

To boo or not to boo?

A Christian conversation on Halloween

By Amia D. Edwards

Jackson Advocate Lifestyle/Entertainment Writer

Jolly Ranchers, Blow Pops (red and green only), Snickers, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, and Candy Corn (judge me not) – these are all the treats I looked forward to consuming during Halloween night and the next few days after.



Amia Edwards

I can't explain why, but Halloween during third grade at Clinton's Eastside Elementary is especially vivid in my memory. Towards the end of the day, everyone returned to their homerooms with season appropriate décor for a brief Halloween mixer. My teacher and the PTA representatives were sporting their unique stitched sweaters with words like "Boo" and topped off their outfit with a witch's hat.

As my classmates and I indulged in party snacks, we were sent home with little plastic bags to assist in our candy conquests. The bags warned us not to go without an adult, not to eat any candy without having it inspected first, etc.

My classmates and I also discussed our costumes we were wearing that evening (always trying to one up the other). I always maintained the same fib; my mama made my costume. I was being Cinderella. The truth? There were no glass slippers waiting for me at home. My single mother of four never really had the last day of

the month holiday on her mind. That's until we came home with imaginations and hearts filled with Halloween hope, and she agreed to take us trick-or-treating. We made our impromptu costumes and memories as well.

Today, as I scroll my social media, I see some of the same classmates making similar memories with their children. I also see a lot of my friends divorce the holiday. I see memes declaring the day reserved for those of a demonic spirit or pagans. Could it be? My reminiscing of a simpler time could be evil? My innocent costume and candy indulgence was not only bad for my teeth but my spirit as well?

I got my friend and fellow *Jackson Advocate* writer on the phone – Pastor C. J. Rhodes, Ph.D. Rhodes is the pastor of Mt. Helm Baptist Church. In fact, he is the youngest pastor to serve Jackson's oldest Black congregation. He is also Director of Religious and Spiritual Life at Alcorn University. To top it all off, C.J. also hosts his own radio show on 97.7 WRBJ. It's safe to say this brother can handle any Halloween/religion question I may tote, even the not so sweet ones.

I asked him point-blank-period. Is it anti-Christian to celebrate Halloween? "So I would say it depends on how and why you celebrate Halloween. Let's face it, a lot of churches do alternatives. They do 'Trunk or Treats' and costume parties. But, there is a Christian side of Halloween called 'All

Hallows Eve' which is about celebrating the saints who have gone on (November 1). There are other elements of Halloween that celebrate the demonic, such as witches and werewolves. There is a playfulness there, but we have to be very careful. Because, I do believe there is a power in the 'black magic' that Halloween in some ways celebrates that we Christians have to be guarded against."



Pastor C.J. Rhodes

He goes into further discussion, noting that with all the holidays (including Christmas, Easter, etc.) there are pagan elements that certain Christian communities always address and mark as controversial.

I asked, before he accepted his religious calling at the age of 18, didn't he just remember enjoying Halloween as community fellowship? Are those days gone? Pastor Rhodes reminded me that when we were growing up, we were dressing as princesses and our favorite superheroes. Now, as the media has gotten more technological savvy, things have taken a grotesque, evil, or seductive turn. "The problem is, if you lack discernment, you can easily move from the cute thing to the more controversial," says Rhodes.

Because I know he is a man of great intellect outside of religion, I ask, "Why is fear fun? We are all guilty of lingering behind a corner to get

a quick innocent scare out of a loved one and, shortly after, there is a laugh from both you and the victim." Rhodes says that the adrenaline rush can be a different motive to celebrate the holiday. "I would call it controlled fear, because we go to the haunted house or roller coaster because there is the assumption that I will survive this. Even with a horror movie, we get to experience the thrill of suspense knowing it won't end badly for us. We enjoy the basic human element of suspense, thrill, and survival."

So I asked, "As a Christian woman, if I put on my costume (I am still looking for a Cinderella costume in my size) and enjoy a cocktail, am I suddenly pagan?" Rhodes gave a chuckled filled, but firm, "No". He says, "For me there is a clear line. You putting on a costume, going to a Halloween party, enjoying a cocktail – I wouldn't say you are doing something evil. Where it crosses the line is when you have a séance and playing with evil spirits; now you're doing too much."

After our "Trick or Treat" conversation, we started to unpack the latest trend in religious social media posts: Manifestation. That's a bag we can get into with another article. Until then, this writer encourages you to enjoy memory-making with your friends and families. Because life without them, THAT can be scary.



By Dr. Anne T. Sulton, Esq.
JA Senior International Correspondent

Machinery, vehicles, tools, plastics, pharmaceutical products, beverages, grains, fruits, footwear, watches, and toys are among the export/import items moving between France and Turkey.

Each year, these nations trade billions of dollars worth of products. Their bilateral trade agreement is important to each nation.

Currently, relationships between the French and Turks are strained. Many Turks are boycotting French products because of comments French President Emmanuel Macron made about Islam. At least 97% of Turks are Muslim.

Reportedly, Macron said that Islam is a religion in "crisis" in response to the beheading of French school teacher Samuel Paty by a young man claiming to be Muslim because Paty showed his students caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims in Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia too are condemning Macron's statement. Tens of thousands are marching in protest.

President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said that Muslims are insulted when cartoons depict the Prophet Muhammad, explaining that "Westerners must

understand the great Prophet of Islam is loved by all Muslims and freedom lovers of the world."

Certainly, the beheading of a school teacher is shocking news. However, a national president saying a religion followed by more than 1.5 billion people worldwide is in "crisis" is shocking news too.

It should come as no surprise that Turks are now not buying French-made watches.

Throughout history, some people have committed horrible deeds and said they so did in the name of a religion they follow. But only the firmly prejudiced would assign blame to an entire religion for those horrible deeds.

Only the truly ignorant would argue that it's a matter of free speech and feathers should not get ruffled when an entire religion is characterized as in "crisis" because some of the persons saying they follow that religion engage in violence.

Horrible acts of violence have been committed by persons professing belief in all of the major world religions. None of the major world religions advocate for violence.

Why is Islam repeatedly singled out by Westerners as being associated with violence?

Daylight Saving Time ends on Sunday and is a reminder to check those life-saving devices. Smoke alarms should be tested once a month, batteries should be replaced once a year, and the entire alarm should be replaced every 10 years.

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