their candles follow.

- The procession exits the church and marches through the nearby streets as a litany is chanted.
- The procession returns to the church.
- The congregation sings the anthem, 'Oh, how glorious is the Kingdom wherein all the saints rejoice with Christ; they are clothed in white robes; they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'
- The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is recited.
- A blessing is given, followed by a concluding hymn.

The Magnificat

And Mary said: 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.' Luke 1:46-48 (ESV)

The above is a skeletal frame and, depending on which tradition one is committed to, there are different kinds of emphases that will be made. One of the important unifying facets of the liturgy is that the anthem draws on the Book of Revelation where the martyrs and saints who have been resurrected are clothed in white garments, a

sign of purity and holiness. The liturgy makes the apocalyptic connection from those alive on earth to those who have already died in Christ but now live again at God's throne. What is quite visually striking for the street procession is that the clerics wear robes or gowns. This is not just appropriate with respect to the liturgy but also mirrors 'dressing up' as an integral part of participating in Hallowe'en.

It is worth keeping in mind that today's popular culture has embraced Hallowe'en and instead of referring to saints what is substituted is the 'spooky' element about ghosts and the dead. Beyond Hallowe'en the fascination with apocalyptic themes and death is also expressed in pop culture with the interest in movies

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and TV shows featuring zombies, werewolves and other undead creatures. The Church has an interesting opportunity when celebrating All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, and the resurrection of the dead, to creatively link this to the pop cultural interests in the spooky and the Undead. Perhaps other Christian gatherings that do not celebrate these calendar events need to explore the challenge that Hallowe'en offers. One is to reflect on the role of the church year, and then another is to rediscover a robust theology of the resurrection.⁷

Pagan

The origins of a pagan festival are shrouded in some mystery. It is important to exercise some caution here as the historical evidence is quite patchy. There has been much myth-making in the past two hundred years about the ancient Celtic festivals and their links to pre-Christian Paganism. One needs to sift carefully through the claims made about what ritual festivals existed and what they celebrated.

In northern and central Europe and across the British Isles one can find huge variations in the sort of festive activities that were observed. A festival in the highlands of Scotland was not necessarily the same in the lowland regions. Likewise, a festival celebrated in southern Ireland was bound to be very different from one observed in England's northern counties. There is not enough evidence to show that festivals were celebrated everywhere. The cycle picks up fragments found in pre-Christian times through to medieval times, and others occurring in the early modern era of the seventeenth century.

We do know that in some places from pre-Christian times it was customary to celebrate an end of season harvest festival in preparation for the onset of winter in the northern hemisphere. One would have completed reaping the harvest of crops and/or mustered in one's flocks or herds. Some festive activities around a bonfire involved a time for tale-telling about life and dying, which was correlated to the seasonal changes as autumn leads into winter. Winter symbolised a time where nature appeared to 'die'.

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Other kinds of folkloric tales were recounted about impish spirits or ghosts that might haunt places. The punch-line would be about being on guard or avoiding such imps.

A festival known from the Gaelic word Samhain (sow-in) gradually emerged and it was understood that a portal could open between the world of the living and the realm of the dead. For some, Samhain became a religious festival to celebrate the Lord of the Dead that coincided with harvest time near the end of autumn. It is known that Irish migrants in the Middle Ages brought to the Scottish highlands the word Samhain, and this is traceable to the seventh century.⁸ A harvest festival, which was dubbed Samhain, gradually developed and it seems like local superstitions and folktales were attached to it. It is quite plausible that over time scattered tales prompted rituals to shun or frighten away impish spirits. Rituals such as lighting candles, or leaving gifts to placate the dead, probably became local customs that in time have become more widely accepted. In parts of Scotland nights of mischief that involved pranks being played became customary.

An old Irish custom involved farmers gathering food gifts from villagers in preparation for a bonfire feast. The gift of food was associated with signs of good luck and prosperity (treat for those who gave, and curse/trick for those who did not give). During the nineteenth century the severe potato famines led many Irish people to emigrate and settle in the USA. The custom of trick-or-treat that is associated with Halloween today has its roots among the Irish migrants who believed in these signs of good luck.

There are records in parts of England concerning folkloric fears about marsh lights that led to the creation of the jack-o'-lantern. However, the hollowing out of a vegetable (eventually the choice being the pumpkin) only emerges with Irish migrant influence in both England and America from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The dressing up in costumes to refer to ghosts, goblins and witches is something that developed in the mid-twentieth century.

In modern times neo-Pagan and witchcraft groups celebrate Samhain as one of eight major festivals in their ritual calendar. This

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is known as 'The Wheel of the Year' and it comprises a series of ritual festivals, known as sabbats, which coincide with equinoxes and seasonal changes. The festivals reflect an eight-episode myth, known as the Wheel of the Year myth, where each festival celebrated represents a particular stage in a grand story about a god and goddess. The Wheel of the Year commences with Samhain and finishes with the autumn equinox (festival of Mabon).

| Northern Hemisphere | Date Observed | Southern Hemisphere | Date Observed |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Samhain | 31 October | Beltane | 31 October |
| Yule/Winter Solstice | 21 December | Litha/Summer Solstice | 21 December |
| Oimelc/Imbolc | 2 February | Lammas/Lughnasadh | 2 February |
| Ostara/Eostre/ Spring Equinox | 21 March | Mabon/ Autumn Equinox | 21 March |
| Beltane | 30 April | Samhain | 30 April |
| Litha/Summer Solstice | 21 June | Yule/Winter Solstice | 21 June |
| Lammas/Lughnasadh | 1 August | Oimelc/Imbolc | 1 August |
| Mabon/Autumn Equinox | 21 September | Ostara/Eostre/ Spring Equinox | 21 September |

In the Wheel of the Year myth the sabbat of Samhain discloses that the goddess is carrying in her womb a child of promise. The child is born at the next sabbat known as Yule (25 December). The child grows up during the time that Nature is full of life through the sabbats that encompass spring and summer. Eventually the child becomes an adult who must contest the power of the Dark Lord of the underworld. In this final sabbat the contest brings about the death and then the rising to new life of this god. In many ways, as we have discussed elsewhere, the Wheel of the Year myth about a virginal goddess and the child of promise who dies and rises again bears uncanny resemblance to the gospel.⁹ For the dedicated practitioner of neo-Pagan faith, Samhain is a time where one reflects on living and on dying. However, contrary to a lot of urban rumours, this is not a day where Pagans make sacrifices in some diabolical pact with Satan.

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The nineteenth century saw Hallowe'en take shape as a popular annual social phenomenon particularly in North America. It carried forward elements of Pagan belief about the dead and the custom of food and gifts associated with harvests. Admittedly many just dabble in Hallowe'en. Serious Pagan beliefs about the Wheel of the Year and the sabbat of Samhain developed in the thoughts of the pioneers of Neo-Pagan witchcraft faith like Gerald Gardner (1884-1964). The spread of Samhain celebrations accelerated in the late twentieth century as popular accounts were published in books and magazines, and then on Neo-Pagan websites. The most deeply committed Pagan practitioners regard Samhain with the same degree of significance and reverence that Christians have concerning Easter.

Secular commercial

The commercially secular version of Hallowe'en is something that has emerged in the past thirty to forty years. What has developed is the take-over of every facet of Hallowe'en – wearing masks and costumes, gifts of food and confectionery, trick-or-treat door-knocking. The commercial interests have spread through shops and malls so that now it is common to see supermarkets with Hallowe'en merchandise prominently displayed. Of course it should be noted that in some western cities the commercial impact may vary. Philip lives in an area where there is a significant number of migrants, none of whom have a background of relatedness to Hallowe'en. Even though the local supermarket generates a lot of energy trying to promote Hallowe'en, the suburban streets are silent. Ross lives in another part of the same city and the local pub, which is close to a university campus, groans with Hallowe'en festivity.

The commercial take-over of Hallowe'en is no different to what has happened to both Christmas and Easter. The displays of products in shops and malls that are geared around these seasons have mere token gestures concerning any real faith, Pagan or Christian. Probably the Pagans are less defensive about the corporate take-over of Hallowe'en because they can enjoy

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the frivolity, and are less fussed about people dressing-up and pretending to be witches. In some respects, if the curiosity is awakened then people can always talk to committed Pagans.

CONTACT POINTS

The most obvious contact points with Hallowe'en start with the trick-or-treat door-knock. The celebration of Hallowe'en is found in school curricula in many places, and there are many children's parties. Adults also may be invited to Hallowe'en parties, as well as encountering the commercial version in the shopping malls.

Some of us may be living in an area where there are committed Pagans who are neighbours, like Phil Wyman's experiences in Salem. If you find yourself living in that context you may want to enter into conversations. It can be helpful for fruitful conversations to develop if you have some background understanding about Pagan faith that goes beyond just Hallowe'en, such as their understanding of deity, Jesus, the spiritual value of the natural world.¹⁰ For others there is the likelihood of being invited to attend a liturgy which will seem 'alien' if your faith gathering does not follow a liturgical approach to worship services.

DISCERNMENT

The first crucial issue for discernment is really making sure you know the facts about Hallowe'en. We all need to approach the phenomenon as careful fact-checkers because there is so much discredited and unreliable misinformation on the Internet and in books about the occult. We need to avoid the mistake of accepting information at face-value. This problem has been aggravated by individuals who have made-up stories about their involvement in occult, Satanist and witchcraft groups that have later proven to be a fabrication.¹¹

Another approach is the kind of response that would come

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from that informal group of Christian novelists called The Inklings – including C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams whose impact is far-reaching with the success of mythic tales like the Narnia Chronicles and *Lord of the Rings*. We could well imagine how they might connect in their story-telling with Hallowe'en today. On one hand, we can see that both Lewis and Tolkien had no difficulty in using the topic of 'magic' and mythical figures of evil like Sauron the Lord of the Rings and the white witch of Narnia in their stories. Charles Williams' last novel was called *All Hallows' Eve*, and it dealt with the interactions between the living and the dead.

On the other hand, Williams took the subject of evil and occultism seriously, and while he was known to enjoy frivolity he would always offer cautionary advice for those who felt the attractive tug toward occult power. In a similar way Tolkien, as a very conservative Catholic, was not happy about people who did not take the occult and evil seriously. His attitude is best summed up in the words he penned in *Lord of the Rings* about the wizard Saruman. The great error of Saruman is that he studied the dark arts of Lord Sauron so closely that he found himself 'hooked' and became a pawn of Mordor.

C. S. Lewis may have found children's fascination with Hallowe'en interesting. Perhaps he would invite everyone to consider his twofold advice in *The Screwtape Letters*:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.¹²

Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, took the devil seriously as seen in his classic hymn 'A Mighty Fortress is our God'¹³ but never allowed himself to fall into the trap of making the devil too big. He was known for his earthy remarks and for laughing at the devil with his taunting words, 'devil you can kiss my ass.'¹⁴

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A Mighty Fortress is our God – Martin Luther

'Though devils all the world should fill,
all eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
they shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none,
he's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.'

Some Lutheran colleagues say that we should not settle for a kill-joy devil but rather laugh at him on Hallowe'en and enjoy the good things of the day and share the gospel!

They pray that we don't lose the plot and exaggerate his role and power. They remind us that Christ is victorious and evil powers have been defeated by the cross and resurrection: 'He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him' (Col. 2:15). Their advice is about having confidence in Christ and not ending up with a devil that is too big.

The spiritual warfare model is often more cautious. The scriptural evidence relied on (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:9; Gal 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1-4) does remind us to be wary of being deceived. Discernment means we all walk a fine line and we should maintain an even-handed understanding as expressed in Lewis' advice. If we tie together misinformation with the spiritual warfare model we can end up demonising everything. If we go too far in down-playing the possibility of spiritual deception, then our discernment will also suffer from a failure to be ever-watchful.

As with yoga the same three responses can emerge – prohibit, Christianise, or leave it as it is. There probably are occasions when we may feel inclined to prohibit. This may be necessary when one is placed in situations where children have

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been 'obliged' to dress-up as witches for Hallowe'en at school. We have personal experiences of cases where a conversation between a parent and teacher to allow a child to have an alternative costume, whether it is an angel or a character out of *Frozen*, was derided and dismissed. If the teacher's narrative is inflexible and narrowly refers to Hallowe'en as a fun or Pagan celebration while ignoring the wider story about its origins as we have told above, then one may genuinely decide not to participate. The same thing may occur in adult contexts where the obligation is to only be in fancy-dress of an evil or wicked character. Again, this can occur when the narrative is limited.

For some of us the commercial stench on its own may be sufficient to warrant a veto for ourselves, or for our whole family. For many of us this has no impact and we leave the commercial version as it is. Whatever your response to Hallowe'en never lose sight of the importance of explaining its background to children. Children appreciate knowing what is good, what may be harmful, and finding balance in things that are fun. It is also a time for addressing the excesses of greed and how instead we can give to others. There are plenty of costumes to dress up in that are not contentious for this time of year. When their friends wear a witch's costume it does not mean that they believe in the occult but, like playing the game of 'cops and robbers,' they enjoy working through what is good and what is evil.

CASE STUDIES

The first kind of response is where Christians who treasure the traditional church calendar simply reassert the primacy of celebrating All Saints' Day. In some respects this might be regarded as 'reclaiming' the day where prayer, hymns, rituals and processions centre on thanking God for Christian martyrs and those who are among the cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1; Rev. 6:9). It is possible to simply celebrate All Saints' Day as we do any other important event – Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, etc. – irrespective

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of what other people are doing on Hallowe'en in secular and Pagan contexts. We have given an illustration of the liturgy.

A second response is where Christians who are not accustomed to celebrating All Saints' Day and do not really follow most of the traditional church calendar, may decide to create an alternative kind of celebration. A few examples include Halo-een and Light Parties. Halo-een has been developed by a colleague of ours, Vanessa Hal, who runs International Trust Ministry. She took the step to launch an alternative in 2012, and she has created some resources, a website, video, and merchandise, themed around love.¹⁵ Vanessa urges Christians to step away from being judgmental of those who choose to celebrate Hallowe'en. She started this ministry as a positive response to Hallowe'en because, in the process of her growth as a Christian, she found herself being reminded of her past cultic involvement in it. Her approach is to empower us and churches to have a different presence and voice on the day. Families wear white costumes or those of angels, adorn their letter boxes with white balloons, and distribute treats like heart-shaped chocolates and Bible verse cards.

Over the past five years in the UK, Australia and elsewhere Light Parties is another trend. Sometimes a local church or a network of churches sponsors a Light Party. The event typically awards prizes for those who come as the best dressed superhero or cartoon character. It features lights as a sign that Jesus is the light of the world and overcomes the darkness. At the party there are all kinds of amusements such as rides, games, craft exercises, giant slides and bouncy castles. Often a Hallowe'en fact sheet is handed out, which briefly covers what we've outlined as the three versions. Scripture Union UK has created on its website an article on alternatives to Hallowe'en, and another page offering resources to use at such parties.¹⁶ It also explores what a Christian light party might look like. The focus is on transition from darkness to light. You might start in a dark space and a Bible story like the Fall, and then physically move around to a new space where the light of Jesus becomes clear. It can include

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a moment of prayer and remembrance of loved ones who have died.

There are other similar responses from some churches such as Halloween community days which focus on craft, food, and kids' activities. On these occasions the 'true' meaning of Halloween is shared about the hope we have in the resurrected Christ.

A third response is for those Christians who intend to treat Halloween as an opportunity for missional outreach. An example is Columbia Baptist Church in Virginia, which is just a few miles from Washington DC. One of us shared in this church's Halloween outreach. The senior minister, Jim Baucom, is a leader of the Missional Alliance, and he entered into the spirit of the night. It was a 'trunk or treat' Halloween where some 200 cars were parked on the church grounds, and the car trunks or boots were open. Each trunk contained different things like sweets, cakes, toys, prizes, as well as information to support charities. The church members stood by their vehicles dressed up as Disney or superhero characters. There was a barbecue with food served to literally thousands of people from the local community. All the adjacent church doors were open and various spaces inside had a popcorn dispenser, games, face-painting, photographs with 'superheroes.' It was a seamless move from the car park and car trunks to inside the church. People were available to have conversations about faith, and the role of the church in the community. It all worked well.

US pastor Mike Jones moved to Australia in 2004 and has brought to a church culture that is alarmed by Halloween the trunk or treat alternative. On the preceding Sunday he challenged the congregation, 'Some of you may be concerned about what we are going to do if some kids come dressed as gruesome creatures, devils, vampires or witches. Well if that's the case and it probably will be, we are going to let them in, love them, be gracious to them and care for them.' His small Lakeside Baptist Church, with a Sunday school of twenty-five children, connected to one hundred and eighty children in the Halloween outreach. Three hundred people attended the BBQ and the majority were

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unchurched. The programme was similar to the one above. As one grandparent said, 'I just can't believe the church just cares for our families so much that you would do all of this.'

If we discern it is appropriate there are various ways that we can make a connection to Hallowe'en. Perhaps the provocative question we need to consider is, should this event stay as it is? Or is it possible to make the event less ghoulish and less commercial, and turn it into something very positive?

THINGS TO DO

Take an inventory of Hallowe'en activities in your neighbourhood. Consider what other Churches and Christian groups are doing. Is your neighbourhood featuring more Pagan spirituality, more of a fancy-dress party or more commercial trick-or-treat? Ponder what you and/or your local church might do for the next year's celebration. Reflect on Phil. 4:8 and ask in what ways the experience of Hallowe'en in the lives of your friends and neighbours is consistent or inconsistent with the message of this text.

START THE CONVERSATION

1. Your child's school or office holds a Hallowe'en party that everyone is expected to attend. How would you engage in a conversation with this school about the meaning of Hallowe'en?
2. Your friends are considering an alternative to Hallowe'en trick-or-treat where their house is decorated for Christmas and they hand out gifts and a message about all the calendar events. What would your response be?
3. Your local church is considering a plan to undertake a future event scheduled for Hallowe'en. In your group consider the range of case studies and what your advice would be?

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4. Think of a friend or relative who enjoys Hallowe'en in either a Pagan or commercial sense. How would you start a conversation with them about Hallowe'en?
5. Scripture Union UK has the following quote on its website: 'Even those who for fun get involved in astrology, séances and spells risk devastating consequences. They're unleashing forces on their lives they don't understand and often can't combat.' Talk about this claim with your friends and mentors and find out if you agree or disagree with this quote.